

 Open access • Journal Article • DOI:10.1080/13645579.2017.1287875

Presenting and representing others: towards an ethics of engagement

— [Source link](#) 

Lucy Pickering, Helen Kara

Institutions: University of Glasgow

Published on: 14 Feb 2017 - International Journal of Social Research Methodology (Routledge)

Topics: Representation (systemics), Dance, Reflexivity and Drama

Related papers:

- [Ethics, Reflexivity, and “Ethically Important Moments” in Research](#)
- [Engaging New Audiences: Translating Research Into Popular Media:](#)
- [Audience Engagement in Theatre for Social Change](#)
- [‘Old Adam was the first man formed’: \(In\)forming and investigating listeners’ experiences of new music as audience enrichment, public engagement and research](#)
- [What’s in a song? How songs contribute to the communication of social science research](#)

Share this paper:    

View more about this paper here: <https://typeset.io/papers/presenting-and-representing-others-towards-an-ethics-of-13e63n8cre>



Pickering, L., and Kara, H. (2017) Presenting and representing others: towards an ethics of engagement. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, (doi:[10.1080/13645579.2017.1287875](https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2017.1287875))

This is the author's final accepted version.

There may be differences between this version and the published version. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite from it.

<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/137082/>

Deposited on: 16 February 2017

Presenting and Representing Others: Towards and Ethics of Engagement

Lucy Pickering

Helen Kara

Abstract

The ethics of research representation are rarely discussed. Yet representation can have a significant impact on research participants and audiences. This paper draws on some of the limited body of accounts of ethical challenges experienced in representing others in qualitative research. These accounts make clear that researchers often have to choose between ‘competing goods’ when representing others, such as participant control over what is presented and how, researchers’ ‘interpretive authority’, and whether and how to represent participants’ speech. These decisions frequently involve researchers choosing between ‘literal’ (empirical, evidence-based) and ‘real’ (authentic, experiential) truths. To resolve these dilemmas, some researchers are turning to creative methods of representation, such as poems, songs, plays and dance. Like all forms of representation, these methods require compromise: in particular, some detail, depth, or location may be sacrificed in return for accessible engagement with participants and wider audiences. Conversely, traditional methods of presentation may sacrifice some scope for engagement and accessibility in return for greater detail and depth. We argue that such sacrifices are a necessary component of all forms of qualitative representation and consequently require a reflexive approach to choices about representation. It is this reflexive approach which we argue constitutes an ethics of engagement.

Keywords

Ethics

presentation

representation

reflexivity

engagement

Introduction

Questions about the ways in which researchers represent others, and the ethical considerations that might underpin such decisions, lag behind other aspects of ethical social scientific consideration. This article seeks to stimulate debate by drawing together work from scholars who have addressed the ethical dimensions of their representational practice. We argue that despite their differences, such works are characterised by a shared *ethics of engagement*. Such an ethics is located in a commitment to actively engage with others through representational acts. Those ‘others’ may be participants, represented and corollary communities, or select or ‘general’ publics. Ethical decisions should always be made situationally (Hammersley, 2015, p. 445). Ethically engaged representation is located at the start or at least the mid-point of ongoing, multifaceted research relationships, rather than long after extractive encounters (Josselson, 2007). This enables us to work and speak with, rather than about, our participants (Mannay, 2016, p. 123). Such an approach often entails creative responses, and consequently an unsettling of the primacy of representation as ‘literal’ (Bakan, 1996) in acts of social scientific truth-telling.

This article sets out to explore some of those choices, and how scholars have talked about the issues. It begins with the impact of future representation on perhaps the

primary research relationship – between researcher and individual participant – before moving out beyond represented communities to consider the diverse audiences contemporary academics now speak to and with.

Relations with the represented

Ethical conduct in social scientific research is a process which, in the view of many of the authors discussed here (for example Bannister, 1996; Gatson, 2011; Josselson, 2007; Mannay, 2016; see also Kara, 2015) extends from study design to data analysis, writing and beyond. As Smythe and Murray (2000) point out, this is not necessarily in line with formal university ethical procedures, which focus primarily on data collection. This focus stems from a particular epistemological position in which human participants are understood as sources of data. As such, once they have yielded that data, it becomes the property of the researcher, and the research relationship ends there. However, such an epistemological position is not necessarily compatible with the ontology of social scientific research. Representation in research is an affective experience for both participants (Pilcher, Martin, & Williams, 2016, pp. 697–698) and audiences (Mannay, 2016, p. 119). As such this is a deeply ethical arena, requiring of researchers reflection, consideration and the weighing up of multiple – often conflicting – goods in order to represent others ethically.

Carusi (2008) argues for a shift in ‘e-research’ from framing data as information to framing data as representation, thus highlighting that in all use of data, even that in ‘large-scale databases’ (p. 38), representational ethics are at play. She outlines five models for conceptualising data in representational terms, located on a spectrum between naturalism (in which data is understood as a faithful representation of a reality) and interactionalism (in which data is understood to be a product of interaction between researcher and researched).¹ Carusi argues that while most researchers understand data and any subsequent representation of participants in terms of the latter, many research participants understand their own contribution in terms of the former. What Carusi highlights, then, is the possibility of a gap between researchers’ and participants’ assumptions about what data is and what subsequent writing represents. Therefore, researchers have a responsibility to identify these assumptions, and develop strategies to manage the gap.

One such strategy is proposed by Josselson (2007), and hinges on the ownership of ‘interpretive authority’ (see also Markham, 2012, p. 15). For Josselson, research ethics, like all ethics, rest on identifying and following the path of least harm among competing goods. Focusing on narrative research, she highlights the diversity of ethical ‘goods’ different scholars prioritise even within a single analytic approach. For example, one ‘good’ may be to ‘give voice’ to participants; another may be to ‘decode’ the texts at another level of significance. Each requires different ethical practice from the researcher – either to endeavour to represent faithfully or to explicitly acknowledge interpretive authority. In other words, to consciously locate oneself on Carusi’s spectrum. In offering up her own practice as model and thinking point, Josselson explains that at the end of an interview she discusses her approach with participants. The aim is for her to be confident that they understand – and thus meaningfully consent to – her interpretive paradigm, including the forms of representation giving ‘data’ to her will entail. For Josselson, managing the gap identified by Carusi is essential, and must happen not at the writing up or data collection stage but right at the start with study design.

For Josselson (2007), this explicit ownership of interpretive authority means that she controls how participants are represented. Her personal practice entails explaining to participants that she focuses on presenting themes across the body of participants as a

whole, rather than on representing participants as whole persons. This means individual participants are told to expect to see themselves in her work in fragments, not as a whole person. Consequently she counsels against creating composites or other forms of fictionalisation to protect participants' anonymity. For her, the competing good of data 'integrity' outweighs the good of ensuring anonymity within the population represented.

However, there are others who do not share this view, who in an ethics of competing goods – and diverse analytic goals – prioritise anonymity and choose to use composites. Chase (2008), for example, in her ethnography of the New England boarding school, created composite characters, and delayed publication until all pupils had completed their education at the school, in order to protect pupils from ready identification by one another and teachers. Markham (2012) also used composites for protection, in research based on data gathered online, where participants' anonymity could be compromised by the use of direct quotes which, if typed into a search engine, can immediately identify the online source of the data. Berbary (2011) went further and in her ethnographic study of sorority members in a US university presented findings as a screenplay. While the text of the screenplay is comprised of extracts of interviews and field notes, the characters in it do not correspond precisely with any participants. Berbary argues that such an analytic and presentational mode captures participants' personalities, interest and relationships in relation to her research questions while protecting their identities and offering a high level of anonymity. And as Berbary notes,

Many of my participants read the screenplay and indicated that they enjoyed following along with the characters and looking for bits of their own experiences in the scenes. (2011, p. 195)

Study participants were able to find themselves within the text without worrying that they could be identified by others in their community. While for Josselson (2007) such an act damages the integrity of the data, for others it creates new and exciting opportunities – a conceptual division which can be unpacked through Bakan's work on truth. Bakan (1996) uses Freud's psychoanalytic case studies of historical or mythical figures such as Leonardo da Vinci and Oedipus to argue that in matters of truth and writing there is a useful distinction to be made between *literal* and *real* truths – and that letting go of representation of *literal* truth opens up spaces to creatively engage with ideas that allow for *real* truth to emerge. Berbary's screenplay can be seen as fictional, then, but is perhaps more usefully read as corresponding to Bakan's notion of *real*, rather than *literal*, truth. It is grounded in empirical 'data', but simultaneously protects participants' identities and opens up a space for exploring real truths of sorority life.

Such an approach can work to protect against failures of anonymising, but also raises questions about what work anonymising does and for whom. Recently, scholars such as Moore (2012) and Hammersley (2015) have begun to question what they see as the default assumption of anonymisation of participants as a straightforward ethical good. To talk through Josselson's terms, they argue that ethics committees, and consequently individuals seeking ethical approval, are not addressing the competing goods of differing forms and levels of anonymisation to identify the most appropriate approach, but rather see anonymising participants' identities as an inherent, unassailable 'good' (see also Clark, 2006; Saunders, Kitzinger, & Kitzinger, 2015). Moore (2012) in particular argues that anonymising can operate as a form of silencing, drawing on feminist analyses of historical forms of anonymising to argue that

For much of history anonymity did not protect the vulnerable, but excluded women and others from authorship and ownership of their own words, erasing them from the archive, even from history, and in the process creating vulnerability through rendering people nameless. (2012, p. 332)

Moore argues that in anonymising participants, what gets foregrounded, what gets recorded for posterity, is the identity – and thus the voice – of the scholar at the cost of the erasure of the identities – and thus in some ways the voices – of participants (see also Richardson & Godfrey, 2003). Hammersley (2015) highlights the contextual nature of research, and ethical decision-making about research, and argues for study participants to be given the choice about whether and how to be anonymised in order to enable those who wish to be identified by name to be identifiable.

Such debates are productive as they challenge the assumed straightforward ethical ‘good’ of de facto anonymisation encoded into common social scientific Codes of Ethics (see Moore, 2012, pp. 332–333), but also bring into focus the impact that anonymisation has on participants. This includes the emotional impact of choosing one’s own pseudonym or having one chosen (Allen & Wiles, 2016), being anonymised without being given a pseudonym (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006), and the impact on individuals and communities when attempts to anonymise fail (Clark, 2006, pp. 8–9).

Such a process of failure of anonymisation is addressed by Elliott (2005) in her discussion of the role of anonymising in Lieblich’s 1996 study on an Israeli kibbutz. Elliott follows Lieblich to argue that the use of pseudonyms as a form of anonymisation can work to protect the identity of participants from outside the community, but not within. They do not operate to protect participants’ identities from immediate others – as indeed they did not on the kibbutz – but rather from the wider world. Unfortunately, in the case of Lieblich’s study a newspaper quickly identified the kibbutz, after which, ‘the personal identity of protagonists was, then, a simple game for all interested’ (Lieblich 1996, p. 176, in Elliott, 2005, p. 142). A commitment to representing a literal truth of kibbutz life, using only pseudonyms to anonymise participants and the kibbutz, inadvertently created uncomfortable and unwelcome knowledge of self and other within and beyond the community.

Such new forms of self-awareness are discussed by Lomborg (2012) and Bannister (1996). Lomborg’s study of the ways people use social media raises the Internet as an arena where anonymisation is difficult to achieve, and the use of pseudonyms are insufficient because copying a quote into a search engine can lead readers straight to its original source. Because of this, she showed her draft report to participants and allowed them to ask for any of their direct quotes to be removed. One participant did, and reflecting on this later Lomborg wondered whether the request was likely to have been made as a result of that participant’s feelings and wishes, and not because of their considered judgement about the extent to which the quote, in context, would add to the body of human knowledge (Lomborg, 2012, p. 28). Again, these are ‘competing goods’ (Josselson, 2007), and researchers need to decide which has priority. In practice, choosing the ethical good of allowing participants some control over the way their material was used in her research led Lomborg to another ethical difficulty, namely the undermining of her interpretive authority.

In his exploration of the impact of publication on participants, Bannister (1996) recounts sending a draft paper on an Australian army marching band to participants: few responded, and those who did responded positively. A version of the paper published in an academic conference proceedings attracted no further response from participants. Then the paper was published in the *Australian Defence Force Journal*, which was read by participants’ peers and commanders. One participant contacted Bannister to express his consternation at how he had been represented and had spoken about his peers. Despite having been invited to comment on the draft paper, it was only upon publication *in a journal read by his peers and commanders* that problems emerged. He

accepted the portrayals and quotations as accurate (i.e. literally true (Bakan, 1996)), but felt that they damaged the social fabric of his community.

These men were ‘professional ritual celebrants’ for whom colloquial speech and criticisms of colleagues (the source of this participant’s consternation) were at odds with their professional self-presentation. Bannister’s representation of them, while accurate, threatened to ‘chink the ritualistic armour of military life’ (1996, p. 55) when presented to others in the military. What was ethically inert in draft form became deeply significant once accessible to particular sorts of publics: the impact on the individual depended upon (their awareness of) its consumption by other audiences. The ethics of representation in relation to individual participants are thus intimately bound up with other – real or imagined – audiences.

As Carusi (2008) and Josselson (2007) demonstrated, how participants react to representation of their selves/lives/experiences rests on their epistemological frameworks. While a participant may anticipate findings that reflect a literal truth of their life, a researcher may anticipate delivering an altogether different project. It is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to anticipate and manage this gap, and to be aware that publication, and location of publication, can matter as much to participants as new forms of self-awareness generated through reading about oneself in draft documents.

Representation and audience

The impact of representation on individual participants is an important ethical consideration when designing a study, collecting data and disseminating findings. However, as suggested above, audiences matter. The impact on a given individual can depend significantly on who else is engaging with those representations. Berbery reported that her sorority participants enjoyed looking for themselves in her screenplay, confident that while they could identify themselves in the text, their peers could not. One of Bannister’s participants felt disappointed in the representation of himself and his peers once accessible to his commanders. Social scientists present findings and represent participants to multiple audiences – first, to participants; second, their academic community; third, ‘the public’. Particularly in ethnographic research, it can be difficult to protect the identity of individual from others within the community, or the community from their broader society (Elliott, 2005), when attending to representation as literal truth. The mechanics of whether and how to present literal or real truths to audiences such as fellow academics or ‘the public’ are fraught with ethical challenges, discussed below.

A key representational site of social scientific research is academic conferences, and conference ‘papers’ – even when read – are always in some way performed to an audience. Thus, as Mortensen (2005, p. 105) notes, ‘we must be reflexive and reflective not only in what we write, but in what we speak’. For Mortensen this emerged from concerns about representing women who had undergone ritual body modification using tattoos and piercings. In the run-up to her first conference presentation she discussed her desire to accurately and authentically represent a participant by including all her umms and ahhs with a colleague. She states of her listener, ‘He looked at me in shock and asked if I intended to make this woman look like an idiot in front of an audience’ (2005, p. 115). Mortensen later found herself facing a hostile response when she opted to paraphrase a participant whom she felt would be too easily identifiable in directly quoted speech. Her audience felt that she had failed to engage in appropriately evidencing her claims. In this qualitative project, quoting in full (including the verbal tics of natural language) risked making participants ‘look like an idiot’; cleaning transcripts of the verbal tics of everyday language was understood to give greater access to the content of

a participant's speech act. At the same time, (sanitised) quotations were seen to constitute part of an evidence base; paraphrasing, Mortensen found out, was not.

By protecting the identity of her participant, Mortensen had inadvertently aroused the ire of her audience, and ran the risk of being seen as a poor scholar. Mortensen wanted her (scholarly) audience to see and understand her participants' unconventional views. She wanted to present them positively, not because of potentially problematic responses from peers (as for Berbary, 2011) or superiors (as for Bannister, 1996) but from scholars whom she felt were likely to view her participants in an unsympathetic light. Thus Mortensen pulled back from what could be called more literal representations of her participants, involving all the verbal tics of natural speech, or including identifiable material in a quotation, in favour of a more polished, or a more anonymous, rendering of her participants' words. Her intention was to support her academic audience in addressing the content of her participants' world views, rather than their delivery.

The presentation of research is always embedded in relations of power. These are not only the power relations of social marginalisation or post-colonial histories, relations between researchers and their participants, but also the power relations of academic presentation itself. Mortensen notes an incident at a conference where she was witness to a scholar using a US southern drawl to enunciate the words of his participants. She and others in the audience worried that while endeavouring to represent his participants authentically, or in a more literally true frame, he was inadvertently presenting his participants as lacking education or intelligence in a (US) cultural setting where Southern is often coded as 'dumb' (Bender, 2004, p. 61). Skloot (2010), in her account of the life of Henrietta Lacks, chose to consult Lacks' relatives on whether and how to keep their dialect, tone and 'errors' (such as the consistent use of 'John Hopkin' to refer to John Hopkins University) in her writing. In the words of one relative,

If you pretty up how people spoke and change the things they said, that's dishonest. It's taking away their lives, their experiences and their selves. (2010, p. xi)

Skloot followed her participants' lead and rejected the 'pretty[ing] up' Mortenson (2005) undertook; she reports experiencing criticism from within the academic community for doing so. By contrast Fournillier (2010) investigated the oppressive structural and institutional racism experienced by Trinidadian and Tobagonian immigrant students in the USA. She does not report being criticised for choosing to maintain her Trinidadian accent when representing her own experiences, and those of her participants, at conferences. Attempts at literal representation of participants' words, whether in written or oral form, may engage a commitment to literal truth, but can create unwelcome, hostile responses from academic audiences. A speaker with a Northern US accent mimicking a Southern drawl (linguistically coded as dumb) evoked different reactions to a member of a colonised society speaking for others within that society using a shared, common accent. Thus in addressing the ethics of reading quotations in academic settings, attention must be paid to both histories of marginalisation and post/colonialism, but also the power relations of the academic conference concerned and the wider academic community.

Fournillier (2010) is also part of a growing movement of scholars who seek to destabilise the primacy of the spoken word in conveying 'findings' to scholarly communities. Fournillier describes using Calypso music, performed in the dialect of her participants, at conferences. She notes that Calypso music was 'historically used as a mode of resistance' in the Caribbean (2010, p. 60). As such, her use of it became not only a means to convey a concept or a sentiment, but the form itself functioned as part of the on-going resistance to the racism she experienced in the USA.

Fournillier performed songs that already existed, but Kitrina Douglas specifically wrote songs to present her research into sport, exercise and health to fellow academics. For Douglas, song can ‘support ... the plurality that exists within our humanity and relationships’ (Douglas, 2012, p. 530) and she used lyrics that contrasted with the mood suggested by the music to demand new forms of engagement from audiences. Both scholars stated that their audiences displayed noticeable emotional responses to these performances such as tears and prolonged silences. The forms were different: one utilised the harmony between word and sound, the other focuses on the contrast between them; one located her songs in a history of music as resistance, the other contributed to that history through the creation of song. Nevertheless, both sought not intellectual, cognitive engagement with the themes of their work, but emotion, affect, and embodied engagement. Such choices to engage with academic audiences on these terms entail new questions about whether and how to engage with people’s minds and emotions, raising new and probing questions about what is, and how one conveys, the ‘truth’ of participants’ lives.

Linked to this drive to move away from literal truth representations to evoking affective modes of engagement, Watson (2011) pushed presentation past disseminating findings to combining direct quotes with fictionalisation, satire, and drama. She ‘presented’ the experiences of a mother whose child had a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. The mother had experienced events leading up to the diagnosis as bizarre and traumatic. As well as quoting the mother directly, Watson added her own interpretations and fictionalised some aspects of the case to build up satirical ‘Hogarthian’ scenes, which were then performed by members of the audience. As they did so in an unrehearsed performance, each participant had scope to perform their parts as they wished, creating space to explore multiple interpretations within the single performance/presentation while recognising the ‘interpretive authority’ of the scholar/playwright. In pushing roles to satirical extremes and forcing audience members to enact those roles, Watson sought to highlight the power imbalances between the family and the ‘educational, medical and psychiatric professions’ who constructed them as deviant (2011, p. 402).

As well as plays being written for performance *by* academic audiences, plays have also been written to be performed *to* academic audiences (Sangha, Slade, Mirchandani, Maitra, & Shan, 2012), to be read rather than performed (Berbary, 2011) and to be performed for both academic and non-academic audiences (Jenkins, 2015). Berbary (2011) fictionalised her data into a screenplay to allow her to attend to an ethical priority for her: protecting the identity of individual participants within their community. Sangha et al. (2012) by contrast used ethnodrama to provoke academic audiences in new ways. Ethnodrama is the conversion of (usually ethnographic) research data into dramatic form, often with the intention of publicising social justice and provoking social action. Written alongside presentations of findings in more traditional academic format, Sangha and her colleagues wrote an ethnodrama from their work with women who work precariously (e.g. in contract, part-time, or temporary positions) and who experience – and resist – racial hierarchies at work. The ethnodrama entailed the creation of composite characters, and the writing of a script that incorporated quotes from the interviews and events disclosed by participants. It sought to remain faithful and respectful to data provided by participants, but to do so in ways which forswore literal truth in favour of immersion, and evoking a sense of being there for the audiences.

Jenkins (2015) similarly ‘wrote up’ her data into a play about the racial, class, and gender-based divisions in Detroit over the last half-century, taking as her starting point ‘the 1967 riot/rebellion’ (2015, p. 65) which followed the police killings of three

unarmed African Americans. An already established playwright, Jenkins' play, *The Spirit of Detroit*, allowed her to present her works to multiple audiences, in multiple settings including the University of Michigan and the Charles C Wright Museum of African American History. Like Watson (2011), Sangha et al. (2012) and Berbari (2011), Jenkins noted positive responses from her audience – but unlike them she also highlighted that audience responses were not *only* positive, noting that individual audience members have different reactions to the same performance, ranging from enjoyment to disagreement or wanting to correct errors (Jenkins, 2014, p. 154; see also Mendeloff, 2015; Rice & Rice, 2015; Smith, 2015).

Other forms of real rather than literal truth seeking/presenting emerge in research poetics, which can take the form of poetry written for the purposes of representation (see, for example, Furman, 2006) or both representation and analysis (see, for example, Carroll, Dew, & Howden-Chapman, 2011). As Carroll et al. argue in relation to scholar-written poetry on the lives of marginally housed people, their participants felt the poems 'accurately represented them and their living situations' and in the words of one participant on hearing the poem about them, 'you've got it to a T!' (2011, p. 627). Following Furman (2006), Carroll et al. sought to represent data that remained faithful to the *essence* of the material presented to them: they sought to present a truth that 'created empathy which allowed for a felt sense of the phenomenon and not merely a detached cognitive understanding' (2011, p. 629). These scholars were keen to move beyond literal representations towards real representations, in order to compel academic audiences to engage on affective as well as cognitive levels.

The above authors note that one strength of these more affective approaches is their potential reach. By putting on the same play in different settings, Jenkins was able to attract academics, policy makers and practitioners, and members of the represented community together with members of its wider society. She was able not only to communicate findings to all these groups but also to do so in a way which opened up space for dialogue between them. The reach of a play can be greater than the reach of a paper when it attracts and engages a wide range of audiences.

The ethical good of ensuring a wide – and diverse – reach of 'findings' is explored by Myers (2012) in relation to dance, specifically the 'Dance Your PhD' competition. This international annual contest was launched in 2008 with 12 contestants; by 2011 there were 55. Entrants must either hold, or be working towards, a PhD, in the natural or social sciences, and the contest works to make science more accessible to non-scientists. Part of that accessibility lies in its medium: as an international contest, dances must be videoed and uploaded onto YouTube for judging by a panel of academics, professional dancers, and previous contest winners (Myers, 2012, p. 158).

The Internet opens up space for dissemination (the YouTube video of the perhaps seminal piece of danced science, *Protein Synthesis: An Epic on the Cellular Level* (1971) has been viewed over a million times) but also discussion. In addition to being viewed so many times, the piece has attracted several hundred comments, thus functioning as a space for anyone interested in anything from dance to proteins to engage in productive conversation.

The ethical dimensions of researching and representing in online spaces have been explored by Gatson (2011). She reflected on her position as researcher when conducting data collection, analysis and dissemination of the content of a fan-led online forum for the cult US TV show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003). Gatson noted that she was herself a contributor to the forum, and thus as much participant as researcher – especially in relation to those others drawing on the forum for both academic and non-academic research and publications. In reporting her findings, and engaging with the reporting of

the findings of others, the lines between researcher and researched, and data and output, collapsed. For Gatson this presented new ethical challenges, but also new opportunities: to turn the research-to-output line into a loop, and to watch that loop become a web.

Towards an ethics of engagement

Social scientists are engaged in the task of representation: of their participants, of themselves, of social worlds. Those acts of representing take myriad forms: from monographs to journal articles to conference papers; from blogs to plays to online debate. Despite the thoughtful and reflexive body of work beginning to emerge on the ethics of representation, most social research ethics texts – while increasingly going beyond the hitherto near-exclusive focus on data collection – still frequently overlook presentation (see, for example, Israel, 2015; Miller, Birch, Mauthner, & Jessop, 2012; Sieber & Tolich, 2013). A notable exception is Iphofen (2011) which includes a chapter on disseminating findings: although primarily about publishing, the chapter includes a short section on presentation. Iphofen's view is that ultimately the researcher's task is to 'convey [the participant's] experience authentically and in a way that might be useful for purposes of explanation, policy-making or practice' (Iphofen, 2011, p. 139). Critical here is the concept of authenticity. What does it mean to present findings authentically when presenting speech authentically (umms, ahhs and all) only risks making your participant 'look like an idiot'? What does it mean to represent your participants authentically when you seek to evoke a sense of being there, or prioritise affective over cognitive engagement at the expense of literal accuracy? An ethics of representation must engage with these questions. Scholars have to make decisions about how to take the words out of their participants' mouths and reproduce them elsewhere. And critically, scholars must acknowledge these choices *as choices*.

There are, today, increasingly diverse ways of presenting social scientific 'findings'. The literary turn of the 1980s opened up new forms of writing to the academy – new ways to communicate concepts and lived worlds to others (see, for example, Clifford, 1988; Clifford & Marcus, 1986 (eds); Richardson, 1987). In its wake we have seen 'findings' increasingly presented as poetry, dance pieces, and plays, among other forms. At the same time we have seen new technologies open up new channels of communication and the rise of academic blogging and other forms of engagement with the back and forth of online fora. In these spaces the expertise of the scholar can be unsettled; these are spaces where the represented can 'talk back'.

As Berbary (2011) and Jenkins (2015) discuss, crafting research findings into a play enabled them to talk about social worlds. They were able to create characters which engaged participants, community members and other readers/viewers and whose words were 'true' (in the sense of being direct quotations from participants). Those words were also 'untrue' in the sense that characters were composites, and specific incidents in the play may not have actually taken place, or taken the form depicted. Yet, these forms of representation, like the poetry discussed by Furman (2006) and Carroll et al. (2011), appear to have been enthusiastically consumed by and commented on by participants, community members and 'the public'.

The significant compromise of researchers such as Furman (2006), Berbary (2011), Carroll et al. (2011), Watson (2011), Douglas (2012), Sangha et al. (2012) and Jenkins (2015), is in relation to what Bakan (1996) calls literal truth. Forms such as poems, plays, song and dance all entail sacrificing literal truth for what the authors hope is, to borrow Bakan's language, a real truth: an evocation of being there, an opportunity to step inside the lives of others for a moment, to *feel* as well as *think* your way into other worlds. Is this sacrifice worthwhile? After all, can a poem provide the detail of a journal

article? Can a play achieve the depth of a monograph? Can a dance piece locate a finding sufficiently well in a body of related research? The authors discussed here, and indeed the authors of this article, recognise that they cannot, yet their use may be worthwhile *as long as the nature of that sacrifice is identified and acknowledged*. After all, most of us select quotes for presentation for their pithiness among other qualities. Ellipses are common. All of us compromise the complexity of a social world we have spent an extended period of time understanding for intelligibility in a given presentational act. Perhaps, like Agee (1941) many of us would love to ‘puts bits of wood, fabric and excrement on the page’ (Stewart, 1996, p. 22) but, like Agee and Stewart, we stick to the assets we have: our words. Here, too, we are compromising; here, too, we should identify and acknowledge the nature of our sacrifice.

There is more at stake than simply understanding the forms of creative presentation or knowledge exchange discussed here as pushing the limits of what it means to authentically represent others. These forms of creative presentation do another important thing: they engage people. One of the authors of this article faithfully sent drafts of her thesis chapters to participants, never to receive much more back than a ‘Thanks, good luck with your assignment’. By contrast, Berbary presented her findings to her participants in a way that actively engaged them. Carroll et al. presented their findings in ways that pleased their participants. Presentations by Fournillier, Douglas, and others were appreciated by their audiences. Creative forms of presentation, then, have the capacity to draw participants in after data collection is done. They explore new ways to engage with fellow academics affectively as well as cognitively. They open up ways to engage with multiple audiences and, when freely available via online platforms such as YouTube or online fora, promise free access to accessibly presented findings.

New forms of representation open up opportunities to do more than just send draft academic texts to participants and hope they’ll choose to engage with them. Poetry and plays, screen plays and dance pieces render findings intelligible in different sorts of ways. New doctoral competitions such as Three Minute Thesis (where competitors summarise three years of work in three minutes to a non-specialist audience with only one PowerPoint slide for support) or Dance Your PhD are attracting ever greater levels of attention and attendant prize money. They do not replace a written thesis, journal article, or monograph. Rather, they stand alongside these texts and push researchers to think about how to present their work in new ways, how to engage with new audiences, and how to engage with old audiences in new ways.

However, this new ethics of engagement comes with a price. Study participants, such as some of Bannister’s perhaps, can operate from the assumption that their words will find their way only into tomes read only by other scholars, not their peers, superiors and local community. Liebllich’s representations of an anonymised kibbutz caused problems for the kibbutz community once the story was picked up by the media. Presentation of research outputs involving participants, in public spaces online, may please participants at the time but come to embarrass or otherwise distress them years later (Mannay, 2016, p. 114). Therefore, an ethics of engagement requires careful consideration of the increasingly public nature of scholarly work. As Josselson (2007) flags up, the assumptions of participants – how they will be represented and who they will be represented to – need to be explored with participants from the start of the research process and throughout.

Conclusion

Focusing on the ethics of representation in social scientific research highlights a paucity of published debate. Some of the brief moments where scholars have stopped to

consider the ethics of representation have been drawn upon here. They highlight different ethical challenges and different responses. What ties them together as specifically *ethical* responses is their shared commitment to reflection – indeed public reflection – on their choices, wise or otherwise. All arguably engage in ethical practice at some or all of the following three levels. First, there is the *overt* ethical practice of presenting research that aims to support ethical social change such as improving health (e.g. Douglas, 2012) or reducing racism (e.g. Sangha et al., 2012). Second, there is the *internal* ethical practice of working with a range of media to reflect complex subject matter more fully than conventional presentation techniques enable (e.g. Fournillier, 2010; Myers, 2012). Third, there is the *relational* ethical practice of aiming to engage audiences, sometimes through direct participation (e.g. Watson, 2011) but always through providing entertainment together with information (e.g. Jenkins, 2015).

Overt, internal and relational forms of ethical practice in representation come together under a fourth, overarching level of ethical practice that characterises all the endeavours described here: a commitment to an ethics of engagement. All the authors discussed here have sought to actively engage with their study participants, their participants' communities, their audiences and wider publics. They have done this through the choices they have made about where and how to present findings, interpretive authority, real versus literal truths, and whether and how to anonymise. Some have bravely disclosed occasions where attempts to represent ethically went wrong, as well as where they went right. In so doing they have aimed to engage fellow scholars in an on-going process of collective as well as individual reflection on what it is to represent others ethically, how to choose between competing ethical 'goods', and how to reflexively engage with those choices.

All address questions about how presenting scholarship engages participants and/or audiences. Whether presentation in a publication or at a conference, as dance, poetry or prose, as a written screenplay or a performed play, in academic journals or across the twittersphere, an ethics of engagement entails addressing the who, how, who to, and why of representation. As the authors discussed here have demonstrated, there is no prescriptive recipe for such an ethics, but serious consideration of the ethics of representation may provide a start to a reflexive, collaborative journey towards a shared ethics of engagement in social scientific research.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Note

1. These are naturalism, isomorphism, figuralism, constructionism and nteractionism. See Carusi, 2008, pp. 49–59 for a detailed analysis of each of these modes of framing data.

References

- Agee, J. (1941). *Let us now praise famous men*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Allen, R. E. S., & Wiles, J. L.(2016). A rose by any other name: Participants choosing research pseudonyms. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 13*, 149–165.
- Bakan, D. (1996). Some reflections about narrative research and hurt and harm. In R.Josselson (Ed.), *Ethics and process in the narrative study of lives* (pp.3-8). London: Sage.

- Bannister, J. (1996). Beyond the ethics committee: Representing others in qualitative research. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 6, 50–58.
- Bender, M.(2004). *Linguistic diversity in the South*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Berbary, L.(2011). Poststructural writerly representation: Screenplay as creative analytic practice. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17, 186–196.
- Carroll, P., Dew, K., & Howden-Chapman, P.(2011). The heart of the matter: Using poetry as a method of ethnographic inquiry to represent and present experiences of the informally housed in Aotearoa/New Zealand. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17, 623–630.
- Carusi, A.(2008). Data as representation: Beyond anonymity in e-research ethics. *International Journal of Internet Research Ethics*, 1, 37–65.
- Chase, S.(2008). *Perfectly prep*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Clark, A.(2006). *Anonymising research data* (NCRM Working Paper Series). Retrieved November 8, 2016, from <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/480/>
- Clifford, J.(1988). *The predicament of culture*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Clifford, J., & Marcus, G. E.(1986). *Writing culture: The poetics and politics of ethnography: A School of American Research advanced seminar*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Corden, A., & Sainsbury, R.(2006). Exploring ‘quality’: Research participants’ perspectives on verbatim quotations. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 9, 97–110.
- Douglas, K.(2012). Signals and signs. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18, 525–532.
- Elliott, J.(2005). *Using narrative in social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Fournillier, J.(2010). Plus ca change, plus c'est la meme chose: An Afro Caribbean scholar on the higher education plantation. *Creative Approaches to Research*, 3, 52–62.
- Furman, R.(2006). Poetic forms and structures in qualitative health research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16, 560–566.
- Gatson, S.(2011). The methods, politics, and ethics of representation in online ethnography. *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* 4, 245–275.
- Hammersley, M.(2015). On ethical principles for social research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 18, 433–449.

- Iphofen, R.(2011). *Ethical decision-making in social research: A practical guide*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Israel, M.(2015). *Research ethics and integrity for social scientists* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Jenkins, M.(2014). Burning down the house. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 14, 147–154.
- Jenkins, M.(2015). Artist's statement: The politics of performing place in spirit of Detroit. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 35, 62–75.
- Josselson, R.(2007). The ethical attitude in narrative research: Principles and practicalities. In D.Clandinin(ed.), *Handbook of narrative inquiry* (pp. 537–566). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kara, H.(2015). *Creative research methods in the social sciences: A practical guide*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Lomborg, S.(2012). Personal internet archives and ethics. *Research Ethics*, 9, 20–31.
- Mannay, D.(2016). *Visual, narrative and creative research methods*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Markham, A.(2012). Fabrication as ethical practice: Qualitative inquiry in ambiguous internet contexts. *Information, Communication & Society*, 15, 334–353.
- Mendeloff, K.(2015). Staging racism: A director's view of spirit of Detroit. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 35, 80–82.
- Miller, T., Birch, M., Mauthner, M., & Jessop, J.(2012). *Ethics in qualitative research* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Moore, N.(2012). The politics and ethics of naming: Questioning anonymisation in (archival) research. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 15, 331–340.
- Mortensen, C.(2005). (Eco)Mimesis and the ethics of the ethnographic presentation. *Journal of American Folklore*, 118, 105–120.
- Myers, N.(2012). Dance your PhD: embodied animations, body experiments, and the affective entanglements of life science research. *Body & Society*, 18, 151–189.
- Pilcher, K., Martin, W., & Williams, V.(2016). Issues of collaboration, representation, meaning and emotions: Utilising participant-led visual diaries to capture the everyday lives of people in mid to later life. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 19, 677–692.

- Rice, A., & Rice, P.(2015). Two brothers reflect on spirit of Detroit. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 35, 83–86.
- Richardson, L.(1987). *Fields of play: Constructing an academic life*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Richardson, J. C., & Godfrey, B. S.(2003). Towards ethical practice in the use of archived transcribed interviews. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 6, 347–355.
- Sangha, J., Slade, B., Mirchandani, K., Maitra, S., & Shan, H.(2012). An ethnodrama on work-related learning in precarious jobs. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 18, 286–296.
- Saunders, B., Kitzinger, J., & Kitzinger, C.(2015). Anonymising interview data: Challenges and compromise in practice. *Qualitative Research*, 15, 616–632.
- Sieber, J., & Tolich, M.(2013). *Planning ethically responsible research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Skloot, R.(2010). *The immortal life of Henrietta lacks*. London: Pan Books.
- Smith, R.(2015). Reflections on spirit of Detroit. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 35, 87–90.
- Smythe, W. E., & Murray, M. J.(2000). Owing the story: Ethical considerations in narrative research. *Ethics and Behavior*, 10, 311–336.
- Stewart, K.(1996). *A space on the side of the road*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Watson, C.(2011). Staking a small claim for fictional narratives in social and educational research. *Qualitative Research*, 11, 395–408.