

## REDUCING THE RISK OF SEXUAL MISCONDUCT AT DENDROCHRONOLOGY CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

CAROLYN A. COPENHEAVER<sup>1\*</sup>, SASKIA L. VAN DE GEVEL<sup>2</sup>, ADAM K. DOWNING<sup>3</sup>, and T. ADAM COATES<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, VA 24060, USA

<sup>2</sup>Department of Geography and Planning, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608, USA

<sup>3</sup>Virginia Cooperative Extension, Madison, VA 22902, USA

### ABSTRACT

Dendrochronologists regularly host conferences and workshops to share tree-ring research and new methodologies. Unfortunately, national and international scientific gatherings have also historically been events where some female researchers have experienced sexual harassment, discrimination, and assault. The objective of this project was to host a focus group with experienced conference and workshop organizers to gather best practices and policies to reduce the risk of sexual misconduct at these events. A concerted effort by organizers is needed, and this begins with the development of a diverse and inclusive organizing committee. Organizers will need to craft a sexual misconduct policy that includes a clear definition, a violation reporting system with multiple reporting pathways, a review process, an enforcement system with penalties for the violator, and supportive resources for victims. Currently, the Tree-Ring Society offers organizers of workshops and conferences a definition of sexual misconduct and possible penalties for violations; however, the dendrochronology discipline currently lacks a reporting system, formalized review system, and resources for victims. We hope sharing the results of this focus group will allow future conference and workshop organizers to implement these findings and provide a safe environment for all dendrochronologists.

*Keywords:* sexual misconduct, sexual harassment, sexual assault, conferences, workshops, best practices.

### INTRODUCTION

Research productivity is a primary metric in promotion and tenure decisions of academic faculty members in dendrochronology and other disciplines. Academic research productivity has traditionally been quantified through published journal articles, funded research grants, presentations at professional conferences, completion of graduate students, and peer evaluations of scholarship (Balogun *et al.* 2007). In the United States, a recent change in the metrics evaluated for the Carnegie classification of American universities has trickled down to promotion and tenure committees and resulted in an increase in the number of times per year faculty members are expected to present at state, national, and international conferences (Leech *et al.* 2015). Presenting at more conferences

impacts all research team members including post-graduate researchers, graduate students, research technicians, and undergraduate students. Thus, it is not surprising that there has been a recent increase in the expectation for undergraduate researchers to present at professional conferences (Hill and Walkington 2016; Little 2020; Ramos *et al.* 2020). The increase in younger researchers attending and presenting at professional conferences provides the perfect opportunity for conference organizers and leadership within professional societies to educate themselves about how existing conference cultures fail to provide a welcoming, safe, and open community for all attendees (McGee and Kazembe 2016; Anonymous 2020; Flores 2020) and to identify policies and best practices for improvement.

Researchers who attend the same professional conference annually develop a core community with their fellow attendees and a sense of belonging

---

\*Corresponding author: [ccopenhe@vt.edu](mailto:ccopenhe@vt.edu); Telephone: +1 540 231 4031

within their discipline. Female researchers tend to be less regular in their conference attendance and attend fewer conferences than males (Timperley *et al.* 2020). Therefore, women are often excluded from core conference communities, which limits their opportunities for leadership positions and involvement in decision-making (Anderson *et al.* 2021). The exclusion of women from positions of power within professional societies, contributes to conference cultures that are less supportive of female researchers and less likely to provide women with opportunities to showcase their research as plenary or symposium speakers (Sardelis *et al.* 2016). In addition, female conference attendees report experiencing higher incivility and sexism compared to males (Settles and O'Connor 2014). Within some disciplines, female researchers describe a conference culture where sexual jokes, sexually abusive comments, and unwelcome sexual advances from male attendees are the norm (Else 2018).

Conferences bring together individuals from many institutions and geographic regions, which results in ambiguity about who establishes and enforces rules for appropriate behavior (Air *et al.* 2021). A few professional societies have begun to develop and implement changes at their national and regional conferences and provide organizer guidelines for: 1) conference planning, *e.g.* invite a diversity of plenary speakers and have a diverse organizing committee; 2) conference registration, *e.g.* gather information to support attendees with disabilities and require a participant code of conduct; and 3) conference infrastructure, *e.g.* gender pronoun name tags and availability of a lactation room (Barrows *et al.* 2021; Dreyfuss and Marasco 2021). Conference guidelines to prevent sexual misconduct are only effective when they are supplemented with a system for reporting suspected violations, a process for reviewing complaints, and enforcement of penalties for behavioral infractions (Favaro *et al.* 2016). Unfortunately, most professional societies have yet to adopt policies and practices to create a safe and inclusive environment for all conference attendees. Two recent surveys found that 24% of biology and 50% of ecology conferences had participant codes of conduct and of those conferences with codes, roughly half included specific language

about sexual misconduct (Foxx *et al.* 2019; Tulloch 2020).

Dendrochronology is a relatively small field with researchers from many different disciplines and geographic regions. Therefore, tree-ring conferences and workshops tend to be international and include researchers and students from diverse professional cultures (Zhang and Shao 2007; Amoroso *et al.* 2018). Several tree-ring conferences and workshops occur regularly and are organized by the same group of researchers, *e.g.* the wood anatomy of tree-ring workshops organized by researchers at the Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research (WSL) (Tardif 2003; Speer 2007; Thresher 2010) or by a professional society, *e.g.* the Association for Tree-Ring Research hosts the annual Tree Rings in Archaeology, Climatology, and Ecology (TRACE) meeting (ATR 2022). Other conferences and workshops are organized by a shifting set of local volunteers on a semi-regular, *e.g.* the AmeriDendro conferences (Sutherland and Mundo 2016) or a one-time event, *e.g.* the 2017 UK Dendro Meeting (Buentgen 2018). The lack of formal structure among workshop and conference organizers may have been one of the reasons that an individual with a multi-decadal history of alleged sexual misconduct was selected annually as an instructor and co-organizer of the North American Dendroecological Fieldweek (Kast 2018, 2019; Flaherty 2019). Although this particular situation reached the popular press, postings on the ITRDB Forum in 2012, 2014, and 2020 (ITRDB 2007–2020) imply that this was not an isolated situation. The ITRDB forum discussion highlighted that many dendrochronologists were unaware of the frequency of sexual misconduct and several forum comments disputed the large impact sexual misconduct continues to have on the dendrochronology community. Female attendees of dendrochronology conferences and workshops requested improved leadership from the tree-ring community to make events safer for them to attend. Therefore, the objective of this paper was to host a focus group with experienced conference and workshop organizers and gather best practices and policies to reduce the risks of sexual misconduct at conferences and workshops and to share these findings with the dendrochronology community. We anticipate that once leadership within the dendrochronology community is

provided with the tools to create a safe and welcoming environment for all researchers, these policies and best practices will become a standard part of all dendrochronology events.

## METHODS

### Recruitment of Participants

The research team identified 20 individuals who had experience organizing and hosting professional conferences and workshops or who had administrative positions within academia where handling sexual misconduct cases or diversity and inclusion were a part of their work responsibilities. The lead author contacted these individuals by email with an invitation to participate in a two-day virtual focus group where the objective would be to identify policies and best practices to reduce the risk of sexual misconduct at scientific conferences and workshops. Ten individuals agreed to participate; eight did not respond to the initial or follow-up recruitment email; and two declined. The ten individuals who served as the focus group participants for this study completed informed consent forms. We shared information about the focus group structure before the event. The researchers had previously had the focus group format reviewed by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (VT IRB-19-1108) and the study was deemed exempt under U.S. federal regulation 45 CFR 46.104(d) category 2(ii). The ten participants included five females and five males. Four participants held leadership positions within professional societies and organized annual regional or national conferences as part of their work responsibilities. Five participants held administrative positions within academia and of these, three held positions specifically related to diversity and inclusion. One participant was an academic faculty member with extensive experience hosting international workshops.

### Format of Focus Group

The focus group occurred during two consecutive afternoons and participants were required to attend both sessions. The researchers opened the focus group with introductions of leaders and

participants, shared data related to the frequency of sexual misconduct at professional conferences and workshops, and allowed for informal reflection among the participants. Then two researchers coordinated an information-sharing process whereby each participant shared a best practice or policy that they had employed to successfully reduce the risk of sexual misconduct at workshops and conferences. Often a participant's contribution to the focus group was accompanied by a personal experience related to the best practice or policy being shared. In these situations, the researchers used probing questions to help participants find more concise phrasing for an item to be recorded by the research team and the leader would verify that the phrase typed by the recorder matched the participant's intention (Liamputtong 2011). After each participant shared one item, the researchers coordinated sharing from participants who had additional items they wished to contribute. During the first afternoon, participants were asked to refrain from commenting positively or negatively about items shared by other participants. At the close of the first afternoon, participants had provided 43 items. Researchers asked participants to complete an electronic survey where they rated each item for its importance in reducing the risk of sexual misconduct at conferences and workshops using a Likert scale: 5 (essential), 4 (very important), 3 (somewhat important), 2 (optional), and 1 (not needed).

The second afternoon of the focus group opened with a researcher sharing the focus group participants' average rating of each of the 43 items. Then two researchers guided participants through the "process of collective sense making" (Wilkinson 1998) as they refined the list of policies and best practices used to reduce sexual misconduct at conferences and workshops. Each participant was provided the opportunity to edit, combine, or remove existing items; however, all participants had to reach a consensus before an item could be modified or removed. Any participant was welcome to add a new item without the consent of the group. By late afternoon, participants reached a point whereby there were no new recommendations and the participants were provided with a second electronic survey to rate the final list of 36 items using the same Likert scale.

### Data Analysis

The ratings of the 43 policy and best practice items gathered from participants on the first day reflected individual opinions prior to the deep reflection and conversation that occurred on the second day of the focus group (Ryan *et al.* 2014). Therefore, the results from the second survey of 36 items more successfully captured the focus group's common opinion, and these survey results became the data source for analysis. The ratings provided by the focus group participants were used for a quantitative assessment of items, but we examined all 36 remaining items for common qualitative themes regarding their potential in reducing the risk of sexual misconduct at conferences and workshops.

## RESULTS

One item received a unanimous rating of “essential” from all focus group participants: “Organizations need to have a policy statement on sexual misconduct. Include the policy on the conference registration website that clearly states what inappropriate conduct is, how to report it, and what will happen with reports. Each registrant must agree to comply with that statement during conference registration” (Table 1). During the second afternoon of the focus group, participants spent a fair amount of time editing the wording of this ‘essential’-rated item. From their discussion it appeared that the participants wanted to capture all of their guidance in a single overarching statement, which would then be supported by the details provided in the other items. In this item, as in several others, the participants used the word “conference.” A number of participants had more experience in organizing and hosting conferences. Therefore, this word was more commonly used in the discussion, but the guidance provided applies to both conferences and workshops.

### Responsibilities of Leadership

One of the most important best practices to reduce the risk of sexual misconduct at conferences and workshops is for organizers to lead and take ownership of this issue. Leaders should: 1) use direct language about sexual misconduct in

membership agreements for professional societies; 2) speak about policies on sexual misconduct at the opening session of a conference or workshop and review these policies several times throughout the event; and 3) provide or require bystander training for attendees, organizers, volunteers, plenary speakers, and/or recipients of travel assistance awards. Messaging on sexual misconduct must come from a diversity of individuals and should direct attendees to “create a culture of inclusion, [where] inappropriate jokes and predatory behavior directed towards other attendees is not tolerated” with special protections for “vulnerable populations, *e.g.* students, post-doctorates, and staff.” Organizers should clearly communicate that sexual misconduct is not gender-specific regarding either its victims or its perpetrators. Judges of student competitions should complete implicit bias training and session organizers should introduce male and female speakers by their professional titles and names. With regards to the latter, one participant shared a story about a conference where the session leader introduced all female speakers by an informal title and their first name (Miss Suzy), while all male speakers were introduced by a professional title and family name (Dr. Yang). This gendered difference in speaker introductions sent a message to attendees that female researchers are less credentialed than their male counterparts.

### Higher Risk during Unstructured Time

Focus group participants recommended that conference and workshop organizers should be aware of the increased risk of sexual misconduct during the unstructured periods of an event. For example, depending on budgets, facility amenities, and number of attendees, some events expect attendees to be responsible for their meals. This may place attendees into unfamiliar settings, dependent upon others for transportation, and into interactions with non-conference community members in environments where “alcohol and drugs...create vulnerability for sexual assault and harassment” (Table 1). Providing resources, such as optional activities or networking groups for post-session meals, are examples of best practices for creating a safer environment during the unstructured periods of a conference or workshop.

**Table 1.** Items identified by focus group participants as best practices or policies to reduce the risk of sexual misconduct at conferences and workshops. Items were rated as 5 = essential, 4 = very important, 3 = somewhat important, 2 = optional, 1 = not needed. The mean rating of all focus group participants is provided in the first column.

Mean	Item
5	➤Organizations need to have a policy statement on sexual misconduct. Include the policy on the conference registration website that clearly states what inappropriate conduct is, how to report it, and what will happen with reports. Each registrant must agree to comply with that statement during conference registration.
4.7	➤Leadership sets the tone. If you are a person in leadership, lead on the issue of sexual misconduct. Set expectations for reducing the risk of sexual harassment and misconduct. Intervene and make changes as necessary.
4.6	➤Multiple reporting mechanisms ( <i>i.e.</i> websites, on-site and off-site representatives, anonymous drop boxes) must be available at the conference for attendees to report incidents.
4.6	➤Train organizational staff and volunteers for all events on appropriate behavior, including their own. Organizational staff and volunteers will be trained to make sure all members know the appropriate chain of command to report and respond to reported incident.
4.6	➤Have direct language about sexual harassment and assault in the membership agreement which places members at risk of loss of membership if a violation occurs.
4.6	➤Leadership training, especially association board training, should include sexual harassment and assault training. Specific examples should be discussed to make sure identification of sexual harassment and assault is clear.
4.6	➤Power differences exacerbate sexual harassment and assault problems - this makes reporting challenging because of the potential negative career impacts - be aware of power differences when creating policies.
4.5	➤Professional associations need to have policies in place to make sure that sexual misconduct and violations are reported through an established pathway, <i>e.g.</i> an Ethics Committee.
4.5	➤Be transparent with attendees about policies and consequences to avoid the potential appearance that nothing is being done following a report of sexual misconduct.
4.5	➤The venue staffers often observe misconduct by attendees in the informal sessions. Make sure that the venues know that the organization has a zero tolerance towards sexual misconduct and will respond to complaints.
4.5	➤Ensure that there are diverse (age, ethnicity, gender) champions of sexual misconduct policy, by including volunteers and non-leadership members. Encourage peer-to-peer championing of this issue to support consistent messaging.
4.4	➤To create a culture of inclusion, inappropriate jokes and predatory behavior directed towards other attendees is not tolerated, especially more vulnerable populations, <i>e.g.</i> students, post-doctorates and staff.
4.4	➤Make multiple avenues available for individuals to receive support, similar to the websites and resources made available to workshop participants. This would include resources that are outside of the organization, which would assist non-mandatory reporters.
4.4	➤Be sure you take action when wrongdoing has occurred. These actions should go beyond the direct nature of the conference ( <i>e.g.</i> membership revoked, removed from association, prohibit future interactions). Actions may be necessitated well beyond the extent of the conference. Provide post-conference training to encourage the perpetrator to change long-term. The perpetrator's boss may need to be contacted to support these post-conference actions.
4.3	➤At the conference, in-person bystander training for how to respond to sexual misconduct issues should be a session at the start of the conference. This training should include how to intervene appropriately when you're a bystander to misconduct and clear pathways for reporting incidents.
4.3	➤To minimize the number of incidents, we need to sensitize the environment. Define the severe consequences of these incidents. Make sure people know they are being asked to report sensitive incidents. Go beyond only having this information documented; verbally affirm the severity of misconduct.
4.3	➤Within academia [in the United States], because of Title IX,† students can be deterred from reporting sexual misconduct to faculty members because they are mandatory reporters; thus, it is really important to have a victim's advocate who is a non-mandatory reporter - this will increase reporting rates particularly from students within academic groups traveling to conferences together.
4.3	➤Implicit bias training should be included in a professional setting, directed toward misconduct issues. This is particularly important when there are judging situations, <i>e.g.</i> male students are asked about their research and female students are asked about their appearance.
4.3	➤Be aware that sexual misconduct is not just directed at females from males; females can also be perpetrators. Encourage attendees to utilize a buddy system.
4.3	➤There is power in perception - teach participants, especially young professionals, it's OK to say, No.

Table 1. Continued.

Mean	Item
4.2	➤Volunteers ( <i>e.g.</i> session moderators) should be required to take the same staff training that identifies and clarifies inappropriate behavior and actions.
4.2	➤Introduce male and female speakers in the same manner, <i>e.g.</i> do not call females by first names Miss XXX and males by Dr. XXX.
4.1	➤At meetings there are industry, academic, and NGOs all present and there needs to be a mechanism to cross these organizational entities when sexual misconduct policies are created.
4.1	➤Communication about sexual harassment and assault needs to be presented multiple times during a conference - during opening session and perhaps at beginnings of other sessions.
4	➤Either during or after the conference, provide a report of misconduct incidents which occurred, to essential personnel, including Board members and CEOs. Include a brief summary to conference participants and include this report at the beginning of the next conference.
4	➤The conference organizers should identify appropriate sexual harassment and assault training that highlights unique conference scenarios and challenges that all attendees must complete prior to conference attendance.
4	➤A diverse group of individuals should be available when someone would like to report inappropriate conduct.
4	➤For conference venue staff, <i>e.g.</i> wait staff at banquet, make sure that lines of reporting to the organization's staff about any misconduct go to the conference organizers so that they can handle their own conference attendees.
4	➤Be aware that sexual harassment and assault can come from non-conference community members because conferences are typically held in larger cities. Conference attendees are in an unfamiliar setting and may not have safe transportation options.
3.9	➤Most of the inappropriate behavior and incidents occur during unstructured time and may occur more frequently as the conference progresses. Policies should be considered for the unstructured time.
3.8	➤Some organizations have moved away from alcohol-based social events because alcohol and drugs often create vulnerability for sexual assault and harassment; consider removing alcohol from the events, limiting distribution of alcohol at social events, and providing alternative forms of engagement without alcohol consumption.
3.6	➤Attendance of a bystander training session at the conference is required for plenary speakers and eligibility for conference awards.
3.6	➤Address the lack of inclusivity during the unstructured time ( <i>i.e.</i> post-session meals, groups).
3.5	➤If you have sexual harassment and assault training, make sure the training is specific and specialized to the event and appropriate for the audience. Avoid using an existing on-line training program that is overly generalized.
3.3	➤Bystander training is recommended for recipients of institutional travel assistance.
3.1	➤In the past there were informal information networks, particularly among women, regarding which males are not safe to be around; organizations need to transition from these informal safety networks to something formalized.

†Title IX is part of the United States Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights 1972 Federal Education Amendment and applies to educational programs or activities within the United States that receive Federal financial assistance.

### Recommendations for Handling Violations

The focus group participants were cognizant that improved policies and best practices would not completely eliminate sexual harassment and assault from conferences and workshops. Therefore, organizers must establish: 1) a clear process for reporting violations, 2) a system for evaluating suspected violations, 3) enforcement of penalties for violations; and 4) support for victims of sexual misconduct. Participants recommended having multiple reporting mechanisms, including on-line websites or conference apps and diverse on-site and off-site representatives. Anonymous drop boxes were suggested because they allow victims from

lower power groups, *e.g.* students, to avoid being afraid to report violations because of potential negative career impacts. Organizers should inform venue staffers about the organization's zero tolerance of sexual misconduct because then venue employees can support the organization's policies and report violations directed towards attendees or conference venue employees, *e.g.* servers at a banquet. Evaluation of sexual misconduct violation reports must be completed in a timely fashion through a previously established ethics committee. Conference and workshop attendees must trust this body and transparency in the review process must be shared with the individual who filed the report. If a violation has occurred, consequences for the

perpetrator should go beyond the conference and may include membership being revoked, prohibiting future attendance at conferences/workshops, post-conference training for the perpetrator, and a report to the perpetrator's supervisor to support post-conference actions. The victim should be provided with several options for support, including external resources. Incidents of sexual misconduct should be reported by conference organizers to the chair of the ethics committee, to the society's officers, advisory board members, and/or CEOs.

### Limitations

Field-based workshops in remote locations are common within dendrochronology; however, the focus group participants spoke more to structured conference or workshop settings, *i.e.* convention centers, hotels, universities, or conference centers where there is an existing infrastructure to support organizers and attendees. Therefore, one of the limitations of this study is the lack of guidance it provides for hosting workshops at remote locations.

## DISCUSSION

Implementation of the policies and best practices recommended by the focus group participants will require a cultural shift and thoughtful commitment from organizers of dendrochronology conferences and workshops. These changes may be uncomfortable for some individuals; however, attending conferences and workshops has long been an uncomfortable and sometimes painful experience for many female researchers (Else 2018). When female researchers regularly describe being "touched in unnecessary and unexpected ways by men, in greeting or in the course of conversation, with men's hands caressing, grabbing, and lingering at hips, arms, backs, hands, and shoulders" (Jackson 2019) during professional conferences, it is time for a cultural shift because this unwanted contact, perceived by males as "innocent," has the effect of sending a physical message to female attendees that they are not "real" researchers (Jackson 2019). Given dendrochronology's history of turning a blind eye to sexual misconduct at U.S. conferences and workshops (Kast 2018, 2019; Flaherty 2019), the authors call upon our discipline to become a leader in

creating a culture where all researchers are valued and welcomed at our gatherings.

Creating a safe environment at conferences and workshops must begin with having a diverse organizing committee (Barrows *et al.* 2021). However, the lack of a strong connection between a professional society and most dendrochronology conferences and workshops will be a challenge because each organizing committee will need to develop their own policy statement on sexual misconduct, create a reporting pathway and review system for potential violations, determine and enforce consequences for sexual misconduct violations, and provide supportive resources for the victim (Table 1). For example, the Tree-Ring Society (Tree-Ring Society 2018) has a policy on sexual harassment. We laud the clear definitions provided in this document and the inclusion of possible consequences (Table 2). However, there is no information about a reporting mechanism, the process for reviewing a potential violation, and who is responsible for enforcement of penalties. Thus, conference and workshop organizers may be able to use some of the language from the Code of Conduct developed by the Tree-Ring Society to define sexual misconduct; however, they must supplement this with a process for reporting, reviewing, and enforcement (Favaro *et al.* 2016). In contrast to the Tree-Ring Society, The Association of Tree-Ring Research (ATR 2022) has no current policy on sexual misconduct posted on their website and the topic is not mentioned in their bylaws (ATR 2017), which leaves the different organizing teams for the annual TRACE meeting having to develop these materials for each event. It will also be the responsibility of conference and workshop organizers to familiarize themselves with local laws on sexual harassment and assault and report violations to police.

One aspect that conference organizers may easily overlook is putting into place best practices for the informal portions of the conference agenda (Table 1). Many regular attendees of professional conferences create a core group of colleagues from other institutions. The informal networking that occurs over meals or during session breaks allows these connections to develop into long-term friendships (Jackson 2019). However, these informal settings, which often involve alcohol consumption, can be particularly challenging for female attendees

**Table 2.** The current policy of the Tree-Ring Society on sexual harassment (Tree-Ring Society 2018).**Definition of sexual harassment**

- Sexual harassment is any form of unwelcome sexual attention or conduct that is perceived by the recipient to be offensive, humiliating or intimidating and that occurs in any instance in a Tree-Ring Society environment or work-related activity and/or event.
- Sexual harassment may be written, verbal or physical and includes:
- unwelcome touching, grabbing or other physical contact
  - asking for sex or sexual favors
  - leering and staring
  - displaying sexually offensive material in any format
  - sexual jokes, gestures or comments
  - questions or discussion about an individual's sex life

**Potential consequences for violating code of conduct**

Where it is found that behavior constituting a breach of the Tree-Ring Society's bullying and harassment policy has occurred, immediate action will be taken. Such action includes, but is not restricted to, revocation of membership, articles for publication, and awards that have/had been given to individuals. Action may also include removing the individual from his/her position, whether it be a Council member, contractor, or any other person affiliated with the Tree-Ring Society. Any behavior that breaches this policy may be reported to the appropriate law enforcement agency.

because as communication styles become more informal, the frequency of sexual jokes and unwanted sexual advances increases (Else 2018). The focus group participants noted that these informal interactions can be particularly uncomfortable for younger attendees, from lower positions of power within their discipline, and encouraged leaders to communicate that is “ok to say ‘no’ [to unwanted advances].” In addition to younger attendees, another vulnerable group identified by the focus group participants are support staff from the venue, *e.g.* bartenders and servers. Venue staffers often work during the informal social periods of a conference or workshop and are also potential victims of sexual harassment by conference attendees (Table 1). One of the most powerful tools for conference organizers during these informal periods of time is conference attendees who have received bystander training. The trained attendees help create an entire community to support and uphold the safety of more vulnerable individuals (Fenton and Mott 2018).

**CONCLUSIONS**

As more professional societies recognize that policies and best practices can reduce the risk of sexual misconduct at conferences and workshops, these tools for creating a safe space for all researchers will become standard. We urge the dendrochronology community to join other disciplines (Favaro *et al.* 2016; Foxx *et al.* 2019; Tulloch 2020;

Air *et al.* 2021) that have implemented codes of conduct related to sexual harassment and assault. In the words of our focus group participants, “Organizations need to have a policy statement on sexual misconduct. Include the policy on the conference registration website that clearly states what inappropriate conduct is, how to report it, and what will happen with reports. Each registrant must agree to comply with that statement during conference registration.” Following these basic guidelines will benefit current and future dendrochronologists.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This work was supported by the United States Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture Higher Education Challenge Grants Program under Grant 2020-70003-30920. The authors appreciate the time, energy, and commitment provided by the ten focus group participants. Without their willingness to share their experience and knowledge, this project would not have been possible. The authors also appreciate the work of Kathryn C. Hollandsworth who coordinated the electronic survey used during the focus group.

**REFERENCES CITED**

- Air, E. L., K. O. Orrico, D. L. Benzil, A. M. Scarrow, J. R. Bean, C. A. Mazzola, L. M. Liau, J. T. Rutka, and K. M. Muraszko, 2021. Developing a professionalism and harassment policy for organized neurosurgery. *Neurosurgery* 88:1038–1039.



- Amoroso, M. M., J. H. Speer, L. D. Daniels, R. Villalba, E. Cook, D. Stahle, A. Srur, J. Tardif, F. Conciatori, E. Aciar, J. Arco, A. Bonada, B. Coulthard, J. Haney, M. Isaac-Renton, J. Magalhães, E. Marcotti, P. Meglioli, M. S. Montepeluso, R. Oelkers, J. Pearl, M. P. Garcia, J. Robson, M. R. Catón, P. Soto, and A. Young, 2018. South American Dendroecological Fieldweek 2016: Exploring Dendrochronological Research in Northern Patagonia. *Tree-Ring Research* 74:120–131.
- Anderson, E. W., C. Vanner, C. M. Wotipka, and K. Kelly, 2021. "Participation does not equal voice": Gendered experiences in an academic and professional society. *Comparative Education Review* 65:534–554.
- Anonymous, 2020. Personal perspective on inequality: Conference attendance as an Iranian citizen. *Fems Microbiology Letters* 367:10.1093/femsle/fnz1244.
- ATR, 2017. Charter of the Association of Tree-Ring Research. <https://treering.org.files.wordpress.com/2017/08/certified-translation-of-atr-bylaw.pdf>.
- ATR, 2022. Association for Tree-Ring Research. <https://treering.org/>.
- Balogun, J. A., P. E. Sloan, and M. Germain, 2007. Core values and evaluation processes associated with academic tenure. *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 104:1107–1115.
- Barrows, A. S., M. A. Sukhai, I. R. Coe, and J. M. Blais, 2021. So, you want to host an inclusive and accessible conference? *FACETS* 6:131–138.
- Buentgen, U., 2018. The value of national dendro meetings: By participants of the 2017 UK Dendro Meeting. *Dendrochronologia* 48:30–31.
- Dreyfuss, B. B., and D. Marasco, 2021. Bringing the welcome home: One section's efforts at incorporating AAPT's diversity and inclusion practices. *The Physics Teacher* 59: 260–263.
- Else, H., 2018. Can conference shed reputation for hosting sexist behavior? *Nature* 563:610–611.
- Favaro, B., S. Oester, J. A. Cigliano, L. A. Cornick, E. J. Hind, E. C. M. Parsons, and T. J. Woodbury, 2016. Your science conference should have a code of conduct. *Frontiers in Marine Science* 3:10.3389/fmars.2016.00103.
- Fenton, R. A., and H. L. Mott, 2018. Evaluation of The Intervention Initiative: A bystander intervention program to prevent violence against women in universities. *Violence and Victims* 3:645–662.
- Flaherty, C., 2019. UT Knoxville professor repeatedly violated harassment policies. Inside Higher Ed. <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2019/08/21/report-ut-knoxville-professor-repeatedly-violated-harassment-policies>.
- Flores, N. M., 2020. Harassment at conferences: Will #MeToo momentum translate to real change? *Gender and Education* 32:137–144.
- Foxx, A. J., R. S. Barak, T. M. Lichtenberger, L. K. Richardson, A. J. Rodgers, and E. Webb Williams, 2019. Evaluating the prevalence and quality of conference codes of conduct. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116:14931–14936.
- Hill, J., and H. Walkington, 2016. Developing graduate attributes through participation in undergraduate research conferences. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 40:222–237.
- ITRDB, 2007–2020. *Archive of the International Tree-Ring Data Bank Forum*. <https://itrdbrfor.org/wws/arc/itrdbrfor/2020-07/msg00122.html>.
- Jackson, L., 2019. The smiling philosopher: Emotional labor, gender, and harassment in conference spaces. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 51:693–701.
- Kast, M., 2018. University of Tennessee professor accused of sexual misconduct had 'creepy' behavior for years, ex-colleagues say. *Knox News*. <https://www.knoxnews.com/story/news/education/2018/10/03/henri-grissino-mayer-tennessee-sexual-harassment/1485477002/>.
- Kast, M., 2019. University of Tennessee professor sexually harassed students for years, report says. *Knox News*. <https://www.knoxnews.com/story/news/education/2019/08/20/henri-grissino-mayer-utk-professor-sexual-harassment/2059768001/>.
- Leech, N. L., C. A. Haug, D. Icceman-Sands, and J. Moriarty, 2015. Change in classification level and the effects on research productivity and merit scores for faculty in a school of education. *Studies in Higher Education* 40: 1030–1045.
- Liamputtong, P., 2011. *Focus Group Methodology: Principles and Practice*. SAGE Publications Ltd, London.
- Little, C., 2020. Undergraduate research as a student engagement springboard: Exploring the longer-term reported benefits of participation in a research conference. *Educational Research* 62:229–245.
- McGee, E. O., and L. Kazembe, 2016. Entertainers or education researchers? The challenges associated with presenting while black. *Race Ethnicity and Education* 19:96–120.
- Ramos, R. L., M. Comiskey, J. Dowling, H. G. McFarlane, and A. J. Betz, 2020. Undergraduate participation in the Society for Neuroscience. *Journal of Undergraduate Neuroscience Education* 18:A129–A133.
- Ryan, K. E., T. Gandha, M. J. Culbertson, and C. Carlson, 2014. Focus group evidence: Implications for design and analysis. *American Journal of Evaluation* 35:328–345.
- Sardelis, S., J. A. Drew, and M. A. Pavlova, 2016. Not "Pulling up the Ladder": Women who organize conference symposia provide greater opportunities for women to speak at conservation conferences. *Plos One* 11:e0160015.
- Settles, I. H., and R. C. O'Connor, 2014. Incivility at academic conferences: Gender differences and the mediating role of climate. *Sex Roles* 71:71–82.
- Speer, J., 2007. Wood anatomy and tree rings - Wood anatomy workshop in Tucson Arizona. *IAWA Journal* 28:103–104.
- Sutherland, E. K., and I. A. Mundo, 2016. The 2016 Ameridendro Awards. *Tree-Ring Research* 72:108–110.
- Tardif, J., 2003. Wood anatomy of tree rings: Report from an international course. *IAWA Journal* 24:86.
- Thresher, D., 2010. International winter school on wood anatomy of tree rings. *Dendrochronologia* 28:259–260.
- Timperley, C., K. A. Sutherland, M. Wilson, and M. Hall, 2020. He moana pukepuke: Navigating gender and ethnic inequality in early career academics' conference attendance. *Gender and Education* 32:11–26.
- Tree-Ring Society, 2018. Code of conduct on bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment. <https://www.treeringsociety.org/Code-of-Conduct>.

- Tulloch, A. I. T., 2020. Improving sex and gender identity equity and inclusion at conservation and ecology conferences. *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 4:1311–1320.
- Wilkinson, S., 1998. Focus group methodology: A review. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 1:181–203.
- Zhang, Q.-B., and X. Shao, 2007. Tree Rings and Ecology The 7th International Conference on Dendrochronology. *Journal of Integrative Plant Biology* 49:129–130.

Received 27 January 2022; accepted 25 April 2022.