



Committee on the situation
of women in economics

Newsletter 2023: Research Summary

AEE Survey on the Work Environment in Economics

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The background to run a survey on the work environment in economics among the members of the Spanish Economics Association comes from the experience of the American Economic Association Member Survey on the Professional Climate in Economics. The initiative in the United States was implemented for the first time in December 2018 after the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Professional Climate in Economics. The aim was to assess the status quo in the profession with regards to inclusiveness, harassment and toxic work environments and to monitor changes over time through a repetition of the survey in regular intervals. Because of that, there has been a follow up survey in 2023 with results that have not been made public yet. Both online surveys were sent by email to all current members and those who were members at any point in the prior 9 years. In 2018, 45,435 invitations were sent out and the response rate was 23%.

As many of the members of the Spanish Economic Association had similar concerns, under the umbrella of the Association Maria, Laura and Judit designed the first survey of the Work Environment in Economics. After obtaining the approval of an external ethical committee, the survey was sent by email to all (ever) members of the Spanish Economic Association. That is 1,800 invitations were sent and 292 responded, leading to a response rate of 16%. The fieldwork spanned from October 16 to November 2, 2023. The questionnaire included 20 questions, most of them extracted from the American Economic Association one. This allowed for a direct comparison of the numbers in both surveys. The median duration to complete the survey was 8.3 minutes; 7.6 minutes for men and 9.1 for women.

Before delving into the results of some key questions, let us briefly compare the characteristics of the samples that responded to the Spanish and American surveys. In the Spanish case, 40% of respondents are women, while in the American survey, this figure is 30%. The percentages of students (6.5% for the Spanish and 6% for the American) and married respondents (78% versus 80%) are quite similar in both surveys. Additionally, 2.5% of Spanish respondents identify as LGTB, compared to 6% in the American sample. Finally, the average age is 48 years old in the Spanish sample and 47 in the American one. It is important to note that 40% of respondents to the Spanish survey (both men and women) have less than 20 years of experience in the profession. Furthermore, over 60% of respondents hold tenured positions with a strong focus on research.

Turning our attention to the main results, Figure 1 below reveals the first and somewhat concerning finding. Within respondents that have been in the profession for less than 20 years, only 36% of men

and 28% of women feel valued in the Economics profession. The figures notably increase for individuals with longer tenure (66% for men and 65% for women). It is essential to acknowledge that the observed differences might stem from factors that we are not able to observe in the survey. Potential influences include selection bias (where only those persisting in the profession end up feeling valued), evolving expectations with career progression, or systemic challenges in valuing young researchers compared to their more tenure counterparts, among other possible explanations. Regardless, this finding is disheartening and prompts collective reflection on how we, as a community, can do better.

Contrary to the previous result, when asked on whether they feel valued in their institution, the figures are much larger and similar for respondents with more and less tenure. Thus, responders perceive that institutions, rather than the profession as a whole are doing a much better job in making individuals feel valued in their jobs.

In Figure 2 we plot the share of respondents, both in the Spanish as well as in the American survey, that have ever been personally discriminated or that have ever witnessed discrimination based on sex. While only 4% of men in both surveys have been personally discriminated by sex, 41% of women in the Spanish sample (and 48% in the American one) have experienced this type of discrimination. In the lower panel of the same Figure, we can see that percentages are much larger for men witnessing discrimination (25% for Spanish and 33% for American men) and smaller for women in the Spanish case (27% for Spanish and 44% for American women). The difference, for women, between personally experiencing and witnessing discrimination led us to two conclusions: 1) women (mostly) do not include their own personal experience of sex discrimination on the witnessing category and, 2) sex discrimination is something that (mostly) happens in the private sphere, as own experiences for women are larger than what both men and women are able to witness.

As depicted in Figure 3 below, the patterns of experiencing and witnessing discrimination by age align with those of sex discrimination although the overall numbers are generally lower and the differences between men and women are also smaller (though still significant).

Next, we zoom in on the types of discrimination that respondents have personally experienced during their time as students or during their time in academia.

Figure 4 plots the share of individuals in both surveys and by gender, that have experienced discrimination during their time as students in access to advisors, access to quality advising, access to research assistantships or funds and, finally, in the job market process. In three out of the four dimensions, women responding the American Association survey report much larger numbers than men in both surveys and that women in the Spanish sample. The exception to this regularity is for the category of access to research assistants or funds, in which Spanish women report higher experiences of discrimination than the other three groups of respondents. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that across all four dimensions of the question, the reported numbers for women consistently exceed those for men.

When we move to discrimination during their time in academia, in Figure 5 we observe that for both promotion decisions and compensation, women experience a much stronger discrimination than men. The numbers are strikingly large for promotion decisions, where women report being twice as likely as men to having experienced that kind of discrimination or unfair treatment. For the compensation category, although the shares are also larger for women in both surveys, the difference is particularly

large for women in the American survey. This is not a surprising finding given the much larger room for salary negotiations in the American, compared to the Spanish, context.

In Figure 6 we explore an issue that was not included in the American Economic Association survey of 2018, which is the incidence of non-promotable tasks. Non-promotable tasks (NPTs) are those tasks that help workers' organizations but do little to advance their careers, such as training the new hires, scheduling appointments, taking notes at meetings, organizing the department parties, etc. In the survey, respondents are asked whether they feel that they were assigned/volunteered/accepted non-promotable tasks more often than their economist colleagues. We can see that, in the three dimensions, the percentage of women is larger than the percentage of men, with a difference of about 20 percentage points. In any case, the numbers are relatively high for both men and women. In results not shown in this report, we also observe that the numbers are higher in the last 5 years than for tasks assigned/volunteered/accepted 5 or more years ago. Finally, we also distinguish between individuals with and without caregiver responsibilities and, while there is almost no difference for women with/without caregiving responsibilities, the results are larger for men with those responsibilities (compared to men without them).

The last two items that we would like to highlight from the survey have to do with the more direct consequences of harassment. In Figure 7 we present some of the actions individuals have taken to prevent harassment, unfair or disrespectful treatment. While we only depict three of them, there are numerous other items covered in the survey questions. The most prevalent actions include refraining from speaking during a seminar, with over 40% of both American and Spanish women having done so, whereas the corresponding numbers for men are below 20%. Similarly, avoiding the presentation of one's ideas or views is common, with women comprising nearly 40% of the sample, compared to around 25% for men. For the last item, not conducting research in a particular field, the figures are smaller, around 20-25% for women and 8-14% for men. Again, even if the sample sizes are very different, the shares responding to these questions are extremely similar for American and Spanish men (women) respondents.

Last but not least, in Figure 8 we illustrate the percentage of men and women who have experienced certain elements of harassment during their time in economics. We start by depicting the share of individuals who have encountered flirtatious comments or have been subjected to direct or indirect sexist remarks/jokes that made him/her feel uncomfortable. We observe that 54% (43%) of women responding the Spanish (American) survey have been exposed to that uncomfortable situation, while 23% (13%) of Spanish (American) men have experienced it. Although the figures for the other two items plotted in Figure 8 are smaller, we still observe that 10% (23%) of Spanish (American) women feel that somebody has made unwanted attempts to establish a dating, romantic or sexual relationship with them despite their efforts to discourage it. Additionally, 10% (13%) of Spanish (American) respondents have experienced being touched in a way that made them feel uncomfortable.

As a summary of the main take aways from this initial exploration of the first survey on the work environment in economics, we want to emphasize several key elements:

- 1) First, despite the difference in the sample sizes between the American Economic Association and the Spanish Economic Association surveys, the observable characteristics as well as the main conclusions of many of the questions are very similar.

- 2) Experiences of exclusion are common in Economics, both among women as well as men (although the numbers are lower). For instance, 51% (39%) of female (male) respondents feel excluded at meetings/events and 64% (38%) feel that their work was not taken seriously.
- 3) Importantly, individuals with less tenure report much worse numbers; only 36% of men and 28% of women with less than 20 years in the profession feel valued.
- 4) We believe that this is an important exercise to understand the magnitude of the problem and the areas where it is more salient but, now that we know the numbers, we must do better.

Figure 1. Share of respondents that feel valued in Economics and in their institutions, by the number of years in the profession.

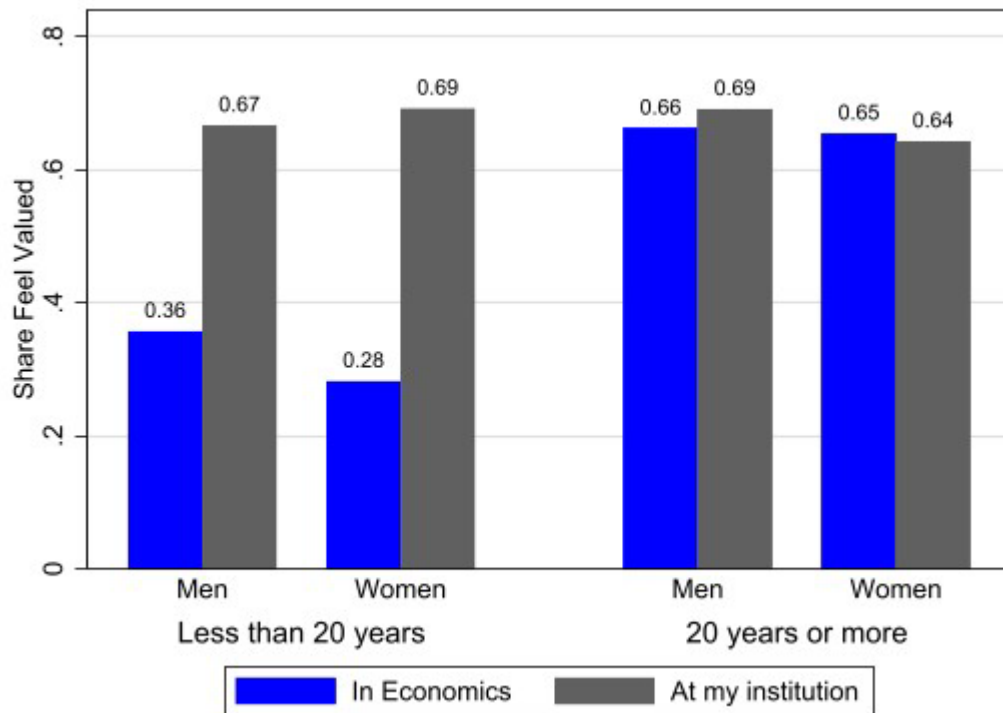


Figure 2. Share that have ever been personally discriminated/have witnessed discrimination based on sex.

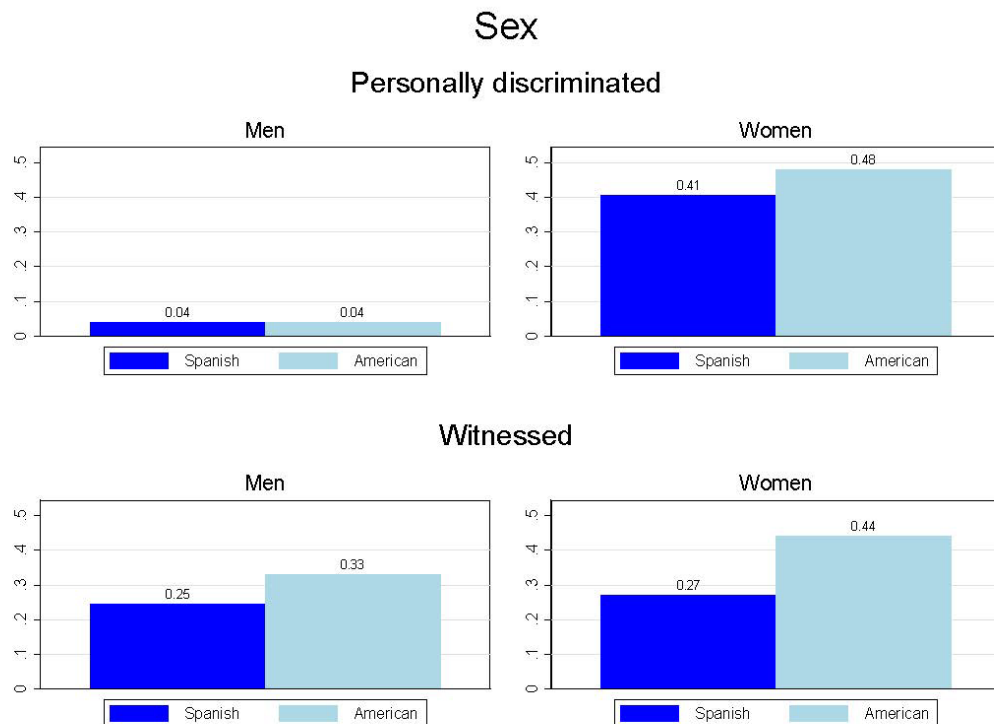


Figure 3. Share that have ever been personally discriminated/have witnessed discrimination based on age.

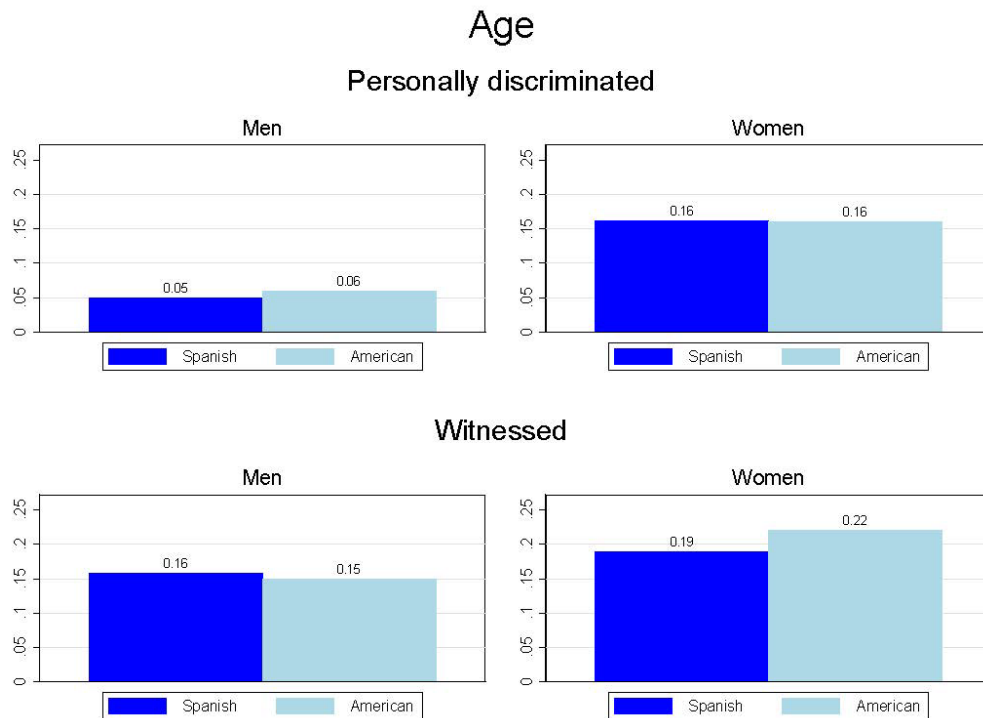


Figure 4. Share that have experienced discrimination as student in the following dimensions.

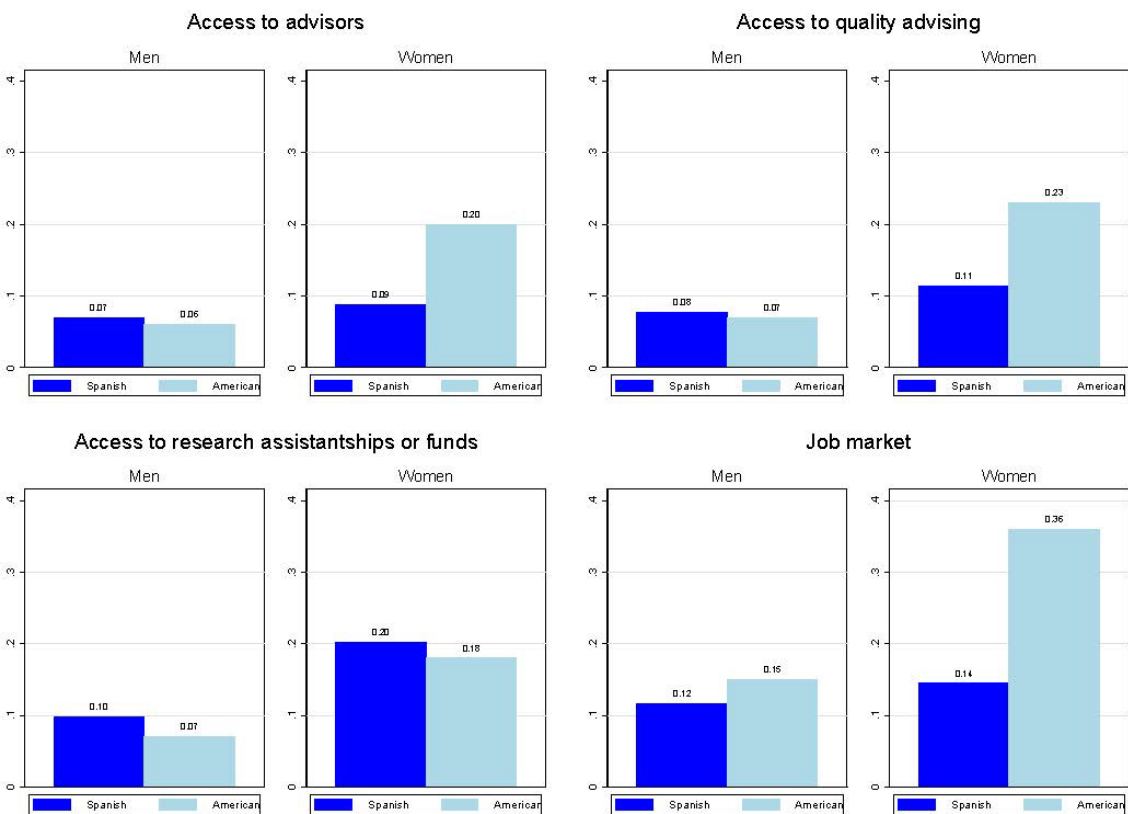


Figure 5. Share that have experienced discrimination during their time in academia, in the following dimensions.

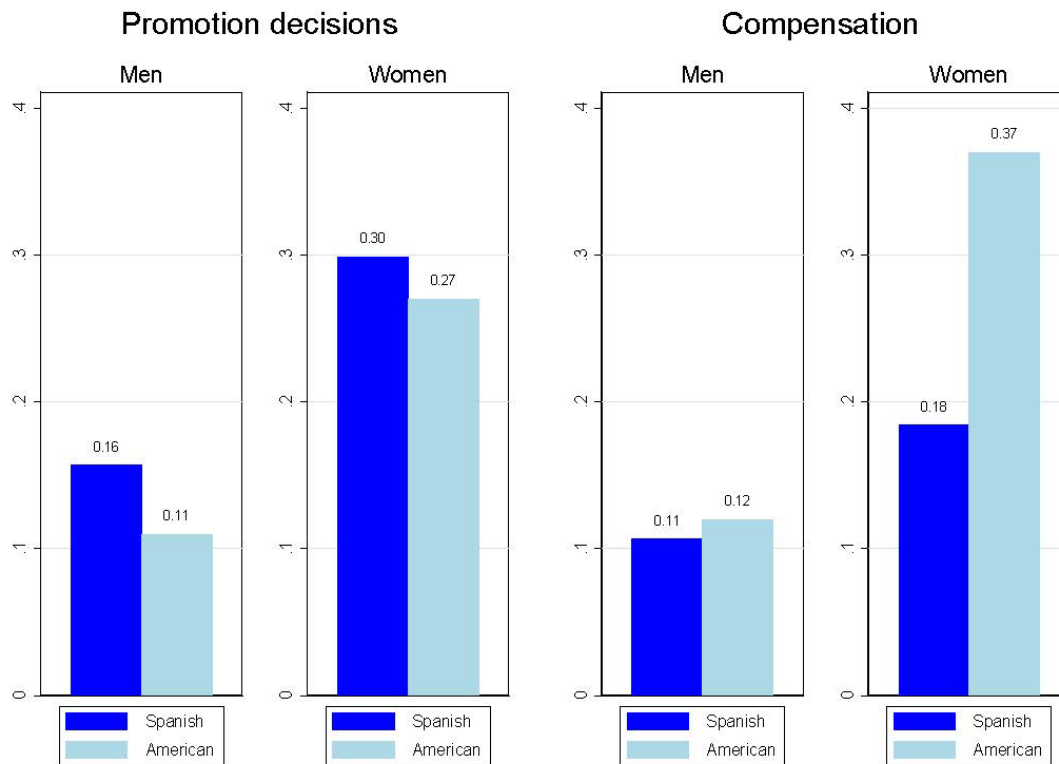


Figure 6. Do you feel that you were assigned/volunteered/accepted to non-promotable tasks more often than your economist colleagues.

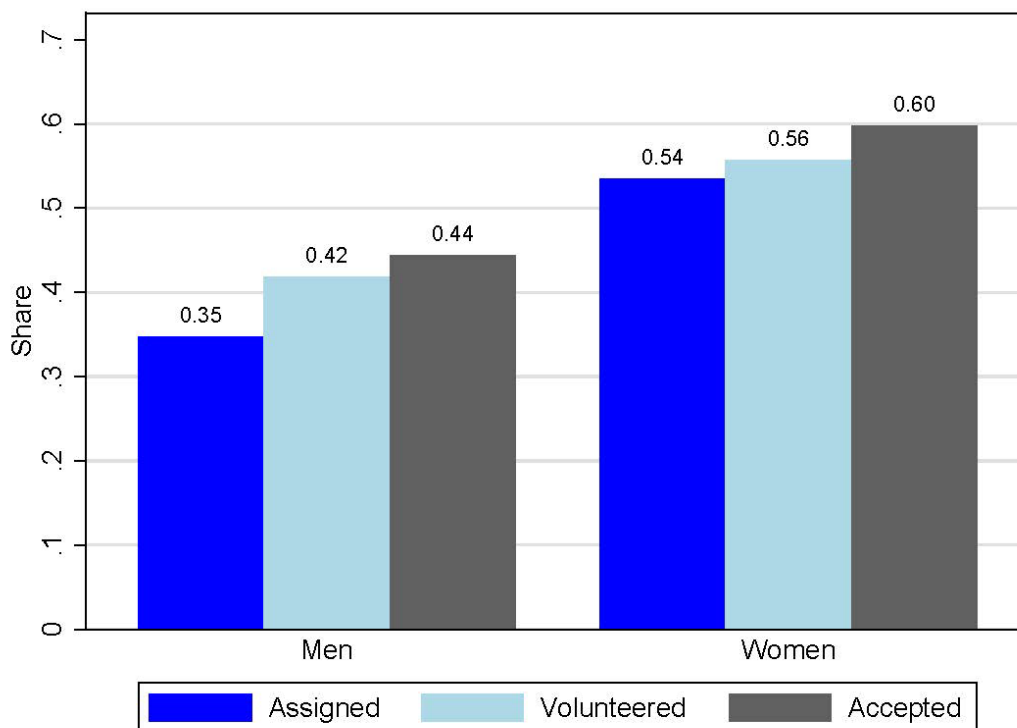


Figure 7. Ever done to avoid harassment, unfair or disrespectful treatment.

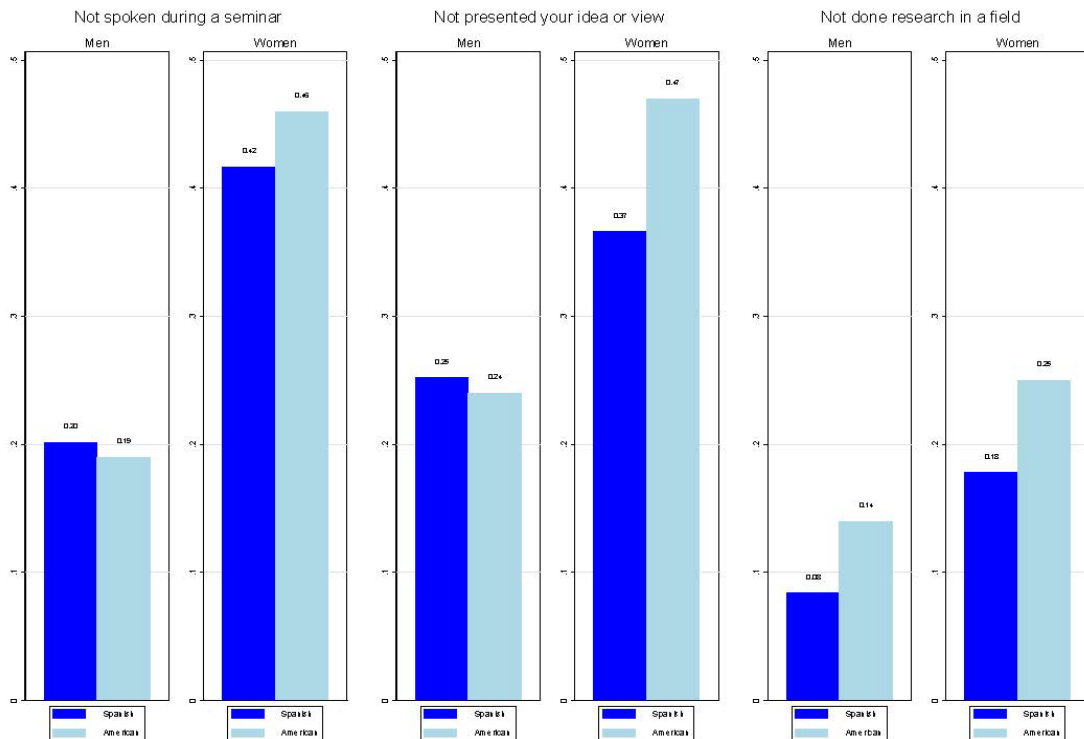


Figure 8. During your time in economics, have you ever felt...

