Sexual Harassment in the Context of Cultural Backgrounds
Sexual harassment and other forms of sexual and gender-based violence are ubiquitous. Participants of global health programs often experience and report such abuses while living and working in low-to-middle-income countries. Efforts should be made to provide guidance and support so that these individuals can effectively cope with these situations. However, the framework for understanding sexual harassment and abuse has fundamentally changed with the #MeToo movement. This widespread grassroots movement has shaken the historic tolerance of sexual harassment, and has led to both discourse and action of global impact. The global health community must now educate its members, from trainees to faculty and researchers, on how to advocate for one’s own rights and the rights of others in the face of sexual harassment and abuse in the era of the #MeToo movement.

Here is our attempt to discuss this critical and globally disturbing problem in the backdrop of diverse cultural and geographical contexts.

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There is no other way to discuss the topic of sexual harassment but to begin bluntly—sexual harassment happens almost everywhere and with great frequency. An online survey performed by Stop Street Harassment, a nonprofit based in the United States, reported in February 2018 that 81% of women and 43% of men had experienced some form of sexual harassment. Additionally, 66% of women reported that this harassment occurred in public spaces, while 38% reported it at the workplace.\(^1\) Based on WHO reports, 75% of the world’s 2.7 billion women aged 18 and older, have experienced sexual harassment.\(^2\)

Recently there have been increasing efforts to counter the culture of tolerance of sexual harassment, to dispel the shroud of silence that surrounds it, and to protect those who come forward to report perpetrators. UN Women reports that roughly 144 countries have passed laws on domestic violence while 154 countries have laws on sexual harassment (though these laws may not comply with international standards or be implemented). Last year, a new position was created at UN Women to focus specifically on addressing sexual harassment both within the United Nations and worldwide.\(^3\) This process was jump-started and accelerated by the Me Too movement, founded by activist Tarana Burke in 2006 in the United States, which she has stated “is part of a collective vision to see a world free of sexual violence... a movement about one in four girls and the one in six boys who are sexually abused every year, and who carry those wounds into adulthood.”\(^4\) The viral hashtag #MeToo transformed the movement into a sweeping
global phenomenon after the Harvey Weinstein sexual abuse allegations, providing the passion and infrastructure of a widespread grassroots movement with measurable impact as far as Sweden, Egypt and South Korea.6

#MeToo has also fueled other campaigns worldwide, including #NotYourHabibti (“Not your sweetheart”) in the Palestinian territories,7 #NiUnaMenos (“Not one [woman] less”) in Argentina7 and #MosqueMeToo, which focusing on sexual abuse that occurs during the pilgrimage to Mecca,8 among many others. Unfortunately, as far-reaching as the global conversation has become regarding sexual harassment and other more aggressive forms of gender-based inequity, not all of these movements have gained traction in many countries including throughout sub-Saharan Africa, China and Russia,9 and some have had the opposite effect. In Japan, women proclaiming #MeToo have been targeted and shamed, and so they created the variant #WeToo in an effort to display a united front. Yet even this Herculean effort can have limited impact in a country like Japan where sexual harassment is not a criminal offense,10 or in Russia where the terms “harassment” or “sexual harassment” do not even have a place in legislation.11

While the reasons for why the Me Too movement has spread like wildfire in some areas and fizzled out in others are myriad and complex, it is important to note that it did not arise spontaneously. Rather it arose through a culmination of well-defined and highly organized preludes advocating for and demanding equal rights for women—in the backdrop of a country that fought hard for civil rights in the 1950s and 1960s and for women’s rights in the 1960s through the 1980s. This is not to say that countries more impervious to the influence of the #MeToo movement have not attempted to redefine the societal measure of women or to address gender-based offenses. Indeed, even prior to #MeToo, other activist movements have taken on issues from sexual violence to bans on dress codes, across the continent of Africa and elsewhere.12 Yet despite these efforts, many women worldwide continue to fight for their rights, with many odds against them, with neither the resources nor the protections in place to address sexual harassment and other forms of violence against women.

Participants of global health programs, particularly women, often note an increase in unwanted attention, sexual politics and other more nefarious forms of harassment when living and working in the host country. One reason for this is relatively straightforward, and relates to being in a new environment. We cannot rely on the same defense mechanisms and other modifications to our daily behavior that we had implemented in our home countries to minimize our risk of confronting sexual harassment and other threatening behavior. Perhaps more importantly, when working in a foreign setting, we lack the deep understanding of the social and cultural intricacies defining behavior, mannerisms, and both non verbal and verbal communication. We also are unaware of the laws governing sexual equity and the avenues for recourse, both institutional or otherwise. Thus we may be burdened not only by the weight of sexual harassment that we experience on the streets or in our professional lives, but also by the inability to effectively address, or in some cases, even understand it.

In these situations, there is no resource more valuable than our trusted friends and colleagues in the host countries. They can serve as good listeners. They can provide essential context in more ambiguous scenarios, and suggest a method or approach to handling particularly difficult situations. They can help us navigate reporting mechanisms if such exist. They can offer empathy and recount their own experiences with sexual harassment or that of their family members or friends.

And this may prove to be our greatest challenge—not the harassment that we personally encounter, but bearing witness to forms of sexual harassment, both flagrant and subtle, by our friends, colleagues, even those unknown to us, in the host countries. Ultimately, as difficult as incidents of sexual harassment or aggression may be for us, we can rely on the support and resources of both our host and home institutions. We can return to our home countries where we can find some comfort in the turning of the tide on issues of gender equity, where the threat of sexual harassment as a public health issue has finally been given the attention it deserves.13 This is more than most can say in the countries we may be working.

As members of the global health community, it is our responsibility to stand by others confronting such harassment, and to push for intolerance of sexual and gender-based violence. We must not be satisfied until all communities of the world begin to engage in serious discussion on these issues, and all women can expect a safe living and working environment. But we must proceed with patience and a recognition of the deeply rooted cultural and institutional mechanisms within which gender inequality and misogyny have bred. This week alone, despite all of the progress made towards securing the safety and security of women, the United Nations was forced to compromise on its most recent resolution on the reproductive and health rights of survivors of sexual violence.14 We cannot remain ambivalent, nor can we let down our guard.
The issue of sexual harassment was, is, and will continue to be one of the world’s most confounding dilemmas. Logically, it seems like it should be a straightforward problem to solve if the right protocols and systems are put into place to punish those who violate others. In fact, this is quite often the way it is handled decade after decade around the world. However, history clearly shows that the complexity of preventing sexual harassment goes beyond programs, manuals, and training videos. Why? Because sexual harassment is inextricably linked to gender inequality, and gender is indissolubly bound to culture, and the logic of a culture is itself governed by that culture.

The #MeToo movement in the United States has given birth to a renewed worldwide mobilization against sexual harassment. #MeToo supports women’s voices and empowers them to speak up and share their stories of sexual harassment and assault. In so doing, #MeToo, as with many other notable movements in history, aims to change the culture of tolerance towards sexual misconduct and to authorize women to demand justice and lasting change.

As much as #MeToo is to be applauded and given wings to fly across the globe, it is an inherently Western movement that cannot be fully translated and realized in all cultures and contexts without adjustments. Here, we take the Zimbabwean context into consideration, particularly the question: Can a global health student from America exercise #MeToo if they experience sexual harassment or assault in Zimbabwe?

Despite the fact that Zimbabwean cultures are inherently patriarchal, great advances have been made in education of the girl child. This has resulted in women being able to work and get paid on par with their male counterparts. In medicine, it is commonplace, for example, for women to work not only as nurses and midwives, as has been traditionally...
acceptable for generations, but also as doctors, medical faculty members, and leaders in health policy. Such education of women is principally tied to the upsurge of women’s rights and the promotion of gender equality.

However, culturally, and in many cases religiously as well, the dynamics between Zimbabwean men and women still places men “above” women in all spheres of life. The male perspective demands and dominates, and this has been, and in most cases still is, accepted as the norm. Within such a male-controlled environment, it is therefore not surprising that it is men who tend to govern sexual interactions between the two genders. Often, within the Zimbabwean context, persistence and aggressiveness in a male suitor are applauded despite rejection from the female object of his affection. Especially if a woman is single and without children, a man has every “right” to pursue her. It is not uncommon for leering shouts of “kiss kiss sista,” or some other version of catcalling, to be heard in the streets directed towards a woman who is simply going about her day. Nor is it uncommon for verbal harassment to turn into physical advances and in tragic cases, sexual assault.

Though still shadowed by stigma and shame in some places, sexual abuse in the form of rape, is unacceptable in Zimbabwe, and many avenues exist to report and prosecute perpetrators if a woman is brave enough to speak out. However, when it comes to sexual harassment that is verbal or behavioral, the lines in Zimbabwe are dreadfully undefined. Women are expected to be silent and submissive recipients of unwanted advances as “it is in men’s nature to behave like that.” In many African societies including Zimbabwe, women rarely discuss their own sexuality among women, let alone in the public arena in relation to male sexuality. Fear of stigmatization is a very real concern that often leads to crippling passivity. Speaking out against sexual harassment and abuse often leads to being blamed yourself, being labeled a “loose woman,” being ostracized from your family and friends, losing your job, and worse. As such, “sexual harassment of female students by their lecturers has become a serious social problem in schools and institutions of higher education in Zimbabwe.”

According to a 2017 article by R. Matsikidze in the Zimbabwe Electronic Law Journal, “The University of Zimbabwe Code of Conduct defines sexual harassment as unwarranted conduct of a sexual nature that affects the dignity of men and women at work. It includes physical, verbal and non-verbal conduct that is sexually coloured, offensive, intrusive, degrading or intimidating. The definition is inadequate in that the content of the definition itself is insufficient and it does not include the mechanisms to detect and resolve the cases of sexual harassment, for example the boards of inquiry, counselling services, (or) post-harassment support centre(s).” Matsikidze goes on to note that “The University of Zimbabwe Students’ Charter comprehensively provides for the combat of sexual harassment but what is needed still is to transform those noble intentions into satisfactory regulations.”

In a study titled “Sexual Harassment Among Female Students at a Zimbabwean Institution of Higher Learning,” Dhlomo et. al found that 31% of the students acknowledged having been sexually harassed. About 69% of the students appeared not to recognize sexually harassment that may have occurred to them. Only a minority of the students (7%) reported the harassment.” How then is a female student visiting Zimbabwe from America who embraces and supports #MeToo supposed to step up and speak out against sexual harassment within this context? Should she follow the pervasive attitude of timidity and tolerance when harassed by an unrelenting suitor while in Zimbabwe? What is considered an overreaction in Zimbabwean culture? Should her comfort with the opposite sex take a back seat because she is in a different part of the world? Will speaking out make a difference?

The unequivocal answer is “Yes! Speaking out will make a difference.” How should this be done?

● Seek advice from strong female Zimbabwean medical personnel who have undoubtedly had to deal with sexual harassment in one form or another. Ask them about the informal and formal ways to deal with sexual harassment in Zimbabwe.

● Though the system may be flawed, make an official complaint!

● After you make a report, do not expect the same reaction/process to occur as in the United States. It is a work in progress that continues to evolve with each official complaint that is registered.

● Do not isolate yourself. In sharing your experience with your Zimbabwean counterparts, you will likely find that you have a lot in common, despite your differences in culture. Such bidirectional exchanges are the key to empowering each other to make a stand against injustice to women in whatever culture it occurs.
A balanced approach is key. Despite your justified anger and hurt, do not throw out the proverbial baby with the bath water. Try not to dismiss an entire culture because of one particular issue. There are countless lovely and noteworthy aspects of Zimbabwean culture, gender relations, and family dynamics, that the world could learn a lot from. #MeToo must be contextualized so as not to dismiss or obliterate these aspects of Zimbabwean culture through unchecked westernization. The goal should be to inform Zimbabwean culture to be a better version of itself, not to make it more American.

The temper of the times is changing in Zimbabwe, be it much slower than the United States. Global Health participants from America may not immediately see this in comparison to the pace of the culture they are used to, but women in Africa are rising up as well. Female revulsion to sexual harassment transcends culture, be it silent, quiet, or loud. Only together, can we find solutions that uplift the beauty, dignity, and pride of the female gender, in all its multifaceted cultural manifestations around the globe.

“What women are saying worldwide is: you don’t listen to us, you don’t believe us, your reporting systems don’t work for us, investigations are not independent, and it takes too long to get an outcome. We certainly have to improve, but these issues are ultimately procedural expressions of a culture that devalues women. I don’t think that we will see lasting change unless we change the cultural expressions of tolerance to male sexual entitlement over women’s bodies.” ~ Purna Sen (UN Women’s Director of Policy Division)
While sexual harassment is described as the bullying or coercion of a sexual nature and the unwelcome or inappropriate promise of rewards in exchange for sexual favors, the coining of this concept is relatively new to many in Uganda. Sexual harassment includes a range of actions from mild transgressions such as looks, touches, to sexual abuse or assault.

Harassment can occur in many different social settings such as on the street, and the harassers or victims may be of either gender. On the streets of Uganda, sexual harassment largely encompasses transgressions of a milder form as opposed to sexual abuse. Oftentimes, it is expected that women, especially young and attractive ones, walking down the streets of Kampala, will hold the attention of men. This is a common scenario for young and working women, such as bank employees. However, this is rarely seen as sexual harassment. Even if it were to be seen as harassment, it would be difficult to prove to the public and in the court of law. There are some women who may appreciate this attention, as it may boost their self-confidence and reassert the belief that they are attractive women. Other women may find this attention intrusive and even offensive.

There are also instances where women are touched while walking on the streets of Kampala, especially the taxi touts and conductors who compete for clients at slow hours of the day. In these situations, these men may believe that by touching a woman, they can convince her to get into the standby taxi as a passenger. This is not necessarily seen as sexual harassment though this is unwanted physical contact. However, on crowded streets, women will get unwanted touches without any other intention.
In most cultures in Uganda, sexual harassment is a term rarely used because there is a thin line between sexual harassment and dating or showing interest in someone. Also, in most of our cultures, sexual advances are rarely on public display and would be seen as completely improper. Therefore these instances are rarely confronted on the street. In addition, sexual harassment is a humiliating situation that is commonly ignored except in cases where the victim has the courage and means to report the incident as sexual assault. In fact, what one might view as bullying or hounding, another might view as persistence, which may be an acceptable trait in a serious partner. After all, the general understanding is that men know their role to include making advances on women, while women also expect advances from men. It is important to note that the harassers are mostly men and rarely women because of the cultural background of Uganda.

All in all, sexual harassment is a complicated issue. Its definition may vary from setting to setting and from person to person. If sexual harassment is to be defined as above, “bullying or coercion of a sexual nature and the unwelcome or inappropriate promise of rewards in exchange for sexual favors,” few instances of sexual harassment exist on the streets of Uganda. However, when such incidents exist, they are commonly ignored and rarely reported for fear of humiliation or retribution due to the fact that it is difficult to prove and this is a predominantly male-centered society.

The following list describes specific actions one can undertake to avoid or counter sexual harassment while in Uganda:

• Wear modest clothing and avoid provocative dress (e.g. leggings, miniskirts, short shorts, etc) while walking on the streets.

• Learn to say a firm and unfriendly “No” to the harasser.

• Avoid over socialization with strangers. They may consider this attention as interest.

• Be prudent with whom one shares personal contact information. When in doubt, choose not to share this information.

• Have a buddy who is familiar with the local customs as a resource and guide when confronting more difficult issues.
While sexual harassment in Russia definitely has been present for centuries, the term itself is still not widely known in this country. Given the unique characteristics of work-related harassment and street harassment, it is worth discussing them separately. Although both women and men can be subjects of sexual harassment, harassment of males is practically nonexistent in Russia.

Work or school-related harassment is a large and daunting subject to discuss. There are currently no strict or precise regulations in place to define appropriate behavior between employees/students and their superiors. Traditionally Russia was and mostly still is a patriarchal society. It is more common for men to hold most of the key positions across different sectors, from finance to education to health care industries, while women’s roles are largely that of assistant to men, even at relatively high positions in the social ladder.

Unfortunately some men in Russia also lack a sense of courtesy towards their female colleagues or students. These factors combine to form an environment in which sexual harassment can occur. It is important to point out that in the majority of known instances, work and school-related harassment is verbal. While other forms of harassment certainly occur, it is difficult to speculate on their exact nature or frequency. Thus, various inappropriate comments directed at females are seen frequently in Russia, though more aggressive forms of harassment are relatively uncommon. Many women will perceive such behavior as incredibly offensive and bothersome.

One group of researchers investigated the prevalence of sexual harassment in the workplace. In one small-scale survey, they found that nearly 30% of working women experience sexual harassment at their workplace, 1 although this is likely an underestimate due to underreporting. While sexual harassment does run rampant in the workplace, it appears that the ice is slowly starting to break. Recently there
has been a number of high-profile scandals in Russia involving politicians and media moguls accused of various forms of sexual harassment. Though rarely penalized, such cases negatively impact the perpetrator’s careers and personal lives, and force a more open national discussion on the issue.

Street harassment in Russia seems to be less of an issue for multiple reasons. First, Russians, like many northern cultures, share certain characteristics of “colder”-appearing people. For instance, it is quite unusual for men to shout out remarks or approach women on the streets. However, this is not to say that frankly revealing clothes or specific social contexts such as bars or nightclubs would not potentially provoke harassment. Secondly, the situation is more favorable towards tourists, particularly due to the significant language and culture barrier that maintain distance. Furthermore, a specialized police division called “Tourist Police” was recently established specifically geared towards ensuring safety of local and international tourists.

Overall, sexual harassment is an important issue in modern Russian society with rapidly growing public awareness of its existence. However, much work remains to be done to change the existing culture particularly in work and school settings.
I’ve been asked to talk about sexual harassment in social context. I’d like to talk briefly what sexual harassment is, what the landscape of sexual awareness looks like, domestically and globally. I will share with you some insight from our global health partners about sexual harassment in cultural context.

Sexual harassment is a form of gender-based violence that serves to maintain structural gender-based inequalities. It is incredibly frequent worldwide. It happens everywhere. It happens at home, at work, in universities, educational settings, churches, really anywhere. The statistics vary widely, but some reputable sources report that if you survey all women across the world over the age 18, probably greater than 75% of them have experienced some form of sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is becoming more visible worldwide. In the U.S. and in the western world, we’ve become very familiar with the #MeToo movement that began with a fury in 2017, raising awareness about all forms of gender-based violence including sexual harassment. There’s less visibility amongst other countries but that does not equate to less awareness. We in the global north have the opportunity and the luxury to occupy the time and space of large media outlets; as such, we have the global stage. But we don’t have a monopoly on awareness.

Though statistics about the problem of sexual harassment are really staggering, it is encouraging to identify that progress is being made for gender equity worldwide. I’m going to provide you just four brief examples of the progress we are making. Social medial movements have been around long before #MeToo. Globally, some of my favorites that I’ve read about include #mydressmychoice out of Uganda and Kenya in 2014. It was a response to dress code expectations that women should not wear revealing clothing, in essence blaming gender-based violence on the woman who chooses to dress in a certain way, rather than the perpetrator. The campaign #BeingfemaleinNigeria in 2015 really raised awareness, just like the #MeToo movement.
but from the Nigerian landscape, about experiences of gender-based violence in Nigeria. In 2016 a Pakistani law student Khadija Siddiqui was stabbed 22 times by her classmate who had expressed an interest in her, after she expressed not sharing that interest. She took him to court and she lost her case, as he was well connected in the country. After her supporters created a social media campaign generating 2,000,000 supportive comments, she appealed the case and she won. In Japan in 2018, significant amount of progress was made after an online petition prompted government hearings about sexual harassment. This is in a country that has no laws about sexual harassment. Those hearings resulted in a promise of legislation. And finally in 2018, the Nobel peace prize was awarded to Dennis Mukwege, a gynecologist practicing in the Congo and an activist Nadia Murad, for their work publicizing and working against gender-based violence, especially rape as a form of warfare.

So now, I’d like to shift a little bit and share with you some insights from our global partners. What I’m sharing with you is based entirely on pieces written by doctors with whom we collaborate in our host countries. A colleague from Russia shared with us that Russia is historically a patriarchal society. In Russia, men hold most positions in education, healthcare, industry, etc. Sexual harassment is very commonplace in the workplace and educational settings. Fortunately, street harassment is less common. Awareness has been building in Russia. There have been high profile scandals involving politicians and media moguls, and while the scandals didn’t result in any trials or convictions for the most part, they did have an impact personally and professionally on the accused. Our colleague shared with us that sexual harassment and more injurious forms of sexual violence are common in nightclub settings or against women who choose to wear revealing clothing. So more progress is clearly needed. Also, there is a tourist police in Russia, so people who are obviously visiting from another country in a public setting in Russia are awarded an extra level of protection against street harassment.

In Uganda, our colleague shared that there is an expectation that young attractive women will attract the attention of men and that this often is not seen as a form sexual harassment. She shares that some women may appreciate the attention and some women may find it offensive, and that persistence may be identified as a positive quality in a male partner. On crowded streets, women will often receive unwanted touch, though frank sexual advances are rare. Our colleague provided practice for our participants. She advised that participants chose modest clothing, limit their socialization with strangers and have a local buddy—this is a theme that will come up frequently.

Finally, our colleague from Zimbabwe shared with us that Zimbabwe is also a patriarchal society that traditionally places men above women in all spheres of life, public, private, educational, etc. However, significant progress is being made. Girls are being educated more frequently, and there is a greater number of female doctors and public leaders. At the same time there are gender expectations, so men are seen as having a right to pursue available women—these are women who are unmarried and don’t have children. Men can be applauded for their qualities of persistence and aggression in their pursuit. Women when they are pursued in this fashion are expected to remain silent and submissive or they face social isolation and backlash, even amongst their own family and friends. A poll of a large university in Zimbabwe demonstrated that 31% of students reported sexual harassment. Our colleague from Zimbabwe recommended that participants, if faced with sexual harassment, should seek advice from a strong female in medicine and choose not to isolate themselves, that they report through whatever mechanisms are available their sexual harassment experience, but they don’t expect that the process will be like in their home country after they report, and that though they are hurt by this act of sexual violence, they try to keep an open eye to the beautiful aspects of Zimbabwean culture and not judge the entire culture through the lens of the violence they experienced.
So, how do we respond to sexual harassment in cultural context? Well, I think sexual harassment is something that unites us more than it divides us, unfortunately. The experiences are different depending on locality and culture, and we need to remember that our global health participants often experience sexual harassment more intensely or more often than they do in their home country while they are traveling in their global health experience. This can be because the usual way they operate doesn’t work for them anymore. Their usual defense mechanisms and behavior modifications that don’t keep them safe, or they don’t perceive themselves to be safe. Also, they lack understanding of the cultural contexts that govern behavior and communication, and they don’t know what to do when they are sexually harassed, what are the reporting mechanisms, and what protections are available to them. A common thread from the writings of all of our international colleagues on this topic was the idea that, when we are participating in the global health program, our greatest advocates and resources are our host colleagues and our friends. These colleagues can provide support and empathy and if we were faced with a situation of sexual harassment and often can recount their own experiences with similar situations. They can provide cultural context, improve our understanding of what’s happened and they can help suggest management strategies. Finally, they can navigate the reporting mechanisms with us so we know how to respond. I wanted to share with you this quote from Purna Sen. She is the UN Women’s Global Director of Policy Division. She said “I don’t think we will see lasting change unless we change cultural expression of tolerance to males sexual entitlement over women’s bodies”.

Finally, I’ll leave you with our marching orders, from Katrin Sadigh’s beautiful piece on this topic: “As members of the global health community, it is our responsibility to stand by those who are confronting harassment and to push for intolerance of gender-based violence. But, we must proceed with patience. We should seek change along with understanding of deeply rooted cultural and institutional mechanisms responsible for maintaining gender inequality”. Many many thanks to our contributing colleagues: Anna Ziganshin, Jamidah Nakato, Tenda Machingaidze, Katrin Sadigh, Mary Shah, to Majid Sadigh for his vision and guidance, and to Dylan Ochoa for support in this presentation.
As Dr. Katrin Sadigh, Dr. Tendai Machingaidze, Dr. Jamidah Nakato, Dr. Anna Petrovna Ziganshin, and Dr. Robyn Scatena have all acknowledged, people everywhere face gender-based violence. Tactics that are context-specific have been mentioned for those who are travelling from the United States to other sites have been discussed. Working in global health, one is trained to respect and work within local norms and customs, and disrupting the norms can heighten the exposure to risk—especially for women. We are also trained to be aware of our own cultural perspective, for our experiences color how we interact and view other cultures and social exchanges. However, it can be challenging for a woman in the field to decide what is “normal” (and therefore disregarded) and what should be reported.

For scholars and researchers arriving in the United States, it would be understandable to be confused and make false assumptions. Contrary to the steady stream of media flowing from the United States, there is no one monolithic culture of the United States. The fragmentation of views in the United States on social media makes this abundantly clear. The #MeToo movement that has resonated so strongly in recent years is that gender-based violence is part of everyday reality for every part of America.1

When arriving in the United States, they also carry their unique cultural perspective and life experience. It is essential that they are also aware of the lens through which they view this experience. A recent study on masculinity in Vietnam came to the conclusion that there is variation in attitudes, based on education, globalization and
In Uganda, three in five women have experienced some form of sexual harassment by their employer. In some places, like Thailand, no survey has been finished and published on gender-based violence. China recently codified its legal code to include prosecution for sexual harassment, so inconsistent enforcement. There have also been studies that show international students in North America face higher risk of sexual violence on campus and less likely to seek help if assaulted. This demonstrates some of the challenges facing the exchange within Global Health. Calls have been made for an inclusive movement where people can speak for themselves and action taken to prevent, recognize, and respond to gender-based violence.

In the Nuvance Health / University of Vermont Larner School of Medicine Global Health Program, a scientific and humane approach to cultural exchange is core to its values. It is essential to recognize the tension between relativism and universality, east versus west, north versus south, male versus female, binary versus non-binary. With an ethical approach to creating a framework where all participants are safe to work in global health and mechanisms in place to respond to gender-based violence, international participants—no matter from where they arrive—will know that this program is not only thoughtful, but active in addressing gender-based violence in all forms. As with American scholars travelling to sites of our international partners, scholars travelling to the United States will have support of mentors as well as educational workshops on sexual harassment. They also have full access to the members of the Global Health Program, including the librarian, who can find resources for their education and research.
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"Kiss Kiss Sista": #MeToo in a Zimbabwean Context by Tendai Machingaidze, MD


Sexual Harassment in Russia by Anna Petrovna Ziganshin, MD


