

Ep #260: Taking Autism and Running with It with Angela Lauria



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Jill Angie

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Welcome to *The Not Your Average Runner Podcast*. If you've never felt athletic but you still dream about becoming a runner, you're in the right place. I'm Jill Angie, your fat running coach. I help fat women over 40 to start running, feel confident, and change their lives. I have worked with thousands of women to help them achieve their running goals and now I want to help you.

Jill: Hey, runners, so I am here this week with an extremely special guest. She is the woman who helped me write three books, they would not have existed without her. So if you've loved my books, you're going to love today's session with Angela Lauria. She's a book coach, she is the CEO of The Author Incubator, and she is a really good friend of mine, too.

And Angela and I, for years have talked about our weight loss journeys. She identifies as fat, so we've got tons in common there. She's a triathlete, she's a fat triathlete. But most recently she's been talking a lot about her autism diagnosis and how it has impacted her life, how it impacts her in an athletic sense. And she's got a lot of really good stuff to share with you today. So I think you're really going to love today's episode. And I think it's going to be super helpful for you.

So, Angela, thank you so much for joining me today.

Angela: Hey, any day I get to talk to you is a good day. This is going to be fun.

Jill: I know. So let's kind of dive right into your story. I guess like back it up because I think when I met you, you had already received an autism diagnosis, but I did not know that about you. You weren't super vocal about it. But you had some struggles before then. And so I'd love for you to just kind of like share a little bit of your story and how things evolved for you.

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Angela: Yeah, so I always thought I was on the wrong planet. So I have the whole black sheep, misfit, never knew quite where I fit in. Didn't really, I don't know, I did have a job before I was 40 but I didn't really have a job. I worked on books, but it was always these random, I would like randomly meet people on the metro. Like no matter what I did I always had work helping people write books.

But I was waiting to grow up. It felt to me like I was pet sitting or something, like anybody could do it. And I got my first job writing a book when I was 20. And so I was, I mean you would also get a pet sitting job at 20. So it just always felt like at some point I've got to grow up.

So I did a PhD in philosophy and I got a job as a philosophy professor, and I was terrible. Really, I was not good at this job. I know this because rate my professor had just gone on the internet and they were not, it was not good reviews. And I got fired a lot, like usually about every 18 months to two years I would get fired from whatever job. So books were perfect because the book was done before they'd want to fire me.

Whenever I had any other jobs I would always get fired. So I knew something was wrong with me. And there were all these platitudes that were like, "You're perfect just how you are." And I would hear that, or "You're enough." And I would hear them and I would think that this doesn't apply to me. Like that is cue, but I know that I'm actually fucked up. But like that's cute for other people. I hope that makes them feel good.

And then I read this book and it was about Asperger's, which at the time autism level one, which is my diagnosis, was at that point called Asperger's. And I was like, oh my god, this is me. So I took a quiz that he recommended in the book and I scored off the charts. It was like out of 100

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and I had like, I don't know, I think it was an 86. And it was like if you have more than 60% you're likely Asperger's, go see your doctor.

And then I had my best friend, Mila, who you know, I had her take it because I'm like anyone would get an 86 or better on this, like come on, you take it. And she got a 5%. So I was like, oh, I think this might mean something.

And I had recently gotten fired and was thinking of, I never ended up suing, but I was thinking of suing. So I ended up getting a professional diagnosis for like Americans with Disabilities Act discrimination based on my autism, because one of the things, as you will hear in today's episode, I swear a lot, which is actually an autism symptom.

Jill: Oh really?

Angela: And I got fired for swearing. And so yeah, your like, maybe I'm autistic, right?

Jill: I know, I'm just like, uh-oh.

Angela: But it has to do with just executive functioning and impulse control. Which my impulse control is terrible, and I can control it, but it's like so much work it lowers my IQ by like 20 points. I'm like exhausted when I do that.

Jill: Which kind of just brings you down to the IQ level of like a normal above average intelligent person.

Angela: But it's like no fun, it takes up like all my resources. And it's like I could also probably be a size 10 or something, but it would take up all of

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my resources, I would have no joy in life. And I don't know, it just doesn't feel worth it.

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: So when I got that diagnosis it was really for legal reasons. I was about 39, 38 or 39. September, so I was 38 and a half. I wasn't trying to change my life with it, I was trying to sue this company, which I never sued and it was perfectly fine. And I did have a little Asperger's pride, like there was a little something there. I never felt bad about the diagnosis, but it didn't feel like something I was ready to talk about.

It was a little bit confusing, because there are some limitations that come with it that I didn't want to be seen as having those limitations. And also, one of the challenges at the time, I was very into the law of attraction. And one of the challenges with that is you're never supposed to think of anything even remotely negative because thoughts create things. And so I don't think I let myself go there because it felt like well that's a reason to not have, do, or be whatever it is I want. So it's like, let me not look at that.

So I didn't know exactly what to do with it but it definitely explained some things. And then in the last few years I've started talking about it more, really because there's been such a move from autistic people, first of all, to change the name of Asperger's, which is a really ableist term. And I'd love to share a little bit why. But also to see this as just like, also I have brown eyes which are pretty, I have a really cute little nose, like whatever. It's just part of who I am and it's not either a limitation or a positive, it just is.

And so that created a safer space for me to talk more about it. And that is a movement in strengths-based autism research and therapy. So a lot of the old therapy when I first got diagnosed was like, how can you be more like

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everybody else? Here's a weird thing you do, here's some tools to stop doing it. Here's a fidget, like CBT, cognitive behavioral therapy tools, here's a tool to make that thing about you go away.

Jill: Kind of like the diet industry.

Angela: Yeah, it's actually very similar. It's why I stopped identifying as somebody who's trying to lose weight. And I'm like I'm just fat, it's fine. There are all different body types, this one's mine. It's just my body type, it doesn't mean all these things.

And that's the same thing with autism. It's like it doesn't mean I'm going to be in the corner, banging my head against the wall, necessarily. I'm just me. But now knowing I have this specific neurology, or knowing I have this body type, or knowing I have whatever, what do I want to do with it? So it's a much more empowering approach.

Jill: I love that strengths-based research.

Angela: Yeah, strengths-based research and then there's also strengths-based therapy. So instead of looking at what's wrong with you and how do we fix you? We just look at who are you and how do we solve the problems that are coming up by focusing on what works and not what's broken about you?

Jill: Yeah, okay.

Angela: So I'm excited to share some of the new research that's come out when you look at it not through a medicalized lens, but just through like, oh, it's a tulip, not a daffodil.

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Jill: Yeah, well, it's like when you recognize that you're an extrovert and not an introvert. Like okay, if you're an introvert, you're not going to go and like fill your whole life with parties.

Angela: Or feel bad if you don't have fun at parties.

Jill: Or feel bad. Right, exactly. So yeah, it's like it's just another way of being a human. So I want to call back to something you said a few minutes ago, which was the word Asperger's or the name Asperger's and the fact that it's kind of an ableist label.

Can we talk more about that and then maybe just talk about language in general because autism falls under the umbrella of neurodivergent, neurodiverse and I'd kind of love to get your explanation of what all that means. Especially for folks who are maybe hearing these words for the first time.

Angela: Sure, absolutely. So first of all, let's talk about Asperger's because I really love that word. And I really loved the shortened word, which was Aspie. And I was in lots of Aspie groups and I identified as Aspie. And a lot of people are still holding on to that word, but I just want to explain really quickly how that came up.

There was a doctor, controversial doctor, I happen to be a fan. But a doctor in Germany during World War II under the Nazi regime and he was studying autism, which at that time they thought was a form of epilepsy. So had that a little bit wrong, but he's studying it. And he splits the kids he's studying into two groups. And he sends one group that were nonverbal, maybe they didn't have bathroom skills, they were hard to reach, and he sends that group of kids off with another doctor.

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And then there are these super high functioning kids that still have this epilepsy. And he's trying to figure out what makes them different. And these kids are known as Asperger's kids. Like who are those kids? Oh, no, he's with Asperger's. Oh, no, she's in Asperger's group. Is she up on the third floor? No, she's with Asperger's. Not she has Asperger's, but she is in the Asperger cohort because he is studying these essentially high functioning autistics.

So what happens is they decide they were going to kill everybody that is not perfectly healthy. And Dr. Aspergers makes this argument, which is a pretty fucking ableist argument and why people hate him. And he's like, keep my kids because they might cure cancer someday. They're super smart, they have these crazy abilities. I know they're really weird and no one likes them, but keep my kids, kill the other ones.

Now, that wasn't his main goal, he tried to save everyone. But when he saw it wasn't working he was like, well, let me see if I can save some of them. So I know he's no Schindler, I don't have a Schindler's List story to tell you, but what a lot of people, a lot of people hate Asperger and think he was a Nazi. I do not think he was a Nazi, I think he was a doctor who couldn't give a shit about politics, was trying to save his research. And what he did is he created classes of people with autism.

So the good ones get to live, I would have been in that group, thanks. Probably would have been killed for something else. Hello being queer, or Catholic, I don't know, pick one. Feminist, there's got to be some reason to kill me but it's not my autism. So since I'm not not using language in the same way, since I'm functioning at a higher level, I'm putting that in quotes for people just listening to the audio, we were put into this other group that lived.

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So very controversial and now people have decided we should not be Hans Asperger fans. I think life is more complicated than that, I'm not totally ready to cancel him. But I don't think it's the right name because it separates people with autism. We just all have autism. It would be like there's the good breast cancer group and the bad breast cancer group. Like we just all have breast cancer. I don't think we need to like divide and conquer. Like it just sucks we have breast cancer.

So yeah, so that's the first thing to know. So what happened is the DSM, which is what the psychologists in the US, I don't know if they use it in other countries, but it's the diagnostic manual for therapists. They need codes to submit insurance claims, and the code for Asperger's was changed to fit under the autism term.

So whatever it was, I don't know what number it was, but if it was 529, 529 is now called Autism instead of Asperger's because a whole bunch of people lobbied to basically cancel the term Asperger's, which is probably right. And now there's just one diagnosis for autism.

So a lot of people then felt like you should say people living with autism. And there was a lot from a very ableist and unpleasant group called Autism Speaks, where they're like, "We're fighting to cure autism." We're all like, no thanks, we're good, fuck off. We don't need to be cured like we're fighting to cure you of your brown eyes. Like I'm good. thanks for your helpful input there.

So we sort of, as autistics, claimed that word. We're like, you can't have it. But you've probably heard the phrase, nothing about us without us. We're like, no if you're going to talk about people with autism, why don't you ask us what we want? We're happy to share, thanks for your interest. We would like to just be called autistic, like we're fine. We don't need to be like

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someone living with, coping with the perils of autism. We're just like, I'm just an autistic person. That's it. That's all it is.

And all of us are autistic, like in this group, whether it's the old Asperger's diagnosis or not. So it is called people first language, so I'm an autistic person, I am autistic. I'm not a person with autism. A lot of people that are not autistic want to label us the other way, she's a person like with autism. So she's a person trying to lose weight. It's just like, she's going to fix it soon. It's going to be okay.

Jill: We're just so we're focused on trying to like help people come back to the norm, like whatever. And it seems like the whole world is like, no, there's this tiny little box that is what a human is supposed to be like. So let's just shepherd everybody over to be the same way, no matter what it is.

Angela: Yeah, and if we're not that way yet we'll just assume you will get there.

Jill: And we'll assume that you want to get there because why wouldn't you?

Angela: So autism has, especially in the last few years with all the strengths-based research that's being done like had a lot of breakthroughs. And there's much more involvement from people with autism actually speaking up for what we want, actually doing the research ourselves, being much more involved in speech pathology and different kinds of therapies.

There's a big movement against that more behavioralist, here's how we're going to fix you approach, which is cool. And at the same time, there are similar movements happening for people with Tourette's, with dyspraxia, with ADHD and other types of neurodivergence. We're learning more about

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brains and people are different. So there are many things that fall under a neurodivergent classification.

So neurotypical is most people, we think it's about 95% of people. I actually think it's more like 80%, but it's because we're massively under diagnosed. But some huge percentage of people have brains that work a certain way and then there's different wiring for people who are neurodivergent. Tourette's, ADHD, and autism are the three biggest categories. There's lots of crossovers and then lots of differences as well within that neurodivergent.

So I am autistic and I am also neurodivergent. All autistics are neurodivergent, but not all neurodivergent people are autistic.

Jill: Okay, that was an amazing explanation and history lesson. And I truly appreciate it because as somebody who is fairly neurotypical, some days I wonder. But for the most part I think I'm fairly neurotypical, it's like that kind of stuff doesn't really enter my world, right? And so it's really helpful to have somebody just sit down and be like, no, this is it.

Because to me, I can relate so much to that from the lens of being fat and just like, okay, there is a range of human bodies, and some of them are bigger than others. But this whole person with obesity, right, like it's the same kind of thing, trying to label the condition and assuming that the person is trying to change it without saying like, hey, what's actually amazing about this person's current body circumstances?

And like it's just one more fucking way to be a human. It doesn't need to be fixed. So I really, really appreciate that extremely well thought out explanation.

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Can we talk about how, oh, there's so many questions I have right now because I kind of want to talk about, and we've touched on it, but a little bit like how your life changed after your diagnosis. And you started to touch on that but I also kind of want to bring in the running and the fitness piece as well.

So let's just go there first because you have a lot of, not just things to say, but also really powerful suggestions to help people when it comes to being autistic or I don't know if this applies to ADHD or to Tourette's as well, but being autistic for sure and exercise and group exercise and like all of those things. So why don't we dive in there? I'm just going to let you kind of like lead this discussion.

Angela: So I want to talk about the problem with weight is that everyone is like, you look fat. I'm going to assume you have certain medical conditions and then you're going to lose weight and those will fix the medical conditions. This is my assumption on your behalf.

For me, what happened with autism was sort of the reverse because there wasn't that kind of outside pressure of what you look like. No one can see your autism. Well, sometimes they can see mine, but in theory no one can see your autism.

So what happened was I kept blowing up relationships. I was a relationship blower upper. At work, romantic relationship, friendships, I blew up relationships. And communication is a major challenge with autism. So I started trying to fix that with the communications issues. Those are the first things I worked on after my diagnosis.

And I would think this would be true for a lot of people, which is like you're going to focus on the part of your diagnosis that's causing problems. Like if

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you actually did have high cholesterol, you should probably focus, don't worry about losing weight, let's focus on getting your cholesterol down. Or if you have a heart condition, let's do things that monitor your heart and try and improve that, like running, for instance, or weight training. It doesn't matter if you lose weight or not, we can track those things.

So for me it was about fixing my relationships, or my ability to relate to others. There wasn't a specific relationship, it was just all of them. So that's where I started and where that showed up the most, you said a word that brings up the things, was group exercise. For me this is where my diagnosis hit me the most.

So I would sign up, I'm going to date myself, but I would sign up for Jazzercise classes. I love Jazzercise, I'm not going to lie. I'm not going to lie, I was a fan. I loved the music. I loved the community. But actually being in a group for me brought up so much social anxiety because I would screw up relationships so much.

Because what happens as an autistic person is we're transmitting a message and it's just not being picked up in the way that we're expecting it to. So we get confused all the time. We tend to be very literal, I think of it as we're right and you all are weird, but okay.

But there's a lot of, this is the only way my autistic brain can say this. So forgive me because I know it's wrong, but it feels like you all lie all the time and it's very confusing. It's like you will say something like nice shirt, which does not mean nice shirt. It means I'm looking for something to say. Or you will say how are you? Which does not mean how are you? It means hello, I'm not sure why you didn't just stop at hello.

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And so, like I said, autistics are known for being very literal. I think of it as right but it's like there's a lot of small talk and niceties, and we tend to just like run on in and give you the answer. Like for instance, if the music was fucking up in a Jazzercise class I would stop the class and be like, "Hey, shouldn't we just stop the class so you can fix the music because it's not fun for anyone here."

And then I think what happens to a neurotypical person is they get embarrassed or something, which I'm not sure why because it's not like they're a bad person. But you're not supposed to stop a class, or maybe people were having fun with the bad music, I'm not sure what's happening, but people are like, "She's such a fucking weirdo." And I'm like, "Wait, you think I'm weird? That music was annoying you too. I know that music was annoying you."

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: And so knowing I had all these bad group experiences over and over again for like 40 fucking years, then I have all this social anxiety about being in groups. So I would want to go to Jazzercise, but then I would have this anxiety. And I don't know if you know what to do with anxiety, but I have found that eating a brownie is a fantastic solution.

Jill: It is an excellent solution.

Angela: Yes. So then I would eat a brownie and feel better but I wouldn't feel like going to the gym and then I would beat myself up and wish I had gone, but then the anxiety and then the brownies, and then this cycle.

So once I started to piece apart like, oh, that's why. The way I described this when I was first diagnosed was like, that's why I'm not getting flowers.

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Because I would always like blow something up. Like, why are we all listening to music that's broke? These songs don't make any sense, that record is player skipping, whatever it is. Like the sound is shitty, why are we just all pretending and exercising? Then I blow something up and then people wouldn't like me.

But the whole time I was like, where are my flowers? Who's going to thank me? I'm going to get a new best friend. Someone's going to tell me I'm awesome. And then no one would tell me I was awesome and I was like, what the fuck just happened? Everybody else hated the music too, right?

Jill: Yeah, I could see how that would be extremely confusing.

Angela: So confusing. So once I knew what was happening, once I had my diagnosis, then I made a very different decision. It's probably the same decision I'd make today, but I hired a one on one trainer. I'm like, oh, I'm not a group class person.

Because with a one on one trainer it's much easier to say, hey, can we change the music? And it's less weird. And I can disclose my autism to a trainer. And I'm probably not going to start a class by saying, "Hey, everyone, I have Asperger's."

Jill: Yeah

Angela: So that was one of the first things that happened for me, and that was super helpful. And then the next thing that happened is I discovered thought work, or maybe this was around the same time, similar timing. And I was able to, in some ways, get the results I wanted by changing my thoughts.

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In other ways I think I gaslit myself because I would come up with a thought that I wanted, even if it was something that was triggering me or not working. But I could work through it because I knew how to kind of manipulate myself in a way to get the results I wanted to.

I want to give you an example, I didn't know this one and I learned it much later, much more recently, in the last two or three years. But this is how I was actually gaslighting myself with thought work which had amazing benefits because I would not have done all the triathlons I've done without it. So pros and cons.

But here's what happened, my family always makes fun of me because if there's ever a loud noise I throw this weird tantrum, like the kids are very annoyed by it. One day when my daughter Sophia was little she fell out of bed, I think she was four years old. And I woke up to the sound of her falling out of bed and I was like, "Oh my God, is everything okay?" And it was fine, she just got back in bed.

Now the whole family makes fun of me. When I hear a loud noise it's like somebody just got shot in front of me. Like my nerves go crazy. It must sound louder to me, like I'm shaking. You know how they tell you if you plan a vacation, you get the same benefits as if you go on the vacation? For me a loud noise is like I get the same negative aspects as if somebody was like shot in front of me. It's like it's so fucking traumatic when somebody drops a knife.

Jill: Wow.

Angela: And I really wish it wasn't. Like this is not my favorite thing about autism. So when I would go to the gym and I would hear plates drop, that sound would freak my whole body out. Like I would need, what I'm doing

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now is like flapping, it's like a stimming response. Like I would need to stim, I couldn't breathe, it gives me tunnel vision. My vision looks like this. I can't see, my ears start ringing, my throat clamps on me.

And so I was like this is a dumb response to a loud noise. We should have another one, person. And so I used the tools of thought work and coaching to tell myself like when there are loud noises, ignore them. And it sort of worked in that I was sort of bypassing, I wasn't listening to my body. I was like that is not the accepted response so we're going to go forward with the workout. We're not going to throw a big tantrum and freak everyone out.

So I'd hear something drop, I would want to make a big deal. My family always says I like make a big deal. Want to make a big deal, and then I was like, no, because I have decided this and I will proceed accordingly. But really, my body was still freaking out and I was doing something that people with autism do called masking.

So thought work was actually a great, effective tool for teaching me to not be me. Like to temporarily have blue eyes. And that like, it's what creates autistic burnout. Like that zapped my soul of all of my energy.

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: But I would get through the workout, but then I didn't want to go work out again and I couldn't figure out why. And it was because working out for me meant masking. It was like, you're going to have to do a lot of masking. You're going to have to do a lot of here's who you are, you're going to have to pretend to be a daffodil even though you're a tulip. Don't let anyone in on it, look like a daffodil. And I'm like, but I'm a tulip, it's going to be hard to look like a Daffodil. Try really hard.

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And so like you can see how tiring it would be for a tulip to pretend to be a daffodil, like you are close, it is not easy.

Jill Yeah. I mean, you're like literally going against every instinct that your body has in reaction to a loud noise or other stimulus. And I feel like that must build up and build up at some point until it releases in a much bigger way.

Angela: Right. And you can see this in the way it releases with Tourette's. If you've ever looked at people with Tourette's, they describe it as like a sneeze. And just before you're going to sneeze, you know how you're like, "I'm going to sneeze, I'm going to sneeze."

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: So the what they do, what their neuro type does is they will express it in like a scream or whatever, some sort of movement, or noise, or tic. And I didn't have that particular outlet. Like one of the nice things about Tourette's, it's not a nice thing, but you have to get it out. For me, I was just like bashing myself in the face not to get it out. Which of course means you're going to be mean to the little, little lady at the grocery store later.

Jill: Yeah, yeah.

Angela: So, of course, that's not going to work. But I didn't really get that. And I was excited that I could get more workouts in and do more.

So thought work does work, but if you don't know your neurology, whatever that is, no matter what your neuro type is. If you don't know your own

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neurology it can be a dangerous tool. Like I found that I really tricked myself into acting in ways that were not authentic to who I really was.

Jill: Yeah. I mean, I think that's a really, really good point because the point of thought work is not to change who you are, but just to create a reality in which you get the results that you want. But I think a lot of times people use it against themselves because they think who I am is wrong and I need to change my behavior so that I can be more acceptable or whatever.

And yeah, I feel like that's actually not the point of thought work at all. But it's kind of handed to us that way in a lot of ways. So I'm sorry you had that experience.

Angela: Yeah, and I mean the exciting thing about self-awareness, any kind of self-awareness, which is really what this is about. Like I hope people who are listening learn something about autism and neurodiversity, but I think you become a better exerciser and a more self-loving exerciser the more you get to know yourself. And if you have a story this should be different, like I could have the story all day long I should not react to loud noises. It's not going to change my neurology.

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: It's really not. I can either stuff it down or not stuff it down, both of which will have consequences. And I've decided to live my life without stuffing that down anymore. But just knowing who you are, then you get to make different decisions.

Jill: Yeah, exactly.

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Angela: So yeah, I've definitely, through my diagnosis, found a way to just be much more gentle with myself.

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: So I talked about sounds, it's the same thing with lights. Like certain lights just bother me. And if I were touring a gym before, like if you've ever done the tours to sign up for a gym, I didn't know myself well enough to know what to look for. But now I'm like, oh, I'm listening for is there two different music, like can I hear the music from the class, from the group class and different music in the weight room? That will drive me nuts, that's not my gym.

Do they have lights that bother me? And the way bother me feels is it almost feels like my blood gets jumpy. Like everywhere feels like buzz, and I do I just want to like, and instead of trying to push that down, I actually amp it up on a tour.

I'm like, is the sound going to bother me? Is the lights going to bother me? Is the smell going to bother me? And I never want to go into the locker room because the locker room smells, like smells matter to me. I wish they didn't matter. I don't know, maybe I don't wish they didn't anymore. But like it just is what it is, it's irrelevant.

So I think knowing yourself, and same thing with your trainer. If you meet a trainer, I don't know, you're thinking about working with Jill and you're listening to this podcast and her voice annoys you, she's not your trainer. That's fine.

Jill: What? My dulcet tones, are you kidding me?

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Angela: I'm just saying. Somebody did just write to me and tell me, oh, no, they posted on one of my Facebook ads that I can't get over her voice. I'm like, "My voice? Why you got a problem with my voice?" Bye boo.

Jill: I do have people who have problems with the swearing and it is definitely not for them, right?

Angela: They just got to go.

Jill: Yeah, it is, right? But here's the question that I keep asking myself, how did you figure out what your triggers were? Like how did you pinpoint? Because you had mentioned something, maybe it was before we started recording, where you talked about the sensation of sweat, right?

And so you've got like a lot of very specific sensations or occurrences that trigger you. How did you figure out like, oh, it's the lights and not, I don't know, the sound of the treadmills running or something like that?

Angela: Yeah. So I have always, as long as I remember, I've had a thing about touching glasses with condensation. If there's any moisture on the outside of a glass, I cannot touch it. And I always walk around with like napkins, bar napkins, they're stuffed everywhere so I don't have to touch things. Which I guess I kind of thought was either normal or just my quirk. But I remember saying this to waiters when I was really young, like I've always asked for bar napkins. I don't know, I just thought it was me.

And then as I started looking at all this strengths-based autism research, and people with autism coming forward and describing it instead of people without autism, like the Autism Speaks people, the way they describe it versus people with autism. And there were other people talking about they didn't like to touch glasses.

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And I was like, “What? Where my people at?” I’m like, What is happening?” And they're like, “Ew, there is nothing more disgusting than touching a wet glass, everyone knows that.” And I'm like, this is the best news ever. So I think that's why this podcast is so important. And why I'll just rattle off some things as an exerciser, that if you're listening, like find your people, we're out there.

Sweat is really hard for me. And finding, I understand it's important to sweat, but I need a strategy. Which I think is how I came up with triathlons. Because it always included jumping in the pool. And I've always been a swimmer because it's a workout I can do where I don't sweat or if I'm sweating it's quickly compensated for.

So sweating, sound in gyms, lights in gyms, anything to do with group classes, that's been a big issue for me. Getting along with people, being misinterpreted, expectations around like eye contact, schedules. Schedules are a big thing. So I have very specific schedules and if I'm involved with like a trainer that's late or classes that are just not well run, it drives me crazy.

That is definitely part of autism. People like accusing me of being blunt or swearing too much, that's all part of autism. Any details that nobody else notices, that's all part of it. And then the other big thing, which is actually at the heart of what an autism diagnosis is, is something called monotropism. And this is one last concept I want to share that's really important to understand.

What separates an autistic brain from a non-autistic brain is one thing. This has come out of the recent research that's been done. And that one thing is called monotropism, which is our brain wants to go deep. For me that going

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deep has been in books, that's been my special interest. Like I just want to talk about books all day, every day to everyone all the time.

So if you think of this like a video game and you're really into it, it's a good video game that you love, I don't know, Frogger. Whatever your favorite video game is. You can see the last time I played a video game. When your mom calls you to dinner, it feels horrible to go. You're like, I just got to get through one more level. I just got to wait until my character dies. I don't want to go to dinner. Even if I'm hungry, it just feels terrible to stop doing this thing you're really enjoying right?

Autistic people have trouble doing everything other than our, what's called a special interest, I just think of it as our interest. But our monotropic interest right now, here is the thing I am fucking doing, do not move me off the path. And so we'll get cranky, we'll get more sensitive, like all of our symptoms come out when you take us out of the deep dive.

This is, of course, how Greta Thunberg is going to hopefully save the world from climate change. This is how so many autistic people, this is how Steve Jobs was so obsessed about making the iPhone and the Mac. He's just like, "I don't care if I have a baby, I'm making a computer. I'll call it the Lisa, fine. I'm going to focus on my computer."

So much amazing progress. It's how Bill Gates is solving malaria. Like it's how Elon Musk is, I don't know, taking us to Mars. We go so fucking deep and it is our gift, it is why Hans Asperger tried to save us. We will be the ones that cure cancer, we really will. But when you try and get us to do anything else, it's kind of a disaster. Even if we know it's good for us, like say eating, or peeing, or any like basic executive function.

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So if you know someone who is obsessed with exercise, this isn't to say everyone who's obsessed with exercise, but someone who's like really into it, that is autistic, it could be that their special interest is health and fitness. In fact, many autistic people, their special interest is health and fitness. Getting to the gym for them will be easy, they'll never have a hard day in their life.

But if you are autistic and your special interest is Star Trek, it's going to be a lot harder to go to the gym than a regular person. So most people's advice won't work for you. You're going to need additional support. You're going to need an outside person telling you, that's why a trainer will work great for you. A specific date and time is going to work better for you than like a recorded class that you could do anytime. Like, I don't know, Gaia TV or whatever, all the free classes.

Those classes aren't going to work for you. Don't sign up for Master Class, that's not going to work for you. You're going to need a date, a time, and a person because you will show up for that. It is easier to go down for dinner if you're having a guest over and your mom told you two weeks ago it's at 6pm on Thursday, because you're not going to start playing your video game at 5:55.

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: So you need a lot of advanced planning as an autistic person to exercise, because if it's not your special interest, it's never going to be fun in the same way. And that there's no meme that's going to make it better.

Jill: Oh, that's so interesting. So what are some of the common excuses that come up? Or maybe they don't, right? So you're autistic and you said I'm going to work out with my trainer at 8am on Monday. And at 7:45 do

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you have the thought, “I don't really feel like doing this” or is that not part of your ...

Angela: I think if you have a trainer and you know in advance, and a lot of autistic people respond well to visual calendars, you are much more likely to go. But if you just say to yourself, without a trainer, I'm going to wake up an hour early and I'm going to start running. When I wake up an hour early I'm going to listen to these recorded classes I got from Jill and I'm going to start running on my own.

Here's what's going to happen, you're going to wake up earlier and you're going to have different sensory inputs. The sun is going to be at a different place. There might be different sounds on your block. It might be colder. And all of those inputs are going to make you, not consciously, unless you've done enough work on this, but they're going to make you say it will be safer for me to stay in this bed.

And you will physically begin to not feel well. For me it feels a little like maybe a panic attack, but I just feel very like “Ah!” And then my brain immediately says, “What's going to make me feel better right now?” And so I just write for a few minutes, that's because it's my special interest. If your special interest is fish, you're going to be like, I just need to clean the fish tank first.

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: You're going to want to do something to calm down your nervous system. And then once your nervous system is calm, you're not going to be like, well, let me go throw myself into the fire.

Jill: Yeah.

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Angela: Right? So just saying to yourself, "I'm going to wake up an hour early and work out," for an autistic person is highly unlikely to work. But thinking about when are you most likely to be calm? Like maybe it's later in the evening, maybe it isn't earlier. When is your best time? What reward can you set up for yourself? Like an hour with the fish, no interruptions. What can you set up after that's exciting?

That was how I was using brownies to try and bribe myself. So because you are going to have more sensations, it is not going to be totally a positive experience. So if you actually want to do it, by the way, you could also just not do it, which is fine.

Jill: Yeah, of course.

Angela: But if you want to do it, you're going to need more supports. So what ABA would say, the type of therapy we don't like, ABA would say set your alarm at seven and you're going to go, and punish yourself if you don't go. And this is what neurotypical people do, so you should do it. Just lace up your shoes.

Jill: Yeah, it doesn't really work very well for neurotypical people either, just saying.

Angela: Yeah, exactly. That's why I say like this really isn't about autism. It's about just knowing yourself and what works for you. And if you start to catalog, oh, sounds bother me. Lights bother me. I do have social anxiety. I have gotten weird reactions before. I do hate leaving my special interest.

Once you start knowing these things, then you're like, okay, I'm going to need a friend, I'm going to need them to come to my house. I'm going to need my sneakers by the door. I am going to need time with the fish after. I

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am not going to want to socialize and go out for beer with everyone, so I need to tell my friend to make that excuse for me. Like how do I build the structure?

Actually, I have a TikTok, which is called Linguistic Autistic.

Jill: Yes.

Angela: And on my TikTok I talk about how I did group travel in Italy and how I prepared, I like analyzed what are all the things that are going to be triggers for me? And how do I plan a trip around this?

Jill: I love that.

Angela: Yeah. So you just need to figure out what are the supports? Who are the people? What are the tools? Or do I not want to do this at all? Which I made this decision I wanted to go on this trip, it was my college roommate's 50th birthday.

So I'm like if I'm going to go on this trip, because it's perfectly fine not to go, you don't get in trouble for not going to Italy. You're allowed not to go. But if I want to go on this, what do I need to make this a success? And it's going to be different than what some other people might need.

Jill: But it's really, and this something that I think a lot of women struggle with, is putting themselves first and saying like, if I want to do this thing, what do I need to do to make it work for me? I think women are socialized to also believe that their needs are really not super important.

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So I think there may be like an extra, for women anyway, that extra complexity of like, is it okay for me to put myself first? And the answer is a resounding fuck yes. Please always put yourself first.

Angela: Right.

Jill: Because otherwise you suffer, and everybody around you suffers too when you're struggling.

Angela: And I still use thought work tools, they're not bad tools. They're great tools, but you have to know yourself first so that you can use them without hurting yourself. And I definitely did a lot of self-harm and I definitely hurt other people by saying, "Oh, just do this, it works" without realizing, oh, there are different people so even if it does work, it has a different effect on different people.

Jill: Yeah. So what you just said is so perfect because for me, as a coach, this has been a really helpful conversation because I do have kind of like standard ways that I guide people. And it hadn't necessarily occurred to me that like, hey, not everybody is going to divulge that they're neurodiverse, neurodivergent, autistic, whatever. Not everybody's going to say that.

Angela: They might not even know.

Jill: They might not even know, exactly. They might be listening to this going, "Oh my God." But if I'm not aware that different people process information and triggers and, what's the word I'm looking for, stimuli different ways, then I'm not super helpful because I'm just assuming everybody reacts to things the same way. And that's not true.

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Angela: That is like one of the big language changes I've made in the last few years. And I think our mutual friend, Tami Stackelhouse, has probably been telling me this for a decade, and I just didn't quite pick up what she was putting down. But the biggest change I've made is like if this works for you.

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: Just like adding that language in. Like here's what I do, you could try it and see if this works for you. Or something that might work for you is this, or what I recommend is this. See how this feels for you, try this on. Because I definitely had a bias of just do this, it will work for you. The only reason it's not working is you're not doing it.

And I even proved that to be true in my own life as an athlete. I just did, I like found the will to do it. And then what I realized is that actually drove me to masking, to burn out, and really to self-hate. Which at the end of the day, the whole point is just to love yourself.

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: That's where we're all going. We're not having you like run to hate yourself, you run to connect with yourself. You run to love yourself more, to show your body love. You're not like, how can I punish you? That is not the point.

Jill: Yeah, that's not the point. And if that's what you're doing, then sign up for Run Your Best Life because we need to talk.

So you mentioned your TikTok account, the Linguistic Autistic.

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Angela: It's true, I talk about books and writing. I mean, I talk about books on autism or writing on autism. But I still think even as a runner or an athlete, just having examples of people with autism. If you're listening to this and you're like, "I think it might be me," I think you might get some value out of just some things that are different when you're autistic. And then yeah, just some ideas and hacks, even if you're not into the writing piece.

Jill: And maybe some like super skills that autistic folks have, because I feel like there's a lot of superpowers.

Angela: Yeah, so the biggest superpower, the number one this is how we save the world is our monotropism. So whatever, and like one of the terrible things people have done to autistic people is, even your mom, even though your mom loves you is they're like, "Do you have to talk about that so much? Like is it always about the environment with you, Greta? Can we talk about anything else?" No, it's always about the environment, that's what Greta wants to talk about, let her talk about it.

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: So knowing what your special interest is and leaning into your monotropism is the source of great delight, and also how we save the world. And the other thing that we have that's related to this is just keen pattern matching. Because we go so deep, we can see patterns that other people can't see.

And you could see this as a neurotypical person, just with a movie. Like if you watch Star Wars once, you're probably like, oh, good movie, whatever. If you watch Star Wars like 300 times, you're going to be like, "Oh, and then they did this. And oh, that's the same hat that they used in this scene." And

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you're going to see all these crazy connections that somebody who's watched our wars once would not see, right?

Jill: Yeah.

Angela: That's what having monotropism is like. So we're making all these crazy connections, which is why my authors have a 99% success rate. It's why they get their books done so quickly. It's why the books do so well. Because I can see all these patterns because this is my special interest. I've been obsessed with books since I was nine.

Jill: And I must say, your special interest helped me a lot.

Angela: See, you're welcome.

Jill: Yeah, my books were super successful because of your, I just remember like watching you like playing the algorithm on Amazon. And me thinking like, how the fuck does she know how to do any of this? I'm like, it's all complete gibberish to me and you're like, no.

Angela: I'm like it's so easy.

Jill: Yeah, fantastic. So okay, so Linguistic Autistic on TikTok. Where else can people find you and follow you?

Angela: I am most active on Facebook. I know we all have mixed feelings about Facebook these days, but you can find me as the Author Incubator on Facebook, or at theauthorincubator.com.

Jill: I love it. And are you on Instagram?

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Angela: I am on Instagram but it's a disaster. It's Author Incubator on Instagram, but I don't know what I'm doing over there.

Jill: I don't even know if I follow you on Instagram.

Angela: Not good.

Jill: I need to check that out.

Angela: Nobody look.

Jill: Nobody look. All right, well we'll pretend we never said any of that.

Angela: Yeah, not for me.

Jill: Okay, well, do you have any final thoughts that you want to share or anything else? Because this has been an absolutely amazing conversation but I want to make sure that ...

Angela: I just love you're open for having it. And if you are listening to any of this and suspecting it, that maybe there's neurodiversity in your family or in yourself, I just want to talk for one second about diagnosis because I want to leave you with this.

If maybe you're like, this is why my sister is so annoying, or I think my husband might have this, or I think I have this. There are so many amazing online tests and my advice to everyone, because I get this PM 10 times a day now. My advice to everyone is take three tests. I really like the autism 360 test, but there's a lot of them.

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Take three tests, any three tests. Don't worry about how good they are. Don't worry if they're paid or free. Take three tests and if you show up as extremely autistic on all three tests, you can just tell people I have diagnosed you with autism. That's it, you're autistic now, it's done. You don't need to do anything else.

If you're borderline or some of them you are, some of them you aren't, you might want to get a professional diagnosis. But I will tell you, everyone I know that's autistic, we take a test and we are like, for real? I am in the 90th percentile on every test. It doesn't matter when I take it, morning, noon, and night, tired, free, paid, I'm always autistic on every test, not sometimes.

So if you want a friend to test, do what me and Mila did, so be like, "Hey, I took this autism test, I got 5%. What did you get? You want to take this test? This is a fun quiz." So you could just do it that way if you're just trying to be a supportive friend or find out if your loved one has autism.

They are such fun quizzes to take. They're like taking Cosmo quizzes. Especially if you're autistic they're super fun because it's like they're asking you about all your favorite things. They're like when you walk, do you count and create patterns? We're like, yeah, who doesn't count and create patterns when they walk? What else are you doing? What are you people doing if you're not?

So all the questions are like so fun if you're autistic. And if you're not, you're like, wait, you do what? You count and create patterns when you walk? What? What's happening. So it's just a fun discussion to have.

The purpose of a professional diagnosis is if you are filing for disability, if you are filing a lawsuit, if it is required for some insurance purpose to get

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some sort of therapy covered. But if you just want to know like, am I a little bit autistic? Are there some things I could do? Is there some support I can create for myself? Most people are just going to be very well served with a self-diagnosis.

Jill: Awesome. I love that. Thank you so much for absolutely everything that you have shared today. This has been a delightful conversation and extremely educational for me. And I know that everybody listening is going to get a lot out of it too.

Angela: Awesome. Thank you so much for having me and being open to the conversation.

Jill: Yay.

Hey, real quick before you go, if you enjoyed listening to this episode you have got to check out Up And Running. It's my 30 day online program that will teach you exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you have always wanted to be. Head on over to notyouraveragerunner.com/upandrunning to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.