

Emotions in the Archives

CHERYL REGEHR AND WENDY DUFF

Abstract

Building on previous work investigating the impact of exposure to a) records with traumatic potentialities; and b) interactions with donors and community researchers whose suffering is documented in the archives, this presentation reports on a study that sought to better understand emotional aspects of archival work. Using a diary research methodology, 15 archivists engaged in diary keeping for approximately four months. The research identified a broad set of events and experiences that triggered a wide range of emotional responses arising from archival work. This included: pre-existing emotional states and characterological traits; emotional exchanges in the workplace with colleagues and others; emotional demands of the work (including emotion work and emotional labour); team and leader interactions arising from group tasks and leader behaviour; and organizational policies, climate, resources and demands. This broader set of interactional factors forms the foundation on which traumatic and other troubling events are encountered. Future research must consider the nature of archival organization and interactions within it that contribute to the overall working experience. In addition, archival organizations need to take responsibility for creating a culture that demonstrates respect and appreciation for workers, acknowledges the interpersonal challenges of the work, and provides supports for archivists who are shouldering the challenges.

About the authors:

Cheryl Regehr is the Vice-President and Provost of the University of Toronto, where she is a professor of social work and holds appointments in law and medical sciences. She is also a visiting professor in the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Policy Research Unit in Health and Social Care Workforce at King's College London. Her scholarly work includes examinations of victims' experiences in the justice system and of individual, organizational, and societal factors affecting stress and post-traumatic stress responses. She is presently co-investigator on a SSHRC-funded project examining emotional responses in archivists.

Wendy Duff is a professor and Dean of the Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto. She is currently Principal Investigator for a SSHRC Insight- funded project entitled Emotional Responses to Archives. Her previous research and publications have focused on the information-seeking behaviour of archival users, archival access, social justice, and the evaluation of archives. She has worked on numerous collaborative projects with academics and professional archivists and served on committees of professional associations and advisory boards, including the Planning Committee on Descriptive Standards and the Canadian Council of Archives (CCA) Standards Committee.