DIARIES IN ARCHIVES: ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS
CHLOE WARYAN
SCHOOL OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

WHAT IS A DIARY?
Within a private domain:
Subjective, thoughtful, personal, factual
(Paperno, 2004; Autrey, 1991)

Within a public domain:
Objective experiences, a genre of distorted reality
(Douglas, 2015)

RESEARCH QUESTION:
Is it ethical to keep personal writing [e.g. diaries] in publically-accessible archives?

RESEARCH METHOD:
Data Collection: read 40 items of scholarly literature about personal writing and the ethics of archives. Data Analysis: thematic.

PROPOSED SOLUTION
Radical Empathy: the ability to understand and appreciate others’ feelings and experiences (Caswell and Cifor, 2016).

To use radical empathy in the archives, archivists must be mindful of four relationships:

- Record creators/archivists: Respect privacy even if it is inconvenient: do not think of anonymity as a hindrance in cataloguing (Ross, 2013).
- Record subjects/archivists: Adopt user-centric policies (Caswell and Cifor, 2016).
- Record users: Educate yourself about the community surrounding and affected by the content of the diary (Caswell and Cifor, 2016).
- Larger community: Question the archival field for a stronger practice (Cifor and Wood, 2017).

ETHICAL GROUNDINGS OF “RADICAL EMPATHY”

IDEALIST: • Physically possible in all archival scenarios • Respects the humanity of the people involved

REALIST: • Balanced approach between excessive and deficient • Empathy is in accord with human nature

PRAGMATIST: • Time-consuming, requires outside education • Not the most efficient means to an end • Shows care • Brings the greatest good to a great number of people

EXISTENTIALIST: • Free from influence of others • Works together with the archivist’s conscious to be an arbiter of good


SCIENTIFIC FUNCTIONS
- Identify health patterns
- Improve cognitive processes
- Enhance meaning making
- Increase self awareness ➔ dialectical thinking and wisdom
(Alexander et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2013)

SOCIOLOGICAL FUNCTIONS
- Form subjectivity in situations of constraint (Hellbeck, 2006)
- Explore multiple identities (Faragher, 2012)
- Cope with end of life (Cox, 2013)
- Combat feelings of isolation (Beattie, 2009)

TRAITS
- Diarists have historically been women ➔ Diaries are associated with femininity.
- Writing in code, redacting, or burning material ➔ Diaries are associated with privacy.
(Autrey, 1991; Douglas, 2015)

RESEARCH METHOD:
Data Collection: read 40 items of scholarly literature about personal writing and the ethics of archives. Data Analysis: thematic.