Introduction

At long last, twenty-seven-year-old housekeeper Katharina Blum has had enough. She raises her gun and kills reporter Werner Tötges with multiple shots. The murder takes place on a Sunday around lunchtime in Miss Blum's previously so neat and tidy flat, which is now a study in disorder. Tötges had come there to interview her. He worked for 'die ZEITUNG' – in capital letters ('the *News*' in the English translation) – which had for several days dragged Blum through the dirt, had indeed ruined her entire life. And not just her life, but also the lives of members of her family.

This brutal murder of a journalist opens Nobel Prize laureate Heinrich Böll's novel *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*, which sold well and occasioned debate in West Germany when it was published in 1974. The reader follows the repercussions of the cynical headlines in everyday life, described in a documentary style characterised by ironic distance. Scenes depict the concealed and open loathing to which Miss Blum is subjected. Neighbours whisper, gossip, and spread malicious rumours about her, she who was previously, before the scandalous articles, known as a loyal, proud, and correct woman. Now they stare at her and no longer want to ride in the lift with her. They avoid or attack her. Friends desert her. Acquaintances make statements about her being a shady character. Anonymous men call her at night and breathe heavily into the receiver. The newspaper's obsession with the crime Blum has supposedly committed – before the murder, that is; throughout the novel, she is accused of harbouring a fugitive from justice – gives rise to inventive interpretations of the statements made by the people around her. When Blum's aged mother exclaims in despair, 'Why did it have to end like this, why did it have to come to this?', Tötges translates this into 'It was bound to come to this, it was bound to end like this.' The justification for the change is that he, as a

reporter, is used to 'helping simple people to express themselves more clearly'.[1]

Heinrich Böll himself regarded the story of Katharina Blum as a pamphlet in the sense of a polemical piece of writing which describes a person who is subjected to the most profound public humiliation through a relentless campaign of demonisation. This is a form of violation, the writer claimed, that leads to Blum losing her sense of belonging in society and being exiled into a barren landscape of loneliness. In this context, the subtitle of the book makes sense: 'How violence develops and where it can lead'. The murder of the journalist can be seen as a grim metaphor for Miss Blum's defenceless-ness against the mudslinging and the prying into the smallest details of her life that characterise this kind of journalism. Böll wrote in anger and claimed that even the headlining done at a newspaper's editorial office can be defined as a form of violation. His wrath against what he called the *Boulevardpresse* (gutter press), and especially the tabloid *Bild-Zeitung*, did not abate over time. Ten years after the original publication of the novel, he wrote the following in a postscript: 'It would be a task for criminology some day to investigate the problems newspapers can cause in all their bestial "innocence"' (Böll 2011:153). His powerful feelings were not only expressed in statements like this one but also in the book itself, where the characters are torn between hope and despair, a desire for revenge and shame, fury and powerlessness. While Böll's story arose from a peculiarly charged political background, it nevertheless provides insights into the possible social consequences of scandal journalism, and here I do not mean the dramatic act of vengeance carried out by Miss Blum.

Four decades after the publication of Böll's controversial book came the release of an award-winning documentary about the much-criticised American congressman Anthony Weiner. Like *The Lost Honour of Katharina Blum*, the film, which is simply called *Weiner*, supplies insights into the contagious effects that lurk in every scandal: the scandal does not simply revolve around the main figure but also pulls in the people in the immediate vicinity of the scandalised person. By way of the invasive camera, it is Huma Abedin, Anthony Weiner's wife, who is made to symbolise this fact. Her naked,

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1 All three quotations may be found in Heinrich Böll, *The Lost Honor of Katharina Blum, or: How,* [sic] *Violence Develops and Where It Can Lead*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Penguin, 1975), p. 105.

shifting facial expressions stay with the viewer: she is sometimes determined, sometimes vulnerable, sometimes angry, sometimes in despair. The look she occasionally gives her husband, in connection with the exposure of his frequent sex-chatting with young women, is heavy with venom. As his electoral support plummets, she seems to hate him while at the same time, almost reluctantly, loving his increasingly broken figure. Her vulnerability is beyond question, and it appears to be on a par with that of her husband, or perhaps even greater than his. The whole thing is excruciating to watch. And very entertaining.

It should, by way of introduction, be said that media landscapes differ a great deal from one country to another. Scandals in Sweden cannot be directly compared to scandals in the United States, or to scandals in other parts of the world for that matter. At the same time, scandals are connected across the borders of countries and across continents, not only through the universal, emotional experiences undergone by the main figures of these scandals and their families, but also through a kind of resilience over time that characterises the phenomenon in question. This is one of the things that the present book will demonstrate.

What is unique about the stories of the fictive character Katharina Blum and the real-life Anthony Weiner is that they succeed in illuminating dimensions of media scandals that have escaped the attention of many people, not least scholars: the scandals in no way play out in the media only; they find their sustenance, their breath of life, outside the media, in regular everyday conversations and interactions between people. Ultimately this deficiency has to do with a limited interpretation of *media* in the term *media scandal*, where it is assumed that scholars agree on what this word means. There are, of course, those who recognise and are interested in the complexity of the phenomenon; in the present publication I refer to several of these researchers, and like them I want to investigate media scandals as social and cultural phenomena. The scandals neither begin nor end in the newsrooms but branch out into people's everyday lives and take shape through a number of different, interconnected forms of communication. Media scandals say something essential about how we get along with one another. After having sat face to face with several people who have been at the centre of this type of reporting, and journalists who have contributed to it in one way or another, listening to their stories, I am convinced that this is true. But let us begin at the beginning.

The project and purpose of this book

This book was written within the framework of a multidisciplinary research project financed by the Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology at Lund University. The project, which is called 'Medie-drevets mekanismer och aktörer' ('Media houndings – mechanisms and actors'), should, according to its description, include perspectives from media and communication studies as well as from ethnology applied to the phenomenon of mediated scandals. It is directed by myself, an ethnologist, former journalist, and Senior Lecturer of Media and Communication Studies, and by Gunilla Jarlbro, Professor of Media and Communication Studies. Both of us are active at the Department of Communication and Media at Lund University. In previous project publications we have combined quantitative and qualitative data, for instance in a detailed study of the so-called 'Toblerone affair' – with the then Deputy Prime Minister of Sweden, Mona Sahlin, in the leading role (Hammarlin & Jarlbro 2012) – and in the book *Kvinnor och män i offentlighetens ljus* ('Women and men in the public eye'; Hammarlin & Jarlbro 2014). In another study we foreground perspectives from cultural history on public scandals, where the view of these as a typical present-day phenomenon is problematised (Hammarlin 2013a). The historical perspectives provide the focus of yet another ongoing research project, which is a kind of extension of the one mentioned above and funded by the foundation Ridderstads Stiftelse (Hammarlin & Jönsson 2017:93–115).

The orientation of the present book is ethnological and phenom-enological. I want to bring out more or less forgotten universal human existential aspects of media scandals, among other things by paying attention to the emotions of the affected parties. They feel what most of us would have experienced if we had ended up at the centre of a scandal, that is, anything from shame and self-contempt to grief, anxiety, fear, anger, and the desire for revenge. Because emotions – which are of course relational in nature – bind us together as people and help us enter into one another's lifeworlds, this is what I have chosen as my analytical point of departure. By giving space to people – and their families – who have experienced media scandals from within in their roles as protagonists, I hope to be able to increase the understanding of what a media scandal does to the life of an individual, but also of what these people do with the media scandal, considered as an experience.

The purpose is dual, but intertwined: my intention is partly to explore the emotional experience of being the main figure of a media scandal, partly to study the complex media circuits that create the scandal. The following questions accompany this study: What does the scandal feel like for the person who is affected by it, and what can these emotions teach us about both people and media? How is the scandal as a phenomenon possible, i.e., through which media and which journalistic genres, in a wide sense, is it created? And in relation to this: how is the scandal created and re-created through gossip and rumour?

The last question underlines my special interest in the relationship between oral, interpersonal, face-to-face communication and communication via traditional and digital media, where I find folkloristic perspectives on news particularly useful. I will also investigate the relationship between the persons who are written about and the reporters who stir up and add fuel to media scandals. The reporters also experience and live through the scandals via the practice of their profession. I wished to establish a dialogue between people at opposing ends of the drama after the scandal has died down. They do not encounter one another in reality; but they meet here, in the text, through language. For this reason attention is paid not only to research about media scandals, but also to a number of published texts written by Swedish journalists who deal with the phenomenon critically and with curiosity. Such a reflective text was written by the internationally well-respected Swedish publicist and author Göran Rosenberg (2000). He describes journalists who, like beaters and hounds, hunt 'rabbits', i.e., the central figures of the scandals – an allegory to which I keep returning.

Perhaps the purpose of a study can also be expressed in a negation. If so, it would sound like this: the purpose is not to persuade the reader to feel sorry for the affected individuals. Instead, the accounts of experiences should be considered as an indispensable source for understanding media scandals better – how they arise, how they develop, how they gain energy, and how they are experienced.

Previous research and theoretical points of departure

One of the reasons for this emotion-orientated introduction to the topic is that such a perspective is missing in social-science-influenced media research, where emotions are often conspicuous by their absence. This may seem surprising because the field in fact quivers

with emotion, dealing as it does with a topic described by Norwegian media researchers Anders Todal Jenssen and Audun Fladmoe as exhibiting a special kind of aura which is largely occasioned by indignation. A person who comments on a scandal can show his or her anger without reservations through the choice of words and facial expressions. They write that words such as 'shocking', 'scandalous', and 'reprehensible' in combination with raised eyebrows and an indignant tone of voice are typical of media scandals (Jenssen & Fladmoe 2012:64). However, these authors do not conduct an in-depth analysis of the emotional expressions themselves in relation to the scandal. There is a gap to be filled here. In order to understand the scandal as a phenomenon, we need to understand the emotions it engenders.

Research on media scandals gathered momentum during the beginning of the twenty-first century, not least in the Nordic countries, where two anthologies were published (Allern & Pollack 2009, 2012c). The fact that media scandals are more and more often the object of scientific analysis appears logical because public scandals are increasing in number, keeping pace with the expansion of the media industry. In a comparison among the Nordic countries, some researchers maintain that there has been a significant increase in the number of scandals during the most recent decades, where Sweden is in the lead with an almost fivefold increase during the period from 1980 to 2010 (Allern et al. 2012; see also Thompson 2008:106–18 for a discussion of the general increase in the West). Scholarly descriptions of the reasons for the increase in frequency are part of a picture of the industry with which we are nowadays quite familiar, where an increased number of actors and intensified competition – as well as convergence – among different media in an increasingly digitalised and competitive media market lead to a type of journalism that to an ever greater extent rests on a commercial rather than an ideological basis, sales figures coming before altruistic ideals (Deuze 2005:443–65, Allern & Pollack 2009:193–207, Deuze 2014:119–30).[2]

A scholarly convention seems to have come into existence regarding how media scandals are to be studied. In line with that convention, several researchers have – besides counting scandals – to a great extent been busy defining what media scandals, particularly political scandals, *are* on the basis of an almost essentialist interest. This is done by determining the temporal and dramaturgical development of

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2 I will return to this discussion in greater detail in Chapter 4.

scandals, creating typologies of media scandals, dividing scandals into genres, evaluating various currently popular terms and, in addition, introducing new names for them (see Sabato 1993, Lull & Hinerman 1997, Wien & Elmelund-Præstekær 2007, 2009, Ekström & Johansson 2008, Allern et al. 2012, Boydstun et al. 2014, Jenssen & Fladmoe 2012).[3] Often this has to do with content studies, which means that the scholar in question examines media production in itself and its publications, often press materials. The project in which I am myself active has also conducted investigations of this type, and on the whole these provide valuable knowledge.

When I use the term *media scandal* I lean on this research, but at the same time I regard it with circumspection. While following in the footsteps of these earlier studies, my ambition is to move beyond them. I want to argue that the human aspect is lost in this type of investigation. To be sure, these studies teach us more about the functions of the media – that is, after all, their express purpose – but rather little about the ways in which human beings function. Instead, I see the present book as a contribution to the few anthropologically influenced studies of mediated scandals (Bird 1997, 2003), as well as to those with a historical perspective (Thompson 2008, Darnton 1997, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2010) and those influenced by social psychology (Wästerfors 2005, 2008).

As a natural consequence of my interest in the cultural dimension of media scandals, I am also interested in another type of communication, namely that which takes place during interpersonal meetings. I want to explore how this kind of communication relates to communication conveyed through the media. Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz's now classic analyses of the public sphere as an interaction between the media and the audience where mediated communication encounters interpersonal communication, such as conversations, actions, and the creation of public opinion, have influenced my understanding of the cultural dimension of media scandals and how

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3 Such labels include *political scandal*, which is subdivided into *sex scandal, financial scandal*, and *power scandal* (Thompson 2008); closely related is the *mediated political scandal* (Midtbø 2007, Todal Jenssen 2014); the *talk scandal*, with its subcategories *first-order talk scandal* and *second-order talk scandal* (Ekström and Johansson, 2008); the *moral scandal* (Djerf-Pierre et al. 2013); the *SMS scandal* (Laine 2010); *political wave-making* (Wolfsfeld and Schaefer 2006); *media hype* (Elmelund-Præstekær & Wien 2008, 2009); and the *media storm* or *media waves*, with the subgenres *wave storm*, *spike storm*, and *non-storm* (Boydstun et al. 2014).

different forms of communication interact (see Dayan & Katz 1992). I have also been inspired by media researcher David Morley's call for a kind of analytic decentralisation. He writes: 'we need to "decentre" the media, in our analytical framework, so as to better understand the ways in which media processes and everyday life are interwoven with each other' (Morley 2007:200).

   Like all ethnologists, I take everyday life as my point of departure. It is through a focus on everyday life that the function and significance of the media, and their importance in people's lives, can be made visible. Hence, decentring the media does not mean that they are relegated to the background. Rather, I wish to show how deeply integrated they are into our culture and our everyday lives.

Affects, emotions, feelings

Should one, on the basis of the above, assume that studying emotions is not in favour within media studies? Not at all. A research survey lists over 400 studies within the media field where emotions (or, more correctly, affects) are foregrounded (Wirth & Schramm 2005). From the 1960s until the early twenty-first century traditional research on effects dominated the field, with a focus on emotional reactions to media consumption or media stimuli. Through experiments scholars have, for instance, studied facial expressions and other physical signals in order to connect reactions to certain types of media stimuli, or to map these reactions by way of interview answers.[4] The now heavily criticised tradition within media and communication studies of effects research – research built on stimulus–response models that were problematised as early as the 1970s (Gerbner & Gross 1976) – lives on, not least within the area of emotions. In summary, the interpretations of emotions within psychology, medicine, and cognitive science may be said to have had quite an

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4 The belief in the possibility of measuring short- or long-term emotional effects resulting from people's media use is not so easily dislodged. An impressively voluminous anthology with the title *The Routledge Handbook of Emotions and Mass Media* (Döveling et al. 2011) presents a number of studies on emotional expressions awakened as a result of mass-media consumption, with keywords such as *measurement*, *gratification*, *response*, *control*, *influence*, *reactivity*, *persuasion*, and *coping*. The majority of the writers focus on psychological effects and on the reactions of individuals as a consequence of media use, i.e., how these effects and reactions arise and are expressed within individuals.

impact on multidisciplinarily orientated media and communication studies, where emotions are often treated as phenomena that can be classified, categorised, and measured, and that are assumed to be important for a person's inner life rather than for what is happening outside the individual human being.

It is time to take this knowledge on board and venture to move towards a more context-orientated view of emotions, as sociologist Jack Katz argued almost two decades ago with the following exhortation: 'A next challenge is to develop empirically grounded explanations of emotions as they rise and decline in the vibrant flow of social life' (Katz 1999:3). It is fair to say that Katz's call was heeded. Alongside the production of psychologically focused studies, a newly awakened interest in perspectives on emotion in cultural analysis, sociology, and social psychology became apparent during the early twenty-first century and had an impact on a number of social-science disciplines as well as on society in general. As time went by, this development came to be known as *the affective turn*, foregrounding – among other things – an acute need for an academic rapprochement between different disciplines, such as psychology and sociology (see Clough & O'Malley Halley 2007). The key role of emotions in the elementary forms of social life had been neglected for a long time, certain theoreticians claimed, and that neglect had impeded a social-science-based understanding of the basic conditions of human beings here on earth. Since then, during the most recent decade, interdisciplinary studies of affects and emotions have spawned a veritable explosion of research and theory development within this area. In addition to supplying valuable knowledge, this has contributed vigorous discussions regarding the concepts being used, concepts which often mean different things to different scholars from various disciplines: *affect*, *emotion*, *feeling*, *sentiment*. Simply put, it may be said that *affect* is customarily used as an umbrella term which includes all the above-mentioned concepts, but it also denotes physical and internal experiences. Traditionally speaking, *emotion* has signified the social dimension of feelings, whereas the word *feelings* itself has mostly been used as a synonym for the two first-mentioned terms (see Frykman & Povrzanović Frykman 2016:9–28 for an exhaustive survey of the concepts). I personally agree with the idea that it can be hazardous to insist too strongly on the differences between these concepts, because this, too, risks becoming a simplified classification of the emotions (Frykman & Povrzanović Frykman 2016:15ff). It seems considerably more productive to focus on what emotions *do* rather than what they *are*. In this book, that view finds

expression in an ethnological method whereby emotions are observed in everyday life through ethnographic studies (Ahmed 2004:14, Frykman & Povrzanović Frykman 2016:17ff). As ethnologists Jonas Frykman and Maja Povrzanović Frykman write: 'the focus on practice – what affect *does* – also tends to widen the scope for what it *is*' (Frykman & Povrzanović Frykman 2016:16). Criticism has also been levelled at the very idea of the affective turn – did it happen at all? – and at literature which, in sweeping terms, maintains that the affective turn had a liberating influence on studies that deal with people's lives. Therefore, I try to accept anthropologist Stef Jansen's challenge regarding the need for clarification when briefly explaining my own points of departure below (Jansen 2016:55–79; see also Gilje 2016:31–55).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, in conjunction with the newly awakened interest in emotions in the social sciences, the study of emotions developed within Swedish ethnology as well, not least in Lund. As a result, this field of inquiry became more methodologically and theoretically useful than it had been before. Here, too, scholars dissociated themselves from the psychological and medical view of emotions while simultaneously using it as a point of departure. That view sometimes makes emotions appear as things held in a container within us, placed in what is usually, for lack of better words, called the soul, and this container may become full and overflow, making us ill if we do not empty it at regular intervals. The danger of such an instrumental view is that emotions are then only allowed to say something about our own internal existence and not about the world. Jean-Paul Sartre expresses his criticism of this view in explicit terms: 'La conscience émotionnelle est d'abord conscience du monde' (Sartre 2002:70) – 'the emotional consciousness is primarily consciousness of the world' (Sartre 2002:34). A point of departure for an ethnologist could thus be the use of empirical studies to try to understand how emotions make the world appear. Our interest should be directed at how my and other people's individual emotions correspond to the world, reflect it, affect it, and transform it. Emotions are individual and universal at the same time. They are relational 'interspatial phenomena' and always actualise a relationship to the Other (Frykman & Löfgren 2005:17; see also Ehn & Löfgren 2004). As we all know, emotional states such as dread, fear, and elation have a strange ability to spread within a group. In fact, language is rich in expressions for how moods are transposed and reproduced non-verbally, as in the following sentence: 'The atmosphere was so dense that one could cut it with a knife' (see Frykman 2012:23–36). Or, in the almost poetic

words of communications scholar Gregory Seigworth and cultural researcher Melissa Gregg:

> [C]ast forward by its open-ended in-between-ness, affect is integral to a body's perpetual *becoming* (always becoming otherwise, however subtly, than what it already is), pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter. With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself – webbed in its relations – until ultimately such firm distinctions cease to matter. (Gregg & Seigworth 2010:3; original emphasis)

It is this intervening space between subjects, and the space between an individual and society, that Gregg and Seigworth feel can offer new paths to an understanding not only of emotions themselves but of the context, culture, and time in which they operate. Thus it is not emotions in themselves that are the object of study here; the intention is to use them as a point of departure in order to be better able to understand the social, cultural, and historical anchoring and significance of media scandals. Stef Jansen calls this 'go[ing] beyond evocation', one of several options for ethnologists and anthropologists who study emotions (Jansen 2016:55–79). Their vagueness may entail analytical challenges, but that vagueness can also be considered an asset for the same reason; complex and ambiguous, emotions open up for the meeting between subject and object, instinct and fantasy, the conscious and the unconscious, body and thought, individual and collective. Emotions can function as indicators of inactivity, of something that is happening or is about to happen; a reiteration, a reinforcement, a change, a degradation (Frykman & Löfgren 2005:15). The fact that Swedish has a single word (*känsla*) for haptic experience, sensation, and mood can be confusing. For example, feeling grief can be indicated by the same word as touching something with one's hand, a sensory quality: *känna* (feel/touch), just as the mood in a room can be described with the noun of the same word: *känsla* (mood). Here the English language is more precise.[5]

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5 Gender scholar Melissa Autumn White has written about the affective turn in relation to her own field of study in different contexts. She concisely explains the respective significance of and the differences among the three concepts *emotion*, *feeling*, and *affect*: 'Where emotion might be thought of as a capture of affect – an "intensity owned and recognized" by the subject (Massumi 2002:28), and feeling closely linked to the perception and movement of sensation, Clough et al. draw on Deleuze (and ultimately Spinoza) to consider affect as intensity related to a capacity and potential to act. In a Spinozan sense, affect refers to the "power to act," the simultaneous power to affect the world and to be affected by it' (White 2007:183).

The point of departure in this book is, however, the word *feelings*, which is anchored in an everyday context to a greater extent than *affects* and *emotions*. Even so, I, too, am in need of synonyms when I write, which is why I also use other words.

Very little research has been done on the experiences of the central figure of a media scandal, but they are not completely absent in the literature on the subject (Brurås 2004, Johansson 2006, Kepplinger 2007, 2016, Bjerke 2012; see also Pihlblad 2010, Karlsen & Duckert 2018). These studies contain traces of what I want to foreground in this study, namely how the stories in the media reach beyond the media context itself and into everyday life; but as a rule, a reader learns rather little about what these people have experienced on an emotional and existential level. The feelings experienced in a Swedish context by the central figures of the scandals I examine may, of course, be different from how scandals affect people in other cultural contexts. In the words of Harvard Professor Robert A. LeVine: 'Rather than seeking to isolate the basic elements of universal building blocks of emotional experience, ethnographers seek to uncover and understand that experience *in all its complexity* in a particular setting' (LeVine 2007:398; emphasis added). At the same time, the emotions that are described in this book have a universal character, not least shame, which is carefully studied in certain sections of the book.

The lifeworld

On the basis of the phenomenological concept of the *lifeworld*, I thus wish to study how the life of an individual is affected by a media scandal and how the scandal is manifested as an experience, something that is related to the discussion above. 'Feelings connect people to the surrounding world – feelings situate people in a lifeworld', writes Frykman (2012:39). As has already been mentioned, I take my point of departure in the individual as an *experiencer*, an acting subject among other acting subjects, where the theoretical direction is taken from a phenomenological view of human beings as actors with a certain freedom of action. In their everyday lives they move, do things, plan, reflect on things, feel, sort, and organise their lives.

Phenomenologist Alfred Schutz's (1970, 1973, 1989) interpretation of the lifeworld plays a particularly important role in the present book. He describes the lifeworld as the reality in which we live and which we take for granted, a world that is immediately and

directly experienced through the actions of the subject and his or her meetings with other subjects in everyday life. Schutz uses the expression 'the social, natural attitude' to denote the original relationship between subject and world, our daily lives that make up the often overlooked prerequisite for all actions, all social intercourse, all emotions, and all reflections (Schutz 1973:59). A curiosity about people as acting beings, experiencers, and creators of meaning rather than as recipients and interpreters of diverse messages is the central starting-point in the present book, irrespective of whether I study them online or offline; that curiosity also connects my work to that of researchers who have emphasised the importance of a phenomenological and existential attitude to communication and media. We create meaning through that which surrounds us. Here I find phenomenologist and media scholar Amanda Lagerkvist's studies inspiring. Her simple and beautiful phrase 'questions concerning digital technologies are … questions about human existence' (Lagerkvist 2017:97) forms a kind of point of departure for my research as well. On the basis of Martin Heidegger's concept of *thrownness*, Lagerkvist poses the initial question: '*What does it mean to be a human being in the digital age?*' (Lagerkvist 2017:97; original emphasis). She believes that a new form of idiosyncratic, existential vulnerability has taken shape alongside the development towards what is called the 'culture of connectivity', a process which originates in digital technology and which to a great extent takes place through social media (Lagerkvist 2017). What surrounds us is also something we are forced to begin from and relate to. Focusing on everyday life, it becomes clear that encounters among people, things, and places are something we have to think about and deal with; those encounters form the 'ready-to-hand' that causes the results of our actions to mostly be something completely different from what we originally expected (Frykman 2012:21). Lagerkvist writes:

> Following Heidegger, our thrownness implies being faced with a world where we are precariously situated in a particular place, at a particular historical moment, and among a particular crowd with the inescapable task of tackling our world around us and making it meaningful. (Lagerkvist 2017:97)

The present book will, I hope, contribute curious, open questions, with the scandal as a phenomenon at the centre of attention. In my view, mediated scandals say something specific about what it means to be a human being among other human beings, or, if you will, a

humane human being among other humane human beings, at a certain time and in a certain cultural context. We are human by nature, but we can only become humane human beings in a community (Kindeberg 2011:42f, 67f).

Communication theorist James W. Carey's theories (1992, 1998) are also of significance for this analysis. In his studies he foregrounds the importance of anthropology and phenomenology for understanding the relationship between communication and culture. Carey's innovative view (at the time of its introduction) of media technology as being both incorporated into culture – i.e., ultimately inseparable from it – and equipped with a unique capacity to affect and transform its development has given him a special position within that part of media and communication studies where cultural studies have been particularly influential. In the now classic book *Communication as Culture* (1992) Carey investigates, among other issues, how the introduction of the telegraph led to revolutionary transformations of entire societies and changed people's views on and relationship to basic phenomena such as place and time. Media development affects 'the habits of mind and structures of thought', he writes (Carey 1992:2). At bottom, this has to do with symbolic processes through which reality is produced, constructed, maintained, renegotiated, and transformed (Carey 1992:23, 30). According to Carey's view, culture is thus not expressed through mass-mediated communication because this communication is in fact a significant part of culture itself. The symbols and signs that are conveyed in this manner create and transform reality, laying the foundation for human existential conditions.

But what does Carey mean by 'culture' in this context? With reference to Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, he might be said to succeed in breathing some life into this well-worn word by seeing it as 'a set of practices, a mode of human activity, a process whereby reality is created, maintained, and transformed, however much it may subsequently become reified into a force independent of human action' (Carey 1992:65). However, there is reason to be sceptical regarding Carey's frequent use of the word 'symbolic'. The pervasive processes of the media are symbolic, he writes repeatedly in his book. In what way are they not also concrete and tangible in an everyday context? As a reader, one suspects the presence of a lingering idea of media as being *something else*, that is to say, something that merely conveys reality rather than forming a self-evident part of it, in spite of Carey's desire to settle accounts concerning precisely this idea.

On the basis of this framework I wish to argue that knowledge about media scandals, and about mediated stories in a wider sense, has been restricted by a sort of academic barrier where researchers in their analyses often distinguish stories in the media from other types of narrative forms, and mediated communication from other pathways of communication. Making such distinctions separates these stories from the human context out of which they spring. Here, the concept of culture can function as an opening, or, as anthropologist Elizabeth Bird writes: '[w]e really cannot isolate the role of the media in culture, because the media are firmly anchored into the web of culture' (Bird 2003:30). One could say the same about media scandals: they are not just embedded in culture; they also contribute to maintaining its boundaries.

Swedish scandals in an international perspective

'But how could this have become a scandal in the first place?? I don't get it!' Over the years, my colleague Annette Hill, Professor of Media and Communication Studies at Lund University, has never ceased to be amazed at my material on Swedish media scandals. In comparison to scandals in England, they occasionally appear quaint. In her eyes, they often have to do with trivial matters that are nowhere near to forming serious transgressions of norms. And yet the hounding begins, time after time. Swedish scandals may, from an outside perspective, have to do with insignificant issues; but the extent of the reporting is, conversely, surprising in the other direction – so much fuss for so little! On the one hand, Swedish scandals often come closer to what could be classified as 'rather inappropriate behaviour'[6] than is the case in many other countries. On the other hand, all the major media usually tag along when the ground starts shaking under a public figure, with the result that events that would elsewhere lead to insignificant local affairs become matters of national concern in Sweden. This is of course an advantage for a researcher of scandals – here one has many opportunities to study the phenomenon in question.

I have also become aware of these cultural differences when presenting my research results to colleagues at conferences, as a

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6 With the exception of sexually related affairs, for which we seem to have greater forbearance in comparison to other countries. Thus far the myth of the sexually liberal Swedes seems to be correct, at least in part. On the other hand, two of the scandals studied in this book have sexual connotations.

few examples will illustrate. At an international conference on political scandals at Stockholm University, I presented a detailed analysis of the so-called 'Toblerone affair', one of the political scandals that have engraved themselves on the collective memory of the Swedish people (Hammarlin & Jarlbro 2012:113–33). At the centre of the scandal was Mona Sahlin, who was at that time, in 1995, the Deputy Prime Minister and presumptive new chair of the Social Democratic Party, and thus automatically the future Prime Minister. Her crime? To have bought a Toblerone chocolate bar and a pack of nappies, paying for them with her government credit card. I did not get further than this in my lecture before a British professor in the front row succumbed to an attack of the giggles. He tried to stop himself by holding his hand to his mouth. Rather concerned, I then wished to make it clear that Mona Sahlin had in fact borrowed some 50,000 Swedish crowns from the public purse, intending, it is true, to pay the money back, which she also did in several cases. This made the professor in question burst into a guffaw. Afterwards he apologised and said, highly amused, 'This is just *too* amazing! It's so incredibly funny!' And then he explained at length what all we nerdy scandal researchers already knew, namely that sentences were just then being passed on British Members of Parliament after a massive police investigation. The so-called MPs' Expenses Scandal shook up the entire British political system when it was unravelled in the news media in 2009. The *Daily Telegraph* had had the sense to make use of a reinforcement of the right of access, which led to stunning revelations on the astronomical expenses claimed by MPs for private purposes. For instance, an already wealthy politician demanded money for draining the moat to his thirteenth-century castle. Another claimed expenses for changing the plumbing at his tennis court. Some additional Members of Parliament employed their children in various advantageous positions within the administration. The calculated lack of transparency and liability caused strong public anger, where the parliamentary allowances routines were perceived to be the real offence (van Heerde-Hudson & Ward 2014:4–5). The scandal led to a number of MPs and ministers having to step down from their positions. Later came a dozen or so convictions, most of them for some form of corruption.

When I delivered a number of lectures about my research at the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of Kerala, in southern India, there were similar reactions. Teachers and students did not laugh; but again and again they asked how much money the financial scandals actually involved, in order to

ensure that they had heard aright. Could there really be a scandal over such a tiny amount? Was it really just a few hundred euros? Is it true that one minister was forced to throw in the towel after having neglected to pay their TV licence fee? The only way to describe the Indian political climate regarding the scandal phenomenon in a reasonably even-handed manner is to say that people have contracted *scandal fatigue* (Kumlin & Esaiasson 2012:263–82). In India, the scandals are so vast and occur so frequently that news reporting about them is incorporated in everyday media activities in a way that makes them, in spite of their magnitude, pass by comparatively unnoticed. Slowly but surely, the scandal phenomenon has depreciated in value.[7]

The low level of corruption and the high level of trust in Sweden

Even though this issue has been insufficiently investigated, it is obvious to every researcher in this narrow field of media studies that certain behaviour which can cause a scandal in one country will be overlooked in another. I would like to argue that Sweden is a particularly interesting country to study if you want to understand mediated scandals: why they arise, how they develop, and how they affect people. In Sweden the threshold seems to be exceptionally low, in particular with regard to financial irregularities, but also when it comes to other types of transgressive behaviour in public individuals. This claim occasions a brief historical excursion into Swedish culture.

Every now and then, more or less successful attempts are made by researchers to describe the essence of Swedishness. One such attempt that has received some international attention is a book by historians Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh, *Är svensken människa? Gemenskap och oberoende i det moderna Sverige* ('Are Swedes human beings? Community and independence in modern Sweden') (Berggren & Trägårdh 2015).[8] In this book, just as in the classic

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7 In 2016 India ended up in seventy-ninth place among 176 countries in the 'Corruption Perceptions Index 2016'. However, development seems tentatively to be going in the right direction. See *Transparency International*, http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016 (accessed 7 March 2019).
8 The acclaimed documentary *The Swedish Theory of Love* from 2016, by director Erik Gandini, is based on this book.

ethnology book *Den kultiverade människan* (Frykman & Löfgren 1979, translated into English as *Culture Builders: A Historical Anthropology of Middle-Class Life*, 1987), certain crucial developments in Swedish society are described, including the radical transformation of society during the latter part of the nineteenth century from agriculture to urbanisation, from farm life to city life. During that century, a number of Swedish philosophers, authors, scientists, and politicians managed in a fascinating way to create direct connections between the Lutheran ideals of an agricultural society, characterised by strictness, conscientiousness, and duty, and a more universal egalitarian philosophy inspired by Enlightenment France. The Nordic version of the Enlightenment was not utopian but anchored in the pragmatic rationality of the agricultural community (Berggren & Trägårdh 2015:98). Applied to class structures that were made visible and questioned during the nineteenth century, this combination of ideals became a revolutionary force.

Out of these different movements sprang the rational Social Democracy that was to shape government politics in Sweden – and other Nordic countries – for almost a century. Its egalitarian Enlightenment ideology characterised the modern project throughout the twentieth century. There are many Swedish traits that are characteristic of this period; I would like to mention two well-known ones which are interrelated and may be linked to the subject of this study: *equality* and *social trust*. During the twentieth century Sweden, together with the other Nordic countries, stood out as evincing significantly smaller class differences than Southern and Central Europe. These differences reflect circumstances such as a higher level of employment and a narrower distribution of wages, as well as a redistributive welfare state. The class differences eroded on a long-term basis until the mid-1980s, after which the levelling stagnated for a period. Since the end of the 1990s class differences in Sweden have increased little by little as a consequence of liberal currents, increased unemployment, an increase in the income of high-salary groups, and changes in redistribution (Vogel 2003:43–79, Vogel & Råbäck 2003:81–101). Nevertheless, Sweden remains one of the world's most egalitarian countries, distinguishing itself by – relatively speaking – continued small class differences between the upper and lower strata of society as well as by equality between the sexes (Wilkinson & Pickett 2010).

In addition, there seem to be exciting connections between equality in the Nordic countries and the absence of corruption, something that seems to promote the formation of *social capital*. This concept

can, in simple terms, be interpreted as a kind of lubrication for society, a lubrication composed of qualities and resources that facilitate collective actions and cooperation with ultimately beneficial effects on democracy and on civil morality, for instance trust between people, social networks of different kinds, and an experience of reciprocity (Putnam 1995:65–78, 2000).

Swedish political scientist Bo Rothstein has devoted a significant part of his professional life to studying social capital, in particular *social trust*, which is an aspect of his colleague Robert M. Putnam's original concept. The overarching question found in this theory formation is this: Which qualities in social relationships result in people's cooperation being based upon trust? In several studies, Rothstein's point of departure is his own native country – a country which is at the top of global statistics with respect to social capital and trust among people and which is, in addition, almost top of the class with respect to anti-corruption (Rothstein 2007).[9] In 2014, 64 per cent of Swedish citizens answered in the affirmative to the assertion that 'Most people can be trusted', a remarkably high figure, globally speaking, and one which has fluctuated only marginally over time.[10]

However, things have not always been this sunny with respect to trust in general. When Rothstein depicts Swedish society during the first decades of the nineteenth century, a dark and dirty picture emerges. Corruption and cliquishness were ubiquitous; in addition, contacts with the upper reaches of society determined which positions a person could attain within public administration and were generally more highly valued than hard work and a good education, even within the universities (Rothstein 2007). One and the same person within the top tier of the administration could, for instance, draw several full-time salaries simultaneously, in spite of unclear working duties. Top civil servants could also enjoy a number of other feudal-seeming privileges, such as income from land and housing which, as it were, 'came with the job' (Rothstein 2007).

During the latter part of the nineteenth century, however, there were gradual structural changes in the direction of more Weberian

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9 In 2016 Sweden ended up in fourth place among 176 countries: 'Corruption Perceptions Index 2016', *Transparency International*, http://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016 (accessed 7 March 2019).

10 Cross-country surveys, *Our World in Data*, https://ourworldindata.org/trust (accessed 7 March 2019).

bureaucratic ideals. Rothstein maintains that the whole idea of what the profession of civil servant really implies, and should imply, slowly changed during this half-century, from a set of functions and roles that were acquired through nepotism and patronage and included special privileges to a full-time job which was attained through meritocratic examination on the basis of universal rules and laws, and which was remunerated at a fixed salary. Of course corruption remained in the system, but it was no longer seen as 'standard operating procedure' (Rothstein 2007). The people's trust in the civil service and its officials increased, little by little; and according to the theory of interpersonal trust, it is precisely this confidence in officials that is the directly decisive factor for the social capital of a society. Investigations show that the likelihood that people one does not know will behave honestly increases if public institutions function in the manner they are meant to. Expressed in terms of trust, one can say that if you trust the honesty of officials, you probably also trust people in general (Rothstein 2013:1009–32).

In a broader perspective, these circumstances illustrate the relationship of Swedish people to social institutions, such as the family and the state. Berggren and Trägårdh assert, by way of an ideal-typical classification of different kinds of welfare logic, that Sweden as a nation has developed an exceptionally strong connection between the state and the individual, at the expense of the relationship between the individual and the family. In this respect Sweden is similar to Germany, but the view of what constitutes the basic unit in society is different. In Sweden, the authors claim, the individual citizen is at the centre. It is toward him or her that measures and resources are directed, without going through the family or private organisations. 'In this way, the individual is protected from the risk of ending up in a position of dependency towards parents, spouses, or charity organisations', they write (Berggren & Trägårdh 2015:82). The thesis that the writers argue for is that Swedes have over time, because of strong ties to the state, been able to develop an individualism which is exceptional in an international comparison, with independence and self-realisation as bywords. This self-realisation is, however, culturally regulated insofar as it should preferably not happen at the expense of the happiness and success of other people, the idea of individual freedom acting alongside a strong egalitarian ideal. Berggren and Trägårdh again: 'Modern Sweden is less a collectivist project emerging from a warm solidarity and more a fusion of an individualistic view on human beings and a strong egalitarian

tradition' (Berggren & Trägårdh 2015:167). In popular parlance in Sweden, this doubleness is called *Jantelagen* ('the Law of Jante'), in reference to a set of ironic maxims which declare that a person must not believe that he or she is in any way special, although there is no prohibition against attempting to attain that status (Daun 1996:52, 207).

All this – the consistently low level of corruption, the social trust, egalitarianism, and the Law of Jante – is more or less explicitly expressed in Swedish mediated scandals. Through these characteristics, corruption is held at bay, morality and a sense of duty are re-established, and the elite are taken down from their pedestals. The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), which is administered by the Ministry of Justice, writes in one of its reports:

> It could be that different revelations and scandals have led to an increased awareness of corruption, which has in its turn produced better routines, reviews of guidelines, and improved controls. One bold idea is that the problems with corruption might have been reduced, especially in forms that are visible and more apt to attract suspicion.[11]

By way of conclusion, I would like to emphasise that Swedish scandals appear odd only when they are placed at the cultural periphery. To Swedes, this scandal behaviour is what one would expect. In the eyes of a Swede, by contrast, the British MPs' expenses scandal appears horrendous and almost unbelievable in its seriousness and scope. As for the Indian scandals, they should not even be mentioned in this context; they come across as fiction more than anything else. Nor is it this or that particular scandal in this or that country which is at the focus of this study. Rather, I emphasise universal and general human aspects – that is to say, what it means for a human being to become publicly disgraced, as well as what the scandal as a phenomenon can teach us about both historical and contemporary media systems. I use the stories of individuals as points of departure, but my interest is ultimately directed at the scandal as a cultural phenomenon, with both a long history and special features in our time.

The meaning of the concepts

Words are important; through them, etymological clues are available. Consequently, I wish to briefly consider the basic concept, *scandal*,

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11 Brå, report 2013:15, p. 8.

and investigate where it hails from. In the Anglo-Saxon part of the world it is, above all, the term *media scandal* that has gained ground, but *political scandal* is also used, as well as the variant *mediated political scandal*. The first two of these are the most common concepts, both in daily parlance and in international research. In Spanish, too, the word *scandal* is at the centre, as it is in France, where the expression *scandale médiatique* is used. The corresponding German terms are *Medienskandal* and *Skandalberichterstattung*. Words designating mediated scandals are thus internationally disseminated, which suggests that there is a linguistic need for being able to talk about this type of phenomenon.

The word *scandal* originally comes from ecclesiastical Latin *scandalum* and Greek *skándalon* and made its way into Early Middle English (*scandle*, *scha(u)ndle*) by way of the Old Northern French *escandle* (*OED* online, s.n. *scandal*; see also Allern & Pollack 2012b:11). Going even further back in time, the word was used metaphorically in early versions of the Old Testament in order to represent a trap or an obstacle on the way – such as a boulder or a stream that prevented or hindered passage – in order to test the faith of an enemy (Hellquist 1922:727). Eventually the religious meaning of the word weakened, and in time it was replaced by other connotations. For instance, in eleventh-century France the word *esclandre* appeared, a development from *scandalum*, which meant 'scandal', 'slander', and 'vicious gossip'. *Esclandre* has in its turn given rise to the English word *slander* (Harper 2012). The concepts *scandal* and *gossip* are thus connected, which the reader is encouraged to remember. This leads us into relationships between a number of interesting phenomena and further into an area that may be regarded as the social and cultural dimensions of scandals, all of which will be analysed in this book.

Yet another word should be explained in greater detail, namely the Swedish word *mediedrev* (herein rendered as *media hounding*). This widely disseminated metaphor symbolises the intense and organised hunt for prey by hunters and hunting dogs. It was used for the first time in Swedish in May 1990 by the well-known Swedish-American journalist Hans Bergström in *Dagens Nyheter*, one of the oldest, biggest, and most respected daily newspapers in Sweden. After a modest introduction, the concept has become established in earnest; indeed, in Swedish popular parlance it is far more common than the concept 'media scandal'. Different versions of this type of designation exist in other languages as well. For instance,

it is reminiscent of Norwegian *klappejakt*, English *media hunt*, and German *Medienhetze*. Here the media themselves are at the centre of things, journalists being actors who urge on the hounding of the prey during the hunt. In comparison, *media scandal* refers to cause and content; the focus is on the scandal itself and the story about it. That focus becomes even more evident in the expression *political scandal*, where the media are not mentioned at all, the subject being politics, or, more often, a politician, and the story about him or her. In this book I try to stick to the term established in scholarship, *media scandal*, even though (as was pointed out above) writers are always in need of synonyms. In Chapter 4, I return to a problematisation of these concepts.

Bricolage as a method

The material I start out from may appear sprawling at a first glance. I have conducted many interviews and read even more journalistic texts, both news pieces and advocacy materials, in a number of newspapers. I have also read other people's interviews with persons who have been at the centre of media scandals. In addition, I have studied blogs, images, billboards, biographies, and interminable Flashback threads (described below). The choice of this extensive collection of materials was inspired by anthropologist George E. Marcus's method *multisited ethnography* (Marcus 1995). It has several points in common with cultural analysis in that it promotes mobility and openness in order to come closer to what is being studied. Follow the people, the stories, the metaphors, the objects, and the conflicts, says Marcus; follow wherever the topic leads you. Such an attitude makes it possible for a deeper understanding of the significance of a phenomenon to take shape, an understanding where stability and variability over time can be studied, where cultural bearings on different places and in different spaces are investigated, and where the importance of a phenomenon to different people in different contexts is made visible (Marcus 1995:95–116, Ehn & Löfgren 2012:157–63). It is characteristic of this method that the researcher takes what is irregular as a starting-point. The method is improvised, curious, and tentative rather than structured – an open, curiosity-driven process whose development is not determined beforehand (Willim 2010:36f). I thus study the smallest constituents of the media scandal by close-reading texts, and then lift my gaze to understand the totality through an observation of

moods, feelings, movements, directions, and events. However, the in-depth interviews that will soon be presented are always in the foreground.

In addition, ethnological cultural analysis recommends drawing attention to what is so common and insignificant that it does not attract any particular interest – to what happens in what ethnologists Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren call 'the secret world of doing nothing' (Ehn & Löfgren 2010), i.e., things which are so taken for granted that one does not give them a second thought, but which are nevertheless crucial to our innate attempts to create order and meaning in the continuous everyday flows of small incidents and great events, sensuous experiences, and encounters with our fellow human beings. 'How, for example, should we write about pauses, gaps in time where nothing of any great importance seems to be going on?', they ask (2012:109). According to another argument of theirs, it can be difficult to perceive lasting values and social principles when small talk and eventlessness rule, although the regular progress of life is of interest to ethnologists. It is not easy to illuminate normality by way of something that is normal. Something has to happen if the deeply embedded mechanisms of one's own culture are to become apparent. It is in the wake of crises, conflicts, and deviations that ideas and agreements are put to the test, occasions when they have to be defended against internal or external threats. Boundaries that may normally be taken for granted are given contours in connection with revolutionary events. In these moments, we become aware of the element of culture. For the researcher, studying an everyday existence in free fall may, for instance, pave the way for discoveries of elusive things such as experiences of belonging or exclusion, ideas about normality and deviation, and typical and atypical behaviours.

This book directs attention to the complete opposite of the common run of everyday life. A scandal can be compared to a landslide that catches everything in its way and drags it along. It changes terrains, demolishes constructions, obliterates plans, makes relationships impossible. It represents a cultural occasion where everything happens, with an intensification of existence as a result. Like intoxication, a heightened emotional state travels through the body of the individual as well as through the social body. Paradoxically enough, though, the word 'pause' also fits this phenomenon. The life of the affected individual is temporarily put on hold, ideas about the future cease to be valid, and the routines of everyday life must give way to more inventive approaches.

A methodological experiment

As was pointed out above, I have a particular interest in the relationship between interpersonal communication which occurs face to face and mediated communication. A starting-point is that speech in the form of gossip and everyday, oral exchanges of information constitute – and have always constituted – a significant proportion of journalistic sources, even in respect of journalism of the more serious kind. Lars-Eric Jönsson, Professor of Ethnology at Lund University, and I have developed a method we call 'listening to talk in texts' (Hammarlin & Jönsson 2017:93–115). By way of this method, we want to draw attention to and investigate the relationship of gossip to journalism and its methodological foundations in a manner that is never encountered in journalism handbooks and extremely rarely in research on journalism and media studies. Science has, according to media researcher John Hartley, consciously or unconsciously adapted itself to the desire of journalism to be seen as a serious activity, a desire which has resulted in some unflattering journalism and less than rigorous journalistic methodology ending up under the radar (Hartley 2008:679–91). The informal Swedish word *snackis* (a hot topic doing the rounds whenever people gather and talk) is the closest one gets to transparency among journalists regarding this practical skill, i.e., listening in on and making journalism out of gossip; it is described as newsroom jargon for news that 'is not particularly important, but able to stir up discussions around coffee tables and on sofas in TV shows' (Häger 2014:112).[12]

In our research, we have been especially interested in how such hot topics move between speech and writing and are interwoven with other kinds of statements, as well as in how newspaper journalists use them in their work, not least when famous people are being discussed (Hammarlin & Jönsson 2017:93–115). We have been inspired by book historian Robert Darnton's many studies, not least by the method he uses when mapping the borderland between written and oral materials (Darnton 1997, 2000, 2004, 2005, 2010). Darnton has devoted a large part of his research to precisely this intractable borderland, starting out from the French media landscape of the mid-eighteenth century. How, then, does Darnton locate the remnants of talk in his material? In his book

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12 The quoted book, which was originally published in 2009, is commonly used in Swedish journalism courses.

Poetry and the Police he notes, among other things, how written poems and songs were modified by the people who recorded them (Darnton 2010:75). There are comments on how such a writer, having heard a song, wrote it down from memory. Minor adjustments then create different versions of the same song or poem, as in a kind of whispering game. Darnton takes these changes as evidence for oral communication, extracting new knowledge about the media system of the time by means of listening (Darnton 2010:76ff). Following written-down versions of talk and dialogue, reproductions of gossip, and gaol sentences for spreading rumours and so-called 'bad talk' (*mauvais propos*), he is able to describe the murmur of all these voices that together formed the sound of the people and simultaneously made up the framework for the news distribution of the time.

My methodological point of departure in this book is that I also listen through reading, in the process of which I do not only use my eyesight but also hone my hearing – metaphorically speaking – in order to pay attention to linguistic constructions that testify to a kind of union between talk and text. I also pay attention to flows, transfers, tones of voice, and moods. This method is particularly apparent in Chapters 2 and 3 where I not only read texts, but also put my ear to them.

Flashback Forum

A Swedish digital community, Flashback Forum (henceforth Flashback), is repeatedly mentioned in this study and should be presented in some detail. The biggest online discussion forum in Sweden, with one million registered users and over fifty million posts at the beginning of 2016, it is partly comparable to open Internet forums such as 4chan and Reddit. Flashback's watchword is that they offer users a place for 'real freedom of speech!' The creators of the website defend it with arguments based on freedom of speech and freedom of expression, and have on several occasions avoided Swedish law by moving their activities abroad (Uhnoo & Ekbrand 2017:126–51). On this forum an impressively extensive exchange of prattle and information is conducted on absolutely anything, from the innocent to the serious; but generally it may be said that the users are very interested in discussing crime (Uhnoo & Ekbrand 2017:126–51). The business idea is to guarantee anonymity for those participating in the discussions, and so far the owners have not been forced to surrender the IP addresses of their users, which

makes Flashback a more 'secure' forum than Facebook, Twitter, Google+, and Instagram for those who wish to publish without revealing their respective identity.

The interviews

At the centre of this book is a total of twenty qualitative interviews that can be divided into three categories: (a) twelve with people who have been exposed to media scandals (six women and six men), and who are the main informants of the book; (b) two with partners of these people (one man and one woman); and finally (c) six interviews with journalists (three women and three men).

The people affected were selected on the basis of scientifically established criteria regarding media scandals:

- all the interviewees, while no law-breakers, have committed what has in Swedish society been considered a violation of norms, or morally dubious and/or reprehensible actions (transgression);
- their actions have become widely known, subsequent to which the people in question have been exposed to very hard media scrutiny during one or several limited periods of at least a few consecutive days, but often longer (knowledge);
- the scandals around them have been national and have emerged from the interaction of the coverage by several media of the relevant events;
- they have all been front-page matter and have often been commented on by media actors and other agents, but also by the general public who have responded to the scandals (reaction);
- the speculation about the main figures has to do with the inherent unpredictability of the scandals, which is to say that no one knew in advance how they would end (Thompson 2008:11–118, Allern & Pollack 2012b:9–28, Bromander 2012:8ff, Hammarlin & Jarlbro 2014:81–119).

The taped interviews have been transcribed and comprise around 370 A4 pages of material, and during my work I have alternated between reading and listening to them. Several interviewees have worked within the top tier of politics or in the immediate vicinity of top politics, including six as politicians and one as a senior civil servant. However, it should be emphasised that I have chosen not to interview only politicians and former politicians. This is a deliberate choice on my part, and it has to do with an ambition to extend the view of media scandals, which are otherwise as a rule almost exclusively associated with the political sphere. Nevertheless, if we

broaden the concept of politics it is possible to claim that all except one of the scandals that are taken up here have political connotations. For instance, one of the affected individuals works as a political journalist, one writes editorials, and one was previously the leader of an advocacy organisation. Writer Maja Lundgren also devoted herself to a political issue in her book *Myggor och tigrar* ('Mosquitoes and tigers', 2007), which exposes patriarchal structures within the Swedish cultural sector and the tabloid business, and caused much debate in Sweden.

What most clearly ties eleven of the twelve main informants together is that they may be considered people from the elite; they have or have had influential positions in society and/or have been successful within their respective areas. As was pointed out above, there will be no scandals without an element of moral transgression. The purpose of this investigation is not, however, to expose the specific causal background of any particular scandal, but rather to look for shared and comprehensive themes in the experience-based stories of the interviewees. Consequently, the question of guilt – that is, whether these people deserved the hard media scrutiny to which they were exposed – is not addressed because it is irrelevant in this particular context. An in-depth study of the events themselves would jeopardise the direction and goals of the study.

It would be appropriate to give a few examples of how the question of guilt has a tendency to control the discussions of scandals. As my work progressed, I regularly presented my results to other researchers, and on those occasions I chose to make all my informants anonymous, a choice which elicited strong opinions. During my seminars, several colleagues have exclaimed: 'But what have they done?! We've got to be told!' When I have asked why this is important, they explained that otherwise it is impossible to understand the scandal. If one does not know what the central figures have done, one cannot have an opinion concerning their guilt, and, by extension, concerning the reporting about them. During a project meeting early on at the Joint Faculties of Humanities and Theology at Lund University, my colleague and I mentioned in passing that we wanted to study the above-mentioned 'Toblerone affair' with Mona Sahlin in the leading role. The research director looked worried and then offered a personal opinion on the issue, saying that the minister made herself impossible because of unpaid nursery-school bills and parking tickets rather than because she was careless with her official credit card. 'If she can't control her own financial affairs, she can hardly be put in charge of the country's finances!' Suddenly

we had left the research issue behind, the one we were supposed to talk about, and instead ended up in the guilt issue pertaining to a scandal that had taken place in the public sphere many years before. In contexts where I have mentioned any of the interviewees by their real names in informal conversations with individual colleagues, there have been exclamations such as: 'But he wasn't the victim of a media hounding, he's a criminal!' The same thing occasionally happens in my personal life. If my research topic comes up at dinner parties, speculations soon have the upper hand. Dead-certain condemnations of and emotional apologies for the scandalised people follow one after the other, even though the details of the event have often been forgotten.

I believe the question of defence, guilt, and punishment repays consideration on the basis of precisely this social aspect. For the stated reasons, I will not present the individual scandals in detail by way of introductions to my analyses, but instead refer the reader to the book's Appendix. However, two cases will be analysed at some length in Chapters 3 and 4, because they shed light on the complexity of the media circuits in particular ways. All except three of the affected people appear voluntarily under their own names in this study.

Interviewees who have been at the centre of media scandals are presented in alphabetical order:

Floorball Dad, private individual (fictitious name)
Håkan Juholt, former party chair (Swedish Social Democratic Party)
Peter Karlsson, former top politician (fictitious name)
Hanne Kjöller, well-known journalist and editorial writer, *Dagens Nyheter*
Sven Otto Littorin, former minister in the Swedish government (the Moderate Party, Sweden's 'Conservatives')
Maja Lundgren, award-winning author
Ingmar Ohlsson, Swedish ambassador, former Under-Secretary of State and the right-hand man of then Prime Minister Göran Persson (fictitious name)
Anders Pihlblad, well-known political reporter and commentator, TV4
Tiina Rosenberg, well-known Gender Studies professor and feminist, former non-professional politician (Feminist Initiative)
Gudrun Schyman, top politician and party leader (Feminist Initiative, former chair of the Left Party)
Cecilia Stegö Chilò, professional board member, former journalist, and former minister in the Swedish government (the Moderate Party)

> **Ireen von Wachenfeldt,** former chair of ROKS (National Organisation
> for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters in Sweden)

Partners listed in alphabetical order:

> **Floorball Dad's wife**
> **Kennet von Wachenfeldt,** vicar, husband of Ireen von Wachenfeldt

The journalists who have been interviewed may also be regarded as elite individuals in a Swedish context. The selection of these interviewees was based on three criteria:

1 In spite of their limited number, these people together represent a broad spectrum of Swedish opinion-building news media, such as broadsheet newspapers, tabloids, and public-service media (radio and TV).
2 During their long professional careers, they have had extensive experience of covering media scandals.
3 They are all well known, influential, and politically orientated.

Journalists listed in alphabetical order:

> **Heidi Avellan,** political editor-in-chief, *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, the largest broadsheet in Southern Sweden (independent Liberal)
> **Anette Holmqvist,** political reporter, *Aftonbladet*, one of Sweden's most influential and oldest evening tabloids (independent Social Democratic)
> **Mats Knutson,** political reporter and commentator on *Rapport*, one of the two largest news programmes on Sveriges Television, public-service television
> **Pontus Mattsson,** political reporter and commentator, Sveriges Radio's news desk *Ekot*, public-service radio
> **Margit Silberstein,** political reporter and commentator, *Aktuellt*, the largest news programme on Sveriges Television, public-service television
> **Niklas Svensson,** political reporter and commentator, *Expressen*, the other of Sweden's two oldest and most influential tabloids (independent Liberal)

A source-critical, detailed survey of both the material and the method is provided in the Appendix.