

## **Sexual Harassment Indicators: The Socio-Cultural and Cultural Impact of Marital Status, Age, Education, Race, and Sex in Latin America**

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**Abstract:** To improve organizational communication, this study identified the primary targets of sexual harassment in Latin America as a point of departure in addressing how managers can focus on strategic communication designed to deter future harassment. Consequently, this study reported the antecedent socio-cultural factors (i.e., marital status, age, education, race and sex) associated with employee targets of sexual harassment based on power relationships previously indicated in US studies and three Latin American countries: Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Differences in perceptions of sexual harassment are discussed in terms of the sociocultural perspective and cultural differences in collectivism, power distance, masculinity, and *uncertainty avoidance* between past findings in the US and Argentina, Brazil, and Chile.

**Keywords:** Sexual harassment, Latin America, collectivism, workplace interaction, sociocultural perspective, uncertainty avoidance, intercultural communication

### **1. Introduction**

To bolster interpersonal civility, it is important to acknowledge and combat sexual harassment in the workplace. Of late, the seriousness of sexual harassment in the workplace has increased (Stanley & Baldwin, 2011). Workplace sexual harassment has been shown to be responsible for increased stress, depression, and anxiety resulting in declines in organizational productivity (Baba, Jamal & Tourigny, 1998). Even those who are not direct targets of sexual harassment experience its consequences. For example, both male and female employees experience diminished well-being in a work environment perceived as hostile towards women (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2004).

Understanding underlying causes (i.e., cultural values and power differentials) of sexual harassment is the first step towards mitigating cross-cultural communication mishaps. For example, Cortina and Wasti (2005) discussed how power and culture impacts sexual harassment coping patterns in Turkey and the US. Another attempt at studying power and culture was undertaken by Fasting, Chroni, Hervik, and Knorre (2011) to examine the experiences of Czech, Greek, and Norwegian female sport students with sexual harassment. Fielden, Davidson, Woolnough and Hunt (2010) examined the affect of power and culture on reporting rates of sexual harassment in the UK. Finally, Luthar and Luthar (2008) used power and culture to analyze the likelihood of perpetrating sexual harassment among American, Indian, and Chinese students. While the extent studies above have carried out analyses of power and culture, presently there are no studies examining the impact of power and culture on sexual harassment in Latin America.

The present study extends Merkin's (2008) study reporting Latin American rates of sexual harassment in terms of where people are more at risk for experiencing sexual harassment. However, the purpose of that study was a general review of the incident rates of sexual harassment, and not the specific effects of power and culture on communication strategies with respect to Latin American sexual harassment. The inquiry into the incident rates of sexual harassment was confined to reporting descriptive statistics. It was beyond the scope of Merkin's (2008) study to provide an in-depth explanation of how theory relating to power differentials and cultural values applies to Latin American sexual harassment incident rates. Thus, the purpose of this study is to rereport on and to examine Latin American sexual harassment incident rates based on power and cultural perspectives, so as to help managers determine helpful communication strategies for handling targets of sexual harassment in three Latin American countries. This analysis also adds to the literature by applying power and cultural perspectives to the previously unexamined Latin American cultures of Argentina, Brazil and Chile.

This examination focuses on whether workplace sexual harassment is perpetrated against those with the least power in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. Based on the sociocultural perspective, a consideration is made using the sociocultural factors of lower status (i.e., marital status, age, education level, race and sex) in greater depth and the associated likelihood that employees will be targets of sexual harassment (Vaux, 1993). US studies will be the basis for most hypotheses because the majority of studies on sexual harassment have been carried out in the US.

In fact, Stoga (2002) advocates the importance of conducting research in Latin American countries because they have experienced growing economic, political and social unrest following transition from military rule to democracy. These political and subsequent financial changes have also changed the role of women in the Latin American workplace in that they have become more independent and assertive (Diekman, Eagly, Mlandinic & Ferreira, 2005). Hence, it is important to assess individuals being affected by sexual harassment in Latin America (Cortina, Fitzgerald & Drasgow, 2002).

The negative consequences of sexual harassment also include interactions between cross-cultural workgroups and whole multicultural organizations because of globalization and an increasingly multicultural workplace (Barak, 1997; Luthar & Luthar, 2002). The number of multicultural studies on sexual harassment, however, are fairly limited (Matsui, Kakuyama, Onglatco & Ogutu, 1995). Thus, as Cortina and Wasti (2005) point out, the cultural context is an area that is ripe for investigation in sexual harassment research.

## **2. Sexual Harassment and Power**

Sexual harassment is defined as behavior that is unwelcome and of a sexual nature (Welsh, Carr, Maquarrie & Huntley, 2006). Conrad and Taylor (1994) argue that sexual harassment is an act of power. Studies show that the more powerful an actor is perceived in relation to a target, the more likely the actor's behavior will be perceived as sexually harassing (Gutek, Morasch & Cohen, 1983; Pryor, 1985). Studies have showed that sexual harassment is likely to be perpetrated by more powerful actors against lower status targets (MacKinnon, 1979; Pryor, 1985). For example, work harassment can result from workers extending their gender stereotypes into the workplace (MacKinnon, 1979).

Dougherty (2001) contends that sexual harassment is constructed by all employees, not just those involved in a harassing situation. Power interactions between employees are often constructed through discourse within an organization (Clair, 1993). According to Keyton and Menzie (2007) this process takes the form of (1) a sender presuming power in the interaction with a receiver, (2) an interaction including phrases that are subject to multiple meanings that are sexualized, (3) a sender attempting to extend the work relationship into a personal relationship, and (4) the receiver not wanting the personal relationship. This pattern where the power relationship is expressed and carried out within the sexually harassing interaction indicates that “communication is the primary medium through which sexual harassment is expressed and it is also the primary means by which policies for eliminating sexual harassment” (Kreps, 1993, p. 1) are carried out.

### **3. Socio-Cultural Factors and Communication**

Keyton (1996) points out that sexual harassment is fundamentally a communicative phenomenon. In fact, Keyton and Menzie (2007) point out that the relationship through which power is expressed exists within interactions. Reporting on who is most likely to be sexually harassed in organizations and to give a power and cultural perspective related to this analysis, this study takes a closer look at the sociocultural factors that could be the grounds harassers consider before entering into sexually-harassing communication. Often, the harasser has the means to harm the target while putting the target in a double bind such that he/she can either resist the harasser and suffer sanctions at work or quit and suffer financially. Ragins (1997) points out that power and status have a strong impact on intergroup communication that causes minority group members to have less secure social positions and to experience more intergroup discriminatory behaviors (Sachdev & Bourhis, 1991). This is particularly true in widely multiethnic societies such as Brazil (Marger, 1985). Consequently, if harassers are of a majority demographic make up, the power and credibility they are granted could put minority status targets of sexual harassment at risk.

Fain and Anderton (1987) explain that individuals bring status grouping and stereotypical responses with them into organizations from the larger social community. Social power is the power that is exercised by individuals or groups within society (Tanabe, 1998). Research shows that more “vulnerable” employees lacking social power are more likely to be sexual harassment targets in the US (Fitzgerald, Drasgow & Magley, 1999). Luthar and Luthar (2008) found the proclivity to sexually exploit others with less power in the US to be the case in all populations.

### **4. Status Characteristics of Sexual Harassment Targets in Latin America**

Ilies, Hauserman, Schwochau, and Stibal (2003) found that sexual harassment is more prevalent in organizations characterized by relatively large power differentials between organizational levels. Thus, as theorized by Gutek in 1985, macrolevel social stratification variables may influence sexual harassment (Fain & Anterton, 1987). Status characteristics relevant to harassment include marital status, age and education (Fain & Anderton, 1987), as well as race (Bergman, Palmieri, Drasgow & Ormerod, 2007), and sex (Gruber & Bjorn, 1982).

#### 4.1 Sexual Harassment and Marital Status

U.S. findings show sexually-harassing experiences were greater among single than among married women in the US (Lafontain & Tredeau, 1986). Similarly, married respondents were less likely to experience sexual harassment than other marital categories (Lee, Gibson & Near, 2004). Fain and Anderton (1987) found that divorced, separated and widowed women are more likely to be harassed than single women, and that married women are the least likely to be harassed.

Social stratification by marital status also appears to be a factor in the incidences of sexual harassment. For example, Nieminen, Martelin, Koskinen, Simpura, Alanen, Härkänen and Aroma (2008) found that married persons tend to have more social capital than singles. Singles may be viewed as better targets by harassers partly because they tend to be younger and less aware of sexual harassment. In addition, sexual pursuit of unmarried employees is likely to be considered more acceptable because sexual harassment may be considered by some as normal courtship behavior. Exactly which single status is the least powerful in the literature is debatable; but most studies concur that individuals who are married are most powerful. Consequently, people who are married, are least likely to be sexually harassed in the US (Fain & Anderton, 1987). Thus, based on previous US research the following hypothesis is reported:

H1: Individuals who are single are more likely to be sexually harassed than those who are married in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile.

#### 4.2 Sexual Harassment and Age

Findings show that younger women tend to be less powerful because they generally have fewer resources and are less likely to be married (MacKinnon, 1979). Schat, Frone and Kelloway (2006) point out that young adult workers are more at risk for experiencing workplace violence. In keeping with this perspective, findings show that the younger the respondents, the more likely they are to experience sexual harassment (Lee, Gibson & Near, 2004). Furthermore, according to Terpstra and Cook (1985), sexual harassment was reported most by sufferers between the ages of 25 and 35. Similarly, Fain and Anderton (1987) found women targets in the 16-34 range to be most likely to be harassed, with the likelihood decreasing with age. O'Connell and Korabik (2000) found that sexual harassment was not related to age in that both the youngest and the middle aged were particularly vulnerable. Finally, in casinos context, sexually harassed employees tended to be younger (Stedham & Mitchell, 1998). Given US findings, the following hypothesis is posed:

H2: Younger employees will experience greater incidences of sexual harassment than older employees in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile.

#### 4.3 Sexual Harassment and Education

Tangri, Burt, and Johnson (1982) point out that sociocultural power reflects attitudes and roles that create differences of power between the genders that are culturally legitimated.

Thus, if the general culture legitimizes differences in education outside of work, then the power differential exists in the workplace as well. Thus, poorly educated employees with low sociocultural power in a society are also at a power disadvantage within their organizations.

Studies show that those with more education generally have greater social power (Tanabe, 1998) because *social* networks increase with *education* (Nieminen, et al., 2008). In a similar vein, lower levels of education appear to put employees at greater risk of being sexually harassed (Fain & Anderton, 1987). Overall, theorists find that sexual harassment decreases as a person's education level increases (Dougherty, Turban, Olson & Dwyer, 1996).

On the other hand, there are progressive companies with well-educated women in powerful positions who appear to have similar problems with sexual harassment (France, 2000). Some findings show that higher education is associated with higher incidences of sexual harassment (Terpstra & Cook, 1985). It is possible that those with lower social status attempting to move into more powerful positions by attaining more education might threaten the advancement of higher status others; who, in turn, may harass those attaining more education. For example, studies show that *sexual harassment* occurs with regularity in medical *education* (Wear, Aultman & Borges, 2007). Then again, the predominant US findings indicate that those with less education have a greater threat of being sexually harassed (Dougherty et al., 1996). Given the conflicting findings, the following research question for Latin America is posed:

R1: Are people from Argentina, Brazil, and Chile more likely to experience sexual harassment in the workplace with less education or more education?

#### 4.4 Sexual Harassment and Race

It has long been suggested that women from minority races are more likely than white women to experience sexual harassment (MacKinnon, 1979). In fact, several studies have demonstrated this (e.g., Berdahl & Moore, 2006; Shupe, Cortina, Ramos, Fitzgerald & Salisbury, 2002). In contrast, Fitzgerald, Hulin, Drasgow, Gelfand and Magley (1997) suggest that race does not moderate the relationship between sexual harassment and other variables. Hendrix (2000) found no differences in the perceived incidences of sexually harassing events between black, Hispanic and white women. In fact, Welsh et al. (2006) found that black women call into question whether the term sexual harassment captures their experiences altogether. Finally, many members of minorities show tolerance by repeatedly voicing that sexual harassment should not cause offense (Fain & Anderton, 1987).

Taken together, studies conducted in the US on sexual harassment and race are somewhat inconclusive. However, if race is an issue in sexual harassment, then it is important to identify and report this because it affects workplace interactions. For example, Lovell (2006) showed that the powerful in Brazil embrace pervasive and persistent racial inequality and do not favor equitable incorporation of women into the economy. Specifically, while absolute gains in terms of education and wages have been made by women and minorities there, the overall economic rewards of these gains are being shared inequitably with white males who occupy the executive positions. Based on previous literature and Brazilian evidence, therefore, the following hypothesis is posed:

H3: People of minority races will be exposed to more sexual harassment than people of majority races in Argentina, Brazil and Chile.

#### 4.5 Sexual Harassment and Sex

Sexual harassment and its consequential outcomes largely impact less powerful women, financially vulnerable men, and men pursuing more egalitarian sexual relationships (Uggen & Blackstone, 2004). Sexual harassment is also the most widespread form of violence against women in the US (Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993). Although men can be targets of sexual harassment, nevertheless, adult women remain the most frequent targets of sexual harassment behaviors such as unwanted touching and invasion of personal space (Berdahl & Moore, 2006). Truly, both sexes experience sexual harassment. For example, men who complain about sexual harassment are believed less, liked less, and punished more than women (Madera, Podratz, King & Hebl, 2007). Nevertheless, given the relative status of males in US findings, the following hypothesis is posed:

H4: Women will experience more incidences of sexual harassment than men in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile.

#### 5. Sexual Harassment and Cross-Cultural Perceptions

While aggression against women may originate in sociocultural constructions of gender and power, cultural forces support and perpetuate it (Wasti & Cortina, 2002). Cultural forces reflect varying perceptions. Cultural perceptions vary because people differ in how they encode and decode messages (Soares, Farhangmehr & Shoham, 2007). Moreover, it is cultural perceptions that influence what language and behaviors encompass sexual harassment (DeSouza & Hutz, 1996). For example, Hardman and Heidleberg (1996) point out that in many Latin American countries people commonly socialize using physical contact and sensuality. In fact, in Latin America there are social values that promote more tolerant or reconciling attitudes towards sexual harassment than in other cultures (Merkin, 2009; Barak, 1997).

Overall, researchers contend that while sexual harassment is reported within all cultures, it is apparent in different ways (Barak, 1997). Thus, what is considered proper behavior in the workplace varies by culture. As a result, behaviors prohibited in one culture (i.e., sexual harassment) may be acceptable in another culture (Luthar & Luthar, 2002). This is partly due to differing cultural dimensions as explained by Hofstede (2001). Luthar and Luthar (2002; 2008) and Fiedler and Blanco (2006) suggest applying Hofstede's (2001) four cultural dimensions to clarify the effect of culture on sexual harassment perceptions. Therefore, Hofstede's (2001) four cultural dimensions: (a) individualism-collectivism, (b) power distance (c) uncertainty avoidance and (d) masculinity-femininity will be the framework used to analyze Latin American data on sexual harassment further.

Hofstede (2001) explained that individualistic cultures stress individual goals, whereas collectivistic cultures stress group goals. *Power distance* is "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that



power is distributed unequally” (p. 98). *Uncertainty avoidance* refers to the extent to which people are made nervous by situations they consider to be unclear or unpredictable, and how much they try to avoid such situations by adopting strict codes of behavior and beliefs in absolute truths (Stohl, 1993). Hofstede (2001) described cultural masculinity on a continuum ranging from masculine competitiveness to feminine leveling behaviors. While competitiveness creates an atmosphere of one person becoming better than another person, leveling behavior creates equality of status.

The US, where most studies of sexual harassment take place, is individualistic, low in power distance and uncertainty avoidance, and masculine. Argentina, Brazil, and Chile are all collective (i.e. value interdependence; Marcus & Kitayama, 1999), high in power distance (show respect for authority; Hofstede, 2001), and high in uncertainty avoidance (need clarity provided by following rules; Merkin, 2010). Argentina differs from Brazil and Chile in that it is more masculine and lower in power distance while the others are more feminine. Otherwise, as Hofstede (2001) points out, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile are all high in both power distance and uncertainty avoidance. Business practitioners in countries with high power distance are more likely to accept inequality in power (Fiedler & Blanco, 2006) and are less likely to report sexually harassing incidents given their emphasis and respect for social hierarchy (Hofstede, 2001; Triandis, 1994; Wasti & Cortina, 2002). Furthermore, according to Vitell, Nwachakwu, and Barnes (1993) business practitioners in countries high in power distance are more likely to take their ethical cues from their superiors, particularly about sexual harassment (Fiedler & Blanco, 2006).

Being that individuals from Latin American countries are also high in uncertainty avoidance, they also tend to rely more on the rules dictated by their organization and to express apprehension over security given their need to maintain consensus (Hofstede, 1991). Fiedler and Blanco (2006) posit that employees in high uncertainty avoidance countries are less inclined to endanger their jobs and break the “harmony” where they work with complaints about sexual harassment.

Chile and Brazil encompass another cultural characteristic classified by Hofstede (2001) as *feminine* in that the society nurtures its people. On the one hand, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile are distinct countries with different cultures. For example, Hofstede (2001) indicated that Chile is very *feminine* (citizens as a group value equality as opposed to status differences), Brazil is also moderately *feminine*, and Argentina is slightly *masculine* (i.e., citizens as a group are competitive; Hofstede, 2001). On the other hand, Argentina, Brazil and Chile share most cultural characteristics. For example, as Hofstede indicates, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile are all *collective* (base their identity on their ingroup; Triandis, 1995), are moderate in *power distance* (show acceptance of authority; Hofstede, 2001), and high in *uncertainty avoidance* (need clarity; Merkin, 2010). Given the above cultural differences, the following research question is posed:

R2: Do national differences impact sexual harassment incidences in Argentina, Brazil and Chile?

## 6. Method

### 6.1 Participants

This study conducted a secondary analysis on a sample data set from a larger collection conducted by the International Labour Office's (ILO) InFocus Programme on Socio-Economic Security. The larger collection conducted each survey using a national collaborating team under the responsibility of ILO's staff. For more information, see Anker (2002), who coordinated the PSS (People's Social Survey) for cross-cultural comparability. The three surveys analyzed for this study were in Spanish for Argentina and Chile and in Portuguese for Brazil. The data was collected between January and April 2001 in the three largest metropolitan areas of each of these countries.

The total sample ( $n = 8108$ ) included 3868 females and 4240 males. The urban households sampled had respondents aged between 15 and 64 years, in Argentina ( $n = 2920$ ), Brazil ( $n = 4000$ ), and in Chile, ( $n = 1188$ ). While these samples are not exactly representative of their national populations, Anker (2002) points out that previous empirical analyses carried out in Chile and Brazil indicate that the efficiency of the sampling procedure tends to be quite similar to that based on pure probabilistic sampling.

### 6.2 Instrumentation

The ILO data was collected with the purpose of reducing socio-economic insecurity. This report included indicators of sexual harassment experienced by employed respondents. For the operationalization of sexual harassment along with the other variables used as indicators of respondents' socio-cultural indicators, see Table 1.

Table 1. Independent Variables

Variable	Name	Variable Description
X1	Marital Status	Marital status? 1 = single, 2 = married, 3 = separated, 4 = divorced, 5 = widowed
X2	Age	What is your age? _____
X3	Education	What is your highest degree of schooling? (1 = none, 2 = elementary incomplete, 3 = elementary completed, 4 = high school incomplete, 5 = high school completed, 6 = college incomplete, 7 = college completed, 8 = Master's or Doctoral degree completed.
X4	Race	To what ethnic or racial category do you belong? 1 = White, 2 = Black, 3 = Parda (mixed), 4 = Asian, 5 = Indian, 6 = Other, 7 = No Answer
X5	Sex	Are you Male ___ or Female ___?
X6	Sexual Harassment	During the past two years, have you experienced sexual harassment at work or at school? 1. Yes, 2. No.



## 7. Results

Running all the covariates together caused the main effects of sex, single, and black to drop out of the model. The resulting overall model was highly significant ( $p < .0001$ ). Main effects for marital status, age, education, and country were significant with *Nagelkerke*  $R^2 = .04$  (see Table 2). This study showed only partial support for Hypothesis One (H1) in that besides the single category, which dropped out of the model, those from other single categories such as divorced, separated, or widowed were more likely to be sexually harassed in Latin America. Specifically, controlling for age, education, mixed race, and Argentinean and Brazilian country effects, the odds of experiencing sexual harassment are 1.78 times higher if the person is divorced, separated, or widowed ( $p = .003$ ), than if a person is married in Latin America.

Table 2. Summary of Logistic Regression Analysis Predicting Sexual Harassment

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	Odds ratio	Wald Statistic
DSW	-.023	.191	1.78	9.08**
Age	-.028	.005	.972	33.07***
Education	.109	.038	1.12	8.09**
Mixed	.301	.139	1.35	4.71*
Argentina	-.869	.154	.419	31.72***
Brazil	-.640	.146	.527	19.35***

Note. DSW = divorced, separated or widowed. \* = .03, \*\* = .004, \*\*\* = .0001

This study showed support for Hypothesis Two (H2), that younger employees will experience greater incidences of sexual harassment than older employees in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Specifically, while controlling for age, education, mixed race, and Argentinean and Brazilian country effects, the odds of experiencing sexual harassment are decreased by a factor of .03 for an age increase of one year.

Research Question One (R1) asked whether people from Argentina, Brazil and Chile are more likely to experience sexual harassment in the workplace with less education or more education. Results showed that while controlling for age, education, mixed race, and Argentinean and Brazilian country effects, the odds of experiencing sexual harassment are 1.12 times higher if the person has more education than if a person has less education,

Hypothesis Three (H3), that people of minority races will be exposed to more sexual harassment than people of majority races in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile was also partially substantiated. Although the category *black* dropped out of the model, while controlling for age, education, mixed race, and Argentinean and Brazilian country effects, findings showed that the odds of being a target of sexual harassment are 1.35 times higher if a person is of a mixed race than if someone is Caucasian.

Hypothesis Four (H4) predicted that women will experience more incidences of sexual harassment than men in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. However, this was not substantiated because the data did not significantly indicate any differences based on sex.

Finally, results of Research Question Two (R2) showed that national differences impact sexual harassment incidences in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Being that Chile was the reference category for testing country effects, when controlling for marital status, age, education, race, Argentinean and Brazilian country effects, the odds of experiencing sexual harassment are 58% lower if the target reports being sexually harassed in Argentina and 47% lower if the target reports being sexually harassed in Brazil than when the target reports experiencing sexual harassment in Chile. Thus, one is most likely to be sexually harassed in Chile, then Brazil, then Argentina.

## 8. Discussion

### 8.1 Implications/Findings

This study's results showed that for the most part, the proposed antecedents representing low sociocultural power are associated with an increased likelihood of being sexually harassed. Although there were insignificant variables that dropped out of the model, elements of the model which were significant showed support for H1 that individuals who are single are more likely to be sexually harassed than those who are married in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. H2 that younger employees will experience greater incidences of sexual harassment than older employees in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile was also substantiated by this study's results. The statistical support found that both H1 and H2 also provide support for the notion that individuals with low social power are more likely to be sexually harassed in Latin America.

Research Question One (R1) asked whether people with less education or more education from Argentina, Brazil, and Chile are more likely to experience sexual harassment in the workplace. *This study's results showed that Latin Americans with more education are more likely to be sexually harassed.* On the one hand, Latin Americans who have more education have more power. On the other hand, it could be that being a minority with higher education, for example, could put more educated people in a lower power category in that their educational status competes with their social status in relation to the harasser. Being a higher-educated minority could explain these results which, in turn, indicate the need for greater probes to determine the complexities related to why and how higher education actually impacts the likelihood to be sexually harassed in the Latin American workplace.

Results supported H3, that people of minority races will be exposed to more sexual harassment than people of majority races in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile as well. The findings of H1 through H3 all showed that lower status individuals were more likely to be sexually harassed in Latin America. *Accordingly, the significant results in this study indicate that individuals who have low social power, i.e., who are divorced, separated, or widowed, younger, and of a mixed race, are most likely to be sexually harassed.*

Contrary to expectations, *H4 was not substantiated because the data did not indicate differences based on sex.* Results were not, however, significant in the opposite direction –

indicating that future in-depth investigation is warranted to establish how gender perceptions are viewed in the Latin American context. Although studies in the US indicated that the targets of sexual harassment are primarily women, as previous studies also suggest, the cultural perceptions of Latin Americans differ in that sex differences were not the major issue with sexual harassment. One explanation of these differences could lie in the level of *masculinity-femininity* of these cultures. The major cultural difference between the US (which is *masculine*) and two (i.e., Chile and Brazil) of the three Latin countries tested (which are *feminine*) explain how, according to Hofstede (1998), cultures that are *masculine* have more sex differences than *feminine* cultures which do not strongly differentiate between men's and women's roles.

Moreover, Hofstede (1998) posits that women from feminine cultures are much less likely to experience unwanted intimacies as sexual harassment because in feminine cultures unwanted intimacies are not considered to be a big issue, while those from masculine cultures do consider sexual harassment to be a big concern. For example, Schwartz (1993) finds that Swedes (feminine culture) have much fewer feelings of being sexually exploited than US (masculine culture) respondents. These differences in perceptions are important to investigate further because the implications for communication in multinational businesses are many.

According to Hofstede (2001), while people in the US are low in uncertainty avoidance (UA), in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile (all high in uncertainty avoidance) sexual harassment could be perpetrated by people who are made nervous by less powerful citizens attaining better positions in the workforce. Moreover, because members of high uncertainty avoidance cultures have a low tolerance for ambiguity in perceiving others (Hofstede, 2001), their communication tends to be more aggressive, particularly in a perceived face-threatening situation such as sexual harassment (Merkin, 2006). The uncertainty avoidance dimension indicates how threatened people can be by uncertain contexts, and the degree to which they will attempt to avoid these situations.

Thus, Tavakoli, Keenan and Crnjak-Karanovic (2003) proposed that those from high uncertainty avoidance cultures show a higher propensity for ethics reporting based on established reporting structures. Not adhering to organizational policy and failing to report rule-breaking activity in high-uncertainty avoidance cultures causes stress. Since those from high uncertainty avoidance cultures are more likely to perceive an unethical violation as severe (Tavakoli et al., 2003), they also have higher propensities to both internally report and whistle blow (MacNab, Worthley & Brislin, 2007). Thus, employees from high uncertainty avoidance cultures should be less likely to tolerate sexual harassment in the workplace.

In terms of the proposed antecedents, this study supports theories suggesting that socio-cultural power sources increase experiences of sexual harassment (Cleveland & Kerst, 1993); in particular, Fain and Anderton's (1987) proposition that individuals bring status grouping into the organization from the larger social community. Thus, managers in Argentina, Brazil and Chile need to beware of this communication phenomenon.

Finally, answering R2, *the results of this study show that sexual harassment is relatively worse in Chile, then Brazil, then Argentina*. Argentina may have lower rates of sexual harassment than the other two Latin American countries because of its lower level of power distance or lower acceptance of authority which could help permit targets to speak up against the status quo, thus halting sexually harassing acts. Furthermore, while the three countries are

all collective, Argentina is the most individualistic of the three, perhaps, again, opening the way for targets to feel comfortable enough to challenge work groups by reporting sexually harassing acts. Finally, because Argentina is a slightly masculine (competitive) country, as opposed to Brazil and Chile which are more feminine (leveling) countries, the cultural need to compete might also give targets the ability to stand up against perpetrators of sexual harassment cultures. Thus, cultural dimensions can help to explain the cultural forces behind the results of this research question. In general, this analysis acts as a starting point in trying to understand the situation in Latin America more fully with regard to sexual harassment. Future investigations can now follow up with more in-depth questions to fill in the gaps that still exist.

## **8.2 Limitations**

There are limitations to the present study. First, the data collection was collected by different researchers. Although the data collected used the same questions across the different samples, different researchers could have introduced variance into the findings. Second, given that this research was conducted using a preexisting dataset, the construct of sexual harassment could not be ideally measured. Third, the purposive samples in this study were not as ideal for generalization as representative samples would have been. However, the data was collected this way because of the financial constraints resulting from the magnitude of this project, which is a limitation of this study. On the other hand, the sample was more diverse in that the data for this study was household survey collection from a realistic cross-section of Latin America. This study also analyzed work-related questions from individuals who were actually working, adding to this study's external validity. Finally, using Hofstede's cultural dimensions alone to analyze the quantitative results of this study has limited generalizability. However, given the dearth of extant research available, this analysis is a starting point for further research.

## **8.3 Future Research**

This inquiry has tried to identify socio-cultural factors affecting incidences of Latin American sexual harassment in the previously unexamined cultures of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. There were a number of conflicting studies cited indicating that perhaps the race variable should not be considered a socio-cultural factor with respect to sexual harassment. However, these findings clearly indicate that this is not the case. Race (i.e., mixed race) is a significant indicator of the likelihood of being sexually harassed in Latin America. This indicates that further investigations as to why this is the case need to be undertaken in order to ascertain more deeply held cultural perceptions. Future studies are needed to test whether race effects exist in other Latin American countries.

The present findings indicate that sexual harassment is different for Latin Americans than for US Americans as is indicated by the lack of sex differences in the data and differing femininity rankings. The femininity of cultures and the corresponding perceptions associated with the egalitarian nature of such cultural values is a ripe area for further exploration. In particular, this data set showed that the more feminine culture, Chile, had the worst problem with sexual harassment and the only masculine culture, Argentina, had the least cases of sexual

harassment. Keeping masculinity/femininity of cultures in mind, perhaps the greater taboo that masculine cultures place on sexual harassment also acts as a deterrent to bosses engaging in this behavior. Future research is needed to clarify this relationship.

Argentina, Brazil and Chile are also known for their high uncertainty avoidance, which indicates that employees would be more likely to perceive unethical violations severely (Tavakoli et al., 2003) and would be more likely to both internally report and externally whistle blow (MacNab, Worthley & Brislin, 2007) about sexual harassment cases if they know about it. Despite this, Latin American findings show that workplace sexual harassment is still widespread. Perhaps the high-uncertainty avoidance targets of sexual harassment avoid the shame associated with revealing their harassing experiences to their bosses (who could be the perpetrators) or to their coworkers (who would be likely to make a big deal over it). Future research should be carried out to test further how high-uncertainty avoidance targets of sexual harassment respond to sexual harassment to determine more definitively how to establish policies that would help them.

Although some research exists showing there is universality in the severity of sexual harassment across cultures (Gruber, Smith & Kauppinen-Toropainen, 1996), this research gives support to the notion that age, marital status and race are universal socio-cultural antecedents of sexual harassment, at least across the US and Latin America. Future research should also attempt to replicate these findings in other cultures. Now that the most likely groups to be sexually harassed in Argentina, Brazil, and Chile have been identified, further questions can be investigated as to the interactions experienced by targets of sexual harassment, who often lack the power to ward off their perpetrators.

This study's results indicate that cultural factors do, in fact, influence organizational behavioral reactions to sexual harassment in Latin America versus studies conducted in the US. Future studies should also analyze how to integrate programs incorporating global issues of sexual harassment into cross-cultural organizational training and education programs.

With respect to theory, the present study substantiates MacKinnon's (1979) and others' (e.g., Gutek, 1985) basic propositions that sexual harassment derives from a sociocultural power. Additionally, this study's results show that stereotyping appears to be consistent with the social distribution of harassing behaviors associated with a number of demographic characteristics which indicate that more powerless employees are more likely to be targets of sexual harassment. What's more, results of this study extend the sociocultural explanation to include the cross-cultural context of Argentina, Brazil and Chile in which sexual harassment is worse in Chile, followed by Brazil, then Argentina. In all three countries, the relationship between particular employee populations (i.e., unmarried, younger age, more educated and a mixed race) and sexually harassing experiences should be of particular concern to multinational organizations who deal with the consequences of workplace sexual harassment. Finally, detailing the population experiencing sexual harassment in major countries in Latin America will help demarcate the population most at risk for sexual harassment in the Latin American workplace.

Given that the three cultures tested were all collective and high in power distance and uncertainty avoidance, important communication consequences are to be noted. Collectivism leads people to try to blend in and not make a scene when they are experiencing sexual

harassment. For example, employees unhappy with sexual harassment prefer to use avoidance strategies and therefore, are more likely to be absent or leave their jobs rather than report sexual harassment (Ng & Chakrabarty, 2005). This also appears to be the case with Latin American employees who have high uncertainty avoidance. On the other hand, researchers also have found that sometimes people in high uncertainty avoidance cultures are willing to justify ethically suspect behaviors to protect the status quo (Parboteeah, Praveen, Bronson & Cullen, 2005).

For example, Brazil has sexual harassment laws, the violation of which carries fairly heavy fines. However, due to the Machismo culture, most men do not take the law seriously, and it is rarely enforced, possibly due to the collectivism that leads to avoidance communication to blend in with the group. Although Brazil possesses a well organized women's movement in Latin America, the country probably has the worst record in discrimination and abuses against women at work, in the family and other situations (Fiedler & Blanco, 2006). Socio-cultural indicators highlight how someone who ordinarily would speak up, given their high-uncertainty avoidance need to adhere to rules, might choose to follow their high-power distance value of putting up with powerful authorities while also communicating their collective values of blending in. The combination of cultural factors present in the Latin American countries tested presents a unique challenge for managers to face in the future. Understanding the cultural values inherent in Latin America is a starting point for determining the elements necessary to improve communicative interactions in the global workplace of the future.

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