

Open Letter to the Organizers for SSNR 2018

To the organizers of the Summer School on Neurorehabilitation (SSNR) 2018:

I would like to commend your team for an excellent event. Every organizer has been friendly, understanding, and accommodating to the varied responsibilities of running a professional event such as this with so many moving parts, schedules, reservations, and individual needs; SSNR 2018 has truly been one of the most inspiring networking and research events I have had the pleasure of attending. However, it is under unfortunate circumstances I write to you, as the actions of individuals attending the summer school created an uncomfortable and unwelcoming environment for some attendees and warrant a proactive response to prevent such occurrences in the future.

Following the Gala dinner, the dance party allowed attendees (and organizers) to unwind and enjoy themselves in a more informal environment. During this party, an attendee approached me and made a comment to the effect of, "the young men have left, but the candy is still here," referring to the women attendees on the dance floor.

The attendees here at SSNR come from all over the world and feature a plethora of unique backgrounds. Many of the attendees here will become leaders in our field through their exceptional insights, knowledge, and ideas. To nullify the accomplishments of a subgroup of attendees based on gender, by reducing their individuality to that of an object, is wholly inappropriate, disrespectful, insulting, and antagonistic to the collaborative nature this summer school strives to instill. These types of microaggressions disproportionately directed towards women and underrepresented minorities are far too common in academic conferences; my peers have observed and experienced numerous such occurrences at professional conferences around the world. I do not levy responsibility for the actions of an individual onto the organization committee, however I do believe proactive measures are called for to address this issue.

It is in this light that several attendees and I request the organizers of SSNR 2019 to adopt and feature prominently during the application process, a Harassment and Non-Discrimination Policy explicitly prohibiting such behaviors on the basis of sex, gender, race, sexual orientation, disability status, and any other demographic factor.

Many prominent professional conferences in our field, including the [Society for Neuroscience](#) and the [Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers](#), have implemented such harassment policies. These policies are featured prominently on their websites and application materials, making it clear beyond doubt that this type of behavior will not be tolerated.

In summary, we would like the organizers of the Summer School for Neurorehabilitation to:

1. Institute an official Harassment and Non-Discrimination Policy for future events
2. Host this Harassment and Non-Discrimination Policy on the SSNR website
3. Require attendees to read through and agree to this Harassment and Non-Discrimination Policy during the application process

We believe that these changes will not only demonstrate SSNR's commitment to building collaborative efforts across a diverse body of researchers, but also set an example of non-discrimination and non-harassment for other professional conferences and educational opportunities across fields.

Thank you for taking our concerns seriously and for your efforts to make the field of neurorehabilitation more inclusive and welcoming for all.

Signed,

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