

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Doing Intersectional Analysis: Methodological Implications for Qualitative Research

ANN-DORTE CHRISTENSEN & SUNE QVOTRUP JENSEN

*Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Aalborg, Denmark*

**ABSTRACT** *This article is about doing intersectional analysis and how to practise intersectionality in qualitative research. The overall objective is to contribute to the development of concrete intersectionality methodologies. The first part of the article discusses important aspects of intersectionality, bringing methodological implications into focus, e.g. the number of social categories to include and the status and differences between categories. The second part of the article argues that taking life-story narratives and the analysis of everyday life as a point of departure has potential for empirical analyses of intersectionality. This argument is illustrated by two empirical analyses. The first is about roots and routes in life-story narratives; the second is about the constructions of respectability in everyday life in relation to the intersection between gender, class, and ethnicity.*

### Introduction

In recent years, the intersectional approach has made a major breakthrough into gender research and has prompted a number of theoretical and conceptual discussions about how to understand and analyse gender in combination with other categories. We see the growing focus on intersectionality as a positive trend that potentially captures the complex interplay between gender and other social differentiations in contemporary, multicultural societies.

Intersectionality is a “travelling concept”, which has taken on new meanings in different contexts (Knapp, 2005). It originated in the US,<sup>1</sup> where black feminists brought their particular situation in relation to gender and race into focus in order to challenge white middle-class women’s dominance in the women’s movement and

---

*Correspondence Address:* Professor Ann-Dorte Christensen, PhD, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Kroghstraede 5, Aalborg East, DK- 9220, Denmark. Email: [adc@soesci.aau.dk](mailto:adc@soesci.aau.dk)

black men's dominance in anti-racist organizations (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Collins, 1993, 1998). The original American debate was characterized by a relatively strong emphasis on structural power relations, i.e. "a matrix of domination" (Collins, 1989). From black American feminism, the concept travelled to the UK where it developed within both the humanities and social sciences (e.g. Phoenix, 2006; Squires, 2007; Yuval-Davis, 2007). In Scandinavia, intersectionality first broke through among post-colonial gender researchers (e.g. Andreassen, 2005; de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005) and post-structuralist gender researchers, especially in the humanities and social psychology (e.g. Lykke, 2003, 2005; Staunæs, 2003, 2004; Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2006; Gressgård, 2008; see also Mørck, 2005). Later, gender researchers in political science and sociology adopted the concept and emphasized that intersectional analyses must be able to encompass the interplay between structures and institutions at the macro-level, and identities and lived lives at the micro-level (Christensen & Siim, 2006; Jensen, 2006).

This article focuses on the methodological challenges of doing intersectional analysis. While overall principles and abstract methodology have already been extensively discussed, there has been less debate about concrete intersectional methodology and analysis (Simien, 2007; Valentine, 2007; Grabham et al., 2009: 14; Berg et al., 2010). Our objective in this article is therefore to contribute to the development of concrete intersectionality analyses.

The article consists of four sections. *The first section* discusses important principles of the intersectional approach with a focus on methodological implications, e.g. the status of and differences between categories and the number of social categories to include. *The second section* develops these methodological implications further as we discuss the concrete methodological implications of intersectional analysis in terms of research design. In the last two sections the methodological implications are exemplified through two empirical intersectional analyses: in *the third section* we consider life-story narratives of belonging to places and roots and routes; and in *the fourth section* we examine the idea of everyday life and respectability as an important marker of social boundary construction in neighbourhood relations.

### **Methodological implications of intersectionality**

The overall aim of intersectional analysis is to explore intersecting patterns between different structures of power and how people are simultaneously positioned—and position themselves—in multiple categories, such as gender, class, and ethnicity (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006: 187; Phoenix, 2011: 137). The intersectional approach is consequently based on a non-additive principle that refers to how different social categories mutually constitute each other as overall forms of social differentiation or systems of oppression (Collins, 1998; de los Reyes & Mulinari, 2005) and in creating complex identities, where different identifications are always mutually constitutive (Staunæs, 2003; Buitelaar, 2006).

Some feminist scholars have criticized the concept of intersectionality. For instance, Maria Carbin and Sofie Tornhill have challenged the cross-roads metaphor, which is central to the original American coining of the term, for containing an idea of separate entities that meet at one point and then continue their separate ways. According to

this critique, the concept of intersectionality is not suitable for grasping the mutual constituting of social categories (Carbin & Tornhill 2004). From a different position, Antje Hornschied has argued that the concept may lead to the exclusion of several forms of feminist knowledge. According to Hornschied, the high status of intersectionality may lead to the exclusion of texts that do not use it. This also excludes early black feminist writing which, although often theoretically quite developed, is often reduced to the status of unfinished early efforts. Furthermore Hornschied is critical of the focus on categories, which, she argues, may move the focus away from categorization as a process (2009). A somewhat similar argument against “the relations to go and the categories to come” is discussed by Lutz, Vivar, and Supik (2011: 8). This debate implies a need to emphasize and maintain an explicit focus on processes and relations in intersectional analyses. Choo and Ferree similarly argue for a process-centred approach to intersectionality in practice and highlight power as relational. They emphasize the need to focus on dynamic forces rather than categories—“racialization more than races, economic exploitation rather than classes, gendering and gender performance rather than genders” (Choo & Ferree, 2010: 134; see also Ferree, 2011). Finally, Choo and Ferree stress that this dynamic, process-centred approach implies comparative and contextualized studies of intersectionality, which connect different levels of analysis. This is in line with the work of Nira Yuval-Davis, who has argued that specific positionings and identities “are constructed and interrelate and affect each other in particular locations and contexts” (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 200).

Basically, intersectionality raises the fundamental methodological question of how to analyse such mutually constitutive processes. Some authors have discussed these complexities in terms of the status of the social categories. Leslie McCall offers one of the most nuanced discussions on this topic, emphasizing that different approaches to social categories produce different types of knowledge. McCall distinguishes between three approaches within feminist theory: the anti-categorical approach (represented primarily in post-structuralist theories); the intra-categorical approach, which focuses on differences within one category (for instance between women, hence the focus on black women in Crenshaw’s analysis); and the inter-categorical approach, which is McCall’s own approach to studying complexity and variation in the interrelations between different categories of inequality (McCall, 2005).

In addition to the general methodology questions of processes and categories, we want to highlight two other methodological challenges. *The first* concerns the distinction between different forms of social differentiation. Several researchers have warned against the danger of treating class, gender, and ethnicity as if they function according to identical logics. The argument is that, although complexity and interaction between the categories or processes must be thematized, it is important to maintain an awareness that gender functions in a different way than class, which again functions in a different way than ethnicity, etc. (Connell, 2006; Jensen, 2006; Skeggs, 2006; Verloo, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Similarly, British political scientist Judith Squires has emphasized the significance of the “distinctive nature of each inequality strand” (Squires, 2007: 162). We agree with this focus on ontological differences between the categories. We emphasize that these forms of differentiation work differently, on both a structural and an identity level, and that they are all conditioned by power relations (Conaghan, 2009; Jensen & Elg, 2010; Phoenix,

2011). Furthermore, we stress that arguing for the differences in the ontology of the categories should not be taken to imply a hierarchization in terms of some forms of differentiation being considered more real than others.

A *second* important question concerns the number of categories. For example, Helma Lutz identifies no less than 14 social differences that could be considered in intersectional analyses (Lutz, 2002; Phoenix, 2006). This tendency to attempt to encompass numerous differences can also be identified in Danish research on intersectionality. It has been an analytical ambition to be open to less commonly considered categories, such as “student”, “patient”, or “adopted” in addition to gender, class, and ethnicity (Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2006).

The number of categories is a methodological challenge—not least to qualitative intersectional analysis, the greatest strength of which lies in its openness towards the unpredicted and in its ability to understand the specific and the local. However, we are sceptical of basing intersectional analyses on an endless series of social categories. Following Hancock, the relationship between categories is an open empirical question (2007: 251) and is based on historical and contextual conditions. This means that in any specific analysis it is necessary to select a number of categories or establishing *anchor points* as a *strategic choice* (McCall, 2005; Ludvig, 2006; Phoenix, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006). This makes the analysis manageable, but also makes it possible to focus on the categories that are deemed most important for a specific research question at a specific time.

Finally, we want to draw attention to the debate on unmarked categories and argue that intersectional analysis could produce richer knowledge about power relations if it included such categories as whiteness and masculinity to a greater degree (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Hearn, 2011). The same point has been made by Yuval-Davis, who argues strongly that, if intersectional analysis is to be seen as a theoretical framework for analysing social stratification, it is important to include not only marginalized people but all members of society (Yuval-Davis, 2011). The original American literature on intersectionality focused on the marginalization of especially vulnerable minorities (e.g. black women), which meant that the majority population was not considered (Nash, 2008). A major epistemological problem is that, even if such research remains loyal and sympathetic to minority groups, it risks depicting “the other” as different because the imagined normality of the majority remains unquestioned. Dorthe Staunæs’ suggestion for a *majority-inclusive* principle is based on the same argument; she advocates including majority groups in intersectional analysis, arguing that social categories condition the lives not only of those who are positioned as others but also of the more powerful and privileged. This means that intersectionality is relevant in terms of creating nuanced understandings of majority groups, although important differences in terms of power and privilege must obviously be taken into account (Staunæs, 2003: 105; see also Berg et al., 2010 and Christensen & Siim, 2010).

### **Methodology, research design, and context**

In this section we further develop the implications of the methodological considerations we outlined above in terms of more concrete research designs.

As Staunæs and Søndergaard have argued, such considerations cannot be entirely abstract. On the contrary, methodological considerations are only meaningful in the context of specific research proposals (Staunæs & Søndergaard, 2006). In this article we discuss the methodological implications of intersectionality in relation to two empirical analyses from *The INTERLOC Project—Gender, Class and Ethnicity—Intersectionality and Local Citizenship* ([www.interloc.aau.dk](http://www.interloc.aau.dk)).

The objective of the project is to perform a multi-level intersectional analysis that emphasizes the interplay between gender, class, and ethnicity. The empirical focus is Aalborg East, a deprived residential area in the Danish city of Aalborg.<sup>2</sup> Aalborg East has approximately 10,000 inhabitants and is the most multicultural area in Aalborg. The argument for using a specific locality as our point of departure is that it enables us to trace in depth the diversity and complexity of people's everyday lives. For the intersectional analysis in the INTERLOC project, we have made a strategic choice to emphasize gender, class, and ethnicity. This decision is based on prior knowledge that these categories shape the lives of most people living in this particular context and that power and privilege as well as identities are anchored to a large degree in the intersections between these three categories. This does not mean that other categories are without relevance (for instance age, sexuality, and disability), only that these categories have been our starting-point.

The research presented here is contextualized in Danish discourses about migration and belonging. It is well documented that discourses expressing hostility towards ethnic minorities and multiculturalism are widespread in Denmark. Carl-Ulrik Schierup (1993) has characterized Danish discourses about “immigrants” as based on a “logic of cultural difference”; Karen Wren (2001) has argued that popular discourses constructing Muslims in particular as not belonging are widespread; likewise, Peter Hervik (2004) has described how the assumed culture of so-called “foreigners” is constructed as being radically different from and inferior to Danish culture; and Rikke Andreassen (2005) has analysed Danish media coverage of ethnic minorities as being preoccupied with crime, the oppression of women, aggression, and an assumed lack of integration.

The empirical data in the INTERLOC project consists of 27 qualitative interviews (12 of these with ethnic minorities), ethnographic data from 37 meetings in two local associations (one primarily for migrant women and one for all inhabitants), a discourse analysis of 385 texts from local and national media, as well as quantitative survey data about the area's social and symbolic profile. In accordance with the majority-inclusive principle, both ethnic minority and majority informants were recruited for interviews.

In the following two intersectional analyses, we focus on the qualitative interviews carried out during the project and conduct in-depth discussions about two topics we consider relevant to the further development of qualitative intersectionality methodology: the importance of life-story narratives and the potential of taking everyday life as a point of departure.

### **The importance of life-story narratives**

In addressing life-story narratives in intersectional analysis we acknowledge the arguments put forward by Baukje Prins (2006) and Marjo Buitelaar (2006). Although

the analysis of life-stories is not in itself a new method in gender research (for an overview see for instance Cosslett et al., 2000), we agree with Prins and Buitelaar that it can be considered an important method in intersectionality research. *Prins* argues that narratives tell us how people draw on different categories in the construction of their life-story. She sees identity as a narrative in which we both play the lead role and write the script (Prins, 2006: 281). Identity is therefore about which stories we can tell about ourselves in relation to social categories like gender, class, and ethnicity. Categories and their intersections emerge in the way people tell their life-stories. At the same time, intersectionality is related to belonging as people's life-stories are based on belonging to and identification with such things as ethnicity, social class, and religion (Prins, 2006: 288).

*Buitelaar* argues that the concept of “the dialogical self” offers potential in empirical studies of intersectionality (Buitelaar, 2006: 261). This theoretical understanding of identity emphasizes that individuals speak from different “I”-positions, switch positions, or combine different positions when they tell their life-stories (Buitelaar, 2006: 261). Telling one's life-story thus consists of “‘orchestrating’ the ‘voices’ within ourselves that speak from different I-positions” (Buitelaar, 2006: 261) and adjusting the narratives for varying audiences. These different positions relate to processes of ethnic, gendered, and classed identification. Thus, intersectionality can be explored by examining how people stress their different affiliations in their life-stories.

We agree with Prins and Buitelaar's arguments for considering life-story narratives as an important methodological approach in intersectional analysis. We furthermore emphasize that life-stories are important for grasping the complex processes of identification and positioning. However, it is also important to be critical towards some versions of life-story methodology, which seem to draw upon an empiricist or authenticist idea of simply “telling it like it is”. Ramazanoglu and Holland discuss the problems inherent in such feminist truth claims (2000). They are sceptical towards the idea that feminist researchers can simply know the objective truth—but equally sceptical towards the endless regression of problematizing how any kind of knowledge is possible. Consequently, they argue that a critique of the tacit assumptions of knowledge production is necessary but “cannot *replace* investigation of social life” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2000: 210), as gender researchers need knowledge about “what power relations actually impinge on real people's life” (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2000: 207). Following their argument, we maintain that life-story narratives do contain important actual information, while it is *also* important to stress that such narratives can be analysed as representations. Therefore it is of central concern to intersectionality research *both* to take the actual information given in such narratives seriously *and* to analyse how gender, class, ethnicity, etc. intersect in the discursive construction of meaning. Furthermore, we stress that producing knowledge about intersectionality from life-story narratives is not antithetical to an analytical awareness of social structures. On the contrary, life-histories contain information about subjectivity and collective processes as well as social structures and institutions (Connell, 1995: 89; Phoenix, 2011: 138). Consequently, we consider life-stories to be an important way of empirically approaching not only constructions of identities but also the role that social structures play in people's lives.



Because the project is rooted in a particular locality, one of the main themes of the life-story narratives is belonging to places, which is not only about the feelings of belonging to Aalborg East, but also about changing and multiple belongings to different places in a life-history perspective. We use the conceptual metaphors of roots and routes to frame the relationship between mobility and belonging to places and argue that there are both roots and routes in people's lives, and that the dynamic between movement (voluntary or forced), security and continuity is central to the belongings that frame people's lives (Gustafson, 2001; Bauman, 2004). The interplay between roots and routes is particularly important in contemporary society, where globalization and increased migration are challenging local and national communities through diversity, multiculturalism, and transnationality (Kymlicka, 1995; Beck, 2002).

In our intersectional approach to roots and routes we have emphasized the majority-inclusive perspective in the sense that we consider it important to grasp variations in belonging to places both between and within ethnic majority *and* ethnic minority groups. This means that the theme of roots and routes is relevant for ethnic Danes as well as for ethnic minorities, although the power relations involved are necessarily experienced as different. The core of the majority-inclusive principle is to not leave the unmarked and privileged unresearched, and consequently it is important to bring the roots and routes of white ethnic Danes into focus. By doing so we have obtained rich information about ethnic Danes and ethnic minorities, but also about power relations as well as the potential for empowerment for some ethnic minorities.

In the following, we illustrate how the roots and routes theme allows us to bring intersecting categories into play in order to understand processes of identification and belonging. We start by looking at two minority women:

#### *Four narratives about roots and routes*

*Jasmina*, 25 years old, has lived in Denmark for almost 20 years. She was born in Somalia and raised by her maternal grandmother, while her parents studied at a European university. When the parents returned to Somalia the father felt obliged to become a soldier. The parents divorced and the mother, *Jasmina*, and two younger siblings fled to Denmark where they ended up in Aalborg after a couple of years in different refugee camps. *Jasmina* has family in Sweden, Canada, and the US, and she knows many Somalis around the world. She speaks five languages and has visited several countries. She has often visited Somalia but does not want to move back due to the chaotic situation in the country. *Jasmina* feels at home in Denmark and wants to stay.

*Ayaan* is 43 years old and came to Denmark about 15 years ago. She fled the war in Somalia, where she suffered serious physical injuries and lost close relatives. *Ayaan* is alone with her ten children. Most of her family now lives in Sweden. When *Ayaan* came to Denmark, she asked to be placed in Copenhagen to be close to her family in Sweden, but her request was not granted. *Ayaan* never wanted to live in Aalborg, and she did not choose to live in Aalborg East. She has been alone and has had trouble settling into the neighbourhood. Her husband visits occasionally, and the children sometimes visit him, but it is difficult to find the money for many trips.

Despite their common roots in Somalia, the two women's narratives about roots and routes differ significantly. Different dimensions of class play a role in understanding these differences. Class as social position is relevant because Jasmina, unlike Ayaan, comes from a relatively well-off and educated family. During her upbringing in Somalia, Jasmina's family had resources and a relatively high status. This class position was to some extent brought with them to Denmark, where Jasmina and her family have experienced better conditions and more possibilities than Ayaan. There are two dimensions to this social position: *Firstly* class as economy matters insofar as Jasmina and her family have had the economic means to travel. *Secondly* class as educational background is important, as Jasmina's family background in a well-educated family has equipped her with resources in terms of language skills. Class also matters in terms of identity as Jasmina expresses a strong awareness of her privileged class position compared to many other Somalis. The combined effect of these dimensions of class is to give Jasmina better conditions than Ayaan in terms of being voluntarily mobile and creating positive belongings to new and multiple places. In addition, the category of age plays a large role. Jasmina is 20 years younger than Ayaan and went to school in Denmark, which gives her access to positions that Ayaan cannot occupy.

These are two women's lives—both framed by the war in Somalia and their escape to Denmark. We see how their experiences and a self-perception as being members of an ethnic minority are closely related to gender, but are also intertwined with class and age.

Now, let us turn to two ethnic Danes:

*Søren* is 50 years old and has lived almost his entire life in Aalborg, the past 20 years in a villa in Aalborg East. Søren is married and has two grown children. His circle of friends is rooted in Aalborg. For Søren, having always lived in the same place is an advantage: your friends are close by and you can socialize with people you have known since school. Søren and his wife also socialize with their neighbours. Søren has a brother, but he lives in Odense,<sup>3</sup> so they mostly see each other at Christmas and large family events. He goes on vacation to other countries a couple of times a year—Grand Canaria, Cyprus, and Malta, and camping in Southern France. Søren feels attached to his residential area in Aalborg East, but he does not use other parts of Aalborg East.

*Karen* is in her mid-40s. She has lived in a terraced house in Aalborg East for seven years. Her husband is a fireman in Greenland (two months away, one month at home). They have two school-age sons. Karen spent a large part of her childhood in Greenland where she learned the language and “felt very Greenlandic”. As an adult she has visited Greenland many times. She returned to Denmark because she feels it is important that her children attend a Danish school and are close to their family while they grow up. Karen's brother lives in Norway, and they visit him fairly often. So, although Aalborg is their base, the family has frequent contact with other parts of Denmark and other countries. If Karen did not have children, she would live in Greenland or southern Europe, not in Denmark. However, she likes living in Aalborg.

The ethnic Danish narratives differ from those of the Somali through the absence of the specific migratory conditions that characterize refugees. In that sense, the two ethnic Danes speak from a privileged position. Still, the differences between Søren



and Karen are striking. Søren's narrative and feelings of belonging are closely related to Aalborg, and he positions himself as anchored in Aalborg as a locality. His social relations are rooted here in the form of old friendships, whereas the fact that his brother lives a three-hour car drive away in Odense is seen as a barrier to regular contact. Karen expresses satisfaction with her life in Aalborg East, but she also mentions strong ties to Greenland and overlapping belonging to places. She is used to moving around and to maintaining close relationships across distances.

Our use of the concept of roots and routes in the analysis of life-story narratives illustrates how the majority-inclusive principle can have implications for designing intersectional analysis research. In our data, the most obvious differences are between those who have been forced to flee and those with more options. However, both groups display very different relations to place and mobility. The theme of roots and routes therefore focuses on an often-neglected dimension in "ordinary" ethnic Danes' lives, and we see how belonging to places is constructed in fundamentally different ways in the two ethnic Danes' lives. There are also large differences between the two Danish-Somali women. As a starting-point they are both underprivileged because of their minority status, but Jasmina has class-based resources that condition empowerment.

This example shows how addressing the same themes in relation to different groups can challenge established perceptions of, for example, who is modern and who is traditional. Media discourses often portray Somalis as leading deeply traditional lives (Fadel et al., 1999; Kleist, 2006; Fangen, 2007), but this analysis indicates that the female Somali informants are often far less traditional than many Danish informants, presupposing that modernity encompasses transnationality and mobility.<sup>4</sup> In other words, the analysis disrupts the doxic understanding of third-world immigrants as traditional and Danes as modern. It thus illustrates that majority-inclusive intersectionality research can meet Gullestad's requirement of breaking down the dichotomy between "us" and "them" by focusing on differences not only between, but also within, minority and majority groups (Gullestad, 2002, 2006). Furthermore, our analysis is both intra-categorical and inter-categorical in the sense that it examines differences between as well as within ethnic groups (McCall, 2005).

### **Everyday life as a point of departure**

As outlined above, one of the methodological questions addressed in the literature on intersectionality has been how to produce knowledge about processes where gender, class, and ethnicity mutually constitute each other in a non-additive way. To some degree this problem of non-additivity is a "desk problem": the social world is not neatly divided into class, gender, ethnicity, etc., although the division of academic labour into specialized discrete disciplines might lead one to think so. We will argue that one way to circumvent the problem of non-additivity could be to focus on everyday life. Everyday lives are rarely—if ever—separated into processes related to gender, processes related to ethnicity, and processes related to class. On the contrary, everyday life is a *melting-pot* (Gullestad, 1989), and it must be seen as a condensation of social processes, interactions, and positions where intersecting categories are inextricably linked.

The concept of everyday life has been a foundational but also contested concept within feminist research (Smith, 1987; Bech-Jørgensen, 1994). In two of her last books Marianne Gullestad, who for three decades was one of the most prominent Scandinavian researchers into gender and everyday life, criticizes her own “bottom up” perspective. She argues that everyday life research should challenge existing prejudices. Gullestad suggests a more critical focus on prevalent everyday knowledge and a better analytical approach to power relations in everyday life by focusing on the interplay between gender, race, ethnicity, and social class (Gullestad, 2002, 2006). Consequently, everyday life can methodologically be considered non-additive and conditioned by power relations.

Another methodological argument for using everyday life as a point of departure in intersectional analysis is that it makes it possible to ask about categories such as gender, class, and ethnicity *indirectly*, and not as abstract categories. It is a basic methodological challenge in qualitative research to ask about social categories without simultaneously constructing them. For example, gender researchers have pondered over how to ask about gender without reproducing gender stereotypes (cf. Chase, 1995). Likewise, it is difficult to ask about class, which today is often euphemized or—especially the working class—associated with negative rather than positive identifications (Skeggs, 1997, 2004; Faber, 2008; Faber & Prieur, 2012). Finally, in research on ethnicity, the danger consists of exoticizing, othering, and stereotyping ethnic minority groups (Diken, 1998; Gullestad, 2002, 2006; Jensen, 2007). The point is that gender, class, and ethnicity are associated with different types of risks of reproducing prejudices and stereotypes if addressed directly in an interview (Højgaard, 2010).

The challenge of (re)producing categories can be met by addressing concrete phenomena from everyday life. One way to do this can be to analyse face-to-face interactions and everyday processes. For this purpose we find the concept of respectability useful. We are thus inspired by British sociologist Beverley Skeggs, whose analyses of English working-class women show that respectability is an important symbolic marker in terms of connecting with dominant norms in everyday life. Respectability involves behaving properly and disidentifying<sup>5</sup> from groups that are perceived as less respectable. Respectability can therefore be a relevant concept in analysing processes of social relations, belonging, and identity, and the intersection between gender and class is often rooted in perceptions and praxis in relation to respectability (Skeggs, 1997).

In general, it is important to the residents of Aalborg East that their neighbourhood be seen as respectable. However, the ways in which respectability is constructed are closely related to gender, class, and ethnicity. Below, we exemplify the merit of taking everyday life as a point of departure by addressing two women’s narratives about respectability and neighbourhood relations (see also Christensen, 2009).

*Grethe* is an ethnic Danish woman in her early 60s; she worked as a shop assistant, but has now taken early retirement like her husband, and they live in a villa zone in Aalborg East. The theme of respectability is present when Grethe talks about differences between people in the neighbourhood. Many foreigners have moved in, and she explains that this is fine with her if only they maintain their house and garden. She can’t understand why they want a house if they don’t keep up the garden.

Grethe thinks that gardens should be maintained according to certain norms. For example, she finds it horrible when her Chinese neighbours put up a lot of “glitter” for Christmas. If people don’t keep their gardens properly, they might as well live in an apartment. Asked whether the people in the villas are different from the people in the apartment blocks, she talks about ethnic Danes who fight a lot and shout at each other. In Grethe’s opinion, they might as well live in the blocks.

Grethe constructs respectability as living up to the standards for gardens and proper behaviour suitable to living in a villa. If you don’t behave properly, you might as well live in the blocks. This indicates an opposition between those who live in apartments and those who live in villas. These are cleavages both between and within different ethnic groups. There are also ethnic Danes who do not live up to the standard for respectable behaviour in the residential area. In our interpretation, Grethe’s account contains a euphemized class motif in the sense that the others, those who might as well live in the blocks, are described as behaving in a vulgar and inappropriate way regardless of their ethnicity but dependent on their lower-class position. This is reminiscent of what Bourdieu calls distinction, i.e. a tendency to look with disdain upon the behaviour and culture of those who are positioned lower in social space (Bourdieu, 1984/1979; cf. Skeggs, 2004).

*Samira* is 40 years old, Palestinian, and studying to become a teacher. She has lived in Denmark for 14 years, the last 11 years in the same apartment in Aalborg East. Samira is happy with the neighbourhood, and she thinks her neighbours are considerate of each other despite the diversity. However, Samira is critical of other parts of Aalborg East; she mentions that the people who live on the other side of the large road that cuts the neighbourhood in two are different and that the youth there bears part of the blame for the negative publicity about the area.

Samira emphasizes parents’ responsibility for their children. She notices how parents raise their children. It angers and saddens her if she encounters “Arabs” who don’t know how to be good parents. For Samira, the boundary between the respectable and the non-respectable is related to motherhood and parenthood as she distances herself from minority families who do not live up to her norms for responsible parenting. The boundary is also related to locality in the sense that she mentions parts of Aalborg East where parents do not take proper care of their children. In Samira’s case, distancing herself from others in the area is mediated through parenthood.

It is worth noting that both Samira and Grethe construct boundaries within their own ethnic groups: Grethe distances herself from ethnic Danes who do not behave properly, and Samira distances herself from “Arabs” who do not take good care of their children. We see various demarcations in Aalborg East—both in relation to other areas of the city and internally within the area: villas versus blocks, and among streets. Within the villa zone, upkeep of gardens plays a large role as a symbolic indication of the area’s respectability.

The analysis above illustrates the ways in which addressing respectability as an aspect of everyday life produces knowledge about intersectionality. In our material, respectability is constructed as being about norms for the upkeep of gardens, parenting, and taking up too much of the common space by shouting and being noisy. But the dynamic interplay between gender, class, and ethnicity to a large degree influences who is constructed as displaying respectable or vulgar behaviour.

## Conclusion

The point of departure for this article is the methodological challenges of doing intersectional analysis. In the literature on intersectionality this has so far primarily been discussed in terms of non-additivity, the status of categories, the number of categories, and the majority-inclusive principle. However these are quite abstract methodological reflections, and their implications in terms of concrete research design need to be developed. Here we have argued for the relevance of life-story narratives, which we consider valuable in producing data about processes of identification and social structures. We have also argued in favour of taking everyday life as a point of departure, perceiving it as a melting-pot where intersecting categories are inextricably linked.

Strictly speaking, neither life-stories nor analyses of everyday life are new methods in feminist research. However, we have argued that they can be considered central to intersectionality research.

We have demonstrated how we are practising intersectional analysis with two examples from our research. Our treatment of life-story narratives illustrates how these can illuminate the complexities of gender, class, and ethnicity in relation to the construction of belonging and roots and routes. Our accounts of respectability and people's everyday social relations in their neighbourhood illustrate how everyday life can be an entry point into understanding the complex local interplay where processes of gender, class, and ethnicity constitute each other in a non-additive way.

In both analyses we have emphasized the majority-inclusive principle, which implies that both ethnic minorities and the ethnic majority are included. Consequently our informants speak from both marked and unmarked positions. As a starting-point these differences are important for understanding power relations within the life-stories as well as in everyday life. On the other hand, the analyses show that inter-ethnic differences both within minority and majority groups are also important. For ethnic minorities this is significant in relation to education and different dimensions of classed identities as well as in constructing respectability and good parenting. Among ethnic Danes, belonging to places is constructed so differently that it might challenge the construction of "us" and "them" in the sense that ethnic Danes do not make up a homogeneous group. We have also noted how ethnic Danes construct boundaries within their own ethnic group if people do not live up to their standards for respectable behaviour in the neighbourhood.

These examples have produced complex knowledge and have disrupted common perceptions about certain groups. These disruptions can challenge the Danish discourses about "us" and "them"—e.g. the construction of ethnic Danes as modern and ethnic minorities as traditional. Thus we argue that the inclusion of unmarked categories is crucial in intersectional research in order to problematize power relations and question the doxic understandings about *differences between* and *homogeneity within* categories.

Finally, let us return to two of the basic debates in intersectional research, namely the question of different approaches to social categories and the question of the number of categories. Concerning the first question, we have combined two of McCall's approaches in the sense that our analysis has been both intra-categorical and inter-categorical. In other words, we have analysed differences between as well as

within ethnic groups (McCall, 2005). We consider it fruitful, and often necessary, to work with different kinds of intersectional analysis in empirical research. Concerning the strategic choice of the three categories of gender, class, and ethnicity, it is a significant conclusion that the category of ethnicity has a much stronger effect than expected, primarily because discursive ethnification has a huge impact on everyday life in the neighbourhood we studied. But at the same time the analysis emphasizes that processes of ethnification are closely related to other categories, for instance classed notions of respectability and perceptions of minority women vis-à-vis men.

To us, intersectionality is an analytical concept that is useful for analysing and understanding differences and multiple inequalities in contemporary societies at both the macro- and the micro-level. But the method of practising intersectionality must be related to power relations, in particular locations and contexts. In other words, there is more than one way of doing intersectional analysis. Thus, we do not want to universalize our considerations. However, it is our hope that our reflections can inspire other researchers striving to do empirical intersectional analysis and that our considerations can be a source of inspiration for other specific research purposes.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It can be argued that intersectional thinking predates the construction of the actual term “intersectionality”. For decades, black feminists in the USA and Britain have worked with the interplay between gender and race (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983; Combahee River Collective 1983; Collins, 1989; hooks, 1989). Likewise, Marxist feminists have emphasized the interplay between gender and class (Hartman, 1981; Walby, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Aalborg is a medium-sized provincial city in northern Denmark with approximately 120,000 inhabitants.

<sup>3</sup> Odense is approximately 250 km from Aalborg.

<sup>4</sup> There are reasons for working towards more complex understandings of mobility as a trait of contemporary society. We are thus critical of John Urry’s arguments that the sociological focus on territories should be replaced by flow (2000). There is a danger that this type of statement will construct people with relatively limited mobility as non-contemporary (Skeggs, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> The concept of disidentification (Skeggs, 1997) and the derived verb “to disidentify” denotes a marked distancing from identity categories and thereby differs from a merely indifferent absence of identification.

## References

- Andreassen, Rikke (2005) *The Mass Media’s Construction of Gender, Race, Sexuality and Nationality: An Analysis of the Danish News Media’s Communication about Visible Minorities from 1971–2004* (Toronto: Department of History, University of Toronto).
- Anthias, Floya & Yuval-Davis, Nira (1983) Contextualizing feminism: Gender, ethnic and class divisions, *Feminist Review*, 15 (November), pp. 62–75.
- Bauman, Zygmunt (2004) *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity Press).
- Bech-Jørgensen, Birte (1994) *Når hver dag bliver hverdag* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag).
- Beck, Ulrich (2002) The cosmopolitan society and its enemies, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 19(1–2), pp. 17–44.
- Berg, Anne-Jorunn, Flemming, Anne Britt & Gullikstad, Berit (Eds) (2010) *Likestilte norskheter. Om kjønn og etnisitet* [Equal Norwegiannesses: About gender and ethnicity] (Trondheim: Tapir Akademisk Forlag).
- Bourdieu, Pierre (1984/1979) *Distinction—A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge).
- Buitelaar, Marjo (2006) I am the ultimate challenge, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 13(2), pp. 259–296.

- Carbin, Maria & Sofie, Tornhill (2004) Interseksjonalitet—ett oanvändbart begrepp?, *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 25(3), pp. 111–114.
- Chase, Susan E. (1995) Taking narrative seriously—Consequences for method and theory, in: Ruthleen Josselson & Amia Lieblich (Eds) *The Narrative Study of Lives, Volume 3: Interpreting Experience*, pp. 1–26 (London: Sage Publications).
- Choo, Hae Yeon & Ferree, Myra Marx (2010) Practicing intersectionality in sociological research: A critical analysis of inclusions, interactions, and institutions in the study of inequalities, *Sociological Theory*, 28(2), pp. 129–149.
- Christensen, Ann-Dorte (2009) Belonging and unbelonging from an intersectional perspective, *Gender, Technology and Development*, 13(1), pp. 21–41.
- Christensen, Ann-Dorte & Siim, Birte (2006) Fra køn til interseksjonalitet—interseksjonalitet i en dansk/nordisk kontekst [From gender to intersectionality—intersectionality in a Danish/Nordic context], *Kvinder, Køn og Forskning*, 15(2–3), pp. 32–42.
- Christensen, Ann-Dorte & Siim, Birte (2010) Citizenship and politics of belonging: Inclusionary and exclusionary framings of gender and ethnicity, *Kvinder, Køn og Forskning*, 19(2–3), pp. 8–18.
- Collins, Patricia Hill (1989) The social construction of Black feminist thought, *Signs*, 14(4), pp. 745–773.
- Collins, Patricia Hill (1993) Toward a new vision: Race, class and gender as categories of analysis and connection, *Race, Sex & Class*, 1(1), pp. 25–46.
- Collins, Patricia Hill (1998) It's all in the family: Intersections of gender, race and nation, *Hypatia*, 13(3), pp. 62–82.
- Combahee River Collective (1983) The Combahee River Collective Statement [dated 1977], in: Barbara Smith (Ed.) *Home Girls, A Black Feminist Anthology* (New York, NY: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press).
- Conaghan, Joanne (2009) Intersectionality and the feminist project in law, in: Emily Grabham, Didi Herman, Davina Cooper & Jane Krishnadas (Eds) *Intersectionality and Beyond—Law and the Politics of Location*, pp. 21–48 (Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish).
- Connell, R. W. (1995) *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press).
- Connell, R. W. (2006) Hegemonic masculinity—debates about the concept, Keynote presentation at the research seminar Masculinity and Power. Aarhus University, 15 May.
- Cosslett, Tess, Lury, Celia & Summerfield, Penny (2000) *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* (London: Routledge).
- Crenshaw, Kimberle W. (1989) *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Legal Forum).
- Crenshaw, Kimberle W. (1991) Mapping the margins—Intersectionality, identity politics and violence against women of color, *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), pp. 1241–1299.
- de los Reyes, Paulina & Mulinari, Diana (2005) *Interseksjonalitet*[Intersectionality] (Malmö: Liber).
- Diken, Bülent (1998) *Strangers, Ambivalence and Social Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate).
- Faber, Stine Thidemann (2008), På jagt efter klasse [Looking for class] [PhD dissertation] (University of Aalborg).
- Faber, Stine Thidemann & Prieur, Annick (2012) Parler des classes dans une société présumée égalitaire. Les représentations des inégalités dans une ancienne ville ouvrière danoise, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 191/192, pp. 133.
- Fadel, Ulla Holm, Hervik, Peter & Vestergaard, Gitte (1999) De “besværlige” somaliere [The “troublesome” Somalis], in: Peter Hervik (Ed.) *Den generende forskellighed* [The unpleasant difference] (Copenhagen: Hans Reitzel Publishers).
- Fangen, Katrine (2007) Breaking up the different constituting parts of ethnicity: The case of young Somalis in Norway, *Acta Sociologica*, 50(4), pp. 401–414.
- Ferree, Myra Marx (2011) The discursive politics of feminist intersectionality, in: Helma Lutz, Maria Vivar & Linda Supik (Eds) *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, pp. 55–65 (Farnham: Ashgate).
- Grabham, Emily, with Herman, Didi, Cooper, Davina & Krishnadas, Jane (2009) Introduction, in: Emily Grabham, Didi Herman, Davina Cooper & Jane Krishnadas (Eds) *Intersectionality and Beyond—Law and the Politics of Location*, pp. 1–17 (Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish).



- Gressgård, Randi (2008) Mind the gap: Intersectionality, complexity, and “the Event”, *Theory and Science*, 10(1), pp. 1–16.
- Gullestad, Marianne (1989) *Kultur og hverdagsliv: På sporet av det moderne Norge* [Culture and everyday life: On the track of modern Norway] (Oslo: Oslo University Press).
- Gullestad, Marianne (2002) *Det norske sett med nye øyne. Kritisk analyse av norsk innvandringsdebatt* [A fresh look at the Norwegian: Critical analysis of the Norwegian immigration debate] (Oslo: Oslo University Press).
- Gullestad, Marianne (2006) *Plausible Prejudice: Everyday Practices and Social Images of Nation, Culture and Race* (Oslo: Oslo University Press).
- Gustafson, Per (2001) Roots and routes: Exploring the relationship between place attachment and mobility, *Environment and Behavior*, 33(5), pp. 667–686.
- Hancock, Ange-Marie (2007) Intersectionality as a normative and empirical paradigm, *Politics & Gender*, 3(2), pp. 248–254.
- Hartman, Heidi (1981) The unhappy marriage of Marxism and feminism, in: Lydia Sargent (Ed.) *Women and Revolution* (London: Pluto Press).
- Hearn, Jeff (2011) Neglected intersectionality in studying men: Age(ing), virtuality, transnationality, in: Helma Lutz, Maria Vivar & Linda Supik (Eds) *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, pp. 89–104 (Farnham: Ashgate).
- Hervik, Peter (2004) The Danish cultural world of unbridgeable differences, *Ethnos*, 69(2), pp. 247–267.
- Hornschied, Antje (2009) Intersectional challenges to gender studies—gender studies as a challenge to intersectionality, in: Cecilia Åsberg, Katherine Harrison, Björn Pernrud & Malena Gustavson (Eds) *Gender Delight: Science, Knowledge, Culture and Writing ... For Nina Lykke*, pp. 33–46 (Linköping: Linköping University).
- Højgaard, Lis (2010) Kan man interviewe sig til viden—om køn? [Can you interview your way to knowledge—about gender?], *Dansk Sociologi*, 21(1), pp. 9–25.
- hooks, bell (1989) *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Cambridge: South End Press).
- Jensen, Sune Qvotrup (2006) Hvordan analysere sociale differentieringer? [How do you analyze social differentiations?], *Kvinder, Køn og Forskning*, 15(2–3), pp. 70–79.
- Jensen, Sune Qvotrup (2007), Fremmed, farlig og fræk: Unge mænd og etnisk/racial andenhed—mellem modstand og stilisering [Foreign, dangerous and provocative: Young men and ethnic/racial otherness—between resistance and stylizing] [PhD dissertation] (University of Aalborg).
- Jensen, Sune Qvotrup & Elg, Camilla (2010) Intersectionality as embodiment, *Kvinder, Køn og Forskning*, 19(2–3), pp. 30–40.
- Kleist, Nauja (2006), Spaces of recognition [PhD dissertation] (University of Copenhagen).
- Knapp, Gudrun-Axeli (2005) Race, class, gender: Reclaiming baggage in fast traveling theories, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 12(3), pp. 249–265.
- Kymlicka, Will (1995) *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Ludvig, Alice (2006) Differences between women? Intersecting voices in a female narrative, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), pp. 245–258.
- Lutz, Helma (2002), Intersectional analysis: A way out of multiple dilemmas?, Paper presented at The International Sociological Association Conference, Brisbane, July.
- Lutz, Helma, Vivar, Maria & Supik, Linda (2011) Framing intersectionality: An introduction, in: Helma Lutz, Maria Vivar & Linda Supik (Eds) *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, pp. 1–22 (Farnham: Ashgate).
- Lykke, Nina (2003) Intersektionalitet—ett användbart begrepp för genusforskningen [Intersectionality—a useful concept in gender research], *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 24(1), pp. 44–55.
- Lykke, Nina (2005) Nya perspektiv på intersektionalitet. Problem og möjligheter [A new perspective on intersectionality: Problem and possibilities], *Kvinnovetenskaplig Tidskrift*, 26(2–3), pp. 7–17.
- McCall, Leslie (2005) The complexity of intersectionality, *Signs*, 30(3), pp. 1771–1800.
- Mørck, Yvonne (2005) Intersektionalitet og diversitet—Fadimesagen [Intersectionality and diversity—the Fadime case], in: Henning Bech & Anne Scott Sørensen (Eds) *Kultur på kryds og tværs* [Crisscross Culture], pp. 65–87 (Århus: Forlaget Klim).
- Nash, Jennifer C. (2008) Re-thinking intersectionality, *Feminist Review*, 89(1), pp. 1–15.

- Phoenix, Ann (2006) Interrogating intersectionality: Productive ways of theorising multiple positioning, *Kvinder, Kon & Forskning*, 15(2–3), pp. 21–30.
- Phoenix, Ann (2011) Psychosocial intersections: Contextualising the accounts of adults who grew up in visibly ethnically different households, in: Helma Lutz, Maria Vivar & Linda Supik (Eds) *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, pp. 137–152 (Farnham: Ashgate).
- Phoenix, Ann & Pattynama, Pamela (2006) Editorial: Intersectionality, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), pp. 187–192.
- Prins, Baukje (2006) Narrative accounts of origins, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(2), pp. 277–290.
- Ramazanoglu, Caroline & Holland, Janet (2000) Still telling it like it is? Problems in feminist truth claims, in: Sara Ahmed, Jane Kilby, Celia Lury, Maureen McNeil & Beverley Skeggs (Eds) *Transformations—Thinking Through Feminism*, pp. 207–220 (London: Routledge).
- Schierup, Carl-Ulrik (1993) *På kulturens slagmark* [On the battlefield of culture] (Esbjerg: Sydjysk Universitetsforlag).
- Simien, Evelyn M. (2007) Doing intersectionality research: From conceptual issues to practical examples, *Politics & Gender*, 3(2), pp. 264–271.
- Skeggs, Beverly (1997) *Formations of Class and Gender* (London: Sage).
- Skeggs, Beverly (2004) *Class, Self, Culture* (London: Routledge).
- Skeggs, Beverly (2006) Which bits to exploit? Making value from emotional telling on Reality TV. Presented at the PhD course Intersectional Analysis, Aalborg, 19–20 January.
- Smith, Dorothy (1987) *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston: Northeastern University Press).
- Squires, Judith (2007) *The New Politics of Gender Equality* (New York, NY: Palgrave/Macmillan).
- Staubæs, Dorte (2003) Where have all the subjects gone? Bringing together the concepts of intersectionality and subjectification, *NORA*, 11(2), pp. 101–110.
- Staubæs, Dorte (2004) *Kon, etnicitet og skoleliv* [Gender, ethnicity and school life] (Frederiksberg: Forlaget Samfundslitteratur).
- Staubæs, Dorte & Søndergaard, Dorte Marie (2006) Interseksjonalitet—udsat for teoretisk justering [Intersectionality—theoretical adjustment], *Kvinder, Kon og Forskning*, 15(2–3), pp. 43–56.
- Urry, John (2000) *Sociology Beyond Societies* (London: Routledge).
- Valentine, Gill (2007) Theorizing and researching intersectionality: A challenge for feminist geography, *The Professional Geographer*, 59(1), pp. 10–21.
- Verloo, Mieke (2006) Multiple inequalities, intersectionality and the European Union, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), pp. 211–228.
- Walby, Sylvia (1990) *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Wren, Karen (2001) Cultural racism: Something rotten in the state of Denmark, *Social & Cultural Geography*, 2(2), pp. 141–162.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira (2006) Intersectionality and feminist politics, *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 13(3), pp. 193–209.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira (2007) Intersectionality, citizenship and contemporary politics of belonging, *Critical Review of International, Social and Political Philosophy*, 10(4), pp. 561–574.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira (2011) *The Politics of Belonging: Intersectional Contestations* (London: Sage).

**Ann-Dorte Christensen** is a Professor of Sociology at the Department for Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University. Field of research: gender, intersectionality, citizenship, everyday life, and belonging. Project leader of two research projects: INTERLOC (Gender, Class and Ethnicity: Citizenship and Local Empowerment) and MARS (Masculinity, Risk and Safety). Examples of publications within the area of intersectionality include: Christensen, Ann-Dorte (2009) “Belonging and Unbelonging in an Intersectional Perspective”, *Gender, Technology & Development*, 13(2); and Christensen, Ann-Dorte & Qvotrup Jensen, Sune (2011) “Roots and routes: Migration, belonging and everyday life”, *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 1(3).

**Sune Qvotrup Jensen** is an Associate Professor at the Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, Denmark. He has a PhD in Gender Research, and his current research interests involve gender, intersectionality, urban studies, and subculture. He is a member of CASTOR (Centre for Analysis of Social Transformations) and an affiliated member of FREIA, the Feminist and Gender Research Centre in Aalborg. Examples of publications within the area of intersectionality include: Qvotrup Jensen, Sune (2010) “Masculinity at the margins—othering, marginality and resistance among young marginalized ethnic minority men”, *NORMA—Nordic Journal for Masculinity Studies*, 5(1); and Qvotrup Jensen, Sune & Christensen, Ann-Dorte (2011) “Intersektionalitet som sociologisk begreb”, *Dansk Sociologi*, 22(3).

Copyright of NORA: Nordic Journal of Women's Studies is the property of Routledge and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.