

Articles

Relational and person-centered approaches to archival practice and education

Anna Sexton, University College London, a.sexton@ucl.ac.uk

Elizabeth Shepherd, University College London, e.shepherd@ucl.ac.uk

Wendy Duff, University of Toronto, wendy.duff@utoronto.ca

Relational and person-centered approaches to archival practice and education

Abstract

In 2013 Terry Cook identified four paradigms that have shaped archival theory and praxis over the last 150 years: evidence, cultural memory, societal engagement, and identity and community. More recently, Jennifer Douglas, Mya Ballin, and Sadaf Ahmadbeigi (2021) identified a fifth emerging paradigm, Person-Centred Archival Theory and Praxis. Person-centred approaches to archival science shifts the discussion from a focus on records to a focus on “the people that create, keep, use and/or are represented in records.” A person-centred archival approach can also be traced to calls to better understand and consider the needs of archival users (Rhee 2015, Duff 2002) and applications of trauma-informed approaches to recordkeeping which focus on the needs of archivists, recordkeepers and creators and users of archives (Laurent & Hart 2021). This paper argues that a person-centred approach to archival theory and practice must acknowledge the deep emotional impact of working with records and the people whose lives are captured in records and who create and use archives. This leads us to the concept of the ‘traumatic potentiality’ of records, the heart of the original contribution of this paper, and to considering how to embed such potentiality in a trauma-informed approach to archival education.

Keywords: archival education; person-centred recordkeeping; affect; emotion; relational models; traumatic potentiality.

Introduction

In 2013 Terry Cook identified four paradigms that have shaped archival theory and praxis over the last 150 years: evidence, cultural memory, societal engagement, and identity and community. More recently, Douglas, Ballin, and Ahmadbeigi (2021) identified a fifth emerging paradigm, Person-Centred Archival Theory and Praxis. Person-centred approaches to archival science shifts the discussion from a focus on records to a focus on “the people that create, keep, use and/or are represented in records.” As Douglas, Ballin, and Lapp (2022) acknowledge, “Person-centred approaches are evident in and across recent archival scholarship, especially scholarship related to personal and community archives and in scholarship that draws on Indigenous, queer, feminist, anti-racist, anti- and de-colonial, and disability studies” (p. 7). Person-centred archival practice foregrounds the “perspectives of individuals and communities, especially those that have historically been harmed by archival work” (p. 11). A person-centred archival approach can also be traced to calls to better understand and consider the needs of archival users (Rhee 2015, Duff 2002) and applications of trauma-informed approaches to archival practice which focus on the needs of archivists, recordkeepers and creators and users of archives (Laurent & Hart 2021). It is not our intention in this paper to examine whether or not person-centred approaches

represent a fifth emerging paradigm, but rather to analyse what person-centred approaches might comprise or how they might be better understood.

This paper argues that a person-centred approach to archival theory and praxis must acknowledge the deep emotional impact of working with records, recordkeeping and the people who create and use archives. Historically, recordkeepers were viewed as neutral observers who were not personally invested in or emotionally affected by their work with records. Archival education has traditionally focused on developing approaches to the processing of records and not on the personal investment of the archivist. The paper responds to Caswell's (2020) call to "take emotions seriously in tandem with an analysis of power, to acknowledge them as valid bases for knowing, as valid bases for archival theory and practice, and most importantly, to address emotions in relation not just to our own personal lives but also to dominant oppressive power structures." This paper asserts that working with records, users and donors evokes emotional responses both negative and positive, which the records profession must acknowledge, understand and address.

In seeking to address these challenges, the paper draws together existing literature mainly from archival science and presents it to the community informatics audience in order to share ideas and emerging understandings. The first section of the paper considers some recent literature, mainly from archival science, which addresses the role of affect and emotion in archives and brings in literature on relational models which study the value of trusted relationships in different settings, using the literature to establish some frameworks for the topic. The second section reports on collaborative research undertaken by two of the authors at UCL (University College London) into the information rights and needs of care leavers, that is adults who were in out-of-home care as children (the MIRRA project). It draws on the existing published findings from MIRRA to consider how new research areas can extend archival understandings and practices in the context of person-centred participatory research. The final section brings in literature from trauma studies to present a new conception of the "traumatic potentiality" of records. This is the heart of the original contribution of this paper which we believe advances the conversation in the field and enables new understanding of person-centred recordkeeping. The final section then turns to how recordkeepers need to be prepared and supported to work with traumatic and affective records and considers how archivists can be educated to be "trauma-informed" in their practices. We believe that embedding the concept of the "traumatic potentiality" of records in a trauma-informed approach to archival theory and praxis requires deeply ethical engagement with individuals, for, about and with whom records are created and asks us each to fulfil our recordkeeping obligations to wider societies, past, present and future.

Affect and emotion

Two key areas emerge from the existing archival literature which frame our discussion of person-centered approaches to archival practice and education: affect and emotion, and relational models. The role of affect in archives has gained significant traction in recent years. Cifor and Gilliland (2016) foregrounded the important link between social justice and the affective impact of archives in a special issue of *Archival Science*. Since that time affect theory has framed studies

on radical empathy, ethics of care, grief work, and the emotional impact of archival work. Discussions of the affective turn in archives appear in conference papers since at least 2014 including at the Archival Education and Research Initiative (AERI, 2022) annual symposium. Recent research has shed light on various dimensions and the importance of archival affect. For example, Douglas (2019, 2021) built on work from grief studies to propose that the recordkeeping praxis of bereaved parents was a type of grief work and an act of love. Brilmyer's (2022) study of disabled people's archival experiences revealed a new affective dimension of using archives, anticipation. Brilmyer explained "anticipation...helped some participants prepare for encountering harmful representation as well as possible trauma" (p.183). The archival profession requires more research to gain a better understanding of the important role that archival affect plays in our work.

The last decade has also seen a growing acknowledgement that emotions are an important factor in the use of archives for social justice. This literature includes calls for us to acknowledge the emotional dimensions of archives (Gilliland, 2014), work aimed at building a global community of practice to support archivists who work with difficult records (Laurent and Hart, 2021), and research that investigated the emotional impact of archival work (Sloan et al, 2019; Regehr et al., 2022). Australian archivists have led the way in developing resources to support archivists emotionally impacted by their work. Laurent and Hart (2018) appealed for a community of care to support archivists experiencing vicarious trauma. More recently Laurent and Hart (2021) urged archivists to develop a global community of practice involving "academics, practitioners and other interested parties, to share resources, skills, learnings and ideas to improve the implementation of trauma-informed approaches and ensure everyone is supported while doing this often difficult and challenging work" (p. 27). The Australian Society of Archivists developed the first online course to prepare archivists who may be emotionally impacted by their work (Laurent & Wright, 2020). In 2021, Wright and Laurent also proposed a framework of trauma-informed practice based on the principles of safety, trust and transparency, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. The work included detailed advice for changing archival practices that, if implemented, may reduce the risk of emotional harm.

While Australian archivists have promoted trauma-informed practice, Canadian archival scholars have conducted some of the few empirical studies on this topic. Sloan, Vanderfluit and Douglas (2019) conducted a survey of Canadian records professionals to understand the impact of working with "traumatic records." Based on data from 155 respondents, the study identified five themes: 1) the challenge of defining a "traumatic record"; 2) the challenges associated with helping users and donors; 3) the impact of organizational and professional cultures; 4) the role of archival education and archival associations in preparing archivists to work with difficult material; and 5) the empathic effects of working with traumatic records. Aton, Duff and Shields (under review) also surveyed archivists to reveal how record professionals were emotionally (positively and negatively) impacted by the work of acquiring, arranging, describing, and preserving records. The 330 respondents identified both positive and negative impacts of their work. Approximately one third of respondents indicated their institutions failed to care about their employees' emotional well-being; many respondents also highlighted a need for different education to prepare them for working in an archive. Furthermore, the study concluded that some archivists were motivated to fight for social justice as a result of their work experiences.

More recently a study by Regehr, Regehr, Birze and Duff (accepted for publication) investigated issues surrounding access to the video evidence presented at the trial of Paul Barnado (a serial killer who recorded his crimes on a camcorder, his trial was one of the first criminal cases to use video recording as evidence). Building on the work of Caswell (2014), Regehr et al. recommended that archivists employ a survivor-centred approach when archiving video records of violent crime. The authors also drew on the principles of the trauma-informed model proposed by the US Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration including acknowledging the widespread impact that trauma has on individuals, families, and communities; identifying indications of trauma in people; “integrating trauma knowledge into policies, programs and practices; and avoiding re-traumatization.” Regehr et al. concluded that a survivor-centred approach should include “providing an environment that promotes physical and emotional safety; creating an organizational climate that involves a shared purpose and openness to learning and change; respecting, collaborating with and empowering service users as decision-makers; and providing peer support for staff.”

Relational models

Over the last decade, researchers have studied the value of strong, trusting relationships in numerous settings including business (Pérezts et al., 2020; Bartels & Turnbull, 2020), childcare homes (Munford, 2022) and institutions of learning (Aspelin, 2014; Hinsdale, 2016; Gravett et al., 2021). Research indicated that strong caring relationships are correlated with better outcomes in various situations. Archival science has long heralded the importance of preserving the relationships among records and between records and record creators, donors and subjects of records, but the value of relationships among archivists and archival researchers has received scant attention. More recently scholars working with Indigenous communities, however, have recommended that archivists focus their efforts on building supportive trusting relationships with communities. For example, Christen and Anderson (2019) proposed a “slow archive” model, which asked archivists “to undo, redo, and build again structures that embody meaningful and mutual obligations to see, hear, and enact different ways of knowing, being, and relating through multiple temporal sovereignties” (p. 107). They called for “undoing limitations on research time, updating reading room and special collections policies around the handling of materials, and inviting relationships to be a part of archival practice and sustainability models” (p. 113). McCracken and Hogan (2021) also invited the archival profession to focus on relationships and to build meaningful and ongoing relationships with Indigenous communities. Only through these relationships, they wrote, “can [archivists] begin to understand how to build safer, more accessible archives that welcome and support Indigenous visitors, even to the spaces that have and continue to be extensions of the colonial institutions that marginalize Indigenous peoples” (p. 108).

More recently, Duff, et al. (accepted) proposed that archives adopt a relationship-based access framework to support users, especially researchers studying difficult histories. Based on findings from interviews with 16 archivists and an analysis of the literature on archival reference, ethics of care, emotions and archival work, relational pedagogy, and slow archives, the authors

urged archivists to adopt a new archival ecosystem and a multi-faceted relationship-based access framework. They defined relationship-based access as a multi-dimensional framework grounded on a temporal model of slow archives and the theoretical construct of an ethics of care. This framework draws on relational pedagogy research, adopting the five tenets of relational pedagogy as discussed by Hinsdale (2016) and the reconceptualization of relational pedagogy proposed by Gravett, Taylor, and Fairchild (2022). A relationship-based access framework encompasses the interactions among archivists and researchers but also acknowledges that “human relationships are entangled within the spaces, places, contexts, and environments” (Gravett et al., 2022). It posits that the archival physical infrastructure, the finding aid system, the institution’s rules, processes, policies and procedures, and the institution’s support systems, as well as power, trust, communities and personal contexts of archivists and researchers, impact relationships among archivists and researchers and the use of and access to the archives.

The MIRRA Project

Two of the present authors were researchers on a collaborative participatory research project at UCL which brought together care leavers, academics, social workers and information professionals to explore information rights in the context of child social care in England. MIRRA (Memory, Identity, Rights in Records, Access) is a UK Arts and Humanities Research Council funded project, co-produced with a third sector partner, The Care Leavers’ Association. We draw here on the existing published findings from MIRRA to consider how new research areas such as this one can extend archival understandings and practices for person-centred recordkeeping. The terms “care leavers” and “care experienced people” refer to adults who were in out-of-home care as children and young people, such as in local authority care, children’s homes or children’s charity care. The MIRRA research project findings focused particularly on the perspective of care-experienced people who sought access to records about their childhood later in life. The findings evidenced strong support for a fundamental shift towards participatory recordkeeping approaches in child social care settings to explore more human-centred, relational and participatory approaches to recordkeeping (published in Hoyle et al., 2020; Shepherd et al., 2020; Lomas et al., 2022). In family settings stories, photographs and memory objects document significant events, celebrations and milestones and support narratives of identity and belonging, affect and emotion. Records and archives give families and individuals access to shared histories and relational values. But for some people, such as children and young people in out-of-home care, these are missing.

Research into the information and emotional needs of care leavers in England builds on multi-disciplinary work undertaken in other national settings, particularly in the context of supporting the information rights of marginalised communities (Evans et al., 2015) and attentive to the ways in which records are created, managed, activated and theorised by multiple agents through time (McKemmish, 2001; Reed et al., 2018). Projects such as the Rights in Records by Design project in Australia build on longstanding archival research to address how to re-imagine recordkeeping systems better to support “accountable child-centred out-of-home care” and enable “historical justice and reconciliation” (Evans et al., 2018).

Affect and emotion

Looked after children often lack access to family narratives, especially where their experience has been complex, disrupted or traumatic. They may be unable to fill gaps in their memories or answer simple questions about their early lives. This dis coherence can lead to feelings of anger, frustration and guilt, and may have negative impacts on their sense of worth and belonging. Care leavers may have very few photographs, keepsakes or memory objects from childhood. Yet they are extensively scrutinised and documented in detailed care files, a compilation of observations, reports, assessments and plans that has no equivalent in family life. If they request access to their official record they are confronted with the product of a bureaucratised system that has methodically analysed their experiences and actions. As Australian care leavers Jacqueline Wilson and Frank Golding (2016) have observed, the “scrutiny” of this “official gaze” may be experienced as a dehumanising form of surveillance.

Most of these records are now “born digital,” created as part of digital recordkeeping systems for social care. However, the records are designed around the needs of the “corporate parent,” with a focus on risk management and mandatory reporting to regulators. Many services contribute reports, assessments and opinions to the care file, including foster carers, social workers, schools, the police, health and mental health services. The files are not, however, designed to support the affective and emotional value of the records to the children themselves. MIRRA research found that a lack of chronology, certainty and narrative compounds the trauma that children faced before they came into care and, in response, developed a journalling app that could enable young people to collaborate in the creation and content of records while they are in care (Shepherd et al., 2021). The UK independent review of children's social care, “The Case for Change” (MacAlister, 2021) also found that care experience carries stigma, can weaken identity and that “Accessing care files ... can play a role in the lifelong memory and identity needs of care-experienced people” (p. 71).

MIRRA identified a range of preservation and access challenges associated with child social care recording systems. Organisational records contain looked after children’s personal histories, but many care leavers find their files are missing or heavily redacted. Young people often do not know what has been written in their care file. Most critically, however, the voices, experiences and feelings of the children in care are rarely heard or recorded. In these ways, social care recordkeeping reflects their broader experience of powerlessness and lack of self-determination over their own lives, an inequality which may have long term impacts as they deal with questions of personal history, identity and belonging. The lack of voice is one of the most powerful symbols of the information inequality experienced by care leavers. As John-George, one of the MIRRA care experienced co-researchers, said:

One of the most profound things for me about the file, and it screams the loudest, is my lack of voice. And I just appear, my scrawled out writing, on like page 52. My voice is totally stolen and words are put in your mouth, saying this is how you feel about certain occasions and certain people, and at times there’s conflict with what I believe.

John-George also said:

I feel like the file is built around the immediate, keep them safe.... all the legal stuff around care, but there's a duty of care for our soul as well. It's not just the duty of care for our wellbeing, as in keep them in school, keep them healthy. This is a long game – life - so there's that duty of care to think about.

Another of the MIRRA care experienced contributors, Susan, on finally seeing her care records, expressed why these files matter so much to her.

I read them and I was crying to myself.... I can't possibly explain or say how important those records were ... for anybody who's in care, ... it's equally important to have them... You see, to them it's just paper, words on paper, but to the person who's reading it, who it's about, it's everything. It's their life.

This testimony shows how powerful the affective value of care records is for the people whose childhoods are captured there. As the MIRRA research demonstrated, records are a vital emotional resource, most especially to the care experienced person themselves in understanding their own life.

Relational models

MIRRA found that seeking access to records is both emotionally and practically challenging, highlighting recordkeeping issues of relational power, informational inequalities and unequal ownership (Shepherd et al., 2020). In the absence of family records, care leavers turn to the records created about them by social workers and care providers to reconstruct personal histories. Care leavers in England must use the generic 'subject access request' process under the UK Data Protection Act 2018 to access their files. They need to identify the organisations who might hold their records, which can include several different local authorities and charities if they were moved between instances of care, before navigating bureaucratic processes that are explained in exclusionary language, using specialist legal terms, in order to make the access request. Care leavers are offered little practical guidance about how to access their records. They are not usually offered the emotional support they may need. To help fill this gap, MIRRA co-produced resources for social workers (including the British Association of Social Workers (2020) top tips on recording) and publicly available guidance for care experienced people on how to find and access their care file. A free web resource, *FamilyConnect*, based on MIRRA research findings has been produced by Family Action (2022). *FamilyConnect* helps adults who have been adopted or in care to find answers to questions about their origins and understand more about why they were separated from their birth family, as well as to understand their legal rights when accessing their birth and care records and how to go about searching for records. These resources bring together an interconnected web of support for care leavers.

In another part of the relational landscape surrounding care leavers and care records, records and information professionals also need better support since they face challenges in processing access requests (Shepherd et al., 2020). Information practitioners are often ill-

equipped to provide the emotional support that care experienced people need, both in order to understand the context of their care and to process the emotional impact of revisiting what may be difficult or traumatic events. One information professional, Lynne, said there should be “a counselling service, or some support service within the council to be able to give the care leavers some support.” She also felt she lacked time, saying “I always think we want more time to give more consideration to the records, because sometimes you do feel like you’re rushing through it and maybe sometimes you can’t give it [redaction] the attention it deserves.” Most significantly, information professionals lack specific and adequate training in what care leavers need. MIRRA research reframes child social care recording as “a caring and loving activity rather than bureaucratic necessity” (Shepherd et al., 2020). Such an approach rebalances information ownership and recognises more fully the child as information owner. However, recordkeepers need training, education and guidance in order to fully appreciate and perform their relational role towards care leavers and their records. Education for recordkeepers in dealing with trauma-informed records, which include records of organisational care, is addressed in the next section.

MIRRA also developed a set of Principles for Caring Recordkeeping in Child Social Care (Lomas et al., 2022). In developing the framework, a new approach to child social care recordkeeping was conceptualised, which combined existing participatory continuum models with a capabilities approach to social work, setting care records into a relational model (Rolan, 2017). The first principle is that:

Care-experienced people should be able to participate in every stage of child social care recordkeeping, if they choose; including the creation of records while they’re in care, the management of records during the period of retention, and the provision of access to records at any stage of life.

Lomas et al. (2022) argue that the context of care-experienced people “provides a powerful focus for shifting viewpoints of records creation and ownership.” Children in care are situated within organizational systems which act as surrogate corporate parents. These systems are complex networks of relationships and embrace sometimes conflicting needs of diverse actors including social workers, information and records managers and researchers. MIRRA’s work asks us to rethink the relationships and responsibilities around the records and systems to build a framework which enables person-centred recordkeeping for child social care.

Participatory recordkeeping seeks to balance the needs of different stakeholders whilst also meeting key legislative and governance requirements. Reconfiguring recording as a participatory and relational practice collapses boundaries of expertise. It empowers children, young people and care leavers to take control of their own stories. It requires that care providers accept that by creating and managing records they have a lifelong responsibility for people’s memories, identities and emotional responses. Participatory research such as MIRRA enables us to develop deeper understanding of the affective nature of records, their value and meaning to those whose lives are captured in them and the urgent need for person-centred approaches to be developed as an essential step towards a more socially just society.

Archival Education, Trauma Informed Archives and the ‘Traumatic Potentiality’ of Records

How then should we educate, train, prepare and support recordkeepers for working with traumatic records? In this third section, we examine the “affective turn” that has occurred within archival studies over the last decade as a growing body of theory has coalesced around an articulation of the affective qualities of archives and records. This work is embedded in a broader landscape of critical archival theory development which has facilitated thinking in new ways about the power dynamics involved in recordkeeping as well as the impact records have on individuals and communities and how recordkeeping practice needs to shift in the light of these understandings. This leads us to introducing the concept of the ‘traumatic potentiality’ of records, the heart of the original contribution of this paper, and considering how to embed this in a trauma-informed approach to archival education.

Within the “affective turn” there has been an emerging discourse around how affective understandings of the record can guide recordkeepers towards an embrace of more empathetically grounded recordkeeping practice. Notably Caswell and Cifor (2016/2021), building on decades of feminist scholarship, argue for a new ethical stance to archival work that seeks to address social justice concerns. Drawing on feminist ethics, their theoretical model seeks a shift away from a legally driven framework for recordkeeping practice centred on individual rights, towards a model that is centred on radical empathy as expressed in a feminist ethics of care. They describe this “as a learned process of direct and deep connection between the self and another that emphasizes human commonality through “thinking and feeling into the minds of others” and the “obligations of care” that arise within the “web of mutual affective responsibilities” encircling the record. This focus demands a shift in the relationships “between archivists and records creators, between archivists and records subjects, between archivists and records users, and between archivists and larger communities” so that those most implicated in and by the record become the central focal point for guiding actions within the recordkeeping endeavour. The attitudinal and relational shifts bound up in a feminist ethics of care necessarily lead archivists to commit also to structural care that acknowledges and addresses the harms caused by oppressive systems by building liberatory structures.

Whilst advocating for radical empathy and a feminist ethics of care as a mindset to inform practice, Caswell and Cifor (2016) draw attention to the complexities within the approach, in particular the need to guard against eliding meaningful distinctions between bodies when seeking to make sense of another’s experience. This requires careful attention to power differentials and difference, and finding ways of maintaining the boundaries of embodiment when acknowledging that the experience belongs within someone else, an issue which is reflected in the MIRRA research findings. Caswell and Cifor (2016) also unpack what it means to talk of archivists as care givers with recognition of the dangers of reinforcing hierarchies in the care giver to care recipient stance, and the harmful consequences that arise from tropes around rescuer and victim, which ultimately uphold unequal power differentials.

For those of us engaged in postgraduate education of archivists and recordkeepers, fundamental questions emerge around how to shift our teaching models in ways that effectively

embrace these new and emerging understandings of what archival work entails. The pedagogical question of how we transform the methods and practice of our teaching to enable our students to become more empathetically grounded, person-centered practitioners is brought into focus by a need to work through some of the conceptual, theoretical and practical complexities around person-centred approaches to archive and recordkeeping work.

We seek to unpack some of these complexities here, by considering the recent rise in archival studies scholarship around trauma and secondary trauma and its impacts on archive workers, researchers, users and donors, which has emerged in tandem with calls for the profession, including those involved in educating, training and supporting the workforce, to develop trauma-informed approaches to archive and recordkeeping (Laurent & Hart, 2018/2021; Laurent & Wright, 2020). These studies have enriched the archival discipline by surfacing the links between records, trauma and secondary trauma and have demonstrated the lived reality for many archive and recordkeeping professionals who have been adversely impacted by the emotional, affective and traumatic demands of their work. However, the implications of adopting the language of trauma, coupled with an unpacking of the conceptual and theoretical worldviews, frames and positions that underpin archival understandings of trauma, is vital groundwork if we are to develop meaningful and inclusive methods for helping archive workers to become “trauma-informed.”

We approach trauma conceptually to surface understandings of what trauma is in an archival context and the conditions in which it occurs. We introduce trauma-informed approaches emerging from survivor knowledge and lived experience of trauma and use these explorations as a springboard for beginning the necessary conceptual groundwork to place trauma-informed approaches to recordkeeping as a pre-requisite for considering how we educate recordkeepers.

Troubling the concept of trauma: The “traumatic potentiality” of records

Trauma is recognised to be the result of disturbing or distressing experience. Trauma can occur from a singular traumatic event, or it can result from repeated and prolonged traumatic experience. It can be complex, that is related to exposure to varied and multiple traumatic events, often of an invasive, interpersonal nature. In some instances, records can act as representations of disturbing or distressing experiences: what we might call “traumatic records.”

In thinking further about how we might define what traumatic records are, Furner’s (2004) concept of ‘record potentiality’ is useful. Furner wrote, “Documents and other artifacts stored in archives are often considered as potential evidence (or potential sources of evidence) of events that occurred in the past. Such artifacts are known as records in virtue of this potentiality.” He developed the concept in the context of talking about the relationship between the record and evidence, saying that records are not necessarily evidence in and of themselves, but are defined by the potentiality to act as evidence. In a similar vein, records that document traumatic experience also carry what we could call “traumatic potentiality” and that “potentiality” can be heightened or lessened depending on the individual’s relationship to the

experience being documented. Trauma is, of course, an embodied experience and records therefore have the potential to trigger deep and painful psychological, emotional and physical responses in an encounter with them.

On the surface, it may appear obvious to suggest which types of records are likely to trigger a traumatic encounter, such as records that are directly linked to acts of violence or abuse or harm. To extend our conception, we can also draw on Sutherland's (2019) scholarship around the concept of the "carceral archive" which describes how institutional and government archives function as instruments of state power, and how violence is perpetuated through processes of dehumanization and exclusion which are then codified, reinforced, reinscribed and reified in the documentary record. This leads to the idea that any record which documents the power of an individual or a group over another individual or group carries traumatic potential, not just a small subset of records. "Traumatic potentiality" therefore exists in many of the records held in institutional archival spaces.

The MIRRA research discussed above demonstrates from a care leaver perspective how trauma is inherent in the direct encounter with the record, but crucially that trauma can be reinforced, compounded and added to by having to navigate a legally and instrumentally-driven system around the record, rather than a human-centred one. This additional trauma is a consequence of the bureaucratic power that is baked into recordkeeping systems, processes, and institutions. Therefore, recordkeeping systems, processes, and institutions also carry 'traumatic potentiality'. The complicity and culpability of practitioners and others embedded in these systems and institutions in compounding trauma also needs to be foregrounded. We might envisage layers of traumatic potentiality: trauma through recordkeeping systems and processes such as selection, retention, description and access; trauma through the representation of personal experience in the record; and the links between traumatic experience and traumatic memory, which can be intergenerational. Since we know that the records and the processes and structures that we impose on records and access to them can both document but also compound trauma, it is vital that we consider how to educate archivists to work in trauma-informed ways as a means of radically rethinking our recordkeeping practices.

First, however, there are issues that need to be confronted and addressed around the complexities of adopting the language of trauma, and this requires some digging into the "archaeologies of knowledge" that we reflect.¹ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2022), the introduction of the noun 'trauma' to the English language can be traced to Blankaart's *A Physical Dictionary* of 1684 where the definition of trauma is "to indicate a wound from an external cause." With its etymology rooted directly in the Greek word "to wound," trauma was first used in relation to physical bodily trauma, and indeed it is still used today as a medical term to describe serious physical injury occurring to the body, typically from wounding.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* credits William James, a philosopher and psychologist, as first using the term in a psychological sense within the *Psychological Review* of 1894 to describe "shocks" that enter the "subliminal consciousness" to act, if unchecked, as "thorns in the spirit."

¹ An analytical method developed by Foucault in *L'archéologie du savoir*, 1969, which requires us to re-examine our modes of knowledge.

Since then the notion of trauma has been taken up by Western psychology, psychiatry and psychoanalysis and connected to the mind as part of descriptors for defining particular nervous conditions that are psychological responses to deeply disturbing or distressing experience. From within, the 'psy' disciplines, psychological trauma is commonly recognised as (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995):

The unique individual experience of an event or enduring conditions in which the individual's ability to integrate his/her emotional experience is overwhelmed and the individual experiences (either objectively or subjectively) a threat to his/her life, bodily integrity, or that of a caregiver or family.

Strong associations are made within these fields between trauma and the concept of mental disorder. In the most recent edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5) (2022), the overarching category of "Trauma and Stressor related disorders" is used as a descriptor for conditions including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and Acute Stress Disorder. DSM-5 has a strict definition of trauma and related traumatic conditions with criterion for diagnosis requiring exposure to "actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence." It therefore does not encompass or envisage other types of distressing and disturbing experience as contributing factors.

DSM-5 foregrounds pathology, symptoms, diagnosis and medical treatment of disturbed bodies and minds. Within the history of Western psychiatric intervention, when human distress manifests as mental disturbance it has been controlled by psychiatry's mastery of the operations of the mind and body. Historically this involved manipulation, constraint and oppression of those suffering from mental disturbance from within coercive systems of control, including the mental asylum. Often this coercive control masqueraded under the guise of care. Threads of this history are still active in the present and can be seen in the power afforded to the DSM definition, which still pervades our everyday understandings of a variety of human experience, including embodied reactions to traumatic events. The power of this rhetoric and the consequences of that power must be opened up for critique. If traumatic experience is subjugated under a language that only seeks to articulate symptoms, which in turn is linked to a history containing elements of abuse of power and manipulative coercion over minds and bodies, then this framing of trauma must be problematized and contested.

In exploring the applicability of an "ethics of care" as a guiding principle for creating digital colonial archives, Agostinho (2019) draws attention to the ways in which notions of care are predicated on a vision of a "benevolent affective relationship." Agostinho draws on postcolonial critiques of power, and particularly the scholarship of Murphy and Mooten, to caution against an untroubled romanticizing of care as a concept capable of realising the aims of social justice, highlighting that the feel-good factor of caring acts cannot be uncoupled from the geopolitics, situational contexts, temporality and history that shape the relational dynamic underpinning notions of care giving and receiving. Agostinho demonstrates a link between notions of care and the 'non-innocent' history of colonialism to suggest that "rather than conceiving care as an exclusively positive affect immune to power differentials" we must instead understand how the concept of care creates its own particular power dynamic, where the care giver is cast as the heart-giving selfless actor, and the recipient is subjugated as the passive inferior. Agostinho's

purpose in unsettling the concept of care and its use as a guiding principle for recordkeeping around colonial records, is not to foreclose the potential inherent in recordkeepers adopting a feminist ethic of care in reparative modes of recordkeeping practice, but instead to harness an understanding of the concept's "entanglement with colonial and non-innocent histories to reorient an ethics of care more firmly towards the identification and contestation of colonial legacies that continue to produce harm and neglect (as well as privilege and rewards) in the present."

Here, we seek a similar movement to that achieved by Agostinho in relation to notions of trauma and care as defined within the psychiatric narrative, where "care" has similarly troubling associations with a non-innocent history where mental difference has been treated both historically and in the present through methods of coercion, constraint and control over the minds and bodies of those perceived to be mentally ill. This is not a foreclosing of the concept of trauma or care as frames for orientating recordkeeping practice, but an exploration of both the potential utility and limitations that these concepts have in guiding understandings and approaches to recordkeeping. It is a laying bare of the troubling entanglements, and what this means in relation to moving the recordkeeping field towards operating in more emotionally aware, person-centred and socially just ways. What may be helpful to our profession is to consider how survivor perspectives on trauma and those emanating from psychiatry and therapeutic settings coalesce and differ as a means of understanding the trajectories we want to develop: and it is that to which we turn now.

Relational models: from "traumatic potentiality" to "reparative potentiality"

Individuals that have lived through traumatic experience are often referred to as "survivors" and many, but by no means all, individuals with lived experience of trauma choose to self-identify using this term. Terms of self-identification are always socially, culturally, politically, geographically and temporally located. This means that within specific communities, including peer-support collectives, it is possible to trace trajectories of self-identification as individuals come together to define themselves in order to act within the specificity of their particular time, place, circumstance and wider context. Survivor generated knowledges of trauma place a higher value on experiential knowledge (such as the lived experience of care experienced adults) than other forms of knowledge circulating around trauma (i.e. secondary, expert, professional knowledges).

Writing from a survivor/mad studies perspective, Filson (2016) defines trauma as always an external event, that is, no one traumatises themselves. It is also subjective and only the person can say what haunts them. It is pervasive, inhabiting every corner of one's life. However, healing happens and the haunting can end. Filson's definition makes two important points. One is that although trauma is subjective and embodied it is the result of external events which are real, brutal and harmful, so that reality and exteriority should not be lost in the discourse of subjective response. The other is the Janus-faced nature of trauma and healing. Where we have "traumatic potentiality" at one end of the scale in relation to the record, we have "reparative potentiality" at the other, and an individual's experience of the record can be both, perhaps moving between

those states over time. The process of working through the affect of the record, and the nature of its contents, is often a long and complex process. In Filson's words "trauma matters. It shapes us. It happens all around us. It destroys some of us, and it is overcome by many of us. To ignore it is to ignore who we are in all our complexity." Filson (2016) goes on to articulate that taking a trauma-informed approach is fundamentally about learning to see, understand and deal with human distress and pain.

In beginning to lay out here the survivor/mad trajectory around trauma we seek to encourage the archive and records profession and archival educators to engage fully in a critical engagement around the semantics of trauma and the archaeologies of knowledge and understanding that we are aligning with, as we develop education around "trauma" and "trauma-informed" approaches to recordkeeping. We encourage the archive profession and archival educators to follow in the footsteps of theorists such as Cvetkovic (2016) who in examining how trauma circulates in relation to lesbian public culture has been careful to articulate the trajectories within trauma studies that they both draw from and depart from. In rejecting individualist approaches to trauma bound up in clinical psychology, Cvetkovic considers trauma as a collective experience that generates collective responses and in doing so develops a queer and sex positive approach to trauma, which is consciously positioned in relation to threads of trauma theory from critical race theory, Marxism, queer theory and feminist theory. It is this kind of conscious examining, unpicking, framing and positioning along, through and beyond existing trajectories that we need to do in order to properly articulate what trauma means for archivists and recordkeepers. Such work can then form the underpinnings of educating archivists and recordkeepers to become "trauma-informed."

We argue therefore that a trauma-informed approach to recordkeeping teaching must be conceptually and theoretically grounded in a way that takes into account different perspectives on trauma. It needs to recognise that individual or community experiences of the record may be powerful for both trauma or healing, reinforced oppression or reparation and liberation, and that the record itself exists in complex environmental contexts and can be subject to recordkeeping structures and processes that hinder or enable its potentialities. We can then go on to consider the ways in which the recordkeeper can develop qualities, strategies and approaches that they may need to manage secondary trauma and emotional labour, and in striving for meaningful practice. A thorough theoretical and conceptual grounding will also then help us to identify interpersonal skills needed by recordkeepers, which may include listening, communicating, acknowledging, balancing, perceiving, empathising, cultural competence, prioritising work-life balance and the ability to understand and set boundaries around ourselves and others.

Teaching methods and principles which might be applied to these issues include valuing experiential knowledge, including experts by experience in delivery, using role play, employing case study approaches and real world examples. However, grounding our conceptual understandings around notions of trauma carefully and critically is the first and most fundamental step to enable us to move forward to develop inclusive and meaningful education around trauma and, ultimately, developing a trauma-informed recordkeeping profession.

Conclusion

This paper has brought together different perspectives from the literature on adopting and developing a person-centred approach to archival theory and praxis in an attempt to acknowledge the deep emotional and affective impact of working with records, recordkeeping systems and the people who create and use archives. Drawing on literature from archival science, the first section brought together ideas from the affective turn in archives, recognising the link between affect and emotion in archives and historical and current social injustices. It reflected on research into trauma-informed archival practices and ways to better support users and archivists working with traumatic records. The second section of the paper considers participatory archival science research where these ideas have been applied to help us to better understand the role of records and recordkeeping in the specific example of information rights of care experienced people, using a case study from England, which builds on work done elsewhere, especially in Australia. In the third section, the paper draws on a range of disciplinary literature, including from trauma, radical empathy, survivor studies and mental health studies, and relational models in various settings including mental health recovery, relational pedagogy and ways of building meaningful and ongoing relationships. This section proposes a concept of the “traumatic potentiality” of records which we believe advances thinking in the field and might enable us to more fully consider what person-centred recordkeeping theory and praxis looks like. Finally, we turn to the question of how we should educate, prepare and support recordkeepers to enable them to work through trauma-informed practices and with traumatic records. The paper draws together themes from literature and uses conceptual development to examine ways of understanding archival practices and archival education embracing different perspectives from the broad landscape of the affective and relational turn in the literature, the specific case of care leaver rights, and developing a trauma-informed approach. We consider some consequences for the education which archivists need if they are to be equipped to respond to the “traumatic potentiality” of records and the challenges posed by the nascent “fifth emerging paradigm, Person-Centred Archival Theory and Praxis.”

References

- Agostinho, D. (2019). Archival encounters: Rethinking access and care in digital colonial archives. *Archival Science*, 19(2), 141–165. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09312-0>
- Archival Education and Research Initiative. (AERI). (2022). <http://aeri.website/>
- Aspelin, J. (2014). Beyond individualised teaching: a relational construction of pedagogical attitude. *Educational Inquiry*, 5(2), 233–245. <https://doi.org/10.3402/edui.v5.23926>
- Aton, H., Duff, W., & Shields, M. Emotions in archives: Activist potentialities in archival work. *Archivaria* (under review).
- Bartels, K., & Turnbull, T. (2020). Relational public administration: a synthesis and heuristic classification of relational approaches. *Public Management Review*, 22(9), 1324–1346. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2019.1632921>

- Brilmyer, G. (2022). "I'm also prepared to not find me: it's great when I do, but it doesn't hurt if I don't" crip time and anticipatory erasure for disabled archival users. *Archival Science* 22, 167–188. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-021-09372-1>
- British Association of Social Workers. (2020). *Recording in Children's Social Work Guide* <https://www.basw.co.uk/resources/recording-children%E2%80%99s-social-work-guide>
- Caswell, M. (2014). Toward a survivor-centered approach to records documenting human rights abuse: Lessons from community archives. *Archival Science*, 14(3-4), 307–322. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-014-9220-6>
- Caswell, M. (2020). Feeling Liberatory memory work: On the archival uses of joy and anger. *Archivaria*, 90, 148–164. <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13763>
- Caswell, M., & Cifor, M. (2016). From Human Rights to Feminist Ethics: Radical Empathy in the Archives, *Archivaria* 81, 23–43. <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13557>
- Caswell, M., & Cifor, M. (2021). Revisiting a feminist ethics of care in archives. *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, 3(2). <https://doi.org/10.24242/jclis.v3i2.162>
- Christen, K., & Anderson, J. (2019). Toward slow archives. *Archival Science*, 9, 87–116. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-019-09307-x>
- Cifor, M., & Gilliland, A. J. (2016). Affect and the archive, archives and their affects: an introduction to the special issue. *Archival Science*, 16, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9263-3>
- Cook, T. (2013). Evidence, memory, identity, and community: four shifting archival paradigms. *Archival Science*, 13, 95–120. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-012-9180-7>
- Cvetkovich, A. (2003). *An archive of feelings*. Duke University Press.
- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-5-TR) (2022). <https://psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm>
- Douglas, J., Alisauskas, A. & Mordell, D. (2019). "Treat them with the reverence of archivists": Records work, grief work, and relationship work in the Archives. *Archivaria* 88, 84–120. <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13699>
- Douglas, J., & Alisauskas, A. (2021). "It feels like a life's work": Recordkeeping as an act of love. *Archivaria*, 91, 6–37. <https://dx.doi.org/10.14288/1.0398429>
- Douglas, J., Ballin, M., & Ahmadbeigi, S. (2021). Call for papers: Defining and enacting person-centred archival theory and praxis. <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/announcement/view/45>
- Douglas, J., Ballin, M., & Lapp, J. (2022). Introduction. *Archivaria*, 94, 7.
- Duff, W. (2002). Understanding the Information-seeking behaviour of archival researchers in a digital age: Paths, processes and preferences. *Proceedings of the DLM-Forum 2002, @Access and Preservation of Electronic Information: Best Practices and Solutions*. Luxembourg: DLM Forum.

Duff, W., Ho, J., Voss, T., Sato, C., Aton, H., & Regehr, C. Supporting researchers investigating difficult histories: A relationship-based access system. *American Archivist* (accepted).

Evans, J., McKemmish, S., Daniels, E., McCarthy, G. (2015). Self-determination and archival autonomy: advocating activism. *Archival Science*, 15(4), 337–68. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9244-6>

Evans, J, Wilson, J, McKemmish, S, Mendes, P, Reeves, K, & Bone, J. (2018). *Rights in Records by Design*. <https://rights-records.it.monash.edu/research-development-agenda/rights-in-records-by-design/>

Family Action. (2022). *FamilyConnect*. <https://www.familyconnect.org.uk/>

Filson, B. (2016). The haunting can end: Trauma-informed approaches in healing from abuse and adversity. Chapter 3 in J. Russo & A. Sweeney (Eds.), *Searching for a rose garden: Challenging psychiatry, fostering mad studies*, London: PCCS Books.

Furner, J. (2004). Conceptual analysis: A method for understanding information as evidence, and evidence as information, *Archival Science*, 4(3-4), 233–265. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-005-2594-8>

Gilliland, A. (2014). Moving past: Probing the agency and affect of recordkeeping in individual and community lives in post-conflict Croatia. *Archival Science*, 14(3-4), 249–274. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-014-9231-3>

Gilliland, A. J. (2015). Studying affect and its relationship to the agency of archivists since the Yugoslav Wars. In R. J. Cox, A. Langmead, & E. Mattern (Eds.), *Studies in Archival Education and Research: Selected Papers from the 2014 AERI Conference*. Litwin Books.

Gravett, K., Taylor, C. A., & Fairchild, N. (2021). Pedagogies of mattering: re-conceptualising relational pedagogies in higher education. *Teaching in Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2021.1989580>

Hinsdale, J. (2016). Relational pedagogy. *Oxford research encyclopedia of education*. Oxford University Press.

Hoyle, V., Shepherd, E., Lomas, E., Flinn, A. (2020). Recordkeeping and the life-long memory and identity needs of care-experienced children and young people. *Child and Family Social Work*, 25(4), 935–945. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cfs.12778>

Laurent, N., & Hart, M. (2018). Emotional labour and archival practice – reflection. *Journal for the Society of North Carolina Archivists*, 15, 13–22. <http://hdl.handle.net/11343/233962>

Laurent, N., & Hart, M. (2021). Building a trauma-informed community of practice. *Education for Information*, 37, 27–32. <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-190363>

Laurent, N., & Wright, K. (2020) A trauma-informed approach to managing archives: A new online course. *Archives and Manuscripts*, 48(1), 80–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01576895.2019.1705170>

- Lomas, E., Shepherd, E., Hoyle, V., Sexton, A., & Flinn, A. (2022). A framework for person-centred recordkeeping drawn through the lens of out-of-home childcare contexts. *Archivaria*, 94, 64–93. <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13865>
- MacAlister, J. (2021). *The independent review of children’s social care: The case for change* available at <https://childrensocialcare.independent-review.uk/case-for-change/>
- McCracken, K., & Hogan, S. (2021). Laughter filled the space: challenging Euro-centric archival spaces. *International Journal of Information Diversity and Inclusion*, 5(1), 97–110. <https://doi.org/10.33137/ijidi.v5i1.34648>
- McKemmish, S. (2001). Placing records continuum theory and practice. *Archival Science*, 1(4), 333–59. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02438901>
- Munford, R. (2022). Children and young people in the care system: relational practice in working with transitions and challenges. *Australian Social Work*, 75(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0312407X.2021.1989003>
- Oxford English Dictionary*. (2022). <https://www.oed.com/>
- Pearlman, L. A., & Saakvitne, K. W. (1995). *Trauma and the therapist: Countertransference and vicarious traumatization in psychotherapy with incest survivors*. W W Norton & Co.
- Pérezts, M., Russon, J., & Painter, M. (2020). This time from Africa: Developing a relational approach to values-driven leadership. *Journal of business ethics*, 161, 731–748. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04343-0>
- Reed, B., Oliver, G., Upward, F., Evans, J. (2018). Multiple rights in records: the role of recordkeeping informatics. In C. Brown (Ed.), *Archival futures* (pp. 99-116). Facet Publishing.
- Regehr, C., Duff, W., Aton, H., & Sato, C. (2022). “Humans and Records are Entangled”: Empathic Engagement and Emotional Response in Archivists. *Archival Science*, 22, 563–583. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-022-09392-5>
- Regehr, C., Regehr, K., Birze, A., & Duff, W. Troubling records: Managing and conserving mediated artifacts of violent crime. *Archivaria* (accepted for publication).
- Rhee, H. L. (2015). Reflections on archival user studies. *Reference & User Services Quarterly*, 54(4). <https://journals.ala.org/index.php/rusq/article/view/5707/7148>
- Rolan, G. (2017). Agency in the archive: A model for participatory recordkeeping. *Archival Science*, 17(3), 195–225. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-016-9267-7>
- Shepherd, E., Hoyle, V., Lomas, E., Flinn, A., & Sexton, A. (2020). Towards a human-centred participatory approach to child social care recordkeeping. *Archival Science*, 20(4), 307–325. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-020-09338-9>
- Shepherd, E., Sexton, A., Lomas, E., Williams, P., Denton, M., & Marchant, T. (2021). *MIRRA app SRS: Memory – Identity – Rights in Records – Access Research Project: A participatory*

recordkeeping application Software Requirements Specification
(SRS). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5599430>

Sloan, K., Vanderfluit, J., & Douglas, J. (2019). Not 'just my problem to handle': Emerging themes on secondary trauma and archivists. *Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*, 6(20). <https://elischolar.library.yale.edu/jcas/vol6/iss1/20>

Sutherland, T. (2019). The carceral archive: Documentary records, narrative construction, and predictive risk assessment. *Journal of Cultural Analytics*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.22148/16.039>

Wilson, J. Z., & Golding, F. (2016). Latent scrutiny: Personal archives as perpetual mementos of the official gaze. *Archival Science*, 16(1), 93–109. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10502-015-9255-3>

Wright, K. & Laurent, N. (2021). Safety, collaboration, and empowerment: Trauma-informed archival practice. *Archivaria*, 91, 38–73. <https://archivaria.ca/index.php/archivaria/article/view/13787>