

Ep #319: Fat Joy: A Power Source for Positive Change with Sophia Apostol



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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 are 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 amazing human being, a super fun human being and I know that you are going to love her just as much as I do. Her name is Sophia Apostol and she is a body liberation coach. She is also fat, and that is her word that she uses. She believes in the total inherent worthiness of fat people, and y'all know how I feel about that.

She is on a mission to help her clients – She's a coach – to help her clients rewrite the messaging that has told them that they are unworthy. And she's been doing this since 2014, so she knows a thing or two. She helps her clients explore body equanimity, unlearn systemic conditioning and just generally build the lives that they've dreamed of.

And she is also the host of the *Fat Joy* podcast. And this is how we came together. And this podcast is her way of using her anger against the systemic lies that oppress fat people. My brain is not fully booted up yet today. But anyway, she uses her anger against the systemic lies that oppress fat people as kind of like an invitation to connect to and create deep joy for her community.

And this podcast is really a love letter to anyone who has ever been told they are too much or not enough or both all at the same time. I can relate to this for sure. My whole life I've been told you're too much and also you're not enough. I think that might be my own internal voice. But anyway,

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Sophia, thank you so much for joining me today. I can't wait for our conversation.

Sophia: Yay, thank you, Jill. I'm so glad we get to do this. I loved having you on my podcast, I feel so honored to be on yours. And gosh, all those things that we're going to talk about are so juicy.

Jill: Yes. Yeah, they really are. And I mean, I think I'd kind of like to start out by having you sort of introduce what does fat joy mean to you and what does joy in general mean to you? Because I think everybody has a different definition.

Sophia: Yeah, I mean I think I'm still figuring that out a little bit. I do feel like that's one of the reasons I started the podcast. I was filled with rage as I started to really see where my body was being oppressed constantly. Just moving around the world doing everyday things. Going to a restaurant, going to the doctor, traveling, and feeling like my body did not fit. And I spent most of my life believing that was a problem with me.

Then I started to learn about systemic oppression and fat liberation and we'll say the word body positivity, I know we're going to talk about that a bit later as well. And I realized, hang on, what if this wasn't a problem with me and was actually a problem with the way everything is designed? Okay, well hang on then, what does that mean?

Like I just kind of went through this process, and it took years of giving myself permission to not make my body the problem and that the problem is actually with how we design spaces, how we have created healthcare systems and all the other ways that systemic oppression happens. And as I saw it more and more clearly I got more and more mad, Jill. Like furious, boiling rage. I don't remember if I can swear on your podcast or not.

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Jill: Oh yes, bring it.

Sophia: Okay, good. And it was like, what the fuck do I do with this anger?

Jill: Yeah.

Sophia: Kind of who I am as a person, kind of the way I'm wired, I use big emotions as fuel. And as context, a lot of my family does not. And so my whole life I was told my emotions were too much, control your passions, all this stuff. But again, as this unlearning was happening I was learning how misogyny, of course, wants women to be quiet, to be obedient, to be polite, to be nice. And so all of this unlearning was happening.

So all of a sudden now my emotions are huge and angry and joyful and it was like such a time of being big in lots of ways, both body, emotion, all of it. But I did do with it, Jill, I was like, I can't walk through the world like this raw, wired, ready to explode all the time, but what can I do?

And I was very, very fortunate to work as – I do different types of coaching and one of the types of coaching I do is as a creative writing coach for a beautiful creative writing studio called Firefly Creative Writing that I talk about all the time on my podcast because Firefly literally changed my life.

And one of the ways they did that was there's 10 of us that work for the studio and the founder always wanted this business to be feminist, anti-capitalist, rooted in anti-oppression, steeped in accessibility and a community of care. I mean it's a very different type of business.

And part of that was constantly educating all of us on how we do that when it's very different from the way most businesses are run, which are profit-focused, people last. And we were just reversing that formula.

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So as part of all of this education and learning monthly if not more frequently learning and training sessions with different anti-oppression educators, anti-racist educators, people who specialize in how do you create learning spaces for people who are neurodivergent, what does it mean to have people who use they or them pronouns in your groups? Like just lots of this learning, it kind of started to clue me in around, oh, these people also are filled with rage. And how they direct it, how they use it is working to create the world that they want to live in.

And I thought, oh, what would my version of that be? And that led to, I was actually at a team retreat with Firefly. We were all in a beautiful cottage country doing team building and strategic planning and visioning for the business. And we did this really cool exercise where it was this idea, especially with writers there's this idea of pseudonyms, like what would I write if my name wasn't attached to it?

It's a complex concept because our names represent our identity in lots of ways. But we were just kind of having some thought experiments. And immediately I thought, oh, my name would be Ursula Wild and I would have a podcast about fatness. And it just came out of me and it caused me to pause and everyone looked at me and they're like, whoa. And then literally the next second later I was like, oh, but I could do that with my name.

And they were like, yes. And the podcast was born because I could do that. And it was so interesting that I thought I wouldn't want my name and then it was like, no, no, no. This is how I use this rage, it is mine. And for me rage is not a bad thing. Rage is a very different feeling to me than anger. Rage is like powerful rocket fuel. And I think rage also has a lot of joy in it. Like I feel joyful when I'm raging.

Jill: Oh my God. Okay, wait, say a lot more about that.

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Sophia: Right? I know. And maybe it's just me. I don't know, we'll see if people can relate. But there's something so energetic about rage. There's something so forward momentum-y about rage. It's like it wants to be channeled. It's like, I am here for you. Let's light that fire.

And that's joyful to me because joy to me also – I think there's different versions of joy. There's this thought that joy can be beautifully peaceful like I'm sitting on my front porch sipping my coffee, watching the leaves move. That's joy. But rage also feels joyful to me too. So I think there's a whole, like joy has a range as all of our emotions do, right?

Jill: Well, and I'm kind of wondering, I'm going to interrupt you for a second because I feel like especially if you're a person who has been fat their whole lives and has been blaming everything on their body and then you get to this point where you realize like, wait a minute, I've been hoodwinked.

Sophia: And lied to.

Jill: Right? And you start to feel that rage about it, I think there maybe, like for me, because I can totally relate to this, I think that the feeling of joy that's sort of coupled with that is like a release.

Sophia: Yes.

Jill: It's like, damn. It's like this excitement of this is a whole new way to look at my life. This is a whole new way to experience my life. So I can see how rage, especially in that context, I'm sure in other contexts as well but I can see how it would be coupled with joy because suddenly you've given yourself permission to think a different way. And I think that can be very exciting and powerful.

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Sophia: And gleeful.

Jill: And gleeful, yeah.

Sophia: When you were talking, because I'm remembering what it felt like and it felt like glee. Do you know the other place where this really crystallized for me? And again, not to get too political but I'm going to.

So I'm in Canada but I used to live in the states. And so when Trump was elected I was devastated. And there were four of us, actually I only knew one and then she invited two other people. So four basic strangers essentially got in my car and we drove straight eight hours to Washington DC to join the women's march the day before Trump's inauguration. Oh, I even get emotional thinking about it.

Being in these streets that were filled with rage, but also joy. That's the cocktail I'm talking about. Where you're like, there is an injustice happening and fuck me if I'm not going to do something about it. That is rage and joy together, to me. And that's the other context I really felt it in and it was like, oh, it's powerful. It's so powerful.

So that really, that feeling of needing to direct it somewhere because I also wonder, and again, I'm so curious about what other people think. I think I'm just wired to take that energy and enact it. I think if I don't, and I know this just from having lived 43 years on this planet and having a lot of energy in this way.

If I don't act on it, I feel bad in my body. I feel deflated. I start to kind of teeter towards depression. There's something about, I don't know, this is not the best phrase but I always think that if nothing else in this life, I want

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to feel like I used myself well. And part of that, my version of that is really with action.

For other people it's writing beautiful words. For others it's having big thoughts. I'm just an action-oriented person, so for me it really channels into action. And I love a project and I was like, all right, here we go, Fat Joy, because I'm filled with rage.

Jill: I love this.

Sophia: And that's really where it came from, was like I have to point this somewhere so I'm going to point it out into the world and everyone can take it or leave it as they like, but I'm spewing it out.

Jill: I love this. Well and I think you hit on something before you said if I don't use that emotion, then it starts to kind of feel bad in my body. And I do think that's what happens. When we have big emotions we have to either release them, and rage is something that if it's not channeled it can be released in a very unproductive way that damages people around you. But when it is channeled and used as a power source and put into a direction that is going to make positive change in the world, then yeah.

But if you just try to keep it inside, then it's just like bouncing around in there like eating you alive. And that's not good for anybody. So I think for any people out there that have been told that their emotions are too big and they need to keep them down, I feel like that's not good for anybody. It's okay to let them out.

And I love the idea that like where can you find the joy in this big emotion and how can you channel that into something that helps other people, which is exactly what you've done.

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Sophia: Yeah. And I've heard this phrase, and I say it all the time to my clients, your emotions are energy in motion. And so they're supposed to move, like we're supposed to move big emotions through us. It's when we suppress them that we have problems.

And this is not just rage, this is like all emotions, right? We have to move them through our bodies, even if we just meditate and imagine them slipping down into Mother Earth, that's fine too. But we can't hold them. That's stress and illness, like so much impacts that.

Jill: It's like trying to hold a beach ball underwater.

Sophia: Yes, exactly. Exactly. Yeah, it's going to pop up. It's going to pop up, yeah.

Jill: Well, so let's talk about Fat Joy, like why did you choose that particular name? And I guess like, does it mean that I am fat and I experience joy? Or is this how I experience joy because I'm fat? Like what is going on with that particular phrase?

Sophia: Yeah. Well, it's interesting, the first thing I looked at was happy fat, not realizing that Sofie Hagen, who's a brilliant comedian and author had a whole book. I mean, I knew it but I had forgotten it, she has a book called Happy Fat. I was like, oh, well, that's taken. Even though book titles are not copyright, I was like, no, I'm not going to do that.

And then I just kind of mulled it over. And there was something so important to me, and this ties into the second half of your question. There was something so important for me about the statement, the bold declaration, the fuck-youness about being joyful and fat, because that's not

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allowed, Jill. If you're fat, you're not supposed to be happy or joyful, or in any way okay with your body as it is.

And that was the whole kind of thing that I was going through, is realizing how damaged I had been by being told my whole life, since I was very young, that there was a problem with my body. My body was too big. And the permission to actually be like, no it's not and fuck you. I mean, I'm a rebel at heart, so the fuck you part was very important to me as well. Not everyone needs to say the fuck you, but for me it was very helpful for me to have that kind of energy too.

And that's why I knew it would be very controversial, which really lit me up. I was like that's right. I mean, if we're going to do this, let's do this.

Jill: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Sophia: And I knew I wanted, because the whole podcast is basically I'm fat, my guests are fat, and all my guests – You being one of them – are fat people doing amazing things in the world, unabashedly fat. Those are the stories, and again I'm also a creative writing coach and a leadership coach, so all these things came together. And I was like, we need more stories of fat people doing amazing stuff in the world so that listeners who are fat can be like, oh thank God, I'm not alone.

And I have so many non-fat listeners, and I hear a lot from my non-fat listeners. And what I wanted from them, is for them to believe our goddamn stories. Believe me when I tell you there is a problem with our medical system. Medical students never practice on fat bodies. I, as a fat person, cannot donate my body to science. Did you know that?

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So right at the beginning of medical training – Sidebar, and I know because I've interviewed medical students, medical doctors, and a funeral director about this, no one in the medical field has ever worked with fat bodies in their training, instruments are not designed for fat bodies. We know tables and all that stuff aren't designed for fat bodies. And yet, you're going to tell me my mortality rate is higher because of my fat body? How about you've never worked on a fat body. Nothing is made from my fat body.

Weight stigma can account for any possible mortality stats, which are also kind of bullshit by the way. But anyway, that's a whole separate thing. But yeah, I was like, no, we get to be fat and we get to be joyful.

Jill: I love that.

Sophia: I just wanted to challenge that.

Jill: You know, when you see a fat person in the media or something, there's almost an apology for taking up space or, well, I'm trying, I'm working on it, right?

Sophia: They're performing as the good fatty.

Jill: Yes, the performative, exactly. And I'm like, we just get to just live our fucking lives.

Sophia: Right?

Jill: And it's not even like people are just like, "Oh, it's so great that you're a runner even though you're fat. You're like, rising above." I'm like, it's irrelevant. Can we just not? Like how about I'm just a runner? And yeah, it's fascinating.

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I have a question for you, because the word joy means different things to different people. And to me, it just means this like bubbling up of happiness. Like when I feel joy, it's irrepressible and it's just like it has to be expressed, right? It is a big emotion. And when you talk about for some people, joyful is just quietly reading. And I'm like, that is not joy for me. Joy is an active emotion. Joy needs to be expressed.

Sophia: Yeah.

Jill: I think I would say calmly reading is more like bliss. That's more relaxed, but anyway, also, I think that it means different things to different people and it also can get confused with – I'm totally going to butcher how I'm trying to explain this. But I think that there's this, and you used the term earlier, toxic positivity.

And what, to you, like where does that factor in? Do you think that we are taught, especially as fat people, because fat people are supposed to be jolly. Not joyful, jolly. Big difference. But do you think that there's this kind of culture of toxic positivity that we're taught, especially as fat folks to buy into, to kind of get past how depressed we're supposed to be about feeling fat?

Sophia: Oh, interesting. I think there's a culture of toxic positivity that is taught to people who identify as women.

Jill: Yes, I would agree with that.

Sophia: Like I see it actually as being bigger. And I feel like, and I'm a huge social media fan, but a lot of social media, I would say still but I think it's maybe shifting a bit, especially in the early days of like Instagram, to be like the Insta happy. Like you only show the best side, the positive side. I think that's actually really destructive. I think it's good that we call it toxic

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positivity because if we only pretend – Because that's the thing, it's false, it's pretend.

So again, this idea of hiding from emotions. So if we pretend all the time that everything's fine and I never complain about my coworker, and I just smile at everyone, and there's never any realness, we're not living authentic lives. We're not making space for the whole range of human emotion.

When I work with clients, we talk a lot about the difference between happiness and fulfillment. Because, to me, the word happy has been so taken over by the marketing industrial complex to sell us stuff, right?

Jill: Yeah, it's the cotton candy of emotions. There's like no substance.

Sophia: Right? There's no substance. Like I just want to be happy. Well, what does that fucking mean?

Jill: Yeah, yeah.

Sophia: But fulfillment is how do I create a sense of belonging, authenticity, how do I create my life so I feel fulfilled? Because fulfillment can have lots of sadness too. Think about hospice workers, they help people transition from life to death. I know several of them who have deep fulfillment doing that work. It's sad work, but you can be sad and be fulfilled.

That's why I like the word fulfillment. I can be joyful and be fulfilled, right? And the truth is to have actual fulfillment, we need all the range of emotions to be able to be expressed. And I just want to tie this into a sense of belonging because, again, there's tons and tons of research on this, that

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one of the biggest impacts of our wellness, of our health is feeling a sense of belonging.

And what that is defined by is we have people in our lives, it doesn't have to be huge numbers, one or two people in our lives that see us and love us for exactly as we are. Exactly as we are means bitchy some days, grumpy other days, joyful other days, fulfilled other days. Like it's the whole range where we can really be all of ourselves, our whole selves.

And so that's why toxic productivity comes in and dampens and destroys all of that. There's no room for grumpiness in toxic productivity. So that's why I hate it.

Jill: Yeah. No, I agree because I feel like toxic positivity is just a way of shaming somebody for –

Sophia: Having real emotions.

Jill: Yeah, it's just another version of shaming somebody for being not the perfect ideal.

Sophia: Right. And I think it's, I mean it is, it's a tool of oppression because if we're all faking being perfectly happy with everything going on, that means we're not calling out the shit that's wrong.

So if we bring it into fatness, I think this is where a lot of the good fatty stuff comes in. I go to a restaurant, I order a salad but I eat McDonald's on the way home. That is the classic stereotype, right? Or, I don't advocate for what my body needs and I'm out with friends and we're in spaces that are very uncomfortable for me and leave me with bruises, right?

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It's the pretense of it's all okay, it's fine. I think in my version of it, it was very rooted in people pleasing. I spent my life as a people pleaser, trying to make up for the fact of my body. And so I would do and say all these things that were not authentic to me, but it was all about making everyone else feel okay.

Jill: And I think people pleasing is a way of belonging, right?

Sophia: Yeah, it's a way of trying to belong.

Jill: Yeah, exactly.

Sophia: It doesn't actually lead to belonging, but it's like our body's way of or our mind's way of trying to, yeah.

Jill: Yeah.

Sophia: So I know for sure, I mean, it shows up with a lot of my clients, a lot of people I speak with. And here's what's also really hard about this, as we unlearn this, as we stop people pleasing, as we stop practicing toxic positivity and the good fatty trope, people around us get pissed. We lose friendships, we lose family.

And that is hard, Jill. And I never ask – Coaches never force anyone to do anything, like I've pretty much gone no contact with my family, which is deeply devastating to me but it was essential. It's been essential for my own mental health and my own way of being proud of living my life in the world.

I've lost a close, close friend, a best friend because she couldn't believe me when I told her, hey, when you do this, it's anti-fat bias. And she just

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couldn't for whatever reason go deeper and understand that, didn't want to. And I was like, well, that's okay, you get to make your choice.

And it's so interesting, I thought I'd be furious, but I'm not. Like I get it. I get that this is really hard work for people to do and to understand. And at the core of any kind of anti-oppressive learning, whether it's learning about if we're white, we're racist. I know a lot of people feel it's a contentious statement, but it's true.

Jill: Yeah, agreed.

Sophia: Because how can you not be? You were given, you were raised in this culture. But to have to deconstruct your world is really hard. And so I have full sympathy for people who say I just can't.

Jill: Right, because it's like, listen, this belief system is working for me and I'm not so sure about that one. And so I'm just going to stick with what I've got, right? It's like the Price Is Right.

Sophia: I'm going to stick with my privilege, right?

Jill: Yeah.

Sophia: It's like people aren't acknowledging their privilege. And that's fine, they get to make that choice. Do I think that's helping our world? No. Does it frustrate me? Yes. But also, they get to make their choices and the only thing I can really manage is myself. So I no longer allow myself to be harmed by anti-fatness in ways that I am able to influence.

I can't influence if a restaurant has chairs that fit my bum, but I can choose not to go back to that restaurant. It's the same with family and friends for

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me and relationships. It's like I am choosing to not be harmed by you, and I get to make that choice. You get to make your choice, I get to make mine.

I always talk in coaching about what's mine and what's theirs. And let's separate them out and get really clear on that because a lot of times it's very mushy, right? They did this and I did this and it's so mushy. It's like, okay, untangle. First, let's separate out what's theirs to manage and control, what's mine to take responsibility for?

Okay, I can take responsibility over the boundaries I set. I can take responsibility over the company I keep so that I am not continually harmed, because that's not how I choose to live in the world. And I'm saying that, and I'm saying it from a very privileged place in that I don't need to rely on my family for financial support or emotional support. I have a lot of other chosen family.

So I just want to acknowledge that I'm able to make that decision from a place of great privilege as well. And for others, they're not able to and that gets to be okay, too. We have to just, I just want to give a shout out to giving ourselves so much more grace than we typically do.

Jill: Yeah, I love that. And I love the fact that you're able to have compassion for people who have the opinions that you're like, listen, this behavior is harmful to me and if you're not willing to change it, here's what I'm going to do, and draw that boundary. But then also having compassion and saying like, hey, I get it, it's hard work and you're choosing not to do it, and that's fine.

Sophia: Well, if you just think about fatness, if people have constructed their whole world around if I eat and work out, I will maintain or achieve this level of thinness. Then someone comes along who's eating what they want,

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doing as much movement as they want, and are happy in their fat body, that's very fucking confronting.

Jill: Yeah, it really is.

Sophia: Yeah, people get mad.

Jill: I love how you just said that because I have had kind of weird reactions sometimes if I go out for a meal or go someplace with people who don't really know me. And then here I am being fat and eating, sometimes it'll happen like I'll be out in public and I'll just have a bag of Cheetos or whatever. And you can just see people looking at you. And not even like, like they're just genuinely confused. Like, oh my God, she's eating in public like it doesn't even matter. And I'm like, yeah, I know.

Sophia: Right?

Jill: But it is confronting, because it's that cognitive dissonance that I think our brains have a hard time holding opposing viewpoints at the same time.

Sophia: 100%, yeah.

Jill: And so if you're all in with your viewpoint that it is morally superior to be thin or healthy, and then there's somebody who's like, actually, it's not and here's the evidence, but you're all in with that belief system.

I mean, I think about it politically, right? We see this so often that you're all in with one candidate, and somebody will bring you very obvious evidence that there has been a lie or this or that and people will just – Like the flat Earthers, they'll come up with all these ridiculous reasons why the earth is flat. And I'm like, wouldn't it just be so much easier?

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But we get so deeply entrenched, and we create a whole identity around beliefs around our health and our bodies that we cannot see contradictory evidence, even when it's right in front of us.

Sophia: Right. And it doesn't help that the diet industry is, I think now like a \$100 billion industry free and every ad, every other add on TikTok is about Ozempic and gastric bypass, and there's just this constant onslaught of images about that you must amputate a perfectly functional organ in order to achieve thinness.

Jill: Yeah.

Sophia: And it's like, what the hell is happening? What is going on? So this is why I can't get too angry with others because it's like, I get it.

I mean, it was about a 10 year process for me to really, and I'm still in it, like unlearn a lot of the shit that we've been given around everything from racism to ableism to why are our schools not at all accommodating, really, of neurodivergent, when we're mostly all neurodivergent? Like there's just all these things. Are you bringing gender or sexual orientation and preference?

Oh my god, we're just so judgmental. And then we have capitalism that has built whole industries around deepening that judgment in order to have us pay to not be judged. I mean, it's a very sophisticated system.

Jill: It is.

Sophia: I mean hats off to the people who have founded this, which was very intentional, by the way. There's so much really interesting stuff around how this all started with creation of patriarchy 200 years ago in a very

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deliberate way, and separating ourselves from the Black enslaved people that were being brought to the US to work on plantations. And their Black bodies must be different from our white bodies and, poof, there's racism and anti-fatness created.

So it's like it's so constructed that it's hard for us to pull back the curtain and see the man. The white, thin, man, rich white man behind the curtain.

Jill: Behind the curtain. One thing though that I find interesting, because I think most of us are very black and white, right? And it's wrong to be fat, it's wrong to do anything that could lead to being unhealthy, right? I mean, there's things that happen, you know, people get sick or whatever. But if you're eating too much of this, or your smoke, or what have you, and you get sick, then like, oh, you're morally bad. We're very black and white about all of that.

But what I find interesting, and you may or may not agree with this, is that I also think that there's a lot of black and white thinking in the fat acceptance movement. Where we have people who are like, no, if you try to lose weight, you're a terrible person. There's not always a lot of compassion in the other direction to look back and say, maybe that is the right choice for that person.

And, to me, I feel like there's a real middle ground where we get to be like, I'm rejecting this belief, but also, I don't have to go all the way to this other side and just think that anybody that either still has that belief is a terrible person, or anybody that has landed in the middle is wrong.

It's fascinating to me because I think it's human nature to be very black and white. And when you reject this side and you go all the way to the other side, it's still black and white thinking. And so I love how you have created

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this compassionate place where you can look to people who disagree with you, and just say, hey, I understand.

It doesn't mean I have to jump in bed with you and let you continue to say things or do things that are not healthy for me. But also, I respect your choice and your belief to do what you think is best for you. But I do think our patriarchal system, it's created a real divide of you're either on one side or the other, whether it's in the fat debate, or political or whatever. And there's no room for middle ground.

Sophia: Yeah, you're absolutely right in that our brains like things to be categorized as this or that.

Jill: Yes.

Sophia: It's simpler for us. Our brains have a hard time with paradox, is what you're speaking to with inherent contradiction. How do we hold both to be true? And it's so interesting because, again, this is one of the prime things that you learn in coach training, is how to help your clients see the both/and rather than the either/or. This is like a core skill that you learn as a coach because it's so hard for people.

And I think with respect to, like I've heard a lot of fat activists I respect and I'm going to parrot them, which is that I am 100% pro-fat liberation, I am 100% anti diet. And I also think people have individual body autonomy to make their own choices. Because what we're talking about, the reason why both those can be true, and I think this is why it's confusing for people, is one is that the systemic level and one is that the personal level.

Jill: Yes.

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Sophia: And you can't bring those together and have them be on the same playing field. It's apples and oranges. Systemically fat people are discriminated against, Black people are discriminated against, women are discriminated against, indigenous people. At a systemic level all of our systems have been designed to discriminate and stigmatize people who live in marginalized bodies, that is true.

What is also true is that individuals who live within that system feel great pressure to conform to the system so that they can live their lives within a capitalist environment, which means they have to have jobs. Fat people don't get hired as much. So if they lose weight in order to get a job and that works for them, how can I be mad at them?

Jill: Right, exactly.

Sophia: It's like all people who live in marginalized bodies, which is everybody other than rich white thin men, are in survival mode. Sonya, Renee Taylor talks about this beautifully with the body hierarchy ladder. Like it's a rich white dude at the top and the rest of us scattered down the ladder. Usually with super fat, black, queer women at the bottom.

And all we do is try to crawl over each other to get up to that top ladder. And Sonya Renee Taylor talks about like, we need to just destroy the ladder, people. Why do we spend our lives trying to go up it? But we get why, because all we see is the ladder. So that's why I think I cannot be angry. And also because I was that person.

I spent decades dieting in the diet cycle, what's it called, the weight cycling. I've done everything. I looked into gastric bypass, I'm so glad I didn't do it. My God, the side effects and the horror show that is gastric bypasses. I'm

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very grateful to some part of myself that was like, no, I will not go that extreme.

Jill: But you can also understand why people would make a choice.

Sophia: Oh, completely. It's the only thing I can do, yeah, I get it.

Jill: Yeah, and I think also sometimes people have a desire to change their body that actually has nothing to do with their hierarchy or their appearance or whatever. They'll just have personal reasons, like I just feel better this way. Or, I don't know, I think people can have a million reasons, but there's no nuance to it sometimes.

Sophia: That's the problem, that there is no nuance.

Jill: Yeah.

Sophia: I mean, what I will say around this is that I think if people are choosing to intentionally lose weight, I think it would behoove them to also look deeper at the forces of diet culture and anti-fat bias that are telling them that whatever they're hoping for, they will achieve by intentional weight loss.

Jill: Yes, exactly.

Sophia: And by that, I mean like food restriction and stuff like that. Because there are health promoting behaviors that will also achieve, very likely, whatever you're actually looking for. So the whole "my body just feels better," well, you can work with a physio and build muscles to help your knees feel better, right? It doesn't necessarily have to be weight loss.

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And again, Ragen Chastain is another person who does amazing work around this with respect to kind of health stuff, body stuff. And I think the problem for me, Jill, is that it's just become automatic for doctors and for people and for everyone around us to say, "Oh, your knee is sore? Well, yeah, just lose weight."

Jill: Oh my God, yes.

Sophia: We don't even look deeper. And that, for me, is where it's inexcusable. No, if you are wanting to change your body size, take a look deeper at what's driving that and what you're actually looking for. Is it more social capital? Is it a "health-based" thing that maybe your doctor said to you?

That critical thinking piece is, I think, what's missing because it's so much easier and everything around us says, "Oh, just lose weight is the answer." It's not. It's not the answer. But we are told that it is our whole lives.

Jill: And I think you're right, we're told that it's the weight that is the problem, when in reality if you have high cholesterol or diabetes, or what have you, the weight isn't the problem. It is other behaviors that may or may not have led to that weight. And I think that's it, right? Like there's no nuance around it.

And then it's frustrating too, because I have had people – This cracks me up. I've had people post on my Instagram. One person was like, "Oh, you should be arrested for telling people it's okay to run when they're fat."

Sophia: I know.

Jill: I'm like, really? That seems like, okay.

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Sophia: Yeah, tell me how that's connected. Why is that illegal?

Jill: Yeah, it really seems shady. But I've had them say things like, "I can tell by looking at you that you're not going to live past 50." And I'm like, well, I'm 55, so okay.

Sophia: Yeah.

Jill: But it really is an assumption that if you're existing in a fat body, you must be unhealthy. And it's not politically correct for me to dis on you for being fat, even though people still do it. But I can, it is politically correct for me to shame you for not being healthy.

Sophia: To make it about health.

Jill: And I'm like, you actually don't know. We have just fucked it all up so bad.

Sophia: Oh, honestly, Jill, most days I have no hope. I'm like, all right. Good luck. I have two stepchildren, I'm like, good luck, kiddos.

Jill: Good luck out there, yeah.

Sophia: Good luck figuring this shit out. Yeah, I was interviewing another guest actually, for my podcast, and they mentioned they were talking to someone who used the term active hope. And I thought that was very interesting because we were talking about just how despondent we are about the whole world. And like why do we bother waking up every day? What's the point of all this when it feels like we're so far gone.

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I mean, the world is literally burning and flooding. And the oceans are like bathtubs. Like it's horrifying. And it's all continued to be perpetuated by the billionaires and our farce of a government system, all of it. And I was like, oh my God, why? Why do we deal with this?

And she was saying the person, this activist she had been talking to, talked about the concept of active hope. Which I just thought, okay, I can get behind that. This idea of I want to be hopeful and I'm going to do my little part of it.

Jill: Yes, yeah.

Sophia: And so I feel like, and you know this, the immense amount of work it takes to produce a podcast, unpaid. I mean, I don't get paid to do it. Sponsors, if anyone's interested, let me know. But I feel like that's my version. Like this is this one thing that I can do.

So we get back to the whole I have rage, what do I do with it? It is this active hope of, all right, well, if I can help a few people, or if I can change a few minds, or open a few minds, I mean I'm okay with not changing them. But then that would be great.

And I will say, and I imagine you get this a lot too with the work that you do, Jill. I mean, I get messages daily from therapists who will say, I recommended your podcast to these clients and here's what they wrote back. And they'll send me these messages that their clients wrote to them that's like, this podcast has changed my life, has changed the way I parent my children.

I had a teacher who wrote to me to say, "I was going through all the kids' books, a teacher librarian at an elementary school. I was going through the

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library weeding out books for things like, homophobia, transphobia, racism, but I never thought about fatness. So now I've added that in. Thank you." And I've got a whole new budget to buy fat positive books.

And I'm like, okay, active hope for the win.

Jill: I know, right?

Sophia: Maybe the world is still going to burn, but one or two kids are going to see some fat positive books. Like, that's what I have to hold on to. And that, for me, that's the joy. That brings me joy.

Jill: Yeah, I love that. It's like leaving the planet a little bit better than you found it.

Sophia: Right? Pack out your trash. Let's just do what we can. And because I'm not in a political position, I don't have billions. What I have is, I'm very mouthy and I have a big personality. And I am good at communicating. And I'm unabashed about asking people to be on my podcast. So that's what I can do.

So I just feel like if we all tap into what our strengths are and use them to make the world a little less oppressive, there will be a shift. And I know lots of people that are doing this in their own ways. And, I mean, that's amazing. That's how we change things.

Jill: Yeah. I mean, even if it's as simple as just living your life as an example of what's possible, right? Like, regardless, you don't have to be an evangelist going around telling everybody your thoughts. Just living your life as an example, as an unapologetic example of what you'd like to see in

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the world, I think, even that is very, very powerful because you never know who's watching.

Sophia: Yeah, well, and I think – Oh, I'm going to misquote. Was it Buddha or Gandhi who said, "Be the change you want to see in the world"?

Jill: Yeah, exactly.

Sophia: I feel like that's kind of, I mean, I don't know, I just keep coming back to that's what I can do.

Jill: Yeah, be the change. Yeah.

Sophia: Be the change.

Jill: I love that.

Sophia: Talk to my kids, my step kids about body stuff and fatness, and those little conversations make a difference. You're right, it doesn't have to be some huge, big public thing. But I think for everyone listening, it's like thinking about what are the ways that you can make this world a kinder place? What are the ways that you can listen and believe marginalized people? How do we extend that further?

Jill: And I love, especially talking to your kids, because when I think back to my preteen and teen years, I feel like if my mom had had even one conversation with me that was not critical of my body in one way or another, but actually was just like, I love you no matter what size you are. If she had had even one conversation like that –

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And she had her own body shame issues. And I get she was trying to help me avoid body shame by helping me change my body. But I feel like I would have turned out a different person. Like honest to God, even one conversation might have made the difference. It doesn't take much. It doesn't take much to plant the seed and let the youth know you don't have to listen to all of this bullshit that's out there.

Sophia: I often wonder, who could I have been?

Jill: Yeah.

Sophia: I've interviewed some people who found and started their fat liberation, body liberation journey at like 15. I'm like, oh my God, who could I have been if I wasn't 35 when that happened?

Jill: Yeah.

Sophia: You're right, we can have way greater impact than we even know.

Jill: Yeah, because even just planting a couple of little opposing seeds to what kids are seeing out there on social media and from their friends and everybody, like even just a few words, I think, is enough to let them realize, like, oh, maybe there's a different way to look at that. And maybe they won't buy into it until they're in their 20s. But they'll remember that conversation and it'll spark something and, yeah, you just never know.

Sophia: Yeah. And I think it's also in the actions. For example, we have fat art in our house.

Jill: I love this.

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Sophia: So the kids see a diversity of bodies, not only my body and their bodies, but the art in our home.

Jill: Like you don't have to go to the art museum and just look at the naked renaissance women lying around with their perfect hourglass shapes and their perky boobs even though they are like plus size.

Sophia: Exactly. Yeah, yeah, yeah. So I think there's a lot of ways we can do this that are kind of low hanging fruit, you know? Yeah, so I think it's important for us to think about all of those things. What's the impact we want to have in the world? And then what are some small things we can take to do that, to achieve that?

Jill: Well, thank you so much for joining me today.

Sophia: No, I don't want to be done. Let's keep going.

Jill: I know. I know, we'll just have to do a part three. We'll have to do a part three.

Sophia: Okay, yay.

Jill: I love it. Where can people find you? How can people follow you, connect with you, work with you? Tell us everything.

Sophia: All the things. So the website is fatjoy.life. My Instagram is fatjoy.life. My TikTok is fatjoy.life, although I'm terrible at TikTok. I keep trying and failing and I don't know. There's something about TikTok that I enjoy watching but I have a hard time contributing to. I don't know why.

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Coming soon, depending on when this airs I'm also starting a Substack to go deeper into some stuff, like to just start to explore. And I think I finally feel ready. I don't know if you've gone through this journey, Jill, but I kind of feel like I've had enough conversations, I've thought enough about – Or not enough, but I've thought even more about this stuff, I'm ready to kind of take a stand on some things.

I'm like yes to this and no to that. Whereas I feel like I'm more confident in what I believe now. So I want to start writing and exploring that a little further with Substack. So that will be coming, that will all be linked from the fatjoy.life website.

The website is the best place to go because it's got everything but my Instagram. I also have two Instagrams, I have the fat joy and then I've also got Coach_Sophia, which is a little more personal. If you want to see pictures of my four and a half month old puppy who I love, you can go to the Coach Sophia website, and they're all linked together and connected and everything's on Linktree as well. So I'm pretty easy to find. Yeah, that would be where I live on socials.

Jill: I love it. I love it. And we'll have all those links in the show notes as well. But, again, thank you so much for a really good conversation. It's always a joy.

Sophia: Yay! Thank you, Jill. I love talking to you so much.

Jill: Yeah, same.

Real quick, before you go, if you enjoyed this episode, you have to check out Run Your Best Life. It's my monthly coaching program where you will learn exactly how to start running, stick with it, and become the runner you

[The Not Your Average Runner Podcast](#) with Jill Angie

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have always wanted to be. Head on over to runyourbestlife.com to join. I would love to be a part of your journey.