Women of Color in Economics and Sociology: Poor Climate, Unequal Treatment, and Lack of Legitimacy

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The social sciences, including economics and sociology, have long histories of excluding women of color and minimizing the legitimacy and value of their intellectual work (Bayer and Rouse 2016; Collins 1990; Cooper 2017; Giddings 2007; Hurtado 1996; Luziris 2011, and Zavella 1988). Since the late 1960s, the Committee on the Status of Women in Sociology (CSWS),the Committee on the Status of Racial and Ethnic Minorities in Sociology (CREM), the Committee on the Status of Women in the Economics Profession (CSWEP), and Committee on the Status of Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups in the Economics Profession were formed (2018a and 2018b). These committees have reported to the American Sociological Association and the American Economic Association since their inception. In both of these disciplines, the committees examined gender (sex) and race as separate constituencies. This practice of examining race and gender as separate, mutually exclusive categories often erases the experiences of women of color in these disciplines.

A recent survey by the American Economics' Association (AEA), for example, revealed widespread gender and racial discrimination in the field, with nearly half of women reporting unequal treatment, including sexual harassment and failure to take their work seriously (American Economic Association 2019). This does not come as a surprise to those who are aware of the study by Alice Wu (2017, 2018) documenting the prevalence of misogynistic comments littering a job forum widely used by the profession, which prompted a petition drive signed by 1100 economists urging the AEA to address misogyny in the field at the 2018 Philadelphia AEA meetings. Wu's research was also cited in a *New York Times* article (2019) on graduate students' demands at the 2019 Atlanta AEA meetings to address continuing issues of sexual harassment and discrimination. The recent AEA survey confirms that hostility toward women and minorities continues to plague the discipline, although several departments and organizations are developing methods to curb the epidemic of harassment within it. Most recently, the AEA itself has put forward a response by making an ombuds available (2019). The survey and the response, however, fail to capture the different experiences of Black women and Latina faculty that are likely distinct from their underrepresented minority (URM) male colleagues.

Similarly, the American Sociological Association (ASA) received complaints from two women of color graduate students who experienced, or knew of others' experiences of, sexual and racial harassment by senior faculty at its Annual Meeting in August 2016 (Grollman 2016). As a result, ASA appointed a working group in 2017 that was charged with drafting an anti-harassment policy, which was unveiled in 2018 (ASA 2018a, 2018b). The policy outlines unacceptable

behaviors including sexual solicitation; physical advances, or verbal or non-verbal conduct that is sexual in nature; threatening, intimidating, or hostile acts; circulation of written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility toward an individual or group; and epithets, slurs, or negative stereotyping based on group identity. At the 2019 meetings, there will be a series of workshops on preventing harassment. Thus far, however, the working group has not examined the differences in experiences among women of color, White women, men of color, and White men, nor developed methods to prevent harassment, especially of women of color.

Further research is needed to explore intersections of gender and race within the disciplines of economics and sociology, rather than considering race and gender simply as either/or categories, e.g., White/Non-White, Male/Female. This briefing paper, based on a National Science Foundation-funded study by Moore et al. (2018), attempts to capture the daily experiences of both URM women and men faculty in economics and sociology within a climate that favors White men as the "ideal" archetypal social science academic (Bonilla-Silva-2017; Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008). It uses an intersectional approach—a conceptual framework recognizing multiple systems of oppression that work together to produce discriminatory practices and experiences that are not simply based on race and gender alone (Collins 1990). To do this, we sent an online survey to 479 economists and sociologists of color that included Likert scale statements and open-ended questions.

The results show that both women and men of color experience aggression, a negative climate, a lack of legitimacy, and a lack of resources in their departments. Yet, women of color report significantly more negative experiences than do their male colleagues of color. The results also show that the participation of women of color in organizations designed to provide spaces for training, networking, and scholarship appears to have a positive and significant relationship with overcoming negative experiences. This briefing paper ends with a series of recommendations for departments and disciplines that can result in more positive experiences for women of color.

The Sample

To identify sociologists we used the ASA's *Guide to Graduate Departments* for every year between 1995 and 2006. We employed a panel of experts to go through the list of Ph.D. recipients and identify recipients' race/ethnicity and gender. The result is a total of 332 Black and Hispanic academic sociologists. To identify a sample of Black and Latinx economists, we used a combination of doctoral dissertation titles and databases corresponding to the academic years 1995 to 2006 (Price 2009) and a panel of experts to identify their race, ethnicity, and gender for a total of 175 academic economists.

Unobtrusive Data

The data for the structural variables in the study come from a series of unobtrusive sources, including membership lists, Pro-Quest dissertation information, curriculum vitae, and web searches through Google, Google Scholar, Academic.edu, and Research Gate. Throughout the analysis, we divide institutions of higher education into two types, research extensive institutions and non-research extensive institutions because numbers for the latter are too small for further breakdowns. We measure human capital by focusing on factors that are regarded by economists

as individually acquired, as opposed to social capital that depends on a set of relations that provide mutual recognition among participants, such as networks and organizations to accrue resources, symbolic or material (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The human capital measures are indicators of social stratification and include variables, such as years in academia, current institution of employment, Ph.D. institution, race/ethnicity, gender, discipline, and productivity (average number of publications). The measure of social capital that we use is participation in a URM-oriented section or organization (Moore et al. 2018).

The Survey

For this study, researchers distributed surveys to the 479 faculty economists and sociologists in the sample from November 2016 through April 2017. The 29-question survey was conducted using Qualtrics, an online survey program.

Of the 479 surveys sent out (28 academics could not be found), there was a 41 percent response rate. Of the respondents, 23 percent are Black men, 31 percent are Black women, 19 percent are Latinas, and 27 percent are Latinos. The sample size does not allow for the disaggregation of sociologists and economists (64 and 36 percent, respectively) or Blacks and Latinx faculty.

Survey Results: Women of Color Report More Negative Experiences than Men of Color

The survey results find that both men and women of color report negative experiences, but women are significantly more likely to do so (Figure 1, corresponding to the survey data in Appendix Table 1). For example, compared with their male colleagues, women are more than twice as likely to report unequal treatment in recruitment processes, and they are 20 percent more likely to report having adequate resources to carry out their work. Women are more than twice as likely to report verbal abuse or ridicule. None of the cases indicated that men had significantly worse experiences on average than their female colleagues. It appears that men do have fewer negative experiences than women, but it is possible that men of color are more reluctant to report negative experiences than are women of color. While we do not measure the source of grievances, they may be at the hands of White male and female faculty and administrators.

In addition, Appendix Table 1 shows that 48 percent of URM men and women report that they do not spend time with other faculty members, suggesting that they do not have the potential for co-authoring or other networking activities. The table displays a series of significant differences between URM women's and men's daily experiences, with women having more negative experiences than men. A total of 42 percent of women report unequal treatment in the area of recruitment. Forty-three percent report that minority faculty do not have equal influence in department decisions. More than half (56 percent) report not having a desirable balance between teaching, research, and service. More than half (55 percent) claim that they do not have the resources they need to carry out their work, while 71 percent report that they have to work harder than their colleagues to be perceived as a legitimate scholar. In addition, 21 percent report that they experience verbal abuse or ridicule often or sometimes, 47 percent of respondents say that their scholarship is not taken seriously, and 37 percent report extra scrutiny of their teaching and

service. On average, women of color sociologists and economists report 3.9 negative experiences, per person.

For example, a Black woman faculty member reports:

> *The most negative experiences I've had with department colleagues has as much to do if not more with my being a woman than with being Black. I have experienced everything from inappropriate comments about my physical experiences to flat out propositions from people more senior than me who were in a position to affect my career.*

Another Black woman reports:

> *I have had micro aggressions. Conversations about my style of dress (too fancy) or arguments in faculty meetings with one particular member who disagrees with everything I say and yells at me (and no one else).*

## Figure 1. Percent of URM Faculty Reporting Negative Work Experiences
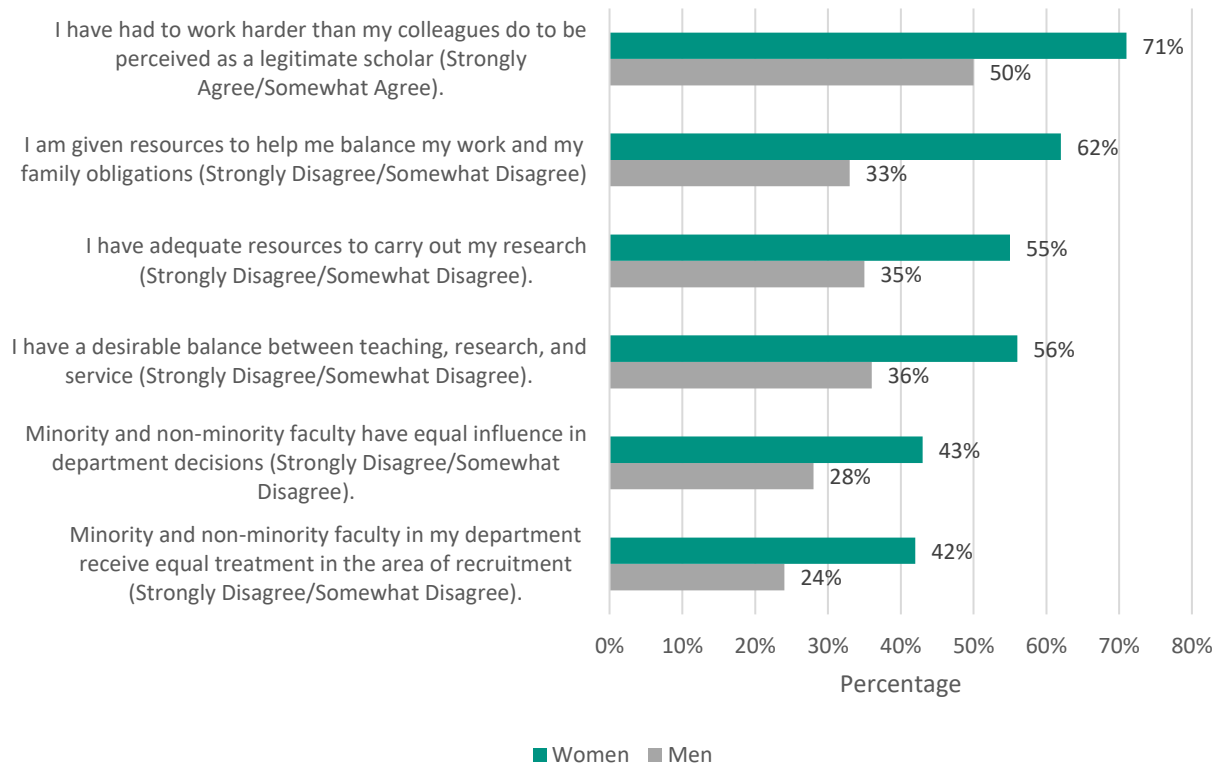
Source: Spalter-Roth and Kalb, survey data 2019.

Principal Components Analysis

In order to reduce data from the 29-question survey into internally consistent and distinct categories, we conducted a principal component analysis (PCA), a statistical procedure, on survey responses to see if the variables used are correlated and if they fit into a series of categories. In other words, the PCA was conducted to produce indices based on survey responses that represented various underlying experiential factors. The PCA was ultimately run on 26 of the 29 questions in the survey, after a reliability test was performed on each survey item (see Appendix Table 2). It was a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1-Strongly Disagree to 4-Strongly Agree (except for frequency questions, 1-Often to 4-Never). URM women were almost three times more likely to report negative responses (Often/Sometimes) to the survey statements capturing experiences of aggression. In other words, when someone answered lower on the scale, they are recording a negative response in one of the four experiential categories.

The results produced four components: (1) Aggression; (2) Departmental and Institutional Climate: (3) Legitimacy; and (4) Material Support and Resources. Composite scores based on survey responses were created from the component loadings for each of these variables. The four components were relatively consistent with the concepts used to describe the historical experiences of URM women in academia, such as marginality and legitimacy, and explained 68 percent of the total variance in survey responses. Furthermore, strong internal scale consistency was determined by Cronbach's alphas. Using these four categories, Figure 2 shows that URM women have more negative experiences than URM men. More than one-third (35 percent) of women of color report that they sometimes or often experience instances of aggression (the quotations suggest these aggressions seemed to be largely psychological); 39 percent report a negative departmental climate; 29 percent report a lack of legitimacy or affirmation for their work; and 55 percent report a lack of resources from their departments or support from their colleagues.

Figure 2 Percent of Negative Survey Responses grouped into PCA categories
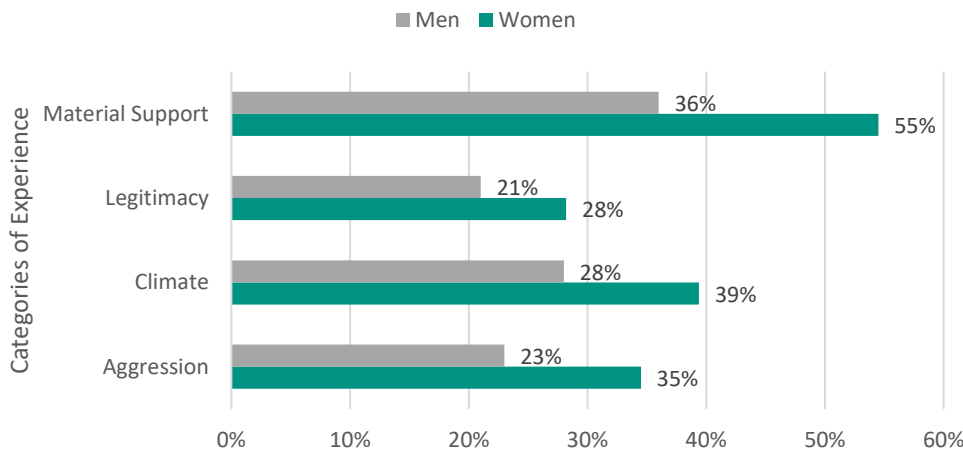
Source: Spalter-Roth and Kalb, survey data, 2019.

Regression Models

The purpose of the regression analysis is to determine if there is a relationship between the experiential measures (i.e., aggression/neglect, department climate, legitimacy and affirmation, and material support and resources) and each of the structural, human capital, and demographic variables relative to one another including Ph.D. year, Ph.D. institution, current institution, discipline, publications, race, ethnicity, and gender, and participation in race/ethnicity-oriented organizations. The language of relationships is used because there is not necessarily a causal sequence between any given independent variable and any specific faculty experiences. For example, belonging to a minority section or organization may be a response to negative experiences as well as an antecedent.

Table 1. Multiple OLS Regression Coefficients of URM Faculty Experience on Selected Variables

Variable	Aggression/Neglect Model 1	Climate Model 2	Legitimacy/Affirmation Model 3	Support/Resources Model 4
Avg. pubs per year	-.617	-.341	1.162	1.253
Graduated from RE	3.418	**2.776***	2.522	1.239
Years in academia	.043	-.168	.000	.041
Race (1=Black)	.293	.080	.130	.109
Sex (1=Female)	**-2.727****	-1.090	-1.349	**-1.335****
Discipline (1=Sociology)	-1.958	**-1.776***	-2.047	-.555
Employed at RE	.348	-1.333	-1.866	.671
Minority Section (1=Yes)	-.668	-.265	-.297	-.157
Constant	24.603	17.141	27.310	8.117
Number of cases	177	179	177	180
R-Square	**.107***	**.099***	.064	**.122****
Cronbach Alpha	0.922	0.931	0.885	0.825

 * = p<.05; ** = p<.01; *** = p<.001

Source: Spalter-Roth and Kalb, unpublished data 2019.

In Table 1 above three out of four of the models were statistically significant and explain some of the variance in URM experiences (i.e., model 1 examines aggression/neglect; model 2 examines department and institutional climate; and model 4 which examines material support and resources). Model 3, which examines legitimacy and affirmation, is not significant. The explanatory power of the three significant models suggested by their respective r-squares is limited—explaining, at most, 12 percent of the variance in survey responses. This table shows that gender is negative in all four, but in only models one and four is gender significant, suggesting that women of color academics in economics and sociology suffer more negative experiences in terms of aggression/neglect and lack of support and resources than do their male colleagues of color.

In the first model counting daily experiences of aggression/neglect, women of color are almost three times more likely to report having such negative experiences as compared to their URM male colleagues.

The second model, exploring department and institutional climate, finds that gender was not statistically significant at conventional levels. The only statistically significant variables in the model were structural, i.e., "discipline" and, the institution type from which faculty graduated. The model indicates that URM faculty in sociology departments are almost two times more likely to report negative departmental climates than economists. The greater negative experiences with departmental climate in sociology departments may be the result of the discipline's and its members' concentration on gendered and racial inequalities. Those who graduated from research-extensive institutions[1] were almost three times more likely to report positive departmental climates.

Of the four models, the final model explains the greatest amount of variation in material support and resources by our predictor variables. As with Model 1, the only statistically significant variable at conventional levels was "sex." The coefficients suggest that female URM faculty in our sample are more likely to report a lack of material support and resources than their male colleagues, all other things being equal.

While none of the four models find that belonging to a minority section had a significant impact on URM faculty well-being, previous research suggests that this variable did have a positive relationship with moving up the academic ladder (Spalter-Roth, Smith, Kalb, and Shin 2018).[2] Thus, another model was estimated that examines whether the interaction between being a woman of color and belonging to a minority section would have an impact on their sense of well-being with the four types of experiences. The findings are shown in Table 2.

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[1] Carnegie code classification for Doctoral Universities awarded at least 20 research/scholarship doctoral degrees and had at least $5 million in total research expenditures (as reported through the National Science Foundation (NSF) Higher Education Research & Development Survey (HERD).

[2] In sociology the sections include Latino/a Sociology, Racial and Ethnic Minorities, and Race, Gender, and Class. In economics the organizations include the National Economic Association (NEA), which promotes the professional lives of minorities within the profession, and the American Society of Hispanic Economists (ASHE).

Table 2. Multiple OLS Regression Coefficients of URM Faculty Experience with Interaction between Minority Section and Sex

Variable	Aggression/Neglect Model 1	Climate Model 2	Legitimacy/Affirmation Model 3	Support/Resources Model 4
Avg. pubs per year	-.466	-.107	1.605	1.405
Graduated from RE	3.204	2.437	1.912	1.055
Years in academia	.040	-.168	.006	.041
Race (1=Black)	.444	.308	.517	.244
Sex (1=Female)	**-3.482****	**-2.276***	**-3.294***	**-1.999****
Discipline (1=Sociology)	-1.854	-1.621*	-1.755	-.447
Employed at RE	.283	**-1.485***	**-2.113***	.592
Minority Section (1=Yes)	-1.798	-1.973	-3.143	-1.146
Sex*Minority Section	-1.798	**3.269***	**5.301***	1.836
Constant	24.981	17.725	28.098	8.387
Number of cases	177	179	177	180
R-Square	.113**	.125*	.098*	.138**

* = p<.05; ** = p<.01; *** = p<.001

Source: Spalter-Roth and Kalb, survey data 2019.

When the joint effect of gender and minority section membership is considered, women URM faculty in the sample are more likely than men or women who are not members of these organizations to report an improved and positive department climate, and an increased sense of legitimacy and affirmation. This suggests that belonging to a minority section and being a URM woman faculty member has a positive impact on several aspects of faculty well-being for women of color, while gender alone has a negative impact.

Conclusions

By examining race and gender as interacting systems that can produce different forms of inequality and discrimination, this study builds on previous research on economists that reveal strong inequalities for women and for racial minorities in the discipline (AEA 2019). The AEA analysis examines either gender differences or racial differences, but not the interaction between these categories, as does the current study.

The intersectional statistical analyses in conjunction with open-ended comments in this current study does suggest that academic women of color in both economics and sociology experience more negative treatment and greater marginality than their male URM colleagues. Participation in disciplinary organizations appears to mitigate some of these negative experiences for women of color faculty. Based on these findings, we propose a number of policies that could be put into effect by disciplinary associations and departments.

1. Departments and universities *need* more scholars of color (especially women) to teach and conduct research. Initiatives by departments to increase representation should not only

increase the pool of URM scholars but can also strengthen the disciplines through practices of inclusion, for example, by adding multiple perspectives. These initiatives may require a series of strategies, including bringing more URMs onto hiring and promotion committees and admission panels, even if this means including disciplinary outsiders, and to define and invest in areas of scholarship that will attract URMs.

> *... we can train a lot of racial or ethnic minorities but if they're going to be marginalized, co-opted, or "othered" in the field they're going to leave. And it hurts us all because we don't create new knowledge, or we don't address societal issues and problems that need to be addressed because we're losing the talent – it's almost like brain drain.*
>
> *-Survey Respondent*

2. Second, departments and disciplinary societies should apply for more funds to enable women of color to travel to disciplinary meetings and to programs, organizations, or sections for URM scholars (especially women of color), so they can find a receptive and safe space to present their work, meet possible collaborators and mentors, and increase their sense of legitimacy.

> *...when you're in a situation where you're the only underrepresented minority, it's nice to have a connection to people at least in the broader profession that are also underrepresented minorities.*
>
> *-Survey Respondent*

3. A third policy is to create more systematic mentoring programs for early- and mid-career faculty at departments and within disciplines.

> *I think what needs to happen is that first of all we need to mentor more underrepresented minority faculty right. We need to cultivate strong trusting mentorship relationships with the young, and build a bridge with young and old scholars together.*
>
> *-Survey Respondent*

4. For those who attend disciplinary meetings, more effort should be made to keep panels diverse and ensure that the work of women of color is visible.

> *I think the disciplinary associations would benefit if they took it upon themselves, a policy that said OK you know your panel your presentations should be diverse by gender by race ethnicity. Sometimes you go to the meetings and it's a whole panel of one particular group. And it might because they have similar research interests but that they should make every effort or intention to diversify their panel.*
>
> *-Survey Respondent*

5. Finally, continuing to monitor sexual harassment, implement policies to halt it, and publicize transgressors is necessary to overcome inequalities in sociology and economics, as well as in all disciplines.

Other important suggestions for overcoming inequalities have been suggested and are worth attending to (Buckles 2019: Stacey and Thorne 1985). All of these policies are designed to increase the numbers of women (and men) of color who have fulfilling and successful academic careers without undesirable experiences, including aggression, negative department climate, lack of legitimacy, and lack of resources.

Appendix Table 1. Different Experiences by Gender

Survey Question	N	Men	Women	χ 2
		Gender		
Minority and non-minority faculty in my department receive equal treatment in the area of recruitment.	192	percent (count)	percent (count)	6.828**
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree		24 (23)	42 (40)	
Strongly/Somewhat Agree		76 (73)	58 (56)	
Minority and non-minority faculty have equal influence in department decisions.	193			4.836*
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree		28 (27)	43 (42)	
Strongly/Somewhat Agree		72 (69)	57 (55)	
I have a desirable balance between teaching, research, and service	196			8.218**
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree		36 (35)	56 (55)	
Strongly/Somewhat Agree		64 (63)	44 (43)	
I have adequate resources to carry out my research.	194			7.582**
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree		35 (34)	55 (54)	
Strongly/Somewhat Agree		65 (62)	45 (44)	
I am given resources to help me balance my work and my family obligations.	195			16.682***
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree		33 (32)	62 (60)	
Strongly/Somewhat Agree		67 (66)	38 (37)	
I have had to work harder than my colleagues do to be perceived as a legitimate scholar.	193			9.027**
Strongly/Somewhat Disagree		50 (48)	29 (28)	
Strongly/Somewhat Agree		50 (48)	71 (69)	
Please report the frequency:				
Verbal abuse or ridicule	194			5.390*
Often/Sometimes		9 (9)	21 (21)	
Rarely/Never		91 (87)	79 (77)	
Failure to legitimize or take seriously your scholarship	192			5.959*
Often/Sometimes		30 (28)	47 (46)	
Rarely/Never		70 (68)	53 (52)	
Extra scrutiny with regard to teaching and service	193			4.230*
Often/Sometimes		23 (22)	37 (36)	
Rarely/Never		77 (73)	63 (62)	

Source: Spalter-Roth and Kalb, Unpublished data. 2019

Appendix Table 2. Total Variance Explained in Survey Responses by PCA

Component	N	Mean (SD)	Minimum	Maximum	Initial Eigenvalues		
					Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1. Aggression	189	25.21 (6.35)	8.00	32.00	12.78	49.149	49.149
2. Department Climate	191	14.52 (4.72)	5.00	20.00	2.12	8.139	57.288
3. Legitimacy	190	27.71 (6.71)	9.00	36.00	1.58	6.088	63.375
4. Material Support/Resources	192	10.23 (3.39)	4.00	16.00	1.23	4.726	68.102

KMO = 0.935; Bartlett's test of sphericity (χ^2 (182) = 3599.08, $p < .0005$)

Source: Spalter-Roth and Kalb unpublished survey data 2018

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