Tri Nation Academic Research Project:  
NAFTA Students’ Whistle-blowing Perceptions: A Case of Sexual Harassment

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ABSTRACT

Business students from the three NAFTA countries were shown a possible Sexual Harassment scenario from Arthur Andersen’s Business Ethics Program. They were asked to respond to a pre-questionnaire concerning the three characters’ behaviors and possible actions and a post-questionnaire after writing a report from the points of view of the three characters in the scenario. The students were asked to consider whether the characters should report the possible harasser to their supervisor, and thus engage in whistle-blowing behavior, as well as directly confront the harasser. Hypotheses are formulated for the three NAFTA countries based on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. There were significant differences, but in some cases not in the direction expected. Gender differences are also explored, but there were few significant differences.

Key Words: Cultural Dimensions; NAFTA; Sexual Harassment; Whistle Blowing

RESUMEN

Este proyecto de investigación académica tuvo como finalidad principal el poder llevar a cabo un trabajo de cooperación interinstitucional entre universidades de la región del TLC (México, EEUU y Canadá) mediante el cual se mostraron a estudiantes de las carreras de contaduría y negocios internacionales los posibles escenarios en donde pueda ocurrir el llamado “Acoso Sexual” en los centros de trabajo, mediante la utilización de representaciones en video y como parte del Programa de Etica Corporativa de la firma de auditores Arthur Andersen, pidiendo a los estudiantes escribir un reporte sobre el potencial o certeza de acoso sexual. Así mismo se les pidió responder a un cuestionario en los tres idiomas con referencia a los comportamientos y posibles acciones de los caracteres y aplicando posteriormente un post-cuestionario sobre los puntos de vista de los caracteres en el panorama. Se les pidió su opinión sobre si los caracteres deben divulgar (whistle-blowing perceptions) el acoso a su supervisor y de esta manera determinar si los estudiantes tienen el criterio de denuncia y enfrentamiento al acosador. Las hipótesis para esta investigación se formulan para los tres países de NAFTA basados en las dimensiones culturales de Hofstede. A pesar de la existencia de diferencias significativas, en algunos casos estas no fueron en la dirección esperada. Las diferencias de género también se analizaron, pero hubo pocas diferencias significativas.

Palabras claves: Dimensiones Culturales; TLC, Hostigamiento Sexual; Divulgar
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INTRODUCTION

Employees from different cultures may have different perceptions of what constitutes sexual harassment and differ in their perceptions of acceptable responses to the behavior, such as whistle-blowing. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was entered into force on January 1, 1994 by Canada, Mexico, and the United States to reduce barriers to trade. With increased cross-cultural business interaction, differences in perceptions of unacceptable business behaviors may arise. The perception of sexual harassment, as an unacceptable behavior, especially in the U.S., can become a costly problem. Businesses must train employees on what behaviors may be interpreted as sexual harassment, develop sexual harassment policies, and provide mechanisms for employees to report sexual harassment behaviors to upper level management.

This paper reports on business students’ responses to a possible Sexual Harassment scenario from Arthur Andersen’s Business Ethics Program and the actions that the characters in the vignette should take. Figure 1 has a short synopsis of the vignette entitled, “A Very Friendly Fellow,” which is part of AA’s Management series (1991). In fall 2006, 78 students from the Canada, Mexico, and the U.S. participated in the project as part of the NAFTA Challenges of Accounting and Business Systems Grant funded by the United States Department of Education Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (FIPSE), Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), and Mexico’s Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP). Students from the three NAFTA countries were shown the vignette and asked to respond to a pre-questionnaire concerning
Bill’s behavior (the possible harasser), and the actions that Shelly (the harassed employee) and Ginny (an observer) should take. The students discussed the situation and then responded to a post-questionnaire. They were asked to consider whether Shelley and/or Ginny should report Bill to their supervisor, and thus engage in whistle-blowing. It was expected, based on Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, that the identification of Bill’s behavior as sexual harassment and the recommendations concerning whistle-blowing would differ among the students from the three countries.

**Sexual Harassment**

There are laws against sexual harassment in Mexico, Canada, and the U.S., but the laws in the U.S. are more stringent and apply to a wider group of organizations. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) (2005b) enforces Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits sexual harassment, as a form of sexual discrimination. Title VII applies to private entities and federal, state, and local governments. The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2005a) reported that there were 13,786 cases of sexual harassment resolved in FY2004 with monetary benefits of $37.1 million, excluding benefits obtained from litigation. Knapp, Faley, Ekeberg, and Steven (1997, p. 687) reported that companies face additional costs besides litigation costs from sexual harassment behaviors, such as decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, increased turnover or requests for transfers, and counseling. Sexual harassment is a significant business risk in terms of financial costs and the loss of reputation. Businesses and government entities have established effective whistle-blowing programs to reduce the damage from unacceptable behaviors.
Avendano (2003) reported that there is no national law in Mexico that explicitly addresses harassment in private companies. The Federal Constitution does allow for three months salary if employees leave their jobs for wrongful treatment, such as harassment. The Federal Labor Code also allows the employer to dismiss harassers, but only if the harassers’ actions “disrupt discipline in the workplace.” The Federal Criminal Code Article 259 makes sexual harassment a crime, but it only applies to federal officers, and most victims fear losing their jobs if they report the harassment. Fifteen of the 31 Mexican states also have criminal legislation.

Mexican cultural customs make it difficult to define and report sexual harassment. Otis (1994) discussed “piropo,” (a tradition in Latin cultures), which involves the public appreciation of woman by men, such as wolf whistles on the streets. Piropo may not be considered sexual harassment. Hilbrert (1994) also explains that women in Mexico are afraid to speak up and report sexual harassment because it is hard to prove and it is typically a woman’s word against a man’s. Women also are motivated not to report because they do not want their families to know because their families may blame the woman for getting herself in the situation in the first place. Women are fearful and will not report harassment because others will know.

However, in the workplace, sexual harassment is taken seriously in Mexico as an objectionable business practice. Husted, Dozier, McHahon, and Kattan (1996, p. 397) studied the attitudes of Mexican, U.S., and Spanish MBAs concerning 49 questionable business practices. The Mexican and U.S. students had a similar ranking of sexual harassment as a questionable business practice, 5, and 4 respectively; the Spanish MBAs ranked it number 1. The Mexican MBAs in the study were from Monterrey, which
Husted, et al., (1996, p. 396) reported is not a typical city of Mexico. Monterrey has a highly educated workforce; it is more industrialized; businesses are predominately locally owned, and it is highly influenced by U.S. popular culture.


**Whistle-Blowing**

There is significant literature on whistle-blowing and its effectiveness both in terms of theoretical models and empirical research. Near and Miceli (1985, 4) define whistle-blowing as:

The disclosure by organization members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employees, to persons or organizations that may be able to effect action.

Near, Rehg, Van Scotter, and Miceli (2004, p. 221) discuss the fact that whistle-blowing includes internal channels, such as employees blowing the whistle to their supervisors, and external channels, such as external agencies. Lee, Heilmann, and Near (2004) provided a model of predictors and outcomes in the case of sexual harassment whistle-blowing. They (2004, 299) consider reporting by the harassed employee to his/her supervisor as an instance of whistle-blowing and not just informing.

Near, et.al., (2004, p. 230) reported that federal government employees who observe unethical behaviors were more likely to report mismanagement, sexual harassment, or unspecified legal violations in comparison to reports of stealing, waste,
safety problems, or discrimination. Terpstra and Baker (1992), in their examination of
133 federal court cases of sexual harassment found complainants were more likely to win
their cases: if the harassment was severe; they had witnesses and documents available;
they had reported the problem to management; and management did not take action.

There have been empirical cross-cultural studies concerning whistle-blowing
behavior. In his study of professional accountants, Patel (2003) found that the Australian
culture is more likely to utilize whistle-blowing as an effective internal control
mechanism in comparison to the Indian and Chinese-Malaysian cultures. In two studies
of whistle-blowing in a possible fraudulent financial accounting scenario, Brody, Coulter,
Lin (1999) found differences associated with Hofstede’s Individualism dimension
between U.S. and Taiwanese students, and Brody, Coulter, and Milhalek (1998) found
differences associated with Hofstede’s Individualism and Power Distance dimensions
between U.S. and Japanese accounting students. The Taiwanese and Japanese students
were less likely to whistle-blow to their superiors than the U.S. students. Cohen, Pant,
and Sharp (1995) found differences in ethical decisions, concerning public accounting
practices scenarios between Latin American and U.S. auditors, but there were no
significant differences regarding the Japanese auditors in the study.

Cultural Expectations

Hofstede (1980) conducted the seminal research on cultural differences in
workplace values of individuals from 40 countries. He (2006a, p. 1) distinguished four
primary dimensions to differentiate cultures: Masculinity, Power Distance, Uncertainty
Avoidance, and Individualism/Collectivism. Hofstede added a fifth dimension in later
research, Long-Term Orientation, but it is excluded from this discussion because there is
no score for Mexico. Table 1 presents Hofstede’s dimensions scores (2006b) for the three NAFTA countries (Canada, Mexico, and U.S). Hofstede’s definitions of the four dimensions (2006a), Hofstede’s (1984) discussion of norms and values associated with each dimension, and Hood and Logsdon’s (2002, pp. 884-886) extensive discussion of the four dimensions for the three NAFTA countries are used here as a basis for the development of hypotheses for the students’ responses to the current study’s questionnaires.

Insert Table 1 Here

Bill Harassing

Hofstede (2006a, p. 1) defines Masculinity as “…the degree the society reinforces or does not reinforce, the traditional masculine work role model of male achievement, control, and power.” Mexico is a highly masculine culture with an emphasis on traditional roles for women and belief in inequality of women. The U.S. also has a high masculinity score and is closer to Mexico than Canada. A highly masculine culture would hold that it is acceptable for men to behave assertively and be dominating (Hofstede, 1984, p. 205). In highly Masculine cultures, Bill might be perceived as just being a man, not a harasser, and doing what men do as part of their natural personality. Based on Hofstede’s classification the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Mexican and U.S. students who have higher Masculinity scores will be less likely than the Canadian students to believe Bill is harassing Shelly.

Shelly/Ginny Whistle-blowing and Confronting

Hofstede (2006a, p. 1) defines Power Distance as “… the degree of equality, or inequality, between people in the country's society.” Mexico has a significantly higher Power Distance score than U.S. and Canada; Mexicans accept a society that has an
unequal distribution of power. Hofstede (1984, p. 94) lists societal norms that relate to high Power Distance scores: Those in power are seen as having the right to special privileges; employees will not be comfortable disagreeing with their boss; and employees do not have solidarity and are hesitant to trust other employees. Americans and Canadians, with a lower Power Distance score, believe in equal rights, are more willing to express disagreement with superiors, and will work together to affect change. Shelly is working for Bill on a project, i.e., Bill holds a higher position. The Mexican students will be less likely to recommend Shelly and Ginny report Bill to their superiors or directly confront Bill because he is in a higher position.

Hofstede (2006a, p.1) defines Individualism/Collectivism as “…the degree the society reinforces individual or collective, achievement and interpersonal relationships.” Mexico, with its focus on the extended family group is classified as Collectivist with a significantly lower Individualism score than the U.S. or Canada. Hofstede (1984, p. 166) lists societal norms that relate to Collectivist: There is an emotional connection between the employee and the company (a sense of duty and loyalty); individual initiative is not the norm; and there is the expectation that the company will take care of employees. The Mexican students, as Collectivists, will be less likely to recommend Shelly or Ginny should report or confront Bill due to their sense of duty and loyalty to the company. The U.S. is individualistic with the highest score; Americans are more independent and do not expect the organization to take care of its employees. Canadians are less individualistic; there is a greater concern for community.

Hofstede (2006a, p.1) defines Uncertainty Avoidance as “…the level of tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity within the society; i.e. unstructured situations.”
Uncertainty Avoidance score is significantly higher in Mexico than the U.S. and Canada. Hofstede (1984, p.166) lists societal norms that relate to high Uncertainty Avoidance: Less tolerance for ambiguity, a need for formal rules and procedures, a low-level of risk taking, and a desire for harmony in an organization. The Mexican students would want harmony and be less likely to take risk; thus, they would not recommend whistle-blowing or confronting Bill.

Based on Hofstede’s country scores for Power Distance, Individualism, and Uncertainty Avoidance the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H2:** Mexican students with higher Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance scores and a lower Individualism score will be less likely than the U.S. and Canadian students to recommend that Shelly and/or Ginny should report Bill to her supervisor.

**H3:** Mexican students with higher Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance scores and a lower Individualism score will be less likely than the U.S. and Canadian students to recommend that Shelly and/or Ginny directly confront Bill.

**Ginny’s Observing**

Hofstede’s Mexican cultural dimension scores do not provide a clear indication on how the Mexican students would react to the suggestion that Ginny should observe Bill’s actions further. Based on the lower Individualism scores the Mexican students would be less likely to recommend that Ginny should observe Bill’s behavior further in order to help Shelly: Shelly should act on her own. However, with a significantly higher Uncertainty Avoidance score it is expected that the Mexican students would want more information before they would recommend that Ginny should act.

Based on Hofstede’s country scores for Uncertainty Avoidance the following hypothesis is proposed:
**H4:** Mexican students with higher Uncertainty Avoidance score will be more likely than the U.S. and Canadian students to recommend that Ginny should observe Bill’s future behavior.

**Methodology**

Students from four different universities participated in the project: 19 accounting students from an east coast university (US1), 24 Francophone accounting students from a bilingual Canadian university (CAN), 17 business students from a university in Monterrey, Mexico, and 18 accounting students from a mid-west university (US2). The results for the two U.S. universities were not combined since there may be significantly different responses due to geographic locations: US1 students were in a northeastern, commuter, urban setting, while US2 students were in a midwestern, residential, rural setting. Students were shown the vignette and asked to respond immediately to a pre-questionnaire concerning Bill’s behavior (the harasser), and the actions that Shelly (the harassed employee) and Ginny (an observer) should take. The students were then asked to discuss the situation via e-mail and write a final group report from the points of view of the three characters in the vignette. The students were also required to provide, as part of their final report, a copy of an organizations’ sexual harassment policy from the Internet. [See Roxas, Peek, and Peek (1998), and Peek, Roxas, and Peek (1995) for a more detailed description of the student project concept.] At the end of the project the students responded to a post-questionnaire. The students were asked to consider whether Shelley and/or Ginny should report Bill to their supervisor, and thus engage in whistle-blowing behavior.

The students’ responses to the questionnaire were based on a 7-point Likert scale with 7 strongly agree, 4 neutral, and 1 strongly disagree. The students were asked
whether Bill was harassing Shelly or just being friendly; whether Shelly should confront
Bill directly or report him to her supervisor; and whether Ginny (the observer) should
confront Bill, report him to management, just let Shelly handle the situation, or observe
Bill further.

RESULTS

Table 2 presents the overall mean responses for the 19 US1, 24 CAN, 17 MEX,
and 18 US2 students who completed the pre- and post-questionnaires. Students were in
agreement that Bill was harassing Shelly as indicated by the overall mean responses to
Question 1 (Pre 5.38 and Post 5.06). Consistent with their responses to Question 1, the
students did disagree that Bill was just being friendly to Shelly based on their mean
responses to Question 4 (Pre 3.25 and Post 3.53).

Insert Table 2 Here

One student’s written comments provided the point of view that the scenario
represents a clear case of sexual harassment:

Bill is sexually harassing Shelly. He is not just being friendly, and if he thinks he
is just being friendly, he should try reading Shelly’s body language. She does not
welcome the touching or him asking her out all the time. She cringes when he
touches her and avoids the subject of going out with him. She just wanted to get
away from him as soon as possible.

However, the mean response for Question 1 indicates that there were students who
disagreed that Bill’s behavior was sexual harassment as represented by another student’s
point of view, though the student did acknowledge that Shelly was uncomfortable:

I think Bill is being friendly towards Shelley. I do not think he is trying to put
moves on her by touching her constantly. I feel this is only Bill’s personality. Bill
seems to be extremely touchy, feely person and Shelly does not want anything to
do with him.
As indicated by their overall mean responses to Questions 2, students were in strong agreement (Pre 6.03 and Post 6.04) that Shelly should directly confront Bill concerning her perceptions of his behavior, but neutral in Question 3 about her immediately taking formal action and reporting Bill to her supervisor (Pre 4.13 and Post 4.08). The students’ written discussions and reports indicated that Shelly should first directly and emphatically confront Bill and tell him that his behavior was inappropriate before formally reporting him to her supervisor. Students believed that Shelly had a responsibility to more strongly confront Bill first before she engaged in whistle-blowing.

One student’s comments indicated the importance of the confrontation:

I didn’t feel that he was exactly harassing her simply because it appeared to be very much his personality and that she didn’t make it evident that she was uncomfortable. She was like a mouse about it and you can’t expect a man with that personality to pick up on subtle clues.

The overall mean responses to Questions 5 and 6 show that the students believed that Ginny should not take the initiative in formally reporting Bill (Pre 2.90 and Post 2.99) and neither should she directly confront Bill, though this option had a slightly better response (Pre 3.38 and Post 3.72). The students were neutral about whether Ginny should just let Shelly work out the situation on her own based on their mean responses to Question 7 (Pre 4.01 and Post 3.62). However, their responses to Question 8 indicated that they did agree that Ginny should observe Bill’s behavior further (Pre 5.46 and Post 5.37). One student’s written comments supported the position that Ginny should take a more direct approach and directly confront Bill:

Ginny should go talk to Bill first, and tell him that his advances are making Shelly uncomfortable. I know that Shelly told him that, but to him she might just be playing hard to get, but if he hears it from someone else then maybe he will get the point. If Ginny learns that the advances still haven’t stopped, she should take Shelly and go talk to their supervisor about the situation.
Another student’s comments indicated that Ginny should play a more indirect, supportive role:

Ginny should just help Shelly tell management, or at least tell Shelly that she might need to talk to management. Shelly tried to say something to Bill; he didn’t listen, so therefore she should go to management, shouldn’t she? Also if the company doesn’t have a harassment training center as mention in one of the reports [Internet sexual harassment policies], Shelly might need Ginny’s help in going to management.

In this situation the recommendation was that Ginny would act as a witness when Shelly reported Bill’s sexual harassment behavior, but it would be Shelly’s responsibility to tell management.

**Cultural Differences**

Table 2 presents mean responses of the students from the four universities and Table 3 presents the results for comparisons among the students from the three NAFTA countries involved in the project. Originally, it was hypothesized that students from the two U.S. universities would have different perceptions, but no significant differences were observed. A nonparametric Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test was used to test the previously stated hypotheses based on Hofstede’s cultural dimension scores to determine if there were significant differences between the students’ mean responses at the four different universities (P-value < 0.05). The hypotheses and significant results are presented in Table 3.

**Insert Table 3 Here**

**Bill Harassing**

There were significant differences among universities for Question 1 on the pre-questionnaire concerning whether Bill was harassing Shelly, but H1 is not fully supported.
The Canadian students had significant differences in their responses on the pre-questionnaire for Question 1 as compared to both groups of U.S. students, but in the opposite direction than hypothesized based on Hofstede’s Masculinity scores. The U.S. students agreed more that it was a case of sexual harassment even though the U.S. has a high Masculinity score, while the Canadians students were more neutral about whether Bill was harassing Shelly. There was not a significant difference between the Mexican and Canadian students’ mean responses as was predicted for H1 based on their countries’ different Masculinity scores.

**Shelly/Ginny Whistle-Blowing**

The students’ responses to Questions 3 and 5 concerning whether Shelly and/or Ginny, respectively, should report Bill’s behavior to a supervisor relates to H2. The Mexican students, with higher Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance scores and lower Individualism scores, were expected to be less likely than the U.S. and Canadian students to recommend whistle-blowing, but there were no significant differences among the students from the three countries. The mean responses in Table 2 indicate that for Questions 3 and 5 the students from all the NAFTA countries were neutral or disagreed slightly that Shelly should report Bill. The students disagreed even more strongly that Ginny should report Bill.

**Shelly/Ginny Confronting**

The students’ responses to Questions 2 and 6 concerning whether Shelly and/or Ginny, respectively, should directly confront Bill about his behavior relates to H3. On the post-questionnaire, H3 is supported, but it is in the opposite direction than was hypothesized. After the group discussions and written reports, the Mexican students were
more likely to recommend that Shelly should personally confront Bill in comparison to the Canadian and US2 students. There was also a significant difference between the US1 and the Canadian students on both the pre- and post questionnaires. The US1 students had a significantly stronger belief than the Canadian students that Shelly should directly confront Bill.

In terms of Ginny confronting Bill, as proposed in Question 6, the Mexican students more strongly disagreed that Ginny should confront Bill in comparison to the US2 students, which supports H3. Unexpectedly, there was a significant difference between the Canadian and the US2 students. The Canadian students more strongly disagreed that Ginny should confront Bill in comparison to the US2 students. The U.S. students were closer to neutral in response to Question 6.

**Ginny Observing**

Question 8, whether Ginny should observe Bill’s actions further, relates to H4, which is supported on the post-questionnaire. After the group discussions, the Mexican students more strongly agreed, compared to the Canadian and US2 students, that Ginny should observe Bill’s behavior further before she acts. The Canadian and US2 students were closer to neutral in their responses.

**Gender Differences**

It was hypothesized that there would be significant gender differences, but there were only significant differences based on gender for Questions 1 and 6. Table 4 presents the overall mean responses for the 38 female and 40 male students who completed the pre- and post-questionnaires. Both the female and male students were in agreement that Bill was harassing Shelly as indicated by the overall mean response to
Question 1. A nonparametric, Wilcoxon Rank Signed Test was used to determine if there were significant differences between the female and male students’ pre- and post-questionnaire mean responses (P-value < 0.05). Only the male students had significant differences their pre- and post-mean responses for Question 1. For Question 1 (P-Value = 0.0343), the males’ level of agreement moved closer to neutral on whether Bill was harassing Shelly after their group discussions (Pre 5.43 and Post 4.88).

Insert Table 4 Here

There were significant gender differences in the mean responses on both the pre- and post-questionnaire for Question 6 concerning whether Ginny should directly confront Bill, based on a nonparametric Wilcoxon Rank Sum Test (P-Value = 0.05). The overall mean responses to Question 6 in Table 4 indicate that the female students before the discussion disagreed more strongly that Ginny should directly confront Bill. There were no other instances of significant gender differences.

Discussion

The Mexican students and the U.S. students, with the highest Masculinity scores, believed Bill was harassing Shelly; the Masculinity hypothesis was not supported in the direction expected. The U.S. students with a higher masculinity score more strongly agreed than the Canadian students, with a low Masculinity score, that Bill was harassing Shelly. The U.S. students’ results indicating that Bill’s behavior was sexual harassment may be attributed to the stronger anti-sexual harassment laws in the United States and increased emphasis on ethical training. The students were well aware in their discussions that there are laws that govern such behavior as represented by one student’s comments:
“I do not believe that Shelly should take any formal/legal action against Bill.” The sexual harassment laws took greater precedent over Hofstede’s Masculinity dimensions.

Mexico has the highest Masculinity score, but the Mexican students agreed that Bill was harassing Shelly. The students involved in this project are from Monterrey, Mexico, and as Husted, et al., (1996, p. 397) reported, the Monterrey MBAs in their study ranked sexual harassment as a questionable business practice and Monterrey has a highly educated workforce. One of the Mexican instructors in the project also attributes the Mexican students’ perceptions of sexual harassment to the fact that women in their university are well represented in administrative positions, and as professionals they will not tolerate sexual harassment behaviors.

In their discussions in this current project, the Mexican students were aware there are cultural differences, but that Shelly’s perceptions of Bill’s behavior also have to be considered in determining whether this scenario is sexual harassment as evidenced by the following comment:

It is partially sexual harassment because even though he is invading her space… I don’t think he is aware of the situation. I have always been told that Canadian and Americans were more protective of our space… as for Latin America is a little more touchy.

The student’s comments indicated that Hofstede’s observations of cultural differences do exist, but as countries engage in cross-border trade and exchange of ideas occur business cultural norms will align. The following comments from a report submitted by a Mexican student and a Canadian student support the idea that there is a different standard of behavior in the workplace and these standards are converging across cultures:

Work is not really the time or place to ask someone to go out. This should be done on their own time on the telephone. …Once again, this probably isn’t
normal social behavior for the workplace. …Behavior at work and behavior away from work should not be the same in this situation.

The Mexican students were expected not to be in favor of Shelly and/or Ginny whistle-blowing, while the Canadian and U.S. students would. However, there were no significant differences in the students’ mean responses.

It was expected that Mexican students with higher Power Distance and lower Individualism scores would believe that Bill in his team leadership position should be allowed more leeway in his behavior; Mexican students would not want to disagree with their boss; and take the initiative to confront or report Bill. Kras (1988, p. 71) in her study of Mexican and U.S. managers discusses the Mexican cultural factor of emotional sensitivity: Mexican managers fear loss of face and will shun confrontation. However, the Mexican students more strongly agreed Shelly should personally confront Bill, which was not expected. As indicated by the students’ comments cited above, they believed that Bill did not realize that his behavior was offensive; by confronting Bill, Shelly may be helping the man to save face. Their agreement was significantly stronger after they had referenced sexual harassment policies as part of their assignment.

The Mexican students more strongly disagreed that Ginny should confront Bill in comparison to the U.S. students; though they were more aligned with the Canadian students. After the group discussions there were significant differences in the students’ mean responses.

Hofstede’s Uncertainty Avoidance norms indicated that Mexican students were more comfortable with following rules and procedures to avoid uncertainty. The sexual harassment policies the students provided in their final reports clearly listed talking to the harasser as a first step in taking action to resolve the issue. [See Government of
Nova Scotia Sexual Harassment Policy, 2005]. There are interdependencies among Hofstede’s dimensions and behavioral expectations based on business policies and procedures.

The Uncertainty Avoidance hypotheses were supported. The Mexican students did more strongly agree after the discussions that Ginny should observe Bill’s behavior further. The sexual harassment policies stressed the importance of having witnesses and documentation of the sexual harassment incidents. The Mexican students believed that Ginny has an important role to play in Shelly’s report of Bill’s sexual harassment behavior.

**Conclusion**

The results of the paper support the importance for corporations to develop sexual harassment policies and provide mechanisms for employees to report sexual harassment behaviors to upper level management. Students’ strategies for the characters in the ethics vignette were guided by the sexual harassment policies they found on the Internet, i.e., Shelly should talk to Bill before reporting him to her supervisor and Ginny should be asked to act as a witness. The students were also aware that sexual harassment charges might be costly to organizations not only in terms of litigation costs, but also in creating a hostile work environment that results in poor employee morale and higher employee turnover. A Mexican student and a Canadian student reported the following in their discussion of stakeholder analysis:

For us, Bill’s behaviour affects the organization because if stakeholders know that he is the kind of person that harasses, and the company lets this go on, people may not want to work here, people may not want to do business with this company. This may mean that people wouldn’t want to invest in a company like this also. People that work for the company may shy away from Bill because they don’t
agree with his behaviour. This would make an uncomfortable working environment, and therefore, would make a less efficient workplace.

The students were well aware of the effect sexual harassment charges can have on an organization both economically and in terms of its reputation.
A Very Friendly Fellow
Vignette Summary

Shelly and Bill work at a management services firm. Shelly works on projects for Bill. She is having a difficult time escaping his physical and social advances; Bill touches Shelly on the shoulder, hugs her, and is trying to get her to go dancing. Ginny, Shelly’s colleague observes Bill’s behavior but she just thinks Bill is being friendly. Bill invites Ginny and Shelly to a happy hour after work. After Bill leaves, Shelly confides in Ginny that she is uncomfortable with Bill’s physical contact and has told him to leave her alone. Shelly asks Ginny “What am I going to do?”
Table 1
Hofstede’s Dimensions Scores
NAFTA Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Canada</th>
<th>Mexico</th>
<th>United States</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individualism</td>
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<td>30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Sexual Harassment and Whistle-blowing Perceptions
Overall and NAFTA Country Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I believe that Bill is harassing Shelly.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1A</td>
<td>OVERALL</td>
<td>US1</td>
<td>CAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1B</td>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>4.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1B</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td>5.08</td>
<td>5.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 2 | I believe that Shelly should directly confront Bill concerning her perceptions of his behavior. |         |                |
| Q2A | OVERALL | US1 | CAN | MEX | US2 |
| Q2B | 6.03 | 6.45 | 6.00 | 5.59 | 6.06 |
| Q2B | 6.04 | 6.39 | 5.42 | 6.65 | 5.94 |

| 3 | I believe that Shelly should immediately take formal action and report Bill to her supervisor. |         |                |
| Q3A | OVERALL | US1 | CAN | MEX | US2 |
| Q3B | 4.13 | 4.66 | 4.16 | 3.47 | 4.17 |
| Q3B | 4.08 | 3.50 | 4.50 | 4.47 | 3.78 |

| 4 | I believe that Bill is just being friendly to Shelly. |         |                |
| Q4A | OVERALL | US1 | CAN | MEX | US2 |
| Q4B | 3.25 | 3.29 | 3.63 | 2.88 | 3.06 |
| Q4B | 3.53 | 3.61 | 3.71 | 3.24 | 3.50 |

| 5 | I believe that Ginny, the Observer should take the initiative in reporting Bill's behavior to a supervisor. |         |                |
| Q5A | OVERALL | US1 | CAN | MEX | US2 |
| Q5B | 2.90 | 3.24 | 2.75 | 2.35 | 3.28 |
| Q5B | 2.99 | 2.87 | 2.92 | 2.65 | 3.50 |

| 6 | I believe that Ginny, the Observer should directly confront Bill concerning Shelly's perceptions of his behavior. |         |                |
| Q6A | OVERALL | US1 | CAN | MEX | US2 |
| Q6B | 3.38 | 3.76 | 3.10 | 2.59 | 4.11 |
| Q6B | 3.72 | 3.66 | 3.38 | 4.06 | 3.94 |
7. I believe that Ginny, the Observer should do nothing and let Shelly work it out.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OVERALL</th>
<th>US1</th>
<th>CAN</th>
<th>MEX</th>
<th>US2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q7A</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7B</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. I believe that Ginny should observe Bill's actions further before she takes any action.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OVERALL</th>
<th>US1</th>
<th>CAN</th>
<th>MEX</th>
<th>US2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q8A</td>
<td>5.46</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>5.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8B</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>5.55</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>6.41</td>
<td>4.78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3
Cultural Differences Hypotheses and Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bill Harassing

H1: Mexican and U.S. students who have higher Masculinity scores will be less likely than the Canadian students to believe Bill is harassing Shelly.

1. I believe that Bill is harassing Shelly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1A</th>
<th>US2</th>
<th>CAN</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1A</td>
<td>5.83</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>0.0176*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shelly/Ginny Whistle-blowing

H2: Mexican students with higher Power Distance and Uncertainty Avoidance scores and a lower Individualism score will be less likely than the U.S. and Canadian students to recommend that Shelly and/or Ginny should report Bill to her supervisor.

3. I believe that Shelly should immediately take formal action and report Bill to her supervisor.¹

5. I believe that Ginny, the Observer should take the initiative in reporting Bill's behavior to a supervisor.¹

¹There were no significant differences among the students from the three NAFTA countries.
Shelly/Ginny Confronting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H3: Mexican students with higher Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance scores and a lower Individualism score will be less likely than the U.S. and Canadian students to recommend that that Shelly and/or Ginny directly confront Bill.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. I believe that Shelly should directly confront Bill concerning her perceptions of his behavior.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Q2A | 6.45 | 6.00 | 0.0483* |
| Q2B | 6.39 | 5.42 | 0.0117* |

| MEX | US2 | P-Value |
| Q2B | 6.65 | 5.94 | 0.0407* |
| MEX | CAN | P-Value |
| Q2B | 6.65 | 5.42 | 0.0019* |

| 6. I believe that Ginny, the Observer should directly confront Bill concerning Shelly's perceptions of his behavior. |

| Q6A | US2 | MEX | P-Value |
| 4.11 | 2.59 | 0.0090* |
| Q6A | US2 | CAN | P-Value |
| 4.11 | 3.10 | 0.0303* |

Ginny Observing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>H4: Mexican students with higher Uncertainty Avoidance score will be more likely than the U.S. and Canadian students to recommend that Ginny should observe Bill’s future behavior.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. I believe that Ginny should observe Bill's actions further before she takes any action.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Q8B | US2 | MEX | P-Value |
| 4.78 | 6.41 | 0.0011* |
| CAN | MEX | P-Value |
| Q8B | 4.92 | 6.41 | 0.0003* |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1A</th>
<th>Q1B</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.38</td>
<td>5.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.43</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>0.0343*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1. I believe that Bill is harassing Shelly.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q6A</th>
<th>Q6B</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.93</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were no other significant differences based on gender.
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