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# **Inbetween animals, humans and law**

– Empathy work by animal welfare inspectors in Sweden

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**Abstract:** In February 2017 I set out to explore the working conditions of ten animal welfare inspectors from two different county offices in Sweden. Reported as permeated with emotionally charged difficulties but never before researched from an emotion theoretical perspective, the daily work in animal welfare inspection calls for further investigation. Approximately ninety hours of shadowing and four interviews were conducted in order to understand the day-to-day work of inspectors and how it is managed emotionally. In this article, I argue that *psychosocial stress* and *epistemic tensions* (frustrations concerning clashing knowledge) are two central challenges for inspectors. Thereto, a new analytical concept, *empathy work*, is constructed in order to understand how inspectors *work* with empathy when approaching these challenges and pursuing animal welfare goals. In addition, *bureaucratic procedures* and *ventilation* are identified as crucial emotion management techniques relating to empathy work.

**Key words:** empathy work; animal welfare inspection; emotion work; emotion management; psychosocial stress; epistemic tensions; bureaucratic procedures; ventilation.

## **Introduction**

Situated inbetween animals, humans and law, animal welfare inspectors in Sweden have for many years been exposed to difficult and demanding working conditions (e.g. Andersson, 2015; Thedin, 2013; Westergård, 2013). In one region the police have been reported to educate inspectors in self-defense techniques due to their encounters with threats and violence (Jersenius, 2013). From these reports, animal welfare inspection seems to be infused with emotion and tension. Yet, to date there are only a few studies that have researched dilemmas in animal welfare inspection and no research that have studied how emotion and tension are managed by inspectors. In this article my aim is to explore the working conditions of animal welfare inspectors in order to analyze the role of emotions and how inspectors manage these. I argue that *empathy work* (emotion work and management by empathy) is performed in relation to animals and humans by inspectors in their pursuit of making the situation better for animals. *Bureaucratic procedures* and *ventilation* helps us understand how inspectors uphold empathy work and stay professional despite the continuous challenges they are confronted with.

Swedish animal welfare inspection is practiced on county government level under the board of agriculture. Thus, the animal welfare offices spread around Sweden could be viewed as authority exercising organizations operating in a bureaucratic manner. In recent years, a

large number of studies have researched emotions in bureaucratic authority and judiciary practicing organizations (e.g. Bergman Blix & Wettergren, 2016; Larsson, 2014; Wettergren, 2010). These, and previous major works in the field of sociology of emotions (e.g. Barbalet, 2011; Hochschild, 1983; Sieben & Wettergren, 2010), have provided both theoretically and empirically motivated arguments that reason and emotions are intertwined and mutually dependent. But also that emotion, and the management of them, is a crucial aspect of professionalism in vastly different professions.

From this premise, my aim is to contribute to the knowledge on animal welfare inspection in new empirical, methodological and theoretical ways. Empirically, the study is motivated by what has been described as exposed and difficult working conditions for inspectors. Previous research mainly concerns inspections on farm animals; I have widened the empirical scope by including inspections on pets and other animals. Methodologically, this meant that a close and intense way of exploring the subject was called for. Shadowing both individuals and organizations made possible the collecting of dense empirical data that could illustrate emotional conditions and dilemmas in inspection. Theoretically, the analytical approaches of sociology of emotion have been used both in pre-existing forms but have also been shaped into new analytical tools to approach the complexities in animal welfare inspection. Thereto, inductive means have let new understandings emerge during the analysis. The following two research questions have been guiding the study: *1. How can one describe and understand the working conditions of animal welfare inspectors in Sweden? 2. How do animal welfare inspectors manage and work with emotions in relation to their working conditions?*

## **Previous research on animal welfare inspection and emotion management**

### *Animal welfare inspection*

Previous research on animal welfare inspection has raised several questions on the relationship between inspectors and animal owners. A recent Danish study, examining animal owners experiences of being inspected, provides a thematic overview of different perceptions of inspection (Anneberg et al., 2012). Farmers perceive inspections as both necessary and unfair; the data reveals mutual understanding amongst farmers and inspectors but also frustrations and concerns that farmers experience when inspected. Another Danish study examines inspectors experiences and analyzes the normative dilemma of whether inspections should be mainly judicially oriented and thus focused on law enforcement, if it should be

pedagogically oriented or whether it should include both of these approaches (Anneberg et al., 2013). Several of the findings in the Danish studies are confirmed in my data. For example, when inspectors both try to motivate a change in animal owners poor care of their animals but at the same time are judicially bound to make them pay fees or costs of inspections, inspector's experience that this has a backlash effect on animal owners motivation to make improvements for their animals.

A quite recent study has explored the experience of inspection dilemmas by government veterinarians in Ireland (Devitt et al., 2014). The dilemmas form three main themes: "(1) defining professional parameters; (2) determining the appropriate response and (3) involvement versus detachment" (Devitt et al., 2014: 6–7). As I will present below, similar concerns reoccurred in my data. Notably, the Irish study mentions the role of empathy in animal welfare inspection but leaves the subject unexplored.

My participants describe that empathy plays a central part in the emotional and practical aspects of inspection, this suggests that a general understanding of animal welfare inspection could benefit from a more thoroughly theorization on empathy than previously done. Apart from investigating the role of empathy and emotions, I also address the unexplored human-animal relational dimension in inspection<sup>1</sup>, which my empirical data and arguments suggest play a substantial role in guiding the work of inspectors.

### *Moral tensions in human-human and human-animal relations*

Jacobsson and Lindblom have argued that animal rights activists suffer from "emotional stress that their norm-transgressions imply" (2013: 56). This phenomenon is the implication of the "recurring (or potential) clashes between activists' moral ideals and existing societal norms [that] give rise to far-reaching emotional tensions and a continual need for emotion work" (Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2013: 56). Such tensions and their consequences have been explored from various angles in different norm transgressing practices of human-animal relations (Hansson & Jacobsson, 2014; Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2012, 2016; Lindblom & Jacobsson, 2014). Notably, there are relevant and substantial differences between the role of the activist and the inspector. For example, inspectors are professional authority officials and thus not agents pursuing subjective moral ideals as in the case of activists (Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2013: 59). However, my data suggests that there are also important similarities; some animal owners perceive the inspectors as moralists rather than caseworkers. Such perceptions become

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<sup>1</sup> Drawing on previous research suggesting that humans can make themselves "sensible" to animals in order to broaden the empathetic capability (e.g. Hansson & Jacobsson, 2014).

a foundation for moral and epistemic tensions between the inspectors and the inspected animal owners.

Holmberg (2008, 2011) has researched professionals working with animal experimentation and shows the moral and emotional complexities in human-animal relations. Holmberg argues that working with animals involves a great deal of “empathy and attention” but at the same time clear power relations that differentiate the stakes between animals and humans significantly (Holmberg, 2011: 151). That is, even if human empathy and attention acknowledges animals as beings with needs and capabilities to feel and suffer, animals are still treated bad and get killed in ways that never would be accepted if they were human. Even though this relational difference exist, animal welfare inspectors, just like the participants in Holmberg’s studies, *perform empathy* (2011: 160) and learn how to get “a feeling for the animal” (2008) in order to deal practically and emotionally with a case. Holmberg only briefly mentions empathy but at the same time implicitly shows its importance in understanding human-animal relations. The analysis presented in this paper fills a gap by looking closer at professional empathy in human–animal relations.

### *Emotion management in bureaucratic organizations*

Wettergren has analyzed emotion management in the Swedish migration board and shows that its bureaucratic emotional regime is constituted by procedural correctness meaning that “correct procedure overrides personal emotions”(2010: 408) implying professionalism by a certain code of feeling and expression rules (2010: 409). Arguably, such emotional regimes enable the containing of personal emotions that contradicts the rationale of the bureaucratic procedures. That is, instead of feeling sad for the faith of a client one feels pride in being professional or correct in relation to the case. This is the bureaucratic ”override” of emotions; the performance of *procedural correctness* is a way of negotiating feelings by justification in relation to the rules of a specific procedure in work.

Arguably, the county government’s animal welfare offices are bureaucratic organizations as the migration board. The offices operate by bureaucratic structures such as top-down handled rules and roles, labor division, a hierarchical organization and guiding policies from which certain procedures follow (Weber, 1949: 196–197). These similarities imply that studying emotions in animal welfare offices could benefit from the theorizing presented by Wettergren. However, to my knowledge no such studies have been conducted. Neither have I found any studies on animal welfare protection with an emotion sociological or social psychological approach. At the same time I argue that previous research have left

questions suggesting that understanding the practices of animal welfare inspection could benefit from emotion and empathy theories and therefore this study have aimed to answer this call.

## **Theory**

### *Emotion management and emotion work*

The theoretical framework guiding this study draws on the empirically supported analysis that emotions are not just part of rationality but might even be viewed as crucial for rational action (e.g. Hopkins, Kleres, Flam, et al., 2009; Kemper, 1978; Turner & Stets, 2006) and further, “that emotion and reason are mutually dependent and informed by one another” (Wettergren & Bergman Blix, 2016: 22). More specifically, emotions informs and navigates cognition and rationality towards action (Wettergren & Bergman Blix, 2016: 22). However, the opposite function applies also; cognition can guide emotions by norms on emotional responses and their expression, theorized as *feeling* and *display rules*, where the former guides what one ought to feel and the latter how one ought to express the feeling (Hochschild, 2012). These rules could be seen as constructed and shaped in social interaction. In Barbalet’s words: “emotional experiences are [...] shaped by the reactions of others to them” (Barbalet, 2011: 42).

In relation to the previous research discussed above one might ask: how are tensions in the inspector-inspected relation managed? A number of analytical tools have been developed that could be used to close in on this question. The concept of *ventilation* can help us understand how emotions can be managed when there is a ”need to give vent to built-up tension and irritation” (Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2013: 61). I argue that ventilation is relevant to understand informal and formal de-briefing and consultation in professions where emotional tension is part of the day-to-day tasks. The specific appliance of ventilation in my study will be put forward in the analysis and exemplified with empirical data.

A further relevant concept is *containing* as theorized by McWilliams (2004: 146) and further developed by Jacobsson and Lindblom (2013, 2016). Containing implies that one “creates space in which it is possible for the person to tell the truth of his or her experience” (McWilliams, 2004: 134). Accordingly, in relation to my empirical data, the inspector has to be the space for the emotional reactions of the inspected (compare with: Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2013: 60). This understanding will be further exemplified and argued for in the analysis and it also needs to be clarified in relation to another major concept used in the

analysis, namely, empathy. This since, in my understanding, ventilation and containing are pre-conditions for professional empathy but also specific ways to manage the emotional tensions that such professionalism implies for the inspectors, not least in relation to the power aspects of inspection.

### *Empathy*

Except for the professional/private difference between activists and inspector that have been discussed above, *power* is supposedly the most noteworthy difference. Inspectors are almost exclusively in a power position in relation to the inspected since they have judicial authority to initiate the enforcement of laws if the inspected does not comply with the regulations. This is a further cause of tension during inspections. Such dilemmas have previously been analyzed in relation to the notion of empathy. Before giving examples on such analyses, I will define the guiding understanding of empathy by elaborating on the following quote:

Empathy is an emotional response (affective), dependent upon the interaction between trait capacities and state influences. Empathic processes are automatically elicited but are also shaped by top-down control processes. The resulting emotion is similar to one's perception (directly experienced or imagined) and understanding (cognitive empathy). (Cuff et al., 2016, p. 150)

By this definition I understand empathy to be a capability that can be developed and cultivated by training through subjective cognitive processes and structurally through social interaction in an empathic climate. I also understand empathy as a situational phenomenon that needs to be contextualized in order to be understood (Hodges & Wegner, 1997; Rogers, 1975: 6). A clear distinction between empathy and sympathy renders the former as “feeling *as*” while sympathy implies “feeling *for*” (Hein & Singer, 2008: 157). That is, empathy is the ability to relate to or produce the same emotions as another and thus understand another's situation. Sympathy instead has to do with adding an emotional reaction to empathy; for example, to emphatically acknowledge the anxiousness of an individual and feel pity (sympathize) for him/her.

To consciously cultivate empathy has to do with transcending the partially automatic nature of empathy: “empathy is partly an automatic response, it is also cognitively regulated and managed” (Wettergren & Bergman Blix, 2016: 22). In my reading, this implies that empathy can be *managed* and *worked* with in various ways. Accordingly, I wish to name the managing of emotions and cognitive responses by empathy as *empathy work*<sup>2</sup>, which could be

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<sup>2</sup> Empathy work have previously been briefly mentioned and used descriptively by prosecutors as shown in a study by Wettergren and Bergman Blix (2016: 28). In this article, the concept will be developed and used analytically.

seen as a professional resource that is used to achieve given goals. This concept will be developed in relation to the empirical data below.

In their research on emotions in the judiciary, Bergman Blix and Wettergren (2016) have shown how judges use empathy in various ways to manage emotions in relation to subjects in court. In the same way that one judge is shown to use empathy when being patient and listening to arbitrary explanations by a defendant (Bergman Blix & Wettergren, 2016: 35), the inspectors in my study have to balance their power and expected impartiality by empathy which implies letting the inspected make themselves heard. This connects to the concept *containing* discussed above. Letting the inspected be heard can imply that inspectors have to *contain*: be the space for the frustrations of animal owners.

In another study by Wettergren and Bergman Blix (2016), previous research on the use of empathy in legal process' (Booth, 2012; Henderson, 1986) is further developed when studying empathy in the work of Swedish prosecutors. The study shows how empathy is used both to understand a case, prepare for trial and managing various situations during trial. Thus, empathy can be understood as a "professional tool" (Wettergren & Bergman Blix, 2016: 30) that allows a subject, by role taking (registration of, but not feeling, the others emotion) or identification (experiencing the emotions of the other by feeling them), to understand another subjects emotions and situation (Wettergren & Bergman Blix, 2016: 31). In relation to the various understandings of empathy presented one might ask: how does empathy work with those whose capacity to verbally express their feelings and thoughts is limited or non-existing?

Björk (2017) have developed an approach to understand how parents' *empathetic imagination* can guide their parenting role. Drawing on previous research suggesting that empathic understanding can be more or less accurate since it depends on the imaginative capabilities of the empathizer (Morton, 2013; Cuff et al, 2016), Björk argues that such capabilities are especially important in adult-child relations since children have lesser abilities to verbally communicate their feelings. Thus, the imagination of the adult becomes crucial in order to guide their empathy towards the child. Accordingly, I will argue and exemplify that the same empathetic imagination is of great essence in human-animal relations since animals like young children lack the ability to verbally communicate their feelings and needs. Further, I will argue and show how the empathetic imagination in animal welfare practice could be considered highly dependent on knowledge on animals' behaviors and needs, knowledge that often becomes an object of tensions and paradoxes.

The development and nurturing of empathy towards animals have been researched by



Hansson and Jacobsson who show how various conscious managing techniques can achieve a “re-engineering” of affective cognitive repertoires and processes of “sensibilization” in relation to animals” (2014: 263). By consciously tuning in and making oneself sensible to animals’ situations and life conditions, one can cultivate a broader empathic capability extending human-human relations. As I have mentioned above, such cognitive processes of cultivating empathy are related to knowledge, which the experiences of the participants in my study confirm.

## **Data and method**

The data presented and analyzed in this article was collected in February and March 2017 with the aim of depicting and understanding the working conditions and emotion management and work of animal welfare inspectors in Sweden. To get a rich material, animal welfare offices from two different county governments were included. The initial contact was made through managers and selection came about by letting managers involve the inspectors that found interest in taking part in the study.

To capture both the backstage and front stage emotion work of the inspectors as well as the subjectively narrated and the observational in-action perspective on their working conditions, a varied selection of ethnographic methods were applied to collect the data: shadowing, observations and interviews. A broad qualitative approach seemed necessary to capture the actual behaviors and emotions that arise during inspections and other work situations of animal welfare inspectors. The reason for this is because the gap between the subjectively narrated and observed emotions supposedly cannot be captured quantitatively. Approximately 90 hours were spent in the field. Shadowing and observations were conducted during around 20 inspections and a number of meetings and briefings in offices. Due to organizational and accessibility differences the amount of data and participants involved varied between the counties. In sum 9 participants (7 in one county and 2 in the other) were shadowed, sometimes individually and sometimes in pairs. In total, 4 participants were formally interviewed (2 in each county) of which 3 were shadowees. In one county, observations were conducted during meetings and office work and involved further participants than the shadowed ones.

### *Shadowing and observations*

Shadowing implies that one follows a member of an organization closely in order to gather intense and detailed data on their activities (McDonald, 2005). By shadowing behavior from a

cognitive and emotional perspective, I intended to understand roles and perspectives by partially observe, partially letting the subjects describe their thoughts and feelings. For my purpose, being able to get first-hand accounts on what unfolds in the day-to-day activities of animal welfare inspectors is crucial in order to capture activities and emotions beyond narrated accounts; in Quinlan's words: "Data from shadowing are grounded in actual events rather than reconstructions of previously occurring events" (2008: 1482).

The ontology guiding the method and theory is a constructivist one. Accordingly, the epistemological standpoint implies that the specific reality examined, and also the knowledge about it, "is the result of an intersubjective construction between workers but also between them [the shadowees] and the shadower" (Meunier & Vasquez, 2008: 176). This is to say that I acknowledge that my presence and questions might alter and modify the behaviors and narratives when examined. However, I see this as an inescapable fact to acknowledge and consciously act upon rather than a problem to escape. The issues of observer effects in shadowing has been raised before and calls for attention (McDonald, 2005: 459). In my case, asking relatively non-guiding questions, keeping a very low profile during inspections and letting the narratives unfold uninterrupted have been the main strategies to be as "conspicuously invisible" (Quinlan, 2008) as possible. Further, there are suggestions that one might address and discuss the observer effect directly with the participants (Burgoyne & Hodgson, 1984; McDonald, 2005), an idea that I have continuously adopted during fieldwork. This by asking the participants if and in what way my presence was altering their work and the situations we experienced. Some inspectors said they forgot me during inspection, thus confirming that I managed the shadowing role sufficiently. When asked, all inspectors stated that my presence did not alter the inspections in any substantial way.

A dialogical approach was adapted which recognized that "the shadowee can provide clarification and interpretation." (Gill et al., 2014: 72). This has meant that shadowee confirmation/disconfirmation of my observations is accounted for as crucial.

### *Interviews*

The interviews, ranging between 45-60 minutes, were semi-structured with a thematic design including questions on emotions and related topics such as debriefing, collegial interaction and organizational aspects of working conditions. Three interviews were recorded by sound and transcribed and one interview was recorded by direct note taking. All interviews included spontaneous questions relating to the interpretations and answers given by the interviewees.

In addition to the formal interviews, all participants were asked questions during and in connection to shadowing and observational sessions.

### *Ethics*

All participants were informed of the ethics and conditions of participation stating the unconditional permission to withdraw from involvement at any time, secured data treatment, anonymity measurements and terms of data usage. Because of the particularly sensitive and exposed nature of the participants' situation, all names and details of the offices, participants and the inspection objects and subjects were coded already in the field notes. This precautionary measure can for example imply that quotes or a description of a particular event does not contain the accurate animal type.

A specific ethical issue for shadowing and similar ethnographic methods arose immediately upon entering the field; the problem of forced consent. As previously problematized by shadowers, hierarchical organizational structures can be a problem when the manager-employee relation puts pressure on the employees consent (e.g. Bart Johnson, 2014: 29). In my case, the field was accessed by seeking contact with managers that later invited me to meet the inspectors. Thus, I did not know if and to what extent participation were the result of organizational pressure. However, when presenting the study for the working group and managers I stressed that no one needed to take part and that everyone involved could just drop out at any time. I also asked inspectors one on one, in order to figure out whether their participation was voluntary and as far as I could tell, all inspectors involved seemed to be taking part out of their own will.

When shadowing and observing inspections the inspectors usually informed the inspected beforehand on my role. But sometimes during non-prepared inspections or acute errands no such information could be handed in advance. Then the inspector or I verbally informed the inspected when we arrived at site. All participants gave their informed consent.

### *Data Analysis*

The analytical approach to the empirical data was thematic content analysis that was partially theoretically deductive and partially inductive. This in the sense that some patterns were searched for with theoretical tools derived from previous emotion research while others emerged when reading the empirical data. For example, emotion work was pre-determined as an analytical category; one has to work with professional emotions according to the theoretical framework of this study. On the other hand, one of the most central themes of the

study came to be empathy, which was not planned beforehand but rather chosen during the analysis as it emerged as a central pattern.

Coding was performed in three stages. First, I read the text several times in order to identify and saturate reoccurring patterns. Second, when no further patterns were found, I merged relating patterns into general themes. Third, I recoded the general themes into the analytical themes that are presented under each heading in the analysis. For example, the general theme empathy was recoded as empathy work, altruistic empathy and instrumental empathy. Further, expressed feelings of insufficiency were recoded as psychosocial stress.

### **The working conditions of animal welfare inspectors**

In this section I will describe the day-to-day tasks and experiences of the animal welfare inspectors that I have followed. The descriptions serve as a background of information that situates and enriches the understanding of the specific empathy work and emotion management described below. Apart from being descriptive, this section is also analytical in the sense that it aims to identify the objects of empathy work and emotion management; that is, the conditions, situations and interactions that involves professional emotional responses in animal welfare inspection. Thus, in this section I attempt to answer the question: *how can one describe and understand the working conditions of animal welfare inspectors in Sweden?*

#### *The day-to-day animal welfare practice*

Sure, it has become tougher. But this image of our work...this image that we encounter misery and we are being threatened...well no, those are very exceptional cases. And those exceptional cases create a kind of hysteria. (John, 40+)

The toughness of it and the amount of crap you have to put up against, that was difficult at first. (Jenny, 30+)

These quotes exemplify quite different accounts of two experienced inspectors. And surely, the subjective attitudes towards working conditions and experiences differ. However, the bigger picture shows that inspectors share a lot of experiences that have in common the need for emotion management and work. This is a call for professionalism that was embraced by all participants with conscious sensibility and with the primary aim of making the life situations of animals better.

The task of animal welfare inspectors is to make sure that animal owners follow the practical guidelines of the animal welfare legislation that are handed down from the board of agriculture. Inspectors divide their work hours between field and office work. The former generally fills out two days of a working week and the latter three days. The tasks of the

inspectors vary and imply different encounters that also differ in how professionally demanding they are perceived to be. The first, roughly drawn, difference is that between inspections concerning production animals (farm animals that produce foods and other products for human consumption; pigs, cows, poultry etc.) and pets (dogs, horses, cats etc.). The inspectors in my study generally have knowledge and experience to work with both kinds of inspections but are usually focused on a specific group – production or pet animals and occasionally laboratory animals and rare animals. Generally speaking, the inspectors working with pet animal inspection more often encounter people living on the margins of society. Whether it is health issues, addictions, mental disabilities, old age or other forms of social exclusion, this branch of inspection generally involves more human psychological suffering and, according to the collected image, also a greater deal of exposure to stress and challenging situations for the inspectors. The second difference in the day-to-day work of inspectors is between routine errands and reported non-compliances. Routine inspections, that mostly involves control of production animals but also pet shops, circuses, laboratories and other professional animal owners, are carried out by forewarn; the animal owner gets notice usually one day before inspection. Inspection of reported animal abuse and/or non-compliance of regulations are on the other hand carried out with no notice and therefore involves an element of surprise for the animal owner. Such inspections target both private and professional animal owners but according to my data much more often the former. Generally, inspections on reported non-compliances are more often concerned with social misery and animal owners with various forms of difficulties in their everyday life. Such inspections are perceived to be more demanding amongst participants.

### *Psychosocial stress*

As mentioned, pet animal inspections generally come with greater challenges and exposure to psychosocial stress. Inspectors, both those specialized in production animals and in pet animals confirm this. Psychosocial stress refers to when challenging social conditions exhausts the psychological coping techniques of the inspectors and causes stress boosts (Compare with: Lazarus, 1966). Such stress is emotionally demanding for inspectors since it requires coping with the emotions of the animal owner, the suffering of the animals but not least their own emotional reactions. For example, the emotional demands on inspectors can have to do with staying calm and correct whilst animal owners are verbally aggressive. The demands can also have to do with witnessing the psychological suffering of animals without being able to intervene.

During a meeting I attended in one of the offices, psychosocial stress was discussed as a risk factor for inspectors in general but for pet animal-inspectors in particular. An experienced inspector working exclusively with pet animal inspections and often with cases described as “the toughest cases reported” explained her notion on the difference between working with production- and pet animal inspections: “I think it has become substantially tougher. We do not work with these production animals where you go to nice business owners who see a reason to take good care of their animals. We are going to a completely different clientele. We do have a tougher work environment.” Inspectors focusing on production animals also confirm this picture. In the words of another inspector, with a lot of experience in both production and pet animal inspection, when leaving the site of an acute errand: “I would much rather take a sharp discussion with a farmer than have to see this misery.” The inspector was referring to a site where particularly the animals, scratching themselves constantly, but also the humans that was living in sanitary nuisance, seemed to suffer. The accompanying veterinarian, brought in to examine the animals medicinally, walked around with a flashlight, examining the furs of each individual animal and found the scalps of all to be infested with countless crawling lice’s. The veterinarian looked astonished, shook her head and mumbled quietly: “ I have never seen anything like this in my career”. The stench from animal feces and the high levels of ammonia in the indoor air was hard to stand. One of the inspectors took a break during inspection to breath some fresh air. When leaving the site by driving slowly along a small dirt road with the house fading out in the rearview mirror, one of the inspectors, seemingly struck by the inspection, remarked: “The smell of her and of her animals” followed by silence, confirming the intensity of the experience.

Even if not generally as intense as the inspection depicted above, many cases described by inspectors and captured in shadowing sessions witnessed of similar demanding cases concerning pet animals. For example, animal owners threatening to take their life and sometimes even demonstrating suicidal threats, animals found almost dead or dead due to starvation, animal owner’s scolding and verbally attacking inspectors etc. The experience-based knowledge on the challenging circumstances of inspection can sometimes guide the inspectors’ workday, for instance during a midmorning while driving on an inspection round, when an inspector remarked: “We better visit them now so they do not become too rude. – What do you mean?, the accompanying colleague replied, – So that they do not do drugs before we get there”. Contrasting the harshness of the situations exemplified above, there are many inspectors that share the picture of their work as fun, exiting and pleasant. Further,

generally inspectors share the notions that: “people are very willing to help” and that “the basic attitude is to trust citizens.”

### *Epistemic Tensions*

Except from the psychosocial stress from implicit/explicit threats and witnessing of misery etc., my empirical data suggests that what could be called *epistemic tensions* are another central challenge in welfare inspection that needs emotional management. *Epistemic tensions*, I argue, arise in situations where inspectors’ knowledge and empathic capability do not cohere with the legislation and its practical implications or strongly contradict the knowledge of animal owners. For example, one inspector uttered her frustration after an inspection where the animals were tied up in the same place without being able to scratch their backs or move around more than a few steps for the whole winter season (approximately seven months): “My personal opinion is that it is better with loose housing, but both ways are equally ok according to the law.” She then continued: “It is all about tradition. What we regulate is the lowest level. I am over qualified; my knowledge is not always relevant. I know that the animals get better legs and hoofs if they can move freely.” Arguably, “It is all about tradition” refers to the arbitrariness of the legislation in relation to the knowledge of the inspector, in this case based on a university degree from five years of full time studies and additionally many years of experience and further education within animal welfare inspection. Even if the inspector practices the legislation so that farmers choosing to tie their animals for seven months a year get the same treatment as farmers applying “better” solutions for their animals, the frustration for the inspector is a fact, as this quote suggests: “one thinks, why do you not do this or that instead [use knowledge based solutions].” Similar utterances of frustration arose among many if not all participants. Here follows a few examples: “Damn dirty place, good to see something bad so you can compare [with places that have better animal welfare solutions].” “We are the lowest level that should be.” “Animal welfare rules are at very low level, lowest level.” These quotes exemplify frustrations of not being able to do enough because of the “toothless” legislation.

Furthermore, *epistemic tensions* arise since the legislation is incoherent in relation to its aims; the legislation is formulated so that contemporary research on animal welfare renders it insufficient even viewed from its own incorporated aims. In this sense, the law is *paradoxical*. This could be exemplified with the following account: “Keeping a dog shut-in affects its natural behavior too. Horses, for example, they are flock-living animals that go long distances every day, to fence them in small areas and to make them stand in a box at night is as much an

impact on them as that we have pigs in small spaces indoors.” This quote relates to what another inspector described as “looking at whether the animals can lead as natural lives as possible” which refers to the fourth paragraph in the Swedish animal welfare legislation. The quote concerning the statutory treatment of horses reveals the epistemic tension between the inspector’s knowledge and the extended implication of the legislation; that it is judicially considered “natural” to keep a horse in a box for many hours every day. I argue that these kinds of tensions evoke frustrations such as the ones expressed in the following quotes: “Then I can get angry – when a pet owner neglects an obviously important commitment.” Or “it is authority obstinacy; how difficult can it be to fix some of this stuff?” These quotes uttered in relation to the noting of the low level of demands in the legislation reveals how inspectors are emotionally triggered by the omissions by animal owners. The legislation can not reach the animal owners even if the animals obviously could have a much better life, in the words of another inspector: ”There are many who are just on the verge of non-compliance with the animal welfare legislation, they are doing everything correctly and they really stay [just on the limit] so we cannot do anything; we cannot find any shortcomings or anything but it is just on the verge [almost miserable].”

The legislation is *paradoxical* in a further sense since it arbitrarily differentiates the needs of animals that in fact share the same needs. For example when asking an inspector on why cows can be tied up in the same spot twentyfour/seven the whole winter in compliance with the legislation while other species can not, the inspector replied: “If it had been a horse, one would think that it was terrible.” This quote was followed by an explanation by the inspector noting that in accordance with contemporary scientific knowledge on the needs of cows, their leg and hoof health improves if they can move around freely.

In this section I have presented some central conditions and situations framing the day-to-day animal welfare practice. The conditions demanding emotion management identified are the exposure to animal and human suffering and various tense situations causing psychosocial stress. Thereto, epistemic tensions challenge inspectors and lead to feelings of inadequacy. In relation to the identified challenges, I now move on to analyze how inspectors manage emotions, not least their own, in relation to the aim of improving the welfare of animals and to the conditions and situations that frame these endeavors.

### **Empathy work by animal welfare inspectors**

It is all [progressive animal welfare inspection] about bringing in people who are empathic.  
(Jenny, 30+)



This quote, referring to the need of employing empathic people into the animal welfare profession, can be argued to exemplify a general notion among my participants; empathy is viewed as a crucial capability in animal welfare inspection. The many accounts on the importance of empathy cohere with the experiences I have drawn from extensive shadowing sessions. In this section, I will argue that empathy is a capability with multicolored professional implications and functions used both to *understand*, *evaluate* and *act upon* situations and conditions arising in animal welfare cases. Further, I will argue that empathy is something that is consciously done and cultivated in the practice of animal welfare inspection; inspectors perform empathy work both in relation to animals and humans but not least in relation to their own emotional and cognitive processes. The following discussion aims to shed light on the question of *how animal welfare inspectors manage and work with emotions in relation to their working conditions*.

### *Instrumental empathy work*

Arguably, empathy work comprises several necessary functions in the tasks of animal welfare inspectors. Empathy work I define as a conscious employment of empathy that can be used in relation to a case in order to achieve the overarching goal of animal welfare interventions; to make a difference to the better for the animals involved. In this sense, empathy work can be understood as instrumental.

Firstly, empathy work is used to *understand* the situation of animals and humans in a case (compare with Wettergren & Bergman Blix, 2016). This can be illustrated by the following quote from an inspector: “This was bad, it was almost on the verge. But you know, they probably still pay for that huge new building.” This quote was uttered when leaving a farm where the animal owner did not show much compliance even if an animal was clearly sick and injured without having been given care. The comment on house mortgage from the inspector suggests that there is an understanding to the economically pressured situation of many farmers that in turn may cause tensions manifested in the inspection setting. The inspector notices that there are pressures on the farmer from several angles and that this can explain the stubborn attitude. Thus, an *understanding* of the case takes form. I also suggest that the understanding becomes a means for the inspector to balance the own emotional responses. The inspector was clearly frustrated after the inspection saying: “this was a damn shithole”, however, the immediate response was to contrast this utterance by the understanding exemplified above. Thus, empathy work, also involves the management of the inspectors’ own emotions.

A similar kind of performance of empathy work to understand a case is substantial also in pet animal inspections: “In animal husbandry, the human life story is important in order to assess whether a change is possible.” And further: “We have to find reasons for why animal husbandry is lacking” These quotes refers to allowing the inspected to share their life story; letting them be heard is important in order to evaluate whether a case can result in the desired change for the animal or if it will lead to forced custody of the animals.

In addition to understanding the human situation, empathy work is performed in order to understand the situation of animals: “It is not always the sickest animals that affect you the most. It can for example be lonely animals that create the most concern.” The quote refers to finding a lonely dog, and arguably suggests that empathy work can enable imagination of implicit and tacit suffering. This seeing capability is both *cognitive* in the sense that the inspector has knowledge on specific animal breeds that suggests that social interaction and certain stimuli is necessary for the well-being of the animal. But the seeing capability is also *affective* in the sense that inspectors can sense the distress of the animal beyond the cognitive understanding and further translate this affective sensing into *empathic imagination* (compare with Björk, 2017). That is, the inspectors can use the sensing of distress and knowledge to imagine the situation for the animal, something I suggest the following quote confirms: “Partly, it is about getting a feel for the animal and what I can see and my knowledge.” This combination of conscious emotional sensibility and cognitive application seems fundamental to create understanding in some cases. Similar observations reoccurred continuously throughout my fieldwork. In the words of another inspector on how getting to open the door to the stable can be the first way to get the picture of the animal welfare status on a farm: “I want to get to open the door to the stable and feel the first smell, you can sometimes immediately determine if there are animals feeling bad.” Further, another inspector on the encounter with suffering animals: “In some sense, it goes straight into the emotional, the fact that there is actually suffering here.”

Another example of how empathy work allows inspectors to understand a case both in relation to animals and humans can be illustrated by a discussion on a slaughterhouse case between two inspectors. One of the inspectors had inspected a slaughterhouse and wanted some consultation from a colleague on technical aspects of the regulation. The inspectors double-checked a number confirming that 134 animals were killed each minute, a number that raised doubt on how well the workers responsible for controlling the various steps of the slaughter could manage regulated criterions such as anaesthetization and death confirmation. Since the animals are killed by getting their throats slit mechanically, the anesthetics must be

verified before the killing. Further, when the throats are slit there must be verification that the animals are actually dead, to insure that they do not suffer from technical faults. This had occurred in another case where animals had been grabbing around in their own blood because of anesthetic failures. Only one slaughterhouse employee was supposed to manage the various control tasks. With 134 animals per minute swishing along the conveyor belt in front of the employee, the inspectors concluded that it seemed highly unlikely or even impossible that regulation could be followed. The inspector that had visited the slaughter house noted several stressful circumstances for the animals and continued: “It is not exactly cozy to be in that environment, there are so many impressions. The treatment is quite bad, a lot of stress for the animals; it is simply too much for them.” The amount of impressions, seemingly overwhelming in the account of the inspector, is used to imagine the situation of the animals. The quote exemplifies the performance of empathy work; the inspector both use her own experience of the stressful amount of impressions as well as her knowledge on the animals ability to experience stress, in order to draw the conclusion that “it is too much for them”. The accompanying inspector continuously confirmed the reasoning by her colleague by similar empathic comments, thus creating a collective and relational dialogue that implicitly cultivates empathy as a guiding capability. Once again I perceive the imaginative tool of empathy to be in play and working as in in Björk’s study on parents and children relations (2017). Thereto, this example of performing empathy touches upon and extends previous research by Holmberg (2008, 2011) as it both illustrates the activating of empathy by cognition and experience, both allows us to understand how empathy towards animals is cultivated relationally between the inspectors.

Empathy work also guides the expressed understanding of the employees’ situation: “You will probably become quite numb by standing there all day long.” This quote shows the understanding of that if you witness the death of 134 animals each minute, this will probably have consequences on your affective responses; thus, the inspector suggests that there is a harshness to the working conditions of the employees. Accordingly, understanding the case is arguably made possible by empathy work both in relation to animals and humans.

Secondly, empathy work is used to *evaluate* a case. In this sense, empathy work helps inspectors to “determine the right response”, which previous research have identified as a dilemma in inspection (Devitt et al., 2014). Understanding is viewed here as a precondition for *evaluation* and as such the two are merging. However, there is an analytical difference that Wettergren and Bergman Blix (2016) previously have touched upon. For example, the inspectors usually have to get a feel for the inspected to see if they are willing to comply. This

is part of the understanding of a case but is more concretely “testing out” the inspected. This can be illustrated by the following questions asked by an inspector to an animal owner after inspecting a farm with several animal welfare omissions: “the surface here is not dry, do you think the animals need a dry bed to lay on?” and further: “does this seem reasonable to you?, do you think you will manage?” Both questions were asked after letting the greater picture fall into place first, that is, there was already an established understanding of the case before these questions were put forward. In my analysis, these questions serve to *evaluate* whether there will be an effort made by the animal owner. Further, the evaluation is made possible by the sensing and understanding of the situation by the conscious empathy work of the inspector. In the words of another inspector: “We try to build up a motivation in [the animal owners] to make a change but sometimes you have the feeling that this will take a bad ending anyway”. I suggest that the “feeling” is an example of empathic imagination, affective and cognitive, that becomes an evaluative tool for deciding how to proceed in a case.

Thirdly, empathy work is performed in order to *act upon* various aspects of a case. In the words of an very experienced inspector that have gone from field to primarily office work: “I know that when I was out on control, I was very sad that I could not do more, the lowest level is so low, one can see that the animals are not well but still cannot do anything. Animals covered in feces that are bound up without being able to scratch themselves, this goes on day in and day out and it burns and scratches their skin. So when you can do something, you look at it properly.” This quote demonstrates how the empathic imagination guides the motivation to act when judicially possible. It also shows how the boundaries of the legislation are contradicting the empathic imagination of the inspector. To connect this to the discussion on epistemic tensions is to recognize how the same empathic imagination that reveals the epistemic paradoxes of the legislation becomes a motivation to change the animals’ situation.

### *Altruistic empathy work*

If instrumental empathy work can be said to be a tool that guides the work of animal welfare inspectors, *altruistic empathy* is the foreground in which inspectors cultivate and nurture empathic capabilities. Altruistic empathy is here contrasted to instrumental empathy where the former is not seen as oriented towards a goal but rather a capability cultivated in the working group. However, these are just roughly drawn differences that should not be over-emphasized; the two concepts merge. Nonetheless I find the differences relevant to understand the distinction between performing a professionally oriented emotion–cognitive work and to cultivate a general empathic approach. For example, inspectors tend to show

understanding of the inspected's perspectives in various ways. One inspector commented that: "I can understand that they have a fear of non-objective inspectors." And another inspector that: "It is probably experienced in a completely different way by those who are inspected." Both referring to the somewhat exposed situation of the inspected. Another inspector comments on the, sometimes, extensive economical pressure on farmers: "it is unpleasant being out inspecting when you know that people are deep down in the mud." An additional example illustrates how an inspector frames the reaction to encountering people that have various difficulties in terms of empathy: "you feel empathy, compassion for the destiny of life, for the human being." Further comments from inspectors notes the humbling experiences of seeing life conditions that are exposed: "The people we come to have none, it gets extra heavy, we take away all that they have; it gets to you". These kinds of reflections are circulated backstage amongst colleagues; inspectors collectively confirm empathic capabilities as crucial during meetings and informal debriefing. Such collective backstage cultivation of empathy becomes manifested front stage when inspectors perform empathy in order to make inspections less strain for animal owners: "when on inspection I joke with the animal owner and try to stay calm and get a feel for the situation" (field note, Anja, 40+). This illustrates how the cultivation of understanding gets practiced in the field. Anja knows that inspections can be very strenuous for the animal owner and therefore use this knowledge both to joke and ease up tensions but also to be calm and sensitive in relation to the situation. This can also help to overcome tensions from the power position of the inspector. Further, altruistic empathy can be performed by giving confirmation of animal owners that are stressed, which the following quote by Martha (30+) shows: "we understand that this can be a big break in your way of living".

Likewise, the inspectors express, cultivate and perform empathy towards animals. Sometimes explicitly, as when Bill (60+) said: "it is important to have empathy for the animals", referring to that the main purpose of animal welfare inspection is to make the lives of animals better. According to Bill, this requires that inspectors care for and understand animals. Thus, I argue, making oneself sensible to and getting a feel for animals, as previously theorized by Hansson and Jacobsson (2014) and Holmberg (2008, 2011), is held to be a generally important empathic capability by Bill, which also was confirmed by participants in general. This is shown in practice as inspector's stress that all animals are to be treated as sentient individuals.

Thus far, I have argued that various forms of empathy work emerge in the collected material as a significant pattern. The analysis reveals that empathy is performative; it is learnt,

cultivated and acted upon socially, rather than a hardwired automated capacity and response. I suggest that the *doing of* empathy is crucial to understand an animal welfare case – where empathy is performed both in relation to animals and humans – evaluating the possibilities of change. It is also crucial for finding the appropriate responses in relation to the situations and conditions that define animal welfare practice. But not least, empathy has also been shown to be a way to take care of emotions produced in animal welfare inspection; by cultivation of an empathic environment where both the inspectors as well as the animal owners emotional responses are allowed. So how then, I ask, can the inspectors uphold the empathy work through the challenges of their daily work? This leads me to the next step in the analysis that investigates *emotion management* relating to empathy work.

### **Emotion management relating to empathy work**

My argument builds on the premise that in order to use ones emotions in *work* – to perform *emotion work* – one need to *manage* the emotions that such work evokes. Thus, to maintain empathy work over time, inspectors have to perform different kinds of emotion management. The concepts *procedural correctness* (Wettergren, 2010) and *ventilation* (Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2013, 2016) have previously been used to understand management of various emotional challenges and dilemmas. I will analyze my data with help of these concepts in order to further investigate the question: *how animal welfare inspectors manage and work with emotions in relation to their working conditions*.

#### ***Bureaucratic procedures***

I suggest that empathy work needs boundaries in order to be maintained. Arguably, bureaucratic procedures can constitute such boundaries. Procedural management of emotions enables inspectors to sustain empathy by having a certain distance in relation to the animals and humans they encounter. Distancing is especially required when attending demanding cases. Speaking about such cases Josefine (50+) says: “Deal with them briefly and correctly.” The quote is a management instruction on how to deal with what inspectors call “dogmatists” – a recurring challenge for animal welfare inspectors. The term “dogmatist” refers to animal owners that claim their legislative right beyond reasonable limits. Being “correct” means that one follows the bureaucratic procedures and treat animal owners equally. Being “brief and correct”, to not engage more than necessary, is an emotion management technique required when the possibility of empathy work is exhausted and implies that inspectors contain their emotions by performing bureaucracy. This argument is informed by the previously discussed

research by Wettergren (2010) suggesting that *procedural correctness* can be a way to override undesired emotions. That is, when one cannot manage a case by empathy work one can at least find comfort and pride in being correct in relation to the given procedure. The pride in maintaining the role of a calm and correct bureaucratic official is exemplified in the following quote:

He [an animal owner] accuses me of all kinds of things and he has also been threatening me. He is really the kind of person you could go tough on if that is your purpose [to act upon personal emotions of irritation or revenge]. But no, he will get the same treatment as everyone else.  
(Martha, 30+)

In this quote an inspector describes the management of personal emotions of resentment by letting the principle of equal treatment, here understood as a specific expression of procedural correctness, guide her work in relation to a demanding client. The inspector empathizes that she will not be provoked by the personal attacks but instead act correctly in the role of a government official. Procedural correctness can also be performed with police assistance: “you [the inspector] are nice and correct and the police may bark [speak up] when needed.” This quote demonstrates how inspectors can uphold their bureaucratic role while the police enforce compliance.

Another bureaucratic phenomenon in animal welfare inspection is the categorization of animals as *production animals* and *pets*. I argue that this categorization enables the inspectors to emotionally manage the consequences that the paradoxical regulation has for individual animals. Such managing is made possible by the tacit and internalized nature of the categorization, which can be exemplified with the following quote:

We might not react that strongly if we inspect a poultry farm and find a dead chicken, that is part of the system. But if we find a dead dog while inspecting a kennel we would probably react more and think that it is much worse. (John, 40+)

The inspector continued telling me that these kinds of immediate reactions had been discussed amongst colleagues as weird and contradictory since they know that all animals are individuals capable of suffering. The “system” refers to the industrial production of animal products (meat, eggs, dairy products etc.) and its surrounding cultural structure. Even if the inspectors are formally supposed to treat all animals as individuals, this is practically impossible since the resources in animal welfare inspection are scarce. If inspectors visit a farm with thousands of animals, they do not have nearly as much time as when visiting a farm with twenty animals. Thus, in practice, empathy work cannot involve thousands of individuals since there is not enough time. Instead of inspecting each individual on such large farms,

inspectors told me that they have to look for the blatant deviances and that this could be frustrating and stressful.

I am not suggesting that inspectors consciously apply the terms *product* and *pet* in order to manage the frustration of not being able to supervise the needs of each individual animal. Rather, the division between product and pet is a broader cultural phenomenon that implicitly undergirds the emotion management process for inspectors. As the respondent John said in the quote above, his “reaction” differs even if it contradicts his knowledge that chickens are as able to suffer as dogs. Social norms and legal regulation makes it accepted to treat animals differently, and thereby enable inspectors to feel that what they do is correct in relation to given procedures. In this way the epistemic tensions identified earlier are managed by the performance of procedural correctness. In some cases, however, the inspectors’ emotions override the bureaucratic procedures.

For instance, two participants described that they act outside their professional role in order to help animals. They told me about a disagreement in the work group concerning whether putting down animals should be considered a way to improve a situation. On the one hand, it was argued that there is no harm for the individual to be put down if it is done without suffering. Thus, in cases where animals cannot be transferred to new homes, putting them down can be viewed as a potential option. This option is sometimes used (in accordance with the legislation) since the government funds for animal welfare do not provide transferring programs<sup>3</sup> for all animals that need it. On the other hand, the two participants telling me about the dispute were clearly against this argument, raising questions like: “how can a life not be worth more? We do not see it as an improvement for the animal to be killed.” The inspectors continued telling me that they sometimes act outside the boundaries of their professional role and contact animal homes to save individuals that would otherwise get put down. In this example we see how emotions are managed by *not* subjecting personal emotive-cognitive assessments to the ones prescribed by procedural correctness.

### **Backstage and front stage *ventilation***

*Ventilation*, as theorized by Jacobsson and Lindblom (2013, 2016), is another emotion management technique practiced by inspectors. Ventilation describes the “need to give vent to built-up tension and irritation” (Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2013: 61). Inspectors consciously and unconsciously use ventilation backstage (amongst colleagues and in office) in order to

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<sup>3</sup> Transferring program refer to the process of giving an animal a new home in cases where its owner can not take care of it.



maintain the empathy work performed front stage (during inspections and encounters with clients). During inspections, the car turned out to be a *pressure chamber* for backstage ventilation as exemplified by the following quotes:

You shut down your emotions [when inspecting] but when you close the door to the car [when inspection is over] the feelings arise. (Jenny, 30+)

I am thinking thru the inspection when it is over, you cannot cry or get angry until you get to the car. (Robin, 30+)

When we got into the car after the inspection we felt completely drained – it was this farmer, questioning everything you said. (Alice, 30+)

The car is perceived as a space where one can allow emotions to be expressed or to simply arise – a space where emotions are vented, that is, emotional pressure and tensions are released. Inspectors continuously refer to “debriefing in the car”, meaning the reflection upon experiences and situations during inspections in order to deal with cognitive and emotional strains. Such debriefing also serves as a means to improve treatment of clients. “Debriefing in the car” can also refer to *pre-inspection ventilation* as exemplified in the following field note:

– Now I suddenly feel a little pain in my stomach, says one of the inspectors. – Me too, the other inspector replies. It gets completely quiet in the car as we wait to start the inspection. We are parked outside the house of a pet owner that might lose her animal if she has not complied with requirements put forward in a previous inspection. When confronted with the requirements, the pet owner demonstrated that she was prepared to commit suicide if the animal would be taken from her. (Field note)

As we see, inspectors can prepare for an inspection by venting their feelings. In their own words, sharing their feelings “calibrates” them and prepares them for the encounter with the animal owner. To “calibrate” or “prepare in the car” is a commonly used description amongst participants on how collegial interaction is shaped in the field. The continuous need to vent implies that working in pairs can be beneficial: “It is easier to punctuate [blow out or vent] oneself if there are two of you” (Bill, 60+). This statement underlines the relational aspect of ventilation – a general pattern in my data suggesting that ventilation is primarily something done together in a reflective way rather than a spontaneous outburst of feelings or thoughts. Ventilation serves the purpose of reducing tensions and to create openness concerning the frustrations felt, which in turn enable inspectors to uphold their professional and empathetically oriented approach towards animal owners. That is, by making emotions and thoughts visible to one another, the inspectors can reflect on and improve their work together for the benefit of the animals, clients and themselves.

In contrast, *front stage ventilation* is a means to directly release tensions, used to communicate the seriousness of a situation to animal owners:

You tell the animal owner that: 'this is bad; can you not see this [miserable condition for the animals] yourself? This is not acceptable.' I am very clear about what I think [in relation to the animal owner]. (Elisabeth, 40+)

The quote illustrates how immediate ventilation takes place in response to the acuteness of animals suffering. The inspector act out her emotive-cognitive reaction, thereby release tensions of frustration. The quote also shows how expressing ones thoughts and feelings can serve as a pedagogical means to communicate the seriousness of a situation. Accordingly, empathy work can be complemented or replaced by front stage ventilation when required. There are further accounts supporting this conclusion:

You can also use anger, because some people are so blocked [lost in their own perspective] that you have to use anger to provoke them so that they get angry and thus lose their tensions. (Martha, 30+)

The quote exemplifies how the inspector uses her own frustration in order to create a ventilation reaction from the animal owner. According to the inspector one can consciously provoke emotional reactions from the animal owner in order to open up a dialogue in cases where animal owners are unwilling to listen. However, the inspector also told me that one cannot become too angry since that would undermine a good dialogue. This is particularly interesting since it suggests that ventilation can be performed in a conscious and balanced way; to release tension in the inspector and in the animal owner, but also as a technique to open up for dialogue. By mutually displaying the emotions at stake – by putting the cards on the table – the inspector and animal owner can have a discussion. Thus, front stage ventilation is a specific emotion management technique in empathy work.

When provoking a ventilation reaction from the animal owner the inspector has to perform *containing*; the inspector has to be the space for the emotional reactions of the inspected (compare with: Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2013: 60). Being the space for animal owners emotional reactions connects to the *understanding* part of empathy work exemplified above. When letting the inspected be heard, the inspector perform containing:

We are at an inspection site together with a police patrol. Some animals have been reported to be neglected by the animal owner who has been identified as a risk profile; potentially able to assault the inspectors. It turns out that no one is home, however, the inspector gets hold of the owner by phone. The animal owner sounds moody, sometimes verbally attacking the inspector, sometimes talking normally. The phone call ends without any progression. Later the same day the animal owner calls the inspector, now in a completely different mood and willing to talk. The inspector patiently listens for over thirty minutes as the person talks fragmentary about her life story and all kinds of things. (Field note, Martha)

As shown in the field note, Martha is the space for the personal attacks and the animal owners need to be heard. As the animal owner *ventilates*, Martha *contains*. Martha later told me that listening is an essential tool to progress in a case.

## Concluding discussion

In this article, I have argued that *psychosocial stress* and *epistemic tensions* are central challenges in the day-to-day work of animal welfare inspectors. Several of my findings allow us to understand how inspectors manage these challenges.

To begin with, I have used previous research on empathy and emotion to construct a new analytical tool – *empathy work* – to be used to understand how one can collectively and individually work with and manage emotions *by* empathy.

Second, by drawing on previous research on empathy (e.g. Björk, 2017; Wettergren & Blix, 2016) the concept *instrumental empathy work* helps to explain how an animal welfare case can be *understood*, *evaluated* and *acted upon*. Inspectors emotionally *tune into* and *get a feel for* animals and humans in a case in order to determine what action to take. Thus, I have extended previous research on animal welfare inspection by answering *how* inspectors “determine the appropriate response” (Devitt et al., 2014: 6–7) both in relation to the animal and human subjects in a case. Thereto, I have shown how *empathic imagination*, previously used to understand crucial capabilities in parent-child relations (Björk, 2017), can be used to analyze how humans can perform empathy in order to understand animals.

Third, I have argued that *altruistic empathy work* is the foreground in which inspectors collectively develop their empathic capabilities. Whilst *instrumental empathy work* is goal oriented, *altruistic empathy work* is the individual and collegial nurturing and cultivation of empathy that imprint the day-to-day practice of animal welfare inspection. Thus, I have shown how previous research on how animal right activists “learn to be affected” (Hansson & Jacobsson, 2014) also can be used to understand how professionals cultivate sensibility and empathy towards animals. Thus, I have sought to develop Holmberg’s theorization (2008, 2011) on how empathy in relation to animals is performed and learnt in professional settings.

Fourth, when the possibilities of empathy work is exhausted, when cases are especially challenging and in relation to general tensions at work, inspectors use *bureaucratic procedures* to manage emotions. The performance of *procedural correctness* (Wettergren, 2010) allow inspectors to feel pride in doing a good job by overriding undesired emotions caused by psychosocial stress and epistemic tensions. Further, bureaucratic procedures manifested as the categorization of production and pet animals are connected to social norms

and legislative regulations that make it accepted to treat animals differently, and thereby enable inspectors to feel that what they do is correct in relation to given procedures.

Fifth, drawing on previous research on emotion work by ventilation (Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2013), the concept *backstage ventilation* helps us understand how inspectors uphold empathy work. The car was shown to be a ventilation space where inspectors can allow emotions to be expressed or to simply arise – a space where emotions are vented – emotional pressure and tensions are released. Thereby, the inspectors can reflect on and improve their work. *Front stage ventilation* helps us to understand how inspectors immediately release tension but also how emotional reactions can communicate the seriousness of a situation. Thereto, provoking a ventilation reaction from the inspected releases tensions during inspection and can enable a good dialogue. Thus, I have shown how ventilation can be understood, not only as an emotion work technique of activists (Jacobsson & Lindblom, 2013), but also as a professional tool used to uphold empathy work over time.

Sixth, my study have raised and left many questions on the working conditions of animal inspectors unanswered. For example, risks, normative aspects of inspection and several other themes were identified during the initial analyses but were not developed. The analyses of such themes could render additional understanding to the subject of animal welfare inspection and is a task for further research.

Finally, the new analytical tool, empathy work, could be further developed and used to understand how emotional challenges are managed in other professions, in activism and social movements in which emotions are situated in between the subjects and objects involved.

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