

Student Fundraising Practices as a Site of Exploitation: A Marxist Feminist Analysis of Gendered Labor in Campus Organizations

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Abstract

This study describes forms of student exploitation in campus fundraising activities through a Marxist feminist perspective. In practice, fundraising is often viewed as a learning activity and a means of developing students' interpersonal skills. However, the findings of this study indicate that behind this narrative lies a power relationship that places students, especially women, in exploitative positions of reproductive and emotional labor. This study used qualitative methods with a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of three informants directly involved in fundraising activities. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, organizational observations, documentation studies, and literature reviews, then describes using thematic analysis techniques. The results of the study indicate four forms of exploitation: (1) a greater reproductive and emotional workload on female students; (2) a gender-based division of labor that places women in tasks related to body representation and public interactions; (3) structural pressures through hierarchies and organizational cultures that normalize uncompensated work; and (4) the commodification of women's bodies as a strategy for obtaining funds. This study concludes that the exploitation that occurs is the result of the intersection of campus capitalism and patriarchy that operate through organizational structures. These findings emphasize the importance of critiquing fundraising practices to make them more fair, transparent, and sensitive to gender issues.

Keywords: Marxist feminism, student exploitation, fundraising, gender, campus organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Developments in campus life in recent years have shown significant changes in work patterns, organizational role allocation, and increasing institutional demands on students to engage in various non-academic activities. Activities such as community service, social projects, organizational work, and fundraising have increasingly become an integral part of

the student experience. While often promoted as a means of developing competencies or learning leadership skills, recent research suggests a tendency toward commodifying student labor, potentially leading to exploitation, particularly when the work is unpaid or underpaid (Kwok & Yu, 2021; Hodder, 2020).

Data from *the International Labour Organization* (ILO, 2022) shows that more than 38% of university students in the Asia Pacific region engage in unpaid or underpaid work, primarily through organizational activities and campus programs. In Indonesia, a survey by *the Nusantara Youth Research Collaborative* (2023) found that 62% of students actively involved in organizations had been asked to participate in fundraising, while 41% reported that the workload interfered with their study time. Furthermore, a study by Rahman & Sari (2021) showed that female students tend to receive a 32% larger share of fundraising work than male students, primarily due to the stereotype that women are more communicative, friendly, and “suited” to engaging in interpersonal relationships with participant.

This pattern aligns with Marxist feminist analysis, which observes that capitalism exploits women's reproductive and emotional labor to support institutional activities without adequate compensation (Federici, 2020; Ferguson, 2020). Fundraising work, which involves persuasion, negotiation, relational work, and the use of bodily and emotional performativity, falls into the category of reproductive labor that is often not recognized as economically valuable (Mezzadri, 2020). This becomes even more complex when campus institutions use *soft coercion mechanisms*, such as SKKM (Competency Standards), certification points, organizational requirements, or committee obligations, which make unpaid work considered normal and appropriate (Bhattacharya, 2019).

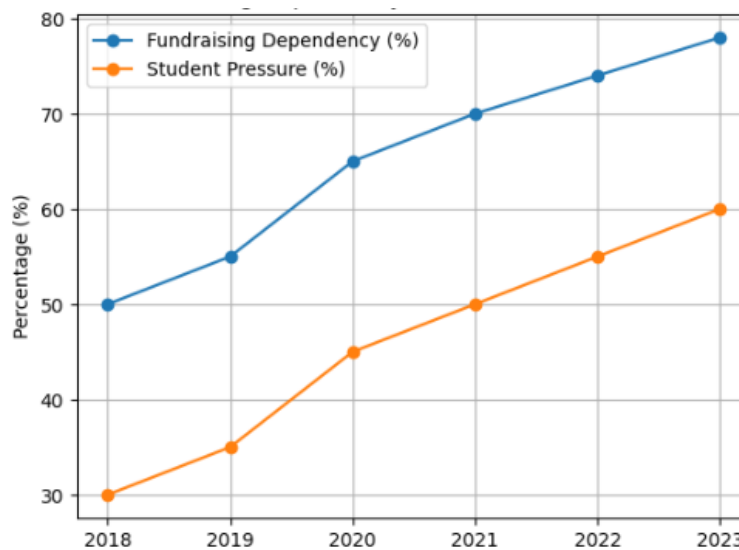


Figure 1. Trend of Fundraising Dependency and Student Pressure (2018-2023)

National statistics support the growing phenomenon of fundraising dependency and structural pressure within campus organizations. In 2018, fundraising activities began to emerge as an alternative source of funding due to limited institutional support, although student participation remained largely voluntary. By 2019, reliance on fundraising increased, accompanied by subtle social pressures within organizations, and early indications of gendered roles started to appear, particularly with female students being more frequently involved in public-facing activities.

The situation shifted significantly in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, when financial constraints forced organizations to depend heavily on digital fundraising, transforming student participation from voluntary to semi-obligatory. This trend continued in 2021, as fundraising became institutionalized as a primary organizational strategy, and structural pressure intensified, with participation increasingly perceived as mandatory. At this stage, gender inequality became more evident, with female students often positioned as the “face of the organization.” Empirical data in 2022 further confirms this pattern, as a survey by the Indonesian Center for Higher Education Studies reported that 74% of campus organizations rely on fundraising as their primary funding source, while over 55% of students feel compelled to participate due to organizational or institutional pressures.

Moreover, research by Putri and Wibowo (2022) highlights that female students experience multiple forms of exploitation, including disproportionate emotional labor and

the expectation to represent the organization visually to attract public attention and sponsorship. In recent years, this practice has become normalized within campus culture, prompting increasing academic concern regarding power imbalances, gender-based exploitation, and the urgent need for institutional funding reform and more equitable organizational practices.

From a Marxist feminist perspective, this situation reflects how capitalism and patriarchy work together to regulate the gendered division of labor. Female students are not only mobilized for unpaid reproductive labor but also commodified as social assets used to enhance the organization's image or attract external resources (López, 2021; Hoskyns & Rai, 2021). Conversely, male students are more often placed in structural positions such as chairpersons, program coordinators, or decision-makers, creating a gender hierarchy within campus organizations.

Student exploitation in fundraising is also closely linked to social class. Data from the *Youth Socioeconomic Mobility Survey* (2023) shows that students from lower-middle-class backgrounds are twice as likely to receive fundraising workloads as those from higher socioeconomic classes, as they rely on organizational networks to access scholarships or internship opportunities.

Although the exploitation of student labor has been addressed in several studies, there remains a research gap regarding how fundraising, as a practice of reproductive and emotional labor, is framed, regulated, and legitimized within the context of gender and capitalism. This gap makes this research academically relevant. Marxist feminism provides a powerful analytical lens for understanding how campus institutions utilize student labor, particularly women, and how the gender division of labor is reproduced through various organizational practices.

This research adopts a qualitative approach to explore and understand the experiences of students, particularly women, in campus organization fundraising activities. The primary data sources consist of student participants who are actively involved in organizational fundraising, supported by secondary data such as previous studies, reports, and relevant literature. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and documentation, allowing the researcher to capture detailed personal experiences, perceptions, and social dynamics within the organizations. The data collection process emphasizes open-ended questions to provide

participants with the opportunity to express their perspectives freely. To ensure the validity of the data, this study applies triangulation techniques, including comparing interview results with existing literature and cross-checking information among participants. Member checking is used to confirm the accuracy of participants' statements and interpretations. Through this methodological framework, the study aims to provide a comprehensive description of students' experiences, particularly women, in fundraising practices, which are then analyzed using a Marxist feminist perspective to uncover issues related to exploitation, power relations, and gender inequality within campus organizations.

Based on this context, this study aims to describe the experiences of students, particularly women, in campus organization fundraising activities through a Marxist feminist perspective. This research aims to uncover how power relations, workloads, and the commodification of students' bodies and emotions are formed, normalized, and negotiated within the internal dynamics of campus organizations. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to the study of gender, social reproduction, and the dynamics of exploitation within higher education institutions.

DISCUSSION

Exploitation of Student Reproductive Labor from a Marxist Feminist Perspective

From a Marxist feminist perspective, reproductive labor is a crucial foundation for the functioning of social structures, yet it has historically been underrecognized as having economic value (Federici, 2020; Bhattacharya, 2019). Reproductive labor encompasses various forms of unpaid labor that sustain social and institutional systems, including emotional labor, administrative labor, organizational labor, and interpersonal labor. In student organizations, fundraising activities can be understood as a form of reproductive labor, as they require students to invest time, energy, communication skills, and emotional effort without receiving commensurate financial compensation or institutional recognition.

To identify the exploitation of student reproductive labor, this study applies several indicators from Marxist feminist theory. The absence of economic compensation indicates that student labor contributes to the organization's sustainability without receiving material rewards. The opacity and normalization of work indicate that fundraising is perceived as a voluntary or moral obligation, obscuring its productive value. The unequal distribution of

labor by gender highlights how female students are disproportionately assigned roles that require emotional engagement and public interaction. The presence of structural pressures reflects how participation is not entirely voluntary but shaped by organizational expectations and power relations. The commodification of identity and appearance demonstrates how certain bodies, particularly women's, are strategically exploited to attract donors and sponsors.

Female students shoulder the bulk of the fundraising workload, particularly in roles that require direct interaction with donors. Three informants reported that women are often positioned as "frontliners" because they are perceived as more sociable, communicative, and persuasive. This demonstrates not only a gendered division of labor but also the instrumentalization of women's emotional and social capacities for organizational gain. These roles often require continuous emotional labor, such as maintaining politeness, empathy, and enthusiasm, regardless of personal circumstances, which reinforces the extraction of unpaid affective labor.

Putri and Wibowo (2022) argue that campus organizations tend to place emotional burdens on women due to patriarchal social constructs. From a Marxist feminist perspective, this reflects a form of systematic exploitation, in which women's reproductive labor is both essential and devalued. Their contributions support the organization's financial and social functions, yet remain unrecognized as labor in economic terms. Fundraising practices within student organizations not only reproduce institutional continuity but also reproduce gender inequality and exploitative labor relations, positioning female students as workers and symbolic assets within organizational structures.

The research results show that female students carry the bulk of the fundraising workload. Three informants interviewed stated that women are often positioned as "frontliners" in fundraising because they are perceived as more friendly, communicative, and receptive to donors. This aligns with the findings of Putri & Wibowo (2022), who stated that campus organizations tend to assign emotional labor to women as a result of social constructs driven by patriarchy.

Informant A (19 years old) said:

"When it comes to raising funds, women are usually the ones who are asked to go down. They say they're more pleasing to the eye, more polite, and therefore easier to get." Interview with A

This statement demonstrates the interpretation of women's bodies as social capital within organizational structures. Indirectly, women's bodies are used as tools to facilitate the organization's economic work, as critiqued by Marxist feminists like López (2021), who highlight how capitalism relies on women's emotional labor and performativity.

In addition to the physical burden, female students also face moral pressure not to refuse fundraising assignments. Informant B (20 years old) admitted to often accepting assignments she didn't want for fear of being perceived as disloyal. This demonstrates an ideological control mechanism, where organizations use narratives of commitment to normalize exploitation (Mezzadri, 2020).

Thus, the exploitation of reproductive labor occurs not only through excessive workloads, but also through the naturalization of organizational culture that positions women as the primary reproductive workforce.

Gender-Based Division of Labor and Emotional Burden

The gender-based division of labor is one of the most obvious patterns emerging in student organization fundraising practices. While campus organizations often claim to uphold equality, field findings suggest that the distribution of work actually reflects gender-biased social constructs. Women are more often assigned tasks requiring public interaction, interpersonal persuasion, and emotional support, while men are more likely to be placed in structural, technical, or decision-making positions. This pattern demonstrates that organizations are not value-free, but rather shaped by social norms that determine who is deemed "suitable" for certain types of work (Telford & Faulkner, 2021).

Informant C (20 years old) explained:

"When we meet with donors, we women are asked to come forward. The reason is simple: women are friendlier and more pleasing to the eye." Interview with C

This statement demonstrates that women's bodies are understood not only as subjects but also as social objects with symbolic functions for organizations. Women are treated as representative figures, believed to increase the chances of fundraising success. In other

words, organizations not only exploit women's labor but also exploit the performativity of their bodies and the characteristics associated with friendly, polite, sweet, and approachable women for the organization's economic benefit.

In the context of Marxist feminism, this constitutes a form of objectification and commodification of women's bodies. Women are not simply performing tasks, but *are part of the organization's strategy to generate value*. Women's bodies are used as social capital to build donor trust and increase revenue. This process occurs under the guise of "work effectiveness," so that female students are unaware that they are being placed within an exploitative work structure.

Kwok & Yu's (2021) research corroborates these findings, showing that female university students spend 30–40% more time performing emotional labor than male students. This is entirely consistent with the findings of this study: all female informants reported dealing more frequently with external parties, while men were more often involved in technical or behind-the-scenes tasks. In many cases, men were the decision-makers, but women carried out the fieldwork and dealt directly with the emotional burdens of donors and the public.

Informant B (19 years old) revealed the form of emotional exhaustion he experienced:

"Tiredness isn't just physical, but mental. We have to keep smiling and be patient, even though sometimes donors say whatever they want." Interview with B

This phrase reflects the forced *emotional labor*, where women are required to maintain a positive attitude to maintain the organization's image. The friendly, patient, and gentle emotions women display are part of the invisible work, yet crucial to the success of fundraising. However, this work is not recognized, let alone compensated, resulting in psychological burdens such as fatigue, anxiety, and pressure to maintain performance.

In a Marxist feminist analysis, this situation illustrates how capitalism and patriarchy mutually reinforce each other. Capitalism requires cheap, unpaid labor to carry out organizational functions, while patriarchy provides a gendered justification for positioning women as "emotional crutches." Women's emotional labor is considered natural, yet it is a historical construct intended to maintain an unequal division of labor.

Furthermore, the gender-based division of labor identified in this study not only impacts workload but also impacts access to strategic positions within the organization. Men more often hold leadership or coordination positions, while women remain in executive or field positions. This structure reflects the patriarchal reproductive pattern that persists in educational institutions, where women are given significant responsibilities but not equal leadership opportunities.

Thus, the gendered division of labor in fundraising not only reproduces social inequality but also reinforces emotional hierarchies within organizations. Women are made the "emotional engines" of the organization, working hard, demonstrating empathy, maintaining relationships with the public, and shouldering psychological burdens not experienced by men. All of this suggests that reproductive and emotional exploitation are integral to the structure of student organizations that appear modern, yet remain rife with gender bias and unequal power relations.

Beyond gender-based division of labor, the most obvious form of exploitation experienced by students in the fundraising process arises through structural pressures stemming from internal rules, organizational culture, and power relations between levels of management. These structural pressures operate subtly but effectively, leaving students feeling they have no room to reject the workload. Within the context of campus organizations, structures such as job hierarchies, loyalty assessment systems, and collective expectations operate as controlling mechanisms, ultimately encouraging students to accept fundraising assignments despite feeling physically and emotionally burdened.

Informant A explained how refusal of a fundraising assignment was immediately interpreted as a form of disloyalty to the organization:

"If you refuse fundraising, you're immediately seen as lacking dedication. I once had a friend who was transferred to another division because he often refused to come down." Interview with A

This statement demonstrates that organizations not only assign tasks but also create mechanisms of social and structural punishment for those who resist. Divisional transfers, negative evaluations, or labels of "disloyal" are forms of internal discipline that maintain the stability of organizational structures. In Marxist feminist theory, this aligns with the idea that

social institutions work to maintain the availability of reproductive power for the capitalist system (Bhattacharya, 2019).\

Informant C gave similar testimony:

"Whether you like it or not, you have to participate. Because if you don't, you'll be judged poorly. You might not get promoted." Interview with C

These comments demonstrate that structural pressures relate not only to assignments but also to social mobility within the organization. Students perceive that participating in fundraising is a prerequisite for recognition, likeability, and consideration for leadership positions. This structure creates dependency, where members feel compelled to work hard to avoid losing opportunities or status within the organization.

These findings align with Rahman & Sari (2021), who found that campus organizations often normalize exploitation by using narratives of commitment, loyalty, and devotion. In this context, students are trained to internalize the logic that unpaid work is part of the learning process and character development. Thus, they are encouraged to ignore physical, mental, or academic challenges to meet organizational demands.

Female students are particularly vulnerable to these structural pressures. In addition to general expectations of organizational loyalty, women often face gender pressures such as stereotypes that they are more diligent, more responsible, and "more deserving" of social tasks. These stereotypes reinforce power relations and make women a more easily mobilized group for jobs that require high emotional energy and commitment.

In Marxist feminist analysis, these structural pressures are part of the reproductive mechanisms of capitalism, which rely on cheap, unpaid labor. Campus organizations, unwittingly, replicate capitalist patterns that exploit the reproductive labor of students, particularly women, to support their agendas, programs, and institutional image (Mezzadri, 2020). Because fundraising activities are considered part of "organizational service," students accept this exploitation as normal.

Thus, exploitation arises not only through directly assigned tasks, but also through the internalization of values, norms, and hierarchies that demand student compliance and a willingness to sacrifice their energy to maintain the organization's continuity. This structural pressure binds, forces, and directs students to operate as reproductive labor in a system that

fundamentally offers neither protection nor equitable compensation. This situation demonstrates how capitalism and patriarchy operate through educational institutions, producing systematic patterns of exploitation that are difficult for perpetrators to recognize.

Commodification of the Body and Representation of Women in Fundraising

One of the most significant findings in this study is the practice of commodifying women's bodies in fundraising activities. This commodification occurs not only explicitly, but also through the way organizations assign roles and construct certain images of who is "appropriate" to appear in public. In fundraising activities, women are often perceived as more visually attractive, more polite, and more acceptable to donors, thus positioning women's bodies as strategic assets for the organization's success. Thus, women's bodies are no longer understood as part of personal identity, but as economic tools that can be exploited to generate organizational profit.

Informant C recounts his first-hand experience:

"The chairman once said, 'If a girl gets on the stage, it's definitely more marketable.' At the time, it felt like we were being used as a sales tool." Interview with C

This statement demonstrates how women's bodies are reduced to instrumental functions: the more they are "accepted" or "liked" by the public, the greater the chance of fundraising success. From a Marxist feminist perspective, this process reflects how capitalism has historically utilized women's bodies as symbolic commodities in the processes of social production and reproduction (Hoskyns & Rai, 2021). Women become visual representations deemed to enhance an organization's appeal, similar to the marketing logic of commercial industries.

Informant B also revealed that some donors specifically requested meetings with "female members only." This adds another layer of emotional and psychological pressure for women, as they not only carry out organizational tasks but also have to manage the discomfort that arises from male gazes, inappropriate comments, or requests that exceed professional boundaries. This phenomenon demonstrates that women's bodies are often constructed as public spaces that can be accessed, judged, and used by others for their own interests.

This commodification also results in a significant psychological burden. Informant A said:

“Sometimes I feel uncomfortable, but because of the demands of the organization, I keep going.” Interview with A

This quote reveals the internal negotiations women experience: they understand that their roles are uncomfortable, but they persist in fulfilling organizational expectations. In Marxist feminism, this form of powerlessness demonstrates how patriarchal-capitalist structures create conditions in which women feel they have no choice but to fulfill their assigned roles (Ferguson, 2020). They are compelled to put aside discomfort for the sake of collective responsibility, organizational reputation, or power relations that preclude resistance.

Upon closer examination, the commodification of women's bodies in fundraising reflects not only gender bias but also the economic logic of organizations. Women's bodies are treated as "symbolic means of production" believed to increase the chances of raising funds. In this context, women are positioned as objects that offer added value to the organization. They are used to build emotional connections with donors, garner sympathy, or create a positive image for the organization. This role represents another form of emotional labor that goes unacknowledged yet is crucial to the organization's economic survival.

This commodification also reinforces power relations within the organization. Men in leadership positions can determine who comes to the forefront, while women accept these positions as a moral obligation. In other words, exploitation is rooted not only in the organization's need for funding, but also in patriarchal structures that empower men to decide how women's bodies are used.

Furthermore, the commodification of women's bodies in fundraising impacts how women perceive themselves in campus social spaces. They are no longer seen as equal members of organizations, but as visual representations that must meet certain standards. This creates feelings of powerlessness, shame, anxiety, and a loss of autonomy over their own bodies. When women's bodies are used as tools to achieve organizational goals, women lose control over how they are presented and judged.

This phenomenon demonstrates how women's bodies are controlled not only by social norms but also by the needs of capitalist organizations. Women's bodies become economic vehicles, tools of persuasion, and symbolic commodities exploited without ethical or emotional consideration. Thus, women's position in fundraising reflects the ongoing process of patriarchal capitalism in educational settings. Women are transformed from active subjects into objects in organizational relations, viewed not for their competence but for the symbolic value of their bodies.

Patriarchal Capitalist Relations in Campus Organizations

The results of this study indicate that student fundraising practices cannot be understood merely as administrative activities or organizational obligations, but rather as part of a structure formed by the intersection of capitalist and patriarchal logics within educational institutions. Marxist feminism views capitalism as always requiring cheap, flexible, and easily controlled reproductive labor. In the context of campus organizations, students become a resource that fulfills this need. Fundraising activities, which appear to be social activities and organizational learning, in reality exploit students' energy, time, and emotions without providing adequate compensation, thus placing them in a position similar to that of exploited reproductive labor.

Women are in a more vulnerable position within this mechanism. Research findings indicate that female students are more often placed in positions as liaisons between organizations and the public, as their bodies are considered more socially acceptable, more attractive to potential donors, and more in line with the “friendly and communicative” image demanded by emotional labor. This process suggests that organizational patriarchy reinforces the logic of capitalism, by transforming women’s bodies and emotions into symbolic assets that can be exploited for the organization’s material interests. The seemingly normal commodification of women’s bodies in fundraising practices actually reflects how women are used as tools for the production of value within the broader social structure.

In addition to gender-based divisions of labor, structural pressures within organizations also play a significant role in perpetuating exploitative practices. Through internal assessment mechanisms, loyalty narratives, organizational hierarchies, and threats of redundancy, students are encouraged to accept fundraising assignments even when they are

burdensome or beyond their capabilities. Female students are the group most often burdened by these assignments due to social and cultural expectations that they are more obedient, cooperative, and easier to direct. This pressure demonstrates that exploitation occurs not only through assigned tasks but also through ideological processes that demand students always submit to the organization's needs.

When this phenomenon is analyzed as a whole, it becomes clear that campus capitalism and patriarchal structures operate simultaneously in shaping fundraising practices. Campus capitalism requires a workforce that can support the organization's operations without cost, while patriarchy provides gendered justifications for determining who should bear that workload. Women, in this case, are positioned as providers of unpaid emotional and social labor, while men often occupy strategic positions that direct the workflow. This relationship demonstrates how campus organizations reproduce broader social inequalities, while also demonstrating that exploitation exists not only within large industries but also in the everyday practices of higher education.

Thus, the synthesis of this research's findings confirms that student exploitation in fundraising is not an isolated phenomenon, but rather the result of a complex interaction between capitalism, patriarchy, organizational culture, and gender construction. This research reveals that fundraising activities, traditionally considered a form of learning, can actually contain dimensions of systematic exploitation, particularly against female students who find themselves at the intersection of reproductive labor, emotional labor, and organizational power structures.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that fundraising activities in campus organizations cannot be understood as simple activities aimed at meeting funding needs, but rather as reproductive and emotional labor practices that are fraught with gender inequality and rooted in capitalist-patriarchal structures. Through a Marxist feminist perspective, this research reveals that students, especially women, are in a vulnerable position to exploitation because they are mobilized to perform unpaid labor, not recognized as value production, yet crucial to the organization's sustainability.

The research findings reveal four main forms of exploitation. First, female students bear a greater reproductive burden, tasked with social and emotional work such as persuasion, donor communication, and maintaining the organization's image. Second, there is a systematic gender-based division of labor, with women more often placed as field executors, while men tend to hold strategic positions. Third, structural pressures within the organization, through narratives of loyalty, management hierarchies, and internal assessment mechanisms, normalize exploitation and leave students feeling they have no room to refuse fundraising assignments. Fourth, women's bodies are commodified as "symbolic assets" of the organization, positioning them as visual representations believed to attract donors and increase fundraising success.

From the overall findings, it can be concluded that the exploitation of students in fundraising activities is not an individual or incidental phenomenon, but rather a product of a larger social structure, where campus capitalism and patriarchy work simultaneously to exploit women's labor and bodies as organizational resources. This research emphasizes that fundraising practices need to be viewed critically, because behind the narrative of "soft skills development" lies unacknowledged reproductive labor, emotional distress, and gender inequality that require serious attention. Therefore, improvements to campus organizational systems are needed to be more equitable, transparent, and sensitive to issues of exploitation and gender bias.

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