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“2019 Academic Marketing Climate Survey: Motivation, Results, and Recommendations”

A Commentary

submitted by:

GENMAC BOARD

(GENDER/MARKETS/CONSUMERS)

We would like to thank Russell Winer and the editorial board of *Marketing Letters* for providing us with an opportunity to respond to the article entitled, “2019 Academic Marketing Climate Survey: Motivation, Results, and Recommendations,” by Galak and Kahn in this issue. We applaud these two scholars for their initiative and consider our group to be an important ally in raising awareness of the widespread nature and seriousness of gender discrimination, harassment and assault (DHA hereafter) in our field. That said, in this commentary we raise conceptual, methodological, and analytical concerns with the paper, and add specific recommendations in the limited space available to us. We wrote this as a collective and it represents the opinions of our board members and council. GENMAC was formed in 2016 after many years of gender scholarship existing on the margins of the field. This organization’s mission is both academic and advocacy. We are dedicated to taking a stand against sexism in whatever form it takes. For example, we recently released an anti-cyber bullying statement when one of our members bravely came forward as a victim. Much more information about our organization and how you can join and become an active part of our welcoming community is available on our website, WWW.GENMAC.CO.

As a preface, we acknowledge the problematic background context of the survey. ACR signaled to some members of the community, particularly women and persons of color (POC (hereafter, the preferred term for ‘underrepresented minorities’ in an institution), that the impetus of the inquiry was to avoid future litigation. This signaling, combined with the use of the word “mitigating” in the 2019 ACR session where the results were presented, fostered our concern regarding the project’s attempt to learn about DHA in our field. The survey was primarily adapted from the American Economic Association (AEA), another academic field that has run afoul of problems with DHA (The Economist, March 23rd, 2019).

Our collective expertise in gender scholarship provides the foundation for this critique, and while we focus on gender, we acknowledge the significant intersectionality of gender, race and class in the experiences of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC hereafter) and in their treatment by others. Because other commentaries are focusing on race, we reserve our analysis to gender, which includes gender-expansive people, women of color, and women in the LGBTQ community. No academic field of inquiry is immune to DHA, nor is immunity guaranteed when there is minimal representation of women, WOC, and LGBTQ scholars. Our critique begins with conceptual issues, and then proceeds to methodological and analytical concerns.

Conceptual Concerns

Overall, the four dimensions framing this study, general experience, explicit discrimination, implicit bias, and social and sexual harassment/assault, are not conceptually distinct nor well-grounded in previous research on gender DHA. Substantial academic research on workplace

climate in academia (e.g., Bilimoria et al. 2008; Grier and Poole, 2020; Settles et al., 2006; Taylor et al. 2017) points to a ‘chilly climate’ (Sandler 1986) for members of marginalised groups (Maranto and Griffin 2011; Robinson 2018; Trower and Chait 2002; Wubneh 2011). Further, this conceptual framework ignores the systemic and structural histories of academic (trans) misogyny and cisgender normativity (Pritcher 2017) that many women have experienced, and continue to endure in academia, both within and outside their home universities. The researchers use as a foundational premise that marketing, as an academic field, “should” be more inclusive due to the nature of what we study and because we are borne from other disciplines, such as psychology, in which more women participate. Perhaps. Yet, extrapolating from Prothero and McDonagh (2021), research detailing the deeply embedded gendered structures in marketing that allow sexism to survive and thrive suggests that the academic discipline of marketing remains hindered by its recent attempts to address gender DHA, although we are somewhat encouraged by this study and related panels sponsored by some of our governing bodies.

Second, we appreciate the focus on explicit discrimination and implicit bias in this work. And yet, the work overlooks important aspects in the definition of implicit bias and how it is linked to explicit bias. The definition of implicit bias in this paper emphasizes attitudes, likely because this is a foundational construct in studies of consumer research, leaving unaddressed the links between implicit bias and behaviors in informing unconscious microaggressions and insults (Capodilupo et al. 2010), as well as explicit manifestations of DHA (Daumeyer et al. 2019). In contrast, Gawronski and Bodenhausen’s (2006) define implicit bias to include thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that emerge automatically and often without awareness upon encountering a relevant stimulus, and unpack its links to explicit bias. In turn, Dovidio and Gaertner (2010)

define explicit bias as the conscious awareness of beliefs and attitudes and their willful communication. This work offers fruitful avenues in understanding and remedying DHA.

Further confusion results from the naming and bundling of two forms of sexual violence, harassment and assault. Each is important to recognize and address. And yet, feminist and genderqueer scholarship on violence against women and gender-expansive individuals points to escalations of “minor” violations in contributing to the pervasive extent of gender DHA and related harm that women and gender-expansive individuals experience, and that minor and major incidents often are interlinked and distributed along a behavioral continuum (e.g. Kelly 1987; Pritcher 2017; Robinson 2018). That sexual violence impacts women and gender-expansive individuals disproportionately and in different ways, needs to be recognized in our discipline. Another conceptual problem is presented in the framing of the conclusion of the work: that some people “perceive” there to be power differences and “believe” that DHA exists. This mischaracterization, a trope as pernicious as common, is unfair to victims, and it downplays the seriousness of this problem and displaces its potential solutions for our field in the future.

Methodological Concerns

In addition to the conceptual concerns noted above, we raise methodological issues that stem from the sensitivity of gender DHA, coupled with career risks and fears of being outed at work that compromise completion rates among the respondents who are most affected by DHA. First, regarding sampling 942 out of 1299 respondents hail from business schools in the U.S., with

more women than men respondents. This skewed representation is not acknowledged, and instead a claim is made that the study results are representative of the academic marketing community.

Second, response rate discrepancies merit interrogation. The paper fails to detail the number and nature of incomplete responses and note that many people opted out of the survey altogether, while others who partially completed the survey neglected to fill out the demographic questions. Sadly, more than a dozen female colleagues from around the world revealed to GENMAC that completing the survey was traumatic and that they were afraid their responses could be traced back to them, thus causing them to avoid filling out the survey or to abandon it midway. This oversight is particularly troubling given the purpose of the study is to uncover the nature and prevalence of DHA and tying it so closely with demographics through the use of a publicly available “dashboard.” That so many people opted to not complete the demographic questions should be a red flag for this paper and for our field. As with other surveys of this sensitivity, and career and personal risk, IRB procedures recommend multiple steps to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. In addition, IRBs require a trigger warning for the potentially traumatizing nature of sensitive questions. In this case, a survey about experiences that include rape and sexual assault has a serious ripple effect in potentially re-traumatizing respondents, pushes people back into the closet and makes them even more afraid to speak out and speak up. These issues of sampling, treatment of anonymity, confidentiality, and sensitive subject matter contribute to compromise these data.

Moreover, the paper glosses over the low response rate for the identities of Transsexual, Asexual, Intersex, Non-binary/Agender/Something else, Other, Prefer Not to Answer in the survey. This

low response rate may indicate their absence, or perhaps the unwillingness to “out” themselves for fear of retribution or DHA. Whatever the reason, in this omission, the paper misses a valuable opportunity to indicate presence and encourage those people who identify this way and are interested in entering our field that they are welcome here.

Analytical Concerns

Our primary analytical concerns are with the lack of discussion of the pervasiveness of DHA, and the related systemic, gender-based power differences in the marketing academy that contribute to this pervasiveness. Despite these concerns and others that we have raised above, we thank Galak and Kahn and all respondents for providing this indisputable quantitative evidence of DHA in the marketing academy. Our assessment of these data is that DHA is a serious issue in our community. The survey data show 42% of women report having been subject to inappropriate conversations of a sexual nature, 15% report having experienced unwanted physical contact, 6% report having experienced unwanted sexual contact, and 8% report having experienced retaliation for withholding sex. These data are astounding and disturbing. To not see this as an institutional problem is to deny and cover up gender DHA, and dismiss the all too real experiences of too many community members. For years, knowledge of DHA, particularly sexual misconduct and its perpetrators, have circulated via whisper networks and word-of-mouth warnings, as a small percentage of us educate and protect women and gender-expansive persons, especially newcomers and junior doctoral students, adjunct faculty, and untenured faculty members. It is time our institutions take responsibility in providing education, socialization and protection concerning DHA, and holding perpetrators accountable.

Perplexing in this paper is the lack of discussion of the circumstances of DHA, even as understanding these circumstances is essential in their remedy. As gender researchers who have compiled decades of study, we note that DHA against women and gender-expansive people is endemic to all social, political, and corporate structures. Hostile work environments are the norm, not the exception. The statistics show that crimes of DHA in the workplace—in academia as in corporations—are perpetrated by people in power, predominantly white men in senior positions (Feagin and Ducey 2017; Steinfield and Scott 2018).

Further, while we appreciate the attempt to distinguish between the involvement of men and women in DHA, it is thwarted by problematic comparisons. If I am a perpetrator and I fill out this survey, what does it mean that I claim I have experienced DHA? The researchers lauded their data-parsing “dashboard” for its ability to “cut the data” however anyone wants. It is not clear how such parsing would separate perpetrators and victims in the questions about DHA, even as such separations are as essential in making sense of these phenomena as discerning the rank of senior/junior faculty and senior/junior doctoral students. This tool promises more than it delivers in the absence of these circumstances and distinctions.

Finally, we emphasize the analytical importance of presenting the voices of those reporting experiences of DHA, in conjunction with examining closely the circumstances, and spreading responsibility for education and remedy. These voices should be at the center of the analysis in this paper, yet they are not. We question what happened to the qualitative responses to the

questions at the end of the survey. There is no mention of this data anywhere in the paper or on the “dashboard”. Several female colleagues reported to us that they wrote extremely personal, specific, and lengthy responses. The qualitative data from the study should be coded and reported at an aggregate level (e.g., text analysis, content analysis, emergent themes, after checking and ensuring anonymity) to offer valuable insight into the nature of DHA within the marketing academy. It also is important to note the risk respondents took in giving the researchers the qualitative data necessary to contextualize and personalize these systemic problems. We encourage the authors to release these data, for other scholars to analyze.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Overall, we are strongly of the opinion that this survey and its subsequent publication can be a step towards institutional education and action in reducing DHA within the marketing academy. Posting information about DHA infractions, encouraging anti-bias training, and sanctioning “bad actors” on one hand, and providing more transparency for salaries, shortlists in job searches, and different forms of evaluation risks on the other, as Galak and Kahn recommend, are steps in the right direction. However, conceptual, methodological, and analytical shortcomings curtail the reach of these steps, and maintain the status quo in which women, gender-expansive people, WOC, and LGBTQ women continue to do the leaning-in, in educating the professional associations within our field to address and rectify its (trans)misogynistic and cisnormative culture.

These concerns lead us to warn of the potential danger that this study and the paper reporting its results pose to our field. We do not offer this warning lightly; to the contrary, it is the result of

much deliberation and discussion. Higher education has the second highest number of sexual harassment cases, after the military (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2018). When senior members of our community previously found to have sexually harassed co-workers (Ramsey, 2021) remain employed and awarded powerful positions, in this case participation on the search committee for the next university President, the signals to the wider academy are lip service regarding DHA and nothing more. We can and must do better.

It is our hope that this survey can beacon the beginning of education and preventative and punitive action regarding DHA by any of our national and international governing bodies. We urge the marketing academy to address the shortcomings we have highlighted in this brief commentary. And, we suggest a good follow up would be to engage experts in the subfield of gender studies of consumption and marketing to help address the fundamental problems of DHA that continue to run rampant in our discipline. Due to space constraints, GENMAC will publish more concrete, specific, and robust recommendations that will appear in a future publication available on our website.

While some progress has been made, the marketing academy remains steeped in gendered inequities (Prothero and McDonagh 2021) in the types of publications accepted, number of women and gender-expansive people in leadership positions, and the number of women and gender-expansive people on governing boards. While some may propose that Title IX is one way for marketing professional associations to address academic DHA, we note that this law falls short in addressing all the systemic power dynamics at play within an institution and an

academic discipline (Corlette and Brillon, 2020). We add that Title IX applies only to scholars working in the USA, and thus does not encompass the thousands of members who work in other countries. More egregious is that to rely on this measure is to absolve our professional associations from their responsibility in educating, socializing and protecting all members. In closing we suggest that readers revisit this study and paper from the eyes of potential students considering a career in the marketing academy. Will they think twice about entering our ranks after reading this paper and realizing how significant DHA is, that its occurrence is well-documented in the field? We trust that these and other concrete measures to keep them safe will welcome and keep open the door for junior doctoral students, the lifeblood of our field, and sustain faculty of all levels, women and men, in sustaining its dynamism.

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