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# Addressing Harassment at ACM Events: Volunteer Training

Valerie Aurora  
(she/her/hers)

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# ACM Policy Against Harassment

ACM's Policy Against Harassment at ACM Activities applies to all ACM events, publications, and communications

<https://www.acm.org/about-acm/policy-against-harassment>



# The role of volunteer leaders

Policies need enforcement

This training teaches volunteer leaders:

- What harassment is and how to spot it
- What to do about harassment at events you are leading
- How to report harassment to ACM

# Disclaimers

**This is not legal advice; use your best judgment**

Organizational rules, laws, etc. override this training

Intended audience is volunteer conference leaders

This training contains brief mentions of physical assault, sexual assault, racism, violence, and other forms of oppressive language and behavior

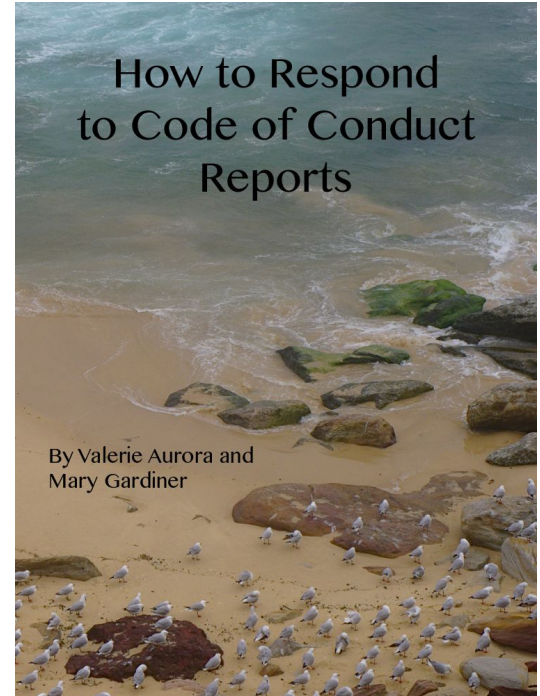
# About Valerie Aurora

Wrote free ebook "How to Respond to Code of Conduct Reports"

10+ years code of conduct work, ally skills, executive DEI coaching, etc.

Former software engineer

<https://frameshiftconsulting.com/resources/code-of-conduct-book/>



# Terminology

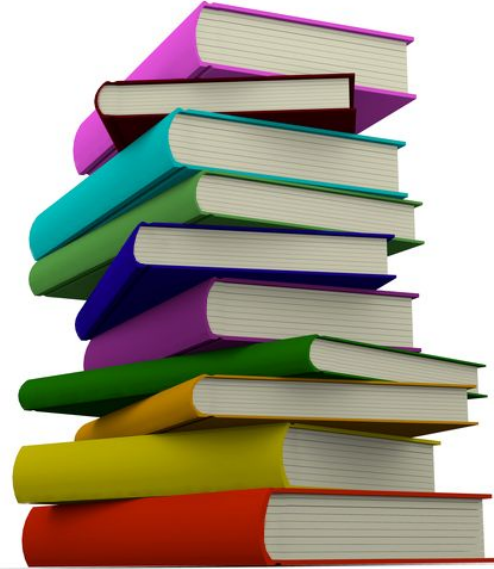
Policy/code of conduct

Events/spaces

Offender/harasser

Target/victim

Incident/violation



# Some of the behaviors not allowed in ACM spaces:

- Abuse: stalking, threatening, intimidation
- Discriminatory harassment: discrimination based on race, age, disability, or several other categories
- Sexual harassment: Unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or similar

Read the full policy for a complete and up-to-date list

<https://www.acm.org/about-acm/policy-against-harassment>

# Allowed or not?

1. Making sexist comments on social media covered by the ACM policy
2. Pointing out that someone made sexist comments on social media covered by the ACM policy



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# What does the policy say? (check for updates)

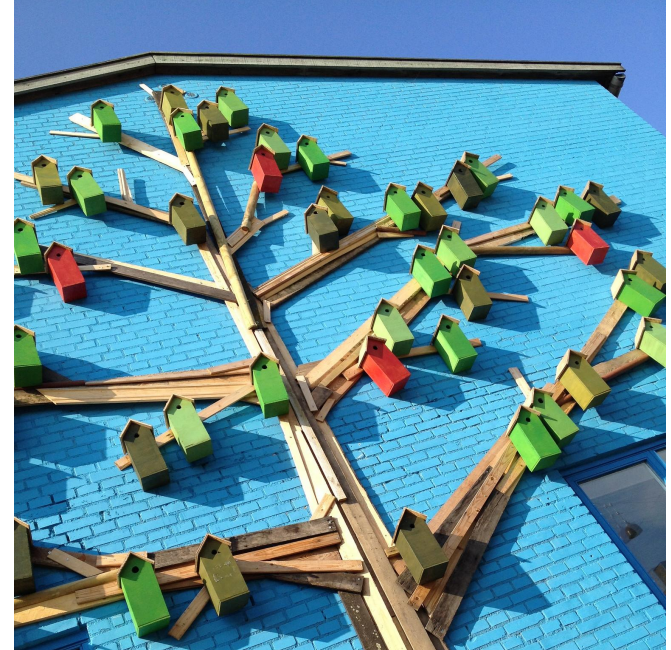
"This policy applies to all ACM activities, including: conferences [...] communications sent through communication channels associated with ACM, including **social media**."

"Discriminatory Harassment: Any conduct that discriminates or denigrates an individual on the basis of [...] **sexual or gender identity** [...]"



# Allowed or not?

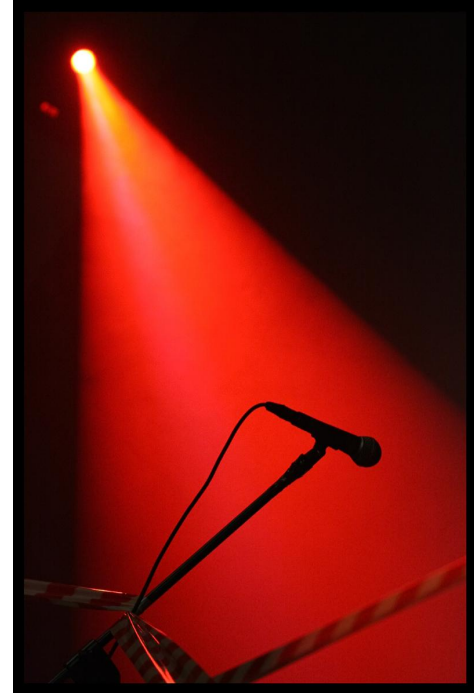
1. Making sexist comments on social media covered by the ACM policy - **not allowed**
2. Pointing out that someone made sexist comments on social media covered by the ACM policy - **allowed**



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# Allowed or not?

1. Saying that people of the dominant race benefit from systemic racism at a conference lunch
2. Reporting the previous comment as racism



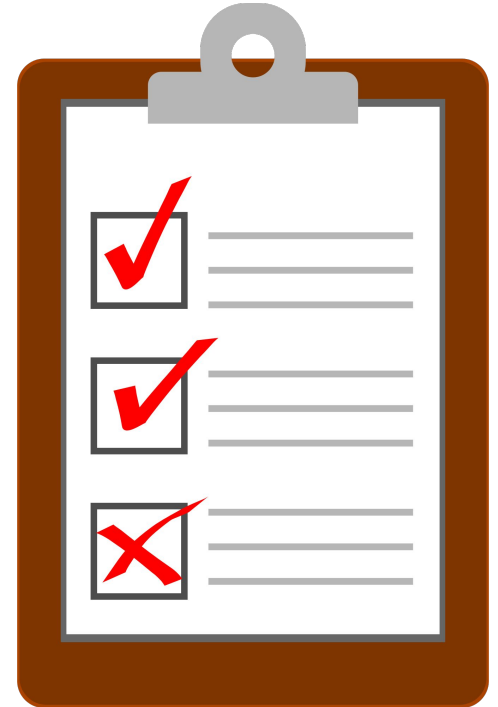
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# What does the policy say? (check for updates)

"This policy applies to all ACM activities, including: **conferences** [...]"

"Discriminatory Harassment: Any conduct that discriminates or denigrates an individual on the basis of **race** [...]"

"Appropriate sanctions also will be taken toward any individual who **knowingly makes a false allegation of harassment.**"



# Allowed or not?

1. Saying that people of the dominant race benefit from systemic racism at a conference lunch - **allowed**
2. Reporting the previous comment as racism - **not allowed**



# Volunteer leader responsibilities

Prepare before the event to support the policy

At the event, listen to people with concerns

If immediate action is necessary, use judgment

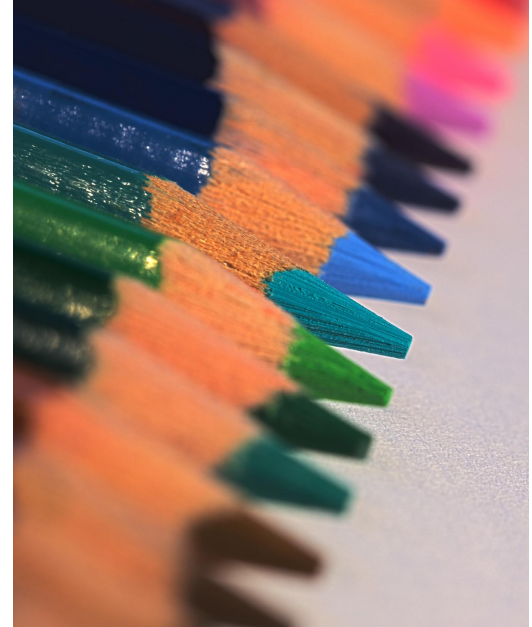
If they are willing, help them report to ACM:

<https://www.acm.org/about-acm/reporting-unacceptable-behavior>

# Why are formal reports important?

Volunteer event organizers are limited in resources, actions, and knowledge

Formal reports allow ACM to take action outside of events, make long-term decisions, identify patterns, etc.



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# Before the event

Read the ACM Policy Against Harassment at ACM Activities

Inform attendees about the policy and how to report violations (e.g., include links in email communications)

Be supportive of the policy in public communications

Use ACM prepared slide about the policy



# During the event

Listen to concerns from attendees

Get enough information to decide whether immediate action is necessary

Do not impose "help" on people who don't want it

Do not mediate or resolve complaints informally

If desired, help them file a formal report

# If immediate action is necessary

**This is not legal advice; use your best judgment**

Only call security, medical assistance, or law enforcement if requested, if someone is in imminent danger, or you are legally required to (e.g. mandated reporter)

Take the minimum necessary action for safety or preventing further harassment (e.g. barring someone from the rest of the event)

# If you need to intervene in an ongoing situation

Evaluate power relationships, safety, potential for retaliation, then choose an option:

- Distract
- Get help
- Confront
- Report



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# Distract

Less chance of retaliation, good for getting more info

"Can I ask you where you got your laptop bag?"

"Your friends are looking for you. If you have a minute, I can take you to where they are?"

Ask them to show you how to get to the bathroom, etc.

Make conversation with the harasser

# Get help

Who is nearby, more powerful,  
easy to reach?

Venue staff

Other event organizers

People you trust

Work together as a group



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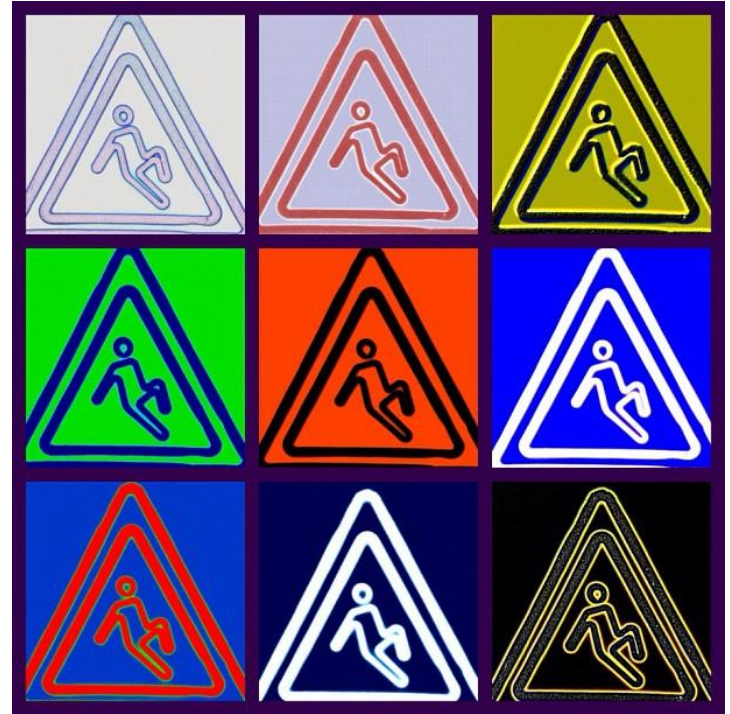
# Confront

Safety first! Think about who is at risk of retaliation

"What are you doing?"

"We don't do that here"

"When people do BEHAVIOR, I don't like it"



# Report

File a report with ACM:  
[https://www.acm.org/about-acm/  
reporting-unacceptable-behavior](https://www.acm.org/about-acm/reporting-unacceptable-behavior)

ACM will investigate and take  
any longer term action



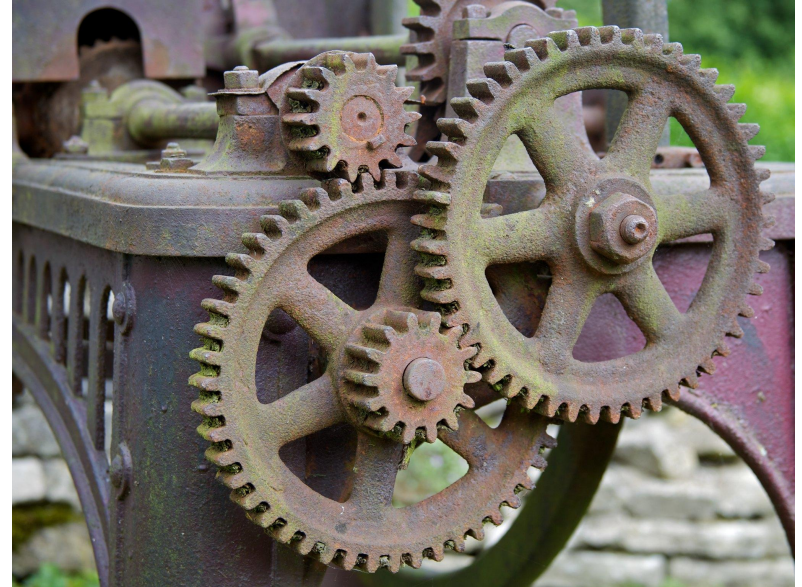
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# Complex issues

What if the direct target says the harassment is okay?

What if someone is drinking?

What if the reporter wants to be anonymous?



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## What if the direct target says harassment is okay?

People often think of harassment as a conflict between two people, but it affects the entire community

Example: A straight person uses a homophobic slur, and their queer friend says they don't mind—but other people hear it and think, "Homophobia is tolerated here"

The target has important information, but it is not their job to decide what is acceptable within the community

# What if someone is drinking?

Studies show alcohol causes clumsiness, sleepiness, lower problem-solving ability, and memory loss

Everything else (violence, sexual advances, rude comments) depends on what is socially acceptable

Drunk people **can** follow the policy against harassment

<http://www.sirc.org/publik/drinking4.html>

## What if someone is drinking?

If someone can't stop themselves from harassing people while drunk, they shouldn't drink at all

Events can send messages about what behavior is socially acceptable when people are drinking by the way they present alcohol

Targets do not "deserve" harassment because they are drunk, wearing certain clothes, out late, alone, etc.

# What if the reporter wants to be anonymous?

People have many valid reasons to stay anonymous

Don't pressure them to break anonymity

Anonymous reports are hard to investigate but help the organization put together a pattern of behavior or structural problems

Anonymous reports are better than no reports!

# ACM resources

<https://www.acm.org/about-acm/policy-against-harassment>

<https://www.acm.org/about-acm/reporting-unacceptable-behavior>

Still have questions? Email  
[advocate@acm.org](mailto:advocate@acm.org)



# Thank you!

Valerie Aurora

Frame Shift Consulting

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