**Archives at NCBS**

**Sensitivity Check**

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**When do you do a sensitivity check?**

The sensitivity check is done during the creation of the finding aid. All the material has therefore already been appraised and found to be of value for the Archives. By having the sensitivity check at this point in the process it is easier and faster to make non-sensitive material available to the public when the material is digitized. It establishes a shorthand for everyone in the Archive to follow when they wish to use material. Of course, this is only temporary as all sensitive material should be reviewed and be made accessible at some point in the future. This can be done by placing an appropriate time embargo on the material or getting permission from the person or their kin to make it available.

**What is a Sensitivity Check?**

The aim of the sensitivity check is to quickly identify any material within a collection which contains possibly sensitive content during the creation of the finding aid. This is check is prescriptive and does not fully represent the Archives’ philosophy when it comes to access and the handling of sensitive material. Here “sensitive” material is broadly defined as material which could harm a person.

The process of the sensitivity check comes in two parts. The first part is about identifying how material might harm or violate the rights of the donor, their family, or any third party mentioned or depicted in the collection material. The second part consist of identifying how the material could harm visitors of the Archives by being, among other things, culturally insensitive or triggering.

By the end of the check each folder containing material will be assigned a sensitive (red) or not sensitive (green) label, and have any additional information added to the catalogue description which helps contextualise the material and give advisories.

**How to establish if something is sensitive or not? – Part One**

Part one of the sensitivity check is about establishing whether information might harm or violate the rights of a person mentioned or depicted in the collection material. Below there is a flowchart which asks a handful of questions to help decide whether information is labelled green, not sensitive, or red, sensitive. The flowchart applies to information on donors and third parties. In addition, there are two lists, a green list and a red list, which offer slightly more information than the flowchart. Please note that what is currently deemed sensitive will change and so the lists and the flowchart will have to be reviewed every so often.

Once it has been determined whether the material is sensitive or not, it should be indicated in the correct finding aid column. This is where it can be seen by anyone who wishes to use the material. Then on a later date the red labelled material can be reviewed.

**Sensitivity check flowchart**

Is the information already public?

Not sensitive

YES

NO

Sensitive

NO

Is the material over 30 years old?

YES

NO

YES

Is the information related to their professional work?

YES

Has the person of concern died?

NO

Is the information related to their professional work?

Not sensitive

YES

Did they die in the last 30 years?

NO

NO

Will the release of this information damage or upset their family or cause them harm?

Not sensitive

YES

Are they still working and would the release of this material harm their career?

Sensitive

NO

Sensitive

YES

NO

YES

**List of non-sensitive material (green)**

* *Public information*

The first question to ask when checking for sensitivity is, is the information is common knowledge or has been published in some way? If it is, then it is deemed not sensitive and given a green label. Public information can therefore include personal data such as date of birth or wedding announcements and any personal information on a person if it is public including, but not limited to, a person’s sexuality or political allegiances. Additionally, any crimes and misdemeanours, including plagiarism and affairs, can be deemed not sensitive if they are public knowledge.

* *Academic records*

Any academic records, including exam results, can be made public if the material is older than 30 years and the release of this information will not damage the person’s career.

* *Children*

Information and images of children can be made public if they are over 30 years old. This is to ensure the children in the material are old enough to object via a takedown request.

* *Slander*

Cases of slander or bad mouthing within a professional academic context can be made public as they offer important contextual information to the material. However, it should only be made public if the material is older than 30 years and, if the person is still alive, they have stopped working within that specific field. This is to ensure the information does not hinder their career.

**List of sensitive material (red)**

* *Material under 30 years old*

Any material which is under 30 years old should not be made public, unless it is already public information.

* *Medical records*

All medical records should not be made public while the person is alive. In cases of pregnancy, this information can only be made public if the person who was born from said pregnancy has passed away. Hereditary diseases can only be made public if the grandchildren of the person in question are over 30.

* *Personal information*

Personal information such as addresses, emails, phone numbers, but also passports, visa applications and financial records, which are not publicly available are considered sensitive. But only in cases where the person is still alive or has passed away in the last 30 years.

* *Slander and insults*

Any personal slander or insults which has nothing to do with their work is sensitive and can be made public after 30 years, unless it could put the person or their relatives or close associates in danger if it is made public.

* *Personal identity*

Any information on a person’s identity, including gender, sexuality, religion etc., which is not public, is sensitive if the person is still alive or has died in the last 30 years. And it should also be given a red label if making the information could still put their relatives or close associates in danger.

**How to establish if something is sensitive or not? – Part Two**

Part two is about identifying how the material could harm visitors of the Archives by causing offense or being triggering. In addition to applying a sensitive or not sensitive label to the material, the person creating the finding aid should also take the time to contextualise the information in the catalogue description. Note that all items should be given contextual information even if they have already been deemed sensitive in the previous round. This is necessary as contextual information and advisories will need to always be in place even if the time embargo has run out.

Again, this section offers two lists, red and green, which organise information into what is deemed too sensitive to put online. Each item in the list also gives some advice on how to contextualise the information. Please again note that what is currently deemed sensitive will change and so the lists and the flowchart will have to be reviewed every so often.

**List of non-sensitive material (green)**

* *Misinformation*

If the information given in the material is misleading, inaccurate, or false, it is not deemed sensitive, but the catalogue description should highlight that the information is inaccurate preferably with references to why it is deemed incorrect. This is likely to mostly apply to unproved or disproven science theories.

* *Cultural insensitivity*

Materials held by the Archives can be seen as offensive to certain groups, this is often because the material was created in a society where certain attitudes and language was acceptable. Material can be given a green label if the appropriate context is given to the material, which helps users of the archive understand how, where, why it was created and who was the creator and what their was position at the time However, if the archivist does not feel like they are able to contextualise the material fully because they are not part of the offended group the material should be considered sensitive and given a red label.

* *Nudity and sexual context*

Any nudity or sexual context, except child nudity, which is there for medical research purposes is not sensitive and is likely to require little contextual information.

* *Written accounts of violence*

Written accounts of violence, graphic or mild can be made public but with the appropriate advisories put in place.

* *Drug use*

Drug use is not considered sensitive unless it is very physically violent. However, it is advised to put a small advisory on this material as people might get offended by its existence.

**List of sensitive material (red)**

* *Explicit sexual content*

All explicit sexual content research related or otherwise should not be made available online. Advisories should be added to the catalogue entry.

* *Graphic violence*

Any images, video, or audio containing graphic violence with vivid detail of injuries should not be put online. Advisories should be added to the catalogue entry and contextual information explaining the reason for the violence and the existence of the material.

* *Cultural insensitivity*

If the archivist does not feel like they are able to contextualise the material fully because they are not part of the offended group, the material should be considered sensitive and given a red label.

* *Child nudity and non-consensual nudity*

Nude images of children and people who are unlikely to have given consent to their image being captured are sensitive and should not be made public.