

## Publication Review

### **Women Thinking Equality: The Summing Up** **Published by: Engender**

**Women Thinking Equality: the Summing Up** is a thought provoking publication, which explores the common threads between people who are discriminated against, those people forming the equality strands, and the underlying issues that maintain that discrimination.

Engender is a membership organisation working on an anti-sexist agenda in Scotland and Europe to increase women's power and influence and make visible the impact of sexism on women, men and society. Between May 2008 and March 2009, Engender facilitated a series of discussions on equalities from a gendered perspective. These discussions brought together women with experience of living and working with equalities, including age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion or belief, and often a mixture of the above.

The overwhelming conclusion is that the underlying issue is the 'Market economy', where national and international policy ensures humans are valued only in terms of their 'value and cost' to the market. Because this system is based on profit through productivity, consumption and credit, there is little if any concern for moral or ethical codes. This is clearly seen in the profit making activities of drug or people trafficking, child labour or environmentally destructive practices.

Media plays a large part in the promotion of profit and the definition of success as 'making the most money', often without concern for the legality of that 'success'. Dozens of publications are dedicated to maintaining this definition of success, with whole magazines promoting the personal lives of the rich and famous, who in turn are given social power.

**Women Thinking Equality: the Summing Up** explores how the 'Market economy' is maintained through unequal education systems, elitist structures such as professional associations, networks and inheritance, and how the gender-bias of our economic structures ensures that work such as childcare or the caring professions are poorly paid and often carried out by sections of society who are most discriminated against. Even work within the third sector is seen as 'a loss to the real economy' and not contributing towards the economic system.

**Women Thinking Equality: the Summing Up** argues that the existing economic gender bias particularly excludes people from the LGBT communities, focusing as it does on the assumption of the heterosexual man being the 'assumed role model' and wage earner. This creates 'discriminatory discourse around gender and sexual orientation'. This is often seen in employment practice and the reluctance of employers to provide flexible employment options or career progression.

Often when women and BME people establish entrepreneurial ventures, in order to 'go around the system that tries to limit their financial success, it encourages the stereotypical assumption, that for example Asians are good shopkeepers, and that there is nothing wrong with the system, because a few people who may be LBG T, BME, people with disabilities, older or younger people do well financially.

So what does the effect of the 'Market economy' have on equalities work?

**Women Thinking Equality: the Summing Up** suggests that equalities work needs to address the effect of the existing national and international economy and the part it plays in discrimination. Equalities work needs to focus on the value of lives and 'sustaining individual and community wellbeing' rather than the monetary value of skills and privilege, which are discriminatory.

This publication acknowledges that this will not be easy, but until we acknowledge the role of 'Market economy' or party politics, and the issue of personal identity we will be unable to challenge the discriminatory practices that see people as different and as a 'cost to society'.

Money is not the answer to discrimination, and we cannot assume that including discriminated groups in the market economy will result in their being more 'successful', or reduce their exploitation.

**Women Thinking Equality: the Summing Up** argues that by focussing on equality strands rather than 'equal human value', equality groups ultimately have to compete for funds with groups and organisations working in the same area or with the same equality strands.

This publication is thought provoking in its challenge to equalities work, but is clear on the strategies the Equality and Third sectors need to adopt in order to create human wellbeing. Otherwise, mental ill health and suicide, violence (especially male violence against women), war, poverty and exploitation will continue to rise.

**Women Thinking Equality: the Summing Up** is part of the Women Thinking Equalities papers that cover Transgender; Disability; Economics; Race; Religion or Belief; Sexual Orientation and Age, all from a gendered perspective.

If you are working with equality strands or within the third sector, these publications are essential in developing effective strategies to challenge discrimination.

For more information about the work of Engender visit [www.engender.org.uk](http://www.engender.org.uk).  
To order Women Thinking Equality: The Summing Up or the Equality papers visit [Engender publications](#)

All Engender publications are available FREE of charge

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