



New York, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2018

To the organizers of the RSA Conference,

We write in response to the publication of your keynote list for RSA Conference USA 2018 and to express our dismay at the near-total lack of diversity or appropriate representation. We hope that you will take immediate steps to remedy this.

Study after study has consistently demonstrated the power of a diverse, inclusive environment.<sup>1</sup> Despite this, women and TGNC (transgender / gender-nonconforming) individuals have faced sexism and exclusion in the technology sector for years.<sup>2</sup> Despite some companies starting to issue diversity reports, large tech firms have yet to institute the right policies to reach better gender parity.<sup>3</sup> And, as women have remained underrepresented in the workforce, they have also faced a constant barrage of discriminatory behavior. In just the last few months, not to mention the years prior, we have seen news outlets riddled with stories of women who have been denied venture funding,<sup>4</sup> underpaid or fired,<sup>5</sup> and sexually harassed and assaulted, including in the course of their careers and professional pursuits.<sup>6</sup>

These are serious issues that deserve serious attention. Efforts to integrate gender and other diversity indicators into the public and private sectors are beginning to achieve global impacts.<sup>7</sup> At Access Now we strive to defend and extend the human rights of users at risk.<sup>8</sup> We recognize that diversity and inclusion are central to this mission, and have made diversity a core part of the work that we do.<sup>9</sup> That doesn't mean we always get it right, but we're always working toward that goal and learning how to improve.<sup>10</sup> We have proposed that an approach to diversity and inclusion includes at least three pillars:

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., <https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/0217/pages/disrupting-diversity-in-the-workplace.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/article/youth-tgnc>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/diversity-in-tech/>.

<sup>4</sup> <http://fortune.com/2018/01/31/female-founders-venture-capital-2017/>.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-uber-lawsuit/three-women-sue-uber-in-san-francisco-claiming-unequal-pay-benefits-idUSKBN1CU2Z1>

<sup>6</sup> <http://money.cnn.com/2017/10/27/technology/culture/sexual-harassment-tech-industry/index.html>.

<sup>7</sup> For example, the fifth Sustainable Development Goal, "Gender Equality," sets out targets to achieve "equal opportunities and participation in leadership" as well as "empowerment of women through technology." <https://www.globalgoals.org/5-gender-equality>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.accessnow.org/about-us/>.

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.accessnow.org/access-now-diversity-mission-critical/>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.accessnow.org/our-commitment-to-better-combat-all-abuse-harassment-and-violence/>.



- developing institutional and operational systems and processes that respect the range of backgrounds and experiences that diversity brings;
- creating public policies that are not developed or dictated by a single point of view;
- and providing platforms for discussion such as panels or events that highlight the voices and perspectives of under-represented people and organizations that are breaking through societal roadblocks and developing valuable expertise, often at great personal cost.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, with the current speaker roster, RSA Conference USA 2018 is creating an exclusionary environment that undermines key principles of diversity.

At the moment, the RSA Conference USA 2018 lists 22 keynote speakers or panelists.<sup>12</sup> Of the 22, 20 are substantive experts on topics related to the conference, including issues related to information security and cybersecurity. All 20 are men. Of the remaining two, only one is not male, Monica Lewinsky, who is joining to speak about “survival, resilience, digital reputation, and equality.” These are important topics, but they do not replace the need for speakers who can provide robust representation for women and TGNC individuals working in the technology sector.

Even more troubling, one place where women are visibly speaking at the conference is during a half-day session block called “Securing Diversity.”<sup>13</sup> A similar event was held in 2017, at which some of the top cybersecurity professionals (who happen to identify as women) were asked to speak not about their substantive work, but instead about diversity and the role of the woman in the tech sector.<sup>14</sup> While these sessions may serve a goal in some environments, using them in place of actual gender diversity is reprehensible.

RSA Conference owes a duty to its audience. On its mission page for the RSA events (RSA hosts more than one a year), RSA makes the following claim:

*“Not to brag, but collectively our conferences draw over 50,000 attendees per year, more than any other conference out there. Why? Two words. Valuable content. And the networking. And the inspiration.”<sup>15</sup>*

As the self-appointed leaders in information security conferences, and a conference that lists networking and inspiration as key selling points, a nearly all-male leading roster is simply not acceptable.

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.accessnow.org/why-inclusion-matters/>.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.rsaconference.com/events/us18/agenda/keynotes>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.rsaconference.com/events/us18/agenda/sessions/11976-Securing-Diversity>.

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.rsaconference.com/events/us17/agenda/sessions/7076-Securing-Diversity-Women-in-Cybersecurity?utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_content=sessions-securing-diversity&utm\\_campaign=standardreg-available-text-us2017](https://www.rsaconference.com/events/us17/agenda/sessions/7076-Securing-Diversity-Women-in-Cybersecurity?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_content=sessions-securing-diversity&utm_campaign=standardreg-available-text-us2017).

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.rsaconference.com/events/us18/about>.



How did this happen? It's hard to believe it is for lack of knowledge of the issues raised by lack of representation at panels and events. Women and TGNC individuals across the internet have raised alarm bells on this very issue for years. There are many resources for conference organizers, including the Geek Feminism Wiki, for example,<sup>16</sup> and lists of diverse speakers in the tech field. Remarkably, despite these resources, many events beyond RSA Conference still fail to achieve even a modicum of diversity. However, as organizers of a series of conferences that attract a larger audience "than any other conference out there," it is your responsibility to be aware of these issues and ensure proper representation.

The current keynote roster for RSA Conference USA 2018 sends a clear message: inclusion and representation are unnecessary, and women and TGNC individuals are not welcome as leaders in this space. This is a message that will be heard not only by the attendees, but by organizers of other conferences that look to RSA Conference as a source for guidance. The bigger danger is that we could see this message – and mindset behind it – reflected in hiring, development, and operational decisions across the sector, with consequences like lack of progress on innovation and lagging performance indicators, with the competitive advantage going to sectors and regions that place emphasis on gender equity.

There is still time for RSA Conference not only to take steps toward redress, but to become a leader in the sector on issues of diversity and inclusion. We implore you to explain what led to the lack of parity in the USA 2018 keynote roster. Further, we urge you to immediately take steps to remedy the lack of adequate representation, transparently and in close collaboration with affected communities, experts, and relevant stakeholders. Finally, we hope that you will invest significantly in creating new policies and procedures, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders and experts, to ensure that this never happens again, and encourage organizers of other conferences to do the same.

Sincerely,

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<sup>16</sup> [http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Women\\_speakers#Solutions](http://geekfeminism.wikia.com/wiki/Women_speakers#Solutions)