

Following an investigation by the journal's editorial team adhering to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) guidelines, we retract the note, ["I am not alone – we are all alone: Using masturbation as an ethnographic method in research on shota subculture in Japan,"](#) acknowledging the harm caused by its publication.

The investigation considered serious complaints raised earlier this month, including concerns relating to the method and material, the ethical review and oversight, the journal's review process, and the potential of the note to cause harm, especially through the way it could be used to legitimise and contribute to child sexual abuse. Accounts were provided by the submitting author and the reviewers, and were considered carefully alongside the editorial review process by the editorial team.

The investigation found that there was a lack of adequate and appropriate ethical support for the work, which was conducted without institutional ethical oversight. The article was anonymously reviewed by two international academics with methodological and subject expertise, who recommended the note for publication on the basis of its academic contribution and fit with the call for short-form notes. However, as an editorial team, we have wider and overarching responsibilities with respect to difficult or sensitive topics to ensure that work accepted for publication does not cause harm, and we we did not fulfil this responsibility with respect to this note. Our practice for notes, in this case, did not offer appropriate ethical review and the necessary additional scrutiny ahead of publication.

Research, writing and publication are ongoing ethical practices. As editors, we have thought carefully about the ethical responsibilities of publishing, the implications of retraction, academic freedom, and the different and strongly held views on the method and material. Due to the potential for significant harm caused by the publication of this work compounded by ethical issues surrounding the conception and design, we have made the decision to retract. We will work with the publisher and our editorial board to scrutinise existing practices and ensure appropriate ethical consideration is in place for all publications at *Qualitative Research*.

We sincerely apologise for any distress and harm the publication of this work has caused.