

[00:00:28.990] - Alys Mumford

Hello And welcome to On the Engender, Scotland's Feminist Policy podcast. I'm Alys Mumford, and I'm here today along with my wonderful co-host, Amanda Aitken.

[00:00:36.250] - Amanda Aitken

Hello.

[00:00:38.470] - Alys Mumford

Today we're going to be talking all about participation, representation and what that really means. And I'm joined by three excellent guests. We have Jessie Duncan, who is Engender's Equal Representation Development Officer. Hey Jessie.

[00:00:51.430] - Jessie Duncan

Hi. Lovely to be here.

[00:00:53.590] - Alys Mumford

We have Ethan Young, the civic participation manager at Inclusion Scotland, Hi Ethan.

[00:00:58.390] - Ethan Young

Hi, everyone.

[00:00:59.830] - Alys Mumford

And we have Kirn Kaur, human rights lawyer and activist, Hi, Kirn.

[00:01:03.550] - Kirn Kaur

Hi, everyone.

[00:01:04.870] - Amanda Aitken

So to kick us off on the right foot, we like to start by sharing something positive at the start of the podcast. So who wants to kick us off? I'm going to go to Alys first because you look quite smug, like you've got something.

[00:01:18.020]

[laughter]

[00:01:20.530] - Alys Mumford

Yeah. Normally I have bad things. I struggle with this question, but I am feeling very positive about some of the amazing climate activism we have seen. And are going to be seeing as we come up to COP Climate Summit. So particularly, we just saw a brilliant stage invasion done by activist Lauren McDonald's at speaking to the Shell CEO. Really, truly speaking, truth to power, even though your voice shakes up on stage at the Edinburgh Conference Centre calling out Shell's climate Crimes. She made it into Teen Vogue, which is obviously the pinnacle of where you want to be with any activism. So obviously we're going to see more hopefully as we come up to the COP Conference in Glasgow. So inspiring climate activism is my good thing today.

[00:02:05.050] - Amanda Aitken

Wonderful. What about yourself Ethan?

[00:02:08.650] - Ethan Young

Well, this is maybe a bit outdated now, but actually, I'm still feeling really positive and a bit smug about the Scottish Parliament electing, the most diverse group of MSPs so far. While there's still work to do it's really positive. And I'm really keen to see what that brings to Scotland.

[00:02:29.170] - Amanda Aitken

And what about yourself, Jessie?

[00:02:30.670] - Jessie Duncan

I feel like mine's very boring. I just got back in from a lovely walk around the block and I feel like it's the first day of proper crispy, like autumn, clear weather and it's lovely and it's put me in a really good mood. So that's a good thing.

[00:02:47.590] - Amanda Aitken

That's so nice. Yeah, it's really sunny in Glasgow this morning. Cold, but sunny. Kirn, what about yourself?

[00:02:54.130] - Kirn Kaur

Well, I've been working on a report with some other fabulous ladies to do with Sikh issues for women within Scotland, and we've just finished it. So I'm feeling really positive about the soft launch that we just had of the report. It's been like a year and a half and some points like, "my God, this is never going to end, I'm going to die with this", [laughter] but we made it through. So I'm feeling really positive about that.

[00:03:17.710] - Alys Mumford

Amazing. And are we able to link to that in the show notes for listeners that are keen to hear?

[00:03:23.660] - Kirn Kaur

Yep!

[00:03:24.860] - Alys Mumford

Amazing

[00:03:26.690] - Amanda Aitken

My positive news is also just not that interesting but I'm going to go to a gig for the first time tomorrow since all of this happened. So I'm going to see Courtney Marie Andrews. She's like a country singer. But last time she played Glasgow, I was like, not in a very good place and I was like, "I just can't go and open mouth cry a gig like this" and then...so I didn't go. And then the pandemic happened, and now she's coming back and I'm like, I'm just going to open mouth cry anyway.

[00:03:54.960]

[laughter]

[00:03:56.160] - Alys Mumford

Everyone will be crying!

[00:03:58.830] - Amanda Aitken

Everyone will be open-mouth crying, just like through masks, just sobbing. But I'm very excited. I've been holding off doing anything with a large amount of people in one room for forever. So it's like - this is the time. So hopefully it'll be fine, quite scared. But I'm very excited.

[00:04:18.510] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, I saw loads of people on Twitter the other day talking about getting Mitski tickets in Glasgow and I was like "ah yeah, the prospect of going to a gig!", but I'm not in the vibe of knowing when the tickets are going to come out. So I just miss all of the ticket sales because it still feels like a thing in a different timeline I would do. But that's very exciting. Amazing! Autumn! Diverse Parliament! Reports being finished! Gigs! Climate Activism! Great. I love it.

[00:04:46.470] - Alys Mumford

So we are going to be talking and following on from Ethan's good thing there about representation and participation today. We're going to be getting into some of the nitty gritty about what those things actually mean, sort of trying to go a little bit beyond the buzzwords and we're going to be talking about big P politics a bit later. But Ethan, you're the civic participation manager at Inclusion Scotland. So just to kick us off there, what does civic participation actually mean?

[00:05:13.830] - Ethan Young

Very good question. And I should really know the answer to this. Often I find myself Googling it, though. Civic participation is very wide definition - to me at the core, civic participation is about people contributing to community and being able to contribute to community. And that can be anything from, I guess, what we've seen through the pandemic, helping our neighbour going and doing someone shopping for them, to joining a community garden, to a sports team, things that benefit yourself and others in smaller communities or bigger communities in terms of our society, all the way up to things that we can work on a bit more, which is around kind of access to activism. So people being able to join groups that are small p political activists or even big p political activists all the way up to voting to being able to join political parties as well or run for elected office as an independent. So there's a very broad range there. Why we focus on that is that people face so many barriers to being able to participate at all these levels, which we can go into a little bit more, perhaps as we go on.

[00:06:34.410] - Amanda Aitken

And Kirn, you've been on On the Engender recently during the Pass the Mic takeover that we did where you spoke with the difficulties of meaningful representation and consultation, particularly in your fields of law and human rights. We talk a lot about consultation fatigue here at Engender. So what are your thoughts on how we can have participation, which isn't just really talking shop, but with no change happening.

[00:07:00.490] - Kirn Kaur

Just based on my experience of participation in terms of civic engagement, is that's actually been quite typical of the current structures in place. So it's all been participating in consultations and a lot of round tables. But I've only really been able to get involved there purely because of the organisation that I was kind of affiliated with or I was involved with. So it never really came to me as a 'everyday individual in society'. I was always kind of put in there because of an organisation and I really strongly believe it shouldn't really be like this. Civic engagement is about engaging with the wider public in society and getting their views and getting opinions, because ultimately, these are the people that you're making your policies and your laws for. So if their voices aren't in it from the start, then who are you really making them for? What's the point of them even being there? And who are they servicing? But I have actually had good examples of engagement - I'm not going to be all doom and gloom and say that it's absolutely rubbish in Scotland, because it's not. When I was part of an organisation, we had a request and put in a consultation, and it was really refreshing because the officials, they asked us, "how can we help you engage people within your community?" So they kind of gave us the resources and they said, well, these are the questions. These are the kind of broad topics. Can you help us get their opinions? And that was really good because we were able to kind of set up different groups, et cetera. That would attract...it was a women's organisation, so would attract women at times that suited them. So rather than being like a Monday morning in St Andrew's House, which is quite inaccessible, I think, for the most part anyway, but particularly for working women or other individuals that never really been in that space, they can find it very intimidating. So we went out instead and I thought that was a really good example. I really liked that. And I feel it should be a lot more of that when it comes to civic participation, particularly to do with policies and bills as well.

[00:09:25.810] - Alys Mumford

Yeah, I think that's a really good point about, like, you already have to be involved in something to get that sort of next stage. And so the people that are furthest away from that the most easily ignored communities can continue to be ignored. But yeah, great to hear examples there about using community expertise, using lived expertise of how to get these views. And Jessie, looking at the work you're doing, I think that really rings true - what Kirn was saying there about..We talk a lot about wanting to get, for example, 50% of women in Parliament. But there's a lot of stages you have to get through in terms of getting involved in parties, community activism, all these things before you can even begin to think about election. So although your project, the Equal Representation Project, is around helping parties to use the self-assessment toolkit to make changes to become more inclusive and accessible in that sort of formal party political sphere. Do some of the other things Ethan and Kirn have been saying ring true in terms of party politics?

[00:10:24.790] - Jessie Duncan

Yeah. Absolutely. I think they ring through. I think there's a lot of common threads between what

needs to happen in relation to your Capital P politics and all other types of public engagement and civic involvement, participation. And in practise these spaces are so connected anyway. So when you think about community groups and activist circles and even workplaces, how do people decide they want to get involved in the capital P side of politics? It can be a circular thing. The roots in and out of this, like, formal political space, are so linked to what's happening in the community and what's happening in like these civic spaces anyway. So I think there's a lot of areas of overlap and therefore a lot of common challenges when we think about improving access to participation and removing barriers around who can access this whole capital P small P political sphere in general.

[00:11:19.810] - Alys Mumford

And that's super gendered as well, right? I mean, we always talk about women's roots to politics is often getting involved in a local campaign to save a play park or to improve things in the area. But then eventually you could do this in a sort of professional, big P politics way. But I assume that's again true across the board? We know that lots of community groups are very women-led in terms of doing the work behind the scenes, the organising work. I talked about climate activism at the start, and we know certainly in the global south that's massively women-led because they're seeing the impacts on the ground because they're dealing with provisioning of households, those sorts of things. Ethan, where you wanted to come in there?

[00:12:02.470] - Ethan Young

Yeah. And there's such a huge range of barriers that people face in underrepresented groups and at Inclusion Scotland we specialise in taking away the barriers that, or working to remove the barriers that disabled people face when running for elected office, because there are many and we often work in an intersectional approach, and we find that when we get them right for some people, we get it right for others as well. So it's really important to us to work hard to pinpoint where the barriers are and not just help disabled people overcome them, but help non-disabled people learn how to not put those barriers there. We've got the Access To Elected Office Fund, which is a great fund that is there for people who want to run for elected office, whether it's selection with a party and that's a candidate or as an independent. That fund is currently open for the local council elections next year, which is a really good start. It's not the only solution, but it's a good way to remove a lot of the barriers and pay for reasonable adjustments that people need to pay, where a non-disabled person wouldn't face additional costs. Talking about consultation fatigue we touched on before, we really see that in the disabled people's movement, we've been consulted for years and years and often we get re-consulted on the same thing and people turn up and say "we spoke about this five years ago. Why are we getting the same questions?" And that's why we really need to see disabled people and underrepresented groups in decision making positions where we're creating policy. We're not being consulted. We're actually creating the policy on an even playing field with policymakers and decision makers, because that lived experience is valuable. If you've not got people creating policies and making decisions that impact the people who they kind of look like, sound like, act like then we're not really doing it right?

[00:14:15.790] - Alys Mumford

Yeah. I think that really speaks back to something Kirn said about working within the structures that we have. And I think a sort of endless conversation that people that want change have, right, how much can you work within the structures? How much can the masters tool dismantle the house? You know those sorts of questions about how much do we engage with these? And obviously we also know that even if we have a truly sort of diverse Parliament that doesn't necessarily reflect the views of...you know 50% of women in the Parliament does not reflect the views of all women. And we've certainly got lots of examples of elected women who have not acted in the interests of women outwith politics. I think there is that sort of issue there around, like 'will we always need consultation?' 'Is it enough to have a representative democracy?' And one thing that we mentioned in the last episode we did is around the consultation on the national care service, which carers groups, disabled people's groups, women's groups have been advocating around care for years saying we need a massive overhaul. Now we've seen this announcement of a national care service which lots of people have been calling for. But the actual consultation we get is incredibly narrow, it's full of really technical questions, and it's not gendered. It doesn't recognise the disproportionate amount of care work done by people of colour, and it's quite short, so carers - who don't have a lot of time anyway - might not necessarily be able to engage with it. But on the other hand, it is a consultation. It is a chance for

people to engage and share their views. So, I guess, how do we sort of square the circle - other than representative politics, you know, is it better to have some consultation than none at all? What's needed to make those consultations worthwhile?

[00:16:09.430] - Kirn Kaur

I think a point that Ethan's just touched on is really important in terms of when are you bringing these people in? So when it gets to consultation stage, like you said, it's already narrowed down. It's very specific to points that decisions have been made in closed rooms. So therefore you're now just looking at a point, a decision someone else has made, and given your view on that. When it could actually be a lot wider, so I think it does need to be changed a lot. And that involvement needs to happen at a lot earlier stage. It can't happen at the stage where you're just about to put pen to paper. But you just need these views in there because let's be honest, there might be a piece of legislation that says you need to consult with someone in order to get this bill through or something. So you're just kind of checking the box here. It shouldn't really be like that. And I think you need to look at why, why is it they're looking for a consultation? Is it because there's a legal requirement to it or is it because they actually want people to put in these policies to make them workable? I think that's a really important thing that sometimes gets overlooked, because people are just like, oh, well, we did consult with you. Therefore, you should kind of be - air quote 'grateful', that you've had this opportunity and when it really shouldn't be like that in the first place.

[00:17:32.230] - Ethan Young

Yeah. And I think coming back to the points we're making there, a big thing for me is the consultation that we're just talking about. It's not very accessible. So we're trying to get feedback from a diverse group of people, of course, but it's in policy jargon, it's very long. The people who we're trying to get information from into that consultation probably don't have a lot of time, face lots of barriers to going online, filling out forms, when disabled people are struggling just to kind of get by and fulfil the basic needs, like many other people are. So that's one thing, the other thing for me is how lived experience has weighted in that as well. So you'll have organisations that may or may not reflect the views of people they're trying to serve, who'll have paid people replying to that consultation. Then you'll have lots of people who do take the time with lived experience. And I just wonder how that's going to be weighed up. We really hope and we'll be pushing for lived experience to be weighted more highly because we know that the people with lived experience are probably less likely to sit down and fill in that form.

[00:18:54.190] - Alys Mumford

And again, speaks back to Kirn saying, you know, we don't want to dismiss the expertise of organisations that work in these areas. But how do we balance it, how do we weight it? And you know Kirn using the example of saying, well, we talked to, you know, Sikh community organisations to consult on how we can best reach individuals with that lived experience and lived expertise. And similarly, Engender as a policy organisation, like, yes, believe us on policy, we do the research, we're not service delivery. So, listen to people on the ground when you're talking about how people's lives can be made better and what we can learn from those experiences. I suppose we should say, when we're talking about consultations, we've generally been talking about sort of Government and Parliament consultations. There are obviously lots of other ways folk do this. But in terms of Parliament, I suppose I should say there's a bit of understandability in that, Covid happened and everything got shelved. But it's a little bit like everyone suddenly realised there's a deadline and you know, we come back from summer and suddenly all of the consultations have come out at once. Because, as you say, Kirn, everyone's got it written into their terms that they need to do this consultation on this bit of policy.

[00:20:04.690] - Alys Mumford

So even for organisations which have paid staff are trying to do this, it's suddenly a huge amount of, like, everything starting up again and all these consultations coming out with short deadlines. So, yeah, for people that are trying to do it as individuals, I mean, there's no way people can engage with everything they might possibly engage with. And because everything is connected, right? It's not like disabled people will only need to respond on a consultation about disabled people's services. We want disabled people's views on all consultations. Otherwise, we continue to get the siloing. That's

just a rant from me, basically.

[00:20:42.560]

[Laughter]

[00:20:44.410] - Alys Mumford

There's no end point there, just grumpy about it.

[00:20:48.850] - Amanda Aitken

Well it kind of, you know, this is the perfect example that you've just been saying, Alys, of how it speaks to how this needs to be an ongoing conversation and not just something that happens when consultations come around. And also yeah, what support structures are there to help people through. If there is something super jargony in these consultations, how can we then get more people to participate in them? And I guess considering that also, I think one of the things that a lot of people think about and struggle with when talking about representation in general is like, the idea that you can't be what you can't see. And that is like well, on the one hand, we want to encourage women and particularly marginalised women, to get involved in things like standing for election or becoming 'the first' - air quote - at something. We also know that doing that puts women in line for sexism, racism, like risk of abuse. On top of that additional unpaid labour, et cetera. How do we balance these things? And yeah, what support structures do we need to see in order for this to happen?

[00:21:49.130] - Kirn Kaur

I don't know, I think maybe, maybe it's just what I see, but I feel that there could be a lot more women supporting other women in these roles. When you see another - particularly, I think I found when there was the first ever Sikh MSP, came to the Scottish Parliament, and I thought they'd be this huge barrage of that's amazing. Well done, that's so great, that's really good to see. And there was there was people within the community that said that's really good what's happened. But then there was a lot of people, particularly older women, that were about, like, oh right, well, let's not talk about that. But then it's just that you need - you kind of need to get over those barriers, within like cultures as well. Where you're looking at all the women - because every woman may not have that opinion of the way that you see women in society, so they may have a complete opposite opinion. So you're kind like fighting against that as well. So I definitely think there could be a bit more of women supporting other women within these roles and try - understanding the struggle and saying, well, it's taken me this long to get here. I'm going to pull other people up with me. And I think that's really, really important. And maybe something that could be built upon me, I mean particularly within the legal field. There's a huge lack of women of colour within senior positions in law firms and also within the judiciary itself.

[00:23:19.670] - Kirn Kaur

So, judges, sheriffs, et cetera. And then you're thinking, Well, I had, like, loads of people - loads of females in my law school. Where did they all go? How come they're not at these high positions, what happened to them? And then I think it's just, unfortunately, we're just at that stage where if you are in that position, then I feel like it's almost as a kind of responsibility on you to try and help other women get to that stage as well.

[00:23:45.110] - Amanda Aitken

What do you feel Kirn would be - you know, obviously, maybe you can just expand a bit more, and obviously like you said, like, the lack of women of colour in them senior positions within your field, how would that change your human rights work being done if it was more diverse, could you expand a little on that and how that would impact it?

[00:24:01.310] - Kirn Kaur

I think if there was a lot more diversity, then human rights, almost like the implementation of human rights almost becomes better because human rights are universal. They apply to everyone. But you can't really be applying human rights to, or making policies which are human rights complying. But in actual fact, they only really help a certain amount of the population. That's not how human rights works. It's not just for a slight few, it's for everyone. So I think diversity is really important when it comes to human rights, because it applies to all people. And in order to apply to all people, all

policies, all laws, et cetera. They need to be representative of those people as well.

[00:24:42.290] - Alys Mumford

And I think there's something else in there as well - oh sorry - about efficiency of you know, getting it right first time. And again, it goes back to consultations and ongoing conversations. But you know, Emma would always say, you can't add gender at the end and stir. You can't add women and stir. So, you might do a policy and you get through and you do some human rights legislation, then someone will point out, hey, you haven't considered this group of people, and for the most part, people are like, oh, that's bad. We didn't do that. We'll go back and retrospectively try and fix that. But you know, that takes time. That is inefficient, and actually doing it right first time makes better policy.

[00:25:18.710] - Alys Mumford

Jessie, you know we - talking about this in a sort of a political context, we did see lots of women from the last Parliament get elected and declare they weren't going to re-stand. Some of them citing incompatibility of sort of having a family with Parliament and just generally, it being a bit of a rubbish five years for them. How do you sort of tackle that in your project, in your area of work?

[00:25:42.110] - Jessie Duncan

I think it's a really interesting point around like the, you can't be what you can't see. We need to have women and we need to have diverse representation in our institutions. We just do, in order for the legislation and the work that comes out of them to be of good quality, of service to the electorate, of service to the whole of society, basically. But it's a huge challenge. Being the first or being in a minoritised group in a very prominent position is hugely challenging. And I think that there's something around, you know, it's really important for parties and institutions to take up their responsibility in making this environment more accessible, more comfortable, more open to more women, getting involved and staying involved. And it's the staying involved that I think can often be the problem. Getting involved is a problem as well, and we can talk about that in a minute. But staying involved is you know, really crucial. So it's incredibly sad, that there were women that felt that they had to step down and step back because the job was completely incompatible with their life. So what's being done about that? Like what are - and there's the responsibility on two parts there. What are the institutions, what's Parliament and what are councils doing, to examine their working conditions? What they can do is workplaces. And what are parties doing? Because parties aren't the employers of MSPs and they're not the employers of councillors even. But they have, you know, there's a similar role there. And there's certainly a duty of care that exists. And I think that the project that I'm working on, the Equal Representation in Politics project. We've created a set of resources that political parties can use to audit their practice and their processes around inclusion, accessibility and how they promote kind of equality and diversity within their own structures.

[00:27:44.330] - Jessie Duncan

And there's a lot of - parties can pick up this toolkit and take self assessment quizzes. But basically it provides advice to parties at an organisational level, looks at them as organisations and suggests, what are the structural, what are the cultural things, that you can do to change the way that you work to reduce the chances of women and people from other underrepresented groups feeling like either they can't get involved in the first place or once they get involved, that they can't stay involved because it's not compatible with their lives. So you know, I think that the project is really quite relevant. It's come at a relevant time. It will be really interesting to see - we had a record number of women elected in May there, and the most diverse Parliament that we've ever had, which is fantastic. But what are we going to be saying in a few years time when it's time to think about the next Parliament? Are parties, are institutions going to have taken the action that facilitates maintaining that level of diversity and also pushing it further because they still work to do in a lot of areas.

[00:28:43.430] - Ethan Young

Yeah, this is something that's really emerging for me, and I'm thinking about a lot more, is that kind of duty of care when there's such a drive and a push to get more people elected, and when we want to get people into something, we sell it, you know, we're like, come on, it's fantastic! It's not, you know, let's not beat around the bush. Councillors are underpaid overworked, MSPs are overworked. The expectation is really high of what one person can deliver, albeit with our team around them as well.

The link between public understanding that politicians are human as well. We're seeing all sorts of horrendous things happening recently, which is a deterrent for people to get involved in politics. We've seen everyone needs work/life balance. We're talking about wellbeing in the workplace more. Are we talking about that within these roles? Not really. And if we're expecting more people who've already faced barriers to get there, then we need to ensure that there's not a whole other multitude of barriers once they're there.

[00:29:53.150] - Jessie Duncan

I was just going to say on that point Ethan, I totally agree with so much that you said. And I think that the role of parties in that is really interesting as well, because obviously they don't set the working conditions of people once they get into these elected roles, but they have a role in ensuring welfare and promoting welfare and promoting a kind of culture within a party, which is a huge part of elected representative's lives, professional lives, even if it's not in the formal workplace, if you know what I'm saying. And parties have an opportunity to stand up and challenge this, parties can adopt party policy that wants to protect the working conditions of their representatives, for example, around demanding better paying conditions for Councillors. It's a choice for parties to adopt party policy that supports that. It signals to members that this is a priority and this is something that's important.

[00:30:57.650] - Alys Mumford

We should just acknowledge as well, while we're talking there about the threats to people in politics that this is the week that we've seen the murder of David Amos, not many years after we saw the murder of Jo Cox. So we're not talking about these things as sort of intangible issues. People do have a lot of anger and vitriol and threats towards elected reps.

[00:31:29.990] - Amanda Aitken

And I think what you're all just saying there really brings us nicely towards the end of this as well, just kind of to start wrapping up. And we've discussed the number of barriers that people still face, marginalised people still face, in terms of accessing politics. The lack of support structures within institutions and parties and what needs to change there as well. But I think looking at all of your individual particular areas of expertise to close us out, it would be really nice to hear what your vision for participation and inclusion would look like if these things were done well, so to look forward to the future, what would you like to see done well from each of your areas? We'll start with you, Ethan.

[00:32:13.370] - Ethan Young

Well, I guess following on from where we'd left off, I would love to see the job of elected representatives have more support. More, I guess that kind of HR support and managerial support that you don't really get, because you're kind of some independent worker that's not part of any kind of framework that protects you so well. So I think we need to completely work on that, I guess continue to remove the barriers that people face at all levels of participation, because I find we are going to exhaust the people who are already there, are nearly there, to getting involved and getting elected. We need to ensure that we're getting an organic wave of underrepresented groups of people coming through at all levels. Whether that's just being able to go and help a neighbour or can I go and volunteer at the weekend. All the way up to saying, you know what, I've got something to say. I want to run for elected office and see who agrees with me.

[00:33:23.850] - Amanda Aitken

And to have the support to then stay within there, also, as Jesse said.

[00:33:28.590] - Ethan Young

Exactly.

[00:33:28.590] - Amanda Aitken

Jessie, what about yourself? What do you think?

[00:33:30.570] - Jessie Duncan

Yeah, I think looking specifically at the formal political parties and what they can do, I'm going to plug the Equal Representation in Politics Toolkit as something -



[00:33:43.650] - Alys Mumford  
Shocking.

[00:33:44.790] - Jessie Duncan

Yeah, I know. Surprise, surprise. As I said earlier, this is a completely free to use set of self assessment resources that's been developed for political parties to assess their processes, practices across a range, you know, the whole spectrum of party life, really. And if it's engaged with - you take a series of self assessment quizzes across these topics, you get a personalised list of recommendations in an action plan for things that you within your role in a party, whatever role that is, whether you're a member of a local branch, an office bearer, party staff even, what actions you could be doing to improve your inclusion and ultimately leading to improved diversity within politics, hopefully. So I'll just say, it's a really valuable resource if it's engaged with earnestly and wholeheartedly. There's easy stuff that can be done in a minute, you know, quick fixes. And there's longer, more intense work obviously it is more structural, more cultural, more kind of challenging. But I think that it puts into a clear framework, a lot of work that we know there's interest and passion in, and that parties and people involved in politics are taking this stuff seriously. But it creates kind of an easy to use framework to be able to do that. So I would just say we need to keep pushing, need to recognise that it's an ongoing - I think the culture of continued assessment and continued reviews is really valuable. We all just need to get more comfortable in that kind of continuous improvement and constantly pushing the envelope. As far as creating diverse representation goes.

[00:35:26.910] - Amanda Aitken

Definitely. And we'll link to that in our show notes as well to the Toolkit. And finally, Kirn, what about yourself? What would you like to see?

[00:35:33.270] - Kirn Kaur

I think firstly, is better and meaningful, aye the dictionary definition of meaningful, commitments to include communities at the very initial stages of policymaking. I think that's really important, and also for, kind of touching on what Ethan and Jessie were talking about in terms of employers making actions rather than it being, why are these people not applying to us? They are applying to you. It's just you're not really doing much to keep them in there. As organisations and employers having real outcomes for better representation of women and women of colour and also other underrepresented groups at positions of power. And then having structures in place which support those outcomes and which can make those outcomes into a reality and also have something there that makes sure that these underrepresented groups actually stay within these positions of power. Because as we touched upon before, women who are members of the Scottish Parliament who have now decided not to run for election again because of family commitments, et cetera. Then clearly shows there's a strong lack there as well. So yeah, those are my two kind of successes that I hope to see within my lifetime. And yeah, that'd be good to have.

[00:36:58.830] - Alys Mumford

Amazing, thank you. We're going to close up as always with some recommendations. Can be serious, can be frivolous, further reading or listening or something you think our listeners will enjoy. Who wants to go first with this? Amanda - you go.

[00:37:12.990] - Amanda Aitken

Well, I happen to have it sitting right next to me, Alys, I was well prepared today. My recommendation is Ruby Tandoh's new recipe book, Cook As You Are. Just came out, it's really big.

[00:37:26.010] - Alys Mumford

For listeners, Amanda is holding this up to the screen so we can see it, it's a very beautiful book.

[00:37:31.530] - Amanda Aitken

You can just Google it, yourself [Laughter]. So, I think maybe we're just talking like at the beginning of the podcast about the cold snap and it's been nice and sunny and things. And this book arrived the other day and I just have already put so many post it notes in it of recipes I want to cook. There's

recipes for when you can't be bothered cooking after a long day, there's a whole chapter on that. There's recipes for when you want to just make something and you go all day, there's like a snack section. It's just like, really good. I love Ruby's writing as well. She just writes really beautifully about food and the love of it, and the recipes are just, yeah, I recommend it really really much. Also, if you sign up to her newsletter, she's also got some of the recipes for free as well. So you should sign up there, but great. I can't wait. I'm going to eat my way through winter with this, basically is what my recommendation is.

[00:38:25.330] - Alys Mumford

A very on-brand recommendation from Amanda. Thank you very much. Ethan?

[00:38:32.170] - Ethan Young

Well, so, probably a bit boring, but I just listened to a preview of a book that someone just recommended to me called This Essentialism, and it's really about cutting down what we're doing in our working life and doing more with less. And it was actually talking about someone who is looking at leaving their job because they were too busy, stretched so many ways and just going into consultancy where they specialised. And their advice was keep your job, but work as if you're a consultant. So they're cutting down all the stuff they don't need to get involved in. So I'm excited to read that. But also something a bit less boring, maybe equally as boring. Do a jigsaw. I love a good jigsaw these days. I really think we need a revival of the jigsaw movement. I might start on Instagram.

[00:39:27.770] - Alys Mumford

100%. I've got a little jigsaw swapping group in Edinburgh, so, you know.

[00:39:34.590] - Ethan Young

Ah wow. I've done a 5000 a few Christmases ago and it was awesome.

[00:39:39.570] - Alys Mumford

Wow. I got a 2000 piece for my dad and he has never forgiven me and nor has my mum, because it took over the dining table for about three weeks. Kirn, have you got a recommendation for us?

[00:39:51.210] - Kirn Kaur

I do. I just started - keeping on the book theme. I know you've put in a jigsaw there Ethan, but I just started reading a book called The Right Sort of Girl by Anita Rana, Anita Rani sorry. So, it's about her life, but it's so funny. It's so amazing. It almost feels like a warm blanket around me when I read it because I'm like, oh my god, that's so weird. That kind of happened to me when I was growing up. I didn't know that was normal, but it's amazing because it's really, really funny. It's great. It's something quite light hearted, especially after a long day at work as well. So, I would definitely recommend that.

[00:40:29.190] - Alys Mumford

Amazing. And Jessie?

[00:40:31.110] - Jessie Duncan

I'm not recommending a book, and I feel I should be. But thank you, Amanda, for reminding me about Ruby Tandoh's book, I'm going to go and buy that on my lunch after this [Laughter]. I watched the first episode of the new American crime story, Impeachment, the other night, which is dramatising the Clinton-Lewinsky story. Speaking of toxic political environments [Laughter]. And I'm really interested to see where they're going to go with it. Monica Lewinsky is actually a producer on the series, so I'm really interested to see how far they're going to push, how far they're going to delve into the misogyny and how the situation was handled, both with the officials involved, but also the media coverage afterwards. I think there's been a lot of really good content recently about just the general misogyny and the treatment of young women in the media during the late 90s and early 2000s, but everyone's kind of looking back now and going, my god, what on earth is going on? [Laughter]. This is a huge part of that narrative. And I think it's the fact that Monica Lewinsky herself is involved gives me a bit of faith, that it will be handled responsibly, hopefully. Maybe that'll not be true when we get to episode ten. But, yeah, I'm interested to see where it's going to go. And that's on - I think it's on BBC Two.

[00:41:59.210] - Alys Mumford

Great. Well, don't worry mine is a book [laughter], so we're back and I was looking for a sort of chill out reading book similar to Kirn was talking about. And I was like, I want some crime drama, but I really don't want to read about another murdered woman. So I got the new Richard Osmond First Day Murder Club, which is called The Man Who Died Twice. I was like, that sounds okay. It is just delightful. I can't recommend it highly enough. There's some beautiful quotes about feminism, including one of the characters saying, oh, you see a lot more female murderers these days, out of context it's really a wonderful sign of progress [Laughter]. Which I just love as a beautiful skewering of feminism.

[00:42:47.470] - Alys Mumford

Fantastic, that is us. Thank you so much to my fantastic - my fantastic guest? Thank you so much to our fantastic guests Amanda sorry - Ethan, Jessie and Kirn. And thank you to you for listening. Stay Safe.

[00:43:12.630] - Amanda Aitken

On the Engender was hosted by Alys Mumford and produced by myself, Amanda Atkin. The music featured throughout was written and performed by Bossy Love. To find out more about the work of the organisation head to [engender.scot](http://engender.scot) and be sure to click subscribe to this podcast so you don't miss the next episode.

[00:43:29.450]

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