

# Confronting Sexual Harassment and Misconduct in SHAFR and the Profession

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The Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) adopted a policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Misconduct in January 2019 in keeping with emerging best practice of professional societies, including the American Historical Association (see its Code of Professional Conduct at Officially Sanctioned AHA Activities: <https://www.historians.org/about-aha-and-membership/governance/policies-and-documents-of-the-association/code-of-professional-conduct-at-officially-sanctioned-aha-activities>). This policy can be found on the SHAFR website at [www.shafrr.org/policies/harassment](http://www.shafrr.org/policies/harassment).

All conference registrants and new and renewing members must affirmatively agree to abide by this policy.

As part of the rollout of this policy, SHAFR President Barbara Keys consulted widely with other organizations about their experiences in enforcing codes of conduct, as a result of which she recommended, and Council approved, three actions for the 2019 conference. First, academia's leading conference code consultant, Sherry Marts of S\*Marts Consulting, was hired to advise on the handling of any reports that might come in during the conference. Second, a three person Conference Code of Conduct Task Force was established. Council member Kelly J. Shannon chaired the Task Force, which also consisted of Conference Committee member Aaron O'Connell and Graduate Student Committee member Ryan Musto. Varsha Venkatasubramanian participated on the Task Force as a trainee, in preparation for serving on the Task Force as a Graduate Student Committee representative at the 2020 SHAFR conference in New Orleans. During the conference, Task Force members made themselves available to answer questions about the policy; receive and, if warranted, investigate complaints; describe reporting procedures and provide advice on resources; and discuss related issues. They also committed to checking the SHAFRConduct@gmail.com account once weekly for three months following the conference. As of the July *Passport* submission deadline, no complaints were received.

Third, SHAFR hired Sherry Marts to run a three-hour workshop for the Task Force and Council members before the conference. In addition to addressing response and reporting practices and procedures, Marts provided a briefing on harassment—defined as unwanted, unsolicited, and unwelcome behaviors—and some of its manifestations, ranging from sexual comments and pressure for sex to assault and rape. SHAFR is following her recommendations for organizational best practice: adopting a code of conduct, developing staff and member awareness of the issue, and devising reporting and enforcement mechanisms.

SHAFR members may wish to take note of Marts' advice on "harassment resistance." Without suggesting that the burden should be on the target—ideally, we want to stop harassment before it occurs—it can be useful to know how experts suggest that harassment can best be stopped in the moment. Mart recommends that the targeted person adopt

a calm demeanor, serious face, and neutral body language. Holding eye contact, being polite (but not nice), and with no apologies, the target can tell the harasser: "You did /said this [summarize offense]. I don't like it. Stop right now." Mart recommends that the target continue to maintain eye contact and to repeat the statements "I don't like it" and "Stop right now" if the harasser responds in a way that indicates that he/she did not get the message.

The bystander interventions recommended by Marts are situation dependent. They include addressing the harasser, offering assistance to the targeted person, and distracting the harasser or target (this may be especially effective in cases of inebriation). Bystanders may wish to speak out on how a remark or action affected them (rather than the target), as in: "that bothers me." Bystanders may also wish to delegate the intervention to a bartender, manager, or other staff member.

To provide a forum for members to discuss the new policy and related issues and to follow through on the recommendation to develop awareness of sexual harassment and misconduct in professional settings, Barbara Keys commissioned me to organize and chair a conference panel on Confronting Sexual Misconduct in SHAFR and the Profession at the 2019 conference.

This panel was well attended, with roughly forty people present. Brian DeLay, the Co-Chair (with Julia Irwin) of the SHAFR Task Force on Conference Conduct that recommended the policy that was adopted, spoke on how the Task Force arrived at the policy. Laura Belmonte, who has served as an Associate Dean at Oklahoma State University, spoke on Title IX considerations. Barbara Molony, co-president of the Coordinating Council for Women in History, spoke on #MeToo in the historical profession, highlighting the damage done by sexual harassment and complicity and the intersectional nature of harassment. Christina Franzino, the Assistant Director of the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office at George Washington University, spoke on bystander interventions and responses. One of her main points—consistent with Marts's counsel—was that an important form of bystander intervention is to create a positive organizational culture. This means speaking out against discriminatory, harassing, and other harmful statements even if there is no target present.

In the ensuing discussion, audience members asked for clarification on SHAFR policy. SHAFR will evaluate complaints with assistance from external experts and conduct investigations when warranted. The President, Vice President, Executive Director, and Conference Conduct Task Force members will have sole access to the unredacted report. If warranted, the harasser will be asked to leave the conference with no refund and will be excluded from other SHAFR activities such as workshops and committees.

Before this policy was formalized, SHAFR addressed one incident, as noted in then-president Peter Hahn's

October 6, 2018 email statement to members, subsequently printed in the January 2019 issue of *Passport*. This statement reported that SHAFR had concluded an independent, external investigation of events that occurred during its annual meeting in Philadelphia in 2018 and was treating the findings as confidential.

In keeping with the new policy, the SHAFR leadership would like to provide further clarification. The incident in question came to SHAFR's attention via a third party, not the alleged target, who did not bring forward a complaint. SHAFR hired an attorney who is trained in sexual harassment investigations to conduct a thorough investigation that included interviews with witnesses. This exhaustively and meticulously researched report concluded that SHAFR did not need to take further action in this case to uphold its commitment to providing a non-abusive and non-discriminatory professional space.

Members should be assured that the SHAFR leadership takes complaints seriously. SHAFR will take meaningful action if warranted. The Executive Director will provide an annual report to the membership on the number of complaints filed and outcomes. If any situation arises that warrants wider disclosure of investigation findings for health and safety reasons, the SHAFR officers and Conference Conduct Task Force members who have read

the investigatory report will make that decision on a case-by-case basis. SHAFR may also choose on a case-by-case basis to share investigation findings with the home institution of the accused, whether to report misconduct or to provide clarification if an individual has reported on a SHAFR member to that member's institution, thereby prompting a Title IX or similar investigation. SHAFR did share the conclusions of the 2018 outside investigation with a Title IX officer.

As noted by Franzino in the panel on confronting sexual harassment and misconduct, outside of the official SHAFR response, targeted people and witnesses can register complaints by contacting the Title IX office of harassers employed in U.S. academic institutions. (Some other countries, among them Canada and the United Kingdom, also have institutional reporting channels). The topic of an appeals and reinstatement process arose in the course of the discussion, and Council will follow up on this.

Audience members expressed appreciation for the panel, with several urging SHAFR to hold follow-up anti-bias events. As planning begins for the 2020 SHAFR conference in New Orleans, we welcome these and other suggestions. Please email me, SHAFR President Barbara Keys, Task Force Chair Kelly Shannon, or SHAFR Executive Director Amy Sayward if you have questions or concerns.

SHAFR is happy to welcome  
the new editorial team  
for *Diplomatic History*:

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