

# Secrets and lies: "selective openness" in the apparatus of animal experimentation

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## **1. Introduction**

Animal experimentation is a well-established institution, practised since the birth of experimental medicine, and now – according to surveys – widely accepted by the public. Attitudes differ somewhat across EU countries; in Sweden, the national context of our study, level of acceptance is relatively high. A *Swedish research council* survey showed that almost 75 percent of respondents consider animal experimentation necessary and acceptable (Vetenskapsrådet, 2008).<sup>i</sup> Still, the activity is often portrayed and understood as debatable, not least from the “inside” perspective; researchers, animal technicians, laboratory assistants, members of animal ethics committees – often describe themselves as being under threat. How are we to understand this discrepancy? And how are we to understand a Catch 22 dilemma in which one needs to be open to promote a more favourable public debate – and in turn get funding for research projects, but in which openness is potentially restricted due to threats based on public (mis)understanding and animal liberation actions?

We draw on findings from a joint project in which we address how dilemmas associated with transgenic mice are handled in practice – by laboratory workers and members of animal ethics committees. This paper is not particularly concerned with the transgenic enterprise (developed in Ideland, 2009; Holmberg, 2010; Holmberg & Ideland, 2009), but we make use of the transgenic position to highlight existing *technologies of secrets*.<sup>ii</sup>

The aim of the present article is to describe, explore and understand the meanings and functions of secrets and transparency in the apparatus of contemporary animal experimentation. We will use the concept *selective openness* to discuss how different strategies on personal and institutional levels are used, with the effect of controlling information and public debates. The aim is also to understand this staging of information from an ongoing paradigm shift in science/public relations, and how selective openness is crucial for this process.

The term ‘apparatus’, includes all layers involved in producing animal experimentation: actual practice including human and non-human actors, organizations, societal institutions, juridical norms and policies, discourse and culture. Naturally, the apparatus of animal experimentation is not limited by national boundaries, but is global in nature. We borrow Haraway’s term *apparatus of bodily production* (1991) in order to frame what is going on. In doing this, we underline the double-sidedness of the apparatus; production of certain animal bodies takes place within the same institution that is set up to understand these products. Concretely, the apparatus involves personal narratives, local practices, organizational cultures, universities, research institutes and commercial companies, national and international law and policy, research funding agencies, scientific journals, ethics committees and ethics reviews, European and international science societies, and organizations such as FELASA, breeders and producers of experimental animals and animal rights and welfare organizations.... For the sake of clarity, we cannot possibly take all of these dimensions into account in one paper. But by focusing on secrets and openness as defined subjects of ethnographic inquiry, we can at least touch upon different layers involved.

## ***2. Science/public relations.***

The present article refers to a large extent to relationships between science and the public regarding animal experimentation, something that is crucial since “managing the public/private distinction has been critical to the credibility of the experimental way of life” (Haraway, 1997, p. 25). According to Irwin (2001), the modern “enlightenment” model of scientific citizenship has given way to new forms of democratic governance. Briefly, the enlightenment model refers to an ideology in which the public – in common accounts a rather diffuse mass – is portrayed as lacking knowledge, knowledge that science should provide. The enlightenment/deficit model has been criticized as an ideology “working to secure and protect the greater autonomy of scientists and scientific institutions against society” (Elam & Bertilsson, 2002), where “the public is excluded from participation in decision making on questions about S&T” (Schiele, 2008; cf. Bauer et al, 2007). Furthermore, it has been argued that the model is dated, as relations between science and society have changed profoundly due to globalization, capitalization and democratization. In science communication studies, the deficit model is being replaced by a contextual model (Schiele, 2008), in which scientific production cannot be claimed to be set apart from society (Nowotny et al, 2002; Jasanoff, 2006). Burchell et al (2009) talk about a shift characterised as moving from deficit to dialogue, from “top-down” communication to “two-way” dialogue. Scientific authority – and also trust – needs in such a context be achieved by different means than before – for example through strategies involving transparency and authenticity (Elam & Bertilsson, 2002; Michael, 2009). In our case, then, we will discuss the idea of openness and transparency as a means of gaining public acceptance and will look closely at the meaning of emotions in creating authenticity. We would like to emphasize that we are not analysing the relation

between science(s) and the public(s) in general, but representations of these categories as presented in our data (c.f. Michael & Brown, 2005, p. 42). We are also interested in analysing how these representations can be understood in relation to either a deficit or contextual model of public/science relations.

Many studies in the PUS field have analysed how the public(s) understands scientific practices and results. Here, we want to stress the opposite, how scientists and other actors within the apparatus of animal experimentation understand and discursively construct “the public”.<sup>iii</sup> Michael points out that publics are “being ‘made’ as particular types of citizen by virtue of the models of the public that inform public engagement with science initiatives” (Michael 2009, p 619) . Michael also emphasizes the importance of making a distinction between “Publics in General” and “Public in Particular” (PiGs and PiPs, see also Burchell et al, 2009). Young and Matthews write: “Public opinion on science is understood to be highly consequential both for the ‘public life’ of scientific knowledge and for the environment in which science is funded, performed and communicated” (Young & Matthews 2007, p 136). So, what are the consequences of these constructions of the outside, of the publics’ attitudes and practices?

### ***3. Secrets and transparency***

What constitutes a secret in this context? On one hand, secrets generally have some negative connotations as something concealed, shameful, suppressed, and connected to guilt. Those who keep secrets can thus be regarded with suspicion; from whom are they hiding something, and why? Moreover, secrets are often imagined to be important: because they are hidden

away, they become exciting (Gusterson, 1998, p. 87). Secrets, on the other hand, are productive; they create notions of exclusion and belonging. For Simmel, secrecy is a constantly occurring sociological phenomenon, ultimately about having control over information flow in interactions and organizations. Behind closed doors, people are freed from guilt that could otherwise be attached to their actions (Simmel, 1906). In science studies, secrecy has typically been analysed as a means of exercising power and control (Balmer, 2006, Gusterson, 1998). This is especially evident in so called secret cultures or societies, where security and surveillance are main features of organisations. Gusterson (1998) describes how nuclear bomb scientists, by orchestration and censorship of everyday practice and talk, become socialised to understand their work in certain ways. Secrecy serves a key role in giving scientists a sense of distinctiveness, e.g. they know the truth (ibid, p. 88). Thus secrecy is closely linked to both power and knowledge. Balmer has studied how secrecy works as a 'spatio-epistemic tool', and as such as a "complex set of social arrangements within which secrets are actively produced and which then define relationships" (Balmer, 2006, p. 695). Who gets access to knowledge, as well as when and where knowledge is produced, is often closely regulated in these contexts. Furthermore, in an information-based knowledge society, secrets break with norms of transparency. This became apparent to us when we tried to gain access to animal houses or animal ethics committees, both examples of hidden institutions. These institutional secrets became visible in light of, or in contrast to, norms of openness. We thus suggest that the presence of secrecy *depends* on transparency – without openness the idea of secrets would be useless. With this concept technologies of secrets, we draw on the work of Hilgartner and his 'technologies of privacy' (2000, p. 17), but where he talks more about the role of artefacts in creating secrets, we include talk and practice that contribute to secrecy making. Certainly, the setting and apparatus of knowledge production that we focus on, has its specific technologies of secrets, which are not the same as

in a nuclear plant or a military research laboratory, while some of the mechanisms are quite similar. Birke et al discuss how animal experimentalists depict anti-vivisectionists as scientific terrorists and, consequently, themselves as deploying strategies for defence (Birke, Arluke & Michael, 2007). The researchers often think of themselves as being stigmatised, due to perceived public distrust. The experimentalists find this stigma puzzling:

*They may react to this by going into the closet, to conceal who they are. [...] Part of the stigma has to do with the gap between what is acceptable practice toward animals outside of labs and what can be justified inside them. (Birke, Arluke & Michael, ibid, p. 154).*

Researchers need to find ways of handling this stigma, since they also depend on public trust in order to continue their research (ibid, p. 161). Human relationships with other animals are, also outside of the laboratory, historically and culturally contingent affairs (Franklin, 1999), and vivisections and animal experiments have a long history of causing public and political controversies (Asdal, 2008; Dirke, 2000). At its heart, the apparatus of animal experimentation is a dilemmatic enterprise, since it builds on the modernist ideology of 'human exceptionalism' (Haraway, 2008). Performing an animal experiment is an act that is sometimes contested, and as in the case of other contested sciences, like nuclear or weapon research, secrecy becomes a tool to avoid open conflict. We approach the apparatus of animal experimentation as a site of partial secrecy, in which human/animal relations are negotiated.

#### ***4. Methodological staging***

When approaching the animal research laboratory from a cultural science studies perspective, one treats it like any other foreign setting and reflects on how actors create meaning, what

symbols are used, what the language means, and what rituals appear, etc. We were struck by the many obstacles we had to overcome to gain access to these milieus, but similarly happy when we were naturally initiated and allowed to share the concealed. It is of course rather troubling that we too contribute to the secrecy machinery by, for example, making our informants anonymous and not giving away institutional belongings or scientific details. However, it would certainly have been impossible, for research ethical reasons, to go about in a more open fashion.

The project this article builds on consists of two parts. Empirical data was collected through ethnographical methods, e.g. observations and interviews. One case study, conducted by sociologist Tora Holmberg, derives from the research practice and concerns how researchers, laboratory assistants and animal technicians handle dilemmas in talk and practice (in the paper referred to as LW). The data are diversified and consist of observations from a two-week course for researchers (Holmberg, 2008), fieldwork with several research groups, including observations of animal experiments in practice, and fieldwork at two different animal houses. All together, approximately two months of full-time ethnography was carried out. In addition, a total of 20 semi-structured interviews with researchers at different levels, laboratory assistants and animal technicians from two different Swedish universities were conducted (Holmberg, 2010).<sup>iv</sup> In the other case study, ethnologist Malin Ideland investigated how members of animal ethics committees talk about transgenic dilemmas, both in committee meetings and in individual interviews (in the paper referred to as ECM). Twenty members of animal ethics committees were interviewed during 2006 and 2007. Among these members, three persons represent animal welfare or animal rights organizations, six are representatives of political parties, ten are scientific experts from different disciplines and one is an animal

technician. All in all, six different local animal ethics committees are represented. The interviews were semi-structured. Twelve meetings, both in preparation groups and plenary meetings, in six different committees, were observed. Interviews and observations focused on how researchers and committee members handle ethical issues associated with animal experiments, in general, and transgenic animals, in particular (Ideland, 2009).

### ***5. Constructing publics***

In order to discuss personal and institutional technologies of secrets and openness, it is important to understand cultural notions of “the outside”. In this section, we will unpack some complexities of the constructions of threats and the public. These notions are not unambiguous. The public is described as genuinely dedicated to issues of animal welfare, on one hand, but considered as unaware of what is going on in the animal experimentation apparatus, on the other.

The deficit model is not totally predominant. There are also some accounts concerning the dedicated public:

*M: What do you think public opinion is when it comes to animal experiments?*

*H: Eh... Well, there is great dedication, right. I mean, there are far more people who care about animal experiments than for example abuse of women when they've done these studies and the like. One could perhaps find this a bit odd. But there is like a huge commitment. (Interview with Helen, researcher, ECM)*

This commitment, however, is not altogether unproblematic. Too much or the wrong kind of commitment is not desirable, like that of the activists (see the section below). Consequently, a kind of Catch 22 is presented. It is presented as a problem that people in general, the “public”, are not aware of the true nature of animal experiments. However, inherent risks of going public prevent enlightenment. In the next section, we will have a closer look at this dilemma.

### 5.1. Personal encounters

Narratives about the threats from animal activists frequently occur in the interviews. Some have stories to tell about threats against other people (see below). However, the most common thread in our data is interviewees’ lack of personal experience when it comes to dealing with threats. A typical statement is:

*T: Have you ever been questioned?*

*M: Eh [pause] not you know directly... personally. (Interview with Måns, researcher, LW)*

One explanation for not having direct personal experience is that you know animal experimentation is a problem, so you do not talk about it – you keep it a secret:

*H: [...] Now, I don't tell people I don't know very well that I'm working with animal experimentation.*

*T: No, that's what I wanted to[*

*H: ]you don't do that*

*T: get at*

*H: No, but you don't. Because it's unnecessary to put yourself in that situation, I think.*

*T: Has it happened, have you been questioned then or?*

*H: No, I probably haven't put myself in that situation, clearly, because I know what it's like... and you never tell people you don't know very well, that there are animals at [the laboratory] you don't. [pause] Because there are maniacs, you know*  
*(Interview with Hanna, laboratory technician, LW)*

Nevertheless, there are some examples of personal experiences. One of the interviewed researchers has personal experience of being threatened. He tells the interviewer about a night in the lab when he caught animal rights activists red-handed in the act of letting animals out of their cages. He got into a violent fight with them and was later tried and convicted for assault. The interviewee brings up the subject himself, but shows that he is not comfortable with the topic and tries to change it as soon as possible. One can only speculate about why he told the story in the first place. Perhaps he wanted to emphasize the threat; perhaps he simply did not want to be caught with a secret. In either case, it works as a strong rhetorical device: I was there and have first-hand experience. However powerful these personal experiences are, they are exceptions in the data. But threats do not have to be personal in order to work, of course. They may also be part of a more culturally shared repertoire.

## **5.2. Narrating the threat**

The threats are typically constructed as coming from animal rights or liberation activists, and as such, belonging to a rather confused and incoherent ideology (cf. Forsman, 1992, p 124). According to senior researcher Sven, typical representatives are “younger women between 16 and 24 years of age”.<sup>v</sup> He is narrating a typical discussion between himself and these – in his eyes – uninformed or misled young girls.

*S: And when you want to speak to them and say, 'hey, look at your shoes, you have animals on your feet, they are also from animals'. 'But that's different' and I say 'No and you take pills' 'No, that's something else'. So they are not aware of being users, that they have something to do with animal experiments. (Interview Sven, research leader, LW)*

Sven who in the interview talks at length about his strategies of openness, also emphasizes how he takes on the debate with individual activists. This strategy may be related to his construction of the activists as 'confused girls'. Other studies confirm that animal rights activists are often portrayed as hysterical, uncontrolled and emotional, something that may refer to the symbolic and historical connection to women and the women's movement (McAllister Groves, 2001). Contradictory to the discourse of the activists as physical threats, this narration demands a different strategy, a different way of handling the problem.

*E: [...] But, but, we have a bunch of ideologies that... well, some people, if we take the extremely militant groups then, there are those with an ideological conviction, right. I have met them occasionally, they don't just have that, but they also have an anarchistic conviction. They frankly don't behave normally, I think. The aim is something different than the welfare of animals. I don't think you... can defend letting minks out, if you like animals and understand, then you handle this in a different way.*

*T: So there somehow... but you can kind of respect those who have rather, so to speak, somewhat extreme opinions, but who think of what's best for the animals, or believe they do?*

*E: Yes, I understand fully people who believe that we have a, a racism so to speak built into our thinking about animals. Even if I'm not on their side, I can listen to them and reason with them. (Interview with Eric, researcher, LW)*

In this last quote, a distinction is made between animal rights spokespersons and animal rights/liberation activists, and the interviewee is sympathetic with the first category and says later on that he has nothing against reasoning with them. The black sheep in this case, the common target of all critique, seems to be the extreme case here – the animal liberation front. Even representatives of animal rights organizations criticize the animal liberation activists, because they harm their reputations. Through guilt by association, liberation activists make it harder for other animal organizations to work from within the system. In the animal ethics committee, this connection between “activists” and representatives of animal rights and welfare organizations is an obstacle, due to the scientific priority of interpretation that is common in the committees (Ideland, 2009). The representatives of animal welfare and rights organizations identify themselves, creating an “Us”, with the scientists, while simultaneously constructing the activists as “Them”. This is done through references to scientific journals, a scientific language and talk about scientists as rational and activists as radical, over-reacting and non-productive.

Constructions of the public(s) are full of contradictions and surprises. For example, the common notion of the public as generally lacking knowledge and interest is also paired with notions of the public as engaged. Furthermore, blame for this ignorant public and uninformed public debate is often placed on scientists themselves. But there is an even worse scapegoat: animal rights activists and animal liberation activists. The threat from the outside is a persuasive and well-rehearsed narrative, including actors or roles involving threatened scientists and members of animal ethics committees, along with different kinds of activists. The narrative also includes a history, a time-space dimension concerning how things used to be and what it is like today. This finding coincides with what Birke et al state, namely that the

public, in scientists' words, are divided into antivivisectionists and the general public, and where "animal rights activists are represented as anti-human, deceivers, and terrorists, while the general public, by comparison, is viewed as uniformed and too emotional" (Birke, Arluke & Michael, 2007, p. 130). The authors' analysis is that this is a form of othering, a process demarcating who is debatable and who is not (Michael & Birke, 1994). Through the othering of both publics (PiG and PiP), scientists legitimise avoiding public engagement and possible controversies. We would like to add a somewhat different interpretation; that constructions of different publics are part of the technologies of secrets that we wish to highlight.

Somewhat surprisingly, this typical narrative of the publics is not just common among researchers and laboratory staff, but also repeated by laypersons and animal welfare/animal rights representatives. It appears to be a "commonplace" (Billig et al., 1988) something that is culturally and rhetorically available, and as such, works as a way of avoiding contradictions and dilemmas within the apparatus. But the commonplace is never free from contradictions, as commonplaces, too, are made up of competing ideologies. They are simply new forms of dilemmas (ibid). In the following section, however, we will investigate how this narrative is given some rather flexible and sometimes contradictory meaning in terms of the strategies deployed.

## ***6. Technologies of secrets and openness***

### **6.1. Institutional secrecy**

*I am on my way to one of the animal houses at the university. I am rather happy that I will get to see the back stage of animal experimentation; before this I have spent quite*

*a lot of time in laboratories, watching experiments. It was certainly not easy to get in touch with the staff at the animal house. They are not listed in the staff catalogue, and the animal department is not on the university website. Having gone through personal contacts, I am finally on my way. But the physical place is not easy to find. It is located in the basement, and the door is not marked. After a great deal of wandering around and some phone calls, I finally get in. (Field notes 02/04/2007, LW)*

The animal houses – that is, departments where the laboratory animals are bred and kept – are often well hidden in the university building. Paradoxically, they can be recognized by their lack of signs or lack of windows. The staff is sometimes strictly forbidden to tell where lab animals are kept (Interview with Stig, researcher, ECM). Other times they seem to have other strategies for keeping the animal housing secret, as will become clearer in the next section.

Similar to the animal houses, ethics committees are hard to access. On their website it is possible to find some sparse information concerning the assignment of the committees and addresses and phone numbers to the courts housing the committees. However, names of members are not published on the website, not even names of chairpersons. This was just the first obstacle on the way into the meeting rooms. Some of the chairpersons and/or the secretaries of the committees were in the first place not interested in having an ethnologist sit in on the meetings. And they were not willing to distribute names and contact information of members. After numerous phone calls and assurances that the interviewer is neither an activist nor an ill-intentioned journalist, all committees except one were visited. But even inside the meeting room, transparency routines differed to a great extent. In some committees, the observer was handed all documents (even those classified as secret), in others she had to wait

outside the room during voting. There seemed to be different views on the rules of public access (the Animal Welfare Agency meant that it was the committees' own decision), and the easiest solution seemed to be secrecy-making.

Many ethics committee members, however, were not aware of the secrecy of the committee. Gunnar, for example, is a politician and has worked in leading positions in the public sphere for many years, who strongly expresses scepticism regarding closed doors: *There's nothing to hide. But it is hidden and forgotten and no one knows anything. [...] We have nothing to be ashamed of. (Gunnar, politician, ECM)*

Note the repetitive affective accounts, through which he stresses the importance of transparency. However, later on in the interview, Gunnar expresses his fear of animal activists, the risk that something could happen to him or his family because of his involvement in the committee. And the brief notion that meetings "of course" have to be held behind closed doors has to be viewed in light of this. Openness is good, as long as no one can identify "me". "We" – as an organization – have nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to hide. But for personal security reasons, secrecy must remain, according to Gunnar. Note the references to shamefulness, in statements like the one above and others already presented. In the final discussion, we will return to the shame discourse as brought up in interviews and try to understand what kind of functions and effects it may have.

## 6.2. Secrets and white lies

There are also more personalized ways of producing secrets:

*T: Mm. Eh... If... what... what do you call yourself if anyone asks what you work with? What do you say your occupation or title is?*

*M: It depends on who is asking. If it's someone I know I'll say that I'm a laboratory animal technician. Otherwise I may say I'm an animal caretaker... or a cleaner. It depends on whether one feels up for the discussion.*

*T: Right... cleaner, yeah.*

*M: Yes. It... then you don't lie, you know. We do clean, so... I have some difficulties lying, but you can always twist it a bit.[...]I usually wait a while before saying what I work with. It's nothing that I'm ashamed of, but... you want to get a feel for the person somewhat first. (Interview with Monica, animal technician, LW)*

The animal technician quoted prefers using white lies (“twist it a bit”), before risking questioning. Similarly to accounts provided by Gunnar above, shame is something that is brought up as a key; there is essentially nothing to be ashamed of:

*S: [...]But, I don't think there's anything to hide, either. But you wouldn't like it to be widely known, so that the activists come knocking on my door. You know, because one must be a little... little careful, but I don't think one should hide it, because it's not ugly what we're doing. I don't think one should have to be ashamed of it. And it gets to be like that if you can't talk about it, almost. (Interview with Sofia, researcher, LW)*

Researchers and other laboratory actors narrate how they try to balance the fine line between the lack of openness and feelings of shame and guilt that it creates. For animal technicians,

there is a specific dilemma; they do not necessarily consider themselves to be part of the animal experimentation apparatus – they are there to take care of and watch after the animals – but they recognize that the public may not see them as a separate category.

*P: Right, I don't feel that – usually I never talk about it – I have no need to save the world. But if it comes up, I have no problems with that. But if I'm at a party or meet new people, then I'm not the one to talk about my work. I'm not the one who sits and says that I work with animal experimentation because I think it's fun to talk about it – 'cause I don't – but I say that I work at [pharmaceutical company], at the lab. No, I have absolutely no urge to spread... but if it comes up I have no problems defending it. (Interview with Pia, animal technician, ECM)*

It is worth noting that all quotes that bring up personal secrecy making are from interviews with women who work at “lower levels” in the animal experimentation apparatus. They are animal technicians and one is a junior researcher. A couple of them express that it is not their job to convert a sceptical public. They do not consider themselves representatives of the enterprise; they are not really included in the “Us” that needs to get more public acceptance and research funding. Animal technicians, together with for example veterinarians, can be analysed as border-crossers in the apparatus of animal experimentation; they have dual functions. They are employed to take care of the animals, and to look after their best interest. Some even develop pet-like relationships with “their” animals (Arluke, 1990). However, they become highly active in practices of animal experimentation, helping out with breeding as well as experimental proceedings. This specific phenomenon can be called “the technician’s burden”, and is in part due to the emotional and practical division of experimental labour (Birke, Arluke & Michael, 2007, p. 99). Perhaps this dual function is one explanation of why narratives concerning threats against veterinarians are common in our data. The same applies

to laypersons in ethics committees. They are in a complex situation, because they are representatives of the public at the same time as they are part of the apparatus. They are “outsiders within” (Wennerholm, 2009), representing the public but also afraid of what the public may think of them.

### **6.3. A window to animal experimentation**

*I am sitting with Pia in the staff dining room at a pharmaceutical company. The interview has just finished and she asks me if I want to see the animal house. Of course I want to do that. She guides me to a changing room where we put on white coats. After that Pia shows me the rooms for rats and mice. She explains which are transgenic, and which are not. How they have enriched the cages and how to interpret the protocols from the ethical reviews. We also look into the laboratories, and Pia explains the use of different methods for euthanizing. After that it is time for us to pet the laboratory dogs. (Field notes 20/11/2006, ECM)*

A seemingly contradictory strategy is to stage animal experimentation by means of openness. In meetings with representatives of pharmaceutical companies, we are struck by the openness, at least concerning some subjects. Their strategy seems to be a reverse of those used by often very secretive public institutions, like universities and ethics committees. This may seem contradictory, as the public sphere is to some extent ruled by the principle of public access to official records, while private industries need secrets, not least due to patent aspirations.

Lennart works as a researcher in a lead position at a pharmaceutical company. During the interview, he takes plenty of time and makes great efforts to explain the company’s bioethical

guidelines. He says that he is proud of them. Besides the guidelines the company has made great efforts when it comes to transparency. On their website, the public can find information about animal research as well as welfare and ethical questions. Lennart also points out differences between his company and universities. Private companies cannot, according to him, afford *not* to be open. However, he feels that “*a university in some way can ‘get away with’ the explanation that they cannot afford the transparency*” (Interview with Lennart, research leader, ECM). Commercial companies are suspected of stretching ethics for benevolent reasons (c.f. Critchley, 2008). In our data, this border between universities and private companies is not well defined. Trust can be earned for different reasons, and through different strategies to stage science, technology and ethical issues (Hilgartner, 2000). Universities may be trusted because of their non-commercial purposes and traditional aspirations of authority, while commercial companies try to gain legitimacy and trust using strategies of transparency. It is the idea of different institutional cultures, not real practices, that counts in the trust league.<sup>vi</sup> Of course transparency is limited, and we may interpret this *selective openness* as a PR strategy. Companies literally cannot afford to be accused of secrecy-making, especially not concerning a traditionally controversial issue such as animal experimentation.

#### **6.4. Personal openness**

*T: If people ask what you work with, what do you say then?*

*M: What I do.*

*T: Yes. [pause] Yes.*

*M: Right [laugh] Yes, I don't keep it to myself, I enjoy telling about what I do.*

*T: Yes.*

*M: With the risk of hitting back or whatever, but I think it's... it doesn't get better if you conceal it. Then it is even more, almost a little stigmatized. I think it's better to be open. (Interview with Margareta, researcher, LW)*

Notice the interviewer becomes silent when the interviewee does not respond in the usual manner. Instead, she stands out as one of few interviewees who state that they never lie or are circumspect about their involvement in animal experimentation. The reason for this is said to be a desire for more openness and a better informed general public (and this is something she “enjoys”), but the informant recognizes the potential risk of being open.

In a similar manner, researcher Per stands out as an example of a person who has strong feelings about being open about animal experimentation. Contradictory to the interviewee in the section on occupational secrets, he has the will to convert the public. He talks about “groups in society that earn a lot of money” by spreading horrific pictures of rabbits in pain.

*P: And that picture, I mean then I think, in some way, that it's the scientists' duty to give a different picture of this. And we can't do that if we just retreat and try to lie low. Someone has to stand up and put his or her foot down and say that it is not like that. And at the same time, of course, there are researchers who aren't so into ethics, so it must be up to scientists, in some way, to keep our own hands clean. I think that's a condition for continuing with our search for new knowledge. (Interview with Per, research leader, ECM)*

In this quote, transparency becomes a guarantee for public understanding and acceptance. The public is constructed as a muddled mass that listens to whoever presents his or her message in the best way. The research community needs to take charge of the public discourse, offering a

contrasting picture to the predominant one – the one with tortured rabbits and painful experiments.<sup>vii</sup> For Per, the choice of strategy is easy: openness and transparency signal that “we” have nothing to hide. This strategy also means that he is not afraid and that he is an authoritative representative of the apparatus. Also, research leader Sven is critical of his fellow scientists, for not being open enough and not going public. By contrasting his behaviour to that of both his weak colleagues and his complaining wife, Sven presents himself as a dedicated researcher who fears no harassment and conquers obstacles established by the outside world.

To sum up this section, the strategies of secrets, on one hand, and openness, on the other, operate on both institutional and personal levels. Universities and their body of ethics committees rely on their historical iconic ivory tower logic and produce legitimacy through authority, thus secrecy works as a means of maintaining the science/public relations status quo. Commercial companies, however, deploy what can be viewed as selective openness, and this may function as a PR strategy. When it comes to personal strategies, some structural patterns can be discerned. It is noteworthy that there seems to be a pattern in which the “outsiders within” – animal technicians, laboratory technicians, vets and laypersons on committees – tend to use the rather shameful strategy of secrets and white lies. Researchers higher up in the hierarchy, however, more often talk about how they use strategies of openness to achieve a higher level of public understanding. These narratives are full of bravery, dedication and truth seeking – cultural elements that harmonize nicely with commonplace images of scientists within the paradigm of science as authority. Gusterson’s study shows that “the practice of secrecy transforms scientists by reworking the web of relationships they inhabit and thus their sense of self” (1998, p. 88). In our study, this goes for

the staff with less degree of freedom and power, whereas senior scientists more often choose to go public with the confidence that they, due to the fact that others have little or no insights into the reality of laboratories, know best.

### ***7. Concluding discussion: selective openness and shame***

In this concluding discussion we would like to develop our analysis on relations between science (in the shape of animal experimentation) and the public. This will be done by discussing a) how the relation can be understood with help from our concept “selective openness; b) the importance of “shame” in talk about publics’ understanding of animal experimentation. By using these concepts we will shed some light over a status quo in the debate on animal experimentation.

Researchers and other human actors within the apparatus of animal experimentation find themselves in a tight corner. They rely on public acceptance to promote their legitimacy and to receive funding, and ever since Jeremy Bentham’s days in the nineteenth century, it has been a well-established “truth” that openness is the best way to gain the public’s trust (Vincent, 2003). At the same time, these actors take risks by going public, fearing public misunderstanding of their work and threats from animal rights activists. The dilemma between openness and secrecy is fairly prevalent in scientific culture as a whole, but the apparatus of animal experimentation presents certain, specific patterns of technologies of secrets. At the personal level, researchers and members of animal ethics boards narrate how they often choose not to talk about their work in public, choosing instead to use euphemisms and “white lies”. Ethics committees and animal departments are used to highlight

organizational secrecy making; these parts of the apparatus are not easily accessed from the outside. In the analysis, we have discussed these examples by contrasting them with openness. We want to stress that, as our study has shown, openness and secrecy do not operate independently – practice is not either secret or open. On the contrary, the boundaries are, as Balmer points out, “fluid and negotiable” (p. 695). Ethics committee meetings are accessible for insiders, and animal technicians have no problems talking about their work with others within. The secrecy sets in when meeting with the public, and there is a whole range of boundary work going on in constructing engaged, risky and uninformed publics.

In our study, the relationship between science and the public is double edged. Researchers and other advocates of science construct the public, in general (PiGs), and animal activists, in particular (PiPs), as engaged in animal experimentation. On the other hand, the public is portrayed as uninformed – thus framed within the well-known deficit model. This kind of public(s), viewed either as unable to understand scientific practices or as misled by interested parties, like animal rights organizations, has also been depicted in other studies (Birke, et al, 2007; Young & Matthews, 2007). The relations require particular strategies and, in this case, a *selective openness*. Selective openness is a matter of controlling information – openness that reveals cruel experiments (blind rabbits) is not good – but also a matter of who is to provide information. Information should be controlled by the research community, not by the media or animal rights activists. To speak with Hilgartner (2000); “stage management is thus not merely a mechanism to regulate the flow of information but also a means of structuring the relations between experts and publics...” (2000, p. 147). Control of openness becomes an important part in a (partly) secret culture (Gusterson, 1998) – as the animal experimentation apparatus – and, as we have shown, this is going on both at personal and institutional levels.

Thus, we suggest that technologies of secrets and selective openness work as means of preserving existing science/public relations.

What is striking is the emotional discourse that seems to be at work in the narratives presented. Interviewees talk about not being ashamed and about fearing activists – or about the importance of not fearing them. One cannot help wondering what kinds of meanings underlie these representations, and what kind of rhetorical work is done by making reference to one’s feelings. Talk about feelings in this context could be interpreted as a means of creating authenticity and thus trust (see Elam & Bertilsson, 2002). Accounts such as “I feel”, “I fear”, etc., could very possibly do this kind of credibility work. But there may be more to this story. The most articulated emotion in our data is shame, most often expressed as *not* being ashamed. How are we to understand this? Sarah Ahmed writes in *The cultural politics of emotions* (2004) that feelings of shame are feelings that are turned on yourself. By that she means that shame is evoked whenever you feel you have done something wrongful – and that someone else has witnessed it (p. 103). Thus, shame is both about turning away and hiding, *and* about exposure. In other words, shame feels like an exposure – another sees what I have done that is bad and hence shameful – but it also involves an attempt to hide, a hiding that requires the subject turn away from the other and towards itself. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 103).

While risking far-fetched analogies, we would like to discuss whether it is possible to see shame as a common force in this story. If shame is both about hiding and being seen, secrecy and openness, then perhaps the narratives presented here could be interpreted as narratives of a certain kind of collective, culturally shared, shame. Arnold Arluke noted a similar tendency in his study, where the use of “information control strategies” such as concealment or disclosure, created a certain kind of guilt among some of the animal experimenters (1991, p.

315). Likewise, scientists often claim that they are being (wrongfully) stigmatized. That stigma and shame go hand in hand (Goffman, 1963), and that the perception that one is being stigmatized gives rise to certain feelings and minimizing strategies (Birke, Arluke & Michael, 2007), seem like reasonable interpretations. In order to prevent witnesses of potential wrongdoing in laboratories, the apparatus invents different technologies of secrets. Thus, technologies of secrets and selective openness could work as shame-preventing strategies.

At the same time, selective openness serves to legitimate a – at least on a rhetorical level – questioned activity, because it offers scientific witnessing while other issues (or persons) may be hidden. This takes us back to the introduction of the paper, and the hypothesis that technologies of secrets work as grease in the apparatus of animal experimentation. Our point is that the public debate on animal experimentation is restricted by selective openness and by the enlightenment/deficit model of public communication. This leads to a status quo in the debate on animal experimentation, which preserves the idea of the public as uninformed and misled (in different ways), effectively hindering other perspectives on and knowledge of animal-experimentation-based research. With a non-existent or stagnated public debate, the apparatus of animal experimentation can maintain its autonomy in relation to society, and intentions to promote co-construction of scientific knowledge and amalgamations between science and society obviously depend on how openness is selected, and under what conditions.

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<sup>i</sup> Hagelin et al. (2003) have shown, however, that results from these surveys should be interpreted with caution, as several factors, for example how the questions are posed, have an influence on the results. Moreover, the foundation *Forskning utan djurförsök (Research without animal experiments)* have argued that since the Swedish public do not know of alternative methods, the figures presented in the Swedish research council's survey are misleading and falsely positive. Their own survey shows that almost 2/3 Swedes have poor or non-existing knowledge of alternatives to animal experimentation (Lindmark, 2009). We agree that these results do not in any simple way reflect

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respondents' attitudes. We mainly use the figures as an argument for our case, which is that most people think animal experiments are acceptable for medical purposes, while at the same time, researchers think that people are generally hostile. See also Birke, Arluke and Michael (2007) for an interpretation of attitude surveys.

<sup>ii</sup> Thank you Eva Hayward for suggesting this concept and for pointing out this direction.

<sup>iii</sup> By "constructing publics" we do not mean the same as e.g. Braun & Schultz (2009) when talking about constructing publics. In their case they discuss how publics are constructed for different participatory arrangements, while we talk about discursive constructions among scientific actors.

<sup>iv</sup> Most of the interviews were performed and transcribed in Swedish, and quotes in this text have been translated. "I" stands for the interviewer. All informants' names are changed.

<sup>v</sup> This group is also the most critical of animal experimentation in surveys (Vetenskapsrådet, 2008).

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. Helena Pedersen's (2007) PhD thesis, especially on the use of Astra Zeneca's information and educational material as non-disputed facts about animal experimentation.

<sup>vii</sup> C.f. Burchell et al's descriptions of researchers' strategies to meet anti-sciences views (Burchell et al 2009, p 25 f).