



THE PALAENTOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA
CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEETINGS AND ASSOCIATED ACTIVITIES

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Palaeontological Society of Southern Africa (PSSA) aims to support our diverse research community and promote an equitable and inclusive environment that protects all our members - students, preparators, support staff and academics - from harassment and discrimination. This PSSA Code of Conduct was established in collaboration with the PSSA President, Prof Chinsamy-Turan (University of Cape Town), and the diversity subcommittee: Wade Harris (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg), Fay-Yaad Toefy (University of Cape Town), Ryan Nel (Albany Museum) and Dr Pia Viglietti (Field Museum, Chicago).

2. PURPOSE

The Code of Conduct provided herein pertains to all PSSA members and non-members attending PSSA meetings or associated functions. All attendees must adhere to the highest standards of scientific integrity and professional ethics. To promote an equitable and diverse environment, we outline expectations of acceptable behaviour at the PSSA meetings and related activities, such as fieldtrips and other events organized by the PSSA. The PSSA does not discriminate in its activities based on sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, parental status, age, immigration status, disability, neurodiverse status, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, socioeconomic background, educational background, or career stage. The PSSA will strive to ensure that all PSSA meetings and associated functions are conducted in a way that all attendees are treated with dignity and respect.

3. SCOPE AND APPLICATION

The PSSA recognizes behaviour as misconduct when it has the effect of creating, contributing to, or maintaining an environment that is hostile towards a person or group on the basis of sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, parental status, age, immigration status, disability, neurodiverse status, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, socioeconomic background, educational background, career stage, or any other reason not related to scientific merit.

The Code of Conduct provided herein applies to all attendees, professional palaeontologists, students, technicians, speakers, exhibitors, staff, contractors, service providers, and volunteers at PSSA meetings and related activities, such as fieldtrips and functions associated with PSSA meetings. Membership or participation in PSSA meetings and associated functions constitutes an agreement to adhere to the Code of Conduct. Attendees must adhere to the highest standards of scientific integrity and professional ethics. To promote an equitable and diverse environment, we outline expectations of acceptable behaviour at the PSSA meetings and related activities, such as fieldtrips and other events organized by the PSSA.

4. EXPECTED BEHAVIOUR

Expectations with respect to the conduct and action of attendees are as follows:

- ◆ Attendees will conduct themselves in a manner that best represents the PSSA.

- ◆ Attendees will give equitable consideration to all professional palaeontologists, students, technicians, speakers, exhibitors, staff, contractors, service providers, and volunteers regardless of their race, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, age, immigration status, disability, neurodiverse status, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, socioeconomic background, educational background, or career stage.
- ◆ Attendees will ensure that questions and discussions are respectful and constructive, focusing on ideas rather than individuals.
- ◆ Attendees will refrain from comments or behaviours that may reasonably be assumed to have the effect of creating, contributing to, or maintaining an environment that is hostile toward or damaging to a person or group, no matter whether they are made directly (e.g., in person) or indirectly (e.g., via social media or electronically).
- ◆ Attendees will not use legal intoxicants (e.g. alcohol) to the extent that their ability to act professionally and follow this Code of Conduct is compromised.
- ◆ Attendees will not take or disseminate photographs, recordings, or reproductions of materials presented as part of the PSSA meetings or associated functions without the expressed permission of the author(s).
- ◆ Attendees will observe the guidelines for reporting misconduct and recognize that such guidelines are always in effect (See section 6)
- ◆ All attendees are expected to adhere to the laws of the jurisdiction in which PSSA meetings and associated functions takes place. Any form of criminal activity is strictly prohibited and may result in immediate expulsion from the events.

5. MISCONDUCT

Behaviours that are recognized as misconduct and may result in disciplinary action include:

- ◆ All forms of harassment, including sexual harassment, quid pro quos, denigrating jokes, stereotyping, or a recurring pattern of microinvalidations, and microaggressions (See section 8). Harassment intended in a joking manner still constitutes unacceptable behaviour.
- ◆ Physical abuse or bullying and intimidation.
- ◆ Verbal or written abuse (in-person or electronically/remotely), including but not limited to harmful comments related to race, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, age, immigration status, disability, neurodiverse status, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, socioeconomic background, educational background, or career stage.
- ◆ Hostile acts such as the display or circulation of written graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion towards an individual or group.
- ◆ Violating the previously communicated (verbally/non-verbally) physical, emotional and sexual boundaries of others through the continuation of otherwise prohibited behaviours.

- ◆ Intentional, unwelcomed physical behaviours, including but not limited to physical contact, stalking, aggressive or intimidating displays.
- ◆ Threats of physical, emotional, or professional harm.
- ◆ Epithets, slurs, negative stereotyping, threatening, intimidating, denigrating jokes.
- ◆ Psychological abuse that makes the person question their perception of reality or sanity, like gaslighting.
- ◆ Inappropriate use of nudity and/or sexual images in public spaces or in presentations.
- ◆ Unwelcome sexual attention, including sexual advances or propositions; verbal comments or physical actions of a sexual nature; sexually degrading words used to describe an individual; a display of sexually suggestive objects or pictures; sexually explicit jokes.
- ◆ Disruption of talks at oral or poster sessions, or at other events organized by PSSA at the PSSA meeting venues, hotels, or other contracted facilities.
- ◆ Invasive photography or recording, including no photographs or recordings of minors (under 18 years of age) without explicit permission from guardians.
- ◆ Recording or photography of talks or posters without express permission from the authors.

Anyone requested to stop misconduct is expected to comply **immediately**.

6. *REPORTING AN INCIDENT OF HARASSMENT*

If you experience or observe harassment, we recommend that you write down the details as soon as possible, in as much detail as possible, to help you to recall specific events in the future. If you believe you have experienced or observed harassment, notify one of PSSA Executive Officers (President, Past President, President-Elect, Secretary, or Treasurer). The person experiencing harassment is not required to discuss the incident with the offending party unless they feel comfortable doing so. All complaints will be treated seriously and addressed promptly and appropriately. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent that it does not compromise the rights of others or the need to conduct an adequate investigation and to the extent allowed by law.

6.1 PSSA Procedures for Responding to Harassment Complaints

- ◆ Any PSSA representative receiving a complaint will immediately notify the PSSA President, or a PSSA Executive Officer. The PSSA President and PSSA Secretary should be made aware of the situation immediately, unless such individual is the subject of the complaint. All complaints will be investigated fairly, thoroughly, and as promptly as possible, and corrective action will be taken where warranted.
- ◆ The PSSA President, along with the Secretary, President-Elect, and Past President, if available, will then determine whether the matter requires an internal investigation. If so, they will name at least two impartial investigators (other PSSA members or from other scientific associations) to investigate. Any individual who believes they have a conflict of interest should not serve as an

impartial investigator. If the PSSA executive officers determine that no investigation is necessary, they will determine if any other action is appropriate.

- ◆ The selected independent investigators will review the complaint and interview the complainant. They will then document and report to the PSSA President, or their designate, who will determine if further investigation is required or recommend other appropriate action.
- ◆ If appropriate, the investigators will then meet with the alleged offender, explain the details of the complaint, and give them a reasonable chance to respond to the allegations and bring evidence of their own.
- ◆ If the facts are in dispute, the investigators will take any additional steps necessary to determine the facts, such as interviewing witnesses. The investigators will seek appropriate counsel from the PSSA executive officers, or their designates, if they are unsure how to proceed at any time.
- ◆ The investigators will report the findings of the investigation to the PSSA President or other Executive officers, as appropriate. The available Executive Officers will then determine an appropriate action, which may include a disciplinary action. The determination will then be promptly communicated to the complainant and alleged offender.
- ◆ Notification to the PSSA is essential to enforcing this Policy. PSSA meeting attendees may be assured that they will not be penalized in any way for reporting harassment or discrimination.

The victimization of any individual who reports harassment or assists in an investigation will not be tolerated and is also subject to disciplinary action.

7. DISCIPLINARY ACTION

7.1 When to take disciplinary action

Individuals who violate the Code of Conduct will be subject to disciplinary action, as will individuals who act in bad faith by making maliciously false accusations. In the PSSA's sole discretion, this disciplinary action may consist, at a minimum, of a written warning, but may also include ejection from the current PSSA meeting, reporting the behaviour to the violator's home institution, and other penalties, without refund of any applicable registration fees or costs. If an incident is particularly serious or repeated incidents occur with the same individual, that individual may be banned from future PSSA meetings and membership to PSSA, as well as subjected to legal action.

7.2 Retaliation

Backlash, victim blaming, or retaliation against any individuals, victims, or whistle-blowers who report harassment, or assists in an investigation as defined herein is strictly prohibited and will not be tolerated. Backlash is a serious violation of PSSA policy and, like acts of harassment or discrimination, will be subject to disciplinary

action. If you believe you have experienced or observed backlash, notify PSSA Executive officers (President, Past President, President-Elect, Secretary, or Treasurer).

7.3 Appeal and questions

If an individual is dissatisfied with the actions taken because of the investigation, they may submit a written appeal to PSSA's Executive Officers. An appeal may be granted at the discretion of the Executive Officers. Any questions regarding this policy should be directed to the PSSA President.

8. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

- ◆ Amateur: a palaeontology enthusiast who is not paid as a professional to do palaeontology.
- ◆ Retaliation: refers to victim blaming or backlash and occurs when the harasser or other people in the environment/workplace blame the victim or whistle-blowers for the harassment or the resulting controversies and conflicts after the harassment is reported or discovered. Backlash results when people erroneously believe the victim could stop the harassment if they really tried, or that the victim must have done something to cause the harassment. The victim or whistle-blowers may be accused of trying to get attention, covering for incompetence, or in cases where the harassment is proven, lying about the extent of the effects. Outdated attitudes about certain kinds of harassment remain and there is often social pressure for victims to keep quiet about abuse or suffer the consequences.
- ◆ Bullying: is physical and psychological harassing behaviour perpetrated against an individual, by one or more persons. Bullying is also repeated, health-harming mistreatment of one or more persons (the targets) by one or more perpetrators that takes one or more of the following forms: 1) Verbal abuse
2) Offensive conduct/behaviours (including nonverbal) which are threatening, humiliating, or intimidating 3) Work interference (sabotage) which prevents work from getting done.
- ◆ Conflict of Interest: a situation that has the potential to undermine the impartiality of a person because of the possibility of the person's self-interest working against professional or public interests.
- ◆ Equity: fairness in treating people without bias discrimination, prejudice, bigotry or favouritism.
- ◆ Ethnicity: a person's affiliation with or membership of a larger group of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic or cultural traditions, origins or backgrounds.
- ◆ Gaslighting: Manipulating someone into questioning their own perception of reality.
- ◆ Gender Expression: the external representation or appearance of one's gender or sexual identity, usually expressed through behaviour, clothing, haircut, or voice;

this may not conform to socially defined behaviours and characteristics associated with being either masculine or feminine.

- ◆ Gender identity: one's internal concept of self as male, female, a blend of both, or neither; one's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.
- ◆ Harassment: continued and regular action of an undesired kind that threatens, intimidates, or demeans others. Such misconduct or behaviour may be of a sexual nature. However, it may also include unwanted conduct or behaviour directed at a person's race, sex, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, age, immigration status, disability, neurodiverse status, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, nationality, religious affiliation, socioeconomic background, educational background, or career stage. See more detailed definitions of the main types of harassment below:

Verbal harassment: Offensive jokes, slurs, epithets, name calling, or insults

Physical harassment: Uninvited or unwanted physical contact, such as kicking, hitting, or shoving.

Non-verbal harassment: Display of discriminatory images or leering at another person.

Psychological harassment: Isolating or excluding the victim, belittling, or trivializing the victim's thoughts or ideas, discrediting, or spreading rumours about the victim, opposing, or challenging everything the victim says, or gaslighting the victim.

Sexual Harassment: Harassment can include "sexual harassment" or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favours, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature. It can include offensive remarks about a person's sex. For example, it is illegal to harass a woman by making offensive comments about women in general. Both victim and the harasser can be either a woman or a man, and the victim and harasser can be the same sex.

- ◆ Inclusion: creating an environment where all people are involved, empowered, and recognized
- ◆ Intimidation: refers to frightening or threatening someone, usually to urge to do something.
- ◆ Microaggressions: comments or actions that indirectly express a prejudiced attitude towards a member of a marginalized group
- ◆ Microinvalidations: a type of microaggression that excludes, ignores, or demeans a person's thoughts or emotions.
- ◆ Misconduct: is any kind of unethical, or illegal activity. Misconduct is also a term used to describe behaviours or actions that breach the contract rules of the code of conduct for a given organisation. Organisations reserve the right to apply disciplinary action against individuals who breaks these contract rules in the code of conduct.

- ◆ Physical abuse: the use of intentional force that can result in physical harm or injury to an individual. It can take the form of slapping, hitting, punching, shaking, pulling, throwing, kicking, biting, choking, or strangling.
- ◆ Quid Pro Quo: Quid pro quo harassment is a type of sexual harassment that occurs when employment or promotion decisions are made based on a person's willingness to grant sexual favours. This can include promotions, raises, preferred assignments, or punishment like being demoted or fired. The phrase "quid pro quo" is Latin for "in exchange for" or "this for that".
- ◆ Race: a socially constructed category within humankind that shares certain distinctive physical traits.
- ◆ Sex: the sum of the structural, functional, and behavioural characteristics which may distinguish among males, females, and intersex individuals.
- ◆ Sexual Orientation: a person's lasting emotional, romantic, sexual, or affectional attraction (or lack thereof) to others (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, asexual). An individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.
- ◆ Stalking: is the unauthorized following and surveillance of an individual (in-person or electronically), to the extent that the person's privacy is unacceptably intruded upon and the victim fears for their safety.
- ◆ Verbal Abuse: any verbal behaviour that causes significant emotional distress to an individual. It can manifest itself in many ways such as shouting yelling, name-calling, or other forms of verbal aggression.

8. Health and Safety

All attendees of PSSA meetings should carefully assess their personal health in the days leading up to the conference, and refrain from attending if they are actively symptomatic with an infectious illness or take the necessary precautions (such as wearing a mask). In this way we hope to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for all. PSSA meeting attendees should act responsibly and not bring other members or themselves into physical harm or danger.