

## Coping in Context: Sociocultural Determinants of Responses to Sexual Harassment

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The authors investigated coping responses to sexual harassment across 4 samples of working women from 3 cultures and 2 occupational classes. Complete-link cluster analyses provide preliminary support for D. E. Knapp, R. H. Faley, S. E. Ekeberg, and C. L. Z. Dubois's (1997) coping framework, suggesting that avoidance, denial, negotiation, advocacy seeking, and social coping are universal responses to sexual harassment. Further, L. F. Fitzgerald's (1990) internal–external dichotomy appears to capture higher order relationships among coping responses. In addition, regression analyses suggest that Turkish and Hispanic American women engage in more avoidance than Anglo American women, and Hispanic women also use more denial but less advocacy seeking. No differences emerged in social coping. The authors discuss these results in the context of coping theory, individualism–collectivism, power distance, and patriarchal gender norms.

Violence against women originates in sociocultural constructions of gender and power, taking many forms. Although such behavior unfolds at the individual level, theory holds that *cultural* forces support and perpetuate it (e.g., Burt, 1980; Koss et al., 1994; B. V. Marin & Gomez, 1995). Evidence from the United States suggests that sexual harassment is the most widespread form of violence against women (Fitzgerald & Ormerod, 1993; Fitzgerald & Shullman, 1993; Gutek, 1985; United States Merit Systems Protection Board, 1981, 1988). Recent cross-cultural research also contends that sexual harassment is common in many societies around the world (Barak, 1997). Despite the prevalence and culturally driven nature of this serious social problem, little empirical evidence addresses cultural influences on sexual harassment processes.

Victim response to (i.e., coping) sexually harassing behavior represents an important component of harassment processes, and may be particularly susceptible to cultural influences. Social–cognitive psychologists have long theorized that coping varies with context or culture. For example, in their classic conceptualization of the coping process, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) discuss

constraints on coping behavior: “culturally derived values and beliefs serve as norms that determine when certain behaviors and feelings are appropriate and when they are not . . . even allowing for a wide range of situational and individual differences, culturally derived values, beliefs, and norms operate as important constraints” (p. 165). Cross-cultural psychologists have proposed similar theory, arguing that culture-specific norms could have a powerful effect on coping responses (Cervantes & Castro, 1985). Simply put, “throughout human history, different cultures arrived at preferential ways of dealing with problems” (Diaz-Guerrero, 1979, p. 321).

In this article, we investigate the influence of culture on coping by comparing Turkish, Hispanic American, and Anglo American responses to sexual harassment in the workplace. Although the Turkish and Hispanic cultures differ in many aspects, such as language and religion, there is also considerable parallelism in cultural syndromes, such as collectivism, power distance, and patriarchy, that leads to similar expectations regarding harassment coping, which also provide an interesting contrast with the Anglo American context. In the following sections, we present a typology of coping responses and review relevant research on Turkish and Hispanic cultures. On the basis of this past work, we advance hypotheses on the coping behaviors of Turkish and Hispanic women in comparison to Anglo American women.

### Culture and Coping With Sexual Harassment

With respect to understanding the structure of sexual harassment coping, researchers have moved away from unidimensional conceptualizations—varying on an assertiveness continuum (e.g., Gruber & Bjorn, 1986)—and increasingly adopted multidimensional frameworks (e.g., Fitzgerald, Gold, Brock, & Gelfand, 1993; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, & Dubois, 1997; Magley, 1999). In one comprehensive classification, Knapp et al. (1997) proposed a two-by-two typology of coping responses to sexual harassment, on the basis of the premise that these

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responses vary according to two elements: focus and mode. The focus of coping may be either the *self* or the *harasser* (the “initiator”). Mode can be *supported* or *nonsupported*, depending on the amount of outside assistance the target seeks. As summarized in Table 1, the juxtaposition of these two dimensions forms four archetypical response strategies for coping with sexual harassment: (a) advocacy seeking, (b) social coping, (c) avoidance/denial, and (d) confrontation/negotiation.

To the best of our knowledge, this framework by Knapp et al. (1997) has not received empirical examination, in particular with cross-cultural samples. Because of its breadth and generality, we adopt this framework as a possible etic classification of coping responses, and advance hypotheses regarding these four types of coping strategies. Hence, our results will not only allow us to infer the influence of culture on coping, but also provide a validity test of this framework.

### Advocacy Seeking

Of all potential responses to sexual harassment, advocacy-seeking behaviors through the use of intraorganizational relief mechanisms have received by far the most research attention. Most evidence in the United States suggests that few victims ever file formal sexual harassment complaints or even informally discuss harassment with organizational authorities, largely because of fears of individual or organizational retaliation (Fitzgerald et al., 1988; Fitzgerald, Swan & Fischer, 1995; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Knapp et al., 1997; Near & Miceli, 1995).

In more traditional societies, additional cultural factors may further inhibit advocacy seeking. Traditional gender roles and honor and shame codes reflect asymmetrical standards for women’s and men’s sexual behavior. For example, both Hispanic and Turkish cultures regard premarital and extramarital sex as highly inappropriate for women, whereas sex is viewed as a physiological necessity for men (Baird, 1993; Burgos & Perez, 1986; Cindoğlu, 1997; Kayır, 1995; B. V. Marin & Gomez, 1995; Pavich, 1986). An old Turkish saying suggests “[sexual liaison] is a stain (dishonor/shame) on her face and henna (sign of celebration and festivity) on his hand.” Such double standards are even evident in the Turkish legal system: Until 1997, Article 440 of the Turkish Penal Code charged a wife with adultery if she engaged in a relationship with a man other than her husband on one single occasion, whereas a charge against a husband required proof that he actually *lived with* another woman (Oğuzman & Dural, 1998). Research specific to sex-related attitudes, norms, and behavior in Hispanic cultures suggests that patriarchal standards also prevail in many Hispanic societies. The traditional *machista* culture rewards men for early initiation into sexual life, dominance over sexual

activities, enjoyment of sex, encounters with numerous sex partners, and extramarital relationships. Women, however, are devalued and stigmatized as *mujeres indecentes* [indecent women] for the same behavior (Baird, 1993; Gomez & Marin, 1996; B. V. Marin & Gomez, 1995; Pavich, 1986). Further illustrating these double standards, traditional Hispanic family members—particularly men—view adolescent daughters’ virtue as nearly sacrosanct, confining them to the home or chaperoning them to prevent sexual exploitation. Adolescent boys, however, are encouraged to develop, display, and explore their sexual virility; sexual prowess and the conquest of females are acceptable topics in adolescent boys’ conversations (Burgos & Perez, 1986; Espín, 1997; Pavich, 1986). Because of these asymmetrical sexual norms, Turkish and Hispanic women may be more likely to accept men’s sexual aggressiveness as normal, and thus consider such behavior less worthy of reporting.

Factors such as fear of blame and damage to personal, family, and professional reputations may further suppress reporting among more traditional women. In many cultures, women tend to receive more blame than men in cases of sexual violence; however, this predisposition appears more likely in traditional, male-dominated societies (e.g., Bakırcı, 2000; Barkley & Mosher, 1995; Menon & Kanekar, 1992). In cultures where sexual contact with any man other than the husband—as well as sexual discussions—are very strong taboos for women, women who disclose their sexually inappropriate experiences might disgrace not only themselves but also their entire families (Baird, 1993; Barkley & Mosher, 1995; B. V. Marin & Gomez, 1995; B. V. Marin, Gomez, & Hearst, 1993). Indeed, in an article in one of the nationally circulated Turkish newspapers, Güreli (1998) stated that female teachers experienced frequent sexual harassment but rarely reported it because of concerns about societal blame for the incidents. Similarly, they worried that their husbands would divorce them if they learned of the harassment. Cindoğlu and Durakbaşa (1996) interviewed Turkish women on gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace. The interviewees who had experienced harassment stated that they did not report the incident to anybody out of fear of blame for provoking the incident. When asked how they would respond if their daughters experienced sexual harassment, some of these women also said they would not disclose the incidents to their husbands, who might be highly critical of their daughters.

Findings from Turkey are remarkably similar to research on Hispanic women. For example, this literature suggests that some traditional Mexican American fathers respond to the rape of a daughter by blaming her, and then treating her as “tainted” and no longer “innocent.” Thus, female Hispanic rape victims often hesitate before reporting rapes to family members, much less police (Barkley & Mosher, 1995). More generally, Hispanics traditionally view formal reporting as “airing your [or your family’s] dirty laundry” in public—something to be avoided at all costs (Ontiveros, 1993). These various arguments lead to our first hypothesis:

*Hypothesis 1:* Compared with Anglo women, both Turkish and Hispanic women will be less likely to engage in advocacy seeking (i.e., less likely to report sexual harassment to their organizations).

Table 1  
Summary of Knapp et al. (1997) Typology of Sexual Harassment Coping Responses

Coping response	Focus of response	Mode of response
1. Avoidance/denial	Self	Not supported
2. Confrontation	Initiator	Not supported
3. Social coping	Self	Supported
4. Advocacy seeking	Initiator	Supported

### Social Coping

A frequent method of coping with sexual harassment is reliance on social support from colleagues, friends, and family members (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1988, 1995; Gutek & Koss, 1993). Researchers have theorized that cultural norms and values heavily influence social-support mobilization (e.g., Butzel & Ryan, 1997; Keinan, 1997; Procidano & Smith, 1997; Vaux, 1985). In particular, they reason that support seeking and benefits should be greater in collectivistic cultures, which emphasize interpersonal orientation, affiliation, and interdependence over independence. Likewise, Triandis (1995) argues that relationships with ingroup members are particularly intimate for collectivists and that seeking ingroup support is one of the most important coping strategies for collectivists encountering crisis (Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clark, 1985). Indeed, Chan, Tang, and Chan's (1999) study on sexual harassment among the collectivist Hong Kong Chinese revealed talking to friends or colleagues about the incident to be the most prevalent coping mechanism. The collectivist Turkish and Hispanic societies also place very high value on social support from their ingroup, which typically consists of both the nuclear and extended family but also may include close friends and coworkers (e.g., Cervantes & Castro, 1985; B. V. Marin, 1990; G. Marin & Triandis, 1985). These patterns are encoded in the Hispanic cultural script of *familismo*, which prescribes strong attachment, loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among nuclear and extended family members (G. Marin & Marin, 1991; G. Marin & Triandis, 1985; Sabogal, Marin, Otero-Sabogal, Marin, & Perez-Stable, 1987). Some describe *familismo* as "one of the most important culture-specific values of Hispanics" (Sabogal et al., 1987; pp. 397–398). In Turkey, Cindoğlu and Durakbaşa (1996) documented that sexually harassed women who did not fear blame often coped by relying on their male support network—arranging for their fathers, brothers, husbands, relatives or friends of higher status to intervene in the situation and step in as protectors. Thus, we propose the following:

*Hypothesis 2:* Both Turkish and Hispanic women will rely more heavily on social support compared with Anglo women.

### Avoidance/Denial and Confrontation/Negotiation

According to past Anglo American research, avoidance/denial and confrontation are among the most and least prevalent responses, respectively, to sexual harassment in the workplace (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1988, 1995; Gutek & Koss, 1993). That is, a common strategy for many targets is to avoid the perpetrator or the harassing context if possible (Gruber, 1989; Gutek, 1985). Other low-intervention strategies may be more cognitively oriented, comprising denial and minimization of the seriousness of the situation. In contrast, confrontation/negotiation involves addressing the perpetrator directly—asking or insisting that the offensive behavior cease.

We argue that collectivist concerns for harmony—that is, smooth and pleasant interpersonal relationships—might influence women's reliance on these particular coping methods. Collectivists generally disapprove of confrontation, conflict, and even open discussion of "sensitive issues" (e.g., Kozan, 1994; Triandis, 1994). Individuals in these contexts typically prefer to minimize

negative behaviors and/or keep silent when dissatisfied with another's actions (G. Marin & Marin, 1991; Pavich, 1986; Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984). This high expectation for harmony in interpersonal relations is central to the Hispanic cultural script of *simpatía* (G. Marin & Marin, 1991). Further, as Ting-Toomey et al. (1991) contended, members of collectivistic cultures are concerned not only with "saving face" but also with "giving face." Thus, they avoid direct approach in a conflict situation for fear of embarrassing the other party. At most, they may resort to indirect methods of communicating discontent (Pavich, 1986). Chan et al. (1999) recently discussed the implications of collectivistic harmony norms on sexual harassment coping. In their study of Hong Kong Chinese women, Chan et al. found that the most commonly used coping strategies were relatively less assertive and indirect in nature, and the authors attributed this behavior to collectivist emphasis on avoiding being "troublemakers." Chan et al. further noted that collectivism among Chinese may even lead them to avoid recognizing and acknowledging sexual harassment behavior when it happens to them, suggesting higher denial among collectivist women.

Moreover, confrontation involves clear, direct opposition to the harasser—a fairly assertive coping strategy. However, traditional Hispanic and Turkish sex roles discourage such assertiveness in women, instead dictating that women be passive, submissive, dependent, and nurturing (e.g., Barkley & Mosher, 1995; Burgos & Perez, 1986; Levine, 1982; Pavich, 1986). Avoidance and denial may thus be more common among Turkish and Hispanic women, being strategies that allow them to minimize the adverse situation and avoid conflict, confrontation, and sexual impropriety. These cultural patterns suggest the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 3:* Compared with Anglo American women, Turkish and Hispanic women will engage in less confrontation/negotiation.

*Hypothesis 4:* Compared with Anglo American women, Turkish and Hispanic women will engage in more avoidance/denial.

### Perpetrator Power

Previous research on Anglo American advocacy seeking suggests that women are less likely to report sexually harassing incidents if the harasser is their supervisor or superior (Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Fitzgerald, 1990; Knapp et al., 1997). This relationship may be even stronger among women from high power distance cultures, such as the Turkish and the Hispanic, which emphasize and respect social hierarchy (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1994). Further, traditional Hispanic behavior reflects *respeto*—a cultural script that prescribes deference to individuals holding positions of higher prestige, recognition, and power in society (G. Marin & Triandis, 1985; Triandis et al., 1984). In situations involving harassers of high power or status in the organization, these cultural patterns could further inhibit assertive responses (e.g., advocacy seeking, confrontation) and engender more avoidant coping among Turkish and Hispanic women. Thus, we propose that:

*Hypothesis 5a:* All women will be less likely to engage in advocacy seeking or confrontation with powerful perpetra-

tors, but this relationship will be stronger among Turkish and Hispanic women.

*Hypothesis 5b:* All women will be more likely to avoid/deny when harassed by powerful perpetrators, but this relationship will be stronger among Turkish and Hispanic women.

### Sexual Harassment Frequency

Past Anglo American research suggests that the likelihood of assertive coping increases as harassment becomes more frequent (e.g., Brooks & Perot, 1991; Knapp et al., 1997; Magley, 1999). This finding is consistent with the stress literature on *chronic persistent events*: as stressful events continue over time, individuals learn and engage in more active, problem-focused efforts to cope with the ongoing stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Nevertheless, on the basis of the arguments presented above regarding reporting and confrontation, we expect that Turkish and Hispanic women would hesitate to engage in assertive coping even when faced with more frequent/severe sexual harassment:

*Hypothesis 6:* Although advocacy seeking and confronting will increase with harassment frequency among all women, this effect will be weaker among Turks and Hispanics.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Four separate survey administrations took place, one in Turkey and the others in the United States. All participants were guaranteed complete anonymity and confidentiality with respect to their responses. We sampled working-class Hispanic American women and, as a comparison group, working-class Anglo American women. We then drew and compared professional samples of Anglo American and Turkish women.<sup>1</sup>

*Sample 1: Working-class Anglo Americans.* A total of 447 women, self-identifying as "White/Caucasian" and working at a food-manufacturing company in the northwestern United States, completed questionnaires in groups. Analyses focused on 160 sexually harassed women who completed scales used in the current article.<sup>2</sup> The great majority of this sample worked as unskilled and skilled laborers. Most of the respondents were high school graduates (but lacked college degrees; 84%), under age 40 (63%), and married or partnered (63%).

*Sample 2: Working-class Hispanic Americans.* We administered the questionnaire to groups of 476 employed women residing in two major metropolitan U.S. cities, who self-identified as Hispanic (i.e., specified their family's country of origin as Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Central America, or Spain). Two hundred fifty of these women completed the relevant scales. Most worked in minimum-wage, unskilled labor jobs (e.g., factory, warehouse, housekeeping). Over three fourths of the sample had at least completed high school, over two thirds were under age 30, and slightly over half were single.

*Sample 3: Professional Anglo Americans.* Two hundred four Anglo American women employed at a large Midwestern university completed questionnaires on an individual basis. Of these, 88 described harassment and completed all scales analyzed in the current article. The sample consisted of both university faculty (44%) and staff (56%). All had completed high school, and 89% pursued higher or technical education. Sixty percent of the sample were under age 45, and 60% were also married.

*Sample 4: Professional Turkish sample.* Data were collected from 355 women employed in 17 public and 20 private organizations located in five major cities in Turkey. Of this sample, 64 women were sexually harassed and completed the relevant scales. The great majority (over 95%) of this

subsample worked in academic, professional, or office jobs. These women were largely single (58%) and between the ages of 20 to 34 (87%). All had high school degrees, and 86% completed at least some college if not an advanced degree.

### Measures

Each sample completed questionnaires that were nearly identical in content, and all analyses comparing samples only involved common items. Below are descriptions of scales analyzed in the present study.

*Sexual harassment.* We measured *sexual harassment* through the Sexual Experiences Questionnaire (SEQ; Fitzgerald et al., 1988; revised by Fitzgerald, Gelfand, and Drasgow, 1995), a behaviorally based scale with excellent psychometric properties (Arvey & Cavanaugh, 1995; Beere, 1990). The SEQ assessed the frequency with which women had experienced *gender harassment* (behaviors that convey sexist, degrading, and misogynistic attitudes about women) and *unwanted sexual attention* (unwanted touching, stroking, or repeated unwanted requests for romantic or sexual relationship).<sup>3</sup> Participants reported the frequency with which they had experienced these behaviors from male coworkers or supervisors in the previous 2 years, using a 5-point scale (ranging from 1 = *never* to 5 = *most of the time*). We summed responses to SEQ items to form our measure of harassment frequency. The SEQ filtered appropriate respondents into the coping section of the survey. Reliability coefficients for the SEQ averaged .83 across the four samples.

*Coping.* To assess participants' coping responses to sexual harassment, we used the Coping with Harassment Questionnaire (CHQ; Fitzgerald, 1990). This measure assesses internally focused coping strategies that involve attempts to manage the cognitions and emotions associated with the experience, paralleling Lazarus and Folkman's (1984; Folkman & Lazarus, 1989) "emotion-focused coping." It also gauges externally focused strategies, which are analogous to "problem-focused coping" (Folkman & Lazarus, 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). As such, the CHQ items assess all four major coping categories proposed by Knapp et al. (1997). Respondents who had experienced any of the SEQ behaviors indicated how well each CHQ item described their responses to the SEQ incident that had made the greatest impression on them. For the professional samples, the response scale ranged from 1 (*not at all descriptive*) to 5 (*extremely descriptive*); for the working-class samples, the response scale included *yes*, *no*, and *?* (if they could not decide).

*Harasser status.* To describe the harasser's organizational power, respondents indicated their organizational relationship to the instigator of the sexual harassment incident that made the greatest impression on them. The response options appeared in the order of organizational power and authority, from most to least: 1 = *Manager*, 2 = *Supervisor*, 3 = *Coworker*, 4 = *Customer, Client, Supplier*, 5 = *Subordinate*, and 6 = *Other*. However, this variable only contained five levels in the professional surveys, lacking the *Subordinate* category. Because of the ambiguity of the *Other* option, we did not analyze data from the few respondents who chose this option.

<sup>1</sup> The term *professional* in this article refers to women employed in "white-collar" and "pink-collar" occupations. Although no sample was 100% working class or 100% professional, their participants were *largely* homogeneous with respect to occupation and education. Thus, we refer to them as either professional or working class, for lack of a more precise shorthand.

<sup>2</sup> Only sexually harassed women completed the coping scales used in the current article. Because approximately 40%–70% of women in each of the four samples denied any experience with harassing behavior, large numbers of participants were screened out of these scales and therefore not included in current analyses.

<sup>3</sup> Items assessing a third type of sexual harassment—sexual coercion—were not included in analyses because of very low base rates and their absence from the working-class questionnaires.

*Control variables.* Several studies have identified workplace climate as an important predictor of target responses to sexual harassment (e.g., Bingham & Scherer, 1993; Gruber & Smith, 1995; Knapp et al., 1997). Specifically, individuals working in climates that strongly discourage sexual harassment use more direct or institutional strategies. Thus, we controlled for organizational climates toward sexual harassment, which likely differ across organizations. Specifically, the Organizational Tolerance of Sexual Harassment Inventory (Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1995; Zickar, Munson, & Hulin, 1997) assessed shared perceptions of organizational responsiveness to harassing situations. A higher score on this measure indicates that the respondent perceives management to tolerate (permit) more sexual harassment. Past research (Hulin et al., 1995; Zickar et al., 1997) has demonstrated high reliability and validity in this measure. Cronbach's alpha for this scale averaged .93 across the four samples.

In addition, we controlled for individual economic vulnerability or financial dependence on the current job, partly to avoid the possibility that economic differences between samples could offer an alternative explanation for coping differences. For example, during periods of adverse labor market conditions, targets of sexual harassment might be more reluctant to report an incident for fear of retaliation that might lead to job loss (Knapp et al., 1997). We assessed economic vulnerability through three items from Hanisch and colleagues' (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990, 1991) Job Withdrawal Scale. Probst (1998) has shown that the original scale is composed of two subscales, namely turnover intentions and ease of quitting. We used the latter subscale to evaluate the respondent's perceived ease of finding a financially comparable job; higher scores indicate greater perceived ease. Coefficient alpha, averaged across the four samples, was .64.

To adjust for additional demographic differences among samples, we also controlled for marital status (with two dummy-coded variables indicating married or divorced/widowed; single participants comprised the undummyed group) as well as for age and education (higher scores indicating greater levels of both) in all comparative analyses.

### Translations

The questionnaire was translated into Spanish and Turkish through a committee approach to double translation (Brislin, 1980; see also G. Marin & Marin, 1991; Werner & Campbell, 1970). Briefly, two bilingual native-Spanish speakers independently translated each scale into Spanish. They then met to resolve any discrepancies between their two Spanish translations. Two bilingual native-English speakers then translated the Spanish text back into English, again working independently. These two translators then met to resolve discrepancies and agree on one English version of the scales. The authors then compared this translation with the original English text, to identify any discrepancies in meaning. Next, all four translators, along with one of the authors, met to review these discrepancies and make final changes to the Spanish translation. Finally, three linguists independently reviewed the entire survey in both languages and made final adjustments to maximize the clarity and linguistic equivalency of the English and Spanish versions. Translation of the survey into Turkish involved comparable methods.

## Results

Analyses of coping typologies and correlates proceeded in two general stages. First, we cluster analyzed coping items separately for each sample. Next, we conducted regression analyses to investigate cultural differences and other correlates of coping. Because of differing CHQ response scales, we performed all comparative analyses separately for the professional and working-class samples. This procedure offered the added benefit of roughly controlling for education level, occupational status, and social class.

### Cluster Analyses

The first stage of the analysis involved a search for a common coping typology across the cultural groups. This process began with clustering of CHQ items within each sample, using Johnson's (1967) complete-link hierarchical cluster analysis—a method of joining similar objects into homogeneous groups (i.e., clusters). Items that failed to converge with others in meaningful patterns or displayed disproportionately large joining distances were discarded iteratively.

*Working-class samples.* For the working-class Anglo and Hispanic data, this analysis uncovered five clusters that contained 14 identical CHQ items, as Figures 1a and 1b illustrate. The results largely confirmed Knapp et al.'s (1997) typology, and hence we labeled the clusters *denial*, *avoidance*, *negotiation*, *social coping*, and *advocacy seeking*. However, the denial and avoidance items did not fall into one cluster as proposed by Knapp et al. (1997), but in fact broke into two separate clusters. It should also be noted that the negotiation cluster contained items that Fitzgerald (1990) originally conceptualized as "confrontation." However, some of these items were not clearly confrontational and could instead describe a range of indirect or subtle communication responses (e.g., "I tried to let him know I didn't like what he was doing"). We therefore preferred the term *negotiation*, representing the initiator-focused, nonsupported category proposed by Knapp et al. (1997). Of interest, in both samples, the avoidance and negotiation items formed a higher order cluster. In terms of differences between the two samples, the advocacy-seeking cluster joined with social coping for the Hispanics; however, in the Anglo sample, advocacy seeking was quite separate from each of the other four clusters. Despite these minor differences in higher order relationships among clusters, the identical composition of individual clusters suggested that items in each cluster could be summed to form a coping scale that would be comparable between the two groups.

*Professional samples.* For the Turkish and Anglo American questionnaires, 14 items formed a five-factor cluster structure that was equivalent between the two samples, as Figures 2a and 2b present. Similar to the results obtained with the working-class samples, the five factors were negotiation, avoidance, advocacy seeking, social coping, and denial. It should be noted that, except for the advocacy-seeking factor, the clusters contained identical items between the two samples. Advocacy seeking for the Turkish sample consisted of the following two items: "I made a formal complaint" and "I talked with a supervisor, manager, or union representative." For the Anglo American sample, the advocacy-seeking cluster included the items "I made a formal complaint" and "I reported him." Thus, although specific items differed slightly, the construct underlying the clusters was conceptually equivalent between the two groups and therefore retained for further analysis. Mirroring the working-class results, avoidance formed a higher order cluster with negotiation in both groups. This in turn formed a further cluster with social coping and advocacy seeking. The denial coping strategies did not converge with these four clusters until relatively late.

In sum, cluster analyses revealed a typology of five general methods for responding to sexual harassment: social coping, avoidance, negotiation, advocacy seeking, and denial. This common typology enables cross-cultural comparison of harassment coping strategies.

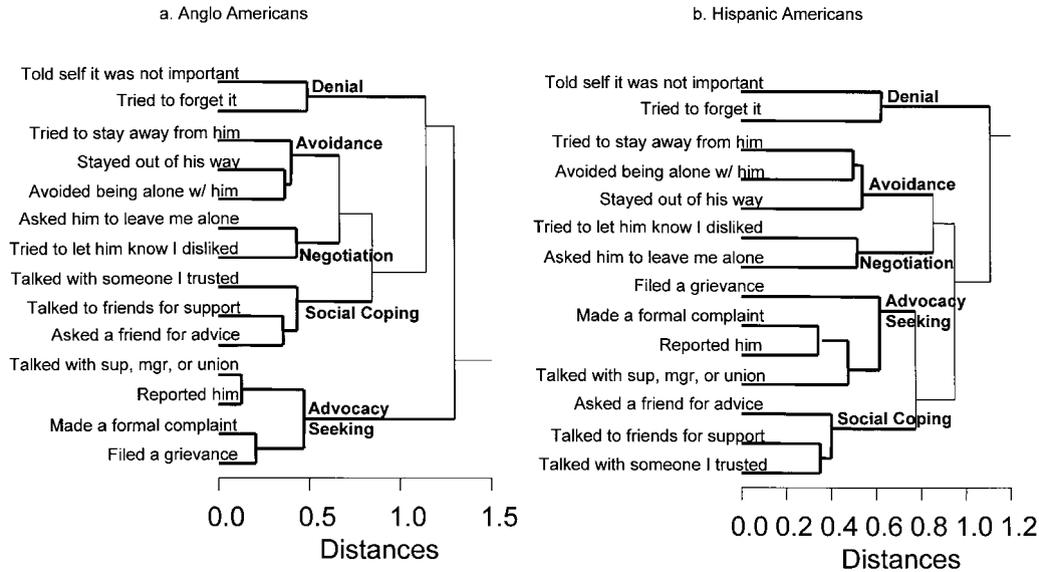


Figure 1. Working-class cluster structures. All items began with “I” (e.g., “I tried to let him know I disliked”) and have been shortened (e.g., “I tried to let him know that I did not like what he was doing”). sup = supervisor; mgr = manager.

*Creation of coping variables for comparative analyses.* Further examination of item distributions revealed restricted variance on the advocacy-seeking items—because of almost nonexistent use of this coping mechanism—in the professional samples. Therefore, for the professional Anglo and Turkish women, we scored advocacy seeking as a dichotomous indicator (individuals who described *never* seeking advocacy on both items received a 0, and all others received a 1 for this indicator). Among the professional Anglo and Turkish women, 17% and 12%, respectively, received

a 1 on this indicator—indicating that they had sought at least one form of advocacy about a sexual harassment experience in the previous 2 years.

Advocacy-seeking items did have sufficient variance in the working-class samples, allowing us to sum them into a scale. In addition, the other four categories of coping each contained items with ample variance in each sample, so we summed these items into four scales for each sample. Cronbach’s alpha for each scale was quite similar across samples, averaging .76 for negotiation, .82

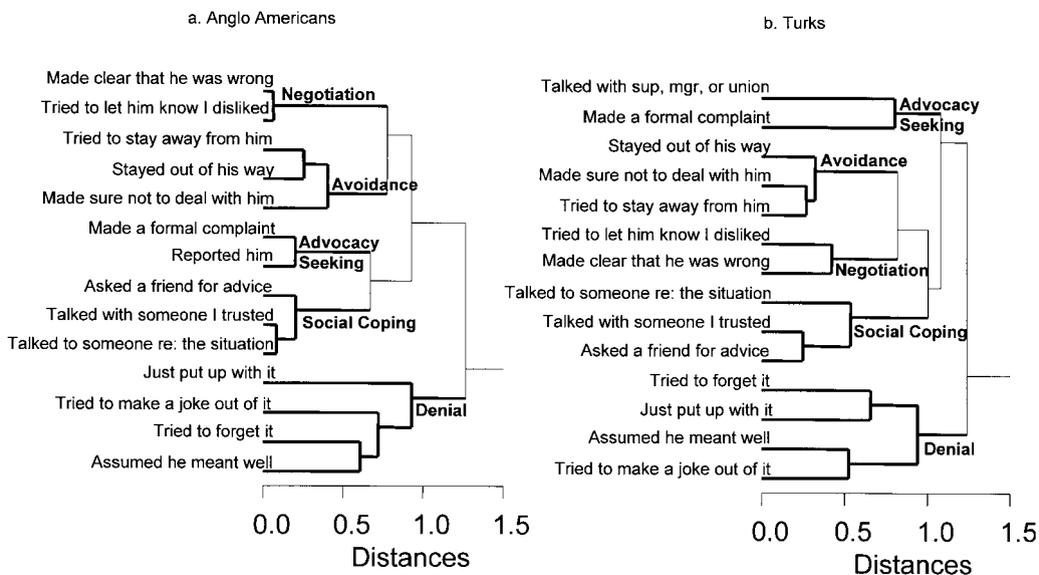


Figure 2. Professional cluster structures. All items began with “I” (e.g., “I tried to let him know I disliked”) and have been shortened (e.g., “I tried to let him know that I did not like what he was doing”). sup = supervisor; mgr = manager.

Table 2  
*Change Statistics for Regressions Predicting Each Type of Coping*

Coping type	Block 1: Climate, financial dependence, demographic variables		Block 2: Add culture, harasser status, sexual harassment frequency		Block 3: Add hypothesized two-way interactions	
	$R^2$	$F(df)$	$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F(df)$	$\Delta R^2$	$\Delta F(df)$
Working-class samples						
Avoidance	.038	2.03 (6, 305)	.166	21.08 (3, 302)**	.010	3.95 (1, 301)*
Denial	.059	3.22 (6, 308)**	.076	8.91 (3, 305)**	.000	0.004 (1, 304)
Negotiation	.006	0.30 (6, 307)	.043	4.56 (3, 304)**	.003	0.51 (2, 302)
Advocacy seeking	.038	1.99 (6, 302)	.060	6.65 (3, 299)**	.013	2.21 (2, 297)
Social coping	.011	0.58 (6, 306)	.011	1.12 (3, 303)	—	—
Professional samples						
Avoidance	.164	3.60 (6, 110)**	.175	9.44 (3, 107)**	.005	0.88 (1, 106)
Denial	.187	4.09 (6, 107)**	.017	0.72 (3, 104)	.000	0.02 (1, 103)
Negotiation	.247	6.07 (6, 111)**	.261	19.08 (3, 108)**	.009	1.01 (2, 106)
Social coping	.080	1.58 (6, 109)	.095	4.05 (3, 106)**	—	—

*Note.* Dashes indicate that no interaction hypotheses were made regarding social coping.

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

for avoidance, .86 for social coping, .61 for denial, and .87 for (working class) advocacy seeking. The remaining analyses will thus focus on these five types of coping.

### Regression Analyses

To provide in-depth information on cultural and contextual correlates of coping, we conducted a series of multiple regression analyses, comparing full and reduced models (again, separately for working-class and professional women). In each model, a coping scale score (or indicator) was first regressed onto age, marital status, education, organizational climate for sexual harassment, and financial dependence on the job—controlling for the influence of these variables. In the next step, we added the following main-effect variables: (a) culture (with the two cultures denoted by a dichotomous variable, such that 0 = Anglo Americans), (b) harasser status, and (c) sexual harassment frequency. In the final step, to assess whether culture moderated the relationships between the proposed contextual factors and certain coping strategies, we added the interactions that follow our hypotheses (culture-by-sexual harassment frequency and/or culture-by-harasser status). To reduce the potential of multicollinearity between the main effects and interactions, we centered the sexual harassment scores (the only continuous variable in the interaction terms) in all models. We repeated this analysis for each of the five types of coping.

When predicting the professional advocacy-seeking indicator, we used a logistic regression analysis, the statistics for which are detailed below. All other analyses of (continuous) coping scores involved linear regression models; Table 2 presents change statistics for each of these models.<sup>4</sup> To illustrate sample differences and similarities, and facilitate comprehension of linear regression results, Figure 3 graphically displays sample means across the different coping scales.<sup>5</sup>

*Working-class samples.* Among working-class women, culture proved to be a significant correlate—beyond control variables—of advocacy seeking (standardized  $\beta = -.28$ ,  $p < .01$ ),

avoidance (standardized  $\beta = .86$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and denial (standardized  $\beta = .33$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Specifically, whereas Hispanic women were less likely to report the harasser, they were more likely to avoid the harasser and to deny the harasser's seriousness compared with their Anglo counterparts.

In addition, we found a main effect of sexual harassment frequency on avoidance (standardized  $\beta = .18$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and negotiation (standardized  $\beta = .15$ ,  $p < .01$ ), and harasser status also directly related to both strategies (avoidance  $\beta = .28$ ,  $p < .01$ ; negotiation  $\beta = .14$ ,  $p < .05$ ). That is, the more frequent the harassment and the more powerful the harasser, the more that women of both cultures avoided and negotiated with him. We also found that harasser status interacted with culture in its relation to avoidance (standardized  $\beta = -.45$ ,  $p < .05$ ). As Figure 4 displays, Hispanic American women described very high levels of avoidance, regardless of the situation; Anglo American avoidance, however, did not match Hispanic levels except in the context of very powerful harassers. No other interactions emerged significant in any regression model. Further, we did not identify any significant correlates of social coping.

*Professional samples.* Regression analysis of avoidance strategies indicated that culture (standardized  $\beta = .37$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and sexual harassment frequency (standardized  $\beta = .38$ ,  $p < .01$ ) explained significant variance, after considering the effects of control variables. Specifically, Turkish women tended to avoid the harasser more than Anglo American women, and higher levels of sexual harassment were related to higher levels of avoidance. We obtained similar results for negotiation: culture (standardized  $\beta =$

<sup>4</sup> The standardized beta weights and standard errors for the regression analysis are available from the authors upon request.

<sup>5</sup> For this display, we performed a linear transformation of each scale mean by dividing the scale mean by the number of scale items. This has the effect of putting all working-class means on the same one-to-three metric, and all professional means on the same one-to-five metric.

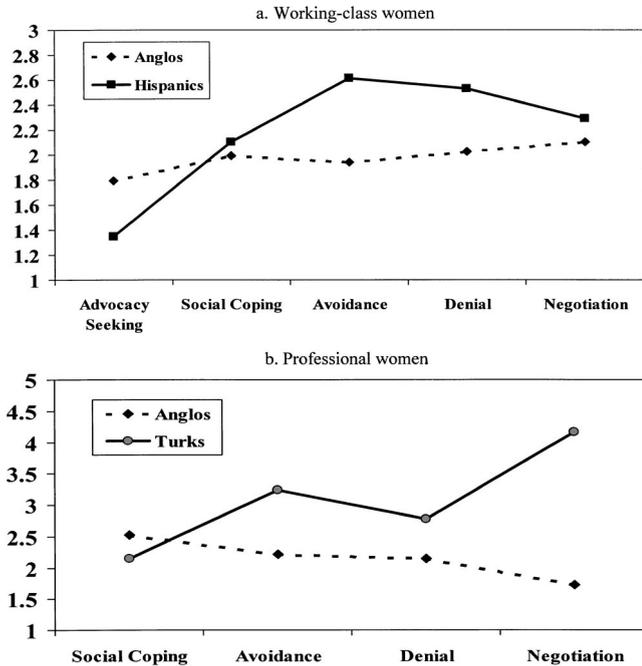


Figure 3. Coping scale means.

.76,  $p < .01$ ) and sexual harassment frequency (standardized  $\beta = .20$ ,  $p < .01$ ) emerged significant. This suggests that Turkish women adopted negotiating behavior more than Anglo American women, and higher levels of sexual harassment frequency predicted more negotiation.

Sexual harassment frequency proved to be the only significant correlate of social coping (standardized  $\beta = .27$ ;  $p < .01$ ) beyond effects of the covariates, with higher levels of sexual harassment frequency relating to higher levels of social coping. We found no significant relationships with denial. No interactions emerged significant in any of these professional linear regressions.

Finally, the dichotomous scoring of advocacy seeking among professional women necessitated that we conduct a logistic regression analysis to examine cultural and contextual correlates of this type of coping. The predictors in this analysis paralleled those in the linear regressions, with three sets of variables (covariates, main-effect terms, interaction terms) entered in a hierarchical fashion. According to chi-square statistics, none of these models predicted advocacy seeking among professional women (Block 1:  $\chi^2(7, N = 132) = 10.16, ns$ ; Block 2:  $\chi^2(10, N = 132) = 14.80, ns$ ; Block 3:  $\chi^2(12, N = 132) = 19.27, ns$ ).

Discussion

Despite the indisputable fact that coping depends heavily on socialization, values, gender roles (e.g., Jung, 1995), and other factors that all vary widely by culture (Triandis, 1994), formal empirical research examining sexual harassment coping through the lens of culture is virtually nonexistent. This study addresses this dearth in the literature, expanding our understanding of the types and correlates of harassment coping by incorporating the influence of culture. The present results not only address the cross-cultural generalizability of Anglo-based findings, but also

underscore the importance of cultural variation in women’s responses to sexual harassment. We now turn to a detailed discussion of these findings and their implications.

Coping Structure

These results provide preliminary empirical cross-cultural validation of the coping typology proposed by Knapp et al. (1997). Of interest, analyses across three cultural groups and two occupational classes suggest that avoidance, denial, negotiation, advocacy seeking, and social coping are responses to sexual harassment that transcend cultures and occupations. These results confirm the Knapp et al. (1997) typology to a large extent; however, across the four samples, avoidance and denial items did not cluster to form a self-focused, nonsupported category, but avoidance items joined a higher order cluster with negotiation items. This finding suggests that avoidance may be better conceptualized as a nonsupported, initiator-focused response. Avoidance is essentially a behavioral, initiator-focused strategy where the target attempts to stay away from the initiator (i.e., the harasser), in full realization of the situation’s implications. By contrast, denial mostly involves cognitive efforts that reject the reality of the situation (e.g., treating it as a joke, pretending that nothing is happening, relabeling the situation as benign or flattering). Of note, although avoidance and negotiation items clustered in this study, future research should determine whether this union would hold with the addition of negotiation items that more specifically assess overtly confrontational behaviors (such as demands that the harasser stop, or verbal threats to the harasser).

In terms of higher order structures underlying coping, one characteristic that emerged was the relative isolation of denial from other forms of coping. Denial strategies would fall into the “internally focused” harassment coping category proposed by Fitzgerald (1990), whereas avoidance, negotiation, social coping, and advocacy seeking would appear in her “externally focused” category. Thus, our results suggest that Fitzgerald’s (1990) theorized distinction between internal and external harassment coping is a higher order dichotomy that largely generalizes across contexts.

Of importance, we do not interpret these cross-cultural findings of a five-factor coping structure—or a higher order dichotomy—as evidence of cultural invariance in coping. Instead, these results highlight the utility of the Knapp and Fitzgerald frameworks as

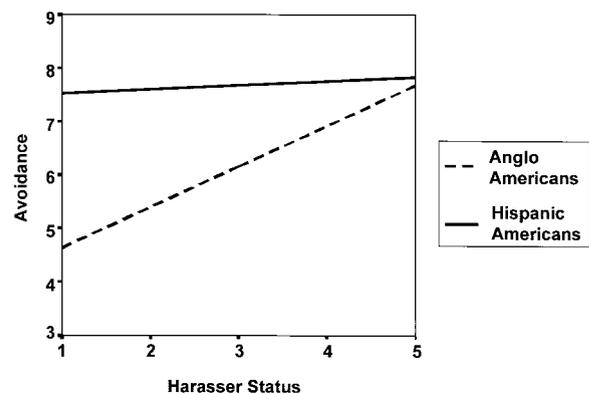


Figure 4. Interaction of culture with perpetrator status in predicting avoidance coping.

etic categorizations of coping. However, the prevalence of strategies within each category differs by culture, as discussed below. Further, each culture likely has emic or culturally unique coping strategies, a potentially fruitful topic for future research.

### *Coping Correlates*

Regression analyses yielded results that were both expected and surprising. Advocacy seeking was an uncommon response to sexual harassment in all cultural and occupational groups. In particular, few professional women had formally sought advocacy about sexual harassment—by reporting, complaining, or speaking with management. This appeared to be similarly true for the Anglo and Turkish samples, with only 17% and 12%, respectively, engaging in such coping behavior. These results tentatively suggest that professional women avoid reporting sexual harassment, regardless of culture. Advocacy seeking was also quite rare among working-class women, as Figure 3a illustrates. It appears that, regardless of context, sexually harassed women tend not to report their experiences to their organizations. Perhaps fear cuts across cultures and social classes in mitigating against advocacy seeking: fear of blame, fear of damage to personal, family, and professional reputations, and fear of job loss in the face of economic vulnerability.

We did find a cultural difference in advocacy seeking among working-class women, with Hispanic Americans reporting even less than their Anglo American counterparts. Possible explanations involve Hispanic “sexual silence” norms that discourage women from discussing sexual topics (B. V. Marin & Gomez, 1995), and more general Hispanic norms that discourage formal complaining (Ontiveros, 1993). Fear of deportation that is common among some immigrant Hispanic Americans may also deter them from “rocking the boat” or calling official attention to themselves (Ontiveros, 1993). An additional explanation relates to prescribed traditional gender roles (Baird, 1993; Burgos & Perez, 1986; Cindoğlu, 1997; Kayır, 1995; B. V. Marin & Gomez, 1995; Pavich, 1986), which tend to be endorsed to a greater extent among women of lower education levels. Specifically, Hispanic working-class women may consider gender harassment and unwanted sexual attention to be “typical” of men in their societies, and they may not consider reporting such normative behavior. Unfortunately, the present data do not allow us to determine empirically women’s reasons for avoiding intraorganizational relief mechanisms, so this remains an interesting avenue for future research.

To our surprise, Turkish women resorted to negotiation much more than their Anglo American counterparts. At first glance, this result appeared to contradict our hypothesis that Turkish and Hispanic women would avoid confrontation. However, on closer examination, we realized that the specific negotiation items that we used (e.g., “tried to let him know I didn’t like what he was doing”) could cover many actions, including the more subtle, indirect, and often nonverbal forms of communication that traditional women might prefer (e.g., moving away without comment when touched, failing to reciprocate or show interest, frowning). In fact, although modern women with experience at confrontation may read direct, confrontational behavior into these vague items, such behavior may be too foreign to traditional women’s experiences for them to interpret these items in the same way. Instead they are likely to understand the ambiguous behaviors as the more subtle, quiet manner of communicating displeasure that they find familiar.

In terms of other cultural differences in coping, Turks and Hispanics supported our predictions by avoiding harassers more than Anglos. Hispanics also engaged in more strategies of denial. Taken together, the results regarding avoidance, denial and confrontation/negotiation are quite consistent with literatures depicting collectivist cultures as aversive to conflict and confrontation, greatly preferring to maintain harmony in interpersonal relations (e.g., Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988).

Despite predictions, we did not find greater social coping among collectivist women. Again, a number of factors may account for this finding. Fear of blame may again play a role, reflecting a concern that friends and family would criticize or blame victims for the harassing situation. Traditional norms of “sexual silence” may also inhibit Turkish and Hispanic women’s discussions of sexual harassment. Further, recent Hispanic immigrants could lack adequate support networks (Rogler, Cortes, & Malgady, 1991), explaining why much of the Hispanic sample failed to avail themselves of this coping strategy more extensively. However, it appeared that Turkish women preferred to deal with the harasser more directly, rather than rely on social support. In sum, socially oriented methods of coping with sexual harassment are not at all straightforward; more research is needed to unravel their complexity.

It should be noted that the Turkish women were highly educated and of higher organizational status compared with the Hispanics. Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that there was no significant difference between Turkish and Anglo women in behaviors such as advocacy seeking, denial, or social coping. Thus, it appears that the proposed cultural differences may be less pronounced for highly educated women of higher organizational status, who, in all likelihood, endorse fewer traditional gender norms. These findings underscore the methodological need to consider issues of social class in cross-cultural research.

With respect to contextual factors beyond culture and class, sexual harassment coping tended not to vary with harasser status, save one finding that working-class women (regardless of culture) negotiated more with powerful harassers. Further, results did not support our hypothesis that culture would moderate relations between harasser status and coping. Thus, even hailing from high power-distance cultures that typically emphasize social power, Turkish and Hispanic American women did not differ from their Anglo American counterparts in responses to sexual harassment from organizationally powerful individuals.

The results also indicated that women tended to use more avoidance and negotiation as frequencies of sexual harassment increased; this was true across cultures and occupational classes. Professional women also tended to seek more social support when encountering more harassment. Thus, sexual harassment frequency appears to influence some, but not all, types of harassment coping strategies, regardless of culture and context. Of particular interest, the present results do not suggest a clear association between increased sexual harassment and more assertive coping behavior.

Finally, we emphasize that, because we conducted analyses separately for working-class and professional women, and controlled for demographic variation, there is less chance that coping differences simply reflect educational or class disparities between Anglo and Hispanic Americans, or between Anglos and Turks. Using financial dependence on the job as a covariate further controlled for differences in economic vulnerability. We also took

into account organizational climates toward sexual harassment, so that disparate organizational policies and procedures would not drive cultural differences. In sum, we built various methodological checks into this study, which should increase confidence in the validity of our findings.

### Limitations and Future Directions

As with any research, these results are not without their limitations. This study is one of the first of its kind; as such, results remain preliminary and, in places, exploratory. In terms of sampling, although we obtained sufficient numbers of working-class women, our professional samples were somewhat small—potentially explaining the restricted variance in advocacy seeking and the absence of significant interaction terms in regression analyses.

In addition, despite the face validity of the coping items that we administered, future research efforts should be geared towards the development of more comprehensive and culture-specific scales. In particular, most of our scales contained few items. Although the reliability of these scales proved adequate, further item generation is clearly warranted. Confirmatory factor analyses can then determine whether our five-factor structure continues to hold across disparate samples. Furthermore, because we did not directly measure cultural value dimensions, we could not disentangle the differing influences of various cultural factors that could possibly account for our results.

Finally, coping with sexual harassment is a dynamic process, representing a response to a dynamic situation that evolves over time. Because this article focuses solely on cross-sectional data, we were unable to capture temporal elements in the process. For example, perhaps traditional women tend not to blame themselves when harassment begins, but as the situation continues and escalates—and more friends and family criticize them for failing to stop it—they blame themselves more than Anglo women. Indeed, the intersection of culture, class, and time as it affects the sexual harassment coping process is an intriguing issue. For these various reasons, it is critical that future research confirm and expand the present findings.

### Conclusions

This study represents a pioneering look at sexual harassment coping across cultures—an ambitious endeavor involving four distinct samples of women. Despite the increasing diversification and globalization of today's workplace, and notwithstanding the toll that sexual harassment exacts on organizations worldwide, little previous research has examined issues at the intersection of culture and sexual harassment. Thus, this work lays a much-needed foundation on which future research can build, enhancing our understanding of how working women around the world cope with sexual harassment.

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