

WORKSHOP OF APRIL 28TH, 2020

« THE INVISIBILIZATION OF POOR WOMEN: YESTERDAY, TODAY AND...TOMORROW? »

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THE ROLES WE PLAY: A CAMPAIGN TO FIGHT AGAINST INVISIBILIZATION

Bonjour, je m'appelle Naomi Anderson.

Je suis une volontaire d'ATD Quart Monde depuis 2014 et je vais parler de l'invisibilité des femmes en pauvreté.

Mais je vais parler en anglais, parce que c'est ma langue maternelle et je suis plus confortable avec ça. *[a note from IHMC: a French version is also available [as a distinct webpage](#)]*

Whilst women and men may have some similar experiences with poverty, I think it is fair to say that there are some experiences that women will have that are completely different.

And if we ignore this difference, we would really be doing a disservice to our efforts to overcome poverty and we run the risk of these unique experiences that women face becoming ever more hidden.

So, yeah, women tend to rely on social security more than men do.

And, on average, women tend to receive 20% of their income via benefits, whereas men receive 10%.

Our universal credit was really gender-biased and put a lot of control in the hands of the man.

For women, it gendered them into staying at home and not being able to work.

The government somehow makes this happen, but then, it's very difficult for women to be mothers, because they don't have enough money to take care of their children, and this can often invite social services into their home, and that grows construed to not being able to be a carer for their child, well, you're not able to live up to gendered standards of the mother being caring and providing things for her children.

So, on one hand, the government genders you into this role, through welfare, and then, on the

other hand, it judges you for the job you're trying to do.

Now, I'm going to speak about domestic violence, and how the welfare system makes it difficult for women in poverty situations to leave.

And also about women, homeless women are also invisible.

For people in poverty, I think, from what I've learned over the years, one of the things that are most difficult is not having much autonomy over your life.

The state consistently tells you what to do, how to live, and how to act, or how you ought to behave.

And how cuts, changes made to the welfare system have very badly affected, well, have increased the chances of child poverty, and so for families it has made it difficult to make ends meet.

And one indication of that is the rise of food bank in general, but also in the number of people who have started to use them.

And, one of the mothers, in The roles we play, her name is Angela, she spoke about the shame of having to visit food banks, and how she used to go to her local market, where she was able to afford food, but it closed down, so she ended up relying on food banks.

And, I think, for a lot of people, this is definitely a source of shame.

Women are more likely to take caring roles, and these roles are not necessarily appreciated, or they're not necessarily recognised or supported financially by the government.

So, for example, if you earn over £110 a week, you won't be eligible for a carer's allowance.

So, for someone like...if you're on full-time education, you wouldn't be eligible for a carer's allowance.

And, for someone like Gwen, from *The roles we play*, she's a carer for her father whilst trying to get a university degree.

And one of the reasons she speaks about wanting to get this degree is so that people won't look at her as somebody who is less than [them], who just wants to live off the state and not give anything back.

It's also very similar for Bea, who's Morean's daughter, who was her carer, and speaks about really loving spending time with her mom and being able to care for her.

But she often feels like people look down upon what she's doing and ask her why she doesn't get a real job, and why she's spending time doing that.

Which is a big shame in itself, because the social security system is there to help people and not to penalise them for situations that they aren't necessarily in control of.

That's one of the biggest problems, that people are constantly blamed for their own poverty, for example "Why don't you get a real job?", but it's not necessarily that easy to do so.

And even when people do try to work, that does not necessarily mean that they will automatically climb out of poverty.

More often than not, their situation does not improve drastically.

It's hard to be a woman.

I think it is difficult to speak about women's issues, because we know that there's so much at stake for all people who experience poverty.

We know the debilitating effects of this and the idea that there is a divide, that what one gender would experience would be worse, that we should be more focused on one than the other, can be seen as divisive.

But I really believe from the experience of all these women that there's a lot at stake for them too and if we don't speak about them then, we really do them a disservice.

I also think about issues like "period poverty", about women not being able to afford sanitary towels, which is something that we think only happens in the global South, but this is an issue for women in the UK too.

This was something that I became aware of for the first time in 2017, when I was in New York, and an ATD Fourth World activist, who was previously homeless, talked to me about not having any sanitary products and having to make tampons out of toilet tissue, and that's something, an issue I would never have imagined to be an issue.

So, I think it's really important that, if we are trying to create a world that is more equitable, where everybody can find their place and everybody can contribute, it's really important to have the opinions of women in poverty.

Because I know this is something that the feminist movement wasn't necessarily talking about, or at all. So, if we don't have these voices included, then we fail.

And, just a last thing about the feminist movement is that they speak a lot about self-worth and self-love, and I think, when I'm reading the texts from the women involved in *The roles we play*, [thinking] about how much they've all been through, and the debilitating situations that, I think, would have most people crumble down, to be able to pick yourself up and to say "I'm in poverty", when that's something you can easily be discriminated for saying, the courage that they have is incredible.

I think the feminist movement is kind of weakened when you say "Yes, tell yourself every day how much you're brilliant, you're wonderful, you're beautiful and so on".

Yeah, it's great, but for women who are literally thinking about whether they can eat, or whether their children can eat, that's not a realistic message, and that's something we need to think about.

Well, the [feminist movement] should think about it, and it needs also to have more voices of women in poverty, and take on the issues that they face.

Not that the feminist movement can be just reduced to loving yourself, I guess I should say, that's a personal reflection that I have.

Actually, the courage of these women to be involved and speak out is something that gave me courage in some ways.