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Gender experts in international governance: Mapping the contours of a field

Hayley Thompson and Elisabeth Prügl

EDITOR'S NOTE

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- 1 Twenty years of gender mainstreaming in international organisations (IOs) has produced an international network of gender experts and a distinctive body of expertise on gender relations. Gender experts have led the development of policies, built capacity through training, designed and implemented projects, pioneered new administrative techniques (such as gender budgeting), spearheaded innovative research, and evaluated interventions geared towards advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. In the process, they have introduced the term "gender" into international politics, built a body of knowledge about gender relations and women's subordination, and fostered the diffusion of such knowledge internationally and its translation into local contexts. They also have formed networks among each other, and they recognise each other's work. In other words, gender expertise has emerged as a professional field.
- 2 Gender experts were conceptualised by movement activists as the Trojan horses of the feminist movement within state bureaucracies. And indeed, early gender experts had to engage in savvy strategising in order to fulfil their mandates in often hostile environments. However, as intergovernmental and international non-governmental organisations have become more receptive to integrating gender, gender experts have

become an asset and a source of epistemic authority. They provide these organisations the credibility to put forward interventions geared towards advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

- 3 We suggest that it is useful to think of gender experts as occupying a transnational social field distinct from (though loosely connected to) the feminist movement. The making of this field has entailed the construction of a form of expertise that takes gender relations as its object and gender inequality as a policy problem to be solved. Following Bourdieu (1999; 2004), we suggest that this field is structured: it has boundaries with barriers to entry, there are different bodies of knowledge about gender relations that are valued differently according to the reputation of those who develop it, and this produces professional hierarchies. Following literature on the sociology of the professions, we suggest that the authority of gender experts depends on developing an ethic in which they become answerable to their professional community rather than to politics or the market (Freidson 2001).
- 4 In order to examine the contours of the emerging field of gender expertise, the Gender Centre at the Graduate Institute conducted a survey of international gender experts from May 2012 to January 2014. The survey was part of a multi-disciplinary, multi-method research project, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, which examined the construction of gender expertise in transnational spaces.¹
- 5 In this chapter we provide a summary of the principal findings of the survey. After problematising the figure of the gender expert through the comments of our respondents, we draw the outlines of the field in three steps. First, we examine the various ways in which individuals have entered the field, asking how one becomes a gender expert. Second, we paint the broad features of the knowledge produced in the field, asking what exactly gender expertise is. Finally, we map the social structure of the field, identifying hierarchies and hegemonies among gender experts. Our purpose is to provide a snapshot of a field in the making, highlighting its struggle for autonomy from political agendas and its groping for an authoritative voice.

The sample

- 6 For the survey, we defined gender experts as individuals who were hired for gender-related work in inter-governmental and international non-governmental organisations (IOs and INGOs). We asked IOs and INGOs to provide us with lists of relevant individuals in their organisations who were hired to work on gender during the previous two years. Some provided us such lists, some offered to forward our questionnaire to relevant staff, while others declined to participate or did not respond to our repeated email messages. We also scoured websites for lists of gender experts and gender focal points and included individuals who were publicly identified as such. Through these various methods we identified approximately 600 individuals with valid email addresses who received our questionnaire.² We sent two reminders in order to increase our response rate. In the end, a total of 118 responses were received—a rate of about 20 per cent. The vast majority of our respondents identified as female with only twelve respondents reporting as male, accounting for 10 per cent of the sample.
- 7 Our sample is fairly representative of the range of organisations and issue areas in international affairs. As shown in Table 1, 25 of our respondents worked in the non-profit sector and 85 in UN agencies. We sampled organisations active in very different

issue areas, but paid particular attention to those working on development, human rights, and conflict – areas in which we planned to do additional qualitative analyses.

Table 1. Gender experts by organisation

	Per cent	Number
Inter-governmental organisations		
International Labour Organisation	14	16
UNWOMEN, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women	14	16
Food and Agriculture Organisation	11	13
International Fund for Agricultural Development	4	5
United Nations Development Fund for Women	4	5
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation	4	5
OHCHR, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights	3	3
UNHCR, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees	3	3
United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations	2	2
United Nations Development Programme	2	2
UN-Habitat, United Nations Human Settlements Programme	2	2
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	2	2
World Health Organisation	2	2
International Training Centre-ILO	1	1
United Nations Children's Fund	1	1
United Nations Conference on Trade and Development	1	1
United Nations Population Fund	1	1
Other IGOs	4	5
<i>Total IOs</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>85</i>
International NGOs		
CARE, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere	8	9

Amnesty International	4	5
DCAF, Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces	3	4
International Alert	2	2
Action Aid	1	1
Human Rights Watch	1	1
International Federation of the Red Cross & Red Crescent Societies	1	1
OXFAM, Oxford Committee for Famine Relief	1	1
Other INGOs or Mixed Organisations	8	9
<i>Total INGOs</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>Total</i>		<i>118</i>

- 8 Because our survey focused on large organisations, we were able to capture experts both at headquarters (often in the North) and those working at regional and country levels. Almost half of our respondents were based at international headquarters, more than a third at regional headquarters, and the rest in a range of countries around the world. Outside international headquarters, 14 per cent worked in the Asia/Pacific region, 14 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa, 8 per cent in Europe, 7 per cent in Latin America/Caribbean, 3 per cent in the Middle East/North Africa, and 5 per cent in other locations – mostly across regions.
- 9 Because gender expertise varies not only by organisation but also by the topics on which experts work, the survey sought to identify the issue areas in which gender experts had been active during the previous two years. Table 2 provides a summary of the responses. The largest group of our respondents worked in the broad field of development (40), followed by human rights (33) and conflict (17). Twelve per cent identified as working primarily on agricultural issues, which is the largest response group, reflecting in part the large number of respondents from the FAO and IFAD. The survey also included experts in a diverse array of other fields, from health to refugees and trade.³

Table 2. Gender experts by main issue area*

Issue Areas	Per cent	Number
Development		
Agriculture	13	15
Development	13	15
Food, Hunger	7	8

Environment	2	2
<i>Subtotal</i>	34	40
Human Rights		
Violence Against Women	12	14
Labour (including social security & cooperatives)	9	11
Human Rights	7	8
<i>Subtotal</i>	28	33
Security		
Conflict and Peace	6	7
Security Sector Reform	4	5
Disaster	3	3
Humanitarian Action	2	2
<i>Subtotal</i>	14	17
Other		
Health	3	3
Finance	3	3
Migration	2	2
Children	1	1
Governance	1	1
Housing, Human Settlements	1	1
International Law (without human rights as a primary focus)	1	1
Refugees	1	1
Reproduction	1	1
Trade	1	1
Other (10 of which “gender mainstreaming”)	11	13
<i>Subtotal</i>	24	28

<i>Total</i>	100	118
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*Note that the broad categories (development, human rights, security, and other) were constructed after the survey. This accounts for the fact that the categories development and human rights appear both as a general category and as a sub-category.

- 10 In sum, our survey of gender experts captures those active in a broad range of issue areas, organisations and geographical locations. However, given its focus on experts hired by international IOs and INGOs, experts in various headquarters predominate.

What is a gender expert?

- 11 Because the project sought to address the role of gender expertise at the international level, we defined gender experts as individuals who were, at the time of the survey, hired for gender-related work in inter-governmental and international non-governmental organisations (IOs and INGOs). This definition narrowed our population, excluding those who only worked for governments, regional organisations, regional or national NGOs, and/or in the private sector; although, those in our population may have worked in any of these concurrently or previously. It also excluded movement activists that were not earning an income through their work in IOs or INGOs. Our definition of gender experts thus presumed a certain level of professionalisation.
- 12 Gender experts have generally been discussed as a monolithic category. However, based on our prior knowledge of gender experts, we assumed there would be differentiation among them and specialisation in issue areas. Our survey supports this understanding. The majority of experts we surveyed were able to indicate a main area of focus in addition to gender. For them, gender is only part of their expertise alongside strong training in fields such as agricultural economics or human rights, and they work to infuse gender into these areas. We propose to call these “gender-and experts,” i.e. they typically identify as experts in gender and something else. They reflect the international mandate to treat gender as cutting across all issue areas.
- 13 But not all of our respondents were able to assign themselves to an issue area. A closer examination of the 84 additional comments provided as a supplement to the survey question summarised in Table 2 shows that 19 respondents identified gender mainstreaming/advocacy as their primary working area over the past two years. This group also accounted for 10 respondents in our relatively large “other” category in Table 2, suggesting that some gender experts do not specialise thematically. For them, gender mainstreaming is the primary expertise. Much of their work is focused on policy development, monitoring, training and other mechanisms to implement gender mainstreaming. We propose to call these experts “gender mainstreaming experts.”
- 14 Early efforts at gender mainstreaming and the implementation of the focal point system in the UN often led to allegations that responsibility for gender mainstreaming was dumped on already overtasked female staff, adding to their main responsibilities and thus marginalising the issue. Our survey contradicts this impression. Among both groups of experts, the vast majority (73 per cent) focused primarily on gender during their work day. In other words, for both groups, gender was the central occupation – for some as they advanced gender mainstreaming, for others as they infused gender considerations into various issue areas.

- 15 While defining our population for the survey required that we specify *a priori* what it means to be a gender expert, we also were interested to learn whether our respondents embraced this identity. We asked whether they would identify themselves “as a gender expert (or gender scholar, advisor, practitioner, analyst, or other similar term suggesting an in-depth understanding of issues of gender in one or more areas).” Eighty per cent answered this question in the affirmative. Many of the additional open-ended responses we received on this question reflected on terminology but broadly accepted a professional identity related to gender expertise. For example:

I would identify myself as a gender expert on a broad number of gender equality issues and also as an adviser/advocate.

- 16 Or:

An investment of a lifetime to understand the concepts and their application in conflict and post-conflict zones at the professional level and the application in day-to-day life at the personal level makes one an "expert" - although I do not personally prefer using the term.

- 17 Many preferred the term “practitioner” over the term “expert.” Others suggested “gender advisor,” “gender analyst,” “gender officer,” and “gender scholar.” A set of different terminologies appeared in the area of training, including “gender and diversity trainer,” and the more specialized “Certified Participatory Gender Audit Facilitator.”

- 18 Many of our respondents referred to their extensive experience as a justification for claiming gender expertise:

I have over 15 years of international experience working on gender issues and women's empowerment.

- 19 And:

Have been working for over 25 years on gender equality, violence against women and related issues. I have a deep practical understanding of gender power relations, how it is supported by patriarchy and the impact that has on the lived realities of women's lives.

- 20 Others also cited academic qualifications, their job profile, as well as recognition by others:

I have a good understanding of gender economics and feminist economic theory. I work in areas that influence policy and actions to advance gender equality globally.

- 21 And:

I was hired because of my academic background in gender studies and gender forms the bulk of my work. Also, within the organisation, I have been involved in internal gender training and our team is a designated contact point for others wishing to mainstream gender into their work. I have been contacted several times in this capacity and have influenced the work of others who do not specifically work on gender.

- 22 But some of our respondents also hedged their bets regarding a claim to gender expertise with statements suggesting they were experts only to a degree. Some recognised limitations deriving from the fact that there is considerable local diversity when it comes to gender equality issues:

Working globally and regionally, it is impossible to be a gender expert of each context – the real experts are the people in the communities whose situation and power dynamics we try to understand – but I consider myself an expert to the extent that I know my way around the “gender knowledge” that exists, am well embedded in the global gender and climate community (through the Global Gender and Climate Alliance as well as academic institutions), have published on the issue myself and am leading on gender and climate within my organisation.

- 23 Others, gender-and experts in particular, hesitated to embrace the label gender expert because of how they saw knowledge of gender as embedded in a specific field:

I am a gender expert to the extent that I have been working on this issue or related issues (i.e. VAW) for 15 years. That is not to say I understand all dimensions of the topic or am even familiar with specialised areas of gender (environmental, population growth, education, healthcare, etc.) outside of my own specialisation – SSR, criminal justice, VAW, etc.

- 24 The professional identity of some gender-and experts was also often filtered through their disciplinary training:

I like to think of myself as a gender practitioner. My background is not gender-related. I have a degree in Law and a degree in International Development but I have worked on gender issues since the tender age of 17. I have therefore accumulated valuable experience on the approach as it relates to development.

- 25 And:

I have dedicated my career to working on women in conflict contexts. While I also hope that I am a “peace and security” expert, certainly my framework is rights, and more specifically, women's rights.

- 26 In some cases, the disciplinary expertise outweighed gender expertise for gender-and experts:

I identify myself as an economist who works on gender issues. I would prefer NOT to identify myself solely as a gender expert because I believe that my work is grounded in my discipline.

- 27 In sum, working on gender equality in IOs and INGOs provides a source of professional identification. What it means to be a gender expert differs depending on whether the experts specialise in processes of mainstreaming or approach gender through issue areas. However, it is clear that gender expertise has become established as a distinctive phenomenon in international administration. Identifications of expertise are based on experience, academic training, and professional recognition. The following section further examines what particular backgrounds lead towards such identifications.

Entering the field: how does one become a gender expert?

- 28 In seeking to ascertain who populates the social field established by gender experts, a first question to investigate pertains to conditions of entry. No doubt each of our respondents had personal motivations for becoming a gender expert. But does the field impose entry requirements? Are there prerequisites for becoming an expert? Does one have to have a degree in gender studies? What are the sources of gender expertise? Does one have to be a feminist?

Becoming an expert through education

- 29 As with professionals more generally, gender expertise is acquired through education and training. Indeed, the gender experts in our survey were highly educated: Over 92 per cent had graduate degrees, with 27 per cent holding a Ph.D.
- 30 But in contrast to other forms of expertise, becoming a gender expert does not seem to require training in a specific discipline. Very few of our respondents have degrees in Women's/Gender Studies. While Women's/Gender Studies is the second-largest category among the primary areas of specialisation for gender experts, it accounts for only 10 per cent of our sample (see Table 3). More generally, gender experts hold degrees from many different fields. The largest category was International Law, which accounted for 11 per cent. International Relations and Development Studies followed Women's/Gender Studies with 9 and 8 per cent respectively.⁴ Next are other social science disciplines (economics, anthropology, sociology, and demography) in addition to education and psychology. Together, these top disciplines account for 70 per cent of the experts in our survey. But our respondents had academic backgrounds as varied as mathematics, archaeology and literature, indicating relatively unstandardised entry into the profession.

Table 3. Areas of primary specialisation (highest degree)

	Per cent	Number
International Law (incl. Human Rights)	11	13
Women's/Gender Studies	10	12
International Relations	9	11
Development Studies	8	10
Economics (incl. Agricultural Economics)	8	9
Anthropology	5	6
Education	5	6
Sociology (incl. Rural Sociology)	5	6

Psychology	4	5
Population Studies/Demography	4	5
Business	3	4
Languages	3	4
Peace & Conflict Studies	3	4
Social Work	3	3
Literature	2	2
Agriculture (incl. Forestry)	2	2
Environmental Studies	2	2
Archaeology	1	1
African-American Studies	1	1
Change Management	1	1
Evaluation	1	1
Geography	1	1
History	1	1
Library Science	1	1
Mathematics	1	1
Political Science	1	1
Public Administration	1	1
Public Health	1	1
Public Policy	1	1
Religion	1	1
Theatre	1	1
	100	118

- 31 Getting a degree is not the only way to acquire academic knowledge about gender, however. Since gender issues have been mainstreamed extensively into some of the social sciences and humanities, more gender experts have taken gender-focused classes than completed degrees. Almost 30 per cent of our respondents indicated that they took at least one gender-focused class at the undergraduate level. This figure increases

to 43 per cent at the graduate level, indicating some specialisation over time. Moreover, almost 30 per cent of gender experts wrote a thesis on gender, mostly at the graduate level. And 13 per cent were able to cumulate their academic work into a certificate. While a significant portion of gender experts has thus received academic training in the field, this still leaves at least 40 per cent that have never had any academic training in Gender/Women's Studies.⁵

- 32 This does not necessarily mean that these experts had never encountered academic knowledge about gender. As one expert commented in our survey:

In my anthropology and sociology studies, gender was integrated into many of the courses, including theory and methods courses. I strongly agree that gender work requires training, but don't think that it is necessary to have a specialised certificate in this...

- 33 At the other extreme, older gender experts went through university when Women's/Gender Studies did not exist – in neither its specialised nor its mainstreamed versions. By definition, these experts would not have received academic training in Women's/Gender Studies; instead they often helped found the field:

When I was in college (master in social sciences) gender/women's studies did not exist; the word gender was not used the way it is now. My gender training came from individual academic research, networking with other researchers, conducting surveys, writing articles, etc. One of my early efforts was to promote gender/women studies and the introduction of these themes into the curriculum.

- 34 These points are all well taken. Yet, it can make gender experts vulnerable to challenges to their authority if their expertise needs no formal credentials. Indeed, according to our respondents, not having academic training was a major source of insecurity about their expert status. Among the 20 per cent of respondents who did not call themselves experts, a salient reason was their lack of specialised training or academic degree. In the words of one respondent:

I would not classify myself as an expert but someone who has worked in this area for several years on programmes with continual acquisition of knowledge on gender.

- 35 Or, in the words of another:

I never studied "gender" as a specific area nor have I obtained academic qualifications in this area. However, through my in-depth work in [my organisation's gender unit] I developed the reflex in my daily work of taking into account the different situations that women and men most often find themselves in and trying to identify the most appropriate way of addressing this inequality. [...] Although I would not qualify myself as a "gender expert", I know that I am recognised by many colleagues as very knowledgeable about gender issues.

- 36 Or, yet another:

I don't have a deep understanding on gender as I never studied this topic in an academic way. My interest in gender issues is much more a consequence of a personal commitment, complemented by gender trainings and sensitisation provided by the NGO I am currently working with.

- 37 While many of the professionals working as gender experts thus have acquired valuable skills and are recognised for their expertise, the absence of academic training generates insecurities about their expert status.

Becoming an expert on the job

- 38 The majority of our experts said that they acquired expertise through their own efforts and through training outside academia. Learning on the job was important for almost all experts (77 per cent) and a large percentage (60 per cent) also indicated that they taught themselves through independent research. In other words, a lot of gender expertise is acquired in an informal manner and through individual, non-structured effort. Yet organised training programmes are also a salient source of knowledge on gender. Experts seemed to extensively take advantage of training offered by their current employer (58 per cent) and former employers (35 per cent) and of programmes offered by the UN (33 per cent) and NGOs (22 per cent). In contrast, university short programmes and executive education types of offerings appear to be somewhat less popular (16 per cent), or perhaps less available. And, 10 per cent of the experts also selected “Other” types of non-university gender training.
- 39 Our survey results suggest that experts largely consider their employers to be supportive of their work. Almost 80 per cent of our respondents stated that the approach, understandings, or priorities of their organisations had helped them to effectively integrate a gender perspective into their work; approximately 45 per cent of our respondents thought that the organisation facilitated their work greatly, and another 33 per cent thought it facilitated their work more so than not. Yet, 10 per cent of our respondents still encountered opposition and resistance to gender mainstreaming, indicating that their organisation had inhibited the effective integration of a gender perspective more than not, or inhibited it greatly. Twelve per cent of the experts had more mixed views on the role of the organisation and remarked that it inhibited their work about as much as it facilitated it.
- 40 Given the small number of respondents from each organisation, we cannot draw any conclusions about which employers are perceived to be more supportive of gender experts. Indeed, those who responded positively on this question came from a broad range of organisations.

Becoming an expert through feminist activism

- 41 Because feminist movement activism was a key force in introducing gender mainstreaming into IOs and INGOs, being a gender expert is often associated with being a feminist. In our survey, 61 per cent of respondents considered themselves to be feminists. Narrative comments showed that for some, feminism and gender expertise were integrally related, as in the case of one who referred to “years of experience as a feminist activist, as a gender mainstreaming expert and as an NGO manager.” Another respondent similarly saw her activism and her policy work as a singular affair:

I have been working on women's rights issues for about 40 years. When gender analysis started to be developed and used in different domains (late 1980s) I worked with this in the area of sexual and reproductive health. Subsequently my approach has been to locate gender role, analysis,

dimensions, inequalities etc. within the more useful framework of human rights. I would describe myself as both an activist and policy analyst in the domain of sexual and reproductive health.

- 42 Yet another of our respondents explicitly saw her feminist activism as formative for developing her expertise:

My interest and passion for women's issues made me venture into gender work. My volunteering work while I was still an adolescent ignited the passion to work in the development sector. My expertise comes not by formal training but mainly by my work in the field with disadvantaged groups and indigenous communities with whom I lived.

- 43 But the connection between feminism and gender expertise is complicated. Sociological literature suggests that experts gain authority by claiming objectivity, which requires that they distance themselves from political and financial interests (e.g. Freidson 2001). In contrast, feminist scholars have criticised abstract notions of objectivity and have argued for a “strong objectivity” that recognises all knowledge as situated and derived from a point of view (e.g. Harding 2004; Haraway 1988). These epistemological tensions also resonate in the comments of self-identified feminists who disliked the label “expert.”

- 44 One concern pertained to the connotations of final authority and closure conveyed by the term “expert.” In the words of one respondent, who called herself a feminist “proudly, loudly, and openly” and who also self-identified as an expert:

But I hate the word expert – so I would use it for job hunting purposes but I am always learning and finding new information.

- 45 Another concern pertained to the way in which the term “expert” seems to privilege those distant from the grassroots.

My experience comes from my deep and close work at the grassroots level rather than only from the textbook. I have worked in tribal and socially disadvantaged areas on gender issues, which has built my foundation for my work. My interest in the subject led me to read and learn from other sources. Today I am recognised in my institution as a grassroots person with strong analytical and gender sensitive programming skills globally.

- 46 But our sample also showed that almost 40 per cent of gender experts rejected the label “feminist.” In our interviews, many of these non-feminist gender experts implicitly recognised that the label weakened their authority, indicating that they found it “unhelpful” in a professional environment, thought it was “irrelevant” to their work, and in some cases rejected feminism for being “too extreme.”

- 47 In our survey, we did not define feminism, but treated it as an identity category. In other words, we called experts “feminists” if they called themselves feminists. Conversely, a non-feminist would be someone who rejected the label “feminist.” But feminism is not just an identity category. It also is a form of knowledge, and those who rejected the label “feminist” did not necessarily reject feminist knowledge. When asked, about half of the non-feminists considered feminist knowledge to be useful, compared to almost all of those who embraced the term feminist.

- 48 Education plays a key role in whether gender experts identify as feminist and thus value feminist knowledge. We found that feminist gender experts were more likely to have had exposure to academic gender studies than non-feminist gender experts: 70 per cent of feminist gender experts had studied gender in a university context, but only 44 per cent of non-feminist gender experts had done so. The starkest difference pertained to having earned a formal degree in the field. Among feminist gender experts, 22 per cent had a degree in Gender Studies, Women's Studies, Men's Studies, Queer Studies, or other such field. In contrast, this was the case for only 7 per cent of the non-feminists. Moreover, among gender experts that did not earn a degree in the field, the feminists had more extensive exposure to gender studies. Forty per cent had taken two or more gender-related classes, written a thesis on a gender topic to meet the requirements of a degree, or earned a gender-focused certificate; this is in contrast to only 26 per cent of non-feminist gender experts. Conversely, minimal exposure was more common among non-feminists. Eleven per cent had just taken a single gender-related class, compared to only 8 per cent of the feminist gender experts.
- 49 In sum, there is no standard path for becoming a gender expert: Experience and activism are sources of motivation and knowledge for many. Highly educated, gender experts also gain knowledge about gender from their academic studies, although only a limited number hold degrees in Women's/Gender Studies. Many also have undertaken efforts to teach themselves. A major source of knowledge is employers, who provide both on-the-job and formal training. Finally, we find an interweaving of feminist identities with a valuing of feminist knowledge, often gained from academic study.

A field of knowledge: What is gender expertise?

- 50 Expertise is an individual attribute that emerges from individual effort, such as activism, education, and training. But expertise also is collective in the sense that experts hold common understandings about the contents of their expertise. Probing the contours of a field of knowledge requires a discursive analysis of documents and language, which we provide in other parts of our project. However, the survey included a question on how often gender experts considered certain issues in their work. The responses say little about the actual content of the work of gender experts, but they allow us to gauge the degree of overlap in their work (see Table 4).

Table 4. In your work on Gender, how often do you consider the following? (in per cent)

	Always Nearly Always	or Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never Nearly Never	or Total %
Women or girls	93	5	0	2	0	100
Inequality Between Men and Women	88	8	1	2	1	100

Gendered Power Structures/ Relations	73	20	5	1	1	100
Particularities of Local Contexts	72	19	6	2	1	100
Discrimination in Society	69	19	9	2	1	100
Discrimination in Laws/ Policies/Programmes	68	26	5	1	0	100
Socially Constructed Differences	68	24	7	2	0	100
Hierarchical Gender Divisions of Labour	63	19	14	3	1	100
Inequality Within Groups of Men and/or Within Groups of Women	56	25	14	3	2	100
Men or boys	43	33	14	9	1	100
Patriarchy	38	28	16	9	8	100
Age	38	30	21	6	5	100
Race or Ethnicity	34	32	22	7	5	100
Class	28	29	25	12	6	100
Biological or Natural Differences	25	16	31	18	10	100
Sexual Orientation	16	17	26	19	22	100
Femininity	14	14	31	25	16	100
Masculinity	11	23	27	25	14	100
Masculinities	11	20	25	27	17	100
Femininities	11	14	25	31	19	100

- 51 What is perhaps most striking about this table is the high degree of agreement in the topics that gender experts address, although they work in very different issue areas and institutions. The vast majority identify women and girls, inequality, gendered power relations, the particularities of local contexts, discrimination, socially constructed differences, gender divisions of labour, intragroup inequalities, and men or boys as topics that they consider in their work frequently.⁶ Structural categories, such as gender divisions of labour and gendered power structures/relations appear almost as often as liberal feminist categories, such as inequality and discrimination. Over two-

thirds of our respondents also identified patriarchy as a topic, a term typically associated with radical and socialist feminist understandings of gender relations.

- 52 In contrast, a minority of gender experts listed femininity/ies or masculinity/ies as topics that appeared in their work frequently. This is surprising since virtually all of our respondents indicated that they dealt with socially constructed differences, and in feminist theory, the notion of social construction is associated with theorising masculinities and femininities. Similarly, we find it surprising that 41 per cent of experts frequently considered biological or natural differences in their work because such differences are often associated with essentialist understandings of what it means to be a woman or man. These seemingly contradictory findings are difficult to interpret; probing their meaning requires additional, qualitative research.
- 53 Ideas of intersectionality, a salient concept in feminist theorising that seeks to overcome essentialist constructions of women as unitary, also figure into the work of gender experts. More than 80 per cent of our respondents indicated that they considered inequality within groups of men or women frequently. In these considerations, the particularities of local contexts played a central role, with over 92 per cent reporting that this was often or always a topic. The categories of age, race/ethnicity, and class similarly are prominent, though somewhat less so, with about two thirds dealing with these issues. Sexual orientation comes up as the stepchild of status distinctions, yet it is still a frequent topic for 33 per cent of our respondents.
- 54 With regard to methods, gender experts extensively practice consultation with stakeholders (i.e. intended beneficiaries, subjects of their research, and/or individuals affected by their work). The vast majority of our respondents said that they have at least some contact with stakeholders, and more than two thirds specified that they always (31 per cent) or often (35 per cent) were able to engage in such consultations. Another 26 per cent of our respondents consulted with stakeholders sometimes, and only 9 per cent rarely, never, or nearly never did so. While a survey cannot capture the quality of the consultations, it does indicate that there is some agreement among experts on the need for and desirability of consultation and participation.
- 55 In sum, the survey paints a picture of considerable agreement among gender experts regarding a core of topics and methods. Given the research instrument, the picture remains somewhat superficial, but it does lend support to the suggestion that gender experts orient their work on each other, that together they construct the outlines of a field of knowledge.

A social field: mapping the contours of hegemony

- 56 Gender experts do not only share knowledge. Collectively, they also establish expertise as a social phenomenon. Employers, universities, and professional associations organise gender experts into a social field structured by rules and standard repertoires, and ordered by hierarchies and power relations. Structures and orders guide the practices of gender experts and define the realm of what it is possible for them to achieve. This section describes some aspects of the way in which the field of gender expertise is structured socially, exploring distributions of influence and networks.

Distributions of influence

- 57 As in any professional field, influence is distributed unevenly in the field of gender expertise. In order to gauge hierarchies, we asked our respondents to name (a) three academics or texts and (b) three gender experts hired by IOs and INGOs, whose contributions they have found most influential and most useful in their work on gender. The answers provided a sense not only of the work considered important but also of the distribution of prestige in the field.

Table 5. Most influential gender scholars

Name	Times Mentioned	Institution	Country
Kabeer, Naila	11	LSE	UK
Moser, Caroline	8	Manchester	UK
Butler, Judith	6	UC Berkeley	US
Agarwal, Bina	5	New Delhi	India
de Beauvoir, Simone	5	Sorbonne (but mostly non-affiliated)	France
Nussbaum, Martha	5	Chicago	US
Elson, Diane	4	Univ. of Essex	UK
Chinkin, Christine	3	LSE	UK
Cornwall, Andrea	3	Sussex	UK
Scott, Joan	3	Princeton	US
Beneria, Lourdes	2	Cornell	US
Boserup, Ester	2	ECE (but mostly non-affiliated)	Belgium
Charlesworth, Hilary	2	ANU	Australia
Cockburn, Cynthia	2	City University, London	UK
Doss, Cheryl	2	Yale	US
Goetz, Anne-Marie	2	NYU	US
Hashimoto, Hiroko	2	Jumonji University	Japan
Heise, Lori	2	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	UK

Kandiyoti, Deniz	2	LSE	UK
Mohanty, Chandra	2	Oberlin	US
Seguino, Stephanie	2	University of Vermont	US

- 58 Of the 176 academics mentioned by our respondents, only 21 appeared more than once, indicating a wide dispersal of understandings of influence (Table 5). With 11 mentions, Naila Kabeer, an economist at the London School of Economics, heads the list by a distance. Kabeer is followed by Caroline Moser (8 mentions) and Judith Butler (6 mentions). Bina Agarwal, Simone de Beauvoir, and Martha Nussbaum follow with 5 mentions each.
- 59 What is perhaps most telling about the list of influential academics is the salience of British scholars. Eight in the list of top-21 scholars work at British institutions, the same number as those affiliated with universities in the US, a much larger country and one which one would expect to provide hegemonic leadership. It appears that British institutions – the London School of Economics (LSE), the University of Sussex, and its affiliated Institute for Development Studies (IDS) – rather than US institutions provide the environment for academic gender expertise to flourish.⁷ LSE is the current and former home of four of the most influential academic gender experts in our survey (Chinkin, Kabeer, Kandiyoti, Moser). Sussex houses one (Cornwall), but two (Goetz and Kabeer) taught there previously. Top-ranking British experts tend to straddle academia and practice – most also consulting with international organisations. Top-ranking US experts more often tend to be known for their theoretical contributions (Butler, Nussbaum, Scott, Mohanty), but not exclusively. Only three of the top 21 academics are from non-Anglophone countries: Belgium (Boserup), France (de Beauvoir), and Japan (Hashimoto). And only one (Agarwal) is located in a country in the South (India), a former British colony.⁸ While this provides an indication of Anglophone hegemony in the international governance of gender, it is important to remember that our survey was conducted in English only.

Table 6. Top producers of gender experts - Universities

	Country	Number
Melbourne	AUS	3
Graduate Institute, Geneva	Switzerland	3
LSE	UK	3
Sussex	UK	3
Cornell	US	3
Harvard	US	3
Australian National University	AUS	2

Tor Vergata University	Italy	2
Universita di Padova	Italy	2
Erasmus University	NL	2
University of Witwatersrand	South Africa	2
Universidad Complutense, Madrid	Spain	2
University of Geneva	Switzerland	2
Cambridge	UK	2
University of Reading	UK	2
Warwick	UK	2
Boston University	US	2
Columbia	US	2
Johns Hopkins	US	2
Yale	US	2
<i>Total</i>		46

- 60 No doubt, some of the accumulation of symbolic capital on display results from the fact that the top scholars identified come from universities that produce gender experts, who in turn are likely to identify their teachers as influential. LSE and Sussex appear among the top five schools at which our respondents earned their highest degree, next to Cornell, Harvard, Melbourne, and the Graduate Institute, Geneva (see Table 6). From the non-Anglophone world, Italian, Dutch, Spanish and Swiss universities make it into the top providers of degrees for gender experts. Regarding universities from the South, only the South African University of Witwatersrand ranks among the top producers of gender experts in IOs and INGOs.
- 61 By far the greatest number of experts in our sample were trained in the US (22 per cent) and UK (18 per cent). Two host countries of international agencies, Italy and Switzerland, followed at a distance with 7 and 6 per cent respectively. Our respondents were also trained in Australia (5 per cent), the Netherlands (4 per cent), Canada, France, India, and Spain (3 per cent each), and in Chile, the Philippines, South Africa, and Sweden (2 per cent each).
- 62 With regard to gender experts inside the organisations, we expected that certain individuals would emerge as leaders in particular issue areas. The data do not confirm this expectation. Table 7 lists the 25 most influential gender experts inside organisations (i.e. those who were mentioned at least twice). When we looked at where the respondents who nominated these individuals were situated, we found that most of our top experts are influential in multiple issue areas. We again encounter some academics who also are consultants: Naila Kabeer emerges at the top here as well, and

Anne Marie Goetz's status no doubt is related to the visibility of her academic work even before joining UN Women. But influential individuals inside organisations also gain authority from their office: The high rankings of both Michelle Bachelet, Head of UN Women at the time of the survey, and Doris Bartel, Senior Director of the Gender and Empowerment Unit at CARE, are no doubt related to the status they held in their organisations and their recognised leadership. When it comes to influence in non-academic networks, issue areas may matter less than organisational affiliation.

Table 7. Most influential gender experts hired by IOs and INGOs by issue area

Name	Institution	Issue Areas				Total
		Development	Human Rights	Security	Other	
Kabeer, Naila	Consultant	1	3	0	3	7
Bachelet, Michelle	UN Women	0	1	0	3	4
Bartel, Doris	CARE	1	1	0	2	4
Goetz, Anne Marie	UN Women	0	0	3	1	4
Quisumbing, Agnes	IFPRI	3	0	0	0	3
Vann, Beth	Consultant	0	0	3	0	3
Barker, Gary	ICRW	0	0	2	0	2
Burns, Kate	OCHA	0	0	1	1	2
Byanyima, Winnie	UNDP	0	0	0	2	2
Connors, Jane	OHCHR	1	0	0	1	2
Cox, Elizabeth	Consultant	0	0	0	2	2
Crowley, Eve	FAO	2	0	0	0	2
Elson, Diane	Consultant	0	1	0	1	2
Fontana, Marzia	Consultant	1	0	0	1	2
Hodges, Jane	ILO	0	0	0	2	2
Martinez, Elisa	Consultant	1	0	0	1	2
Montano, Sonia	ECLAC	0	1	0	1	2
Moser, Caroline	World Bank	0	0	0	2	2
Pillay, Anu	GenCap	0	2	0	0	2
Razavi, Shahra	UNRISD	0	1	0	1	2

Robinson, Mary	OHCHR	0	2	0	0	2
Sandler, Joanne	UNIFEM	1	0	1	0	2
Smyth, Ines	Oxfam GB	0	0	1	1	2
Valasek, Kirsten	DCAF	0	0	2	0	2
Wilde, Vicky	CGIAR	2	0	0	0	2
<i>Total</i>		13	12	13	25	63

Professional Associations and Networks

- 63 Professional associations and networks can play an important role in not only establishing expert authority but also structuring a field. Sixty-seven per cent of our respondents indicated that they were members of a group, network, community, movement, scholarly institution, or association related to their work as a gender expert. While this indicates a high level of organisation, there is very little overlap between the kinds of groups and networks to which our respondents belong. The largest overlap was with regard to AWID, the Association for Women's Rights in Development, making AWID the closest there is to a professional network of gender experts working internationally. However, only six of our experts indicated that they belonged to AWID, and AWID self-identifies as a feminist advocacy and movement organisation rather than a professional network.⁹ The next largest group was GenCap, the Gender Standby Capacity roster run by the UN's Inter-agency Standing Committee for Humanitarian Assistance and the Norwegian Refugee Council; three of our experts reported that they belonged to this network. The vast majority of our respondents listed participation in employer-related groups and networks.
- 64 Professional associations and networks provide sites for an exchange of ideas and for developing shared understandings about what the field's expertise consists of. They allow for discussing expectations with regard to methods and the application of gender expertise. They also offer possibilities for training and for socialisation into the field. Moreover, professional associations can help develop a field's symbolic capital. They create peer-approved standards of quality, define curricula, and bestow recognitions and honours. The absence of shared professional associations and networks among gender experts may be problematic from this perspective.

Conclusion

- 65 Our survey shows that gender experts exist as a professional category and gender expertise as a professional field. It paints a picture of expertise as weakly standardised and the field as loosely structured. There are multiple paths of entry into the field; and while 10 per cent of experts have degrees in Women's/Gender Studies, overall there are no clear academic entry requirements beyond generally at least a Master's degree. With regard to the structure of the field, it is possible to identify the outlines of an unequal distribution of influence, but this is not very pronounced: Gender experts find a broad

range of individuals influential. Experts do not share a strong professional association, which may weaken their opportunity to develop common standards of knowledge, entry, and quality.

- 66 Gender expertise thus can be described as an emerging field whose contours are far from settled. While there appears to be a common problem definition, generally the field operates at the intersection of different social science disciplines. This openness can be an asset because it allows for a continued influx of new ideas. But it can also create competing loyalties for gender-and experts in particular. More problematically, gender expertise is struggling to establish its boundaries from the demands of the feminist movement and from the demands of employers. Again, this can be an asset: Movement activists can link experts to the grassroots, providing them invaluable access to the situated knowledges. And employers have played a seminal role in establishing gender expertise. However, depending on employers to provide core training and to define the professional networks of experts is problematic. It threatens the autonomy of a form of knowledge that should be independent of the political missions of IOs and INGOs. Widespread critiques of gender mainstreaming for allowing IOs to co-opt gender equality goals to their agendas are connected to this dearth of independence. Similarly, while gender experts are “programme professionals” (Wilensky 1964), i.e. they identify with the goals of a programme that has its origins in a social movement, they need independent spaces that allow them to problematize such programmes. The complicated relationship of experts to feminism, identified in narrative comments provided in the survey, suggests the need for such a space. Enhancing the professional autonomy of gender experts should be a priority for those seeking to increase their authority in international governance.

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NOTES

1. The project was directed by Elisabeth Prügl. Team members included in addition to Hayley Thompson (Graduate Institute), Rahel Kunz (University of Lausanne), Christine Verschuur and Françoise Grange (both Graduate Institute). See project website at <http://graduateinstitute.ch/home/research/centresandprogrammes/genre/research/gender-in-international-governan/gender-experts-and-gender-expert.html>
2. The reason we can provide only an approximation of the total is because of organisations that preferred to distribute the survey themselves rather than allow us direct access to their staff.
3. Several additional categories were provided but received zero responses as primary issue areas for survey respondents. These additional categories include: Age, Crime, Education, Finance, HIV/AIDS, Human Resources, Indigenous Peoples, Medicine/Medical Assistance, Personal Status Codes, and Population. Twenty-two respondents (19 per cent) did not identify a provided category as an issue area on which they had primarily worked over the past two years.
4. It might be reasonable to merge the category Peace and Conflict Studies with International Relations, in which case the majority of gender experts (i.e. 12%) have degrees in these fields.
5. This figure is arrived at as follows: 67 of our experts never took a graduate course in Women's/Gender Studies. Of these, 10 took at least one undergraduate course and 9 wrote a gender-focused thesis. Making the conservative assumption that these are not the same people, this means that at least 48 (i.e. 67 minus 19; or 40.7%) of our respondents never got any formal training in Women's/Gender Studies (i.e. they took no classes and wrote no thesis).
6. We use the term "frequently" to merge the categories "always or nearly always" and "often" that appear in the table.
7. The Labour government set up IDS in the 1960s/70s as a think tank on development studies. IDS houses an MA in Gender and Development and is the home of some large-scale research projects on the issue. Movement of personnel between LSE and IDS is frequent and has been described as resembling an "invisible college" (Maitrayee Mukhopadhyay, personal conversation).
8. Kabeer was born in East Pakistan, but her academic work and career have been in the UK.
9. AWID is described on its website (www.awid.org) as "an international, multi-generational, feminist, creative, future-oriented membership organisation committed to achieving gender equality, sustainable development and women's human rights."

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