

Accessibility at the Go Feminist Conference



This past weekend, Amanda Conroy and Linnea Sandström, members of the

Engenderings editorial collective, set up a stall at the Go Feminist conference held in London. This is what they got out of the experience.

Immediately upon arriving to the **Go Feminist conference**, it seemed different to other conferences; there were women transcribing what was being said by the panel as well as translator for those who were hard of hearing. This motif of accessibility and inclusivity was something that permeated the entire conference. If there was one theme that united the myriad voice and perspectives at Go Feminist it was Accessibility.



The young feminists that we spoke to told us about the difficulties of engaging their peers in a society often talked about as post-feminist, a society in which feminism is seen as redundant since, allegedly, we have already reached equality and equity between the sexes. They told us how they faced difficulties explaining to people that while, yes, we have come further than previous generations might have thought possible, there is still a need to continue talking about gender, a need to keep on deconstructing gender and a need to keep gendering issues. How do they do this, they asked, when feminism as a movement is often seen as inaccessible? How do we bridge the gap between the feminist movement and the people that keep repeating that notorious phrase: “I’m not a feminist, but...”? We need to become more accessible, they said, we need to reach out and we need to stop preaching to the choir. Or as Kealy, a young feminist on the panel of women and sexism in culture said: “we need to stop trying to convert the converted.” Later, in the same spirit, she told the audience that “you can’t be what you can’t see,” pointing to the invisibility of feminist role models outside of the feminist movement.



These are all important points and ones that need to be discussed further in feminist circles; but also, as demonstrated by all these young feminists' observations, these discussions need to access arenas *outside* of feminist circles. Feminism needs to become more accessible to people not already immersed in the movement, it needs to reach beyond its current borders and stretch and flex to allow others to be a part of it as well. While there are certainly things society in general could do to enable the feminist movement to become more visible, we need to realise that we, too, bear a responsibility for how the movement is shaped, conceptualised and brought forward into future generations.

In an earlier panel on connecting movements, **Breish Rowe**, a deaf feminist, psychology graduate and founder of **Triangle**, discussed what it was like being someone who identifies as a feminist but might still face difficulties in terms of accessibility. Often the language used in feminist circles can be quite inaccessible, as can any jargon. (These two authors discussed how none of them knew what the term **cis gender** meant until becoming fully immersed in the feminist movement and how they are still uncertain of how to pronounce it.) In order to make feminism more accessible to people who may not be familiar with the jargon, and for those who do not have English as a first language, the language needs to be simplified and understandable so it can be accessible to all. While there are certainly good points to be made about why certain terms are necessary, feminism, as well as politics in the media,, could learn from this insight that not all people use language in the same way and that this may even make discourse harder to access.



As **Joanna Burigo**, on the panel on women and sexism in culture pointed out, we need to include everyone to succeed, and this means men too. (Because yes, men are affected by notions of constricting gender roles and norms as well!). In order to build a sustainable society with more sensitivity for gender and more equality and opportunities for everyone, we need to bring in more people and the way to do this is to make feminism more accessible. This theme was one of the principle issues addressed throughout the entire Go Feminist conference; in panels, among the conference goers and it was visible in the ways in which the organisational group had provided multiple means to aid accessibility.

In order to harness the potential of the movement and make people understand the importance and relevance of feminism today, it needs to be accessible. The Go Feminist conference leaves us with the inspiration and the questions of how we – as individuals, as feminists, as a community – can aspire to achieve this accessibility. At Engenderings, we have since the beginning aimed to bridge the gap between the Ivory Tower and the rest of society, or between academia and jargon-filled feminist- and gender theory and people unfamiliar with it. We would therefore like to invite you all to **tell us how you would do it.**





Collection of other blog posts about the conference:

[Go Feminist by the F Word](#)

[Faith and Feminism at Go Feminist by We Mixed Our Drinks](#)

[Go Feminist Conference, thoughts and links round-up by Teaspoon of Sugar](#)

Amanda Conroy is a PhD Student at the Gender Institute and the Centre for the Study of Human Rights. Her research interests include Renaissance and early Enlightenment political thought; contemporary political philosophy; feminist and post-colonial political theory; right-wing and conservative social movements; the intersections between gender, race, and nationalism; and the gendered dimensions of citizenship. She has studied in the US and the UK, and has degrees in Gender Studies and Politics. Amanda is also on the editorial team of the [Graduate Journal of Social Science](#). Her writing has also appeared in the LSE British Politics and Policy blog, openDemocracy, and the Guardian. She drinks way too much Diet Coke and spends way too much time thinking up pithy titles and sub-headings – titles and sub-headings which, upon closer inspection, are not nearly as clever as her Diet Coke-addled mind had led her to believe.

Linnea Sandström is an MSc student in Gender, Policy and Inequalities at the gender institute. Having graduated in June 2011 with an MA in Social Sciences (Politics) from the University of Glasgow she is now hoping to explore in her dissertation what role the institution of marriage plays in making a good citizen and hopes to figure out a way to apply feminist and non-feminist political theory to policy. She has kept a blog called *Feminism and Tea* for the past few years and can often be found discussing gender on various social networks when not feeding her news addiction.

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