

[00:00:00] **Kaitlin:** I'm your host, Kaitlin Solimine, and this is the Postpartum Production Podcast. Here we hold conversations about the intersection of caregiving, creative practice, and capitalist production, as well as what it means to be producing art while also being a parent in modern society. Find out more at [www](http://www.postpartumproduction.com).

[00:00:26] postpartumproduction.com, where you can also sign up for our newsletter.

[00:00:39] So what? As I tried to figure out when I could record this episode, I realized that there's just never the perfect time. And I feel like that is also the perfect metaphor for parenting while doing anything professional and creative. If I sound nasally, it's because I am. It's because I'm still getting over this cold, which is potentially RSV.

[00:01:06] It was a rough one, but we're getting better. And. I'm just really excited to dig in on this episode on this season. So listening back, I have to say that I was surprised by how long ago the early interviews of this season felt to me. And depending upon how you have listened to these episodes as a listener, whether you're listening chronologically, whether you just dive in based on the subject matter, maybe they don't feel as far away from you.

[00:01:36] But to me, they felt. Like a long time ago, even though I guess in the grand scheme of things, they weren't, but they also made me realize that a podcast is a very strange record of, in this case, my own interactions with these absolutely wonderful humans and their work, with the questions that I might've been wrestling with that day or that they were, or that what we were inspired to discuss that day, what was weighing on us collectively as a society at that moment in time.

[00:02:05] Just as right now, there's obviously so much that's weighing on me personally, on us as a, as an American society, as a global society. Today, these recordings are then in many ways time capsules, records that we leave for humanity so long as the digital cloud remains in some kind of vault form, whatever it looks like, and humanity remains on earth.

[00:02:32] I know I'm sounding Weirdly philosophical today, but for that, I'm realizing that these conversations are truly quite impactful, despite the fact that in our lives, it can feel like a simple conversation itself has very little productivity and certainly can't be monetized, as I've learned from figuring out how to monetize this podcast to keep it sustainable.

[00:02:55] It means that it's been almost a year since our first conversation with Julie Phillips. And for example, in my own tiny life here, My daughter wasn't yet walking when we recorded that episode and now she's running and climbing. So for this season's last episode, I wanted to look back on these conversations and remind us all of what important lessons, questions, and opportunities have arose, what we've learned, and what still needs so much work and support to come.

[00:03:25] This season in particular, I turned a bit away from the first season's deep dive and focus on creative caregivers and took a bird's eye view. on those who are examining the lives of writers and caregivers who look in their own ways at the impact of parenting on our creative and social lives. We spoke with biographers, poets, journalists, psychologists, memoirists, activists, lactation specialists, chiropractors, and more about the ways in which creativity and caregiving intersect.

[00:03:54] And while I sat with their ideas and words in compiling this compilation episode, I was struck as a writer who usually sits alone in a room with my own words. By the medium of the podcast format itself, at how present we have to be when we're sitting with each other in conversation, when the kids aren't climbing up our legs, when the dogs aren't barking, although sometimes they did, when we aren't checking Instagram or reading Substack newsletters, when we aren't tending to a meal, a sick child, or an ailing parent.

[00:04:25] In these moments, we got to just be present with each other. And for that, I'm incredibly grateful. That my guests could take the time to sit with me too for their honesty and vulnerability, which really make this podcast the open and engaging space that it is, and hopefully is for you as listeners. Today we'll look back at a few themes that have emerged and take stock of what this means now.

[00:04:49] Looking back and also looking forward to the work we all have to continue in our examination of this intersection of caregiving and creativity.

[00:05:07] For starters, I'm often in a doom loop with myself and my own work when it comes to the question, will anyone care about motherhood and caregiving enough to want to read my work? My new novel right now is tracing the return of a pregnant woman to her hometown in New England. At the precipice of an environmental crisis, and also a personal one, I won't give away too much.

[00:05:28] But often I feel as if my writing this story now will be pushed to the shelves of maybe quote unquote women's stories, as if pregnancy, birth, and motherhood are not worthy of wider literary interest or intellectual inquiry. To that end, I was overjoyed to hear Julie Phillips address this very subject.

[00:05:48] You pose this question, and also I think all of the work that you're examining does as well, about how we think about motherhood and intellectualism together and also how we think about motherhood as an intellectual concept. And I was curious how that came about in your work and also how you've wrestled with that personally.

[00:06:08] I mean, I

[00:06:09] **Julie Phillips:** think it's there right from the beginning in anything that You say about motherhood and intellectual life that there's a perceived split between them. There's an idea that they cannot exist together, that the kind of emotional and physical labor of care and the labor of thinking, the labor of intellectual work, They just can't go together, not only in terms of time, but in terms of thinking about them, conceiving the combination of those two and what it might look like.

[00:06:55] And of course, there's a lot of moral judgment that comes into that because there's this old idea that thinking too much is going to be bad for the baby. It's going to draw you away from that labor of care. It's going to make you emotionally inaccessible to this family that is making demands on you.

[00:07:18] There's a fear that women will neglect their Care work, I think. I mean, the whole society is built on women's care work. I understand why it's policed so much. I understand why the motherhood police is always telling you that you're doing it wrong. It's always asking you when you're going to have another child, or why didn't you have another child, or is always voicing an opinion about how many days your kid should be in daycare, whether you should be leaving it to cry or not leaving it to cry.

[00:07:49] I mean, it is. The basis of civilization, it is not really so strange that people want to control it. You do have to turn your back off to say, okay, I am going to define it for myself, but it is hard. And there is this sense of mother and thinker as a negative space.

[00:08:17] **Kaitlin:** Amanda Monti and Molly Caro May added to this thought.

[00:08:20] By exploring the ways in which the bodily experience of caregiving in our artistic work becomes a valid form of creative inquiry.

[00:08:29] **Amanda Montei:** I think I wanted to become a parent. I think I wanted to get pregnant because I wanted to understand this aspect of my body. And of course going through that process was a lot more complicated than I had ever imagined because we can't separate out the body from the cultural. And the political, and the theoretical, and all these stories that we take into an experience like pregnancy or motherhood.

[00:08:58] **Molly Caro May:** Like probably five years ago, I remember saying to my husband, I just wish there was, and I'm sure this exists actually now, but I wish there was some sort of machine. Where I could attach, like, keyboard to my limbs or something, and I could literally, like, learn to type differently, but through my body, so that the writing was actually a physical dance, instead of just my fingers dancing, it was my whole body dancing, because I felt like I wanted to project onto my wall, like a big screen that was huge, and then that I could like, Punch it out or flow it out and, and write.

[00:09:35] And anyway, we've laughed a lot about that, but that's what I'm talking about. I, I want to feel my body, not just my sensations in my body, but feel my body in motion as I am writing. And so a lot of what I do, and even what I did when I was writing my last two books. is walking and recording myself and writing with my voice and feeling what that feels like to have it come from my pelvis and not my voice and not necessarily through my hand initially.

[00:10:05] So I'm really curious about oral storytelling and what it means to have words move through my body.

[00:10:13] **Kaitlin:** Ben Berman added nuance to how we process creatively while parenting.

[00:10:18] **Ben Berman:** Embracing my children in the life of a father in particular, I want to say parent, but I think father for me gives me both immediacy and some distance in terms of the expectations and the reality of how much you can sometimes be involved.

[00:10:35] Thinking of that as the writing material. So I'm not choosing, I'm merging the two, right? I'm trying to find a way to say that the most complex themes are often right in front of us. And if what is right in front of us is a four

year old throwing her socks in the toilet, I want to make room for that in my poetry as well.

[00:10:55] So for me, I think that allowed the choice to dissolve and to say, I'm not going to try to write some great literature that's detached from the reality. Of my life, life and of my life. My children are the most wonderful and important thing to me. As difficult as parenting is. That's like where my heart always is, and to really think about, well, how do you make that your creative engagement as opposed to thinking of them in opposition to one another?

[00:11:25] **Kaitlin:** As I'm also preoccupied with the logistics of how to lead a creative life while caregiving, as all of our guests are equally invested in inevitably, many of our conversations revolved around that subject matter. Here's evolutionary parenting Tracy Cassel's weighing in.

[00:11:42] **Tracy Cassels:** It's okay to struggle in a society that doesn't support you. It's okay to be like, this doesn't work and I have to get some stuff done. The question is then, how do you approach those changes that you have to make with your family in mind, and while considering everyone? So it's also looking at your child and saying, yep, this may not be the ideal, it may not be what I want it to be, but how do I do it knowing what's most important to my child?

[00:12:07] **Kaitlin:** And for Yasmina Barrera, her exploration of the ways in which text and maternal body intersect were ripe with really creatively provocative opportunities.

[00:12:17] **Jazmina Barrera:** When you get pregnant, the body becomes a text, a text for someone else, and a text that is changing all the time that you have to decipher.

[00:12:28] **Kaitlin:** KJ Del Antonio digs in more on this subject, in terms of how this access to a creative life should be a basic, fundamental right for all creatives.

[00:12:38] **KJ Dell'Antonia:** The problem is not that you are privileged. The problem is that we have a system in which many people do not have the very basic things that they need. So, when we talk about that as appreciating our privilege, yeah, check where we are. But also, every Parent should have access to childcare and functioning schools.

[00:13:00] That should not be a privilege. Like, we should, we must never forget that that is not meant to be a privilege only according to a certain few.

The goal is that we all have those things. So, yeah, don't, don't put the burden on your, on your um, your babysitter time to create the most beautiful thing.

[00:13:21] **Kaitlin:** And we learned a lot throughout the season about ways in which creative motherhood and parenting more broadly are not supported in capitalist Western societies, which was highlighted in our conversation with Mina Dubin about her work, Mom Rage.

[00:13:34] **Minna Dubin:** We get so isolated in America because there's so much emphasis on the nuclear family. And then if you're in a nuclear family and there's only two of you. And one of them, especially in different sex relationships, if one of them is a father, the labor just falls on you and you're just so isolated. The way that we do family in America, it not only puts all the labor on the mom, but it puts all the labor on the mom and she's alone.

[00:13:59] **Kaitlin:** And Tracy Castles also took a deep dive into the ways in which our capitalist, patriarchal system puts undue pressure on caregivers, children, and families.

[00:14:09] **Tracy Cassels:** The burden falls on the mother and the child and that is very clearly the sign of a patriarchal culture though, right? That is exactly what we do there is we look at everything that they provide and offer is invaluable and because of that.

[00:14:27] What we end up fighting against is thinking that they're the problem and that's what needs to be fixed because goodness knows it can't possibly be that in a capitalist society, the problem is, is with something else like structure of work, the value that we put on caring or allowing children to develop into their own people, as opposed to getting prepared for being part of a, another kind of societal machine.

[00:14:54] **Kaitlin:** At the same time, we spoke with those who are telling stories as well as building important agendas to support caregivers, which I don't know about you, listener, but these episodes really gave me hope and took me out of my doom loop spiral or whatever metaphor conjures that pit of sadness in the never ending story.

[00:15:12] Anyway, like Kimberly Seals Allers, who we have to thank for such incredible activism in the maternal world, as she highlights for us. Having

[00:15:22] **Kimberly Seals Allers:** something, something that you keep for yourself can actually be the most revolutionary and important thing that you

could do postpartum journey. And you may not be able to do it for long, you maybe only do it for three minutes.

[00:15:37] I used to be able to write in my journal for 30 minutes and it turned down to like 60 seconds, but it was still my time. Finding that time if you have to lock yourself in the bathroom, but making those simple escapes. and valuing less, right? And in those times, less may be more, but the consistency is everything.

[00:15:56] So lean into that. Find it in a different way. And let's not give in to the way the world wants to value us as mothers and carers and nurturers. Let's define that for ourselves.

[00:16:10] **Kaitlin:** And in Amanda Monti's work, she regularly examines the intersection of motherhood and activism.

[00:16:17] **Amanda Monte:** As a writer, I've always been really fascinated by narrative and what it can do. Like writing in and of itself, I think is productive, is an action. Making art can be a social justice practice. It can be an action, but I'm also really interested in how narrative can just disrupt these other narratives that we're always carrying around.

[00:16:41] **Kaitlin:** Similarly, Raena Boston's inspiring interview reiterates the need for community as a critical piece of the caregiver activist puzzle.

[00:16:49] **Raena Boston:** Because you also mentioned something like, uh, it's one more thing that shouldn't be on us. And I wholeheartedly agree with you. And if we want things to change, nobody's coming to save us. They're just not. And that's heavy and that's rough. And that's why I think we have to do it in community.

[00:17:11] **Kaitlin:** And thankfully this work matters, as Dr. Elliott Berlin notes.

[00:17:15] **Dr Elliot Berlin:** That kind of goes back to what I was thinking earlier, which is that you're born, you get bigger, you give birth, and you die. And you can have the greatest, most successful, most impactful career on the planet. But it still pales in comparison to what you do by leaving your imprint, your DNA imprint on the planet.

[00:17:33] Or it doesn't even have to be DNA, your parenting imprint on the planet for the future generations. I don't know why the world ticks that way. It's just an observation that it does.

[00:17:49] **Kaitlin:** While I try to avoid prescriptive feedback in this podcast and in life in general, I did find that there were so many gems of advice and feedback in our episodes that I still take with me into my daily life and remind myself to return to. For example, this exercise Pooja Lakshmin humored me to try in her own episode, I still try to remember to do myself on a daily basis.

[00:18:14] There's an exercise in your book that I wrote down for myself and I keep returning to is when you, you talked about I'm happiest when I feel most like myself, when I was like fill in the blanks. Can I ask you to do that for us? Would you fill in the blanks?

[00:18:27] **Dr Pooja Lakshmin:** Yeah, sure. Can you remind me what they are? I don't know how to memorize.

[00:18:30] **Kaitlin:** I'll say, I'll say each one and then you could fill it. Okay. So I'm happiest when blank.

[00:18:36] **Dr Pooja Lakshmin:** I'm happiest when I'm in a conversation with somebody else who really enjoys thinking deeply about hard topics. .

[00:18:44] **Kaitlin:** I feel most like myself when I blank.

[00:18:48] **Dr Pooja Lakshmin:** I feel most like myself when I am on the couch, in my sweatpants, with my cats, and just vegging.

[00:18:59] **Kaitlin:** I am bound to fail when I blank.

[00:19:02] **Dr Pooja Lakshmin:** I'm bound to fail when I'm not compassionate with myself.

[00:19:10] **Kaitlin:** I know I cannot do blank and be blank.

[00:19:13] **Dr Pooja Lakshmin:** Hmm, I know I cannot do everything and be everything.

[00:19:24] **Kaitlin:** I love that. That was actually, when I did this earlier today, that was exact, I know I cannot do everything. I had the same exact line.

[00:19:31] **Dr Pooja Lakshmin:** And maybe it's be everything to everyone.

[00:19:33] **Kaitlin:** At the same time, Molly Carol May reminds us about presence in daily life. And I really enjoy this particular clip.

[00:19:45] **Molly Caro May:** I just want to be present. I just want to, it sounds so cliché to say that, but it's, that hasn't even come from an idea that has just come from the lived experience of when I'm making scrambled eggs for my kids, I want to be freaking making scrambled eggs for my kids. And everything is pulling me not to, everything is pulling all of us not to.

[00:20:03] And so one thing that I have found is that facilitating or teaching really lights me up and it aligns me in a way that everything else in my life can feel like it's, it's messy and falling apart on some level. And once I'm in that space and it doesn't feel artificial, it doesn't feel like I'm hiding anything.

[00:20:21] Cause I'm very honest with the people I'm working with. I feel like, Oh. Here I go, shoop! And here I am, and I'm focused, and I, it's like being an alchemist. You know, we all have those spaces where we are that, and it feels that way for me. It's really nourishing for me. If it ever becomes something that is not nourishing for me, then I will pivot.

[00:20:41] **Kaitlin:** So many of our interviews dance around the subject matter of presence, of being present. Like that in Jazmina Barrera's conversation.

[00:20:50] **Jazmina Barrera:** Taking care, especially of a small child, is something that is very difficult to do while doing something else. I mean, you have to be there, you have to be present. I mean, that can be, of course, tiring because it's exhausting.

[00:21:08] And I think it's also wonderful in the sense that it brings you to the present. It makes you forget about speculating and going around stupid things in your brain. You have to be there doing what they're doing, and for me that has been precious learning, just being there. And that is something, as you said, that capitalism struggles with.

[00:21:34] **Kaitlin:** And poet Ben Berman also navigates this thin line between writing and caregiving, as he discusses here.

[00:21:41] **Ben Berman:** It's very hard to both be in the moment. and to detach and be thinking about the moment. When I'm parenting, not that we're ever not

parenting, but when I'm fully there, poet brain is totally off. I am not making meaning, I am not deeply contemplative, I am not watching from afar, right?

[00:21:58] But the next morning there's this totally other me that's able to sit with that material and bring in this other sense of awareness and caretaking. And sometimes they merge. And sometimes there's a huge gap between them and I write in order to bring them together. But it's, it's not like it's this contemplative practice where everything evens out in the end.

[00:22:19] You still get incredibly frustrated or say the wrong thing and, but the poetry or the writing tends to give me a chance to, to be very aware of it and to engage it and to try to understand it.

[00:22:32] **Kaitlin:** Poignantly, Eugenia Leigh, also a poet, (*Isn't it always the poets who know best how to speak the words our souls feel?*) reminds us how a creative practice can be life saving.

[00:22:43] **Eugenia Leigh:** I came to poetry when I was younger as a coping mechanism, and I think I still do sometimes. And, you know, some poets like to pretend that it's a totally intellectual practice and that there's no therapeutic benefit for them. But for me, it did start out as a therapeutic practice.

[00:22:59] And I think I still turn to it in that way and maybe in some ways the pandemic helped me to access that primal relationship I have with poetry where I went back to the original reason why I go to poems. It's because I did need a place where I could tell the truth. I did need a place where I could process the most impossible things.

[00:23:23] And in doing that, then I figured out how to be a poet again. And I figured out that I haven't lost my relationship to writing. I can start writing again. And so I think it was in a weird way, all of these terrible things happening simultaneously brought me back to that place .

[00:23:41] **Kaitlin:** To my earlier point, that I'm astonished at how much resonance these conversations still have, I love hearing, for example, this reminder from Darcia Narvaez. A reminder that feels all the more important today, given current world events and our need to come together, truly together as humanity, now more than ever.

[00:24:00] **Dr Darcia Narvaez:** We have to make sure to not get stuck in this us against them imagination that the news media likes to get us our attention with us against them stuff or these violent things are happening and oh what an

outrage to try to not immerse and marinate in that but marinate instead of this sense of oneness that we're all connected and we all can help one another and that we're all here together to make a beautiful world.

[00:24:38] **Kaitlin:** So thank you listeners for joining this journey with me. I don't yet know what's in store for this podcast. If you're inspired to continue listening, please drop us a line at hello at postpartum production. com, or shoot us a note in our Instagram page postpartum production. So we'll know that you're out there in your corner of your universe, trying to make sense of this all like us.

[00:25:00] We look forward to hearing from you and hope you and yours are well in this holiday season and beyond.

[00:25:10] I'm your host, Caitlin Salini, and this is the Postpartum Production Podcast. If you like what you've heard today, please subscribe wherever you get your podcasts and give us a rating which will help us reach more listeners like you. For regular updates, visit our web. Site, www.postpartumproduction.com.

[00:25:29] Follow us on Instagram at Postpartum Production podcast and subscribe to our substack newsletter. Thank you for listening today and being a valuable part of this community of caregivers and artists who are redefining the work that we do and pushing forward with a new system in which art and caregiving are increasingly valued and supported.