

OSA and SPIE

Professional Conduct

Research

ASSESSING AND ADDRESSING THE LEVEL OF HARASSMENT
AT SCIENTIFIC MEETINGS



HARASSMENT

consists of unwanted, unwelcomed, and uninvited behavior that demeans, threatens, or offends another.

To report harassment you have witnessed or experienced at an event or meeting:

SPIE.

Contact any SPIE staff member
(if onsite at an event or meeting)

SPIE Reporting Hotline:
1-888-818-6898 or
spie.ethicspoint.com

More information:
spie.org/conduct

OSA

Contact any OSA staff member
(if onsite at an event or meeting)

Online portal:
osa.org/IncidentReport or
email: CodeOfConduct@OSA.org

More information:
osa.org/codeofconduct

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“Modern scientific research increasingly depends on diverse collaboration for success. This interdisciplinary, global exchange of knowledge must be broadly inclusive, seeking contributions from all sources, based solely on excellence. The Optical Society is, by its nature, diverse. We are committed to it also being inclusive, and we strive to provide an atmosphere in which all people feel valued and respected and have access to the same opportunities. We are a professional community in service to the greater human community.”

From The Optical Society Core Values Statement on Inclusivity

“Technology flourishes from the exchange of diverse ideas, and SPIE strives to provide open and inclusive forums that maximize the potential for innovation and collaboration. We will seek to improve the quality of technical discourse through diversity of participants—diversity in gender, geography, race, heritage, experience, age, sector, and other characteristics.”

From the SPIE Strategic Plan 2018

1. Introduction

Meetings, programs, and events are core activities of both OSA and SPIE. Advancement of scientific and technical knowledge in the field requires opportunities for the sharing of information, from experimental findings to practical applications. Advancement of individuals in their careers requires opportunities to present their research, establish connections with others in the field, receive recognition and awards, and contribute to the work of OSA and SPIE as volunteers or leaders.

The experiences of participants at OSA and SPIE events generally serve two goals: advancing the field, and advancing individuals in their careers. However, negative experiences can become obstacles, and even barriers, to those goals. Rather than spurring advancement, these experiences discourage and hold individuals back from full participation in events, and consequently reduce their ability to contribute to the field.

Harassment, bullying, and retaliation create divisive and exclusionary environments. The science and engineering ecosystem thrives on a diversity of ideas, perspectives, and talents, so therefore must be free of these types of behaviors. Providing a professional and safe conference environment, as well as raising awareness of harassing behaviors, are priorities for OSA and SPIE. Both organizations are determined to eliminate harassment in any form at their respective events.

OSA and SPIE have worked to address this problem through the adoption of an anti-harassment policy and a code of conduct for their events and by establishing procedures for implementing and enforcing this policy. Each organization also has programs, events, and activities designed to recognize, celebrate, and support the diversity that helps to make our interdisciplinary, global community thrive.

To better understand the experiences of each organization's attendees, OSA and SPIE jointly distributed a professional conduct survey to their combined global membership in December 2018. The survey results are intended to provide statistical data to help us understand the scale of any issues at our events and to look for critical areas of focus for improvement.

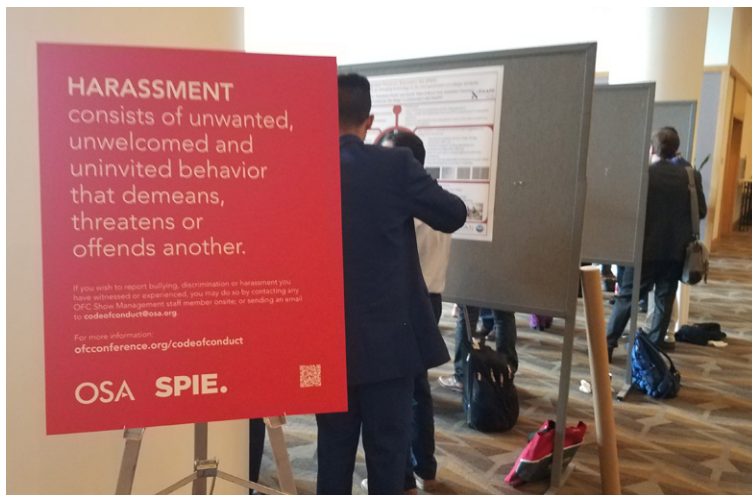
The good news is that the majority of attendees at OSA and SPIE meetings have not experienced or witnessed harassment at our events. However, the survey illustrated that problems do exist and highlighted the need for both organizations to continue their efforts to provide safe and diverse meeting experiences that focus on advancing the science and application of light.

This report provides an overview of the survey results, along with recommendations for future action.

Both societies are committed to making long term, systemic change and plan to continue working together to that end. In that regard, we will be looking at repeating a survey on this issue in future years.

2. Goals of the Professional Conduct Survey (PCS)

1. To determine if members have experienced or observed harassment or bullying at OSA and/or SPIE conferences.
2. To assess the frequency and seriousness of these experiences.
3. To provide data from the optics and photonics community for comparison with results from similar surveys in other STEM fields.
4. To provide statistically relevant data to guide OSA and SPIE on needed policies, procedures, and programs to stop and prevent harassment and bullying at events.



SPIE and OSA are committed to seeing that:

1. All reports of harassment will be investigated
2. Confidentiality of reporters and victims of harassment will be upheld to the extent possible
3. Actions against harassers will be transparent and meaningful

3. Survey Results

Targets of Harassment and Bullying at OSA and SPIE Events

The survey link was sent to the combined global membership of the OSA and SPIE, of whom 2,228 completed the survey. Of those who completed the survey, 74% were men and 23% were women. Following are key results of the survey and an appendix that includes additional detailed descriptions of incidents both experienced and witnessed, as well as thoughts and suggestions on ways to address these issues that were provided by survey respondents.

Harassment was reported by fewer than 10% of respondents.

The survey asked whether respondents had ever been bullied, harassed, or made to feel uncomfortable at an OSA or SPIE event. (Note: For the sake of brevity, in the remainder of this report, harassment will be used to indicate the experience of being bullied, harassed, or made to feel uncomfortable at a meeting.)

The majority of the survey respondents indicated they have not experienced (91%) or witnessed (93%) harassment at an OSA or SPIE event.

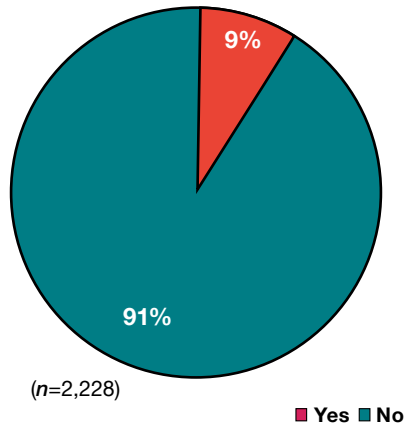
Women are more likely to experience harassment than men even when the harassment is not sexual or gender based.

Women are more likely to be the targets of harassment. Of those who experienced harassment, 63% were women.

“Harassment didn’t seem prevalent but almost every female grad student that I know has a story from an OSA or SPIE event. Sometimes the response they got after telling someone (their advisor or a professor) is that this happens at meetings and they need to be careful (basically boys will be boys). When reported to OSA or SPIE or their university, it was taken seriously (although asking a student what they want the outcome to be instead of having a policy is probably not the best).”

Of the men who reported being harassed at a meeting the largest factor affecting their harassment was because of their race/ethnicity/nationality (14%).

Ever Harassed at an SPIE or OSA Meeting



Of the 9% who have experienced harassment at an OSA or SPIE meeting, 63% are women, 33% are men and 4% non-binary/not listed/prefer not to disclose.

Ever Harassed at an SPIE or OSA Meeting by Segments			
	<i>n</i>	Yes	Yes (Percent)
Women	508	120	24%
Men	1,640	62	4%
Non-binary/Not listed/ Prefer not to disclose	80	9	11%
TOTALS	2,228	191	9%
By Age Range			
20–29	464	44	9%
30–39	437	52	12%
40–49	378	43	22%
50–59	441	29	7%
60 and above	498	22	4%

The age of the respondents broke down fairly evenly with the highest level of harassment happening to those between the ages of 30-49.

Verbal and visual harassment are the most common forms of harassment experienced.

The respondents who experienced harassment (9% of survey participants) indicated that it most frequently takes the form of verbal and visual harassment, including:

- Having someone make a biased (61%) or bigoted (36%) comment to or about them
- Someone called you by an endearment (54%)
- Being asked inappropriate personal questions (48%) or being told inappropriate personal information (37%)
- Being leered at or excessively stared at (44%)
- Having someone make offensive or suggestive comments about their appearance (41%)
- Having someone make a sexually suggestive comment to them (41%).

“An attendee started talking to me while I sat on a couch in the meeting hall, and described how he was at the meeting to meet beautiful women, and then showed me a photo on his phone with two women at one of the exhibition booths, and related that he told them they were ‘two beautiful women with a beautiful optic.’ I immediately reported this incident to one of the lad [sic] organizers of the meeting, who passed this on to a meeting staff person. There was no confidentiality involved, since I basically let the individual know I was going to report him. Apparently, he was not kicked out of the meeting, since I saw him later that evening, and I don’t know how this indecent [sic] was resolved. It certainly was taken seriously by staff, as far as I could tell.” (Edited for confidentiality)

Similar percentages of both men (41%) and women (35%) reported that they were the target of biased or bigoted comments. Women were more likely to be the target of leering or staring (43%).

Physical harassment also occurs.

Respondents also reported being followed or stalked (24%), being touched or grabbed (28%), and having someone purposely block their path (20%). Women were more likely than men to be stalked (28%) or grabbed (31%).

Witnesses of Harassment and Bullying at OSA and SPIE Events

Seven percent of respondents indicated that they had witnessed harassment at an OSA or SPIE meeting. Twelve percent of women and 5% of men responding said they had witnessed harassment. Forty-three percent of those who witnessed harassment indicated that the harassment was based on the target’s gender. Women were more likely to report gender as the reason for harassment (51%).

“I was informed that a group of the male attendees in the conference lobby were speculating that I may have had breast enhancements, which was not the case. Unfortunately, this is the type of childish behavior I had to tolerate on a daily basis.”

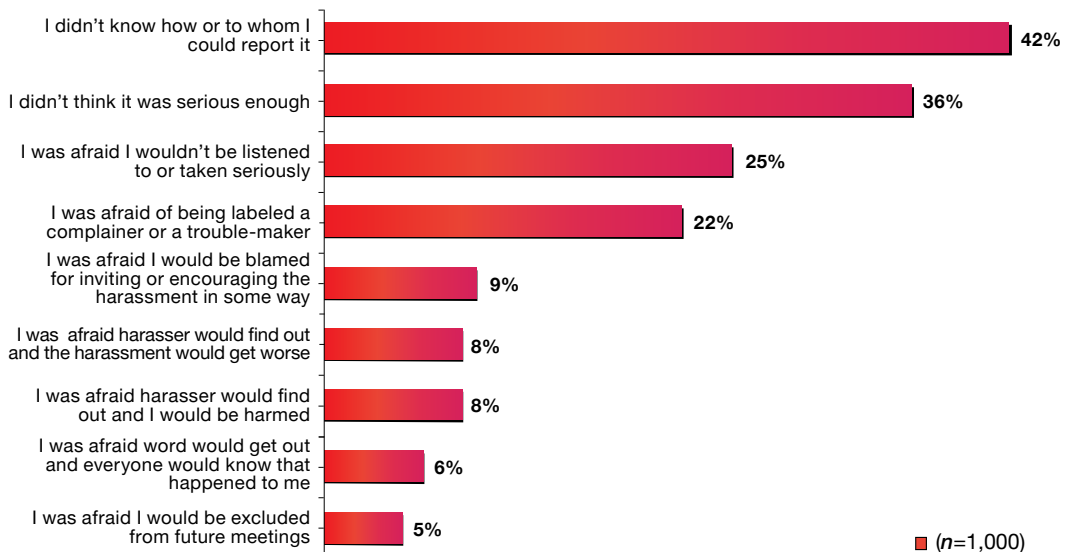
“While not “harassment” or “bullying” I did notice that a significant number of attendees were behaving in a way that made a young female colleague of mine uncomfortable at Photonics West 2018. Particularly at social events, people were staring at her chest and her in general, very obviously and for extended periods of time. I’m not generally very perceptive of these things so if even I am noticing I take it as a sign that it was flagrant. I don’t have any suggestions on how SPIE could improve this situation I just wanted to bring it to your attention because I was disappointed that one of the few women in attendance was treated this way.”

Similar to the results for experiences of harassment, verbal and visual harassment was the most commonly reported form. This included the target being called an endearment (68%), receiving a sexist comment (63%), being leered or stared at (59%), and receiving a comment on their appearance (54%).

Reporting Harassment Incidents

Only a small fraction, about one percent, of those who witnessed or experienced harassment indicated that they had reported an incident, either to OSA/SPIE staff (61%) or to venue staff (22%).

Reasons Participants Did Not Report Harassment



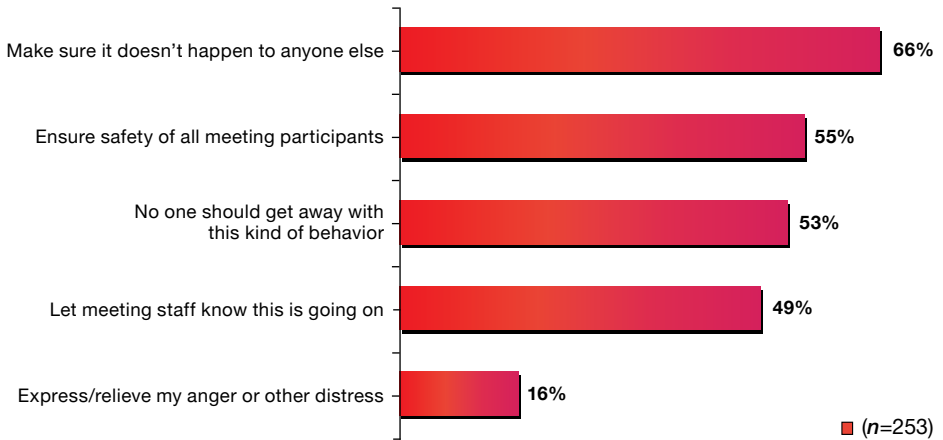
The most common reason given for not reporting incidents is that the target or witness did not know how or to whom to report it (42%). Other reasons for not reporting included the belief that the incident wasn't serious enough to report (36%), that they would not be listened to or taken seriously (25%), and fear of being labeled a complainer or trouble-maker (22%).

“I am convinced that reporting will not change anything and will instead put me on a kind of blacklist.”

“What I observed was not criminal, ‘just’ very uncomfortable for the women...”

When asked if they would report such incidents in the future, 69% of respondents said “yes.” However, fewer women (56%) than men (79%) indicated that they would report future incidents. Those who indicated they would report incidents said that they would do so to make sure it doesn't happen again (66%), to ensure the safety of meeting participants (55%), to make sure that harassers don't get away with it (53%), and to make sure OSA and SPIE staff know what is going on (49%).

Reasons Participants Would Report Harassment



When asked why they would not report future incidents, 50% indicated “other” in response to this question, and their comments fell into three main categories: the incident wasn’t serious enough to report (33%), it is not my problem (19%), and it is just how things are (16%).

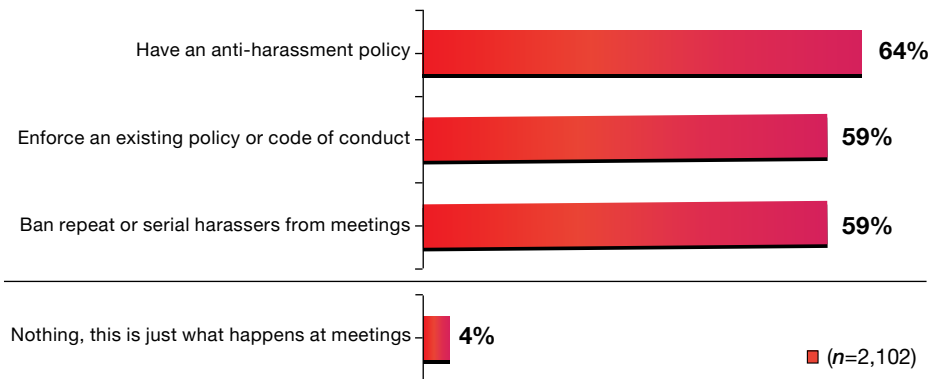
“Strong male culture at meetings: who would care?”

Respondents were asked what would encourage them to report harassment. The majority (57%) indicated that knowing how and to whom to report harassment would encourage them to report. Other important factors were knowing what action would be taken when a report is made (47%), knowing that the report would be kept confidential (45%), and knowing the meeting has an anti-harassment policy (39%).

What Can OSA and SPIE Do To Address Harassment?

Many respondents (64%) indicated that OSA and SPIE should have an anti-harassment policy to address this issue, they should enforce that policy (59%), and they should ban repeat offenders (59%).

What OSA/SPIE Can Do To Address Harassment



“Although I have never been subjected to harassment, a student with whom I worked closely was harassed at an event. She came to me and I told her to report it to our Dean, which she did. The Dean took immediate action to confront the person doing the harassment and helped to ban the individual from future events. The response was satisfactory with the student. This is a good example to follow.”

4. Other Studies – A Discussion

How Does This Compare With Other Surveys?

While the proportion of respondents who reported that they had been harassed, bullied, or made uncomfortable at an OSA and SPIE meeting may seem low, it is important to keep in mind that the survey population included all OSA and SPIE members. The majority of respondents (74%) were men, while the most common types of harassment experienced were sexual or gender-based harassment of women.

Studies that have sampled from populations that include a higher proportion of women find a higher percentage of respondents reporting, experiencing, or witnessing harassment.

- A 2014 survey found that 65% of women and 25% of men surveyed reported being harassed in public spaces (“Unsafe and Harassed in Public Spaces: A National Street Harassment Report” by Stop Street Harassment. Full report available at <http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/National-Street-Harassment-Report-November-29-20151.pdf>)
- A 2015 survey (SOME15) found that 60% of respondents reported having experienced harassment at a scientific meeting (Marts, S.A. “Open Secrets and Missing Stairs: Sexual Harassment at Scientific Meetings.” Available at <http://bit.ly/osmspdf>)
- A 2017 survey of harassment among astronomers and planetary scientists found that 39% of respondents reported experiencing verbal harassment in their workplace, and 9% reported physical harassment. (Clancy et al. “Gender, Race, and Harassment in Astronomy” available at <https://agupubs.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/2017JE005256%4010.1002/%28IS%292333-5084.SCISOC1>)

The most closely comparable survey is the SOME15 survey performed by S*Marts Consulting in 2015 and reported in “Open Secrets and Missing Stairs.” Respondents of that survey were a convenience sample recruited from women in science organizations, predominately the Association for Women in Science.

Despite the lower percentage of respondents reporting harassment, the results of the OSA/SPIE survey were very similar to the results of the SOME15 survey. Specifically:

- The relative frequency of types of verbal and visual harassment (being called an endearment, biased or bigoted comments, unwelcome personal questions or information, leering or staring) were nearly identical.
- The relative frequency of behavioral responses of targets and witnesses (avoiding the harasser, concern about safety, concern about what to wear) were the same.
- The top reasons for not reporting harassment (don’t know who to tell, not serious enough, won’t be taken seriously, will be labeled a complainer) were the same, although the relative frequency differed.
- The desire for having and enforcing an anti-harassment policy, and for banning repeat harassers, was the same.

5. Impacts of Behavior

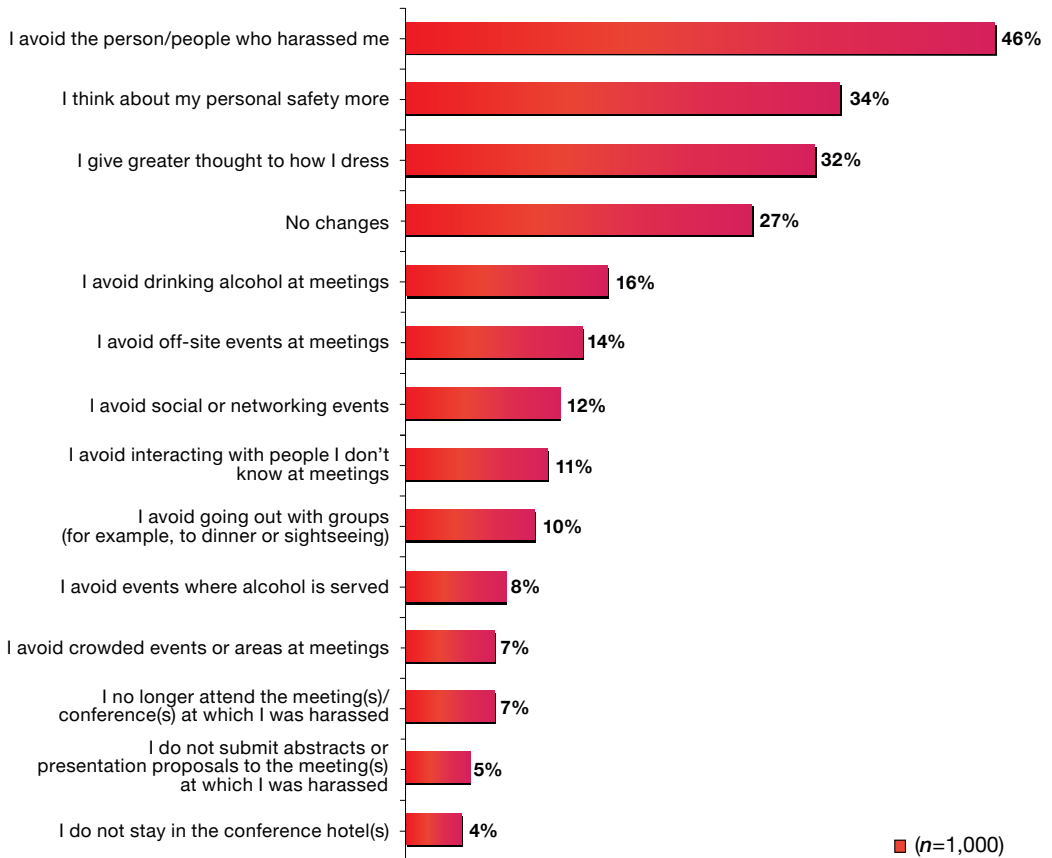
“I avoid interacting one-on-one with other event participants.”

“I avoid talking to exhibitors at booths unless I have to.”

“I avoid attend[ing] meetings alone (without known colleagues).”

As these comments illustrate, both targets and witnesses of harassment reported that their behavior changed after these incidents. Forty-six percent of targets and 43% of witnesses said they go out of their way to avoid the harasser, 34% of targets and 24% of witnesses give greater thought to their safety at OSA and SPIE events, and 32% of targets and 18% of witnesses give greater thought to how they dress for OSA and SPIE events.

How Behavior Has Changed After Experiencing Harassment



The impact of harassment on targets' behavior at meetings is not surprising, given what is known about the effects of harassment in the STEM workplace. As reviewed in the 2018 report from the U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, studies of harassment from the 1980s to the present have found that harassment is linked to decreases in job satisfaction and performance, and to targets leaving their field or profession entirely. These impacts extend to those who, while not the direct target of the harassment, are witnesses to the harassment. The experience of harassment leaves targets feeling disillusioned and angry over the failure of organizations to stop or even recognize the problem. Furthermore, experiencing repeated incidents of gender harassment has been found to have consequences for the targets' careers and their physical and mental health. These results are similar for those who have experienced extreme or egregious incidents of harassment. Racial harassment adds to the impact of sexual and gender harassment for women of color. (Citation: U.S. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2018. *Sexual Harassment of Women: Climate, Culture, and Consequences in Academic Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.17226/24994>, pp. 67-91.)

The survey results demonstrate the ongoing damage of harassment on OSA and SPIE meetings. Social networking events, time in the exhibit hall, and meetings with colleagues and potential collaborators are all key activities at these meetings. When targets remove themselves from these activities to avoid harassers, or because they have experienced harassment at these activities in the past, they not only reduce the value they get from attending, other participants are deprived of their unique contributions to the event and to the field.

“Fortunately, I have not been sexually bullied, but the harassment I have experienced is common throughout optical science. It is the more subtle kind of discrimination that occurs without people even being aware of it. For example, a woman might ask a question at a conference talk and it gets ignored, overlooked, or discounted as foolish/irrelevant. It is not always obvious that this is going on, but after repeated experiences such as these, women feel less welcomed, even if they weren’t the person asking the question.”

6. OSA and SPIE Current Efforts and Recommendations in Response to the Survey

In response to the need for clarity on behavioral expectations at OSA and SPIE events, the organizations recently expanded their Codes of Conduct and each have adopted an Anti-Harassment Policy. This statement of organizational values, commitments, and standards codifies the behavioral standards that all attendees, speakers, exhibitors, award recipients, staff, and contractors are expected to adhere to, and it serves as the basis upon which OSA and SPIE may take corrective action when those values, commitments, and standards have been violated.

Implementation of the Anti-Harassment Policy includes providing clear and obvious signage at OSA and SPIE events to remind participants of the code of conduct and to provide easy access to information on how to report violations. The organizations have partnered on signage that will be at every OSA or SPIE meeting.

“Creating a policy against harassment is a good start, but OSA and SPIE need to be prepared to put real teeth into the policy, to enforce it, absolutely protect confidentiality, and have the processes and mechanisms in place to protect those involved. It’s not easy.”

In response to these survey results, OSA and SPIE will continue to take action as listed below.

- ✓ Ensure that OSA and SPIE on-site staff are trained to respond to incident reports and assist participants who want to report an incident.
- ✓ Continue the use of an incident investigation checklist and take appropriate disciplinary action when the anti-harassment policy or code of conduct are violated.
- ✓ Ensure that OSA and SPIE volunteer leadership, including Board members, Committee chairs, and others who serve the societies in a volunteer capacity, are familiar with the anti-harassment policy and with the implementation and enforcement aspects of the policy and the code of conduct, and that these individuals are committed to ensuring that the policy is effective in making OSA and SPIE events safe and welcoming to all participants.
- ✓ Ensure that session moderators and chairs are trained to respond to incidents of inappropriate imagery or comments during presentations, and to step in to prevent and stop harassment and bullying during scientific sessions.
- ✓ Ensure that exhibitors are aware of and abide by the code of conduct, including eliminating offensive, demeaning, or objectifying images, giveaways, marketing materials, slogans, catchphrases, and other media.
- ✓ Whenever possible, encourage groups hosting events in conjunction with OSA and SPIE conferences to abide by the posted code of conduct.
- ✓ Offer effective trainings for members and meeting attendees such as bystander intervention, ally skills, and unconscious bias.

7. Appendix I: Descriptions of Harassment Experiences

The survey provided many opportunities for individuals to share their own thoughts and stories. (Note: some quotes were edited for length or to ensure confidentiality.)

There were a few who shared their displeasure at our efforts such as “**Stick to technical issues**” and “**Stop spending our money on fake issues.**” However, the vast majority were supportive of these and other efforts from the societies, even if they had not experienced anything personally. Some of these comments are included here.

“Although I have not personally witnessed any harassment that I can identify, I know that it happens. I have heard stories from my colleagues about things they witnessed, and I would say the vast majority of incidents go unreported. We need to make it clear that this kind of behavior is unacceptable, and we as a community need to report incidents when we see them, even if we are not personally involved. We need to create a welcoming community for women, minorities, and LGBT folks, and that means visibly being supportive.”

“Although I have not witnessed harassment at SPIE meetings, I have experienced harassment within the scientific community as a young woman (graduate student). It would have been good to know what to do when I was younger. Having workshops focused on the subject with attendance from women of all ages could be helpful. This way we can give advice to the younger generations.”

“As a member of that most privileged demographic, an older hetero white male, I have not experienced sexual harassment at meetings - but I know it occurs. I have witnessed professional bullying of another male, and reported it as well as wrote both the target and the aggressor. Thank you for working to make our meetings safer and more professional.”

Individuals also shared examples from their experiences at OSA and SPIE meetings as well as at other meetings and workplaces. These illustrate the types of harassment that were asked about in the survey; the responses of organizations, employers, and colleagues; and the consequences of reporting incidents.

Inappropriate Personal Questions and Comments

“Upon my 30th birthday approaching at least 5 men asked me why I was not pregnant yet, when I would be getting pregnant, told me that we need to produce intelligent people, so I should ‘get on it’, and pushed the issue to the point where I felt I was defending my career and familial decisions. These were separate instances and made me very uncomfortable and upset.”

Comments on Appearance

“[D]uring what I thought was a working lunch with someone (a potential client to my consulting business), upon looking me up on LinkedIn this married CTO said ‘you’re way hotter in real life!’”

Sexual Comments

“[I heard] repeated comments rife with sexual innuendo.”

“A man passed a nude calendar to a man I was speaking with.”

Stalking

“A highly respected expert in his field (color science) stalked me for about 2 years. He met me at a non-OSA/SPIE conference. He attended the next OSA conference because he knew I would be there. He followed me everywhere at the conference and tried to come to my hotel room. Somehow he found out where I was staying. For the next several years I always checked to see if he was a speaker or session chair before going to a conference. If I thought I should still attend the conference, I had a male colleague also attend and never leave my side. This occurred about 15 years ago.”

Sexualized Images in Exhibits

“[An exhibitor] distributed a booklet at [an exhibition] a few years ago... [that used] a Cup Size specification which looked like it was from the bra manufacturing industry. There was a snide remark about a negligee included on the page as well. There are so many things wrong with that, I can’t even begin to list them all... But one consequence which may not be so obvious is that male colleagues couldn’t wait to point this page out to me. [The exhibitor] announced their view of women but also opened the door to many small acts of humiliation, alienation, inter- and intra-company friction based on who did and did not approve of the page or who was and was not offended by the page.” (Edited for confidentiality)

“There was a company on the exhibit floor at [an exhibition] that had a female model in a skin tight racing suit with their logos on it standing at their booth. I didn’t see what company it was, but they were selling fibers/fiber components. The man from the company was joking with an attendee, saying that now he would be interested in fibers because of the model.”

Gender Harassment

“[The] Harasser continually interrupted a female speaker during [her] presentation.”

“At every conference I attend, there is always at least one person who acts inappropriately towards me. It’s hard to stand up for myself and tell the offender that their behavior is unwelcome because there is no backup, and often these incidents occur without witnesses. I am tired of being called ‘sweetie.’ I am tired of people grabbing my arm or shoulder like I’m an object to lead me somewhere, and I am tired of feeling like I have to prove myself when people interrogate me at my poster, just because I am a tiny woman. It’s no secret that some people do not know how to act professionally around women. I do not know how to change this, but one suggestion I have is to show a short presentation during the opening remarks of the conference that explains the professional conduct we expect, and what to do if we experience unwelcome behavior. The presentation could also explain the consequences of unwelcome behavior. It’s one thing to have a policy on harassment, but it means nothing if it can’t be enforced. Currently I have no idea how SPIE/OSA enforces these policies.”

“Over the years, I have encountered sexual harassment in a variety of ways. In grad school, I was repeatedly told that I was taking a place away from a guy who needed to get a Ph.D. to support a family someday.”

“Dear OSA & SPIE, thanks for this survey. Just the fact of sending it makes a difference. However I think it does not address the real problem. Gender discrimination is not only about sexual harassment it is also about career discrimination. It is about getting women scientists as heads of Departments, as heads of Committees. It is about role models. In summary, thanks but there is much to be done.”

Physical Harassment

“In my first post-Ph.D. job in industry, I was very painfully pinched in the butt, most likely by the head of the facility where I had recently started working. The circumstances were such that I could not prove it was he. There were other people standing around who I was sure could identify who did it, but they were all aimlessly looking around, pretending not to have seen anything. So I said in a very loud voice, so everyone heard, ‘Hey, who did that. That’s not funny. It hurt.’ I never had another problem like that in the remaining 3.5 years I worked there. I left on my own terms, when it was a good time for me to move on. The other main incident occurred when I was interviewing for a job that would allow me to leave the one referenced above. It was a job in academia. I won’t even bother to mention the countless times during technical meetings and discussions where I worked that my comments and contributions were ignored, discounted, or deemed to be wrong because I was misunderstood, not because I was wrong.”

Sexual Advances and the “He’s Just Like That” Excuse

“While I have not experienced harassment at an OSA or SPIE meeting, many years ago as a young postdoc at [another scientific] conference a well-known senior physicist made several sexual advances. After returning from the conference I told my adviser, who said ‘he has a reputation for that’ and filed a complaint on my behalf. It was a disaster. The organization did not keep the complaint confidential, so everyone at my workplace knew about it and asked me for details. The physicist who had made advances told me he would ruin my career. Nothing more was done. Twenty years later at my workplace I and another woman filed a complaint along with a third woman who chose to remain anonymous. The response was much the same. Human Resources investigated, spoke to other woman scientists, and came back with ‘he has a reputation for that.’ The supervisors involved did not keep the complaint confidential, and the engineer responsible for the misbehavior actively and vocally complained to other coworkers about the two of us whose name she knew, despite having been told by Human Resources that the harasser was not to discuss it with coworkers. Nothing more was done. All three of the women involved, including myself, left the company.”

Other Types of Harassment

“Inappropriate comments about nationality.”

“Inappropriate booth literature.”

“Made inappropriate racist/gender derogatory comments.”

“Made racist statements about someone else.”

“Commented on language skills in demeaning way.”

“Harasser used migratory status as leverage to get sexual favors.”

The Experiences of a Witness

Several people also commented on things they witnessed at meetings, and how they felt about it.

“Big-shot harasser thought younger women (phd students) were his for the taking.”

“Harasser continually interrupted female speaker during presentation.”

“I feel as though I need to be more protective and encouraging towards certain populations whom I have seen targeted by harassment.”

“I warn my female students.”

Ways to Address Harassment

Education was a theme that ran through the suggestions on how the societies should respond to incidents, educating our members/attendees on what harassment is, how to respond when you see it—or when it happens to you and how to report. Following are a few other suggestions.

“Have attendees check a box stating in some clear way that they will respect their colleagues.”

“Have meeting registrants be required to read the anti-harassment policy and affirmatively agree to it before the registration process can be completed.”

“Have the Chair at each Conference/Session remind participants that harassment is not to be tolerated and is a direct violation of SPIE/OSA principles.”

“Increase diversity; isolate behavior; promote positive climate.”

“Make a more active campaign for anti-harassment. Posters at conferences, dedicated webpage, etc. Have a way to easily report harassment at a conference through text, phone, and the meeting app.”

“Make reporting easy. Have a reasonable escalation of response. Try to nip things in the bud. Focus not just on bad behavior but good, inclusive behavior. Don’t be afraid to act against prominent members if necessary.”

“Bystander training is the most effective method of dealing with this. (The bystander is someone present who is not the perpetrator or the victim.) Instead of trying to get to the small fraction of perpetrators, bystander training gets to the majority of previously-passive third parties.”

“Knowing that there is a mandatory training program in place; Knowing about levels of diversity in attendance at these events and seeing improvements in representation from females and racial minorities.”

“Cultivate a climate of respect for others, especially those different from us and with whom we disagree.”

8. Appendix II: Definitions

For purposes of this report, “Bullying,” “Discrimination,” “Harassment” (including “Sexual Harassment”), and “Retaliation” are defined as follows.

Bullying is the ongoing abuse and intentional mistreatment of one or more vulnerable persons or groups by a more powerful individual or group. Bullying consists of repeated verbal (name-calling, verbal attacks), physical (use of physical force or aggression), and/or social (ostracism, exclusion, spreading rumors) behavior that causes physical or psychological harm. Being “more powerful” may include being physically bigger or stronger, having more social status, or having influence over someone’s employment and/or professional advancement.

Discrimination is the unjust or prejudicial treatment of categories of people based on personal attributes such as race, sex, age, color, sexual orientation, body size, ethnic or national origin, disability, religion, marital status, veteran status, political affiliation, or other attributes not related to the merit of one’s work or scientific research or ideas.

Harassment consists of unwanted, unwelcomed, and uninvited behavior that demeans, threatens, or offends another and results in a hostile environment. Harassing behavior includes, but is not limited to, the use of epithets, derogatory comments or slurs, assault, stalking, impeding or blocking movement, threats of violence, offensive touching, any physical interference with normal work or movement, and visual insults, such as derogatory images, posters, or cartoons. Harassment is often (but not always) based upon personal attributes such as race, sex, age, gender, color, sexual orientation, body size, ethnic or national origin, and disability.

Sexual harassment consists of harassing behavior based upon sex, gender, or sexual orientation. Sexual harassment includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors (often accompanied by overt or implied promises or threats relating to employment, professional advancement or recognition), lewd comments or images, or other verbal, visual, or physical conduct of a sexual nature where such conduct creates an unreasonable, intimidating, hostile, or sexually offensive environment and may interfere with the target’s professional performance.

Retaliation consists of negative action or treatment towards someone who has reported bullying, discrimination, or harassment based upon such report. Retaliation may include terminating or demoting a reporting employee, excluding a reporting individual from work or professional activities, injuring a reporting individual’s professional or personal reputation, or unjustly demeaning a reporting individual’s work. Retaliation can be used as a method of bullying or harassment, but more importantly retaliation creates an environment that discourages victims and bystanders from reporting offensive behavior.

Special Consultant on the OSA and SPIE Survey project and report

Sherry A. Marts, Ph.D., smartsconsulting.com

CEO of S*Marts Consulting LLC, Sherry is a consultant, workshop leader, facilitator, writer, and speaker. She provides a range of services on harassment and other aspects of diversity and inclusion, including: development and adoption of meeting codes of conduct; staff training on harassment awareness, active bystander intervention and de-escalation, and code of conduct enforcement; workshops on active bystander intervention, how to resist harassment, and how to be an effective ally; enforcement liaison services, serving as the initial point of contact for harassment reports and investigations at meetings. Her interest in the issue of harassment and bullying emerged from her experiences as an association CEO, and her training as a self-defense instructor.

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