

Activism At Home: How Kimberly Seals Allers is Making Equitable Maternal Care Accessible to All

[00:00:00] **Kimberly:** And having 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 may be only do it for three minutes. 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 from those times less, maybe more. 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.

[00:00:51] **Kaitlin:** I am your host, Kaitlin Solimine, and this is the Postpartum Production Podcast. Here we hold conversations about the intersection of [00:01:00] caregiving, creative practice, and capitalist production, as well as what it means to producing art while also being a parent. In modern society. Find out more @ www.postpartumproduction.com where you can also sign up for our

[00:01:15] **Kimberly:** newsletter.

[00:01:26] **Kaitlin:** I'm really excited to share with you this conversation today with Kimberly Seals Allers. She's an award-winning journalist, five-time author, international speaker strategist, and also an advocate for maternal and infant health. She's the former senior editor at Essence and a writer at Fortune Magazine.

She's also a leading voice on the racial and sociocultural complexities of birth, breastfeeding, and motherhood. She's the founder of Irth, a new Yelp-like app for brown and black parents to address bias and racism in maternity and infant [00:02:00] care. Kimberly also created Birthright, a podcast about joy and healing in black birth that centers on positive black birth stories as a tool in the fight for birth justice and reverses the narrative of negative statistics common in mainstream media coverage of black maternal health.

You can learn more about her@kimberlysealsallers.com. And follow her at I Am K Seals, all on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

I am so excited. To be talking with Kimberly today. I read your book years ago, the Big Letdown, how Medicine, big Business and Feminism Undermine Breastfeeding, and I am just really excited that now I have this opportunity to talk with you and to share your work with our community and the world and all of the amazing work you've been [00:03:00] doing since you've published this book as well.

I'd love to hear where we're finding you today and what's weighing on you right now, and then we can look at some of your research and all the work that you've done as well.

[00:03:11] **Kimberly:** Yeah, what a great question. Thank you for having me today. You're finding me in Atlanta, Georgia, where we are laying the prep. Work for activating Atlanta as our next location for gathering Earth app reviews, meeting with community partners, all with the goal of crowdsourcing community experiences and birth breastfeeding, prenatal, and using that as a tool for change.

You know, and so I'm excited. What's weighing heavily on me right now I think is the resistance that we meet in our work from hospitals is deeply concerning. Given the statistics, particularly around black maternal mortality rates, what we know is happening across communities of color, what's happening in our country in general for all mothers, the resistance to transparency and [00:04:00] accountability is deeply concerning.

Mm-hmm. And so while we're excited about the many hospitals that have come on board, To be a part of our improvement process, to be a part of how we use Earth App feedback to create an improvement plan for them to execute and implement the amount of nos that I get and the resistance to nothing. But the fact that we're asking them to be accountable is very scary and quite frankly, often enraging.

Mm-hmm. To that end,

[00:04:28] **Kaitlin:** could you give us a little bit of a background about the Earth app, how you came to build it and what it's doing, because I think that's something that our listeners would love to understand as

[00:04:37] **Kimberly:** well. Yeah, so Irth is first of all like the word birth, but we dropped the beef of bias, so it's I R T H and Irth is the first of its kind nonprofit, Yelp like tool designed primarily for black and brown women and birthing people to find and leave reviews.

Of their OBGYNs, birthing hospitals and pediatricians. So we're all about being able to use [00:05:00] technology to inform and protect each other, to let each other know where we're getting good care, where we are not to search reviews, to see what other people of color are saying about their experiences, which we think that even white women should care about.

Right. And then on the back end, we turn those reviews into data to work directly with hospitals, payers, and providers. What can we learn, as we say, from the living instead of waiting for another maternal death to recognize that there are problems, you know, and on the team or bias or whatever it is. This is a very backward process where everything is assumed fine until someone dies, and then we're trying to solve this problem from the grave.

So we are really trying to be an early warning detection system for hospitals and health systems. When we see patterns of some of the behaviors that we know have disproportionately led to the death, dismissiveness, or pain levels, someone being ignored. You know, these are things that we know have been common threads and we see that Irth.

And then giving our community power. To say we have to start holding these systems accountable. [00:06:00] Our care needs to be transparent. It can't be a survey that only the hospital sees anymore. That is not good enough. And so we are really pushing that and we are, you know, grateful for our funders to support us and that mission.

So that's where we're at. That's what Earth is about. We're excited about the hospital pilots we have in Detroit. We are just bringing on Philadelphia. We're about to start two in la, two public health departments in the Bay Area, another hospital in Sacramento. We're working with a collaborative. In New York City, 32 birthing hospitals, acknowledging they don't have enough patient experience feedback.

They're bringing us into, provide that from black and brown folks working with the March of Dimes on a national level. So we're getting there. It's pretty exciting.

[00:06:44] **Kaitlin:** As you were talking, I was thinking that obviously there's been, well, I say obviously, and maybe that's just because of what I follow and see in media, but there's been a lot of coverage recently about maternal mortality rates and especially as it impacts black and brown birthing women, as you said.

And [00:07:00] so it's interesting also to hear that on the flip side of that, while that's getting so much coverage, that you're getting some resistance from providers. I can imagine that that's, For me, it just enrages me sitting here and not doing that work on a daily basis. But what do you see as the challenges and what are the possibilities like when you do see movement that matters?

Where is that happening and how are you adjusting your work to ultimately make those important changes?

[00:07:31] **Kimberly:** When we get resistance, I always ask hospitals straight up, what are you expecting? I'm expecting four and five star reviews. What are you expecting? Right? Mm-hmm. And I just be quiet, like I'm okay with silence, right?

And so to really let them own. That there's a reason why they have a problem with Earth. Like they can acknowledge they don't have patient experience data. Black and brown folks are not responding to hcaps, they are not responding to press. Gies. Some of these hospitals have literally opened up their dashboard and we have more [00:08:00] reviews in earth without even trying than they have in press GA responses, right?

And so, They know that they need the information, but our work is about the transparency, accountability, and also, I will say, Caitlin, that if I was willing to sell the data, just sell it to hospitals, we would not have a funding gap. But the only way to access our data, I. At this time is to agree to do the work, right?

You sign an mou. Mm-hmm. Your CEO must sign off on it. It's an agreement about an 18 month process that includes implementation. Us going back in again to make sure that, to see if the reviews have improved. And so there's a process and so these are the things I don't budge on. Right? There will be, will be community accountability.

We are not just selling data. To hospitals for them to, again, keep it to themselves. If you don't agree to the work, you don't have access to our feedback, it will always be there to benefit the community. Hospitals and products have an opportunity to learn from it, or [00:09:00] they can just wait

on the front end as we activate our community and then, Their reputation takes a hit.

I'm good either way. I'm good either way. Like I'm here for my community. I hope that hospitals and providers and others see the benefits of our data, but the fact that we immediately are of service to our community is something that's really important to me, and I say immediately. Mm-hmm. Honoring that our reviews are moderated by a panel of volunteers who approve the reviews right now, maybe takes about seven to 14 business days, depending on.

How our volunteer bandwidth is lining up. But people know that that review is going to be helpful to their community. It's gonna help another mama, it's gonna help somebody else. And that is something that hospitals have not been able to provide to the community, and that's our value add.

[00:09:58] **Kaitlin:** This work is so impactful [00:10:00] and meaningful and the work that you've done in your journalism is deeply impactful and meaningful. And I'd love to hear, how did you get here? Take me way back, way back, Kimberly. Like how did you get where you are? Maybe that's a very long story, but the cliff notes of we could spend a whole podcast on this

[00:10:17] **Kimberly:** one question.

I have a very clear short version. You know, I was having a wonderful career in journalism. Quite frankly, motherhood was not on my radar. I remember very briefly having my first auntie experience with my niece, who I loved dearly, and I would go on her school trips. I would come there wearing my white linen outfits completely inappropriately.

I know they were messy, and I remember being on the school bus and. All the mothers were digging in their bags, and all I had was lip gloss. I was like, what are these people, why would they have Ziploc bags? And I, it was not my world. And so I was doing my journalism thing. I was super excited about it.

Senior writer at Fortune, Uber at Murdoch sent me to London. I worked for the newspapers out there and, and [00:11:00] I got pregnant and everything shifted for me. It really activated me. I didn't care about any of the things that I cared about before. And I'm sure most mothers and parents can understand. And I became deeply passionate about this issue, and I think the first thing that I became was terrified.

I was doing all this research. Again, being a journalist at that time, I probably had access to more research tools than the normal person right before what we have today. And I was terrified. I was blessed to not be poor. I was blessed to be educated. I was literally pregnant while in graduate school at Columbia University, and I was clueless.

Had no idea that none of this mattered as a black woman, and that I was statistically at the same risk as my disadvantaged sister or a white woman, mm-hmm. Who never graduated high school. And that scared the crap outta me. And more importantly, as I began to do the research, The answers that I was finding at that time were simply unsatisfactory.

And so my very first [00:12:00] response was my first book, which came out back in 2007, the Mocha Manual to a Fabulous Pregnancy published by HarperCollins, which was really the first kind of sociocultural exploration of what was going on in black women's lives that might be impacting their birth outcomes. I

Again, not a doctor, but what are the things that may be going on? And so for me, it was my first kind of foray into examining the lived experience as critical to what was happening on the outcome side. And that is the thread that has continued in my work. And so the book as books do lead to speaking and lead to traveling, and I realized that I was having little focus groups with black and brown mamas all over the country by means of my book events.

And listening to them and taking notes, and really starting to think through what I could do. How could I take this one step further? The book was great, but I wanted to do more briefly. I will say that I entered into a fellowship opportunity. Unbeknownst to me, the Kellogg Foundation was one of the funders of that fellowship.

It was [00:13:00] actually a food fellowship and I went with a girlfriend who's very much into food. I went because she said there was gonna be free wine. I'm gonna be very honest. I told her, you should have said that first, and started talking to the people about breastfeeding as a food issue. All of these folks there were thinking about food deserts and access to foods and all that stuff, and I'm like, Hey, I promise you that where people are struggling to get healthy fruits and vegetables, I promise you those infants are less likely to be receiving their most optimal nutrition as well, which is mother's milk and breast milk.

And there were different reasons for that. And you know, I had that Shira's courage and was talking to the program managers. They encouraged me to

apply and I was the first person in this food fellowship talking about breastfeeding as a food systems issue. I'm very proud of that. I went to all the food conferences.

I ate really well for two years. Oh my God. I ate well for two years and I would go to food conferences and be like, Hey, I'm here to talk about the original whole [00:14:00] food, and you want people to eat local. I want babies to eat local. I had all. About the work, but the Kellogg Foundation was one of the funders of this fellowship, did not know them all their work.

And when funders come through, you do your dog and pony show, talk about what you're working on. And the president at that time who was heading kind of their maternal health breastfeeding advocacy work, said to me, Kimberly, I want you to stop just writing and start doing something. And I was like, What is she talking about?

Writing is doing something. What's up with her? But they challenged me to take my work into the community. I'm very grateful for that support. Mm-hmm. And I literally started in three cities, Birmingham, Alabama. Jackson, Mississippi and New Orleans. I was thrown into the belly of black infant mortality, and they challenged me to test on the ground what I was writing about, which was does the community have solutions?

Right? As a journalist coming to the space, it was very odd to me that the answers were seemingly found in academic journals and medical folks and [00:15:00] researchers, and I was like, okay, that's great. But as a journalist, I always go to the people. And I was really struck that people didn't view the community as a source of solutions.

And so I literally started knocking on doors in those cities asking the community what they thought the solution would be. And trust me, I got a lot of resistance. And I mean from so-called breastfeeding advocates as well. Cause the approach was apparently flipping the power dynamics, even within birth and breastfeeding.

It was, it was very telling for me to see this resistance to disrupting that model and saying the community could be a source of solutions. And not just someplace that really smart people, quote unquote, go to fix and change and save, right? Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. This has been a common theme, unfortunately, in some birth and breastfeeding advocacy, and so that will continue to grow and really got the fire underneath me.

Kellogg funded us again. We got like a half a million dollar grant. I took my learnings, went to [00:16:00] Detroit, went to Philly, and so now. I'm engaging in what was called community participatory research, and I was like, okay, I'm just talking to people. I'm figuring out their solutions and we're testing it and we're trying it.

And for me, earth is an extension of that, right? It is for me, a platform. For taking the stories of the community and putting it on a technology platform. And it is for us to say that the community can see us through, right? The community's power mm-hmm. Can now be the tool that can drive for systems change.

The community can now be the tool that helps us inform and protect each other. And so when I started in this work with that slide that said, whatever the question, the answers in the community. Sometimes I got side eyes and now people are like, Hmm, you know? Yes, you are right. And I think this is a thread of my work that I'm really proud of, that this is how I got here.

By believing and listening [00:17:00] to my community and being a person who's passionate about storytelling and believing that stories have power to change the world in so many ways, and this is the way that I've chosen to steer the power of stories.

[00:17:12] **Kaitlin:** Thank you. That was really, really holistic and helpful. I'm seeing threads that I hadn't seen or known of before, so it, it's making a lot more sense to then see the trajectory of your work in that lens.

And one thing that I was drawn to that you talk about in the big letdown, for example, and you're talking about here, is how social support. Changes the dynamic and the success. I hate to put that word out there when we talk about whether it's breastfeeding or birth or mothering, but that changes the relationship to the outcome or the experience ultimately.

Right. And you talk about specifically how that support would allow mothering to be properly valued. And I was curious because you do talk about, and we [00:18:00] talk, everyone talks about value, right? In capitalist societies and what that means. And I am curious your thoughts on. What would a valued motherhood experience look like today?

[00:18:13] **Kimberly:** I love that research in that chapter. I believe it starts off with that quote from Dorian Gray. Everyone knows the price of everything, but the value of nothing. Right? And that if, if we had to ask someone, I've done

this at conferences, how much would you pay for a good mother? Mm-hmm. How much would you pay for a good mother?

A good mother is priceless, right. But right now we're also valueless in the current system. And when I look at that, I think about the fact that we still live in the only industrialized nation that doesn't have a federal paid leave policy. Mm-hmm. I think we are grateful for the recent momentum on the Pump Act, but we still don't have paid leave in this country.

And that's a huge failure that shows that mothering and parenting is not truly valued because no one will give you the time to do it. They will allow you to pay [00:19:00] someone else to do it. So that person could have benefits and income. Mm-hmm. But they won't let you do it. It's crazy. And I remember in many of these debates, some of these models were about us putting our own money into a fund, for lack of a better word, and then drawing from it later.

And even that was a problem. It's like, you won't let me put aside my own money. It was crazy. I mean, it's just nutty like the obstacle to this on a federal level, and very grateful for the states that have stepped in. To fill in the gap, and I think we need a more comprehensive state strategy across the board until we get the federal one.

But this is a huge statement about whether mothering is valued. And so for me, mothering would be valued if we actually have time to mother. Number one, would the paid leave us says that 25% of us remember going back to work 10 to 14 days after childbirth. Like when I hear that statistic, my vagina hurts.

That doesn't make any sense. Mm-hmm. It [00:20:00] doesn't make any sense. It literally makes my vagina hurt. And so I'm like, this is unacceptable. The mothering experience is not being valued. And I do believe, and I talk about this in the book, that this is one of the unintended consequences of feminism where we fought to be equal to men, but didn't fight for the things that people with uteruses and women uniquely do.

And I think we have to accept that because now we've been forced into male work models with, it's just like, birth is nothing. Come back to work in 10 days. Like you didn't just grow a human and push something out of your vagina or get cut open for God's sakes. You know? And so I, I think we have to look at this from a different perspective.

And I would say that we could be paid for mothering. Mothering would be valued as important work. We don't have to deal with the off-ramps and on-

ramps of our careers when we choose to mother. There's so much that could be included in that. Obviously, on a very nitty gritty level, [00:21:00] affordable childcare, paid leave, affordable childcare, co-located childcare.

Do you know what other countries. People think about childcare as a design issue. I mean, just what we can see, and it's not like we don't have these models in pretty much every other industrialized nation it's happening. Mm-hmm. You know? Mm-hmm. But we are woefully behind and we have to take that as a statement as to where we truly are around supporting mothering as important work so much to be done.

Yeah. Mm-hmm. And the last thing I would say about my vision would include postpartum support in every other country. Mm-hmm. As a standard practice of care. If you deliver a baby, someone's showing up at your house soon, a few days after a midwife, a nurse, somebody mm-hmm. In this country that is not a standard practice of care like you may be in a program, maybe your, your payer may, but it's not a standard practice of care.

And this is where so many new moms and birthing folks are falling in the gap. Of [00:22:00] postpartum. Right. That's where breastfeeding can be so critical and tenuous day by day, that's where postpartum depression can really take off. Mm-hmm. That's where a lot of people are dying. In those days after release from the hospital when they're having symptoms, complications from that C-section that aren't being heard.

Right. And so this is a huge issue that shows that mothering is not valued. I will also say, I know I said that was my last thing, but this is my last thing, that we have a commercialized version of motherhood in this country. So there's a lot of focus on the things that they can sell you around motherhood.

Mm-hmm. The strollers, the things, the lifestyle, the leggings, clothes. Mm-hmm. But very little focus on the care, and that's mm-hmm. A deep. Problem for mothering to be valued, care has to be valued, and not just the commercialized aspects, not the things that we can be told and sold and mothers are [00:23:00] targeted to as potential purchasers and consumers, but cared for.

Mm, not so much.

[00:23:06] **Kaitlin:** Right. As you were talking, I was thinking also about, given the examples that we have outside of the United States, What it is specific to our systems that have caused that. And also then what, again, I hate to say fix because I don't think it is a fix. I think it's an entirely new system.

So how do you dismantle what's here and build something entirely different? Because I feel like the hodgepodge approach I, I don't know if that's enough. Right. It feels kind of frankensteiny to me. When you look at the system that we have and how incredibly

[00:23:44] **Kimberly:** broken it is, I feel like on a very, very, very macro, high level, how many feet up level.

America is rooted in these ideas of rugged individualism, and you have to make it on your own and pull yourself up your bootstraps. [00:24:00] It's a fallacy because our country is built on privilege and oppressing others, but that is a mystical myth, and so, mm-hmm. It's up to you to pull yourself up from everything, including.

Having a kid, that's your responsibility and mm-hmm Know the government's not gonna help fund your retirement in any meaningful way. And actually now employers aren't going to do it. You've got to meet us halfway. And it's like, this is nuts. Mm-hmm. And I think other countries have actually a more humane.

Approach. Quite frankly. Side note, I've just been loving the recent protests in France. Mm-hmm. I mean France mm-hmm. Is saying that they're going to raise the retirement age from 62 to 64 and the whole country is like, oh no. I'm like, just love it. I'm actually jealous. Cause I'm like, you guys know how good you have it.

Yeah. But to see that type of. Visceral countrywide response. The pilots were striking. This is a different mindset. It's [00:25:00] a completely different culture than what we have here and. I don't know if it's fixable, right? Because we're talking about a major cultural shift that's deeply embedded on and who America thinks it is and wants to be, even though we know it's a fallacy, it's, it's a false notion.

And I think that it maintains privilege, right? So if we, if we don't help anybody and only the privilege are making it through birth only, the privilege of making it through breastfeeding, it maintains a status quo. Like, I'm better than you because I did get to breastfeed and I did have this fabulous birth, and I did.

Mm-hmm. Like that is also part of America, the need to keep. People in groups and to have gaps like that is how America was built. And so I think breastfeeding has become, and chest feeding has become a class-based privilege for most people, right? Mm-hmm. It is [00:26:00] something I know that I was allowed to do it for as long as I did because I.

I mean, my job did not give me 12 months off, but they held my job for up to a year. And then as a writer, I freelanced the hell out of the other re after my paid leave ran out so I could continue to stay home. So I was working differently and that was a privilege, right? But for those hourly workers, those who work in retail, God bless our teachers and our nurses, like a number of female dominated industries.

What for them, you know what I'm saying? Mm-hmm. And so, mm-hmm. It's become a privilege to have a respectable birth experience, which can often mean at a childbirth center that is not covered by insurance doulas. Mm-hmm. Now, maybe they're gonna be covered by Medicaid, but not enough. And there's a lot of people who aren't Medicaid eligible but can't afford a doula.

It's like, come on now. So there's still so many gaps, so many gaps. Yeah.

[00:26:59] **Kaitlin:** Although at the same [00:27:00] time, I do feel as you're talking, I'm hopeful in that every little piece you just addressed, I know of individuals and organizations that are doing work and really valuable work in each of those places to address those challenges.

There is a lot of work there, but I think as you say, The massive cultural shift of mentality of value is really onerous. It's something that I personally struggle with a lot, and again, I'm coming from it obviously with insane amounts of privilege in so many different levels, but that's also what's motivating me because I see my motherhood journey and I say, this should be standard, this should be basic.

This is not privilege. This should not be the privileged path. It should just be that you. Inherit this structure of support and empowerment and access and information that's just readily available to support you, prepare you. Right.

[00:27:56] **Kimberly:** And I would say, I think that as a [00:28:00] group of women fems parents, we need our our France moment, right?

Like we have to harness our power. And I think what has gotten in the way of that, and this is what I'm hopeful about, Is that there's been, in my opinion, a concerted effort to divide mothers and figure out how to keep us soccer moms, dance moms. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Formula moms, breastfeeding moms. No, like these for me are quote unquote wars that are manufactured by marketing interests, and we've unfortunately played into that.

But what I see right now, to your point about all the organizations also, People say, no, we're all in this together on some very basic level around some very basic needs, paid leave benefits everybody. And so for us to galvanize and to use our power and to have our own France moments, and quite frankly all of Europe around women harnessing their power because I think that is the only thing that's going to do it.

How we vote, who we're voting for, more mothers in office, which is [00:29:00] happening, you know? Mm-hmm. So I think there is movement and the more that we, as the folks who are impacted by the issue, who represent a majority of the population, don't, we are active and vocal and willing to say, no, no, no, no, no. We will not be ignored anymore then than we're gonna have to force to change.

Right? Whenever things are in place, it's because they're working for somebody and if we want it to be working for us, Then we're gonna have to agitate and activate and strategize to make that change happen.

[00:29:41] **Kaitlin:** Do you think here, I'm gonna play a little bit of devil's advocate though, because I see this playing out on an everyday level, but I see it also mentioned a lot in different media formats. Are American women, especially white American women, willing to put themselves on the line in the way that needs to happen?

Like what does that look [00:30:00] like? What does it look like to really show up for all of these issues?

[00:30:05] **Kimberly:** Yeah, that's a great question. You know, I think, let's be honest, through the previous administration, we've seen that white women, at least in terms of their political power and voting interests, Will vote in favor of the male patriarchy, the white male patriarchy.

And so that is disappointing. I think that we're gonna have to work on the commonality of parenting to find that thread. Mm-hmm. And then we have a younger generation of moms that are coming through that I don't think subscribe to that way of thinking. Mm-hmm. And so I'm excited about young people and I'm excited about them becoming parents.

And I'm excited about watching them do parenting on TikTok. I find it so entertaining and challenging, and it was just saying the ways that they talk about their bodies and what's happening on Instagram. I've seen more vaginas on Instagram. I've seen more births, just crowning babies on Instagram lately.

I'm just, [00:31:00] I'm here for it. Or like something's happening. Something's happening. Mm-hmm. And I think the younger generation and more people coming into motherhood who have a different set of values will also be a part of that. And some of these folks mm-hmm. Who continue to vote against the interests of women and in the interests of men are going to have to be outnumbered by new parents and new mothers.

Mm-hmm. And new women who are voting otherwise and are saying, we are going to make those folks the minority of women, not the majority of us. That's my hope.

[00:31:32] **Kaitlin:** Even I see it in my own seven year old daughter. For example, recently my father was visiting and he was tickling her, and that was something that like generationally, parents would tickle kids, but she's like goong.

In my family, I don't like tickling and my family knows that, and so you can't tickle me. I don't think I ever had that as a child. That ability to tell an elder like. Then my body take your hands off of it. I don't like that kind of touch, you know? And it was just [00:32:00] to your point of how does that build, how does that person that's given that space, that has that autonomy and that will.

What does that mean down the road? But I think if we can raise more, especially young women and also men, to see that and to support, I mean, we need white men in this too. Absolutely. Right?

[00:32:18] **Kimberly:** Absolutely. We definitely need the male allies of all sorts, but white men with privilege, right, who have been maintaining and dominating that privilege, have a responsibility to their own mothers and to their daughters to use their privilege and service, right?

And so I hope that, More folks are getting that message. And I also am seeing, to your point of your daughter, more daughters mm-hmm. Asking that of their fathers, right? Mm-hmm. And so your daughter mm-hmm. Will have great expectations for the men in their lives mm-hmm. Around what they're expected to do, what she will be vocally asking them to do, where they will be dropping her off and driving her to.

And so I think the change comes two ways because even the younger generation is [00:33:00] affecting the generation in front of it. Right? Right. Through their actions, through their activity. And so it has potential for a two gen effect and

acknowledging that we are in a generational work. The work that I do for me, it's for my children and my children's children, and I know that, right?

Mm-hmm. And. When I remember that and I hear these stories like your own daughter and see mine, I'm like, mm-hmm. We may get there. Mm-hmm. Or somebody, something's gonna get burned down cuz these young people are not playing. Mm-hmm. Yeah.

[00:33:33] **Kaitlin:** Yeah. Our France moment will have to be our kids, I guess, baby.

[00:33:37] **Kimberly:** That's right.

[00:33:45] **Kaitlin:** I wanted to pause here a moment because the conversation with Kimberly got me thinking about what are the small everyday things we're doing as mothers, as caregivers, as creatives to foster, not just shifts. But radical ways of rethinking care, work, and even [00:34:00] creative work, I think of Jaina Bar's, legitimization of Motherhood as worthy of Academic Investigation, which is similar to that of Julie Phillips biographies that we spoke about in episode one.

We'd love to hear from listeners about what keeps you up at night. But also what's giving you hope, because I think we all need that right now. Drop us a line via email or Instagram and if you're feeling up for it, record audio of what moments, what care work or creative work you're doing on a daily basis that makes you feel hopeful.

And we can share that with other listeners on a forthcoming episode.

We focus a lot on the postpartum experience about the transition to parenting. And creative practice and how we balance our roles and our our responsibilities, but also, We talk a lot about, and you talk about this in your books as well, about productivity, and you have this really wonderful moment where you talk about productive and reproductive, and it was the [00:35:00] first time I actually ever was like, oh, right, the root of reproductive is productive, and yet we've completely.

Obliterated any value around that productivity that we do when we are reproducing human species. I'm curious your thoughts on productivity and how we reframe that in the work that we do. I think you've been talking about this in terms of value, but what would you say to someone who's become a parent and

they also are trying to balance a creative practice where it feels like there isn't much value to that in the world either?

[00:35:33] **Kimberly:** Yeah, I think the important thing to remember is that we are being valued and judged on our productive work, as in the things that we can clock time for, we get paid for, but not for our reproductive work, which includes mothering and nursing and all those things, which nobody's willing to pay us for. And what happens is we fall into that thinking, right.

So after you have a baby, you've literally produced a human because you're not at work. It's like you just had a baby. You are producing a [00:36:00] human. You are producing food with your body. You are caring for a baby no matter how you feed that baby like you are mothering. That is a job. But too many folks get caught up in, I'm not doing anything because they're only used to valuing themselves based on their productive work, based on the work that we were told is how we are valued.

Mm-hmm. Versus us setting that value for ourselves. And so one of the things that I think is an important reset in that time, whether it's about making time for your creative practice is that mothering is important work. Like write it down, put it on a sticky note, saying it like, this is the most important job you could have at this time.

It really is, and it's unfortunate that our country and our society does not allow us to live out that work and its fullest, meaning to do it in the way that could be wholesome. To ourselves and to our babies, but it is important work. So don't let society's interpretation or valuation on that work [00:37:00] be your valuation on that work.

I think we have to create that value for ourselves, and so that is really, really important if you're in that postpartum period. Those creative practices may be things that help you maintain those hormonal imbalance of postpartum, those things that help you feel like yourself. Again, when you are transitioning into motherhood, even if it's not your first child, there's still another transition because you're doing motherhood differently.

And mothering one is not like mothering two, and then it just gets more crazy from there. And so allowing space for those transitions, finding time for yourself. And I think the creative practice is so important because on the other side of that, motherhood is also synonymous with martyrdom, right? You're supposed to give everything, mm-hmm.

To your child, everything. And sometimes it does feel that way that they are literally sucking you dry if you are nursing. Mm-hmm. Sometimes you can feel that way that they are literally sucking you dry. Like literally, if you are nursing. And having something, something that you keep for yourself [00:38:00] 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 may be only do it for three minutes. 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. Mm-hmm. But the consistency is everything. 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.

[00:38:42] **Kaitlin:** One thing I've been doing in our home with language is talking about working in the home and working out of the home.

In some ways the pandemic has done this, but it's not just working from home, but working in the home. Mm-hmm. And I've noticed now that my husband will also say, oh yeah, I think right now she's working in the [00:39:00] home. Instead of saying, okay, she's a stay-at-home mom, or she's just a mom, which I feel like is also the language that we've inherited.

Yeah, generationally and giving that value. I think then that simple linguistic shift can help to start to reframe the way in which we think and support those roles. Yes, but what you were saying also had me thinking about, as you said, motherhood and martyrdom of this idea of mother as this one-dimensional.

Carry all term that like you are mother, you are nothing else. And whereas if we see motherhood as multi-dimensional, as diverse as any human experience is that that then also allows us to be creative and mother, we are not writer now mother, that like we are holding all of those things simultaneously.

Absolutely. I assume when you're out speaking, when you're out doing all this work, You are always still a mother. You're not just the professional person in that moment. Right. You are holding all of that at once and I'm holding all

[00:39:59] **Kimberly:** of that and I [00:40:00] consider my books, my book babies, and I talk about birthing things and I birthed Earth, right?

And so I think we are constantly mothering in different ways and I think that when we are creating, whether that's creating life in our wounds, in our bellies, mm-hmm. Or creating things, That we gotta lean into that, right? And so, particularly after you have literally created something that you can lean into that creative space because it is literally what just happened.

So what better time to make sure that that creativity finds another home and has a home of some sort within you or within your life? I think that's really, really important.

[00:40:39] **Kaitlin:** I'm curious to hear from you now that you are where you are and your children are where they are, what are your biggest takeaways, and not even on the political standpoint, from the personal standpoint, what drives and motivates you because you seem like I.

You have endless and infinite passion and energy, and I You must sleep and you must, you must

[00:40:59] **Kimberly:** [00:41:00] recharge. Well, like I said, I'm motivated by my children and my children's children. Like that vision of them having an experience is what keeps me motivated. I'm a creative person. I take joy in creating products and things, whether it's Earth, whether it's the podcast.

We've just launched a learning tool for doctors and nurses based on the analysis of our podcast transcripts. What could doctors and nurses learn from black birthing joy? I'm so excited about that. Like I love creating things. I love seeing ideas in my head. Take life and take shape and grow. So that motivates me and it brings me a lot of joy.

It's my passion and I feel incredibly blessed to be of service to, for me, the most incredible journey of my life, which is motherhood and to my community of black women and other people of color from which I come from, and which I owe everything about who I am and how I show up in the world. And so to be of [00:42:00] service to motherhood and my community, I'm like, What else could I ask for?

Really, it's like a dream life and to feel like I still have creative things that I wanna put out in the world. I have a notebook of lots of other ideas that have yet to come to fruition. So it's, it's a very dangerous place in my head. I'm here for

all of those creative folks, all the folks who have to have a notebook at night to write things down so they can sleep.

That is me. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. So shout out to my fellow notebook, night sleepers. Those are my people. That is my place and that is what motivates me.

[00:42:35] **Kaitlin:** Well, thank you. Going to the start of this conversation when you were talking about individualism in the United States, and I think that when we actually sit within generations, when we really sit within what we've inherited and really understand the span of existence, not as this tight little individual birth to death moment, but how we are within that flow holistically.

[00:43:00] I think that's. Sadly revolutionary in that I think it's how humans have always existed, but we've really lost connection to in this country, and I can see in you. How you're able to live that out in a way that's really positive. So thank you.

[00:43:15] **Kimberly:** Yeah, thank you. It's been a great joy for me as a mother to know that my children watch me build a life around my passion.

Mm-hmm. I think one of my greatest things I will be proud of when I get to the other side and my legacy with my children is that they saw me live a life around my passion. I hope that is one of the lessons that they take away. That is possible. A lot of no sleep and a lot of tears, but that for me, Is a great joy and my children have been with me since they have been little.

I always say my son learned how to count, counting, change in my book events. That was his job. So this has been their life and I am really proud of that.

[00:43:56] **Kaitlin:** Oh, I'm so, so honored to spend this time today and I'm
[00:44:00] excited for what's to come for you, for Earth, for all of the other not little, I'm sure, ideas and germinations in your notebooks at night.

So we will include all of that in our show notes. We'll have access to everything that you are working on. And so thank you so much for sitting with us today, and hopefully we can actually meet in person sometime soon too.

[00:44:21] **Kimberly:** I would love that. Thank you for having me.

[00:44:32] **Kaitlin:** I suspect that this conversation has you hungry to learn more about Kimberly Seal's all's work. To find out more about Earth and the Earth app, go to birthwithoutbias.com. You can also find out about the

Birthright podcast. At birthrightpodcast.com and for following Kimberly herself, you can learn more about her work @[kimberlysealsallers.com](https://www.instagram.com/kimberlysealsallers) and that's Kimberly k i m b e [00:45:00] r l y s e a l s a l l e r s . c o m .

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