Skrifter utgivna av Inst. för ABM vid Uppsala universitet. Volume 11.

Skrifter utgivna av Inst. för ABM vid Uppsala universitet. Volume 11.

Distribution:
Department of ALM
Uppsala University
Box 625
751 26 Uppsala
publikationer@abm.uu.se

“I Can’t Play God, You Know”

Ethical Dilemmas that Archivists Face in the Assessment of Records from Social and Psychiatric Care

Ida Grönroos

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET

Dissertation presented at Uppsala University to be publicly examined in Humanistiska teatern, Thunbergsvägen 3C, Uppsala, Friday, 14 February 2025 at 10:15 for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The examination will be conducted in English. Faculty examiner: Professor Elizabeth Shepherd (University College London).

Abstract
Grönroos, I. 2025. “I Can't Play God, You Know.” Ethical Dilemmas that Archivists Face in the Assessment of Records from Social and Psychiatric Care. *Skrifter utgivna vid institutionen för ABM vid Uppsala universitet* 11. 209 pp. Uppsala: Department of ALM, Uppsala University. ISBN 978-91-506-3082-4.

When a person requests records from a public archives in Sweden, the records must be assessed, and any information in them that may be detrimental for the person concerned shall be redacted before disclosure. This puts the assessing civil servants—in this study, archivists working at municipal and regional Swedish archives—in a position between the individual asking for information, and the state holding it. When requested records concern social care or health care, the assessments become part of the state’s interventions in the most private of spheres that exist: the family and the body. The assessing archivists often find themselves caught up in conflicts between the archive users’ rights to knowledge about their lives and other people’s right to privacy.

This dissertation focuses on these archivists as street-level bureaucrats. Their role is to put legislation into practice and make day-to-day decisions, often using a great deal of professional discretion. Starting from the position that (public sector) archives operate in the tension field between the individual and state power, the dissertation explores how different views on vulnerability, social care, privacy, and dignity affect the assessing, classifying, and disclosing of official records containing sensitive personal information. In the interviewed archivists’ reasoning on detriment assessment and disclosure, two ethical perspectives, the legalistic ethics and the feminist ethics of care, are brought to the fore. The aim of the present study is not to reach a conclusion about which ethical perspective is “right,” but to show how the feminist ethics of care clash with the established legalistic ethics.

The leeway that archivists have for professional discretion gives them power. The inherent paradox of power in the archives in combination with the intricate webs of relationships that are documented in care records, leave archivists stranded. Neither the legalistic ethics nor the feminist ethics of care are sufficient for providing guidance about decisions on disclosure. Whichever way the archivists turn, they are left with undesirable consequences and unsolvable problems. Thus trapped, the archivists in this study must walk a fine line between care and control, between the rule of law and inhumane bureaucracy.

Keywords: Archivists, street-level bureaucrats, records, detriment assessment, decisions on disclosure, legalistic ethics, ethics of care, vulnerability

Ida Grönroos, Department of ALM, Box 625, Uppsala University, SE-75126 Uppsala, Sweden.

ISSN 1652-5353
ISBN 978-91-506-3082-4
URN urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-544226 (http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-544226)

Contents

Acknowledgements **9**

1. Introductory chapter **13**

Previous research 15
Theoretical perspectives 33
Analytical concepts 43
Aim and research questions 51
Method and material 52
Archival practice and legislation in Sweden 57
Outline of empirical study 64

2. Bureaucratic narratives **65**

"It's complicated" 66
The stories behind the story 68
Intersubjective methodologies 69
To ease the fall a bit 71
Archivists as narrators 73
Intimacy 75
Credible sources 78
To get what you ask for, or what you need? 79
Narratives and entropic archives 82
Conclusion 83

3. Getting the work done **87**

Efficiency 88
Professional categories in the archives 89
Trust 91
Routines 93
Bending the rules, or changing them? 96
"Are you crying?" 97
"You get used to it" 100
Collegiality 102
Conclusion 104

4. "The words and the law" **107**

"That little fop" 107
Appeals 112
Britta's case 113
Street-level institutional culture 115
Conclusion 117

5. Privacy **119**

Privacy and detriment 120
Sanctity of the private sphere 122
Socially distributed secrets 124
Governmentality, examination, and confession 127
Family affairs 129
Personal integrity and surveillance 134
What does privacy do? 135
Conclusion 137

6. The peace of the deceased **141**

Peace or legacy? 142
To change the image of a person 143
To respect the will of the dead 145
But what is the will of the dead? Or of anyone? 146
Desire or interest? 148
Can the dead be harmed? 149
"The object of protection" 152
Conclusion 154

7. Records management as care **157**

The power to care—or not to care 158
Arguing for your case 159
Critique of the care-perspective 162
"What has happened has still happened" 164
Protecting perpetrators 165
"I got feeling" 168
Citizens and vulnerable others 169
Conclusion 172

8. Concluding chapter **177**

Feminist and legalistic ethics 178
Discretion and detriment 179
Bureaucracy and profession 181
The record subjects 183

Sammanfattning (Swedish summary) **185**

Syfte och forskningsfrågor 186
Metod och material 187
Den empiriska studien 187
Slutsatser 188

Interviews **191**

References **193**

Appendices **205**

Appendix A – Interview guide 205
Appendix B – information and consent form for interviewees 206

Acknowledgements

During my years as a doctoral student I have had constant discussions with knowledgeable, intelligent, curious, and empathic people. To have had the privilege of being surrounded by such an abundance of intellectual stimuli has left me forever grateful to everyone who ever crossed my path these four and a half years. There is not enough space here to name them all, but they all contributed to making me the person I now am, and to the making of this book. However, I will name a few.

First and foremost, a heartfelt thank you to my interlocutors, both those who ended up being mentioned and quoted in the text and those who did not. Your generosity sharing your time, thoughts, and profound insights were absolutely vital for me, and I hope that this dissertation will do justice to your stories and experiences. For confidentiality reasons I cannot thank you by name, but you know who you are, and you have my deepest gratitude. Tack!

Immense gratitude also to my supervisors. Kerstin Rydbeck, who with a steady hand and good humor guided me through the research process, always keeping an eye on both the big picture and the details. Kerstin's experience and calm has been a benchmark for me throughout my work, and her vast knowledge of both Swedish social history and the LIS field has helped shape this dissertation in crucial ways. Reine Rydén provided invaluable knowledge on Swedish history and archives, sharp-eyed and thorough readings of my texts, and much needed reality checks. Reine saved me numerous times—always in a both laconic and witty manner—from making embarrassing factual errors or bombastic exaggerations. Mats Hyvönen has been the most street-smart guide to academia there ever was, tireless editor of my texts, as well as graphic designer who patiently endured my shifting whims and created the cover of this book. Thank you—all of you—for your wise comments, literature tips, unwavering support, and for always keeping your doors open.

My heartfelt thanks also go to everyone at the Department of ALM for insightful comments on my drafts in higher seminars and for being genuinely nice people. A special thank you to Åse Hedemark for believing in my project enough to hire me, to Isto Huvila for being an excellent guide into the LIS field, and to Matts Lindström for his very helpful comments on my manuscript at the half-time seminar, which helped me define the two ethics central to this dissertation.

My fellow doctoral students at the Department of ALM have been a great source of support along the way. Thank you, Ina-Maria Jansson, Amalia Juneström, Dydimus Zengenene, and Inge Zwart, for welcoming me when I

first started. Thank you, Zanna Friberg, who embarked on this PhD journey at the same time as I did and whose support has been crucial over the years. Nasrin Mostofian, thank you for your delightful ways and enthusiasm, which brightened many otherwise gloomy work days. Camilla Lyckblad, meme-queen and favorite shrew, thank you for telling it like it is.

Charlotte Borgerud, Mo von Bychelberg, Jenny Glashoff, Nikolina Nordin, and Erik Svallingsson: thank you all for the enthusiasm you brought to the department when I needed it most. Last but not least, huge thanks to the administrative staff—Emma Molin Eksell, Görel Tunerlöv, and Camilla Paajunen—who hold the department in their very competent hands.

The Engaging Vulnerability Research Program has provided both resources and freedom, and its thematic seminars and vibrant academic environment have given me invaluable knowledge and inspiration crucial for my work. Thank you Don Kulick, Sverker Finnström, Mats Hyvönen (again), Maria Karlsson, and Sharon Rider for taking me on board. Thank you also to the EV postdocs and associates: Lee Gallagher, Arvid Lundberg, Chris Meyns, Anyssa Neumann, and Per Vesterlund. Anyssa Neumann deserves particular mention for being a great friend and an outstanding proof editor. Thank you for working your magic on my texts and helping me improve my writing.

A special thank you also to Don for his New Perspectives on Vulnerability course and for his writing seminars. Don's insightful, witty, and, sometimes, merciless comments (and persona) have inspired me to always try a little harder. I would also like to thank the participants in Don's writing seminars from outside EV: Alec Forss, Mathias Levi Toft Kristiansen, Emy Lindberg, and Alexander Sallstedt. Thank you for generously taking to read and comment on my texts and for inspiring me with your own writing.

The doctoral students of the Engaging Vulnerability program have given me an additional academic family, alongside the one in ALM. The ones who started before me: Adelaida Caballero-Svensson, Rikard Engblom, Karl Ekeman, Erik Hallstensson, Kristian Sandbekk Norsted, Carolien Hulshof, Kasper Kristensen, Macario Lacbawan, and Mirko Pasquini. Thank you all for leading the way.

Those who started at the same time as me (and with whom surviving the NPV-course was a joint effort): Meryem Saadi, fellow cat-lady; Qing Shen, who taught me the true meaning of the word archaeologist; Aliaksandra Shrubok, delicate flower and hardy thorn; and Aske Stick, Danish guy. I am so happy you all came to this "horrible, horrible country" so that I could get to know you. Thank you all for being great friends, allies, and inspirations.

Also at EV: Axel Rudolphi, brilliant mind and ramblin' man who was always there to cheer me up, make me see things from a different perspective, or simply tell me to get my shit together; Leyla Belle Drake, glamorous revolutionary, who taught me how to use both footnotes and retinol properly; and Vida Sundseth Brenna, mentor and safe haven, who got me back in the saddle

and made academia feel like home. Thank you all for the laughs, the tears, the beers, and the friendship.

Apart from my friends and colleagues at the Department of ALM and the Engaging Vulnerability program, there are many others who have helped and supported me over the years. Thank you, Ann-Sofie Klareld, for your encouragement and insightful comments. Thank you, Samuel Edquist, for being an extremely thorough, engaged, and helpful examiner at my final seminar, pointing me in the right direction. Thank you, Solveig Jülich, for welcoming me on the Bureaucracy, Records, and Archives course and for discussions on archival ethics. Thank you, Hannah Siegrist, for inviting me to the course and for becoming a friend. Thank you, Anna Singer, for help in translating crucial Swedish legal concepts into English. Thank you, Anneli Sundqvist, for engaged and helpful comments on my work, both in Oslo and in Uppsala. Thank you, Erik Jansson Boström, for Weber lunches and borrowed books.

To Gerd Berget and everyone else at OsloMet, thank you for generously welcoming me for a very productive week and providing the opportunity to present my work. Thank you, Brita Brenna and Hufsa, for opening up your home to me when I was in Oslo, and Camila Borges Freitas, for doing the same in Malmö. Thank you to The Swedish National Archives and the Ingvar Andersson foundation, for the generous grant that enabled my travels to Oslo, Malmö, and Sigtuna.

Anna Lundh and Anette Trennedal at the Swedish LIS Doctoral Education Network, thank you for the monthly shut up and write sessions and yearly writing retreats. And thank you to the Swedish Library Association, for enabling these writing retreats. All participating doctoral students: Rui António, Camila Borges Freitas, Shirley Chan, Björn Ekström, Mikael Eriksson, Olof Falk, Katarina Hagberg, Hanna Hallnäs, Ben Hogan, Mauritza Jadefrid, Camilla Lindelöw, Madelene Logren, Karin Lundin, Hana Marčetić, Marie Louise Nzayisenga, Amanda Persson, Emma Román, Marco Schirone, and Fereshta Westin, thank you for rewarding discussions and socializing

To the doctoral students participating in the 2023 Aboagora Pre-symposium in the Finnish archipelago: Aditya Jeevannavar, Sanna Lehtinen, Carlos Lesmes, Saara Mildeberg, Sanna Ryynänen, Alizée Ville, and Nina Vurdelja. Thank you for the nocturnal forest walks, constant discussions, saunas, and cake-shaped voids. A special thank you to Taru Elfving, who made the symposium possible, guided us through the forest, and helped us explore the Edges of Knowing.

Thank you, Alva Magnusson, for sparking the initial idea of this dissertation. Thank you, Kajsa Hallberg-Adu, Marie Karlsson, and Marie Sörensen for encouragement, for reading of drafts and proofs, and for having the grace to not ask me how writing was going.

Thank you to my mother, Ulla Norlin, for teaching me that life is a struggle, and to my father, Åke Norlin, for showing me that even so, the heart must stay soft. Johan Asplund, thank you for being the ultimate older brother, always

right and never content. Whatever grit I have in me, it comes from the lifelong quest of proving you wrong.

Writing this dissertation has been a life-altering experience. However, there are a few people to whom I hope—and think—I am the same as before. A loving thank you to my children: Otto, my wise and beautiful boy, and Iris, my perfect storm. I would probably have finished this dissertation faster without you as my companions, but I also would never have finished it at all. You are my reasons and my anchors, and I wrote it for you.

To my husband Örjan, rock solid and ever patient with my fickle soul: thank you for staying put, giving me unfailing love, support, and space, and for your beautiful mind. I would have been lost without you.

1. Introductory chapter

When I was in my twenties, I worked in a nursing home for a couple of years. I worked nights, caring for elderly people with severe dementia and, in many cases, other underlying physical and mental illnesses. When I mentioned my job to other people, the most common reaction was horror. Many were horrified by my description of the work and the lives of the patients (or users, as the official term was). The most common comment was that these lives were "undignified" and that one would rather kill oneself than not be able to go to the bathroom, recognize one's own children, eat proper food, etc. (the examples varied). I always found these opinions uncomfortable to hear, but it was only later that I was able to formulate an adequate response: that an innate part of human life is to be dependent on other people, and if the lives of the elderly are considered undignified, then so are the lives of young children.

Years later, I was talking to a friend who had just started working in a regional archives,[1] handling disclosures. She told me about an incident during one of her first weeks, when she was still learning the ropes with a more experienced colleague. A man had asked for access to his deceased mother's psychiatric records from one of the major mental hospitals in the 1950s. My friend's colleague evaluated the information in the records and decided to release most of it to the son—except for the documentation of an abortion the mother had while hospitalized. Neither of us knew what to make of this. Was my friend's colleague trying to protect the mother? The son? The hospital? From what?

Over the years, I have often revisited these episodes in my mind, and the questions they raise have become the focus of my PhD work. I want to shed light on the gap between law and practice and what is being used to fill that gap. Therefore, in this dissertation, I focus on the professional role of archivists by examining how they, as public servants, balance legislation, discretion, and professional judgment, and how they determine this balance. I will do so by examining how professional archivists perceive and assess vulnerability and how they deal with the disclosure of sensitive information in psychiatric and social care records.

The conflict between one subject's right to knowledge about ones' life and family and another subject's right to privacy relates to the tension between

[1] In archival studies, archival institutions such as municipal and regional archives are always written in plural, referring to the fact that each institution holds several archival collections.

individuals, families, and other social units tied together by affection, blood, or law. The state works as mediator between individuals to ensure each subject's independence and autonomy while also trying to reduce their vulnerability. In the cases of assessments of detriment, the archivists, who are also individuals, represent the state.[2] The practice of detriment assessment on this administrative level is a form of hidden authoritative power that I believe needs to be observed. The archive is only one of many places where the state and the individual intersect and where legislation is put into practice. In such processes, there is always a risk of arbitrary or even illegitimate exercise of power.

My theoretical framework is taken not only from archival studies and information studies but also from various other fields within the humanities and social sciences. The interaction between archivist and archive user that is the focus of study brings to the fore issues that call for interdisciplinary persepectives on concepts such as dependency, dignity, and privacy, as well as the politics and ethics of disclosure. These concepts all relate to vulnerability, which is a central concept of this dissertation.[3] I am interested in the vulnerability of the people concerned by and engaged in records from social and psychiatric care and, more specifically, how these vulnerabilities induce archivists to engage ethically in the matters of disclosure.

In this dissertation, I will investigate which ethical perspectives archivists use when assessing records and how these ethics work. Does the use of different ethical perspectives convey different focuses, and results, to the assessments? And how do these ethics relate to the archivists' tasks and professional roles?

The remainder of this introductory chapter begins with a review of previous research relevant to this dissertation. In the course of this review, I identify a research gap in which my study is situated. Next, I present the theoretical perspectives upon which the study is based. I follow this with a discussion of key analytical concepts used in the dissertation. I then return to the purpose of this study, elaborating my aims and presenting my research questions. Afterwards, I describe my methods and materials and discuss the ethical considerations made throughout my work. The chapter ends with an overview of the Swedish legislation that applies to my study.

[2] Throughout this dissertation, I will use the term "state" to talk, in general, about Swedish regions and municipalities as well as other official authorities. Even though in Sweden, municipalities and regions have a large degree of self-determination, they are part of the public sector and represent the "state" in relation to Swedish citizens.

[3] My PhD-project is a part of the ten-year interdisciplinary research program Engaging Vulnerability at Uppsala University. The aim of the EV program is to re-focus our understanding of vulnerability as something more than simply a lack (of agency, power, or resources) and examine vulnerability as a productive set of relationships that demand something from us.

Previous research

This dissertation touches on a number of issues that have received considerable scholarly attention within archival studies and beyond. These areas often intersect, both in this study and in previous ones. In this overview, however, I have separated the various themes into separate sections. These are: 1) bureaucracy, with particular emphasis on street-level bureaucracy; 2) archival ethics, power, and social justice; 3) secrecy, privacy, and integrity; and 4) care records.

The line between previous research and theory is not always clear-cut, and some of the concepts presented and scholars referred to in this section are also employed for analytical purposes in the empirical chapters.

Bureaucracy

The literature on bureaucracy is so vast that it is virtually impossible to provide a brief overview of it. Instead, I will focus on a few seminal works on the topic and, through them, identify the space in which my study's relationship to bureaucracy is situated. First, I will give a very brief introduction to the concept as formulated by Weber, and then I will move on to discuss a few works on bureaucracy that are particularly relevant to this study, namely those by Bauman, Arendt, and Caswell. In the subsection entitled "Street-Level Bureaucracy," I will introduce Lipsky's term, which I use recurrently throughout the dissertation to refer to the archivists, and review previous studies of street-level bureaucrats in other professions. Then, under the subtitle "Archivists as Street-Level Bureaucrats," I will focus on studies of the archivist profession, with particular emphasis on its role in bureaucracy.

Max Weber (1968) defines the ideal type of bureaucracy as follows:

1) It covers a set area of activity, which is governed by rules. Bureaucracy is based on specialization and division of labor. Within each area of expertise, there are legislation and rules that the bureaucrats working in this area must be acquainted with.

2) Bureaucracy is hierarchical, meaning that in every organization there is a clear chain of command, with areas of responsibilities clearly defined.

3) The bureaucracy's (and bureaucrat's) actions are based on written documents (case files). The bureaucratic organization is text-based, not oral. Every order and decision must be documented to take effect.

4) Bureaucrats have received expert training. Since bureaucratic work is divided into different expert areas, the bureaucrats performing the work need sufficient education and knowledge to carry out their special tasks.

5) The bureaucrats are completely devoted to their work. This means that they should not involve personal opinions in their decisions but focus solely on the rules governing them.

6) Bureaucracy management is based on general rules. Just as individual bureaucrats are guided strictly by rules and legislation, so too is the bureau on

an organizational level. It is not up to any manager to change practices or intervene in individual decisions; rather, the guiding principles are always above the level of any particular bureaucrat and cannot be overruled by a single decision.

Weber's view of bureaucracy has been enormously influential, affecting all subsequent studies of bureaucracy. However, there are other views on what constitutes bureaucracy, and Weber's theories have also been criticized. This critique, in turn, has been criticized for being based on careless and/or malicious readings of Weber that fail to place his ideas on bureaucracy in context with the rest of his writings (Swedberg and Agevall 2016).

Bureaucracy as a system has been widely criticized for its alleged tendency to dehumanize both citizens and bureaucrats, enabling officials to make decisions that violate their personal moral beliefs, leading to inhumane exercise of power. Perhaps the most influential description of this anti-humanist efficiency is sociologist Zygmunt Bauman's work on the Holocaust (1989, hereafter referred to in a 2007 edition). In it, Bauman, drawing on Hannah Arendt's 1963 report book from the Eichmann trial, *The Banality of Evil: Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Arendt 1977), gives a sociological explanation of how ordinary, seemingly decent people could actively participate in the atrocities of the German Nazi regime.

Bauman also draws on Milgram's findings that physical as well as psychological distance allow one's actions to be decoupled from one's personal and moral beliefs, hence causing people to commit acts that, under normal circumstances, they would find despicable (Bauman 2007, 155). Physical proximity and personal contact, which the bureaucrat generally lacks, are obstacles to carrying out orders that violate the civil servant's personal morals and beliefs.

In addition, archival scholar Michelle Caswell argues that the production of records (and archives) enables Arendt's banality of evil by isolating bureaucrats from the concrete consequences of their decisions: "First, documents allow for specific actions to be compartmentalized, thus distancing bureaucrats from the larger goal of their discrete tasks, and second, by fulfilling a social function that encourages a culture of thoughtlessness" (Caswell 2010, 10). The bureaucratic machine functions through an elaborate system of documentation in which tasks are distributed by written orders and then documented after execution.

Some of Arendt's critics have claimed that she places too much emphasis on the bureaucratic process itself and overlooks the specific historical and ideological contexts in which the Holocaust took place. One cannot, as critics claim that Arendt does, explain the misdeeds of the Nazi regime solely in terms of bureaucratic efficiency.[4] In other words, it makes a difference which political and ideological system a bureaucracy upholds; bureaucracy itself is not inherently bad.

[4] For an elaborate discussion on Arendt and her critics, see for example Caswell (2010), 14–16.

In a response to her critics, Arendt elaborates on the Eichmann case through a philosophical discussion that draws on Socrates' reflections on the self. She develops the idea that in order to have a conscience and question established ideas, we must be able to engage in a dialogue with ourselves, a "two-in-one" (Arendt 1971, 442) set-up in which we examine and question our own thoughts and actions. This dialogue of the self with the self is what Arendt simply calls *thinking*. The ability to think has nothing to do with intelligence, she claims, but comes from a thirst for *meaning* that some people have and some do not. The difference between thinking and non-thinking individuals becomes crucial only when commonly accepted rules or laws collide with the conscience of the thinking. Eichmann, according to Arendt, did not think, and that was the reason he (and many of his countrymen) so easily embraced the evils of the Nazi regime.[5]

It is, of course, impossible to compare the archivist bureaucrats in this study with the banal evil of the bureaucrats of the Third Reich; the redaction of information about third parties in case files is in no way comparable to genocide. The purpose of this dissertation is not to make moral judgments about the professional conduct of the archivists studied. Nor is it to argue that bureaucracy as a system is either good or bad. What I instead aim to do is to point out some of the problems that arise for street-level bureaucrats because of paradoxes built into the bureaucratic system.

Street-level bureaucrats

Street-level bureaucracy (SLB) is a term coined by the American sociologist Michael Lipsky in 1969, although it did not have much impact until 1981, when he published a monograph on the subject (Lipsky 2010). The term refers to public service workers who are not traditionally thought of as bureaucrats or decision-makers but who, Lipsky argues, make decisions on a daily basis that affect people's lives in ways far more concrete and direct than do decisions made at higher levels.[6]

Lipsky's examples of SLBs include police officers, nurses, social workers, and school teachers. Professionals are expected to exercise professional judgment—discretion. They have some leeway in how to perform their duties and how to interpret existing rules in particular situations, discretion is given to them because it is necessary. The tasks of SLBs

> Involve complex tasks for which elaboration of rules, guidelines, or instructions cannot circumscribe the alternatives. […] Street-level bureaucrats work in situations that often require responses to the human dimensions of situations.

[5] Before her death, Arendt developed these thoughts in an unfinished work on judgment. Using the manuscripts she left behind along with other writings in which she touched upon the subject of judgment, others have attempted to reconstruct her work (e.g., d'Entrèves 2006).

[6] Another more recent term sometimes used as synonym to street-level bureaucrats is frontline bureaucrats. In this dissertation, however, I will use the original term as coined by Lipsky.

> They have discretion because the accepted definitions of their tasks call for sensitive observation and judgment, which are not reducible to programmed formats. (Lipsky 2010, 15)

In other words, there can never be a guideline for every single situation an SLB might face. They have to be able to make decisions based on discretion.

Lipsky's concept of SLB has been highly influential in the research field of public administration as well as in studies of social work and in political studies. Discretion is a particularly well-studied aspect of SLB, primarily in the context of policy implementation but also in regard to decision-making (Chang and Brewer 2023, 2198).

Public administration scholar Steven Maynard-Moody and law scholar Michael Musheno have, in a number of works, problematized the view of SLBs as state agents whose job it is to put abstract policies of government agencies into practice. This traditional view, according to Maynard-Moody and Musheno, is based on the sharp distinction between politics and administration (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000). Although many scholars have challenged this distinction, Maynard-Moody and Musheno claim that it keeps returning to the academic discussion under new names, such as implementation theory and principal-agent theory.

The traditional narrative of SLBs as state agents is challenged by a counter-narrative, which Maynard-Moody and Musheno call the citizen agent narrative. In the state agent narrative, discretion is mostly regarded as a threat, as a way for SLBs to make their work easier or serve their own interests. This, in turn, erodes the trust in public governance and creates room for corruption. In addition, discretion overturns the hierarchical relationship between policy and administration; critics have argued that SLBs with too much room for discretion would *make* policy rather than just implement it (ibid., 342).

In Maynard-Moody and Musheno's studies, SLBs rarely described themselves as state agents. Instead, they talk about themselves as citizen agents, working for the clients, students, or citizens they interact with in their work (ibid., 347).

In an article on the production of police reports, information scholar Ciaran B. Trace (2002) explores the culture of record creation, introducing the difference between the use and purpose of the records. Identifying use as the immediate operational needs and purpose as additional uses by a range of audiences, Trace also explores the representational nature of records, particularly in relation to their purpose. She points out that operational needs are only the starting point for understanding the nature of the record, arguing that professionals, such as the police officers she studied, are also concerned with avoiding liability, projecting competence, and conforming to larger narratives within their professional cultures, which they might do, for example, by reaffirming existing social prejudices around poor, racialized, or otherwise marginalized people.

Trace's study on the production of records through street-level bureaucratic policies brings us on to the record keepers—the archivists—as street-level bureaucrats.

Archivists as bureaucrats

The most commonly studied professions in SLB research are social workers, police, and teachers (Chang and Brewer 2023, 2200). These professions are all well known and highly visible in society; thus, it is easy for people to relate to them and understand what they do. By contrast, the profession of archivist is not widely recognized. In the following section, I will provide a brief overview of previous research on the archival profession, with a particular focus on its function in society.

The subjectivity of archivists has long been a challenge in archival theory. Scholars have debated the extent to which archivists are, and should be, objective toward the records in their care. This discussion has also moved toward the archivists' relationships with the users of archives (Nesmith 1999, 11). To elaborate on these issues, I will draw mainly on two archival theorists, Terry Cook and John Ridener, who have both described the development of archival thinking and the archivist's profession as a move between paradigms. Their views differ slightly, but both present ideas that are valuable to my study.

John Ridener (2009) has sketched a division of four paradigms within archival theory, which he calls the consolidation, reinforcement, modern, and questioning paradigms. He additionally highlights technology as a driving force behind the development of archival practice and theory, pointing out that technological breakthroughs have always affected archivists' and records creators' work, from the invention of the typewriter and the telephone, to the current digitalization of society (Ridener 2009, 10–13).

In Ridener's view, however, the most important factor that has had an impact on archival theory is historiography. For most of its history, the archivist profession has been tightly linked to that of the historian. Most archivists were also historians, and only in the last fifty years has this connection slowly begun to loosen. Accordingly, historiography was for a long time the guiding theoretical principle of archival practice (ibid., 14). Ridener outlines the development of historiography in the twentieth century as moving from a positivist view of telling "what really happened" to a more relativistic approach that gave rise to the subfields of social and cultural history (ibid., 18–19).

In a highly influential article, Canadian archival scholar Terry Cook (2013) developed his own idea of four archival paradigms: evidence, memory, identity, and community. Moving through these overlapping paradigms, the archivist has developed "from passive curator to active appraiser to societal mediator to community facilitator" over the last 150 years (Cook 2013, 95). Cook is particularly interested in archivists' shared identity and sense of community that have developed through the profession's increasing contact with citizens and communities in society. This is, to some extent, the interest also in my study.

Archival scholar Devon Mordell (2019) has presented an additional paradigm to Cook's, which she calls the data paradigm. Based on technological development, this new paradigm shows how intertwined the different forces

behind change are. While Ridener views paradigms as one of three underlying impetuses, Mordell (and Cook) merge these different impetuses into overarching paradigms.

As modern archives developed, their main focus was to retain official state records that served as juridical *evidence* for government agencies. After the French Revolution, the audiences of the archives widened to include not only state officials but also citizens. In 1898, the Dutch Manual (Muller, Feith, and Fruin 2003) codified the principles of provenance and original order, hence formalizing the records' functions as evidence (Cook 2013, 106). The archivists' role, consequently, became to protect the "truth" that was believed to reside in unaltered and unmediated archives (Jenkinson 1922). This paradigm of evidence dominated professional archival discourse until the 1930s, and while it is no longer the dominating paradigm, it has not been totally replaced by other paradigms but merely supplemented (Cook 2013, 107).

After the Second World War, the number of official state records grew enormously, creating the need to appraise and select which records should be kept in the archives. It was no longer possible for the archivists to act solely as custodians of archives—the archives had become too vast—so they had to start making conscious decisions on what information to retain. This need, formulated by T.R. Schellenberg in 1956 (1971), put *appraisal* at the core of the archivists' profession and made way for the memory paradigm. In this paradigm, archivists work "for" historians, trying to anticipate what records would be useful for historical research in the future and then basing their appraisal on that.

As the academic discipline of history shifted its interests from primarily the lives and deeds of the powerful and wealthy to a more "bottom-up" history, so too did the archives. In combination with the development of the archival profession as a profession in its own right, archival studies as an academic discipline, and the influence of postmodern philosophy that replaced the stern belief in the "truth" for archives to protect, appraisal shifted focus. No longer aimed toward future historical research or focused on powerful people or state agencies, it instead began to document "citizens as much as the state, margins as much as the center, dissenting voices as much as mainstream ones, cultural expression as much as state policy, the inner life of human motivations as much as their external manifestation in actions and deeds" (Cook 2013, 110). This is the core of the identity paradigm.

The community paradigm, as phrased by Cook, includes a shift from

> dominant-culture language, terminology, and definitions to sensitivity to the "other" and as keen an awareness of the emotional, religious, symbolic, and cultural values that records have to their communities as of their administrative and juridical significance. (ibid., 115)

In line with Cook, but from a slightly different angle, Ridener sees the dialectic relationship between objectivity and subjectivity as the foundation of, or the thread running through, all changes in paradigms regarding archival practice and theory. Cook frames this dichotomy between objectivity and subjectivity differently, viewing it instead as a tension between evidence and memory, with archivists as guardians or as interpreters.

Like Cook, Ridener draws both on Muller, Feith, and Fruin and on Schellenberg to explain the consolidation and the modern paradigm. Ridener, however, also uses Jenkinson[7] to establish his reinforcement paradigms. Jenkinson's most important contribution, according to Ridener, was that he defined the archivist as a professional:

> The archivist was to focus on arrangement and description of archives, in a formal and professional manner. Jenkinson was able to carve a niche for archivists as distinct from both historians and librarians and created a clearly defined role for archivists to fulfill professionally. (Ridener 2009, 146–147)

Both Cook and Ridener see the current paradigms of community (Cook) and questioning (Ridener) as coming to an end. Cook identifies a crisis within the profession, and Ridener foresees one, that will inevitably force archival thinking into a new paradigm. Ridener suggests that this next paradigm shift will be induced either by questions regarding the retention and accessibility of digital records or by a reaction toward "the increased subjective responsibility given to archivists over the past 50 years" (ibid., 153). Cook also highlights the relevance of technology and digitalization in the future of archiving, but he puts faith in the community paradigm as an opportunity for "an increased capacity in our archival community to harbor plurality, diversity, and difference" (Cook 2013, 117).

The interest in archivists as subjective interpreters of records and mediators of various truths naturally turned into an interest in archivists themselves, and in the archival profession.

Studies of professional archivists

Chinery and Casey (2021) acknowledge the fact that the archival profession has traditionally been predominantly male but that the gender balance has now shifted and the archivist is increasingly coded as feminine. The "feminization" of archival work, which Lapp (2019) also addresses, is relevant to this dissertation because I will later elaborate on ethics that are coded as masculine (legalistic ethics) and as feminine (care ethics). Apart from gender, Chinery and Casey also focus on stress as a factor in archival work. They conclude that stress levels for professional archivists are high, and that the archivists' moods were significantly affected by this. In fact, the archivists were so affected that

[7] In his 1997 essay "What is Past is Prologue" which contains early sketches of his paradigms, Cook also wrote about Jenkinson.

some of the individuals who participated in the study were on the verge of clinical depression (Chinery and Casey 2021, 461).

Other works dealing with the emotions of archivists are often concerned with archivists who, like the ones in my study, encounter documents that record disturbing events such as abuse and oppression (e.g., Regehr et al. 2022; 2023; J. Douglas et al. 2022).

A Swedish scholar who has written extensively about the professional role of archivists and records managers is Maria Kallberg, whose doctoral dissertation (2013) examines how the profession is being changed and challenged by the transition to digital documentation practices and e-government. Kallberg's findings point to a gap between archival legislation and the practical work of archivists and registrars in Swedish authorities. She also notes a lack of resources and competence, both at the political level and in the archives, and foresees a future in which the professions of registrars, records managers, and archivists may be redistributed. When public authorities transform their functions into digital processes, archivists lose professional status and jurisdiction. This provides possibilities for other professional groups, such as registrars, to take more strategic roles within public organizations.

Archival researcher Anneli Sundqvist has also focused on the work of professional archivists. In her doctoral dissertation (2009), she writes about the search behaviors of users in two Swedish authorities—a municipality and a government agency. Sundqvist addresses the mediating role that archivists and registrars play in these searches. Her study confirms the importance of personal contact and guidance when users search for information, and implicitly places archivists at the center of all information retrieval activities.

In her dissertation, archival scholar Ann-Sofie Klareld (2017) examined how public recordkeeping and archives do, and do not, work together. Her findings suggest that conceptual confusion regarding the use and purpose of public archives risks obscuring responsibilities and mandates. "Decision makers," she writes, "might have different interpretations of what an archive is, or could be, and what purposes it serves" (Klareld 2017, 82). According to Klareld, such conceptual confusion risks "becoming a problem when a variety of actors separately plan, discuss and make decisions affecting public recordkeeping" (ibid., 82).

These various concerns about the archivist profession are relevant in the context of my dissertation, which touches on the demarcation between the social services and archives. As I will show, this demarcation is not always clear. The blurred line between public administration—in my case, the administration of social care—and archives makes the professional roles of archivists ambiguous and the treatment of archive users arbitrary.

To conclude, a strong theme in the literature on archivists' professional roles is a call for archivists and records managers to take control of their profession as well as the public image of their profession. Caswell ends her article on Arendt and bureaucracy with a call for archivists to think about what bigger

purpose their archives serve and what consequences their work might have. In doing so, she joins a strong discourse on social justice within the archival world, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section.

Archival ethics, power, and social justice

Another line of literature about the archival profession focuses on power and on archivists' responsibilities toward society. Since the 1990s, archivists have increasingly challenged each other to abandon their pretense of neutrality, to acknowledge their power and use it to promote social justice. This power is at work in every aspect of archival work, including the appraisal, description, and provision of records—and, as is the case in this dissertation, the disclosure and classification of information.

A fixed starting point for this focus on power is difficult to pinpoint, but the term "activist archivist" became popular in the 1960s and 1970s. This term referred to archivists who actively took a stand in public debates and included their personal and political beliefs into their professional practices. One of the most influential champions of the activist archivist was Howard Zinn (1977), who criticized conservative colleagues who opposed action against the Vietnam War. Those conservatives accused archivists who took a personal stand of "politicizing the profession." Zinn urged archivists to lift their gaze and acknowledge their power and the impact they could have on society:

> Equally important for social control as the military scientists are those who are connected with the dissemination of knowledge in society: the teachers, the historians, the political scientists, the journalists, and yes, the archivists. Here too, professionalization leads to impotence, as everyone is given a little corner of the playground. (Zinn 1977, 17)

While the war in Vietnam is easy to criticize, especially in hindsight, matters are more complex when it comes to the assessment of personal information for disclosure or redaction. But the primary conflict is similar. Zinn encouraged archivists and archival institutions to actively collect testimony from the "losing side"—the marginalized, the racialized, the poor: "[T]he rebellion of the archivist against his (sic!) normal role is not, as so many scholars fear, the politicizing of a neutral craft, but the humanizing of an inevitably political craft" (ibid., 20).

Verne Harris (1996; 2000; 2002; Harris and Merrett 1994; Harris and Cook 2007) who wrote about the South African National Archives and the role it played in the process of ending apartheid, was part of the second wave of archivists who challenged existing power structures. Harris and others of his generation (such as, for example, Cook) were influenced by postmodern theories and put focus on the archive and the record itself, not only on their practical implications in society.

In 1996, The International Council on Archives (ICA) adopted a code of ethics ("Code of Ethics" 1996) outlining professional conduct requirements for archivists worldwide. The Code states that archivists should protect the authenticity, integrity, and accessibility of archival material and respect the principle of provenance (i.e., the fundamental principle of archival practice, referring to the organization, family, or individual that created or received the documents in an archive). It further states that archivists should promote access to archival material, "provide impartial service to all users" (§6), "respect both access and privacy," and "act within the boundaries of legislation" (§7).

The archival profession has traditionally been defined as being in the service of the law, with archivists charged with protecting individual legal rights by "documenting when such rights have been violated in order to provide evidence for legal redress" (Caswell and Cifor 2016, 24). For archivists working at institutions, this means that their prime responsibility is to understand and apply relevant legislations so that the right amount of information is retained in the archives and disclosed to the people who request it.

In recent decades, however, a discourse has emerged that challenges this legalistic approach, countering it with a feminist ethics of care.[8] This discourse emphasizes how archivists meet and interact with users as fellow human beings rather than as citizens. Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor (2016) discuss perceived obligations of archivists to archive users, questioning the traditional rights-based legalistic model of managing archives and their use. Instead, they propose viewing archivists less as "sentinels of accountability" (ibid., 24) and more as a type of caretaker. With this radical empathy approach, Caswell and Cifor argue that archivists have affective responsibilities toward record creators, record subjects, archive users, and the larger community. Cheryl Regehr and Wendy Duff have also recently argued for care ethics similar to that of Caswell and Cifor (Regehr et al. 2022; 2023).

The dichotomy between care and law is sometimes presented in a rather simplified way that does not provide much analytical space. However, there are voices that question this very dichotomy. David Wallace (2017), for instance, writes about social justice in archives, arguing that it is both contested and ill-defined as a concept. Should archivists engage in questions of social justice? And if so, what exactly *is* social justice? Wallace describes how social justice in the archives has been debated since the 1970s, a debate reignited in the early 2000s, when critical voices were once again raised against the reflexive strive for "justice" by archivists:

> These parallel discussions and the debates they engendered identify key unresolved themes—primarily the legitimacy of the politically active archivist who pivots between the personal (mis/characterized as 'political,' 'emotional,' 'subjective,' and 'irrational') and the professional (also mis/characterized as

[8] This change is sometimes described as being a part of the "affective turn" (Clough and Halley 2007) in social sciences and was introduced to archival studies by Cifor (2016).

> 'nonpolitical,' 'nonemotional,' 'objective,' and 'rational'). Disputes over neutrality and non-partisanship sit at the center of both eras of debate and are especially charged given that they continue to be promoted as benchmarks for professional codes and disciplinary acculturation. (Wallace 2017, 272)

What Wallace seems to be saying is that there is no way of separating the personal from the political, and vice versa. Therefore, striving for social justice in public archives that serve an unjust society is futile. This theoretical *cul-de-sac* has been increasingly recognized in archival studies in recent years.

One of the more recent contributions to the literature on archives and power is *Archives: Power, Truth, and Fiction* (Prescott and Wiggins 2023) in which over thirty scholars from a variety of disciplines, not just archival studies, contributed chapters. The chapters on power investigate in different ways what the editors refer to as the "well-known paradox whereby the archive can be both a means of oppression and of empowerment" (ibid., 1).

What is to some extent still missing in archival studies, however, is research that implements theoretical ideas on social justice in empirical studies of archival practice,[9] in particular, archival practice that focuses on recordkeeping and contemporary records rather than historical records. There is a tendency for either esoteric theorizing about the impossibility of ever knowing what the archivist's profession is about, or practice-oriented empirical studies that either aim at best practice guidelines or survey the status quo. Much has been said about the archivists' power, but relatively little research has been done to actually demonstrate and analyze this power at the street-level.[10] My study is an attempt to combine these two lines of research, to provide an empirical study that not only describes and theorizes archival practice but hopefully also says something about what archival work is—and what it could be.

Secrecy, privacy, and integrity

To give or deny users access to information in archives is perhaps the most obvious example of power exercise in the archivists' profession. Since it is also the object of study in this dissertation, issues of secrecy, privacy, and integrity are highly relevant to my study.

[9] One recent exception is Roeschley et al. (2024), who examine the occurrence of mentions of sexual abuse in archival descriptions and finding aids in American college and university archives. They find that there are few, if any, guidelines regarding archival description of sensitive material. Archivists are thus left to use their own judgment, which puts them in a potentially precarious position between promoting social justice for the record subjects and aligning with the dominant narratives of their employers.

[10] In a number of historical studies (2017; 2019; 2021), Samuel Edquist has showed how archivists have used—or tried to use—their power on a more political level. However, Edquist's focus was referrals on government bills concerning archival legislation, not the exercise of power by individual archivists.

Right to, access to, and freedom of information

Archival scholar Elizabeth Shepherd writes about "right to information" (RTI), "access to information" (ATI), and "freedom of information" (FOI) focusing in particular on legislation and the dichotomy between privacy and secrecy (Shepherd 2017).

RTI is associated with three key concepts: *accountability*, *transparency*, and *good governance* (Shepherd 2017, 248). RTI is necessary for public authorities to be held *accountable* for their actions. *Transparency*, Shepherd argues, is a broader concept related to accountability that allows for public scrutiny of authorities which in turn gives citizens the opportunity to understand the actions of those authorities. "Transparency," she writes, "is therefore a prerequisite for, but not the same as, accountability" (ibid., 249, citing Florini 2007). Accountability, on the other hand, is a prerequisite for *good governance*. Shepherd elaborates on accountability by drawing on Hurley (2005), who defined a set of recordkeeping functions necessary to achieve accountability, and O'Neill (2002), who distinguished between reductive accountability (leading to an audit culture) and intelligent accountability (leading to good governance). In short, accountability, transparency, and good governance are largely interdependent, and, in turn, all depend on good recordkeeping practices.

Shepherd writes about the ethical dilemmas that record keepers may face when they encounter cases involving third party information and/or records in child abuse cases (Shepherd 2017, 256). Shepherd illustrates her thesis with cases from Australia and Scotland, where record keepers "find themselves in difficult situations in trying to preserve confidentiality and privacy of different data subjects and yet ensure access to the records needed for the public good" (ibid., 257). She concludes by highlighting the critical role that archivists and records managers play in ensuring both access to information and the protection of privacy.

Sweden is often described as a unique case regarding openness because of its famous principle of public access to official records and the Freedom of the Press Act. This calls for a particular focus on research on privacy and openness in Sweden, which will be examined in the next section.

Privacy research in a Swedish context

Political scientist David H. Flaherty has written extensively about privacy issues and surveillance techniques. In one of his influential contributions to the field, he writes about Sweden, among other countries. The premise of Flaherty's work is that many Western countries are becoming surveillance societies and that existing privacy legislations are inadequate to protect individuals from the harms caused by this surveillance.

For Flaherty, Sweden is "the model surveillance society in the Western world" (Flaherty 1989, 4) because of its ingrained use of personal identification numbers (PINs) and its widespread collection and storage of data about

citizens. In addition, the Swedish tradition of openness makes available to the public much personal data about individuals that is highly confidential in most other countries (ibid., 5). Flaherty admits, however, that some state control is necessary to keep society functioning:

> We want people to obey the criminal laws and to pay their fair share of taxes. The real issue is how far we are prepared to venture in a democratic society to accomplish these legitimate goals, since all personal information systems are surveillance systems of one kind or another. (ibid., 12)

In his doctoral dissertation, historian Lars Ilshammar (2002) examines how technological developments during the second half of the twentieth century have affected—and been affected by—Sweden's political move toward market-orientation. Ilshammar argues that major technology-related changes in the management of public affairs have altered the state's role. The state no longer guards citizens' freedom of speech or enforces the transparency of public authorities. Instead, the state has become the protector of the privacy of the individual and the secrecy of the authorities (Ilshammar 2002, 305).[11] Citizens are now, through legislation, seen solely as individuals caring for their own private interests rather than as political subjects with an interest in the general transparency of state affairs.

Swedish law scholar Johanna Chamberlain's doctoral dissertation on integrity and tort law in Sweden (2020) shows that Swedish legislation on privacy is complicated by the trouble both legal scholars and law professionals have had defining privacy as a concept. This difficulty has resulted in the protection of privacy in Swedish law being spread across several legal areas, adding to the initial confusion and obstructing protection of privacy.

Archival scholar Rikard Friberg von Sydow has published several studies about the use of privacy regulations in Sweden. In a study of discussions on the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in a Facebook group for professional archivists (2021), Friberg von Sydow highlights how archivists discuss the implementation of this new regulation amongst themselves in an informal environment. By using these informal discussions to focus on archivists' practical experiences, he shows that archivists (and other professions affected by the GDPR) often feel alone and excluded trying to navigate new regulations. This, in turn, affects the quality of their work and can hinder the public's access to official records.

[11] This change in discourse, in which citizens increasingly see themselves primarily as customers and consumers, can be illustrated with an example from Flaherty's book, written a little more than ten years before Ilshammar's. Flaherty provides an anecdote about an American woman on vacation in Paris who got a notification from her bank that someone (in fact, herself) had been using her credit card abroad. The woman allegedly got upset by this notification, which she perceived to be based on undue surveillance by the bank. Today, these kinds of notifications are common and, by most people, viewed as a service by companies to help individuals protect their personal data and money.

In discussions of public access to official records, it is important to keep in mind the distinction in legislation (that exists in most Western countries, as in Sweden) between the preservation of records and the access to those records (Coppel 2014, 246). The issues are, of course, dependent on each other; if no records are preserved, no one can access them. In some cases, however, there are discrepancies between the two sets of legislation, highlighting key questions about the purpose of archives. For now, however, we will focus on the more practical aspects of providing access to records.

Access and reference services

The work of archivists who provide access to records on demand, such as the archivists in this study, has received some scholarly attention. Common to most of this literature is that the user to whom access to the records should be granted (or denied) is almost always a researcher. Elizabeth Yakel (2000) extends this view somewhat, writing about additional user groups such as administrators and "recreational researchers" (Yakel 2000, 141). She argues that archivists must begin to see the reference function as producing knowledge, not just providing information, and that doing so, context is crucial. Yakel is primarily interested in how the "post-custodial condition" (ibid., 143)—that is, digital information that does not require physical proximity between archivist, records, and user—affects reference services. However, her focus on context is useful in other situations as well. Viewing archivists as knowledge workers rather than simply information providers raises questions about the interaction between archivists and users. What exactly is it that archivists do, and provide, if not just information? As Yakel puts it, "Archival information is not the appropriate response for every reference inquiry" (ibid., 144). Together with Wendy Duff (Duff and Yakel 2016), Yakel again adopts a broad perspective on reference services. Duff and Yakel emphasize the tacit knowledge and the "people skills" (which they call "interaction knowledge") required of archivists working within these services. In doing so, they move beyond the factual knowledge necessary to navigate archive holdings and to locate requested material, which has been the main focus of research to date.

A reference interview is defined as "a conversation between an archivist and a researcher designed to give the researcher an orientation to the use of the materials, to help the researcher identify relevant holdings, and to ensure that research needs are met" (Pearce-Moses 2016, 337). Such conversations aim to help the archivist help the user find relevant sources, which in turn will help the user find answers to their questions. The "interviews" conducted by the archivists in this study, however, are more often focused on providing the archivist with enough information about the user and the user's knowledge to make informed assessments and redactions of the requested records. Nevertheless, literature that raises aspects of these interviews is also important to this dissertation, such as the relationships and power imbalances between archivist and user (e.g., Long 1989; Thomsen 1999).

In her discussion of the ethical facets of access to information, Elena S. Danielson (1997) also touches on how the interpretation of information is inevitably intertwined with reference services. She writes: "It is one thing to recover a document that demonstrates that a person is eligible for pension; it is a very different intellectual process to survey the documentation and conclude that it does not contain evidence of wrongdoing" (Danielson 1997, 109).

There is a vast field of literature on genealogists' use of archival sources and family history (e.g., Duff and Johnson 2003; Yakel and Torres 2007; Darby and Clough 2013; Clarke 2023). This field explores slightly different questions than my dissertation does, but because the users in my study also seek answers about their family history, albeit closer to the present time than most genealogists, it is still relevant to mention.

Jaak Valge and Birgit Kibal (2007) have made an ambitious collocation of regulations regarding access restrictions to archives in EU member countries. They analyze restrictions of different kinds, among them restrictions on the protection of personal data (Valge and Kibal 2007, 203–204). They also acknowledge the actual interpretation of regulations and professional judgments that archivists perform.

> In the everyday operation of Archives, the regulation of right of access means active dialogue with society and the user. In the decisions over making information public or restricting information, the advantages and disadvantages to society and the individual must be weighed up. (ibid., 200)

The archivists in my study are often engaged in dialogue with the users. They also weigh opposing interests against each other, often including the interests of different individuals within the same family. However, societal interests are also implicitly present in the legislation that archivists must follow when making decisions.

Writing about user access to archives, Ketelaar (2023) brings up The International Council on Archives' (ICA) Principles of Access to Archives (2012). These principles state that all users should have equal right of access to archives. However, this right is not equal in practice. Ketelaar, like Valge and Kibal, brings up the difficulties archivists face in interpreting and complying with regulations and touches on professional discretion, a concept central to my study. "Archivists cannot change the legal access rules," he writes, "but they have a certain leeway in applying the rules" (Ketelaar 2023, 290).

Ketelaar acknowledges the power this leeway entails. Archivists who work in access and reference services understand, negotiate, and translate questions posed by the user into meaningful requests commensurable with the archive's search functions. "In doing so, the archivist applies his or her expertise embedded in a particular worldview. This implies that the archivist largely remains in control of the retrieval of the right information in a meaningful form"

(ibid., 291). The archivists' discretion and decisions emanate from both professional experience and personal disposition and are thus difficult to dissect.

Yakel, Danielson, Ketelaar, and Valge and Kibal write about issues very close to those of this study. However, they all focus on privacy issues related primarily to researchers, in particular historians, and prioritize the ethical implications of giving researchers access to case files. Hence, they describe the tension between the interests of the state and the individual. The ethical dilemmas that occur when archivists mediate between and weigh the interests of different individuals, rather than those of individuals and state or semi-official groups, such as researchers, are however scarcely elaborated on.

Care records

The various types of research focused on care records cannot be described as a separate field. Rather, care records should be seen as an intersectional concept in which many different research fields overlap.

Records from social and psychiatric care are in many ways different from other types of records. Although they are official records stored in public archives, they contain extremely private information. They are byproducts of care (or "Care"[12] in some cases) produced by health professionals and social workers to enable communication of important information between colleagues. In recent decades, however, these records have also become service tools for patients. Patients expect their medical records, prescriptions, and diagnoses to be available online for convenience and transparency. In the wake of this development, much research has emerged on the production, sharing, and use of patient records. The broad turn toward individualism in society has also led scholars to turn their attention to the production and handling of social care records, and, in particular, how these records affect the people portrayed in them.

Much research argues for increasing the documentation of care processes and involving the care recipients[13] themselves in the production of records. There is, however, a counter-argument that restrict documentation on vulnerable people such as care recipients. The tension between these two conflicting views on documentation will be detailed in the next section.

Focus on the care recipients: more documentation, or less?

Between 2017 and 2019, a UK participatory research project named MIRRA (Memory-Identity-Rights in Records-Access) investigated how practices of recordkeeping and information rights in child social care impacted on the life-

[12] In the literature, the word care is sometimes put in citation marks, or spelled with a capital C, to illustrate abuse of individuals from Indigenous or marginalized groups by the state under the pretext of various forms of care.

[13] I will use the term "care recipient" to refer to patients and social service clients rather than "care-taker," which is occasionally used in the literature. Since I refer to care professionals as caretakers, it would be difficult for a reader to separate between the two terms.

long wellbeing of care-experienced persons (called "care-leavers"). The project emphasized that social care records are the only "family archive" available for people who grew up in institutions or in foster care. Because such people had no family with parents or other caregivers to document their childhood, the MIRRA project advocated that public agencies should increase the documentation of these children's lives and also involve care-leavers themselves in the documenting practices (Shepherd et al. 2020; Shepherd and Hoyle 2022). Such documentation would compensate for the lack of family memories, hence expanding the purpose, creation, and use of records. In Australia, the *Who am I?* project (Downing, Campbell, and Kertesz 2012) explored similar questions.

In Sweden, Proscovia Svärd and Sheila Zimic have argued for participatory recordkeeping practices in residential care homes for children to facilitate access to complete records for, and give voice to, the children and young people in care (Svärd and Zimic 2024, 210). Svärd and Zimic identify as a problem that "the placed individuals are not at the center of the records management system design and are not considered owners of the records that document their placements" (ibid.,211), thus aligning with initiatives such as MIRRA and drawing on Iacovino's participatory model of archival ownership (Iacovino 2010).

Standing in opposition to the aim of expanded recordkeeping is the concept of ethical destruction—the practice of destroying certain records whose content is deemed so sensitive that it would be unethical to retain them in public archives. The argument for this practice is that disclosure would be so devastating that, because of the risk of accidental disclosure, the records cannot be kept in the archives, even if protected by secrecy laws.

In Sweden, records from social care are destroyed five years after the last notation is made in them, unless they concern children in out-of-home care, adoptions, parental investigations, persons born on the fifth, fifteenth, or twenty-fifth of each month, or are produced in one of Sweden's intensive data regions (*intensivdataområden*), which retain all records from social care. Historian Samuel Edquist has studied the processes behind Sweden's policy on ethical destruction (Edquist 2017; 2019; 2021) and gives a thorough analysis of the debates leading up to the decisions, which were not easily made. Edquist (2021) identifies four arguments used to promote retention of sensitive records in general—which is to say, arguments *against* ethical destruction: 1) the *usefulness*, or business value, of the records for the record creators; 2) the *accountability argument*, meaning that records should be retained for the benefit of the general public, enabling the audit of authorities and controlling the exercise of power; 3) the *heritage argument*, which highlights the value of archives as "remnants of history and markers of identity for individuals, certain groups, organizations, or nations" (Edquist 2021, 136); and 4) the *academic argument,* which argues that records should be retained for research purposes.

Edquist also identifies four arguments for the disposal of records—that is, arguments *promoting* ethical destruction. First is the *redundancy argument*,

meaning that weeding out of some information is necessary for the retention and searchability of other information; culling copies is one such example. Second is the *economic argument*, closely linked to the redundancy argument but focused on the economic aspect, not the searchability of information. Contrary to what is commonly (mis)believed by many outside the archival world, the transition to digital information will not solve the economic limitations of archives. On the contrary, digital information may very well be more expensive and labor-intensive to retain and maintain than traditional physical archives (Hackett 2010).

Edquist's third argument, the *ideological argument,* is seldom put forward as an actual argument but is rather a practice that occurs in silence when regimes, authorities, or individual power holders (politicians or civil servants) want to cover their tracks by either destroying information about their activities or omitting to document their actions properly. Finally, the fourth argument, which Edquist refers to as the *too-much-information argument*, is based on the idea that society is increasingly drowning in its own information (Edquist 2021, 138).

One specific type of ideological argument for destruction is that of ethical destruction (ibid., 138). The two arguments underlying this position are, first, that the governments or companies with control over the information might use it for malicious purposes (if not by the current regimes, then in the case of a future power shift, war, or *coupe d'état*) and, second, that the information might fall into the wrong hands (either through a breach of privacy caused by human error, by hacker attacks, by a regime change, as in the previous example). As Edquist explains, this argument is strongly linked to the concern that state surveillance is a threat both to personal integrity and democracy, particularly in the digital age. This discourse has spilled over into the domain of paper records, shaping perceptions of risks associated with holding sensitive information in archives, both digital and physical.

What makes the issue of ethical destruction in Sweden so puzzling is that it is not regulated in either the Archives Act or the Freedom of the Press Act. Instead, it is regulated through a number of other laws and ordinances that prescribe ethical destruction for specific types of records and that each override the Archives Act (ibid., 142). The exceptions from ethical destruction—records regarding parental investigations, adoptions, and children placed in out-of-home care, for instance—are motivated by a concern for individuals' ability to research their past. Other exceptions, such as records on people born on specific dates or in specific geographical areas, are motivated by research interests. Hence, there are a number of paradoxes at play in Sweden's approach to ethical destruction (ibid., 144–145).

First, many social service records are destroyed to protect the privacy of individuals, while other records, just as personal as those destroyed, are retained to help the same individuals find information about their own background. Second, the existence of intensive data regions and the requirement to retain records on individuals born on certain dates result in a situation in

which the same type of information gets two vastly different treatments depending on context and location, either legally destroyed for privacy reasons or legally retained because privacy is overridden by research interests.

> Thus, there are two aspects of power in documentation, where the same record can be regarded as oppressive and emancipatory. Advocates for ethical destruction argue that archival *silence* is for the benefit of the persons involved in the records. On the contrary, archival *existence* is often described as a prerequisite for history writing, identity, and justice. (ibid., 149; italics in original)

A recurring argument for ethical destruction is that the very retention of sensitive information about citizens is seen as violations of integrity. Hence, archival records can be oppressive, serve as evidence of oppression, and be used for resistance, all at the same time.

Although Edquist does not argue either for or against ethical destruction, his thorough analysis of its ideological underpinnings is helpful in placing the dominant contemporary narrative of expanded documentation in critical perspective. I will return to the paradox of the record's double functions later in this dissertation. In the following section, however, I will draw out the theoretical perspectives on which it is built.

Theoretical perspectives

In this section, I will discuss the theories that underlie this study, divided as follows: state and individual (governmentality), legalistic ethics, feminist ethics of care, vulnerability, and asymmetrical reciprocity. Governmentality and asymmetrical reciprocity serve as the basis for my own analysis, while the two ethics help explain the archivists' different approaches to the cases that they discuss. Vulnerability, particularly situational vulnerability, is used to integrate a tangible social dimension as a point of reference, anchoring power dynamics that otherwise risk becoming amorphous.

State and individual

The relationship between state and individual is at the center of this dissertation. Depending on how one views this relationship, it can be described as a tension, a demarcation, or a point of contact. Either way, the archivist on duty when a citizen requests personal records from a public archives is at the epicenter of these tensions, demarcations, or contacts.

To discuss this relationship, I will draw on Foucault's thinking on power and governmentality. In his lecture "The Political Technology of Individuals," Foucault poses the question how we have come to see ourselves as part of a society, social entity, nation, or state (Foucault 1988b, 146). The answer, he

says, is governmentality, which he defines as "contact between the technologies of domination of others and those of the self" (Foucault 1988a, 19). By this, he means that organized political state power (sovereign and disciplinary) works through the governing of people by people themselves. He thereby differentiates state and government. The state is the political and executive power with police that monitor citizens and courts that impose punishments on those who deviate from the rules.[14] Governmentality, on the other hand, is the internal process by which citizens govern themselves by internalizing state power into their own minds and behavior.

This process of internalization is not imposed on citizens from above, however. Foucault wanted to show that the state, contrary to how it had previously been described,[15] does not have an essence. It has no inherent "desire" or tendency to grow and swallow or colonize everything outside of itself. Rather, the state emerges through the incorporation of its power by individuals. This "strategic reversibility" of power means that when governmental practices interfere in the lives of individuals, these individuals begin to use their own lives as a starting point for political demands, which sets off (or continues, since it is difficult to see a starting point in this dynamic) a spiral of interdependency between state and individual.

In *The Statesman,* Plato described the art of government in two different ways: the pastoral and the city. In contrast to the pastoral way, which Plato compared to a shepherd who cares for every individual in the flock, the city way governs citizens through laws rather than tending to indivduals through care (Plato 1995). The pastoral was taken up by Christianity, while the city became model for Greek (and later modern Western) secular rulers (Gordon 1991, 8). In *Birth of the Clinic* (Foucault 2010), Foucault sketches how, in modern Western rationalities, the pastoral and city views of Plato are coupled to a secular political pastorate where "individualization" and "totalization" are merged. Modern governmentality, Foucault claims, has its origin in the doctrines of reason of state, *raison d'état*, which emerged in sixteenth-century Europe. With these doctrines, the guiding principles of government were no longer subordinate to and consequences of, religious doctrines but immanent in the state itself (Gordon 1991, 9). Reason of state does not concern itself with *why* the state exists, or whether it is just; it is only concerned with how to make the state as efficient as possible in governing (Foucault 1988b, 150–151).[16]

[14] On a more concrete level, this study views the state as a marker of all public sector authorities that exercise power over individuals. As mentioned briefly in the beginning of this chapter, I consequently regard municipalities and regions as state actors.

[15] One example is Louis Althusser (Althusser 1993), whose concept of ideological state apparatuses in many ways lay the ground for Foucault's concept of governmentality, even though Foucault himself would probably beg to differ (see, for example, Montag 1995).

[16] This reason of state is of course the basis for modern bureaucracy as described by Weber and criticized by Bauman and others.

Given the reason of state, individuals are only of relevance to the state insofar as they strengthen or weaken the state's power (ibid., 152). Hence, the state has developed techniques of governing individuals to make them useful. Such techniques focus on the self, and integrate the selves, the individuals, into the social entity (ibid., 153). Governing thus puts focus on individuals not only as juridical agents, but as living human beings, creating incitement and laying the ground for biopolitics (ibid., 156–160).

According to Foucault, one cannot build a personal moral or ethics on political theory alone. There is a gap that needs to be filled with individual moral decision, discretion and practical choices (Gordon 1991, 6). Hence, governmentality relies on the everyday decisions of civil servants exercising the power invested in them—on the discretion of bureaucrats. The space of uncertainty in bureaucratic work, the gap between policy and practice, must be filled with ethics. In this study, I employ two different ways of ethical thinking that I observed among the archivists I interviewed. The first one, which I call a legalistic ethics, is described in the next section.

Legalistic ethics

The balance between participation and non-intervention by the state has long been one of the main topics of discussion in Western politics. Isaiah Berlin's two concepts of liberty—positive freedom (freedom as self-mastery and active citizenship) and negative freedom (freedom as non-intervention) —have been vastly influential in Western liberal discourse (Carter 2022). Freedom is often seen as the goal within discourses that regard individuals as separate, independent entities who, in cooperation, rationally organize society for the best. "Best" here means maximum freedom for the individuals to live their lives as they prefer. This presupposes both active citizenship by all members of society, and non-intervention by the state in matters that regard the individual on a private level.

Philosopher Philip Pettit (1997) formulated a third conception of freedom, often referred to as "republican freedom."[17] This concept defines freedom as *non-domination*, different from the non-intervention of Berlin. Pettit denounces both what he calls the communitarian and populist republicanism of Hannah Arendt and the libertarian liberalists' concept of freedom as absence of interference. Non-domination is both positive and negative, requiring both security against interference on an arbitrary basis (positive) *and* the absence of domination (negative) (Pettit 1997, 51).

Pettit defines domination as: 1) someone has the capacity to interfere, 2) on an arbitrary basis (power is not constrained by external rules), 3) in certain choices that someone else is in a position to make (ibid., 52). This someone can be the state, a state agency, or a state official working for the agency.

[17] Republican freedom is related to classical republicanism, with its origin in ancient Rome, and its successors, including Montesquieu and de Tocqueville (Pettit 1997, 19).

However, officials can and should practice non-dominating interference with citizens when a "suitably constraining, constitutional arrangement works effectively" (ibid., 65). Of course, for these interferences to be non-dominational, the legislation in place, and its implementation, must function satisfactorily.

Pettit does not say anything about the internal desires and thoughts of the power-holder. All he says is that the possibility of arbitrary interference should be removed. This is accomplished through constitutional provision such as legislation and regulations, that is, control mechanisms external to the dominating and dominated parties. But since, according to Foucault, power always requires some space for disobedience, there is no way around the professional discretion that entails the possibility of domination. Pettit also admits that there cannot be detailed rules for every situation. Government agents need some room for discretion; otherwise their ability to do good would be limited. As Pettit writes: "The best sort of law will always require government agents to satisfy certain constraints—it will always impose some measure for due process—but it may also have to allow a substantial degree of discretion" (ibid., 176).

So, if room for discretion is necessary, how then should one prevent officials from dominating citizens through arbitrary interference? Pettit suggests that the decision-making must be of a form that "we" can "own and identify with: a form of decision-making in which we can see our interests furthered, and our ideas respected" (ibid., 184). This, however, presupposes a broad consensus on what "our" interests are. Pettit responds to this objection by calling for the inclusion of diverse groups in lawmaking and executive authorities (ibid.,190–191). To make decisions that are broadly accepted as fair and just, governments first need society to reach a consensus, a certainty, about what is fair and just.

I do not adopt Pettit's view on republican freedom as a theoretical starting point, or even a tool, in my dissertation. Rather, I use his concept to show the foundation on which the legalistic ethic applied by the archivists in this study is based. Pettit's way of having his cake and eat it illustrates the conflict (which he tries to bridge) between individualism and dependency, between the individual and the state, that is prevalent in this dissertation. In the following chapters, I will return to him a few times and contrast his approach with other thinking in order to analyze my empirical material.

In addition to freedom, another crucial concept within liberalism is rights. In fact, freedom is often expressed as precisely a right that citizens hold. And as observed by political thinkers since the eighteenth century, the state is at the same time a precondition for and a threat against this freedom.

The best way to practice vigilance against arbitrary power exercise is, Pettit argues, to restrain individual officials' power through strict legislation. According to Pettit, the needs of citizens should therefore be phrased as *rights*, not as "a gift that may be withdrawn at anyone's whim: not at the whim of a subsidized employer, not at the whim of a street-level bureaucrat, not even at the whim of an electoral or parliamentary majority" (ibid., 162). However,

there is a significant body of literature that criticizes rights as the foundation of law and society.

One such critic is legal scholar Upendra Baxi, who writes that "theistic natural law" is natural (God-given) rights that, according to its believers, have been passed on to man from God through holy texts or the words of prophets. The same holy texts, however, are often the source of contradictory interpretations and, consequently, different "human rights" (Baxi 2012, 13). Secular natural law, on the other hand, is based on the "reading" of human nature without any divine interference.[18]

Foundational to all secular human rights ethics is respect for the other as "coequal human" (ibid., 15). But this respect demands acknowledgement of our differences. Still, to be effective, it also demands governance – the requirement that state powers back up their pretty words of equality with action. And to work effectively, states need laws that apply equally to everyone, which simplify and pin down humanity, erasing the differences and otherness that were supposed to be the object of protection.

The aim of human rights is to give voice to oppressed or marginalized people and to mitigate human suffering. But to articulate this suffering, people's suffering must be represented, and that can only be done by simplifying millions of different voices into one. "Human rights" is a blunt tool, a wide net through which a lot of suffering and injustice falls (ibid., 8). In addition, the concept of "basic" human rights suggests that there are other additional rights that are "negotiable, if not dispensable at least in the short run" (ibid., 10). Basic human rights imply that differences in quality and duration of life between individuals (and populations) are acceptable. Trying to standardize a fixed set of human rights inevitably overlooks the "forbiddingly diverse world of actually existing human rights" (ibid., 10). Therefore, we cannot let abstract rules and legislation guide us in ethical concerns regarding individuals. That would mean not seeing the other, only the category into which we have boxed the other.

Still, Baxi sees no better option than a human rights approach. There is no guarantee, he states, that governance guided by human rights principles succeeds in translating these human rights blueprints into actual human rights for everyone in every situation. Nevertheless, "human rights standards and norms continue, amidst all this, to provide benchmarks by which forms of barbaric governance, at least, may be severely judged. This is, I suggest, no small gain" (ibid., 17). In other words, governance based on human rights standards is not perfect, but it is better than the alternative.[19]

On the note of liberal human rights discourse as based on independent individuals, political theorist Wendy Brown writes about what she calls the

[18] One example is Lon Fuller's assertion that all humans are equal because we are all vulnerable to pain and physical harm (Fuller 1978). In addition, John Rawls placed human rights at the center of society, seeing them as the foundation of liberty and equality (Rawls 1973).

[19] Echoing Spivak's words that liberalism is that which we cannot not want (e.g., Brown 2002, 420).

"masculinist discourse of rights" (Brown 2002, 431), meaning that the concept of rights presupposes an autonomous, self-sufficient subject to hold those rights. This brings us to the second, contrasting ethical perspective, the feminist ethics of care.

Feminist ethics of care

In 1982, psychologist Carol Gilligan identified two different ways of moral thinking: the ethics of justice and the ethics of care. The latter she identifies as female, but she also asserts that the "female voice" she is interested in is not necessarily the voice of women. Instead, she sees the male and female voices as representations of "a distinction between two modes of thought," and she uses them to "focus on a problem of interpretation rather than to represent a generalization about either sex" (Gilligan 1982, 2).

By drawing on these words, I do not intend to compare the male and female archivists' views on the ethical matters they encounter—or even pay attention to their genders. I am simply using the term "feminist" ethics of care because that is the established term. I will not use the ethics of justice and care respectively to divide the archivist profession into "male" and "female" archivists, where the former apply an ethics of justice and the latter an ethics of care. The ethics of care is indeed based largely on a feminist ethics of care, but (as demonstrated in this study), this ethic can be employed by male archivists, just as the legalistic ethics can employed by female archivists. I do not use these two ethics to divide my interlocutors into competing bands of professionals but to illustrate two conflicting approaches that the archivists in my study have to relate to and use. The ethics are to be seen as two extremes on a sliding scale on which individual archivists position themselves differently.

Feminist ethics question and challenge traditional moral assumptions, emphasizing "particularity, connection, and context" over abstract moral principles (Browning Cole and Coultrap-McQuinn 1992, 3). Challenging those principles and assumptions, some feminist scholars argue for replacing rights-based legalistic ethics with feminist ethics. Others see the value of acknowledging rights as a part of moral thinking and have an additive approach to the two ethics, where they complement each other (ibid., 6).

Roger Rigterink (1992) belongs to the first category. Even so, he provides an illustrative example of how legal and feminist ethics intertwine and collide. In a seminar, Rigterink showed a newspaper article to his students. The article told a story about a rare white crow that had become a local celebrity in a small community, attracting attention in local press. People from outside the town had come to see the crow, and it had become an appreciated member of the community. But then, the article explained, the crow was shot by a hunter, who wanted it as a trophy. The hunter had done nothing (legally) wrong—all crows were fair game in hunting season, white as well as black—and when

interviewed by the newspaper, he claimed his right to shoot the bird. His action nevertheless stirred up great emotion in the community, and most people were outraged by the killing. Rigterink asked for his students' opinions on this matter. While most students acknowledged that the hunter was fully within his rights to shoot the crow, they also thought he was "a jerk" (Rigterink 1992, 38). They did not think the hunter had done anything wrong, but neither did they believe that his actions were right. This example shows how contradictory perspectives can be applied simultaneously to cases, resulting in irresolvable ethical complications.

To relate this anecdote to the topic of this dissertation, we could compare the ethical dilemma to that of the archivists. The archivists in my study are required to follow the law, but there is room for discretion in their professional practice. At first glance, they are not, like the hunter, free to shoot the crow or let it live according to their personal liking. They must follow protocol. However, the protocol does not say that the crow must be shot (neither does it say that it must live). Sometimes the protocol says that it is up to the archivists to determine whether shooting or not shooting would cause detriment.

In her book *Love's Labor* (1999) philosopher Eva Feder Kittay makes a distinction between inequality of power in a relation of dependency and the exertion of domination in a relation of inequality (Kittay 1999, 33). In other words, even though dependency always entails some aspect of inequality, inequality is not the same thing as domination. Domination, she states, is to take advantage of someone's dependency and use it against their best interests. Many relations are unequal but based on love and affection and, hence, they are not examples of domination. One would not describe the relationship between a parent and child as one of domination, for example, even though the child is completely dependent on the parent.

The labor in Kittay's book is the one performed by those she calls "dependency workers": people (mostly women) who care for others through paid or unpaid labor. In Kittay's definition, dependency work is the work carried out by nursing assistants, caretakers, personal assistants, and people caring for young or disabled family members at home. These laborers are defined by being without any exercise of discretionary judgement, having little or no professional training, lacking professional status, not upholding any generalized and systematic knowledge, and being oriented only toward the care recipient, not the community interest (ibid., 38–39).

Kittay does not include social workers in this definition, since they perform what she calls *functionally specific work* rather than the *functionally diffuse work* carried out by dependency workers. The difference between functionally specific and functionally diffuse work is that the latter is to be seen as merely sustaining, while the former is interventionist. "The point of intervention is a carefully targeted set of concerns, for which the professional is specially trained" (ibid., 40). Kittay admits that the line between sustaining and inter-

vening tasks is sometimes a fine one, adding that precarious or recently professionalized professions often pivot between sustaining and intervening roles. She uses social workers as examples, but the same could be said about archivists who handle disclosures. The archivists might (at least ideally) be "specially trained" for the legal aspect of the interventions—that is, for the assessment of the information. But they are not trained for the inter-personal and emotional aspects of the work, which may require them to engage with people in crisis and make decisions that affect the archive users' wellbeing.

As noted above, some feminist scholars argue for an additive approach to the feminist ethics and rights-based ethics, claiming that a person should contextualize any given situation to determine which ethics is best applied, basing the decision on whether the parties involved are in a relationship of dependency. For example, a child or a cancer patient is inherently dependent on their parents and caretakers; hence, an ethics of care should be applied in these relationships. A business contractor, on the other hand, is usually not in a position of dependency toward his or her business partner, so the legalistic ethics should prevail (Rigterink 1992, 40).

If we follow this line of thought, the central question of this study boils down to whether a person asking for information from a public archives should be seen as dependent on the officials dealing with the matter. Are archive users to be seen first and foremost as *citizens* exercising their legal right to information, or are they *persons* in need of information regarding deeply personal matters? The answer is that they are often both, and this is what complicates the archivists' task.

Vulnerability

The focus areas described above are all highly relevant to this dissertation. Yet, there is one perspective missing, a perspective that tie them all together and enables me to draw conclusions from my study; the concept of vulnerability.

In line with Pettit, political scientist Nancy Hirschmann (2016) argues that disability rights should be motivated by a concern for freedom—not justice—for disabled people.[20] This is not the case in most societies today, with the result that rights formulated in legislation are not satisfactory put in practice (Hirschmann 2016, 43). In her article "Disability, Justice, and Freedom as Non-Domination," sociologist Marie Sépulchre (2022) draws on both Pettit and Hirschmann to argue that the rights of disabled people should be based on the conception of freedom rather than justice, the kind of republican freedom that Pettit sketches.

[20] Hirschmann uses the term "disabled people" rather than "people with disabilities" to underline the view of disabilities as a structural dimension of social inequality and injustice.

Domination and vulnerability are closely related, and Sépulchre uses republican theory to consider the vulnerability inherent to life in society characterized by relationships of dependency—that is, our *vulnerability to domination*" (Sépulchre 2022, 23).

The established view on vulnerability is that it is a lack, a diminished capacity to protect oneself from harm. However, another possible perspective frames vulnerability as an opening toward each other, as a crack in our self-sufficiency that demonstrates our need for each other and allows us to meet. Of course, the fact that we do need each other, and that these needs will never be fully reciprocal, brings with it power structures and inequalities. Some people will always need more help than others.

Scholars interested in vulnerability are sometimes divided between two competing perspectives. Either they focus on the universal, inherent vulnerability shared by everyone with a mortal body, or they put emphasis on situational vulnerability: that is, the vulnerabilities connected with certain material and/or social conditions and affecting different people, and groups of people, to different extents. Critics of the latter perspective (e.g., Fineman 2008) claim that a focus on vulnerable groups adds to a (re)stigmatization of those groups and does more harm than good. But this critique ignores the fact that there are real, material differences between people from different groups, such as financial situation, educational level, health, and life-expectancy, however these groups may be construed.

One example is the differences between people who have experienced social or psychiatric care and people who have not. Such experiences inevitably contribute to the constitution of a person's being, adding vulnerabilities to the initial vulnerability that caused the region or the municipality to intervene in the first place by taking the person into care or providing financial or psychological aid.

Vulnerability is a complex concept reluctant to be pinned down, and the resulting tension between the above two views on vulnerability is unsurprising. As philosopher Diane Perpich writes, vulnerabilities are never just inherent *or* situational; they "occur on a continuum between material and social factors" (Perpich 2019, 245). Inherent vulnerability and situational vulnerability are not mutually exclusive but coexist in an intricate relationship where they amplify each other.

This dissertation applies a view on vulnerability that moves away from the focus on individuals as originally independent of each other and of the surrounding society. Instead, it focuses on the interrelated dependencies, and the individuals holding them, that in themselves constitute society. Vulnerability forces us to interact with each other and try to organize society in ways that mitigates it. "What is this nonpower at the heart of power?" Derrida (2002, 396) asks rhetorically. It is the vulnerability and suffering of others that holds society together. Much like a house of cards or a scaffolding structure, every unit in the societal web is dependent on every other unit in an intricate pattern.

These dependencies do *not* form an external scaffold that supports the "building" inside it. These dependencies *are* the building, the society.

Some of these dependencies are not equal and reciprocal but are to be seen as relations of domination, or unequal power. This calls for a theory that addresses the asymmetry of power in reciprocal relationships.

Asymmetrical reciprocity

Philosopher Iris Marion argues that it is both impossible and undesirable for someone to adopt the viewpoint of someone else (Young 1997, 340). Instead, one should strive for what philosopher Hannah Arendt called "enlarged thought," moving from a narrow and subjective understanding to a "moral, objective judgment" (ibid., 341). This means that one should not strive to, imaginatively, adopt other people's perspectives. Rather, one should take the perspective of other people *into account* to arrive at a fair judgement. Young calls this use of Arendt's idea "asymmetrical reciprocity." She dismisses the idea of symmetrical reciprocity—that is, the belief that it is possible and desirable to adopt the perspective of people with whom we are related in social structures. According to Young, this kind of reciprocity is prevented by social differences such as gender, class, race, and religion (ibid., 346).

Philosopher Luce Irigaray (1985) writes about the gender system, that presents feminine others as complementing the male subject. Young uses Irigaray's argument and extends it beyond the context of sexual difference and shows how the same line of reasoning can be applied to any structured difference. Women (or others, in Young's version) become mirrors in which men can see themselves

> objectified, bounded, and determinate. In the specular relation of phallocentric logic, the self put himself in the place of the other in order to return reflectively to himself. But this circular relation displaces and silences the other, as she might speak in a different, incommensurate register. (Young 1997, 346)

We all share traits and experiences to some extent, but these similarities are not symmetrical and reversible. The problem with trying to put ourselves in the position of another and see things from their perspective is that we are putting *ourselves*, with all of our own experiences and privileges, into the position of the other: "When privileged people put themselves in the position of those who are less privileged, the assumptions derived from their privilege often allow them unknowingly to misrepresent the other's situation" (ibid., 349).

In addition to Irigaray, Young draws on philosopher Emmanuel Levinas to arrive at the concept of asymmetrical reciprocity. From Levinas, she gets the understanding of communicative relations between subjects as based on asymmetry: "While people may be in touch and their communication may construct

relationships of similarity or solidarity between them, their positions are nevertheless irreducible and irreversible" (ibid., 351). From Irigaray, Young takes the acknowledgement of *distance* between subjects: "Speakers cannot communicate unless there is a space differentiating them and across which they communicate" (ibid., 352).

In other words, for us to actually learn something from each other, we cannot be exactly the same, or at exactly the same place, when we communicate. The asymmetry that Young speaks of is thus grounded in both temporality and position. Everyone has their own lived experiences and history, on both individual and group levels. Hence, one subject can never be replaced by another because there will always be individual differences between us. A well-educated, middle class archivist, for example, can never totally adopt the perspective of someone who grew up in foster care and never finished high school. But neither can one person who grew up in foster care and never finished high school totally adopt the perspective of someone else with a seemingly identical biography. All lives are different, and we can never trade places with each other. This might seem as a very pessimistic view on the possibility of human communication and understanding, but Young offers a solution.

Understanding others is often thought to be based on finding commonalities, thereby seeing ourselves in the other. Understanding others through identification, however, means that we do not really transcend our own experience. But, as Young writes, "we can interpret understanding others as sometimes getting out of ourselves and learning something new" (ibid, 354). To do so, we must listen to the other person, without prejudice, and take their perspective into account. As the empirical chapters of this dissertation will show, however, sometimes this is not possible.

Analytical concepts

In the following section, I present the concepts and definitions used for analysis in the dissertation. These key concepts are as follows: archive users, record subjects, third parties, information, records, and narratives. The complicated relationships between these entities naturally bring to the fore issues related to concepts close to archival and information studies as well as more general concepts such as professional discretion, privacy, and vulnerability.

Archive users

"Archive user" in this study refers to a person who requests access to archival records—who uses (or wants to use) the archive. The most common term in Swedish for this is *arkivanvändare*, meaning precisely "archive user." A few of the archivists I interviewed referred to the users as customers (*kunder*), a

nomenclatorial choice inspired by neoliberalism and the overall trend in public administration to adapt concepts and theories from the private sector, commonly referred to as New Public Management (NPM) (Cifor and Lee 2017, 12). This practice was the exception, however, and was often questioned by the archivists themselves. Some of the archivists interviewed found it difficult to find an appropriate term when referring to the users.

Record subjects

The people described in the archival records discussed in this study are consistently referred to as record subjects. This term was introduced by archival and information scholars Michelle Caswell and Marika Cifor (2016) and is relatively established by now.[21] However, the English word "subject" is ambiguous, especially in regard to its various Swedish translations. Therefore, the dissertation will benefit from a short review of its different meanings and these meanings' significations in the context of this study.

One signification of the word subject can be roughly translated to "topic" (*ämne* in Swedish); it denotes what a text or an utterance *is about*. In this sense of the word, the record subjects of this dissertation often are exactly subjects, since the records often were created to document events that happened to or involved them. Another adjacent Swedish translation of the word subject is *föremål,* which when translated back into English, then means "object (of discussion)." The word subject is also commonly used to mean subordinate (*undersåte*), hence aiming at someone being the subject of someone else. The syntactic meaning of the word subject, in both English and Swedish (*subjekt*), is the actor performing the act stated by the predicate. Simple as it might seem, this meaning complicates and questions the use of the term "record subject" in this dissertation. Though the record subjects are the ones performing the acts documented in the records, they are not the ones performing the act of documenting. Hence, one might just as well regard the doctors and social workers creating the records (commonly referred to as record creators) as the record subjects. By this logic, then, the people who are called record subjects in this study should be considered record *objects*. That said, it seems objectionable, even offensive, to refer to people as objects. Furthermore, the ambiguous meaning of the word subject renders a complexity to it that justifies its use—rather than record object—in this context. Additionally, the focus of this dissertation is on the way that archivists relate to and handle certain records, not on how social workers and psychiatrists created those records. Thus, in this case, it is reasonable to assume that the record subjects are the subjects *inside* the records, not the subjects *creating* the records.

[21] Similar terms were already used in the International Council on Archives (ICA)'s code of ethics from 1996, which mentions both "data subjects" and "subjects of records," but the exact term record subjects does not occur.

There are often several different record subjects in a file, and even in a single record. In addition to the person on whom the record was created (the patient or the child in care), most records include a number of other people related to the main subject, especially in social care records, which often include entire families. The record subject is often, but not always, the same as the archive user. Sometimes a person asks for his or her own patient record or case file, in which case the user and the main subject are the same. Sometimes people ask for the files of their parents, siblings, or other relatives. In these cases, the archive user *can* also be one of the "supporting" record subjects occurring in the file. This is particularly common for siblings, who sometimes are mentioned in their sisters' or brothers' social service records. When the social services have indications that children are neglected or abused within a family, all the children living in this family are supposed to have their own separate case file. However, until just a few decades ago, it was often the practice to keep a single file for all the siblings. This probably lightened the administrative burden of the social workers, but today it obstructs the archivists' ability to assess information.

Sometimes, the archive user has no relation to the record subject at all and therefore does not appear in the records. Alternatively, they do have a relation, but the requested records were produced before the user was born, meaning the user will not appear in the records. The archivists that I spoke to generally referred to record subjects simply as "the people in the files," since, to the best of our knowledge, there is no established Swedish term.

To conclude, this dissertation refers to the people who appear in archival records as record subjects. They may or may not be the same people as the archive users, and there may be one or more subjects in a single record.

Third parties

A third party (*tredjeperson*) is the established term for people who is a stakeholder in a record, but is not the primary record subject. Third parties are stakeholders in that they might be at risk of suffering detriment if certain information is disseminated, even if the information does not concern them directly. Often, a third party is a record subject other than the archive user, such as a parent appearing in a social care case file. They may also not be record subjects at all but still have a connection to the people in the records. For example, they might be children of a record subject whose memory or reputation is judged as being damaged if certain information is disclosed; that damage is then considered to affect the surviving children.

Detriment assessments

Throughout this dissertation, the term "detriment assessment," or "assessment of detriment," will be used to signify the Swedish term *menprövning*. Detriment

assessment refers to the process of assessing information in archival records that is requested by an archive user and deciding if the release of this information would cause any detriment to the one concerned—the record subject—or any of its kin. In this assessment, the archivist must "imagine oneself in the situation of the affected parties and try and imagine how they would be affected if the information should be given out" (Bohlin 2010, 204; JO 1982/83). This assessment is to be carried out even if the affected party is deceased (*Prop. 1979/80:2*).

The concept of detriment has been thoroughly discussed in various preambles to the Swedish Access to Information and Secrecy Act and appeals to various administrative courts.[22] In these preambles, detriment signifies different types of violations of integrity, as in the example of someone becoming the subject of the disdain should his or her personal relations be revealed (Bohlin 2010, 204). The preambles also state that the assessments of detriment sometimes need to be adjusted to align with common values of society (ibid., 204). Since a deceased person cannot experience any detriment, the assessment of cases in which the record subject is no longer alive should instead consider not to "violate the peace that should apply to the deceased" (Sandén 2012, 172).

The concept of detriment assessment is central in my dissertation, and I discuss it from different angles throughout, particularly in Chapters 6 and 7.

Information

The term information is difficult to delineate, but it is also so widely used in our society that it is often considered self-explanatory. Perhaps this is why archivists have mostly avoided to describe and analyze it (Yeo 2018, 85–86). The ambiguity of the concept of information is corroborated by the way in which the archivists I interviewed handle and perceive information about cases of assessment and disclosure.

One defining question about the meaning of information is whether it is best regarded as an object in itself, being transferred from sender to recipient, or whether it is best described as the *understanding* of this object. This dichotomy emerged in the centuries following the Middle Ages, when the shift from scholastic philosophy to modern empirical science brought with it a new understanding of information, more mechanistic than holistic (Capurro and Hjørland 2003, 356). As media historian John Peters put it, "At first informed meant shaped by; later it came to mean received reports from" (Peters 1988, 12–13).[23]

Archivist Geoffrey Yeo formulates a compelling argument against the materialistic view of information as objects through a rhetorical question:

[22] RÅ 82 2:66 and RÅ 2007 ref. 16 are two such examples.

[23] However, there are two vicissitudes in the perception of this shift made visible in the LIS-literature. Michael Buckland (1991) writes that this modern usage stems from the emergence of information systems. Hence, he positions this shift much later in time than Capurro and Hjörland, who derives the change in meaning already to the shift from medieval age to modernity (Capurro and Hjörland 2003).

> What if information resides in people's minds as well as, or instead of, on tangible or digital media? If it is associated with a medium, should it be equated with the medium itself, the content inscribed on the medium or the ideas, meanings or memories that the content conveys? […] If we surrender our scripts to a third party, our minds can still retain the information we acquired from them before we handed them over. Information cannot simply be correlated with the objects that practitioners seek to manage and govern. We may find that we must consider these objects, not as information per se, but as entities from which information can be elicited or derived. (Yeo 2018, 92–93)

Information does not let itself be erased from one place as it moves to another medium. Rather, it duplicates itself and sometimes, becomes inextricably intertwined with both mediums.

Communication scholar Sandra Braman regards information as a constitutive force in society. In her view, information does not only exist within social structures, but it also creates those structures. Information is a strong, powerful concept charged with meaning (Braman 1989, 239). As I understand Braman, this is essentially the same as arguing that information is power. Hence, in this view, the concept of information closes in on social constructionism and discourses. One may say that information is a building block in social constructionism, or, to put it another way, concepts one can apply to unveil societal structures. Information scholars Donald Case and Lisa Given question this "information as power" trope, or at least suggest a more moderate view on its truthfulness. Most of the time, information alone cannot generate power; it needs to be backed up by institutions and social relations. According to Case and Given, "knowledge must have agency in order to exercise power" (Case and Given, 64). As with the question of the effects of information, the focus of study should not be on the information itself but on the effects it produces and the concepts needed to describe those effects. In doing so, of course, one must also study the surrounding societal context in which the information is created.

As Case and Given point out, we do not necessarily need a definition of information—a concept is sufficient for our purposes (ibid., 71). As Artandi (1973) and Belkin (1978) make clear, it is enough to agree on a way of looking at a phenomenon in order to be able to discuss and analyze it productively. Hence, "by accepting the idea of a concept one becomes free to look for a useful concept, rather than a universally true definition of information" (Belkin 1978, 58).

Drawing on this line of thought, I will not attempt a definition of information. Instead, I have chosen a different way of looking at the phenomenon of information, closer to Yeo's view. In my dissertation, information is not regarded as a commodity that you can split, share, or give away. When we do "give away" information, it does not (like the medium on which it is recorded) move from one place to another. Instead, it multiplies and grows, spreading out like a living organism. Moreover, like an organism, it constantly evolves and change shape. Unlike the conduit metaphor or "bucket theory," in which,

according to psycholinguist Charles Osgood (1979, 213), "words, like little buckets, […] pick up their loads of meaning in one person's mind, carry them across the intervening space, and dump them into the mind of another." Rather, words spread like root systems or mycelium from one mind to another, evolving, entangling, and affecting each other in a web where every thread of information connects to every other thread and creates an intricate system of kaleidoscopic relations, dependencies, and bearings.

One cannot define or delimit information into units that can be kept, sent, and received. Given the theoretical foundation of this dissertation, information necessarily has to be viewed as a process or a construct—something that we create together and that is dependent on both sender and receiver to be meaningful. The text in the records is not information until it is read and interpreted by someone. And when this text is read and interpreted by someone, its meaning is not fixed but depends on the pre-understanding of the receiver.

But does information need an interpretive recipient to exist or come into being? Perhaps not. Nevertheless, as far as this study is concerned, information without a recipient, real or imagined, is without meaning. By this, I do not mean to say that information that never reaches a recipient is pointless. Sometimes the information withheld is more charged with value than the information communicated; what we do not say can sometimes more important than what we do say. However, people generally base their decision to share or not to share information on the anticipated reaction of the receiver. Because of this, information (both the communicated and the withheld information) *does* things. It affects its recipients in one way or another. Otherwise, to speak with anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1972, 453), it would not be information. This raises the stakes for the people handling information, such as the archivists in this study.

Records

For archivists or researchers in archival studies, talking about archives and records always relates to the common idea of "archival records" and "archives." In the wake of the linguistic turn, the so-called archival turn has led scholars from disciplines far outside archival studies or its related field, history, to see archives everywhere (e.g., Reed 2005; Hofman 2005; McKemmish, Reed, and Piggott 2005). In the context of archival studies however, archives and records are more easily defined.

In Sweden, the standard definition of a record is the one stated in the Freedom of the Press Act: "A record is a representation in writing or picture, or a recording that can only be read or otherwise perceived with technical aid" (Chapter 2 §3; my translation). In other words, a record is information on a medium. Hence, the record in archival studies necessarily has a form, one tightly linked to its materiality. If one lets go of this materiality, what remains is not a record, but information.

As mentioned earlier, I regard information as an immaterial structure, not an object. However, the materiality of the *record* plays a significant part in my study. The different formats and mediators used in recordkeeping influence the design and shape of the information, consequently affecting both the content and the users' perception of this content. For example, the type of information notated by a psychiatrist in a medical record will vary depending on whether the structure of the record is controlled through multiple choice questions and panels or whether it is left to the recording doctor to decide which data to include and in what way.

There are two different ways of understanding the record. The first relates to the physicality of the records just mentioned and pertains to the origin of the records—how and why they came about. Media scholars such as Wolfgang Ernst (2015) and Cornelia Vismann (2008), and historian Arlette Farge (2019) give examples of this in their writings about how technical developments, along with social and societal contexts, have affected the design of records. The second way relates to the nature of the records more than the shape of them. This is a philosophical issue linked primarily to the question of what information is.

Eivind Engebretsen theorizes the social childcare record in his doctoral dissertation on case files from social childcare in Norway during the 1950s and 1980s. Engebretsen points out that the record and the case file can never fully depict reality; it is epistemologically impossible to bring all of reality to light at the same time (Engebretsen 2005, 36). Moreover, the cases originates from the records that describe them, making the case-files foundational to the actual cases. "In principle," Engebretsen writes, "the case is a linguistic construct that only takes form in the official's computer. The case is secondary and the case record primary, since the case is created out of the written text, not the other way around" (ibid., 36, my translation).

In this dissertation, I look at records partly from an Information Studies perspective. My work is not concerned with the actual statements and opinions that the social workers and doctors have expressed and documented; it is not a study of the (recordkeeping) practices of Swedish psychiatrists and social workers. Neither is my work concerned solely with the handling of the information from a technical or strictly materialistic perspective. Instead, this dissertation focuses on the relationships between the archive, the records, and the information-creating practices of the people who handle and use them. Information can still affect a person's life, even if—or even because—that person is denied access to it.

Furthermore, information does not only affect its designated recipient. Neither the archivists nor the archive users in my study were the imagined readers of the records when first created. Nevertheless, the assessment, redaction, and disclosure of these records affect them both.

Narratives

Information make little sense without a narrative. Cognitive narratology emphasizes that it is through narrativization that people make sense of information. Records and information they contain are the raw material with which the narratives in this dissertation are constructed. But as mentioned in the section above, official records, particularly care records, are in themselves constructs, created by providing certain information and omitting other information. Sometimes when the archivists assess the records after a request, they use the narratives jointly made by information and silence to create new narratives that can be disclosed to the archive user. The user, in turn, merges this narrative with their previous knowledge of the events portrayed to create yet another narrative, namely their own personal history.

Thus, narratives are present on every level of this study. To analyze them, I will draw predominately on anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot's writings about history production. Trouillot writes that

> Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance). (Trouillot and Carby 2015, 26; italics in original)

This dissertation focuses on the moment of fact retrieval—that is, the making of narratives. When archivists collect, assess, redact, and disclose requested records from archives, they produce narratives for archive users to turn into history. As Trouillot explains, the different silences that produce the writing of history should not, in the context of history writing, be seen as separate entities. In other words, from a historical perspective, it is not enough to focus on one moment of silence alone. Since my dissertation is not a historical study, however, I take the liberty of focusing primarily on the moment of fact retrieval. With this said, I am well aware of the moments that preceded retrieval: the creation of records and the appraisal (or assembly) that put these records in the archives, and I do touch upon them briefly from time to time throughout the study.

Studies of genealogy, or family history,[24] are often occupied with narratives and the narrativization that genealogists do as they search for their roots. Family historians' search for their ancestors is, on a deeper level, a search for meaning and coherence (Yakel 2004). Sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel (2012) writes about the social and cultural elements of ancestry and kinship, claiming that genealogy is more a way of creating our past than discovering it:

[24] These two terms can be used interchangeably but can also be distinguished from each other. Genealogy then denotes an interest in biological ancestry, while family history has a wider range, including a focus on narrativization and history writing (Klareld 2023, 2).

> Not only are genealogies more than mere reflections of nature, they are also more than mere records of history. Rather than simply passively documenting who our ancestors were, they are the narratives we construct to *make* them our ancestors. (Zerubavel 2012, 10; italics in original)

Zerubavel thus pinpoints the way family history and genealogy are intrinsically connected to narrativization. So is the search for information in care records. Accordingly, in the present study, narratives are constructed through fact retrieval. Archival scholar Jeannette Bastian also emphasizes narratives as an integral part of archival work, but she focuses on the custody of, or control over records rather than on their retrieval. Control over records, Bastian argues, is more about controlling the narratives that they tell than controlling their physical or evidentiary value (Bastian 2021, 28).

> While records as transactions characterized much of archival thinking in the twentieth century, particularly as it related to business and government, records as narrative have emerged as a compelling responsibility of the twenty-first. As archivists focus on the diverse perspectives of communities and peoples, telling the stories is a central and cogent concern. (ibid., 27)

Bastian suggests that talking about custody of records—and hence control over narratives—in an archival setting often unsettles archival theorists. The concepts "custody" and "control" denotes authoritarian power, in which public archives decide on what stories to tell about certain communities. But, Bastian argues, control is in itself not a bad thing. Control can be benign depending on who has it. Focusing on archival narratives necessarily means acknowledging the subjectivity of the records, the archives, and the archivists.

Here, Bastian joins the discourse on archivists and social justice discussed earlier in this chapter, as well as the theme of objectivity versus subjectivity in the archive. This return to the basis of my study signals that the most important analytical and theoretical concepts have now been covered, and it is time to turn to the concrete questions addressed in this dissertation.

Aim and research questions

The overarching question of this dissertation can be formulated as follows: How does the archives' dual role as part of societal interventions in people's lives and as an impartial instance between individual and state affect the archivists' work? Starting from the position that (public sector) archives operate in the tension field between the individual and the state, I will explore how different views on vulnerability, social care, privacy, and dignity affect the assessment, classification, and disclosure of official records containing sensitive personal information carried out by professional archivists. In the interviewed ar-

chivists' reasoning on detriment assessment and disclosure, two ethical perspectives, the legalistic ethics and the feminist ethics of care, are present. To investigate this more deeply, the following research questions were formulated:

RQ 1. How do ethical perspectives become visible in the material, and what do these ethics denote regarding a) the main focus in the archivists' assessments, and b) the results of the assessments (i.e., what is disclosed)?

RQ 2. How do the above issues relate to a) what tasks are included in the archivists' work, and b) the professional roles of the archivists?

The first question delves into how ethics affect the archivists' reasoning about cases of disclosure and redaction. Does an attraction toward one ethics or the other imply a tendency to either disclose or redact information? Does it affect which aspects of a case the archivists will emphasize? The second question concerns the archival profession. How do the different ethics interact with the expected and actual professional role of archivists? How does ethics affect the archivists' own perception of their work?

Before embarking on the empirical study and answering these questions, however, I will first provide an overview of my methods, the material studied, and the ethical considerations taken into account.

Method and material

The main empirical material of this dissertation consists of interviews with professional archivists. The decision to base my study on interviews was a natural one, given the object of study. Since my research interest was archivists' work, and how they reason about this work, the best way to gain knowledge was to talk to archivists. That said, the present study has raised issues that I now think could be further investigated using more quantitative methods, such as statistical studies of the occurrence of different kinds of requests, and the demography of the archive users. But that would be a different dissertation. This dissertation, however, is heavily grounded in qualitative methods.

One concept has been particularly useful: the method of *document ethnography*, which will be explained in the following section.

Document ethnography

After I had begun the interview process and decided to include case files in my study, I became familiar with document analysis as proposed by Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars Kristin Asdal and Hilde Reinertsen (2022). They have put together a methodological toolbox useful for analyzing practical work with documents, which they call practice-oriented document

analysis. The aim of their method is to investigate what impact document work has, how it shapes the sites where it takes place, and issues it deals with. Practice-oriented document analysis consists of six methodological moves: *document tools*, *document work, document texts*, *document issues*, *document sites*, and *document movements*.

These moves can be used separately or combined, depending on the scope of the material and the object of study. In this dissertation, the object of study is archivists who perform document work in archives. Archives are places that contain and deal with documents—they are document sites. Therefore, Asdal and Reinertsen's methodological moves *document work* and *document sites* are of great value in this study. Asdal and Reinertsen formulate ways of looking at and investigating documents, document work, and document sites as entities in themselves rather than just focusing on the documents or the information in the documents.

In this study, I conduct what Asdal and Reinertsen refers to as *document ethnography*: the combination of the study of documents with an ethnographic method. The idea is that by studying the document work as work, one can gain insights on both the documents and the work. Multi-sited ethnography, which considers both workplaces and documents as sites, can focus on the practices of the document work, not just the ideas behind them. "The documents are sites, as are the institutions that produce and/or hold them. In this way, both the archive and the archives become sites in their own right, not just holders of documents" (Asdal and Reinertsen 2022, 25–26). The documents are one site, one of the places that one studies. The archives, both as physical places and as collections of documents, becomes sites in their own right, not just abstract constructions of aggregated documents. Furthermore, the institutions producing or holding the documents are also document sites.

The methodological move *document movements* is used to study "how documents are set in motion and bring things along with them" (ibid., 151). This can easily be linked to document sites by studying movements within and between sites, for instance. In this study, the movements I study are primarily those between the official sphere of the archive and the private sphere of the individual archive user. In the document, the public and private spheres join.

To conclude, I make use of Asdal's and Reinertsen's methodological moves *document work*, *document sites*, and *document movements*. The document work is the assessment, redaction, and disclosure of records, which I gained knowledge of by simply talking to the archivists and asking questions about their work. The sites, the archives, are studied partly physically through my visits to them but mainly through more theoretical analyses of their functions in a larger societal perspective. The document movements are the movements of records and information between the archives and the archive users, initiated by the archive users' requests and occurring as a result of the document work by the archivists. These movements, like the sites, are analyzed as points of intersection between public and private spheres.

To study the document work, document sites, and document movements, I conducted interviews and studied case files.

Interviews

This study builds on 19 interviews with archivists working at nine different archival institutions (five municipal and four regional), who assess records for detriment. In total, I interviewed 26 people. My conversations with these interlocutors were mainly carried out as physical interviews during my visits to their workplaces. The interviews were a mix of individual and group interviews, and the number of interviewees ranged from one to five at a time. Some of the archivists I only met once, some twice, and three people I met three or four times. On a few occasions, I conducted initial and/or follow-up interviews using Zoom to gain an understanding of the particular context of a certain archive or to ask questions that had come up during the coding.

The archives were selected for their geographic as well as demographic diversity. I tried to include archives of different sizes from the whole of Sweden and to have a balance between archives in urban and rural areas. This diversity seemed important to avoid biased results that might have been the case if the selection of archives had been too narrow.

The interviews were semi-structured. Throughout the collection of material, I used a list of questions that served as a structure and starting point for our conversations. These questions, however, were open-ended, eliciting different ideas from the interviewees that took the conversations in many different directions. Here are some examples of the questions I asked:[25]

- Tell me about your work.
- Can you give me a walkthrough of the process when someone makes a request?
- How do people react when they are denied information?
- Tell me about a case that was particularly difficult to assess.

As a starting point for discussion, particularly during the group interviews, I described a few cases and asked for the archivists' comments. One of these cases was the one discussed at the very beginning of this dissertation, the example of the archivist who redacted information about a deceased woman's abortion when her son asked for her psychiatric records. I also used cases that had come up as examples in previous interviews (after receiving permission from the person who provided the example).

In cases where several people were interviewed at the same time, the participants already knew each other. They were colleagues who had worked together for shorter or longer periods of time. In these interviews, much of the conversation took place between the archivists without much involvement

[25] The full list of questions is available in Appendix A.

from me. On these occasions, I acted more as a conversation starter and intermittent moderator than as an interviewer.

Two of the group interviews lasted long enough to require a coffee break (on other occasions, coffee was consumed during the actual interview). I then turned off the recorder and participated in normal lunchroom conversations with the interviewees. On one of these occasions, however, the conversation took an interesting turn and one of the archivists recounted an incident related to the issues we had discussed before the break. Since this report was not caught on tape, when the official interview resumed, I asked the archivist to comment on what he had just said in order to include the story in the material.

The fact that I am a trained archivist, and that I worked for eight years with records management in various Swedish authorities before becoming a Ph.D. student, naturally affected my relationship with the archivists I met. I believe that my background gave me credibility in the eyes of my interlocutors and allowed them to trust that my project aimed to fairly represent their profession. In other words, they trusted that I knew what I was talking about and that I was on their side. However, I did not always know what I was talking about. Although I have professional experience in the disclosure and redaction of information, I have never worked with the particular types of issues discussed in this dissertation. Initially, this fact was a source of stress for me, and I worried that my lack of experience would make people less inclined to talk openly with me. These concerns turned out to be unfounded; my ignorance in certain areas led me to ask for thorough explanations during interviews. This revealed tacit knowledge that interviewees would not have shared if I had not explicitly asked for it. In addition, my juniority in relation to the archivists with whom I spoke erased any prestige that might otherwise have been an issue in an interview setting.

Before this project, I had briefly met two of the archivists, Eva and Sven, in a professional setting, but we did not know each other well. With all the other people I interviewed, I had no previous connection.

All the interviews were conducted in Swedish and recorded and transcribed by me. The original transcripts are in verbatim Swedish, but the quotes used in the text of the dissertation have been translated into English and edited to be intelligibly verbatim. This means that I have removed repetitions, verbal pauses, and most, but not all, filler words.

For privacy reasons, all the names of the archivists have been changed, and the locations of the archives have been omitted.

Case files

In addition to the interviews, I also studied eight different case files from three of the archives I visited, two municipal and one regional. I did this to gain a better understanding of the material around which the interviews revolved. Since I have no professional experience with the disclosure of social service

records or patient files myself, this was crucial for my understanding of the cases the archivists talked about. I read the files after all the regular interviews had been conducted. Thus, reading the actual files not only gave me insight into the materiality and content of the records, but it also gave me a deeper understanding of the difficulties archivists face when trying to assess information.

The archivists I spoke with agreed that working with social service case files and psychiatric records is hard work. The files are disjointed, fragmented, and messy, and the content is often horrifying. Trying to extract a straightforward timeline and narrative from them to determine how a matter unfolded can be emotionally draining, tedious, and upsetting. This is what my interviewees told me over and over again. Yet it was only after the interviews had concluded and I had studied a number of files myself that I fully realized how right they were. Although virtually every archivist I spoke with described the files as "messy" and "dense," leading me to think I knew what to expect, I was overwhelmed by the cacophony of different voices emanating from the pages.

Apart from contextualizing the interviews for my own understanding, I also use some of the case files examined in my empirical chapters to illustrate various phenomena and points I want to make. To protect the anonymity of the archivists I interviewed and, of course, of the people whose files I studied, I made the somewhat unorthodox decision not to cite the sources (i.e., the files) that I describe. To tell the reader where to find these files would be to reveal the archive in which they are kept, and thus the workplace of my interviewees. I do, of course, have documentation of the sources in my possession, with archives and case numbers written down, but I will not disclose them in the dissertation.

In addition to interviewing archivists and reading cases of disclosure, I have also studied a number of legal cases in which Swedish courts have ruled on issues regarding privacy and the right to information. Some of these cases were brought to my attention by archivists during interviews. The majority of the cases, however, were found by reading additional literature. Two sources were particularly useful for finding court cases: a master's thesis in Archival studies (Ericsson 2018) and a bachelor thesis in Law (Flodin 2019).

Ethical considerations

Writing this dissertation has involved a great deal of ethical stress. Initially, my plan for this project was not to study actual case files, but to obtain information only from the archivists who told me about them. One of my reasons for doing this was a sense of guilt. I felt guilty about prying into the lives of strangers, adding another layer of intrusion, even violation, to the already scrutinized lives of the record subjects. Nevertheless, when I decided to request a series of case files from the archives, I did so because I urgently needed to see the actual records the archivists were talking about. I needed context to make sense of the archivists' discussions.

As mentioned, the reading became an emotional experience, and I questioned whether I had made the right choice. However, I hope that the humility I feel toward my material has led me to treat the people and stories I have encountered with the utmost respect and care.

I have followed the Swedish Research Council's guidelines for good research ("God Forskningssed" 2024) regarding the ethical aspects of my work, and my supervisors and I have had ongoing discussions on ethical issues related to my research throughout the work process.

Before I started collecting material, I applied for ethical approval from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (*Etikprövningsmyndigheten*). My application was approved in March 2021 (Dnr 2019-05743).

I practiced informed consent with the people I interviewed. All interviewees were informed about the project before they agreed to participate, which they did by signing a consent form. They were also informed that they could withdraw their consent at any time before, during, or after the interviews. All audio recordings and transcripts of the interviews are stored in Uppsala University's secure electronic data portal Allvis.

Before moving on to the first empirical chapter, I will briefly describe the organizational and legal framework within which archives in Sweden operate.

Archival practice and legislation in Sweden

In this section, I will provide an overview of the archival sector, the archival profession in Sweden, and the legislation that governs Swedish public archives when dealing with social service- and psychiatric records. The laws that are of relevance in this context are: 1) the Freedom of the Press Act (*Tryckfrihetsförordningen*) (SFS 2009:400); 2) the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act (*Offentlighets- och Sekretesslagen*) (SFS 2009:400); 3) the Administrative Procedure Act (*Förvaltningslagen*) (SFS 2017:900); 4) the Archives Act (*Arkivlagen*) (SFS 1990:782); and 5) the Social Services Act (*Socialtjänstlagen*) (SFS 2001:453).

Regions and municipalities

The second half of the nineteenth century saw an increase in societal activity in Sweden. In 1862, a new municipal act was introduced, which led to an expansion of the functions of Swedish municipalities. The 1862 legislation not only regulated the operation of municipalities but also included the establishment of county councils (*landsting*), now called regions (*regioner*). This legislation was followed by municipal reforms in 1952, 1964, and 1971, as well as by a municipal ordinance in 1962. The reforms gradually reduced the number of municipalities, and today there are 290 municipalities and 21 regions in Sweden.

These reform changes secured the continuation of the strong self-government that Swedish municipalities have maintained since they were parishes. An important part of this self-government is the municipalities' right to tax their inhabitants, which gives them the power to decide how much money to collect and how to allocate it. Even so, the state still has a strong influence on the general functioning of municipalities and regions. A large part of the municipalities' funding comes from state subsidies, and the state also supervises the municipalities through various state agencies and county administrative boards (*länsstyrelser*). The self-government is also reflected in the archives. Not only are municipalities and regions independent authorities, but the Archives Act also states that they are responsible for auditing their own archives. Thus, they are not controlled by the National Archives but by the municipal and regional councils. These boards generally have little to no knowledge of recordkeeping and archival matters, and in practice, it falls to the archival institutions themselves to make decisions about their operations; the councils' primary task is to allocate funds to the institutions.

The 1930s and 1950s in Sweden saw an emerging welfare state, with the launching of a number of reforms regarding social insurance, health care, and education. This implied that more—often personal—information about Swedish citizens was being recorded and archived (*Härifrån till evigheten. SOU 2019: Betänkande från Arkivutredningen (Ku 2017:2)* 2019, 135). Beyond the official records of the state's operations and listings of citizen births and deaths, authorities including municipalities and regions started to document detailed information on the lives of these citizens, using childcare, healthcare, and social service records to compile data.

During the first two decades of the twentieth century, there was an extensive increase in the number of hospitals in Sweden. Epidemics such as tuberculosis, the Spanish flu, and polio created a need for sanatoriums. At the same time, Sweden (alongside most Western countries) also saw an increase in mental hospitals and asylums for children with disabilities, institutions that first appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century (Nilsson and Forsell 2013, 435–436).

Traditionally, the care of the poor in Sweden has been the responsibility of the municipalities and, before that, the church. The organization of this care was not strictly regulated, and there were no rules about how to handle the records of this care or who could have access to them. Prior to the twentieth century, priests, who were also state officials during this period, wrote personal and often condescending remarks about individuals in church books (*kyrkböcker*), which were the main source of records at the time. Decisions about how to help the poor were made by parish committees (*sockenstämmor*), which meant that people in a community who needed social care were vulnerable to gossip and disdain by other community members—their neighbors often knew every detail about their situation. This changed when responsibility for social care was transferred to municipal welfare boards at the same time that legislation was introduced to protect privacy.

As the municipalities' responsibilities grew during the twentieth century and they became the main organizers of social care, both the care and its documentation became more formalized. The Law on social registers (*lagen om socialregister*) (SFS 1936:56) stated that all social service records were to be classified and accessible only to other authorities who needed the information in them to carry out their own tasks. It was not until 1961 that this absolute secrecy was lifted and researchers were able to gain access to the records (Edquist 2017, 14–15). In 1980, it became possible for people to choose to have their own patient records destroyed.

The archivists

The archivist profession has always been tightly linked to the history discipline. For a long time, the main purpose of archives was to provide sources for historical research, and most archivists had a background as historians. With the bureaucratization of society and the growth of the public sector during the twentieth century, however, the archives grew—and with them the need for professional archivists to tend to them. The digitalization of society also meant that archivists needed to be more proactive and work more closely to the production of information, going beyond receiving and archiving information that had already served its purpose. In English-speaking countries, this led to a division of the profession into two branches: archivists (who work in traditional archives, primarily with physical documents) and records managers (who work in the record creating organizations, primarily with digital information). In Sweden however, this linguistic division never happened, resulting in the same word—archivist—being used for both branches of the profession. Today, a large proportion of Swedish archivists work in public agencies such as state agencies, municipalities, and regions.

The archivist profession has undergone great changes in recent decades. From a relatively small profession mainly working in archival institutions caring for historical records, archivists today are present in every Swedish public agency (see Cavallin-Aijmer and Edquist 2021). They deal with the control and classification of information (particularly digital), information security, and education in matters regarding the public's right to information. The archivists interviewed in this study all work in either municipal or regional archives. In addition, they all work with reference services to users and the assessment of requested records. As described above, the responsibility and audit of municipal and regional archives lies with these agencies' own boards. This means that activities in municipal and regional archives are highly dependent on the interests and competence of the archivist/s working there. In large organizations that employ many archivists, the conditions for both width and depth of knowledge are naturally better than in small municipalities with a single archivist working alone. In such small municipalities, the archivist is responsible for all tasks in the archive, including reference services. In larger

organizations, there might be up to twenty people working solely with reference services. This span in staffing and workload makes for a wide scope of methods and routines across different archives, as the following chapters will show.

The professional title "archivist" is not protected through certification or authorization. In theory, this means that anyone can claim to be an archivist without consequences, unlike medical doctors or police officers, for example. Practically speaking, however, in Sweden as in most other countries, one needs a particular academic degree to be able to work as an archivist. Nowadays, Sweden has programs educating archivists at several universities and university colleges, on both bachelor and master levels. Historically, archivists were recruited from the history discipline, meaning that to become employed at one of the larger archival institutions, a person was expected to be a historian with a doctoral degree. However, with the increase of public agencies and official records during the second half of the twentieth century, the demand for professional archivists also increased and a special education was needed to meet this demand.

Most of the people I interviewed in this study are academically trained archivists, but not all. A few of them were archival clerks (*arkivadministratörer*) and were trained at the archives where they worked. Others were "archival case managers" (*arkivhandläggare*) and had a bachelor's or master's degree in a different field, such as sociology or political studies. Hence, their competences varied from a broad knowledge of the archive and the archival sector to a narrower orientation, one specifically geared toward the assessment of sensitive information. Of course, working with the same types of issues for many years, in any profession, naturally implies a certain level of specialization. This applies to both the specialized information assessors and the archivists who worked at larger institutions where work tasks were divided between colleagues. Even the classically educated archivists gained knowledge in the particular areas they worked in, and lost knowledge in others.

Regardless of their different titles and areas of expertise, the archive employees I interviewed were selected to participate in the study based on their experiences dealing with detriment assessments. Even though not all of them formally are archivists (though, a vast majority is), in this dissertation they will all be referred to as "archivists." Hence, for the purpose of this study, an archivist should be understood as a person working at an archive institution and carrying out detriment assessments.

The Freedom of the Press Act (SFS 1949:105)

The Freedom of the Press Act is part of the Swedish constitution. It states that official records are public and, as a general principle, should be available to anyone who requests them. This also applies to social service records and records from psychiatric care. However, there are limitations to the availability of official records.

The Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act (SFS 2009:400)

The access to records stated in the Freedom of the Press Act is to some extent limited by the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act. According to Chapter 25, §1 in this act, medical information about someone or other personal information should be classified if it is unclear whether the information can be disclosed without entailing detriment to the person or any of his or her kin. In Chapter 26, there are corresponding paragraphs regarding information within social care. The act defines suffering detriment as being the subject to others' disregard (*missaktning*) (Bohlin 2010, 178–179).

Generally, all information about an individual should be accessible to that individual. However, in some cases, primarily regarding psychiatric care, secrecy might be applied toward the patient if the treating doctor deems that the disclosure of certain information may affect the treatment of the patient in negative ways (ibid., 213).

Anyone is free to request social care and patient records from municipal and regional archives. But such requests are always followed by an assessment of detriment in which the content of the records is assessed by someone working at the archive (most often an archivist), who decides which information can be released and which information should be redacted before release. Any redactions should be accompanied by a decision that is possible to appeal against to the Administrative Court (*Kammarrätt*). Seventy years after the last notation is made in a file, the secrecy is repealed, and the records are then public and should be released to anyone who requests them.

The Administrative Procedure Act (SFS 2017:900)

The Administrative Procedure Act (*Förvaltningslagen*) stipulates how public authorities should be run, including municipalities and regions. It states that the authorities should be objective and impartial in their decision making. Because authorities have an obligation to provide services and information to the public, the Administrative Procedure Act states authorities must be accessible to ensure the public's right of access to public records. Consequently, archivists working for these authorities are civil servants with a duty to provide information and help users promptly.

The Archives Act (SFS 1990:782)

The Archives Act (*Arkivlagen*) defines an archive as the sum of records from an agency's activities (§3). The act further states that archives from public agencies must be retained, kept in order, and cared for in such a way that the public's right to access of records stated in the Freedom of the Press Act is secured (§3). Other reasons for keeping the archives in order as mentioned in

the Archives Act are for adjudication and administration and for research purposes. The Archives Act also regulates that authorities should organize their records management to enable transparency.

Destruction of records is permitted as long as the reasons for keeping archives are not negatively affected.

The Swedish Patient Data Act (SFS 2008:355)

The Swedish Patient Data Act (*Patientdatalagen*) states that healthcare agencies must produce a record for every individual patient to ensure that all patients receive good, secure care. This act also states that patient records must be retained for at least ten years after the last notation. When ten years have passed, patient records may in theory be discarded. However, in an advisory report (2014), the National Archives strongly recommends that these records be retained indefinitely, which is also standard procedure in virtually all Swedish health care organizations.

A patient record is a record produced or retrieved in connection with the care of a patient. The records can contain information about the patient's health and other personal information, alongside treatments the patient has received and medications administered and/or prescribed. Information that is not directly related to the care of the patient is sometimes documented in the patient records, such as information about the patient's family relations, home, and work situation. Hence, patient files consist of several different types of information retrieved or produced by the documenting health professionals through conversations with the patient, the patient's relatives, or other people in contact with the patient. The record also contains documentation of observations of the patient made by care professionals, test results, diagnoses etcetera (Sandén 2012, 73–74; *Bevara eller gallra?: råd om patientjournaler och övrig vårddokumentation i landsting/region och kommun* 2014, 17).

Because patient records document the health or wellbeing of an individual, they are often rich in sensitive personal information. As stated in the Freedom of the Press Act, records created in public health care are official documents, meaning that anyone can request them to be disclosed. However, as mentioned above, the right to information in the records is restricted by Chapter 2 (§2) of the Freedom of the Press Act and the regulations in Chapter 25 in the Public Right to Information and Secrecy Act. Therefore, when a request for a patient record is received, the archives where the record is retained will assess whether or not the information requested may be disclosed without causing detriment for the individual concerned, or their relatives. If the archives decides not to disclose the requested information, the archive user can appeal against the decision according to Chapter 6 (§7) in the Public Right to Information and Secrecy Act.

The Social Services Act (SFS 2001:453)

Chapter 1 of the Social Services Act (*Socialtjänstlagen*) defines the aim of the Swedish social services. Stating that the social services shall, "on the foundations of democracy and solidarity" (Chapter 1 §1) work for economic and social security, equality in life conditions, and active participation in social life for everyone. In activities concerning children, the child's best interests (*barnets bästa*) is of particular importance. In decisions on care or treatment of children, which includes situations when a child is taken into care, the child's best interests shall be the *decisive* factor.

Chapter 2 of the Social Services Act states that social care is a municipal concern and that each municipality is responsible for social services in their area. Chapters 11 and 12 of the same act deal with the handling of matters and the use of information within the social services, stating that inquiries in matters concerning individuals shall be documented. The documentation must consist of decisions and actions taken in the matter, as well as circumstances and events deemed significant. Inquiries into the welfare of children and youth (under the age of eighteen) must therefore also be documented. In these cases, the act specifies that a care plan (*vårdplan*) must be established when a child is taken into out-of-home care (Chapter 11 §3). This plan will be revised after at most two years of care. In addition to the care plan, the social services must establish an action plan (*genomförandeplan*) for how to provide the care. Other types of documents commonly included in a social service case files are inquests, notifications, decisions, appeals, applications, and correspondence (*Bevara Eller Gallra: Råd För Socialtjänsten m.m* 2022).

All documentation should be produced with respect for the concerned individuals' privacy, and the person on whom the file is produced should be informed about the documentation on his or her case. During inquiries into the welfare of children, the affected child can be interviewed by the social services without consent from guardians and without guardians present at the interview.

Documentation from social service investigations can be discarded five years after the last notation in the case file is made. This, however, does not apply to records concerning parental investigations, adoptions, or cases where a child has been put in out-of-home care (Chapter 12 §2). In addition, the Regulation on Social Service (2001:937) (*Socialtjänstförordningen*) states that all social service case files in Gothenburg municipality, and in all municipalities within the regions Östergötland, Gotland, and Västernorrland, must be retained indefinitely. Furthermore, social case files regarding people born on the fifth, fifteenth, and twenty-fifth each month shall be retained, in every municipality in Sweden.

A significant part of the social work profession is documenting contacts with clients and the actions taken as a result. In Sweden, social workers are often employed by organizations such as municipal social service departments, that serve clients in need of financial aid or outpatient care. The social

workers may also work in institutions and out-of-home care facilities, such as treatment centers for alcohol or substance abuse or group homes for people with disabilities.

It is now time to move on to the empirical study of the dissertation. The following section presents an overview of this study.

Outline of empirical study

The empirical part of this dissertation consists of six empirical chapters and a concluding chapter.

In Chapter 2, I describe the role that narratives play in the assessments performed by the archivists. I also establish the two conflicting ethics—the legalistic ethics and the ethics of care—that are used as the analytical framework throughout the study.

Chapter 3 provides material and professional context for the work that archivists perform. What aspects of their work did the archivists themselves emphasize in the interviews, and how did they relate to them?

Chapter 4 focuses on legislation and the archivists' relationships with the jurists who they sometimes consult in complicated matters.

In Chapter 5, I discuss the concepts of privacy and detriment in connection to my material. How do the archivists define detriment, and how does this concept relate to that of privacy? I also touch briefly on theoretical and historical perceptions of privacy and how they affect the work of the archivists.

In Chapter 6, I focus on cases in which one or several of the record subjects are deceased. What does Swedish legislation say about the privacy rights of dead people, and does this legislation coincide with the ethics applied by archivists?

Chapter 7 examines recordkeeping and archival practices as forms of care. It critically engages with the underlying ethics of care and of law, and finds that both, in practice, lead to the domination of archive users.

In the concluding chapter, I return to my research questions and answer them. The chapter is structured around the themes of ethics, discretion and detriment, and bureaucracy and profession.

2. Bureaucratic narratives

> [The archive] is proof that a life truly existed, that something actually happened, an account of which can be put together. The final destination of the archive is therefore always situated outside its own materiality, in the story that it makes possible. (Mbembe 2002, 21)

> It is always a question of who is in control, for who controls the records, tells the story. (Bastian 2021, 27)

Narrativization is a human endeavor to deal with the arbitrariness of life. People want to believe that life has logic and meaning; that events are connected and form a coherent story with a beginning, a middle, and an end. To do so, we use different strategies to bring coherence and authenticity to our different life experiences. One such strategy is to assemble the bits and pieces of lived lives into a narrative. Inevitably, these narratives are simplifications. They hide contradictory storylines, depicting events and pasts as simple, unified lines of developments rather than acknowledging the multiplicity of events, voices, and perspectives that they are (Ochs and Capps 2002, 5).

This multiplicity makes archivists who work with records from social care often describe case files as "messy" (*röriga*). Archivists are supposed to make judgments about which information to give out, judgments based on an understanding of the people affected by the decisions and grounded in the relevant legislation. Since their task is to decide whether a particular amount of information would be detrimental for a certain individual if another individual were to access it, archivists sometimes need to consider the family and life situations of the persons involved and thus include more people in the assessment than just the archive user.

When an investigation regarding the welfare of a child is carried out, it naturally involves members of that child's family. The major part of a person's case file often does not discuss that person directly, detailing instead observations about their parents or siblings. In other words, there may be a number of personal narratives intermixed within the file's main narrative. This makes it complicated to assess the information in terms of potential detriment, since it might be hard to determine whether a certain piece of information regards a child or its mother, for example.

Archivists who assess information for detriment must relate to different narratives: 1) narratives crafted by professionals and written in the records,

which in turn are built around the narratives presented to the recording professional by the record subjects; 2) narratives presented by the archive users who ask for the records (and that the users often expect the records to confirm); and 3) potential narratives that sometimes form in between these stories and expectations and can be either enhanced or concealed by the archivists as they disclose and redact information.

In this chapter, I will focus on how narratives and storytelling emerge in my empirical material and investigate what implications the attraction to, desire for, and use of narratives have on the archivists' work of assessing, classifying, and disclosing official records. What narratives do they find in the records, and what narratives are constructed in the process of assessment? To discuss these questions, I will draw on previous work of scholars who have studied narratives from various perspectives. My theoretical framework comes from Trouillot's view on history production, focusing on the moment of fact retrieval.

In personal narratives (or life stories, as I will alternately call them) the relationship between the individual and society comes to the fore. As historian Mary Jo Maynes and sociologists Jennifer L. Pierce and Barbara Laslett argue, people always tell their stories in specific social, historical, and political contexts. This makes personal narratives the perfect object of study to uncover and analyze not only personal but social life (Maynes, Laslett, and Pierce 2008, 2–3). Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett draw on Foucauldian and feminist critique of the Western notion of the self as an independent entity, free from limiting social structures. At the same time, they acknowledge that individuals indeed have a sense of self and unique psychological traits (ibid., 18). For these scholars, then, it is important to focus on both the individual subject and the social context and structure at the same time.

"It's complicated"

Archivist Fredrik, in a conversation with his colleagues, spoke about possible reasons for the messiness of the files, attempting to explain why records rarely focused solely on one person:

> It's complicated, because … I guess that in these types of investigations the social worker *has to* … or the civil servant who describes the case, if there is a family you *have to* … get the whole picture, right? The father is like this, the mother is like that, one sibling is so, one sibling is so. There is this large and wide story. Of all kinds of intimate and horrible stuff that is collected in a file. And they need to get it all in there. And then it is going to be disclosed, perhaps.[26]

[26] Interview no. 9

As Fredrik described, the social workers who created the narratives in the records needed to give a full picture of the child's environment by sketching the family members as vividly as possible. Every piece of information written down by the social worker contributes to the thickness of the file and the basis for the municipality to make a decision regarding the welfare of the child. Each observation also contributes to making the record ripe with sensitive, potentially hurtful and humiliating details regarding everyone in the child's family. However, the complexity of case files stems not only from descriptions of the different record subjects viewed as objects from outside, but also from the need for the bureaucratic state to exhibit accountability and to give all involved actors a chance to tell their story (Engebretsen 2005, 11).

One can affect and interact with the narrative without using many words. Philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin says that a narrator can be influenced by words and stories told by others and incorporate these voices, explicitly or not, into a narrative (Bakhtin 2011, 24). Ochs and Capps label these different levels of engagement low and high involvement tellership. Sometimes, a teller reproduces the exact words of someone else, with or without being transparent about the source. Other times, these previous stories form an implicit background or foundation on which the present narrative builds. One example of this is when archivists gather narratives found in the records along with those told by the archive users and weave them together into a story of someone's childhood.

The stories put forward in psychiatric records and social care files often lack involvement from the people who the narratives are about, however. These narratives might be told by a number of people—psychiatrists, social workers, and police officers—but the voice of the record subject is seldom heard in the record itself (e.g., Svärd and Zimic 2024).

The stories that the involved parties tell are not always coherent or aligned. Narratives from all involved actors, such as parents, are documented meticulously by care workers, but when the main character, the child that is the subject of care or intervention, requests the records to complement their own memories, the narrative is fragmented through redactions of information concerning third parties. How should the archives handle stories about people whose lives have been deeply impacted by public authorities? Authorities monitor citizens and produce records containing information about these citizens, information that is sometimes requested by the people on whom the records were first created. When archivists are faced with such a request, they must consider the purpose of the stories in the records. Are they stories about the people documented within—the record subjects? Are they stories about the agencies that produced the records? Or should the records be seen as material to answer questions that the archive users might ask?

The stories behind the story

As mentioned, Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett pay attention not only to narratives per se, but also to the relations between individual and social narratives. The interdependencies between personal narrative and existing discourse entail that the way people narrate their lives—tell their stories—are always connected to the types of stories already at hand (Maynes, Laslett, and Pierce 2008, 70). Well-known genres and tropes affect the way we interpret events that we have experienced, so we tend to reproduce these plots through the structuring of our own life stories when we tell them in hindsight. Hence, analyses of personal narratives, such as those performed by the archivists in this study, must take into account how the narratives are shaped through conventions in existing genres and narrative structures (ibid., 71). These conventions, through the same logic, also affect the way analysts (i.e., the people "reading" the narratives) interpret other people's life stories and make them fit into other societal narratives.

One example of existing archetypal narratives influencing the interpretation of personal narratives is the different interpretations that archivists Hanna and Helena made of two similar case files. Hanna, an experienced archivist who worked at a regional archives, provided me with the psychiatric records of a young girl that I will call Lisa.[27] In the file, suspicions of sexual abuse were expressed about Lisa's father by both her mother and care professionals. However, the suspicions never turned into formal accusations, and the matter was not investigated.

When we spoke about Lisa's case file after I read it, Hanna said that she did not pay much attention to the recorded suspicions on sexual abuse. The reason for her dismissal was that the file was from the early 1990s, a time when, according to Hanna, "the psychologists were, like, hysterical about incest. It's in almost every file from that time."[28] Hanna then proceeded to tell me how innocent men had their lives destroyed by accusations of sexual abuse from their ex-wives, backed up by psychologists and psychiatrists.

This incest discourse, or hysteria, as Hanna called it, did not affect Helena, head of a municipal archives whom I met on several occasions, in her interpretation of a social service case file that concerned a girl who I will call Anna. At my last visit to the municipal archives where Helena worked, I read parts of Anna's extensive case file. Anna's problems started in her early teens. She repeatedly ran away from home, experimented with alcohol and drugs, and had numerous sexual contacts with various boys and men. In her late teens, her drug use escalated and she started selling sex. Anna lived a marginalized life marked by addiction, abuse, and criminality for about ten years before she became free from drugs and moved to another part of Sweden to start over.

[27] Lisa's case is described in more detail in Chapter 8.
[28] Interview no. 18.

In the earlier parts of her case file, Anna's relationship with her father was brought up on a number of occasions. Anna's mother, as well as social workers and psychologists, speculated about whether Anna's father ever abused her sexually. But every time Anna was asked about her father's suspected abuse, she strongly denied it. Helena, however, was not convinced by Anna's denial. When she handed the file over to me, Helena told me that it was "apparent" that Anna's father had sexually abused her. "There is no proof, but it's obvious. You'll see when you read it,"[29] she said.

The fact that there is a strong trope, at least in Sweden, of the sexually abused girl who becomes self-destructive and ends up selling sex undoubtedly influenced Helena's interpretation of Anna's life story. In the same way, the equally strong trope of (female) psychiatrists and psychologists in the 1980s and 1990s who saw sexual perpetrators in every man affected Hanna's interpretation of Lisa's file. If Lisa and Anna were actually sexually abused, only Lisa and Anna know. The point is not to establish the guilt or innocence of their fathers but to highlight the different ways Hanna and Helena interpreted similar narratives in the two case files.

According to Ochs and Capps, the moral dimension of a narrative is constructed through the joint effort of tellers and listeners, also called interlocutors. Together, the interlocutors position the narrative and frame themselves as being morally and ethically superior in relation to others (2002, 50). In communication with archive users, the archivists I talked to do not consciously express any moral stance toward the actions of the people in the records or the intervening state. However, they do hold opinions. Even if archivists are cautious not to pin their own norms on archive users, the norms still affect them since they make implicit assumptions about the stories they encounter in the records and in conversation with people asking for information. This was evident, for example, in the interpretations of Anna's and Lisa's case files. The narratives within the actual records are normative as well. In addition, the mere fact that society creates a psychiatric record or a social care case file on a person is a consequence—and a testimony—of the fact that the person's life story has diverged from the norm in one way or the other.

Intersubjective methodologies

The issue of to what extent an archivist is (and should be) invested in the cases they handle, and how much they remember, was discussed by archivists Eva and Sven, who work in a regional archives. Both in their late fifties, they had worked together for many years, and the atmosphere between them seemed genial. I had long since put my questionnaire aside as conversation flowed easily between them without my intervention.

[29] Interview no. 19.

Sven told Eva and me an anecdote about one of his former managers, who claimed that one of the most important qualities of an archivist is forgetfulness. "And that manifests partly by the fact that we are working with written information because we are aware that the human memory is weak. But also by the fact that we…" Sven hesitated for a moment before continuing: "We look at what we have in the archives, and then we forget it."

"But it isn't that easy Sven!" Eva burst out laughing. "It is!" Sven insisted. "Not to me," Eva began, but Sven interrupted: "To me it is. One shouldn't linger on things." "No, one shouldn't. But that is easier said than done, I would say," Eva snickered. Sven was not affected by Eva's frivolous view on the matter: "No. No, you can learn to forget." "Well …," Eva concluded with a grin, leaving the discussion unresolved. [30]

This discussion between Eva and Sven illustrates one aspect of the tension between professional distance and personal engagement that inevitably comes up when archivists are confronted with touching or sad stories in the records. Should the archivists care about the overarching life narrative of the archive user or record subject? Or should they focus solely on the information in the actual records, engaging only with the part of narrative absolutely necessary for the assessment of detriment, as described in the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act?

Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett write that one of the key elements of analyzing personal narratives is its "intersubjective methodology—whatever genre of personal narrative is involved, the analyst to some extent or another must think him- or herself into the mindset of another person" (Maynes, Laslett, and Pierce 2008, 96).

These intersubjective interpretations are often made by ethnographers and historians. But they are also, sometimes, made by the archivists handling disclosures. One archivist working at a municipal archives, a man in his early forties named Mats, told me, "The thing is, there are different individuals we're dealing with here, and something that might be *super detrimental* for one person can be totally critical for another person to be able to move on in life and … yeah, you know, have a happier future. So it's tricky."[31]

Here, Mats directs attention to how the same information might affect different people in very different ways. He then continued to illustrate his point, noting how one person might find it extremely traumatic to learn that, as an infant, they had been abused and neglected by their parents, while another person might find similar revelations comforting and react with relief and gratitude upon understanding that there indeed *was* a good reason for them to be taken into foster care. Mats implied that the amount of information that is disclosed sometimes depends on how much information he deemes the archive user being able to handle.

[30] Interview no. 15.
[31] Interview no. 9.

In contrast to the cases in which information was left out to protect seemingly fragile archive users, if the archivists I talked to deemed the archive user to be emotionally staunch, the archivists might give out more information than necessary. Some of the archivists said they might assess differently depending on the life circumstances of the record subject. For example, Julia and Magdalena once said that a deceased woman who had been a "fancy housewife" (*fin hemmafru*) might suffer more damage if her children learned that she was taken into a psychiatric hospital than a deceased woman who had other types of social problems.[32] Hence, the stakes are higher for people who are or were socially respectable.

A different kind of vulnerability is produced by concealing people's past or parts of their life. Socially stigmatized people are more vulnerable to begin with, but they also have less to lose, at least in the eyes of the archivist. By taking into account the appearances and self-presentations of the archive users and record subjects, archivists align with and continue the narratives already at hand. This applies both to the narratives created by doctors and social workers in their descriptions of events and individuals, and to the narratives that the archive users create for themselves and for the archivists. The archivists feel inclined to provide information in line with the already accepted narrative and to not disturb the archive user's memories.

In addition, archivists sometimes feel a need to expand and elaborate on the narratives in the records. They do this to help the archive users accept the recorded information and incorporate it into their own personal narrative. When redactions cannot be justified, and a smoothing contextualization or mitigation is not available in the content of the records themselves, archivists sometimes create a narrative around the circumstances of the words in the records, which they present to the archive users to ease the reception of the assumed hurtful information. One of the most common examples brought up by the archivists I talked to was records in which parents had expressed negative feelings toward their children.

To ease the fall a bit

The narratives authored by doctors and social workers also affect the way the archivists relate to and assess the information. Seemingly appaling information in a case file or a patient's record can be phrased in such a way that the reader is presented with a context that somehow explains and mitigates the facts. One example of this was a mother who, during a visit to a childcare center, expressed a wish that her children had never been born. This information was relatively unproblematic for archivist Marianne to disclose to the now adult son, thanks to what she described as the recording doctor's empathy.

[32] Interview no. 12.

"Once I had a file where there was this mother who was … just *exhausted*," Marianne told me:

> So then the doctor wrote, I suppose it was in a childcare record (*BVC-journal*) or perhaps school health-record, that "The mother says this as a consequence of her enormous fatigue" or something like that, you know, that there is an explanation that goes outside of herself and … Yeah, at least it was something that showed that from the situation at hand, the mother was experiencing frustration and needed help.[33]

Marianne interpreted the doctor's description of the mother's fatigue as a sign of empathy. However, one might also read it simply as a clinical psychiatric assessment. Marianne reads the record not only as a professional archivist but also as a nonprofessional in relation to the medical context in which it was produced. Consequently, she interprets the content of the record in the way a fellow human would, not a purely objective civil servant. In this instance, she also relates to the record subjects and archive users as fellow human beings with affects and emotions, not just as citizens with legal rights.

Case files and patient records are structured as narratives. However, the narratives are not an innate part of them. In her book *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History,* historian Carolyn Steedman writes about so called "enforced narratives" (Steedman 2001, 48), life stories written down by a seemingly invisible interlocutor. The absence of a clear authorial voice makes such narratives seem "natural" and objective. In Steedman's book, such narratives are written by nineteenth-century magistrates; in this study, they are written by psychiatrists and social workers. The archivists I spoke with must deal with such enforced narratives. Even though the narratives are often biased, they are sometimes the only source of information available for archive users to gain knowledge about their own or their family's past.

One gloomy Tuesday morning, I was sitting in an airy, modern meeting room in a municipal archives along with five of the archivists employed there. The archives had recently moved in to the brand new building, situated in an industrial area in the outskirts of town. The head archivist was Helena, the same archivist who on another occasion presented me with Anna's file. She explained the reasoning she and her coworkers used when disclosing what they believed to be hurtful information about someone's parents. "I think that today, we would have released that information. But we would give the person who had asked for the records a call and try to … yeah, try to ease the fall a bit." The other archivists present nodded and hummed support. Helena took a deep breath, looked out the window at the uninspiring view of an empty parking lot, and said:

[33] Interview no. 10.

> There might be reasons you know. The people who are saying things might be in … mental illness or in an addiction or … you know, there might be several reasons for a person to have those kinds of feelings toward their children. Extenuating circumstances. And I think it is good to try to mitigate … the shock, as much as you can.[34]

Instead of just presenting the facts, archivists offer suggestions to why and how these facts came about, filling in the gaps within the records and creating, as best they can, a coherent and comprehensible story. They do this because they *feel* for the people they meet, and for the ones they read about in the records. The narratives are what enable the archivists to identify with the record subjects and archive users. The archivists thus follow the instruction from the Parliamentary Ombudsmen and try to "put themselves in the position of the individual in question […]" (JO 1982/83, 227; my translation). Or, in the words of Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett, they use an intersubjective methodology. This, however, is a problematic quest.

Iris Marion Young claims that it is both impossible and undesirable for a person to adopt another person's standpoint in the way described by the Parliamentary Ombudsmen. As Young argues, archivists cannot switch places with the people portrayed in the records. Neither, however, is there a way to acquire a "moral, objective judgment," since, as Fredrik pointed out earlier in this chapter, people are different, and no life story is exactly like any other. So, what do the archivists do then? They try to tell stories that will be accepted by the archive users, without violating the law.

Archivists as narrators

English scholar G. Thomas Couser has published extensively on biographical life writing. In particular, he has focused on the ethical predicaments of life writing and the relationship between biographer and subject. Do biographers hold any allegiance toward their subjects? "Are auto/biographers obliged to 'do good'—or at least to do no harm—to those they represent?" he asks (Couser 2004, x).

Using the same line of reasoning, one could ask if the archivists in my study are obliged to "depict" the record subjects as sympathetic (i.e., providing information that will form such a narrative). The big difference between these two examples is, of course, that the archivist's task is not to provide stories at all, only information. However, the human mind needs narratives to make sense of events. When users turn to the archive, most often they do not ask for a certain record, such as a decision on placement from the municipality's board of social services. Instead, they tell the archivists that they want to know why they were placed in foster care as children.

[34] Interview no. 9.

This illustrates the difficulty separating events from the larger story to which they belong. A narrative always somehow organizes information in terms of time and causality. If it did not, it would not be a narrative. Humans need linearity to make sense of events, so we organize those events into a unilinear timeline and cause-effect progression (Ochs and Capps 2002, 41).

One of the most pronounced conflicts between legalistic ethics and the ethics of care played out during my interview with Eva and Sven. As we sat down in the archives' cramped meeting room, which also served as a storage place for expendable furniture, I presented them with the case described in the introduction to this dissertation, regarding a man whose deceased mother had been in a mental hospital. When the man asked for his mother's records, the assessing archivist disclosed all of it—except for the information about the mother's abortion.

Sven said that he would have done the same, but Eva was less sure. She said that before making a decision, she would take into consideration how old the man was at the time of the abortion. Eva continued to talk about the man's mother, on whom the file was written: "And then you read the record, and she has been *ill*, and *in care*. And this happened while she was in care. You know she must have had so many problems, so I reckon that this particular …."

Eva paused and let the implicit assumption that the abortion was the least of the woman's problems sink in before continuing:

> Can it *explain* something to him [the son]? I mean could this be something that might explain something in her … I don't know, a piece of the puzzle for him, in this whole file? I think he should get it because I don't think an abortion in itself … how should I phrase it? That it kind of violates her memory in any way, I don't see it like that. So I cannot say for sure that I would disclose it, but if it would help him to put pieces together, of his mother's life. But if there were other things as well one might be hesitant, so … no. But … I would do everything to be able to disclose it without soiling her memory in any way. But give him an explanation.[35]

Sven listened to Eva's arguments but was not convinced. "I wouldn't reason like that," he said. "Because the legislation on secrecy and the assessments of detriment doesn't grant any element of … that you assess the *benefit* for the person asking for the information. It doesn't grant *any* element like that; one only measures the *injury* for the one *concerned* by the information." Eva nodded but persisted: "Mm. Yeah, but I don't see any injury for the person concerned. I'm measuring it as insignificant in this case."

Here we can see how Eva and Sven apply different ethics to approach the case presented to them. Sven only refers to the relevant legislation and its limits and focuses on the detriment of the record subject. Eva, on the other hand, goes

[35] Interview no. 15.

beyond the limits of the law by considering the benefit to the archive user. Thus, Sven can be said to apply a legalistic ethic while Eva applies a care ethic.

Using a legalistic ethic, Sven focuses solely on the information in the file. He does not want to know anything more about the case than what is explicitly written in the records and therefore not expand the narrative beyond that of the record creators. Eva, on the other hand, wants to know as much as possible about the lives of both the mother and the son to be able to get a fuller picture, a wider narrative. Her aim is to provide the archive user with answers, giving him tools to reconstruct the broken narrative of his childhood.

In the example of Eva and Sven, Eva's care ethic entailed a more generous interpretation of which information should be disclosed. Generally, however, both ethics can allow for disclosure. The difference lies in *on what grounds* this disclosure is approved. Note, for example, how Eva explicitly focuses on the narratives in the records. She regards the mother's abortion in the context of not only the case file but also the lives of both mother and son.

Sven, on the other hand, views the particular note as separate information that is to be assessed on its own terms, independent of the surrounding context. Moreover, the circumstances worthy of notice are solely those of the archive subject, the mother, since those are the only ones mentioned in the legislation. When archivists assess fragmented or insufficient information for detriment, some fill in the blanks with suggested interpretations to give context to the present information and to compensate for the missing information. Like Eva, archivists can also discover more context by investigating personal and familial relations that are at the heart of the files. In doing so, they might gain contextual information about the records and widen the narrative, but they cannot tell it outside the restrictions put up by legislation, as Sven pointed out.

Intimacy

Novelist and essayist E.M. Forster says that we can never totally understand other people in real life, only in fiction, since an author can provide us with more information about a character than we could ever get from a flesh-and-blood person. Authors can, if they want to, turn their characters inside out and expose the entirety of their inner life, "tell[ing] everything about them there is to be told" (Forster 2005, 57). Still, what we *can* know about each other is enough to form the basis of society—and the basis of intimacy. The archivists I spoke to use the narratives they encounter as professionals to form the basis of society. Sometimes, by choice or by necessity, they also touch on intimacy.

With all the information on the archive users and record subjects that the archivists obtain, a certain amount of intimacy is easily established. The archivists I talked to had different ways of relating, or not relating, to this intimacy. Some read the records with a heavy emphasis on narrative, almost as if the files were stories or novels. Doing so, they engage strongly with the people

in the records and with the archive users, similar to how one engages with characters in a novel. Others, conversely, focus on the actual information in the records and on the legislation that governs it.

Some archivists expressed a desire for more interactions with the archive users, fueled by curiosity and the perceived investment in the lives of the people in the files. Archivist Magdalena, who worked in a municipal archives, talked about how she found it slightly frustrating that she seldom had contact with the archive users after releasing the records, meaning that she never knew how the reading of their files affected them. She said, referring to the users:

> And then they read their case file, and by then, of course, they have forgotten about me. I had nothing to do with it really, but still, for me, it's like "I read your whole life from when you were born till you were eighteen!" But you know, I'm of zero significance in their lives.[36]

Magdalena seemed slightly embarrassed when she continued, "Even if I think they have significance in mine. So I can see why they don't contact me. Once they get the records, obviously that's a new chapter in their life."

The compelling content of the case files immerses Magdalena in the lives of the people inhabiting them. She engages with the records almost as if they were works of fiction and is frustrated when she does not know how the story ends.

Like Magdalena, many of the interviewed archivists, especially those working at municipal archives and handling records from social care, expressed frustration at the fact that they got to read snippets of people's lives but never got to see how those lives "ended." The archivists found it especially difficult when the records concerned children who had been in care and whose childhoods had been marred by their parents' abuse, mental illness, addiction, and so on. Often, the archivist would follow a child from birth to the age of eighteen, when the case closed. A child's eighteenth birthday ended the narrative in the social service's file on the child, but it was, of course, not the end of the larger narrative of the person's life. That larger narrative, however, was closed for the archivists.

Sometimes, the information in the records was so disturbing that archivist found it difficult to let go, wondering what had happened to the children since and worrying about how their adult lives had turned out. To comfort themselves, the archivists sometimes made up their own imaginary narratives about the children.

The majority of users who ask for social service records are also the record subjects; these are people who want to read their own childhood case files. This means that when handling the requests, the archivists are in contact with not only the archive user but also the record subject, who in this case is the same person. Most of the time, such contact consists only of a couple of

[36] Interview no. 12.

emails back and forth and then sending off a pile of papers to the right address. However, even this brief contact are often enough to provide material for the archivists' homemade narratives. Magdalena and her colleague Julia expressed joy over the times that a user contacted them using a corporate email, since it meant that they "at least have a job."[37]

When the disclosed files are ready to be mailed, the archivist uses the national population register to find the correct home address. That register contains information on other people registered at the same address, which makes it easy to gain information about a person's family relationships. Hence, the archivists always know if an archive user is married and has children or if they live alone. If the user has a family, that fact is taken as a sign that everything had worked out for them and becomes the foundation of a new, happier narrative than the one told in the case file.

Magdalena, who assessed many social care records, explained that after she became a parent herself, she began to find it especially hard to read about children being mistreated. She and Julia, who also has small children, told me how they sometimes soothed themselves by making up stories about the lives of the archive users. Magdalena was aware that her fantasies were only a figure of her imagination, but it did not matter.

> It's ok you know that it isn't the truth because it's my way of dealing with it, to create something. Because I can only read until they are eighteen and then it stops. So these fantasies can be a way for me to create, yeah, I don't know … to deal with it. Because Jesus, it's such a tragic life, and children shouldn't have to put up with that. But *now*, they live *there* and work *there* and have these little kids and … and I'm imagining that everything turned out fine![38]

The vulnerability of the record subjects and archive users affects Magdalena on a personal level. She is in a position of power over both the people in the records and the ones requesting access to them. She reads every word in the files, so she often knows more about what happened than the people directly affected. She then decides how much of this information should be disclosed to the user, how much they are entitled to know about their own story. Nevertheless, this exertion of power also makes Magdalena vulnerable. She does not know anything about the archive users' lives outside of what is described in the records, and her professional role prevents her from engaging with them. This lack of knowledge takes a personal toll on Magdalena since the narratives in the case files are often engrossing and upsetting, and she has a hard time letting them, and the people in them, go. "We have a lot of power, we really

[37] Interview no. 12.
[38] Interview no. 12.

do. And power is a heavy burden sometimes, you know,"[39] as Sonja, one of Helena's coworkers, phrased it.

Credible sources

Occasionally, different narratives inside and outside the records come into conflict with each other. Archivists dealing with the narratives told by the archive users sometimes need to merge them or make them fit with the narratives in the records.

One example is an anecdote that Gunilla told me. Gunilla had been working as an archivist for about twenty years in the archives of a small, rural municipality. She told me about a woman who, as a child, had been in foster care for periods of time and now wanted to learn exactly what had been going on in her family. Her parents and her older brother had told her conflicting stories, and she wanted to sort things out by reading the case file herself.

"And the user was like 'my brother said this and that,' and the parents were dead so she couldn't get an answer from them, and in this case it was … she could tell *two different versions* of the same event that she heard from different people. And I don't know exactly where the truth lies, but …" Gunilla gestured with her hands as to show how she was weighing arguments against each other.

> So then I started to analyze like, "what is this really," and "ok, right, it seems to be correct what the brother is saying in this detail," and so on like that. And in this case it was rather easy because there was no evidence supporting either story. So I reckoned: ok, she has told me these two conflicting stories, and I cannot say which one is true so … I simply gave her everything there was![40]

Here we can see how Gunilla acts almost as a sort of arbiter of truth. Beyond the assessment for detriment, she also assesses the verity of the narratives in the records and considers that criterion in her decision.

Gunilla told me something else about her decision-making. When I asked her about her thought process when receiving a request for a social case file, she answered that she started by asking the archive user what he or she wanted to know. "'I want to have everything there is *about me,'* they [the users] say, and then I have to ask them to be more specific," Gunilla said. "I usually ask them: 'What question do you want answered?'"[41]

The approach that prioritizes what the user wants to know—rather than just the specific records they request—affects the way the archivist assesses the information. When Gunilla focuses on the truthfulness of the records, she naturally puts narratives in the foreground. The narratives become the main issue,

[39] Interview no. 9.
[40] Interview no. 6.
[41] Interview no. 6.

not just a byproduct of the records. This view also acknowledges the narratives as an entity in themselves. Life stories are not just constructed through the use of information in the records; the records *are* the life stories.

Trouillot's ideas about historical narratives is, I think, useful here. On a societal level, there are hundreds of different narratives around the same event that can all give their own accounts of what happened. Often, the different stories are contradictory and cannot be merged together to form a common narrative that everyone can agree upon. Trouillot argues that this does not mean that the different narratives are equally true, however. Some events did take place, and some did not (Trouillot and Carby 2015, 13).

Trouillot writes that when historical facts are retrieved, sooner or later there is inevitably an urge to test these facts for credibility:

> At some stage, for reasons that are themselves historical, most often spurred by controversy, collectivities experience the need to impose a test of credibility on certain events and narratives because it matters *to them* whether these events are true or false, whether these stories are fact or fiction. (ibid., 11; italics in original)

It goes without saying that it matters to the archive user whether the information in her records is fact or fiction. However, the truth is not so essential to Gunilla. It is not her job to arbitrate the truthfulness of the records, only to assess them for detriment. Nevertheless, she could not refrain from applying value judgments on the content of the records and assess not only the potential detriment but also their truthfulness.

The ICA's code of ethics states that archivists should protect the integrity of archival material "and thus guarantee that it continues to be reliable evidence of the past" ("Code of Ethics" 1996, §1). The code further states that "the objectivity and impartiality of archivists is the measure of their professionalism. They should resist pressure from any source to manipulate evidence so as to conceal or distort facts" (ibid., §2). These statements reflect a stern belief in the credibility of the records and that the facts stated in them are, indeed, facts.

When records contain facts that are questionable, or even obviously untrue, the archivists' task of protecting the integrity of records becomes difficult. Should they focus on producing a "truthful" narrative of what actually happened or simply derive it from the—perhaps already manipulated—records?

To get what you ask for, or what you need?

Appraisal of value is integral to archivists' work. As Cook points out in his foreword to Ridener, archivists continually assign and re-assign value. It is deeply rooted within the archivist profession to focus on what use records

could have. But in the particular task that this dissertation examines—assessment for detriment—the archivists are supposed to disregard that use or value. When they assess the requested records, they are not supposed to focus on the value the information in those records might have for the archive user. Instead, the archivists should be on the lookout for potential damage, or detriment, that this information risks causing for the record subjects or third parties concerned by the records. Apart from the fact that it is often extremely difficult to foresee and judge detriment for other people, this change in perspective makes the archivists' task even more difficult.

In Freud's writing, Derrida (Derrida and Prenowitz 1996) sees the "archive fever," described by Steedman as "the desire to recover moments of inception, to find and possess all sorts of beginnings" (2001, 5). These beginnings are what many of the archive users want (the archivists to give them) from their files—the answer to who they are and where they come from. This expectation is problematic because they are, to some extent, looking in the wrong place. The truth in the archive is only *a* truth, and this "truth" is further distorted and redacted before it reaches the users.

The truths are redacted for different reasons. Most often to protect record subjects from detriment. But sometimes archivists also feel inclined to redact information for the protection of the users. A few of the archivists I spoke to claimed that they sometimes leave out (truthful) information because they deem that these truths would cause unnecessary pain for the archive users, not because they would be detrimental for any third party. Most of the archivists were aware that, as Sven pointed out in his discussion with Eva, this line of reasoning does not accord with the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act. Still, they sometimes felt an urge to protect the users.

During my first meeting with Sandra, she explained it like this: "Sometimes I almost think that I don't want to … you know, this is so horrific, so let's just redact this! But of course you can't think like that. It's their [the archive users'] childhood. They already know it was awful, you know. But still."[42]

Märta, on the other hand, did not lose any sleep over hurtful truths delivered to the users. She was the manager of another archives in the same organization that Bosse and Sandra worked for. In one of our meetings I asked her if she ever felt torn between the users' right to information and the potential damage that information could have on them. "No, I don't think like that," Märta said.

> Because they have asked for this information and you know—now this might sound harsh but if you're in for a penny, you're in for a pound (*den som sig i leken ger får leken tåla*). If you go to the archive and ask for stuff about your childhood … well, then you might find stuff that you didn't know about. They are adults, and they want to know. And then things might be revealed.[43]

[42] Interview no. 2.
[43] Interview no. 8.

Some archivists tried to manage the disclosure of hurtful truths to the users by providing not only the actual records but also interpretations and contextualization of their content. When I asked Dora, a woman with over thirty years' experience working with assessments, how she would handle a file in which a mother made derogatory statements about her child, who was now grown up and requested the case file, Dora answered: "Well, I would feel instinctively that I don't want to disclose. But then it's not me who should …" Dora paused for a second and continued:

> Like, how much can someone bear to know? And if you release it, then someone should tell the user that yeah, your mom said this, but she was in this or that state at the time, and she wasn't herself and … Someone who can explain the context, like how can someone *say* something like that about their child?

Dora spoke with emphasis and looked at me, as if she expected me to provide an answer. "Or? I don't know," she sighed. "But I still think the child would be entitled to know. Because the mother saying these things might have been a reason the child was taken into care. But I sure wouldn't like to hear that from *my* mom!"[44]

Dora was not the only one who wanted the records to be interpreted and curated upon disclosure. This was a recurrent topic that some of the archivists brought up. A few of them also warned the archive users before releasing the records, either by contacting them via email or telephone or by putting the most disturbing records in a separate envelope with a note that the content might be upsetting, thus giving the user the choice not to open it.

When one provides "the truth" to someone, it is done because one believes that the person either needs truth, wants truth, or is entitled to truth. "The truth," then, is always distributed in the form of information. The need for information is discussed by librarians Nicholas Belkin and Alina Vickery (1985), who ask if we really can talk about information needs in itself. Is it not actually information that fulfils other needs? Records (which contain information) cannot themselves fulfil needs, but they *do things* that might lead to the fulfillment of needs.

Another question that arises is whether the concept of need should be seen as a void, a gap between a current state and a desired state, or as something in itself, a thing. This question relates to how one views information, as a thing or a relation, and it arises when one uses need as a verb. Is a need then truly a need, or rather a suggestion for a solution? Furthermore, to find a solution, we must also agree on what the problem is and who to involve in the solution—who to ask what they want.

Needs must be identified by someone (Dorner, Gorman, and Calvert 2017, 6). For example, to label a condition such as poverty as a need (for social

[44] Interview no. 17.

action), one must first agree on that this condition is not wanted or acceptable. Dorner et al. call these agreements "value judgements," stating that "an information need is a value judgement that a particular client group, service provider or facility has an information-related problem requiring a solution in order to fulfil a necessary, useful and defensible purpose" (ibid., 8). It is therefore possible to view needs as social constructs that can be expressed at different levels. A person living in poverty, for instance, would probably identify his or her own need as a need for money. This core need can then be abstracted into a general need for social action (radical redistribution of means, welfare politics, or charity, depending on ideological inclination).

In addition, there is a difference between need and want. Dorner et al. argue that to give someone what they want should be characterized as a demand-driven service, while to give someone what they need should be considered a value-driven service (ibid., 7). Some of the archivists in my study focus on what the users "need" to know in order to make peace with their history or get answers to their questions (these two are not always compatible). In this regard, their practices can be seen as value-driven. Other archivists focus on what the users say that they want, making their practices more demand-driven.

Narratives and entropic archives

Archives have traditionally served people who write history, offering material for the construction of narratives to reveal and explain the past. There are, however, other ways to view the archive. As the production and processing of information increasingly becomes digital, the "record" in its traditional sense is being replaced by a number of data sets in various databases, compiled and presented together to provide information requested at any given moment. This complicates the view of the archive as a place where narratives simply lie around, waiting to be discovered by the historian. An unstructured mass of information, or data, can be constructed into any number of different narratives, and the historian will have to look elsewhere for ready-made stories. Media scholar Wolfgang Ernst (2015) and archivist Rick Prelinger (2019) have elaborated on this topic, both advocating a move away from the "overnarrativization" (Prelinger 2019, 28), which they see as an obstacle to archives adapting to societal changes and maintaining (or perhaps restoring) their relevance. Ernst says that what we ought to strive for is an *entropic archive*, "to tolerate a high degree of disorder in the service of maximal potential information" (Ernst 2015, 89).

However, archivists cannot totally abandon narratives, adopt the views of Prelinger and Ernst, and treat the records as independent information detached from meaning outside of itself. The narratives Prelinger and Ernst move away from are already in the records—psychiatric journals and social case files are narratives simply by virtue of their format. As literary scholar Petter Aasledal

writes, “All medical records are essentially narrative in structure; that is, it is impossible to imagine a record that did not describe events through time” (Aaslestad 2009, 8). The micro-narratives in the patient and client files are, of course, only constructions—constructions of small snippets of time in peoples’ lives, seen through the professional lenses of doctors, psychologists, nurses, and social workers. Nevertheless, they are narratives.

Conclusion

When assessing information for detriment, archivists have to negotiate between different narratives produced in the process. Every case has the potential to present highly intricate and delicate issues that inhabit a gray area between the legislation and the individual. The task of the archivists is to make decisions regarding these issues and to navigate within this gray area. To do so, they can choose to adopt either a legalistic ethics or an ethics of care. As shown earlier in this chapter, these two ethics are often contradictory. Since they are both applicable to and dependent on the problems the archivists face, these contradictions can make it impossible for the archivists to make a decision without either breaking the law or violating their own sense of human compassion. Gilligan wrote that female moral (that is, the ethics of care) is “contextual and narrative rather than formal and abstract” (Gilligan 1982, 19). The legalistic ethic, on the other hand, lies closer to the entropic view of recorded information.

The tension between focusing on the wellbeing of the archive users or on their legal rights is present in the empirical material at large and manifests itself in the two contradicting ethics applied by the archivists. In the ethics of care, archivists perceive the difficulties, even impossibilities, of assessing what kind of detriment other people may suffer, but they still try to carry out this task. In this ethic, the archivists need narratives, the fuller the better, to be able to perform the assessments. To judge if a certain piece of information is detrimental, they need context. They make great efforts to research the background of the affected people, and they often interview the archive users to get a sense of who they are, what they already know, and what relationships they have with the other people mentioned in the files. When operating from a legalistic ethic, archivists talk little about the feelings of the archive users but instead a great deal about their rights.

The archivists’ approaches to the narratives can be more or less open. Some archivists are reluctant to indulge in the narratives as “stories” and prefer to view the case files as pure information, while others acknowledge the inherent narrative structure of the files. In both approaches, however, nonlinear events are put together into causal narratives. The narratives in the records, along with the ones told by the people who contact the archives, are often fragmented into micro-narratives, snippets of lives and events that for some reason

were documented by officials and now are pieced together by archivists to form a coherent life story.

The demarcation between the life stories of different individuals within the same family is sometimes hard to draw out. This difficulty points to the question that is often actualized through the material in this dissertation: who does the information in the records actually concern? As Trouillot writes: "Can we confidently exclude from one's history all events not experienced or not yet revealed, including, for instance, an adoption at the time of birth?" (Trouillot and Carby 2015, 15). Adoption is generally deemed to be of great significance to the adopted persons, something that concerns them. But what about other events that happened to someone's parents and things that the parents said or did? Our life stories are dependent not only on what we remember but also on things forgotten, things that happened without our knowledge, and things that happened before we were born. Hence, the line between a record subject and a third party is sometimes fuzzy, and it is an impossible task for the archivists to draw it clearly.

Trouillot acknowledges this problem in the writing of individual versus collective history: "We may want to assume for purposes of description that the life history of an individual starts with birth. But when does the life of a collective start?" (ibid., 16). If we view a family as a collective, the problem is then that the history of the family—which consists of numerous individual narratives lined up and intertwined—is impossible to demarcate from the life-histories of everyone who belongs to that family. Their lives overlap both in temporality and space and are dependent on each other to the extent that one could not exist without the other.

To understand the narratives of the records, the archivists need to relate to both the grammar and propositional content of these records, as well as to their pure materiality. In other words, they need to take into account not only what is recorded in the files but also who the record subjects and archive users are and in what contexts they are located. Archivists who perform assessments of detriment thus inevitably learn more and more about individuals over the course of the case. The more information archivists access about an individual or a family, the more complex the interpersonal relations appear, complicating any decisions about disclosure or redaction. In addition, the personal traits of the people in the records, and the differences between them, are sometimes taken into consideration by the archivists.

Linear narratives give people a sense of order and control over their lives, especially if they have had troublesome experiences. On the other hand, non-linear narration gives room to "multiple truths and perspectives and the realization that certain life experiences resist tidy, ready-at-hand interpretive frameworks" (Ochs and Capps 2002, 45). Nevertheless, sometimes a tidy, ready-at-hand framework is just what people looking for information about their or their family's past want. Acquiring the truth about one's childhood is

often perceived as a main condition for coming to terms with childhood traumas. But sometimes, "Generating a coherent narrative may be more central to healing than reviewing every aspect of a traumatic event in search of what really happened" (ibid., 259). This means that, from the perspective of personal healing, it might be more important for an archive user to acquire a narrative that makes sense to them and that they can accept than to learn the absolute factual truth at all costs, even if that is what they say they want.

The job of the assessing archivist is not to give people peace of mind, however, but to give them the information they are legally entitled to. Exactly how this job is carried out will be the focus of the next chapter.

3. Getting the work done

The archives that I visited during my study are located in varied settings. Some, especially those in large cities, are located inside large and beautiful buildings in the city centers. The majority, however, are situated in the outskirts of cities, where rental costs are lower. Their surrounding neighbors are usually various small industries, shopping malls, or wholesale stores. Those are the kind of areas that are difficult to access without a car and where you do not go unless you have a specific errand. In these large, square buildings, behind walls of corrugated iron or concrete, the archivists do their work.

This work can be categorized, as I will do in this chapter, using Asdal and Reinertsen's concept of *document work*. Asdal and Reinertsen describe document work as something constantly going on in the background of organizations without attracting much attention. It is the kind of work that takes place before and during the work that is usually seen as the real work, or the "core processes," of the organizations. "In a number of offices and institutions around the globe, staff are busy writing, reading, editing, reworking, issuing, stamping, circulating, using, sorting, deleting, shredding, storing and archiving documents" (Asdal and Reinertsen 2022, 58). I suggest that the two main activities performed by the archivists in this study, namely "assessing" and "redacting," can be added to this list.

Asdal and Reinertsen argue that "paperwork"—the documentation and handling of the documents—is an integral part of the work any official does. In many professions, this paperwork is seen as an obstacle and a burden, bureaucracy that comes between the professional and his or her main task of "the real work" (ibid.,63). For archivists, however, the paperwork *is* the real work, and the challenge of this study is to uncover the processes behind the paperwork. What are the real purposes and consequences of the archivists' document work?

This chapter focuses on the work that the archivists perform. It touches on issues such as New Public Management (NPM) and trust-based management to explore how contemporary organizational discourses affect the archivists in their work.

Efficiency

The archives where Julia and Magdalena work handle about 20,000 requests a year. When I met them, they told me how the heavy workload, combined with a reduction in their team from ten to four people, meant that archive users generally had to wait for two months before their request was even opened. Fortunately, they explained, new routines and a more efficient way of working had recently reduced this waiting time to one month. "The team was downsized for a number of reasons," Julia said, and Magdalena filled in: "The people who used to work here had to prioritize other tasks, you know." "Yeah," Julia continued. "Or they moved on and now work in other units. So … it just happened, you know, that we were fewer people." "But I think it works well. It's not like 'boo-hoo, poor us,' but we carry on!" Magdalena said. Julia agreed, "Yeah, definitely. It's like, you know … When you start to talk about it you realize that we were actually a lot more people before. But, on the other hand, I think we are more efficient now, and we work really well together." Magdalena affirmed this view, and Julia continued:

> And in general we have started to … of course you shouldn't push people into burnout, but like, what is efficient work? That discussion is more present here these days because … yeah, we have decreased in numbers, not just in this unit but generally, and people have retired and stuff, so you know we *have to* change the way we work. To cope (*mäkta med*), you know.[45]

"And then we realized that there are areas to cut down on, without affecting …." Magdalena finished Julia's thought: "You know before we had more time to … mess about (*grejsa*). And we just don't have that time anymore." "Yeah," Julia agreed. "We've cut out a lot of the fluff. Like the interviews with the users, for example."

Julia and Magdalena seemed proud to explain how they had learned to manage their work more efficiently to reduce the backlog, even though it meant changing their routines to become more automatic, leaving less room for professional judgment such as interviewing users and contextualizing; what they referred to as "fluff." They rejected the idea that the reduction in their unit had a negative impact on their work, focusing instead on how it had forced them to develop efficiency. Julia and Magdalena never questioned, criticized, or even mentioned the underlying reasons for the downsizing. It seemed alien to them to protest the cuts to management. When SLBs such as teachers, police officers, and health care workers have been able to resist cutbacks, it was because of their visibility to the public and their influence over the public opinion (Lipsky 2010, 7–8).

However, there is a difference between typical SLBs and the archivists in my study: the former is much more visible to the public than the latter. A decrease in the number of police officers patrolling a neighborhood or the

[45] Interview no. 12.

number of teachers in a school will certainly attract more attention and criticism than a decrease in the number of archivists in a particular archival institution working to provide citizens with official records.[46] Even though the archivists in my study do have direct contact with the citizens in the course of their work, the public's overall awareness of their existence is much lower than that of, for example, social workers or nurses.

At the regional archives where Camilla was manager, the archives handled every request across the whole region, including requests to clinics and other units whose records had not yet been sent to the archives. This unique way of organizing made their role different from most of the other archivists I spoke with. "I think that we're the only ones in Sweden who work this way," Camilla said with pride:

> And since we work exclusively with these assessments, we ask critical questions that perhaps others don't. In other places, I think that they just "yeah whatever, no detriment!" and then they disclose, you know. While we think … this is what we *do*. On an *everyday basis*. And that's why the region chose to centralize, to improve the rule of law. Because sometimes we send stuff back to the units for assessment when a user have visited several different clinics, and then when we get the different units' opinions, they have made totally different assessments. Of the same type of information.[47]

Camilla's point was that the archives acted as both consultant and supervisor to the other units in the region and that their specialization paved the way for more consistent, accurate assessments than in other regions. Adding to their uniqueness was the fact that the people working on the assessments in this particular archives were not archivists.

Professional categories in the archives

At the regional archives where Camilla was manager, the staff came from different professional backgrounds and had varying levels of education. Their titles were senior archive administrator and coordinator (*senior arkivadministratör* and *koordinator*). A similar situation was at hand in the archives where Märta was manager. They, too, had other categories apart from the archivists who worked with assessments. "I have this internal working group here at the archives, where all the different professional categories, archivists, archival case managers, and archive assistants are represented," Märta told

[46] There are exceptions, however. In 2021, a whistle blower at the District Court (*Tingsrätt*) in Stockholm revealed to the media that official documents were being stacked in piles on open shelves, classified information was accessible to all staff, and case files had gone missing. "Despite all this, the District Court now wants to decrease the number of staff in the archives," Sweden's largest newspaper, *Dagens Nyheter*, wrote with indignation (Röstlund 2021).
[47] Interview no. 14.

me. “And the reason we have these categories is because it was a little tricky to recruit archivists to work here.”

Märta explained that most archivists in her area were educated in the nearby city where Bosse and Sandra worked but that, upon graduating, very few wanted to move or commute to the small town where this archives was located. “So instead, we hired people who had a university or college degree—or at least a certain number of credits—but not in archival studies. [We hired them] as archival case managers. Skilled case managers.”[48] From what Märta said, it is clear that the people working in the archives, regardless of their title of archivist, archival case manager, or something else, are first and foremost bureaucrats and document workers, not historically oriented cultural heritage workers. This aligns with the general development of the professional role of archivists’ as outlined in the introductory chapter. A decreasing proportion of archivists are employed in the cultural heritage sector, and the profession is increasingly moving toward the records management sector.

In addition to archivists, archive administrators, archive assistants, and archival case managers, there are other, more peripheral professional categories that come into contact with archive users. Jeanette laughed resignedly when I asked her to tell me about how people usually contact the archives to ask for records.

> Well, we have this contact center, in the municipality and … Ideally, the first contact should always be through them. And then it differs, it can be via email, phone … They can come to the reception, physically. And when we aren’t staffed here [in the municipality], we have this call center that sits, I think, somewhere up in the north of Sweden, I don’t know exactly. And they, well, I’ve tried to organize it with these FAQ codes for the contact center and call center because … the people working there they don’t have that much knowledge, obviously, and shouldn’t either, and can’t handle these matters. You know it can be quite sensitive, these questions when they come in.[49]

I asked Jeanette if she meant that the questions asked by the archive users contained such sensitive information that she did not want them documented by the service center. “Exactly,” Jeanette said.

> Exactly. And we don’t want that in the first contact, you know. So … we try to make them direct the users either to the social services or the archive, depending on how old the records are. We try to only get the information from the caller that is absolutely necessary to take their issue further, to the right authority.[50]

Jeanette sighed. “It’s not always easy, because people tend to want to talk a lot and share a little more than they need to.”

[48] Interview no. 8.
[49] Interview no. 1.
[50] Interview no. 1.

The municipality where Jeanette worked sought an efficient "one way in" for people to get in touch with them. Most public authorities describe their reasons for this kind of streamlined process as a way to provide better and more equal service to citizens. By offering a single channel of communication, the municipality aims to make it easier for people to get in touch and ensures that everyone who contacts the service center receives the same information. Instead of being forced to email random officials in different parts of the organization, the citizen, or customer, should only need one phone number or email address from which he or she will be routed to the appropriate unit. The result, however, is often an unhappy citizen who receives incorrect information because the staff working at the front desk or answering calls at the service center are not qualified to answer questions or even to direct the user to someone who can.

Trust

Another effect of the streamlining discussed above is evident between the lines in what Jeanette told me. When people decide to search for information about their past in the archives, that decision is often preceded by thorough consideration, a process that may have taken years.[51] So when archive users finally call the municipality to ask for records, they may feel a need to debrief, to release years of build-up by talking about these processes. First-line service staff, then, try to keep this need at bay for fear of overstepping their boundaries.

The issue at the core of Jeanette's example could be described as one of trust—and mistrust. Jeanette does not trust the staff at the service center to handle sensitive issues that may arise during the first contact with users. Nor does she trust the users to keep their descriptions of their cases brief and free from disturbing details. The users, on the other hand, trust the archives and the municipality with their personal narratives, which they are willing to share on first contact. Trust is a mirror concept of vulnerability. Exposing one's vulnerability to others requires trust that this vulnerability will be acknowledged and met with empathy, or at least grace. When the receiving parties of vulnerability are not able to meet the trust put in them, trust easily turns into mistrust.

Anthropologist David Graeber (2012) discusses the power relations that surround and constitute bureaucracy and how they affect the production of knowledge. Graeber points out that those in power do not have to make an effort to understand their subjects. These subjects, on the other hand, often actively try to figure out how and why the system of power works the way it does. Graeber uses the term "interpretive labor" (Graeber 2012, 117) for this kind of work, which is typically done by subjects of various kinds of oppression. He then applies this relationship to the bureaucratic system. Bureaucrats

[51] The personal experiences of asking for and gaining access to one's own care records have been investigated by, for example, Wilson and Golding (2016).

need not care what a citizen thinks about the form he or she fills out; the important thing is that the form is filled out correctly.

However, there are examples of "soft" bureaucrats who in their profession are expected, and trusted, to act as compassionate humans and at the same time exercise power. This applies to most people within the caring professions as well as all civil servants handling the allocation of different means, such as social workers and officials working at the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (*Försäkringskassan*). It also applies to the archivists in my study. In this context, discretion is an important concept.

Sweden ranks low in international estimates of corruption, and the country's citizens generally have a high level of trust in public authorities.[52] Media scandals in Sweden rarely focus on officials who have abused their professional power for their own benefit. On the contrary, most public outcries are about officials who have *not* used their power, their discretion, but followed regulations in a rigid way, resulting in decisions that collide with the perception of common sense or decency. As Lipsky writes: "In short, to a degree the society seeks not only impartiality from its public agencies but also compassion and flexibility in dealing with them (Lipsky 2010, 15). In other words, people want to be able to trust their officials' judgment, not only their ability to read and follow guidelines.

Trust is therefore not only a mirror of vulnerability but also closely related to professional judgment. Professional judgment, or professional discretion, can be seen as the active counterpart of trust. Trust and vulnerability go hand in hand, as do professional judgment and vulnerability.

In their work, archivists sometimes meet and interact with people who live on the margins of society and who may suffer from mental illness or social problems. Apart from the fact that archivists are in a concrete position of power over the archive users, since they decide what information the users should be granted access to, the archivists I spoke with are all well-educated and mostly middle class. Thus, the vulnerability of archive users gives them no choice but to trust archivists, and the vulnerability archivists encounter and perceive compels them to exercise professional judgment.

[52] According to the 2024 issue of "Förtroendebarometern" (*Trust barometer*) (Ekengren Oscarsson and Söderpalm 2024), an annual report published by the association *Medieakademin*, the percentage of Swedes who have a very great deal, a great deal, or a fair amount of trust in public institutions, authorities, and large companies has fallen slightly since the previous year. The highest levels of trust are reported for, among others, the police, health institutions, the courts, the Tax Agency, and "the state." It is worth noting that social services are at the bottom of this trust index, together with actors such as Google and "the banks."

Routines

The archives I visited had varying degrees of standardization when it came to the assessment of records. Some, like the regional archives where Camilla was manager, had fixed routines for almost every type of request. Others, mainly small municipal archives with few cases to process, had to start from scratch for each new request. The larger archives with many employees had an incentive to keep their routines highly regulated; when several people are working on similar cases, the rule of law is easily called into question if it turns out that different officials within the same organization make different assessments in similar cases. A few archives held regular workshops in which archivists read the same case files and made "mock assessments" of them. They then compared and discussed their redactions in order to reach consensus. Others had monthly meetings with colleagues to discuss particularly tricky cases. Some workplaces did not have formal meetings to discuss assessments, but in these cases, the archivists said they talked to each other on a daily basis and asked each other for advice informally.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the archives where Märta was manager was a kind of satellite archives to the one in the big city where Bosse and Sandra worked. At our first meeting, Märta talked about how she tried to align the routines of "her" archives with those in the big city:

> We sometimes discuss those cases where there has been a discrepancy between how we've reasoned here and how they reason [in the big city]. Because it has developed a bit differently. When I started here, I discovered that there were different views and different … routines about what to disclose. Because there have been managers here before me and maybe they viewed things differently. And I'm trying … I don't want to criticize the previous management, but I try to go back to what the legislation *actually* states. And I talk a lot with Bosse in [the big city] to make sure that we're on the same page.[53]

I asked Märta whether aligning routines consisted mostly of them changing their routines to match those of the mother institution, or if the discussions worked both ways.

> Yeah, I think it is a joint effort, we arrive at conclusions together. But we don't have any of these very structured guidelines and joint templates, we're not there yet. It's more you know … based on experience (*beprövad erfarenhet*) … actually Bosse was a person that I used to call years ago when I worked at a municipal archives and was rather new to the game and found something difficult. He could always give you an answer.[54]

[53] Interview no. 8.
[54] Interview no. 8.

Märta's goal of creating guidelines and routines for every type of case is in line with modern public administration. To increase transparency and efficiency, organizations want detailed routines to make the quality of work less dependent on individual officials. This effort also tends to limit the discretion granted to these officials. This is not always seen as a negative thing, however. Archivists working in larger institutions, surrounded by many colleagues with whom to discuss difficult issues, sometimes pitied their less fortunate colleagues in small municipalities who were left to their own devices or to the (sometimes not very supportive) assistance of municipal jurists. Many archivists that I met spoke of the need for guidance. Although they sometimes felt constrained by legislation in their assessments, as described in the previous chapter, they also felt confused and abandoned. This was the case for Jeanette, for example, when she told me about the implementation of GDPR in the archives where she worked.

The European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) took effect in 2018. In Sweden, the regulation was followed (and preceded) by intense discussions on what its implementation would entail for recordkeeping practices in official agencies and archives. However, GDPR is trumped up by the Freedom of the Press Act, which is part of the Swedish constitution. The Freedom of the Press Act states that official records, i.e., all records retained in a public archive, should be accessible to the public. This means that GDPR has had very little impact on archival praxis. The public's right to information weighs more heavily than does individuals' right to control over information about themselves. For example, "the right to be forgotten" does not apply to archival records; one cannot demand to have all official records on oneself deleted from a public archive. Nevertheless, Jeanette found GDPR to be a major obstacle in her work routine when she disclosed social care records at a municipal archives.

"This is *super* tricky (*knepigt*)," Jeanette said:

> You have the right to read your own file, of course. But *now*, since we have to respect GDPR it can … Well, we've said that they can come here and read their files, but if they want to have it sent to them, we have to make redactions of all the people in there and that's just *weird* you know? Before, we just disclosed these files as they were, basically. They have the right to read what the authorities wrote about them. But now we have to adjust to GDPR, and it somehow becomes … *really* difficult. And we don't have any guidelines to follow, and since we cannot take chances, we do it like this.[55]

Jeanette continued to tell me about a case just after GDPR took effect, in which a man had asked for his own social service file from his childhood. "And the directions were so fuzzy, we were just stumbling around in the dark so we … we redacted. Better safe than sorry, you know. But still, he could obviously tell that it was his parents' names we had blacked out."

[55] Interview no. 1.

A little astonished, I asked Jeanette if they redacted only the names of the other people in the case file but left the concrete information about them unredacted. Jeanette laughed and shook her head as if to show that she understood my skepticism. "Yes ma'am! We redacted the names because … you know we didn't *know*, we didn't get *any* directions."[56] Jeanette's bewilderment and want for clear directions echoes the findings of Friberg von Sydow in his study of internal discussions on GDPR in a Facebook group for archivists, which he describes as filled with "many questions and a lot of confusion" (Friberg von Sydow 2021, 124).

In their writings on SLBs as state agents or citizen agents, Maynard-Moody and Musheno posit that SLBs who are new to their profession tend to follow regulations meticulously and therefore are state agents. As SLBs gain more experience however, they learn to subvert the system and serve both the client and the system, hence becoming citizen agents (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000, 349). However, in my study, strict adherence to the law and an application of a legalistic ethic was as common among highly experienced archivists as it was among more junior archivists.

Märta had worked as an archivist for many years but still had great respect for rules. She justified the need for joint guidelines with an example of what she perceived as a lack of respect for the law:

> I've come across this a few times, that if a patient is in a mental hospital for many years, and not much happens, then not much is recorded in the file. It's the same type of notes year after year. And then if the patient died a few years into the 1950s, they [other archivists] just release the whole file. Because the secrecy is still there on most of the records, but they reasoned that since all the notes were the same it didn't matter. But I think it matters because if the line is drawn at seventy years, then it *is* seventy years. Period.[57]

What Märta is referring to here is the time limit on the confidentiality of patient files, which stipulated that all notes should be classified for seventy years. However, as she described, sometimes the practice is to release the whole file when the oldest note in it reaches the time limit. Märta's example involved a file in which the prematurely released notes contained no information than that already declassified; even so, she did not want the decision to disclose the notes to be based on an individual archivist's discretion. In Märta's view, it would be better if archivists just followed rules meticulously and refrained from contextualizing.

Sven expressed a similar opinion during our interview. "We're in a profession whose job it is to guard these issues," he said. "And if we start to freestyle

[56] Interview no. 1.
[57] Interview no. 8.

(*slira*) too much in our assessments and disclose stuff that the legislator has classified, then … well, that's a dangerous path, if you ask me."[58]

According to the SLBs in Maynard-Moody's and Musheno's study, legislation and rules are "part of the setting" of their work (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000, 351). Regulations constrain their judgments, but the judgments are not in themselves legalistic but rather moral and normative. First, Maynard-Moody and Musheno argue, the SLB decide if a client is "worthy" of help. Then, they use the existing regulations to either help or punish the client, according to their own ethical judgment (ibid., 351). This is contradicted by the statements of Märta and Sven, who put great emphasis on the fact that as archivists they should protect the existing regulations instead of using them for the benefit (or hindrance) of the archive user as they see fit.

Other archivists, however, played with, bent, or even changed the rules in order to make decisions they felt were fair.

Bending the rules, or changing them?

One of the more mundane tasks that archivists face at the workplace is photocopying. When a user requests access to records containing sensitive personal information, the released records cannot be sent out electronically due to their sensitive content. This means that the archivist has to make physical copies of the records and send them to the requesting person by mail. Most archives in Sweden charge the users for this service; usually the archives follow a general fee (Avgiftsförordningen SFS 1992:191), which states that the first nine pages are free, and the following pages cost two Swedish crowns (SEK) each.[59] This practice of charging archive users is sometimes contested, and most archivists find the administrative task of sending out invoices awkward and troublesome. However, most archive users are not familiar with the general fee, which gives the archivists ways to work around this obstacle. Gunilla told me that she never specifies to the users exactly how many pages they are entitled to free of charge, because that could lead to a number of different requests from the same user, each for exactly nine pages.

> So that's why I'm not super clear about the rules. I just say that "if there's only a few (*några enstaka*) copies then it's for free. And then it's the regular fee," that's what I say. And then if they ask for eleven pages, then so be it, just send it to them! It's more work administering the payment, you know.[60]

While Gunilla found ways around the problem of charging users without creating extra work for herself, Göran had made the problem go away. He told

[58] Interview no. 15.
[59] About 0.18 USD.
[60] Interview no. 6.

me that a few years ago, he petitioned the municipality to remove the fee for copies of official records. "I said to them: I think we should get rid of this fee for collecting one's tragedies. Because that's what it's about, really," Göran told me. "Let's get rid of the cost. You have the right to get records once a year, and if it's more often, then you have to pay. And I can see in our statistics that no one has taken advantage of this so far."[61]

Tragedies documented in the records not only made Göran question the ethics of charging users to receive them. The tragic content of case files also sometimes affected the archivists both professionally and personally.

"Are you crying?"

Some of the archivists I spoke to mentioned that the transition from university to working life had come as a shock to them. They were not prepared for the kind of information they would encounter in social and psychiatric case files, nor did they feel prepared to interact with archive users. During their professional training, the main focus had been on the legislation regarding official documents. As Helena put it, "The only information we get is that we're supposed to treat everything as an official document, that we hand stuff out to researchers and that there's no difference [between assessments of different types of documents]. Well, everything's simple in theory!" Helena leaned back in her chair, folded her arms, peered at me, and asked rhetorically: "But do we really want to be that neutral? Just be state power (*statsmakt*)? I'm not so sure about that."[62]

When Helena questioned how much of a state agent she was supposed to be, she balanced her statement by mentioning the role of "anchor" that legislation could play, ensuring that she (and her coworkers) remained professional. After a second of hesitation, she stated that she herself had always managed the balance between humanity and professionalism, but that it was not always easy. "You know the truth, Ida, of how I really feel behind this façade … 'the uncut version,'" Helena snickered.

> So yeah, we try to be professional, and we have the law and the jurists on our side and everything, but still, you are a human being. And I think that's something to be thankful for. The day you no longer get emotionally affected by these things, then it's time to think about what kind of person you've become.[63]

SLBs, including the "street-level archivists" in this study, make decisions that have a concrete impact on the lives of their clients. This may be the case for most or all civil servants; however, a defining feature of SLBs is that they can

[61] Interview no. 5.
[62] Interview no. 3.
[63] Interview no. 3.

observe the effects of their decisions (Lipsky 2010, 9). A police officer, for example, is directly confronted with the reactions of a person he or she arrests. But archivists are not always confronted with the consequences of their decisions, or with the archive users' opinions on the content of the disclosed files. In fact, most of the time, the archivists send off a pack of records to a person with whom they have only had brief email contact, and that is the end of the matter, soon forgotten.

Sometimes, however, they do get to see how an archive user responds. This may happen if users are physically present in the archives reading the files stored there, or because they contact the archive after they have read the files. Even if most archive users do not contact archivists after disclosure, the knowledge that they could do so, and the intimacy established through the reading of the users' lives in the assessed records, makes the archivists perceive themselves as closer to the archive users than many other bureaucrats to the citizens they serve.

Almost all the archivists I talked to said that it sometimes was—or had been before they got used to it—emotionally burdensome to deal with the tragic events and life-stories depicted in the records. When I asked them what the most difficult part of the work was, some also mentioned the fact that archive users could sometimes be angry, and, in a few cases, even aggressive.

"Yeah, sometimes people are really upset," Bosse said when this topic was brought up. "But you just ask them to calm down. And then there are people who have these querulous tendencies (*rättshaveristiska tendenser*)," Bosse continued, rolling his eyes. "But you just treat them as any other person and help them the best you can. You just have to take it easy."[64]

Bosse was a large man in his late fifties. He sported a full beard, and the little hair he had left on his head was trimmed down to a few millimeters. When we met, he was wearing jeans and a flannel shirt with rolled up sleeves. I could not help thinking that most people probably *would* calm down if he asked them to, and that this might be the reason he did not find it difficult to deal with aggressive users.

Gunilla did not have the same physical authority as Bosse. Still, she also spoke casually about the potentially threatening situations she had experienced with angry archive users. She mentioned in passing that an archive user once threatened to kill her. Before I had the chance to ask her to elaborate on that episode she continued and told me that users often come directly from the social services office, where they ask for records and get redirected to the archives. When they arrive at the archives, they are already upset because they did not get the help they wanted and expected at the social services.

"There have been several cases where people have gone berserk (*gått bärsärkargång*) at the social services, and then they come to me asking for records," Gunilla said. "But I don't know, you have, like, an intuition. You

[64] Interview no. 4.

can sense that there's something … not quite right. So I just tell them to sit down, and then I throw them a newspaper and tell them to read it while I go looking for their file."

While she talked, Gunilla's gestures indicated that she spoke firmly to the archive users and gave orders rather than suggestions—something I could easily envision after having spent the morning with her. Gunilla continued:

> So the key is to treat these people … in a manner not totally formal, if you know what I mean. Sure, you need to stay within the boundaries of the law and all, but you know … be a little easy-going (*lättsam*). So they become a little more friendly (*välvilligt inställda*). Because at the end of the day, we're a public authority that can deny them access to records so … so that can make the whole experience maybe less positive for them.[65]

Göran's experiences were similar to Gunilla's, and he also dealt with those cases in a similar way. Göran told me he had only once encountered a user during his many years at the archives whom he had not been able to handle without help from the security staff. Göran, like Gunilla, also mentioned that some users had a negative attitude toward authorities in general. "There are always people who don't like public authorities, and then it doesn't matter what you do. They will never be content, you know. But then it's not really *us* they are angry at, it's society in general."[66]

At one point during our meeting, I asked Göran and his colleague Johanna if they ever found the work emotionally burdensome, given the often depressing content of the files they were assessing. "We had this archivist working here a couple of years ago who … well, who was really emotional," Göran said. "And … the first time it happened I was like, 'Are you *crying*? Has anything *happened*?' But it was just a file that they found, so … yeah, it was just too much. So I just said, 'Take a break, go and do something else for a while, I'll take this one!'"[67]

The fact that this particular colleague did no longer work at the archives is telling. The emotional strain of handling social service and psychiatric records is self-regulating to some extent; archivists who are not tough enough eventually move on to other types of archives. But while not everyone are "tough enough" when they arrive, most grow tougher in the process.

[65] Interview no. 6.
[66] Interview no. 5.
[67] Interview no. 5.

"You get used to it"

"Of course you are ill at ease (*illa berörd*) sometimes," Göran said when I asked him if he ever found it difficult to handle the doleful life stories depicted in the social service records he handled. He continued:

> But I never take the workload home with me. Sure, sometimes when it's [the content of the records] totally miserable, you get affected, but when it's done, it's done. It might have to do with me having worked for so long with it. When I started in '89, maybe I was more affected, I don't remember. I just try to get the work done, and when it's done well, then I take the next one.
>
> And of course, these are not pleasant matters to deal with. There is always a certain degree of … misery, you know, but at least I try to *help* these people. That's kind of comforting. And this might sound really cold-hearted (*känslokallt*), but … I've been doing this for so long that I just put each case behind me. And then I take the next one.[68]

The fact that Göran had decades of experience working with "heavy" case files is significant. The most frequent response from the archivists when I asked how they handled the emotional strain of being exposed to the "misery" in the records was that it was hard in the beginning but that eventually, they got used to it. Another recurrent comment from the archivists I talked to was that they became "numb" to the human suffering described in the records and started weighing different tragedies against each other, measuring some as less severe than others, in a way that would have been alien to them before they started their careers.

Åsa told Hanna and me about a case in which a woman had requested her mother's medical records. The mother had died of cancer when the woman was little and after reading the records, including the autopsy report, she called Åsa and wanted to debrief. "And she even wanted to read parts of the records out loud over the phone," Åsa said, inhaling deeply. "And I was like, ok … let's do this! And we talked for almost two hours. She read some stuff, and then she cried a little, and then she read some more." "But the content of those records weren't even that tough (*tufft*)!" Hanna blurted out, astonished. "I know!" Åsa agreed. Hanna looked at me and said, apologetically, "You see, we're a little damaged here!"[69]

When Åsa and Hanna referred to the cancer records as "not that tough," it was an expression of a common opinion among the archivists I interviewed: namely, that psychiatric and social records are "worse," as in more burdensome for them to handle, than somatic records. In addition, records that concern children, especially the mistreatment or abuse of children, were generally considered the most difficult to deal with. Still, even such horrible case files

[68] Interview no. 5.
[69] Interview no. 13.

eventually become part of everyday working life. Åsa explained: "The worst thing is when it is about child abuse … I mean, those are *tough.* They are super hard to read, but I feel that now, when I've done it for so long, I've reached a stage where … when I go home, I go *home*. I leave it at the office."[70]

The ethics of care not only puts focus on the emotions of the archive users, but it also acknowledges the emotions of the archivists working with them. Archival scholars Cheryl Regehr, Wendy Duff, Henria Aton, and Christa Sato (Regehr et al. 2022) write about how dealing with what they refer to as "traumatic collections" affects archivists on a personal level. The archivists interviewed in their study describe emotional reactions to disturbing file content similar to those of the archivists I met. They felt powerless, not knowing how to help the users. Records documenting abuse of children were often described as particularly difficult to read; the archivists felt anger toward the people perpetrating the documented abuse, and it was difficult for them to forget such images and leave them behind after work. All of this led to frustration about not being prepared for these things in their professional training. Regehr et al. emphasize the affective responsibility of archivists toward users, stating that this responsibility includes not only helping the users acquire the information they need to move on in life but also protecting them.

At the same time they described the work as burdensome, almost all of the archivists I talked to highlighted that it was also extremely rewarding. The most gratifying part, they agreed, was helping people, whenever possible. The archivists also described the work as intellectually stimulating. Not only did they frequently discuss legal and ethical matters, but they also gained broad knowledge about Swedish social history. "These issues are really interesting, I think," Märta told me. "And it's really rewarding to be a part of this and see all of it, to gain insight into how people have lived."[71]

To deal with the disturbing material they read on a daily basis and to accept that the decisions they had to make assessing information were often not totally satisfying, many archivists used humor to distance themselves from the absurdity of their work. In one of our meetings, Helena told me about a recent case in which records revealed that the archive user's father had sadistic inclinations and had regularly tortured small animals. "So then we were like: Are we gonna tell her that her dad ran birds through the wringer (*mangel*)?" Helena seemed both amused and satisfied to see the impact of her words reflected in my shocked face. She continued: "Yeah, that's the kind of stuff we get here! It sounds totally insane every time I say it." She chuckled. "You know, this is the trickiest part of my job. I don't know, does it bring anything to the matter (*tillför det något i sakfrågan*)? It's a public document. What do we do?"[72]

[70] Interview no. 13.
[71] Interview no. 8.
[72] Interview no. 3.

This battlefield story that Helena, not without pride, told me had its equivalents in almost every archives that I visited. As in all workplaces, the sharing of difficult professional experiences seemed to act as a social glue that bound archivists more closely together. This sense of collegiality occasionally extended beyond the particular archives in which they worked, encompassing all archivists who shared similar experiences.

Collegiality

During interviews with two or more archivists at the same time, it was apparent that there was a strong sense of community in the workplace. Almost everyone I talked to appeared to enjoy the company of their colleagues, and my impression was that they had a lot of fun together. There seemed to be a strong sense of collegiality between the archivists, and many of them discussed their professional role as a collective group that included archivists in general, not only their day-to-day colleagues at their particular archives.

This observation is supported by the writings of Maynard-Moody and Musheno, who state that SLBs tend to have strong relational ties with other SLBs. They learn from each other and turn primarily to each other for support and advice (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000, 352). Maynard-Moody and Musheno also write that while SLBs' internal relationships are mutually supportive, the relations with clients are often marked by tension and sometimes conflict (ibid., 352). During my interviews for the present study, however, underlying conflicts also surfaced in the relations between different archivists.

Some of the archivists occasionally criticized the actions of professional colleagues at other institutions. This sometimes led to conflicts of loyalty on the part of the archivists, who did not want to criticize other archivists too harshly but still felt the need to protect the interests of the archive users. One such example was Helena, who told me that she felt compelled to encourage a user to appeal against a decision from the neighboring regional archives that had denied this user access to her file. Helena was acquainted with the head archivist of this particular archives and did not want to step on anyone's toes, but at the same time, she was convinced that the other archives had made an incorrect decision.

"So what should we do in these cases?" Helena asked me. "Should we go against our friends, our professional colleagues, and encourage the users to appeal against them?" I did not know what to say, and mumbled something about the obligation of service (*serviceskyldigheten*), which is stated in the Administrative Act and says that if a civil servant, or authority, cannot help a citizen in a particular matter, they are obliged to refer that citizen to another authority that can.

"Yeah, and how far does that obligation go? Where does it end?"[73] Helena asked.

This anecdote illustrates that different cultures can develop in different workplaces. Two archives can apply different approaches and arrive at diametrically opposed decisions about how much information a user is entitled to. The professional concord and workplace cultures that arise in the archives could also sometimes result in a dehumanizing tendency to view archive users as faceless and anonymous.

When the archivists talked about individual users, they were always respectful and empathetic. However, when they talked about users *in general*, especially among themselves and not directly to me, they sometimes expressed slightly demeaning opinions about them and frustration with those they described as difficult.

Bauman writes about how the separation between perpetrators and victims leads to an emotional detachment that enables the perpetrators to carry out actions toward the victims that would otherwise be morally unthinkable (Bauman 2007, 156). The archivists in this study are not perpetrators, and the users are not victims, but the same social dynamics and power relations are at play. The large number of users with whom the archivists come into contact, the distance between archivists and users, and the collegiality and unity at the archives make it difficult for the archivists to meet each user as a human being.

Trying to align the wants and needs of the archivists' employers—the municipalities and regions—with their own is often challenging for the archivists. How can they come to terms with the fact that what they believe to be right, or just practically doable, is sometimes considered malpractice? Bauman explains the ability of bureaucrats to detach themselves from their decisions and to place responsibility for those decisions elsewhere by using the concept of agentic state, as explained by Milgram. The actor (in this case the archivist) performs actions on behalf of a higher authority (the law, when the archivists apply a legalistic ethic), meaning that there is always someone else to pass the final responsibility on to. "[T]he organization as a whole is an instrument to obliterate responsibility," Bauman writes (ibid., 163).

According to Bauman (and Arendt), people do not need to "learn" to be moral beings. Bauman argues that morality, the ability to tell right from wrong, is grounded in human relations and that an organized society is not a prerequisite for morality. On the contrary, in fact—sometimes it is a hindrance.

"*Morality is not a product of society. Morality is something society manipulates*—exploits, re-directs, jams" (ibid., 183; italics in original). Here, Bauman is influenced by Levinas, for whom ethics precedes ontology, meaning that our concern for the other must always come first. For Levinas, problems arise when there are many others to whom we owe our concern. Hence, society's demand of us to take into consideration the benefit of all, not just the other in front of us, obscures our vision and brings a sort of ethical fatigue. It

[73] Interview no. 19.

is impossible for us to see everyone at the same time. This can easily lead us to not see others at all, except those closest to us.

The ethical burden on the archivists in this study is heavy. They are expected to take into consideration the needs and rights of the archive users, the record subjects, and sometimes also the third parties not mentioned in the records. In addition, they also feel compelled to show consideration to their colleagues in other archives and the organization in which they work.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the document work that archivists in municipal and regional archives perform. As Asdal and Reinertsen write: "From the outside this 'document work' appears faceless and invisible. Individual bureaucrats do not have their name on a public budget document. [...] It is the institution as such that is the document's signatory and sender, not individuals" (Asdal and Reinertsen 2022, 61). Officially, "the archives," "the municipality," or "the region" are the agencies that decide on the release or redaction of information in archival records. Nevertheless, the actual assessments and decisions are made by individual, street-level archivists who use their legal knowledge and their personal and professional judgment to arrive at these decisions.

The public and private spheres are joined not only in the case files and records on care recipients and patients but also in the work of the officials who produce and handle these records. Doctors, social workers, and archivists are supposed to engage with the cases they handle while also treating them professionally and carrying out bureaucratic procedures uncontaminated by emotion. In line both with bureaucratic procedures and with a legalistic ethic, the archivists cannot view every case as unique and individual. They must categorize the cases and alienate themselves from them. As sociologist Nikolas Rose explains, "Work is made up, principally, of the elements of obedience, self-denial, and deferred gratification—it entails an essential subordination of subjectivity" (Rose 2005, 56).

This subordination can be seen in my conversation with Julia and Magdalena, described at the beginning of this chapter. They did not question the cuts in staffing that led to an increase in their workload—or the underlying ideological reasons for these cuts. Instead, they adjusted their work routines and embraced a discourse of efficiency and streamlining that enabled them to meet the demands put on them by their employer. Doing so, Julia and Magdalena acted as good bureaucrats. As Bauman (and Weber) describe, they did not question the larger picture in which their work was done. They simply did their job, taking pride in doing it well with the resources they were given. At the same time, however, as individuals with emotions and opinions, they sometimes got annoyed with a needy user. And occasionally they struggled to stop

thinking about the abused children in the records they handled, and dreamt happier adult lives for them than those documented in the files.

In a remark on a case in which a social worker had exposed information about a client to a third party, the Swedish Parliamentary Ombudsmen (JO) stated that civil servants assessing detriment should "put themselves in the position of the individual in question and try to understand how they would experience the dissemination of their information to other people" (JO 1982/83, 227; my translation). This explicit expectation to perform the kind of interpretive labor that Graeber discusses means that archivists constantly mediate not only between the state or the municipality, the law, and the citizens, but also between the citizens asking for information and other members of their family. Furthermore, the assessing archivists are expected to use empathy and compassion to exercise their duty as state officials and make judgments based both on legislation and feeling. These perspectives are based on two different ethics, functioning in separate spheres. These two ethics—the rights-based legalistic ethic and the care ethic—are nevertheless expected to function side by side.

To be efficient, public administration requires officials to practice empathy and genuine care for subjects under their purview. And citizens expect officials to use their discretion to mitigate the harshness of the law and make decisions that do not violate human decency—to put a human face on the state's power. This brings to mind Foucault's concept of governmentality discussed in the introductory chapter. According to Foucault, state power is no longer seen as threats of violence or other reprisals. Instead, it is internalized into both state officials and state subjects, resulting in an expectation on the officials—the archivists in this study—to practice discretion and invest their personal selves in their professional practice. Without this investment, public administration would crack and fall.

4. “The words and the law”

“Do you ever ask the region’s jurists for advice?” I asked Hanna and Åsa during one of our meetings. “We can ask them, yeah,” Åsa replied. “We can,” Hanna affirmed, and the two of them exchanged a mischievous look. “But do you?” I persisted. There was a slight pause before Åsa said, “No. Not often. Really seldom, actually.” “Most of the time their answers are not very clear, you know,”[74] Hanna filled in, causing Åsa to explode in laughter.

Åsa’s and Hanna’s conversation took place in a particular organizational context. In most regions and municipalities, there are clear divisions of labor and responsibilities. The divisions may vary, but in most of the archives I visited, the archivists made most of the decisions about disclosures and redactions. However, if a user wanted to appeal a redaction at the administrative court, a jurist would have to write a formal, appealable, decision. The archivists are also able to consult the jurists when they need input. This happens to greater or lesser extent, as we can see from Åsa’s and Hanna’s comments.

This chapter will focus on the interplay between law and practice. It will also explore the archivists’ views of the law and their relationships with its representatives, the jurists. Archivists need both law and professional judgment to deal with the complex issues regarding disclosures. This balance between legislation and discretion is, of course, present in most professions, so the aim of this chapter is to say something general on this balance as well as something specific about the archival profession.

“That little fop”

Gunilla was not impressed with some of the jurists that worked for her municipality. She said that they were usually not very helpful, and when they did help, the quality of their service was poor. One of the examples she gave me was an incident that happened when she was on summer leave and a colleague with limited experience in assessing detriment acted as her substitute. When a complicated request came in, the colleague contacted the municipality’s jurist on duty and asked for help, but all she got in response was an email with a checklist of things to consider when making the assessment. Gunilla laughed when she told me how it all went:

[74] Interview no. 13.

> And in the end, the archive user had to wait the whole summer, until I was back from vacation. And then, that little fop [*sprätt*] who was the jurist here at the time, he calls me up and starts lecturing *me* on what to think about when assessing! And I said wait a minute—well, thanks for the info, I said—and I was thinking that "I know this better than you." Because he could easily have done it [the assessment] to begin with, but they … they don't want to *deal with it* [*ta i det*], I think.[75]

Later, however, Gunilla spoke well of the municipality's current jurist, who she said was very helpful.

This dual approach to the legal profession was evident in the stories of all my interlocutors. When the cooperation with the legal department worked, it worked very well, but when it did not, it became a great source of frustration and even bitterness. Several of the archivists I spoke with expressed resentment toward the jurists because of the latter's privileged position in the organization and in relation to the law, which allowed them to focus solely on the strictly legal aspect of cases and spared them the inconvenience of facing the consequences of their decisions—or facing the archive users who had to live with those consequences. "It's easy for them because they don't have to meet these people and actually talk to them," Helena once pointed out.

Everyone I talked to agreed that the decisions of lawyers and judges are subjective and that legal professionals also find disclosure difficult to deal with. "If you ask five jurists the same question, you'll get five different answers" was a popular saying. Julia and Magdalena mentioned this when I asked them about cases that get appealed to the administrative court.

"You can see it in the appeals, you know, even in the same court. It always depends on who handles the case there," Magdalena said. "Yeah, God, definitely," Julia affirmed. Magdalena continued:

> And then there can be previous similar cases where the court has judged differently, or different decisions in different instances (*instanser*), and then it's like, eh ok … what is *correct* then? That's the thing with the law that … if you're convincing enough in your … argumentation so … And when we talk among ourselves, when we are in doubt, it always boils down to be able to make a decision and [to be] comfortable with the fact that there is no "right." You know, there is no fail-safe "right" here. And no one will tell me what to do. I have to take that responsibility myself.[76]

Magdalena points to the apparent arbitrariness of legal decisions. From the outside, these decisions do seem arbitrary, appearing so because the legal decisions made by jurists and judges are made within a legal framework, with a legal logic unfamiliar to most citizens. The problem for the archivists in this study is that they have one foot in the legal system—they have to follow and

[75] Interview no. 6.
[76] Interview no. 12.

know the law—but they also have one foot in a professional reality that involves interacting with citizens.

The jurists of the municipality where Julia and Magdalena worked had even admitted that the archivists were more competent than they when it came to assessing harm in social care files. In the past, the jurists were regularly invited as experts to the courses, workshops and seminars organized by the archives as part of ongoing archivist training. Most of the time, however, these occasions resulted in archivists teaching the jurists about the evaluations.

Although the archivists agreed that lawyers found assessments just as difficult as they did, many of them still relied heavily on the support and expertise of jurists, if for no other reason than to be able to pass the responsibility for a final judgment on to someone else.

At one point, Sven expressed his frustration with what he saw as overly cautious colleagues. I asked him and Eva if they ever consulted each other at work to discuss particularly difficult issues. "Yes, we do," Sven said. "Or, I mean, I don't ask the others, but the others often come to me for advice because I'm the one with the most experience."

"And sometimes we ask the jurists," Eva chimed in. "Yes, but you're all such cowards!" Sven spat out. "Yes, we are," Eva snickered. "But it feels good to have the support of the jurists you know. To know that they have our backs."

I then asked if the jurists were usually confident in their answers. After a long pause, Sven said, "No. They are not that confident, actually. They discuss back and forth, and then it ends with 'I don't know,' or 'what the hell, just disclose it!'"[77]

Individuals largely prefer to outsource difficult ethical and moral decisions to institutions and authorities. Since it is often impossible to find an acceptable solution to these kinds of questions, decisions are best put elsewhere, outside of one's personal purview (Douglas 1986, 124). Nevertheless, there are individuals on whom these decisions still fall. These individuals, such as the archivists in this study, apply institutional thinking rather than personal thinking to distance themselves from their decisions, which they make on behalf of the institution (or here, archives). This is, of course, their job; as professionals, they are expected to maintain a professional distance. However, sometimes institutional thinking interferes with personal conscience.

Drawing on Arendt's work on the Holocaust, Caswell writes that bureaucrats alienate themselves from the consequences of their decisions through recordkeeping: "[B]oth practically (by issuing the orders that designate someone further down the chain of command to, for example, pull the trigger or open the gas valve) […]" (Caswell 2010, 10). Regional and municipal jurists are positioned further up in the chain of command than the archivists in these organizations. What the archivists lack, and the jurists have, is the ability to distance themselves from their decisions. The jurists can distance themselves

[77] Interview no. 15.

from their own work to a greater extent than the archivists can. The jurists write decisions about redactions, and then the archivists must implement those decisions by redacting and releasing records to users. The archivists are the SLBs, and they cannot easily become alienated from their work. On the other hand, it is not only the execution of orders that is sometimes difficult for archivists but also the responsibility of making decisions. So another way to distance themselves from the burden of decision-making is to assign the actual decision making to jurists.

Dora however, never involved jurists in her assessments. Dora had worked with disclosures of social service records for over thirty years, and when we met, she had only a month left before retirement. Having initially worked at the municipality's social service office, she was later recruited to the municipal archives to help with particularly difficult matters.

During our conversation, which took place via Zoom, Dora was skeptical about jurists in general and those who focused narrowly on the law in particular. She emphasized that the most important part of the assessment is establishing contact with the user, understanding what they want to know, and, above all, learning what they already know. "So these sections of law (*lagrum*), I don't know … I don't mean that my law is just common sense, that's not what I'm saying," Dora said with a wink and a crooked smile.

> But … you know when you make these judgments. My judgment can fall within a section of the law—and it can fall outside, all depending on who would do the audit. To be honest, I've stopped thinking about it. My goal is that they [the archive users] should get as much information as possible. And then if there is an appeal and I get a reprimand, so be it! It hasn't happened yet, knock on wood, and now they only have one month left to get to me![78]

Dora went on to talk about how many of her colleagues, especially the jurists, were reluctant to release information to archive users out of fear. When I asked her what they were afraid of, she said that they were most likely afraid that the third parties in the records would file a lawsuit against them, which would reflect badly on them and on the whole municipality. Others, she said, were afraid that the disclosed information would fall into the wrong hands and cause real harm.

Dora described the jurists as overly protective, even possessive, of the records: "'What are they gonna do with these papers?'" she imitated mockingly. "So you see how it can go wrong when the jurists get their hands on a case. It's … you know, I also get anxious, and I've also lost sleep over cases," Dora confessed. "But I'm not afraid to disclose [information] because I feel safe doing it. And then if they [the jurists] complain, then let them do it better themselves! They can sit there with these cases that are thick as bricks and read every word. And do it better." Dora paused and gave me a defiant look

[78] Interview no. 17.

that nearly burned a hole in my computer screen. “Or they can pay me to do it!” she concluded, causing us both to burst out laughing.

Maynard-Moody and Musheno describe the SLBs (or SLWs: street-level workers, as they sometimes call them) as

> taking on the burden of making moral and pragmatic judgments that alter the lives of citizens. They justify their decisions and actions as improvements in policy over the unrealistic decisions and actions of those with formal and legitimate authority. (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000, 354)

Dora’s comment about jurists clearly reflects this distance between SLBs and “regular” bureaucrats who have the luxury of focusing only on rules and legislation without ever having to do the practical work of making real, concrete decisions. Like Gunilla, Dora expressed both contempt and envy of the jurists, who may have university degrees and legal knowledge but lacked the professional experience to translate that knowledge into pragmatism.

The opinion that they were better off without the help of jurists was a recurring theme among the archivists I spoke to. Göran told me that during his years at the municipality archives, he had sought help from the municipality’s jurist only twice, and the jurist at the social service’s office once. “And that’s not much, in my opinion,” he said, implying that managing without the help from lawyers was something positive.

> Sure, there have been tricky cases, but then I just take a break, or I go talk to Johanna [his colleague], and then most of the times you see things clearer. We have a nice dialogue here, we’re not afraid to say “Johanna what do you think?” And that we use our jurist as little as we do, I think that’s like … that’s a good thing, that we deal with it on our own.”[79]

There is professional pride in dealing with difficult, complex cases and making tough decisions. When dealing with archive users, Göran and his professional colleagues not only need to be well acquainted with the law, but they also need experience using their professional judgment and having the courage to do so.

Göran was also proud that the archives where he and Johanna worked had so far never had a decision being appealed to the administrative court. But this was an exception; most of the archivists I talked to were more or less used to handle appeals.

[79] Interview no. 5.

Appeals

Several of the archivists I interviewed sometimes redacted information that they were not legally required to leave out but that they felt would be harmful to the user if known. The archivists often argued that if the person requesting the information really wanted to know something, he or she could appeal the redactions. They argued that by classifying the information in the first place, they were at least giving users a chance to escape potentially hurtful truths.

Technically speaking, an official who redacts this kind of sensitive but not legally detrimental information is not following protocol. However, some of the archivists I spoke to did not see it that way, considering instead that they were simply passing the decision on to the next level, the administrative court of appeal. These archivists emphasized the fact that the administrative court is the real authority, not the archivists themselves, and thus they could use it to escape the onus of decision-making. As Johanna put it, "It's always just an assessment, you know. There's no black or white, 'right' or 'wrong' here. I mean, the user can claim that I redacted too much but … well, in that case, it will be sent for appeal."[80]

In addition, they saw withholding information as an act of human solidarity with the users. Other archivists, on the other hand, did not have much faith in the decisions of the administrative court.

Julia, who had seen many cases being sent for appeal, said:

> They are funny, the administrative court, because they are really, you know … you can tell that they find it difficult to relate to appeals because it's like, if the customer [archive user] have appealed 200 pages, then they are like, "the archive is right." But if someone has appealed one sentence in one page, then they are like, "you should disclose the word 'and' and the word 'but.'"[81]

Magdalena and Julia laughed at the arbitrary rulings, but then Julia explained that although the court was sometimes "funny," most cases were decided in favor of the archives. Several archivists, including Julia and Magdalena, sometimes encouraged archive users to appeal decisions, if the archivists were in doubt about how to interpret the law in a particular case. When the interpretation of either the law or the text to which it is to be applied is ambiguous, a precedent court decision can be useful for future assessments.

At one point, I asked Gunilla about her redaction routines. What does she do when she deems certain information in a file as potentially detrimental and therefore needs to black it out? "Well, then I do it like this," she said. "Because you don't want a lot of extra work writing these appealable decisions." Gunilla looked at me inscrutably, leaned toward me across the table, and lowered her voice.

[80] Interview no. 5.
[81] Interview no. 7.

"So then I go a little rogue (*gör en lite ful grej*). I say to the user that, 'I've looked in your file, and there's information regarding other people that I cannot release. Is it ok if I omit that information and send you everything that I *can*?' 'Oh yes, absolutely!' they say, and then I do it, and the case is closed." Gunilla gave me a triumphant look.

> And very few people say "no," because I also tell them that if they want everything, I will need consent from their parents and then … well, maybe they don't think they will get one anyway. Because when I first started working, I did everything by the book, and it was like: ok, we have to write an appealable decision, and then I have to get hold of a jurist, and that takes time, and they might be away, and then I might forget, and you know … It was always such a hassle to get that decision, so now I've stopped writing them.[82]

A reader might find Gunilla's behavior somewhat disturbing. After all, she is withholding information from the archive user and limiting his or her options for pursuing the case. Bosse, for example, talked about archives in small municipalities (like the one where Gunilla worked) and said that he had seen many mishandled cases coming from such places. "I can see that in many cases, the people who come to us have been mistreated by other authorities, other archives. They've just gotten a flat 'no' when they asked for records, with no appealable decision. I know that in many places they … you know, they don't want to *deal* with classified information. They think it's a pain in the ass."[83]

However, after studying a case that had been appealed (and the appeal itself) from another municipality archives, my sympathy and understanding for Gunilla increased. This case came up during my interview with Julia and Magdalena and will be discussed in the next section.

Britta's case

Julia and Magdalena told me about a woman who had requested the social welfare files of her parents and siblings and then appealed the archives' decision not to release them to her. Later, I returned to the archives to look at the files that the woman—I will call her Britta—had requested, as well as her appeal and the correspondence and decisions sent to and from the administrative court.

The files Britta requested included social care files for Britta's mother, father, and one of her sisters who had been placed in foster care at birth. There were also child welfare case files (*barnavårdsakter*) for Britta and her siblings and a sobriety care case file (*nykterhetsvårdsakt*) for her father. The records date from the late 1940s to the 1980s.

[82] Interview no. 6.
[83] Interview no. 11.

The files were voluminous and even messier than the average social case files from the period. Britta had many siblings, and the social workers had frequently mixed up the names of the children. Additionally, the files often contained information on all of the siblings, not just the one on whom the file was created. Britta's parents were both deceased now, but all of her siblings were still alive and would not give their consent for Britta to read their files.

At first, the archives released only the case file on Britta herself and denied her access to the files on her siblings and parents. Britta was not satisfied and appealed to the administrative court. The court ruled that the archives should also assess the files that did not concern Britta, page by page, redacting any information that was either detrimental for her parents or concerned her siblings, and then release the rest to Britta. The archives did so, but the second round of assessments still included redactions that resulted in most of the information being withheld. Britta filed a second appeal, arguing for her right to read the case files to learn what actually happened in her childhood home:

> I am grateful for the records I have received, but I want all the records. This concerns my life. I was brought up in this chaotic family. I am 65 years old, and my parents are long since dead. The authorities know only a fraction of everything that was going on. My life is like a puzzle. There are pieces missing, and I need these pieces to understand. I just want to get a chronology of everything. I just want to know.[84]

As sympathetic as Julia and Magdalena were to Britta's claims, they found the thorough assessment of the case files tedious and unnecessary. They could see that the information Britta was legally entitled to consisted only of facts that she either already knew or that would not add any significant new pieces to her life puzzle.

As it turned out, the appeal process did not help Britta. Rather, it created resentment toward the authorities for denying her the answers that she felt entitled to. In Britta's case, the "common sense" notions of what was right collided with the legal restrictions, creating suffering and anxiety for Britta and extra work and frustration for Julia and Magdalena.

Bosse's observation that some archivists and other officials "don't want to deal with" classified information and appeals is certainly true; there are numerous examples of people who have been mistreated and dismissed by officials when trying to access information. However, when archivists try to avoid appeals by dodging the issue, they sometimes do it as much for the sake of archive users as for themselves. Appeals can be "a pain in the ass" for archivists, but they can also be traumatic for the archive users. Experienced archivists can often anticipate the outcome of an appeal, and they sometimes know in advance that a user's claim is futile. Thus, helping the user file an appeal would only raise false hopes. In such cases, the only advice that might be

[84] Britta's second appeal.

helpful to the archive user is to hope to live long enough for the time limit on secrecy to expire and then request the records again.

I asked all the archivists I spoke to if they found any part of the legislation to be onerous; were there rules they had to obey that they wished were different? The most common answer to this question was the narrow time limit for secrecy. After seventy years, all classified information in patient records and social service case files is declassified. Once the classification is removed, anyone can request and receive the full, unredacted files, regardless of their relationship to the record subject.

This was troubling to many archivists, who felt that the gap between the rigorous assessments of newer records and the total openness once the records reached a certain age was intuitively wrong.

"You know, after seventy years, the person might still be alive," Åsa said. "And even if they are dead … I mean, seventy years is not *that* long." "No, it's not," Hanna agreed. Åsa continued: "So you stand there copying a psychiatric record like it's nothing, and we don't even send it out in a registered letter, just a regular envelope. Like … they don't even have to be related, it can be just *anyone*." Åsa paused and gave me a sly look. "That feels a little … a little strange."[85]

Street-level institutional culture

Several of the archivists pointed out the arbitrariness of their decisions, expressing that there is no "fail-safe right" in most matters of disclosure. As in many professions, the archivists are sometimes forced to make decisions between equally bad options. However, Magdalena had a positive view on the possibility of making a fair judgment despite the difficulties archivists generally have when assessing detriment.

"It's so fascinating, you know," she said during our second conversation, "how law and text can turn into something so incredibly concrete. You can, like … get a real *answer*. On something that is so very special as someone's life story or childhood." Magdalen emphasized on the word "answer" with a gesture and leaned across the table to make sure I was following her argument. "You know, the customer," —at the archives where Magdalena worked, practice was to use the word customer, not archive user—Magdalena continued:

> The customer is getting something that they have experienced and that might be painful memories but if we are … when we need to sort something out that is uncertain … it is *the law* and it is *the words*, and what are the words? And what does the law say? And who might be affected? It is … so weird that you

[85] Interview no. 13.

> can put these two layers on top of each other, and then add someone's personal life, and come up with these really concrete judgments.[86]

Magdalena claims that it is possible to arrive at "really concrete judgements" based on records and legislation, but she also calls this possibility "weird," implying that the judgments may not be so concrete after all. This contradiction, brought to the fore here, exemplifies the tension between the ethics of care and the legalistic ethics. There is no sharp line between these two approaches. Rather, they are to be seen as the two extremes on a sliding scale. Throughout my interviews, I saw a division of attitudes between officials at different archival institutions as well as between archivists working at the same institution. Moreover, the same archivists occasionally expressed contradictory views in different interviews or even on different occasions during the same interview, as in the case of Magdalena.

This ambiguity stems from the complexity of the cases that the archivists deal with. As noted above, they sometimes feel resentment toward other professional categories, especially jurists, who do not have to engage with the consequences of this complexity. Maynard-Moody and Musheno write of an "us-against-them street-level institutional culture" (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2000, 353) that often develops when SLBs do not see themselves as part of the larger governmental system they serve.

The archivists' tendency to distance themselves from jurists could be seen as an example of this us-against-them thinking. Archivists see jurists as representatives of the state, as state agents, while seeing themselves primarily as citizen agents (at least those drawn toward an ethics of care). As Maynard-Moody and Musheno put it, "Their [the SLBs] decisions and judgments exist in the context of rules, procedures, and agencies but are case specific and guided by normative, rather than legal, ordering" (ibid., 347). In other words, the state pays their salaries, but they work for the archive users.

The archivists I met tended to explain their work in one of two ways. Either they claimed that their primary professional purpose was to help archive users find answers to their questions, or they claimed that their job was to help users access the records to which they were legally entitled. While the first explanation is an expression of a care ethics, the second reflects a more legalistic approach. Both goals, however, place the archive users at the center. The users are the reason why archivists are there, doing assessments; the archivists are, as it were, at the service of the users.

[86] Interview no. 12.

Conclusion

Gilligan (1982) writes about a former student, Hilary, who faced an ethical dilemma when she began practicing law. Hilary was conflicted whether she should tell the opposition in one of her cases about a document she found that would help the other side's client but which the opponent had overlooked. Should Hilary provide the opposing side with this document, strengthening their case? Or should she not tell them and increase her client's chances of winning, thereby enhancing her own career?

Gilligan writes: "Though she has access, as a lawyer, to the language of rights and recognizes clearly the importance of self-determination and respect, the concept of rights remains in tension with an ethic of care" (Gilligan 1982, 136). Like the archivists in this study, Hilary found herself torn between a professional legal justice and a personal ethic of care. The conflict for the archivists lies between their professional responsibilities to the law and their personal responsibility to the people affected by the records they handle.

Underlying the concept of justice is the assumption that the self and the other are equal. Earlier Christian morality was based on self-sacrifice, as in the ethics of Levinas, putting the other before oneself. When rights and justice entered the moral equation, however, "thought" had to be added to "care" in the ethical dynamics of relationships (ibid., 149).

Gilligan speaks of personal relationships and the tension between responsibilities to oneself and to others. The archivists' dilemma is the tension between the perceived responsibility to care for the other and the responsibility to attend to the rights of the other. Sometimes, it is someone's right to get hurt by information they have requested and are legally entitled to. And it is someone else's right not to be hurt by the disclosure of harmful information about them. At the same time, however, it is the archivist's moral responsibility to care for all of these people—because they are other people.

This brings us back to the intersection of the personal and individual on the one hand and the professional and public on the other. How should archivists balance their dual perspectives on matters of disclosure, and arrive at just and certain conclusions? Douglas embraces Durkheim's thinking, and then proceeds to dismantle it, writing, "In Durkeim's work the whole system of knowledge is seen to be a collective good that the community is jointly constructing. This is the process we need particularly to focus upon […]" (Douglas 1986, 29).

In other words, knowledge is a social construct. Douglas elaborates on this theme in her 2001 lecture on dealing with uncertainty, in which she talks about how the increasing number of facts we have discovered from science has not made us more certain or more prone to agreement but, on the contrary, has made us more uncertain and more prone to dispute. "The real problem," she writes, "is not knowledge but agreement. The experts, the representatives of the public, and government agencies, all have different constituencies. The

more indiscriminately a sensitive topic is opened to debate, the more intractable it is bound to become" (Douglas 2001, 146).

It is "agreement in knowledge, not knowledge per se, that produces certainty; thus certainty is politically, not factually, secured" (Logue, Clegg, and Gray 2016, 13). From Durkheim and Fleck, Douglas draws the conclusion that the way people think derives from and upholds the social order at the same time (ibid., 10). The object of study must therefore be the internal thought processes of individuals, from both an internal and an external view. "Half of our task is to demonstrate [the] cognitive thought process at the foundation of the social order. The other half of our task is to demonstrate that the individual's most elementary cognitive process depends on social institutions." (Douglas 1986, 45). In the quest for certainty, "we create institutions that protect our valued ideas. We use analogies to build them up like a house of cards, one weak and fragile idea balanced against the other, with a few central ideas holding them in place like a roof" (Douglas 2001, 148).

In this dissertation, the two ethics that archivists apply to their cases could be seen as Douglas's roofs. Archivists try to balance against each other two fragile ideas that do not fit. Archivists cannot do their job unless they adhere both to the law and to what is "right" in its more alluring common, professional, or ethical sense. Emphasizing one perspective over the other would lead to an untenable situation. Either the archivists become Eichmann types who simply follow orders without question, or, if they focus entirely on their own personal sense of what is right, they run the risk of becoming publicly funded activists.

5. Privacy

> No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks. (Article 12, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the United Nations)

> Archivists should respect both access and privacy, and act within the boundaries of relevant legislation. […] They must respect the privacy of individuals who created or are the subjects of records, especially those who had no voice in the use or disposition of the materials. (Code 7, *Code of Ethics*, International Council on Archives [ICA])

What is privacy? In the Swedish context, this question is difficult to answer because the Swedish legal system does not clearly define the concept (Chamberlain 2020). This lack of clarity complicates judgments on privacy issues for the archivists in this study.

Drawing on the work of Goffman and Austin, information scholar Helen Nissenbaum writes that "Privacy constitutes the capacity to shape how individuals define themselves and present themselves to others" (Nissenbaum 2010, 82). In other words, privacy is control over what information about you is accessible to others and thus how others perceive you.

However, one's privacy naturally imposes demands and obligations on others. To illustrate this with an example relevant to this dissertation, archive users sometimes cannot know certain details about their own lives since those details are connected to and intertwined with the lives of others, whose privacy must be protected. The capacity to define oneself, which often requires knowledge about one's family and history, can interfere with the right of other family members to present themselves in a favorable light to others.

At the same time, privacy is key to maintaining close relations. Legal philosopher Charles Fried writes that "[privacy] is necessarily related to ends and relations of the most fundamental sort: respect, love, friendship and trust. Privacy is not merely a good technique for furthering these fundamental relations; rather without privacy they are simply inconceivable" (Fried 1968, 477).

Intimacy is not based solely on the sharing of personal information. Rather, it presupposes trust between individuals to give each other space to have secrets. With this thin line between the privacy of different individuals and the high stakes connected to it, it is important to discuss principles and regulations of privacy thoroughly before they are put into use (Nissenbaum 2010, 72).

Legal scholar Ruth Gavison (1980) offers a neutral and descriptive definition of privacy that aligns with Nissenbaum's definition: privacy is the degree of access others have to a person through information, attention, and physical proximity. Gavison's definition contrasts with that of Charles Fried, for example, who focuses more on the control of personal information than the "absence of information about us in the minds of others" (Fried 1968, 482). Others (Kang 1998; Froomkin 2000) have followed this line of reasoning, focusing on issues of control over information rather than on personal information per se.

In this chapter, I will base my analysis of privacy issues on Gavison's definition. Adhering to this descriptive definition, I do not mean to deny the use of and need for normative accounts of privacy. Nevertheless, such normative accounts will always be based on a neutral pre-understanding of the concept of privacy itself. As I analyze the meaning of different conceptions of privacy among my interlocutors, I do so not to argue for or against certain breaches of privacy that might occur during assessment and disclosure but to illuminate the mechanisms that influence the assessments.

First, I will briefly sketch the emergence of the idea of the private sphere as a dominion in need of protection. With my empirical material as a starting point, I will then show how different ideas of privacy and detriment affect the archivists' assessments. Privacy is a thriving sub-field within the discipline of information ethics, particularly for library and information studies scholars who have mostly focused on aspects of government and corporate surveillance. In addition to wider surveillance, this chapter will also focus on the individual and personal aspects of privacy: How much information do we need, and how much information do we need to keep to ourselves?

Privacy and detriment

What is the definition of detriment? When I posed this question to Camilla and her coworkers, Camilla opened her computer and began searching for the right guideline. "Oh, here it is!" she said and started to read out loud:

> "If it is not clear that the information can be disclosed without it entailing detriment to the concerned person or any of its kin," that's what it says. And that's "information about health, or other personal information," so that means also financial information. And examples of this can be, like … illness, family relations. Ability to work, social relations. All that is stuff we're supposed to protect.[87]

"Yeah, that's the information to protect, I guess," I said, "but *to suffer detriment*, what is that? How do you define that?" "Well, we define it mainly as violations of integrity or financial damage," Camilla replied swiftly. Realizing that the conversation did not go in the direction I had anticipated, I started to

[87] Interview no. 14.

feel exhausted. “But then, the question remains what a violation of integrity is,” I said. Camilla gave me a look that suggested she thought I was a bit daft. “Yeah, obviously,” she replied.

The concepts of privacy and detriment are linked in several ways. First, breaches of private information can result in detriment. If someone, for instance, receives personal information about you that would devastate that person’s perception of you, this breach of privacy would lead to detriment. Second, breaches of privacy can also be regarded as detrimental in and of themselves. The mere fact that personal information about you is spread outside your preferred circle can be experienced as detrimental, even if the information does not put you in a negative light (Brown 2002, 428).

As discussed in Chapter 2, Couser is interested in where individuals’ rights to self-expression, self-fulfillment, and self-realization collide with other individuals’ right to privacy (Couser 2004, x). In this dissertation, these questions are further complicated by the fact that the life stories and interests of the different individuals involved are entwined by blood, affection, or law. Because of these intermixing interests, the lines between different individuals’ interests—and rights—are sometimes difficult to demarcate. Does, for example, the information in records from a childbirth belong primarily to the mother giving birth or to the child being born?

Political theorist Wendy Brown writes about rights “as boundary, and as access; rights as markers of power, and as masking lack; rights as claims, and protection; rights as organization of social space, and as a defense against incursion” (Brown 1995, 97n3). The rights of different individuals are always at risk of colliding, and to acknowledge rights for a certain category will inevitably leave other categories without rights. Sometimes, it is impossible to meet everyone’s rights in a conflict of interest. It might be impossible for the archivists in this study to always put the other first simply because there are always several others. But, drawing on the words of Brown, it is equally impossible for the archivists to adhere exclusively to a rights-based, justice-based, legalistic ethics without violating the rights of some.

Brown writes about the right to privacy in particular, calling it “a highly ambiguous right that differentially serves those differentially situated in the murky sphere demarcated as ‘the private sphere’” (ibid., 98). In the following section, I will examine the emergence of this murky sphere and how we came to view it as sacred and worthy of protection.

Sanctity of the private sphere

The division between public and private spheres dates back at least to Aristotle and his definition of "polis" and "oikos," which Arendt (2018) notably discusses, among others.[88] The discourse on the protection of *the sanctity* of the private sphere, in turn, has its origin in the nineteenth century. When society started to establish institutions such as public schools, hospitals, and welfare agencies, whose purposes spanned the protection, education, monitoring, and control of the population, intersecting with and intervening in the private sphere and family life, the perceived need to protect that sphere arose (Nissenbaum 2010, 91).

Most sociologists agree that the social reforms of Western societies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were not enacted in recognition of the principles of equality. The welfare state did not emerge solely for the benefit of the working classes and marginalized groups but from the need to curb social unrest; it was, in many ways, a means for the capitalist economic system to prevail. Rose writes, for example, that "the policies and practices of welfare, far from extending citizenship in any benign sense, have in fact functioned to maintain inequality, to legitimate existing relations of power, and to extend social control over potentially troublesome sectors of society" (Rose 2005, 125).

However, the family is, to a certain degree, outside both authority of the state and the scope of market relations (ibid., 126). For centuries, feminists have criticized the family as an ideological tool for maintaining a patriarchal and capitalist order. According to this order, working-class men were bribed with the promise of family rule, which functioned to keep them content with the underpaid, alienating work they performed. "The language of privacy disguised and legitimized the authority of men in the household over both women and children," argues Rose, "and obscured the extent to which the state actually shaped and controlled relations in the intimate sphere for public, political ends" (ibid., 126). Thus, family ideology served as a provider of labor force, unpaid domestic workers, the socialization of children, and a safeguard against social unrest.

In the same way that social reforms worked to maintain peace and the capitalist status quo, so too did the definition of certain aspects of life, such as family, as "private"—nature-given and outside the scope of the state. The privacy of the family was, of course, not nature-given at all but instead a conscious political decision to leave certain areas seemingly ungoverned. In fact, families *were* regulated. Both state and church decided what types of relations were to be acknowledged and protected through marital and inheritance laws. Teaching the people how to lead virtuous and family-oriented lives was a form of domestication, primarily performed by controlling the way people brought up their children (ibid., 131). Through the registration of births, infant welfare

[88] This dichotomy has, however, been challenged in recent years (Ojakangas 2020).

centers, school doctors, and social workers, the "tutelary complex" (Donzelot 1979) took shape. Despite these technologies of government, the idea of the sanctity of the private sphere and the family as untouched—untouchable—has prevailed in Western societies.

In a Swedish context, other factors must be considered when describing the relation between family life and welfare institutions. As described in previous chapters, the Swedish welfare state has long enjoyed a stable position. People in Sweden generally have a high level of trust in state authorities. As a result, the social contract in Sweden has remained strong and, for the better parts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, has not been significantly challenged. Swedes tend to accept relatively far-reaching interventions into their lives because these interventions have been the prerequisite for financial and social security and well-functioning public services. Nevertheless, there are limits to Swedish authorities' access to information about their citizens.

Social service officials in Sweden do not have automated access to case files transferred from social service offices to municipal archives. Archivists sometimes find it problematic to deny social workers access to archived case files in matters concerning the welfare of a child. On one occasion, Bosse and Sandra discussed this with me. "Sometimes we get a request from the social services," Bosse said.

> They're investigating the welfare of a child who perhaps is going to be taken into care. And they want the records, you know, ASAP. But we never give them the records, of course. The one who owns the records are the parents, most of the time, and they don't want to give consent, in these cases. And the social workers, they get really surprised, you know, that we don't simply hand over the files.[89]

I asked Bosse and Sandra if these cases were usually urgent. Did they concern acute placements for a child who might be in danger of abuse or neglect? "That might be the case, absolutely," Bosse said. "They want the files well, basically yesterday, so …. So that might feel … you know, if it's a gap in the legislation that prevents us from sharing these files … [then it is problematic] because it concerns the welfare of children. But we don't have the right to disclose." Sandra agreed: "Exactly. It's like these cases fall through the cracks."

Restrictions in privacy are sometimes necessary to protect individuals at risk of being subjected to oppression or maltreatment, as when social workers interfere in a parent's right to privacy in order to protect children from abuse. The social contract depends on individuals' willingness to trade some of their privacy for governmental protection and support. At the same time, state intervention in families has also been used as means to control and oppress people who are poor, or who deviate from societal norms.

[89] Interview no. 11.

If society leave families to mind their own business, thus protecting the freedom and privacy of these families, this privacy can at the same time facilitate a lack of freedom for certain individuals within families, most often women and children. As Brown writes, "Like rights themselves, depending on the function of privacy in the powers that make the subject, and depending on the particular dimension of marked identity that is at issue, privacy will be seen variously to advance or deter emancipation, to cloak inequality or produce equality" (Brown 2002, 428).

Political scientist Priscilla Regan, on the other hand, argues that individual privacy from the state is valuable not only to individuals themselves but also to society as a whole (Regan 2009). Drawing on Hannah Arendt, John Rawls, Oscar Gandy, and Carl Friedrichs, Regan argues that the protection of personal interests, relationships, habits, and preferences from public view enables people to separate those interests from public discourse and to engage in that discourse by focusing on what they have in common with their fellow citizens rather than on the personal interests that might divide them (ibid., 226–227).

However, this claim presupposes that society is fundamentally just and fair and does not take into account unequal power relations and structural injustices. Brown and others see the focus on privacy rights as allowing these injustices free rein. When, for example, women and racialized people are given the same official rights as white men, the oppressive structures in which they live become invisible and are seen merely as personal, private matters. As Brown writes, "Rights do not liberate us from relations of class, gender, sexuality, or race, but only from formal recognition of these elements as politically significant" (Brown 1995, 115).

But there are differences in people's life conditions, dependent on the different social contexts into which we are born. Even though we are all equal before the law and, at least in Sweden, officially have equal educational opportunities, the shape our lives is influenced by our parents' income, the color of our skin, and where we grew up. The archivists in my study are well aware of that. Even so, the differences in class and in life experiences between them and the archive users sometimes affected their views both on the users' right to privacy and on secrecy.

Socially distributed secrets

The difference between privacy and secrecy has been thoroughly discussed within the social sciences for half a century. Sociologists Carol Warren and Barbara Laslett (1977) describe this difference by defining privacy as the limitation of information considered just by normative standards in society. According to their definition, privacy is the established right of an individual to conceal thoughts or actions that 1) are considered acceptable in themselves, and 2) are considered acceptable to conceal from others—that is, to keep private.

Secrecy, on the other hand, is the concealment of thoughts or activities that are not accepted or approved by the one(s) from whom they are kept secret or by society at large (Warren and Laslett 1977).

For example, sexual activities are generally considered private; most agree that a person's sexual life belongs to the private sphere and is not anyone else's business. Everybody knows that people have sex, but most of the time we do not talk about it, at least not in detail. However, when someone's sex life involves activities that are illegal or generally regarded as morally reprehensible, those activities are no longer only private but secret.

Despite this difference, secrecy and privacy are often treated as synonyms. Anthropologist Don Kulick argues that this mix-up can be devastating (Kulick 2015b). Kulick states that secrets, even the most intimate ones, are part of our sociality. We keep secrets, for others and for ourselves, because we have to if we want to live together in the world (ibid., 241). Because secrets are social, they are always socially distributed, meaning that some people and groups of people are seen as entitled to more secrets than others, and vice versa. This distribution of secrets is always a reflection of power relations (ibid., 241). What happens when "privacy and secrecy collapses into one another" in Kulick's example is that private matters, such as people's sex lives, are treated as secrets and thus as something illegitimate, dangerous, and immoral. But what does the difference between secrecy and privacy entail in matters of disclosure?

On a crisp autumn day, I met Marianne and Aurelia, two archivists who worked in a regional archives in a Swedish small town. We were joined by Märta, their head of unit, in a spacious meeting room where we positioned ourselves as far away from each other as possible, adhering to the recommendations regarding the then spreading Corona virus.

The discussion started cautiously, and I got the impression that Marianne and Aurelia were careful to say the "right" things. But when Märta left for another meeting, the atmosphere changed, and the two archivists became more relaxed. They began telling me how they found some of the archive users too open about their personal lives when requesting records. Marianne and Aurelia suspected that these users had been damaged by having to talk repeatedly about their problems with doctors and social service agents, and worried that they were too casual and unguarded about experiences that ought to have been traumatic. They reasoned that the users' personal "integrity"[90] had been "stretched" (*uttöjd*), becoming lax.

Marianne raised the idea that earlier experiences made persons who were unhappy prone to "gushing out at every occasion. It's the local doctor and it's the … some other doctor somewhere, and they are going in to the emergency

[90] Integrity here refers to the most common Swedish meaning of the word, "*integritet,*" namely the right to have one's private and inner sphere respected, and the ability to protect it from encroachment.

room and they are so used to talking about themselves and their wellbeing that when we show up they are not …." Marianne stopped and seemed to be searching for the right word.

"Maybe they have a different threshold," suggested Aurelia. Marianne nodded eagerly. "Yes," she said. "I think their threshold has been stretched. Their integrity is stretched." "If they were to start feeling better, it might shrink again," Aurelia continued. "Maybe the threshold would recede again."[91]

Aurelia and Marianne's views on some archive users' lack of self-preserving "integrity" reflect social aspects of privacy and of secrets. There are certain issues one is not supposed to talk about with strangers. Being unable to contain sensitive personal information about oneself is socially stigmatizing.

The archivists did not talk about these oversharing archive users with contempt but with pity. Aurelia's suggestion that users' traumas caused their inability to withhold sensitive details reveals both a deep understanding of the users and a significant divide between them and the archivists with whom they share these details. Aurelia's understanding of the archive users showed that she recognized their reactions to lived experiences and felt empathetic toward them. But the discomfort she felt hearing the users' confessions points to an unbridgeable gap between her and them: the difference between living a life in which the private is limited to family and friends and living a life in which the private extends to include civil servants, including the archivists in this study.

The difference between the archivists and the users is also found in their respective private lives, which, for the users, contain elements and experiences generally viewed as not only private but also secret. Since secrets are socially constructed, what is regarded as secret changes in different times and different social contexts. Experiences that the archivists perceived as secret, that is, socially unacceptable—may not be perceived that way by the archive users themselves. In the view of these users, they are not sharing secrets at all.

Some archivists were reluctant to listen to the archive users' confessions, but doing so forced them to acknowledge the otherness of the archive user, to engage with them and share in their secrets. "The space between that familiar sameness and in many ways unknowable difference is the space of engagement and extension; the space where privacy and secrecy are disaggregated, not collapsed into one another" (Kulick 2015b, 247).

The engagement that Kulick talks of is, in the case of the archivists in my study, an ethics of care. When archivists meet the archive users and listen to their life stories, they interact with them as with fellow human beings rather than as clients or citizens. But the archive users are still citizens, of course, and the archivists are still civil servants. This fact brings us to another aspect of the dynamic between the individual and the state: governmentality.

[91] Interview no. 10.

Governmentality, examination, and confession

The archive users that Marianne and Aurelia talked about had spent so much of their lives in close contact with societal institutions and institutional employees, such as doctors, psychologists, and social workers, that the act of divulging their personal hardships to strangers had become normal.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes how the act of being thought about and described, by oneself or others, was once a privilege reserved for the ruling classes:

> For a long time ordinary individuality—the everyday individuality of everybody—remained below the threshold of description. To be looked at, observed, described in detail, followed from day to day by an uninterrupted writing was a privilege […] The disciplinary methods reversed this relation, lowered the threshold of describable individuality and made of this description a means of control and a method of domination […] This turning of real lives into writing is no longer a procedure of heroization; it functions as a procedure of objectification and subjectification. (Foucault 1991, 191–192)

The scientific study and classification of humans by psychiatrists added a new trope to the connection between the self and the public. Instead of being a means of expression for the privileged, observation and description, now of the poor, became an instrument of control. Foucault sees the very production of records on individuals, of case files, as a way of exercising power over these individuals, which he calls "examination" (ibid., 184). Foucault's concept of "confession" could be seen as a mirror of examination.

> The truthful confession was inscribed at the heart of the procedures of individualization by power […] The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. (ibid., 59)

We are obsessed with talking about ourselves as a way of trying to assert our identity as subjects. In exposing ourselves to others, however, we only give away more of ourselves and our power (ibid., 60).

If you are a marginalized person with limited power over your own life, one of few ways to regain control is convincing the people in power—psychiatrists and social workers—that you are more than a case, that you actually are a subject. This is done by telling the power holder personal details about yourself, which, of course, is exactly what the power holders need to uphold their power. In today's information- and attention-seeking world, a grain of privilege still lingers in these disciplinary methods. Being the subject/object of thorough observation and description does, if nothing else, seem to prove that

one's life has significance. This resonates with Ernst's comparison between public displays of private life in past centuries, when kings meddled in family matters, and today's exhibitionism as displayed in reality shows (Ernst 2015, 67).[92] The people with "stretched integrities," as Marianne and Aurelia put it, probably did not have family collections at the National Archives or Library, no posthumous diaries of deceased relatives in the stacks. In most cases, neither did they have suitcases stuffed with private collections of letters in their attics. However, they did have social service case files at their municipalities' archives.

Initiatives such as the MIRRA Project take this assumption into account and seek to broaden the function of care records. In addition to the records' initial function as a professional work tool and means of communication for social workers, the MIRRA Project wants to expand the documentation to make the files resemble family archives. By including the words of the care recipients themselves and adding their experiences and voices to the "official gaze," they want to move beyond the notion that care records are simply *about* care recipients and make them *by* and *for* care recipients.

Regardless of such benign initiatives as MIRRA's, most people do not considered it "normal" for public authorities to have records and case files about oneself or one's family. Public records cannot be compared to personal archives, inherited diaries, collections of letters, or other family records. That said, these private examples are not very normal either, outside of upper middle class families. The difference between these two types of documentation—the records describing citizens produced by the authorities and the documentation produced and archived by oneself or one's kin—is that of privilege.

One aspect of this privilege could be phrased as the difference between ascribing and describing. Doctors categorize, label, and ascribe fixed traits to people, rather than describe each patient as an individual person with a complex personal disposition. This can be illustrated by the interview with Marianne described in Chapter 2, in which she interpreted a doctor's labelling of a mother as "exhausted" as empathy. The doctor's description of the mother as exhausted could also simply be seen as a fixed trait ascribed to a patient.

Patients and social clients become well trained in the art of confession. To compensate for the objectification that comes with doctors and social service agents ascribing to them traits and turning their lives into case files, they desperately try to take charge of their story by revealing more information than is considered respectable. Instead of gaining control, however, the oversharing results in contempt, unease or—at best—pity. Archivists like Marianne and

[92] Literary scholar Norma Clarke also writes on this topic, noting that "Now that 'Everybody does family history,' and everybody has access to information, now that 'everybody' is busy recording their own lives in selfies and Instagrams and Facebook and Twitter […] the power of secrecy has already diminished. I question whether it ever had more than a limited traction, relevant for certain kinds of families in particular cultures during circumscribed historical periods" (Clarke 2023, 395).

Aurelia who become the recipients of these life stories are uncomfortable listening to such confessions and find the archive users' tendency to overshare inappropriate. After all, the users are strangers to them. What information is acceptable to share with others depends on the relationship between teller and receiver. The next section will consider different relationships between archive users and record subjects and how archivists evaluate them.

Family affairs

As critic and novelist E.M. Forster points out, mutual secrecy is one of the conditions of human life (Forster 2005, 57). This also applies to family members, of course. Spouses, children, and parents sometimes hide more from each other than they share. Most people would agree that we are all entitled to have secrets, even from our loved ones. But how are the archivists in my study supposed to know if a secret is really a secret or if it is just a fact that someone never got around to mentioning?

In this section, I will examine how archivists assess privacy issues across various social contexts, drawing on empirical examples involving siblings, adoptions, paternal investigations, and foster care.

Siblings

The archivists that I talked to sometimes found themselves caught between different members of the same family and forced to mediate between relatives' conflicting interests.

One example of praxis deviating between different archives were cases in which one sibling requested information about his or her parents. In some archives, the archive user then had to get consent from all other siblings to retain that information. The argument for this requirement was that the person who requested the records might share information with his or her siblings, who might then suffer detriment from this information.

Åsa and Hanna, however, did not accept this reasoning. "In these cases we argue that all the siblings have the right to request this file and get the information. It isn't like only one of them is entitled to it. Everyone has the same right, you know," Hanna said.

I presented to her the view that the information might spread to siblings who did not want to know. "Yeah, but you know, that's life," Hanna replied. Åsa filled in: "We've concluded that we cannot monitor what people do with the information once they get it. We can only make sure that we give out what the user is entitled to. When it's out there, when it's reached the receiver, it's not our responsibility."[93]

[93] Interview no. 13.

Åsa and Hanna draw a line between themselves as civil servants and the archive users as private persons with their own constellation of family relations. They avoid getting involved in the internal affairs of the users' families, maintaining a legalistic and official distance rather than offering a caring, private intimacy.

Adoptions

Another issue that the archivists frequently mentioned during interviews was that of adopted children and their right (or not) to know about their biological parents. In the twentieth century, adoptions within Sweden—that is, Swedish families adopting children born in Sweden—were much more common than they are today. For women during the first part of that century, becoming pregnant and having a child out of wedlock carried significant social stigma. In addition, women did not have full access to the labor market, and childcare was scarce and expensive. Hence, many unmarried girls and women gave their children up for adoption since they did not have the means to take care of or provide for them.

In Sweden, a person who is adopted generally loses all legal connection to their biological parents. The sections in the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act about relatives' rights to information about close kin is not applicable to cases in which an adopted child seeks information about their biological parents. Nevertheless, most of the archivists I spoke with found this regulation problematic.

During our interview, Hanna told me about a case where an archive user, given up for adoption as an infant, requested the psychiatric records of his biological parents. Hanna had denied the user access to these records. "When adopted children ask for their biological parents' records," she told me, "I can … I really get that they want to read the file, that they, somehow, want to understand how … how their parents were and felt and …." Hanna paused, before continuing: "But in this case where the child had not been brought up by them, we rejected the request. And to be honest, that feels a little shitty, not to be able to give them that information." I asked her if she would have made a different assessment if the child had lived with his parents for a longer period before being adopted, and Hanna answered affirmatively. "So basically, the less you already know, the less information you will get?" I asked. "Exactly," Åsa said. "And also, they don't have that legal connection anymore, it's only blood relations, nothing else."[94]

Although Åsa refers to the biological bond between child and birth parents as "only blood relations," it is evident that she, as many others that I spoke with,

[94] Interview no. 13.

view these blood relations as significant. And though Swedish law prohibits archivists from disclosing information solely on the basis of biological ties in these situations, the archivists instinctively view this restriction as wrong.

Parental investigations

Many requests for archival records are made by people seeking their biological father. In cases where the identity of the biological father is uncertain, the files contain parental investigations[95] that were conducted by the social services in cases where there is uncertainty as to who the biological father of a child is.

These investigations consist of interviews with the mother of the child, the alleged father/s, and, depending on when the investigation occurred, comparisons of the child's physical traits with that of the alleged father/s, testing for blood groups, or DNA tests.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, of which Sweden is a signatory, states that every child has the right to knowledge about their biological origin (*The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)* 1990, Article 7). These changes were then transferred into Sweden's Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act (2009:400). Chapter 26 §8 of this act stipulates that the secrecy of social service records, which may be detrimental for a third party, does not apply to a person over the age of eighteen if that information is of significance for that person's inquiry into his or her biological parent/s. One of the preambles to the act states that the right to know one's biological origin outweighs the right of the parents to privacy with regard to their sexual partners. But this change in legislation, which entitles people to all available information about their biological paternity, was not familiar to some of the archivists that I spoke to.

When I asked Gunilla about paternal investigations, she gave me an example where a woman wanted to find her biological father. "The problem was that there were several … [possible] fathers involved," Gunilla said, giving me a suggestive look. "So then I told her that this is not really information that concerns you, this is information that your mom gave [to the social services]."

I found this interpretation interesting, that information about the archive user's paternity did not concern the user herself, but I kept quiet and let Gunilla continue.

> And then eventually the mother herself came in and collected the file and I said to her that … you do whatever you want with that. If you want to let your daughter read it, that's up to you, the whole file or just parts of it. And I don't know what she decided, that's none of my business but … I mean, if she wants

[95] These investigations were historically called paternal investigations (*faderskapsutredningar*), and the archivists continued to refer to them as such.

> to tell her daughter that she slept with three men in one night, that's her choice.[96]

Gunilla clearly did not think that the woman's right to knowledge about her biological origin was more important than the mother's right to privacy regarding her sexual partners. Neither was she aware of the changes in legislation described above.

Bosse, on the other hand, had been engaged in the matter from the beginning. He told me that in the early 1990s, he had written to the Ministry of Justice suggesting a change in legislation to enable people to obtain information about the men who had figured in their paternal investigation. He had been frustrated by his inability to help archive users wth their searches and was relieved when the law changed.

Other archivists, however, were uncomfortable releasing this kind of information and instead questioned the new legislation. They felt bad for the men who might have their lives turned upside down by being contacted by a stranger claiming to be their adult child.

Helena recounted a case of a family torn apart by the sudden revelation of an adult child born from an extramarital affair, for whom the father had secretly payed allowance—a discovery prompted by the disclosure of social records. "So what?" Bosse snorted when I recapped Helena's example. "They [the archive users] have the right to see the records!"[97]

In this example, we can see a clear difference between Bosse's and Helena's approaches toward the case. While Helena adopts a care ethics toward the entire family affected by revelations of unknown children and thinks about possible far-reaching consequences, Bosse adopts a legalistic ethic and focuses only on the concrete rights of the archive user to information, not on how that information might affect others.

Foster care

Many people who come to municipal archives to research their past or want to read their own social service case files were in foster care during their childhood. In these cases, much of the recorded information is based on the testimony of foster parents rather than biological parents.

A foster family or foster parent (*familjehem* or *familjehemsförälder*) is one or more people engaged by the municipality to take care of a child and function as an acting family when, for some reason, neither of the child's biological parents are fit to take care of the child. Foster parents receive a fixed financial reimbursement from the municipality, alongside allowances to cover extra costs (food, clothing, and consumables) for the foster child. They can

[96] Interview no. 6.
[97] Interview no. 11.

also apply for extra payments to cover extraordinary expenses, such as travel and birthday gifts.

Some children are placed in a foster family directly after birth and remain with the same family into adulthood; in certain cases, the foster parents eventually adopt the foster child. Others move back and forth between different foster homes, their birth parents, or institutions. Some foster parents only have one foster child, while others run the foster home like a small institution, with several children at a time in their care.

Sometimes the foster parent is related to the child in their care, as when a woman cares for the child of a sister or daughter who might be dealing with drug addiction, mental illness, or incarceration. This makes foster parents similar to birth parents in many ways.

However, apart from such cases of interfamily foster care, there is no blood relation between the foster parent and child. Neither are foster parents the legal guardians of a foster child. The differences between foster families and biological families are reflected in the way the archivists consider foster parents to be third parties, as compared to biological parents or adoptive parents.

Bosse and Sandra described foster parents as somewhere in between biological parents and social workers or institutional employees. Such care professionals are, without exception, considered unprotected by the archivists who interpret the legislation on secrecy. What a doctor, social worker, or psychologist has said or written in their professional capacity is never redacted to protect them from detriment.

This contrasts with archivists' treatments of biological parents, for instance, whose derogatory opinions about their child may be redacted.

"Foster parents are more like professionals in a way, I think we usually say, right?" Sandra asked Bosse, who confirmed her view. "So we can release more about them [than about biological parents]," Sandra continued. "It's their profession, you know, their job. Sure, there's a personal aspect to it as well, but … yeah, we release that info more easily."[98]

Julia and Magdalena, on the other hand, held the opposite opinion. "I would say that I assess in kind of the same way for foster parents as for biological parents," Magdalena said. "But perhaps a *tiny bit* (*pyttelite*) more restrictive when it comes to disclosing stuff about foster parents," Magdalena sighed. "Because, well, they don't have any, you know, *responsibility* toward the child, really, like the biological parents do."

With this statement, Magdalena drew attention to the fact that foster parents do not have legal parental responsibility for the children in their care in the same way that legal guardians do. Julia continued: "I think I believe that I *don't* make a difference [between the different kind of parents], but actually,

[98] Interview no. 11.

I probably *do*. When there's no blood relation involved, it's like, the connection feels weaker."[99]

As in the case of adoptions discussed earlier, blood is seen by the archivists as thicker than ink. In the context of adoptions, there were "only" blood relations, but those relations made it difficult for the archivist to redact, making them perceive the adopted child as entitled to knowledge about his or her biological parents. In cases of foster parents, on the other hand, the absence of blood relations made the archivists view the foster family relationships as weaker than those of biological families. Even though legal conditions dictate archivists' decisions, it is nevertheless difficult for them to disregard blood relations.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, privacy and integrity are contested and ill-defined concepts. Adding to this confusion is the interplay of different discourses on these concepts, which influence each other.

Personal integrity and surveillance

As the Chapter 3 example of Jeanette's GDPR problems showed, the current debate about protecting personal data from unscrupulous companies or government agencies sometimes spills over into the discourse about disclosure and redactions. The trade-offs of privacy primarily involve balancing an individual's right to privacy against the rights of others.

On a general societal level, however, individuals' right to privacy in connection with state agencies and organizations is more frequently discussed. Mårten, an archivist working with Helena, talked about this during our meeting:

> There is a public debate on how too much data is kept in all these systems and that, you know, states and organizations are gathering information on citizens. And at the same time, there are situations when citizens ask for stuff that might be sensitive from a personal or a family perspective. And then they get this stuff back, *redacted*. And then it's like, "what do they really *know* about me?"
>
> So there's like an *idea* about this that's based on not violating other people's privacy, and we're supposed to keep that in mind. At the same time we have … a situation where this might exacerbate a state of paranoia. "Why am I not allowed to know everything that has happened to me?" you know?[100]

Archival scholar Heather MacNeil claims that the excerpt from ICA's code of ethics quoted at the very beginning of this chapter has its foundation in the legal principles behind data protection laws. Such principles, she argues, state

[99] Interview no. 12.
[100] Interview no. 9.

that personal information held by authorities, either willingly shared or collected by coercion, should be treated safely and with care and not distributed to third parties (MacNeil 2005, 67).

As custodians of records that contain such personal information, archivists have an "obligation to protect the integrity of particular relationships between individuals and their government to which the records bear witness, as well as to intercede on behalf of record subjects to protect their privacy interests" (ibid., 68). However, archivists are not only custodians, their task is also to promote access to archival holdings. This dual role, MacNeil argues, makes archivists "uniquely qualified to contribute to societal debates concerning the appropriate balance in a democratic society between the individual's right to privacy and society's need for knowledge" (ibid., 68).

MacNeil goes on to argue that contemporary threats against individuals' privacy are perceived to emanate mainly from the surveillance carried out by large organizations and governments that gather and handle vast amounts of personal information about citizens and customers (ibid., 70).

As argued by Edquist (2021) and discussed in the introductory chapter, the discourse on big data and state surveillance has spilled over into the general discourse on recordkeeping and archiving, both for digital and physical archives. As a result, archivists must relate to the surveillance trope, even if it does not necessarily have a concrete impact on their work.

What does privacy do?

In his work on biographic writing, Couser asks rhetorically, "What good does life writing do, and whose interests does it finally serve—the subjects', the writers', or the readers'?" (Couser 2004, 10). To paraphrase Couser, we could also ask what good the disclosing of records does and whose interests it finally serves—the record subjects', the record creators', or the archive users'? In addition, one might further ask whether the main reason for disclosing records is to "do good."

In ethical thinking, a dividing principle is often understood as the difference between deontological and teleological approaches to ethics (ibid., 10). Deontological ethics focuses on what is right in principle. Teleological ethics is more pragmatic, focusing on the consequences of certain actions.

On the issue of privacy, then, deontological ethics might be said to regard privacy as having a value of its own, regardless of the consequences that a breach of privacy might entail. Teleological ethics, on the other hand, would judge a breach of privacy based on exactly what consequences the spreading of personal information could have.

In a similar way, for the archivists who apply a care ethic when assessing sensitive personal information, the question boils down to what good the disclosing of records does, leaning toward a teleological ethics. This care ethics

approach brings us back to the question of whose interests the disclosing serves: the record subjects', the record creators', or the archive users'? Applying a legalistic ethic, on the other hand, one arrives at the question what *bad* the disclosing of records could do. Both these approaches, however, could be seen as variations of a teleological ethics. The difference lies in their focus: while the legalistic ethic focuses solely on the detriment a privacy breach might cause, the care ethic takes into consideration what benefit might come from the disclosing of private information.

A few of the archivists I talked to expressed thoughts closer to a deontological ethics approach, however. The archives where Camilla work had denied a user information about a famous person's time of birth, not because the information was detrimental in any way but because the disclosure would imply that one of the archivists had to read the celebrity's file. Hence, Camilla explained, the very act of reading the file was considered a violation of privacy.

"We didn't disclose the time of birth, even though they reckoned we could have, because they didn't ask for any classified information," Camilla said. "No, the time of birth is not classified, but to get that info we need to read the file, and we don't open anyone's file unless …." Camilla searched for the right word. "Because they wanted to create a horoscope you know, for the celebrity. And I don't think that's a good enough reason to open someone's file so … we didn't."[101]

Camilla did not want to disclose the requested information because she considered it morally wrong to open a case file, even if any sensitive information it contained would be known only to the archivist handling the request. It was the sheer act of reading the file that was wrong, in Camilla's view.

At the same time, she was receptive to a more teleological approach. She declined the disclosure request because she deemed the archive user's reason—to create a horoscope for the record subject—insufficiently legitimate. If the reason had been more important, however, its results might have justified a breach of privacy.

To discuss this example further, I will draw on Couser's definition of an ethical dilemma which he describes as a conflict between competing principles and obligations (Couser 2004, 9). When a writer and a subject are connected by close relations, Couser argues, the ethical stakes are higher than if writer and subject are strangers (ibid., x). In the same way, the ethical stakes, and the possible harm, are higher when there is a close relation between the archive user and the record subject.

When Camilla and her coworkers refused to check the celebrity's time of birth, for instance, believing that assessing the records would infringe on that person's integrity, their feelings stemmed from a sense of familiarity with the celebrity.

Every archivist adheres to a genral rule not to handle requests involving individuals they are acquainted with. If such a request arises, they promptly pass it to a colleague with no ties to the archive user or the record subjects.

[101] Interview no. 14.

The decision to recuse themselves aligns with the reasoning outlined by Couser: the ethical stakes are higher when the reader/writer and the subject are familiar, and it would be unethical for the archivists to handle cases about people they know. Archivists read personal details about strangers on a daily basis; it is part of their profession, and most archivists I interviewed explained that they forget these details immediately after finishing a case. They *can* forget because of the anonymity of the people in the records. These people are simply names to which the archivists have no connection. A public figure, however, is someone everyone has a connection to. Everyone "knows" a celebrity in the sense that they all have some knowledge about the celebrity's life and personal traits.[102]

Conclusion

As discussed at the start of this chapter, the need to demarcate and protect the private sphere did not arise until there was an active public sphere to protect it *from*. In the cases of this study, however, the violation of the sanctity of the private sphere has already occurred, and it cannot be undone.

The records under assessment document the state's interventions in the most private of spheres that exist: the family and the body. They depict these interventions at the same time as they form them, as I discussed in Chapter 2 by drawing on Engebretsen (2005). The records document and form interventions (and sometimes violations) by the public. In addition, when records are retained in archives, they can also be seen to form a continuation of these encroachments. Containing the events and actions taken by both the state officials and the individual at the center of the intervention, the records preserve the vulnerability of the record subject by keeping the documentation in existence, even long after the vulnerable subject is deceased or has moved beyond their original vulnerable state.

To continue protecting the privacy of the individuals involved, the archivists guarding the records assess the information in them, sometimes redacting certain parts, before releasing the files to the archive users. These archivists are already knee-deep in the "sacred" private sphere. They cannot simply leave it be; it is their job to dissect the delicate issues inside the records. They must make the best decisions possible in an impossible situation. In the complex context of vulnerable life stories they encounter through conversations and case files, they strive to maintain clear boundaries between themselves and the archive users.

[102] In Swedish, the word for celebrity (*kändis*) stems from the word "known" (*känd*). To know someone is called "känna," which is the same word for "feel."

The challenge for the archivists, however, seems not to lie in interpreting privacy legislation but applying it to specific contexts. Legislation is dependent on interpretation of the material, so even though seemingly sharp, the borders of the legislation become blurred when archivists make the actual decisions. The law is clear, but its implementation is not. This is why, when asked to define the meaning of "detriment" in their assessments, the archivists stumble. Like Camilla, they repeat the wording of the Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act:

> [A] statement concerning the personal relations of an individual should be classified if it cannot be ruled out that the statement can be revealed without the individual, or any of their kin, *suffering detriment thereof*. (Chapter 26 §1; my translation and emphasis)

The archivists I spoke to were unable to define exactly what this detriment consists of and how it emerges. This conceptual elusiveness comes from the complexity of the concept of privacy. Privacy, and therefore detriment, is always contextual. People are dependent on each other when keeping, sharing, trusting, or revealing secrets. If they were not, social relations would collapse.

I began this chapter with a quote from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that affirms everyone's *right* to privacy. Legal Philosopher Duncan Kennedy writes that the concept of rights in legal thinking is appealing because rights serve as "mediators between the domain of pure value judgments and the domain of factual judgments" (Kennedy 2002, 184). This means that if someone establishes a "right" and advocates for it, they can counter any potential criticism that their right is simply "an opinion" and does not justify the methods used to attain it. As a result, rights take on the authority and legitimacy of facts.

Duncan further argues that rights can function as facts for two reasons. First, because they are "universal," meaning that everyone ought to agree that they are desirable for everyone, and second, because rights are also "factoids"—the assertion of a right inevitably creates a desire for specific actions necessary to achieve that right (ibid., 185). For example, the right to privacy is something that few would argue against. From this follows a need for regulations and legislation to protect each individual's right to privacy.

When these regulations are put into practice, however, and actual decisions to protect privacy are made, it appears that the right to privacy is perhaps not a fact at all. Problems arise when one person's right to privacy interferes with another person's—for example, the legal right to knowledge about one's origin. MacNeil proposes guidelines on accessing personal information in archives to fill gaps in existing legislation (MacNeil 2005, 78). In Sweden, however, where legislation focuses on detriment, such guidelines do little to assist archivists in making actual assessments.

Let us return to the question, inspired by Couser, of what good the disclosing of personal information actually does, as well as to the concern about surveillance and privacy. With these two issues in mind, perhaps the main question should not be who should have access to what information, but rather: Should state authorities retain sensitive personal information on individuals in the first place?

6. The peace of the deceased

As long as they can harm us / The dead do not die. (Stone 1992)

In the preceding chapters, we have seen how archivists who assess and disclose sensitive information often find themselves caught up in ethical dilemmas. They have to weigh against each other the respective interests of different people affected by this information—the people asking for information (the archive users) and the people in the records (the record subjects). In addition, the Parliamentary Ombudsmen (JO), whose role is to monitor and audit the procedures of Sweden's public authorities, have stated that archivists, or whoever assess for detriment, should put themselves in the position of the record subject and try to imagine what information he or she would want disclosed (JO 1982/83, 227). This means that the archivists should base their judgments on not only a general perception of what is right but also what the different stakeholders in the cases might feel.

If record subjects are alive, they can give or deny permission for other people to read their files, which facilitates the archivists' job. Sometimes, however, people who appear in the records are no longer alive and thus cannot provide consent for a user to access their records. When this happens, the archivists instead take into account "the peace of the deceased" (*den avlidnes frid*). The integrity of deceased people is protected in Swedish legislation, not in actual law texts but in preambles and through a number of precedent court decisions. Over time, however, administrative courts have reached differing judgments, leading to multiple interpretations of the legislators' intent (Sandén 2012). Through these preambles and decisions, Swedish legislation recognizes the deceased as having certain rights, effectively granting them agency to make demands, even posthumously. The archivists enact these rights of the dead by acting on their behalf to safeguard their interests. This poses a challenge for the archivists, since they not only work to protect the dead but occasionally must prioritize the dead over the living. Sweden is a highly secularized country, and the legal term "the peace of the deceased" is one of the few expressions that treats the dead as agents under Swedish law.

The archivists in my study often held conflicting views on matters of assessment and disclosure. One thing they agreed on, however, was the opinion that it is harder to deal with cases with one or more deceased record subjects. Drawing on the sometimes contradictory views of the archivists, this chapter examines the implications of weighing the rights of the dead against those of

the living. What role does legislation play in the archivists' judgments? How do they interpret the intentions of the legislator? And how do these interpretations affect their decisions?

Peace or legacy?

A proposition (*Proposition 1979/80:2 Med Förslag till Sekretesslag m.m.*) for the previous Swedish Secrecy Act (SFS1980:100) states that a person's death should not diminish the protection of their privacy. The proposition mainly focuses on how to avoid detriment for the deceased's surviving kin. Nevertheless, it also stated that the deceased themselves should be protected from privacy breaches, because of two reasons: 1) Chapter 5 of the Penal Code (*Brottsbalken*) states that the peace of the deceased shall be protected, and 2) Chapter 7 of the Freedom of the Press Act mentions defamation of the deceased as criminal if it disturbs this peace. In addition, the proposition emphasizes that most people wish to maintain a good reputation also after their death and argues that removing all protection of an individual's integrity posthumously would fail to uphold human dignity.

Peace and legacy were often mentioned by the archivists I met when they talked about their work but, perhaps because of the vagueness of the concepts, were never properly defined. Swedish legislation uses the term *peace* (*frid*) of the deceased. In everyday parlance however, peace is often replaced with *legacy* (*den avlidnes minne*), indicating the memory of the deceased as held by their surviving kin. While "peace of the deceased" highlights the perspective and experience by the deceased, the term "legacy" shifts the focus more explicitly to the living's remembrances of the dead. When these terms are used interchangeably, as they often were by the archivists I talked to, confusion arises.

Since the legacy of the deceased exists primarily in the minds of the surviving kin, it cannot be considered an entity separate from them. Archivists thus must consider the feelings of the living archive user when assessing detriment for the deceased record subject. In many cases, archivists are torn between viewing the deceased as vulnerable, unable to speak for themselves, and seeing their children as vulnerable due to the actions of the deceased.

This dilemma raises ethical questions about the relationship between the living and the dead. Do the deceased have rights? And if they do, what happens when these rights conflict with the rights of the living? Gunilla pinpointed this dilemma when I asked her to tell me about cases with one more deceased record subjects. "These are the trickiest things to assess," she said, "because … well, people who are dead are still included in the secrecy laws, but at the same time, the child has a right to know."[103]

[103] Interview no. 6.

To change the image of a person

During my first conversation with Sandra, we talked about the ambiguity of "the peace of the deceased" in the context of assessing detriment for the dead. I gave her an example from a previous interview, in which a man wanted to read his case file containing derogatory comments made by his now-deceased mother. The archivist who initially provided me with the example found it difficult to decide whether to give the son access to this information or not. The hesitation arose not only from a concern about the son's feelings if exposed to his mother's hurtful words but also from a concern for her legacy. "I can't play God, you know," Sandra said, meaning that it was not her role to intervene in family matters by deciding what information about a dead parent the archive user was entitled to. "But still, you can assume that this is something that the mother probably would not have wanted her son to know," she continued with a resigned sigh, referring to the Parliamentary Ombudsmen's statement that officials should put themselves in the record subject's position and try to imagine what information he or she would want disclosed. "And then, of course, there is the peace of the deceased. If something could significantly change the child's perception, giving them a totally different view of their mom, then it might not be right to release that information."[104]

Here, Sandra implicitly defines the peace of the deceased as protection of the surviving kin's memory and image of the dead person, thus intertwining it with the legacy of the deceased. But what would it take to completely alter someone's image of a family member? This question was raised several times during my conversations with the archivists, but a definitive answer was never formulated. On a later occasion I met Sandra again, along with her colleague, Bosse. Bosse told us about a case he had handled where the records revealed that the archive user's deceased mother had "been a prostitute"[105] and her son had become "pretty shaken up" by that information. Because the file was seventy years old and the Swedish time limit on secrecy had expired, the records were to be released, regardless of who requested them, with no assessment of detriment necessary. I asked Bosse if he would have released all the information to the archive user if the file had been more recent and still protected by secrecy laws. "I probably would have," he answered. "I mean, if the records were fifty years old and his mother long since dead … And what would I base a redaction on anyway, defamation? That would just be laughed at by the administrative court."[106]

---

[104] Interview no. 2.

[105] Rendering this anecdote, I will use the term "prostitute" and not "sex worker," since being a prostitute (*varit prostituerad* in Swedish) was the term Bosse used. The words have different connotations, and I think it is important to reproduce the actual term being used during the interview, to understand the context of Bosse and Sandra's discussion. Additionally, since the events took place over seventy years ago, it would be anachronistic to use the modern term sex worker here. When I return to the case later, however, I will not use the term "prostitute."

[106] Interview no. 11.

In Chapter 5 §1 of the Swedish Penal Code, defamation of the dead (*förtal av avliden*) is defined as accusing a deceased person of being a criminal, alleging they led a reprehensible life (*klandervärd i levnadssättet*), or otherwise spreading information intended to expose them to public disdain (*missaktning*). If Bosse were to redact information on the basis that the archive user's mother had sold sex, he would be implying that selling sex is a reprehensible way to life, something that few well-educated people in Sweden today would be keen to claim.[107] He could, however, have made a redaction based on the assumption that the mother *herself* would not have wanted her son to know this aspect of her past. But since the mother was dead and could give neither consent nor permission for the disclosure of information, Bosse turned to the only person he could ask—the archive user.

Sandra gently suggested that Bosse could use the peace of the deceased as a reason to redact. "But I don't know," she then said. "The way it [the legislation] is put is that it has to be something that completely changes the image of the person … something severe. I don't even know what that might be."

"Well," Bosse replied, "if it's in a patient file, then my opinion is that even if the parent died *yesterday* and the children wanted to read the file … It would take a lot for me to not let them."[108]

Nevertheless, both Bosse and Sandra expressed a slight distaste for people who, after being denied access to information by their parent when alive, came back and requested the information again after the parent's death. "Sometimes they come back you know, when their mom has died, and ask if they can get more records," Bosse said.

"Yeah," Sandra filled in. "And sometimes it's really close in time [after the parent passed away], maybe just a month!"

They looked at each other and shook their heads. Sandra continued: "And then you feel like … well of course, they have the right to do it, but … It's interesting sometimes, how people function."[109]

The archivists' disdain for people who return to request records after their parents' death stemmed from the belief that such individuals disregarded their parents' wishes and took advantage of their death to uncover information the parents had deliberately withheld. Bosse and Sandra thus demonstrated a strong sense of moral, if not legal, obligation to respect the will of the dead.

[107] Sex work is not broadly socially accepted in Sweden. However, most people do not (at least not openly) hold derogatory views of women who sell sex. Instead, female sex workers are usually victimized and pitied. There is broad consensus that people who sell sex are most often either victims of trafficking or survivors of sexual abuse. In Sweden, accordingly, it is illegal to buy sex, but not to sell it. Nevertheless, in a guideline on defamation from the Swedish Prosecution Agency (Åklagarmyndigheten 2022), it is stated that information about someone selling sex could, in general, be considered defamation.

[108] Interview no. 11.

[109] Interview no. 11.

To respect the will of the dead

Various preambles to Swedish legislation states that assessments of detriment should be adjusted to align with the "common values of society (*gängse värderingar i samhället*)" (Bohlin 2010, 204). Archivists are therefore supposed to take into account the values of the person portrayed in the records as well as the surrounding social context, both of which are highly complex and open to interpretation. One strategy that archivists use to deal with this dilemma is to simply read the files and follow the law, trusting their own professional judgment to arrive at a conclusion without too much fuss. Others instead leave the legal interpretations to jurists.

During my first meeting with Helena, I brought up the concept of the peace of the deceased. Helena was dismissive. "That's not what our jurists talk about," she said. "No, it's the … the balancing act between the grown-up child's right to know and avoiding appeals and legal processes."[110] As Helena implied, dead people cannot file appeals or complaints. Therefore, their potential views on the disclosure of their personal information hold no weight if the assessment focuses solely on archive users' right to knowledge and the risk of the municipality being reported by living third parties, which could result in a reprimand from the Parliamentary Ombudsmen. This approach does not consider the moral or ethical responsibility one might have to respect the wishes of the dead. In this conversation, Helena speaks on behalf of her municipality's legal officers, and the perspectives she puts forward are not necessarily her own. Nevertheless, these were the perspectives she applied to the cases she handled.

A relatively common type of appeal is when a patient, while alive, has expressed a wish that no one—or, in some cases, a particular person—should be allowed access to their medical records after their death (Flodin 2019). With such an explicit prohibition in mind, courts have generally judged against claimants who want to see the records anyway. The argument for denial is that the peace of the deceased would be violated if their explicit wish were ignored. In a few cases, however, the courts have reached other conclusions.

During my interview with Marianne and Aurelia, I brought up a case Bosse had told me about. It concerned a young woman who had spent an extended period in psychiatric care, including time in closed wards and against her will. While a patient at the clinic, she asked the psychiatrist to note in her file that her parents should not be granted access to her records in the event of her death. Some time later, she committed suicide. Her parents then requested her file but were denied access by the regional jurists. After an appeal, however, the administrative court ruled in the parents' favor and the region released the file. I asked the archivists for their take on the decision. Marianne thought for a long time before she said:

[110] Interview no. 3.

> I think that … I would guess they estimated that it would hurt more … it would be detrimental for everyone *not* to … Because what she wrote and said in there [in the psychiatric clinic] might not have been thought through. Perhaps the parents would be better off actually *knowing*. Because it is an assessment. Would this be detrimental for the deceased? Would it ruin her parents' memory of her? No, maybe it won't. On the contrary, maybe the parents will get a *better* understanding, and memory, of the deceased. And if so, the case for protection [of the classified information] might not be that strong.[111]

At first glance, Marianne's argument might seem backwards. From a legal standpoint, protecting the memory of the deceased is intended to avoid the detriment of the deceased, not the survivors. Based on this reasoning, the administrative court's decision to release the young woman's file to her parents—arguing that access to the classified information would help them better understand their daughter—appears to have been wrong. However, people's memories of others exist only in their minds. It is therefore practically impossible to fully separate record subject and archive user in assessments of detriment related to information about a deceased person. As Marianne suggested, preventing the parents from reading their daughter's file might have caused greater harm to their memory of her, even though granting them access meant disregarding her expressed wishes.

Respecting the will of the dead, however, is challenging, not only because it can conflict with their legacy but also because it is difficult, maybe even impossible, to know what that will really is.

But what is the will of the dead? Or of anyone?

Philosopher Achille Mbembe writes that keeping archives is a way for society to simultaneously confront, acknowledge, and conceal its debt to its former citizens—the deceased (Achille 2002, 23–24). But what is this debt? How can we now what we owe the dead? Can we even know what we owe to the living?

In her writings about asymmetrical reciprocity, philosopher Iris Marion Young discusses the problem of trying to put oneself in the position of someone else. She argues that putting yourself in the position of someone "less fortunate," such as the disabled, terminally ill, or marginalized, results in well-meaning but patronizing pity. Privileged individuals who attempt to adopt the perspectives of the underprivileged often end up projecting false ideas about them, ideas that emanate from their own privileged position. Instead, careful listening is the better way to achieve genuine understanding of the lives of others (Young 1997, 344). The misconception that we *can* put ourselves in the position of someone else risks impeding communication. As Young writes, "If you think you already know how the other people feel and judge because you

[111] Interview no. 10.

have imaginatively represented their perspective to yourself, then you may not listen to their expression of their perspective very openly" (ibid., 350).

But to listen openly to someone presupposes that this someone can tell you their perspective. In an article drawing on Young's work, anthropologist Don Kulick asks what happens when the other cannot participate in dialogue (Kulick 2015a), offering examples of people with severe disabilities and no verbal language or with intellectual impairments preventing communication. The weakness of Young's asymmetrical reciprocity is its focus on communication; it does not take into account situations with epistemic obstacles for dialogue.

For most people in a secular context such as Sweden, death is seen as such an epistemic obstacle for dialogue. There is no way for the archivists to ask deceased record subjects what they wanted their surviving kin to know about them. The dead record subjects' perspectives are only brought to the archivists by proxy, either through the recorded notations of officials, or the testimonies of surviving kin. This is problematic for a number of reasons. First, the records were created by doctors or social workers who held a position of power over the record subjects, and the archivists have no way of knowing what the record subjects may have objected to in these notations. Second, ethical asymmetrical reciprocity, even at best, inherently contains gaps—things we either choose not to share or cannot fully understand about each other. Therefore, a surviving relative's account of a deceased record subject, no matter how benign or well-intentioned, can never fully convey the perspective of the deceased.

In his comparison of care professionals in Sweden and Denmark, Kulick explores how they handle difficulties that arise when they are unsure about what their clients mean. His point is that all communication involves an aspect of risk-taking. We can never be certain that we know exactly what another person means or wants, not even living, non-disabled people.[112] Therefore, if we want to be able to do anything at all for a fellow human, we must sometimes take a leap of faith and trust that we interpreted them correctly, even if certainty is impossible.

When the archivists in this study attempt to interpret the posthumous wishes of the deceased, they too, like the care professionals in Kulick's study, have to take risks. If they do try to understand the perspective of the deceased record subject, they must accept the fact that they will never know whether their interpretation was right. This is where the archivists' discretion comes in—or as Kulick puts it, "the space between that familiar sameness and the in many ways unknowable difference is the space of ethics" (Kulick 2015a, 28).

[112] Kulick points out that if we follow Freud and believe in the unconscious, we can never even be sure that we know what we *ourselves* want.

Desire or interest?

In a secular society, it is accepted as a fact that we cannot ask the dead what they think and receive an answer. In some cases, however, they have explicitly told us (or someone else) what they thought and wanted before they died. When making ethical judgments, the archivists must consider not only these explicit requests of dead record subjects but also their potential wishes or desires. The cases they handle also actualize the difference between desires and interests. We can see this in the aforementioned case of the young woman who, before committing suicide, stated that she did not want her parents to access her records. After her death, the woman's explicit wishes were overruled by the administrative court, which disclosed the records. Thus, the woman's desire was harmed. But was her *legacy* harmed?

Recall Marianne's argument, that disclosing the woman's records might have given the parents a more empathetic, and perhaps ultimately a more loving, understanding of their daughter. The conflict between the wishes of the deceased woman and those of her living parents could, firstly, be phrased as a conflict between what the woman wanted (her desires and interests) and how her parents remember her. However, it is possible to separate between desires and interests. The woman's explicit *desire* was that her parents should not read her file. But one could argue that it is implicitly in her *interest* for her parents to read it, given that its content could lead to a more positive remembrance of her. To interpret the "real" interests of someone in this way, however, is problematic and unavoidably patronizing. As political philosopher T.M. Wilkinson puts it,

> We are assuming people can have posthumous interests. If people are wrong about what would promote their interests, what follows? Should the state then work out what those interests require independently of what people actually think their interests require? (Wilkinson 2011, 42)

In addition, we might ask whether archivists really ought to assume that everyone wishes to be remembered fondly after their death. Maybe the young woman wanted to punish her parents by making them remember her with agony and forever wonder about the reasons for her illness and suicide. It may not have been a particularly pleasant or palatable wish, but if it indeed was her wish, on what grounds could an assessing civil servant legitimately go against it? As Sandra stated, "I can't play God, you know."

When I asked Camilla how she defined what would "damage the legacy" of a deceased person, she was reluctant to answer at first. I suggested Sandra's interpretation, that it had to be information so severe that it would utterly change the archive user's view of their deceased. Camilla shook her head. "No, there's no law about that," she said quickly.

> But it says that if it [the information] would harm the memory of the dead relative [the information must be redacted]. And you're supposed to put yourself in the dead person's position. Not work on what *you* think, but what *that person* would find detrimental. And that's super hard. So generally, I would rather redact than disclose in those cases. [113]

Camilla concluded. "But I know people who are real veterans (*är gamla i gamet*), and they definitely would have disclosed much more, because they are like, 'Whatever, that was so long ago!'"

Just as moral and social standards change over time, the same piece of information can be regarded as more or less sensitive—and therefore secret (or classified)—in different social contexts and time periods. Something that was considered shameful and secret fifty years ago might now be seen as unproblematic, and hence not detrimental. However, since the archivists' task is to consider the view of the record subject when assessing for detriment, the matter becomes intrinsically complicated. Should they judge how detrimental a certain piece of information is considered to be in today's standards, or how detrimental it was during the life of the record subject? To return to the example of the mother who had an abortion at a mental hospital, should the abortion be assessed according to the societal norms that prevailed during the 1950s, when it took place, or during the 2010s, when the information was requested? Should the assessing archivist try to imagine what the mother would have wanted at the time of the abortion or what she might have wanted if she were still alive today?

Apart from the question of whom the information is regarded detrimental to, there is a more fundamental question to answer: can deceased people even suffer detriment?

Can the dead be harmed?

During my first meeting with Märta, I asked her how she typically approached the issue of protecting deceased people as third parties. Did she assess cases with deceased third parties differently from those in which all third parties were still alive? Märta told me that when she worked as an archivist at a municipal archives, she had a dispute with social workers regarding the disclosure of files:

> Some of the social workers, they were very strict when it came to protecting third parties, including deceased people. You know, if an adult person wanted their own file, they said we should protect, like, if the file contained negative information about the parents. We should … "honor their memory," they

[113] Interview no. 14.

> called it. And I was like: but … can they suffer detriment? Can they *suffer detriment* now that they're dead? If we disclose stuff that has been going on in … in someone's home?[114]

Can dead people suffer detriment? Do our interests die with us, or do they linger after death? From the point of view of most secular Swedes, including the archivists I talked to, a deceased person does not have consciousness after death and cannot experience breaches of integrity. But can such breaches still occur, even if the subject of this breach is unaware of them?

In philosophy, the question of whether the dead can be harmed has been debated for decades. The position that the dead can suffer harm is often referred to as the Pitcher/Feinberg approach, named after philosophers George Pitcher and Joel Feinberg. Feinberg defines harm as something preventing someone from achieving their justifiable goals (Feinberg 1984). Pitcher defines it in largely the same way, claiming that "an event or state of affairs is a misfortune for someone (or harms someone) when it is contrary to one or more of his more important desires or interests" (Pitcher 1984, 184). Pitcher concludes that the dead can indeed be harmed, a conclusion he reaches by dividing the deceased person into two selves: the ante-mortem and the post-mortem. The ante-mortem self refers to the deceased person as they are thought of or spoken about after their death. The post-mortem self refers to the deceased person as they are in their deceased state, "mouldering, perhaps, in a grave" (ibid., 184). In contrast to the post-mortem person, the ante-mortem person can be harmed. It is therefore not actually the deceased person but rather the living person who is harmed by what happens after their death. This entails somewhat of a logical somersault:

> The sense in which an ante-mortem person is harmed by an unfortunate event after his death is this: the occurrence of the event makes it true that during the time before the person's death, he was harmed—harmed in that the unfortunate event was going to happen. (ibid., 187)

Pitcher's argument may seem intuitively convincing, but the backwards causation on which it is based has been criticized by other philosophers (e.g., Callahan 1987; Taylor 2005; Fabre 2006). Wilkinson, on the other hand, defends Pitcher. He does so by clarifying Pitcher's argument to show that it is, in fact, not based on backwards causation; the harm of the ante-mortem is not caused but "made true" by what happens after it (Wilkinson 2011). By this, he means that posthumous harm is not a matter of cause and effect but of one event being retroactively "responsible" for something being true, thus making it true.

To illustrate this argument, I will use the example of the mother whose legacy was, perhaps, damaged by the revelation that she in her youth had sold sex. The event (the disclosure of information) that caused her legacy (or her

[114] Interview no. 8.

peace: her son's remembrance of her) to be harmed occurred after her death. Still, this event taints her legacy.

But ante-mortem people can also be helped, or at least given acknowledgment, through records. Sven recounted a case in which a man had learned that he had a deceased older brother. The brother was born with intellectual disabilities and placed in an institution before the archive user was born. Their parents never spoke about the absent brother, and it was not until late in life that the archive user discovered the truth about his sibling. Sven said that the man was happy to learn about his brother and that his visit to the archives had been very emotional. "The user asked to see what we had, and as it turned out, we had quite an extensive care file on this guy," Sven continued:

> And it was good material, that file, it contained … you know, they had put a little bit of everything in there. Not just the usual reports and physical examinations, but it was … well, sometimes there were even, like, these journal entries from the group home where he spent his last years.[115]

For all that the surviving brother knew, his deceased brother had not existed before he engaged in genealogical research and discovered his parents had a son before him. The visit to the archives and the reading of the brother's file gave him information about the person that his brother had been, providing material that helped him form an image of his brother's life.[116] In Pitcher's terms, the brother became an ante-mortem person through the records.

Both Pitcher's and Wilkinson's arguments are based on the fact that people define each other. The ante-mortem mother and brother in my examples, just like the peace of the deceased in Swedish legislation, only exists in the minds of the living. Wilkinson explicitly engages with the different subjects involved in the harming of dead people: "The fulfilment of people's goals in many cases logically requires other people to do certain things or the impersonal world to be a certain way" (ibid., 31). The fact that we are connected to and dependent on each other puts the harm of the dead in a different light than if the harm is looked upon as something separate, existing only within the deceased person. In both the examples of the mother who sold sex and the brother hidden away in an institution, the harm or benefit that comes from the disclosure of records depends on the archive users' reception of the information. The mother's legacy is only harmed if her son's perception of her is actually tainted by the knowledge that she had once sold sex. And the unknown brother is only redeemed if his surviving siblings receive the revelation of his existence with gratitude and love and not, for example, shame.

[115] Interview no. 15.

[116] As mentioned, however, it is highly problematic to create a life narrative out of official documents. Care files are not created to provide [patients] with a narrative about their life, or even their illness, but are produced as working material for the care professionals.

The purpose of this philosophical detour has been primarily to show how powerful our sense is that the dead can still be harmed. Even if we cannot logically explain it, as Pitcher tries to do, we all share a gut feeling that the dead are damaged when their legacy is tarnished. This gut feeling also applies to the archivists in my material. The difference between them and most other people is that the archivists are sometimes obliged to go against their instinct of protecting the dead to instead help the living or follow procedure. At other times, however, they are expected to protect the dead on the expenses of the living, even when they feel, morally, that they should not.

"The object of protection"

Even if we agree that the deceased can be harmed, the question remains: How much consideration should be taken not to harm them, especially when that potential harm conflicts with the benefits of the living? When I met Göran and Johanna at the municipal archives where they worked, I gave them the same example I had given Sandra, about the mother who spoke ill of her son, and I asked them how they would assess the case. Göran answered:

> I would feel, if I was the child, and didn't know anything … If I got *that*, [that hurtful information], I might feel … really, really bad to learn it, [especially] if it is said that, for example, my mom never wanted me or something like that. I wouldn't think that a great read, if you know what I mean! But I would like to know more about the relationship between the mother and child before she passed away. If it was a disaster all along, then I'd probably think well, is the archive user gonna feel any better by learning that she said this, when he knew he had been detested (*avskydd*) his whole life? But … if their relationship had been good, even though she said this once, I might make another assessment.[117]

I asked Göran if he meant that if the child already knew he was disliked by the mother, it would make no real difference whether this particular information was disclosed—and in fact would be an argument *for* disclosure.

"Yeah, if the child didn't know," he said, "then it could become a real … crushing blow (*dödsstöt*), actually. But if they hated each other all their lives … what difference would it make?"

I asked what the main reason for redaction would be if they decided not to disclose the mother's comments. Would non-disclosure be intended to protect the mother or the son?

Both Göran and Johanna were confident that they would redact the information to protect the archive user, the son. "The mom has, in a way, already made her own bed there," Göran said, and Johanna agreed. Göran continued, pausing to search for the right word, "And I feel that … it is the one who is

[117] Interview no. 5.

alive, who becomes the one to … If we're using military language here, becomes the object of protection (*skyddsobjekt*)."

By focusing on the wellbeing of the archive user and wanting to protect him from his mother's hurtful statements, Göran and Johanna apply a care ethic to this case. But their decision to disclose or not to disclose also depends on what the archive user already knows. If the archive user's relationship with his mother was bad, Göran argues, less harm is done by revealing what she said. If the archive user remembers his mother fondly, on the other hand, the disclosure could be devastating. In other words, the peace of the deceased mother is not disturbed if her son's memories of her were already mainly negative. The peace is already disturbed and cannot be disturbed any further. Many archivists who lean toward a more legalistic ethic use this same line of reasoning, but from the perspective of the record subjects. Recall Julia and Magdalena in Chapter 2, who took into consideration whether the mother had been a "fancy housewife" with a façade to maintain and a lot to lose, or if a psychiatric diagnosis or an abortion would be seen as the least of her problems.

Note also how Göran talked about the archive user by referring to himself. "I would feel, if I was the child," he began. Göran put himself in the position of the archive user and tried to imagine how the information would affect him. The Parliamentary Ombudsmen discussed earlier assume the same imaginary act. The difference, for them, is that the person whose feelings Göran *should* be imagining in this case is the mother, not the son.

Presented with the same example, Dora first expressed similar opinions to those of Göran and Johanna. She said that she would not prioritize the mother when assessing the records, partly because the mother was deceased but also because she "actually said these things,"[118] leaning toward Göran's view that the mother had already damaged herself by expressing negative feelings about her child. As Dora continued talking, however, her views shifted slightly, and she offered an alternative interpretation of the mother's words:

> But you know, you could also think that she just said these things when she was upset while talking to a social worker. "I don't give a fuck about that kid anymore!" you know. Sometimes people say stuff they don't really mean. Like, I have a son, and sure, I've called him a fucking brat (*jävla skitunge*) sometimes. But if it's something that's recurring, and the mother just keeps saying these things, then … Well, you would have to dig deeper into the file to get the whole picture. Because that's an important difference, I think.[119]

To illustrate that ante-mortem persons can be wronged, Pitcher provides an invented example of a woman he calls Mrs. Blue. After Mrs. Blue's death, a neighbor accuses her of having been antisemitic, even though the truth is that she was nothing of the sort. Pitcher concludes that the ante-mortem Mrs. Blue

[118] Interview no. 17.
[119] Interview no. 17.

was therefore wronged by this neighbor (Pitcher 1984). Importantly, Pithcher distinguishes between being wronged and being harmed.

Being wronged, as I understand him, means to be subject to some sort of injustice or slander (ibid.). Thus, if Mrs. Blue actually had been antisemitic, she could not be wronged by the revelation of that fact, even if she, while alive, tried to keep it a secret. But would she have been *harmed* by this revelation? If she, during her life, tried to conceal her antisemitic opinions, does that not imply that her public image as a person free from religious and ethnic prejudice was important to her? That maintaining this image was her desire and in her interest? In terms of harm, does it matter if Mrs. Blue actually was antisemitic? And does it matter if a mother actually meant what she said when she wished her child away? Göran and Dora seem to think it does.

Swedish legislation, however, is ambivalent on the matter. According to Chapter 5 §1 in the Swedish Penal Code, someone who is accused of defamation may be acquitted if he or she can prove that the negative information is true. However, praxis is that it, in general, does not matter if the degrading information about someone is true or false. Many times, spreading negative information about someone, even if the information is true, will still be deemed as defamation by Swedish courts (Åklagarmyndigheten 2022, 5).

Conclusion

As described in the introductory chapter, the general rule after a patient dies is that their files are retained and archived as official documents. One purpose of this practice is to provide information for research, especially in the medical field, which regularly consults patient files. The Ethics Approval Committee seldom rejects for access to such files; the interests of scientists seeking new knowledge weigh heavier than the integrity of the deceased. This policy is the result of conscious political decisions preceded by thorough inquiry (e.g., Edquist 2021). Nevertheless, It may seem wrong, even immoral, that unrelated scientific researchers can easily access files withheld from the very individuals they concern. I sometimes felt as if I was doing something indecorous when reading the case files of Lisa, Anna, Britta, and others. Holding the intimate details of someone else's personal affairs in my hands evoked a deep respect for the lives of others, both living and dead.

In this chapter, we have seen how archivists balance the conflicting rights and interests of the dead and the living. Drawing on the concepts of peace and legacy, they make ethical decisions based on their own judgment and experience. To do so, they must interpret the (sometimes unarticulated) wishes of the dead by trying to put themselves in the position of the deceased record subjects, as stipulated in legislation. But this proves problematic for a number of reasons.

As Young explains, reciprocal interchanges of perspectives are not practically achievable. The best we can do is to listen, without prejudice or preconceptions,

to other people. But when the other person cannot tell their opinion or give their perspective, as with the deceased record subjects, this too is impossible.

Even so, the archivists that I met have no choice but to make decisions. They have to decide whether to prioritize a deceased mother's right to privacy and protection of her legacy or her childrens' right to know about the context into which they were born. The micro-decisions made daily in the archives are also motivated by political and juridical regulations. But the connection between praxis and policy is often obscured by personal ethics and philosophical questions. The archivists make decisions using their professional discretion, charged with moral preconceptions of deservingness as well as with an understanding of the legislative framework. Doing so, they take risks. The risk is to some extent for the archivists themselves—they are civil servants trusted to make decisions concerning citizens and any wrong decision may reflect badly not only on them but on the authorities for which they work. The main risk, however, is the potential harm that their decisions may inflict on the dead record subjects and the living archive users. The archivists must negotiate the conflicting interests and perceived vulnerabilities of the living and the dead. These vulnerabilities raises the stakes for them in their professional practice and also affect them on a personal level. Archivists can seldom be sure that they make the right decision because sometimes there is no right decision. Often, there is no solution that does not violate the rights of either the living or the dead, forcing the archivists to "play God," even though they do not want to.

7. Records management as care

> Maybe love is just an economy based on resource scarcity / But what I fail to see is what that's got to do with you and me. (Father John Misty 2015)

When I asked Märta if she ever found it difficult to handle archive users who were upset or sad because of things they had read in the records, she answered ambivalently. "Of course, it's hard sometimes," she said.

> I especially remember a girl who had several candidates that might be her father, and they never designated any of them, so she … Well, she had to leave the archives without knowing which one out of three or four men was her dad. Back then, they didn't have the [DNA] technique they have now. And that was really sad for her, obviously, but at least it was, you know, the truth.[120]

I asked Märta if she ever felt that she needed support from a social worker or psychologist when relating to upset archive users, like the girl she mentioned, but Märta gave me a dismissive look. "No," she said. "Well, yeah, of course, she was sad, that girl. But then, you know, she was allowed to be sad in my office, that … that was just natural."

Over the last decade, much scholarly attention has been given to how records from social and psychiatric care affect the people portrayed in them. As discussed in previous chapters, the MIRRA Project has reconceptualized recordkeeping as a practice that does not merely produce bureaucratic and legal evidence of actions taken by society: rather, the creation of records becomes an act of caring. In this sense, the records become actions themselves, not only documentation of actions taken.

Even though to my knowledge no similar project currently exists in Sweden, the country has seen a significant shift over the last few decades in the way social workers write about clients. Dora mentioned that it is now common for notes in a child's case file to be directed *to* the child, telling him or her what has happened on their case. "'Today I met your mom, and we talked about this and this and that,'"[121] she cited from memory.

This chapter discusses records management as care. Here, care has three meanings. First, care is produced by activities, such as the MIRRA Project, that turn the very production of documentation and records into care activities.

[120] Interview no. 8.
[121] Interview no. 17.

Second, care can be to include social workers or psychologists in the assessment and disclosure of records, and to use disclosure to help users process and heal from painful experiences. Third, for the archivists that I spoke with, care means considering how information from the records might affect the archive users on a personal or even psychological level, applying a care ethic to their assessments.

Unpacking these different senses of care will reveal conflicting perspectives on welfare, social care, and the impact of official roles on archivists and their work. Where is the line of responsibility (for both records and users) drawn between the producer of records—the social services and psychiatric clinics—and the archives where these records eventually end up? How do the archivists' different approaches to engaging with archive users shape their professional roles? Archivists' views on these issues lead to questions of domination and care, of ethics and justice, while also highlighting how their concern for archive users—and their different ways of caring—can lead to unintentional and sometimes unwanted consequences.

The power to care—or not to care

Archivists assessing for detriment must decide whether releasing records might harm the records subjects, relying on their professional discretion to make these decisions. There is no simple, agreed-upon template for an archivist to use when deciding what should be disclosed and what should be redacted. There is no computer program where they can insert all the information in a case file and then, with the help of AI, obtain a correct assessment.

The only template archivists have at their disposal is the law, and precedent court decisions. The Swedish Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act states that personal information regarding health care and social care is protected by secrecy unless the information can be disclosed without entailing detriment for the person in the records or any of their relations. The law is purposely ambiguous here and arguably could never legislate on the detail of every case. This places a heavy responsibility on the archivists, giving them significant power over the outcome of the archive users' contact with the archives.

Some of the archivists I spoke with told me that their power to help people seeking answers to their past entails a moral obligation to be of assistance, and to actually help, even though their legal responsibility does not include such an obligation. On the contrary, in fact—the law often prescribes that archivists *not* help the archive users. This could involve either concealing information crucial to the user's search for answers on details about why they were taken into care, for example, or disclosing hurtful information. As Sven pointed out in Chapter 2, there is no legal space to consider how the disclosed information might affect the person who requests it, neither in negative nor positive ways. According to the law, archivists should only weigh the detriment that disclosure could have on the record subjects, or by proxy, their kin. Archivists who

see their role as providing help do not view this perceived moral obligation as one that emanates from law or justice, however. They see it as an obligation on them as human beings.

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the radical empathy approach of Caswell and Cifor calls for a shift in the way archives should be managed and organized on all levels, not least regarding the disclosure of records to archive users. "An ethics of care," they write, "would transform the reading room space from a cold, elitist, institutional environment to an affective, community-centered service space" (Caswell and Cifor 2016, 24).

When Caswell and Cifor discuss record creators, they refer primarily to individuals whose personal archives have ended up in community archives because of their connection to various social movements and contexts, such as queer archives. The records they discuss are not produced by officials writing about citizens but by the record subjects themselves. Hence, Caswell and Cifor do not address the power dynamics between record subjects and record creators that are central to my study. Records from social and psychiatric care cannot be seen as "representing" the record subjects in the same way as the records in a community archive represent the members of that community, since the voices of the mental patients and social service clients are mostly missing from official records. However, the main focus of Caswell and Cifor's article is on the interaction between archivist and archive user, particularly how the former should relate to the latter when sensitive and hurtful information is disclosed. In this context, the concept of radical empathy could be relevant also to public authority archives.

Arguing for your case

Helena once told me that she wanted the archives to be, as she put it, "more human" (*mer mänskligt)*. Even though she said she managed, she still struggled to balance her professional role with her personal feelings toward the archive users. "Maybe I am too much of a fellow human being, and maybe that makes me a worse archivist (*en sämre arkivarie*). But I am not ashamed of it. I *am* a human being."[122] Several times during our meetings, Helena mentioned that she would like the responsibility for social care records to stay with the social services office beyond the prescribed five years. She also wanted social services to play a bigger part in matters of disclosure suggesting that a social worker should be present when certain kinds of sensitive material are disclosed to former clients and that this practice should be stated in legislation.[123]

[122] Interview no. 9.

[123] This practice is in use in for example Australia (Murray and Humphreys 2014). Additionally, some genealogists recommend that people who search for ther biological origin should be given access to "identity counselling" (Zerubavel 2012, 8).

Helena is a dedicated advocate for a view on the archives and its relation to archive users that I identify as an expression of a care ethic. Like all the archivists I met, Helena is concerned about the wellbeing of the archive users. However, she takes this concern further than most. A majority of the archivists admitted that they sometimes feel anxious about how the disclosure of certain information will affect the archive users, or, conversely, how the redaction of certain information will affect the users. Most of the archivists I spoke with, however, set this concern aside to be able to carry out their assessments. Legally, we must remember, the potential harm or benefit this information might have on the person requesting should not be taken into consideration. But Helena was keen to prioritize how the information in the records could help the archive users answer questions, fill in gaps in their family history, and heal from traumatic experiences.

When Helena first told me about Anna,[124] a woman who had requested her social service records from the archive, Helena referred to the file as "the worst thing I have ever read." The file was extensive, containing information on neglect and abuse, sexual violence, drug abuse, and "all the atrocities that you could possibly imagine." Anna requested her file as part of her rehabilitation and had told Helena that she was going to read it with her psychologist. During the same time she collected her social service records from the municipal archive, Anna also requested her records from the child and adolescent psychiatric services (BUP, *Barn- och ungdomspsykiatri*). While the social service case file was disclosed to her with only a few minor redactions, the psychiatric records from the regional archives were heavily redacted. This upset Anna, who turned to Helena to ask why the regional archives would not let her read her own file. Helena could give her no answers since the regional archives is separate from the municipal, and she has no knowledge of their procedures. When I met Helena a few weeks after her final encounter with Anna, she was still occupied by the case, and she questioned why the regional archives had made such extensive redactions.

> You know, we have such an extreme power as a public authority. And we assess these things differently. And they are *right*, you know, the region, they are *correct*. For them, this is just another document. They are doing tons of these assessments, they have a whole *team* of people, and all they do is sit and redact documents. And they are really good at the *law*.
>
> But … if you think again the … the role of health care is to help a person progress in their care. She [the archive user] is in treatment now, trying to move on, and she has moved to another part of Sweden. And this person has been extremely expensive, you know, for the state, all the resources they have used to help her, through everything, through her life. So I think we should do everything in our power now to help her by disclosing these files, not give her another trauma by redacting stuff. Thirty-eight years old, you know, and not

[124] Anna's file was also discussed in Chapter 3.

> even then is she deemed adult enough to … you know, take full responsibility of her own life. Do you see what I mean?[125]

Here we can see how Helena uses three different arguments to make her point. She acknowledges that the region's assessment was right, at least in the eyes of the law, but questions the legalistic ethic as the sole authority. Instead, she emphasizes the therapeutic dimension and the potential for care that lies in the disclosure of information.

She also incorporates a socioeconomic argument ("this person has been extremely expensive") to make her point more valid in the eyes of an imagined external opponent. The socioeconomic argument is based on the fact that unhappy people are costly to society in the sense that they often require support from public agencies, including psychiatric care, financial assistance, or treatment for alcohol or substance abuse related to self-medication. There is convincing research showing that it can be traumatizing for people to read their own case files and records (e.g., Wilson och Golding 2016). So the socioeconomic costs of caring for people who feel traumatized by information disclosed to them from official documents can be high, and the socioeconomic argument suggests that it would be more effective to provide therapeutic assistance directly during the act of disclosure, when retraumatization might happen.

Helena additionally brings up a moral argument, challenging the region's right to decide what information an adult is entitled to read and questioning their right to decide whether an adult is allowed to "take full responsibility of her life." At the same time, she argues that because society has intervened in peoples' lives, society also has a responsibility to consider how documentation of these interventions affect the individuals and to provide care when the documentation affects them negatively. She wants the authorities to disclose as much information as possible to the archive users. She also wants the municipality to care for the archive users when they receive this information.

Helena wants to help the users in two steps: first by providing information about their past, and second by helping them understand this information and deal with its consequences. She is aware that her arguments do not align with legislation ("They are *right*, the region, they are *correct*. And they are really good at the *law*"). The law does not leave any room for archivists to consider how the disclosed information affects the archive user, only how it might affect the record subjects. Knowing this, Helena understands that her arguments are not relevant in the eyes of the law. However, she believes them to be morally and ethically valid, and she adds a socioeconomic angle to give her personally anchored arguments some general significance and show that it is not only fair to take into consideration the feelings of the archive users in matters of disclosure, but also economically effective.

[125] Interview no. 16.

Critique of the care-perspective

If Helena found the division between her bureaucratic task and her perceived moral responsibility toward the archive users problematic, other archivists had different views. Bosse spoke condescendingly of former colleagues who, like Helena, had worked in social care. He had no time for colleagues who hesitated to disclose information that might be upsetting or hurtful to the archive users. "Some people don't disclose everything they should because the client [archive user] might feel bad about it," he told me.

> And I mean … we have [hurtful] stuff in our records, but we can't take those kinds of considerations. Put crudely (*rått uttryckt*), you know, if someone feels bad about what they find in the archive, that's none of our business. People get to read what they are entitled to read![126]

As we can see, Bosse does not, in principle, want to disclose more (or less) information than Helena. Helena wants the archive users to get all the information that will help them. Bosse wants them to get the information they are legally entitled to, regardless of how it might affect them. The issue here is not if Bosse does or does not care about how the archive users might react to the disclosed information. His point is that concern for the archive users' reaction to disclosed information should not form a basis for the archivists' decisions.

Bosse was not the only one critical of ethically inclined archivists. While Helena questioned the regional archive's ability or willingness to help people, Camilla, who was the manager of that archives, held a different perspective. Camilla often spoke about how the rule of law had increased since the region had implemented a centralized unit for assessment of patient files ten years earlier. The archive staff now administrated all matters of disclosure across the whole region, including those concerning records that were still housed in, and in use at, different clinics and departments. As Helena pointed out earlier, the regional archives employed a whole team of people who specialized in assessing records. For Helena, this specialization implied that the staff at the regional archives were brusquely businesslike, insensitive to the delicate nature of the matters and people they dealt with. Camilla, on the other hand, regarded this specialization as a key to archivists' ability to uphold the rule of law and make equal assessments.

Camilla and her coworkers handled about 350 requests per day from different categories of archive users, or customers (*kunder*), the term they used. Requests came in not only from private persons but also from different care units within the same or other regions (requesting older records on a patient in their care), from social care services across various municipalities, and from police, insurance companies, and so on.

[126] Interview no. 4.

Camilla told me that the archive's relationship with some of the social services had once been strained. The reason, she explained, was that the social workers expected the archives to hand over the totality of a person's records on request. Social services usually made such requests as part of an ongoing assessment of someone's ability as a parent. To judge this, social workers wanted access to the parent's health records, not only from after the birth of the child(ren), but sometimes up to ten years earlier. When the archives refused to disclose these early records, or records concerning health issues that they deemed not relevant to the patients' abilities as parents, the social workers initially were incensed. But with time, Camilla told me, they accepted this practice and are now "fine" (*helt ok*) with it.[127] Camilla's mission to educate social services about the boundaries between them and the archives stands in stark contrast to Helena's desire to incorporate perspectives of social services into all archival practice.

During my visit to the archives where Camilla worked, I witnessed a discussion that illustrated the tension between legalistic ethics and care ethics. I was sitting with Camilla and two of her coworkers, Henrik and Therese. Camilla had just poured us all coffee, and we were enjoying some fancy cookies from an artisan bakery that she had visited on her way to work. I brought up the issue of parents who are recorded as having made derogatory comments about their child or expressed doubt or hesitation regarding their love for their child.

Henrik nodded eagerly. He understood exactly what I was referring to, he said. He told us about a record he had recently assessed, in which the mother of the man who was requesting his BUP file had distinctly said that she wished her son had never been born. "And obviously that stuff I didn't disclose," he continued, taking a sip of coffee. When I asked him if the redaction was for the protection of the son or the mother, he hesitated for a moment and said that it was for both.

Camilla intervened. She said firmly that the main protagonist in this case should be the deceased mother, since it was her memory that archivists were supposed to protect. Henrik agreed with Camilla but did not seem totally convinced. "Yeah, I know," he said. "But still, it's the son who has to live with that for the rest of his life. With that knowledge."

Camilla looked at Henrik skeptically and told him that his argument was not valid. "But we're not supposed to think like that," she said in an upbraiding tone. "They [the archive users] get all sorts of info that's not at all pleasant, really. So we're not supposed to protect them like that, you know."

Henrik looked down at his half-eaten cookie. "Yeah, you're right," he mumbled.[128]

[127] Interview no. 14.
[128] Interview no. 14.

"What has happened has still happened"

One dividing principle between the archivists advocating a care ethic and the ones drawn toward a legalistic ethic is their view on time, on what role temporality plays in cases under assessment. Case files from the social services are transferred to the municipal archives five years after the last note has been made. The case is then considered closed, and the client is removed from the social services lists. Should the former client require social assistance or intervention again in the future, a new file is opened. If this happens and the social workers want to read the previous file that has been transferred to the archives, they need the client's consent.

In this way, a line is drawn between ongoing actions by the municipalities and those taken in the past. For example, the fact that a citizen was in foster care as a child, or received financial aid ten years ago, is not deemed relevant if the person's ability as a parent is under investigation. When a former client or patient comes to the archives to view their old case file, however, the line between the past and the present is sometimes blurred.

Helena spoke about the practice of transferring records to the archives after five years and how it can affect archive users who are receiving psychological care. "Then after five years, all of a sudden this doesn't matter because then the file has become … an official document. And we think that's super weird (*jättekonstigt*) because … the situation is still there, you know. What has happened has still happened."[129] Helena further pointed out that people tend to create a narrative of the past for themselves that enables them to move forward in life. She talked about how we sometimes choose to forget things that are too painful, even if we are aware of them "deep down inside." Helena's view was that the archives, when disclosing information to someone who might have repressed that information, risked initiating painful processes within the archive user. Again, Helena thought that the fact that the municipality (through the social services) had intervened in the life of the archive user entailed a responsibility from the same municipality (now through the archives) to care for the archive user when these interventions were revived through the disclosure of information.

> When the municipality has made such a huge intervention in someone's life, I think you're [the municipality] responsible for that documentation, even when the child is grown up. So what we would like to do, here, is that when we disclose case files—especially when they concern children—where the people in question might not remember or may have had a totally different reality presented to them than what was written down by the social workers … we would like the social services to be there, be present, when the file is disclosed. Just like a regular client visit at the social service office. So that they can explain.

[129] Interview no. 3.

> Why have they written like this, how did the legislation work at the time? Why did they make these decisions? Why did it happen like this?[130]

Gunilla provided an example of how care is already being integrated into archival practice, explaining that the municipal archives where she worked had stopped assessing records from school psychologists. Whenever a request for such a file came in, Gunilla contacted the psychologists' office, which sent someone over to the archives to perform the assessment. No psychologist is present when the users receive the records, as in Helena's suggestion; this routine is aimed at protecting the archive user from even receiving certain information.

Gunilla is well aware this practice is against regulations. Since the patient records have been transferred from care units to the archives, the legal responsibility for them also shifts. After a case file is delivered to the archives, the psychologist who originally wrote about the patient no longer has any more right to access the file than anyone else. Involving school psychologists in the assessment records records therefore does not accord with regulation. Nevertheless, Gunilla defends the procedure by referencing to the complexity of the content of the records and her lack of psychological competence.

> Because as a psychologist said, one has to know the individual to be able to make the assessment. Like, this person might be very resilient (*tålig*), but that person might not be … How am I supposed to read between the lines in such a text? I'm not a psychologist. So … we made this solution, but really, it isn't correct. Since the records are delivered to the archives, it is us who should assess them, but … Well, this is how we do it, in practice.[131]

In this example, the past vulnerability of the record subject is considered a reason to protect the archive user, who is the same person as the record subject but appears later in time. The timeline is thus destabilized; the fact that ten or even twenty years might have passed makes no difference to the archivists' or psychologists' view of the archive users. The subject/users are treated as patients, even though they do not visit the archives as patients but as citizens asking for information.

Protecting perpetrators

If Bosse and Helena represent opposite poles regarding how much emphasis should be put on the individual when archivists assess for disclosure, most archivists I spoke to positioned themselves somewhere in the middle. A majority acknowledged that legislation does not leave room for concern about how the disclosed information might affect the archive user, only the record

[130] Interview no. 3.
[131] Interview no. 6.

subject. At the same time, however, most of them were occasionally hesitant to release records that people were entitled to access, citing concerns for the claimant's wellbeing ("Do they really understand what they are asking for?" was a common question I often heard posed).

There were also times when the archivists wanted to help archive users by disclosing more information than they perceived themselves legally allowed. One instance of this is when archivists are required to "protect perpetrators"—that is, to classify information about violations committed by a parent against a child when the child was too young to remember, especially if revealing it would cause detriment for the parent should the child learn about it. In response to my question about whether there are times when archivists make decisions that go against what they think is right in order to adhere to the law, Julia said this:

> Well, it's this issue with protecting the perpetrators. I understand why you do it and all, but in principle, I think it's a bit … wrong, you know. I'm not supposed to think like this, but I imagine that the one asking for information from us, they … might have memories, or you know, *vague* memories. I often think that it might be that if we redact information that can be detrimental to … Because a perpetrator or a parent maybe has done something really bad, or whatever the thing is. Because *that person* [the parent] might suffer from it. So that it kind of … it makes it problematic for this child who has experienced something and can't put it into words … Somehow, on a personal level, I want that person to get acknowledgement for their memories. Or for their childhood, that it really *was* like this, I *know* I was subjected to this you know! And then … sometimes, they can't have that.[132]

I saw this routine of redacting potentially detrimental information about parents in practice when I read a BUP file at one of the regional archives that I visited. Dating from the early 1990s, the file concerned a six-year-old girl—I will call her Lisa—who went to therapy because of behavioral problems that the staff at her preschool had noticed. The file consisted of the psychologist's notes from conversations with Lisa and her parents, test results, and the therapist's descriptions of what Lisa said and did during sessions. It also contained a number of statements from the psychologist and the therapist, in which they concluded what they believed to be the cause of Lisa's difficulties. The treatment had the desired effect; after about a year, Lisa's situation had ameliorated. She was deemed cured, and the therapy ended.

When Lisa was in her thirties, she requested her BUP file from the region. At my visit to the archives, I read both the redacted version that had been disclosed to Lisa and the full, unredacted file. The redactions were not extensive—only a few sentences on every other page had been blacked out. A majority of the redactions were of things that Lisa's mother had said to the psy-

[132] Interview no. 12.

chologist during their sessions where Lisa was not present. Most of these matters did not concern Lisa; they were about the mother's psychological health and her relationship to her own mother—that is, to Lisa's maternal grandmother. On two occasions, Lisa's mother talked about her relationship with Lisa, describing the difficulties she had bonding with Lisa when she was younger. Those segments had also been redacted.

Other redacted information included the mother's suspicion that Lisa's father had abused Lisa sexually. This suspicion came up a number of times and was also brought up by the psychologist, who wrote that there was an "incestuous energy" (*incestuös laddning*) emanating from Lisa's father. This sentence had also been redacted by the archivists. In her final statement, when Lisa's treatment was nearly finished, the therapist concluded that Lisa showed signs of trauma and had a sexualized language and behavior that was not normal for a girl her age. The therapist further stated that Lisa most likely had been subjected to some kind of sexual violation, but did not speculate in that statement on where, when, or by whom this violation might have been inflicted. This final statement was disclosed to Lisa without redactions.

Even though Lisa's father, from what could be read in the BUP file, was never formally charged with the vague accusations mentioned in the records, this example illustrates the ethical dilemma of "protecting the perpetrators" that Julia described. The fact is that had he been convicted (and hence formally deemed a perpetrator), this information would have been made public for everyone, including Lisa. Sentences from Swedish courts are official public documents. This sometimes complicates the assessments for the archivists, who redact information in a case file but at the same time refer the archive user to a court archives, where this same information will be accessible to them.

Hanna, the archivist who provided me with Lisa's file, told me that Lisa had contacted her after receiving the records and asked about the redactions. Hanna explained to Lisa that if she wanted to see the records without blackouts, she would need written consent from her parents, who were both alive. Lisa understood and told Hanna that she would get back to the archives with the consent, but she never did. "So I don't know," Hanna said. "Either she didn't get consent, or she never had the courage (*vågade*) to ask them."[133]

Protecting perpetrators was not the only occasion when the archivists felt torn between the law and their instinct. These urges to deviate from practice are seldom acted on, but they are sources of a great deal of ethical stress for many archivists. If the archivists follow regulations, they feel anxious about not doing what is best for the archive user. If they deviate from the rules and follow their personal convictions, anxiety emerges from the knowledge that they are not acting professionally and could be held responsible for it. For example, when Gunilla told me about her archives' practice of letting psy-

[133] Interview no. 18.

chologists assess certain records, she—partly joking, partly serious—questioned if I really should include that information in my dissertation, given the bad reputation it might give her, the municipality where she worked, and archivists as a professional group.

"I got feeling"

On the other hand, I also spoke to archivists who were well versed in the law but not particularly bothered when they occasionally deviated from it. Sometimes those archivists who best knew the legislation were also the ones who most easily deviated from it as they saw fit. Bosse, for example, who as we have seen was firm in his belief in legislation, told me about occasions when he simply ignored the rules and acted at his own discretion. "I got feeling, you know," he said. He then told me about an incident at the beginning of his career, back when he was young, when he acted in what he called "a gray area" (*en gråzon*). The case concerned a man who was adopted and had no knowledge about his biological parents. The man had now become a father, and his young son suffered from mysterious health problems about which doctors were clueless. The man wanted to access his biological mother's patient records, hoping to hand them over to the doctors so they could search for any hereditary diseases and gain insight into his son's case. Bosse continued:

> And I suppose I didn't act correctly, because I called up the biological mother, and she was rather … she didn't even know that her son was still *in Sweden*, you know. Anyhow, of course she wanted her records to be handed out, so I did. I redacted all personal information on her and the biological father, and then I sent the records to the doctor. And that was … questionable, by me. But I did it.[134]

I asked Bosse what he would have done today. "Well, I would have done the same thing, actually" he answered. "Or rather, I wouldn't even have called the mother. I would just have sent out the records."[135]

The reason for Bosse to call his actions here "questionable" is that the only one with a right to ask for and receive records on a patient's biological relatives, for medical reasons, is the doctor currently treating the patient. Since the identity of this particular relative (the paternal grandmother of the patient) was not known, this was impossible. For Bosse to work around this obstacle the way he did was thus not according to protocol.

One important difference between this example and others presented in this chapter is that this case regarded physical health, not psychological or social. I believe it is significant that the example Bosse gave me about deviating from his conventional practice involved physical healt and, specifically, the health

[134] Interview no. 4.
[135] Interview no. 4.

of a child. The consequences of disclosing this information were concrete, unlike in social and psychological investigations, where outcomes are often open to interpretation. Even so, Bosse was not a stranger to becoming personally invested in the lives of archive users.

Several archivists told me that they were in contact with people who they first encountered as archive users but who had stayed in touch with them and visited at the workplace or called them on a regular basis. Sometimes, former archive users asked for advice in matters regarding other authorities—Bosse told me about a man who had asked his advice on how to deal with the legal and practical issues following his father's death. Other times, former archive users simply wanted to talk about how they were doing or what they had been up to since their last meeting with the archivist. For these users, the archivists have a therapeutic function. The archivists are representatives of the region or municipality and consequently an authority. But archive users also sometimes see the archivists as human beings they can trust, even though they generally do not trust authorities. In some cases, they even become a general guide, or bridge, into official Sweden. As Göran told me, "Quite often we are the first positive encounter with a public authority that they have had, and somehow we become their 'way in.'"[136]

Citizens and vulnerable others

Interaction between archivists and archive users are inevitably colored by differences in life experiences, social and economic status, and level of education. Archive users come to the archives because they or their relatives have been involved with psychiatry or the social services and received care or interventions. These experiences have often formed their lives in ways very different from the lives of the well-educated archivists they encounter. But such differences between archivist and archive user were rarely addressed by the archivists I met, except in the recurrent comment that it was encouraging to see how most of the people asking for their case files had managed to "turn their lives around"—which most of the time meant that they had jobs and children.

The only archivist who explicitly acknowledged the difference between archivist and archive user was Helena. Before she became an archivist, Helena worked for her municipality's board of social service. Although she is now the head of the municipal archives, she still identifies with and often thinks about her former profession as a social worker. During our first interview, Helena described herself as having had a privileged life and explained how her work in social services and the municipal archives had entailed her first ever contact with "that part of society" (*den delen av samhället*).

[136] Interview no. 5.

> So they live a hard life—a much harder life than us who work here at the archives. And I quickly realized that those things you read about in the morning paper, those are reality for many people. And I think that is kind of good to have in mind when you do these disclosures. One must never forget that there is a person behind the file.[137]

Reminding themselves, and me, that there are actual people behind every case file was common and not just unique to Helena. This acknowledgement, however, often collided with the aim of treating every case in the same way: to make just assessments and follow the rule of law.

In his writings, philosopher Emmanuel Levinas makes a distinction between ethics and justice. Ethics, he says, precedes justice. Ethics is the acknowledgement of our responsibility to care for the other and put their well-being before our own. Justice, on the other hand, is a calculation based on knowledge and therefore necessarily, in Levinas's view, always a simplification (Wright, Hughes, and Ainley 1988, 171).[138] To achieve justice, society must see every person "from a perspective in which he or she becomes formally (conceptually) the same and indistinguishable from every other before the law" (Perpich 2019, 237).

A definition like this describes the approach adopted by many of the archivists that I spoke to, as well as the Swedish legislation and praxis that they are supposed to adhere to. Every citizen who comes to the archive and asks for information should receive equal treatment, and the law should be applied in the same way in every case. This ability to generalize and comply with universal rules—justice—is often taken as a sign of a highly developed humanity and civilization. In Levinas' thinking, however, it is our concern for the other—that is, ethics—that makes us human. We are not subjects relating to each other, we are subjects *because* we relate to each other.[139]

To take full effect, this relation needs political action. The archivists can care for the archive users all they want, but they are still constrained by legislation, by justice. When discrepancies between legislation and common ethical ideas occur and become too disturbing, voices are often raised for changes in legislation. But for Levinas, the urge to shape society by rules according to one's ethics diminishes the other to a symbol of something else. It inevitably erases the otherness of the other and simplifies her into an example, an illustration, or an "element of an ideal calculus" (Levinas 1969, 216). But the archivists and archive users are not only elements, not only civil servants and citizens. They are also human beings with particular traits and needs, and not "the same and indistinguishable from every other."

[137] Interview no. 3.
[138] In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas had not yet developed this distinction. There, ethics and justice are interchangeable and have the same meaning.
[139] This is basically what Butler says as well when she writes that "we define each other." I will not go into detail on Butler's use of Levinas here: this issue is for example discussed by Perpich (2019, 243).

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the established view on vulnerability is that it is a lack, a diminished capacity to protect oneself from harm. But thinkers like Levinas see vulnerability instead as a prerequisite for increased connection. Vulnerability is the capacity for the subject to be open to the other. What Levinas calls the openness of the subject directs us to look at vulnerability not as a trait that can be ascribed to different actors but as an inherent part of being with, relating to, and being exposed to the other. Without the other, we do not exist. The call of the other brings us into being; a subject is always a subject for another. Hence, the archivists and the archive users are both vulnerable others to each other—they are both inherently vulnerable in a universal human view of vulnerability that focuses on our shared mortality. However, the different material conditions in which they live and interact are real and affect the way in which these interactions play out; they affect the situational vulnerability.

Philosopher Diane Perpich writes of "the material thickness of human lives—the lived, material need of the other that cannot be reduced to or captured within a set of principles or typologies" (Perpich 2019, 238). In other words, the messiness of life and the many layers of complex physical and psychological experiences that constitute us as humans and make it impossible to ever formulate a universal law of what is "right." This vastness of every life makes it impossible for the archivists to ever know with certainty whether their understanding of a case is correct, their decisions justified. Since the needs of the other is the first priority in Levinasian thinking, these needs, this thickness, will always be in the way. It gets in the way, for example, when the archivists try to perform their task of judging what information to disclose and to redact, using a strictly legalistic ethic. Moreover, the thickness that the archivists have to negotiate is not only that of the archive users but also of the record subjects. The records being assessed contain documentation of lived, material needs, adding layers to the thickness. In a Levinasian sense, the archivists meet (and are open to) the other when they communicate with the archive user, but they also meet representations of the other (and other others) in the records.

The tension between the thickness of life and the bureaucratic aim to apply rules in an effective way is illustrated by this quote about his social service case file from John-George Nicholson, a participant in the MIRRA Project who spent his childhood in various institutions and foster homes:

> Over time I've come to appreciate these 126 pages of fragmented fact and fiction. They've become gateways I sometimes pass through. I still keep the file by my bed. Now forty-one, the pages speak to me through all the characters that contributed to them. I wonder about all those people pressing keys and scribbling on pages. I'm not sure they always saw me. Instead a form to quickly complete. A train to catch. A box to tick. At times they missed the boy and I wonder if they ever considered the man that would one day read their words

> again and again. I wonder if they appreciated the written world that they were crafting, because it has now become a big part of me. (Larrisey et al.)

This quote reminds us, as the archivists often reminded me, that there is a person behind each file. It also tells us that official records are sometimes the only information an individual has to form a narrative of, and make sense of, their childhood. This realization, of course, puts a moral weight on the archivists. It impels them to do everything they can to help the archive users find answers to their questions—to see the other in the archive user.

Conclusion

During my conversations with the archivists, we never explicitly talked about politics, ideologies, or theories that might form foundations for their views on disclosure. As I explained in the introductory chapter, the ethics that I use to analyze the archivists' approaches are my formulations, not theirs. Though none of the archivists explicitly made the connection, the caring approach can be seen as drawing on a feminist ethics of care.

Kittay makes a distinction between power inequality in a relation of dependency and domination in a relation of inequality (Kittay 1999, 33). By this, she means that even though dependency always entails some aspect of inequality, inequality is not the same thing as domination. Domination, she writes, is to take advantage of someone's dependency and use it against their best interests. Many relations are unequal, but those based on love and affection are not examples of domination.[140] In this light, the unequal power relations between archivist and archive user are not necessarily a problem. As long as the archivist wants the best for the archive user, no harm is done.

Political philosopher Philip Pettit has a different take on domination. As discussed in the introductory chapter, Pettit defines domination as when a state, agency, or official has the capacity to interfere, on an arbitrary basis, in certain choices that someone else is in a position to make (Pettit 1997, 52). But if the state, agency, or official is constrained by law or other external rules, the interference cannot be said to be done *arbitrarily*. Authorities and officials can interfere without it being domination, if the interference is tightly regulated by law and leaves little or no room for personal interpretation (ibid., 80). To *interfere*, according to Pettit, is by definition to make things worse for the other party, not better. Hence, interference in Pettit's writing has a similar meaning as domination in Kittay's. In Pettit's view, for example, a state official who makes a decision based on discretion that is in favor of the citizen would not be said to interfere. Importantly, though, it is only the *ability* to

[140] As mentioned in the introductory chapter, for example, Kittay observes that the relationship between parent and child is not generally seen as being based on domination, even though the child is utterly dependent on the parent.

interfere arbitrarily that is required to entail domination, not the actual interference. Therefore, a well-meaning official who usually makes wise and just decisions regarding the lives of the citizens she encounters still dominates those citizens if, being in a bad mood or for any other reason, she suddenly may make a rash and harmful decision (ibid., 55). Kittay would argue that archivists' arbitrary interference with archive users is not domination if it is well-meaning and benign. For Pettit, on the other hand, the intention behind the interference makes no difference, it is the arbitrariness itself that creates the domination. Even if the archivists do not intentionally make things worse for the archive users, the possibility that they could is enough to entail domination.

The key point here seems to be professional discretion. How much space for professional judgment do the archivists have (or take), and how restrained are they by law and practice? The answers to these questions depend on whether one looks at the issues through a legalistic or a caring ethic. Levinas refers to the gap between law and personal ethics as a discrepancy between an inter-human perspective and the order of politics. He argues that there is always a difference between the person as a person and as a citizen (Levinas 1988, 165). Since the self is distinct from the citizen, a gap will emerge between what the civil servant owes to the citizen and what the civil servant *as a self* perceives he owes to the citizen as other. The archivists in this study are to different extents willing to fill this gap. Their willingness to use their own personal judgment coincides with their tendency to view the archive users more as fellow humans and less as citizens (or customers). Archivists holding a legalistic ethic are careful to keep a professional distance from the archive users, priding themselves on not mixing personal opinions or emotions into their assessments. Their focus is the upholding of law, social order, and equal treatment of citizens.

The closer the archivists come to a care ethic, the less bothered they are by the immanent imbalance of power between them and the archive users. Their prime mission, as they see it, is to help people, not protect the legal order of the state. The archivists with a more legalistic ethic also must relate to the gap between law and practice. However, they are reluctant to fill it with anything other than guidelines, regulations, and precedent court decisions.

Something that unites the archivists, whether they lean toward a legalistic or a caring ethic, is that they are aware of and express conflicted feelings toward their exercise of power as civil servants. They all try to exercise their power wisely and justly. They do this either by sticking firmly to legislation or by focusing on the benefit of the archive users. The latter focus on the well-being of the users gives these archivists moral legitimacy, at least in the eyes of Kittay. Nevertheless, from Pettit's perspective, since this moral legitimacy stems from the personal moral compass of individual archivists rather than from legislation, it is arbitrary and still a form of domination.

The different views on what constitutes domination concern not only the interaction between archivist and archive user. Domination and care are also

at the core of relationships between archivist and record subject, record subject and state, and archive user and state. When discussing personal information in official archives, recorded by officials in positions of power over the record subjects, the concept of domination becomes even more complicated. The relationship between psychiatrist and patient, or social worker and client, is a relationship of dependency, at best. In fact, it often proves to be a relationship of domination. The trope of governments using records on citizens as tools of surveillance and control is brought to the fore in this quote from a testimony, "Confidential evidence 284," from one of Australia's "stolen children."[141]

> Why have they got records on us? I'm not a criminal. I never have been a criminal and I object to the government holding records on me. I didn't do anything wrong and I want those records to be—if they don't want to hand them over to me, then destroy them in front of me. I don't see why I should have that humiliation. (Australia and Wilkie 1997, 306)

Here, records are seen solely as instruments of surveillance and control. This quote can be contrasted with the testimony, earlier in this chapter, from a care-leaver in the MIRRA Project who kept his case file by his bed. These two quotes illustrate two diametrically opposed views on records of social care (or "care," as the latter example would have it). They also illustrate—but from the perspective of the archive users and record subjects—the legalistic and the caring ethics.

The point of departure in matters of assessment and disclosure is that the records in question were produced in a context of domination, where the production of records on patients and clients was a way of controlling them. For archivists like Helena who rely on a care ethics, interactions between archivists and archive users are not primarily about relationships between bureaucrat and citizen; they are interactions between fellow human beings, between a subject and an other. With this approach, the archivists aim to avoid the problem of domination in matters of assessment, even though we might question to what extent their view of the interaction is shared by the archive users. So, when the records produced in social welfare and psychiatry are later assessed by archivists who must decide which information to provide for the archive users, archivists try to mitigate or remedy the initial domination.

But attempts to mitigate domination may result in further domination. If the archives had a more human and less bureaucratic approach, as Helena suggested, and involved caretakers in the disclosures, some people might experience the archive as a warmer, less intimidating place—an affective, community-centered service space, as Caswell and Cifor put it. However, since the

[141] During the twentieth century, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia were forcibly taken from their families and placed in institutions. They are commonly referred to as "the stolen children" or "the stolen generation."

records in question are created by the state from a position of power, mitigating their harsh, cold content would at the same time work as a way of concealing the state's power. As Foucault writes, "It's impossible to reconcile law and order because when you try to do so it is only in the form of an integration of law into the state's order" (Foucault 1988b, 162).

For Levinas, the choice to do bad is what makes goodness possible. This choice is represented by the space for professional discretion that the archivists in this study have and by the responsibility that this space entails. The Levinasian choice to do bad is the same as Pettit's domination and also aligns with Foucault's view on power. Power, he states, is only power if one has the choice not to succumb to it, otherwise it is just violence, or raw force (Foucault 1991). Pettit, like the legalistically inclined archivists, wants legislation to eliminate this choice, to eliminate domination. What Levinas, like Foucault, is saying, however, and what the experiences of the archivists that I talked to show, is that this elimination is impossible.

8. Concluding chapter

Archivists, like many other public service professionals, wield power. Their job is to decide not only what information should be preserved for future generations but also what information should be available to whom. In this dissertation, I have studied archivists in their role as officials rather than cultural heritage workers. This focus derived from the fact that the archivists interviewed exercise their agentic power through encounters with archive users, not by selecting what to include in the archives. The archivists' job is to provide access to official records, working along an assembly line providing information to citizens who request it. As requests for records continue to accelerate, however, they need to make swift ethical decisions that concern other people in deeply personal ways.

The overarching question addressed in my study is how public archives are both a conduit for societal interventions in people's lives and an impartial agency between the individual and the state. I have explored how differing perspectives on vulnerability, care, privacy, and dignity influence the assessment, classification, and disclosure of official records containing sensitive and personal information. To do so, I began with two research questions.

The first question considered how the ethical perspectives emerged during interviews—the rights based legalistic ethics and the feminist ethics of care—were expressed by the archivits as they described their work. The focus of study then shifted to exploring how these ethical perspectives affected the archivists and their work. Specifically, I examined how the different ethics impacted a) the primary focus of the archivists' assessments and b) the results of those assessments.

The second question was more practically oriented, focusing on how the different ethics and their implications affected a) the tasks involved in the archivists' work and b) their professional roles.

In the next three sections, I will elaborate on my findings, focusing on ethics, discretion, and bureaucracy. In a final fourth section, I will turn to those who, while not the main subject of this dissertation, were nevertheless ever present: the archive users and record subjects. Here, I will explain my decision to not engage in the discussion about care recipients' use of records while, at the same time, engaging to some extent in that very discussion.

Feminist and legalistic ethics

The democratic role of archives (and thus of archivists) is to ensure that the public's right to transparency in official affairs is guaranteed. This task places archives somewhere between the state and its citizens, expecting them to function as neutral safety zones that do not take sides for or against the authorities whose archival records they handle. However, as my study shows, archives and archivists sometimes tend to also become caring institutions.

As the archivists talked about their work assessing records, I identified two distinct ethics: a feminist ethics of care and a rights-based legalistic ethics. These ethics overlap, but do not coincide, with Maynard-Moody and Musheno's view of street-level bureaucrats as either citizen agents or state agents. Archivists who applied care ethics to their assessments generally prioritized the wellbeing of the archive user over strict adherence to regulations and the maintenance of the state. Archivists who favored the legalistic approach, on the other hand, often felt a deep sense of responsibility to uphold the rule of law. This sense often sprang from a responsibility toward the archive users, however, not the state per se. Instead of aiming to shield users from painful truths or help them find answers to heal from trauma, the legalistically inclined archivists often justified their decisions by emphasizing the *rights* of the archive users. This contrasts with the ethics of care, which often focused on the *needs* of the users instead.

In Chapter 7, I showed how archive users are sometimes treated as patients or clients in their interactions with the archives. Some archivists emphasized the caring aspect of the archives, linking them more closely to the caring institutions whose records they hold. Others sought to draw a clear line between themselves and the record creators. However, none of the archivists found the drawing of this line easy, and most of them wavered in their convictions from time to time. This wavering reflects the central paradox at the heart of this study: that archives are both extensions of the state and places where citizens can hold that same state accountable for its actions.

As noted in the introductory chapter, my use of the feminist ethics of care does not mean that I have taken into account the gender of the archivists interviewed. Nor have I quantified how many archivists lean toward a care ethic versus a legalistic ethic. Rather, my interest has been how these ethics are expressed by the archivists and what consequences they have. As Gilligan writes of her approach to the female voice versus the male voice, "I point to the interplay of these voices within each gender and suggest that their convergence marks times of crisis and change" (Gilligan 1982).

In this dissertation, I have, to paraphrase Gilligan, highlighted the interplay of voices within the archival profession and suggested that their convergence marks a time of crisis and change within this profession. Archivists today are no longer primarily heritage workers; they are civil servants. This shift introduces new dilemmas to the profession's longstanding debates: whose heritage,

whose stories, and whose archives should be preserved? While these questions remain important, the archivists in my study are more concerned with navigating the fine line between care and patronization, between upholding the rule of law and perpetuating inhumane bureaucracy. Using their professional discretion, they strive to tread this delicate path, avoiding the pitfalls on either side.

As noted at the end of Chapter 4, putting too much emphasis on the ethics of care risks turning archivists into activists. But some might wonder: what harm would that cause? The concept of the activist archivist has been debated for decades, with many advocating for archivists to take a stand, assert their place in society, and drive change. The problem with activist archivists, however, is not their potential to challenge state power by defying regulations they deem unjust. The problem, I argue, is that in doing so, they are not really challenging state power but enabling it.

As Foucault asserts, the state does not maintain its power by exercising it from above, forcing citizens to obey the rules it has established: "The aim of the modern art of government [is] … to develop those elements of individual lives in such a way that their development also fosters the strength of the state" (Foucault 1979, 252). The state and the individual are inseparably intertwined and mutually dependent, a relationship that becomes especially evident—and problematic—when archivists use their official roles to assist and care for archive users. Governmentality, and good governance in particular, operates in the interactions between archivists and users, shaping their participation in the broader dynamics of governance.

This echoes Wallace's critique of an uncritical adoption of social justice agendas in the archives. The paradox of pursuing social justice from within an unjust system is evident in the attempts to soften the harshness of public records by bringing in social workers and psychologists to comfort archive users and, as Helena put it, "ease the fall." This paradox, coupled with the intricate webs of relationships documented in the records, leave the archivists stranded. As several cases in this dissertation have demonstrated, the question of what is right and just often has no conclusive answer. Accordingly, the purpose of this dissertation has not been to determine which ethical perspective is "right" for assessing detriment, but rather to show and explain how care ethics clash with established legalistic ethics. Neither ethical framework provides sufficient guidance for the archivists. Whichever way they turn, they are left with undesirable consequences and unsolvable problems.

Discretion and detriment

At the heart of this study, and of the archivist's task of assessment, is decision-making. The archivists I met are rarely confident they have made the right decisions, yet they make decisions anyway—because they must. Their job is

to deal with the cases they are assigned. While they can seek advice from colleagues and jurists, they frequently find that even the legal experts are uncertain how to apply the law in individual cases. Moreover, the often heavy caseloads that the archivists handle compels them to maintain a certain pace, leaving little time for deep reflection on each case.

The archivists I spoke with and the various archives I visited differed in their approach to assessments, leading to inconsistent practices. As a result, the same type of information may be assessed differently depending on which archives hold it. Even within the same archives, archivists sometimes make conflicting assessments of the same material. This inconsistency poses a problem for the archive users: the information disclosed about one's past depends on where one live, or even which archivist handles the request. The professional discretion granted to archivists gives them power. This discretion—and the power that comes with it—is both stressful and liberating for the archivists. From the outside, including from the perspective of archive users and subjects, this power can look like domination. Despite archivists' intentions to help users and act in everyone's best interest, their assessments often appear arbitrary, leaving users vulnerable to what may look like random decisions.

Much of the variation in decision-making stems from the inherent complexity of disclosure issues and the significant professional discretion that archivists must exercise. Sometimes, however, archivists violate clearly stated rules that leave no room to interpretation. While some breaches occur out of ignorance, more often they happen because the archivists find that the rules are not "working"—which is to say, failing to help the archive users. When confronted with a Gordian knot of conflicting demands, the archivists sometimes do what Alexander the Great did and simply cut it in two. Acknowledging that no decision will satisfy everyone, the archivists rely on their intuition to decide who should benefit. Alternatively, they decide not to choose at all, instead following the rules meticulously and disregarding the ethically and morally problematic outcome of their decisions.

Juggling public opinion, legislation, and the recognition of others, both living and dead, archivists strive for certainty in their decisions. At times, they focus on only one of the enumerated issues, whether by meticulously following the law, relying on "common sense," or prioritizing the welfare of the other, and allow the other considerations to fall by the wayside. Other times, they try to triangulate these incongruous viewpoints, usually in vain. But they still have to make decisions. For public administration to function, it is not enough for officials to be trusted to make professional decisions; they must have the courage to act. This courage comes from a combination of professional expertise and personal experience. As Gilligan points out, drawing on a famous quote from *The Mill on the Floss* by novelist George Eliot,

> The mysterious complexity of our life cannot be laced up in formulas. Moral judgment can never be tied to general rules, but must be guided by a life vivid

> and intense enough to have created a wide, fellow-feeling with all that is human. (Gilligan 1982, 130)

When archivists exercise discretion, they draw on their experience and are guided by their feelings, acting "with all that is human"—that is, both human law and human nature. This is why the most experienced archivists, who know the law intimately, are the most willing to deviate from it when they deem necessary. Professional discretion is rooted in trust, but it also demands courage. The vulnerability of users and subjects often compels archivists to use their discretion. Archivists are "trusted" to make decisions and exercise discretion, a power that makes vulnerable not only archive users and record subjects, but also the archivists themselves.

The gap between law and practice, which must be filled with discretion for public authorities to function, offers a clear illustration of how governmentality works. The archivists incorporate their personal selves into the bureaucratic state through their roles as street-level bureaucrats. They engage deeply in the cases they handle, applying a human touch where needed and showing firmness when required. This inherent dichotomy between the archivist's profession and the welfare state brings us to the role of archivists as bureaucrats.

Bureaucracy and profession

Many of the archivists interviewed in this study said that their training did not prepare them for the emotional challenges of their work. Some, like Helena, pointed out that they lacked the professional skills of psychologists or social workers and felt unequipped to deal with people in crisis. Instead, they believed interactions with traumatized archive users would be better handled by care professionals. Others, like Märta, viewed these interactions not as something the university could ever fully prepare them for but rather as a natural part of encountering fellow human beings.

When Märta let an upset archive user sit and cry in her office, she was not acting as a therapist, social worker, or archivist but simply as a human being. At that moment, the archive user was no longer a citizen, client, or customer but a young woman grieving because she had been unable to find her biological father. In Märta's view, what this woman needed was not therapy but a quiet place to cry and someone to sit with her. And in that moment, Märta relied not on her professional expertise but on her sense of decency and empathy. Paradoxically, it was her setting aside her professional role and meeting the archive user as a fellow human being that made her behavior profoundly professional.

The desire expressed by some archivists for support in professionally handling interactions with users stems from a desire to do the right thing. Many archivists feel insecure about their ability to assist people in crisis and would sometimes prefer to outsource these interactions to professionals who are

more comfortable with emotions than with information. They are afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing and inadvertently making matters worse for archive users. Thus, the archivists want to be sure they are making the right decisions. When unsure, they prefer to defer decision-making to someone they perceive as more qualified. But, as this study has shown, many of the cases have no clear right or wrong answers. Archivists can never obtain a sufficiently complete understanding of the subjects' lives to make certain decisions.

This brings us back to the connection between discretion, trust, and courage. Public authorities rely on their officials to have the courage to make decisions based on ambiguous instructions. Some of the archivists that I met clearly felt more confident making these decisions than others. As Sven put it, "You're all such cowards." Ultimately, archivists must make decisions in every case—redact or disclose—and then move on to the next task. The gap in political theory that Foucault discusses (Gordon 1991, 6), which must be filled with moral and individual decisions, becomes evident in the professional discretion of the archivists in this study.

We will never be able to definitely determine what constitutes justice. "There is no fail-safe right," as Magdalena expressed it. Consequently, general laws cannot be too detailed, but leaves room, and need, for professional discretion in their implementation. The same is true for guidelines, policies, and professional instructions. In complex tasks, there must always be room for professional discretion. This discretion, in turn, is shaped by a combination of formal training, practical experience, and explicit as well as implicit ethical and moral discourses. When we encounter a particular situation to be unjust, we often feel confident in our judgments. However, we cannot assert with certainty that any specific right, rule, or law will be correct in every circumstance. There is room—or indeed need for—discretion and personal judgment. These judgments vary depending on the ethical perspective of the person making them.

If the archival profession relinquishes the responsibility of assessing records for potential harm and leaves this task to caretakers or jurists, as some of the archivists in this study seem to prefer, an important part of Swedish public authority will be lost. This study shows that the archivists' task is difficult and sometimes even impossible. Whatever decision they make, whatever ethics they apply, people will always be hurt (or suffer detriment, to use the terminology of this study). However, the impossibility of reaching balanced conclusions that take everything and everyone into consideration does not mean that we should stop striving for them. Archivists occupy a unique position, distinct from both care and law professionals, which gives them an advantage in balancing the caring and legal perspectives. They operate at the intersection not only of the individual and the state but also of the past and the present, the dead and the living, and care and control.

The record subjects

This dissertation has not been about archive users, record subjects, or care-leavers—it was never meant to be. It focused instead on the professional practices of archivists as street-level bureaucrats and the ethical dilemmas that arise from the vulnerability of the archive users and record subjects, not the vulnerability itself. Maintaining this focus, however, was not always easy. For a long time, my scholarly attention shifted more toward the patients and social care recipients than the archivists I set out to study. Understandably, too—the lives captured in the records were often more compelling than the archivists' bureaucratic procedures.

As a number of studies have shown, access to personal records can be crucial for people with experience in care who want to understand their lives (e.g., Shepherd and Hoyle 2022; Wilson and Golding 2016). As this study has shown, however, obtaining or releasing records is no simple matter. Even when access is granted, it is often unclear whether the records actually answer the user's questions. Moreover, if the records do provide answers, can we be certain those answers are true? As discussed, official records are created in certain professional contexts and for particular reasons, and the narratives they contain are not necessarily true or complete. Or they may be "true," but only as one of several possible narratives that could have been told. Often, the narratives in the records are chosen because they serve the purposes of the record-keeping authority or professional, not because they are the only "truth."

As examples in this study have shown, sometimes the less you know about your past, the less you will learn by visiting the archives. The common belief that archives are places to find answers about your own life clashes with the reality that, even when answers exist, you may not be eligible to access them. This dissonance creates a wedge between the individual and the state. By actively preventing citizens from accessing information about themselves, the state demonstrates its power, making it impossible to ignore. Given this, the belief in official records as definite sources of truths about ourselves is profoundly misguided. If these records were produced as tools of control, they are inherently patronizing, and no amount of sugarcoating could ever make them less so.

Records that document "misery," which I found heartbreaking or sickening to read at the start of my research, I quickly became accustomed to and eventually even felt blasé about. Just as the archivists had described about their own experience, I started to see the tragedies documented in the records as more or less normal and "not that tough."

Tolstoy said that all unhappy families are unhappy in their own way. While this may be true in both reality and in fiction, it does not quite apply to official records. It was not long before I began to mix up the various cases I was studying. They all contained the same elements of poverty, illness, violence, and marginalization, and sometimes the narratives were nearly identical. Many

comments in the records could easily have applied to any of the individuals portrayed in them. This realization made the reading of unredacted case files of strangers—alongside the redacted versions these individuals had been given access to—a disorienting experience. The information that so quickly became routine for me would be profoundly significant for the people in the records. Those people, however, were often not allowed to read the information that I, as a researcher, so easily could access.

In addition, the record subjects were never in the files to begin with; only descriptions of them, heavily filtered through the official gaze and shaped by professionally ascribed traits, were present. Thus, using the records to try to say anything meaningful about the record subjects would have been impossible. I can only assume that the files I studied revealed very little about the people they were supposed to represent, but all the more about the society in which they were created.

Sammanfattning (Swedish summary)

Arkivarier har makt. Deras maktutövning består inte bara i att avgöra vilken information som ska bevaras för framtida generationer, utan också i att avgöra vilken information som ska vara tillgänglig för vem. Den här avhandlingen lyfter fram arkivariers roll som byråkrater, snarare än deras traditionella roll som kulturarvsarbetare. Studien bygger på intervjuer med arkivarier som arbetar på svenska kommun- och regionarkiv. Intervjuerna fokuserar framförallt på arkivariernas uppgift att menpröva känslig information när handlingar från vård och socialtjänst begärs ut.

Menprövningar går ut på att bedöma huruvida specifika uppgifter om en person kan lämnas ut utan att personen uppgifterna berör, eller dess närstående, påverkas negativt. För arkivarierna i denna studie innebär det att deras arbete består i att läsa de begärda journalerna och avgöra vilka uppgifter i dem som kan lämnas ut utan att det leder till men för de personer som figurerar i journalerna. Ett vanligt exempel är när personer som varit omhändertagna av sociala myndigheter som barn i vuxen ålder begär att få läsa vad socialsekreterare och vårdpersonal skrivit om dem och deras familj. Arkivarierna ska då bedöma om uppgifter i akten som handlar om arkivanvändarens (det vill säga personen som begär ut arkivhandlingar) familjemedlemmar kan lämnas ut utan att dessa familjemedlemmar lider men.

För att kunna avgöra vilka uppgifter om arkivanvändarens familj som kan vara menliga att lämna ut måste arkivarierna ibland göra efterforskningar kring dessa familjer och försöka ta reda på vilken relation de olika familjemedlemmarna har till varandra. Ibland innebär detta att arkivarierna intervjuar arkivanvändarna för att utröna hur mycket de vet om sin familjehistoria. Denna avhandling fokuserar särskilt på arkivariernas möten med arkivanvändarna, och hur dessa möten påverkar dem i deras yrkesutövning. Samtidigt som beställningar av den här typen kommer in i en stundtals hög takt, förväntas arkivarierna fatta snabba etiska beslut som på djupt personliga plan berör arkivanvändarna och de personer som förekommer i arkivhandlingarna.

Det finns en stark arkivvetenskaplig forskningsdiskurs kring arkivariernas makt, men relativt få studier har hittills framställt och analyserat denna makt i dess praktiska tillämpning. Det som i viss mån fortfarande saknas inom arkivvetenskapen är forskning som implementerar teoretiska idéer om social rättvisa, i synnerhet i studier som fokuserar på informationsförvaltning och samtida arkiv, snarare än historiska arkiv. Det finns en tendens till antingen

abstrakt teoretiserande om omöjligheten att någonsin veta vad arkivens kärna är, eller empiriska studier som antingen syftar till riktlinjer för bästa praxis eller kartlägger status quo. Denna avhandling är en empirisk studie som inte bara beskriver och teoretiserar arkivpraktik utan förhoppningsvis också säger något om vad arkivarbete konkret innebär.

Avhandlingens teoretiska ramverk är hämtat från arkivvetenskap och informationsvetenskap, men också från andra discipliner inom humaniora och samhällsvetenskap. Studiens fokus på interaktionen mellan arkivarie och arkivanvändare aktualiserar frågor knutna till etiska och politiska begrepp som beroende, integritet, och värdighet. Dessa begrepp relaterar alla till sårbarhet, som är ett sammanhållande tema i avhandlingen. Undersökningens grundläggande teoretiska begrepp är *legalistisk etik* och *omsorgsetik.* Dessa två etiker identifieras i arkivariernas olika sätt att förhålla sig till den sårbarhet som de möter hos arkivanvändarna och i arkivhandlingarna.

Syfte och forskningsfrågor

Jag har i denna studie intresserat mig för hur sårbarhet av olika slag påverkar hanteringen av psykiatri- och socialtjänstjournaler. Tydligast framträder förstås sårbarheten hos arkivanvändarna och de personer vars liv dokumenterats i arkivhandlingarna, men även arkivarierna är till viss del sårbara i sin yrkesutövning. Mer specifikt studerar jag hur dessa sårbarheter påverkar arkivariernas engagemang och etiska beslut i menprövningarna de hanterar. Avhandlingen behandlar den övergripande frågan om vad det innebär att offentliga arkiv på samma gång utgör en del av samhällets ingripanden i människors liv och en förment opartisk instans mellan individen och staten. Hur påverkas arkivariernas arbete av denna dubbla roll? Olika synsätt gällande sårbarhet, omsorg, integritet och privatliv leder till motstridiga etiska förhållningssätt. I avhandlingen formuleras dessa motsatser som en legalistisk etik å ena sidan, och en feministisk omsorgsetik å andra sidan. Dessa ligger till grund för undersökningens forskningsfrågor:

1. Hur blir de två etiska perspektiven synliga i avhandlingens material, och vad innebär dessa perspektiv för a) vad arkivarierna fokuserar på i sina menprövningar och b) vad prövningarna resulterar i – vilka uppgifter lämnas ut och vilka beläggs med sekretess?

2. Hur förhåller sig ovanstående frågor till a) vilka uppgifter som ingår i arkivariernas arbete, samt b) arkivariernas yrkesroll?

Den första frågan behandlar hur etiken påverkar, och påverkas av, de intervjuade arkivariernas sätt att resonera kring utlämnande och menprövning. Innebär en benägenhet för den ena eller andra etiken en tendens att antingen lämna

ut eller sekretessbelägga information? Påverkar de olika etiska förhållningssätten vilka aspekter av ett ärende som arkivarierna väljer att lägga fokus på?

Slutligen rör den andra frågan arkivarieprofessionen. Hur samspelar de olika etiska förhållningssätten med arkivariernas förväntade och faktiska yrkesroll? Hur påverkar detta arkivariernas egen uppfattning om sitt arbete, och vad består arbetet egentligen av?

Metod och material

Studien är baserad på nitton semistrukturerade intervjuer med arkivarier som arbetar på nio olika svenska arkivinstitutioner – fem kommunala och fyra regionala – och som i sitt yrke handlägger utlämnanden av allmänna handlingar och utför menprövningar. Sammanlagt har tjugosex arkivarier intervjuats. Arkiven där intervjuerna genomfördes valdes ut för att få geografisk spridning; jag ville undersöka arkiv i såväl storstadsområden som på landsbygden.

Samtalen med informanterna genomfördes huvudsakligen som fysiska intervjuer, där jag besökte dem på deras arbetsplatser. Intervjuerna var en blandning av enskilda intervjuer och gruppintervjuer där antalet intervjupersoner varierade från en till fem. Vissa av arkivarierna träffade jag bara en gång, andra två gånger, och tre personer träffade jag tre eller fyra gånger.

Utöver intervjuerna har jag även studerat åtta olika ärendeakter från tre av de besökta arkiven, två kommunala och ett regionalt. Detta gjordes för att få en bättre bild av det material som intervjuerna kretsade kring. Eftersom jag själv inte har någon yrkeserfarenhet av utlämnande av just socialtjänstjournaler eller patientjournaler var detta avgörande för min förståelse av de fall som arkivarierna talade om. Jag läste akterna efter att alla ordinarie intervjuer hade genomförts. Att läsa de faktiska akterna gav mig inte bara insikt i materialiteten och innehållet i journalerna, det gav mig också en djupare förståelse för de svårigheter som arkivarier ställs inför när de utför menprövningar.

Den empiriska studien

Avhandlingens empiriska studie presenteras i sex kapitel, kapitel 2 till och med 7, som fokuserar på olika aspekter av arkivariernas arbete med menprövningar.

I kapitel 2 beskriver jag hur narrativ och livsberättelser påverkar de bedömningar som arkivarierna gör. Vilka narrativ finns redan i arkivhandlingarna, och vilka narrativ skapar arkivarierna när de väljer ut vilken information som ska lämnas ut till arkivanvändarna? I detta kapitel synliggör och fastställer jag också de två motstridiga etiker – den legalistiska etiken och omsorgsetiken – som används som analytiskt ramverk genom hela studien.

I kapitel 3 tillhandahåller jag en materiell och professionell kontext för det arbete som arkivarier utför. Vilka aspekter av arbetet lyfter arkivarierna själva

fram i intervjuerna och hur förhåller de sig till dem? Med hjälp av begrepp som New Public Management, tillit och effektivitet, samt teorier kring byråkrati, undersöker jag hur dessa olika idéer påverkar arkivarierna i deras arbete.

Kapitel 4 fokuserar på lagstiftning och arkivariernas relation till de jurister som de ibland rådfrågar i komplicerade ärenden. Denna del av undersökningen fokuserar på samspelet mellan lag och praktik. Hur balanserar arkivarierna lagstiftning och professionellt omdöme i de svåra etiska beslut de behöver ta i sin yrkesutövning?

I kapitel 5 diskuterar jag begreppen integritet och men i anslutning till mitt material. Hur definierar arkivarierna men och hur förhåller sig detta begrepp till begreppet integritet? Jag berör också kortfattat teoretiska och historiska uppfattningar om integritet och hur de påverkar arkivariernas arbete.

De flesta arkivarier som jag talade med ansåg att det var svårare att menpröva handlingar där en eller flera av de berörda aktörerna var avlidna. I kapitel 6 fokuserar jag på dessa fall, och utgår från olika filosofiska idéer kring den fråga som uppehöll arkivarierna: kan döda personer lida men? Vad säger svensk lagstiftning om döda människors rätt till integritet, och sammanfaller denna lagstiftning med den etik som arkivarier tillämpar?

I kapitel 7 ställs konflikten mellan den legalistiska etiken och den feministiska omsorgsetiken på sin spets. Var går gränsen – och var bör den gå – mellan samhällets vårdande instanser och arkiven? Hur påverkar synen på arkivanvändarna som antingen omsorgstagare eller medborgare arkivariernas arbete? Jag undersöker hur både journalföring och arkivpraxis kan användas för att vårda och hjälpa, utöver deras grundläggande syften att dokumentera och bevara. Dessutom analyserar jag kritiskt den underliggande etiken i både vård och lag, och finner att båda kan ge upphov till problematiska konsekvenser.

Slutsatser

I det avslutande kapitlet återvänder jag till och besvarar de forskningsfrågor som vägledde min studie. Kapitlet är tematiskt uppbyggt kring etik, professionellt omdöme vid menprövningar, samt byråkrati och profession.

I arbetet med att intervjua arkivarierna identifierade jag i deras beskrivningar av arbetet med utlämnanden och menprövningar tidigt två olika förhållningssätt. Ett förhållningssätt var att strikt fokusera på lagstiftningen och basera bedömningarna enbart på denna. Det andra förhållningssättet var att utöver lagstiftning också ta i beaktande hur arkivanvändarna kunde tänkas påverkas av att få del av informationen i arkivhandlingarna. Inte bara vilka uppgifter som kunde leda till *men* för någon inblandad, utan också hur de berörda parterna kunde bli *hjälpta* av utlämnandena. Dessa två förhållningssätt formulerade jag sedan som kontrasterande etiker: en legalistisk etik och en omsorgsetik. Omsorgsetiken uppstår ur den sårbarhet arkivarierna uppfattar hos arki-

vanvändarna och arkivsubjekten. Denna upplevda sårbarhet påverkar arkivarierna på ett personligt plan och manar dem att engagera sig djupare i ärendena de handlägger – och att försöka hjälpa arkivanvändarna.

En del av arkivens, och därmed arkivariernas, demokratiska roll är att säkerställa allmänhetens rätt till insyn i offentliga angelägenheter. Denna uppgift placerar arkiven mellan staten och dess medborgare, och leder till förväntningar på arkiven att fungera som neutrala zoner som inte tar parti för eller emot de myndigheter vars arkivhandlingar de hanterar. De arkivarier jag talat med och de olika arkiv jag besökt har olika praxis för hur de resonerar i sina bedömningar. Som ett resultat av detta fattar olika arkiv ibland olika beslut om samma typ av information. Dessutom gör arkivarier som arbetar i samma arkiv ibland olika bedömningar. Detta är naturligtvis problematiskt ur arkivanvändarnas perspektiv. Vilken information om ditt förflutna som lämnas ut till dig beror på var du bor, eller till och med vilken arkivarie som råkar hantera din begäran.

De skillnader i praxis mellan olika arkiv som påvisas i undersökningen kan förstås som en brist på rättssäkerhet för de personer som begär ut handlingar från offentliga arkiv. Denna brist har flera orsaker. Till viss del beror den på oklarheter i lagstiftningen, varierande kompetens hos arkivarierna och bristande riktlinjer, men till största del är den ett resultat av de inneboende konflikter mellan olika individers intressen som uppkommer i menprövningarna. Ofta finns det helt enkelt inget rätt eller fel i de fall som arkivarierna är satta att bedöma. Ärendena befinner sig på en gråskala där arkivariernas bedömningar färgas av de olika etiker som appliceras, men där varken den legalistiska etiken eller omsorgsetiken räcker för att ge klara svar i de dilemman som arkivarierna ställs inför. I slutändan är det deras egna professionella och fallspecifika bedömningar som avgör vilken information som lämnas ut.

Studien visar dessutom att det ibland är så att ju mindre en arkivanvändare vet om sitt förflutna desto mindre information får användaren ta del av ur arkiven. Känsliga uppgifter som kan tänkas leda till men om de blir kända är naturligtvis bara nödvändiga att sekretessmarkera om de inte redan är kända av frågeställaren. Detta leder till att arkivanvändare ofta blir besvikna på informationen de får ta del av; den bekräftar bara sådant de redan vet, och utelämnar svaren på precis de frågor som ledde dem till arkivet. Dissonansen mellan den allmänna uppfattningen att arkiven är platser där man kan hitta svar om sitt eget liv och verkligheten att svaren ibland finns där, men att man inte är berättigad att få dem, utgör en kil mellan individ och stat. Att göra strykningar i journaler och aktivt hindra medborgare från att läsa information om sig själva gör det omöjligt att bortse från statens makt, oavsett om dessa strykningar görs av välvilja.

Interviews

Interview no. 1, 2021-05-25, with Jeanette (via Zoom).
Interview no. 2, 2021-08-18, with Sandra (via Zoom).
Interview no. 3, 2021-08-18, with Helena (via Zoom).
Interview no. 4, 2021-08-30, with Bosse (via Zoom).
Interview no. 5, 2021-09-10, with Göran and Johanna.
Interview no. 6, 2021-09-16, with Gunilla.
Interview no. 7, 2021-09-20, with Julia, Magdalena, and Katrin (via Zoom).
Interview no. 8, 2021-09-24, with Märta (via Zoom).
Interview no. 9, 2021-09-30, with Helena, Mats, Gunnel, Tomas, and Johan.
Interview no. 10, 2021-10-05, with Märta, Marianne, Aurelia, and Gittan.
Interview no. 11, 2021-10-12, with Bosse and Sandra.
Interview no. 12, 2021-10-15, with Julia and Magdalena.
Interview no. 13, 2021-10-19, with Hanna and Åsa.
Interview no. 14, 2021-10-28, with Camilla, Henrik, and Therese.
Interview no. 15, 2022-03-24, with Eva and Sven.
Interview no. 16, 2023-05-25, with Helena.
Interview no. 17, 2023-06-27, with Dora.
Interview no. 18, 2023-10-06, conversation with Hanna in connection with reading case files.
Interview no. 19, 2023-11-22, conversation with Helena and Tomas in connection with reading case files

References

Aaslestad, Petter. 2009. *The Patient as Text: The Role of the Narrator in Psychiatric Notes, 1890-1990*. Translated by Erik Skuggevik and Deborah Dawkin. Rev. 2nd. ed. Oxford ; New York: Radcliffe.

Åklagarmyndigheten. 2022. "Förtal och Förolämpning. Rättslig Vägledning 2022:2." https://www.aklagare.se/globalassets/dokument/rattspromemorior-och-rattslig-vagledning/rav-202202-fortal-och-forolampning.pdf.

Althusser, Louis. 1993. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses." In *Essays on Ideology*, reprint, 1–60. London New York, NY: Verso.

Arendt, Hannah. 1971. "Thinking and Moral Consideration: A Lecture." *Social Research* 38 (3): 417–46.

———. 1977. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report of the Banality of Evil*. Rev. and Enlarged ed. New York London Victoria...[etc.]: Penguin books.

Arendt, Hannah, Danielle S. Allen, and Margaret Canovan. 2018. *The Human Condition*. Second edition. Chicago (Ill.) London: University of Chicago press.

Artandi, S. 1973. "Information Concepts and Their Utility." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 24 (4): 42–245.

Asdal, Kristin, and Hilde Reinertsen. 2022. *Doing Document Analysis: A Practice-Oriented Method*. London : Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications Ltd ; SAGE Publications Inc.

Australia, and Meredith Wilkie, eds. 1997. *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*. Parliamentary Paper, no. 128 of 1997. Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission.

Bakhtin, Michail. 2011. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. 18. paperback printing. University of Texas Press Slavic Series 1. Austin, Tex: Univ. of Texas Press.

Bastian, Jeannette A. 2021. "Mine, Yours, Ours: Archival Custody from Transaction to Narrative." *Archival Science* 2021 (21): 25–42.

Bateson, G. 1972. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 2007. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Reprint. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Baxi, Upendra. 2012. *The Future of Human Rights*. 3rd ed. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
Belkin, Nicholas. J. 1978. "Information Concepts for Information Science." *Journal of Documentation* 34:55–85.
Belkin, Nicholas J., and A. Vickery. 1985. *Interaction in Information Systems: A Review of Research from Document Retrieval to Knowledge-Based Systems*. Library and Information Research Report 35. London: British Library.
Bevara eller Gallra: Råd för Socialtjänsten m.m. 2022. Fjärde reviderade upplagan. Stockholm: Riksarkivet : Sveriges kommuner och regioner.
Bevara eller Gallra?: Råd om Patientjournaler och Övrig Vårddokumentation i Landsting/Region och Kommun. 2014. [3. uppl.]. Stockholm: Sveriges kommuner och landsting : Riksarkivet, LTAB).
Bohlin, Alf. 2010. *Offentlighetsprincipen*. 8th ed. Stockholm: Norstedts Juridik.
Braman, Sandra. 1989. "Defining Information: An Approach for Policymakers." *Telecommunications Policy* 13 (3): 233–42.
Brown, Wendy. 1995. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press.
———. 2002. "Suffering the Paradoxes of Rights." In *Left Legalism / Left Critique*, 420–34. Durham: Duke University Press.
Browning Cole, Eve, and Susan Coultrap-McQuinn. 1992. "Toward a Feminist Conception of Moral Life." In *Explorations in Feminist Ethics. Theory and Practice*, 1–11. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
Buckland, Michael. 1991. "Information as Thing." *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* 42 (5): 351–60.
Callahan, Joan C. 1987. "On Harming the Dead." *Ethics* 97 (2): 341–52.
Capurro, R, and B Hjørland. 2003. "The Concept of Information." *Annual Review of Information Science and Technology* 2003 (37): 343–411.
Carter, Ian. 2022. "Positive and Negative Liberty." In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2022. Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/liberty-positive-negative/.
Case, Donald, and Lisa Given. 2016. *Looking for Information: A Survey of Research on Information Seeking, Needs, and Behavior*. Bingley: Emerald.
Caswell, Michelle. 2010. "Hannah Arendt's World: Bureaucracy, Documentation, and Banal Evil." *Archivaria* Fall 2010 (70): 1–25.
Caswell, Michelle, and Marika Cifor. 2016. "From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives." *Archivaria* 81 (Spring 2016): 23–43.

Cavallin-Aijmer, Maria, and Samuel Edquist. 2021. “Historikerna och Arkiven i Teori och Praktik.” In *Historikern i Samhället - Roller och Förändringsmönster*, edited by David Ludvigsson and Martin Åberg, 134–55. Gidlunds förlag.
Chamberlain, Johanna. 2020. *Integritet och Skadestånd: Om Skyddet för Personuppgifter och Privatliv i Svensk Rätt*. Upplaga 1:1. Skrifter Fran Juridiska Fakulteten i Uppsala 140. Uppsala: Iustus Förlag.
Chang, Ahrum, and Gene. A. Brewer. 2023. “Street-Level Bureaucracy in Public Administration: A Systematic Literature Review.” *Public Management Review* 25 (11): 2191–2211. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2065517.
Cifor, Marika. 2016. “Affecting Relations: Introducing Affect Theory to Archival Discourse.” *Archival Science* 16 (1): 7–31. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9261-5.
Cifor, Marika, and Jamie A. Lee. 2017. “Towards an Archival Critique: Opening Possibilities for Adressing Neoliberalism in the Archival Field.” *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies* 1 (1): 1–22.
Clarke, Norma. 2023. “On Family History and Archives.” In *Archives: Power, Truth, and Fiction*, edited by Andrew Prescott and Alison Wiggins, 386–96. Oxford University Press.
Clough, Patricia Ticineto, and Jean Halley, eds. 2007. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11316pw.
“Code of Ethics.” 1996.International Council on Archives Beijing. https://www.ica.org/resource/ica-code-of-ethics/.
Cook, Terry. 2013. “Evidence, Memory, Identity, and Community: Four Shifting Archival Paradigms.” *Archival Science* 13:95–120.
Coppel, Philip. 2014. *Information Rights: Law and Practice*. Fourth edition. Oxford ; Portland, Oregon: Hart Publishing.
Couser, Thomas. 2004. *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
Danielson, Elena S. 1997. “Ethics and Reference Services.” *The Reference Librarian* 26 (56): 107–24.
Darby, Paul, and Paul Clough. 2013. “Investigating the Information-Seeking Behaviour of Genealogists and Family Historians.” *Journal of Information Science* 39 (1): 73–84.
Derrida, Jacques. 2002. “The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow).” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (2): 369–418.
Derrida, Jacques, and Eric Prenowitz. 1996. *Archive Fever : A Freudian Impression*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Donzelot, Jacques. 1979. *The Policing of Families*. 1st American ed. New York: Pantheon Books.

Dorner, Gorman, and Calvert. 2017. *Information Needs Analysis: Principles and Practice in Information Organizations*. London: Facet Publishing.

Douglas, Jennifer, Alexandra Alisauskas, Elizabeth Bassett, Noah Duranseaud, Ted Lee, and Christina Mantey. 2022. "'These are Not Just Pieces of Paper': Acknowledging Grief and Other Emotions in Pursuit of Person-Centered Archives." *Archives and Manuscripts* 50 (1): 1–25.

Douglas, Mary. 1986. *How Institutions Think*. 1st ed. The Frank W. Abrams Lectures. Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press.

———. 2001. "Dealing with Uncertainty." *Ethical Perspectives* 8 (3): 145–55.

Downing, Melissa, Lynda Campbell, and Margaret Kertesz. 2012. "Self-Assessment Tool for Archives Report . Who Am I? Project - Archives Strand." Melbourne.

Duff, Wendy, and Catherine A. Johnson. 2003. "Where is the List with All the Names? Information-Seeking Behavior of Genealogists." *American Archivist* 66 (1): 79–95.

Duff, Wendy, and Elizabeth Yakel. 2016. "Archival Interaction." In *Currents of Archival Thinking*, edited by Heather MacNeil and Terry Eastwood, Second edition, 193–224. Santa Barbara, California: Libraries Unlimited.

Edquist, Samuel. 2017. "Ethical Destruction? Privacy Concerns Regarding Swedish Social Services Records." In *The Right of Access to Information and the Right to Privacy*, edited by Patricia Jonason and Anna Rosengren, 11–41. Huddinge: Södertörn University Library.

———. 2019. *Att spara eller inte spara De svenska arkiven och kulturarvet 1970–2010.* http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-382111.

———. 2021. "The Archival Paradox of Power: When Are Records Menaces to Privacy or Evidences of Maltreatment?" In *From Dust to Dawn: Archival Studies After the Archival Turn*, 132–58. Studia Rhetorica Upsaliensia. Uppsala: Uppsala University.

Ekengren Oscarsson, Henrik, and Per Söderpalm. 2024. "Förtroendebarometern 2024." Medieakademin. https://medieakademin.se/fortroendebarometern/.

Engebretsen, Eivind. 2005. "Barnevernet Som Tekst. Naerlesning Av 15 Utvalgte Journaler Fra 1950- 0g 1980-Tallet." Oslo.

Entrèves, Maurizio Passerin d'. 2006. "'To Think Representatively': Arendt on Judgment and the Imagination." *Philosophical Papers* 35 (3): 367–85. https://doi.org/10.1080/05568640609485187.

Ericsson, Peter. 2018. "Att Värna Privatlivets Helgd. En Arkivvetenskaplig Studie Av Sekretesslagens Utveckling 1927-2010." Masteruppsats, Lund: Lunds universitet.

Ernst, Wolfgang. 2015. *Stirrings in the Archives: Order from Disorder*. Translated by Adam Siegel. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Fabre, Cécile. 2006. *Whose Body Is It Anyway?: Justice and the Integrity of the Person*. Oxford, New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.
Farge, Arlette. 2019. *Smaken av arkivet.* Translated by Tommy Andersson.
Father John Misty. 2015. *Holy Shit*. Vol. I Love You, Honey Bear. Bella Union.
Feinberg, Joel. 1984. *Moral Limits of the Criminal Law. Volume 1, Harm to Others*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1093/0195046641.001.0001.
Fineman, Martha. 2008. "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition." *Yale Journal of Law and Feminism* 20 (1): 1–24.
Flaherty, David H. 1989. *Protecting Privacy in Surveillance Societies: The Federal Republic of German, Sweden, France, Canada, and the United States*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
Flodin, Isabelle. 2019. "Rätten Att Vila i Frid. En Rättsvetenskaplig Undersökning av den Avlidna Patientens Integritetsskydd." Bachelor thesis, Umeå University.
Forster, E. M. 2005. *Aspects of the Novel*. Edited by Oliver Stallybrass. Repr. with a new introd., Further reading and Chronology. Penguin Classics. London: Penguin Books.
Foucault, Michel. 1979. "Omnes et Singulatim: Towards a Criticism of 'Political Reason.'" Presented at the The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, Stanford University. https://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_resources/documents/a-to-z/f/foucault81.pdf.
———. 1988a. "Technologies of the Self." In *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, 16–49. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.
———. 1988b. "The Political Technology of Individuals." In *Technologies of the Self. A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, 145–62. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.
———. 1991. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Reprint. Penguin Social Sciences. London: Penguin Books.
———. 1998. *The Will to Knowledge The History of Sexuality: 1*. Amended reprint. London: Penguin Books.
Friberg Von Sydow, Rikard. 2021. "Discussions in Social Media Regarding the Implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation." In *Privacy, Digitalization, Rule of Law: Some Contemporary Challenges*, edited by Patricia Jonason, 105–28. Huddinge: Södertörns högskola.
Fried, Charles. 1968. "Privacy: A Moral Analysis." *Yale Law Journal* 77 (1): 475–93.
Froomkin, A. Michael. 2000. "The Death of Privacy?" *Stanford Law Review* 52 (5): 1461-1543. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229519.

Fuller, Lon L. 1978. *The Morality of Law*. Rev. ed., 15. print. A Yale Paperbound 152. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press.
Gavison, Ruth. 1980. "Privacy and the Limits of Law." *The Yale Law Journal* 89 (3): 421–71. https://doi.org/10.2307/795891.
Gilligan, Carol. 1982. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
"God Forskningssed." 2024. Vetenskapsrådet. https://www.vr.se/english/just-now/news/news-archive/2024-10-02-new-edition-of-the-swedish-research-councils-publication-good-research-practice.html.
Gordon, Colin. 1991. "Governmental Rationality: An Introduction." In *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, 1–53. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Graeber, David. 2012. "Dead Zones of the Imagination: On Violence, Bureaucracy, and Interpretive Labor. The Malinowski Memorial Lecture, 2006." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2 (2): 105–28.
Hackett, Yvette. 2010. "Preserving Digital History: Costs and Consequences." In *Better off Forgetting? Essays on Archives, Public Policy, and Collective Memory*, edited by Cheryl Avery and Mona Holmlund, 124–40. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
Härifrån till evigheten. SOU 2019: Betänkande från Arkivutredningen (Ku 2017:2). 2019. Norstedts Juridik AB.
Harris, Verne. 1996. "Redefining Archives in South Africa: Public Archives and Society in Transition, 1990-1996." *Archivaria* 42:6–24.
———. 2000. "'They Should Have Destroyed More': The Destruction of Public Records by the South African State in the Final Years of Apartheid, 1990-1994." *Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*, no. 42, 29–56.
———. 2002. "The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa." *Archival Science* 2002 (2): 63–86.
Harris, Verne, and Terry Cook. 2007. *Archives and Justice: A South African Perspective*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists.
Harris, Verne, and Christopher Merrett. 1994. "Toward a Culture of Transparency: Public Rights of Access to Official Records in South Africa." *The American Archivist* 57 (4): 680–92.
Hirschmann, Nancy J. 2016. "Disability Rights, Social Righs, and Freedom." *Journal of International Political Theory* 2016 (1): 42–57.
Hofman, Hans. 2005. "The Archive." In *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*. Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.: Elsevier Science and Technology.
Iacovino, Livia. 2010. "Rethinking Archival, Ethical and Legal Frameworks for Records of Indigenous Australian Communities: A Participant Relationship Model of Rights and Responsibilities." *Archival Science*, no. 10, 353–72. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-010-9120-3.
Ilshammar, Lars. 2002. *Offentlighetens Nya Rum: Teknik Och Politik i Sverige 1969-1999*. Örebro: Univ.-bibl.

Irigaray, Luce. 1985. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press.
Jenkinson, Hilary. 1922. *A Manual of Archive Administration Including the Problem of War Archives and Archive Making*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.
JO. 1982. *Justitieombudsmännens Ämbetsberättelse 1982/83*. Stockholm.
Kallberg, Maria. 2013. *"The Emperor's New Clothes" Recordkeeping in a New Context*. Sundsvall: Mid Sweden University.
Kang, Jerry. 1998. "Information Privacy in Cyberspace Transactions." *Stanford Law Review* 50 (1193): 1212–20.
Kennedy, Duncan. 2002. "The Critique of Rights in Critical Legal Studies." In *Left Legalism / Left Critique*, 178–228. Durham: Duke University Press. https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1515/9780822383871-007.
Ketelaar, Eric. 2023. "The Agency of Archivers." In *Archives: Power, Truth, and Fiction*, edited by Andrew Prescott and Alison Wiggins, 287–95. Oxford University Press.
Kittay, Eva Feder. 1999. *Love's Labour. Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency*. Routledge.
Klareld, Ann-Sofie. 2017. "Closer Together or Further Apart? Public Administration and Archives in the Digital Age." Dissertation, Sundsvall: Mid-Sweden University.
———. 2023. "A Quest for Roots and Kinship: Family History in the Television Series Allt För Sverige (The Great Swedish Adventure)." *Journal of Family History* 48 (2): 145–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/03631990221075260.
Kulick, Don. 2015a. "The Problem of Speaking for Others Redux: Insistence on Disclosure and the Ethics of Engagement." *Knowledge Cultures* 3 (6): 14–33.
———. 2015b. "When Privacy and Secrecy Collapse into One Another, Bad Things Can Happen." *Current Anthropology* 56 (12): 241–50.
Lapp, Jessica M. 2019. "'Handmaidens of History': Speculating on the Feminization of Archival Work." *Archival Science* 19:216–34.
Larrisey, Gina, Linda Whyte, Rosie Walter, and John-George Nicholson. n.d. "Care Leaver's Experiences." UCL Information Studies. Accessed March 28, 2021. https://cpb-eu-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.ucl.ac.uk/dist/1/627/files/2019/07/Care-Leavers-Experiences.pdf.
Levinas, Emmanuel. 1969. *Totality and Infinity; An Essay on Exteriority. Translated by Alphonso Lingis*.
———. 1988. "Useless Suffering." In *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, edited by Robert Bernasconi and David Wood.
Lipsky, Michael. 2010. *Street-Level Bureaucracy, 30th Ann. Ed.: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Service*. New York: Russell Sahe Foundation.

Logue, Danielle, Stewart Clegg, and John Gray. 2016. “Social Organization, Classificatory Analogies and Institutional Logics: Institutional Theory Revisits Mary Douglas.” *Human Relations* 69 (7): 1587–1609.
Long, Linda. 1989. “Question Negotiation in the Archival Setting: The Use of Interpersonal Communication Techniques in the Reference Interview.” *The American Archivist* 52 (1): 40–51.
MacNeil, Heather. 2005. “Information Privacy, Liberty, and Democracy.” In *Privacy and Confidentiality Perspectives: Archivists & Archival Records*, edited by Menzi L. Behrndt-Klodt and Peter J. Wosh, 67–81. Society of American Archivists.
Maynard-Moody, Steven, and Michael Musheno. 2000. “State Agent or Citizen Agent: Two Narratives of Discretion.” *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory: J-PART* 10 (2): 329–58.
Maynes, Mary Jo, Barbara Laslett, and Jennifer L. Pierce. 2008. *Telling Stories: The Use of Personal Narratives in the Social Sciences and History*. Ithaca (N. Y.): Cornell university press.
Mbembe, Achille. 2002. “The Power of the Archive and Its Limits.” In *Refiguring the Archive*, edited by Hamilton, V Harris, J Taylor, M Pickover, G Reid, and R Saleh, 19–26. Dordrecht: Springer. https://doi-org.ezproxy.its.uu.se/10.1007/978-94-010-0570-8_2.
McKemmish, Sue, Barbara Reed, and Michael Piggott. 2005. “The Archives.” In *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*. Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.: Elsevier Science and Technology.
Montag, Warren. 1995. “‘The Soul Is the Prison of the Body’: Althusser and Foucault, 1970-1975.” *Yale French Studies*, no. 88, 53. https://doi.org/10.2307/2930102.
Mordell, Devon. 2019. “Critical Questions for Archives as (Big) Data.” *Archivaria* Spring 2019 (87): 140–61.
Muller, S., Johan Adriaan Feith, and R. Fruin. 2003. *Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Archives*. Translated by Arthur H. Leavitt. Second edition. Chicago: Society of American Archivists.
Murray, Suellen, and Cathy Humphreys. 2014. “‘My Life’s Been a Total Disaster but I Feel Privileged’: Care-leavers’ Access to Personal Records and Their Implications for Social Work Practice.” *Child & Family Social Work* 19 (2): 215–24. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2012.00895.x.
Nesmith, Tom. 1999. “Still Fuzzy, But More Accurate: Some Thoughts on the ‘Ghosts’ of Archival Theory.” *Archivaria*, no. 47, 136–50.
Nilsson, Lars, and Håkan Forsell. 2013. *150 år av självstyrelse: kommuner och landsting i förandring*. Stockholm: Sveriges Kommuner och Landsting. https://skr.se/download/18.5627773817e39e979ef5eb95/1642511174869/7164-966-9.pdf.
Nissenbaum, Helen Fay. 2010. *Privacy in Context: Technology, Policy, and the Integrity of Social Life*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Law Books.

Ochs, Elinor, and Lisa Capps. 2002. *Living Narrative: Creating Lives in Everyday Storytelling*. First Harvard University Press paperback. Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Harvard University Press.

Ojakangas, Mika. 2020. "Polis and Oikos: The Art of Politics in the Greek City-State." *The European Legacy* 25 (4): 404–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2020.1721828.

Osgood, Charles. 1979. "What Is a Language?" In *Psycholinguistic Research: Implications and Applications*, by D Aaronson and R.W. Rieber.

Pearce-Moses, Richard. 2016. *A Glossary of Archival and Records Terminology*. Chicago (Ill.): Society of American Archivists. https://files.archivists.org/pubs/free/SAA-Glossary-2005.

Perpich, Diane. 2019. "Rethinking Vulnerability in a Levinasian Context." In *Levinas and Analytic Philosophy: Second-Person Normativity and the Moral Life*, 234–52. Routledge Research in Phenomenology 15. New York: Taylor & Francis.

Peters, J.D. 1988. "Information: Notes toward a Critical History." *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 1988 (12): 10–24.

Pettit, Philip. 1997. *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*. Oxford Political Theory. Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.

Pitcher, George. 1984. "The Misfortunes of the Dead." *American Philosophy Quarterly* 21 (2): 183–88.

Prelinger, Rick. 2019. "Archives of Inconvenience." In *Archives*, by Andrew Lison. Lüneburg: Meson press.

Prescott, Andrew, and Alison Wiggins, eds. 2023. *Archives: Power, Truth, and Fiction*. Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature. London New York: Oxford University Press.

Proposition 1979/80:2 Med Förslag till Sekretesslag m.m. n.d. Vol. 1979/80:2.

Rawls, John. 1973. *A Theory of Justice*. Oxford Paperbacks. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Reed, Barbara. 2005. "Records." In *Archives: Recordkeeping in Society*. Wagga Wagga, N.S.W.: Elsevier Science and Technology.

Regan, Priscilla M. 2009. *Legislating Privacy: Technology, Social Values and Public Policy*. Chapel Hill, NC: The Univ. of North Carolina Press.

Regehr, Cheryl, Wendy Duff, Henria Aton, and Christa Sato. 2022. "'Humans and Records Are Entangeled': Empathic Engagement and Emotional Response in Archivists." *Archival Science* 22:563–83.

Regehr, Cheryl, Wendy Duff, Jessica Ho, Christa Sato, and Henria Aton. 2023. "Emotional Responses in Archival Work." *Archival Science*, no. 23, 545–68.

Ridener, John. 2009. *From Polders to Postmodernism: A Concise History of Archival Theory*. Duluth, Minnesota: Litwin Books.
Rigterink, Roger. 1992. "Warning: The Surgeon Moralist Has Determined That Claims of Rights Can Be Detrimental to Everyone's Interests." In *Explorations in Feminist Ethics. Theory and Practice*, 38–44. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
Roeschley, Julie Miller, Alison Nikitopoulos, Morgan Davis Gieringer, and Jessica Holden. 2024. "Archiving Difficult Realities: A Systematic Investigation of Records Related to Sexual Violence in US College and University Archives." *Archival Science* 24 (3): 387–414.
Rose, Nikolas S. 2005. *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self*. 2. ed., [Reprint]. London: Free Association Books.
Röstlund, Lisa. 2021. "Tingsrättspersonal: Vi Bryter Mot Lagen." *Dagens Nyheter*, February 2, 2021. https://www.dn.se/sverige/tingsrattspersonal-vi-bryter-mot-lagen/.
Sandén, Ulrika. 2012. *Sekretess Och Tystnadsplikt Inom Offentlig Och Privat Hälso- Och Sjukvård*. Uppsala: Iustus.
Schellenberg, T. R. 1971. *Modern Archives: Principles and Techniques*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Sépulchre, Marie. 2022. "Disability, Justice and Freedom as Non-Domination." *International Journal of Disability and Social Justice* 2 (1): 11–30.
Shepherd, Elizabeth. 2017. "Right to Information." In *Currents of Archival Thinking*. Santa Barbara: Libraries Unlimited.
Shepherd, Elizabeth, and Victoria Hoyle. 2022. "Good Practice in Recording and Access to Records." Research in Practice. https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/182464/.
Shepherd, Elizabeth, Victoria Hoyle, Elizabeth Lomas, Andrew Flinn, and Anna Sexton. 2020. "Towards a Human-Centered Participatory Approach to Child Social Care Recordkeeping." *Archival Science* 2020 (20): 307–25.
Steedman, Carolyn. 2001. *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
Stone, Alison. 1992. "Heritage." *Poetry*, 1992.
Sundqvist, Anneli. 2009. *Search Processes, User Behaviour and Archival Representational Systems*. Sundsvall: Mid Sweden University.
Svärd, Proscovia, and Sheila Zimic. 2024. "The Need for a Participatory Recordkeeping System for Children and Young People Placed in Residential Care Homes: The Case of Sweden." *Archival Science*, April. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-024-09437-x.
Swedberg, Richard, and Ola Agevall. 2016. *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts*. Second edition. Stanford, California: Stanford Social Sciences, an imprint of Stanford University Press.
Taylor, James Stacey. 2005. "The Myth of Posthumous Harm." *American Philosophy Quarterly* 42 (4): 311–22.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). 1990. *Geberal Assembly Resolution 44/25*. https://www.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/unicef-convention-rights-child-uncrc.pdf.

Thomsen, Elizabeth. 1999. *Rethinking Reference: The Reference Librarian's Practical Guide for Surviving Constant Change*. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers.

Trace, Ciaran B. 2002. "What Is Recorded Is Never Simply 'What Happened': Record Keeping in Modern Organizational Culture." *Archival Science* 2:137–59.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, and Hazel V. Carby. 2015. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.

Valge, Jaak, and Birgit Kibal. 2007. "Restrictions on Access to Archives and Records in Europe: A History and the Current Situation." *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 28 (2): 193–214.

Vismann, Cornelia, and Geoffrey Winthrop-Young. 2008. *Files: Law and Media Technology*. Meridian. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.

Wallace, David A. 2017. "Archives and Social Justice." In *Currents of Archival Thinking*, Second edition, 271–98. Santa Barbara, California: Libraries Unlimited.

Warren, Carol, and Barbara Laslett. 1977. "Privacy and Secrecy: A Conceptual Comparison." *Journal of Social Issues* 33 (3): 43–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1977.tb01881.x.

Weber, Max. 1968. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Claus Wittich and Guenther Roth. Vol. 2. Bedminster Publishers.

Wilkinson, T. M. 2011. *Ethics and the Acquisition of Organs*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wilson, Jacqueline Z., and Frank Golding. 2016. "Latent Scrutiny: Personal Archives as Perpetual Mementos of the Official Gaze." *Archival Science* 16:93–109. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9255-3.

Wright, Tamra, Peter Hughes, and Alison Ainley. 1988. "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas." In *The Provocation of Levinas. Rethinking the Other*, 168–80. London and New York: Routledge.

Yakel, Elizabeth. 2000. "Thinking inside and Outside the Boxes: Archival Reference Services at the Turn of the Century." *Archivaria* 49:140–60.

———. 2004. "Seeking Information, Seeking Connections, Seeking Meaning: Genealogists and Family Historians." *Information Research: An International Electronic Journal* 10 (1).

Yakel, Elizabeth, and Deborah A. Torres. 2007. "Genealogists as a 'Community of Records.'" *American Archivist* 70 (1): 93–113.

Yeo, Geoffrey. 2018. *Records, Information and Data: Exploring the Role of Record Keeping in an Information Culture*. 1st ed. Facet. https://doi.org/10.29085/9781783302284.
Young, Iris Marion. 1997. "Asymmetrical Reciprocity: On Moral Respect, Wonder, and Enlarged Thought." *Constellations* 3 (3): 340–63.
Zerubavel, Eviatar. 2012. *Ancestors and Relatives: Genealogy, Identity and Community*. Oxford New York: Oxford University Press.
Zinn, Howard. 1977. "Secrecy, Archives, and the Public Interest." *The Midwestern Archivist* 2 (2): 14–26.

Appendices

Appendix A – Interview guide

Used as guideline for semi-structured interviews with archivists.

Phase 1: Introductions

I introduce myself and my project. I ask the interviewee/s to sign a consent form, if they have not already done so. I ask if they have any questions for me before we begin.

- Tell me a little bit about yourself and your background.
- Tell me about your work.

Phase 2: Practicalities

- What is the procedure when someone requests records? Can you give me a walk-through?
- Who is the typical archive user in this archives?
- Do people physically come to the archives to read requested records?
- Do you ever ask the municipality's/region's jurists for advice?
- Do you charge users for copies?
- Do you interview users to find out what they already know before you assess the records?
- What about appeals? How often do they happen, and what happens when someone appeals a decision?

Phase 3: Discussion questions

During this phase, the conversation often returned to previous questions, either because I asked follow-up questions or because the interviewee(s) spontaneously returned to these topics.

- How do people react when they are denied information in the records they request?

- How do people react to information they were previously unaware of?
- Tell me about a case that you found particularly difficult to assess, or that affected you.
- What types of cases are the most challenging?
- How do you define detriment?
- Do you make different judgments depending on whether a third party is alive or deceased?
- I provide the example of the mother's abortion, and ask the interviewee/s how they would have reasoned in that case.
- I provide the example of the mother who made derogatory remarks, and ask the interviewee/s how they would have reasoned in that case.
- What information in child birth patient records do you disclose to the adult child, if the mother is deceased?
- What are your general thoughts on derogatory language in records?
- Is there any particular type of case or record that is particularly difficult to assess?
- Are there things in the law that you have to follow in these cases that you think are wrong, strange, or unfair?

Appendix B – information and consent form for interviewees

Information for research subjects

We ask you to participate in a research project. This document provides you with information about the project and what participation entails.

What is the project and why do you want me to participate?

The project wants to investigate professional archivists' encounters with archive users who request documents containing sensitive personal data. The project seeks you who are an archivist and work or have previously worked with disclosures of archival documents from social services and/or psychiatric care for one or more interviews about your professional experiences. We ask you because your employer has suggested you as a possible participant.

The research principal for the project is Uppsala University. Research principal means the organization responsible for the study.

How is the study conducted?

The project is an information study study using in-depth interviews as main method. Based on what emerges from these interviews, case file studies of specific cases may also be relevant.

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be interviewed by a doctoral student at the Department of ALM, either during a physical visit to your workplace or via video link. The doctoral student, Ida Grönroos, is a trained archivist and has been working as such for a number of years. If, after the interview, the researcher deems it necessary to ask any follow-up questions, the researcher will ask for permission to do so. These questions will then be asked via video link. The interviews will be recorded so that the information can be checked afterwards by both the interviewee and the researcher. Before the interview starts, the researcher will make sure that the interviewee understands that they are being recorded. You can withdraw from the survey at any time before, during, or after the interview.

Possible consequences and risks of participating in the study

During the interview with the doctoral student, you will be asked to talk about the parts of your work that involve contact with archive users, as well as the secrecy and confidentiality of sensitive information in archival records. Although the interviews' purpose is not to obtain information of a private nature, there is, of course, always a risk of privacy invasion and emotional impact in research carried out through interviews where personal data and personal experiences are conveyed. If at any point you feel uncomfortable participating in the study, you can always withdraw without stating a reason.

What happens to my data?

The project will collect and record information about you in the form of recordings and transcripts of your answers during the interview. Your answers will be treated in such a way that they cannot be accessed by unauthorized persons. All data will be pseudonymized so that an outside reader will not be able to identify you based on your answers or what otherwise appears in the material.

Uppsala University is responsible for your personal data. According to the EU's General Data Protection Regulation, you have the right to access the data about you that is processed in the study free of charge and, if necessary, to have any errors corrected. You can also request that your data be deleted and that the processing of your personal data be restricted. If you wish to access the data, please contact the researcher responsible for the project, Kerstin Rydbeck (contact information below). The Data Protection Officer can be reached at dataskyddsombud@uu.se, or by phone 018-471 1573. If you are

dissatisfied with how your personal data is processed, you have the right to lodge a complaint with the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection, *Integritetsskyddsmyndigheten* (formerly the Swedish Data Protection Authority, *Datainspektionen*), which is the supervisory authority.

How will I be informed about the results of the study?

The project will be published as a scientific monograph with a tentative publication date in 2024. If you want to access your individual data, they will be stored at Uppsala University.

Insurance and compensation

You will not be exposed to any risks through your participation in the study, and no insurance is linked to the project. You will not receive any compensation for your participation in the study.

Participation is voluntary

Your participation is voluntary and you can choose to withdraw at any time. If you choose not to participate or wish to withdraw, you do not need to give a reason.

If you wish to withdraw, please contact the person responsible for the study (see below).

Persons responsible for the study

The person responsible for the study is Kerstin Rydbeck, Professor, Department of ABM, Thunbergsvägen 3C, Uppsala. Postal address: Institutionen för ABM, Box 625, 751 26 Uppsala. Mail: kerstin.rydbeck@abm.uu.se.

Consent to participate in the study

I have received oral and written information about the study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I will keep the written information.

☐ I agree to participate in the study *Delicate Matters: Vulnerability in Swedish Archives*/*Känsliga ärenden: sårbarhet i svenska arkivhandlingar*

☐ I consent to my data being processed in the manner described in the research subject information.

Place and date	Signature

Skrifter utgivna av Institutionen för ABM vid Uppsala universitet.

1. Inga-Lill Aronsson & Birgitta Meurling (red.). (2005). *Det bekönade museet. Genusperspektiv i museologi och museiverksamhet.*

2. Ulrika Kjellman (2006). *Från kungaporträtt till läsketikett. En domänanalytisk studie över Kungl. Bibliotekets bildsamling med särskild inriktning mot katalogiserings- och indexeringsfrågor.*

3. Åse Hedemark (2009). *Det föreställda folkbiblioteket. En diskursanalytisk studie av biblioteksdebatter i svenska medier 1970–2006.*

4. Per Nyström (2011). *Att göra historia. En kritisk studie av historieämnet som kunskapsorganiserande system.*

5. Björn Hammarfelt (2012). *Following the Footnotes: A Bibliometric Analysis of Citation Patterns in Literary Studies.*

6. Lisa Börjesson (2017). *Resources for scholarly documentation in professional service organizations. A study of Swedish development-led archaeology report writing.*

7. Olle Sköld (2018). *Documenting Videogame Communities. A Study of Community Production of Information in Social-Media Environments and its Implications for Videogame Preservation.*

8. Amalia Juneström (2022). *Content Moderation and Fact-Checking. A Study of Journalists' Information Practices in the Contemporary News Media Landscape.*

9. Inge Zwart (2023). *Beyond the Participatory Project. Practices of Organising, Planning and Doing Participation in Museums.*

10. Ina-Maria Jansson (2023). *Förflutenhet för alla? Digitalt deltagande som metod för demokratisk kulturarvsproduktion.*

11. Ida Grönroos (2024). *"I Can't Play God, You Know". Ethical Dilemmas that Archivists Face in the Assessment of Records from Social and Psychiatric Care.*