

## Fuck It

### *Profaning Methodologies*

---

**ABSTRACT** Profane methodologies is one way to describe research practices as creation rather than categorization and optimization. This essay takes on the utterance of *fuck it*, ubiquitous in late capitalism, as a spark that profanes methodologies. The essay explores the creative potential of *fuck it* in research methodologies in three ways. First, *fuck it* is situated within existing modes of inquiry. Second, *fuck it* is discussed as a performative that creates both an impasse and aesthetic. Third, *fuck it* is explored in three locations using both low theory exemplars and data from an ongoing post qualitative inquiry. **KEYWORDS** Post qualitative inquiry; Research creation; Assemblage theory; Affect; Impasse

---

*Fuck it* is a performative utterance of productive disinterest in the project of naming of social environments such that they can be optimized. It is also a performative utterance of productive disinterest in naming methodological movements such that they can be walled off from others. *Fuck it* initiates a pause, or an impasse (Berlant, 2011), in social science research settings. Research that minds its manners “provide[s] an infrastructure of sociality” (Berlant, 2011, p. 172) that allows radical neoliberalism, or “the World As We Know It” (Massumi, 1992, p. 103) to continue apace (Clough, 2018). The point here is not coarseness for its own sake, but rather to interrupt spaces where methodological manners allow for the continuation of a problematic world and, in that impasse, to experiment with making our worlds differently.

*Fuck it* here is also an immediate response to an intensely practical research conundrum within a research project at a four-year university in the south-eastern United States. Specifically, I was compelled to say *fuck it* in the data collection stage of this project, and I was then inspired to explore *fuck it* within its methodological practices. This project was a post qualitative study of the impact of learning communities on undergraduate students and other

---

*Departures in Critical Qualitative Research*, Vol. 12, Number 1, pp. 4–26. ISSN: 2333-9489, electronic ISSN: 2333-9497 © 2023 by the Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved. Request permission to photocopy or reproduce article content at the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://online.ucpress.edu/journals/pages/reprintspermissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/dcqr.2023.12.1.4>

associated persons and institutions. Learning communities, in their most basic definition, refers

to a variety of curricular approaches that intentionally link or cluster two or more courses, often around an interdisciplinary theme or problem, and enroll a common cohort of students. They represent an intentional restructuring of students' time, credit, and learning experiences, to build community, enhance learning, and foster connections among students, faculty, and disciplines. (Smith et al., 2004, p. 20)

The higher education literature now classifies learning communities as one of several high-impact practices (HIPs) that universities can implement to best improve student outcomes (Kuh, 2008). HIPs thrive in crisis ordinariness, as their existence is justified through their positive impact on student retention and graduation, both of which are marketed by foundations and philanthrocapitalist organizations as persistent locations of crisis in the modern college (Complete College America, 2011; Glover, 2020; Greenstein, 2017; Kuh, 2008). The crisis of universities failing to create cultures of retention and completion can be solved, in part, through ensuring students complete one or more HIPs beginning in their first year. HIPs live in the “metastructure of consent” (Berlant, 2011, p. 185) produced by radical neoliberalism in the academy through delivering a quick route to retention and graduation solutions that administrators desperately desire. HIPs merge mannerly methodologies of outcomes research and assessment (e.g., Mayhew et al., 2016) with mannerly college practices of responsibility to degree completion metrics. And yet, something happens in HIPs. There are moments and openings of connection and possibility oozing within learning communities (cf. Wolgemuth et al., 2020).

My conundrum centered on this oozing: How can one capture and represent ooze in research, and how is such an urge commensurate with post qualitative inquiry? This essay explores this conundrum through profaning methodologies. In their enactments, profane methodologies rise to the challenge of researching college environments that creatively explore students' capacities, evincing a productive disinterest in outcomes measurement and management. A *fuck it* aesthetic evaluates the products of learning communities in excess of institutional outcome metrics.

This essay explores profaning methodologies in several ways. First, it situates this discussion within poststructural theories and their kin to make clear that *fuck it* requires both alter-normative judgments on social science

research methodologies and the removal of boundaries around the proper ways of performing profane research. Second, it sets up the problem space of this essay: What are the transformative potentials of a *fuck it* aesthetic? Third and finally, this essay explores three locations of the *fuck it* aesthetic. Across this essay, the *fuck it* aesthetic is named and explored through philosophy, cultural studies and sites of law theory, and a traditional social science field site. In this array of spaces through which you, the reader, may enter this essay, I hope you find your own inspiration and instigation to make *fuck it* a daily practice.

### (HIGH) THEORIES OF PROFANING METHODOLOGIES

Poststructural and posthuman theories of social relations and their kin (e.g., Alaimo, 2016; Braidotti, 2013; Campt, 2017; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987; Keeling, 2019; Weheliye, 2014) theorize the profane—research practices and methodologies that share ontoepistemological commitments to contingency and entanglement—at research sites. Profane, as such, includes an ever-expanding constellation of theories. This focus on the profane is of a tradition that has questioned social science’s adherence to scientized research methods (and research paradigms) for decades (e.g., Childers et al., 2013; Dillard, 2000; Koro-Ljungberg, 2015; Lather, 1992, 2004; Martin & Sugarman, 1993; Springgay & Truman, 2018; St. Pierre et al., 2016). In recent years the profane has gathered under the signs of post qualitative inquiry (Lather, 2016; St. Pierre, 2011), research creation (Manning, 2016), and others. I use profaning methodologies here to cast the widest possible tent around research practices and methodologies that share ontoepistemological commitments to contingency and entanglement. I default to discussions of poststructural philosophy both because it is my training and because it constitutes a significant theoretical base of current writing on research creation and post qualitative inquiry. Profaning methodologies does not presume poststructural theory as a starting point for research; it requires only the above commitments.

This essay explores *fuck it* as the act of profaning methodology, or the utterance that can spark a *fuck it* aesthetics and profane methodologies. Profaning methodology gallivants between the following incommensurate assertions: poststructural philosophy can be used wrong in social science research, and poststructural philosophy is always done wrong in social science research. The incommensurability of these statements are the *fuck it*

threshold—the point at which researchers acknowledge that they have commitments that they cannot perfectly uphold, and yet they proceed apace. The ethics of profaning research methodologies does not lie in an epistemological judgment of wrong or right, it lies in continuing to enact them, an ontoepistemological commitment, with an orientation toward progress, itself a contested concept.

### *Fuck It to Right and Wrong, Let's Fuck With Incommensurability*

There is no amount of reading that you can do that will make your social science research methodology properly profane. There is no threshold for mannerly, correct, proper, orthodox, or sacred when profaning methodology. Social science research is inescapably representational—researchers take presentations of social worlds they experience, or the data they collect, and represent these to readers and other consumers of their work. Modes of social science inquiry like post qualitative and research-creation approach experimentation. The moment of representation is the moment of the death of the movement required of poststructural research and profane methodologies. When representation wins, today's profanity becomes tomorrow's banality. Contingency in poststructural research practices becomes sedimented with standard forms of representation, this conversation here included. To profane is to live out ontoepistemological commitments to contingency and entanglement, and thus the incommensurate, even as representation happens (Berlant & Stewart, 2019). There is no hard boundary at which reading poststructural philosophy or its kin takes researchers away<sup>1</sup> into profane methodologies. For Elizabeth St. Pierre (2018), post qualitative researchers must read (profane) theories until they become them, they “must live the theories (will not be able not to live them) and will, then, live in a different world enabled by a different ethico-onto-epistemology” (p. 604). If there is no boundary at which reading makes us profane, there is also no single order. It cannot be necessary to start reading within a particular tradition, so long as texts express profane commitments. To center the profane is to commit to multiple entry points into this world.

There is an ethics to profaning methodologies that cannot be ignored. If we agree with the ontoepistemological commitments of profane theories, the only ethical research practices are in profane methodologies. And still, even when we live our theories, for the most part we enact them wrong. Our research becomes mannerly by virtue of representation. As such, the act of profaning methodologies requires a comfort with a judgment that we have

used profane theories wrong, even when we have taken all the right steps; we have been properly motivated to read all the right texts, the new texts, the canon, the anti-canon, the books with the 2023 publication dates, etcetera. This comfort that the act of profaning methodologies requires comes not in harnessing the confidence of a mediocre cishet white philosophy bro,<sup>2</sup> but in being unconcerned with performing mannerly research. *Fuck it* redirects our desires not to work toward the abolition of judgments of right and wrong methodological practices, or the elimination of incorrect post qualitative research, but rather work toward “abolition as the founding of a new society” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 42). Embracing the incommensurability of our profane beings and mannerly actions produces the profane world that haunts our here and now.

### THE FUCK IT AESTHETIC

To center a profanity like *fuck it* in research methodology for the express purpose of profaning research is perhaps a curious goal. For some, the constant repetition of *fuck* in this essay obscures any attempt to engage the argument at hand. Perhaps a censoring like *f\*ck it* or *f@#S it* or *f-word it* would help. Perhaps another euphemism could be substituted. While I am sympathetic to these arguments, there is a singular force to the language of *fuck it* in our times, and the intensity it provides as an aesthetic category is precisely what is needed in research methodology. *Fuck it* combined with profane ontoepistemological commitments provides a spark that no close substitutes provide. It is this spark this essay chases, in a manner that brings to mind Foucault’s (1984) well-worn insight that it “is not that everything is bad, but that everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do” (p. 343). My argument here is that everything is combustible. Mannerly research practices order the *everything* of our worlds to render it scientifically, and thus inert. Even so, “obscenity oozes out from under the rugs of ‘polite’ schooling and ‘tidy’ society” (Wolgemuth et al., 2020, p. 24). The mannerly scientific study of social spaces continues to uphold “the World As We Know It” (Massumi, 1992, p. 103; see also Ahmed, 2012; Clough, 2018; Deleuze, 1986/1988; Ferguson, 2012). *Fuck it* is a spark that ignites this combustible landscape; it is a performative (Butler, 1990; Ngai, 2012). It brings worlds into being with its utterance.

*Fuck it*, both as an utterance and more broadly as an aesthetic, sparks the combustible World As We Know It to create an impasse, a space in which

what has come before can no longer continue as is. This performative spark and the impasse it ignites is read here not as a method for profaning methodology but as an aesthetic category, a location of combustion. A *fuck it* aesthetic in social science research profanes methodology, and it is in this space that worldmaking occurs.

### *Fuck It, An Impasse*

*Fuck it* brings life in its midst to a running in circles. This is the space of hope in the world—a pause in our world of crisis ordinariness or mannerly research practices in which a different world might take hold. For Lauren Berlant (2011), this pause is an impasse. An impasse is a

stretch of time in which one moves around with a sense that the world is at once intensely present and enigmatic, such that the activity of living demands both a wandering absorptive awareness and a hypervigilance that collects material that might help to clarify things, maintain one's sea legs, and coordinate the standard melodramatic crises with those processes that have not yet found their genre of event. (p. 4)

An impasse is the world created by the ignition of the combustible. Research impasses gather artifacts in line to be faithfully represented and procedures waiting to find a methodological home and, instead of sorting them into these places, jumble them together in a whole that denies such internalized coherences. Impasses re/make worlds, but there is no inherent value to this practice; an impasse can be destructive or productive, or both at once (Berlant, 2011; Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). An impasse can provide a break from a world that is otherwise crumbling around you, and an impasse can break any discernibly good path forward. In an impasse,

one keeps moving, but one moves paradoxically, in the *same space*. An impasse is a holding station that doesn't hold securely but opens out into anxiety, that dogpaddling around a space whose contours remain obscure. . . . It marks a delay that demands activity. The activity can produce impacts and events, but one does not know where they are leading. (Berlant, 2011, p. 199, emphasis in original)

The utterance of *fuck it* does not ensure an impasse that leads to the liberation of research from previously oppressive practices. It does not even ensure that research practices in the end will change at all. It creates a spacetime in which research methodologies might change, or a site in which we might revalue our research practices (Massumi, 2018). There is no way to ensure

a productive *fuck it*, as there is no way to know what the product of *fuck it* will be in advance. There is also no way to know what practices will be judged destructive, unproductive, or productive in the wake of *fuck it*. These framings elide the potential of *fuck it*, as they gesture to desired claims on the future. The impasse produced by *fuck it* provides an opening of the present.

### *Fuck It, An Aesthetic*

A *fuck it* aesthetic, then, is the quality of a world within an impasse produced by the utterance *fuck it*. *Aesthetic* here promiscuously strays from philosophical aesthetics to the quick, almost throwaway definition Nathan Snaza (2019) gives “our literally aesthetic capacities (from *aestheis*: sense touching)” (p. 120). *Fuck it* as an utterance produces a sense touching that breaks through the threshold of mannerly methodology. As an aesthetic category, *fuck it* takes seriously Sianne Ngai’s (2012) centering of trivial, multiple aesthetic categories: “What better way to explore the ramifications of how aesthetic experience no longer seems definable by the presence of a single exceptional feeling . . . than through a set of aesthetic categories based on complicated intersections of ordinary affects” (p. 23)? Indeed, for Brian Massumi (2018), theorizing worldmaking requires the use of aesthetic categories amid otherwise rationalist, mannerly procedures. Kandice Chuh (2019) expands on the relationship between the aesthetic and the rational: Aesthetic inquiry is the operation of a “corporeal common sense” that “leaves the specificity of each sense intact, and understands each as equally but incommensurably contributing to the ability of the body to apprehend the world it traverses” (p. 22). Exploring *fuck it* as an aesthetic category provides researchers an avenue to attend to its intensity in excess of rationalizations or other means of making such an obscenity mind its manners.

In justifying the aesthetic categories that frame her book, Ngai (2012) gives three axes that give an aesthetic category coherence as such. An aesthetic category is first an experience “of a particular kind of form (although, as we shall see, a particularly ‘formless’ or amorphous kind),” if second, it makes “judgments based on feeling rather than determinate concepts or abstract principles,” and third, it makes “the claim to universal validity that every aesthetic judgment makes, and in the same performative mode—if not with the same degree of affective force” (p. 23). Does *fuck it* perform the work of an aesthetic category? First, *fuck it* refers to an amorphous form. The possible range of subjects and feelings this phrase can portray in English is limitless. This is the key to both its amorphous form and its judgment making on

feeling instead of determinate concepts. *Fuck*, on its own, “has no intrinsic meaning at all . . . it is merely a word of offensive force that can be substituted in oaths for other swearwords or in maledictions” (Fairman, 2006, p. 11). *Fuck it* is a derivative phrase that provides *fuck* a direction. Second, *fuck it* is a judgment on feeling or affect because it cannot be a judgment on rationality or on a determinate concept. *Fuck it* has no stable meaning and thus no boundaries around its possibility. Third and finally, *fuck it* makes a universal claim to validity. There is no ambiguity in this utterance; it is a universal judgment of the experience at hand. *Fuck it* performs the work of an aesthetic category, and as such, it is an utterance and concept capable of sidestepping rationalized discourse to make different worlds possible (Chuh, 2019; Massumi, 2018; Ngai, 2012). *Fuck it* is bad manners, it is a decidedly impolite utterance in the context of social science research, and its production is at times of frustration, or possibility, or resignation—not at rationally determinable points in time. It profanes research methodologies with its utterance by enacting a break with the research world it precedes and installing its own aesthetic in its place.

#### LOCATIONS OF *FUCK IT*

In this final major section, I explore the work of *fuck it* in the world. The specific artifacts of low theory (Halberstam, 2011), research field sites, and theories used here to explore *fuck it* as an impasse and aesthetic are combustible. The explosion they create is the ensuing exploration of *fuck it* in motion, or rather, *fuck it* as motion. In what follows, we work through three locations where a particular *fuck it* initiates an impasse. Each location of *fuck it* explored below is connected to both an empirical site from low theory and a traditionally empirical site. I explain each of these sites here, in turn.

Low theory, as Jack Halberstam (2011) explains through Stuart Hall, is “a kind of theoretical model that flies below the radar, that is assembled from eccentric texts and examples and that refuses to confirm the hierarchies of knowing that maintain the *high* in high theory” (p. 16, emphasis in original). Low theory brings cultural studies and pop culture together in a spacetime that inures us to manners of all sorts, and an orientation to high theory that says *fuck it*. In doing so, it sparks reconsiderations of theorizing and theories themselves. The locations of a *fuck it* aesthetic from low theory given below—podcasts, television, and music—provide three possible locations of the *fuck it* aesthetic.



The second type of empirical site mobilized is, again, an ongoing post qualitative research study of learning communities at a four-year university in the southeastern United States. There are surely research sites more perceptibly problematic—racism, sexism, transhomophobia, and other fascisms thrive. To be clear, these are not separable from learning communities. *Fuck it* does not require its practitioners to rank and select the most problematic spaces; this would violate its own logic against optimization. *Fuck it* does, however, require a problem of optimization that in some way can be made perceptible to others. To be more direct: As researchers, we need to be able to perform our *fuck its* in a way that can satisfactorily respond to a *who fucking cares?* from others. In addition to the above fascisms, learning communities also evince a less perceptible problem: They are a site of quotidian violence, “the violence that maintains a temporality and a spatial logic hostile to the change and chance immanent in each now” (Keeling, 2019, p. 17). I take up this quotidian violence here. *Fuck it* at this empirical site reanimates the quotidian moments of this HIP; in doing so, it challenges this post qualitative study from within to attend to occasions wherein student success was experienced with a disinterest to outcomes.

#### Location: *Fuck It* (Nothing Matters)

One aesthetic judgment of a simple *fuck it* is *this is not worth it*. This judgment can be attached to impasses of productive disinterest—disinterest producing the impasse. This disinterest is marked by a doubled sensation. The first of these is the sense that nothing matters anyway, or that there is a situation you want to change, but you do not think you are able to change it, so you do nothing. The second sensation in this aesthetic is that you see this resignation and inaction at work in other people, and you despise it—and still you do not move in a way discernible to outsiders to change your own circumstances. The low theory exemplar of this location of *fuck it* comes from John B. McLemore, star of the podcast *S-Town*. The social science exemplar of this location of *fuck it* comes from observational data collection practices within learning community classrooms.

*Low Theory Empirical: John McLemore and Friends on S-Town* The *fuck it* that initially sparked my journey into *fuck it* as methodology came from John McLemore. When I heard this gloss of McLemore and friends’ “fuck-it philosophy” (21:31), as podcast host Brian Reed (2017a) names it, something sparked in me. It captured my attention for the four years between its release and my typing these words. As Reed (2017a) explains,

There's a particular philosophy I've encountered down here [in Shittown, Alabama], and will continue to encounter. That is the fuck-it philosophy, a belief that there's no sense in worrying or thinking too much about any given decision, because life is going to be difficult and unfair regardless of what you do. It's more than a belief, really. It's a way of moving moment to moment through the world. And from the get-go, Kabrahm seems to be a subscriber. I show up with a microphone and ask if I can talk to him on the record about a matter I have yet to name, and he's immediately game. *Fuck it*. And we walk over behind some stacks of lumber to be alone. (21:31)

The impasse here is sparked by a realization that nothing matters. Kabrahm here expresses one of two components of this location of *fuck it*: There is no path forward to becoming an ideal subject, so do what moves you. *Fuck it* here accepts the fucked-up world as unchangeable; its impasse is embodied through a shrug of your shoulders and doing nothing about it (Reed, 2017a).

McLemore's own *fuck it* aesthetic doubles this move, as he participates in Kabrahm's move and completes the aesthetic by railing against this behavior in others. As McLemore laments, "You know, I really hate that these kids know all the things that they know, and they just accept them as normal. . . . Accept it as something you can't do nothing about" (Reed, 2017a, 34:26). To Reed, this is another example of *fuck it*—but in this case, the outside world says *fuck it* and McLemore remains, jousting at windmills. As Reed (2017a) laments,

It maddens John. The whole world is giving a collective shrug of its shoulders and saying *fuck it*. What I admire about John is that in his own misanthropic way, he's crusading against one of the most powerful, insidious forces we face—resignation, the numb acceptance that we can't change things. He's trying to shake people out of their stupor, trying to convince them that it is possible to make their world a better place. . . . There is a different way. (34:55)

This impasse both makes this realization about others possible and traps its central character in the impasse. He is in a double bind. The world says *fuck it* and that makes him mad. He wants other people to recognize their own complicity in "the World As We Know It" (Massumi, 1992, p. 103) and do something to change it. Yet he spends the last years of his life ranting about his hometown he calls Shittown to anyone who will listen while never moving away. This tension eventually breaks a 20-year friendship of his:

“And I just couldn’t hear any more of it. I couldn’t hear Shittown, Shittown. I couldn’t hear it anymore. If you’re not going—if you don’t like it, leave it. You can leave it” (Reed, 2017b, 35:40). This impasse is marked by irritation at the resignation and inaction of others combined with your own resignation and inaction.

The specific aesthetic of *fuck it (nothing matters)*, or the quality of the world created by its impasse, is the chaos, mixed signals, and incommensurability of railing against the nothing matters of others while being caught in a nothing matters of your own. The quality of this world is not just the simple resignation that Reed names; it is an active, productive resignation that John B. McLemore embodies. *Fuck it* here marks the quality of giving up tag-teamed with dismay at “the World As We Know It” (Massumi, 1992, p. 103). It is the aesthetic double bind of the promise of individualized agency inside a profoundly entangled world.

*Traditionally Empirical: The Head on Desk Count (HODC)* A major component of data collection for the learning communities research collaborative mentioned previously was observations of learning community classrooms. I observed two 3-credit courses and two 1-credit courses. In the 3-credit courses in particular, I found myself defaulting to lecture format habits. In other words, I often defaulted to taking observation notes on the course content shared by learning community professors as if I were a student in the course. It may go without saying, but I was not there to observe the content of courses! I was there to attune to student engagement and signs of the impact of the learning community on students. I knew better than to focus on course content, and my observation habits were haunted by relationships to similar environments.

I also did not, and still do not, know how to observe student engagement. In this frame I was beholden to the promise of individual researcher agency, that I could see engagement within a profoundly entangled world. As I noted in the first week of class, “What does engagement look like? Did the earlier break out count for today? Notes are out, at least two people have books open, two people typing and two writing.” In fact, 45 minutes earlier I noted “five laptops up, everyone else but one taking notes by hand except one person with only a plastic water bottle and pack of Pop-Tarts on his desk.” To research student engagement in excess of metrics, I was still counting. Five laptops, one pack of Pop-Tarts. Something in me sparked, and I said *fuck it* to the imperative to represent affective student engagement outside of

quantification. One week in, I hit the doubled *fuck it (nothing matters)* that John McLemore lived. I despaired at the quick moves to quantification motivated in part by a belief that the human experience in its fullness is not representable so we might as well count it, and here I began to do the same myself.

*Fuck it (nothing matters)* was a specific reaction to data collection from within a post qualitative study. We were on the hunt for affect. Our premise was that there is an impact of a HIP like a learning community that is affective, and as such outside the range of current ways of determining high-impact in the moment—student engagement. But by definition, an affective student engagement would exceed typical representations available to researchers. What else is there to observe? How can we faithfully represent the affective? We cannot by definition, so *fuck it*. If nothing matters—if there is no way to capture affect by definition, then I was going to count the most ordinary parts of these classroom environments.

This impasse changed my observations. It stopped me from taking notes about course content and shifted my attention to students and other components of the classroom environment. I began counting and quantifying affective fields through things like the head on desk count (HODC). How many students were not just asleep, but aggressively asleep? This impasse made it possible for me to reorient my attention from the lecturer to the rest of the room and whatever atmospherics I could capture. If nothing matters—if we cannot capture affect, I might as well count how many students are laid out on desks, how many students have their hoodies up, and the range of drink cups and snacks. This study crusades against the mannerly research notion that we can know concepts like impact or engagement through simple measurements, and in data collection, I resigned myself to simple measurements in the hope that something might come from it. In week three, this location of *fuck it* generated the following observation:

7 Chick-fil-A bags on just this side of the room. 2 on the other. Most also with Chick-fil-A cups. A McDonalds cup. 4 single-use water bottles, one with a red liquid inside. 2 reusable water bottles. 2 tumblers with straws. 1 coffee tumbler. 1 iced tea bottle . . .

8:30 HODC: 3.

How do people stay awake in this class day after day? Especially without caffeine or some kind of stimulant? I enjoy [this subject], and, this is just too much. Too much, too little, too something. Too much lecture format.

The low buzz of the HVAC, the flow of [the professor's] voice, only small prompts to contribute to discussion, no movement . . .

A student interjects into lecture format—quickly—and [the professor] responds. Someone is engaged.

*Fuck it (nothing matters)* produced different attendings in my observations. Something came from it—here, I got close to an engagement I may not have attended to otherwise. The something that comes from it exceeds the notes I could take, as that something is inarticulable. Ultimately then, nothing comes from it, as there is no way to represent either the aesthetic of *fuck it (nothing matters)* or the affect of student engagement. As such, I do not remark on my actions here as individually agential, triumphant, or courageous, nor is this a specific recommendation on how to experience this aesthetic category in research. In this instance, a contingent and performative (Butler, 1990; Ngai, 2012) *fuck it* simply produced a remaking of my observational habits. Its particular efficacy will come to pass as the world continues to spin.

#### Location: *Fuck It (This Will Not Stand)*

The aesthetic judgment of *fuck it* can also be a *fuck this*. This is a sharpened aesthetic judgment, a judgment that names its problem directly and incites movement. The low theory exemplar of this location of *fuck it* comes from B\*ll O'Re\*lly's infamous *fuck it* outburst as anchor of *Inside Edition*. The social science exemplar of this location of *fuck it* comes from the learning communities study at the intersection of data collection and data analysis.

*Low Theory Empirical: B\*ll O'Re\*lly* Whereas the aesthetic of *fuck it (nothing matters)* both reorients its subjects toward action and forestalls that action, the aesthetic judgement of *fuck it (this will not stand)* is one of movement. This judgment says, "I see what is wrong here, and I will change it." The impasse initiated at this location is constituted by the movement of change that transforms the orientation of its speaker toward the externalized concern. *Fuck it* at this location differs from the previous location in its orientation to changing others, but it remains the case at this location that it is not oriented to changing the self. In the case of B\*ll O'Re\*lly, it was well documented that he was an asshole at the time of this particular utterance, and he continued to be an asshole for decades (Abramson, 2017; Lemann, 2006). Within the impasse at this location, the speaker orients their energy, whatever it may be, toward changing an externalized practice of concern.

The externalized concern of O'Reilly in this internet-famous meme is a teleprompter, and perhaps the author of its words. The clip in question is an undated outtake from his time as the anchor of the television magazine *Inside Edition*. The clip shows him attempting to pre-tape the closing of his show. He struggles with several takes, as he does not understand the colloquialism used in the script scrolling on the teleprompter. On his last attempt at pre-taping, specifically at the first ellipses in the text transcription below, he combusts. The text transcription, as usual, does no justice to the energy flowing through this outtake:

That's tomorrow, and that is it for us today, and we will leave you with a . . . I can't do it. We'll do it live. We'll do it live! *Fuck it!* Do it live! I can—I'll write it, and we'll do it live! Fucking thing sucks! [5, 4, 3 . . . ]  
That's tomorrow, and that is it for us today, I'm B\*ll O'Re\*lly, thanks again for watching, we'll leave you with Sting and a cut off his new album. Take it away. (CrownVictoriaCop, 2008, 0:00)

The clip goes silent, and O'Reilly is shown throwing a fit as he gets up from his chair to leave the set. *Fuck it* here sparks an impasse in which O'Reilly refuses to let this unjust world exist. He takes matters into his own hands, refusing the tyranny of the teleprompter and of the script's author, and completes the take on his own terms, live. He recognizes "the World As We Know It" (Massumi, 1992, p. 103) as grievous and does something about it. This impasse sparks externalized change while remaining unoriented to internalized change. O'Reilly may have completed his monologue on his own terms, but he remained an asshole on set for decades until his history of sexual assault in the workplace finally shamed his employer enough to fire him. It took decades for the impasse initiated by this *fuck it* (or perhaps an earlier *fuck it* from outtakes yet to come to light) to turn inward on its subject, and resolve.

The aesthetic of *fuck it* (*this will not stand*), from an outsider's orientation, is the quality and the feeling of the world changing world imperceptibly, then all at once. The quality of this world is the change of all manner of insignificant practices that do not add up in the short run to structural change. Whereas the aesthetic of the last location was mired in the recognition of an externalized problem, the aesthetic of this location is overcome by action toward an externalized problem. The aesthetic has shifted from recognition with no action to action with no progress.

*Traditionally Empirical: Buzz* As observational data collection in learning community classrooms continued, I settled into the double bind of the *fuck it (nothing matters)* aesthetic. From within this aesthetic, I encountered this next location of *fuck it*. The *fuck it (nothing matters)* aesthetic names the quality of the double bind: I hate it that you are resigned to the world, and I, too, am resigned to the world. The *fuck it (this will not stand)* location drops the resignation, but localizes the world in question to externalized problems. The impasse sparked by *fuck it (this will not stand)* creates an aesthetic of externalized action. In this impasse, things change but imperceptibly, all action and no consequence, until at some point both the internalized and externalized world changes. This impasse gives a feeling of running in a hamster wheel until the impasse closes, the wheel breaks loose from the axle holding it in its place, and things change. In the course of data collection, I came to a *fuck it (this ambiguity will not stand)* around naming the atmospherics of classroom spaces. I had incommensurate desires for order and chaos. It could not stand to simply have descriptions without a concept, even if the name foreclosed future modes of attention. *Fuck it (this chaos will not stand)*—we’ll call it buzz. This was a methodological call to order directly contradictory to my post qualitative commitments (Harney & Moten, 2013).

Buzz is a naming of a classroom affect that is not expressed in discernible words. Buzz is the sound of students settling into their seats for class that overtakes the formal activity:

Students: still have the sounds of getting ready, papers moving about, backpacks up and down from table to floor and back, pens, laptops being readied. A few students respond to [the professor’s] question—the words are indistinguishable from the buzz.

Buzz is the speech of the more-than-human elements in a classroom: the hum of the HVAC or the ray of sunlight obscuring a PowerPoint projection. Buzz is the sound underlying discussions of contentious issues, such as when a social science professor taught the concept of racial stereotypes, and asked students to name some out loud: “Black student: ‘White people don’t season their food’ <class falls out with buzz and laughter>.” Buzz was also present moments before, where the concept of white privilege was implicitly questioned. The professor asked for examples of stereotypes about white people, and a white student responded: “That we’re all privileged.” I recorded what follows in my field notes: “Buzz! Buzzy buzz, buzz on buzz, loud buzz. A Black student with their head on desk makes eye contact with me and rolls

his eyes. This is a buzz in vehement disagreement.” The origin of buzz did not even have to be perceptible to name it: “A buzz just rolled around the room, but I’m not quite sure what it’s attached to. It went away as quickly as it came.” The naming of buzz is the taming of affect.

Naming buzz within learning community spaces sparked an impasse with each naming. Buzz is an affective concept, and its naming was a continual action throughout my observation notes from its first instance forward. The practice of buzz happens, the sensation is named—and the sensation can never be captured by the name, there is no way for the name to do its job. *Fuck it (this will not stand)*, we’ll call it buzz, even though it remains uncapturable, out there in the world, a quality that exceeds representation. This impasse persists in this incommensurability between manners and profanity, order and chaos, or representation and affect. To close the impasse here would require a post qualitative study that eschews all representation. Notably, a *fuck it* that would name and capture buzz wouldn’t be a *fuck it* at all; it would be thoroughly mannerly. It would be more Ned Flanders than B\*ll O’Re\*lly: *okily dokily, this cannot stand*, we’ll call it buzz (Brooks et al., 1989–present). *Okily dokily* does not spark this impasse; *fuck it* does.

#### Location: *Fuck It* (We’re Doing Something)

Our third and final location of *fuck it* carries an aesthetic judgment of *this situation is worthy of my action, therefore I act*. It is incommensurate with our first location; *fuck it* contains multitudes. The low theory exemplar of this location of *fuck it* comes from music star Lizzo with music legend Missy Elliott. The social science exemplar of this location of *fuck it* comes from procedures of learning community data analysis.

*Low Theory Empirical: Lizzo and Missy Elliott* Lizzo and Missy Elliott paint a picture of our final location of *fuck it*. Their song “Tempo” finally uses fuck in its most profane use: “Slow songs, they for skinny hoes / Can’t move all of this here to one of those / I’m a thick bitch, I need tempo / *Fuck it up* to the tempo” (Lizzo & Missy Elliott, 2019, 0:09). It is indeed about fucking as a sexual activity. But *fuck it up* is also about changing one’s practices in order to consume, or to be able to support one’s own consumption, or to become less precarious (Berlant, 2011). It is also about shaking your ass when you do so. *Fuck it (we’re doing something)* initiates an impasse wherein subjects are not just caught up in action, they are caught up in the change of their material↔discursive circumstances. The impasse is in the stuckness in



change to themselves and others, externalized and internalized, without consequence to the territory of the assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). For example, Missy Elliott gives the following instructions to big womxn:

Thick girl, split / Get a bag, get rich / Hair done, fixed / If you see a hater, tell him quit / Get your own dough / Get your bread, own dough / Go on, ladies, head to the floor / Fuck up the tempo, thick girls get low. (Lizzo & Missy Elliott, 2019, 2:01)

There are several changes in material↔discursive circumstances offered here: get money, get your own money, actively set interpersonal boundaries and tell people how they should treat you, twerk on it. All of these actions change the lived experience of the person undertaking them and those surrounding her. And yet they remain ensconced in the racial capitalism, or assemblage of control (Deleuze, 1992), that produces the very problems (raced and sexed access to wealth and status) that these actions are designed to counteract. “Get a bag, get rich” (Lizzo & Missy Elliott, 2019, 2:01) is a far cry from a post-control politics. *Fuck it (we’re doing something)* always comes of and within an assemblage. It creates change in both yourself and others, but only so much—that is, until the assemblage reterritorializes and everything changes.

In social science research generally, this impasse initiates techniques of data analysis and data representation that push the limits of analysis and representation as pre-planned, externally validated methods undertaken by agential subjects on objects. This is an imperative that reading the right texts or grounding your theoretical framework in the right authors does not guarantee. This requires a *fuck it up* vigilance, an entire aesthetic oriented toward “fuck[ing] up the tempo, thick girls get[ting] low” (Lizzo & Missy Elliott, 2019, 2:17). “The World As We Know It” (Massumi, 1992, p. 103) is always within and around us, waiting to bring our research back to representation, clean findings, or themes that mind their manners.

The impasse that *fuck it (we’re doing something)* initiates makes radical change possible. It may be of and in the very system it critiques, but this is the only way: “escape always takes place in the World As We Know It” (Massumi, 1992, p. 105). In assemblage theory, history is discontinuous and assemblages orient truth and reality (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980/1987). If this is the case, then it is impossible to evaluate the constant actions within this impasse through something like design thinking or scientific

management where each would build on the other to produce an outcome. Each of these actions does nothing to the assemblage until they do everything. Each is of the system they are within, until the system changes. *Fuck it (we're doing something)* as an aesthetic is an evaluation of the world that none of this may matter, but we are going to act as if it will in the future anyway. In doing so, the future is built in the present. In the case of Lizzo and Missy Elliot, “Tempo” builds a refuge in a sea of racial capitalism, it is built of the tools of racial capitalism, and it enacts a future that gestures outside of its ground.

*Traditionally Empirical: Singular Engagements* This then is the question of data analysis within profane social science research: How can researchers build a social science outside of “conventional humanist qualitative inquiry” (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 223) from within a world built by it and built through representational practices? There is one way: You cannot, until you have. For research on the value of learning communities, this takes a specific point: How can we demonstrate the value of learning communities outside of values that can be measured as outcome variables such as student engagement, grade point average, retention, graduation, future earnings, and other markers of human capital (McMahon, 2009)? The perhaps unsatisfying answer is that representation of affective values will always fail. That is, their representation will always fail by definition, but at some point the world changes. The impasse at the *fuck it (we're doing something)* location here prompts continuous action to fight for new affective valuations of the student (and college) experience from within a measurable world.

From within this impasse, measurements born of research that minds its manners like measurements of student engagement (e.g., Zilvinskis, 2019) morph into singular student engagements, or simply singular engagements. Singular engagements are the affective qualities lived within learning communities, qualities that may become the outcomes that students and institutions chase—or not. These are engagements that elude measurement. These are, in each moment, Deleuze’s (1968/1994) eternal return of difference, “the reprise of pre-individual singularities which, in order that it can be grasped as repetition, presupposes the dissolution of all prior identities. Every origin is a singularity” (p. 202). These are the actualizations of histories, futurities, and realities that swirl in learning communities. These are the points at which students may become different. These are the points at which outcomes emerge, yet their form renders them mundane, skippable,

forgettable, detritus of what a mannerly social science research might orient itself toward. These are engagements as stories of heads on desks as well as the stench of the cadaver lab, the feeling in the air at the midpoint of the term, the rituals within 8 a.m. courses, and all of the various practices that become the habits (or not) that produce the outcomes (or not) that are measured later (or not). The search for and production of singular engagements in learning communities is the *fuck it (we're doing something)* that works and works and works to produce ordinary moments again and again and again. It repeats singular engagements ad infinitum. At some point the world changes, both within learning communities and within social science research.

The impasse produced through a focus on singular engagements makes possible alternative valuations of learning communities. This is the paradox inherent in learning communities and other practices that have gained a foothold in the modern undergraduate education landscape due in part to their identification as a HIP (Kuh, 2008; Zilvinskis, 2019). Their valuation through college impact metrics as a HIP protects their existence at colleges, and, learning communities have long been valued for now-obsolete reasons that have nothing to do with this modern metric (Meiklejohn, 1932/1971; Smithers, 2020). The *fuck it* aesthetic here produces a barrage of different practices, and, in their doing, new values take shape (Manning, 2016). This location of *fuck it* makes possible the creation of a new values system for the practices of undergraduate education—a new assemblage, or a new world.

### THE FUTURE IS PROFANE

The ethics of profaning methodology are stark. There is a doubled sense of this: profaning normative social sciences and profaning the procedures of inquiry you thought were profane in the first place. Both are ethical imperatives. This is living “in the break” (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 39), in incommensurability, in experimentation. It is not about getting it right or wrong—this is something we need to unlearn about methods. Profaning methodology is about sparking change in the world, honoring our contingency and entanglement.

This contingency and entanglement denies a static category of profane as well as a static response to the question of *who fucking cares?* Methodologies that mind their manners and profane methodologies are relative. The problems that come to matter in some social settings matter not at all in others. Different eras judge the methods and objects of our research differently. As

researchers, sometimes *fuck it* finds us and sometimes we seek it out. Agency is tricky, as not only is it hard to assign, but the agential pursuit of a Fuck It Aesthetic Applied to Issues of Broad Concern reinscribes a manners of its own. Profaning research is less a task of agency than conceptual and practical orientation (Ahmed, 2006). The impasse that *fuck it* provides orients our practices away from attachments (Berlant, 2011) to methodologies that mind their manners and toward experimentation. So long as there are research practices that mind their manners, whatever their labels or provenance may be, *fuck it* will be profane. Orient to *fuck it*, catch its spark, and experiment. ■

---

LAURA SMITHERS is an assistant professor at Old Dominion University. Laura earned her PhD in Critical and Socio-cultural Studies in Education from the University of Oregon in 2018.

#### NOTES

1. Or, as Snoop Dogg describes with rhyme and product placement, “Bow wow wow, yippie yo, yippie yay / Woof motherfucker, the Dogg came to play / Calgon, Calgon, take me away” (Lil Bow Wow & Snoop Dogg, 2000, 2:48).

2. This, as I learned from Corrin Gillis, is otherwise known as *What Would Jake Do?*

#### REFERENCES

- Abramson, J. (2017, October 25). Bill O'Reilly is just one of the countless terrible men in media. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/25/bill-o-reilly-fox-terrible-men-media>
- Ahmed, S. (2006). *Queer phenomenology: Objects, orientations, others*. Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press.
- Alaimo, S. (2016). *Exposed: Environmental politics and pleasures in posthuman times*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Berlant, L. (2011). *Cruel optimism*. Duke University Press.
- Berlant, L., & Stewart, K. (2019). *The Hundreds*. Duke University Press.
- Braidotti, R. (2013). *The posthuman*. Polity Press.
- Brooks, J. L., Groening, M., & Simon, S. (Executive Producers). (1989–present). *The Simpsons* [TV series]. Gracie Films; Twentieth Century Fox.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.
- Camp, T. (2017). *Listening to images*. Duke University Press.
- Childers, S. M., Rhee, J., & Daza, S. L. (2013). Feminist methodologies: The dirty theory and messy practice of educational research beyond gender [Special issue]. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(5). <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2013.786849>

- Chuh, K. (2019). *The difference aesthetics makes: On the humanities "after Man."* Duke University Press.
- Clough, P. T. (2018). *The user unconscious: On affect, media, and measure.* University of Minnesota Press.
- Complete College America. (2011, September). *Time is the enemy.* Complete College America. [https://completecollege.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Time\\_Is\\_the\\_Enemy.pdf](https://completecollege.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Time_Is_the_Enemy.pdf)
- CrownVictoriaCop. (2008, May 13). Bill O'Reilly goes nuts [Video]. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O\\_HyZ5aW76c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O_HyZ5aW76c)
- Deleuze, G. (1988). *Foucault.* University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1986)
- Deleuze, G. (1992). Postscript on the societies of control. *October*, 59(Winter), 3–7.
- Deleuze, G. (1994). *Difference and repetition.* Columbia University Press. (Original work published 1968)
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia.* University of Minnesota Press. (Original work published 1980)
- Dillard, C. B. (2000). The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen: Examining an endarkened feminist epistemology in educational research and leadership. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 13(6), 661–681. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390050211565>
- Fairman, C. M. (2006, March). Fuck. (Public Law and Legal Theory Working Paper No. 59). [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=896790&](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=896790&)
- Ferguson, R. A. (2012). *The reorder of things: The university and its pedagogies of minority difference.* University of Minnesota Press.
- Foucault, M. (1984). On the genealogy of ethics: An overview of a work in progress. In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault reader* (pp. 340–372). Pantheon Books.
- Glover, H. (2020, May 19). *In a brutal recession, education is more important than ever – here's how to help people finish their college degrees.* Lumina Foundation. <https://www.luminafoundation.org/news-and-views/in-a-brutal-recession-education-is-more-important-than-ever-heres-how-to-help-people-finish-their-college-degrees/>
- Greenstein, D. (2017, September 22). *Strengthening the bridge to opportunity (Remarks at NALEO conference).* Gates Foundation Postsecondary Success. <https://postsecondary.gatesfoundation.org/updates/strengthening-bridge-opportunity-remarks-naleo-conference/>
- Halberstam, J. (2011). *The queer art of failure.* Duke University Press.
- Harney, S. & Moten, F. (2013). *The undercommons: Fugitive planning and black study.* Minor Compositions.
- Keeling, K. (2019). *Queer times, black futures.* New York University Press.
- Koro-Ljungberg, M. (2015). *Reconceptualizing qualitative research: Methodologies without methodology.* SAGE Publications.
- Kuh, G. D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter.* Association of American Colleges and Universities.

- Lather, P. (1992). Critical frames in educational research: Feminist and post-structural perspectives. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 87–99. <http://www.jstor.com/stable/1476394>
- Lather, P. (2004). This *IS* your father's paradigm: Government intrusion and the case of qualitative research in education. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 10(1), 15–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800403256154>
- Lather, P. (2016). Top ten+ list: (Re)thinking ontology in (post)qualitative research. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 16(2), 125–131. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616634734>
- Lemann, N. (2006). Fear factor: Bill O'Reilly's baroque period. *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/03/27/fear-factor>
- Lil Bow Wow, & Snoop Dogg. (2000). Bow wow (that's my name) [Song]. On *Beware of Dog*. So So Def; Columbia.
- Lizzo, & Missy Elliot. (2019) Tempo [Song]. On *Cuz I Love You*. Nice Life; Atlantic.
- Manning, E. (2016). Ten propositions for research-creation. In N. Colin & S. Sachsenmaier (Eds.), *Collaboration in performance practice* (pp. 133–141). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Martin, J., & Sugarman, J. (1993). Beyond methodolatry: Two conceptions of relations between theory and research in research on teaching. *Educational Researcher*, 22(8), 17–24. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1176818>
- Massumi, B. (1992). *A user's guide to capitalism and schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*. MIT Press.
- Massumi, B. (2018). *99 theses on the revaluation of value: A postcapitalist manifesto*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Mayhew, M. J., Rockenbach, A. N., Bowman, N. A., Seifert, T. A., & Wolniak, G. C. (2016). *How college affects students: Vol. 3. 21st century evidence that higher education works*. Jossey-Bass.
- McMahon, W. W. (2009). *Higher learning, greater good: The private and social benefits of higher education*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Meiklejohn, A. (1971) *The experimental college*. Arno Press. (Original work published 1932)
- Ngai, S. (2012). *Our aesthetic categories: Zany, cute, interesting*. Harvard University Press.
- Reed, B. (Host). (2017a, March 28). Chapter II. [Audio podcast episode]. In *S-Town*. Serial Productions. <https://stownpodcast.org/chapter/2>
- Reed, B. (Host). (2017b, March 28). Chapter VI. [Audio podcast episode]. In *S-Town*. Serial Productions. <https://stownpodcast.org/chapter/6>
- Smith, B. L., MacGregor, J., Matthews, R. S., & Gabelnick, F. (2004). *Learning communities: Reforming undergraduate education*. Jossey-Bass.
- Smithers, L. (2020). Student success as preemption: Predictive constructions of futures-to-never-come. *Futures*, 124, 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2020.102639>
- Snaza, N. (2019). *Animate literacies: Literature, affect, and the politics of humanism*. Duke University Press.

- Springgay, S., & Truman, S. E. (2018). On the need for methods beyond proceduralism: Speculative middles, (in)tensions, and response-ability in research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24(3), 203–214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417704464>
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2011) Post qualitative research: The critique and the coming after. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 611–625). SAGE Publications.
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2013). The appearance of data. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 13(4), 223–227. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708613487862>
- St. Pierre, E. A. (2018). Writing post qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24(9), 603–608. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417734567>
- St. Pierre, E. A., Jackson, A. Y. & Mazzei, L. A. (2016). New empiricisms and new materialisms: Conditions for new inquiry. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 16(2), 99–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532708616638694>
- Weheliye, A. G. (2014). *Habeas viscus: Racializing assemblages, biopolitics, and black feminist theories of the human*. Duke University Press.
- Wolgemuth, J. R., Koro-Ljungberg, M., & Barko, T. (2020). (In defense of) pedagogies of obscenity. *Power and Education*, 12(1), 23–38. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1757743819850853>
- Zilvinskis, J. (2019). Measuring quality in high-impact practices. *Higher Education*, 78(4), 687–709. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00365-9>