
Hispanic Perspectives on Sexual Harassment and Social Support

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Bridging the social support, sexual victimization, and cultural psychology literatures, this study examines social-support processes in the context of sexual harassment and Hispanic American culture. Surveys were administered to a community sample of Hispanic American working women, 249 of whom described some encounter with sexual harassment at work. Regression results provided mixed backing for hypotheses about support-seeking behavior, which appeared largely dependent on the social power of the harassment perpetrator. Additional findings upheld predictions about support-perception patterns; harassed women perceived more supportive social reactions when they turned to informal networks of friends and family, but responses were less positive when they turned to formal, organizational sources. Finally, as expected, perceived support and acculturation interacted to moderate relations between sexual harassment and job satisfaction. The article concludes with implications for research and interventions related to social support and sexual harassment.

Keywords: sexual harassment; social support; culture; stress

For more than two decades, scholars across the social sciences have been intrigued by social support processes. This literature recognizes the event- or context-specific nature of social support (e.g., Bolger & Eckenrode, 1991; Kaniasty & Norris, 1992; Lepore, Evans, & Schneider, 1991), yet certain contexts remain understudied. Specifically, research on support processes surrounding stigmatized interpersonal stressors has only recently begun. Furthermore, few empirical studies have considered relationships between social support and culture. I attempt to address such gaps with the current project: a culture-specific examination of social-support mobilization, perception, and impact in the context of sexual harassment.

BACKGROUND: SOCIAL SUPPORT,
SPECIFIC STRESSORS, AND CULTURE

Numerous studies have demonstrated both direct and indirect benefits of positive, helpful, validating social responses (e.g., S. Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lepore et al., 1991; Thoits, 1986; Valentiner, Holahan, & Moos, 1994). A smaller segment of the social support literature has focused on “the negative side of social interaction” (Rook, 1984, p. 793), examining negative or ineffective social responses (e.g., silencing, blame, and rejection) that harm support seekers (e.g., Herbert & Dunkel-Schetter, 1992; Pagel, Erdly, & Becker, 1987; Rook, 1984; Ruehlman & Karoly, 1991).

Several theorists have argued that negative social reactions are more likely with stressors that involve interpersonal difficulty or stigma (e.g., Herbert & Dunkel-Schetter, 1992; Lepore et al., 1991; Shinn, Lehmann, & Wong, 1984). More specifically, they posit that stressful interpersonal situations (e.g., unwanted social interactions, marital conflict) can disrupt social relations, and stigmatizing stressors (e.g., AIDS, mental illness) can make otherwise supportive social network members uncomfortable, threatened, and distant. It follows from this reasoning that stressors that are both interpersonal and stigmatizing could be particularly detrimental to victims’ social support experiences.

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To date, little research has systematically investigated social reactions to individuals experiencing stigmatized interpersonal stressors, with the exception of work on sexual assault (Campbell et al., 1999; Campbell & Raja, 1999; Davis & Brickman, 1996; Davis, Brickman, & Baker, 1991; Kimerling & Calhoun, 1994; Ullman, 1996a, 1996b, 1999). In this domain, researchers theorize that rape myths, fears of personal vulnerability, and “just world” beliefs prompt negative responses to sexual assault victims. Perhaps one of the most troubling conclusions of this work is that formal-support providers (e.g., police, hospital personnel), whose training and duty is to provide tangible aid and information support to victims, often respond negatively to sexually assaulted women, exacerbating their psychological and physical distress.

Research on social reactions to sexually victimized individuals should expand to include sexual harassment victims, for a number of reasons. Similar to sexual assault, sexual harassment involves a stressor that is both interpersonal and stigmatizing, and similar factors (e.g., misconceptions about sexual victimization, fears of vulnerability or an unjust world) could trigger negative social reactions. However, unlike sexual assault, much sexual harassment is more akin to Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) conceptualization of “daily hassles” rather than “major life events” (p. 311); that is, the most prevalent sexually harassing behaviors involve gender disparagement, misogyny, crude sexual language, and unwanted romantic overtures¹ that accumulate over time (e.g., Gutek, 1985; United States Merit Systems Protection Board [USMSPB], 1981, 1987), creating a chronic rather than an acute stressor. Long-term, chronic stressors can threaten or overburden network members, eventually leading to the loosening of social bonds and deterioration of support (Lepore et al., 1991, Newcomb, 1990). In short, the nature of sexual harassment may have the insidious effect of eroding a victim’s social support network.

Sexual harassment also is associated with unique formal support mechanisms provided by organizations, labor unions, and both state and federal courts. Furthermore, sexual harassment has exceptional stakes in that it can threaten the job conditions and well-being of not only the victim but also coworkers from whom she² might seek support. It can inspire fears of legal liability among organizational representatives whose role is to assist employees. In addition, to the extent that sexual harassment is perceived to endanger a woman’s job security and income, its impact also can extend to household members whom she supports financially. These various threats can color social responses from coworkers, organizations, and families. No past research has examined in depth the social reactions to support-seeking harass-

ment victims. Moreover, no study has investigated how these reactions influence harassment victims’ support perceptions, despite the fact that these perceptions—as opposed to mere social integration—are thought to drive the buffering benefits of social support (e.g., Cohen & Wills, 1985; Helgeson, 1993).

Additional gaps appear in the literature on culture and social support. Researchers have theorized that cultural norms and values heavily influence social support availability, appraisal, reliance, efficacy, and transactions (e.g., Butzel & Ryan, 1997; Keinan, 1997; Procidano & Smith, 1997; Vaux, 1985). For example, Procidano and Smith (1997) note that “people’s support-related statements and schemas undoubtedly are based on their exposure to culturally derived systems of meaning, expectations, and prescriptions for interpersonal relationships and transactions” (p. 100). In particular, support-seeking and benefits should be prevalent in collectivistic cultures, which emphasize affiliation, interpersonal orientation, and interdependence over independence (Butzel & Ryan, 1997; Procidano & Smith, 1997). This may result in what Nadler (1997) terms “active social orientation . . . [an] enduring tendency to see the social world as the primary reservoir of resources to draw upon during times of stress and hardship” (p. 385). Indeed, seeking ingroup support is thought to be one of the most important coping strategies for collectivists in crisis (Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clark, 1985). Despite such theorizing, empirical data remain sparse. The few studies that do address culture and social support (e.g., Akiyama, Antonucci, & Campbell, 1990; Antonucci & Jackson, 1990; Butzel & Ryan, 1997; Vaux, 1985) rarely consider social support in the context of specific stressors.

THE CURRENT STUDY

Integrating literatures on social support, sexual victimization, and culture, I examine sexually harassed women’s experiences of support within a particular collectivistic context: Hispanic American culture. Hispanic American population growth (Bureau of the Census, 2001) and female participation in the workforce (Herrera & DelCampo, 1995; Rojas & Metoyer, 1995) call for greater attention to these women. Toward this end, this study investigates individual differences in Hispanic American women’s experiences of harassment-related social support—specifically, support mobilization, perception, and impact. Following is a brief review of relevant literature and resulting hypotheses, which Table 1 summarizes.

Support mobilization. One concentration of the present study is harassment victims’ attempts to mobilize social support from different sources. Past research on this

TABLE 1: Summary of Hypotheses

Social-support mobilization	
<i>Hypothesis 1:</i>	Hispanic women who are less acculturated will seek more friend and family support and less organizational support.
<i>Hypothesis 2:</i>	Hispanic women who are experiencing more severe sexual harassment will seek more support from all sources.
<i>Hypothesis 3:</i>	Hispanic women who are harassed by powerful men will seek more friend and family support and less organizational support.
<i>Hypothesis 4:</i>	Hispanic women who are harassed by ingroup members will seek less support from all sources.
<i>Hypothesis 5:</i>	Hispanic women who are working in organizations that are responsive to sexual harassment concerns will seek more organizational support.
Social-support perception	
<i>Hypothesis 6:</i>	Hispanic women's perceptions of support will decrease with more severe sexual harassment.
<i>Hypothesis 7:</i>	Hispanic women's perceptions of support will increase with greater reliance on friend and family support but decrease with greater reliance on organizational support.
Social-support impact	
<i>Hypothesis 8:</i>	Perceived support will attenuate the relation between sexual harassment and Hispanic women's well-being, and this effect will be most pronounced for the least acculturated women.

topic has focused heavily on formal, organizational support-seeking; that is, lodging a sexual harassment complaint with the organization, which only 2% to 13% of sexually harassed women ever do (e.g., Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Culbertson, Rosenfeld, Booth-Kewley, & Magnusson, 1992; Gruber & Smith, 1995; Reese & Lindenberg, 1997; Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997). Somewhat more common are conversations with organizational representatives about sexual harassment, without filing any complaint; 17% to 37% of harassment victims engage in this behavior (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Culbertson et al., 1992; Gruber & Bjorn, 1982; Gutek, 1985; Schneider et al., 1997). Less research has addressed sexually harassed women's attempts to recruit social support from friends and family; given that 33% to 69% of sexually harassed women display such informal means of support-seeking (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Gruber & Smith, 1995; Schneider et al., 1997), the scarcity of detailed studies on this topic is surprising. Of note, virtually all of this prior work has focused on the experiences of non-Hispanic White women.

Due to the absence of previous research on support mobilization at the unique intersection of sexual harass-

ment and Hispanic American culture, the present study begins with an exploratory research question: From whom do Hispanic American women seek support to cope with the stress of sexual harassment? In other words, what patterns characterize their support-mobilization efforts? Additional interesting and unexplored questions surround correlates of social support-seeking: Under what individual and situational conditions do harassed Hispanic women seek different types of support? Hypotheses about potential correlates follow.

An individual variable that likely correlates with Hispanic American support-seeking is cultural affiliation, or acculturation level. In this article, acculturation refers to Hispanic values, norms, attitudes, and behaviors changing as a function of exposure to the mainstream cultural patterns of the United States (Marin, Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, & Perez-Stable, 1987). More traditional, less acculturated Hispanics typically endorse the cultural script of *familismo*, which prescribes strong attachment, loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among nuclear and extended family members (Marin et al., 1987; Marin & Marin, 1991; Marin & Triandis, 1985). Some describe *familismo* as "one of the most important culture-specific values of Hispanics" (Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987, pp. 397-398). Thus, I expect less acculturated Hispanic harassment victims to solicit more support from informal networks of friends and family (Hypothesis 1 [H1]).

Other features of traditional Hispanic culture suggest different hypotheses about reliance on organizational support. Hispanics tend to view formal help-seeking or complaining as "airing your [or your family's] dirty laundry" in public—something to be avoided at all costs (Ontiveros, 1993). In addition, discussing sexual harassment with organizational officials is an assertive, proactive method of coping with the stressor, but traditional Hispanic sex roles discourage assertiveness in women (e.g., Barkley & Mosher, 1995; Burgos & Perez, 1986; Pavich, 1986). Furthermore, economic vulnerability, limited employment alternatives, and fears of deportation among recent Hispanic immigrants (Chapa & Valencia, 1993; DeAnda, 1994; Ontiveros, 1993) could deter them from organizational support-seeking, which could trigger retaliation (Near & Miceli, 1986). For all of these reasons, I expect the least acculturated Hispanic women to be the least likely to utilize organizational-support mechanisms (H1).

In terms of situational correlates, past research highlights stressor characteristics and appraisal as important determinants of support-seeking (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman 1984; Lepore et al., 1991). Briefly, the more threatening or difficult the stressor, the more the individual engages numerous coping mechanisms, including social support systems. It then follows that more fre-

quent and perceptually severe sexual harassment should lead to greater attempts to mobilize social support from all possible sources (Hypothesis 2 [H2]).

Sexual harassment always involves a perpetrator who has some degree of social power. Research has shown that harassment perpetrated by more powerful organizational members is considered by victims to be more offensive and negative, perhaps owing to recognition that organizational authorities have greater ability to retaliate or sexually coerce (Cortina, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 2002; Dougherty, Turban, Olson, Dwyer, & Lapreze, 1996; Thacker & Gohmann, 1993). Issues of social power and hierarchy are even more central in the Hispanic culture, characterized by high “power distance” (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1994). Moreover, the Hispanic cultural script of *respeto* requires deference to and respect for individuals with higher power, prestige, and recognition in society (Marin & Marin, 1991; Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984). Owing to these norms, Hispanic women may feel more intimidated and frightened by harassment from powerful or highly placed members of the organization, so they may seek more support from informal friend and family networks to cope with their heightened fear (Hypothesis 3 [H3]).

At the same time, women may hesitate to seek formal organizational support when harassed by powerful men. Exposing the misbehavior of a highly placed member of the organizational hierarchy—thus characterizing that person as unlawful, unethical, or inappropriate—questions that hierarchy. This action deviates from social norms, especially when it comes from low-status employees. As a result, the Hispanic victim might fear that the organization’s dominant coalition, including the harasser, will retaliate against her if she challenges authority in this way (Miceli & Near, 1992; Near, Dworkin, & Miceli, 1993). Hispanic women may therefore seek less support from organizational sources when harassed by perpetrators with greater organizational power (H3).

A perpetrator’s ingroup status also may be relevant to Hispanic support mobilization. Due to the cultural script of *simpatía*, Hispanics traditionally place heavy emphasis on harmony in ingroup relations. As a result, they tend to minimize negative interactions and avoid expressing discontent with ingroup members (Marin & Marin, 1991; Pavich, 1986; Triandis et al., 1984). Furthermore, ingroup protection and loyalty norms attach great importance to the security of the ingroup (Sabogal et al., 1987; Triandis, 1994, 1995). These Hispanic cultural patterns might deter women from disclosing ingroup-perpetrated sexual harassment, inhibiting all forms of support-seeking in such situations (Hypothesis 4 [H4]).

Features of the organization may be relevant only to organizational support-seeking. Logically, women should be more likely to recruit formal support from organizational authorities if they perceive those authorities to be responsive to sexual harassment concerns (Bergman, Langhout, Palmieri, Cortina, & Fitzgerald, 2002; Offerman & Malamut, 2002). Leaders can demonstrate responsiveness by taking complaints seriously, correcting harassment when it occurs, and sanctioning harassers (Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1996; Offerman & Malamut, 2002; Williams, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1999). Thus, perceived organizational responsiveness to sexual harassment should foster greater organizational support-seeking among employees (Hypothesis 5 [H5]).

Support perception. A second major focus of the current study is correlates of perceived support; that is, after Hispanic women have solicited support from others to cope with sexual harassment, how do these women evaluate the responses they receive? More specifically, what relates to perceptions of supportiveness? To date, the sexual harassment literature has been virtually silent on perceptions of social reactions following women’s attempts to recruit help from others.

Stressor severity and appraisal should be highly relevant to support perceptions, because past research has found perceived support to decrease as stressors escalate, challenge coping skills, and foster negative affect (Dunkel-Schetter, Folkman, & Lazarus, 1987; Hobfoll, 1998; Lepore et al., 1991; Silver, Wortman, & Crofton, 1990; Ullman & Siegel, 1995). This is particularly true when the stressor involves sexual victimization, severe cases of which are associated with more negative and fewer positive social reactions (Ullman & Siegel, 1995). The negative reactions may be intentional (e.g., victim blame or disbelief), or they may arise from support attempts that are ineffective and unhelpful (e.g., blocking open communication about the victimization). Thus, with more severe experiences of sexual harassment, victims should perceive less supportive social reactions (Hypothesis 6 [H6]).

Past research further suggests that support-provider characteristics also influence social support perceptions (Dunkel-Schetter et al., 1987; Procidano & Smith, 1997; Shinn et al. 1984; Thoits, 1986; Ullman, 1996a; Ullman & Siegel, 1995). Thoits (1986) points to “empathic understanding” as a theoretical explanation, hypothesizing that socioculturally similar others are better able to empathize and offer effective and appropriate support. This would suggest that Hispanic women are most likely to perceive supportive social reactions from family and close friends, who often come from their own social background. Perceptions of supportive organizational responses, particularly from organizational leaders, might be less common; these leaders are, more often

than not, non-Hispanic, nonfemale, and non-working class—quite dissimilar from the modal Hispanic working woman.³ In sum, perceptions of support should increase with greater reliance on friends and family but decrease with organizational support-reliance (Hypothesis 7 [H7]).

Support impact. A third major goal of this study is to investigate social support and culture as moderators of the relationship between sexual harassment and well-being. Longitudinal research suggests that, over time, harassment impairs employees' occupational and psychological health (Glomb, Munson, Hulin, Bergman, & Drasgow, 1999; Munson, Hulin, & Drasgow, 2000). Perhaps social support can attenuate these effects, because studies show that appropriate, supportive social reactions often buffer individuals from the harmful impact of stressful events (for a review, see S. Cohen & Wills, 1985). Additional research has demonstrated that personality variables (e.g., locus of control, sex role) interact with stressors and social support in this process, with buffering effects being more apparent for some individuals than others (e.g., L. Cohen, Hettler, & Park, 1997; Lefcourt, Martin, & Saleh, 1984; Sarason, Sarason, & Shearin, 1986). One such person-level moderator may be cultural affiliation; that is, if collectivists are more likely to profit from social support in times of stress (Butzel & Ryan, 1997; Procidano & Smith, 1997; Triandis et al., 1985), the buffering benefits of harassment-related support should be more pronounced for collectivist women compared to those more acculturated to an individualistic society (Hypothesis 8 [H8]).

Method

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES

Participants were 462 employed, urban women who were enrolled in vocational schools that serve largely Hispanic communities. They were recruited through these schools to participate in a Study of Latina Work Experiences. In exchange for \$10, they completed pencil-and-paper surveys in either English or Spanish, depending on their preference (slightly more than half chose Spanish).⁴

The present study focused on the 249 participants who, on their surveys, described a history of sexual harassment and provided details about social support experiences. Average sexual harassment levels within this subsample were in the mild to moderate range ($M = 33.51$, $SD = 23.04$), as indicated by responses to the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire–Latina (Cortina, 2001, see below). In terms of demographics, they indicated that their families had originated from Mexico (90%), Central America (3%), Puerto Rico (1%), Cuba (0.5%), and countries not included in this list (5%). Mean accul-

turation levels, as measured by the Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (Marin et al., 1987, see below), were low to moderate. Whereas 34% of these women had never finished high school, 55% had high school—but not college—educations. The remaining 11% had college or graduate degrees. Approximately 60% of the sample were younger than age 30, and 57% were single. More than half worked in service-delivery or factory jobs, and an additional 22% held clerical/office positions. Participants' average tenure in their organizations was 3 years.

INSTRUMENTS

I designed the survey to be accessible to populations with limited education, relying heavily on measures with simple wording and brief response formats (e.g., 3-point response scales). All items were reverse scored when applicable, and sum scales were created such that higher values reflect higher levels of the underlying construct. Table 2 presents summary statistics, coefficient alphas, numbers of items, and intercorrelations for all constructs.

Measures of support-seeking correlates. Acculturation was assessed with the language use and media subscales of the Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (Marin et al., 1987). A sample item reads, "What language(s) do you speak at home?" with 5-point response options ranging from *only Spanish* to *only English*. This measure has been found reliable and valid for both Mexican Americans and Central Americans, and the scale correlates appropriately with generational status, length of U.S. residency, and age at arrival (Marin et al., 1987).

The Sexual Experiences Questionnaire–Latina (SEQ-L) (Cortina, 2001) assessed participants' experiences with the two most common forms of sexual harassment—gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention. The SEQ-L represents a culture-specific adaptation of Fitzgerald and colleagues' (1988) SEQ, which is widely considered the most reliable and valid sexual harassment measure (Arvey & Cavanaugh, 1995; Beere, 1990; Paludi, 1990). Instructions asked respondents how frequently (from 1 = *never* to 5 = *most of the time*) men had perpetrated specific behaviors against them in their workplaces during the previous 2 years. Participants endorsing any SEQ-L item were branched to the section of the survey containing the Harassment Intensity Scale, Feelings Scale, as well as perpetrator and social support items, detailed below.

The Harassment Intensity Scale, developed by Swan (1997), measured additional objective characteristics (e.g., predictability, ease of escape) of the harassing situations described on the SEQ-L. For example, participants described whether "it was hard to get away from the behavior (e.g., by leaving the room)." Responses

TABLE 2: Correlations, Summary Statistics, and Coefficient Alphas for All Measures

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	M	SD	α	# Items
1. Acculturation	.20**	.05	.03	-.11	.07	.09	.07	.19**	-.11	-.10*	.08	22.74	8.27	.93	8
2. SH severity		.54**	.15*	.06	-.27**	.16*	.23**	.16*	-.28**	.27**	-.26**	6.62	25.62	.96	43
3. Perp power			.06	-.02	-.19**	.27**	.38**	.24**	-.09	.19**	-.18**	10.26	3.99	.86	6
4. Perp social proximity				.11	-.03	-.11	-.06	.01	-.21*	-.09	.15*	3.22	1.62	—	1
5. Perp Hispanic background					-.02	-.01	-.05	-.09	-.01	-.02	-.01	0.57	0.50	—	1
6. Orgl responsiveness to SH						.01	-.03	.05	.13	-.21**	.33**	31.89	7.40	.83	9
7. Family support seeking							.57**	.42**	.15	-.04	.03	4.91	2.23	.75	3
8. Friend support seeking								.43**	.30**	.08	-.04	6.11	2.54	.85	3
9. Orgl support seeking									-.07	-.01	-.02	5.48	2.35	.81	4
10. Perceived support										-.14	.25**	45.92	7.03	.92	17
11. Psychological distress											-.30**	34.96	13.15	.92	18
12. Job satisfaction												56.89	15.56	.87	18

NOTE: SH = sexual harassment; Orgl = organizational; Perp = perpetrator.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

were given on a 3-point scale: 1 = *no*, 2 = ? (*cannot decide*), and 3 = *yes*.⁵ Two previous administrations of the Harassment Intensity Scale yielded alpha coefficients of .74 and .79 (Swan, 1997).

To assess subjective appraisal of sexual harassment severity, the Feelings Scale (Swan, 1997) asked respondents whether (no, ?, or yes) they had experienced a list of negative affective responses to SEQ-L behaviors. Swan (1997) modeled this scale after Lazarus and Folkman's (1985) emotions scale, reporting coefficient alphas of .91 and .93 in two independent studies. The SEQ-L, Harassment Intensity, and Feelings items were standardized and summed into a composite measure of sexual harassment severity (see Cortina et al., 2002, for a detailed explanation of this composite).

All perpetrator questions focused on the primary instigator of SEQ-L situations, that is, the man each respondent identified as having "bothered [her] the MOST." The Perpetrator Power Scale (Swan, 1997) gauged this man's organizational power. Specifically, it assessed his ability (no, ?, or yes) to affect various aspects of the respondent's job, for example, "pay raises" and "performance evaluations." Previous studies reported reliability coefficients of .82 (Swan, 1997) and .90 (Cortina & Magley, 2003) for this scale.

Two items were used as indicators of this perpetrator's membership in the victim's ingroup. A social proximity item asked the respondent "to describe [her] relationship with this man . . . BEFORE he bothered" her; response options ranged from 1 (*extremely distant [like an enemy]*) to 7 (*very close [like a spouse or parent]*). In addition, respondents indicated the perpetrator's ethnicity; this variable was dichotomously scored such that 1 = Hispanic (i.e., membership in the victim's cultural group) and 0 = non-Hispanic (i.e., nonmembership).

To assess the organizational climate for sexual harassment, I relied on the Organizational Tolerance for Sexual Harassment Inventory (Hulin et al., 1996; Zickar, 1994). This measure presents several vignettes depicting workplace sexual harassment. For each vignette, participants report (on a 5-point scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*) their perceptions of (a) the risk to a female victim for reporting the harasser, (b) the likelihood that her allegations would be taken seriously by the organization, and (c) the likelihood that the harasser would be punished. Past research (Hulin et al., 1996; Zickar, 1994) has demonstrated high reliability and validity in this measure, including coefficient alphas exceeding .95. Higher scores reflect greater organizational responsiveness to sexual harassment.

Support-related measures. Participants completed Fitzgerald's (1990) Coping with Harassment Questionnaire (CHQ), which assesses numerous ways of coping with sexual harassment. Respondents who had experienced

TABLE 3: Frequency of Participants Describing Specific Support-Seeking Behaviors

Family support seeking	
I talked about it with my family	37%
I told a female family member what was happening	39%
I told a male family member what was happening	27%
Friend support seeking	
I talked to my friends for understanding and support	52%
I asked a friend for advice	49%
I talked about it with someone I trusted	64%
Organizational support seeking	
I talked to a supervisor, manager, or union representative	26%
I reported him	21%
I made a formal complaint	20%
I filed a grievance	17%

any SEQ-L behaviors indicated how well (no, ?, or yes) each CHQ item described their responses to these behaviors. The current study focuses only on the social-support-seeking items in the CHQ, which were supplemented with two new items to focus in greater detail on family-support-seeking. In total, 10 items assessed attempts to mobilize support from families, friends, and organizations. All of these support-seeking CHQ items appear in Table 3.

Support seekers then completed Swan's (1997) Social Support Resource Scale, indicating the extent that they perceived supportiveness in others' reactions. Specifically, they noted (no, ?, or yes) whether each of a list of descriptors (e.g., "were supportive," "listened to me," "blamed me," "made me sorry I talked to them") characterized others' responses to them. Swan (1997) conceptually based this measure on the Inventory of Socially Supportive Behaviors (Barrera, Sandler, & Ramsay, 1981), finding coefficient alphas of .87 and .94 in two prior studies.

Well-being measures. To assess well-being, I relied on measures of job satisfaction and psychological distress, which are known to vary longitudinally with sexual harassment (Glomb et al., 1999; Munson et al., 2000). Specifically, participants described job satisfaction levels via items from the Job Descriptive Index (JDI) (Roznowski, 1989; Smith, Kendall, & Hulin, 1969). These items asked respondents to indicate whether short descriptors characterized their work, coworkers, and supervisors. Response options and coding followed standard JDI scoring procedures (no = 0, ? = 1, and yes = 3). Extensive research supports this scaling and, more generally, the excellent psychometric properties of the JDI (Hanisch, 1992; Johnson, Smith, & Tucker, 1982; Kinicki, McKee-Ryan, Schriesheim, & Carson, 2002; Smith et al., 1969).

TABLE 4: Results of Regression Analyses of Social-Support Mobilization

Predictor Variables	Family Support Seeking			Friend Support Seeking			Organizational Support Seeking		
	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β	B	SE B	β
Acculturation	.02	.02	.06	.01	.02	.01	.03	.02	.14†
Stressor (harassment) severity	.01	.01	.02	.01	.01	.07	.01	.01	.07
Perpetrator power	.15	.04	.28***	.23	.05	.38***	.14	.05	.25***
Perpetrator social proximity	-.19	.09	-.14*	-.12	.10	-.08	.01	.10	-.01
Perpetrator Hispanic background	.07	.31	.02	-.24	.33	-.05	-.27	.34	-.06
Organizational responsiveness ^a	—	—	—	—	—	—	.02	.02	.09

a. Variable only included in regression model predicting organizational support seeking.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

To indicate psychological distress, participants completed the depression, anxiety, and somatization subscales of the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI) (Derogatis & Spencer, 1983). This measure asked them to indicate the extent that each of a list of symptoms had “distressed or bothered” them during the previous 7 days (from 1 = *not at all* to 5 = *extremely*). Extensive psychometric evaluations support the reliability and validity of this measure (e.g., Derogatis & Melisaratos, 1983; Derogatis & Savitz, 2000).

Results

An initial inspection of significant correlations in Table 2 revealed a number of interesting patterns, many of which were consistent with predictions. Specifically, harassment severity and perpetrator power (in addition to being highly intercorrelated) both positively related to support-seeking from all three sources. A relationship between acculturation and organizational support-seeking also emerged such that the lower the woman’s acculturation level, the less she sought assistance from organizational sources. However, it was surprising to note that this organizational support-seeking did not vary according to the organization’s responsiveness to sexual harassment concerns. Regarding social-support perceptions, women perceived higher quality support when they turned to friends to cope with less severe harassment. Moreover, this higher perceived support was significantly associated with job satisfaction but not general psychological distress. Next, I turn to analyses of these variables to test specific questions and hypotheses.

Support mobilization. Participants described whether they coped with sexual harassment by seeking support from sources that fell into the broad categories of family, friends, and organizational representatives. For purposes of descriptive analysis, these CHQ responses were scored such that no = 0 and other responses = 1. Based on this scoring, 68% of the harassed Hispanic women endorsed at least one friend-support-seeking item, 52% sought family support to some extent, and 38%

communicated with someone in authority in their organization. These categories are not mutually exclusive, because slightly more than half of these women sought support from multiple sources.

More specifically, Table 3 presents frequencies of participants seeking support from specific sources within each category. Most commonly, they attempted to enlist aid from friends and “trusted” others, whereas the least frequent support-seeking behaviors involved formal complaints and grievances to the organization. Conversations with male family members about the harassment were also relatively infrequent, whereas discussions with female family members were more typical.

For regression purposes, I summed items (scored on their original 3-point scale) into family-, friend-, and organizational-support mobilization scales. I then regressed each of the three scales onto the following independent variables (all variables entered simultaneously on one step): acculturation, harassment severity, perpetrator power, perpetrator social proximity, and perpetrator Hispanic background. The organizational support-seeking regression also included organizational responsiveness as a sixth independent variable. Table 4 presents results for these three regression analyses, which test Hypotheses 1 through 5.

The model explained 10% of the variance in family support-seeking, $F(5, 199) = 4.52$, $p < .001$. According to beta weights in Table 4, women seeking support from family members perceived the harasser as more powerful and socially distant. A significant 18% of variance was explained in friend support-seeking, $F(5, 200) = 8.80$, $p < .001$, with women turning more to friends when harassed by organizationally powerful men. The model accounted for 11% of the variance in organizational support-seeking, $F(6, 186) = 3.68$, $p < .01$, which increased with perpetrator power levels and (marginally: $p < .06$) acculturation.⁶

Support perception. The remaining analyses focused only on women who endorsed at least one of the support-seeking items, indicating some attempt to seek social

TABLE 5: Results of Regression Analyses of Social-Support Perception

Predictor Variables	Perceived Support		
	B	SE B	β
Stressor (harassment) severity	-0.08	0.03	-.28***
Source: family	0.58	0.30	.18*
Source: friends	1.41	0.42	.30***
Source: orgl representatives	-0.53	0.25	-.19*

NOTE: Orgl = organizational.
* $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

support about having been harassed ($n = 126$); they described their perceptions of how others responded to their support-seeking efforts. Testing correlates of these perceptions, perceived supportiveness was simultaneously regressed onto harassment severity and support source (the latter construct indicated by the three variables detailing extent of family, friend, and organizational support-seeking). Table 5 presents results of this analysis, which tests Hypotheses 6 and 7.

The model accounted for a significant 20% of the variance in support perception, $F(4, 113) = 6.83, p < .001$, with all independent variables emerging significant. According to betas in Table 5, perceived supportiveness decreased with more perceptually severe sexual harassment. Furthermore, reliance on friends and family related to more positive support perceptions, whereas reliance on organizational representatives related to less positive support perceptions.

Support impact. Final regression analyses tested whether perceived support and acculturation moderate the relation between sexual harassment and well-being (H8). Specifically, job satisfaction and psychological

distress were each regressed onto the following variables in a hierarchical fashion: harassment severity, acculturation, and perceived support (Step 1), Severity \times Acculturation and Severity \times Support (Step 2), and Severity \times Acculturation \times Support (Step 3). The two-way interactions test for “simple buffering effects” (stressor severity interacting with one buffering variable), whereas the three-way interaction assesses “complex buffering effects” (stressor severity interacting with two buffering variables) (S. Cohen & Wills, 1985). Centering was used to reduce problems of multicollinearity between main effect and interaction terms. Table 6 presents results of these two regression analyses.

The model containing only main effect terms explained a significant 19% of the variance in job satisfaction, $F(3, 120) = 9.16, p < .001$. Although the addition of two-way interactions did not lead to a significant increase in R^2 , $\Delta F(2, 118) = 0.52, ns$, adding the three-way interaction increased the variance accounted for by 4%, $\Delta F(1, 117) = 5.95, p < .01$. This “complex buffering effects model” explained 23% of the variance in job satisfaction. According to the beta weights in Table 6, significant predictors were harassment severity, acculturation, and the three-way interaction among severity, acculturation, and support. Illustrating the nature of this interaction, Figure 1 shows the severity-satisfaction relation separately by acculturation and supportiveness groups (created for illustration purposes only, based on median splits). Figure 1a demonstrates that when victims perceived highly supportive social responses, perceptually severe harassment related to a modest dip in job satisfaction; the effect was similar for women at both levels of acculturation. According to Figure 1b, however, women perceiving unsupportive social responses experienced steep declines in job satisfaction as harassment increased in

TABLE 6: Results of Best-Fitting Regression Models of Social-Support Impact

Model	Job Satisfaction					Psychological Distress				
	B	SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2	B	SE B	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1										
Stressor (harassment) severity	-.20	.06	-.31***	.186***		.14	.05	.26**	.075*	
Acculturation	.40	.17	.21*			-.04	.15	-.02		
Perceived support	.24	.22	.11			-.11	.18	-.05		
Step 2										
Severity \times Acculturation ^a	-.01	.01	-.01	.193***	.007	—	—	—	.086	.010
Severity \times Support ^a	.01	.01	.23†			—	—	—		
Step 3										
Severity \times Acculturation \times Support ^a	-.01	.01	-.26*	.232***	.039**	—	—	—	.090	.005

a. The addition of these variables did not lead to a significant increase in R^2 in psychological distress.
† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

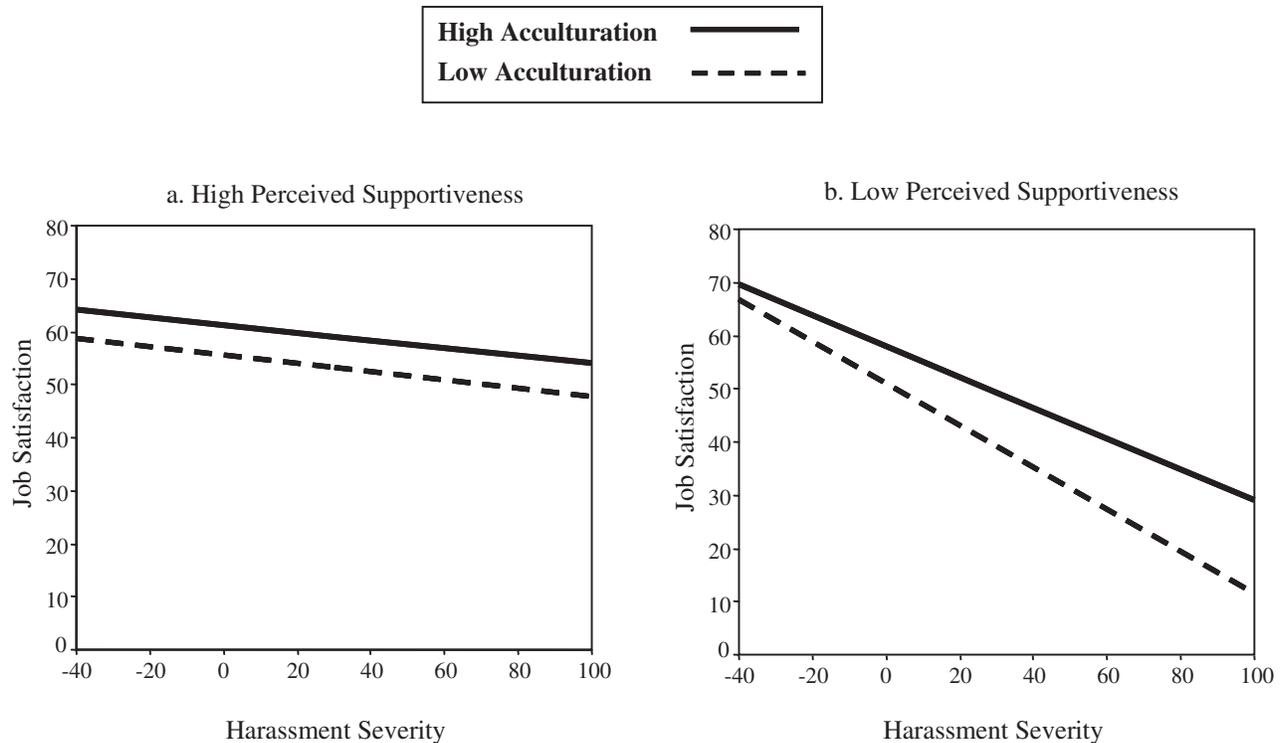


Figure 1 Moderating effect of Perceived Support \times Acculturation on relationship between sexual harassment severity and job satisfaction.

severity; this was apparent at both acculturation levels but most pronounced for the least acculturated women.

The model containing only main effect terms explained a significant 8% of the variance in psychological distress, $F(3, 122) = 3.31, p < .05$, with harassment severity emerging as a significant predictor. However, the variance accounted for did not increase significantly with the addition of either two-way interactions, $\Delta F(2, 120) = 0.69, ns$, or the three-way interaction, $\Delta F(1, 119) = 0.62, ns$. In other words, neither social support nor acculturation moderated the impact of harassment severity on psychological distress.

Discussion

The present study examines how social-support processes operate at the unique intersection of sexual harassment and Hispanic culture. Survey data offer provocative preliminary support for many of the proposed relations. Not only does this work advance the basic social support literature, it also has clear real-world implications for sexual harassment jurisprudence as well as interventions in diverse organizations. A brief discussion follows.

SOCIAL-SUPPORT MOBILIZATION

Descriptive results suggest a relationship between support-provider characteristics and support mobiliza-

tion, with many more women seeking informal support from friends and family rather than formal support from organizational representatives. These results also raise the possibility that provider gender might be relevant to support-seeking, because considerably more women sought support from female compared to male family members. In fact, efforts to recruit support from family men appeared as rare as conversations with organizational representatives. Although this study did not examine support-provider gender in detail (i.e., no systematic gender variation in friend- and organizational-support options), it appears reasonable to theorize that women may feel more comfortable seeking social support from other women in cases of sexual aggression. This would be consistent with Thoits's (1986) argument that social support is more effective when coming from others with similar social backgrounds and stressor histories.

Regression findings provided mixed support for hypotheses about support mobilization, which varied primarily according to perpetrator characteristics. In particular, perpetrator power was consistently and strongly related to all types of support-seeking behavior, with women recruiting more support from *all* sources—including their organizations—when harassed by powerful men. Hispanic sensitivity to social power, as prescribed by *respeto* and power-distance norms (Marin &

Marin, 1991; Triandis, 1994), could explain this effect. Hispanic women may be particularly alarmed by victimization from authority figures—an interpretation supported by a strong positive correlation between perpetrator power and perceived stressor severity ($r = .54, p < .01$). They may fear retaliation for not acquiescing to powerful-male advances. They also may fear potential sexual coercion, because more powerful perpetrators have greater ability to make targets' job conditions contingent on sexual cooperation. As a result of heightened distress, it would make sense that these women seek additional support to cope.

A second perpetrator characteristic—social proximity to the victim—also affected support-seeking, partially supporting H4; that is, as Hispanic women perceived greater social proximity to the perpetrator, they were less likely to discuss the harassment with family members. Given *familismo* and the highly cohesive and connected nature of traditional Hispanic families (e.g., Miranda, Estrada, & Firpo-Jiminez, 2000), a perpetrator who is close to the woman also may be close to her family and could even be a member of the extended family network. She would thus perhaps hesitate to reveal his misbehavior to family members, fearing disbelief or silencing.

Surprisingly, the organization's responsiveness to sexual harassment concerns did not predict organizational-support mobilization: harassed Hispanic women—particularly those with low acculturation—simply tended not to pursue organizational support. Conventional methods of making organizational assistance available to employees (e.g., requiring employees to take the assertive step of seeking out organizational officials and speaking out against the wrongdoer) may be culturally incongruous for many of these women. Traditional Hispanic norms discourage assertiveness and formal complaining (e.g., Barkley & Mosher, 1995; Burgos & Perez, 1986; Pavich, 1986), particularly in women, likely deterring them from lodging complaints with the organization. Concerns about retaliation (Near & Miceli, 1986) or deportation (Ontiveros, 1993) could further silence them. In addition, these women often have limited power in organizations, so they may hesitate to utilize organizational procedures that assume equal power between the victim and the accused, increase risk of retaliation against the victim, and possibly engage her in adversarial proceedings in which she lacks an advocate (Riger, 1991).

Legal scholars and management experts emphasize intraorganizational support as a primary mechanism of managing wrongdoing in organizations (e.g., *Burlington Industries v. Ellerth*, 1998; *Faragher v. Boca Raton*, 1998; Near & Miceli, 1995; Offerman & Malamut, 2002). At the same time, American organizations are rapidly becoming global and diverse, employing individuals with wide

ranges of cultural affiliations and values (e.g., Sue, Parham, & Santiago, 1998; Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994). To keep up with these evolving workplace demographics, organizations need culturally sensitive procedures for supporting employees experiencing job-related stress or organizational wrongdoing. Organizational support mechanisms have limited value if large sectors of the workforce find them too aversive to use.

SOCIAL-SUPPORT PERCEPTION

Perceptions of social responses to support-seeking efforts appear heavily dependent on stressor severity, as predicted by H6. Specifically, Hispanic women experienced less positive support when they were facing more serious harassing situations. This finding is consistent with arguments that negative social responses become more likely as stressors involve more stigma or interpersonal conflict (e.g., Herbert & Dunkel-Schetter, 1992; Lepore et al., 1991; Shinn et al., 1984); this may be particularly true when social network members endorse the harmony-seeking, conflict-avoiding values of collectivism. Another possibility is that, in cases when the harassment has persisted over time, support may decline as the family starts blaming the woman for “allowing” the harassment to continue. In many cultures, women tend to receive more blame than men in cases of sexual violence (Koss et al., 1994; Ullman & Siegel, 1995); however, this predisposition appears especially prevalent in traditional, male-dominated societies (e.g., Barkley & Mosher, 1995; Menon & Kanekar, 1992).

Perceptions of support varied as a function of the support provider in the exact pattern predicted in H7. The more that Hispanic women turned to their private networks of friends and family, the more they perceived supportiveness. Conversely, enlistment of organizational support related to lower perceptions of help/concern/support. This latter result is consistent with sexual assault research, which reports rape victims frequently encountering negative social reactions from formal support providers (Campbell et al., 1999; Campbell & Raja, 1999; Davis & Brickman, 1996; Davis et al., 1991; Kimerling & Calhoun, 1994; Ullman, 1996a, 1996b, 1999). This result also may explain the robust finding that reliance on organizational support triggers psychological and job-related difficulties in sexually harassed women (Bergman et al., 2002; Hesson-McInnis & Fitzgerald, 1997; Reese & Lindenberg, 1997); that is, negative social responses may account for the association between organizational support-seeking and adverse victim outcomes, explaining an otherwise counterintuitive relationship.

This research suggests that harassment victims' relative avoidance of organizational-support providers (documented here and elsewhere: Culbertson et al., 1992;

Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Schneider et al., 1997) may be well justified. Ullman (1999) argues that formal-support avoidance may even be adaptive for sexually victimized women, protecting them from negative social reactions that could otherwise exacerbate their distress. These findings have important legal implications. Two recent Supreme Court decisions can protect an organization from legal liability or damages when the alleged victim “*unreasonably* failed to take advantage of any preventive or corrective opportunities provided by the employer,” including “*unreasonable* failure to use any complaint procedure” (italics added) (*Burlington Industries v. Ellerth*, 1998; *Faragher v. Boca Raton*, 1998). Given current findings of perceived nonsupport from the organization, coupled with past evidence of how unsupportive social responses harm victims (Campbell et al., 1999; Davis & Brickman, 1996; Davis et al., 1991; Ullman & Siegel, 1995), organizational-support avoidance could sometimes be the most *reasonable* course of action for sexually harassed women. Thus, similar to Bergman and colleagues’ (2002) reasoning, I argue that the affirmative defense provided in these two cases should not hold for organizations with histories of negative social reactions to harassment complainants.

*SOCIAL SUPPORT AND ACCULTURATION:
INTERACTIVE MODERATORS OF STRESS*

The final regression analyses revealed that perceived support interacts with acculturation in moderating the relationship between sexual harassment severity and job satisfaction, consistent with the support impact hypothesis (H8). Specifically, women perceiving high support described slight decreases in job satisfaction as harassment increased. However, this inverse relation was much stronger among women lacking support, and the effect was most pronounced for the least acculturated women. This interaction is highly consonant with theory (Butzel & Ryan, 1997; Procidano & Smith, 1997; Triandis et al., 1985), suggesting that the more a woman endorses traditional Hispanic (collectivistic) beliefs, norms, values, and so forth, the more she requires social support as a stress buffer, and thus, the more she suffers when support is absent. This result is also consistent with portrayals of Hispanics and, more generally, collectivists as socially interdependent, particularly when in crisis (e.g., Cervantes & Castro, 1985; Marin, 1990; Marin & Triandis, 1985; Triandis et al., 1985). Furthermore, this finding highlights cultural affiliation as an important personality variable in the social support process—a topic clearly in need of further study.

Note that results support a “pure buffering model” rather than a “main effect model” of social support (S. Cohen & Wills, 1985); that is, the absence of a significant main effect of social support in the presence of inter-

active effects suggests that support benefits emerge only under conditions of elevated stress. Stress thus serves to “activate” social resources. These results replicate findings from previous social support research (for a review, see S. Cohen & Wills, 1985) and extend this line of inquiry to the sexual harassment context and Hispanic culture. Of note, neither social support nor acculturation moderated relations to psychological distress, suggesting that the buffering benefits of social support are limited to the immediate context of the stressful situation (in this case, the workplace context), only mitigating the most immediate consequences.

Limitations and Conclusion

As with any study, this research has limitations. Certain obvious biases come with a convenience sample composed of adult vocational students, limiting generalizability. Results are most applicable to literate, working-class Hispanic American women. Of course, the correlational nature of these data limits causal inferences. In addition, although the survey was psychometrically rigorous, it did not include explicit measures of cultural value dimensions. Thus, cultural interpretations remain preliminary until empirically confirmed in future studies that directly assess cultural values.

Finally, a caveat is in order about cross-cultural inferences. This research involved an in-depth examination of harassment and support experiences among Hispanic American working women, without comparison to their Anglo-American counterparts. This within-group research design follows the advice of psychologists such as Stanley Sue (1983, 1999), who argue that minority populations warrant study in their own right, not just relative to Anglo-Americans. Although cross-cultural research is also valuable, before we can broach comparative analyses we must understand the basic sexual harassment process from each group’s perspective. Considerable prior sexual harassment research speaks to the Anglo-American experience (e.g., Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Glomb et al., 1999; Gutek, 1985; Schneider et al., 1997), and the current study complements that literature by beginning to shed light on Hispanic American perspectives.

In conclusion, sexual harassment and other interpersonal stressors are inherently (anti)social phenomena, involving networks of social interaction and tension. Furthermore, these social networks are embedded in a larger cultural context, which lends them meaning and function. A complete understanding of interpersonal stress and social support thus requires attention to culture. The present study begins to address these complex relationships, suggesting how culture and

social resources intersect to influence Hispanic experiences of sexual harassment.

NOTES

1. In its most extreme and rare forms, sexual harassment can involve sexual coercion or assault, certainly qualifying as a "major life event" (Gutek, 1985; United States Merit Systems Protection Board [USMSPB], 1981, 1987).

2. Reflecting research findings that most sexual harassment is perpetrated by men against women (Koss et al., 1994), this article refers only to female victims and male perpetrators.

3. Although women and Hispanics are increasingly occupying higher level positions in organizations, as of 1995, less than half of managers and professionals were women and less than 5% were Hispanic (Tsui & Gutek, 1999).

4. Measures that did not already exist in Spanish were submitted to double translation, using a committee approach (Brislin, 1980; see also Marin & Marin, 1991; Triandis, 1994; Werner & Campbell, 1970). Following translation, three linguists independently reviewed these measures in both languages and made final adjustments to maximize the clarity and linguistic equivalency of the English and Spanish versions.

5. The survey included a number of scales utilizing a no/?/yes response format, which is patterned after the widely used Job Descriptive Index (JDI). Extensive research on the JDI has shown this 3-point response format to have properties similar to conventional Likert-type formats, with the former having less method bias and being considerably easier for workers to complete (Hanisch, 1992; Johnson, Smith, & Tucker, 1982).

6. Although stressor severity did not emerge significant in any regression, this could be due to shared variance with perpetrator power (note the high correlation between these two variables in Table 2). To test this possibility, follow-up regression analyses were conducted, minus the perpetrator power variable. In these analyses, stressor severity became a significant predictor of all three types of social support mobilization (standardized betas ranged from .15 to .26, all $ps < .05$).

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