

**Application Velux Foundation:**

**The Danish Family Revolution: Experiences and Institutions (FREI)**



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## Introduction

From the mid-1960s to the 1980s in Denmark, the family underwent profound social and cultural changes. What we call ‘the family revolution’ was the result of the combined effects of women entering the labour market, changing gender roles, the breakdown of traditional marriage, and the expansion of state-organized family policies. **The goal of this project is to explore the impact of the family revolution on Danish society by analysing individual experiences.** What appears as a linear, uniform process at the macro level takes on a different form at the individual level. The family revolution changed both society and people’s everyday lives by opening new opportunities for some as well as closing off existing opportunity structures for others. In this context, **The Danish Family Revolution 1960s to 1980s: Experiences and Institutions (FREI)** revolves around two central and interrelated research questions:

**RQ1:** How was the family revolution experienced at the micro level?

**RQ2:** How did these individual experiences interact with macro-level changes?

FREI will generate new knowledge about the ‘lived experiences’ of the family revolution, showing how these individual experiences were affected by and interacted with macro-level trends and policies using an innovative model for collecting life stories. Our goal is to craft a genuinely new history of the family revolution in Denmark.

**Scientifically**, the project will produce new historical insights into one of the most important transformations in twentieth-century Danish society. It breaks new ground across fields such as welfare history, gender history, and family history. **Oral History database:** FREI will utilize an innovative Citizen Science (CS) and oral history-based model that we have developed for the collection of life-history interviews from contemporary witnesses to the family revolution (i.e., individuals aged 70+). We have successfully tested this data collection model in three pilot rounds (2021-2023). We will establish a unique database with over a thousand transcribed life story (semi-structured) interviews. The oral history database will be used in the project and made available for future research. **Methodologically**, FREI represents a unique integration of cutting-edge digital humanities research and traditional historical methods. FREI will also have a **high societal impact**, as our project will involve more than 3,000 high school students and improve their historical knowledge and general scientific literacy as well as fostering cross-generational dialogue between students and the 1,000+ interviewees.

## **Beyond the State-of-the-art: The family revolution**

The Danish family revolution has led to what has often been described as a ‘women-friendly’ welfare state (Hernes 1987) characterized by gender equality and women’s labour market participation (Lundqvist 2011, Leira 2006 & 2010), laying the groundwork for a gender-equal dual-earner family model (Lewis 1992). In the Danish context, research on this transformation has mainly focused on four themes. **(1)** Transformation of family patterns and marriage through statistical analysis (Christoffersen, 2004; Johansen & Holten, 2015) as well as by qualitative studies exploring changes in marriage law (Bradley 1996, Melbye et al., 2006;) and family practices (Faye Jacobsen & Løkke 1997, Vallgård 2021). **(2)** Women’s (increasing) employment has been analysed statistically (Åmark 2006; Hansen & Henriksen 1980) and from political-discursive perspective (Larsen 2006; Petersen 2012). **(3)** Qualitative studies on changing gender roles (Rosenbeck 1985) and gender discourses (Dahlerup 1998) emphasizing the changes in the 1960s and 1970s, especially for women (Ipsen, 2020). **(4)** Finally, the institutional development of family policy programs such as public day-care, parental leave and child welfare has been meticulously analysed (Petersen 2013; Borchorst 2002, 2003; Bjerre 2021).

This body of existing literature is largely top down focusing on the national (macro) level through the public sphere and institutional frameworks with a focus on policy formation, statistical averages, and elite intentions. Hence, the dominant narrative of the family revolution in Denmark resembles a ‘bloodless revolution’ (Florin & Nilsson 1999) in which national policy change trickled down to affect families, who then adjusted to these new opportunities and limitations. FREI challenges the simplistic top-down interpretation of a progressive elite project with trickle-down effects on individuals and families. First, we know, that family-related changes triggered heated public debates in the days (Larsen 2006, Petersen 2021). Second, we are inspired by international feminist scholarship on women’s actual experiences with family life (Hochschild 1989; Summerfield 1998; Brannen et al. 2004; McCarthy 2020; Worth 2021). Third, we draw on a growing focus on ‘lived experiences’ within international social policy research has challenged classical ‘Whig’ (Thane 1982), top-down interpretations of welfare state history and change (McIntosh & Wright 2019; Michener et. al. 2022).

## **Theoretical framework and methodology**

To fully understand the dynamics and impact of the family revolution, we employ a theoretical framework drawn from the ‘history of experiences’ (Haapala et al. 2023a) combining micro and

macro perspectives. Methodologically, we will adopt a mixed-methods approach that combines traditional qualitative historical methods, oral history, history of emotions, and digital text analysis. The integration of these methods allows for methodological triangulation (Bertaux & Kohle 1984).

While interest in people's 'experiences' has a long tradition within phenomenology, feminist studies, and ethnography (McIntosh & Wright 2019), this approach has only recently gained traction within historical studies (Eiranen et al. 2022). The history of experiences offers new insights into how societies are constructed and constituted in everyday life with the data deriving from the active participation of citizens themselves (Haapala et al. 2023b). Focusing on subjects' lived experiences sheds light on how the welfare state as an everyday experience relates to overarching social issues such as equality, trust, and collective/individual agency (Haapala et al. 2023b). In our view, experiences draw attention to the **emotional aspects** (sentiments, values), **practices** (life strategies), and the **narration** of life (narrative structures, sense-making, key themes, and historical sequences) (Eiranen 2023).

The history of experiences is closely related to the **history of emotions** (Boddice 2017, Vallgård 2013). Our approach posits that emotional experiences are linked to the words used to describe emotions, associated values, and social norms governing behaviour and expression (Vallgård & Olsen 2022). Therefore, analysing emotional tones and repertoires (Barclay, 2021) within our sources can provide valuable insights into how individual Danes experienced the family revolution.

How do we locate 'lived experiences' in historical research? Here the **oral history** tradition (Thompson 1988) provides a strategy for studying major societal transformations from a micro-perspective. Large-scale oral history projects (Niethammer 1980, 1991) demonstrate the potential of this approach for understanding societal transformations. We employ a life story approach (Atkinson 1998) commonly used within anthropology, sociology, and feminist studies. This approach seeks to comprehend the interaction between personal experiences and broader cultural, social, and historical structures and transformations (Bertaux & Kohli 1984; Peacock & Holland 1993). Life stories grant us access to unique and lived experiences, including subjects' emotional and narrative dimensions (Kwan et al. 2023). Hence, oral history and life stories resonate well with a history of experiences approach because they provide more nuanced reconstructions of the past (Shopes, 2014,). In this project, we will collect over 1,000 life stories through semi-structured interviews. The specifics of our data collection are described below (and in appendix A).

Given the extensive scale and intricate structure of our dataset (see below), our project will utilize Natural Language Processing (NLP) techniques to process the large-scale textual data. Analysing such a large dataset is a task beyond the practical capacity of human manual scrutiny and interpretation. Specifically, we will employ **topic modelling** (Blei, 2012) to reveal latent patterns, such as recurring themes or sequences, embedded within the compiled life narratives. In addition, we utilize **sentiment analysis** (Liu, 2015) to discern the emotional nuances, emotional repertoires, and ‘structure of feeling’ (Williams 1961) that emerge in these life narratives.

The NLP analysis can yield valuable insights and patterns for further exploration of reported experiences. We will conduct statistical analyses, focusing on the outcomes derived from the NLP analysis across various subgroups focusing on salient distinctions such as gender, geographical location (rural/urban), and education level (our data allows for this). We undertake more qualitative analyses of selected sources (within our dataset as well as with other types of sources). Collecting life stories, we believe, is a fruitful strategy for overcoming the lack of sources with respect to what McIntosh & Wright (2019) refer to as the ‘shared typical’.

Like all historical sources, analysis of life story data requires a critical approach (Oelefse 2011, Brannen 2013). People’s life stories might be biased and incomplete (Scott 1992, Brannen 2013), however they also offer access to individual (subjective) experiences that otherwise would not become part of historical analysis (Summerfield 1998). Analyses based on life stories must be properly contextualized, which necessitates the use of multiple data sources, including other historical sources and research literature. Oral history-based analysis typically relies on limited data and related representativity problems, however with a substantial number of life story accounts (1,000+), we can use digital and quantitative methods to identify significant patterns and shared intersubjective experiences, compare subgroups to control for socio-economic bias, and locate outliers (Bertaux & Kohle 1984).

Our goal is to integrate our subjects’ personal experiences into the history of the family revolution, not as a parallel history but as an integral part of this revolution. Based on our pilot studies, the life story interviews offer unique insights into the changes in family life. They allow us to study experiences expressed in terms of pervasive themes, narratives, personal sentiments, values, perception of change as well as practices and life-strategies. They are ‘a window – though not a perfectly transparent one – on historical periods, cultural practices, and psychic events’ (Peacock & Holland 1993, 373). As described in more detail in the section on research design, we use this ‘window’ to gain new insights into the interaction between individual

experiences on the micro-level and changes on the macro level (including more structural changes as well as policy changes related to the welfare state). This approach relies on combining above mentioned methods with more traditional historical methods such as source criticism and historical reconstruction based on multiple sources (see section below on sources).

### **Data and data collection model**

Over the past three years, we have developed and tested a collaborative CS-based data collection model for studying the family revolution. A detailed description can be found in appendix A. In brief, we use CS to collect a high number of oral history (Ritchie 2011) interviews. We have partnered with Danish high schools to prepare and train high school students (aged 17-19) in an 8-week module via a web platform. Subsequently, they conduct and record semi-structured life-history interviews with elderly citizens (age 70+), all of whom were adults during the family revolution. The students analyse these interviews in class and submit their audio files to our platform, along with metadata on the interviewee (age, gender, education, urban/rural setting). The anonymised interviews and metadata are stored at SDU, transcribed (using a combination of speech-to-text software supplemented by hand-editing by history students) making them available for further analysis. Our model has been evaluated and approved by the SDU Research and Innovation Office.

Although CS has gained attention for its potential to collect data on a large scale (Freitag & Pfeffer, 2013) it has seen only limited adoption in the humanities (Heinisch et al., 2021). Hence, our model combines the strengths of the CS approach to address representativity problems often related to oral history studies. Regarding data quality, the model has been tested and calibrated over two pilot rounds (2021 and 2022), with 717 students (working in groups) conducting interviews with 239 persons (Bjerre et al. 2022; Bjerre & Petersen, 2022a & b). To have consistency and comparability in the interviews, the students follow an interview guide provided to them beforehand (see appendix A). The interviews typically last between approximately 40 and 90 minutes, and the data quality has proven to be robust. During the project period, we will gradually scale up, aiming for 1.000+ interviews to have representation from a varied sample of socioeconomic localities.

FREI combines the collection of new data in the form of life story interviews with 'traditional' historical sources. By 'traditional' historical sources including but not limited to: a) Policy documents, including legislative texts, public reports, and relevant archival documents; b)

parliamentary debates; c) party manifestos; d) public debates as documented in the mass media or periodicals; e) family-related statistics; and f) popular fiction presentations of family change (see Mai 2019, Nexø-Andersen 2016). These sources serve two primary functions: first, they provide the necessary context for the political landscape, culture, ideas, and socio-economic structures; second, the more overtly political sources such as party pamphlets and parliamentary debates articulate intentions and policy ideas that we can compare with the real-life experiences and practices of our interviewees. The PIs have extensive experience working with these conventional historical sources. As some of these sources (b, c, d) are available in digital form, we can carry out a digital comparison of the life story interviews and official texts.

## **Project design**

Our work is structured around five Work Packages (WPs) that will run concurrently and include the active participation from both PIs. Postdocs will primarily contribute to WP3 and WP4. Assistant Professor Zhiru Sun will play a crucial role in implementing NLP techniques and statistical analysis across the WPs. WP2-5 use a mixed-methods approach, meaning both the collected interview data combined with other historical sources.

### ***WP1: Data collection and data management***

WP1 focuses on establishing, developing, and maintaining a new relational database, as well as managing data (see data management plan). This effort involves collaboration between the PIs and Assistant Professor Sun, the SDU Citizen Science Centre, and the SDU e-Science Centre. In addition, we will create a shared working database for the non-interview-based sources, such as the policy documents, political texts, and research literature. WP1 thus provides the necessary infrastructure for carrying out the research activities in the remaining WP2-5.

### ***WP2: Data-driven narrative - Analyzing interview data with NLP and statistical approaches.***

In WP2, we utilize a multifaceted approach to uncover intricate semantic patterns within our dataset. Initially, we employ advanced NLP techniques such as topic modelling (Liu, 2022) and sentiment analysis (Vayansk & Kumar, 2020) to identify recurring themes and discern the associated emotional tones embedded in the interview data. Additionally, we conduct in-depth statistical analysis by integrating metadata associated with the interviews. These analyses will shed light on critical issues such as gender disparities, educational variations, urban vs. rural differences, and temporal shifts. The findings will provide compelling insights, including variations in identified

themes and emotions across different gender groups, generations, urban versus rural contexts, and over time. These insights involve comparing differences in experiences (sentiments) between men and women, as well as examining differences within the two gender groups and comparing the pace of change in experiences between urban and rural settings. Furthermore, we investigate intentions expressed in parliamentary debates or party manifestos. By comparing topic salience and associated sentiments, we aim to address fundamental questions concerning how policy goals were experienced and internalized by individuals. With a robust dataset comprising over 1,000 entries and metadata, our analysis becomes expansive, allowing us to explore multiple combinations of topics, subgroups, and policy documents. The nuanced patterns unravelled in WP2 will serve as a foundational basis for the subsequent investigation in WP3 and WP4.

### ***WP3: Changing inter-family dynamics.***

WP3 investigates how the family revolution influenced social dynamics within families. The focus is on three key areas of change: Gender roles, attitudes about female employment, and experiences of parenthood. 1) Feminist ideas and actors played a significant role in shaping a new national policy agenda regarding gender roles and gender equality discourses (Petersen 2013; Florin & Nilsson 1999). Using our database, we analyse how these discursive changes were experienced by women and men at the individual level and the degree to which they varied across the different socio-economic groups (gender, class, generations). For example, we expect the family revolution to have had different contours for families in the countryside and for the urban middle class families in the major cities. 2) Salaried employment has been regarded as a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality (Lundqvist 2019). However, women's employment was also a major topic of debate even within the broader women's movement (Larsen 2006) and could course a 'double burden' imposed on women (Hochschild 1989). Following intersectional theory (McCall 2001, 2005), we explore variations in attitudes and practices towards female employment and the 'career' of the traditional male-provider model as it operates within various sub-groups (e.g., women/men with/without higher education). 3) We explore the extent to which the family revolution paved the way for a reconceptualization of parenthood by challenging established ideas of women's motherhood (Michel 1999) as well as the role of the father as main provider. We assess the idea of an 'incomplete revolution' (Esping-Andersen 2006), in as much as norms of motherhood changed more rapidly than the normative role of fathers.

### ***WP4: Reconsidering welfare state-family dynamics***



WP4 examines the interactions between welfare policy interventions and family life during the family revolution. The family revolution coincided with the ‘golden age’ of the welfare state with dramatic expansion of family-related public spending and policy reforms (Petersen 2013). The research literature has tended to view these welfare policies as ‘women friendly’ reforms (Hernes 1987). However, this viewpoint is not grounded in subjective experiences of individuals. Here our project aims to break new ground by exploring how individuals and their families navigated their lives when confronted with these policy interventions, or coped when expected welfare measures were not implemented. This includes analysing the emotional dimensions of these interventions. We especially will focus on public childcare and targeted family policies. 1) The public day-care sector expanded from the 1960s (Petersen 2022a), but access to public childcare was often inadequate in the rural areas. We can thus compare subgroups in terms of how their degree of day-care access influenced family strategies, including labour market participation, gender roles and care work, and we can examine the related sentiments on the individual level. 2) With respect to targeted family policies, Danish citizens exhibit strong support for welfare programs but also markedly differing attitudes towards recipient groups (Albrekt Larsen 2006). Interventions targeting what was considered ‘deviant’ groups such as single mothers or ‘dysfunctional’ families (Bjerre 2022) are often labelled as stigmatizing. However, we know very little about how these policies were experienced by the targeted groups themselves (e.g., as supportive or controlling).

***WP5: Methodological and conceptual innovation (PI's, Kaarsted and Sun)***

WP5 aims to develop a **generic and scalable Citizen Science Model for Historical Research** that can be applied to contemporary history contexts. WP5 is essential for the development of a generic CS-model for history projects and for addressing inherent methodological questions in oral history research. In addition, this WP explores the **narratives of experiences** and analyses the relationship between individuals' hopes and reality, socio-economic and gender-related differences, and methodological questions in oral history research (Bertaux & Kohle 1984, 224).

**Management and feasibility**

This collaborative project involves a core group of researchers working in close cooperation with specialists in CS and data management at SDU. Key aspects of project management and feasibility include:

**Project leadership:** The project will be jointly managed by the two PIs. Professor Petersen, a leading international expert on the history of the Nordic welfare states, has successfully led multiple

research projects, while Bjerre, an emerging scholar, has demonstrated extensive scholarship in welfare and family history. Petersen brings his substantial experience in research leadership, while Dr. Bjerre has accumulated valuable experience participating in research projects and will, as a co-PI, gain the research management experience that is of vital importance for her future career.

**Other personnel:** The project will employ two postdoctoral scholars, each for two years, who will collaborate closely with the PIs on WP3 and WP4, respectively. Both postdocs will be recruited through open calls. Assistant Professor Zhiru Sun, with a 25 % employment commitment and substantial expertise in analysing large datasets will oversee data management (WP1) and lead the execution of NLP and statistical analysis (WP 2-5). We will also recruit four master's students; the students will be recruited annually and offered thesis stipends related to WP2-4. Student assistants will be hired to assist with the editing of transcribed interviews.

**Support from SDU Centres:** The SDU Citizen Science Centre and SDU eScience Centre play crucial roles in the project. The Citizen Science Centre, with Director Thomas Kaarsted and High School Coordinator Mette Fentz Haastrup, will manage cooperation with high schools, community engagement, and the development of the CS-elements in the project. SDU eScience Centre will provide support for data storage and will establishing and maintaining the relational database.

**Administrative support:** SDU's Department of Language and Culture handles administrative support for budgeting, accounting, and HR-related matters related to the FREI project.

**Advisory board** (all confirmed): The FREI's advisory board consists of renowned experts in family and gender history such as Professor Pirjo Markkola (Tampere University), Professor Åsa Lundqvist (Lund University), Associate Professor Karen Vallgård (Copenhagen University), Professor Emerita Bente Rosenbeck (Copenhagen University), and Senior Researcher Mikkel Thelle (National Museum of Denmark). All possess comprehensive expertise relevant to the project. Their main tasks on the Advisory Board will include providing advice, quality assurance, evaluation, and participating in workshops. The board will convene three times annually, both in person and virtually.

**Other partners:** FREI will collaborate with the Center of Excellence for Historical Experiences (Tampere University), a world-leading institution in the study of the history of experiences.

### **Outcome and impact of the project**

The scientific impact of the project will be realized through workshops, international conferences, and academic publications. We will publish a minimum of 12 scientific articles published in leading

international journals spanning fields such as modern history, family history, gender history, social policy, digital humanities, and CS. Target journals include *Social Science History*, *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, *Journal of Social History*, *Journal of Family History*, *Social Politics*, *Gender & History*, and *History Workshop*. We also will publish two edited volumes (edited by postdocs and PIs), containing contributions from the postdocs, PIs, recruited master students and advisory board members. The PIs will co-author a monograph targeting a broad popular audience, to be published by University of Southern Denmark Press. Furthermore, the project will build a new and unique database of over 1000 personal life stories that will be made available for future research as open source through the Danish National Archive.

Societal impact as a CS-project: FREI will engage more than 3,500 high school students and over a thousand ordinary Danes aged 70+. Conducting interviews with elderly Danes will provide the high school students with the opportunity to enhance their scientific (historical) literacy in relation to their own lives (Oesterle et al., 2020; Ballard et al. 2018), while also fostering cross-generational dialogue and social cohesion. In the evaluation of the pilot projects, one teacher summarised the project as ‘a welcomed alternative perspective that makes the subject more relevant for the students in many ways.’ Hence, the impact of the project extends far beyond academia (Jenkins 2011).

To further facilitate impact in the high school sector, FREI will produce two additional outputs: 1) an online textbook for high school students co-produced with high school teachers; and 2) the development of a comprehensive online teaching platform, offering free access to curated interviews and resources for students.

Finally, the project will emphasize popular dissemination and actively engage with popular blogs, newspapers, and relevant media platforms in the form of op-eds, interviews, podcasts, and radio programs. Our results will be disseminated using social media channels to generate broader public awareness about the relationship between welfare policy and family life.

### **Time schedule:**

The project runs over 4 years from 1 September 2024. Except for months 1-6, WP's run in parallel. Hence the number of life stories available for research will grow throughout the project (and first publications in years 2 will present more tentative results).

	2024		2025				2026				2027				2028	
RESEARCH PLAN	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q	3Q	4Q	1Q	2Q
Work Packages																
WP1: Data collection	D'base created		Data collection, transcription and management												D'base stored	
WP2: Big data patterns	Research															
WP3: Changing interfam. dynamics			Research													
WP4: Welfare state family dynamics			Research													
WP5: Methodological/conceptual innovation							Research									
Admin & management			Recruitment of masters students								Exit strategy					
Milestones																
Interviews completed (number)		♦ (400)					♦ (650)				♦ (850)				♦ (1000)	
Interviews transcribed (number)		♦ (100)		♦ (250)			♦ (450)		♦ (650)		♦ (700)		♦ (850)		♦ (900)	(1000)♦
Jnl. articles (♦) collected vol. (+) popular book (-)				♦		♦		♦ ♦		♦ ♦ ♦ ♦		♦ ♦		♦ ♦ ♦ ♦		♦ ♦ ♦ ♦
Conference presentations					♦				♦			♦		♦		♦ ♦ ♦ ♦
Workshops w/ guests held	♦	♦		♦		♦		♦		♦		♦		♦ ♦ ♦ ♦		♦ ♦ ♦ ♦
Advisory board workshops (online or physical)	♦		♦		♦		♦		♦		♦		♦ ♦ ♦ ♦		♦ ♦ ♦ ♦	♦
Network meetings		♦		♦ (online)		♦		♦ (online)		♦		♦ (online)		♦		♦ ♦ ♦ ♦
Impact teaching activities	♦ launch teaching platform						♦ online textbook									
Impact: media articles		♦	♦			♦				♦				♦		

## Exit strategy

The rich data collected in our project allows for further use beyond the project period, especially in addressing specific questions relating to gender, family, and welfare history. In year 4, we will develop an exit strategy, in close cooperation with the advisory board. The exit strategy will include the following:

- 1) Comparative projects:** Based on highly positive feedback from international colleagues, we will explore possibilities for a comparative project; either a Nordic project (potential funding /NOS-HS) or a more comprehensive European project (funding via Horizon 2030).
- 2) Going further back in history:** We will explore possibilities for connecting our collected life stories with earlier studies of family life in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Notable here is the collection of life stories carried out by the National Museum of Denmark in the 1950s, a collection that we will recontextualise (Tureby 2013).
- 3) Application of our CS-based data collection to other contemporary history projects:** As our model is generic, we will engage with Danish and Nordic historians to promote the widespread use of this model.

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