
Storytelling beyond the Academy

Exploring Roles, Responsibilities and Regulations in the Open Access Dissemination of Research Outputs and Visual Data

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In the last decade there has been a movement towards facilitating Open Access to academic outputs via the World Wide Web. This movement has been characterised as one that embodies corporate citizenship because such sharing has the potential to benefit all stakeholders: academics, policy makers, charitable sectors and the wider public. In the UK, the Economic and Social Research Council are implementing Open Access compliance guidelines for research that they fund, which is interpreted by individual institutions in their school regulations. In the case of doctoral theses, there is now a requirement for students to provide an electronic format of their final work to be included in their school's online digital repository. In a number of UK institutions, University Awards and Progress Committees will only consider awarding the doctoral degree once these requirements have been satisfied. Although this move to Open Access can be considered as an egalitarian endeavour, this paper argues that an important stakeholder may have been overlooked in the march towards progressive dissemination. The temporal space between gaining informed consent from research participants and the changing nature of the accessibility of outputs can both engender a breach of ethics in terms of the initial agreements negotiated with participants and raise issues around representation in the ongoing dissemination and reformulation of the original work, particularly where visual images are central to research outputs. The paper utilises autoethnography and poetry to reflect on my own encounter with the requirement for Open Access and the ways in which this brings up concerns around ethics, obligations and integrity.

- Anonymity
- Autoethnography
- Corporate citizenship
- Ethics
- Higher education
- Informed consent
- Open Access
- Poetry
- University regulations
- Visual methods

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PEASE (2012) PRESENTS ACADEMIC WRITING as a form of activism and political practice that has the ability to motivate and compel the reader to take action against injustice and challenges the researcher to move beyond the dense, dry, flat prose that form a 'linguistic armor' (Lerum, 2001). When we are writing as a project of social justice, then, it is important to engage both cognitively and emotionally with an audience. The call for papers for this special issue of *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship* specifically asked writers to engage in 'storytelling beyond the academic article', which would be accessible, interesting and useful. For these reasons there follows an autoethnographic poem focusing on the need to consider all stakeholders in the march towards progressive dissemination; this alternative form of presentation aims to bring the issues of corporate citizenship discussed in the following sections to life and emphasise the need for caution in the charge towards Open Access.

It's nice to share
 This is what we tell our children
 Don't be selfish
 Sharing has an inherent goodness
 It's good to share
 Mutually beneficial dissemination
 Egalitarian Open Access
 Sharing is implicitly, corporate responsibility
 Is this corporate citizenship?

It's not nice to steal
 This is what we tell our children
 Don't be selfish
 You shouldn't take what's not yours
 It's bad to steal
 Did you ask if you could use it?
 Mutually beneficial dissemination
 But informed consent?
 Right to withdraw, unethical sharing
 Is this corporate citizenship?

Social research is a privilege
 Not a right
 We are placed in a position
 One of trust
 Informed consent acts as a promise
 Participants generously share their stories
 Their experiences
 Their subjectivities
 Their lives
 Authors and owners

 Social researchers are offered
 An insight

For which they offer assurances
 Informed consent
 Researchers listen and interpret
 Participants' experiences
 Participants' subjectivities
 Participants' lives
 Authors and owners?

Informed consent offers an ethical foundation
 It is the anchor to promises made
 Perhaps the sea of World Wide Web dissemination
 Offers new opportunities
 The greater good
 A global and accessible representation of knowledge
 Compelling or
 Controlling and
 Compromising

Open Access is an egalitarian endeavour
 But not all data has been granted access
 Participants' voices; particularly the marginalised
 Have traditionally been neglected in academia
 Contemporary research demands change
 Participatory practices and projects of social justice
 Open Access then should never override informed consent
 If this is lost and forgotten in the rush towards Open Access
 Researchers need to put on the brakes
 Rock the boat of new conventions
 Consider what is right, agreed, informed
 This is corporate citizenship

Contextualisation

The Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities (2003) set out a vision of a global and accessible representation of knowledge. This vision was to be facilitated by encouraging researchers and grant recipients to support Open Access by providing their resources on the internet according to the principles of the Open Access paradigm, a mission of disseminating research to constitute a global and interactive representation of human knowledge and the guarantee of worldwide access. The unfolding of this vision can be seen in contemporary Open Access literature, which is composed of online copies of a number of research outputs such as peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers, reports, working papers and theses. In most cases licensing restrictions do not apply to Open Access literature and it can be used freely for research, teaching and other purposes. This knowledge is accessed through archives or repositories that are digital collections of research

articles that have been placed there by their authors located in universities or other research-based institutions.

By 2006 there were 77 Open Access UK-based archives and several of the UK Research Councils required their grant-holders to deposit a copy of any publications resulting from the research they fund in an appropriate Open Access repository as soon as possible after publication (Hassen 2006). More recently, the Research Councils UK Policy on Access to Research (2012) has provided a set of Open Access requirements for all outputs published after 1 April 2013; although it suggests earlier compliance is preferable. The policy also discusses extending existing mechanisms to include compliance monitoring for this policy as well as to track the shift to Open Access and the anticipated changes for the wider academic and political community. In this way compliance with unrestricted, online access to peer-reviewed and published scholarly research papers becomes a proviso of securing research funding.

True corporate citizenship involves far more than what has traditionally been called corporate social responsibility because, as Waddock (2003: 3) maintains, corporate citizenship requires developing mutually beneficial, interactive and trusting relationships between the company and its many stakeholders—employees, customers, communities, suppliers, governments, investors and the third sector. This conception of corporate citizenship is necessarily achieved through the implementation of the company's strategies and operating practices. However, in the move toward Open Access there is a danger that the interests of one set of stakeholders, namely research participants, could be overlooked; an imbalance which could unintentionally elevate particular institutional interests 'above broader values of community and corporate citizenship' (Swanson and Frederick, 2003: 25).

Being a good corporate citizen means treating all stakeholders with dignity and respect, being aware of the company's impacts on stakeholders and 'working collaboratively with them when appropriate to achieve mutually desired results' (Waddock, 2003: 3). In the university research setting, collaboration between the researcher and the researched should be premised upon a strong ethical foundation. As Cocks (2006) argues, issues of power relationships in research are part of the ethical maze facing researchers but ensuring that ethical guidelines are followed, such as the right to withdraw and informed consent, provides some directions with which to map the maze. However, arguably the frameworks set out by ethics boards have become in some ways a piecemeal, tick-box exercise and researchers need to take responsibilities not simply for research ethics but for research etiquette.

Research inquiry is always a moral enterprise, but when we apply qualitative methods ethical issues can be amplified not least because the researcher is delving into people's private lives with the intention of placing a version of these accounts in a public arena (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009). Informed consent then needs to be 'informed' and if participants agree to particular forms of wider dissemination then it is in these agreed arenas alone that their stories can be ethically shared. Therefore, in terms of a doctoral study where participants have agreed, perhaps, to have their data presented at conferences, published in journal articles

that draw on fragments of the completed study and for the entirety of the thesis to be held in the University library, how then should the doctoral student negotiate the new premise that recommendations for a doctoral award are made following confirmation that the final version of the thesis has been uploaded into the digital repository? And why is negotiation, and sometimes resistance, necessary?

The Open Access argument then is presented as an ethical one: all knowledge should be freely available to everybody. This view, often phrased in all-or nothing idealistic terms has been taken up by governments with the added argument that publicly funded work should be available to any interested reader, anywhere (Wickham and Vincent, 2013); however, pre-Open Access, this is often not the wording of the participant consent form—but does this matter? Many of the associated difficulties come with the idea of informed consent as a finite agreement, where the name in the box means that permission is granted. In this conception an interviewee's consent need not be specified for Open Access, as well as the already existing forms of publication, because their consent, the signature, allows the researcher *carte blanche*. The signature is often hastily scribbled without a full reading of the consent form and, in such cases, there may be signed consent—but we should not deceive ourselves that such consent is in any way informed or ethical.

In visual social science research there have been calls for informed consent to be reconceptualised as something that is not fixed but fluid so that the use of images and interview data is continually negotiated with research participants; such participatory practice aims to rebalance the issue of unequal power in the research relationship (Wiles *et al.*, 2008). There have also been innovative alternatives to the standard consent form where digital podcasts are employed to keep the attention of participants and ensure that they are fully informed about to what exactly they are consenting (Hammond and Cooper, 2011). As a visual researcher, I was guided by this discourse of negotiated ethical responsibility and I wanted to ensure a level of fluidity and consent that was fully informed; a particular challenge when participant groups come from outside the academy and may have no experience of the forms of dissemination commonly employed within the university setting.

In response to this challenge, in gaining informed consent I was careful to take concrete examples to show participants what the unknown entity of a journal article or thesis could look like; because how can participants consent to the unknown? Where possible I also took research participants to conference sessions so that they could understand the ways in which accounts of their lives through the research would be presented to others. These visits were planned to engender informed consent. Furthermore, even when initial consent had been agreed, I negotiated the content to be presented in some journal publications, featuring both images and interview data, by asking participants to read pre-publication proofs (for example Mannay, 2010). These are the standards that I aspire to, but realistically not all research participants can attend a conference and it may not be possible to arrange pre-publication or presentation checks. Nevertheless, institutional interpretations of the Open Access movement can inadvertently act to close down the opportunity for this form of ongoing and evolving ethical relationship between researchers and the researched.

This is particularly problematic when researchers themselves are unsure about how the openness of an online repository will not only disseminate but also reformulate their original work. For example, the thesis publication form for my own research states ‘Cardiff University is not under any obligation to reproduce or display the Work in the same formats or resolutions in which it was originally deposited’ (Cardiff University, 2013). Arguably, whether text is in Arial or Times New Roman may not impact on meaning but visual reformatting can actively direct how an image is read. The interpretation of the audience is not necessarily the same as the narrative the image-maker wanted to communicate; indeed, it can often be markedly different (Mannay, 2010, 2013). Therefore, in the institutional regulations the initial reformat, followed by further use of the image perhaps decontextualised from the accompanying text, raises additional issues of representation.

The issue of (mis)representation can be seen commonly in media images. For example, Wright (2011) revisits the iconic print media image ‘Boy Petrol Bomber, Londonderry 1969’, which contains contradictory metaphors of a young boy, the innocent child, standing wearing a gas mask and holding a petrol bomb in his hand. Wright demonstrates the power of the image by charting the way that it has been canonised through its appearance in a series of murals in Northern Ireland; where each artist casts the boy differently according to their political loyalties. In this way images become signs of their times but can be reformatted to act as signs beyond their times. Thus images are reinvented and mediate new messages depending on context. It is this reinvention and the mediating of new messages that can become problematic when applied to exploring visual productions in qualitative research. It is important that the original meaning of an image does not become silenced and that in interpreting images, researchers are giving voice rather than simply voicing over. In this case then, the institutional response to the vision of Open Access threatens images produced in visual fieldwork, which can then be shaded, cropped and perhaps be employed by an individual accessing this data to represent a stereotype of particular places, people or groups, in ways that no longer represent the original creation. Importantly, the fragmentation and misquoting of textual information is also something that requires consideration.

As Bauman (1989: 163) contends, ‘the organisation as a whole is an instrument to obliterate responsibility’; where documentation, guidance and institutional practices act as pressures towards conformity and uniformity that work towards diminishing individual ethical responsibility and action’; but the voice of the individual should not be extinguished in relation to the ethics of social research. In my own experience of completing a successful viva, I needed to negotiate the administrative requirement for submission of my doctoral thesis¹ to the school’s online digital repository; a thesis of both words and images. In light of the issues of informed consent and representation discussed, I refused

¹ Funding: The doctoral research project from which this article is drawn, titled ‘Mothers and Daughters on the Margins: Gender, Generation and Education’, was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council.

to submit an electronic copy despite the wording of the documentation and further guidance, which suggested that compliance was necessary to officially receive my doctoral award.

Therefore, considering the ethics of obedience (Bauman, 1989), I wrote and appealed against the procedure, explaining carefully that electronic access to the thesis would compromise the informed consent gained at the outset of the study, when submission to an online digital repository was not an institutional requirement. The appeal was considered and it was agreed that I would be able to submit a hard copy to the home library as initially stated in the documentation at the commencement of the study. As would be expected in a School of Social Science, my concerns about the nature of informed consent, once formulated into a considered written argument, were well received and it was noted that in future students who began their doctoral study before the recommendations to submit to the online digital repository would be provided with the option to submit in hard copy.

Ethically, then, the outcome was a happy ending for concerns around informed consent. However, as Drucker (1969: 210) suggests, the legitimacy of institutional aims is to satisfy their members but this 'is not and can never be the first task or the test of the pluralist organisations of our society. They must satisfy people outside, must serve a purpose outside, must achieve results outside'. Participants often reside outside of the academy, beyond the ivory tower and outside of research councils' conceptions of Open Access. In this case it is me, the researcher, who has had to stand up and reject the institutional requirement to submit my theses to the online digital repository in order to uphold the tenets of informed consent.

As Bauman (1989) argues, organisations work, consciously or otherwise, to eradicate unpredictable and disruptive forms of ethical resistance and to stop individual members from feeling and acting upon their moral judgements about institutional behaviour. However, this administrative experience suggests that ethical responsibility ultimately lies with the researcher; and that importantly they must have the conviction and the confidence to resist rather than implicitly accept the administrative requests of their institutions; even when they are guided by overarching ideologies that present themselves as being embedded in the values of corporate citizenship. Fortunately, the time of submission allowed me to bypass the administrative demand for Open Access; however, if participants are not told about the way in which these new requirements to 'electronically store, copy or convert the Work' (Cardiff University, 2013) can potentially transform and possibly misrepresent their visual and textual accounts, the problems discussed here will remain for new doctoral submissions.

It is essential that individual research councils and academic institutions facilitating the Open Access movement acknowledge the research participant as central in the production of research knowledge and ensure that the obligations of informed consent are at the centre of the moral enterprise of corporate citizenship. Again the academic researcher has a role to fulfil; as do university administration systems and training programmes, which need to ensure that they educate new researchers about exactly what Open Access entails. When participants are generous enough to share their stories, which are often difficult

even to voice (Mannay, 2011), then they deserve to have the respect accorded to the original promises set out in the process of informed consent and researchers must ensure that this respect is upheld in the changing landscape of academic publishing and institutional administration.

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