

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 00:31

Welcome everybody to New Legacy Radio. I'm Christine Erickson, your host and I'm also the founder of New Legacy Institute, which focuses on the collective community of people without children. We are working toward equitable benefits and DEI inclusion in the workplace and public policy equity. So often where family policies are concerned, we are not considered so those are some of the things that we are focusing on. We are an inclusive Institute and today we have a wonderful guest with us, Kim Martinez Phillips. She is a Ph.D. candidate in the sociology department at Memorial University in Newfoundland and Labrador, and she is currently conducting interviews for her dissertation research on single, never married, voluntarily childfree women of color. Her analysis utilizes the perspectives of standpoint theory and decolonial feminism through an intersectional lens. She has also taught sociology courses at universities in California and Canada for over 24 years, ranging from race and ethnicity, feminist theory, criminology, introduction to policing, social problems, and marriage and family. Kim, you have such an incredible background. Welcome, today. We're really happy to have you here.

Kim Martinez Phillips 01:54

Oh, thank you. Thank you.

Christine Erickson 01:58

Is there anything I missed that you'd like to share?

Kim Martinez Phillips 02:00

Oh, I'm sure you can go on and on and on. No, you're good.

Christine Erickson 02:06

Your fabulous resume background. I'm so excited to talk to you today. Do you want to share a bit about how you came to focusing on this in your research?

Kim Martinez Phillips 02:17

Sure. I was an undergraduate at UC Irvine, many, many decades ago. And I was studying criminology and I was very happy doing so. And I went on to get my master's degree in sociology, where my interest started to shift toward women, and marriage and family issues. And I ended up doing my master's thesis on a topic that had to do with why people marry. And I did a quantitative survey of 300 people and asked them what was the purpose of them marrying, the gist of it, and finding out that people no longer married for societal purposes, but were only marrying for personal motivations. Then 25 years later, I decided to go back, you know, take a nice break and get my Ph.D. And so when I think back, I knew exactly what I wanted to study, myself being a never-married single woman of color. I knew that this group, it's not like we have Friday night meetings, we often don't know anyone else in our category. And especially as I got older, it became more difficult to find women who were childfree, also never being married. And it just made me wonder who's looking at us. There are a lot of studies about single mothers, there's a lot of studies about women who never married, but they were married at one time or had children. And so there are studies on single women, but they've been divorced or widowed. And this category just really interested me because A) I was one of them. But B) it was sort of this kind of internal-external search for my tribe. Like where's my tribe? Where do we fit? Where do we fit in societal paradigms? When we're told we're supposed to be mothers and wives and when we're not doing that. How do we live our lives? And what kind of purpose do our lives have for ourselves individually, and then for society? So I came in sort of like, let me get through the other stuff first, because I know exactly what I want to do. And that's kind of how it's gone. So I got through the PhD coursework and said, "Okay, I'm ready to go!" And got my proposal approved in three months and started researching this year.

Christine Erickson 04:55

Nice. And that's how I found you. Yeah, do you want to share a bit about how you're approaching this research, I know you've already started your interviews, and just exactly what you're looking for. Because I know there are some more details to the category, such as age and all of that. So we can be clear on that, because we're hoping there are listeners today, too, if you can be part of this, we would love for you to do that.

Kim Martinez Phillips 05:25

Thank you. Yes, anyone on social media knows I am recruiting like a mad woman. But it's paying off. And that's just what you have to do. So also, it's important to me because I want these women's stories to be heard, I want them to be a part of the academic canon of knowledge that we're not forgotten, we're not sort of ancillary on the side. And I really wanted to be inclusive in my criteria, as much as I could be. Discussions about what makes a woman and these newer conversations around gender and sexuality. Oftentimes, a lot of studies, it's only heterosexual women, or it's only biological women. And I was like, I don't want to be restrictive of anyone, because my main category is that you are a woman of a certain age. And we deem that to be, me and my supervisors, determined that from 40 to 60, was that age range, because I wanted women who had stayed childfree for the majority of their childbearing years. I have interviewed people a little bit younger than that, like 36, and up, and I've interviewed a woman 61/62. So I'm willing to go a little bit up and down. But that was the purpose of that of being childfree, the majority of your childbearing years. So really, the criteria is you've never married or been in a common law marriage, you are currently single and have been single for the majority of your life. Doesn't mean you don't date. Doesn't mean you don't have sex. Doesn't mean that you don't go out and have a good time or that you've dated people. I have people in my study who lived with someone for three years, or dated someone for five years and dated another person for five years, you know, that's fine. I'm not looking for celibate women who don't want to have sex or marriage, dating. In fact, many in my study have said they're still very much open to marriage. So it's not as if they're anti-marriage or close the door to it. It's just they're

not married and never have been. So those were the important factors. Now, on top of that, is the childfree part. I know there's debate in many of the literature and conversation about is it childless or childfree. I chose to use the term childfree because what I am looking for are women who have decidedly remained childfree, whether that be biological children, adopted children, foster children, that they have decided not to parent. And that might be a different category than people who really wanted to have children. And for whatever reason, whether that'd be a biological reason, fertility reasons, they were not able to do so. So these women that I'm studying are very secure in their choices and happy with their decisions for the most part. And that is what I'm examining and looking at, at the heteronormative paradigms of women who are not fulfilling the role of mother and childbearing and nurturing in society. So other than that, my study is open to women of all sexual orientations. I've had heterosexual women, lesbian women, bi women. I am open to trans women being in my study, I am open to women who are asexual, who are celibate, who are virgins. It's really about learning. And what I've learned so far is that this group is not a homogenous group. And there are myriads of sexual orientations and behaviors. And they have different views on some of those issues. But there's definitely I've interviewed 28 women now, there's definitely starting to be some pretty big markers that I'm finding, which I'm very excited about. I'm very excited to see where the rest of my research will go. But if it's going in this direction, and I don't want to get ahead of myself. I'll have another third interview. But I'm seeing some very, very interesting things. Let's say that,

Christine Erickson 09:48

Okay, well, we'll have to have you back postdoc! Well, that's wonderful. I think it's really exciting and yeah, your research really stood out, as you said, you know, looking for your tribe. Where is that? And what have you seen? Has this topic been invisible? Or have there been counter-narratives? What have you found in your research? What do you see in the media otherwise or in academia?

Kim Martinez Phillips 10:24

There definitely is research out there. Like I said, there's plenty of research on single mothers. Yeah, and there is research out there on single women. But they don't differentiate often between the single women who do not have children and the single women who do. So also, the single women's studies often do not differentiate between women who have never married, it's just they're currently single, so meaning, they could have been married, divorced, separated or widowed. So it's their information is there but not to the specific population that I'm trying to get at. And then people studying women who have not had children, again, those studies sort of blur the lines often, and I'm not naming any names, because I don't want to put anybody out there on blast. But they often blur the lines between women who wanted to have children but are filed childless or childfree, and women who never did. So then results are getting mixed, because if you those who really, really wanted to have children. So of course, they have different feelings about that then the women who never wanted to have children. And I think one thing I can say, because I don't want to, you know, affect any future participants. But what I am finding is that the women I've interviewed so far, the decision and they really deem it to be a decision not to have children is made very young. I'm talking about some of my women. I call them women not participants. Some of my women told me they knew they did not want to have a child when they were nine, when they were 10, when they were 12. So this was something most of them didn't play around with back and forth, like, oh, maybe I won't. It's like they just knew really early that this was not for me. And so I find that to be very interesting.

Christine Erickson 12:22

It is. I also take what you said about the labels, let's say, you know, we've talked on this program about being in two camps, as I'm trying to bring people together to work on policy and beyond that, but there really are different narratives, the childless versus the childfree. And so often I see articles, even research sometimes that says childless women da da da, whatever the statistic or the focus is. And then I keep reading, and it's exactly what you said. It's a mixed study, it doesn't differentiate. And I do think that has become very important. It's become so important that we are in these separate camps, not against each other, but just with different narratives.

And I think we need to start pointing that out, you know, more in media. I mean, obviously, research should specifically address that. But in media, because I do see it all the time. And I'm drawn in, and then I'm like, oh, wait, this is that. So I think it's confusing to people that when we're trying to create more awareness, you know, and educate people outside of the community. That's not helpful.

Kim Martinez Phillips 13:32

Right. And it also puts people sometimes in an uncomfortable situation. If I say, Oh, I don't have children, sometimes I'll get responses like, Oh, I'm so sorry.

Christine Erickson 13:42

Right, right.

Kim Martinez Phillips 13:43

And I'm like, No, I'm good. So there are some people who assume if you do not have children it's because for some reason, you couldn't have them. Where that is not the case for all women. And then some people might make the reverse assumption of like, oh, good for you. And they might say that to a woman who really did want children. So there are distinctions that are important to know, these are different populations. These are people who have really different worldviews of what it looks like to not have children. So it's really what I'm finding, and I hope other researchers as well are finding that it just really doesn't do either group justice to lump them together.

Christine Erickson 14:29

Yeah, absolutely true. Absolutely. I want to go back to what you said about some of your findings so far, and again, without you know, spoiling it. And this is not a requirement of the research, to have made your decision at a younger age. But that is an interesting marker. There was an article that just came out recently, I don't know if it was today or yesterday. In essence, you're speaking about the structural systemic things for women of color and particularly black women around the choice to have a child or not at later ages. You know, so I think I always, not always, but I tend to go there in the

conversation around what is happening, you know, due to the disparities in health care and maternal health care, maternal death, and infant death. And so that is very interesting. And yet I know many childfree people who yes, they're like, I knew when I was nine. How do you look at that? Yeah, it's interesting, because I would have thought the opposite, I guess is where I'm coming from.

Kim Martinez Phillips 15:40

There are some interesting things that I am finding, I am finding that, you know, I am looking specifically at women of color for a couple of reasons. But one reason mostly is because there's a gap in the literature that when studies have been done on this population, they've often been done by the focus of a middle-class white family dynamic. So including these other groups is going to give us a better bigger conversation to have, and especially looking at it from a decolonial feminist perspective of women who were basically brought to America to breed generations of capitalists. And what does it say for these women within their own population to say, No, I'm not doing that. What I found from the women who identify as being African American or black, what often not all, of course, but what often some are telling me is that they knew very early like a teenager, they were not going to be a single mother, they were not going to be another statistic, they were not going to be another cautionary tale. And some of them had that relayed to them by their mother, but many of them it just came from them. They saw girls in their high school getting pregnant, and they said that's not going to be me, it is not going to be me. So for them, it was I am not having a child without being married. And then later it became, I'm not having a child. And what I'm finding with a lot of my Latina participants, is they were given all the encouragement in the world, they were told, go have kids! You know, whether you're married or not, we'll support you, the family will help you. And they also were like, No, that's not the road I'm on right now. So it's interesting that they've gotten push and pulls from their families in different directions. But both those groups are still sort of making the same decisions. I think that might get broken off into two different studies at a later date. But right now, it's just fun to get all those differences that have not been brought to the forefront, at least not the literature that I've looked at yet.

Christine Erickson 17:53

Right. Oh, and to move some of those assumptions. I mean, so I choose what I'm reading what I'm focusing on, and I make assumptions, right? I mean, you're already moving a lot of those. And again, as it is, in the childfree, community, people have made those decisions at all stages of their lives. But also because I identify with the age group. I know what you just said about the values and the questioning of marriage of having children or that getting pregnant when you're young. I mean, the messages that were inundated with around that time, you know, really have made an impact on all women, really interestingly, in our community.

Kim Martinez Phillips 18:34

Right, I mean, especially the older group, the cohort, I'm looking at between 40 to 60. Even though so far, many of my participants are in their mid-early 40s. I, myself am 52. And I remember we grew up where HIV AIDS epidemic was, we were in high school and early college years, I mean, so this was something that was always around us. So not only were we worried about pregnancy, we were worried about these other issues. And it really made people think about what do you want for your life and your sexuality and pregnancy and how that plays a part into that. And then from the younger women who, you know, were maybe a little bit younger during that time, they also talk about how birth control being very important to them, that they always used birth control, they were always very much aware of it. They knew that they, like I said, did not want to be a single mother and they did everything within their power to make sure that did not happen. And some women even talked about having their uterus or fallopian tubes tied because they were just so sure. You know, they were in their 30s but they were so sure this was my life and how some doctors didn't really treat them with dignity because they were like, oh, like you silly woman, you're going to change your mind. And still saying no, I have really thought about this and this is a choice I want to make. So there are problems in the medical community as well of treating women who are saying this is the road I'm on

being told, Oh, no, no, you may change your mind. So we're not going to close that door for you, even though they're asking for it.

Christine Erickson 20:18

Yeah, absolutely voluntary sterilization and, you know, whatever methods. It's incredible that, you know, we have a right to these things. I mean, there are legal medical procedures. And there are cases going on right now. I mean, women that I know, that are trying sometimes they have to go to another country. I mean, it's really incredible the influence that the medical community has on a woman's right in that space. Yeah,

Kim Martinez Phillips 20:47

Right. Women often get, you know, treated as children. I don't know. But I'm going to make the argument that I doubt many men, if they went in to say I want a vasectomy, they would say Oh, you silly boy. You don't know what you want. So there is still some of that. And I've had some of my women in my study, talk about those experiences.

Christine Erickson 21:14

Yeah, I mean, and that it's legal. We spoke in one of our early episodes with Joan Eisenstaedt, who shared that she was the first person in her home state of Ohio to have a tubal ligation. And at the time, she had that I think she was 25, or 26. But the law was, or the rule was, I think it was law. But anyway, the medical rule, I don't want to say it wrong, was that the number of children you had, in order to qualify for a tubal ligation had to equal like the number 125 or 126. So she would have had to have had four or five children already to qualify for that. And it was with the backing of Planned Parenthood and her doctor that she was able to do that. And she was the first one in the state of Ohio. But I mean, unbelievable. So you put that expectation, like, of that number of children, let alone the choice at all. Access, you know,

Kim Martinez Phillips 22:18

I mean, just as archaic as that sounds.

Christine Erickson 22:22

And it's within our lifetime.

Kim Martinez Phillips 22:25

Right! In terms of women's worth, until you've basically given back four of us. We won't let you back in control of your body. So you must, you know, it's kind of like when you hear about human traffickers, we must bring in to work before they let you go. And it's like she had to birth out four people before she was allowed to make choices about her own body. That that's scary. And it's scary because I fear that we are heading back to those days.

Christine Erickson 22:59

Exactly. There's definitely a push in certain corners, right? I mean, yeah, it's happening. We have a case in California where there's a woman who had a stillbirth who is being charged, you know, and of course, advocates are working, you know, to rectify that. But that you have to go through that at all. A woman in Texas was just arrested the other day, or accused of trying to self-abort, and she was also released, but the trauma of going through that. The release isn't even the point, like just being able to have the choice and not being traumatized through the legal system, and not knowing what that outcome is. That's enough damage. I mean, the damage is done. Yeah, there are so many elements coming into play of this. And as I said, there, there are currently women who are trying to have whether it's a tubal ligation or whatever procedure, because they know they don't want to have children. And sometimes it's because of other health reasons that they know they don't want to have children. And doctors are not facilitating this in the way that they are supposed to. It's definitely counter to do no harm. You know, I think how we interpret that, sometimes is so literal, but really what is harm? You know.

Kim Martinez Phillips 24:21

Right. And I think it's, we could all state that. What we've seen again, historically, and even research-wise men are not treated the same when they go and seek out these kinds of choices. Again, men being turned away for getting a vasectomy because they think they're too young. Or how many children have you had you haven't had four children?

Christine Erickson 24:46
Can you imagine?

Kim Martinez Phillips 24:46
Okay, no you can't have one yet. Until you've given us four children, then you cannot have this done.

Christine Erickson 24:53
Yeah. Come back in a decade.

Kim Martinez Phillips 24:55
Right. I can't even imagine that happening.

Christine Erickson 24:58
Yeah, No, no. Well, and, you know, they're usually the decision makers, the lawmakers. Our choices are still in those hands predominantly. So yeah, it's very frightening to consider where we're headed. And you know, and so then the whole spectrum of choice when you're interviewing, not only women of color, but who have never married who are childfree by choice. You know, there's backlash against both childfree by choice like the audacity of the choice. And then in the childless space, there's backlash, like, Well, why don't you get over it? Or why didn't you adopt or why? You know, there are all these narratives coming at our community, and in particular, women, again, women all the time that really don't have to do with what is actually happening, you know, or why those decisions were made.

Kim Martinez Phillips 25:55
Right. Those narratives are still strong, women are still being told they're being selfish if they decide not to have children or not to marry, often by people in their family, often by people they know. I think people in society are becoming at least a little more forward-facing. Okay, I think this but I'm not gonna say it. But doesn't mean they're still not thinking it. But then there is more acceptance as well. There's a lot more acceptance of generations, 50 and younger, who are growing up in families with less and less children

generation after generation. So you don't have today often families where it's like, we had 12 kids in our family, or we had six kids in our family. And so going from two to one to none is sort of the natural trend. For some people.

Christine Erickson 26:55

Yes. Yeah. Yeah. It will be really curious to see how those narratives differ and are similar in your research, for sure. I'm really looking forward to it. And again, I encourage anybody who qualifies for this study to reach out to Kim.

Kim Martinez Phillips 27:14

Yes, please reach out to me!

Christine Erickson 27:16

We're gonna go to a short break. And we'll be back with Kim Martinez Phillips shortly. Thank you for listening.

Kim Martinez Phillips 27:42

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VoiceAmerica 27:50

New Legacy Institute is committed to equitable and inclusive change for people without children. We invite you to become a member of New Legacy Institute and to share what matters most to you. Participate in our research surveys, upcoming webinars and efforts to influence policy, media narratives, and DEI initiatives that fully recognize our community. Check us out online at newlegacyinstitute.com. Join us today. Tune in to the voice America variety channel on the voice America Talk Radio Network. Voice America variety broadcasts a diverse array of topics reaching a global community. Our experts come from all walks of life and the topics they discuss are everything from current events, arts and entertainment, leadership, parenting, relationships, self-improvement, career advice, and a variety of other topics. Check us out today. You're sure to find something of interest. Voice America Variety talk on today's hot topics. Voice America programs are now available on your favorite connected device, including

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Christine Erickson 29:42

Welcome back to New legacy radio everyone. Today we're having a conversation with Kim Martinez Phillips who is interviewing for her dissertation on single, never married, voluntarily childfree women of color. Now we're going to talk about, I know that you've also been doing research and writing around single women in film, film and/or media. Will you share with us about that?

Kim Martinez Phillips 30:09

I started this project when I was still finishing up some of my PhD coursework, and I wanted to look at single women in film and how they're being depicted. And like many of women of my age and generation, we grew up with a lot of romantic comedies, we grew up with movies and TV shows, but I was looking primarily at movies of women who are still sort of playing the Cyndi, you know, Cinderella fantasy kind of role of waiting for Prince Charming and her life was miserable in some form, or fashion. And I wanted to see if that had changed. If the movies I had grown up with in the 80s. Are those narratives still true for the movies coming out in 2017 2020? This idea of, oh, my life is awful. If I could only have this one piece fit, then everything would fall into place, whether that be *An Officer and a Gentleman*, whether that be *Bridget Jones*, whether that be *Fatal Attraction*, or some of these other films. While *You Were Sleeping* is sort of one of my favorite, it's kind of like the opposite of like *Sleeping Beauty*. Like she literally created her whole love life fantasy world, again, with a man who was not even conscious. And, and how we sort of celebrated that like "Oh, that's great!" I'm like, that is insane but it looks very sweet. And, and so I wanted to look at some of those films I grew up with. But I also wanted to look at films that were about adult

women. Because if I looked at films about teenagers, you know, then you're into a whole nother kind of cup of tea there. And so I picked films of single women, adult women, that had single women as the main character or in the lead to leads. And so I came to the process of narrowing that down to 20 films. And in doing that, I realized looking at just the same Hollywood narratives of a romantic comedy, it gave me white middle-class female characters. There was not a lot of diversity in the storyline, nor in actress or representation. And I decided midway through I did not want to do a study of just all romantic comedies, white women trying to fit into this sort of middle-class world. So I decided to look at it from a transnational point of view, to bring in films from different countries thinking that if I brought in films from different countries, maybe I'll get a different narrative. And it's not as easy to find films about single women as you might think. You think they're everywhere. But when I was looking at films about single women that their whole focus in life wasn't trying to find a man. It just became less and less available to pick from. But I ended up getting a film from South Africa called *Seriously Single* if you have not seen it. It's amazing. A film from Nigeria called *Isoken*. Both of those are on Netflix. And a film from Spain that has English translation, *All About My Mother*, it's a Pedro Almodóvar film. And a film that was created and centered around a young woman in Great Britain. I also included films of casts that were racialized casts that were filmed in America, centered in America, of women that we don't typically see in romantic comedies. So I included *Daughters of the Dust*, which is a really interesting sort of period piece. I included two period pieces to see if the way we talked about history was any different than the way we talk about the present. So one is set in India surrounding the story between two Indian women. And so I really wanted to encompass, to have women of color, to have different generations, time periods. I tried to make this as genre diverse as possible to say, Okay, this isn't just what we see, as a narrative in romantic comedy. This is a narrative across the board. This is a narrative we're seeing in thrillers and cop buddy films, and femme fatale films. I mean, this isn't isolated to women looking for romance. This is just how single women are depicted in films when they are present. And so I found five themes that came across being negative in nature. Often single women in film are depicted as being emasculating, as being threatening to men, as trying to

either usurp their role at work or take over their duties that they should be in the kitchen kind of thing. And again, these are films from like, 2010 2020. This is not I mean, some of these films could have been made in 1930. And just change the clothing, literally they could have. And the two African films gave me a really great perspective of seeing very similar themes. Yes, the different cultures were a factor in the film. But the themes were no different than any other Hollywood movie about singleness and single women specifically. So it was really great to see that, from my point of view, researching it. I don't think it's great for women.

Christine Erickson 36:16

Right!

Kim Martinez Phillips 36:20

We're talking about some of the issues that it brings up. And one of the issues that it brings up are these microaggressions. And these microaggressions that single women mostly get that, depending where they are in their life, depending how comfortable they are with their choices can be pretty harmful. The single women will often be asked, Why aren't you married? What's wrong with you? Oh, you don't have any kids? Oh, I'm sorry. Oh, well, I hope you're still trying. Don't give up. Prince Charming's around the corner. Not only do I see these themes in the films, I've seen them in the research I'm doing with my own research with the women I'm interviewing. Is that some people, "Oh, I'm just making conversation. It's a harmless question. It's a harmless topic." But for some women, they don't want to have those conversations with someone they don't know. And it's none of your business why someone's not married. You know?

Christine Erickson 37:26

All of the things.

Kim Martinez Phillips 37:28

Right. Just walk up to somebody like, "Oh, why aren't you married?"

Christine Erickson 37:32

Right! And the opposite, I mean, it's so obvious, but the opposite isn't done. Like, why did you get married? Why did you have a child? Why did you do this? Why did you do that? Or it's the backhanded compliment of I can't believe you're not married. You're so ABCD. Right. You know, it's not a compliment. It's an invasion. It's an invasive question.

Kim Martinez Phillips 37:56

It's a very invasive question. And I think if we turn that around, people would realize how invasive it is. That if you meet someone and you found out they were married, they went, Oh, my God, you're so wonderful. Why'd you get married?

Christine Erickson 38:08

Yeah. Exactly.

Kim Martinez Phillips 38:12

People would think you were insane!

Christine Erickson 38:14

Yeah, and I think it brings up, this is a side note, but just the consciousness and conscientiousness, of choice in the childfree space and in the childless space of, you know, we're not saying that childlessness always has a choice, but perhaps like when to stop IV treatments or knowing that you're not in a position to adopt or those kinds of things. That just the consciousness around that, but if those questions were turned around, it would be really curious what the answers are and I'm not saying that everybody has children unconsciously. But it is a status quo unconsciousness around it, that perpetuates the story and the narrative and the choices often without that sort of real pause, you know. Yeah, it's a very curious space. And a lot of people are tired of being asked these questions, and then you bring it into the workplace, into other spaces, and you have no idea what that person's, you know. Either you're you're shaming or being invasive about their choice, or something could have happened yesterday, a miscarriage, anything. People can be hurting at anytime. To bring that in without establishing that

trust and consent with somebody is just really, really a social space that we need to change.

Kim Martinez Phillips 39:39

Right. It's really inappropriate and I hope that one day, in my lifetime, that's sad to say, that we do have a family leave national family leave program a really nice thing. But if and when we do, there needs to be a conversation had because what does family mean? If people are given time off which I am all for, to take their children to school for a play or to take their children to a doctor, which is what we should have, right?

Christine Erickson 40:09

Yes!

Kim Martinez Phillips 40:09

Then people who do not have children should also have equal opportunity to use time, flex time, if they themselves have to go take care of treatment for themselves, maybe an elder parent, maybe an older brother, or sister or younger brother or sister they're taking taken care of, or even a pet. Who is going to determine whose family is more significant than others? And I think that's a conversation we haven't really had. Because we don't have family leave. But we do I think whoever determines whatever policy room that is determined in, I hope somebody's in there to say, Okay, we're gonna give this so many hours. That's great. But is that only for people who have biological birthed children? Or is that the people who have deemed whoever they have to be their family in order to take care of them? You know, we talked about family of choice and chosen family, if my best friend is going through chemo treatment, I want to be able to take time off to go be with her. And I don't I don't see that any different than had she been my biological sister?

Christine Erickson 41:22

And I think it's difficult because the the climb to that, you know. Ultimately, why are we even being defined by our reproductive status, you know? Or parental status and not? But because things are segmented out, you know,

what is medical leave, what is personal leave, what is parental leave? If we just had universal leave, and also paid leave, I mean, you know, if you're going to be penalized for having that time, that's also not great, whether you're having a child or doing something else. Also universal flex time, as you're saying, but I mean, call it a thing, make it a thing, define it, everybody's clear. And in some of the conversations I've had with people in companies, there's always a concern, oh, well, people will misuse the system. But that's counter to making it equitable. If everybody has, if it's the same playing field for everybody, then that's what we have, you don't have to work around it and take days that you really need for a mental health day to go do a medical appointment and catch up on everything. I mean, it's, it's ridiculous, the way that we're mismanaging just wellbeing and burnout, and you know, all of the things that come with that. And, you know, as far as defining family, the way that we define it in the Institute, is anything that is defined by an individual, a couple or a group, however, you name family, it doesn't have to be by blood or adoption or marriage, it's it can be animals, it can be people, however you define that that is your life. That is what you're responsible for or your taking care for. I don't know how someone else can define that. And it feels like also something you were saying earlier, you know, about singlehood. And in the media and film, it's like, we're not caught up with what is? If these aren't ideas for planning for the future. This is what the population is this is who employees are. We're so so behind in this.

Kim Martinez Phillips 43:31

Right. Because we are often stuck in this heteronormative kind of paradigm. And people are having a difficult time opening that box. Well, this box serves us and we're kinda happy here. And we like it, it's comfortable. And it's they don't often understand that once you open that box and realize that there are family dynamics and structures that are affecting many different people, that if we make it more equitable, and we make it more healthy for everyone, it's going to benefit everyone. So it's gonna benefit everyone, if you have people who could take flex time or time off because they have a sister who has a child and they want to say hey, you go do what you need to do I'll take my niece or nephew to the game. Then I'm using my time to do that. But it's this idea of parenthood being so thinly defined and narrowly defined to people

you're biologically connected with. And we live in a world today where those lines are being blurred more and more and more.

Christine Erickson 44:47

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I find it really curious. Oh, there was a great tweet the other day, I'm sorry, I can't remember her name who did it. But she was saying also, simply because we don't have children, she was saying child free, but anybody who doesn't have children, doesn't mean we're more available. Also, you know, from a workplace perspective, from a personal perspective. It's also the narrative on being tired, you know, as though we wouldn't be tired, I'm sure you're tired, you're doing a PhD. You know, oh, all of those things. And I think, if we just set it down, I used to I say this all the time. I used to think, you know, we go through life, and we have our narratives and our experiences, our traumas, whatever is impacted us in life. And that would allow us to then empathize, even if we don't understand or experience other other people's lives. And I think this setting down and creating equity in the workplace, in what is family policy, public policy, it allows us to set down those things and to just be and why that is very scary, you know, when it's actually not working the other way. And because of all those neurons we spoke to, it's, it's not actually working, you know, there's a last plug at "oh well the economy is this," "oh no! the birth rate is dropping," but it's the wrong model. It's the wrong model. It's not about the birth rate.

Kim Martinez Phillips 46:18

I've had some, I have a friend who works in more of a corporate world, and there is still that kind of, I'm not sure how she would define it. But there's conversation that often kind of she has with people who work with her like, "Oh, you're not married, you can stay late." "Oh, you don't have kids, you can stay late and do this." And like you said, just because you don't have children doesn't mean you have more free time. What I'm finding is women who are not married and not having children have very full lives. They often have other obligations, maybe sometimes taking care of part of other family members. But they have full lives, they get tired, they're choosing to live their life in the way they've chosen. Why should they be penalized for that any more than someone who chose to have five children? One of the women I

spoke to, I love this said, I'm paraphrasing, but says something to the effect of we're talking about nurturing, and how some people don't have the desire to nurture, take care of others. And she said, I'm taking care of someone, I'm taking care of myself. Yeah. Yeah. Because that's about all I can do. I'm taking care of myself. So it's like, just because people for whatever reason, maybe they weren't nurtured as children, maybe they had trauma. There are some people that are really having to raise themselves, right? We should be more respectful of that and more, kind of sit back and let our own biases go that we feel that "Oh, well you must be sitting home doing all this great stuff." No, maybe they're doing some really intensive work we don't know about

Christine Erickson 48:05

Right, right. Or just people who are chronically ill or in pain. I mean, it dismisses so many people where it's not even about not having children. It's all the other layers too that we don't know people are living. It's major, major, major assumptions about one another. Yeah, so a push for things to be universal and for family to be not only diverse, but just fully inclusive. When we talk about family policy, or family-friendly workplaces, or family benefits, I think that language has to change. You know, even the reasoning behind a lot of it for retention. It's not just about you know, I mean how it started and why it's there. And what actually still not there in the US many places, I don't want to over speak to horrible parental leave policies that have, you know, leave much to be desired in childcare. We are for those things being done and done well to support people. But I think we just have to look beyond that at this point. And even see, you know, who in our organization, what is the percentage even of people who are parents and non parents, you know. Are companies even looking at that? Because just the lens on family and status quo family, with children or Married with Children has been so predominant for so long, that it's just programmed that way.

Kim Martinez Phillips 49:35

The research is definitely out there. And there are people looking at it. I know when I submitted my proposal. There's a report the United States Census report that 110 million unmarried persons over the age of 18 in 2017, and 53% of those were women. Wow. And in two 2009 the number of married

women in America was less than 50% of all women. And that was the first time that unmarried women out Marvy category.

Christine Erickson 50:18

Wow!

Kim Martinez Phillips 50:18

Some of those women may have been, you know, in separations, divorced, but the fact that there were more unmarried women than men. And so that trend is continuing. And so what I have found in both of my research projects right now is that having women who are either single or childfree as role models in a woman's life makes a big difference. When they had an aunt who was living their life and happy and didn't have children, or was single and not lamenting, they didn't have a man in their life. It really gave some of these young girls when they were girls, a different path they might have, but there is one that exists. And they saw it. Many of the women I talked to did have single childfree women role models in their lives.

Christine Erickson 50:18

Wow! That's so great. And yeah, from film to and thank you for mentioning all of those films, that's so great. From film and media to the workplace to public policy, as I said, I just think we need to meet what is. Like that is the next practice. That is the new strategy. We're already here, this isn't coming. You know, the same with aging without children like these, these issues and means are here now. It's not something we're just looking to in the future. And so I don't know, these conversations need to happen. And they need to not feel so threatening to the system that is, because it's not working. It just hasn't been as visible or as verbal, but it's not working. And I do think that the work from home and the pandemic has brought some of these issues to light. It's not that it's not being discussed. I just you know, with the Institute, and all of these conversations we're having on here, I would like to see us become more collective in that voice so that there's a constant visibility of it not such a fragmented one. And it's why I love the work that you do and how you're focusing on very distinct voices and narratives. Because all of those

voices have very, sort of super lenses on what is needed and how to achieve that based on their own experiences.

Kim Martinez Phillips 52:49

Yeah. And you shouldn't have to sacrifice family. These women have loved their families spend time with their families. It's not that they're one or the other.

Christine Erickson 53:00

Right, right. And do you want to share with people your website and where to find your research initiatives? How to find you? How to participate?

Kim Martinez Phillips 53:12

Yes. Please find me. I created a website to help not only with my research, but other projects I'm working on. It is I choose all one word, ichoosefeminism.com. And I also am on Twitter. And also it's [@ichoosefeminism](https://twitter.com/ichoosefeminism). And I also have an Instagram account. And that is under my name Kim Martinez Phillips. And right now I'm just heavily recruiting for my study for my dissertation. Once I finish that I will hope to be you know, giving information and asking for information about other projects and other things about single women and never married women and women who are childfree. This is definitely going to be my little niche, something that I will be focusing probably throughout my academic career, because there's so much there, you know, there's so much to be studied and so much to learn.

Christine Erickson 54:14

Absolutely.

Kim Martinez Phillips 54:15

Especially when you add in the differences of you know, women of color and different ages. And I would love to do a cross-national study where I can go and interview women from different countries. How are they living their lives and are their lives filled? And are they being ostracized? So that hopefully is in my future.

Christine Erickson 54:17

Yes. Excellent. Well, we hope today will bring some more participants for your wonderful research. Thank you so much. Thank you so much for being here, Kim. Let's continue this conversation on any of the platforms Kim mentioned. If you want to email us you can email us at radio@NewLegacyInstitute.com. You can also find us on Twitter @NLInstitute. And yeah, let's continue the conversation about what is happening in the lives of single women, voluntarily, childfree women. This is all a part of what we're trying to do here and through the institute to make appropriate changes for what we need and to make all of us visible. Thank you for listening, and we'll be back next week. Thank you so much.

VoiceAmerica 55:28

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.