Editorial
Hvenegård-Lassen, Kirsten; Stoltz, Pauline

Published in:
NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research

Publication date:
2014

Document Version
Early version, also known as pre-print

Link to publication from Aalborg University

Citation for published version (APA):
NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/swom20

Editorial
Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen & Pauline Stoltz
Published online: 29 Jul 2014.

To cite this article: Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen & Pauline Stoltz (2014) Editorial, NORA - Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research, 22:3, 165-169, DOI: 10.1080/08038740.2014.933667
To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08038740.2014.933667

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the “Content”) contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions
EDITORIAL

We are happy to present a new issue of NORA, opened this time by Carol Bacchi and Malin Rönnblom. Over the years, Bacchi has been a frequent and welcome visitor to several universities in the Nordic countries, and many gender researchers, especially those with an interest in policy studies, have used her “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach in their research and education (see also Bacchi 1999; 2009). One of the Nordic researchers with whom Bacchi has recently been working is a former editor of NORA, Malin Rönnblom, with whom she shares an interest in methodological issues.

In “Feminist Discursive Institutionalism—A Poststructural Alternative”, the two authors aim to initiate “[…] a new conversation that examines theoretical stances in terms of the forms of politics they make possible.” They take issue with methodological eclecticism and the perhaps related tendency towards smoothing over theoretical differences among feminists. In their article, they focus on Vivien Schmidt’s discursive institutionalism as an example of an empirical approach that is influential within feminist political science. Bacchi and Rönnblom argue that her discursive institutionalism discards or ignores epistemological and ontological precepts in favour of an eclectic framework that borrows from a variety of theories. Thereby, they argue, the relation between theory and the politics that is made possible disappears. In their article, the contrasting epistemological and ontological premises of discursive institutionalism and Foucauldian-inspired feminist analysis are specified in order to substantiate this argument.

An institution that is familiar to most of us in which gender equality policies are implemented is the university. The next two articles, “Justifications of Gender Equality in Academia: Comparing Gender Equality Policies of Six Scandinavian Universities”, by Mathias Wullum Nielsen and “Administrators or Critical Cynics? A Study of Gender Equality Workers in Swedish Higher Education” by Britt-Inger Keisu and Maria Carbin, address this issue. Nielsen analyses institutional policy documents on gender equality from six universities (two in Norway, two in Sweden, and two in Denmark). He concludes that discrimination is acknowledged as a fact that needs to be dealt with in the Norwegian and Swedish documents, whereas this is not the case in the Danish documents. Here, gender equality is rather depicted as a problem related to women. In addition, the promotion of gender equality in the Danish documents is argued through the use of managerial terms relating to workplace productivity and creativity. These arguments also appear in the Swedish and Norwegian documents, but in combination with more justice-oriented ideas of structural inequalities that need to be remedied.

© 2014 The Nordic Association for Women’s Studies and Gender Research
Keisu and Carbin’s article identifies a shift in Swedish gender equality agendas towards a managerial neo-liberalism. Moving closer to everyday practices, they base their analysis on interviews with gender equality workers about their visions and strategies. They argue—in line with the results of Nielsen’s analysis—that the gender equality workers in their study draw on two discourses: a liberal discourse of equal rights and treatment, which stipulates that everybody should have the same opportunity of reaching top levels in the university; and a neo-liberal audit discourse, which prioritizes efficiency and bureaucratic procedures. Keisu and Carbin argue (and criticize) that the positions that gender equality workers are offered and take up in contemporary Swedish universities are either as critical cynics, who usually relate to a feminist politics, or as administrators who do not necessarily have any relation to feminism.

Finally, Randi Kjeldstad and Trude Lappegård take us into another contested area of gender equality, the sphere of the household. In their statistically based analysis they ask: “How Do Gender Values and Household Practices Cohere?” Their analysis is based on the previously established observation that the gender values expressed by married and cohabiting couples often do not cohere easily with their actual practices concerning the division of housework and childcare. Based on their analysis, Kjeldstad and Lappegård point out two types of gendered inconsistencies, or paradoxes: on the one hand, women express egalitarian gender values, while their perceptions of the division of labour in the household are inegalitarian; on the other hand, men express inegalitarian gender values, while they perceive their practices as egalitarian.

Recently, a renewed debate over intersectionality has made its way into feminist journals as well as into wider public fora. Over the years, NORA has frequently been engaged in the scholarly debate over the concept of intersectionality and its uptake in different (inter)disciplinary and policy contexts. In 2009 Carol Bacchi wrote another article in NORA together with Joan Eveline, addressing the question of whether policies for gender mainstreaming or diversity mainstreaming were preferable. Amongst other things, this stimulated a discussion on the notion of intersectionality and how it has been institutionalized, a subject that Agneta Hugemark and Christine Roman also addressed in the context of Sweden in the most recent issue of NORA (Hugemark & Roman 2014) and which Johanna Kantola and Kevät Nousiainen (2009) have also discussed in relation to equality bodies and law in Europe. Drawing a distinction between “intersectionality” and “multiple discrimination”, Kantola and Nousiainen argued for example that the EU focuses on the latter, hence favouring anti-discrimination policy over other measures aimed at furthering equality, thereby narrowing down the debate.

Bacchi and Eveline (2009) argued in addition that both gender mainstreaming and diversity mainstreaming involve fields of contestation and could be taken in anti-progressive directions. They preferred to address the processes and practices that give an initiative content and shape, and which they called the politics of “doing”. In order to produce reforms responsive to the needs and wishes of diverse groups of women, Bacchi and Eveline argue that attention ought to be directed towards ways of making those “doings” inclusive and democratic. Privileging the views of marginalized women in policy deliberations and respecting their perspectives
on the usefulness of appeals to identity is crucial here, and they introduce the concepts of “coalitions of engagement” and “deep listening” to generate discussion around these contentious issues.

When it comes to NORA, Dorthe Staunæs’s article “Where have all the subjects gone? Bringing together the concepts of intersectionality and subjectification” (Staunæs 2003) has consistently been among the top ten most-read articles; and a more recent methodological article on intersectionality by Ann-Dorte Christensen and Sune Qvortrup Jensen (2012) can also be found here. Checking Google Scholar on 4 June 2014, we found amongst the latest hits an article from the UK newspaper The Telegraph (15 January 2014) entitled “‘Intersectional feminism’. What the hell is it? (And why you should care)” by Ava Vidal. Vidal writes:

The phrase “check your privilege” that accompanies many discussions about intersectionality is one example. On Twitter in early January, there was a hashtag started by a white feminist #reclaimingintersectionalityin2014 that caused many black feminists to question how she intended to reclaim something that had never been hers in the first place.

Vidal’s piece lands us squarely in the middle of a fierce debate that is taking place right now—a debate which suggests that intersectionality has been colonized by white European feminists, who—because of a widespread European denial of the importance of race and racism—have watered down the scholarly and political edge of the concept. For instance, US scholar Barbara Tomlinson in two recent articles (2013a; 2013b) has argued that the European use of the concept replicates a racial hierarchy in the guise of feminist academic arguments.

In our view—and as argued by Tomlinson—there is indeed a pressing need within European feminist research and politics to take up questions concerning race, racism, and colonialism, not as something that “merely” relates to the US and the UK, but as a highly relevant and foundational question all over Europe, including the Nordic countries. This also includes a recognition of the fact that the concept of intersectionality came out of black (and women of colour’s) feminism. This, amongst other things, is what Gail Lewis argues in another recent article (2013), where she also points out the current anxiety about multiculturalism amongst the European elite:

[I] suggest that there is a deep anxiety traceable in the reception of, and debates about, intersectionality that have arisen as it has traveled from the feminism that black women and other women of color have fashioned in The United States, via the feminism forged by black women and other women of color in Europe, and into the wider community of feminist scholarship. (Lewis 2013: 873–874)

Tomlinson, however, seems to generalize (white) European feminism in a way that is not fruitful for a nuanced debate. In this piece, it seems that Tomlinson believes all travel of the concept from its original location to be bad. But, perhaps more importantly, she seems to be arguing that there is no debate whatsoever about race (including whiteness) and colonialism within European feminist research and
politics. This is an unfortunate line of argument. The politics of representation are important for feminists all over the world, and they do appear in contemporary feminist debates in Europe, including the Nordic countries, as is also attested by articles in previous issues of *NORA* (see for instance Eriksson 2013; Hübbinette & Lundström 2011).

Who can or cannot represent (black, postcolonial, or other) feminist knowledge is arguably also dependent upon who has access to academe: which members of staff are hired and which students are enrolled. The composition of staff and student bodies differ between universities within European states as well as between these states. This in turn is influenced by the above-mentioned national and European equality policies in education and research. Both how these policies are formulated and how they are implemented can be claimed to be of importance for the discussion of who has the ability to influence the ways in which intersectionality is discussed in European research. If the experiences of those who today are on the margins of academe were to be put at the centre of our knowledge-making processes, then arguably these processes would change substantially (see also Stoltz 2005). We agree with Tomlinson that much remains to be done in relation to the question of who can set the agenda for research discussions about intersectionality, but we welcome a greater sensitivity towards the particular contexts that are at stake, including the particular politics of representation.

Tomlinson does not address questions concerning theoretical differences, but her fierce critique and rejection of the framework argued by Staunæs in the article mentioned above does suggest that this might be at stake as well: she is clearly not happy with the questioning of standpoint feminism from theoretical perspectives with a more poststructuralist leaning. And this returns us full circle to the first article in this issue of *NORA*: theoretical stances make possible specific forms of politics.

*Kirsten Hvenegård-Lassen & Pauline Stoltz*

**References**


