EXPANDING EPISTEMOLOGIES:
THE FRAMING OF GENDER AMONG DEVELOPMENT RESEARCHERS
AND PRACTITIONERS

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by

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ABSTRACT

The field of research on gender is expanding with the emergence of new sites of knowledge production. This paper identifies how researchers and practitioners situated in different institutions are informed by different systems of knowledge in their study of gender, and what implications this has on what and how they study and on how these actors work together. Key informant interviews with gender specialists from universities, research organizations, NGOs, UN agencies, donors, and the state in Delhi, India are used as an illustration. Gender-related topics are framed in line with organizational frameworks. These specialists have adopted 'pragmatic' ways to bridge epistemological divides between the 'gender and development' and 'feminism' perspectives. The need for 'evidence' plays a critical role in changing expectations of researchers and practitioners in the field. By virtue of specialization, knowledge-producing institutions work interdependently towards the common goal of gender justice.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Isha Bhatnagar is an MS/PhD Candidate in Development Sociology at Cornell University. She worked with the Population Council, New Delhi for six years before joining the graduate program at Cornell. At the Council, she contributed to various research projects addressing reproductive, maternal and child health and nutrition in North India. She also holds a MA in Sociology from Jawaharlal Nehru University and a BA (Hons) in Sociology from the University of Delhi. She is also a journalist by training. Her research interests include the study of gender, as a system of knowledge and as practice, specifically in relation to patterns of fertility and the family, with a regional focus on India. For her dissertation, she intends to examine the expectations and roles of parents and daughters in the context of cultural norms bolstering son preference amidst fertility decline and changing political and economic conditions in urban India.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GAD	Gender and Development
GOI	Government of India
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
MLE	Measurement, Learning and Evaluation
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NFHS	National Family Health Survey
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RCT	Randomized Control Trial
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
TOC	Theory of Change
UN	United Nations
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WID	Women in Development

INTRODUCTION

Gender equality and women's empowerment are critical for development and the recognition of this has increased at the global level (Arutyunova and Clark, 2013; Beneria et al., 2016; Kabeer, 1994). The fifth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal reiterates the commitment of governments, development organizations and researchers to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender equality and women's empowerment are among the key development goals of the Government of India (GOI). Achieving these goals will require policy to draw upon social science research and insights. Scholarship on women and gender in India has been extensive and is unique, and has occasionally been compared with western feminism (Chaudhuri, 2010; Purkayastha et al., 2003). In recent years, such scholarship has expanded with the emergence of new sites of knowledge production such as international development organizations and private donors (Arutyunova and Clark, 2013; Chaudhuri, 2010; John, 1996; Kishwar, 2004).

"Gender" refers to the social, behavioral and cultural attributes, expectations and norms associated with femininity and masculinity. This study explores whether epistemological differences, visible in the ways gender is framed by development researchers and practitioners, restrict professional conversation and exchange between them. The research questions I ask are: (1a) How are researchers and practitioners, situated in their respective institutions, informed by different systems of knowledge in their study of gender and (1b) what implications does this have on what and how they study it? Secondly, (2a) are these researchers practitioners apt to work together, and, if so, (2b) when and how do they collaborate? Key informant discussions carried out with 25 researchers with expertise on gender/women based in Delhi are used to answer these questions. This analysis relies on a grounded theory approach, a process in which theory is generated from data (Charmaz, 2001; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The paper is organized into four sections. It begins with a discussion on the ways in which gender is framed differently among researchers committed to development in India. After a description of the methods, sample and analysis plan, I present the findings of the study. The findings are under three themes: the ways by which gender is framed among the informants, the process of sharing research between institutions, and the challenges faced in the research field. The paper concludes with a discussion on what this means for contemporary research and practice on gender/women under the rubric of development. The study is intended to capture challenges, concerns, success stories and experiences of development researchers and practitioners on topics that currently lack adequate theorization.

Framing of Gender
Processes of knowledge production in the contemporary context: The theoretical and methodological approaches for studying gender are shaped by historical processes of knowledge production. Knowledge on gender in the Indian context has been produced by the women's movement, academic disciplines and development practice for advancing the well-being of women and girls. We cannot point out a 'pure' beginning of the women's movement in India, but to date it has engaged with the state in raising issues related to violence against women, personal law and religion, population policy and the role of women in the economy (Agnihotri and Mazumdar, 1995; Mazumdar and Sharma, 1979). The basic principles for which most feminists stand include the right of all human beings to an equal share in economic and social life, freedom from exploitation and oppression, opposition to violence, recognition of work, and a transformation of all social relations of power that

marginalize any set of people based on their gender, sexual orientation, ability, race, religion, nationality, location, class, caste and ethnicity (Batliwala, 2013).

The study of gender/women connects many social sciences, including sociology, women's studies and development studies; no discipline can claim the topic as its exclusive constituency. Since these social sciences are in constant dialogue, the lines of distinction on approaching this topic are difficult to draw but may be experienced in practice. For instance, Rege (2003) notes that feminist sociologists are located on 'academic borderlands' as they have to travel between the academic disciplines of sociology (the zone for their inclusion) and women studies (a zone of exclusion, but one that allows greater expression of their thoughts). Sociological studies in India tend not to separate gender/women as an analytical category, but study the cumulative effects of caste, class, language, ethnicity, culture, history and gender. Feminist thought has raised the underlying absence of women as producers of knowledge in the field of sociology in India, and the limited role played by men in the field of women's studies, and affirms that gender/feminist scholarship remains at the margins of enquiry (Beteille, 1995; Chaudhuri, 2002; Rege, 2003). Some academics have also argued that since the Indian society has historically been hierarchical and multi-cultural, the lens of individualism and equality posited by feminism and development studies are inadequate to study gender (Chitnis, 2004; Purkayastha et al., 2003).

The inclusion of women/gender in development discourse can be traced to the work of Ester Boserup. Her work, *Woman's Role in Economic Development*, showed how women have been equal producers as men in traditional economies, until the introduction of modern commercial agriculture (Boserup, 1970). The Women in Development (WID) perspective emerged to call for an integration of women with the economy as a means of improving their status (Razavi and Miller, 1995). However, WID has been criticized for isolating 'women' as an analytical category. Marking a conceptual shift from WID, the Gender and Development (GAD) perspective brought in the relational aspect of women's status vis-à-vis men in the study of development. Gender equality is crucial for meeting development goals, such as increasing labor force productivity, improving child health outcomes and reducing fertility. It is seen as both 'instrumental' for development and of 'intrinsic' value (The World Bank, 2012). This can be welcomed as signifying a change at the ideational level in development practice for which gender equality matters as a human right, as advanced by the women's movement (Razavi, 2012).

Feminist engagement with development discourse: The practice of development as it pertains to women and girls in India today is chiefly instituted by the state, in rolling out policies, laws and programs for women's empowerment/gender equality; and more recently, liaising with 'development organizations', which have been on the rise following neo-liberal economic reforms in the 1990s (Agnihotri and Mazumdar, 1995; Chaudhuri, 2010; John, 1996). The research priorities and policy agendas of the GOI and many of these development organizations are guided by international policy declarations such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are formulated from the perspective of GAD. The GAD discourse has played a significant role in raising the issue of gender inequality in primary and secondary education, labor force participation in all sectors and political participation. Research and programming in the development sector focus on the gendered division of work at home and in wages, access to and control over resources, the elimination of all forms of violence against women and increasing access to reproductive and maternal health services (Rai, 2011; The World Bank, 2012; United Nations, n.d.).

Scholarship on women/gender has also been critical of development discourse and has argued for strengthening research on women's active role in the agrarian and informal economy

using local meanings of work, profit and exchange, and for addressing rights to property and land (Agarwal, 2008; Krishnaraj, 2008; Mazumdar and Sharma, 1979). Feminist critiques of development discourse include that it has shifted the signification of women as 'exploited' (which was first brought out by feminists) to women as 'efficient' players for the economy, or girls and women as a good 'investment' for development, or 'gender equality as smart economics' (Beneria et al., 2016; Cornwall and Rivas, 2015; John, 1999). Feminist ideas have been appropriated and transformed by neoliberal development discourse, evident from development strategies such as expansion of microfinance, concern for family planning and activities involving adolescent girls. Some authors (e.g. Wilson, 2015) argue that such strategies serve to reinforce and extend gender inequality.

Batliwala (2013) writes how the creation of women's self-help groups by mainstream development organizations seems to nurture a form of de-politicized collective action that is not threatening to the political order. Though feminism and gender and development practice are both considered active strategies for social change (Batliwala, 2013; Mohanty, 1988; Sen and Grown, 1987) the 'instrumental' strategies of the development 'industry' (which are primarily economic in nature) are seen in direct contrast to feminist agendas driven towards social change by political means: *'...there is an emptying out of politics from the present economic model. It transforms itself simply as a technical decision- above ideologies, above politics...'* (Chaudhuri, 2010: 385; Esquivel, 2016; Krishnaraj, 2003; Subrahmanian, 2007). Cornwall and Rivas (2015) locate the concepts of gender equality and women's empowerment in different perspectives but find their meanings conflated in the international development agenda. The concept of 'empowerment' has been instrumentalized through indicators and targets and its original meaning rooted in power and rights has been lost in development programming (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015; Esquivel, 2016). Development organizations and donor money have shifted from long-term movement building approaches towards projects which have more visible and measurable solutions/outcomes and can be done in a short amount of time (Subrahmanian, 2007).

Epistemological distinctions: In evaluation studies of development interventions, which aim at gender equality and women's well-being, 'feminist evaluations' have been contrasted with 'gender evaluations' (Hay, 2012; Krishnaraj, 2005; Podems, 2010). A 'feminist' evaluation seeks to understand the local context with an aim of structural transformation of patriarchal structures. On the other hand, 'gender' evaluations do not necessarily challenge women's position in society; rather they record it. Feminists claim to use a mix of rational and intuitive methods, are more oriented to process than outcomes and pay more attention to particular contexts than predefined and unified grand theories (Krishnaraj, 2005). Feminist research neither assumes that certain concepts are universally applicable, nor privileges empirical methods of knowing such as quantification of social processes (Krishnaraj, 2005). Gender evaluation frameworks assume that women want what men have, which can be brought about through development interventions. Feminist evaluators allow for the possibility that women do not want what men have and do not emphasize gender equality, but instead look for gender justice. They recognize that in most societies, women and men are assigned different roles, and that women are more embedded in familial roles, hence both have different values, experiences and needs (Harding, 1991; Kabeer, 1994).

These approaches can be differentiated on epistemological grounds. Epistemologies provide philosophical bases for the ways in which social reality is studied and understood. This paper approaches feminism and gender and development as 'ideal types' in their epistemological leaning to the study of gender/women in development. An ideal type is a methodological tool for social science, to study subjective social reality objectively (Weber, 1947). An ideal type is a combination of typical characteristics of a social phenomenon abstracted into a logically

constructed whole. Ideal types are not found in reality, but allow the investigator to make comparisons with empirical reality. I use ideal types to locate how informants frame gender in their work. These ideal types can be closely associated with the epistemologies of 'positivism and post-positivism' on one hand and 'critical theory, constructivism and participatory/cooperative inquiry' on the other (Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

Lincoln and Guba argue that positivism and post-positivism are commensurable, while the set of critical theory, constructivism and participatory inquiry are philosophically coherent with each other. Positivist and post-positivist inquiry aim at explanation while critical theory, constructivism and participatory inquiry aim to critique, transform, emancipate and understand. A key ontological difference between these two is reality's accessibility and universality for scientific enquiry, calling for different ways by which we can know reality. The origins of positivism/post-positivism can be found in the Cartesian duality of approaching reality, that reality can be broken down or reduced to its constitutive parts which can be studied in isolation from each other (Kabeer, 1994). Methodologically, this can be unraveled by treating social facts as 'things' (Durkheim, 1933), which can be measured empirically, primarily with quantitative methods and additionally with qualitative inquiry. I place this as the basis of the ideal type of gender and development. On the other hand, feminism as an epistemology (like the set of critical theory, constructivism and participatory inquiry) is more likely to accept multiple realities constructed by both the researcher and participant of the study in their respective contexts, hence calls for more ways of knowing, including hermeneutics, reflexivity, historical/dialectical and participation/collaboration (Sudarshan and Sharma, 2012). Social actors interpret and make meaning out of the world they experience. The post-positivist method strives for a value-free, objective science in which theories can be tested repeatedly and said to hold universal claims. This approach is generally privileged in research and development practice over local, experience-based, 'situated knowledges' supported by feminist epistemology (Haraway, 1988; Kabeer, 1994; Podems, 2010). Detached and neutral knowers, are privileged over those who are argued to be more connected and passionate (Lincoln and Guba, 2000).

Hence, the theoretical and conceptual frameworks and methods of study on gender/women are guided by different discourses and epistemologies (Chaudhuri, 2010; Cornwall and Rivas, 2015; Krishnaraj, 2006; Podems, 2010). These frameworks influence the ways in which institutions frame gender and share knowledge. Such institutions include universities and centers of academic and applied research, community-based organizations, multilateral organizations and the state. Many of these institutions employ researchers and practitioners largely engaged in the study of gender/women, whom I refer to as 'gender specialists'. Drawing on a feminist sociological analysis, this study demonstrates the role professional associations play together in shaping knowledge.

METHODS, SAMPLE AND ANALYSIS PLAN

Methods and Sample

Gender specialists serve as key informants to this study. An ideal informant is one who is willing and able to communicate her or his knowledge in a manner that is intelligible to the researcher and can provide the big picture along with her or his opinions (Marshall, 1996; Tremblay, 1957). The key informant interview method allows one to obtain rich data in a short amount of time. For this study, I developed a semi-structured interview guideline to organize my discussion with the informants. The following themes were addressed: concepts and theories used and position taken in addressing gender-related topics, preferred methodological tools, type of data used and collected, demographics of the communities studied/interventions designed, ways in which different institutions share their work with

policy makers, donors, academics and research organizations and challenges in sharing knowledge.

The study was approved by the Cornell University IRB in May 2016 and key informant interviews were conducted thereafter. Key informants were chosen based on the role they play in the process of knowledge production and sharing, amidst the backdrop of development (Charmaz, 2001; Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Tremblay, 1957). I identified six 'types' of institutions that play a dominant role in theorizing on women/gender, viz. academic institutes, research organizations (national and international), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), UN agencies, donor organizations, and the Ministries of the Government. An academic institute is defined as one that offers courses of study/degree programs. Informants were purposely selected from institutions based in Delhi because (a) most organizations working on gender and representing these institutional types in India are based there; (b) it is the seat of the government; hence engaging with policy makers is most likely to occur there; and (c) for ease in selecting influential and larger organizations, as they play a bigger role in shaping research and policy. Though the study was based in Delhi, the discussions did not try to identify a Delhi-specific framing of gender, as all organizations work in most states across the country and gender as a policy intervention is decided for the country.

A list of organizations that carry out research on gender and represent six ideal types was prepared, based on my knowledge of the field and through contacts/networks. The list was expanded by visiting websites of organizations to identify partner organizations and by seeking guidance from informants once interviewed. Since the objective was to obtain experiences from different types of institutions regarding collaborative work, a few of each 'type' of six institutions were included. All organizations represented in this study are well known in the field of gender, and most are known in the public sphere in Delhi, particularly as women/gender is a much-debated topic there. One to two informants were selected in each institution/department, with an attempt to reach out to those in senior positions, as they would know more about the field since they would be associated with it longer. Eventually, 52 specialists from 37 different organizations were emailed regarding the purpose of the study, and 38 members of 29 organizations responded with interest in having a discussion on this topic. Of those who did not respond, additional follow-ups were made by email and/or phone. I was ultimately able to meet with 29 informants[1]; 25 agreed to be interviewed and four provided insights and resources, although they did not want to be formally interviewed. The visit to Delhi was made possible by a university travel grant. Thirteen other potential respondents were interested, but could not be interviewed because a mutually convenient time could not be found. Several were traveling and were scheduled to return to Delhi after I had left India. Table 1 lists the organizations of the gender specialists interviewed.

An informed consent form was emailed to all those who agreed to be interviewed. Consent was also taken verbally at the start of the discussion. All but three interviews were audio-recorded, as the majority of informants agreed to have it taped. Discussions/interviews took place at the offices of the informants, as this was professional and convenient. All discussions/interviews were conducted in English, which is largely used in these professions. Words or expressions in Hindi/Hindustani language were occasionally used. Hindi/Hindustani appeared to be the lingua franca for almost all of us. On average, the length of an interview was an hour. Out of respect for informants' busy schedules, a single meeting took place. Seven specialists worked for research organizations,[2] five for NGOs, five for academic centers

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[1] One interview was done over email. Another was interviewed at Cornell University who was here as a visiting scholar.
[2] Two are independent researchers but were earlier affiliated with a research organization.

in research universities. Four worked for UN bodies, three for donor organizations and one was from a Ministry/state that works directly with the nodal Ministry for women/gender: the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

Table 1: Names and types of institutions key informants represented	
Academic institutions - Institute for Human Development - International Institute for Population Sciences - Indian Institute of Technology - Jawaharlal Nehru University - University of Delhi	**Research organizations** - International Center for Research on Women - Independent researchers - Institute of Social Studies Trust - Population Council
NGOs - Breakthrough - Jagori - Nirantar: A Center for Gender and Education - The YP Foundation	**Donor organizations** - Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation - MacArthur Foundation - Oxfam India
UN agencies - UN Women - UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) - UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund)	**Government of India**

I began each discussion with the argument that some studies conclude that we need more conceptualization on gender, and asked informants for their opinions about that. From there, I attempted to gain an understanding of the conceptualizations and the theoretical perspectives they draw on in their work. Upon gaining an impression of the kind of literature and perspectives each person used, I began with a different argument that 'researchers I am talking to seem to be using different lenses to approach their work. For example, some explicitly use a feminist lens, while others prefer to position themselves within gender and development', and asked for their impressions. My intention was to tease out whether, and if so how, they perceived different perspectives on gender. I also asked informants to cite examples of specific studies/ programmatic interventions they were involved in, which gave them a space to elaborate on specific topics (why such topics are chosen, how they work with other organizations), and to talk freely and share their personal experiences and challenges. Since most of them came from diverse backgrounds and had a range of experiences, such examples provided a way to concretize abstract ideas and identify patterns (Becker, 1954; Merton and Kendall, 1946). The discussion in each interview addressed the informant's experience and institutional affiliation and mission. I often took the opinions of one informant to develop questions for a different informant to answer, hence placing interviews in a sort of dialogue. All interviews were built upon content from the previous ones as I constantly engaged with data analysis, a basis for generating theory from data, or grounded theory (Charmaz, 2001; Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

Six informants categorically mentioned that they had been thinking about the topic of the study, and that had motivated them to participate. The content of their discussions was particularly insightful and they shared what they thought 'ought to be done' as researchers and practitioners, even if it is not possible to accomplish. They were more perceptive about the 'politics of discourse' and passionately struggled with the same question of bridging academics, research and practice. Hence, their views may predominate in the paper. Three of them represent the three different UN organizations included in the study, two are academics, and one works with a human rights organization. They found this topic of practical importance today for different reasons, such as the difficulty in translating gender-related

topics into action and policy. They also observed that young researchers are largely choosing topics that are well funded and considered important by development organizations, and are no longer driven by what they are passionate about, or by theory. This is what one referred to as the 'professionalization' of the field. Some of these informants have worked with different kinds of organizations over their career, including those emerging from civil society, the women's movement, academics or the UN so could feel the differences among these.

With few exceptions, respondents had ten or more years of experience working on gender in their institutional fields, although they varied in the level of seniority and designation held in the organization. In relation to me, all were considerably well versed with the subject and had opinions about the research field. Hence, I was not at an advantaged position in terms of knowledge. Being an inchoate researcher with relatively few prior conceptions and ideological leanings in this field helped me ask naive and basic questions, another useful strategy for interviewing (Becker, 1954). While preparing the list of institutions and potential informants, very few men were found to be gender specialists, which explains why only four of the informants are men and the rest are women. All interviews were manually transcribed in English (Roman script) from the audio recordings. None of the transcripts or quotations bear the names of the informants, only the type and name of the organization. Some quotes in this paper have been paraphrased for brevity.

Analysis Plan

I chose the topic for this research because of my experience working in the development sector and because I believe that practitioners have a lot to add to our understanding, although their voices often are not captured in published literature. I chose to use the grounded theory approach because this topic is under-theorized. The analysis was conducted throughout the research process, including during interviewing (because directions for subsequent discussions were rethought based on issues emerging from prior ones), as well as during transcription and notetaking. Typed interviews were coded and analyzed in Atlas.ti 7. I developed selective/focused codes (Charmaz, 2001; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) during the process of reading the literature, transcribing the interviews, and from the interview text. I identified the categories of 'position/P', 'sharing/S', 'challenges to sharing/C', 'methods used/M' and 'other/O'; each also had sub-codes. Each interview text was analyzed in two ways, (a) as it stood on its own, to understand a particular institution and the actors' experience as part of it, and (b) in conjunction with those representing the same type of institution, to understand common practices of each type of the six kinds of institutions represented in this research. Concepts and phrases from the different epistemologies of feminism and GAD were used to carry out a content analysis of the discussions.

The findings are presented under three sections. First, I discuss the different ways in which specialists approach gender. These approaches include theoretical ones, the nature of the work, academic training, and/or epistemological roots. Very few informants revealed a concrete epistemological position they took[3]. Since epistemology is a philosophical/academic concept, cues were taken from the types of concepts, theories and literatures informants used, the types of thematic areas in which they worked, the kinds of methods preferred for data collection, and the use of certain words. In some discussions, informants did explicitly share their opinions on different systems of knowledge. This section throws light on the first research question of how researchers and practitioners, situated in their respective institutions, are informed by different systems of knowledge, and how this shapes what and how they study. Regarding the second theme of institutional sharing in the field of gender research, I discuss how these different types of institutions work together in the research field, revealing

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[3] This could be because they were not asked this directly. I tried to arrive at it through their work and words.

where sharing occurs, where it does not and why; and what techniques are used to facilitate the process despite differences in framing of gender. The last section addresses challenges informants raised in the discussions. Since the topic of challenges researchers face was not the focus of this research, this third thematic section may present a partial picture, but I attempt to illuminate several epistemological concerns in this research field.

FINDINGS

The Framing of Gender

Aim of knowledge production: All informants reported that their research is geared towards social change and not carried out simply for knowledge's sake. This comes across as a pragmatic approach; that knowledge is useful if it enables us to achieve important collective goals (Cornish and Gillespie, 2009; Kloppenberg, 1996).

Academic background: Informants were trained in communications, demography, economics, psychology, public administration, sociology, statistics and women's studies. Regardless of academic background, a number of respondents reported that differences in academic training create dissimilar ways in approaching gender. For instance,

> *The world has not come together, the gender people, the statisticians, the feminists…it's a disciplinary bias…like for the target of unpaid work under goal 5, people interpret and measure it very differently. Such as how men and women's household chores are divided, how much time a woman is collecting water or firewood or contributing to subsistence or engaged in home-based work such as stitching buttons on a t-shirt for a Benetton or Gap. Feminists, economists, feminist economists, statisticians, policymakers, women workers…all will see it differently* (UN representative).
>
> *This is a pedagogy phenomenon. UN Women has people coming from anthropology and women's rights backgrounds. UNFPA and UNICEF have doctors and public health people, there are no rights based people. The academic field does not exist here, so who will have these conversations? For example, in the field of nutrition, they do not make a fuss about the data gap for stunting among girls and boys, because those girls that were not taken care of are already dead and not counted* (UN representative).

Theoretical orientation: Although all informants read published literature at various stages of the research process, most agreed that practice in the development sector does not need to make use of academic theory explicitly. Instead, with the exception of the academics interviewed, all informants rely on their organization's frameworks/conceptual models, such as a 'Gender Action Plan' or a 'Gender@Work' framework, or what is commonly referred to as a 'theory of change'. A theory of change guides how researchers approach the thematic areas they work on and the indicators used to track progress and establish causal links between inputs and outcomes (Esquivel, 2016). Those informants affiliated with international organizations rely on the international conceptual frameworks of their organizations, with the India office having the liberty to modify the framework based on cultural specificities and the government's mission.

Most of the academics I interviewed were trained in sociology (and one in economics), and took a sociological perspective to studying any topic, including gender. A typical sociological perspective involved discussing how one's perspective is influenced by one's broader theoretical position, the importance of studying social relations in different contexts, the changing nature of social relationships over time and place, the importance of the comparative method, how values shape meanings attached to actions and words, and the need to be critical of different theoretical positions.

Type of work: Respondents distinguished three types of research specialists in gender according to the type of work carried out: those who design, implement and evaluate development programs (includes both researchers and practitioners), academics, and activists. Program implementers and evaluators directly engage with the international development agenda, as their work is aligned with the SDGs and are likely not to have strong opinions of government policies. They prefer concepts and theories that can be translated into concrete measures with which change can be captured. Academics see their role as to 'think' about society and social processes. They feel that they have the advantage of time, to reflect, compared to those who are working on development programs. Those not affiliated with an academic institution feel that academics use abstract concepts and measures that cannot be easily translated into programmatic work and are not always connected to the realities faced by communities. A few academics and development professionals mentioned that some development practitioners do not spend time to develop theoretical grounding. Differences between those who design and evaluate development programs and academics are visible from the following quotes,

> *With evaluation studies, what can the academic bring into? Good social science can only come out of good understanding of history, economy, polity, culture…if that is left out and you are doing only evaluation, which is at the surface level, you have fancy power points, lots of diagrams…its not the same as old fashioned social science …you see a global trend, everyone speaking the same language, you have ads which say, 'wanted feminist to work with an NGO'…which was unthinkable in our time. Good or bad, I am not commenting (sic), but it would have implications* (Academic).
> *There are those who are doing academic work of building strong measures and testing them and then there are practitioners in the development sector…because of the political economy of women's studies which is becoming more strict in terms of its boundaries so it can be taken seriously…GAD has become so well funded that many agencies have got into it, by doing surveys without theoretically grounding themselves…* (Donor).

Activists engage with the state and law and were considered to be closer to policy makers and development practitioners because of their eagerness to change policy, law and society. They may have opinions about policies and programs and be critical of a kind of 'development', depending on their ideology. Like academics, they raise those issues, which are not necessarily raised by international development organizations or in the discourse of gender and development. While some saw a connection between academics and activism, others found these to be disconnected. As voiced in the discussions,

> *The eagerness to change that you find in activism…whereas in academia, the issue is more about having a better understanding (of society). Sociologists in the Indian context may not be good at policy suggestions. Academics can come together with activists and development practitioners but they have a separate role, to understand, reflect, to help others know what's happening. Theory generally develops after something has happened, unlike social work and activism which is geared towards policy change and makes it its priority. The only thing with academics is that it is usually ex post facto…it is delayed as they reflect. Both have their value* (Academic).
> *Our role is to think and thinking is important…like the whole question of communalism in India…how will there be development? By the time NGOs feel there should be funding there, 30 years would have passed…today women's empowerment, tomorrow sexuality, next day transgender…then something else…because they are not academics* (Academic).
> *The funny thing is that at UN Women, if you are not an activist, you are looked down upon and at UNICEF, if you are, you are looked down upon* (UN representative).

The 'type' of work can change over time. In practice, I found that the categories of development professionals, academics, and activists did not appear as impermeable and informants had worked across these in their career.

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Feminism as a position: Though discussions with most informants were rich with perspectives, words and expressions of feminist thought, only three informants explicitly referred themselves as feminists. All three expressed that they are affiliated with a feminist organization. Their organizations carry out monitoring and evaluation studies like those who position themselves with the GAD approach, but these informants discussed wider research tools such as 'power walks' and 'body mapping'[4]. They directly brought in the importance of studying sexuality and the body, affinity with the women's movement, and an attempt towards participatory research, such as:

> In our research, we locate the root cause in the construction of sexuality and try to make people draw linkages with sexuality, because there is so much silence on this and we need to talk about it. [Later] We only hire women and transgender persons, as our founding members want to develop young feminist leaders.

> We have been observing the nature of laws in India. When this recent rape case happened, there was a debate on death penalty…so different organizations came together to express our set of legal recommendations. It was at the level of the movement, not the organization.

> It's okay if the community we work with doesn't even know the word gender. We take the vocabulary from the people and talk in the language they are comfortable with and avoid elite intellectual jargon.

Informants noted that feminism is perceived negatively by some donors, the research community, and the public. For one informant, their organization preferred not to openly claim that it is a feminist organization, which would be perceived as 'male bashing' and would threaten the continuity of their programs. Another informant mentioned that they have changed the name of the kind of work they do, from 'feminist evaluations' to 'gender-transformative evaluations' as using the word 'gender' rather than 'feminism' is believed to reach a wider research community.

Integrated epistemologies: In almost all discussions, informants used concepts indicative of both the ideal types of gender and development and feminism as summarized in Table 2. The Table has been developed from the content of the discussions, categorized by the constructed ideal types. Hence, what appear as differences, are integrated in practice,

> Our work is broadly based on GAD…we have helped develop feminist principles for monitoring and evaluation (Donor).

> Every time we work with civil society organizations, we ask them if they have women in their leadership positions (UN representative).

> We are a rights based organization. Our main focus areas are early marriages, gender biased sex selection, domestic violence and sexual harassment. I am part of the M&E team. We help the other teams create a logical framework, called a LFA, which is based on a theory of change, the target of the project, we list out the activities, the outcomes and outputs…we track both process and evaluation indicators…[Later] Very few organizations are headed by women (NGO representative).

> We are using a tool called the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, which is being used in other countries to find patterns across the globe (Feminist NGO representative).
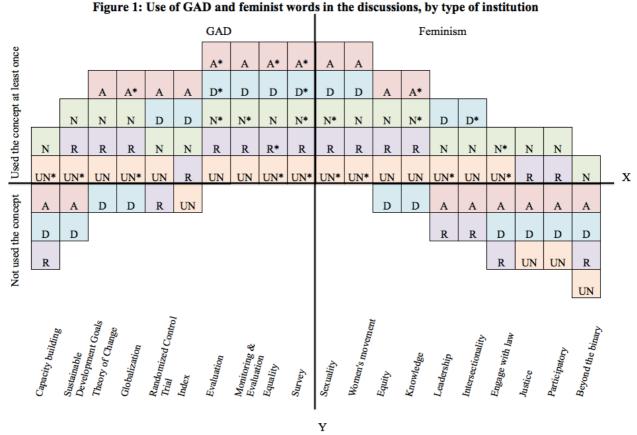
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[4] Power walks are a participatory tool to understand the perception of power (or privilege) among members of a community. Body mapping is a process to help community members understand sexuality and gender differences through imagery.

Table 2: Distinctive characteristics of the ideal types of GAD and feminism, emerging from the discussions		
	Gender and development	**Feminism**
Topic chosen for study	No gender/women exclusive program: gender is cross cutting, topics of concern are health, education, work	Women as entry point for programmatic work, violence against women as key thematic area
Key angles taken	• Emphasis on equality as an outcome • Numbers for measurement/ large surveys for influencing policy action and as evidence • Search for universals/generalizations • Less likeliness of ideological leanings • Neutral opinions towards state	• Justice and equity as an outcome • Explicit engagement with law and public discourse for policy action • A need to engage with political questions of struggle to change power dynamics • Questioning existing systems of knowledge/language • Belief in women having positions of leadership
Common concepts	SDG, RCT (randomized control trials), control group, evaluation tool, MLE (measurement, learning and evaluation), M&E (monitoring and evaluation), theory of change (TOC), gender empowerment measures, index, global, auditors, social change agents, capacity building	Women's movement, intersectionality, sexuality, beyond the binary, participatory research, subaltern, language is not elite, culture of silence, giving up power, theory of oppressed, structural

Concepts and phrases from Table 2 were used to carry out a content analysis of the discussions. The number of informants who spontaneously used these words at least once in the discussion were totaled by type of institution. Mentioning a concept at least once indicates that it is thought about in one's research and practice. Figure 1 depicts the content analysis. It shows the most common utterances of these concepts by type of institution. If at least one informant representing the type of institution used the selected concept once during the discussions, the institution is placed above the horizontal X-axis. The vertical Y-axis on the other hand divides concepts by the ideal types of GAD and feminism. Because only one person representing the GOI was interviewed, that informant's responses are not included in the Figure.

Linguistic categories illustrate what constitutes knowledge and legitimatizes research practices (Cornwall et al., 2007). The analysis reveals greater use of words from the GAD framework compared to the feminist approach, among all types of institutions (including the GOI, not shown). Of the ten selected words from each epistemology, more words from the GAD approach were used by all types of institutions such as 'evaluation', 'M&E', 'equality' and 'survey'; than from feminism. The most commonly articulated feminist words were 'sexuality' and the 'women's movement'. However, it is not clear if this commonality of language reflects a genuine sharing of perspectives or the dominance of a particular linguistic style or way of thinking driven by international development discourse, influenced by resource rich organizations. This could either be celebrated as the success of the international framework of the SDGs in mainstreaming 'gender' in development practice or the failure of genuinely bringing multiple ways of thinking together for the purpose of development.

Figure 1: Use of GAD and feminist words in the discussions, by type of institution

GAD (columns 1–10) — Feminism (columns 11–20)

Column key:
1. Capacity building
2. Sustainable Development Goals
3. Theory of Change
4. Globalization
5. Randomized Control Trial
6. Index
7. Evaluation
8. Monitoring & Evaluation
9. Equality
10. Survey
11. Sexuality
12. Women's movement
13. Equity
14. Knowledge
15. Leadership
16. Intersectionality
17. Engage with law
18. Justice
19. Participatory
20. Beyond the binary

Used the concept at least once

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
						A*	A	A*	A*	A	A								
		A	A*	A	A	D*	D	D	D*	D	D	A	A*						
	N	N	N	D	D	N*	N*	N	N*	N*	N	N	N*	D	D*				
N	R	R	R	N	N	R	R	R*	R	R	R	R	R	N	N	N*	N	N	
UN*	UN*	UN	UN*	UN	R	UN	UN	UN*	UN*	UN*	UN*	UN	UN	UN*	UN	UN*	R	R	N

Not used the concept

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
A	A	D	D	R	UN							D	D	A	A	A	A	A	A
D	D													R	R	D	D	D	D
R																R	UN	UN	R
																			UN

Legend: A: Academic, N: NGO, R: Research org, UN: UN, D: Donor
*Indicates that half or more respondents of that type of institution used the word

Figure 1 also shows that representatives from donor organization and academics used the least diverse vocabulary of both GAD and feminism. Perhaps their current discursive fields such as sociology or management determine most of their vocabulary used (which need not largely be of GAD and feminism). NGOs used the most diverse vocabulary from these epistemologies, followed by the UN. An official identification with feminism was only expressed by NGOs and perhaps this extensive use of feminist concepts reflects that these organizations work hard to keep the language of feminism thriving while forming alliances with international development organizations. International development organizations produce pressures for common linguistic and presentational styles of thought and content when building alliances at a global level (Cornwall et al., 2007).

Evidence as game changer: Evidence can be considered as data used to support an argument (Becker, 2017). The need for evidence, that too of a particular kind, is increasing. Almost all informants brought out that evidence in the form of numerical data is perceived to be more acceptable, particularly to policy makers and donor organizations. It is regarded the most 'useful' in making policy level decisions (which affect a large population) and for indisputably demonstrating 'change'. Informants who felt that large quantitative data or RCTs are not enough to study gender also felt less connected with policy makers. It is perceived that the concern for evidence is driven by donors, initially international government and bilateral donors and recently, private donors.

Numerical measurement of institutions, ideology, resources and norms is not perceived as adequate and given less priority for study in research. As said by a member of a research organization, *"I am very skeptical about quantitative research, though I come from a background of psychology and sociology and have lived with number crunchers most of my*

life. Maybe that's why I have become more skeptical…after several years of research we are still struggling with how to measure norms…in the 1990s, people said there is nothing like norms, but now people want to understand norms because research shows contradictory pieces." Some informants felt that because of the growing demand of quantitative studies, institutions are prioritizing research projects over movement building activities. The feeling of being united under the women's movement is diminishing; and allegiances are shifting towards an organization's specific activities. One donor brought out how the 'obsession with measurement' should not distance ourselves from the real mission, *"For the communities on the ground, it does not really make much difference as long as they can see the difference in their lives. The need to validate the change is for organizations. In fact, for us on the ground, even the fact that women step out of their homes is a form of empowerment."*

Institutional Sharing

Implications on working together: This section lays out how each type of organization has developed a niche based on its specialization of the study of gender. Differences and acknowledgment of expertise facilitate working together. Expertise varies from conceptualizing/theorizing, measuring, training, implementing, monitoring, advocating, publishing and providing 'technical assistance'/advice and funding. Expertise is also thematic. Hence, each organization is able to maintain its boundary and sustain in the research field. Specialization promotes interdependence in knowledge sharing. Informants realize that they have to collaborate to get work done and only one kind of organization cannot achieve the mission towards gender equality single handedly, again a pragmatic approach to research. Pragmatic researchers see knowledge as a tool for action and accept plurality of knowledge and methods (Cornish and Gillespie, 2009). I explore the typical ways in which informants interface with policy makers, academics, donors and NGOs to throw light on how their differences facilitate this process and the kind of challenges that also emerge.

Interface with policy makers/government: All institutions align their research recommendations and/or work with government officials as it is acknowledged that only the GOI can make a significant and long-term impact in India, given its resources, personnel and infrastructure. Other institutions offer their expertise by carrying out research studies, testing interventions, and evaluating schemes and programs, a pragmatic approach:

> *I think there is a divide in the feminist movement on the role of the state and how much it can regulate. But I think this is the only way to institutionalize and sustain. That's the only reason why I work with the UN. There might be a huge criticism of the UN, of GAD, but ultimately there is a mechanism, there is a role of the state, member states that have committed to these promises, who are for human rights and gender equality, and they work on it. My own view is that you have to engage with the system* (UN representative).

Organizations primarily interface with the government in three ways, through evidence building, funding, and advocating for legal reform. All these organizations also prefer to use government platforms such as schemes and laws and personnel like health workers, for their development activities, *"For addressing domestic violence, there are various government services in place such as a protection officer at the block level, but people do not know how to access the system, so our project helps identify them... "* (NGO representative).

Many informants argued that there has been an increased interest in gender-related research and programmatic work, mainly because the government is acknowledging it. The government is increasingly accountable to the public and willing to provide evidence regarding how successful a scheme has been. The media is taking up debates related to women and gender, which shapes the public's perception of the government in power. These

debates present an opportunity to bring diverse opinions and actors together, including policy makers, academics and NGO professionals to discuss the same issue. Moreover, as mentioned by a government official, the GOI knows that India is being 'watched' by the international community on its development achievements for which the GOI has to 'report against' SDG targets. Hence, the GOI is interested in evidence through data and needs to ensure that studies are 'rigorous'.

Gender-related issues can also become the state's mandate if a government official has particular interest in them. Moreover, compared to the past, we find more government officials with research degrees and exposure to international debates. Organizations that work closely with policy makers acknowledge that relationships with officials have to be built over a period of time. Unfortunately, when collaborating officials are transferred to other bureaucratic positions, a new relationship has to be built again. Another way to influence policy and/or work with policy makers is to work as a consortium of institutions, since one organization generally cannot have significant influence on its own. Some informants held the view that the UN has the most influence on policy and found it disappointing that academics, independent research organizations, and NGOs have less leverage. This was partly attributed to the fact that the UN provides more funding to the government compared to other organizations. UN organizations explicitly expressed that they work in tune with the government's agenda and develop their country program plans along with government officials, perhaps making them more influential.

Some informants expressed that effective communication between policy makers and social scientists/gender experts is needed because delaying marriage by a few years cannot alone bring about change in gender roles and norms, as advocated by the government:

> *…Like all the girl child policies at the end of the day, the money is delivered at the age of 18, the legal age at marriage …that's okay we are helping you with getting your daughter married. But as gender people we would want to say that you shouldn't be making marriage the be all and end all of a woman's life in India…but they (policy makers) never ask us…they go ahead and make their policy…* (Academic).

Informants were critical, for example, of certain government programs aimed at addressing gender-related issues. The popular scheme of providing a cash incentive to families who postpone their daughter's marriage to age 18 or more was considered to reinforce patriarchal norms instead of addressing the root cause of discrimination against girls. By providing the incentive, it bolsters the idea that a daughter's marriage is a significant and costly event and supports cultural concepts like *'kanyadaan'* (to gift a daughter in marriage). The cash incentive is then often saved to use as a dowry for a daughter's marriage. Nonetheless, informants acknowledged that delaying marriage of girls is a key development goal and positively contributes to women's educational and economic status (ICRW, 2011). Delayed age at marriage (18 years or more) has been shown, for example, to increase the odds of using contraception, having the first birth in a health facility, and to reduce the chances of maternal and infant mortality and of experiencing violence (ICRW, 2011; Santhya et al., 2010).

Some raised that the mindset of government officials and providers continues to be patriarchal which hinders the pursuit of issues pertaining to gender:

> *The challenge with working with policy makers is largely their patriarchal mindsets in decoding what works for women and families at large. You may give them statistics and research, but what stops them is their perceived notions and the socialization process* (Donor).

> *We are a patriarchal society. You don't want to upset that too much. Our country is run by men and that's how it is* (Donor).

Interface with academics: Two kinds of academics appeared from the discussions. One kind considered themselves independent and/or were critical of development agendas, hence chose not to work with policymakers. These informants raised the issue of preservation of autonomy in academics:

> *Suppose there is a policy meeting and they tell me to speak, I will be very happy, but they cannot tell me what to say. My role is to make policy makers understand…its not that policy makers tell me to do this study…if my role becomes that, then I am an employee of the policy maker"* (Academic).

Another set of academics was involved in programmatic research and contractually hired by large organizations including the UN or donors for a specific project. These academics developed a relationship with these organizations, which could contact them for more projects, but they remained affiliated with a university/center of academic research and primarily carried out academic activities such as teaching and research. This relationship with a non-academic organization is maintained by an academic's interest and 'wavelength' with the professional representing the non-academic organization and is also facilitated when the authority of the academic institution is not restrictive. Often an academic's publications in journals and the media gets noticed by UN/donor agencies, which then approach academics for collaborative work.

However, most organizations did not directly work with academics but drew their theoretical understanding from published academic literature, including peer-reviewed journals and research reports. For researchers affiliated with non-academic institutions, publishing work was considered integral for reaching a wider audience, but depended on a donor's interest to publish academic material. Most of these informants expressed that they are hardly able to publish academic papers because academic writing and publishing is given low priority in many non-academic organizations. These researchers had an interest in writing, but not the time since writing academic papers was not 'budgeted' in their work. Those who wanted to write academic papers or share their experiences took out additional time to do so. For some, publishing work in academic journals was seen to be important, while others felt that communicating beyond academic journals is more important. One informant said that journals are increasingly accepting papers based on programmatic research (regarded as different from academic research) and qualitative inquiry, unlike earlier. Some academics took a pragmatic approach by publishing in journals that are read by policy makers and beyond academia such as the 'Economic and Political Weekly' or leading newspapers, particularly when a topic is being debated in the public sphere. Another challenge raised was that many activists and program implementers do not have the skills to write effectively on how an intervention was developed and implemented and the challenges of implementation. Such knowledge is useful for development organizations. Using social media to share research findings and debate on gender issues was also suggested to reach a wider audience.

Interface with donors: Donors are practical and efficient at how money is spent and the search for evidence is considered 'value for money'. Most informants shared that donors have become flexible over the years and prefer to carry out formative studies[5], visit field sites, and explore the reasons why or why not an intervention worked. Donors and funded organizations work together at all stages of the research process and a proposal is discussed with the donor organization before it is finalized so that both are on the same page regarding how they will conceptualize the program and measure the gender-related concepts. NGOs and research

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[5] Formative studies are carried out before a development intervention is designed and implemented to understand the behavior and practices of a community.

organizations are pragmatic, evident in the tone and words used in their research proposals making their goals and strategies clear yet keeping space for flexibility in the proposed work.

Funding for gender-related research and programmatic work is increasing; but compared to other development goals such as poverty eradication, expansion of education and family planning, it still remains low. Organizations like the UN Women and the Ministry of Women and Child Development are not as well funded as other UN organizations and Ministries. An informant presented this reasoning:

> *It's simple. Patriarchy is pervasive, because it's about everybody's own homes; that's what is most difficult to change. I always compare it with the resource mobilization efforts of UNICEF, you have a hungry child on the cover of your report…and you get all the publicity [and donor interest]. If you are talking about a woman who has faced mental and physical violence, it's your own home, so you don't talk that openly about it. It's complex and challenging and if you are challenging gender norms, you are challenging caste, religious institutions and all the structures, which are deep rooted. You are challenging the way you exist, the way you behave, your daily routine on what you do in the house and that's not easy. It doesn't come easy to feminists who are so critical; it cannot come easy to non-feminists. I think that's the biggest challenge* (UN representative).

Interface with non-government organizations: Compared to all informants, those working with NGOs are more likely to directly interface with a wider group of actors, including beneficiaries of development programs. A key activity taken up by these NGOs is to provide training on gender to professionals who engage with beneficiaries of development programs including staff of community-based organizations/local NGOs, police officers, transport authorities, school students, health workers, influential community members and volunteers. Those working with beneficiaries consistently mentioned that one has to start working with younger people particularly to transform gender norms. Like any other kind of organization NGOs are not a homogenous category and informants' discussions reflected that diversity. For instance, one informant said that NGOs can be skeptical of research findings if they feel that such research has a hidden agenda, while another said that some NGOs take ideological stands and are 'left-oriented'. The general perspective of these NGOs are shaped by the class of people with whom they work and the ideology of the head of the organization.

Challenges In The Field Of Research On Gender

Lack of depth: Although research on gender has increased there is a long way to go to understand the central questions with sufficient depth. Even today, many studies explore gender questions superficially without asking 'why' or understanding and measuring social norms and the function of social institutions. In their research studies development practitioners often overlook integrating the role of socialization (especially at a young age) and sexuality in shaping gendered practices. Theoretical and historical explanations interwoven with the specificities of the Indian society are almost missing. One informant said as a caveat that researchers should avoid looking for findings that are 'representative' of 'India,' as India is a complex and diverse country. Respondents remarked:

> *You pick up any government report and you will find a chapter on gender, like the 8th or 9th chapter… it would generally be data disaggregated by sex. They know there should be something on gender. It's not mainstreamed, but one chapter; very tokenistic. What happens is that when it becomes a politically correct term, people do not internalize it so quickly* (Member of a research organization).

People think that research on gender is the easiest thing, because they think they know everything about women…women are suffering; they are exploited. But clearly we need more defining and understanding on what we mean by the power dynamics…it is beginning to happen, but we need more of that (Academic).

A student wants to work with me; all she has read is Judith Butler…no location…So some students want to work on sexuality and LGBT, without complex understanding of sexuality in the Indian context. Sexuality has been addressed even in Indian academics…but it's much more complicated. I feel increasingly we have very cursory work, even from some very good American institutions, which was not the case before. American anthropology was very high standard. Earlier when I used to meet academics in the United States, they were very solid. They understood the society. I think something is changing. Is it only affecting Indian academia? I don't know. I have a feeling that it is even affecting western academia. I do not know, because I do not stay there. I only make visits (Academic).

Only a few people in this sector understand norms. Norms are somewhere else, they are the society, not the individual. So until now, we have been measuring attitudes and saying that we are changing norms. Norms have not changed. If norms around child marriage had changed, India would have been somewhere else (Member of a research organization).

Little large-scale and national level data: A concern repeatedly voiced was the lack of large-scale national level data on gender. This is interesting and unexpected because all informants reiterated the importance of context to study gender. Most organizations however do rely on large-scale data for understanding the national and state-level context and for setting benchmarks for indicators used in their studies. Only the government is considered capable of funding such national level data-collection projects.

With one exception, all informants who work on the theme of gender-based violence talked about a lack of reliable data on this topic, the difficulties in defining violence (against women and men) and the need to collect data from diverse samples. The common sources of data on violence against women cited were the National Crime Records Bureau and the Demographic and Health Surveys (called the National Family Health Survey/NFHS). In many ways, informants argued that these sources do not provide a complete picture because of their narrow definitions of violence (domestic violence and not all forms of sexual harassment), and because they are based on reported cases and/or limited samples. The informant from the Ministry shared that the GOI has to be sensitive when collecting such data, noting, *"So many nations are eyeing our data."* This reflects the various ways in which countries are framed in development discourse. For example, India is often portrayed as a place where violence against women is notoriously high. An informant from the UN rightly addressed the importance of linking measures with theory and political questions in the context of studying violence against women:

> *There are also very different political views on it? Is more violence a good thing, is less violence a good thing? We all know that less violence is a good thing but if there is more violence, it is an indicator of women asserting and demanding their rights? Once we were visiting two state governments in southern India, which had done good work with women's self-help groups. The one from Andhra Pradesh said we have empowered our women; there is no violence. The one from Kerala said, we have empowered our women; there is growing violence* (UN representative).

Greater legitimacy to quantitative studies: Although most informants were working for organizations that carry out both qualitative and quantitative studies and while some researchers preferred mixed methods, all felt that that rigorous qualitative studies on gender-

related themes are needed. Qualitative studies were also believed to be less circulated, and thus less known in the research community. As said by some,

> *The myth is that people think qualitative is very easy, anyone can do it. Most people do not understand the philosophy of qualitative research…they look for representation* (Member of a research organization).

> *There is too much of an emphasis on RCTs on women's issues. Though we have used RCTs for measuring the baseline and endline, for our various projects related to violence against women, it may not be the best methodology* (Donor).

> *There should be good strong courses, strong researchers and bodies of work that are built around qualitative work. I think there is a lot of information on what qualitative research is and that it's not systematic and it's epistemologically different but I don't think so. There is sampling in qualitative work, methodologies and designs. I think people don't do it well or they don't do it enough, as everyone thinks you need to have a survey. But we don't have the how and why questions, we think very anecdotally about these things. It comes from a perception that quantitative data is saying more* (Donor).

> *Qualitative data needs to be backed up by some larger quantitative data to make any policy decisions on it. There is a need for qualitative work, but it should explore those things that have not been explored before* (Donor).

DISCUSSION

This paper seeks to understand how researchers and practitioners, situated in their respective institutions, are informed by different systems of knowledge in their study of gender, and what implications this has for what and how they study, and how they work together. This is especially important as this research field is expanding in countries like India with the entry of development organizations and international frameworks. Those who took part in this study argued that individual researchers and practitioners tend to conceptualize and measure gender based largely on the conceptual frameworks of the organizations for which they work. They indicated that researchers tend to frame gender differently because of their varying academic backgrounds and the type of work they do, but they also suggested that, despite these differences, there is a large degree of commensurability among the perspectives they discussed (Kuhn, 1970). Furthermore, most organizations have found ways to complement one another and to work together, pointing to the positive link between specialization and interdependence (Durkheim, 1933). That participants from most types of institutions seemed to engage concepts from the gender and development (GAD) approach more than concepts that could be classified as explicitly feminist ones could mean that there is limited cross-fertilization across approaches or that the GAD framework is currently dominant in the international development discourse in India. Extensive use of feminist concepts does occur within NGOs, however.   These organizations keep the language of feminism thriving while forming alliances with international development organizations.

Although portrayed as epistemologically different from one another in the literature, gender and development and feminist framings appear to be highly integrated in practice in the context of India. A number of practitioners interviewed for this research have argued that we can move beyond these epistemological antinomies (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), and build on a commitment to social justice. These gender specialists are a pragmatic group of researchers/practitioners who judge knowledge by how well it serves the interests of the people, and not by its epistemological underpinnings or by the methods used to obtain it

(Cornish and Gillespie, 2009). Pragmatic practices include implicitly accepting the use of different epistemologies, perspectives, disciplines and methods for denoting what is accepted as evidence, drawing on local languages, tailoring research proposals/reports to the needs of donors and the funded organization's own mission, publishing in newspapers and policy oriented journals, building networks with other experts, pursuing those in power/policy makers, and looking out for data that can be used to answer questions, both general and specific. Pragmatic researchers do not consider the explicit use of academic theory to be necessary.

Although an interest in carrying out research on gender/women is increasing, there is a long way ahead to achieve in-depth understanding of gender norms. Work on gender in the development sector is largely considered to be limited to data disaggregated by sex, or a tokenistic chapter among many other themes. There is a need to situate studies in the historical and cultural context and study gender in relation to social institutions, norms, sexuality and the process of socialization. Additionally, those discourses and specialists who prioritize conceptualization over empirical study feel least connected to policy makers. Theoretically rigorous studies, which initially informed development discourse, are waning. The increasing role of evidence based on numerical data is changing the field and explains why organizations are geared towards measuring gender-related concepts and seeking stronger measurement tools over strengthening the feeling of being united under the women's movement. Since the gender frameworks of each organization tend to drive theorization, conceptualization, and measurement decisions for many researchers, the focus on power, participation and justice that the women's movement has been rooted in is sometimes seen as secondary to GAD framings (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall and Rivas, 2015; Esquivel, 2016; Krishnaraj, 2003). Given the increasing connection between demographic/gender research and development/policy agendas, such studies tend to simplify the multidimensionality of gender and present generalizations from large-scale quantitative data to help identify single operationalizable interventions which can be applied to many kinds of settings (Basu, 1997; Cornwall et al., 2007).

This paper gives voice to the opinions of those practicing research on the research process itself, opinions that are not accessible in published work. I also demonstrate how professional associations play a role in the scientific field. The field is marked by a number of challenges that may provide an important avenue for future research. One is the emergence of pragmatic ways to bridge the discursive divide between institutions/researchers, including questions about the meaning of certain concepts, measurement indicators and ascendance of research methods. Another involves the belief that the taking an explicitly feminist stand continues to be viewed negatively by other researchers, policy makers and the public. Despite apparent feminist leanings, very few informants in this study took an openly feminist position.

This research is not without limitations. I was not able to meet with many policy makers or members of large bilateral donor organizations. In addition, the views of activists who were not affiliated with an organization were not included, given my sampling design. As each informant had distinct views, I tried to weave a general picture from those who were based in the capital city; hence different perspectives found outside of Delhi are not represented. Many of my informants were self-selected and collectively they represent some of the bigger and more influential organizations in the field of gender.

In addition, those who were interviewed may have been selective in the stories they opted to tell. And those who preferred not to be audio recorded may have had particular reasons for making that choice. It is possible that they faced unique challenges that were not revealed in our conversations. The results presented here cannot be generalized to the expansive field of

research on gender/women; but they present a range of perspectives from members of different types of organizations that address concerns about gender in the context of India.

This paper opens up the question of what makes one more critical in their approach to study/research, acknowledging the need for critical analysis, especially when a research field is expanding. Personal stories shared with me reveal tensions in personal opinions vis-à-vis societal expectations and/or organization's/policy makers' frameworks, all of which lays bare the axiom that the personal is political. A woman in a senior position talked about her encounter with biases because she is unmarried, while another talked about how his wife would answer my questions differently, because of gendered socialization. Gender may be a topic of research for all informants but questioning one's own biases is the beginning for any social science research. Interestingly, it was the male informants who raised the point that gender equality/transformation starts with men giving up power; and one of these informants left me with a question, "Do men really want to give up the power they have?"

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