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‘Why Does Dismantling Pronatalism Even Matter?’ Guest: Jody Day

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SPEAKERS

VoiceAmerica, Christine Erickson, Jody Day

VoiceAmerica 00:05

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 00:32

Welcome, everyone. And thank you for listening to New Legacy Radio. I'm Christine Erickson, the founder of New Legacy Institute. The Institute's purpose is to advocate for inclusivity and equity for people without children. Today, we're going to discuss what is at the heart and purpose of the Institute - dismantling pronatalism. We're honored to have Jody Day with us today to do a deep dive into this conversation. And looking at the complexities around not only what is pronatalism, but how it permeates our society and culture, our subconscious, and what we can do about it, what we're going to do next, how are we going to have these conversations for change? Jody Day well known international thought leader on childlessness, and childless women. She is the founder of **Gateway Women**. And she is the author of **'Living the Life Unexpected'**, the go-to book on childless living. Thank you for being with us today, Jody,

Jody Day 01:40

Thank you for having me on the show. Christine. It's lovely to be here.

Christine Erickson 01:43

So this large question that we have put out there. Why does dismantling pronatalism even matter? In 2022? Does it matter? I mean, I feel like it's been such a push conversation to get it to matter, to have our community be seen. Where are we with this? And where do you want to start with - you know - our thoughts on this, your thoughts on this?

Jody Day 02:09

Yeah, I think I'll start sort of very briefly with my sort of personal journey on my sort of relationship, my conscious relationship with pronatalism. So I sort of realized I was going to be a childless woman, let's say around about probably 2009. So I was in my mid 40s, and my second post-divorce relationship had ended, I realized that, you know, I wasn't able to conceive naturally, and that my time to even to find someone and do IVF, which was my kind of life's mission at the time was over, and I was facing permanent childlessness. And it was extremely, extremely difficult, if not impossible, to find any resources or any writings around it. Fast-forward a few years later, and I started writing about it myself, you know, 'be the change you want to be in world!'

Christine Erickson 03:05

As one does!

Jody Day 03:08

And what I found really interesting was that when I was looking for resources, and thinking and writing on childlessness, I couldn't find any but I could find articles and resources created by childfree by choice women. And I came to understand that, you know, for many of them, because they'd chosen their childlessness. And also, they'd spent a long-time kind of grappling with it intellectually, and socially, they often had a lot well, in my experience, their thinking was a lot more developed. So I learned a lot from the childfree community. And that's where I first heard this term pronatalism. So I was like, 46, okay, when I first heard the word, and to this day, by the way, people aren't there, spell-checkers still don't know it. That's how embedded it is!

Christine Erickson 04:01

Confirmed!

Jody Day 04:03

And then, in 2012, Laura Carroll, who you've had on the show, wrote a book called **The Baby Matrix**. And Laura was a great supporter of my work. And my blog is right from the beginning, Laura's childfree by choice. And really, that book unpacked for me what pronatalism is as an ideology. When I really kind of absorbed it into my heart what

pronatalism was, it actually brought up a huge amount of grief for me as well, more grief around my childlessness, because I thought, I thought that my pain over not being a mother was biological. I didn't understand the social component. I also didn't understand that had I understood what pronatalism was, and how powerfully it had influenced my construct of myself throughout my life. And through my journey of trying to become a mother. I may have taken different decisions. I may have chosen not to become a mother, I may have, you know, been able to sort of untangle my medical infertility from the social stigma of possibly being taught. Basically, I might have had a gentler, more conscious experience of coming to terms with not being a mother. And I would have understood why everyone else had such a problem with me not being a mother, and also such a problem with me talking about it. You know, I'm being honest and open. So it's like, for me there was this, it was like an intellectual thing that I also had to process in my body. And I know from talking about pronatalism, writing about it myself over the years that that, certainly for childless women, that's women who are childless, not by choice or by circumstance, pronatalism is a really scary thing to understand. But also to realize that we've been duped, that these free thoughts we thought we were having, were actually, social conditioning. It's really 'annoying' to use a polite word for radio. Yeah, I'm wondering, you know, what, what's been your journey with the subject?

Christine Erickson 06:12

I think for me, when I first started, let's say I wrote about this briefly in a short e-book in 2015, that was published. And at that time, I was really unpacking my own grief and sort of the overwhelm of how it socially came at me, not being childless in ways I didn't expect from people that I knew or from everyday situations. And that sort of tapped my grief, more than my own assessment or realization, even of being childless. I felt like it was more in this line of decisions I had made. And I understood why - it was not my choice to be childless, but based on circumstances, I felt like I was making the next best choice. And suddenly, it was this backlash of I wouldn't understand anything, because they don't have children, etc. And so it really piqued that grief and frustration. And it was never conversations about pronatalism, or law or policy or inequity. It was all about what I didn't do or didn't have. That was the focus of the conversation. And over the years, and at the time that I wrote that I started wandering into areas like about inequitable taxation, all of these things, but always stayed grounded in that grief and support space, which has really grown since your work in what 2011 is, when you started your blog, we have wonderful support groups we have titled this week. And I thought that's where I would stay, you know, and not really exploring the other pieces of this or the impact of it, or even my own unconsciousness around it around pronatalism. And it took several years as I think you've been a witness to, throughout our conversations, to really look at, I'm somebody who likes to get underneath things, and what is the root cause of things? And how does that play out. And I started doing that in how I was noticing and reflecting on my own workplace

experiences, experiences in different cultures. language around pronatalism, but not called pronatalism. And for me, I started paying attention to what people were saying and what they weren't saying within our community about what was what was impacting them beyond the personal journey. And I felt like we needed this bridge, this stretch, which you so beautifully just illustrated in your own comments about how you looked at pronatalism, going from that personal space to this unconsciousness and all of these other layers that impact us. And so for me, it took several years of really integrating that thinking to land here with the Institute and these conversations about, okay, how do we unpack this? The conversation that we're having today is necessary because we're still not having it. It's at the base of this, but also how does it impact us in all of these societal ways, in legal ways, in policy ways. It's every day and it's in every system, it's completely permeated in our culture's, structures and systems. And so for me that became a lens to navigate what to do next and how to create some change. Yeah, if that if that answers your question.

Jody Day 09:48

It totally does. And I think you know, we're talking about this this thing called pronatalism and I am going to have a go to say, what I think it is, or a definition because... it creates so much unconscious bias because it is so unconscious. So it's actually even quite hard to find a language to describe it, which in itself, as a communicator, as a psychotherapist, the fact that it's hard to name it, that it's hard to describe it, for me is a lean-in moment; it's like - that's interesting what's going on there?! I mean, at its core, pronatalism is a valuation system, a way of assigning value, mostly to women, although to men as well. But I think at first to women, which privileges the experience of mothers over non-mothers. And I've, you know, looked back and I've thought, you know, over the last sort of year of the kinds of conversations and writing in my own work, I've been thinking right back into evolutionary history, thinking back to those very first human tribes, and how incredibly important it was to have new members of that tribe, to have children being born. To have women who were capable of giving birth and surviving giving birth, and then imagining what the experience might have been for women in those tribes who couldn't, or wouldn't, you know, engage in that process and how they would be devalued, othered, and possibly even, exiled from the community. And something I've begun to sort of think about only recently. And you and I were talking about this before the show, is that perhaps in a way, pronatalism is one of the very first 'isms' that predates patriarchy, predates everything, because it goes right back to those matrilineal times, when human societies worshipped fertility, worshipped goddesses, worshipped Mother Earth, and it was a mystery. It was a divine mystery, this life-giving quality that nature had, that plants have, that the planets had, and that women had. And to not be part of that mystery, to be excluded from that mystery, for whatever reason, would be to be devalued within that meta system of understanding of how the universe worked, and what had value and what was sacred. So I think that one of the reasons perhaps it's so hard to grasp the concept of pronatalism, is

because it is in our unconscious, so, so deep, so close to our beginning, as a tribal species, that even trying to name it... it's almost like trying to talk about something holy, something, something numinous that exists outside the world of language. But in order for us to grasp its impact, both positive and negative on modern societies, we have to have a language because without language, we can't have the thoughts. We need to bring this up into the collective conscious if we're going to understand what it's doing, how to work with it, how to push back against it, how to recognize its beauty, and its terror.

Christine Erickson 13:28

Profoundly said, thank you. Yes, its beauty and its terror. And as you're speaking and thinking, how, how do we go back to that sort of foundational unconsciousness? And then begin to tease the layers all the way to a conversation on equitable policy, right. But it is it makes sense in what you're saying, why the chasm is what it is, in understanding, not only defining pronatalism, but its impact and why it is so integral to every structure and system we have created?

Jody Day 14:25

Because it's one of the I suspect, obviously, I need to do you know, this is today's new idea, I need to go do a deep dive into the research, you know, in into Evolutionary Anthropology and evolutionary psychology to really, you know, which is, you know, basically where I'd like to spend my time anyways. And, you know, and because there will have been, there will have been other thinkers who have come at this possibly from a slightly different lens. I mean, one of the interesting things I've been looking at recently is something called **Terror Management Theory**, which is a I mean, it's quite sort of recent. It comes from the work of Jeff Greenberg, Sheridan Solomon and Tom Pyszczynski - I hope I've got his name right - and their 2015 book 'The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life'. And although you think death, what's this got to do with it? In a way, I feel that the fear of people without children is part of it evokes in US death anxiety, because it's sort of the death of the line, the death of the species, it's an unconscious fear. And what Terror Management Theory is all about is how do we as humans deal with the fact that we are aware of our own mortality, but that we have to ignore it every single day. And one of the ways we do it is we build self-esteem around being part of acceptable cultural and social systems. And it's really interesting, because I think being a non-parent is to be in the out-group. But more than that, it's to be in the out-group that reminds people unconsciously of death. So not only do they not want us in their group, they don't even want to think about our existence; they want to deny the very existence of people without children. So you know, in terms of things we've decided to, you know, devote our lives to, we're trying to bring into consciousness something that human beings exert an awful lot of unconscious energy on not being aware of.

Christine Erickson 16:31

Yes, yes, absolutely. And unfortunately,

Jody Day 16:35

This week's challenge!

Christine Erickson 16:38

Yeah, when you say, you know, the fear of people without children, or childless people in particular, I would say. And then that equal assessment from people who do have children, or the expectation of society, that we will have children or that we will fit into these molds. And the irony of how populations all over the world, and women in particular, have moved away from that norm, in numbers, in growing numbers, and the absence of meeting that population, our population, our community, where it is, as well as different family structures. It is still this capped norm and status quo of a married heterosexual couple with children for the most part. And, and yet, that's not what the world looks like.

Jody Day 17:39

I believe - I haven't seen the stats recently - but I don't think that's even the most that's even the standard American family anymore?

Christine Erickson 17:47

And so I also find that that space of denial, very curious of why whether that's workplace policy, public policy, why it is being driven by something that is no longer what it was.

Jody Day 18:04

I guess, because what it is being driven by is this unconscious bias that is so deep in our psyche, this valuation system, that people with children, you know, that their needs are more important. And I think it's really important that the needs of parents and children are hugely important - I never want to devalue or diminish that, and in many ways, parents let's say in the workplace, need more nuanced support and understanding. But it comes quite often at the cost of those people in the workplace without children, often, you know, we're often are part of the system that enables that support to exist for parents, and yet their needs are not considered. And something I've seen quite a lot when trying to advocate for non-parents in the workplace is that parents can become quite protectionistic. And there's this thing that, you know, might if we start to try and think about making policies that work for non- parents as well, it's going to take away from the things that we have, and we don't have enough anyway - we don't have enough to share. And one of the things I say it's not about having a piece of your pie; it's about growing the pie bigger. And strangely enough, I think some of the issues that childless or non-parents are

facing in the workplace are actually quite similar to other diversity groups. And if you change the word out, if you put the word disabled, or a different sort of sexuality or gender-based issue, in in in place of the word non parents, people would see the need, but as soon as you say non-parents, it's like, oh, those people don't have any needs. We don't have to think about them. What needs do you have; I do this whole job, and I've got kids?

Christine Erickson 19:54

I thought it would be a clear conversation like that, like, well, here's the here's the other group. Here's another group, but it's not that direct line it is something more permeated, it is something different. And I think when we're talking about the workplace issues such as you do, I think the issues with parents not having adequate policies and support at work. I also think that comes from a pronatalist perspective. Because I think, if we tease these things apart, and you can add other, all the other intersectional layers that add to that, but it's coming from the same lens of projection, if you will, right.

Jody Day 20:38

Let's just take a moment to think what that might be. You know, it's like so you're a mother. So pronatalism says that mothers are endlessly nurturing and giving and selfless, that it's a natural process that needs no support, so kind of if you're struggling with it, or if you're struggling to manage your workplace duties, and the roles of parenting, there's something wrong with you. Not actually, this system was not set up for this. You know, it's an imperfect system, and you're having an imperfect experience because of the system, not because of your parenting needs.

Christine Erickson 21:13

Right? I also think that it sets up this unconscious division between parents and non-parents, that, at the core of it, I'm not sure has a truth. I think it's because we're coming from that lens, as you said, both from a scarcity mentality of you know, the company has x resources, and we have these and we don't have enough, we already need more. So if we add more people to this pie, then everybody's going to get crumbs. But also the division, you know, that we have to fight each other, or compete with each other for those resources. I think if we could defuse that tension, and that conversation to bridge the space with parents, I mean, I, I tried to say as often as possible, if I write something or tweet something, and I genuinely mean it, you know, I, I've seen policies around the world. Yes, parents need good support, and policy and affordable childcare, and all of those things, if we didn't advocate for that, as well, it wouldn't even make sense. You know, so I'm not here, we're not here to take anything away. We're here to support that as well as our own equitable rights and benefits. It's a very curious thing to be an employee, in a workplace where someone is being paid as one person and one is being paid for five, I'm just using a gross example, right? Because there's, there's a financial impact to that

there's a time management impact, there's an energy impact, there's a mental health impact, potentially, all kinds of disparities that happen in the way that we have accepted how things are done, that falls on those without children.

Jody Day 23:06

I was just imagining that scenario in that early tribal system that I painted a picture of earlier. And if we imagine a limited amount of resources, food, and various other resources, and a group of women to be fed, some of whom have children, some of whom don't, or can't, or won't. Who is the tribe going to feed? They're going to feed the mothers and the children. This system is very, very deeply embedded in terms of, we don't need to keep you alive, you're not contributing to the future. It's awful. But it comes from a dark place in our past. It includes something called the Death Mother Archetype, which is the opposite of the life-giving mother, which is the mother that actually kills her children. And we see it in fairy tales quite often the, you know, an evil woman in fairy tales, will very, very rarely be a mother, she will usually be childless. But she is a threat to children. You know, she's a witch, and she's a threat to children, she eats them usually. But deep in our evolutionary past sometimes - and we don't like to think about this, because it's so goes against our idea of the good mother archetype - but as well as the good mother archetype, there is the Death Mother. And the Death Mother often had to abandon or kill her children because there weren't enough resources for the tribe to support them, or for her to carry them in order to get to the next place where there would be food. You know, there was infanticide in order to control population size. So this is inside our evolutionary psyche as well, and it gets projected onto women without children. But the fact is, these very ancient parts of our psyche do not fit the world we live in which is an overpopulated world, is a world where women can have value other than being mothers and can contribute massively to the culture, to civic society, and to families. You know, that actually, sometimes not having children can be a huge contribution to the world. And we need to find a way to unpack these ancient ideas, look at them in the light of modern life and go, am I really going to let this million-year-old idea, which made a lot of sense for a long time - run my modern life? You know, as an HR Director, am I really thinking in terms of tribal crumbs and who I'm going to hand it out to? Right, right, to surface this stuff and actually go, oh, okay, I see why going against it, having these modern ideas about equality feels actually probably quite risky. Because it's connected to the evolution and the survival of the tribe, and of the human species - it doesn't come much bigger than that in terms of things we don't want to think about.

Christine Erickson 26:09

Right? Right. Yeah. And I was just imaging hosting. Thank you for that. That was that was really powerful. I was just trying to imagine the again, the leaps in you know, the PowerPoint presentation. At HR, you know, 'From the Death Mother to DEI' - these are hard conversations, these are hard things to to look at. They feel far away from the topics on the surface. And yet without having these conversations, we don't really have a place to move from. So I really appreciate that. We're going to take a quick pause and we will be back with more on this conversation looking at why does it really matter if we dismantle pronatalism with Jody Day. Thank you.

VoiceAmerica 27:07

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Christine Erickson 29:08

Welcome back everybody. We are in conversation with Jody Day today, founder of Gateway Women. And we are discussing what pronatalism is - see it's even difficult to say - let alone discuss define and how are we going to dismantle this and does it even matter? Before the break we were discussing some very in-depth perspectives from Jody around the Death Mother and the ideas of how pronatalism has been with us since the beginning and how it permeates our unconsciousness. Gosh my brain is certainly happy having this conversation and where to go next. Jody what are you thinking right now?

Jody Day 29:58

Well, something I've been thinking about which is mean when I at the beginning of the show I talked about sort of coming into an awareness of pronatalism, one of the things that my childlessness gifted me, and it was a painful gift was, for the first time in my life - although I've had a difficult life, I also have to recognize that I've had some unearned privileges - being white, sounding middle class, having had a good free education, lookism, looking a certain way that the culture found acceptable, even my accent, my voice, you know, there are many, there are many things that I had nothing to do with attaining that have status in society. And then I was married, you know, so I had the sort of matrimonial privilege as well. And then when I became single and childless, in my 40s, I became part of an out group, I became part of something that I'd had no control over, which suddenly people placed a huge judgment on me for. And as well as there's been an incredibly painful personal experience, which broke my heart, you know, the grief of childlessness broke my heart, I think the experience of being so othered I mean, I called myself social plankton, you know, I was just absolutely the bottom of the food chain, I used to joke that the only invitations I got were for dental checkups, you know, not actually that funny. But you know, that was that was true. But that heartbreak also broke my heart open with compassion, because I suddenly realized and had an idea what it felt like to be on the receiving end of oppression. And I got really, really curious and really compassionate, and, you know, became, and still am, a committed sort of anti-ism, whatever the 'ism' is, I want to try and be on the side of the angels with it, I don't always succeed because I have my own unconscious biases that I'm always looking for. But as I came to, and particularly with my anti-racism work, and my relationship with **Yvonne John**, who is a Gateway Woman facilitator, she her heritage is, is black Caribbean, she's a British woman, she's a Gateway Women facilitator and the conversations we were having around race. And her sharing with me her experience as a black childless woman, I began to see so many parallels between the way that racism operates, and the way that pronatalism operates, the way that sexism operates ableism all these things, and I started to notice all these connections. And I thought, okay, just like you, there's something else going on here. And so I realized there was a, there was some kind of system behind oppression, to give it its name. So I was absolutely thrilled to very recently, a writer I admire, Melanie Joy PhD, written a book called **'Powerarchy: Understanding the Psychology of Oppression for Social Transformation.'** And what Melanie Joy has looked at in this, she's basically defined the system that I was sniffing, but there was no way to name it. And she has named it Powerarchy. And she says, 'in this book, I propose that there is an overarching belief system that informs all oppressive systems, which I call Powerarchy. Powerarchy is a nonrelational system that is organized around a belief in a hierarchy of moral worth, that some individuals or groups are more worthy of moral consideration than others, and that it is structured to maintain unjust power imbalances.'

And this is a brilliant book, which, you know, is the kind of thing that sort of Christine and I talk about and read and think about for breakfast, just so good. But you know what, this book goes everywhere, including into what she called 'carnism', which is the unjust dominion that humans have over animals, and which animals they choose to eat and exploit and which they don't. But you know, what, in this whole book, she does not mention pronatalism. So here is someone who is looking at the hierarchy of power and pronatalism isn't in there. And I think that that goes to what we open the show with this sense that I think it is the original, it is the water that all the Powerarchy's swim in. It's so big, it's invisible!

Christine Erickson 34:45

Yeah, I I've been through that with, you know, DEI frameworks and the wonderful conversation I had with **Rhodes Perry** and I love his book on belonging about belonging in the workplace and his belonging movement. And to also have that conversation and realisation that pronatalism was not part of that framework, which he has done so beautifully, and which I use in my work. And I just really, really appreciate this conversation and looking at pronatalism from a different lens of perhaps where it foundationally infused our ways of being. Because how do we explain in 2022? This isn't an oversight, that pronatalism is not being addressed, that the inequities - I mean, it is an oversight, but it's not as simplistic as I think I would like to even see it, you know, well, here's another oppressed group that fits into this. You know, when I think of pronatalism, I also see how it runs through the all those other groups.

Jody Day 35:58

Yes, because it's intersectional, it impacts everyone in a different way. Parents are non-parents. And it impacts children, and old people. It impacts every single human on this planet is impacted by pronatalism. Yeah. And this is something else from Melanie Joy's book, 'If we think of oppressions hierarchically, it can reflect and reinforce a belief in the hierarchy of moral worth. It is this very myth that forms the foundation of the mindset that drives oppression, the oppressive mentality. According to this myth, some individuals or groups are more worthy than others of moral consideration, of being treated with more integrity.' So you can really see how, how powerfully, oppressions intersect and how they are a way, I think also of parceling out resources. I take us back once again to that diorama of that early tribe and food shortages, and having to make very hard decisions about who gets those resources. This stuff is so foundational to what it is to be human. And yet we experience it in such nuanced and layered and visible and invisible ways in modern culture. So perhaps we can't always see it for what it is; I don't think we can see what it is.

Christine Erickson 37:27

Yeah, all of those layers, like the common image of an iceberg, right? I feel like it's, it's the tip with the name pronatalism. And what we're not talking about is the rest of that iceberg. And so it becomes a very, almost surface use of that term, even in looking at things that I've expressed or written, it's maybe almost a misuse of it, in that it's not doing it justice, you know, to just see it within that container of 'we need to include this too.' You know, or also this, but why and how has it impacted? Why don't we see it? What way is it that we do not see it, that that you're sharing today?

Jody Day 38:18

And I think, you know, we're going to be very uncomfortable, rather than to be too comfortable, or we're going to be uncomfortable with really looking at what we're doing with, you know, ideologies like pronatalism, which is assigning value and worth in a hierarchy of who deserves it. And, you know, we're back to that question in the workplace. Well, what needs to you non-parents have? Because I think the idea that there are other needs other than bringing children into the world, that we are all born childless and worthy, we are all born equal, at what point does pronatalism say, 'Well, you're a value and you're not, you get fed you don't you get looked after in your old age, you don't?' - it kind of points to, I suppose an ugliness in our nature that perhaps goes against our more developed ideas about what human beings are. But of course, that exists alongside those, more recently developed ideas about what it means to be human. But I think as long as we continue to ignore our evolutionary urges, those unconscious ones, we're not going to get a handle on why these things are so sticky, and also why they bring up so much shame to talk about. You know why it's so hard to have these conversations - these are hot button conversations - people's backs go up really fast when you try to talk about this. And that's really interesting, too. You know, you might be able to have an interesting conversation about homophobia with someone, but you go to pronatalism, and the shutters go down. And it's like, what is driving that? And how do we get past it? And I think we have to sort of go on a big educational field trip, I think. And we have to start talking and writing and thinking about it. And I think your, your PowerPoint, you know, 'From the Death Mother to DEI' - that needs to be out there!

Christine Erickson 40:28

I'm working on it! Yeah, you know, I mean, you're just really strikes me again, having this conversation about the, you know, you're talking about from an evolutionary perspective, the depth of that justification.

Jody Day 40:44

Yeah, absolutely. And how can you deny that? How can you push back against that? When people say it has always been this way. It's like, yeah, it has. But that world is not

the world we're living in. And actually, people without children, non-parents are, and the, as you said, the increasing numbers of them. I mean, there is every sign that for example, in the UK, we've just had 50% of women in this year 50% of women turning 30 don't have children. The average age of first birth in the UK is 29. This is the highest number it has ever been - 50% - this predicts even more people without children in you know, when there's in 10 years-time those women will turn 40. In 15 years-time, their according to statistics, their fertility will have timed out, we're going to look at a massive bump in the number of people, yes, some of those women will have children in their 40s, most of them won't. So let's say we are currently one in five in the UK, we could be heading towards the one in three that they're seeing in Germany and Japan. Now, I don't know how our society is going to survive, ignoring not only the existence of that many non-parents in the workplace and in society, but also trying to ignore us, and ignore the qualities and talents that we can bring to a world which, let's face it is in crisis, we need everyone at the pumps! You know, we have so much to offer, often precisely because we're not involved in parenting. And that doesn't just mean paying taxes, and doing physical things. Because that's also ableist that you are only a value of your function, either your economic function, or your physical function - we have value in in every way. And we deserve to be recognized for it. You know, we may not be the same as parents, but we're not aliens. And we have lots to offer to civic society and families and communities and culture that quite frankly, it needs. The next 50 years are going to be well I don't know, if I'm even allowed to say a shitshow. We need everyone involved in getting our world to survive for future generations to inhabit. And when you don't have children, your care for the future generations is something actually very different to parents. I care about all future generations. I don't have a biological imperative to protect my children or grandchildren. I care for the children of the world. And I want to make a difference to that future. And I want to stop pronatalism saying that because I'm not a mother, my opinion doesn't matter.

Christine Erickson 43:35

Yes, or your contribution.

Jody Day 43:37

Or my contribution, yeah.

Christine Erickson 43:38

Thank you for that. I want to go back to something you said earlier about shame. And I think about you know, we're talking about the just the depth of all of this, I can't think of another way to say it, I just feel like you know, this sort of flag post has been planted that goes down so, so far in the not only the invisibility or lack of awareness of pronatalism, but what that means when we are bumping up against it as a community, in our everyday experiences in the long-term impacts both from a personal perspective, and professional

perspective. And when you touched on shame, a while back, I think about the depth of it, and how we are living and unpacking our own, unconsciousness around this and then you add it to not 'fitting in', that shame creates extraordinary silence.

Jody Day 44:47

Yeah, and existential terror. Because, you know, what Terror Management Theory says is that the ways the way we cope with being aware of, you know, the fact that we could die at any moment is by investing in our self-esteem. And our self-esteem is created by fitting into systems. And when we don't fit into systems, what we feel is shame, because shame is a powerful tool of social control, to make us do what's needed to fit into a system. So actually, to feel the shame of childlessness is also to feel the incredible vulnerability, of being part of an unrecognized and unsupported out group. And to be more aware of our mortality and our vulnerability. Because also one of the things that helps with existential angst, is having children, because it's about an illusion of immortality, which is kind of the antidote to knowing about death. Religion, having children, there are ways that you can kind of, they call it buffering, you can kind of buffer yourself against the anxiety of death. And you can understand that children are one of those, it's like, you know, when people talk about, you know, the most important thing they've ever done, it's like, you know, my children, and they're not just - they are being pronatalist - but it's also speaking to something deep in the human system and psyche, it's like, I will never really die, because my children will live on. And this may not be explicitly articulated. But if you don't have that, you face the reality of the finitude of your life, more square-on than a parent does. So you know, you've got anxiety of death, fear of aging, without children, shame of not fitting in, the grief of childlessness, if you're if indeed, you know, you are grieving it. And this feeling of being, not just invisible, but invisibled. Shame is, when we experience it personally, it's a kind of a deep dropping down feeling inside the core of our body physically. And I experience it as a feeling like I want the ground to open up, and I want to disappear into it, and I never want to be seen again. So therefore, you can really feel how much it's about making someone invisible. And when that is culturally placed on to people without children, it's like it gives organizations permission to ignore us. Because we don't speak up. Because we're consumed with shame. And if we don't speak up, people think we don't have any issues that need addressing. And then when we do say, what issues we need addressing, they will say, 'no you don't.'

Christine Erickson 47:30

Well, and it's not as though we're going along our journeys and know that there's a space for us to join, in a real way. It's, it's also being able to cope, not only feeling shame, but how do we cope day to day people in the workplace, with all the conversations that are present, the things that are celebrated on and on that speak to having children? Yes, and or/or end up being married, etc., the status quo.

Jody Day 48:02

It's celebrated.

Christine Erickson 48:04

Yes, the mental health aspect of that, the coping mechanisms; it's a harsh reality, it's another deterrent of energy, massively, to move forward.

Jody Day 48:16

When I think of all the energy that goes into coping with being a non-parent, being a childless person, you know, if you're also grieving, and how that energy might be used in society productively; when I look back, and you know, when I talked about discovering pronatalism, one of the griefs was this feeling of a lost decade for me. I thought how different might my 40s have been after, you know, my marriage broke down when I was 38? How different might it had been, if I'd been able to unpick this then? And just, you know, these incredibly powerful years of my life that were lost to grief, and shame, and hiding, and being an outsider. I see you know, I see it in my work all the time, I see women coming into the Gateway Women support areas, and I see them going through the things I went through. And when I recently did all my research for my TEDx talk in the one I gave for **TEDx gateway**, which is an Indian subcontinent organization. And they asked me to include statistics from India in my talk, and so I did a deep dive into the research and something that really stunned me and really showed me you know, also another area of unconscious bias, which was my, my white privilege, and was that really, although the languaging was slightly different, the situations and experiences that Indian childless and childfree women were describing what exactly the same as mine. I had the idea that because I came from a sort of a white western perspective, somehow it would be a little bit different. And I'm going to say, and I'm put in inverted commas for radios because this is my privilege prejudice 'advanced' - but you know what, it was exactly the same. Pronatalism expresses itself through different cultures with a slightly different, window dressing, but it is the same stuff. And it stunts lives. It's stunting women's lives. And men's too. And yeah, we've taken on something so big here, Christine, but it's so important.

Christine Erickson 50:29

Yeah, absolutely. And I would include in that. Yeah, all genders looking at how this impacts us. And how do we create a new conversation? It I'm sitting here thinking about my own unconscious biases of pronatalism and systemic thinking, or the limits of that, even in how I've been approaching things, you know, at the Institute, and I shared a bit with you earlier, you know, thinking, well, the lowest hanging fruit, if there is any, would be to create another category, you know, well look at us too, we're this marginalized group and we need to be included and in policy, because that's speaking into a listening that is

somewhat there, not so much about pronatalism, but about oppression, about inclusion and equity. And, really, there is a stretch to go before that, that conversation needs this underneath unpacking for our community, for us to be able to express it differently, for me to be able to have the conversation differently, because I'm, I'm only able to meet it within the systems that are and this is bigger than that, and it goes beyond that. That's my true vision. But if we can't even have it within these known systems, how do we go beyond them? Or that's always my question or my challenge, ultimately, how I would like to see our lives as freer and fuller and, you know, not that they aren't full. But in terms of what we're talking about our capacity being diminished because of the world we live in, in the spaces we work in.

Jody Day 52:24

Absolutely. Hear, hear. I think we need to become pronatalist literate. We have to keep having these conversations, keep creating this language. We're trying to do something very, very difficult. But that doesn't mean it can't be done. And it doesn't mean it's not possibly really important for the future of human civilization.

Christine Erickson 52:51

Yeah. Thank you for all of that, Jody, thank you so much for being here. And for such a powerful conversation. I truly appreciate it. Thank you everyone for listening. I wanted to announce that New Legacy Radio has been renewed for another year. So we will be bringing you 52 weekly episodes. We're also going to be making some big changes. So stay tuned for that. And we would love to continue this very meaningful conversation with you on all of our social media platforms. You can find Jody Day at @GatewayWomen and her other mediums that will have posted and on our New Legacy Institute page. You can email us at radio@newlegacyinstitute.com or @NLInstitute on Twitter. Thank you everybody and take good care. Bye-Bye.

VoiceAmerica 53:50

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 in our diverse community of people without children? Until we speak again, we invite you to engage with us on any of our platforms.

RESOURCES FOR THIS EPISODE

Gateway Women www.gateway-women.com

Jody Day (2020) *'Living the Life Unexpected: How to Find Hope, Meaning and a Fulfilling Future Without Children'*

2nd Edition, 2020. UK: Bluebird/PanMacmillan

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Laura Carroll (2012) *'The Baby Matrix: Why Freeing Our Minds From Outmoded Thinking About Parenthood & Reproduction Will Create a Better World'*

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<https://thebabymatrix.com/>

Terror Management Theory in Sheldon Solomon, Jeff Greenberg, Tom Pyszczynski (2016) *The Worm at the Core: On the Role of Death in Life* (2016)

UK: Penguin <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/170217/the-worm-at-the-core-by-sheldon-solomon-jeff-greenberg-and-tom-pyszczynski/>

Daniela Sieff PhD (2019). 'The Death Mother as Nature's Shadow: Infanticide, Abandonment and the Collective Unconscious'. In *Psychological Perspectives: A Quarterly Journal of Jungian Thought*. <https://danielasieff.com/media-type/writing/the-death-mother-as-natures-shadow-infanticide-abandonment-and-the-collective-unconscious/>

Yvonne John

The UK's leading voice on childlessness for black women and women of color.

<http://findingmyplanb.com/>

Melanie Joy PhD (2019). '*Powerarchy: Understanding the Psychology of Oppression for Social Transformation*'

USA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

<https://www.melaniejoy.org/>

Rhodes Perry on New Legacy Radio:

<https://newlegacyinstitute.com/episode-13-what-is-needed-to-create-a-culture-of-belonging-in-the-workplace-guest-rhodes-perry/>

<https://www.rhodesperry.com/>

Childbearing for women born in different years, England and Wales - Office for National Statistics, 2020

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/conceptionandfertilityrates/bulletins/childbearingforwomenbornindifferentyearsenglandandwales/2020>

Jody Day (2022) 'Social Plankton: Why Single Non-Mothers are the Fuel of the Future'. TEDxGateway (Mumbai). Talk and transcript here: <https://gateway-women.com/watch-now-jodys-new-ted-talk-social-plankton-why-single-non-mothers-are-the-fuel-of-the-future/>