Welcome to RespectCon!

Hi there! We are thrilled to have you join us for RespectCon 2016! To those returning for their second, third, or even fourth RespectCon, we cannot wait to show you all the cool improvements we’ve made this year. If this is your first time "RespectConning it," we promise you an experience that will continue to bring you back. That isn’t to say the conference won’t challenge you or make you uncomfortable at times, or even that the conference we’ve planned is as excellent as any conference can be. We grow and build the conference every year—just as we hope every attendee is able to grow and improve in-between their time at RespectCon. Everyone here (including us) can learn something new and benefit from the amazing people gathered at the conference. So whoever you are, you’ll find something great at RespectCon.

Let’s take a minute to talk about the conference theme. We aren’t an authority on social justice; we don’t claim to be. But we are running the conference, and we did make many decisions along the way about what to include, what not to streamline, and why. We want you to know the how and the why of RespectCon, because transparency is important to us. So here is our take:

Social justice* is complex and can be approached from many different angles. We believe social justice envisions a society that both values human rights and respects the dignity of every person. A society which provides equitable opportunity, safety, and treatment for all members, irrespective of race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other discriminatory factors. It can sometimes be viewed as a struggle of “us” vs. “them” due to the pervasiveness of power, privilege, and oppression. And yes, it can be difficult to connect sexual violence, which often appears as incidents between individuals, back to larger systems and social norms. But sexual violence is a form of oppression, and the work to end oppression is social justice work. Sexual violence prevention, advocacy, and response, are linked to the broader social justice movement because ending sexual violence means ending oppression.

Social justice can refer to the way in which we, as individuals, interact, but often refers to the ways that systems operate to either enable or hinder equitability among all social groups. Striving for social justice means striving to not only build and strengthen systems that promote equity throughout all social groups, but it also means acknowledging that many current systems largely fail in this endeavor. We believe that it is important to ask not only what systems are operating on or around our college campuses to address sexual violence, but also to consider whether these systems are themselves socially just, and how they address the systematic injustices that may contribute to the issue of sexual violence.

We acknowledge that applying the concept of social justice to sexual violence may look different depending on your community’s needs, challenges, or strengths. It may be more difficult on some campuses than on others. But we believe social justice is an imperative and inseparable part of effective conversations if we are to understand and work to end sexual violence. Truly, we are so excited for you to join in these conversations. Welcome to RespectCon!

Sincerely,

Drew, Wanda, Elyse, Audrey, Andrea G., Ciara, Andrea N., and Micha—aka Team RespectCon 2016

*Credit to Ruku Machiwalla ’15C, LB Klein, MSW, Emily Faerber ’15MPH, & Drew Rizzo, MS for the description of social justice presented above.
We LOVE Our Volunteers! Thank You!
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