

It's International Woman's Day, not International Mother's Day

New Legacy Radio-Episode 3: Jody Day

VoiceAmerica 0:05

Welcome to New Legacy Radio with Christine Erickson. Are you someone who doesn't have children by circumstance, choice or chance? This show is for our collective community. Are you someone who influences policy, DEI initiatives or media narratives? Learn how you can co create inclusive, equitable policies and environments for people without children. Now, here's your host, Christine Erickson.

Christine Erickson 0:31

Welcome to New Legacy Radio. I'm your host, Christine Erickson. I'm the founder of New Legacy Institute, which was created to build a collective community voice by people without children to impact social equity and policy change. Thank you for joining us today, on International Women's Day. We have a very special guest with us today. Jody Day is an expert and thought leader on female childlessness, the author of *Living the Life Unexpected: How to Find Hope, Meaning and a Fulfilling Future Without Children*, and the founder of Gateway Women, the global friendship, support and advocacy network for childless women. She is also a dear friend, and her accolades could go on and on. I invite you to read more at GatewayWomen.com. Thank you for being with us today, Jody.

Jody Day 1:21

I'm absolutely thrilled to be here. It's always a delight to spend time with you.

Christine Erickson 1:26

Thank you, likewise. And today being International Women's Day, we have titled this show how to look at what our position is on this day, and the things that often overrun celebrating all women, when a pronatalist perspective can easily take over this and many other days as well.

Jody Day 1:47

Absolutely, yes. Yeah. I mean, I say it's International Women's Day, not international Mother's Day. And I've been saying that on social media for a few years now. And it's interesting today, I'm noticing a lot of people, a lot more people than normal are picking it up. Sometimes I feel like I'm sort of, you know,

speaking into, you know, an echo chamber, but I'm really noticing that other people are starting to notice how the, the pronatalist motherhood narrative is overtaking everything to do with women. And I think more and more people are going, hang on a minute. Why is that? And is that helpful for everyone? I mean, is that even helpful for mums?

Christine Erickson 2:25

Right, right. Exactly. Yeah, I noticed that today, too. On Twitter, especially people that I wasn't even that familiar with. I really appreciated seeing a lot of that, you know, acknowledgement, and then celebrating all women isn't not celebrating motherhood. It's just not centering it today.

Jody Day 2:45

Absolutely. I think the centering word is a really helpful word there, because it's not like, we're anti-mom. I mean, you and I just wanted to be mothers. We celebrate all women, and that includes mothers, but often 'all women' doesn't seem to include childless women. And that's the issue.

Christine Erickson 3:03

Yes, very much so. So before we delve back into this wonderful topic for today, would you like to take us back to how you got involved how you started your childless journey with this fabulous blog? And how many years ago it was 2011, I believe?

Jody Day 3:22

Oh, yeah. Let me just engage the way back machine. Yeah, I'm thinking of me. You know, I was, you know, I was in my mid 40s, at the time. I was struggling to come to terms with my childlessness. And I was, I just kind of learned that really, I was going to be permanently childless. And I started trying to find support for that. I, you know, was consulting Dr. Google, you know, the library, therapists, the internet, anything I could find. I was speaking to therapists, but no one was really able to give me any understanding, I would just get bingoed. And that would include being professionally bingoed by therapists and professionals. You know, I look young for my age. And so it was oh, you've still got time, or why don't you have one on your own? And these would be the same people that, you know, if I'd suggested getting a dog, they'd say, "Well, who's going to look after him in the daytime?" Yet, suddenly, as a, you know, a single middle aged, freelance person

with no home of their own and no savings, I was just magically going to be able to afford to have a child of my own. And this is despite the fact that actually, I had been infertile for a long time, so it wasn't going to happen anyway. So it was after a while, I stopped talking about it, because these bingos are very shaming, you know, well, maybe you didn't run on them badly enough, or you would have tried harder. It's like 15 years of trying to have a baby? I think that's, you know, I think I've ticked that box, various things like that. So, and because I'm, you know, I'm someone who makes sense of things through words. You know, I took to the page, and I've been blogging for a while, sort of a personal blog, which was read by about three people, you know, all of whom I knew, for a couple of years. Blogging was very new. I've always been an early adopter with technology. And I remember them saying, you know, when I read your stuff, I can hear you talking. And I thought, oh, I must have "found my voice". Those are air quotes. They're very good for radio. And, and I thought, well, okay, I'm going to just write about my childlessness. So I started this blog, called Gateway Woman, I got my first piece of PR, the day after the first blog was published. And then women from all over the world, were kind of commenting on the blog saying, "How do you know the exact words in my head? I thought I was the only person, you know, with these thoughts and feelings." And women from all over the world, were commenting, and I was sitting at my desk on my own, in my flat, with tears running down my face, because for the first time, I felt heard. And that was the beginning of Gateway Women. I had no idea what it would become, you know, I accidentally started a global movement and a global network. It's been a heck of a ride, the last 11 years. And it has, you know, has done something, you know, my work has initiated conversations in the culture that have been picked up now around the English-speaking world, and further than that. There are quite a lot of other childless women and activists and writers in other countries, who've kind of taken up the torch in their own language, and they're own cultures. And you know, you and I met through this work also. Yeah,

Christine Erickson 6:35

Absolutely. That's what I was thinking, it was back in 2014, or 2015, that I started doing a Google search, where I was, in my own journey, looking to connect, and I found you. And when I wrote a short book in 2015, it was just to add to that voice, because they weren't there. And now there are so many books and blogs and conversations, at least in that personal space, that have really shifted things since that time that you started and do quite a lot to your/our visibility, I believe.

Jody Day 7:11

Yeah, I mean, I'm, you know, Google, Jody, and childless and it's kind of ridiculous. I mean, that next to Jennifer Aniston, I must have the most famous empty uterus in the world; it's quite bizarre. And something you said, then, which is really important, you said, there's a lot in that kind of personal space, but what I really value about what New Legacy is doing, and you know, what the plans for the Institute, is the next stage of the work, is taking this out of the personal space and into the political and policy and organizational and systemic space, which needs to happen. It's not that it supersedes the personal work, because that needs to be there, too. But there needs to be more. International Women's Day is a really good example of why we need more, because we need more awareness, at a policy level within organizations, that people who are creating these memes and hashtags within organizations, they don't understand how they are excluding so many women. And the numbers will rise, you know, we're an average of one in five; and that's one in three in Germany, in Japan. I would say that early, early statistical analyses are showing that all developed, I hate that word, countries are on track to for one in three. You know, we are all heading this way. So it's really time that the world wakes up to the fact that we're not going anywhere.

Christine Erickson 8:41

And that when you look at that percentage of population in any other policy consideration, or DEIB initiative, it is there. The numbers are there. In fact, sometimes we're stronger in terms of numbers, and not that it's a comparative analysis. It's just that we need to be seen in that way. And the language needs to shift and the policy needs to shift and the equity in benefits need to shift in the same way that we have seen in other historical groups.

Jody Day 9:10

Well, that's very interesting, because I've, I've seen that and I've taken great heart and from, you know, the gay liberation movements, you know, 60s and 70s. Onwards. And really the traction for them really started to change when workplace changes came in, when laws and guidelines started to change in the workplace because this brought their situation and their identity to the awareness of people that would otherwise not have come across it. And it started to kind of normalize it within the workplace and that spread into other parts of society. And I think, you know, policies around non parents in the workplace, they shouldn't just be a nice idea. They need to be law.

Christine Erickson 9:57

Yes. It does sound in a lot of conversations I have around workplace policy it does, it seems like it's a bonus, like the request is for a bonus or something special or other, rather than just the same, or something equitable to what is already being given.

Jody Day 10:17

Yes, I've noticed in the UK, I don't know if this is the case in America, there has been a big push in the last few years, big media campaigns, which are leading to policies within the workplace, around the menopause. And starting with fertility in the workplace, in terms of understanding complex fertility journeys for people in the workplace, and what's that like and how to support them. But when you consider that the most likely outcome of a complex fertility journey i.e. one that includes treatment is just, yeah, it is the most, the most likely outcome is that it will fail. But once again, the pronatalist miracle baby narrative, childlessness is not being included, in these fertility kind of ideas. Whereas with a bad fairy at the christening, if you imagine that even for women in their 20s, IVF, and ART is going to fail more than 50% of the time for someone in their 40s, which is a very common age for a woman and a couple to be going through treatment, you know, it's going to be between one and 5% success rate in 95-99% is that it's not going to work for them. They're not going to, you know, have a baby.

Christine Erickson 11:31

Yeah, we can't isolate the conversation of fertility or fertility treatments without this conversation.

Jody Day 11:37

Except that is exactly what is happening. We are still being left out. And it's not a kind of-it's not a deliberate oh, let's exclude the childless people. It's a very powerful, unconscious mechanism that's at work that is making us invisible.

Christine Erickson 11:54

Absolutely. And you mentioned, you know, being the bad fairy at the did you say at the baptism or the christening? Yes.

So I want to come back to that and speak a little bit more about this unconscious bias and how this as you said, hostility toward non mothers, how has this come to be in society. Childlessness, or child free living is not new, it has been there for centuries, the conversation has shifted, and we're hoping to shift that more. But why is it the way it is today?

Jody Day 12:31

I have a thought, an idea, which is that I think I know this sounds quite severe, but I think there is a whiff of death, about the childless woman. And that includes the childfree woman, a woman without children, which is that we represent the end of the line. I think if we go back to our deep ancestral roots as a tribal species, the only way a tribe could survive and thrive was to grow was for there to be lots of babies being born. Infant mortality and Mother mortality very, very high. So to be a woman who was able to give birth multiple times, survive it and have children who survived, you were a really, really, really important part of the tribe. Now imagine being a childless woman, a woman who was at that point infertile within that environment. You know, people would have been scared of you. You represented the end of the tribe. You would have been someone who the tribe would have had to support it, but you wouldn't be growing the tribe. Possibly, if you were lucky, and the tribe had the resources, it would support you. And that would free you up perhaps to become a midwife and a healer, and maybe even a shaman, you know, to take on other roles within the tribe that you could because you weren't bringing up children. But I think there was always a sense of fear around the childless woman that somehow there was something about her that could influence the fertile women that could cause the death of them. You see it in fairy tales. You know, there's this kind of idea that childless women are witches, are powerful and to be feared, and all fairy stories involving witches, they usually end up eating the children. There was some cannibalistic, you know, so I think there's all and I'm, you know, this goes back to in all cultures, you know, very, very scary things attached themselves, unconsciously, to a woman without children. And I think that exists in what Jung would call our collective unconscious. It is part of our collective psyche as a species to fear and want to other i.e. keep away from us, women without children. And I suspect that some of those same things probably sort of accrete around non sort of homo, you know, ah, what's the what's the word, heteronormative sexual identities because they were perhaps historically non reproductive identities. That's not the case anymore for many people. I have to say, gay and lesbian queer women can also

end up childless for exactly the same reasons as heterosexual women, not finding a partner, IVF not working all of those things. And they get left out of these discussions, in this debate. It's amazing the childlessness story, and childless campaigners like, like you and me, you know, we are still, you know, predominantly white, middle class, Western, middle aged, educated women. It's time, it's really important that we expand that narrative to all women without children.

Christine Erickson 15:50

Yeah, absolutely. And the, the irony, if you will, and maybe that's not the best word is that our collective community is diverse and intersectional. By nature, that is who we are. This impacts everyone from all different walks of life. And absolutely, those narratives need to be centered and re-centered.

Jody Day 16:13

And also expressed in different ways for different cultures, because there's going to be a different framing. Even the difference in my work, you know, working with, with British and European women, and then working with women from the United States, I've seen big differences in the stories that women bring to their childlessness. I mean, I was, I come from, you know, I'd say, probably in Europe, you know, Britain is one of the most secular countries. So mostly, for me, what I found fascinating and working with women from the United States was how much Christianity informed many of the stories about their sense of failure as women, and how unfortunately, that had often been reinforced, you know, within the church environment that, you know, maybe God didn't want you to be a mother and stuff like that, that you don't hear so much of in the UK. So it's been really important to understand that we also need to really filter this right down to cultural levels, as well, which is one of the one of the intersections of intersectionality.

Christine Erickson 17:20

Yes, absolutely. So in speaking to that, what, what do you think it is that, why have there been so few voices in the childless space? And what was happening when you started? And what do you see now?

Jody Day 17:42

Hmm. Well, as I said, before, when I started there was there was nothing. There were one was one or two books out there, both published in America, both about coming to terms of childlessness, after failed fertility treatments. One called Silent Sorority by Pamela Tsigdinos, and Life Without Baby by Lisa Manterfield, who's actually a British woman who is married to an American and lives in America. And I contacted both of them, and they were really supportive, you know, to me, right from the beginning, they were fantastic. And Pamela is now one of the Nomo Crones, you know, the next part of my work working with the older, you know, becoming an older, childless woman, what that's about. But there was nothing. There were a few blogs. But they once again, they were about fertility treatment. And they were you know, most of them not particularly well written. Not, you know, they were almost like personal diaries. But they were online. And they didn't speak to me as a woman who was childless through infertility also being single in my mid 40s, and childless by circumstance. And I found them hard to identify with. So there was very little out there and what there was, didn't speak to me. So I think, you know, I started my blog, I was the first person talking about being childless by circumstance. You know, at that point, it was the idea, and, you know, this is a quote from my book, you know, and one of my early blogs, you know, "The room called childlessness has many doors, not just 'didn't want' and 'couldn't have', but those were the only two narratives that were out there. And I'll be honest, the 'didn't want' you know, that they didn't want, the child free narrative at that time, the only ones I could find were absolutely terrifying. They were really radical childfree voices, very anti-children, very anti-parents, very polemic. And I was, you know, repelled by them, because I didn't want people to think that I was like that, you know. I had a lot of pronatalist prejudice about being childfree, which I don't have anymore because they actually, those blogs do not represent any childfree person I have actually met, apart from the occasional heckler at a public talk. Also there is a great deal of shame that accrues to childless women, there is a sense that you are a failed woman that gets placed on you by society by pronatalism, which, you know, many of us then internalize. That shame is the most powerful tool of social control. And shame makes people silent. I think that also has had a huge impact on why a lot of people don't speak up in their workplaces, in their family, they don't write books, they don't start blogs, they don't stand up. I had the idea that, you know, after a few years of Gateway Women, I had this fantasy that, you know, every woman who was helped by Gateway Women and healed and moved on and felt great about her

life, would turn into a sort of a spokesperson in her own life. And I discovered that actually, very, very few people actually do that. The shame is still so strong that a lot of people, once they feel better about their own personal situation, they go back into their life, and that's absolutely fine, and they sort of go silent about it, but they're at peace. They don't become kind of activists in a way. So you know, this journey is a lot. This revolution that we need is going a lot slower than I might have hoped. But still after 11 years, it's done something; here we are.

Christine Erickson 21:36

Absolutely. When did you really see things, you know, because I said it was back in 2015, or 14 when I found you, when I wrote and then stopped, for several years. When did you see things really start to pick up? You know, if I look at the number of books today, the blogs and podcasts and even in that personal space, when did you really feel that?

Jody Day 22:05

I think probably after about five years, you know, I'd written a book, it was in its second edition. I was starting to write a lot of forwards and things for other people. And there were starting to be events I was speaking at. And I do remember an event, which was a little bit later than that think it was 2018, which was at Fertility Fest at the 'There's More to Life' day, which was part of Fertility Fest, which was curated by Jessica Hepburn. There were all these people on stage that were talking, and I knew some of them, but not others, you know, and every single person, even those I didn't know, name checked Gateway Women as having been really important in their journey. And they were artists, they were poets, they were speakers. They were this, they were that. And they all credited Gateway Women, or me personally, or my book as being part and I thought, hang on, this is the stuff I'm seeing. So how much out there is happening, that you know that that my work and the community that's, that's grown around me, because Gateway Women is a we, not a me. How much impact is it having out there in the world that, you know, that I haven't seen? And, and now, you know, there is such a thing as childlessness literature. I'm reviewing books all the time. I just, you know, I'm starting to review novels. And it's, you know, it's not just books, there are important books being written, you know, by established writers, you know, people who already have, you know, a big audience and a big platform. It has been normalized as a subject to center a novel around in a way that

motherhood has always been. So, in a way, I think, when it is no longer remarkable to talk about childlessness, our work will be done.

Christine Erickson 23:56

Yes, yes. That's a lovely, lovely thought. Well, I appreciate hearing, you know, sort of the evolution from where you started, to where we are now. As you said, even having this conversation today, and in these episodes so far, we've looked at you know, both childfree and childless spaces and experiences, and wanting to bring that together in that collective voice for what is next, the next practices and looking at policy change. Again, as it is International Women's Day and not International Mother's Day. When we come back from a break in a few minutes, I'd like to focus on how the prejudices toward us as non-mothers how they show up in everyday ways. You mentioned bingos before, as well as a phrase you've coined or a term you coined for these things, and not everybody might be familiar with that. So I'd like to look at some of those again, as well. How did how did you go up with saying bingos?

Jody Day 25:01

I can't take the credit for it. I got. I got that from the child free community. But I do think a lot of people have learned about it from me, especially as I kind of listed quite a few of them in my 2017 TEDTalk, 'The Lost Tribe of Childless Women'. So I think that's been watched a lot.

Christine Erickson 25:18

I got it. Yes. And we'll put a link up to that on the website as well, after. Yeah. So we have about two minutes till break. Is there anything else you'd like to share on what we're just speaking to before we go?

Jody Day 25:32

I guess I'd love to talk a little bit more about shame. Because I think that is a really powerful piece in this whole story. I think, for me, my marriage had broken down because my, my ex-husband, sadly got very embroiled in addictions. And I ended up in a 12-step group called Al Anon, which really helped me to understand the power of peer-to-peer healing, which is a really important part of why I set up Gateway Women. You know, I wasn't an expert, and I wasn't healed, but I thought, if I can just get us together, you know, in a confidential space, maybe it would work. And it did. But I think that sort of helped me understand I didn't

need to be ashamed of these things that happened to me. And I think that was one of the huge things that helped Gateway Women get off the ground. Because in that first blog, I used my own photograph, I used my real name, I had a background in design, so it was very kind of, it was my look, it didn't look like a self-help blog, you know, it wasn't green and purple with little flowers on. And people thought, hang on, she, she looks all right. Because there's this idea that all childless women are weeping weirdos. And so therefore, we don't want to identify as one and we don't want to be seen with them. And that's shame. And it's like we have nothing to be ashamed of for being childless. We've done nothing wrong. We are nothing wrong.

Christine Erickson 26:55

Absolutely. Beautiful. We'll continue this conversation when we return from a short break, with Jody Day on International Women's Day.

VoiceAmerica 27:20

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You are listening to New Legacy Radio with Christine Erickson. Now back to the show. Here is Christine Erickson.

Christine Erickson 29:20

Welcome back, everyone. We are having a conversation with Jody Day on International Women's Day. And before the break, we started talking about shame. And Jody was sharing some of her experience. Would you like to share more of that with us Jody?

Jody Day 29:35

Yeah, I mean, shame is the most powerful tool of social control. And I think historically, in order to make sure that as many women, you know, partnered and became mothered, as you know, as much as possible, shame was about very powerful way I think possibly all of us growing up or even now, knew women in our social circle who hadn't had children, you know, an aunt or a friend of our parents, and there was always something slightly odd that attached to them; and no one really spoke about what their story really was. And you know that shame, it's like, you don't want to end up like her, in that shame. And I can imagine when it was maybe, you know, one in 10 women, you know, perhaps wasn't having children, it was probably a very powerful tool. But as you know, as we talked before, when it could be as much as one in three soon, you know, the idea of shaming, you know, one quarter to 1/3 of the mature female population, and that shame having such a huge impact on them, that they are unable to participate in life, and contribute to civic society in other powerful ways apart from having their own children. I mean, the planet will be fine, you know, with less people on it. It's going to be fine. So we need to really wake up to how inappropriate the shame is that pronatalism places on women, and how it limits so many women from also connecting with other childless women, because the way that we heal is through grief. You know, we need to grieve our childlessness. That's for women who are involuntarily childless, childfree women have a different thing-they need to be with other women who are celebrating their childlessness, and don't think they're

weird for doing that. And it but we need to be able to find each other. And if we're all hiding from each other at home, and when someone asks us, you know, if we have children, we kind of happy for them to imagine that actually, maybe I chose it. Because that seems a bit groovier than kind of actually, it chose me. Because that doesn't sit well with our idea of agency, either. It's like, well, you must have done something wrong. And, you know, shame kind of underpins so much of the public and private and internal narratives that fuel this deficit narrative around being childless, that you are less than mothers. And to be honest, there's an awful lot of shame placed on women who do have children as well. What I can see is, I think mothers seem to get more of the guilt, and childless women get more of the shame. But whatever it is, is whatever way we're doing being a woman, we're getting it wrong somehow.

Christine Erickson 32:19

Yes, absolutely. I think in this, you know, we talk about pronatalism a lot, obviously, as the driver of these things, and when you're also hiding, and you're grieving, it's also reinforced by language every day, or activated in you. Like I can remember doing crossword puzzles, and just a word would come up, you know, baby or whatever, natal. And you think about it, it's something you can't unsee, when you're living it. And so you see it in that way, and then you're unseen in other ways. There's language that excludes you. There's policy that excludes you. There are workplace groupings that exclude you. And so I think it's like living that full spectrum.

Jody Day 33:09

Yeah, pronatalism is that kind of, as you know, Laura Carroll, called it the Baby Matrix, in her book about pronatalism, and it is that once you see it, you can't unsee it. It is everywhere. And it starts so young. You know, this is a very, very powerful conditioning mechanism of our culture, to you know, going back to the tribal roots, as I talked about before, you know, to make sure as many women as possible have children. Because if you think about it, logically, it's a really bad idea. So the best thing to do is not think about it logically, just to kind of get on with it.

Christine Erickson 33:50

Keep going. Yes.

As you said, you know, those kind of ways it shows up in life, I mean, one of the ways it shows up in life, and people say to me oh no, we don't we don't discriminate against childless women. What do you mean, it's a stigma? What do you mean, there are prejudices? I think you're being a bit oversensitive about this. But it is everywhere. And should we talk about some of the examples I'm sure we can trade. I mean, actually, at the moment, with the political situation in the world, and coverage that is coming out of Ukraine, the "as a mother", or "as a parent", hashtag is rife. I do appreciate that if you are a parent, there is a biological drive that makes you terrified for your children, when they're out of your sight. That's normal. And perhaps when you see terrible things happening to other people's children, that gets activated. But that is actually do you know I mean to mistake that as the idea that parents have automatically more empathy. And that you know, because you are a parent, you feel these things, which means that people who aren't parents aren't feeling these things. It's a false correlation. You know, there are parents who do not feel empathy for other people, including their own children. And there are childless and childfree people who do extraordinary work, often in very unsexy, unflashy ways, supporting the Civic fabric of society and other people's children. But the 'as a mother' hashtag is everywhere, and it's also very overused, I think, in the advertising space. The advertisers are so you know, understand, when you add pronatalism and consumerism and social media together, you know, mothers have a lot of spending power. So it is, it has really been weaponized by the advertising industry that moms are making all of the decisions about spending. And that certainly wasn't the case when I was kind of coming to consciousness. You know, I was kind of growing up in the 70s. There was nothing glamorous, and there was nothing noteworthy about being a mother then. It was actually quite embarrassing. If you're a famous TV star or pop star or someone got pregnant or movie stuff, they had to drop out a site. It was really uncool. They couldn't be seen until it was all over, and they were back to be groovy again.

Christine Erickson 36:16

Yes, by all means, do not get pregnant. That was my time. The time in which I grew up.

Jody Day 36:23

You know, in studio contracts and things, because that would be the end of your allure, as a woman, once you're a mother. If I think back to, you know, the 80s

when Lady Diana, you know, married Prince Charles in the UK and the British Royal Family. And then she got pregnant, she wore this enormous maternity smock, which was like a navy blue marquee. And, you know, when I was growing up, it was slightly embarrassing when a woman was pregnant, because it meant she'd been having sex with her partner. And then, you know, we fast forward and then you know, when Beyoncé was pregnant with twins, and posed for a photograph, which nearly broke Instagram, of looking absolutely fantastic with a huge pregnancy, dressed as a Yoruba fertility goddess. And you know that the shift from the very private, personal space to the public performance, of fertility and pregnancy enhancing her value as a superstar that says a lot about what's happened with pronatalism in our lifetime.

Christine Erickson 37:32

Yes. And perhaps I think about it, in the sense of, in the absence of something you know, mothers feeling guilt and not being recognized or that hiding you know, whether it's a pregnancy or your own pregnancy, don't wear these clothes, don't show it. You know, we have unconscious bias working here we have pronatalism. And then we have the overreach perhaps of like a cultural bypassing in the absence of something else, we now have shifted to this glorification and Hollywood baby bumps and that type of media, where I look at that, and it is every day headlines, and I find it odd. You know, motherhood is beautiful, your experiences are your own, but that's what the headlines are. That's what the images are, in a way, that I'm just always curious how whether it's for mothers or non-mothers, we are continually showing women in the spaces of how they are related to someone else, and who they are in relation to something else, and what they can do for them. And that starts with pregnancy. And that's for all women, you know, as you say, we're women first, above all, and so how do we get lost in that narrative? Whether it's patriarchal, pronatalist? We are all getting lost in that.

Jody Day 38:57

I don't think it's an accident. I think the pronatalism, plus capitalism, plus consumerism, plus social media, I think they have come together as in the most magnificent backlash against the gains of the Women's Liberation Movement of the 70s. And earlier, you know, we have to also acknowledge our forebearers who worked many, many years before that the first wave movement, the second wave movement, the third wave, and apparently, we're now in the fourth wave, right?

And because what tends to happen when there is a big-I mean, do you know when we look at the last 50 years of what's happened in modern Western women's lives, in terms of the introduction of the pill, legalized and safe abortion, in most places, not all, women's access to higher education and the professions, plus fertility treatments; that was in 50 years. There has never been such a big shift in women's lives, probably since we've moved from the matrilineal to the patriarchal society around 10,000 years ago. It's hardly surprising that there is actually within that a huge cultural unconscious backlash. Because really, really powerful change like that always provokes a backlash. It's natural. We can't take it personally. There is thesis, there's antithesis, and then it settles into a new synthesis. We are still in the backlash and childless women, I think particularly are really, really feeling it because we are carrying this idea that we're wrong. You know, we've done something wrong by being childless, which, when so much childlessness is systemic and out of our control is very, very painful to be blamed for it. But I think if we can, if this backlash can help to reduce women to their reproductive status and say, okay, well, it's great that you've got the phone, it's great that you've got jobs, it's great. You can own your own house, it's great. You can be a lawyer or whatever it is you want to be. But if you're not a mom, none of that matters. Yes. And we see this in interviews with very powerful women or women in in the public eye, you know, who will, when asked, you know, what is the most important thing, you know, in your life, or what you've done they will always say, you know, that the thing I'm most proud of is my children, you know, and it doesn't really matter if it's the Queen, or you know, or a Hollywood star, and you just think it just really, really, really reinforces this idea that that means that anyone who doesn't have children can never actually really feel super proud of anything. And because, yeah, okay, so you wrote a book, that's great, ah, but you didn't have kids. You know, okay, so you went to the moon. That's amazing, but you didn't have kids. And it's really what's happening systemically and also in the unconscious around, basically, you powerful women, get back in your box. And we've seen that in the kind of, you know, the slide towards more punitive reproductive laws, as well. It's like, it's gone too far, all these liberated women with jobs and education you know, we need to stop it in its tracks. And I think that is going to become more and more prevalent. I fear that the punitive and unpleasant reproductive laws, I just have a nasty feeling with my witch's crystal ball, that we're going to be seeing a lot more of that, and that we're going to have to fight against.

Christine Erickson 42:34

Absolutely, absolutely. I can remember, internalizing that myself and getting to a point of realizing I'm really not going to have a child and thinking, but I did all this on purpose. I didn't get pregnant in the 80s. We weren't supposed to do that. I traveled, I educated myself, I, you know, experienced other cultures. I had a home I created work for myself, so it'd be flexible. And I just remember feeling crushed. It all came down on me and thinking, well, me thinking, well, that doesn't matter. Or why did I do that? Like, what does it mean now? You know, inevitably, I was doing those things for myself, but subconsciously, there was also a track that I'm setting things in motion, the way that I see this can work. And along my value system and the way that I want to have a child. And, you know, I was doing that to myself.

Jody Day 43:38

I call it psychologically nesting. And we don't kind of necessarily realize we're doing it until we realize that the nest is always going to be empty. And then it's like, well, what can I constellate a life of meaning around, if it's not a child? And if we look to the culture of that answer, it says nothing. There's nothing for you. You know, but if we look at the life of childfree women, who have chosen not to have children. I mean, when I first started getting interested in childfree women, I thought, they've got a secret that I need. They've chosen this life that is crushing me. What's going on there? You know, it's my nature to get really curious about what's underneath things. How is that possible? You know, I didn't ever think I would get to a place where I was at peace with my childlessness. But to say that, you know, my late 50s, and this has been the case since my late 40s, now, you know, I feel as at peace with my childlessness, I think as if I had chosen it. Now, that was not an easy journey. And I'm still not completely comfortable saying it, because I've said that to my 44-year-old self, she would have said things which are probably not okay to say on live radio.

Because it goes so against the dominant narrative, which is, well, number one, you stupid woman, for organizing your life in such a way that you didn't have children. And also, you are never going to get over this. You are always going to have a secondary life, and you will forever be crushed by your childlessness. It's like the idea that it is possible to grieve this in a deep and powerful way, and that grief itself, because grief is an identity transformation. We've come out the other end of grief, a different person to who you went in, and that person has a

different constellation of meaning. And then you can build your life again, in a different way. And it's not a more powerful way or a more meaningful way or a less meaningful way. I consider my life to be, you know, a messy, imperfect human experience as the life of Jody without kids. And probably if I'd been a mum, a messy, imperfect human experience with kids. I no longer see one is having more value than the other. And that brings me enormous peace.

I feel the same. I you know, there are still moments is, as you said before, and as Laura wrote, you can't unsee this, of course, you know, the noticing. What the difference is, I notice, and it doesn't activate me in the way that it did. You know, I feel a different sense of peace and a different just way of being with myself that I feel full I feel whole in my life. And I do think those things change, and that there are milestones that bring things back about, you know, from not having children to the not having grandchildren or graduations or all of those points within families within friend networks that can touch on that for any of us.

Yeah, and the kind of you know, the bingos that still go on around they don't they annoy me now, rather than make me feel crushed.

Christine Erickson 47:00
Or that, yes.

Jody Day 47:01

Things like, you know, within the workplace, you know, the way female friendly policies are always conflated with basically, you know, mother friendly policies, family friendly policies. And there's that blind spot that the people who are organizing this don't see that that creates inequities. A third, you know, up to a third of your workforce are going to be non-parents. It's like, you're pissing an awful lot of people off by accident. And especially as you know, particularly within the female part of the workforce, those women who aren't having children by choice, or by chance, or by circumstance, who aren't taking maternity leave, I understand that it's not something that is available in the US, you know, they often take on jobs and skills of other people's jobs while they're away. And they don't go on maternity leave for, you know, one, two or three years, they become some of the most valuable people in your organization. You do not want to piss those people off, they are really talent that you want to keep. And in my experience, you know, with many women, a lot of women are leaving

organizations because of this issue, and they are really valuable employees that you're losing. There is a talent drain because of not recognizing pronatalism in the workplace, I think is something that may finally get organizations to wake up. I think actually equity around this issue in the workplace, actually will impact the bottom line in a positive way. This is not a 'nice to have'. If you're not thinking about this, you are missing a big piece of how to make your company culture and your bottom line more productive.

Christine Erickson 48:39

Yeah, I think from how we defined family to universal leave, or equitable leave, all of these things are coming into play. And I think the conversation is fragmented.

JD: That's why I think your organization is so important CE: I think it's time to bring it together so that it's not just, you know, an article during COVID or, you know, someone's personal story. This needs to be a collective action for equitable policy in the workplace. Absolutely. Absolutely. So earlier, you mentioned Ukraine, and right now, I actually forget in my context, that there's so much happening in the world, there always is, and there has been for a long time, you know, COVID Afghanistan. Why is it so important, with everything going on in the world, with such a troubled reality, to focus on this, the rights and equity and the representation of non-parents?

Jody Day 49:45

It's a very good question, because I think it's that well, what about ism? You know, well, what about that, what about this, why care about this, with everything else that's going on? I think because at a deep systemic level, the exclusion and othering of nonparents actually represents the divisive and systemic devaluing of women as anything other than reproductive objects. And as I said before, I think it's a very slippery slope from there to punitive reproduction laws. This is actually a kind of canary in the coal mine issue that we really need to wake up to, because it's one of those areas of kind of radical injustice in our society that we need to address. Because if we think about it, what causes wars-radical injustice, usually, you know, what happens radical injustice. And, you know, I wrote about this in my in my most recent newsletter, and are now seeing other people starting to say this is like, who's thinking about this, the childless women, and the single and childless women and the single childless older women and older, childless couples who are trying to get out of the way of bombs in Ukraine and poverty and terrible things happening in Afghanistan? I understand

the focus, you know, on supporting mothers and vulnerable children because they're in a they're in a super difficult position. But it's like, there are other people too, and all people have value. And I think it's also within, you know, we need to really get the feminists engaged with this issue, because feminism is very hot on reproductive justice for mothers, you know, delaying pregnancy, care during pregnancy, workplace issues, choosing not to have children, choosing how many children to have, abortion, all of these things, but involuntary childlessness, you know, most people who don't have children at midlife, 90% of those didn't choose that. There is almost as much a deafening silence of it within feminism, as there is within every other systemic area in life. And I find it absolutely extraordinary. And particularly as childless women, particularly single childless women, have historically been, as Bella Depaulo's work has shown the biggest contributors to political campaigns, to charities, and actually feet on the ground hours, in kind of volunteering. You know, we are just not these kind of people that have to be supported, who don't have children. We are valuable, and that we are that village. Yeah, it takes a village to reach it. It's us.

Christine Erickson 52:23

We're not the observers were the actors. Yes.

Jody Day 52:26

You know, we're the childless aunts, the therapist, the teachers and the taxpayers. And we're part of this story. We're not alien to it.

Christine Erickson 52:38

Absolutely. Well, thank you so much, Jody, for being here for today, for International Women's Day. I think we have covered a number of topics and issues that are really near and dear to both of our hearts and to our community. I want to thank you for that. And are there any closing comments you would like to make before we wrap it up today?

Jody Day 53:01

Thank you so much. It's been a delight. I'm just getting going. I just want to say that I'm so proud of what you're doing. It is so important that the New Legacy Institute, the work is really the next stage that needs to happen. One of the areas I'm working on now, which is another area which people aren't sort of really thinking about, apart from "Oh, God, what are we going to do?", is older childless

women. How do we become conscious, childless elder women in a culture that only has one word of respect for older women, and that's 'grandmother.' That's the next 10 years of my work.

Christine Erickson 53:32

Yes, beautiful. Well we look forward to it. And we'll have you back to discuss that at some point. Thank you, everybody, for listening today. We celebrate all women today and keep in our hearts, those who are impacted by conflict, women who are missing around the world. Our hearts are with you. Thank you everyone. Continue our conversation and respond to what Jody has said here today on any of our platforms, or email us at radio@newlegacyinstitute.com. Thank you and take care. Bye-bye.

VoiceAmerica 54:08

Thank you for listening to New Legacy Radio. We hope Christine and her guests have given you the context and insight to connect with our community in new ways. What personal or professional change might you consider to acknowledge and include our diverse community of people without children? Until we speak again, we invite you to engage with us on any of our platforms.