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Tracking royal sex scandals 1880–2010

A methodological experiment

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2021

Document Version:

Peer reviewed version (aka post-print)

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Hammarlin, M.-M., & Jönsson, L.-E. (2021). *Tracking royal sex scandals 1880–2010: A methodological experiment*. Abstract from 3rd International Conference in Scandalogy.

Total number of authors:

2

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Scandalogy Conference 2019, Paper Proposal Abstract

Mia-Marie Hammarlin, is Reader in Ethnology and Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication Studies at the Department of Communication and Media, Lund University, Sweden. Her fields of interest concern the entanglement between interpersonal communication and mediated communication in everyday life. She has written several books and articles about mediated scandals. In her latest book *Exposed: Living with Scandal, Rumour and Gossip* (2019) (Lund University Press/Manchester University Press) she uses ethnological and phenomenological perspectives to understand how the person at the center of the scandal experiences the scandal, thereby highlighting the existential level of the phenomenon. In the book, she also challenges the established idea that the media scandal is a typical modern phenomenon.

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Abstract (312 words)

Tracking Royal Sex Scandals 1880–2010 – A Methodological Experiment

This paper presents two cases concerning Swedish royal media scandals, investigating journalism, rumours and street slandering. The chosen scandals have Swedish kings and presumed and forbidden sexuality in center of focus. The first scandal took place in the late 19th century, the second in the early 21st century.

Via the concept of media circuits, I investigate these scandals as phenomenon that are being formed through a whole range of media forms that traditionally are not included in the media concept, such as the spoken word which we follow through archived texts, such as social media forums, novels, newspaper articles, singing chapbooks, poetry and documentary books. Through such a set of different sources I open a methodological discussion on how to track down talk, such as popular rumours and street slandering. I am inspired by Robert Darnton's way of 'listening' to texts and his claim that no history of communication and massmedia can be executed without taking the oral word into account.

In *Poetry and the Police* Darnton notes how written poems and songs were modified by the people who recorded them (Darnton 2010:75). There are comments on how such a writer, having heard a song, wrote it down from memory. Minor adjustments then create different versions of the same song or poem, as in a kind of whispering game. Following written-down versions of talk and dialogue, reproductions of gossip, and gaol sentences for spreading rumours and so-called 'bad talk' (*mauvais propos*), he is able to describe the murmur of all the voices that together formed the sound of the people and simultaneously made up the framework for the news distribution of the time. I also try to listen while reading; I do not only use my eyesight but also hone my hearing – metaphorically speaking – in order to pay attention to linguistic constructions that testify to a kind of union between talk and text.