Sexual harassment (SH) constitutes unethical conduct on the basis of sex that presents negative consequences for the victims. Legally, in the United States, sexual harassment has two dimensions differentiated by their severity: hostile work environment and quid pro quo (O'Leary-Kelly, Bowes-Sperry, Bates, and Lean 2009). Hostile work environment is the less severe harassment type (Benavides-Espinoza, 2009). Victims of this form of SH faces verbal or nonverbal behaviors based on sex or gender (Fitzgerald, Magley, Drasgow, & Waldo, 1999). In the more pervasive type of SH, quid pro quo, the victims face more severe behaviors ranging from unwelcome date requests to sexual imposition (Fitzgerald, Magley, Drasgow, & Waldo, 1999). Among SH’s documented effects at work are: decreased satisfaction and commitment, and greater work withdrawal. In addition to these workplace effects, victims’ suffering transfers to aspects of their lives affecting their well-being and overall health (Chan, Lam, Chow, & Cheung, 2008; Wilness, Steel, & Lee, 2007).

Sexual harassment is a persistent problem across cultures and settings. Statistics suggest that over 40% of women in the workforce have been sexually harassed in both the United States and some South American countries (Peirce, Rosen, & Hiller, 1997, www.dt.gob.d). In Canada, this rate is as high as 56% (Crocker & Kalemba, 1999). In the sports domain, as with any setting that perpetuates masculine hegemony (Knoppers, 1999; Fink 2008), women are more likely to be targets of SH (Stockdale, 1993; Wilness et al., 2007). According to a recent study, 71% of runners in Mexico have experienced or witnessed SH (www.mujerydeporte.org). In the United States, over 50% of print sport media professionals have also been victimized (Pedersen, Lim, Osborne, & Whisenant, 2009).

The job-related consequences of SH have been well documented (see Chan et al., 2008; Wilness et al., 2007). For example, job satisfaction, or the fulfillment one gets from performing a job, decreases in organizations where this conduct is prevalent (Wilness et al., 2007). Furthermore, work withdrawal is greater as a consequence of SH. These effects influence men and women differently (Benavides-Espinoza & Cunningham, 2009). In some cases, such effects are greater for men (Street, Gradue, Stafford, & Kelly, 2007), while in others they are greater for women (Barling, Dekker, Loughlin, Kelloway, Fullager, & Johnson, 1996). It has been suggested that a difference in the behaviors interpreted as harassment by women and men may account for these differences (Kenig & Ryan, 1986; McCabe & Hardman, 2005). Thus, we propose to examine the perceptions of what constitutes sexually harassing behaviors among women and men from a qualitative approach.

Furthermore, sexual harassment research has predominantly examined women in the United States. Literature indicates men get sexually harassed (Kronfeld, Golding, & Berman, 2009); however, their experiences differ from those of women (Berdahal, Magley, & Waldo, 2006). Research suggesting gender differences in the perceptions of sexual harassment also indicates this disparity may vary in different countries (McCabe & Hardman, 2005). The context where SH takes place influences its perceptions, and consequently subsequent outcomes. In patriarchic contexts, attitudes toward women are more traditional (see Harris, Firestone, & Vega, 2005). Accordingly, ideas about the roles women should fulfill and their power as it relates to men may vary based on the national context. As sexual harassment is a function of power and dominance (Berdahal, Magley, & Waldo, 2006), we believe the examination of SH perceptions in countries like Mexico is warranted. Thus, with this study we seek a definition for SH in the Mexican context. This rationale led to the following research question: Do Mexican women and men define sexual harassment differently?

To examine the research question, a group of working sport management students from a large public university in Northeast Mexico will be interviewed. The participants will answer a short questionnaire specifying their demographics. After completion of the background questionnaire, the participants will answer questions regarding their job experiences, work relationships, sexual harassment, and bystander exposure to this unethical behavior. The interviews will be conducted by the first author, recorded, transcribed verbatim, submitted to member check, and then translated to English.
This work is in the data collection stage. We expect that upon its completion, this research will offer insight into what is considered SH in Mexico by women and men. Furthermore, it will provide a starting point to the analysis of its incidence, reactions to it, and bystander exposure. This will be of great benefit for the sport management sexual harassment literature, and the sexual harassment literature in general, as it is a topic whose boundaries need to be expanded. Other implications and further research directions will also be discussed.