Methodology, Fake Learning, and Emotional Performativity

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Abstract

Purpose: Academics are at the forefront of criticisms about so-called "fake news" considered to undermine evidence-based approaches to the understanding of complex social, political, and economic issues. However, universities contribute to the production of fake news through the legitimization of measures that promote student performativity rewarding their academic non-achievements. This conceptual article will seek to illustrate how this can occur via the writing of methodology chapters by postgraduate students.

Design/Approach/Methods: This article provides a critical analysis of the writing of methodology chapters in dissertations and theses in postgraduate education in the social sciences. In so doing, it applies the concept of performativity to student learning.

Findings: It is argued that the pressures on students to comply with the requirements of emotional performativity in respect to ideology and method in close-up, qualitative research can lead to fake learning. This phenomenon may be exemplified by reference to a number of practices, namely, phony positionality, methodolatry, ethical cleansing, participatory posturing, and symbolic citation.

Originality/Value: This article provides an illustration of the concept of student performativity. It demonstrates that emotional performativity plays a significant role in the way in which students are required to comply with expectations that give rise to inauthenticity in learning.

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Introduction

Recent years have witnessed escalating concern in academe about the spread of so-called "fake news." According to what is fast becoming conventional wisdom, fake news is generated by appeals to emotion with politicians and the social media at the center of such allegations. This tends to result in the marginalization of experts including academic researchers, among others. The victims of fake news are said to be the public who are duped into a false understanding based on allegation, emotion, and rumor rather than hard evidence. Academics can also find their empirical work misrepresented, or simply ignored. This conventional interpretation of fake news is now widespread. Yet, is it possible that the university, including some of the knowledge produced by academics and students, might be part of the problem too? Are they contributing in any way to "faking" as well? The notion that academe may be helping to create fake news may, at first blush, be considered a controversial and even somewhat perverse suggestion. Yet the notion of trust-worthiness cuts both ways and forms of academic fraud have always existed.

Academic fraud tends to be conventionally thought of in dramatic, headline-grabbing terms. The acronym "FFP"—Falsification, Fabrication, and Plagiarism—is repeatedly intoned in discussions about research misconduct in the hard sciences. These academic crimes attract a lot of attention because they are clear-cut instances of a lack of academic integrity. In reality, there are considerably more subtle, ethically borderline practices that can go almost completely under the radar. Citing sources without reading them, or understanding them properly, is a commonplace enough example. Who has not cut corners occasionally or relied simply on an abstract in citing an academic paper before? Data gathering and analysis in qualitative research is rarely subject to forensic scrutiny either, and many decisions that lone investigators make, in including or excluding data, or carrying out thematic analysis, tend to be highly idiosyncratic in practice. Claims that researchers have followed a formal process of qualitative analysis quite often lack an evidential base as themes are reported to "emerge." In other words, academic fraud needs to be understood in all its subtlety and sophistication and can be much harder to detect than the familiar acronym FFP might imply.

In understanding why fraud occurs, it is important to understand that student learning at university has been converted from a private space into a public performance (Macfarlane, 2015). One example of this phenomenon is the way in which students are increasingly required to show how they are learning in the classroom through the grading of their formal and informal

oral contributions. The demands of performativity are now embedded in the learning environments of universities, and setting assessment tasks that encourage academic non-achievement are commonplace (Macfarlane, 2017). The phrase "academic non-achievement," originally used by Sadler (2010, p. 727), refers to student grading based, at least in part, on behavioral and transactional incentives. An example is attending lectures, or displaying enthusiasm and asking questions, in order to get a class contribution grade. The concept of student performativity—bodily, participative, and emotional (Macfarlane, 2017)—is a way of understanding academic non-achievement in a broader and more comprehensive framework. Bodily performativity includes mandatory attendance at lectures and other face-to-face teaching contexts. The emphasis on students making oral contributions in class and working collaboratively as a member of a group leads to participative performativity, while the need for learners to increasingly surface their feelings and emotions and prove that they have found particular educational experiences "transformational," "inspiring," or in some other way influential on their thinking constitutes emotional performativity. The pressure to conform to these expectations is promoted by so-called student engagement policies. These reward forms of academic non-achievement common in both compulsory and higher education through measures such as class attendance, class contribution grades based on attendance records and/or observable levels of student engagement, as well as other indicators of compliance with the values promoted by the university, such as global citizenship (e.g. volunteering) (Coates & McCormick, 2014; Kuh et al., 2008).

The purpose of this article is to present a conceptual analysis of the way in which student learning can be faked in the sense that students will learn how to comply with performative demands—even where they are not explicitly acknowledged by universities or university academics. In so doing, I will extend my earlier analysis of emotional performativity in student learning which was mainly concerned with reflective writing (Macfarlane, 2017) by exploring the way in which it plays a role in student (and wider academic) writing about methodology in an education and social science context. The writing of methodology chapters in dissertations and theses is, I believe, an important example of where students need to demonstrate emotional performativity in complying with implicit criteria connected with the ideological beliefs of academics. I will argue that this can occur with the full, or at least partial, complicity of academics working as postgraduate research supervisors. In elaborating my argument, I will focus on the following five examples: *phony positionality*, *methodolatry*, *ethical cleansing, participatory posturing*, and *symbolic citation*.

Faking qualitative research

Close-up qualitative research occurs where "the researcher tries to get relatively 'close' to the meanings, ideas, discursive and/or social practices of a group of people . . . " (Alvesson, 2003,

p. 168). In educational research, this normally occurs when researchers study their own organization, or a relevantly similar one, and tend to focus their investigation on understanding issues affecting academic staff and students in a university department, college, or school. The researcher will often be a complete or at least partial insider in the sense that they either work in the same organization that they are simultaneously researching or have the status of an external "colleague" working in a parallel one. Close-up, qualitative work makes few (if any) claims to generalizability and, in a low-status academic field such as education, rarely gets much public attention. Yet, the nature of this research raises a wide range of ethical issues that are extremely complex to deal with such as insiderism, negotiating the pitfalls of organizational politics, and an often wafer-thin dividing line between researcher and participant (or none at all in the case of self-ethnography). The extent to which researchers are engaging authentically or merely "doing rapport," "faking friendship," "faking solidarity," or even faking identity online are relevant for any close-up, qualitative researcher (e.g., see Duncombe & Jessop, 2002). Close-up research requires personal contact between the researcher and the participant and so giving an appearance of sincerity can be regarded as a work-related, investigatory skill (Alvesson, 2003).

These are all important ethical issues, but it is not my purpose in this article to focus on these relatively well-known concerns here as others have done so already in greater depth than I can hope to cover. Instead, I wish to raise a broader question around "faking." This is the increasing tendency, as I see it, for the philosophy and language of close-up, qualitative research—criticality, reflexivity, statements of positionality, discussions of insiderism, and so on—to be the subject of a strategic deception. Here I am mainly, although not exclusively, thinking of master's and doctoral students (but some university academics as well) and referring to the way in which they can adopt the language of the close-up, qualitative researcher in a compliant, mechanical, and ultimately inauthentic way.

Phony positionality

In qualitative and mixed methods research, there is now a strong emphasis on the importance of researcher reflection (Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016). This involves being explicit about values which the researcher holds and demonstrating a preparedness to self-evaluate how these may have shaped the philosophical assumptions informing research design. A reticence to be explicit about personal values is considered a failing among researchers since these beliefs, it is frequently argued, will inevitably play a role in framing any investigation (Hammersley, 2006). The modern necessity for a researcher to be open and explicit about their positionality is closely related to the broader trend in education and society in which a "confessional" discourse has become commonplace (Fejes & Dahlstedt, 2013). A positionality statement in a dissertation or thesis is the equivalent of reflective

writing exercises found elsewhere within the contemporary undergraduate, postgraduate, and professional curriculum at university.

Selecting a methodology—as opposed to just a method—is a daunting prospect for postgraduate research students. In most postgraduate research training programs, the teaching of research methods invariably occurs a matter of weeks, or a few months at best, before students need to start writing a methodology chapter in which they are expected to sign up to one of several competing "philosophies." As part of this process, students are normally encouraged to write a "positionality" statement within their methodology chapter. Positionality refers to the relationship between the researcher and their research topic. Someone's positionality is shaped by their world-view and implies reflexive self-awareness of assumptions along with how these views are rooted in their social identity. Gregory et al. (2011, p. 556) stressed that "a researcher's social, cultural and subject positions (and other psychological processes) affect: the questions they ask; how they frame them; the theories that they are drawn to; how they read..." There is, in short, a growing emphasis on researchers making their positionality explicit. A good positionality statement is shaped by a reflexively self-aware account of someone's worldview incorporating their personal beliefs, sense of personal identity and politics, philosophical assumptions, biases, and prejudices. It implies a deep analysis of assumptions and how these are rooted in our own social identities.

Yet, in practice, positionality statements can be self-stereotyping by focusing on single points of identity, such as class and gender, rather than a more complex and real interconnectedness of a person's identity and their assumptions about the world which flow from this level of detailed self-analysis. A self-stereotyping positionality statement seeks to establish that the investigator has a distinctive, and even to some extent superior, moral claim to researching the subject since they have personal experience that gives them special insight into the world of their participants. Merton (1972) recognized the emergence of this type of reasoning when he commented:

> In its strong version, the argument holds that, as a matter of social epistemology, *only* black historians can truly understand black history, *only* black ethnologists can understand black culture, *only* black sociologists can understand the social life of blacks, and so on. (p. 103)

This type of rationale stands conventional notions about the objectivity of the researcher on its head together with the risks of insiderism making it into a virtue rather than a vice. Cousin (2010, p. 9) has used the term "positional piety" to refer to situations where affinity with participants is considered to invest the researcher with superior moral authority.

However, the pressure of self-disclosure means that positionality statements can be ritualistic and inauthentic. Such statements tend to cover up the fact that methodological reflexivity is an idealistic luxury with researchers making quick and instinctive decisions much of the time in practice. Student teachers' reflections show a desire to conform and fit in (McGarr & McCormack,

2014) and this effect can also be detected in positionality statements too. This type of "faking" is about more than poor scholarship. Hobbs' (2007) account of the way in which she resorted to a "strategic deception" in producing a reflective piece of writing to satisfy assessment requirements is a perfect illustration of this phenomenon (p. 414). Reflection is an act of confession and self-disclosure—whether real or fake. In composing such statements, students are complying with what they perceive to be a performative requirement to link the ontological with the epistemological. Can academics assessing such work *really* distinguish between a real and a phony one?

Methodolatry

The expression "methodolatry" (Janesick, 1994) conjoins the words "method" and "ideology." It refers to a reification of a particular method regardless of the practical considerations of researching the subject in question resulting in "a preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told" (Janesick, 1994). Even mixed methods, once a loosely bounded concept, has been formalized in recent years into a "thing" despite the lack of integration of findings in practice (Hesse-Biber, 2015). This means that there are a growing band of researchers who believe that there is a compelling case for the use of mixed methods to the exclusion of single methods.

Sociology, it has been argued, is the most "methodology-conscious" of the social science disciplines (Francis, 1969, p. 122) and its influence plays a leading role within the teaching of research methods in education. This methodology-consciousness means that methodolatry thrives in qualitative social science research, resulting in the oversimplified dichotomization of ideological camps such as "positivists" and "phenomenologists." The authors of well-known textbooks on research methods are sometimes identified as responsible for reinforcing this type of division:

> Philosophers of science cannot be readily identified as members of warring camps, and their positions cannot be readily individuated on the basis of the categories that Cohen et al. employ. (Rowbottom & Aiston, 2007, p. 19)

The role of the teacher-researcher also needs to be understood and acknowledged in the context of this issue. The ideological commitments of academics working as teachers and supervisors in relation to methods courses are a critical source in influencing student interpretations. Hesse-Biber (2015, p. 779) commented on the way in which, in teaching her own mixed methods novices, students report "having a hard time fitting their research project into one of the designs offered by an expert knowledge builder in the field of mixed methods" and that "there is an underlying acceptance of these designs as if they are 'real/concrete', and one must be selected." The fact that students feel under pressure to take a position is hardly surprising given the emphasis placed on different ideologies of design in research methods training.

Yet, sadly, the way in which students feel impelled to sign up to a methodological camp is rarely recognized as a potential problem even by those offering so-called "expert perspectives" in the teaching of research methods. Research methods experts such as Andy Field and Amanda Coffey proffer the view that teaching styles are legitimately individualized, while Johnny Saldaña goes further by proudly proclaiming that "we teach who we are" (Lewthwaite & Nind, 2016, p. 421). This means that passionately shared attitudes involving the fetishization of particular methods and approaches are directly passed on to students by academics. At one level, this type of advocacy is an understandable expression of academic freedom. Yet it can also result in a negative impact on the academic freedom of students with limited self-confidence. Self-censorship and compliance with the approach advocated by the teacher-researcher is a frequently observed consequence (Macfarlane, 2017).

Students are told that describing their methods of data collection alone is not enough and that they "must" have a philosophical "position" which nails their colors to a particular ideological mast. Unsurprisingly, when faced with this decision, students will more often than not choose the course of least resistance by plumping for the same philosophical position favored by their supervisors. This provides an ingrained and efficiently reproducible blueprint. To do otherwise would be akin to a professor of politics informing a student that they are a liberal democrat and then expecting the student to write an essay from the position of a Marxist. In practice, only the extremely courageous or self-confident will give expression to an alternative perspective. This is why methodology chapters written by postgraduate research students are littered with often unconvincing declarations of commitment to an off-the-textbook-shelf methodological stance such as "constructivism," "interpretivism," "social realism," "grounded theory," "bricolage," or "auto-ethnography." Some students may genuinely hold these positions, but compliance, self-censorship, and a lack of self-confidence will result in others feigning allegiance as well.

Participatory posturing

The rejection of positivism within qualitative research is now practically an article of faith among qualitative researchers. Recent years have witnessed the movement to promote a more democratic role for participants in mixed methods research too (Torrance, 2012). The phrase "research subject" is eschewed and the word "participant" has become *de rigueur*. The promise conveyed by this word implies the emancipation and empowerment of the "participant" in a relationship where meaning is negotiated and co-constructed. It can further imply the involvement of end users and communities in the application and control of the results of research in what is a democratic project respecting the rights of all affected parties. In other words, the participant is genuinely participating rather than experiencing a brief, essentially transactional relationship with the researcher.

In practice, students pursuing independent research, especially at master's level, need to complete their dissertations within very short time frames often in less than 6 months. After ethical approval is granted for fieldwork to commence, students may only have a few months at best to engage with participants. As a result, even if they are committed to the principles of emancipatory research, students are highly unlikely to be able to practically effect a genuinely deep or meaningful engagement. Yet, the word "participant" is used habitually, and even zealously, in methodology chapters to describe those who play virtually no meaningful participatory role beyond being interviewees, members of focus groups, or even respondents to questionnaires.

The "co-creation" of research with communities is another buzz phrase. This can lead to exaggerated claims about the extent to which communities share in the control of research processes and results, something that has been observed in respect to academic research more generally (e.g., Vines et al., 2013). It is an equal if not greater risk in respect to student research projects where an individual researcher, rather than a team, with limited time, experience, and resources is seeking to comply with an expectation that qualitative research protects and promotes the engagement of marginalized communities. Demonstrating a *faux* sensitivity toward such communities has become a further ritual of the close-up, qualitative researcher. In practice, doing co-production is enormously difficult to achieve, time-consuming, and politically rife. Few researchers really achieve such goals. Yet, many feel increasingly impelled to make weak claims that their participants have really participated beyond being milked for their data.

A further aspect to participatory posturing is that it is common for qualitative researchers to claim that they are using an ethnographic framework when, in practice, there is often insufficient evidence that such an assertion is defensible. There are practical reasons why this claim can also be suspect. The short duration of a research student's engagement in an organizational context and the limited nature of data gathering that takes place, often consisting of little more than interviews, means that few are real "ethnographers" in the true sense of the word. Here, it would be more authentic if claims were couched in terms of drawing on ethnographic techniques rather than researchers over-egging their ethnographic credentials (Wolcott, 1999).

Ethical cleansing

Some reference to research ethics is now a more or less compulsory part of any research methodology chapter and, indeed, published papers. However, the manner in which this occurs is frequently tokenistic and highly defensive based on a curiously "front-ended" approach to understanding how ethical issues arise in research (Macfarlane, 2009). In other words, potential ethical issues need to be identified by the researcher in advance of undertaking their research. This process has tidied research ethics into a neat, but thoroughly inauthentic, bureaucratic bundle. In practice, many senior academics regard ethical approval processes as a tiresome administrative

chore and delegate the task to a junior member of their research team. Hence, "doing the ethics" has been made into a standardized procedure at the expense of what it ought to be: a thinking exercise in the research field.

Hughes (2005) used the phrase "ethical cleansing" (p. 229) to describe university ethical approval processes since they are largely concerned with institutional risk management rather than real research ethics with all its attendant messiness. The upshot of this is that gaining ethical approval has become a proxy for students "covering ethics" in relation to methodology. There are two problems with the way this is occurring. Firstly, real research ethics begins when an investigation commences (as opposed to before it begins) and complexities which have not necessarily been considered in advance are encountered.

> Ethical practice is an ongoing interaction of values in shifting contexts and relationships, rather than something delivered by a signed consent form or adherence to a static set of principles. (Hughes, 2005, p. 231)

This lack of predictability is especially true in qualitative research given that research instruments typically need to be developed and adapted in tandem with data collection. Interview schedules, for example, constructed in advance of interviews and submitted as part of an ethical approval application cannot ever hope to capture the direction and natural evolution of a genuinely in-depth interview. Conversations are simply not that predictable. Flexibility and adaptation will always be key. This contrasts with the development of instruments, such as questionnaires, in quantitative work. Here, the instrument is fully designed before data collection occurs, something that is far more difficult to achieve in qualitative research.

Secondly, reliance on ethical approval processes has reduced research ethics to a series of tokenistic mantras. Words and clichés such as "confidentiality," "anonymity," "informed consent," and "secure data storage" are ubiquitous and parroted by students and academics alike. Similarly, examples of stock sentences that commonly occur in student (and faculty) methodology chapters include "all data will be stored on a password protected computer/in a locked cabinet," "participation is entirely voluntary," and "data made publicly available will be fully anonymized." Possibly the most banal sentence, indicative of the problem at hand, is "I have obtained ethical approval from the university research ethics committee." It demonstrates that the researcher has ticked a box and complied with the institutional risk management framework rather than engaged with research ethics in any meaningful sense. This is a phrase that seeks to close off discussion about ethical issues rather than open up an authentic analysis of what these matters might actually be.

Ethical approval processes are further predicated on assumptions with respect to the "vulnerability" of those taking part in research. Here again the assumption is that all participants

are vulnerable when, in reality, there might be some who may be far less vulnerable than the researcher depending on their power and organizational position. Virtue signaling in respect to vulnerability though is expected especially in respect to research involving children, those with a limited educational background, and indigenous people along with an acknowledgment of the power differential between the parties. This mantra works well where genuine power differences exist, but where researchers are in an inferior power position compared with those that they are researching (such as academics working in higher education), the concept of vulnerability is less convincing.

Despite this complex reality, in practice a lot of real ethical issues in research remain unreported or get artificially tidied up. While most close-up, qualitative researchers believe in the importance of reflexivity, students tend to steer away from candid discussions regarding ethical challenges. This is not surprising given the stern warnings students receive regarding the importance of obtaining ethical approval in the first place and little else beyond this instruction. Having successfully navigated this bureaucratic hurdle students can be fearful that raising (real) ethical issues may endanger their original ethical approval and so tend to stay silent, even if they have encountered unpredictable challenges while conducting their research.

Symbolic citation

Many of those that subscribe to close-up qualitative research see it as more than simply gaining a better understanding of practice and as a part of a radical agenda to bring about social change through critical reflection and action.

> One of the functions of close-up research with its emphasis on depth and understanding is an attempt to explain why things are as they are and, where we identify wrongs, *ceteris paribus* how we might change them. (Clegg et al., 2016, pp. 234–235)

In order to achieve such socially radical objectives, research is expected to be "critically theorised" (Clegg et al., 2016, p. 238). Even if postgraduate students do not share such an agenda though, they can feel obliged to gesture their compliance with particular ideological stances via a practice known as symbolic citation. It has long been recognized that one reason for citation is for authors to signal their allegiance to a school of thought representing "clusters of like-minded researchers and scholars" (Allen, 1997, p. 937). This is a practice known as symbolic citation or copied citations and is essentially a form of (soft) plagiarism. It is also, and more importantly for my purposes in illustrating different forms of emotional performativity, about symbolizing the ideological credentials of the researcher through referencing the great and the good in a particular school of thought. In seeking to explain why the majority of texts that cite others do not explore their theoretical contributions, Ramos et al. (2012, p. 712) provided two possible explanations.

Either publications have only been skim-read superficially or "are not read but are merely copied from other works' reference lists." Both practices are common.

Students writing methodology chapters may enter into symbolic citation as a means of demonstrating their emotional commitment to whichever philosophical/ideological position they have chosen to align with. This frequently involves citing important and influential authors in a tokenistic way without demonstrating any depth of understanding about their ideas or (probably) reading them. Classic examples of symbolic citation include referencing the work of Geertz (1973) for ethnographic research or Glaser and Strauss (1967) for "grounded theory." In the case of a "thick description," following the work of Geertz (1973), claims are sometimes very "thin," based, for example, on little more than standard interview data.

Symbolic citation can also give rise to mistakes which can be made by the original author of a text and are then copied without checking for accuracy by others. Researchers frequently lift references from other publications without consulting the original source (Broadus, 1983). This means that when the author of a publication fails to cite correctly or accurately, the error can become compounded in the literature. This can range from the correct spelling of an author's name to more serious misattributions. For example, the notion of four organizational cultures identified by Harrison (1972) is widely attributed, by both students and academics alike, to Handy (1985) who subsequently helped to popularize Harrison's model of culture in his book *Understanding Organizations*. At the time of writing (October 2020), and mainly as a result of the incorrect attribution of the culture model, Handy's book has approximately six times as many citations (6,153) in Google Scholar as Harrison's article (1,167).

In research methodology, symbolic citation is used for uncritical positive valorization of theorists and thinkers associated with social theory and method, such as Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Margaret Archer, Judith Butler, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. The flip side of this undiluted adulation is where some ideas and concepts are roundly condemned as beyond the pale. Examples of concepts regularly subject to condemnation include "managerialism" and "positivism." Similarly, the word "neoliberalism" is now used by academic writers as a term of abuse too (Lipscomb, 2019) having had its true meaning largely hollowed out in much the same way as "fascism" became little more than a swear word in the 1940s, as Orwell (1944) observed.

A further attraction of symbolic citation for research students is that it helps to extend their list of references with minimal effort without reading or really engaging with the cited texts. Citations of key thinkers and authors add a verisimilitude or a scholarly gloss to a dissertation or thesis that suggests a deep theoretical engagement that may be fake rather than real. It can provide an opportunity to list "the great and the good" associated with a particular methodological camp or group of critical theorists. The technological convenience of automated referencing tools such as Endnote eases this process further. The very attentive student may even manage to include one or

more references to the work of their supervisor as a signal of their devotion to their mentor's methodological position or ideological cause.

There are other practical reasons for symbolic citation connected with "bulking up" a dissertation or thesis; 80,000 to 100,000 words is now widely regarded as a standard length of a doctoral thesis in most parts of the West. However, the PhD thesis used to be more succinct and often published as a short book when first introduced to British higher education in the 1920s (Goodchild & Miller, 1997, p. 26). Hence, at a more mundane level, symbolic citation helps to pad out the thesis. This is nonetheless still a form of fake learning since it is seeking to represent an academic non-achievement as an achievement.

Pastoral power, culture, and discipleship

This article has been written largely from the perspective of working in a Western higher educational setting, albeit with significant numbers of international students present on master's and doctoral degree programs, a large proportion of whom are from China and elsewhere in East Asia. In a Western educational context, the concept of social justice is strongly embedded in the rhetoric of higher education practice. This helps to partly explain the emphasis given to the ethical treatment of research subjects. Moreover, standardized ethical approval processes are rigorously enforced and have become an article of faith of institutional policy and supervisory practice in the West. However, supervisory practice needs to be understood as culturally framed. This means that in other, non-Western higher education contexts across the globe there are different nuances and cultural values that result in alternative displays of emotional performativity. For example, in an East Asian context, the cultural norms of *guanxi*, respect for seniors, and obedience play a role in shaping the supervisor–supervisee relationship. In both Western and non-Western contexts, research students need to navigate different sets of cultural expectations. At the extreme, this can result in forms of discipleship, where the academic apprentice becomes a devout follower of the ideas and methodological convictions of their academic supervisor (Frow, 1988). Quite aside from the risks of encouraging discipleship in terms of fake learning, it is a phenomenon that may further retard the future intellectual development of an academic field.

In understanding why fake practices exist, academics need to practice what they preach by being self-critical about the potential role of their own "pastoral power" (Atkinson, 2012). This phrase, derived from the Anglosphere, means that academic supervisors are a powerful influence on students and, in a research context, impressionable students may end up lip-syncing to the same ideological tune as their supervisors. There is, hence, a need to recognize that strategic deception arises because students get to know the methodological convictions of their supervisors only too well. Someone's whole *persona*, and professional identity, can be tied to a particular theoretical approach (Trowler, 2012). When this occurs, methodological guidance can lapse into methodolatry

and students can feel obliged to swear their allegiance to a flag that they do not really believe in. There is growing evidence that students learning in many contexts strategically comply with the demands for "reflection" on academic programs (Atkinson, 2012; Hobbs, 2007). The verisimilitude of qualitative, close-up research is linked to a researcher's genuine commitment to reflexivity and self-disclosure.

Perhaps 20 or 30 years ago, critical reflexivity was an overdue *corrective* to the apparent invisibility of the researcher in the research process. It was rare for a researcher's positionality to be explicitly surfaced within methodological work. Today, in qualitative work, the reverse is true. Positionality statements and references to reflexivity have become more of a stock convention. Is it even any longer valid to talk about "traditional" and "critical" approaches to research, or has the "critical" perspective become the new "traditional"? At one level, this is a great success story where critical reflexivity is explored authentically, but there also appears to be an increasing tendency to treat the practices and lexicon of close-up research as ready-to-wear garments. When ideas and concepts enter the mainstream, their meaning can quickly become oversimplified. The nuances get stripped away. The word "reflection" has now sadly become little more than a performance indicator for a range of professionals, including students completing dissertations and theses in the social sciences.

We know that in the world of the news media—and fake news—it is important to find a scapegoat. In attributing blame for the types of inauthenticity I have illustrated that the obvious target is the perpetrator: normally, but not always, the research student. Is it possible though that the academic profession is responsible, at least in part, for this state of affairs? While the focus of this article has been on the effect of emotional performativity on postgraduate students pursuing independent research projects in higher education, it is probable that some (if not all) of these learnt behaviors can be observed in the work of academics as well. This is especially true in respect to symbolic citation given the weight of evidence that such practices are common across academia (e.g., Ramos et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The examples given of fake learning in respect to the writing of methodology chapters in this article illustrate the concept of emotional performativity. This concerns the way in which students feel under pressure to comply with the moralistic and ideological elements of learning. In this context, it can lead to a form of methodological political correctness. The moralistic elements of learning about methodology involve parroting a sense of caring and sensitivity about the rights and feelings of "participants" (*ethical cleansing*) and their potential desire to be actively engaged with the research process (*participatory posturing*). The ideological elements of emotional performativity in respect to methodology involves personally affiliating with a preexisting sociopolitical

school of thought or "camp" (*methodolatry)* and reinforcing this identity via *phony positionality* and *symbolic citation*.

The presence of positionality and reflective statements in research reporting enhances the apparent trustworthiness of the work of the lone researcher. Yet, there is a need to be aware of the scope for disingenuous manipulation. Feeling fraudulent as an academic—otherwise known as the "imposter syndrome"—is a common enough condition. When academics reflect on their feelings of inadequacy, this tends to focus almost exclusively on their lives as teachers rather than researchers (e.g., Overall, 1997). Perhaps there is a need to extend this self-analysis to the research arena and the way in which "faking it" also occurs.

Acknowledgement

Declaration of conflicting interests

Funding

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