

Special Issue: Gender Experts and Gender Expertise

EDITORIAL

Introduction: gender experts and gender expertise

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The rise of gender expertise and gender experts as a new profession is a significant and highly controversial phenomenon of contemporary feminist politics. This introductory article provides a contextualisation of this phenomenon, a short review of the literature and a theoretical specification of gender expertise, drawing on insights from the professionalisation and expertise literature. We highlight the importance of studying the politics of gender expertise and interrogate the type of knowledge that it constitutes and its relationship to policy and politics (including feminism). The special issue as a whole shows the varieties and complexities of gender expertise, what it makes possible and what it forecloses, and the disruptions it produces. The contributions adopt different approaches to show: how gender expertise is rent with tensions and divisions; how it is constrained within institutions, networks and policies; and how it produces multiple and sometimes unintended outcomes with powerful political effects.

key words gender experts • gender expertise • global governance • feminism • politics of expertise • gender mainstreaming

Key messages

- Gender expertise knowledge and practice is highly political.
- We interrogate the type of knowledge gender expertise constitutes and its relationship to feminism.
- The special issue shows the varieties and complexities of gender expertise, what it makes possible and what it forecloses, and the disruptions it produces.
- Gender expertise practice highlights spaces for contestation and negotiation.

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Introduction

One of the remarkable outcomes of the feminist movement of the late 20th century has been the development of specialised knowledge about gender relations and the packaging of this knowledge as expertise. Decades of gender mainstreaming have produced a distinctive field of knowledge on ‘gender and development’, which is today taught in university classes and finds application in the policy world. After the United Nations (UN) Security Council passed the landmark Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) at the turn of the century, gender expertise has also strengthened on gender and violent conflict, with new scholarship emerging and findings making it into policy documents (eg Coomaraswamy, 2015). The salience given to gender equality in international policymaking, including most recently the sustainable development goals (SDGs), has raised new demands for gender expertise in areas ranging from health and education, to clean water and climate change. The result has been not only the creation of such expertise, but also the formation of cadres of gender experts around the world who market their ideas in multiple spaces. As these experts define a new body of knowledge, they also establish a new profession. Employed by governments, international organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and businesses, gender experts work to change organisational practices and insert gender considerations into various issue areas and policies. In addition to generating new knowledge, they implement gender mainstreaming, offer specialised training, spread gender-equality considerations throughout organisational structures and seek to bring about social change through the implementation of gender-sensitive projects.

This rise of gender experts and expertise is a significant and highly controversial phenomenon of contemporary feminist politics that has not been sufficiently studied. Existing literature has mostly analysed the phenomenon through a gender-mainstreaming lens, focusing on its successes and failures and the role of gender experts therein. In this special issue, we propose to reframe the conversation and shift the questioning from assessments of gender mainstreaming to exploring gender expertise. This opens space to examine the phenomenon more deeply and understand its varieties and complexities, the way it is organised, what it makes possible and what it forecloses, and the processes it sets in motion. It invites us to embed gender experts and gender expertise in a broader range of literatures on expertise and professionalisation, while bringing to bear feminist insights on these literatures, in particular, reflexivity in the study of expert knowledge and practice.

This special issue was developed in the context of a research project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation on ‘Gender Experts and Gender Expertise’.¹ In the context of this project, we analysed the transnational field of gender expertise and its manifestation in three different development and post-conflict contexts with large gender-mainstreaming initiatives: Colombia, Mali and Nepal. Our multi-method approach combined an online survey with 118 individuals working on gender for international organisations or international NGOs with document analysis, in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork.² Across the three case studies, we carried out approximately 160 semi-structured in-depth interviews with individuals engaged in gender-related work in international intergovernmental organisations and NGOs, as well as local governmental or non-governmental institutions. In the context of this project, we organised a series of workshops and panels and built a network that

allowed academics, practitioners and activists to engage with each other and with our findings. The set of articles in this special issue are the outcome of conversations we have had in this network over the past five years. The articles closely speak to each other in addressing the various dimensions of the politics of gender expertise, while addressing the breadth of the phenomenon from different angles and in different contexts, including international organisations as much as situated encounters with gender expertise in Sweden and France. The issue brings together a diverse set of authors from various disciplinary, linguistic and national backgrounds, and at various stages in their career. In this introduction, we first provide a review of the literature that has made gender expertise an explicit or implicit topic. We then present a theoretical specification of gender expertise, drawing on literature on professionalisation and expertise more broadly. Finally, we outline the key questions addressed in this special issue and summarise the various contributions.

Gender expertise and gender mainstreaming

Gender experts have been an explicit or implicit topic of feminist literature on gender mainstreaming and gender politics (Hafner-Burton and Pollack, 2009; Freedman, 2010; True and Parisi, 2013; Allwood, 2014; Debusscher, 2014; Mergaert and Lombardo, 2014; Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Van Eerdewijk and Davids, 2014). Gender experts are sometimes the ‘insiders’ in explanations that find feminist advances to combine insider/outsider strategies (Hawkesworth, 2006), and sometimes the ‘bureaucrats’ and ‘femocrats’ in feminist triangles of cooperation and influence (Woodward, 2004; Holli, 2008). They populate the ‘women’s machineries’ that have been set up to advance feminist agendas in governments around the world and in international organisations (Jahan, 1995; Goetz, 1997; Miller and Razavi, 1998). They are the Trojan Horses of the feminist movement that have battled patriarchal structures from the inside, learned the master’s tools in the hope of dismantling the master’s house, faced co-optation into state agendas, but also achieved small victories against considerable odds (Baden and Goetz, 1997; Charlesworth, 2005; Moser and Moser, 2005; Benschop and Verloo, 2006; Cornwall et al, 2007; Mukhopadhyay et al, 2007; Cohn, 2008; Prügl, 2009; True, 2009; Eyben, 2010; Bacchi and Eveline, 2012; Brouwers, 2013; Eyben and Turquet, 2013; Davids et al, 2014). The fact that right-wing governments around the world today dismantle or weaken gender machineries and the gender studies programmes that nourish their expertise is perhaps a testimony to the subtle effectiveness of these experts.

Yet, feminist scholars and activists have been critical of the professionalisation of feminist knowledge in governmental institutions. Some argue that gender experts do not have the necessary authority to bring about change towards gender equality and that the translation of feminist ideas into policymaking through gender mainstreaming leads to the evaporation of gender concerns (Moser and Moser, 2005; Porter and Sweetman, 2005). Others critique the lacking accountability of gender experts to feminist activist constituencies, co-opting feminist empowerment agendas (Makibaka, 1995; Baden and Goetz, 1997; Hemmings, 2011). Worse still, gender expertise and experts are suspected of being complicit in entrenching neoliberal agendas detrimental to feminist goals (Fraser, 2009). In this context, gender experts and gender expertise have been accused of technicalising and depoliticising feminist agendas, reducing the struggle for gender equality to checklists, gender-training toolkits or the ‘gender

washing' of policy documents (Mukhopadhyay, 2004; Daly, 2005; Walby, 2005; Desai, 2007; Mason, 2013). Critics fear that because it approaches feminist concerns in apolitical and technical ways, gender expertise no longer serves feminist goals. The concern has also been that gender mainstreaming becomes part of an 'add women and stir' approach (Ertürk, 2004: 6–7) and that gender experts contribute to turning feminist insights into 'managerial solutions' that do not address structural gender inequalities (Desai, 2007: 801).

Critical of the focus on experts and their work, some studies advocate a shift from studying expert groups and what they are doing towards analysing expertise. They adopt the Foucaultian concept of governmentality to explore the performativity of gender expertise (eg Campbell and Teghtsoonian, 2010; Bacchi and Eveline, 2012). This literature focuses on the construction of identities in gender expertise, such as interpellations of women as entrepreneurs invited to self-improve (Kunz, 2011; Altan-Olcay, 2015; Cornwall and Rivas, 2015), as always already vulnerable and victims, or as invariably nurturing peacemakers (Otto, 2006; Shepherd, 2008, 2016). It has also identified how feminist agendas have been recruited for international governance projects. For example, gender considerations have been absorbed into neoliberal forms of governing development and finance (Griffin, 2009, 2013; Prüggl, 2015a), and the UN's WPS agenda connects to (neo-imperial) state projects of counter-insurgency and counterterrorism (Pratt and Richter-Devroe, 2011; Nesiha, 2012; Pratt, 2013). These studies reveal the ways in which gender expertise has been co-opted and depoliticised. Yet, they also contribute to exploring openings for feminist agendas, both in the international arena (Prüggl, 2016; Shepherd, 2017) and perhaps more frequently in contexts of translation where gender expertise meets the complexity of local politics. This literature points, for example, to the way in which gender advocacy has opened spaces for subversive politics in post-tsunami Aceh (Jauhola, 2013) and identifies local forms of resistance to neoliberal formulations of the global remittance trend (Kunz, 2011).

A number of authors who have also worked as gender experts have called for more nuanced analysis and for taking seriously the experiences of gender experts in order to highlight the variety of gender expertise and to tease out the tensions and complexities of their work in sometimes inhospitable institutional contexts (Hertzog, 2011; Jauhola, 2013; Ferguson, 2014; Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Harcourt, 2015; Bustelo et al, 2016). In national contexts, in the 1990s, Australian writers had already coined the term 'femocrats' to describe the ambiguous positioning of these new experts between activism and technocracy (Yeatman, 1990; Eisenstein, 1996), and in the UK context, Ross (2018) has proposed the figure of the 'professional feminist'. In the international arena, Ferguson (2014) draws on first-hand experience as a gender expert to explore what it means to work within the 'business case for gender equality' framework (see also Ferguson, 2019). She warns about the risk that gender expertise may legitimise institutions that pay lip service to gender equality and thereby lend credibility to neoliberal agendas. Yet, she also identifies spaces for feminist politics in gender expertise, such as gender experts discussing feminist issues in their daily practice and influencing agendas in the form of 'microtransformations and unexpected consequences' (Ferguson, 2014: 15). Based on her experience as a gender consultant for a women's empowerment programme as part of a World Bank-funded irrigation project in rural Nepal in 1997, Hertzog (2011) analyses the politics of gender expert interventions. She highlights the dilemmas that she faced as

an (external) gender consultant and the ways in which her activities were shaped by neo-imperial development bureaucracies, contributing to patronising, marginalising and controlling the beneficiaries of women's projects. Hertzog provides an in-depth self-reflexive analysis of the complex power relations involved in gender expert work and identifies spaces of empowerment within this context. In an effort to re-conceptualise the meaning and identity of gender experts, Jauhola (2013: 174) coins the term of the 'queered gender advisor', 'who instead of "knowing gender", would have the task of interrupting the processes of knowing and subverting the normalised understandings of gender'. She challenges the understanding of gender expertise as a form of 'possessive' knowing. Instead, she proposes that gender expertise can be practised as an activity of analysis, deconstruction and provocation, which opens up space to recognise the political potential for displacement, engagement and solidarity in the context of gender expert activity.

The existing literature demonstrates the importance of a critical and reflexive engagement with gender expertise and helps to bring into focus the politics and practice of gender expertise (Kunz, 2017). It shows how the figure of the gender expert epitomises many dilemmas, such as the urgency of action paradox, the instrumentalisation trap and the complicity of neo-imperialism and anti-feminism (see also Kunz et al, 2019). Yet, it also highlights spaces for contestation and negotiation, and exemplifies how critical reflection on our own practices as gender experts or researchers studying gender expertise can open up space to see the political. In short, this literature highlights the importance of studying the politics of gender expertise.

What is gender expertise?

Deciding what constitutes gender expertise is a complex matter. In the context of our research project, we found that many people we interviewed did not like to call themselves 'gender experts', even when they were identified as such by their employers for the purpose of our survey. Some denied that their knowledge was developed enough to be expertise, identified as an expert in gender only in a particular discipline or were uncomfortable with the superior knowledge that the term signalled, referring to feminism's common rejection of hierarchical categorisations. Others denied that it is possible to be an expert on gender issues or invoked particular qualification criteria, such as experience of personal gender discrimination or in fighting against discrimination, diplomas in gender studies, or the capacity to be critical (see Thompson and Prügl, 2015; Ferguson, 2019; see also Hoard, 2015: 45f). Implicit in these hesitations are differing understandings of what makes a true gender expert. Although there were disagreements in the criteria applied to judge this, there was also overlap in our data. Our research reveals that the understanding of gender expertise circles around the following issues: (1) the source and type of knowledge that constitutes gender expertise; (2) the objectives of gender expertise and its relationship with feminism; and (3) the recognition of expertise and the broader context of gender expertise work.

There are few systematic efforts to define gender expertise in the literature. One important exception is Hoard's comprehensive discussion of the role of gender expertise in policy success, which defines gender expertise through the figure of the gender expert. According to Hoard (2015: 12), a gender expert is '(1) an individual with feminist knowledge regarding the cause-and-effect relationship between policies,

actions, and/or activities and gender inequalities, and (2) is formally requested to provide her [sic] knowledge and services'. We take Hoard's definition as a starting point for our discussion of the politics of defining gender expertise. Together with the insights from our interviews, it provides us with an entry point to explore the various dimensions of the phenomenon, leading us to ask uncomfortable questions and complexify the discursive field. In particular, we interrogate what kind of knowledge gender expertise constitutes, the relationship of that knowledge to policy and politics (including feminism), and finally the social space that gender expertise occupies.

Gender expertise as specialised knowledge

In a recent contribution, Cavaghan (2017) insists that gender expertise is different from everyday 'gender knowledge', which she identifies, with Andresen and Dölling (2005), as collective knowledge about gender differences and the reasoning about these differences that inform doing gender (in organisations). In contrast, Collins and Evans (2008: 13) recognise the complexity of everyday knowledge and treat it as a form of expertise, 'which every member of a society must possess in order to live in it'. However, they also draw a distinction between 'ubiquitous expertise' and 'specialist expertise'. Specialist expertise is not required in the same way as ubiquitous expertise, and the number of people holding specialist expertise diminishes with the degree of specialisation. Our challenge, then, seems to be to identify what is specialist about gender expertise.

Hoard (2015: 12) provides one attempt, highlighting that gender expertise is 'feminist knowledge regarding the cause-and-effect relationship between policies, actions, and/or activities and gender inequalities'. Critics, such as Janet Halley (2008) and Nancy Fraser (2009), would presumably agree that gender expertise and 'feminist knowledge' are of one cloth. However, what is one to make of the fact that feminism is endlessly diverse and, indeed, profoundly contested? Furthermore, if this is so, what kind of feminism informs gender expertise? Hoard's definition seems to suggest that it is a positivist kind of feminism that knows about causes and effects. However, the understanding that experts gain authority through their association with positivist science sits uneasily with the critique of such knowledge by some feminists. It implies a god's-eye view that is invariably biased, and it anchors a particular understanding of the relationship of science to society, justifying efforts of intervention and technocratic control. Must gender expertise thus exclude non-positivist feminist knowledge, that is, the knowledge that is taught in most gender studies programmes? Could knowledge based on notions of strong objectivity, feminist standpoints, situated perspectives, experience and alternative visions qualify (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1993, 2004; Hartsock, 1998)? However, if we embrace such notions, do we then not also need to reject the idea that gender expertise is specialised knowledge, that is, different from the everyday knowledge that such approaches want to valorise? Would that then mean, against Hoard, that gender expertise cannot be feminist knowledge?

Not ready to abandon the notion of specialist knowledge as distinctive from everyday knowledge, Collins and Evans (2002: 280; 2008: 5) dismiss standpoint approaches as 'extreme'. They develop a sociological understanding of expertise that does not require positivism. In their understanding, specialised expertise is learned through immersion in expert communities in a way akin to learning a language, creating if not 'contributory', then 'interactional', expertise that allows experts to participate in

discussions. Thus, expertise is the specialised knowledge of those ‘who know what they are talking about’; it is not a matter of academic degrees and may include non-scientists and a broad public. However, unlike with the issues they discuss (HIV/AIDS, colour-blindness, gravitational waves), everybody knows a lot about doing gender to begin with by virtue of having been socialised; everybody seems to know ‘what they are talking about’ when it comes to gender. Thus, reverting to learnedness does not get us out of the cul-de-sac of standpoint epistemologies if we want to hold on to a notion of gender expertise as being more than knowledge about causes and effects. Clearly, whatever the source and form of knowledge that characterises gender expertise, it is different from, but at the same time related to, everyday gender knowledge. For definitional purposes, focusing on the way in which expertise is acquired is not enough. As discussed further later, we also need to understand expertise as a matter of attribution, that is, as a matter of an audience recognising a claim to expertise (Villumsen Berling and Bueger, 2015: 7–8).

Gender expertise as policy expertise

A second point of contestation regarding the understanding of gender expertise concerns its impact and objectives, as well as its relationship with feminism as a political movement. Hoard’s definition emphasises that gender expertise is policy expertise, that is, that it seeks to address the ‘relationship between policies, actions, and/or activities and gender inequalities’, and she explores the conditions that make experts successful. This is also the approach of some of the authors in this special issue. Thus, Dersnah (2019) shows that gender experts were successful in advancing the UN’s WPS agenda by focusing on sexual violence, and Miller (2019) highlights the distinctive impact of different kinds of gender expertise on UN funding practices. The impacts of gender expertise on policy are also the topic of much of the gender-mainstreaming literature reviewed earlier. In these contributions, there is often an assumption that gender expertise is more or less feminist, in the sense that it is more or less successful in advancing gender equality or gender justice.

Indeed, the effects and objectives of gender expertise (whether feminist or not) are varied and sometimes contradictory. Gender mainstreaming and feminist policy machineries yield changes in policy (eg Mazur and Pollack, 2009) and epistemic reframings of problems (eg Lombardo et al, 2009; Kunz, 2016), but they also have power-laden discursive truth effects that may or may not advance emancipatory goals (eg Shepherd, 2008). Thus, expertise, on the one hand, emerges as a source of authority supporting transformative projects, while, on the other hand, setting in motion mechanisms of governmentality that fix fluid realities into exclusionary categories and powerful truths (Prügl, 2011). In this latter sense, gender expertise may not be entirely different from specialised knowledge about gender that does not pursue gender-equality goals, such as, for example, medical knowledge about gender dysphoria applied to correct sex in non-conforming bodies. Both types of ‘gender expertise’ are similar in that they reproduce the gender binary (Repo, 2015). Yet, they differ in that gender policy expertise explicitly seeks to advance gender equality.

Villumsen Berling and Bueger (2015) suggest that expertise occupies a boundary position between politics and science, and that one might want to think of experts as intermediaries negotiating the different temporalities, profits and types of knowledge demanded in these domains. As such, experts also face questions regarding the

legitimacy and ethics of science participating in societal change projects, a central preoccupation in science and technology studies (STS) more broadly (for an overview, see Durant, 2011). Not only do courts and politicians already participate in adjudicating competing scientific claims, but democratic polities increasingly demand that citizens should take an active role in scientific decisions that impact societies. If much of the existing literature has focused on environmental and health policymaking, the question of gender expertise participating in changing societies is clearly pertinent, but it also raises a slew of uncomfortable questions: can and should gender expertise contest highly patriarchal societies? If our intuitive answer is 'yes', what is the source of legitimacy for gender experts to engage in such a project? If positivist science cannot, or can no longer, provide this legitimacy, what can? How does gender expertise negotiate the politics of coloniality that invariably inhabits such a project, especially when it crosses state boundaries?

Coming back to the notion of 'feminist knowledge' that seems to anchor Hoard's definition, perhaps the answer lies in making a link to feminist movements by considering gender experts as accountable to such movements. Through their participation in the production of expertise, feminist movements may democratise it and give it legitimacy. In other words, we come back to the issue of methods. In the field of International Relations, scholars have argued that a key element of feminist methodologies is their close attention to reflexivity, to considering power relations in the research efforts (Tickner, 2005; Ackerly et al, 2006; Ackerly, 2009). Moreover, the feminist literature on gender expertise that we reviewed earlier suggests that reflexivity has relevance not only in research, but also beyond. It highlights the complexities of working in a power-laden field, the tensions that result from engaging with hegemonic conventions, the queering of the role of gender advisor and the micro-politics of co-optation and resistance. Can we find in reflexive expert practices standards of ethical conduct in the same way as we can in reflexive research practices (cf Prügl, 2015b)? Can such gender expertise claim social legitimacy? What would this mean for the relationship between gender expertise and policy praxis? Can reflexive expertise be practical for policy purposes? Perhaps, rather than holding on to an opposition between 'problem-solving' and 'critical' theory (Cox, 1981), the notion of reflexive gender expertise could lead us to recognise the profound problem-solving capacity of critical feminist knowledge, which invites us to approach as a democratic interchange both processes of knowledge production and the application of expertise. Taking feminist methodologies seriously may thus lead us to reconfigure existing notions of expertise and, with it, the relationship between science and society.

Gender expertise as performance and practice

Recognising the relationship of gender expertise to political practice brings into view a range of actors besides Collins and Evans's socialised scientists: movements, governments and other employers. An alternative approach to defining gender expertise might thus be to think of it as a performance or practice in a social space or network relating multiple actors. Hoard seems to agree that social recognition matters when formulating a second definitional criterion for gender experts: their knowledge and services need to have been formally requested. The view of expertise as social and requiring recognition has been developed further in STS and the sociology of expertise.

STS has shown that the development of scientific knowledge needs a network of not only scientists, but also institutions, laboratories, funders and multiple other actors, as well as non-human 'actants' such as instruments of measurement and the objects of interventions themselves (Callon, 2001). Moreover, various non-experts, including government bureaucracies and courts, participate in deciding which knowledge is to be accepted or not (Callon, 1984; Latour, 1987; Knorr-Cetina, 1999; Mitchell, 2002; Haraway, 2013). As such, expertise operates as a 'network of power', producing various effects (Brady, 2018: 2). If we apply these insights, gender expertise becomes much more than specialised knowledge: it becomes an aggregate performance of an actor network that interlaces knowledge with multiple interests. It no longer relegates feminist methodologies to the status of an 'extreme' oddity, but highlights how performing gender expertise enlists movements and other actors, but also distinctive instruments of research, such as indicators and data (Merry, 2011; Davis et al, 2012), and tools of application, such as training curricula, checklists and results frameworks (Eyben, 2013; Prügl, 2013). Here, gender expertise becomes multiple and results from negotiations and competitions within the network.

Similarly, the sociology of expertise focuses less on experts than on the kinds of interventions that they jointly engage in (Eyal and Buchholz, 2010; Brady, 2018). It has developed from the sociology of the professions, which studies the way in which professions have organised, established boundaries and set their own standards of entry and conduct (typically through academic training), gaining independence from politics and the market (Wilensky, 1964; Abbott, 1988; Freidson, 2001). However, as knowledge-based occupations have proliferated, scholars have begun to question the ideal-type of the professional lawyer or doctor, and begun to explore practices of expertise and professionalism rather than the professions and their institutionalisation (Evetts, 2003; Stehr and Grundmann, 2011). In a neoliberal environment, they have observed the phenomenon of 'hybrid professionals', no longer autonomous from market logics, but having to negotiate control over their work between the demands of their employers and their professional ethics (Noordegraaf, 2007). Scholars influenced by Bourdieu have added to this scholarship, explicitly conceptualising expertise as an intellectual practice in a social field structured by accumulated social capitals and characterised by contestation (Bourdieu, 1988, 1999; Sending, 2015). Does gender expertise constitute such a field and what are its structures? To what extent is this field a market and how does this affect it? The articles by Blanchard, Kunz et al and Olivius and Rönblom (2019) begin to provide insight into this matter.

Adding another element, Brady (2018: 1) proposes a 'critical, feminist sociology of expertise' and theorises expertise as 'a network and performance that inherently implicates the performances of multiple socio-material identities including gender, race, and class'. She thus trains our view on the fact that the performance of expertise is embodied. The idea of expertise being gendered has typically been applied to other fields, such as medicine and law (eg Azocar and Ferree, 2015). However, should we perhaps think of gender expertise as also *gendered* expertise? How does it matter that most gender experts are women? How does gender expertise negotiate the stigma of femininity attached to it? How does gender expertise amount to a performance of femininity and what are the power effects of such a performance?

Thinking through the meaning of gender expertise thus makes visible significant tensions regarding the types of knowledge that qualify as expertise, regarding feminist methods in expert practices and regarding the politics of the field itself. Rather

than smoothing over these tensions and seeking to resolve them through our own definition, we acknowledge their productivity and the need to study them. The articles collected in this special issue make these tensions the focus of their inquiry, taking different approaches to show: how gender expertise is rent with tensions and divisions; how it is constrained within institutions, networks and policies; and how it produces multiple and sometimes unintended outcomes with powerful political effects.

Investigating gender expertise

The first article by Rahel Kunz, Elisabeth Prügl and Hayley Thompson provides empirical depth on the question of definition broached in this introduction through a re-conceptualisation of gender expertise in global governance as a transnational field. This includes two theoretical shifts: a depersonalisation to understand expertise as a field rather than experts as individuals or a group of people; and a re-conceptualisation of expertise from a depoliticised body of knowledge towards expertise as a performative and intrinsically political practice. Drawing on a survey and qualitative interview data with individuals doing gender work in various national and international contexts, the authors show that boundary-drawing practices are central to establishing and maintaining this field, which is constantly contested and shaped by a range of power relations. The article illustrates three sets of practices of boundary drawing and erasing that make up the field: contestations over the boundary between gender expertise and feminism; contestations over scientific epistemologies and authority; and contestations over the logics of (post-)colonial politics surrounding gender expertise.

The following two contributions focus on the international context and examine gender expertise in the organisational setting of the UN, keeping in view the impacts achieved through the application of different types of expertise. Megan Dersnah analyses the evolution of the UN's WPS agenda and shows how gender experts, whom she defines as 'bureaucrats and diplomats, who are feminist by personal conviction', strategically refocused attention towards conflict-related sexual violence. She shows how these experts pursued a political agenda in a highly conflictual field in which they had to face political opposition, bureaucratic infighting between different organisations and also critique from feminist activists. Their advocacy for combating sexual violence resonated beyond their expectations, so much so that, for some, it led to 'buyers' remorse' as they saw the new agenda crowding out other issues. The chapter offers an interesting illustration of the contested nature of gender expertise, its embedding in an extensive political field and its ambiguous political effects.

Staying within the UN but focusing on funding, Kellea Miller examines the ambivalent role of gender expertise in the Fund for Gender Equality. For her, not all gender experts are feminists; instead, she distinguishes between 'feminist funding' and 'development' expertise, with the first embodying ideas and networks from social justice philanthropy and the second recruited from development bureaucracies. Using institutional ethnography, Miller traces a stark change in personnel and practices over the lifetime of the Fund, with development experts replacing feminist funding experts, and more critical projects losing out in favour of those proposing partnerships with governments. In addition to identifying different types of gender experts, the chapter shows that 'feminist enclaves' are possible. However, it also illustrates the liminal space that these inhabit, the pressures they face to adjust to the bureaucracy,

even within UN Women, and, ultimately, the difficulty for feminist commitments to survive in the face of these pressures.

A second set of articles shifts the focus to national contexts, approaching gender expertise as a market-mediated field and conceptualising gender experts as consultants. In a contribution that builds on an article previously published in Swedish, Elisabeth Olivius and Malin Rönnblom analyse the emergence of gender-equality consultants as key actors in the implementation and design of Swedish gender-equality policies in the context of broader moves towards market-based forms of governing.³ Like Miller, they document the structures of the field, but they take a Foucaultian approach and identify tensions between subject positions rather than groups of experts. They distinguish three positions – that of the flexible activist, the neutral advisor and the entrepreneur – accompanied by three related logics, that is, social justice, technocratic and administrative problem-solving, and competition and profit. Gender-equality consultants constantly negotiate these subject positions and the resulting pressures for short-term projects, depoliticisation and commodification. Interestingly, consultants do not always consider the market as limiting; instead, they also see it as a space for activism. Accordingly, the authors alert us to the presence of multiple and contradictory rationalities and the possibility for transformative change in the work of equality consultants.

Soline Blanchard continues the focus on professional gender-equality consulting with an analysis of consultants and firms in France. Starting from the sociology of the professions, she insists that in order to understand gender expertise, it is necessary to examine its commercial dimension. The French market for expertise has been created through a series of gender-equality laws since the 1970s as consultants help government and firms to address the requirements of the laws. The article highlights a stark segmentation of this market between those working with the public and the private sectors. Consultants in these sectors are not only differently funded, but also differently organised, with the first regionally based and the second centred in Paris. They also privilege different types of knowledge, with the first informed by constructivist understandings and a social justice approach, and the second mired in essentialist premises and anchored in economic concerns. Although the cleavage between the two segments of the market is clear, at the level of individuals, there are commonalities in profiles and a circulation of knowledge paired with conflicts and competition within the segments.

A final set of contributions showcases feminist reflexivity in the practices of gender experts and in the research encounter between experts and academics. Lucy Ferguson explores privilege in the theory and practice of gender training, a key dimension of gender expertise practice. Adopting an intersectional approach grounded in black feminist thought and privilege studies, she develops a notion of *feminist gender training* that is grounded in feminist theory, politics and practice, and characterised by a reflexive and self-critical attitude and a focus on process. The author highlights the failure of much gender training to address privilege and explores how feminist pedagogical principles – such as participatory learning, validating personal experience, encouraging social justice and critical thinking and open-mindedness – can be operationalised in gender-training scenarios in order to explore privilege in critical, dynamic ways. The article highlights the transformative potential of encounters in *feminist gender training* while acknowledging its clear limitations and challenges.

Drawing on her professional experience of being employed as a ‘gender expert’, Aiko Holvikivi reflexively explores the production of knowledge from relations of personal and professional proximity. The article employs feminist methodology and engages in auto-ethnographic reflections on research conducted with gender experts involved in gender training in the field of security to examine how ‘critical friendship’ plays out in such a research endeavour. It argues that critical friendship is not a unidirectional relationship extended from the researcher to the researched and draws attention to the potentially problematic implications of this relationship, such as the representational privileging of actors based in the Global North. However, overall, the author suggests that the concept of critical friendship is useful because it reminds us of the continued importance of ‘reflecting on the positionality of the researcher, with a view to producing knowledge that is (more) methodologically rigorous, ethically sound and politically responsible’. This article also illustrates and further complexifies the notion of gender expertise as a field of contestations.

The articles in this special issue thus all approach gender expertise as a practice that takes place in a socio-political field. The context may be national, with a wide repertoire of logics (Olivius and Rönblom) and structured by distinctive markets for expertise (Blanchard), or international, including institutions or networks of political communities of practice (Dersnah), driven by feminist and technocratic rationales (Miller), or rent by divisions and boundary struggles (Kunz, Prügl and Thompson). These fields are also sites of reflexivity in the creation and application of expertise (Holvikivi; Ferguson), destabilising the boundary between academia and the policy world, and between feminist science and society. The contributions thus deepen the analysis of the phenomenon of gender expertise, its varieties and complexities, what it makes possible and what it forecloses, and the disruptions that it invites along boundaries of knowledge production and use.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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Notes

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2. For more information about this project and its findings, see Kunz, Prügl and Thompson (2019). Detailed results of the survey are published in Thompson and Prügl (2015). More project findings can be found in a collection edited by Christine Verschuur (2017). For further information, visit our project website, available at: <http://graduateinstitute.ch/home/research/centresandprogrammes/genre/research/international-governance/recently-completed-projects/gender-experts-and-gender-expert.html>
3. As editors, we found it worth republishing the Swedish article in revised form for an anglophone audience because it offers a novel perspective on the development of gender expertise and provides an interesting point of comparison to the French case analysed by Blanchard in this special issue. The original publisher, *Tidskrift för kvinnoforskning*, has granted permission to publish a version of the Swedish article in English (see Olivius and Rönnblom, 2017).

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