



# Laudation

## 2021 Joni Lovenduski PhD Prize in Gender and Politics

Ashlee Christoffersen's doctoral dissertation '*The politics of intersectional practice: Representation, coalition and solidarity*' focuses on the under-researched area of equality NGOs and their interaction with the field of policymaking. Her research is based on fieldwork conducted with networks of third sectors equality organization in England and Scotland, using interviews, focus groups, observation and document analysis.

The jury awards the **2021 Joni Lovenduski Ph Prize in Gender and Politics** to Ashlee Christoffersen's outstanding dissertation for its intellectual innovation, rigour and depth of commitment to exploring intersectionality in practice. This work fills an important gap in gender and politics scholarship: the operationalization of intersectionality for empirical studies. She shows a firm commitment to drawing extensively on the intellectual contributions of Women of Colour, providing a deep engagement with intersectionality in terms of research, epistemology, ontology, practice and activism. This is a thorough and multifaceted approach that engages with the dilution of intersectionality but does not replicate it.

The findings of this thesis, - in terms of its elaboration of analytical typologies, the incisive application of existing perspectives on representation, solidarity, coalition and agency, and the commitment to meet prescient questions on the short-comings of organisations' uses of intersectionality - mean that they can be applied to study several area of political science, including policy studies, social movements, political parties, interest groups and arenas such as the elections, parliaments and media. The typology of five competing meaning of intersectionality in the field should be a key reference for practitioners of public policies.

Christoffersen builds on these findings, by relating them back to theory in a nuanced and thoughtful manner. For example, she goes beyond the focus on representation to considering who is constructed as a credible knower or activist within organisations. Similarly, she examines the processes of acknowledgement and negotiation of power asymmetries, and how these feed into challenges in 'allyship' in the context of coalitions and solidarity. Christoffersen's thesis also takes risks both in terms of its theoretical approach and its methodology, which includes a commitment to participatory research and reflexivity around her own positionality and privilege. The analytical and methodological approach are sound and clearly



explained, the presentation of the analysis is empirically rich, providing extensive quotes and evidence. The research is rigorous, of high quality, very timely and extremely innovative.

This thesis provides rigorously developed tools to tackle an urgent problem in European feminist political science. Scholars building on her work will find a well-developed intellectual platform that helps avoid the ‘watering down’ of intersectionality and instead moves it much closer to the kind of egalitarian and authentic intellectual position that most feminists aspire to.

## **An honourable mention**

Malin Holm’s *‘The rise of online counterpublics? The limits of inclusion in a digital age’* investigates the reproduction of privilege in the context of (online) platforms. By analysing three case studies of Swedish online platforms, this doctoral dissertation shows that, while the proliferation of online media has lowered barriers to entry the public debate, it has also provided privileged groups with new possibilities to influence dominant public discourse, also through the competition between counterpublics representing differently marginalized groups. Holm skilfully combines network analysis with deductive and abductive reasoning, interpretive and textual analysis, to show how online spaces shape access to the political sphere so that the advantages of groups already enjoying structural privilege are maintained. Her analysis focuses on well-chosen sites - newspaper comment pages, anti-feminist blogs and feminist twitter.

The jury find Malin Holm’s investigation deserves an **honourable mention** for its theoretical innovation to the study of the public sphere and the notions of counterpublics and inclusion. The dissertation offers significant conceptual innovations (including the typology of counterpublics and a new analytical approach to platform affordance). The analysis of counterpublic dynamics is illuminating of how structural and political privilege and disadvantage combine to shape the power to influence public discourse. The rich empirical finding shows that online media have offered new possibilities for the articulation of racist and sexist political projects, and the limits of strategies that focus solely on inclusion. Holm also demonstrates a creative use of a variety of methods (interviews, social network analysis, textual analysis and the co-creation of online material) to capture different aspects of power in online media. This dissertation shows great potential to inform both academic and activist debates on the antifeminist backlash, online activism and the politics of — inequality in the public sphere.