

Using Hofstede's cultural dimensions to explain sexually harassing behaviours in an international context

Vipan K. Luthar and Harsh K. Luthar

Abstract It is increasingly evident that sexual harassment concerns in the workplace are not limited by national boundaries. Yet, sexual harassment as a research topic has been studied mostly in the United States. Further, even in the US, very few studies have explored sexual harassment from a cross-cultural perspective. The current paper examines this major gap in the literature and focuses on how cultural dimensions are important and can significantly influence the likelihood to sexually harass in various countries. Specifically, this paper develops a model using Hofstede's cultural dimensions, and conceptualizes these dimensions as key variables in explaining differences in the social-sexual interactions between various countries. It is suggested that varying differences in these dimensions across countries may predict the likelihood of managers sexually harassing in an international and a cross-cultural context.

Keywords Sexual harassment; cross-cultural; Hofstede; sexual exploitation; cultural dimensions; cultural differences.

Introduction

The topic of sexual harassment kept coming up repeatedly in the media in a variety of political, social, as well as workplace, contexts in the 1990s. In the twenty-first century, it is expected to remain a controversial but nevertheless an important issue in human resource management. It has been studied at length in both the social-psychological and legal literature (Barling *et al.*, 1996; Foulis and McCabe, 1997; Luthar and Pastille, 2000; Perry *et al.*, 1998; Thacker and Gohman, 1993). Sexual harassment has existed as a social problem for a long time but has been acknowledged only recently (Fitzgerald and Shullman, 1993), because it was only in the early 1970s that cases concerning harassment of women in the workplace started to be heard in the US courts. The first major decision by the US Supreme Court on sexual harassment came in 1986 and unmistakably established it as an important concern that management needed to take seriously in the workplace and to address appropriately. Several other pivotal decisions by the US Supreme Court followed in 1993 and 1998, clarifying sexual harassment laws and providing practical guidance for managers (see Luthar and Pastille (2000) for a discussion of these Supreme Court cases).

It seems that many other industrialized countries are following in the footsteps of the US as their courts hear an increasing number of cases on sexual harassment. Laws making sexual harassment illegal in the workplace are starting to be passed all over the

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world (Barak, 1997). The European Commission reviewed all sexual harassment studies conducted between 1987 and 1997 in the Member states (Timmerman and Bajema, 1999). Based on a pioneering study, it has taken many steps to prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace. Employment laws that refer categorically to sexual harassment exist in countries such as Austria, Ireland and New Zealand. All except one of the states in Australia have legislated laws specifically concerned with sexual harassment.

It is likely that the application and impact of sexual harassment laws across countries will differ widely. Multinational corporations need to be aware of both the letter and spirit of such laws, as perceptions regarding what conduct is appropriate in the workplace will often be influenced by the culture of the host country. Indeed, researchers have started to theorize that sexual harassment behaviours and perceptions are to an extent rooted in a cultural context (DeSouza *et al.*, 1998; Pryor *et al.*, 1997). Social-sexual interactions become more complex when perpetrators and victims of harassment are from different countries and hold widely different values and perceptions about normal behaviour in the workplace. Settlement of such sexual harassment cases becomes complicated because behaviours forbidden in one culture may be admissible in another. Many Latin and Mediterranean countries, for example, commonly use physical contact and sensuality as part of everyday socializing (Hardman and Heidelberg, 1996); such behaviours may be frowned upon in the United States.

Barak (1997) noted that sexual harassment has been more extensively studied in the US than all other countries. One unfortunate corollary to this confinement of research is that almost all research examining gender differences between men and women in interpretation and perception of sexual harassment has used samples from the United States. The generalizability of these findings to other countries is at best problematic. Furthermore, no theoretical framework has been developed to address the notion that, along with perceptions of sexual harassment, its likelihood may also be culturally rooted. In other words, males from some countries may be more prone to engage in sexually harassing behaviours, given the social-sexual context of gender interactions in their culture.

This paper proposes that Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions of individualism versus collectivism, high versus low power distance, high versus low uncertainty avoidance and masculinity versus femininity may be helpful in determining the probability and severity of sexually harassing behaviours in different countries. This macro-approach complements the micro-perspective that the likelihood to sexually harass can be predicted based on personality characteristics of individuals. For example, the likelihood to sexually harass (LSH) instrument has been used to measure the propensity of men to engage in sexual harassment and exploitation of women (Pryor, 1987). Perry *et al.* (1998) explained the LSH as a measure of the propensity to employ social power for sexual exploitation. An individual scoring high on the LSH scale will make a stronger mental association between power and sex. We make the link in our paper between Hofstede's cultural dimension and the likelihood to sexually harass. In this conceptualization, the cultural dimensions provide a significant context in predicting the general propensity by males to sexually harass in different countries.

Sexual harassment literature in a cross-cultural context

There is no doubt that, in comparison with other industrialized countries, the US has been far ahead in addressing sexual harassment concerns. According to Pryor *et al.* (1997), the study of sexual harassment has gained greater appreciation in the United

States than all other countries because of a favourable attitude towards research on women's issues. It is not clear, however, that the incidence rates of sexual harassment in the United States are the lowest among industrialized countries. One study observed that sexual coercion occurred for 10.7 per cent of women in New Zealand whereas the percentage was 11.9 per cent for American women. Rape attempts were reported by 11.2 per cent of women in New Zealand compared to 12.1 per cent for American women (Barak, 1997). According to Gruber (1997), studies using equivalent surveys for American and European samples found somewhat higher rates of sexual harassment in America than Europe. A rate of only 2 per cent was reported in a Swedish survey on sexual harassment (Timmerman and Bajema, 1999). Only one question, however, was asked about sexual harassment experiences in this study. Very high incidence rates were reported in surveys carried out in Austria, Germany and Luxembourg. These results could be partly due to the use of extended comprehensive definitions of sexual harassment in the surveys. Because very few studies to date have incorporated cultural variables on interpretations of sexual harassment (DeSouza *et al.*, 1998), our knowledge of what is considered to constitute sexual harassment may be influenced by cultural factors specific to the United States (Pryor *et al.*, 1997).

Historically, American literature, based on US samples, has suggested gender differences in interactional control, especially in sexual control. Several authors have noted the weakness of women in negotiating about sexuality in general in a variety of arenas and how this tends to spill over into the workplace. Many of these studies have shown that women in weaker socio-economic positions experience comparative disadvantage in sexual negotiations (Vanwesenbeeck *et al.*, 1998). Other literature, however, has pointed out that relationships between men and women are undergoing a fundamental change as women gain more power in the workplace (Luthar, 1995–6).

Men are also increasingly facing sexual harassment in the workplace and may be targets of harassment by both male and female superiors. A number of large studies of federal workers in the US have shown that 14–19 per cent of males reported being subject to sexual harassment at work. Interestingly, a 1998 US Supreme Court ruling made same-sex harassment actionable under Title VII (Luthar and Pastille, 2000). Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 essentially makes it unlawful to discriminate against an individual based on many factors including his or her gender (Conway, 1998). The vast amount of empirical data from North America, however, continues to demonstrate that overall women are much more likely to be sexually harassed than men (Luthar and Pastille, 2000). Laws similar to Title VII have been passed in other industrialized countries. Like Title VII, the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 in the United Kingdom was not designed as a measure specifically to prohibit sexual harassment but it can be used for this purpose (Barak, 1997).

Although women have made significant gains towards gender equality in the US and other industrialized countries in Europe, they face major challenges in the third world countries as well as industrialized Asian countries like Japan where male power structures are deeply embedded in both the societal and organizational hierarchies. Even well-educated and experienced professional women discover that their organizational power is frequently undermined for various reasons (Tangri and Hayes, 1997). The informal structure created by some organizational members may withhold valuable information and opportunities from women. They are further disadvantaged and marginalized in organizations by being perceived in terms of their gender rather than their position. This is supported by research, conducted since the early 1970s in the US, showing that women are far more likely to be sexually harassed in the workplace than men. The literature also points out that women have a much greater tendency to

perceive potential sexually harassing behaviours as unacceptable than do men (Hendrix *et al.*, 1998; Luthar and Pastille, 2000). Given these findings in the US and many industrialized western European countries, we would expect conditions to be even more unfavourable for women in countries which lag behind and where males completely dominate the power structure.

According to Barak (1997), although sexual harassment sweeps across all cultures, it appears in each culture differently. Hardman and Heidelberg (1996) noted that what is demeaning to an American may be considered acceptable in other cultures. Pryor *et al.* (1998), for example, observed differences in perceptions of sexual harassment across four cultures. North Americans, Germans and Australians viewed sexual harassment scenarios as concerning unwelcome physical or verbal sexual overtures. In contrast, Brazilians viewed sexual harassment as behaviour aimed at seducing someone and becoming more sexually intimate. In Nigeria, it is not only accepted but also expected that a male supervisor will have sexual access to female subordinates (Hardman and Heidelberg, 1996). Sexual harassment in Mexico has been admitted as a problem but accepted and tolerated because of the implicit cultural support for men conceiving themselves to be superior to women (Gordon, 1991). Barak's (1997) contention that cultural variables play some role in influencing cognitive processes related to sexual harassment is, therefore, unquestionable.

Ethnicity and culture appear to be significant components in determining the legitimacy and perceptions of sexual behaviours. The literature cited above suggests that the likelihood to sexually harass may be higher in some countries than others. At the same time, women in these countries may be more accepting of such male behaviours or reconciled to it, as it may be commonplace and considered quite normal in that environment. Such beliefs and a value system in the societal culture would carry over into the workplace and have an enormous impact on what would be perceived as a reportable incident of sexual harassment. Since there are clear and wide ranges of cultural perceptions of what is appropriate sexual behaviour across many countries, a closer look at the essential differences in cultures in various parts of the world is needed.

Hofstede's framework allows for that in addressing a variety of cross-cultural issues. We apply his framework to understand the context of sexual harassment across many different countries and cultures and review its applicability to our current understanding of the propensity to sexually harass on the part of individuals. Before proceeding with our discussion of differences in cultures, we examine the 'likelihood to sexually harass' concept developed by Pryor (1987) in greater detail.

The likelihood to sexually harass

According to Pryor (1987), men engaging in sexually aggressive behaviours have a natural willingness or inclination to use power as a means to sexually exploitative ends. The likelihood to sexually harass (LSH) scale was developed to assess that tendency and measure a male respondent's propensity to engage in sexually exploitative behaviour. It has been shown that men scoring high on the LSH scale cognitively link social power and sexuality. For example, thoughts of power in gender interaction can activate ideas of sexuality automatically for men scoring high on the LSH scale (Pryor and Whalen, 1997). Since men often have power over women in a variety of work settings, this line of research suggests that a percentage of men will act in a sexually exploitative manner towards women based on their personality characteristics.

Interestingly, some scholars have argued, based on social-psychological research as well as actual US court cases, that women's occupation of more powerful positions in the workplace will result in more males being sexually harassed by women in the future (Luthar, 1995–6). In other words, some women, just like men, might have a tendency to use their power and position in the organization to advance their sexual interests. This point of view, while out of the mainstream, cannot be dismissed, especially in industrialized countries where women indeed do hold much power in middle management and are moving up to senior management positions. A review of many European studies indicated that some sexual harassment of men occurs in several European countries (Timmerman and Bajema, 1999). Out of seventy-four surveys, fifteen reported an incident in which men were sexually harassed. Still, even though there have been cases of women superiors sexually harassing male subordinates in the US and other industrialized countries, these cases are few and far between.

From an objective and a global perspective that takes into account a great number of countries, men have historically had a higher propensity to sexually exploit and harass than women for several reasons. First, even though women now hold more respectable positions in organizations, in most countries, including the US, they are still likely to have less power than their male counterparts. Further, it has been argued that even women with formal authority over males may not engage in sexual harassment because their gender would not justify such behaviours. Women in most cultures may not have the same propensity to sexually harass as men because of differing self-perceptions based on gender. For example, women are perceived by others and also perceive themselves as being ones that nurture and give comfort to their friends and family. This self-perception is not consistent with blatantly sexually exploitative and harassing behaviours. Second, in many countries women perceive their organizational powers as more tenuous than the organizational power of men (Perry *et al.*, 1998). This may be due to the general perception that men are more competent, responsible, committed and valuable than women in the workplace. Finally, it can be argued that biological and hormonal factors might significantly explain some differences in aggression between men and women in the context of sexuality and sexual harassment (Tangri and Hayes, 1997). Therefore, for a variety of reasons, the probability of men sexually harassing women is much greater than that of women harassing men. Indeed, the likelihood to sexually harass has been shown to be significantly lower for women than for men (Perry *et al.*, 1998).

Hofstede's framework and its application

It is quite possible that the likelihood on part of men to sexually harass and exploit women might be increased dramatically depending on the cultural context. Hardman and Heidelberg (1996) noted that what may be sexually offensive to many in the US may not be viewed as such in many other cultures. Hofstede (1980, 1998), in his work, provided a framework that seems ideally suited for measuring cultural traits across countries that might be related to behavioural tendencies to sexually harass.

In a comprehensive study of sixty-six countries and 90,000 people, Hofstede (1980) identified four independent dimensions of national cultural differences and placed each on a scale. The four dimensions are (1) individualism versus collectivism, (2) high versus low power distance (3) high versus low uncertainty avoidance and (4) masculinity versus femininity. Because Hofstede's research used large samples of individuals across many different countries, the framework developed is extremely useful for understanding cross-cultural differences in behaviours and perceptions. Next

we discuss each of the dimensions and its potential application for helping to appreciate the context of sexually oriented behaviours in different countries and cultures.

Individualism versus collectivism

The individualism versus collectivism dimension proposed by Hofstede (1980,1998) refers to the extent to which someone values his/her own interest versus group interest. Each individual is expected to take responsibility for himself/herself in individualistic societies. In contrast, people in collectivist societies rely on their groups to harbour them throughout their lives. Individuals in collectivist societies are unable to distance themselves from the norms of the group in which they are members (Vitell *et al.*, 1993). Hofstede (1998) noted that groups in collectivist societies expect permanent loyalty from group members because of the protection offered by the group. DeSouza *et al.* (1998) concluded that individualistic societies such as North Americans were consistently more punishing given a sexual harassment scenario than Brazilians, a collectivist group of individuals.

Pryor and Whalen (1997) pointed out that men wishing to engage in sexual exploitation will do so only when social norms allow for such behaviour. They argued that sexual exploitation cannot occur without the existence and support of local norms. Social norms are considerably more important in guiding the behaviour of individuals in collectivist societies. Whereas people in individualistic cultures frequently question ethical standards established by their societies, members in collectivist cultures are inclined to accept them (Singhapakdi *et al.*, 1999). Table 1 shows an index of individualism (IDV) scores for some selected countries (Hofstede, 1980).

Given the low individualism scores in countries like Brazil, Venezuela, Guatemala, Mexico, Japan, Arab countries and India, we would expect the members to identify and adhere closely to the group norms. For example, Brazilians do not see sexual harassment as unwelcome behaviour in the same way as it is perceived in the US. In Brazilian culture, sexual overtures made by a professor to a student may not be evaluated negatively. DeSouza *et al.* (1998) suggested that Brazil as a *machista* society allows a sexual power structure that subordinates women to men. In contrast to North American males, Brazilian males may feel a stronger sense of entitlement in initiating

Table 1 *Individualism (IDV) scores of selected countries*

	<i>IDV score</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Arab countries	38	26/27
Brazil	38	26/27
India	48	21
Venezuela	12	50
Guatemala	6	53
United States	91	1
Mexico	30	5/6
Great Britain	89	3
Netherlands	80	4/5
Canada	80	4/5
Japan	46	22

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sexual advances. Brazilian females may accept a higher level of sexually suggestive and aggressive behaviour as being normal as compared to North American females. Sexual harassment in Mexico is often *quid pro quo*, resulting from male supervisors offering better positions or promotions to female subordinates for sexual favours. However, such situations may be viewed in a different light in Mexico than in the US for a variety of reasons. Certain types of behaviour considered common in Mexico would be considered sexual harassment by a US employee. A Mexican man is forthright in praising a woman on her behaviour and appearance. Mexican women are accustomed to this social game, often play along and realize its implications and consequences (Gordon, 1991).

Outside of Latin America, Asian countries also appear to score low on the individualism index. An example that can be pointed to in an Asian country is that of India. India, although industrializing rapidly, remains a collectivist culture and its individualism score is similar to that of Japan. Kanekar and Dhir (1993) reported endemic sexual harassment of women in India, more prevalent there than in Western countries, partially because of the low status of Indian women, the high dominant status of Indian men and the lack of opportunity to engage in Western forms of courtship. Given the collectivist mentality and the orientation towards group and organization loyalty, the likelihood of Indian women reporting sexually harassing conduct would be much lower than that of American women. Similarly, Hardman and Heidelberg (1996) noted the prevalence of sexual harassment as a problem for women in Japan. It is noteworthy that Brazil, India, Mexico and Japan have substantially lower individualism scores than countries such as the United States, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Canada. The pattern in Table 1 and the discussion based on the cross-cultural literature lead us to the following propositions:

- P1:* Sexually exploitative and harassing behaviours in the workplace will be tolerated to a greater degree, by females, in countries with a lower individualism index than in countries with a higher individualism index.
- P2:* Sexually exploitative and harassing behaviours in the workplace will be engaged in to a greater degree, by males, in countries with a lower individualism index than in countries with a higher individualism index.

High versus low power distance

One of the key elements in most theoretical sexual harassment models is power (Luthar and Pastille, 2000), and power differentials between managers and workers may increase the potential for what would be considered sexual harassment behaviour. For example, Pryor and Whalen (1997) have proposed that it is common for some men to use power to gain sexual favours. Power distances in a culture may translate into power differentials in organizations as well. Individuals holding greater organizational status may use their legitimate power to sexually harass those with lesser power (Perry *et al.*, 1998).

The power distance dimension developed by Hofstede (1980, 1998) reflects the degree of tolerance of social inequality by members in a social system. In cultures with high power distance index (PDI) scores, the position of an individual in the hierarchical structure in the society or the organization acts as a critical source of power. The exercise of such power is often difficult for subordinates or people at lower levels of the hierarchy to resist as there is the potential for serious job-related or other consequences. The large gaps in power in many cultures can lead to constant stress and feelings of helplessness on the part of persons with low levels of power. The powerful and powerless experience more harmony between themselves in low rather than high PDI

Table 2 Power distance index (PDI) scores of selected countries

	<i>PDI score</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Arab countries	80	7
Brazil	69	14
India	77	10/11
Venezuela	81	5/6
Guatemala	77	10/11
United States	40	38
Mexico	81	5/6
Great Britain	35	42/44
Netherlands	38	40
Canada	39	39
Japan	46	22

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cultures, although in practice it may not be obvious to the casual observer. Table 2 shows some PDI scores from selected countries (Hofstede, 1980).

It can be seen from Table 2 that the power distance is highest for Arab countries, Brazil, India, Venezuela, Guatemala and Mexico. We have already discussed the fact that many of these countries have been shown to tolerate sexual harassment more than countries such as the United States, Canada and the Netherlands where power distance scores are much lower. It is quite plausible that large power distances in a culture allow for easier sexual exploitation of females by males. In countries like India, where females often have much less power than males, it may be difficult to resist sexual demands by a superior in the workplace. The fear of loss of job in a country with high unemployment may hinder a female from filing a complaint against a powerful manager in the organization hierarchy. One example of a country with a weak link between sexual harassment and job withdrawal on part of the subordinate is Turkey where women face unfavorable economic conditions (Wasti *et al.*, 2000). Large power distances in a culture would certainly increase the likelihood of harassment, as there would be virtually no controlling mechanism in terms of punishment.

It is quite possible that power distances may also be correlated with perceptions of what constitutes acceptable social-sexual behaviour at work. For example, low-status females in such cultures may come to view sexual behaviours on the part of male managers as a legitimate exercise of power. The propensity to blame sexual harassment victims more than perpetrators in such countries may be higher also. Menon and Kanekar (1992) observed that Indian male subjects viewed a sexual harassment victim more negatively than Indian female subjects, given a hypothetical sexual harassment scenario. This is an expected result given the power differential perspective. There is good theoretical ground to suggest that such power distances across cultures may provide the context for and be predictive of increasing levels of sexually exploitative and harassing behaviours. It is interesting to note that countries scoring low in individualism also scored high in power distance. It would make sense to suggest that in high power distance countries, there is a much greater probability of exercising that power for sexually exploitative purposes.

Based on the literature and data summarized in Table 2, we make the following propositions:

- P3: Females in higher power distance index countries will tend to consider a greater degree of sexually aggressive behaviours and unwelcome sexual attention to be within the bounds of acceptable behaviour more than females in lower power distance countries.
- P4: Males in higher power distance index countries will be more likely to sexually harass than males in countries with a lower power distance index.

High versus low uncertainty avoidance

The uncertainty avoidance dimension according to Hofstede (1980, 1998) explains the degree of tolerance a society has for uncertainty and ambiguity. Cultures scoring high on the uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) are risk averse and distance themselves from ambiguity and therefore distrust new ideas and behaviours. They are emotionally resistant to change. Individuals in low UAI countries are greater risk takers and experience less emotional resistance to change. Vitell *et al.* (1993) explained that uncertainty avoidance reflects the degree to which individuals become nervous in experiencing unstructured and unpredictable situations. This would be more likely in a culture that is highly structured and risk averse. Indeed, cultures scoring high in the UAI index use rules and codes as means of minimizing or avoiding risk. Uncertainty-accepting cultures are more accepting of opinions other than their own. Table 3 shows the uncertainty avoidance index for several countries (Hofstede, 1980).

Table 3 shows that Japan, Brazil, Mexico and Guatemala have substantially higher uncertainty avoidance scores than countries such as the United States, Canada, Great Britain and the Netherlands. Vitell *et al.* (1993) proposed that business practitioners in high uncertainty avoidance countries (e.g. Japan) are less inclined to perceive an ethical question in an ethically ambiguous situation than business practitioners in countries low in uncertainty avoidance (e.g. the US and Canada). Niikura (1999) noted that both Malaysian and Japanese respondents hesitated to express their opinions out of respect for others' feelings. This behaviour was employed to avert a dispute and maintain affable relationships with the persons with whom they were speaking. Both the Japanese and Malaysians held group cohesion in high esteem and junior members exhibited consideration and regard towards senior members.

Table 3 *Uncertainty avoidance index (UAI) scores for selected countries*

	<i>UAI score</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Arab countries	68	27
Brazil	76	21/22
India	40	45
Venezuela	76	21/22
Guatemala	101	3
United States	46	43
Mexico	82	18
Great Britain	35	47/48
Netherlands	53	35
Canada	48	41/42
Japan	92	7

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Consistent with prior findings relating to collectivist and individualistic societies, Ohbuchi *et al.* (1999) found that Japanese respondents were most concerned with preserving social relationships and preferred avoidance approaches. American respondents, in contrast, were more interested in justice for themselves and reported a preference for assertive tactics. Cultural researchers have provided several explanations for differences in these behaviours. People in individualistic cultures perceive any interaction as a relationship in which conflict is an inescapable aspect of social life. Collective cultures, in contrast, are averse to conflicts. Tsai and Levenson (1997) concluded that Asians as a collectivist culture value emotional control more than Europeans. In collectivist cultures, emotions may be used to control relationships between individuals more than in individualistic cultures. Members of Asian cultures, therefore, can be expected to demonstrate emotional moderation in social contexts. These studies clearly suggest that members in some cultures (e.g. Japan) avoid discord with peers and superiors to reduce the uncertainty in relationships. Males in these social contexts may see this as a form of weakness on the part of a female and have a greater likelihood to sexually harass than men in cultures that see conflict as unavoidable.

The literature cited and the data pattern in Table 3 lead us to make the following propositions:

- P5: Females in higher uncertainty avoidance index countries will be less likely to make accusations of sexual harassment than females in lower uncertainty avoidance index countries.
- P6: Males in higher uncertainty avoidance countries will have a greater likelihood to sexually harass than males in countries with a lower uncertainty avoidance index.

Masculinity versus femininity

The masculinity versus femininity dimension refers to the different roles assumed by men and women in a society (Hofstede, 1998). Assertiveness, over-selling oneself and decisiveness are examples of traits that assume importance in cultures with high masculine index scores (MAS). Low-scoring masculinity cultures allow for equality between the sexes, with a greater focus on under-selling oneself, rejecting assertiveness and being intuitive. Some cultures make sharp divisions between the roles of men and women. Patriarchal and developing cultures have been classified as cultures of honour by Wasti *et al.* (2000). These cultures can be categorized as such because of the important association between male honour and female chastity. This connection implies that men are in charge of the sexuality of women and their sense of honour depends on this control being socially accepted as legitimate.

It is likely that these differences will extend themselves into the workplace. Differences in egalitarian attitudes were also observed by Chang (1999) between high and low masculinity countries. The Chinese, who scored among the highest on a masculinity measure, were observed to be less egalitarian in gender-role attitudes than Americans. This difference gives support to Hofstede's observation that the percentage of professionally and technically employed women in high masculinity cultures is relatively low. Chang (1999) also referred to a study that tested fifty males and fifty females in fourteen countries. The Netherlands was observed to be the most egalitarian and Nigeria the least egalitarian in gender-role attitudes. As noted by Hardman and Heidelberg (1996), a male supervisor can expect sexual access to his female subordinates in Nigeria and sexual harassment is pervasive in the workplace in Japan. Table 4 shows the masculinity index for selected countries, with Japan having the

Table 4 *Masculinity index (MAS) scores for selected countries*

	<i>MAS score</i>	<i>Rank</i>
Arab countries	53	23
Brazil	49	27
India	46	30/31
Venezuela	73	3
Guatemala	37	43
United States	45	32/33
Mexico	69	6
Great Britain	66	9/10
Netherlands	14	51
Canada	52	24
Japan	95	1

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highest masculinity index among all countries studied and the Netherlands the lowest (Hofstede, 1980).

Gruber (1997) noted that even Americans are faced with higher rates of sexual harassment than Europeans, particularly Europeans in the Baltic States. This may be because Scandinavians' gender equality is unrivalled in the modern world. Scandinavian women have experienced greater labour-force participation and have had greater equality than American women for several decades.

On the other hand, as noted by Hardman and Heidelberg (1996), sexual harassment is pervasive in the workplace in Japan. Table 4 shows that Japan has the highest masculinity index among all countries studied and The Netherlands has the lowest. Wasti *et al.* (2000) noted that working American women who interact more with men than women in an organization may view their jobs as containing sexual elements. They may be less likely to perceive and report problems associated with sexual harassment because they may consider it as a part of the job. Similarly, women in high masculinity cultures may perceive sexual harassment as expected rather than a serious problem. These studies lead us to form the following propositions:

- P7:* Females in higher masculinity index cultures will be more tolerant of sexually aggressive behaviours than females in lower masculinity index cultures.
- P8:* Males in higher masculinity index cultures will be more likely to engage in sexually aggressive behaviours than males in lower masculinity index cultures.

Cross-cultural sexual harassment model

Having reviewed Hofstede's cultural dimensions and related international research based in several countries, we offer an integrative model of cross-cultural sexual harassment. In the model presented, we conceptualize Hofstede's four dimensions of individualism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity to show that they create a cultural context leading to varying levels of sexual harassment. Figure 1 depicts the relationship between Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the cross-cultural context for sexual harassment and its impact on the likelihood to sexually harass.

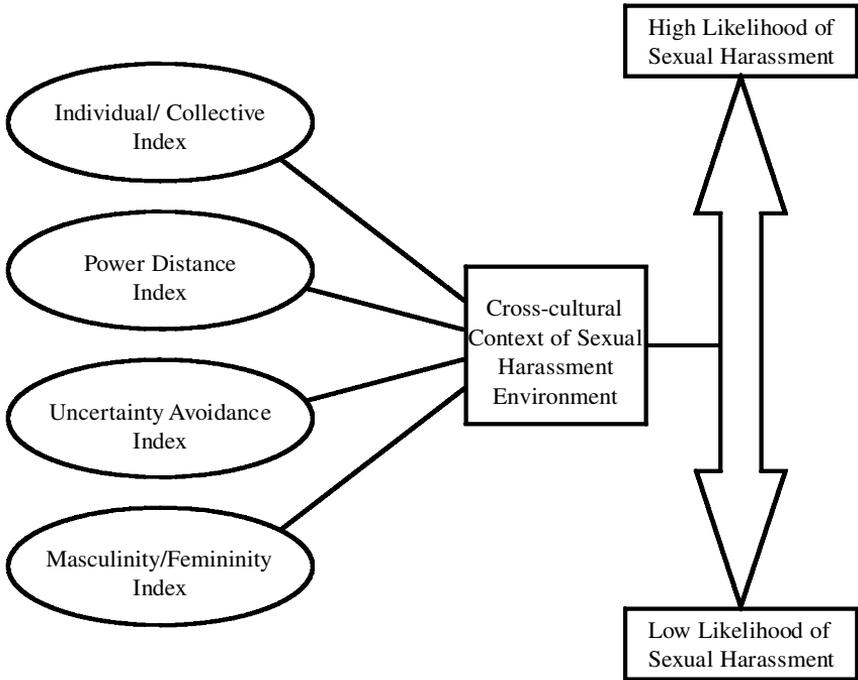


Figure 1 *The relationship between Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the likelihood to sexually harass*

Discussion

Pryor and Whalen (1997) reiterated evidence that men with a higher score on the LSH scale are more prone to act on their predisposition for sexual harassment when this conduct is accepted or permitted by the group norms. Applying Hofstede's framework to understanding the nature of cross-cultural sexual harassment strengthens this assessment. Studies have demonstrated that an environment tolerating sexually exploitative behaviours will serve as encouragement to men who already have a proclivity for sexual harassment. Timmerman and Bajema (1999) pointed to this disposition by observing that the outcome of liberal standards of social-sexual behaviour in organizations resulted in more sexual harassment of women.

This paper proposes that women operating within certain cultural dimensions will have a propensity to tolerate sexual exploitation. The victim in a case of sexual harassment may learn that all means of ending it are ineffective and that harassment will continue (Dansky and Kilpatrick, 1997). In such situations, without the alternative of quitting, the victims may be led to accept sexual harassment as a normal part of their jobs. The first proposition developed in association with each of Hofstede's dimensions in our paper suggests that sexual tolerance is greater under particular cross-cultural contexts and conditions.

The forced acceptance of sexual exploitation in turn is very likely to jeopardize the satisfaction levels of women in the workplace. This is especially true for patriarchal cultures in which sex is seen as natural for men and a taboo for women (Wasti *et al.*

2000). Such perceptions encourage organizational tolerance of sexual harassment and women who report sexual exploitation in the workplace may have their character tarnished and be labelled as indecent. In general, the outcomes for sexual harassment victims include lower job satisfaction, performance, motivation and production (Dansky and Kilpatrick, 1997). Therefore, the need to address this problem regardless of the cultural context is obvious.

The use of written policies may be critical in encouraging women to report incidences of sexual harassment across cultures. A sample of Canadian women employed in organizations with sexual harassment policies was more likely to complain about this behaviour than those in organizations without such policies (Gruber, 1997). In addition, these same women also experienced less sexual harassment. Interestingly, the victims of sexual harassment are frequently unaware of company policy on sexual harassment or the means to file a complaint. One study revealed that only half the employees knew their department's policy regarding sexual harassment. Clear communication of existing policies to both employees and managers appears to be an important component in organizational strategies to address sexual harassment issues in the workplace.

Although many approaches have been suggested to prevent sexual harassment, legal deterrence has been emphasized the most (Barak, 1997). In a growing number of countries, legislation that specifically refers to sexual harassment has been passed. But the capability of the legal approach to prevent sexual harassment can be questioned for two reasons. First, individuals who violate laws are confident that they will not be reported or charged. Second, the legal approach assumes people can control their behaviour and its consequences. This assumption, however, may not be valid because behaviours are often a result of strong internal drives or environmental factors.

This suggests that organization-specific measures to combat sexual harassment may be more effective. A number of changes in the organization have been proposed to deter sexual harassment in the workplace. Ideally, there would be equal representation of males and females in the work environment. Job roles and authority would be clearly defined for all members. Communication would flow freely between all power levels so that management becomes receptive to charges of sexual harassment or other forms of sexually exploitative behaviour (Grundmann *et al.*, 1997). However, introducing a greater number of women into male-dominated organizations or occupations is insufficient to alter the sexist climate (Gruber, 1997). Ideally, the male culture would need to change before the number of females in the workplace was substantially increased. Many researchers have proposed that prevention measures should include education and training of both men and women on combating sexual harassment (Barak, 1997). Such steps have been used in various countries, including Australia, Belgium, Canada, and the United States.

The second proposition developed in association with each of Hofstede's dimensions looks at the other side of the coin and argues that men operating under certain cross-cultural contexts will be more likely to engage in sexual harassment of women. This greater likelihood could result from little perceived repercussion or even social acceptance of sexual harassment. It is not unusual for social norms to have a strong effect on whether a woman is objective in perceiving sexual harassment (Fitzgerald *et al.*, 1997). Women may not only become socialized to accept sexual harassment as normal but the prevailing sexual norms of men may encourage them to initiate heterosexual activity. Unwelcome behaviours and remarks towards women may become normalized and not be perceived as sexual harassment. This harassment-

tolerance link might be stronger and lead to a higher likelihood to sexually harass in some cultures than others.

It is not sufficient to employ training programmes that merely deal with what constitutes sexual harassment and what steps to take once it takes place (Hotelling and Zuber, 1997). Simple awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment may not be enough to address the problem. If sexual harassment results from cultural roles and organizational hierarchy, then prevention programmes must concentrate on socio-cultural as well as organizational interventions.

The importance of using diverse samples from a wide range of countries appears critical in developing a general model of cross-cultural sexual harassment. Such a model may explain differences in both the likelihood of initiating sexually exploitative and harassing behaviours as well as differences in perceptions of such behaviours. The model offered here is a step in the direction of developing and extending further our understanding of cross-cultural sexual harassment. It uses a conceptually sound framework to strengthen our ability to infer the likelihood of sexually harassing behaviours in cross-cultural settings.

Conclusion and directions for future research

This paper has conceptualized that Hofstede's framework, employing various cultural dimensions, is helpful in understanding the differences in social-sexual context and interaction across different cultures. Based on large sets of data from several countries, it may be reasonable to suggest that the likelihood to sexually harass is greater in some cultures than others. This possibility has serious and profound implications for multinational corporations as they navigate through the vast diversity of laws and value systems across the globe.

There is an obvious limitation in using Hofstede's study in this paper. Hofstede's data published in 1980 must be used with caution in the current time frame. Results of a study by Fernandez *et al.* (1997) suggested that a shift in country rankings had taken place since Hofstede's study. The study by the authors included Russia and China, two countries not included in the original study by Hofstede. In the Fernandez *et al.* (1997) study, countries such as Venezuela fell below the mean of power distance in contrast to Hofstede's study that rated it as a high power distance country. In the same study, the United States was ranked as high in uncertainty avoidance whereas Hofstede ranked it as a low uncertainty avoidance country in his study. Mexico and Japan actually fell below the mean in uncertainty avoidance in contrast to Hofstede's study. Interestingly, Mexico ranked above the mean in individualism in comparison to Hofstede's study. Venezuela and the United States scored below the mean for masculinity. Venezuela in Hofstede's study had been ranked as a highly masculine country. The results of this study point to noteworthy changes in the form of possible shifts of values and perception of gender roles across many countries over time.

Interestingly however, analyses of many replications of Hofstede's dimensions have largely supported the original results (Sondergaard, 1994). Hofstede's dimensions have been incorporated as paradigms in 274 citations, not an exhaustive list but one that points to the growing use of his results.

There are important directions that the study of cross-cultural sexual harassment can take in the future. First, the interactions of the dimensions and their impact on sexual exploitation in the workplace cross-culturally could be investigated. It is possible that two cultures may be equal in one dimension but differ on others. This interaction

between dimensions may be a better predictor of whether the likelihood to sexually harass becomes stronger or weaker in a particular culture.

One may also study the influence of these dimensions on particular types of occupations. Many studies have shown that the likelihood to sexually harass increases when there are a higher proportion of males in the work environment (Hotelling and Zuber, 1997). These findings have been attributed to a greater number of men in jobs that are considered non-traditional for women and men's resentment about women in these jobs. Future research could examine whether Hofstede's dimensions have a different impact on non-traditional and traditional jobs across cultures.

We suggest that this stream of research is an important one for effective human resource management in an international context. At the centre of this research thrust is the notion that perceptions about what constitutes improper sexually oriented behaviour cannot easily be generalized from the population of one country to another. Clearly, the need for conducting widely based cross-cultural research is critical in the very human but controversial area of sexual harassment.

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