



2022

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Recommended Citation

Gurrieri, Lauren; Prothero, Andrea; Bettany, Shona; Dobscha, Susan; Drenten, Jenna M.; Ferguson, Shelagh; Finkelstein, Stacey; McVey, Laura; Ourahmoune, Nacima; Steinfield, Laurel; and Zayer, Linda Tuncay. Feminist academic organizations: Challenging sexism through collective mobilizing across research, support, and advocacy. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 29, 6: 1-22, 2022. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, School of Business: Faculty Publications and Other Works, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12912>

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

WILEY

Sexism in Business Schools: Structural Inequalities, Systemic Failures and Individual Experiences of Sexism

Feminist academic organizations: Challenging sexism through collective mobilizing across research, support, and advocacy

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Funding information

Open access publishing facilitated by RMIT University, as part of the Wiley - RMIT University agreement via the Council of Australian University Librarians.

Abstract

This paper examines the establishment of a feminist academic organization, GENMAC (Gender, Markets, and Consumers; genmac.co), serving gender scholars in business schools and related fields. In so doing, it builds on the emerging literature of feminist academic organizations, as situated within feminist organizational studies (FOS). Through a feminist case study and by assessing the reflections of GENMAC's board members, we tell the story of the emergence of GENMAC and detail the tensions the organization encountered as it formally established itself as a feminist organization within the confines of a business school setting, a patriarchal system, and a neoliberal university paradigm. We build on the FOS literature by considering how our organization counters cultures of heightened individualism and builds collective action to challenge sexism through the nexus of research, support, and advocacy pillars of our organization. We demonstrate how, through these actions, our organization challenges hierarchies of knowledge, prioritizes the care

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and support needed for the day-to-day survival of gender scholars in business schools, and spotlights and challenges structural inequalities and injustices in the academy.

KEYWORDS

business schools, feminist academic organizations, feminist case study, feminist organizational studies, sexism

It is so much more than just producing scholarship - it is questioning and/or resisting the very structures that underpin marketing scholarship. Likewise, it is about exposing the kinds of injustices that have too long remained hidden and unspoken about in our field. It's a political project - and that is why it is critical to have a community of likeminded scholars who can advocate collectively.

(Simone)

Systemic problems that perpetuate injustice and inequity in academia have been well documented in recent years (Flood et al., 2013; Pereira, 2016; Prothero & Tadajewski, 2021; Sang & Calvard, 2019; Walters, 2018). Sexism is one such critical and longstanding issue. Women in academia experience a range of structural barriers that impede their careers, giving rise to the phenomena of the 'leaky pipeline' and 'glass ceiling' (Bourabain, 2021). Higher education institutions are second only to the military in the number of sexual harassment cases (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Business schools in academia constitute a particularly 'chilly climate' for women (Lanier et al., 2009; Reilly et al., 2016), where it is difficult to challenge the inequality regime (Acker, 2009). Consequently, business schools have been observed as undermining the very practices of 'diversity management' taught in business courses (Fotaki, 2011). While socio-political movements such as #MeToo and #TimesUp have been significant across different societies (particularly the Global North) in challenging the normalization of sexist behavior and a culture of "just grin and bear it" (Ozkazanc-Pan, 2019; Veer et al., 2021), individual and systemic sexism still pervade academia.

Nevertheless, as our opening quote highlights, collective organizing remains critical to spurring the action - consciousness raising of individuals and the social transformation of institutions - needed to enact social change (Collins, 1990). In this paper, we aim to investigate the role of collective feminist organizing. In doing so, we provide a critique from within the Global North context of the postfeminist neoliberal academy—specifically the business school context—as a means to both resist and dismantle sexism in its various forms. We explore how feminist academic organizations can challenge sexism and offer alternative spaces and practices in such a climate. Through a feminist case study, we tell the story of how we, as a group of gender scholars located across the globe (spanning Australasia, Europe, and North America) in marketing and related fields, mobilized to establish and maintain a feminist academic organization, GENMAC (Gender, Markets, and Consumers; genmac.co) to address sexism in the marketing academy, a business school discipline, through collective efforts across the domains of research, support, and advocacy. In doing so, we recognize that the feminist case method allows us to document our story (Reinharz, 1992) and contribute to the challenge set in this journal to "tell feminist stories for others to follow" (Pullen et al., 2019, p. 7).

We begin by examining the extant literature on feminist organizational studies (FOS), highlighting the intersections and elaborations of feminism and organization. Next, we turn to feminist academic organizations, illustrating how, to date, challenging gendered inequalities in academia—as heightened by the conditions of neoliberalism and postfeminism—has encompassed a separate focus on research, support, and/or advocacy in feminist academic organizing. We then present our feminist case study of GENMAC, our feminist academic organization nested in the discipline of marketing. Our case study documents our story to date and maps how, through GENMAC, we have sought to resist, challenge, and provide alternative spaces to confront sexism and the gendered inequalities and injustices

present in our discipline (and the wider academy). This encompasses building a feminist academic organization that challenges hierarchies and promotes inclusivity through organizing efforts across the nexus of research, support, and advocacy. By examining these initiatives (and arising tensions) through bringing forth our voices and others in our organization, we contribute to the literature on feminist academic organizing, demonstrating how feminist academic organizations, in the context of postfeminist neoliberal academia, can mobilize to counter cultures of heightened individualism and build collective action to challenge sexism. Specifically, this is enacted through research, support, and advocacy efforts that challenge hierarchies of knowledge, prioritize the care and support needed for the day-to-day survival of gender scholars in business schools, and spotlight and challenge structural inequalities and injustices in the academy.

1 | FEMINIST ORGANIZATIONAL STUDIES

A growing body of scholarship has examined the intersections of feminism and organization, giving rise to feminist organizational studies (FOS). FOS focuses on how gender relations (and their intersections with other forms of oppression) are enmeshed with and fundamental to contemporary organizations and capitalism, as elaborated through both feminist and organizational theories (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Grosser & Moon, 2019). FOS is both a political and intellectual endeavor that conceives gender as a central organizing principle of social structure, including organizational practices and processes (Acker, 1990). This inspires exploration of how sexism and misogyny operate as forces across organizational and social life and the ways in which these can be named and challenged (Bell et al., 2019). Research across FOS has drawn upon a range of feminist theoretical perspectives—including liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, poststructuralist/postmodern and transnational/(post)colonial—each of which conceive gender in different ways, offering distinctive ways to frame gender problems and arising courses of action (Calás & Smircich, 2006). Each perspective shares a recognition of gendered dominance in social arrangements and the arising need for social change (Calás & Smircich, 2006), whereby a gender regime results in the systematic marginalization, oppression, and exploitation of women and the privileging of men (acknowledging diversity in how this may be expressed and experienced) (Bell et al., 2019). This embeddedness of patriarchal structures across organizations manifests a “masculinity-as-power” dynamic (Gabriel, 2014).

One research focus in FOS is feminist organizations, namely “the places in which and the means through which the work of the women’s movement is done” (Ferree & Martin, 1995, 13). There is no single form that a feminist organization constitutes—ranging from highly bureaucratized structures to radical underground collectives—yet all focus on power, hierarchy, and decision-making processes (Mendez & Wolf, 2001). Typically, feminist organizations support decentralized and non-hierarchical structures, egalitarianism, equality, collective leadership, and consensus (Acker, 1990; Gherardi, 2009; Martin, 1990; Thomas, 1999). Feminist organizing is often messy and dissonant (Deschner et al., 2020). Feminist values, moreover, drive a blurring of the organizational and personal and a focus on emotionally charged situations (Ashcraft, 2001; Martin, 1990). However, feminist organizing processes can be difficult to sustain (Ashcraft, 2001; Eisenstein, 1995), and tensions can arise between respecting multiple diverse voices and achieving common goals (Acker, 1995). Moreover, feminist organizations can still experience issues stemming from unequal power dynamics (Tom, 1995). A focus on feminist outcomes often directs feminist organizations (Thomas, 1999), with ‘success’ tending to be evaluated in terms of the impact made on people’s lives over time (Staggenborg, 1995). Another key consideration is that many studies on feminist organizations hail from scholars from the Global North, which carries certain privileges (Bell et al., 2019).

2 | SEXISM, BUSINESS SCHOOLS, AND THE POSTFEMINIST NEOLIBERAL ACADEMY

FOS has generated insights into the gendered nature of academic organization, processes, and practices of knowledge production (Benschop & Brouns, 2003; Pullen & Rhodes, 2015; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). Sexism is an

ongoing feature of academic organizations and work, where issues of discrimination and sexual harassment are rife and women's career progression is stymied, with these issues exacerbated for women of color (Lester et al., 2017). Indeed, women constitute the minority of full professors in business schools (Bartel, 2018). Academic 'merit' is highlighted as a key obstacle hindering gender equality across universities (Clavero & Galligan, 2020), fostering gendered assumptions about the 'ideal academic' (Lund, 2012). Precarity is a dominant issue, with women holding the majority of contingent faculty positions, including part- and full-time non-tenure-track appointments (Zheng, 2018)—especially in business schools (Bartel, 2018). Amplifying these issues is the reproduction of patriarchal norms and structures in academia. As Savigny (2017, p. 644) notes, "the history of women in Universities is one which has not taken place in a natural setting, but against a backdrop of masculinist discourses which have written and defined structures, cultures, and the position of women in the academy". Moreover, it is under this purview that programs that aim to support women and caregivers are both created and evaluated.

Across academia, women produce less research than their male colleagues (Barbezat, 2006), are less frequently first authors (Andersen et al., 2020), publish fewer articles throughout their career and acquire fewer citations than their male counterparts (Huang et al., 2020). Citation practices privilege the citing of 'canonized' research produced by men, highlighting patriarchal practices in the academy vested in knowledge (re)production and the routine and systematic under-recognition of women's research (Bell et al., 2019; Czarniawska & Sevón, 2018). Likewise, gender and feminist scholarship occupies a marginalized or excluded position, especially in what are considered prestigious journals. This is the case across multiple business disciplines, including management and organization studies (Bell et al., 2020; Benschop & Verloo, 2006; Calás & Smircich, 2006) as well as marketing (McDonagh & Prothero, 2018). Feminist research is also subject to disciplinary effects in the peer review process—it is more likely to be desk rejected or substantially watered down (Özkazanç-Pan, 2012). Moreover, for business scholars, very few feminist/gender journals are included in the lists of journals recognized by business schools (Harding et al., 2013). Compounding this problem is the longstanding misunderstanding of what gender research actually "is"—namely the difference between studying 'gender-as-a-variable' sex-difference research and gender as a social construct with an activist agenda (Bettany et al., 2010). Collectively, these issues function as epistemic oppression (Dotson, 2014).

Gender inequalities are further heightened by the conditions of contemporary neoliberal academia, as characterized by managerialization (Acker & Wagner, 2019), precarity (Gill, 2010), performance-oriented practices, and workload intensification alongside an audit culture (Davies & Bansel, 2010). This has fostered an individualistic culture that is competitive, isolating, damaging to wellbeing, marked by masculinist and ever-increasing standards of 'success'—with particularly harmful effects for women, especially caregivers (Bayfield et al., 2020; Gill & Donaghue, 2016). Emotions such as anxiety pervade university cultures and diffuse across personal and professional lives (Askins & Blazek, 2017). In this age of the gendered neoliberal university (Lund & Tienari, 2019), there has also been a rise in postfeminist discourses whereby gender equality is said to be achieved and feminism is reconstructed as empowerment marked by individualism and choice (Gill, 2007). In a postfeminist university, the institution is assumed to be on the right track to achieving gender equality and collective struggles and action are discouraged (Deschner et al., 2020). Here, the responsibility for sexism is placed on the individual, with structural gender inequalities denied (Liu, 2019). In turn, the collectivist and activist orientation of feminism is undermined (Bell et al., 2019) and replaced by a neoliberal feminism that only represents the interests of white, middle class, heterosexual women (Calás & Smircich, 2006; Liu, 2019). What then is the role of feminist academic organizing in resisting, challenging, and providing alternative spaces and practices in such a climate?

3 | FEMINIST ORGANIZING IN ACADEMIA (FOA)

A growing number of feminist academics have begun to document how they organize as a way of challenging and resisting neoliberal and postfeminist cultures, exposing unequal power relations, and providing the collective

support to survive academia (Deschner et al., 2020). FOA examines how research, support, or advocacy efforts are promoted—although presently the enactment of these efforts occurs in siloed ways.

First, FOA in the domain of research has examined how different practices can challenge the exclusion of women's voices and the limited framings of what counts as legitimate in knowledge reproduction. In response to this, some advocate for feminist slow scholarship to relieve mounting pressures (Bergland, 2018; Mountz et al., 2015). Others draw upon feminist methodologies, such as writing and publishing personal reflections on lived experiences (Liu, 2019; Lund & Tienari, 2019) to challenge traditional forms of knowledge production. Meanwhile, other collectives have focused on research collaborations, attending to how different perspectives can be considered and integrated throughout the research process with a view to negotiating a social contract acceptable to the group (Voice Group, 2008). Others come together with the aim of offering a counternarrative to the masculinized, disaffected audit culture of academia (Henderson et al., 2019). Even the act of academic writing itself is revisited through efforts to develop a feminist *écriture* that challenges the gendered nature of forms of writing (Fotaki et al., 2014). Collectively, these acts envisage a new kind of academy that embraces feminist values and scholarship.

Second, FOA has encompassed efforts to build a more supportive academic environment for women, queer, trans, and non-binary people. This includes adopting a politics of care as a collective stance to shift neoliberal norms (Askins & Blazek, 2017); openly sharing challenges (SIGJ2 Writing Collective, 2012); promoting unconventional approaches to self-care (O'Dwyer et al., 2018); creating 'protective enclaves' that challenge masculinist environments (Wright et al., 2017); creating feminist spaces through prefigurative organizing (Deschner et al., 2020); advocating for feminist pedagogy to inspire struggle and change (Weber, 2010); and using online social networks as collective support tools to discuss challenges and seek advice (Bayfield et al., 2020). To date, these efforts in business schools have been organized inconsistently and informally, although networks are beginning to emerge to formalize supportive and safe spaces, such as the intersectional feminist VIDA network (Contu, 2018).

Third, FOA has involved various and diverse advocacy efforts that aim to bring attention to sexism, injustices, and inequity, while also designing innovative approaches and developing tools to address these (Gender at Work, 2021). For example, a group of PhD students established an encrypted messaging app to develop strategies and foster support for those experiencing misconduct (Smyth et al., 2020). Within business schools, *The PhD Project* (2022) in the USA was established as a means through which the diversity of business school faculty could be improved, with an emphasis on sponsoring and supporting PhD students from minority backgrounds. Other examples include the Australian #FEAS—Feminist Educators Against Sexism (Blaise et al., 2019)—who built a punk feminist collective to mobilize and connect feminists to resist sexism in the academy—and the Res-Sisters' (2019) whose focus was on feminist collective strategies to survive and resist the academy, as articulated through a five-point 'call to arms' 'Manifesta'. The above demonstrates that advocacy comes in many forms, and can vary from smaller resistance acts, such as the organization of feminist workshops, to more consolidated efforts aimed at bringing together larger collectives for change.

Collective action that builds solidarity to find collective solutions is critical in challenging neoliberal and post-feminist conditions (Bayfield et al., 2020). Yet, how countering sexism, inequalities, and injustices can be collectively enacted via FOA across the nexus of research, support, and advocacy—as opposed to focusing on each independently—remains underdeveloped. Indeed, the power of harnessing this nexus can be seen through institutions like the *Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media* (2022). Established in 2004 by actor Geena Davis, the group has various pillars focusing on advocacy, support, and research, enabling the organization to tackle sexism, inequity, and injustice within the entertainment industry. The group has had considerable success; for instance, their large-scale research highlighted inequality by showing the difference between male and female speaking roles in film and television and stereotyping "behind the camera". They have also been successful with research funding and collaboration with other groups such as the United Nations. Most recently, their funding from Google led to the development of the Geena Davis Inclusion Quotient (GD-IQ), an algorithm that can highlight gender representation in movies. The group has also had success through their advocacy efforts to advance more women in STEM roles. And, they are supporting various DEI initiatives, for example, founding a successful film festival in 2015. However, this is a feminist

organization outside of academia. To understand how this nexus can be advanced within academia through collective feminist organizing, we next present a feminist case study of GENMAC, a feminist academic organization that assembles and advocates for gender scholars in marketing academia and questions and challenges sexist and oppressive cultures of knowledge production within the discipline.

4 | GENMAC: THE ORIGIN STORY OF A FEMINIST ACADEMIC ORGANIZATION

GENMAC is being wrapped up in a beautiful patchwork quilt where everyone does their bit.

(Jan)

I believe gender issues to be important, both for the persons and experiences involved; as a source of support and to support colleagues; and because I find gender subjects and phenomena matter to offer vital knowledge valuable to the field of marketing and consumption studies, and to society.

(Mercedes)

Origin stories are important tropes in the establishment of political organizations, and told via a feminist case study, are an important way to document a) the existence of the group b) for the group to reflect on its activities, and c) to consider the experiences of its members (Reinharz, 1992). The stories we tell others and ourselves about our origins help us make sense of and communicate who we have become over time (Zheng et al., 2021) and where we have come from. Building on Reinharz's (1992) summary of feminist case studies and the importance of storytelling (Grosser, 2021; Pullen et al., 2019) we tell GENMAC's story by exploring and reflecting on our personal involvement in GENMAC alongside the reflections of our wider board. Specifically, our feminist case study revolves around the telling of our origin story by providing an account of our experiences and reflections in establishing our organization and the role the organization plays in advancing research, support, and advocacy efforts to date.

Within our case discussion are quotes from our Board Members (some of whom are also authors of this manuscript) who were asked to reflect on these issues for the purposes of telling our story and writing our case. Pseudonyms are used to provide anonymity, and each pseudonym is the name of a feminist thinker chosen by each of our members. As well as reflecting on our organization in the process of writing this paper, each of our twenty Board Members were asked to reflect and comment on six key questions, which form the quotes contained throughout the manuscript. These were:

- What does it mean to you to be a gender scholar in marketing?
- What is your first memory of GENMAC? (NB For many of us this will be before we officially became GENMAC, and when we were involved with the ad hoc gender and marketing conferences).
- Why did you join the GENMAC organization?
- What does it bring to you in terms of advocacy/support/research/other?
- How would you like to see the GENMAC organization develop in the future?
- Anything else you wish to add?

We begin by articulating clearly the context within which GENMAC operates, namely the marketing academy. Mainstream marketing research cleaves strongly to neoliberal capitalism; the free, choosing, and agentic neoliberal consumer is the dominant heroic trope. Marketing as a discipline is globally dominated by US scholarship and US-based elite journals, so much so that in Europe the discipline is hollowing out, with scholars turning to journals in organizational studies, sociology, cultural theory, and tourism to gain the necessary, career defining 4/4* publications (and to articulate counter hegemonic ideas and discourse). Most other business and management disciplines hold highly ranked gender and critically focused journals, unlike marketing. Consequently, PhD students are not shown

a clear institutionalized path for gender focused and feminist work. Within this fallow context for persuasive and transformational feminist scholarship, the idea of GENMAC was born.

Gender and feminist work in marketing has a long history, with a relatively small patchworked network of gender scholars from around the globe loosely tethered by a biennial conference that began in 1991 and continues through today (Bettany et al., 2010). As one of our board members articulates “GENMAC is a young group with long roots” (Mercedes). Several factors led to the decision to formally organize as a feminist academic organization. First, our conferences are typically funded from internal sources such as host universities and generous benefactors. Conference locations were chosen in an ad hoc fashion with no formal call for proposals. Second, apart from volunteer conference chairs for individual conferences, there was no overarching conference governing body to oversee the continuity of conferences. Third, we note the ceding of the gender landscape to other entities from the early 2000s, including sub-disciplinary organizations. Practices such as establishing canons (with no feminist scholars in either the delivery or in the reading lists of such canons) and reacting defensively to the kinds of inward facing criticality and reflexivity of gender and feminist work, means gender scholars felt the most productive types of feminist critique were being co-opted and neutered (or spayed?) by experimentalists, cultural anthropologists, and evolutionary psychologists. We became concerned that this slow erosion would dissuade future gender scholars from pursuing gender as a topic. Fourth, junior scholars, notably doctoral students, informed us they had no education in gender scholarship during their doctoral programs, and were dissuaded from pursuing a PhD in gender due to a perception they would be unmarketable. They pleaded for help and direction. Fifth, we saw the emerging need for an advocacy organization for women related to issues of discrimination, harassment, and assault (DHA). We were informally fielding complaints of DHA from women in marketing across the globe. Thus, we chose to create an academic, advocacy, and support organization to strengthen gender scholarship and to improve the lived experience of women scholars in the field.

In the summer of 2016, our organization took shape. It began as many revolutions start, in a Parisian café. The gender conference sessions had just wrapped up for the day and one attendee started writing about what a gender organization in the field could look like, how it could be governed, how membership could work, what duties would be fulfilled, and what goals it could accomplish. These notes were typed up and spontaneously presented to attendees prior to the end of the conference. After the presentation, a small group talked about the possibility of starting a gender organization. That informal gathering attracted 20 scholars from every echelon of our field and was the beginning of what we now call GENMAC. We started to coalesce an informal group of gender scholars to form our first “board”. We did not have any verbiage to choose or describe this group, but knew that we wanted to make sure that many voices were “at the table”. We began to discuss constructing a more formal “call for proposals” for the 2018 conference, eventually holding that conference prior to a more established conference in our field. At its conclusion, we held our first official GENMAC board meeting. Here, we discussed governance, goals, mission, and guiding principles. These were lively and extremely productive, and not everyone was initially convinced about establishing a formal organization:

If I'm honest, I joined reluctantly. I love the group and everything it stands for, I just hate organizations and bureaucracy ... That said, I am amazed by how much the group has achieved since its inception. And, I am happy to eat my words and say setting up formally was, and is, an excellent idea.

(Gloria)

The minutes became the basis for the official GENMAC governance structure and guiding principles, as collectively agreed by the board. Once our charter was drafted, a small committee began drafting our bylaws, using as open and transparent a process as possible.

During our establishment process, we followed a number of key principles to avoid replicating patriarchal power structures. Recognizing that academic work is embedded in patriarchal social formations that marginalize and silence feminism as both theory and praxis (Benschop & Verloo, 2006), we adopted a deliberately feminist means of organ-

izing. Like other feminist organizations that promote a democratic non-hierarchical structure (e.g., Ferguson, 1984), GENMAC avoids a patriarchal top-down structure and fosters participatory modes of decision-making. While GENMAC has an organization model that mirrors classic academic organizations built through elections, it remains collective in its functioning with a series of collectives (4 subcommittees) that report to a collective (the council). The council is elected by the larger board, with our first set of elections taking place in 2020, reflecting the mode of governance agreed upon in our bylaws. All GENMAC collectives perform coordination duties, so that no individual acts as a single coordinator. This ensures there is sufficient flexibility for decisions to be taken collectively, in line with collective leadership models in feminist organizations (e.g., Calás & Smircich, 2006).

GENMAC avoids the masculine leadership style of command and control, ensuring there is a conscious effort to maintain collaborative and participatory modes of operating. This includes the time set aside at meetings to discuss personal issues, reflecting the feminist emphasis on holism and the blurring of the organizational and personal (e.g., Martin et al., 1998), something cherished by our members. As Jan summarized, it simply provides 'sanity', and others reflect,

GENMAC has been a lifeline of a community—and more importantly, I see so much potential in the organization... GENMAC brings community and other experts I can turn to for advice and support. I know GENMAC members will be there for me in any time of need. For me, it's less about the research, or even the advocacy. It's about our collective identity—all coming together with a shared interest.

(Sophonisba)

The space provided for personal reflection, respecting different perspectives and reflexive learning strengthens the culture and fosters an environment in which all members' voices count. We acknowledge, though, that there is a risk of burnout in a system in which everyone is a 'leader'. GENMAC also makes a space for community and fun, seeing both as important aspects of self-care and a way to strengthen unity among members, something reflected on by many of our members:

I remember laughter, tears, booze and deep, meaningful fun. Watching football in the rain with Mercedes, Starhawk, and others in Paris. Mostly I feel deep commune with this group – and I have been involved right from the beginning of my own academic journey.

(Donna)

In addition, there were more formal aspects of organizing that we had to grapple with. First, we undertook the process of becoming a non-profit organization. We implemented communication strategies to build our community, disseminate our research, and create reach for our advocacy efforts—all funded with our own monies and maintained ourselves. We soft launched our membership drive. Membership dues were created to serve several purposes: 1) helping to pay for future conferences and seminars, 2) paying for a scholarship created to support female scholars of color in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, and 3) supporting junior scholars with research grants. Yet, we experienced various tensions and complexities in undertaking this formal organizing that clashed with feminist values. For instance, despite being a global collective, we were required to set up in one country and were bound by these national parameters. We were constrained by the bureaucracy of capitalist processes, as we needed access to both institutional funds and credit cards to set up a bank account to process our membership dues. We were deeply aware of the ready access to such resources we were afforded by the privileges of our positions in the academy—and that these may not be as readily available to grassroots feminist organizations.

Finally, a key issue that we continue to grapple with and have not fully addressed is the diversity of our organizational composition that is "too female, white and from establishments in the Global North" (Gloria). Indeed, our members are fully aware of this important limitation in our feminist organizing:

GENMAC should not be about white women driving a white feminism agenda. It should be an inclusive, activist, feminist research organization that educates younger generations, helps them understand basic feminist theories and encourages gender research and scholarship.

(Ajinkya)

Committing to prioritize this as a matter of urgency, undertaking advocacy with an intersectional purpose (as detailed below) and our ongoing solidarity efforts to align with and amplify race scholars in marketing are steps we are taking to redress this. We acknowledge, though, that much more needs to be done. Next, we reflect on the three core pillars our organization began to address as a means to challenge sexism and offer alternative spaces and practices in the postfeminist neoliberal academy.

5 | BUILDING A FEMINIST ACADEMIC ORGANIZATION TO ADDRESS SEXISM IN BUSINESS SCHOOLS: COLLECTIVE MOBILIZING ACROSS RESEARCH, ADVOCACY, AND SUPPORT

I see the institutionalization of GENMAC as necessary to increase power for both advocacy and research. Whilst recognizing that an informal structure has a unique culture, the steps towards institutionalization have not negatively impacted our culture so far. Largely due (in my opinion) by the fabulous work undertaken by the Advisory board, go you!

(Jan)

In this section, we wish to avoid painting a heroic or savior image of GENMAC as an organization. Rather, we confront the reality of contradictions and complexities entangled with being a feminist organization within capitalist and patriarchal systems. Since our official formation in 2019, how have we, as a feminist academic organization, continued to build on our mission to advance gender scholarship, support our members, and engage in a broader advocacy role? Below we detail our ongoing efforts across research, support, and advocacy; and while they form separate discussions here, it is important to emphasize their inter-relationships and the enmeshed efforts that give rise to their enactment, as per the messy nature of much feminist organizing (Deschner et al., 2020). Indeed, these inter-relationships have been aptly summarized by Simone:

For me it's all interconnected and comes down to voice - calling out the unspoken, coming together to be heard more loudly, amplifying less heard perspectives as well as a process of ongoing discovery of my own voice. In turn, that solidifies who I am as a scholar, who I want to surround myself with, who I feel supported by and knowing what injustices require my attention.

(Simone)

Research

It is an exciting time to be a gender scholar in marketing. With #metoo and other social movements sweeping the world, there seems to be a turning point in business and in academia whereby gender is increasingly recognized as not only a legitimate area for research, but one that is important. As scholars, we need to keep the momentum going—gender is not a problem that is “solved.”

(Ruth)

As signaled earlier, gender research has been marginalized in the field of marketing both historically and to date. Moreover, what gender research constitutes has been subject to contestation. In mainstream marketing scholarship, there is a stream of research that focuses on sex differences in relation to a range of psychological constructs, such as information processing and decision-making. Challenging the underlying assumptions of inherent biological differences steeped in this research—and distinguishing it from gender scholarship—has presented an initial set of political challenges. Beyond this, there have been obstacles to advancing scholarship examining gender, consumers, and the market that is more culturally informed (e.g., Dobscha, 2019; Otnes & Tuncay Zayer, 2012); critical (El Jurdi & Ourahmoune, 2021; Gurrieri et al., 2016; Maclaran et al., 2017) and transformative (e.g., Hein et al., 2016; Steinfield et al., 2019; Zayer et al., 2017). Indeed, only 2% of research appearing in what are labeled the marketing field's top journals (between 1993 and 2016) is focused on gender (McDonagh & Prothero, 2018). This marginalization exists within a patriarchal academic system where less than a third of editorial review board positions are held by women, where there is a lack of named awards after female scholars, and where female voices are limited when celebratory issues of journals are published (Prothero & McDonagh, 2021).

Consequently, gender research has—and continues to be—conducted on the peripheries of marketing scholarship. This was echoed by one of our participants:

To say we've made progress is true, but there also seems to be residual reluctance to be pigeonholed as gender scholars—in favor of labels such as 'feminist scholar', 'queer theorist', 'consumer sociologist interested in gender issues', and others.

(Sophonisba)

Indeed, the bi-annual gender conference was, for many years, the only venue that celebrated gender scholarship within marketing—with gender tracks not added to other marketing conferences until 2014 (Macromarketing) and 2015 (Transformative Consumer Research), respectively. How then does GENMAC address these issues while nurturing and advocating for gender scholarship within the marketing academy? Our response has been to create a series of initiatives that challenge the devaluing of gender-focused scholarship in the marketing academy. However, in doing so, we are forced at times to operate within the capitalistic boundaries of the academy. As an organization with advocacy at its core, GENMAC's current initiatives reconsider the function and premise of an academic organization by decentering capitalist research outputs, while recognizing the need to operate within the broader capitalist academy.

An underrecognized form of gender and sexual DHA is the devaluing of gender-focused scholarship, particularly in ignoring, delegitimizing, or plagiarizing the intellectual labor of gender-focused scholars. In the field of consumer research, some suggest gender-focused scholarship has “crossed over from being seen as a niche specialization to having people recognize its broader significance” (Drenten et al., 2021, 304). However, gender-focused research often remains relegated to the margins of business scholarship. GENMAC aims to make gender-focused scholarship not only visible but highly citable—recognizing that citability is tethered to the neoliberal, capitalist measures of value in academia. For as one member observes, we need:

More ways to elevate our research. Whether we like it or not, we are still evaluated on citation counts, h index and other measures which we know to be damaging to women scholars and ones that disadvantage scholars doing research that is not on “hot topics” or considered “mainstream”. We lose out on tenure, promotion, grants, etc. when in fact our research does have impact, just not necessarily impact that is measured in these ways.

(Ruth)

In a critical statement from the *Cite Black Women Collective*, Smith et al. (2021, 1) affirm “the academy has traditionally used authorship to create hyper-individualistic hierarchies of knowledge that can be monetized and cata-

logged according to capitalist and neoliberal measurements.” Indeed, citations and publications are—to use a business term—a key performance indicator in the capitalist academy. Citations and publications equate to value, but they also shape how future knowledge is created. To counter and influence this, GENMAC has designed four key initiatives to promote citability, recognition, and accessibility of gender-focused research. First, we created a shared ‘syllabus’ for gender-focused consumer and marketing research, which can be incorporated both formally (e.g., doctoral-level courses) and informally (e.g., self-guided reading). This also encompasses curated ‘pocket literature reviews’ that provide topical guides to scholarship within subcategories of gender-focused consumer research. Second, we developed promotional posts on social media, such as scholar spotlights and featured publications and special issues, to promote gender scholarship in marketing more widely. Third, we hosted virtual writing groups across different time zones to mentor early career scholars, making knowledge more accessible and collaborative. Fourth, we are introducing awards for gender scholarship, named for underrepresented women and minority scholars in the field to amplify identities as a way of countering the extensive number of awards in our field named after white men.

By making our research more widely accessible, recognizable, and citable, we are advocating for the legitimization and recognition of both gender-focused research and scholars in the field. Indeed, this has inspired recent efforts by our members to co-edit a number of recent special issues (e.g., Coleman et al., 2021; Dobscha & Ostberg, 2021; Gurrieri et al., 2020; Steinfield et al., *forthcoming*) as well as develop cognate research groups, such as those that examine issues of sexuality. This crucially functions to challenge the hierarchies of knowledge that persist in the (marketing) academy (Coffin et al., 2022). However, we acknowledge that these efforts nevertheless operate within the existing boundaries of the capitalist academy and what it recognizes and rewards as ‘successful’. A tension thus lies in using capitalist valuations (e.g., awards, citations) of intellectual labor to combat gender and sexual DHA as a manifestation of citational violence, wherein gender-focused research and marginalized scholars’ work are devalued.

Support

I have always felt *supported*, valued and heard. As an emerging researcher, it brings me a sense of feeling like the work I want to do will have a place, an audience, a form of value. But it’s not just acceptance, it’s also protection: it’s an acknowledgement that there are predatory men and practices in the marketing discipline, but you can succeed without pandering to the egos and expectations of these men.

(Andrea)

As detailed above, a key aim of our organization is to support female colleagues, particularly in relation to their experiences of DHA. It became very clear from the informal complaints we were receiving from women around the globe, from PhD students to Full Professors, this was and is a significant problem within our academy. And, of course, addressing such issues remains fraught with so many difficulties. At the same time, directly confronting them within our academy more broadly has not happened. One way our organization has differentiated itself is through our approach to confronting DHA. As a feminist organization, recognizing and publicizing the prolific, gendered, and sexualized nature of DHA was central to early conversations between council members. While we had all heard (unofficial) disclosures from colleagues and students, and knew of specific perpetrators, we identified that challenging the normalizing of this criminal activity would be critical to separating ourselves from the problematic work of other marketing organizations in addressing ‘misconduct’ (Prothero & Tadajewski, 2021). Although we have witnessed examples of roundtables at conferences focused on DHA issues (Veer et al., 2018), ongoing efforts by the GENMAC group to include such events at major conferences have been met by rejection and comments that such a session is important, but that within limited time slots other topics take priority.

In response, we have begun to implement a range of initiatives to address DHA in the marketing academy in line with our feminist values. First, we established a committee to develop a ‘GENMAC pact’. This pact aims to unite global frameworks (such as CEDAW, ILO, and the Beijing Platform) to address intersecting injustices suffered by women in the worlds of work and higher education, but with specific attention to the gendered inequalities

systemic to business discipline(s). We intend to invite other marketing organizations to ratify their commitment to our pact. Second, recognizing the culture of DHA in the marketing academy and the lack of supportive structures, we designed a conference knowledge forum to address institutional injustices and develop a conversation for transforming organizations in the academy. Third, in response to a recently published climate survey on gender within the marketing academy, we collectively authored a rejoinder commentary to hold marketing scholars accountable in accurately researching and reporting sexual DHA. Finally, in support of individuals who suffer DHA in our field, we released a swift public statement of solidarity following the image-based abuse of a GENMAC member. We also receive reports and disclosures of DHA from members of the marketing academy. In doing so, we aim to advocate for victim-survivors and call out the problematic culture of DHA that persists in our academy. Traditionally, academic organizations tend to defer gender and sexual DHA issues to individual institutions. GENMAC, however, is attempting to act as a field-level supportive resource for gender and sexual DHA issues.

Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate how we prioritize care and support for our members, as Audre notes:

GENMAC gives me a sense of community and the knowledge that there are other teacher/scholars who share the sensibilities about gender and gender justice that I have. There is a priceless sense of comfort that comes with that knowledge.

(Audre)

Moreover, as the quotes above highlights, we offer support and guidance in other ways too—through helping and mentoring each other and our members in relation to our scholarship, our career advancement, in navigating our roles as women in business schools, and in sharing and supporting in relation to our personal lives. As Rosi notes:

At last, there may be a 'we' rather than a 'me'. Gender transcends our work into our personal lives, and if Covid has shown us anything it is that we cannot do it all alone, and loneliness is one of the biggest silencers. We need each other to continue building on the work that we've started. A publication from a fellow colleague is not a threat or a competition – it's a stepping stone, a celebration!

(Rosi)

In doing so, we offer a global collective that is working to build a more supportive and care-focused academic environment, especially for those who suffer from the injustices of sexism in our academy. As Donna reminds us, GENMAC also provides support for ourselves in terms of feeling more confident in speaking out,

When I asked in a meeting at another school if there was a menopause policy and several of the men sniggered and rolled their eyes I felt empowered to say, WTF are you lot laughing at. I think that's what it is, it gives you confidence to say things that you would in the past have bitten your lip, buried and in a really unhealthy way raged about later at home on your own. It hasn't done me any favors career wise, but I wouldn't change it.

(Donna)

We recognize that some tensions exist here too as our initiatives may give rise to various concerns and complexities. We understand that part of facilitating meaningful change means we need clear policies and procedures, both in terms of what is done with disclosures and reports, but also what support and resources we offer to those who come forward. We are especially aware that we largely lack the training or expertise to support victim-survivors. If done poorly, we risk further harming victim-survivors. While, at the same time, providing support can oftentimes be triggering for those providing the support. Further, despite working as a global organization committed to breaking down the individualized, neoliberal frameworks of institutions (like universities), we are limited to advocating for victim-survivors through frameworks and resources bound by national, state, and/or private regulations. These are

tensions we are still navigating, but our commitment to addressing DHA in the academy is of central importance to our organization. Indeed, we recognize that providing care and support provides a crucial resource for the day-to-day survival of gender scholars in business schools.

Advocacy

Why did you join GENMAC?

It was the opportunity to connect with the scholars in the discipline that I had respected for so long – women whose research was instrumental in shaping my academic journey to date. What I didn't expect was (i) the immediate acceptance as an equal within this collective of senior scholars, (ii) being privy to the structural and institutional inequalities these impressive women had faced in their careers, and (iii) the experience it would afford me in practicing advocacy within academia.

(Andrea)

Against the backdrop of difficulties highlighted earlier, particularly in relation to DHA issues, advocacy is the third key pillar of our organization. GENMAC made its motives very clear from the early days of organization to the formalization through its bylaws: it will function in both an academic and advocacy capacity. This was crucial for addressing the inequalities and injustices that persist in Business Schools and the academy more widely. GENMAC embodies a fundamental shift in reimagining what an academic organization is and its role in the academy by foregrounding advocacy in its initiatives to promote gender research. This alongside protection of our colleagues are central to our efforts, especially in an environment where there is limited space for such desperately needed advocacy.

GENMAC has engaged in several advocacy actions since its official inception in 2019. First, the first chair of the organization has attended several sessions organized by traditional marketing academic organizations in her capacity as an expert on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In one particular meeting, the current president of one traditional marketing organization asked GENMAC's chair what she meant by GENMAC being an advocacy organization. Our chair gave the president an example of what advocacy would look like. The president responded, "well, we want to make it very clear that we are NOT an advocacy organization. The board discussed it and we want to make this position very clear. We are willing to help on the academic side but are not comfortable with being advocates." (field notes, August 2021). The GENMAC chair responded, "your organization's position is very clear as is ours." The chair has since spent 15 hours meeting with this particular organization, attempting to educate them about how their existing policies, structures, and leadership all contribute to their inability to improve on DEI metrics. This education has mostly fallen upon deaf ears. Advocacy thus is central to our organization,

I was adamant that we create an advocacy as well as academic organization as I had grown sick and tired of predators going unchecked in our discipline. I would like to see us strengthen and codify this part of our mandate.

(Starhawk)

Second, GENMAC was very quick to draft and publish a comprehensive Black Lives Matter statement. Unlike other organizations, this statement made clear that racism exists within the marketing academy and that substantive changes must occur for real change to happen. The statement also put forth several action steps to help women of color overcome institutional and systemic disadvantage(s), including our plans to create a scholarship for a person of color. Third, following the cyber stalking of one of our members discussed earlier, GENMAC not only offered support but also jumped into advocacy mode. It drafted and published an anti-cyber bullying statement that was widely distributed within our field. Protection remains crucial to our existence.

Overall, we see advocacy as an important means through which to spotlight and challenge structural inequities and injustices, and this helps explain why it is such an integral element of our organization. Still, tensions exist. Specifically, these relate to how a FAO and its membership can be envisioned. Traditional academic organizations are

monetized by membership affiliations, which poses difficulties in decolonizing access to organizational knowledge. However, formal membership for GENMAC is central to enabling the initiatives to support our advocacy, activism, and support initiatives. We acknowledge the monetization of academic organizations through affiliations, such as memberships, is another problematic institutional norm. While membership may seem trivial when compared with the DHA we are combating, it is often the more taken-for-granted organizational practices and processes that (re)produce social and economic inequalities (Amis et al., 2020). In our feminist reimagining, we collectively questioned how we could find ways of existing, and even growing, while simultaneously resisting the organizational norms of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy (hooks, 2000). This was unpacked by the council in understanding what membership means to, and within, a feminist organization. As Gisele states:

I see GENMAC as a platform to uplift us and help us voice ourselves while cognizant of our obstacles and try to navigate these in a smart and supportive manner- to achieve more in terms of research/ advocacy than if it did not exist!

(Gisele)

Collectively, we needed to reconceive the value of organizational membership. This includes critical discussions on what 'value' membership offers when we do not want to make access to knowledge a privilege, or perpetuate the 'status' of membership that often contributes to (re)producing inequalities (Ridgeway, 2014). So, through our collective reflections, a core value of GENMAC membership is to support active change in the academy. While we have implemented a formalized membership process, our advocacy-driven goals focus on financial support as solidarity.

To enable this, we provide 'pay-what-you-can' pricing options to offset increasingly precarious labor conditions, economic uncertainty, and historic financial inequity, thus making GENMAC membership accessible regardless of financial resources. We created a 'solidarity support' membership tier, explicitly meant to offset costs for other members who may face heightened financial constraints. We are committed to remaining open, transparent, and decolonized in our membership process and financial expenditures, including how membership dues are allocated in support of advocacy initiatives (e.g., scholarships for underrepresented scholars). We are still in the infancy of our membership drive and as we continue to generate new ideas and strive to reposition the value of academic membership, the complexities, and contradictions we face are ongoing. Our desire to accrue income for social justice initiatives periodically results in the proposition to monetize exclusive website content (our labor) behind a membership paywall. As just one example, this speaks to the ongoing contradictions we struggle with, and against, as feminists working under capitalist patriarchy (Ramazanoglu, 1989). However, our consciousness of this also offers us another point of value. In operating as a collective feminist organization, our value is additionally in our commitment to critical reflexivity and internal critique—central as we work to reimagine an organization for feminist marketing academics whose advocacy work spotlights and challenges structural inequities and injustices.

6 | CONCLUSIONS—A FEMINIST ACADEMIC ORGANIZATION EMERGES

Critical scrutiny of what-is and a vision of what ought-to-be has been described by some feminists as a moral imagination (Miriam, 1998). In applying this sort of reimagining to a feminist academic organization, we have conceived and implemented a number of initiatives to combat sexism across business schools in the academy. Our feminist case study documents how we resist the neoliberal standards that impact women's careers, while playing a crucial role in advancing the valuation and visibility of gender scholarship in our discipline and building advocacy and support levers for meaningful performance to undo the injustices and inequalities that pervade our academy. However, each of these raise considerable complexities as we struggle against the contradictions of operating as a FAO within a neoliberal and postfeminist university paradigm.

Through our story, we have considered the role of collective feminist academic organizing in the postfeminist neoliberal academy—specifically the business school context—as a means to both resist and dismantle sexism in its various forms. We have detailed how we have established ourselves as a FAO, describing our intersecting efforts with regard to research, support, and advocacy, while acknowledging both the tensions we face in operating within the capitalist and patriarchal academy and the Global North situatedness of our organization. By examining how these give rise to challenges for feminist academic organizations (especially within a business school setting) in enacting political and intellectual endeavors, we offer a case example of academic feminist organizing in practice. Moreover, we establish that feminist academic organizing can counter cultures of heightened individualism and build the collective action needed to challenge sexism. Importantly, our paper highlights how a focus on research, support, and advocacy in FAOs does this by challenging hierarchies of knowledge, prioritizing the care and support needed for the day-to-day survival of gender scholars in business schools and spotlighting and challenging structural inequalities and injustices in the academy. Through these contributions of our work, we add to the emerging FOS literature in several ways.

First, we emphasize the importance of collective feminist action to build solidarity and challenge the neoliberal and postfeminist conditions of universities, most particularly business schools. Such environments are isolating, promote anxiety, are structured by masculinist standards of success, and marked by gendered inequalities—with responsibility for sexism placed on the individual (Askins & Blazek, 2017; Bayfield et al., 2020; Gill & Donaghue, 2016; Liu, 2019). We demonstrate how feminist academic organizations can bring to light the structural inequalities denied in such an environment and offer a space to encourage and promote collective action to counter heightened individualism. Our efforts, with regard to research, support, and advocacy document some of the efforts we have begun to take in this regard. However, we also highlight the tensions that arise in operating within the existing boundaries and norms of postfeminist neoliberal academia—and enacting this as a larger and global organization. Future research should further explore the implications of larger-scale feminist organizing in academia in such an environment.

Second, another issue of importance, which became clear from our case study and the telling of our story, is the role feminist organizing in academia plays in our individual lives. While the existing literature discusses whether or not feminist organizations are successful based on the impact on people's lives over time (Staggenborg, 1995), here we highlight the role they play in the day-to-day survival of our members and how, through various community-based initiatives and simply by being there, a FAO provides a crucial support mechanism to gender scholars within a neoliberal academic environment. This speaks to the positive actions that arise from feminist organizing that blurs the organizational and the personal (Ashcraft, 2001; Martin et al., 1998). Future research to further examine the role such organizations can play in the everyday lives of their members is warranted. At the same time, greater consideration of the patriarchal norms that have informed the conceptualization of organization and organizations should also be further interrogated by researchers.

Third, building on the words of Ferree and Martin (1995) we have shown through the telling of our story how our work is done, grappling with issues of power, diversity, hierarchy, and decision-making, alongside the feminist principles and practices we hold. We add to this body of research by focusing on how we *emerged* as an organization, an important element of feminist case studies (Reinharz, 1992); how we built our organization around the nexus of advocacy, research, and support; and the tensions that arose along the way. Such a process can be useful for others researching feminist organizations more broadly, and those in academia or business schools more specifically. Future research in this space can build on exploring possible solutions to the tensions we have identified, alongside an examination of the longer-term impact of some of the initiatives we have created.

Finally, it will be interesting to revisit our organization in the future to see if we have managed to sustain ourselves, unlike other feminist organizations (Ashcraft, 2001; Eisenstein, 1995), and if we have successfully addressed issues of sexism within business schools, improving gender scholarship and moving it from the periphery to the mainstream, while challenging sexist and oppressive cultures of knowledge production in our discipline. Will we be able to address the issue of having a more diverse board? Will our membership drive succeed? Will we see change in relation to issues of DHA in our discipline? Will we establish a journal? Will it be successful? There are promising signs. But, only

time will tell. That said, GENMAC does not aim to operate in isolation from the international academic ecosystem (which is another risk of marginalization), but rather to build a strong FAO able to lead conversations about gender across and outside of academia. Indeed, as Simone articulates below, it is counterproductive to reproduce cultures of silos and domination:

Having a greater voice and presence at the mainstream marketing conferences and journals - it's really the only way that change will occur in the discipline. I am guilty of not doing this myself - after all, it's much easier to align with sociologists or gender studies academics. However, if we don't do this we will always be regarded as a fringe group. I recognize this will be a long and fraught project - but it also doesn't mean playing the game according to the established rules. It's about questioning the very essence of those rules and actively playing a part in reshaping our field.

(Simone)

GENMAC aims to promote dialogical and collaborative strategies to encourage the variety of audiences within our field to confront issues of sexism, inequity, and injustice as critical and generative topics worth researching and advocating for within the larger bodies, either organizations or universities, that scholars belong to. We see this as the power of feminist organizing in academia and how the postfeminist neoliberal environment of business schools can be both challenged and reimagined.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank our colleagues in the GENMAC community for their collective efforts in supporting gender scholars, advancing gender scholarship and advocating for gender equity in our academy.

Open access publishing facilitated by RMIT University, as part of the Wiley - RMIT University agreement via the Council of Australian University Librarians.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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How to cite this article: Gurrieri, Lauren, Andrea Prothero, Shona Bettany, Susan Dobscha, Jenna Drenten, Shelagh Ferguson, Stacey Finkelstein, et al. 2022. "Feminist Academic Organizations: Challenging Sexism Through Collective Mobilizing Across Research, Support, and Advocacy." *Gender, Work & Organization*: 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12912>.