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Falsified Incompetence and Other Lies the Positivists Told Me

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Abstract

Facilitated Communication (FC) is a technique of supported communication for non-speaking people with motor movements commonly understood as spasmodic, dyspraxic, or otherwise unruly. FC is a contentious site of scientific conflict where highly circumscribed quantitative experiments have been unable to reckon with the lived reality of typers. The debate over the efficacy of FC centers around broader arguments of what counts as scientific rigor and validity. In this paper, I remind readers that experiential data is, in fact, empirical. Qualitative analysis is scientifically rigorous. Adopting technologies of analysis from Chela Sandoval's "Methodology of the Oppressed," I explore a rhetorics of evacuation deployed by skeptics that result in the erasure of FC user agency, testimony, and experience. I invite readers to explore how these rhetorics extend beyond FC and into the wider field of education research.

Keywords

Facilitated Communication, Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Autism, Research Ethics

Introduction

Facilitated Communication (FC) is a technique which enables a non-speaking person with co-occurring motor coordination difficulties (such as global dyspraxia) to articulate with a communication device via physical, emotional, and instructional support from a trained facilitator (Biklen & Cardinal, 1997). This interrelation allows the non-speaking person to explore how to express themselves through typing. The nature of facilitation changes and adapts to the FC-user over time. Some FC users eventually become full or near-independent typers (Cardinal & Falvey, 2014). The technique was developed in Australia by Rosemary Crossley and brought to the United States by Douglas Biklen (Biklen, 1990).

Debates about the validity of FC as a communication method often focus on “the authorship question”—is the typer the authentic author (the “genuine rhetor”) of the typed message? Despite the fact that other study designs have successfully demonstrated authorship via message passing (e.g. Cardinal et al., 1996; Weiss et al., 1996), researchers engaging in a specific “double blind” design (e.g. Mostert, 2010) refuse to acknowledge the veracity or even often the existence of these alternative, and successful, designs. In such studies, facilitators and FC users are shown cues, usually pictorial, and then the FC user is asked to name that cue. When the facilitator and FC user are shown different cues, the correct responses are near zero. However, this protocol has been critiqued for how unlike typical FC use it is (Biklen & Cardinal, 1997). Specifically, facilitators do more than support motor coordination, they provide a relation through which to attenuate emotion and attention to type. When the cue is obscured from the facilitator, they are artificially secluded from the full interrelationship and are unable to support the FC user

in the usual way. In quantitative studies that provided practice trials and maintained connection between FC user and facilitator, success rates of message passing were much higher (Emerson et al., 2001; Marcus & Shevin, 1997). Therefore, the external validity of quantitative experimental findings remain suspect.

Though not all FC users are expressly “technology” users in the sense that some FC can be “analog” (e.g. letterboards), it is still useful to conceptualize it as a technology in the barest sense. FC is a system with interlinked components, a communication tool. Shew (2020, p. 43) describes Technoableism as a “rhetoric of disability that at once talks about empowering disabled people through technologies while at the same time reinforcing ableist tropes about what body-minds are good to have and who counts as worthy.” Taking from Dolmage’s (2017) theorizations that ableism, the societal preference for able-bodiedness, is entangled with disableism, the societal distaste for disabled embodiment (Kumari Campbell, 2009, p. 4), it is possible to imagine a disableist reciprocal of Technoableism. Technodisableism is a rhetorical force which compels society to devalue, delegitimize, or distrust the agency of a person based on their reliance on technology to enact that agency. This technodisableism is evident in the skepticism that all non-speaking people and AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) users face. Whether or not they are users of FC or related typing methods, AAC users are often subject to scrutiny not only about the veracity of their technomediated communication but of their very ability to communicate at all.

I will pause here to make very clear my conceptualization of fraught terms like “ability”, “agency”, “capacity”, and “intent” for the purposes of this paper. When using these words, I am not seeking to impose a normative logic, but to trouble and disrupt the

reader's normative construction of such terms. Erevelles (2002) undermines such debates around coherence/incoherence, rationality/irrationality, reason/unreason of the "deviant" subject, noting that such arguments are always "brought to crisis" for any side which tries to definitively classify such slippages as distinct and separate categories dependent upon embodiment and performance. In other words, it is impossible for any subject already *marked* as "irrational" to engage in any "rational" appeal that satisfies the *marker*. For example, Yergeau (2015, pg. 31) challenges us to reckon with the precarity of "intent" as a space paradoxically regarded as a prerequisite to agency yet confined by the querent's own interpretation. What is intended may be missed. What is perceived may be unintended. But the un/intendor articulates regardless. In their community project, 'The A Collective', Estee Klar and Adam Wolfond foster a space of collaboration and relation that privileges neurodivergence in the process of creation, expression, connection, and meaning-making. It is possible to imagine all embodiment as an inherently entwined phenomena through which all expression relies and is co-constituted by articulation with other matter and other bodies. It is my hope for the reader to understand non-speaking communication as a site where the interrelation of bodies with each other and with other materials is made most perceptible.

Dindar et al. (2017) discuss what they call the "Construction of Communicative (In)Competence" in autism research. Via two case studies, they detail how single-channel communication data (such as coding interactions via only audio, or only video) construct data representations which erase non-speaking autistic subject's communicative capacity. In prior analysis of the isolated audio transcript, an effective communication exchange between a participant and a researcher is reduced to a caricature of the non-compliant,

inattentive autistic child. Through multi-modal analysis, the true exchange is revealed—the participant actually assists the researcher in recognizing a technical problem with the equipment. As Dindar et al. point out, “any methodological decision has consequences for how participants are constructed” (p. 886). Our interpretation of research findings is constrained by how the authors choose to represent their subjects. In quantitative experimental studies of FC through message-passing trials, multi-modal accounts of facilitator and FC user interactions are unreported. We know only that the researchers did not receive the answer they were expecting, and thus coded this response as an error.

Below, I line up a series of quotations in an autistic flow of echolalic reproduction. Deliberately cascading in relation with each other, the articulation of this echoic space within the broader work is left up to the reader.

If you have ... can't spit whole thing out... 「other people seem to need the words more than i do.»¹— Emma Zurcher-Long, UNSPOKEN, (Peschka, 2017)

「i think all the time about having to prove myself. i want people to understand how hard it is to type. the way i want to express myself is through movement. and i am wanting to talk less.» — Adam Wolfond, S/pace, (Klar & Wolfond, 2019)

The struggle of literature is in fact a struggle to escape from the confines of language; it stretches out from the utmost limits of what can be said; what stirs

¹ I use half-brackets to distinguish between oral and typed words from non-speaking typists.

literature is the call and attraction of what is not in the dictionary. (Italo Calvino, 2017, p. 18)

If you could say it in words, there would be no reason to paint. (Edward Hopper, as cited in Bardt, 2019, p. 96)

... there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages. There is no ideal speaker-listener, any more than there is a homogeneous linguistic community. Language is, in Weinreich's words, 'an essentially heterogeneous reality'. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 7)

It would be an error to believe that content determines expression... to believe in the adequacy of the form of expression as a linguistic system. (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, pp. 89–90)

This series of quotations flows from Zurcher-Long's relation to typing as a means of linguistic regulation, to Wolfond's contestation of the primacy of language over movement; from Calvino's imaginary of literature as a form beyond coded meaning, to Hopper's assertion that art is a form of expression beyond language; ending with Deleuze and Guattari's upheaval of the very certainty of language as a concrete, deterministic exchange. The autistic experience is as likely to transcend linguistic coherence as any other human experience. Why is it that the notion of a language inadequate to the burden of one's soul is so romantically applied to certain people— usually self-described scholars, poets, or authors? But to make the same case for non-speaking people is seen not as romantic but as delusional! And even the art, poetry, and scholarship of typers is

systematically denied, denounced, and discredited (as in Schlosser et al., 2014). The demand for any person to prove themselves via performances of intelligibility is itself a violent act of exclusion. The scientific perseverance for the legibility of the subject is not a pursuit of knowledge, but a deployment of knowledge-power—an exercise in containment, seclusion, and segregation.

In the United States, various procedures and policies make it difficult if not impossible to get accurate national statistics on the number of non-speaking children receiving special education services from pre-kindergarten to post-secondary educational settings (Smith, 2010). There are several means of constructing proxy statistics to construct an argument, such as the number of children who are in segregated settings more than 80% of the time, or the number of children listed as autistic and “low-functioning.” But none of these proxies are accurate in capturing the number of people who have been systematically denied access to communication. If you are a scholar of Disability Studies in Education, or a practitioner of “special” education, you know. You personally know someone who has had their right to a “free and appropriate public education” manipulated into the bare minimum of attention. Each of you holds the memory of a person shunted into such a void—languishing in “the cracks.” It is my hope that the analysis I present here offers a guide—a means of finding other strata of oppression in which to drive a fulcrum, to cause a rupture, and to spill loose the souls secluded in these voids of deliberate inattention.

Education researchers are eager to engage in critical reflections of ‘Post-Truth’ in education and the means to resist it (AERA et al., 2019). To understand the abuses of ‘truth’ in education, we must understand how our research practices construct the falsified

incompetence of our most oppressed students. As Hannah Arendt states, “fact depends entirely upon the power of the man who can fabricate it” (1951, p. 350). Donna Haraway further problematizes objectivity in her essay ‘modest_witness@second_millennium’, noting that the ‘modest’ or ‘objective witness’ is circumscribed by historical legacy to be an archetype of white-cishet-able-normative positionality (2004). The hegemony is “endowed with the remarkable power to establish the facts” (p. 224). As for those of us that lie outside hegemonic identity, we are relegated to the margins— “[t]o be the object of vision, rather than the ‘modest,’ ‘self-invisible’ source of vision, is to be evacuated of agency” (p. 233).

This ‘evacuation of agency’ is but an illusion. Chela Sandoval’s ‘Methodology of the Oppressed’ describes the technologies of semiotic deconstruction and oppositional consciousness that oppressed people leverage in enacting their own liberation (Sandoval, 2000). Sandoval describes this technology of semiotic deconstruction as a process of tracing the symbols employed in a text to their rhetorical purpose or origin of their oppressive power. An oppositional or differential consciousness and perception is required to identify these rhetorics. By deconstructing the discourses that attempt to mark the boundaries of reality, the absurdity of the façade is revealed. Sandoval calls this a hermeneutics or “physics of love” (loc 2331). In the case of those who type to communicate, a semiotic veil seeks to obscure all non-speaking rhetoricity as either a shared delusion or sleight of hand. The non-speaker is never allowed to be the one participating in either the delusion or the trick. It is in the spirit of Sandoval’s “hermeneutics of love” that I offer this paper as a challenge to the evacuation of non-

speaking people's agency, highlighting bodies-in-relation. My non-speaking kin are not planchettes.

When we regard quantitative experimental research as the gold-standard of truth, we demand an ahistorical science that is not accountable to the legacy of eugenics that gave birth to 'statistical validity' (Reyes, 2019). Imagine a jar full of marbles that we cannot open. We can observe this jar from all angles to make empirical estimations of the jar's contents. Perhaps we have found that all the marbles are blue, are 1 cm in diameter, and due to the volume of the jar and the estimated volume of the marbles, there are perhaps 127 marbles inside. We can even replicate the jar with a matching container and similar marbles to verify our estimate. We can calculate the margin of error and conclude that there is a statistically significant chance that we are correct about the contents of the jar. Then, we are able to open it—and we find a single red marble among the rest. Our original conclusions were valid. They were empirically tested. Our hypothesis is accepted. But the red marble still exists. To clarify, I am not claiming that some FC users are these exceptional red marbles. Nor am I claiming that all FC users are red marbles. What I am saying is that each of us contain red marbles that statistics cannot validate. Our narratives are more true than what can be measured.

My purpose in this essay is to appeal to scholars of disability studies in education, and to disabled student educators, to engage with me in a resistant, oppositional reading of the texts of skepticism surrounding people who type to communicate. In focusing on non-speaking people and their most controversial means of communication, I hope to engage readers in a practice of Sandoval's oppositional method to recognize the evacuation of agency that is threaded throughout disabled student education. In this

paper, I explore the rhetorics of evacuation that skeptics deploy in their quest to invalidate and vilify facilitated communication. Then, I discuss how the controversy over FCs validity represents a crucible of post-truth— a metaeugenics of silencing and isolation. Finally, I invite readers to explore how the same discourses of evacuation can be seen in the broader domain of education research.

Method

Below I describe a highly focused corpus of texts on facilitated communication for analysis. I am targeting the specific term “facilitated communication” over the past ten years because I am particularly interested in the “death” of FC— the point in which denizens of FC “evacuated” to new euphemisms. I do this because, as with all euphemisms, they are just as vulnerable to the same rhetorical forces that drove their creation. I am essentially looking for a fulcrum from which to pry apart the arguments which have served to delegitimize non-speaking communicative agency by severing non-speakers from their embodied relations. This political project of delegitimization ultimately results in withheld communicative access at home, in school, and in the community. I focus particularly on the past ten years for a few reasons. Firstly, work from the past decade necessarily references prior decades. Further, this timeframe aligns with what might be called “the final push” to obliterate the validity of FC, coinciding with what some consider a coup by operant behaviorists of the national “gatekeeper” of assistive communication technology, ASHA (The American Speech, Language, and Hearing Association). Therefore, this is the proper temporal location to find the most recent patterns in the rhetorics employed.

FC invalidation efforts are inextricably linked to the political projects of operant behaviorism. Roscigno (2019) has illustrated the ways in which Applied Behavioral Analysis, the medical-industrial manifestation of operant behaviorism, can be read as employing “biophilanthropy” (Schuller, 2017)—leveraging the affects of pity and charity in service of sorting disabled children along an incrementum of their uses to capitalist production. Like ABA, the project of FC invalidation couches itself in the auspices of biophilanthropy—namely that it leverages the charitable affect of “best interests” (Williams, 2019) to exclude FC from any possible “best practice” (Todd, 2012). The result is an execution of a biopolitical sorting, delineating which bodies have a right to communication and for which bodies communication can be conceived of as a “harm” (Singer et al., 2014; Todd, 2012).

To capture FC discourse in the domains of psychology, education, and humanities, I conducted my search in EBSCOhost web and included the following databases: Academic Search Premier, Anthropology Plus, Education Source, ERIC, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and PsychINFO. I intentionally limited search terms to the Boolean phrase “facilitated communication” in the publication title to ensure the resultant texts were targeted toward the validity of FC use in the context of disability. There were 20 search results from peer-reviewed, English-language journals from 2009 to March, 2019. Fifteen were retained for analysis. These papers are marked in the references section via asterisk (*). One paper was excluded for a false-hit; one paper was excluded because I could not obtain the full text; and three were excluded because they were position statements written on behalf of an organization.

Organizational position statements, both those for and opposed to the practice of FC, are overt projects of persuasion, often intended to shape public perception and educational policy rather than engage in direct scholarly discussion. I focus on everyday scholarly discourse specifically, because position papers often appeal to “the evidence base” in order to make their claims. I am thus targeting my analysis on this “evidence base” because such analysis inherently effects the persuasive power of position statements. The consistent question at issue among the retained texts is what is known as “the authorship question.” These texts explicitly set out to prove or disprove the authenticity of authorship of their non-speaking research subjects, or to provide scholarly analysis of the authenticity of experiments designed to assert authorship.

I engage Chela Sandoval’s technologies of semiotic deconstruction and oppositional consciousness, described previously, to conceptualize themes encapsulating discursive devices that serve FC skeptics in undermining the authorial agency of FC users. Like Biklen and Cardinal’s *Presumption of Competence* (1997), Erevelles’s contestation of any concrete delineation between coherence/incoherence (2002), and Ashby’s assertion that “Voice is not mine to give or uncover” (2011), this project is not intended to prove or disprove FC as a method of communication, but to examine the scholarly discourse surrounding FC as a political campaign that serves only to harm non-speaking people. I read each of the 15 texts looking for recurrent themes in the way that participants were represented, discursive moves deployed by authors in the representation of FC, as well as rhetorical deployments in the representation of research methods. These themes are identified here, and elaborated upon in the following section:

- 1. Evacuation of the legitimacy of qualitative research.** Examples: misuse of the word “empirical,” replacing “qualitative” with “anecdotal,” using “scientifically / statistically / empirically valid” as a euphemism for quantitative methods and implying that qualitative methods are thus not valid research methods, etc.

Occurs in: (Agran, 2014; Charlton et al., 2010; Ganz et al., 2018; Mostert, 2010; Saloviita, 2018; Saloviita et al., 2014; Schlosser et al., 2014; Singer et al., 2014; Stock, 2011; Tostanoski et al., 2014; Travers et al., 2014)

- 2. Constructing FC researchers as uncredible or unscrupulous.** Examples: adjectives of disbelief (such as “purported” / “allegedly” / “supposedly,” etc.), misrepresenting FC-supportive researchers’ guidelines, principles, and conclusions.

Occurs in: (Ganz et al., 2018; Mostert, 2010; Saloviita, 2018; Schlosser et al., 2014; Singer et al., 2014; Tostanoski et al., 2014; Travers et al., 2014)

- 3. Comparison to mysticism, charlatanism, or spirituality.** Examples: referencing Ouija boards, parlor tricks, methyl chelation, fad diets, the anti-vax movement, etc., as directly or indirectly linked to FC.

Occurs in: (Ganz et al., 2018; Mostert, 2010; Saloviita, 2018; Singer et al., 2014; Tostanoski et al., 2014; Travers et al., 2014)

- 4. Evacuation of communicative intent, capacity, or possibility of FC users.**

Examples: methodology that limits observational data such that the interaction

between facilitator and communicator is erased in transcription, appealing to differences between an FC user's behavior or performance with and without access to FC as evidence of FC's fakery, incredulous presentation of FC user testimony to invalidate themselves, etc.

Occurs in: (Charlton et al., 2010; Ganz et al., 2018; Mostert, 2010; Saloviita, 2018; Saloviita et al., 2014; Schlosser et al., 2014; Singer et al., 2014; Tostanoski et al., 2014; Travers et al., 2014)

- 5. Misdirection via Moral Panic.** Examples: claiming that the worst outcome of FC is a false accusation against one's family of sexual assault, misrepresentation of the reality of such cases, asserting the "unintentionality" of facilitator influence to implicate the FC method itself as generative of these accusations, removing all responsibility for harm away from the adults in power to imply abolishing FC can itself protect disabled people from abuse.

Occurs in: (Ganz et al., 2018; Schlosser et al., 2014; Singer et al., 2014; Tostanoski et al., 2014; Travers et al., 2014)

Discussion

In this section, I use examples from the texts analysed to illustrate the five themes outlined previously. Then, I discuss the impact these discursive moves have on the reader, the broader field of study, and ultimately members of the participant population themselves.

Delegitimizing Qualitative Research

Most of the texts I reviewed, including those that were neutral or nuanced toward FC, used phrases such as “peer-reviewed empirical research” (Mostert, 2010), “empirical studies” (Saloviita, 2018), and “empirically validated” (Charlton et al., 2010) to describe the research base of quantitative experiments which conclude FC is inauthentic. By using “empirical” and even “peer-reviewed” to modify only those quantitative experimental studies, the reader is led to believe the research base in support of FC is not scientifically valid, not rigorous, or even fabricated outright. However, controlled quantitative experiments are not the only kinds of studies which constitute “empirical” research.

Empirical (adjective):

1. originating in or based on observation or experience
2. relying on experience or observation alone often without due regard for system and theory
3. capable of being verified or disproved by observation or experiment
4. of or relating to empiricism

(Mirriam-Webster’s Dictionary)

I provide the Mirriam-Webster’s definition to contest the use of “empirical” as used in these texts which attempt to delineate valid vs. invalid research on the basis of a definition of empiricism that is not real. There is nothing within the definition of “empirical” that excludes exploratory, ethnographic, experiential, or otherwise qualitative research methods. It is an outright lie to classify qualitative work as “anecdotal” (as do Mostert, 2010; Saloviita, 2018; Saloviita et al., 2014; Tostanoski et al., 2014; Travers et al., 2014). Mostert goes as far as to propose an “empirical/anecdotal divide” (2010, p. 38)—research must be classified as one or the other, and results between groups

presumably never concur. This is especially disingenuous given studies which conclude both with and without support for FC have used single-subject design.

The positivist predilection for dismissing and erasing the rigor and skill required to conduct qualitative inquiry has led many fields (for example, Applied Behavioral Analysis, Rehabilitative Therapy, and Assistive Technology) to abandon critically important opportunities for developing a deeper understanding of how systems operate in the complexity of life, society, and culture. If not coupled with some sufficient offering of quantitative statistical analysis, research into qualitative (experiential, embodied, lived) aspects of technology and of care are walled off, derisively labeled “just” Technoscience, “just” Humanities, or some other domain which the “hard scientists” can dismiss. As explored in the introduction with Dindar et al.’s “The Construction of Communicative (In)Competence,” controlled experimental methods are no less subject to bias and elision of reality. The researcher brings their own implicit attitudes toward their guiding assumptions, the formation of their research questions, and the interpretation of results—no matter their research paradigm.

In the corpus of texts analyzed, authors deploying FC-skeptical rhetoric often used “peer-reviewed” as a euphemism for quantitative experimental work to imply that qualitative work is not peer-reviewed. Some papers even further qualified quantitative work as “objective, peer-reviewed research” (Ganz et al., 2018), “well-conducted peer-reviewed studies” (Travers et al., 2014), “published, peer-reviewed” (Singer et al., 2014), and “scientific, peer-reviewed” (Saloviita, 2018). Therefore, research that supports FC must not be “well-conducted,” “scientific,” “objective,” or even “published.”

Some skeptics acknowledged that work concluding in support of FC is in fact both peer-reviewed and published in well-regarded journals (Mostert, 2010; Saloviita, 2018). This acknowledgement, however, was then leveraged to spread doubt from the FC method itself to those very same high-rigor publications. “In successfully publishing in scholarly journals, FC advocates further bolster their claims to legitimacy” (Mostert, 2010, p. 39). To summarize—FC-supportive research is either not scientific, not rigorous, or not peer-reviewed, and if it is, such recognition could only be achieved through trickery or manipulation. We are meant to trust the scientific process, but only when it supports the conclusions of FC-skeptical researchers.

Even within the relatively concrete domain of physics, the measurement of material phenomenon, or more specifically, the result of measurement, is dependent upon the tool of measurement (Barad, 2007). To understand this phenomenon of diffraction, we must also understand that our experimental and empirical tools dialectically shape what we are able to measure and what we are able to perceive. Diffraction gives us a useful tool for thinking through the complicated space in which experimental work that “proves” communication via FC is suspect can coexist with work that validates FC on an individual basis. Just as Dindar et al.’s multi-modal analysis revealed the “truth” as coded by audio did not match the events as provided by video, alternative means of measurement in authorship investigations (as in Jaswal et al., 2020) may be able to show us how the restrictive message-passing experiments can present the results they do while FC users continue to communicate with their social networks, unbothered by the statistical (in)significance of strangers.

Construction of the Uncredible Researcher

FC-skeptical rhetorics use adjectives such as “apparently,” “purportedly,” and “allegedly” to introduce the concept, method, and results of FC as dubious from the outset. Examples include: “FC was purportedly developed to provide a means of communication to individuals with disabilities who had concomitant complex communication needs” (Ganz et al., 2018, p. 53); “RPM may be the current facade of deceptive practices purporting to aid individuals with autism” (Tostanoski et al., 2014); and “... presents an apparent success of Facilitated Communication (FC).” (Charlton et al., 2010, p. 71). These turns of phrase frame FC as implicitly deserving of doubt, encouraging readers to presume inauthenticity and deliberate disingenuity.

Indeed, whether the study design is qualitative or quantitative is irrelevant—only one kind of experimental design is acceptable to satisfy FC-skeptical researchers. Saloviita (2018) insists “... message-passing tests should be the only proof required to denote the validity or invalidity of FC” (p. 92). Any positive validation of FC is explained away by claiming, without sufficient justification, that the methods used are “inappropriate,” “flawed” and not worthy of consideration:

- “The studies that purport to prove the validity of FC have, with a few exceptions, used inappropriate methods for proving cause and effect or poorly controlled experiments.” (Singer et al., 2014, p. 184)
 - Where “inappropriate” methods and “poorly controlled” experiments are qualitative ethnographic methods in naturalistic settings and situations.

- “...instances of studies purporting to be experimentally designed (and therefore controlled) but claiming FC efficacy revealed major design flaws that meant that they could be discounted” (Mostert, 2010, p. 38)
 - These “major design flaws” included practice trials (Mostert, 2001), despite the fact that most measures in cognitive psychology include practice trials.

FC-Skeptical authors also cite FC-supportive researchers to construct self-invalidating arguments by attaching the citation to a misleading or incorrect interpretation of the cited work. The most common example is of citing or otherwise referring to Biklen and Cardinal’s work advocating for ‘Presuming Competence’ (Biklen & Cardinal, 1997) as evidence that FC employs a circular logic (Mostert, 2010; Saloviita, 2018; Tostanoski et al., 2014). Mostert claims “all the newer pro-FC studies operate from the premise that FC works” (2010, p. 39). In the context of research seeking to refute the efficacy of FC, such a claim marks the “pro-FC” researcher as deliberately ignorant to the controversy in their own field.

In fact, FC-supportive researchers are more likely to acknowledge the contested and controversial history of FC, and to posit in comparatively neutral language that the dominant quantitative methods may not be nuanced enough to capture the fullness of what actually happens during trials in the lab (Bigozzi et al., 2012; Cardinal & Falvey, 2014; Sipilä & Mättä, 2011). Further, they do not claim unilaterally that FC works, but instead advocate that researchers operate from an assumption of competence—that non-speaking people have something to say and have the capacity and intent to say it if given effective tools and strategies for communication (Biklen, 1990). What they do claim, with

respect to FCs efficacy, is that the qualitative methods are sufficient to prove the validity and potential of FC (Cardinal & Falvey, 2014). Given that this position is in stalemate with the FC-skeptical camp's demand for proof via a specific and highly circumscribed experimental design, FC-supportive researchers regard the continued 'epistemic exploitation' (Berenstain, 2016) of non-speaking people to be unnecessary and cruel.

Conjuring Charlatanism

Many papers referred to the occult, spirituality, and charlatanism in conjunction with FC-supportive perspectives in order to imply or directly state that FC is no more legitimate than Ouija, chelation, or anti-vaccine quackery (Ganz et al., 2018; Saloviita, 2018; Singer et al., 2014; Tostanoski et al., 2014). By linking risks of harm and even death from chelation, fad diets, off-label pharmaceuticals, and vaccine-preventable illnesses to the practice of FC (Singer et al., 2014), those risks and harms are projected from these dangerous treatments to an inert protocol. Some authors even go so far as to call FC itself a treatment (Ganz et al., 2018), granting it a power to cure or harm that it does not realistically possess. When these comparisons are made in addition to invalidation of qualitative methods, adjectives of suspicion, and misleading interpretations of FC proponents' conclusions, FC-skeptical authors attempt to acclimate the reader to their position, eventually stripping away any semblance of balance or objectivity.

In particular, FC-skeptical researchers implicate ideomotor processes as the root mechanism by which FC manipulates its proponents into believing the disabled person is communicating. Ideomotor movements are movements that occur unconsciously, or more accurately, subconsciously, while the person conducting the movement believes they do

not have conscious control of these movements (Carpenter, 1852). Ideomotor phenomena are believed to be the underlying mechanism that enables parlor tricks like Ouija.

Ideomotor responses do, in fact exist. However, that ideomotor processes occur in lab settings designed to elicit them does not mean that ideomotor movements are behind the FC technique. In fact, the studies which conclude FC is a product of ideomotor phenomena do not use experienced FC users or trained facilitators in their design (Wegner et al., 2003). Such experiments tell us nothing of what occurs in an FC-mediated conversation.

Evacuation of Agency

These tactics of invalidation, skepticism, and connection to the mystical are then deployed upon the FC users themselves. For example, Schlosser et al. describe FC as “a technique whereby individuals with disabilities and communication impairments *allegedly* select letters by typing on a keyboard while receiving physical support, emotional encouragement, and other communication supports from facilitators” (2014, p. 359). Placing “allegedly” before “select” rather than “receiving” (as in “while allegedly receiving physical support”) casts the skepticism onto the volition of the FC user rather than on the technique itself. While this may have simply been an unfortunate authorial choice, the consequences to how this sentence is interpreted are significant.

Facilitators are often absolved of any intentional deception by FC-skeptical authors. Mostert proposes facilitators have a “genuine belief that they were only conduits and not creators of the communication allegedly coming from their clients” (2010, p. 36). Travers et al. concur: “FC is a powerful illusion in which facilitators unknowingly author

messages using the hand of a person with a disability” (2014, p. 196). Consequently, the FC user is rendered passive, inert, spectral. They neither assert nor resist control.

What do FC-skeptics make of FC user testimony? It would be much more plausible to insist that facilitators were in fact knowingly fabricating communication. Instead, the communication produced by FC is proposed to be the byproduct of a complex orrery: “Individual and personal differences in resistance between clients explain the persistency of idiosyncrasies across time and facilitators” (Saloviita, 2018, p. 97). In essence, linguistic consistency across time and between facilitators is explained away as more likely to result from a consistent randomness than the communicative intent of a disabled person.

When shown evidence of characteristic linguistic idiosyncrasies within and between FC users, FC-skeptical authors demand that there be evidence of this language style in the absence of the communication mode (Saloviita, 2018). FC users must prove that how they talk with FC is how they would talk by other means, despite the fact that no other means is functional for them. It is proposed that if FC worked, FC linguistic style would be similar to the linguistic style of their speaking autistic peers. Rather than compare written linguistic corpora between speaking and non-speaking autistics, Saloviita insists FC users should type like speaking autistics talk: apparently, “rigid and impoverished” (2018, p. 92). Yet none of us, not even neurotypical folk, type like we talk.

It is remarkable, in fact, that FC-skeptical papers would use features of FC user expression as self-evident of FCs impossibility, even when those features were strikingly similar to speaking-autistic stereotypes. For example, in a critique of linguistic analysis, Saloviita points out that many of the words used were determined to be outside the scope

and lexicon of same aged (non-disabled) peers (Saloviita, 2018). However, those peers are being brought up in a collective curriculum, and precocious speech and hyperlexia are common traits in autistic people. Other accounts of FC user testimony resonate with speaking autistic people's own experiences of dyspraxia, proprioceptive dis/orientation, and stress-induced communicative difficulty (Wilson et al., 2014). Even so, FC users' communication corpora are believed by FC-skeptics to be a parlor trick of oxymoronicly cohesive yet random error. This evacuation of agency ultimately manifests dire consequences—that of the disbelief and denial of non-speaking people's own testimony of abuse.

Manipulation of Morality

Disabled children are two to three times more likely than their typically developing peers to be victims of abuse—this risk increases with severity of disability, as does the likelihood that a child will not disclose the abuse (Hershkowitz et al., 2007). Several high-profile allegations of sexual abuse were reported by FC users in the 90s. Publications replicating the “double blind” message passing protocol for quantitative refutation of FC appear to escalate in frequency after these allegations became high-profile (Schlosser et al., 2014; Stock, 2011). Botash et al. (1994) is often cited to support claims that FC is dangerous because it can lead to false allegations of sexual abuse (e. g. Lilienfeld et al., 2014; Stock, 2011; von Tetzchner, 2012). However, what Botash et al. actually conclude is that the number of allegations from speakers and typers that are corroborated by supporting evidence is roughly proportional (elaborated upon in Meissner, 2018). It must also be noted that just because charges are dropped, does not mean that abuse did not occur (Heckler, 1994). While unnecessary family separation is

traumatic, separation is traumatic even in very clear cases of abuse. Therefore, when FC-skeptical authors appeal to the “danger” and “harm” of FC manifesting as “unsupported accusations via FC of parental sexual abuse” (Singer et al., 2014, p. 181), we should all ask ourselves why a false accusation is more harmful than the inability to accuse. In the wake of #metoo, it is particularly insidious to prioritize the presumed innocence of caregivers over the physical and emotional safety of disabled children.

Conclusion

Throughout the FC-skeptical texts analyzed here, authors use rhetorics of evacuation to erase the agency and humanity of non-speaking autistic people. First, the qualitative, ethnographic, and mixed methods research that affirms FC is evacuated of scientific rigor and validity when FC-skeptical researchers present quantitative experimental research as the only valid expression of empirical science. Next, FC-supportive researchers themselves are painted as unreliable, delusional, or manipulative. Then, FC supporters are further vilified as charlatans, and “purveyors of false treatments” (Ganz et al., 2018) akin to vaccine deniers, chelation quacks, and fad diet hucksters. Finally, the very method of FC is evacuated of all potential—disabled people are supposedly incapable of testifying to their own abuse; facilitators themselves are believed to be innocent bystanders, duped by their own ideomotor responses. Despite FC-skeptical researchers’ own claims that FC is pseudoscientific and no more valid than the paranormal, they have been quite effective at conjuring a spectral bully capable of generating allegations, jokes, and poetry out of the “artifacts” of a miraculously consistent randomness (Saloviita, 2018).

These rhetorics are dependent upon a refusal to engage with the complexity of interrelationships, and the conceit that authorship is something discreet which can be isolated from its context while retaining its original meaning. I invite readers to consider the rhetorics of evacuation in their own fields. How is the privileging of quantitative data, statistical significance, and reproducibility erasing the humanity, wonder, and majesty of the students in your life? What are the consequences to marginalized students who are most likely to fall prey to the eugenic legacies of outlier removal, standard error, and regression? We are not working with marbles; we are working with fellow life. Experiential data is empirical. Experience is essential to contextualize experiment. We can no longer afford to silence the narratives of our students and claim that numbers are more representative of their living truth.

The Facilitated Communication literature represents a micro-site of “post-truth.” Its subjects challenge us to upend our assumptions of what competence looks, sounds, and feels like (Ashby, 2011). FC supporters challenge us to critically examine what or who makes science objective, and who benefits from the position of objectivity. FC detractors challenge us to remember that statistical quantitative measurements are blunt instruments that maim as they bin, and erase as they generalize. There can be no truth in an exclusively positivist science that withholds an individual’s access based on the statistical aggregate of strangers.

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