

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON

The Politics of Family Secrecy

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN, APRIL 23 – 24, 2020



Call for Papers

Illegitimate children, adoption, queer sexuality, mental illness, incest, family violence, treason, venereal disease, drug addiction, alcoholism, suicide... Every family has a skeleton in the closet or so the saying goes. A dubious deed or a disgracing detail that is kept under wraps through more or less elaborate practices of secrecy. But what does this convey about the family and its relationship to society? And how can and should we examine family secrecy in a historical perspective? The things family members choose to hide from each other or from a broader public offer a powerful lens through which to examine the internal power dynamics of the family and the ways these connect to social and economic developments, aesthetic practices, political currents, and legal change.

Family secrecy is closely tied to other knowledge practices such as palpable silences, innuendo, lies, partial disclosure, discretion, privacy, and “active not-knowing” (Konrad 2005), all of which have to do with the social ordering of relationships. These practices play a vital part in the making and unmaking of families and might help us bridge the gap between ideal and reality, between what is expected of us and what we are able to do or actually did. Secrecy might be oppressive and suffocating, but it might also provide a protective shield for individuals – or families – deemed problematic by society or by the state (e.g. Bok 1983, Bergmann 2011; Smart 2011; Swain 2011; Cohen 2013). Secrecy fluctuates with the mutability of morality and is entangled with the production of wider social norms and with official policies and practices. But the politics of family secrecy have yet to be systematically mapped.

In this workshop, we aim to examine the historically contingent politics of family secrecy from a variety of angles, exploring individual cases as well as broader theoretical and ethical issues pertaining to the study of secrecy. We invite submissions that investigate specific examples of family secrecy and disclosure in different geographical and historical contexts and papers that probe the emotional micropolitics of the family in relationship to the macropolitical contexts in which they take place. Papers that discuss the epistemological, methodological, and ethical issues pertaining to the study of family secrecy and related knowledge practices are particularly welcome.

RESEARCH PROJECT AND WORKSHOP ARE FUNDED BY



The workshop will be based on full-length papers to be submitted a couple of weeks before the workshop and pre-circulated among all participants. After the workshop, we aim to publish selected papers in a special issue of a journal or an edited volume, so please submit only original, unpublished research.

The workshop is organized by the project *The Politics of Family Secrecy* (<https://familysecrecy.ku.dk>) and is funded by DFF, the Independent Research Fund Denmark. It is free to attend, and some funding will be available to cover participants' expenses for travel and accommodation.

Please send an abstract of no more than 500 words along with a CV and a list of publications to Katrine Rønsig Larsen: krl@hum.ku.dk by **Oct. 1st 2019**. Applicants will be informed about decisions by Nov. 1st 2019.