

Episode 2.18 Landwhales and Fat Liberation with Jes Baker

May 18, 2018

Hannah (Host): [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Hi, I'm Hannah McGregor and this is *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Welcome back. I would like to extend to you my listeners an invitation on Sunday, May 27th, which coincidentally is only two days after my birthday, I am going to be at a *Secret Feminist Agenda* meetup and celebration at the 2018 Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, which is a big conference. The conference is happening in Regina, Saskatchewan this year. Regina, the city that rhymes with fun. And while I super want to encourage anyone actually attending the conference to come to this meetup, I also want to make the point that you don't have to be attending the conference to come to the meetup. So if you are Regina-based, or Saskatchewan-based, or it just kind of close to that area of the country and you would like to come by and meet and chat about feminism and podcasting, that would be really dope. So the meet up is, as I said, Sunday May 27th. It's happening from 7 to 9:00 PM at the malty national— M A L T Y National Brewing company that's at 1130 15th Avenue in Regina, Saskatchewan. It would be really great to see some of y'all there. Some previous podcast guests will also be in attendance, so it's gonna be a real star studded occasion, and I believe will also mark the launch of the first ever *Secret Feminist Agenda* merch. So if you want to get your hands on that, you should definitely come by. Okay. Enough of that. Let's go meet Jes. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans] Jes Baker, blogger, speaker, author, former mental health professional, cat lover, all caps user, an unabashed fat chick. After creating satirical versions of Abercrombie and Fitch advertisements in 2013, she appeared on the Today Show and quickly became one of the leading voices in the current body image movement. When she isn't writing, just spends her time speaking around the world, working with plus size clothing companies, organizing body liberation events, taking pictures in her underwear, and attempting to convince her cats that they like to wear bow ties. Keep fighting the good fight, Jes. [Music: "Secrets" by Mary Lambert]

Jes: Anyways, let's get this going. Let's do it.

Hannah (Host): Fantastic. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me. This is extremely exciting. I've been a huge fan for very long time of your work.

Jes: Thank you!

Hannah (Host): And I'm particularly excited to talk to you about your new book.

Jes: Are you in Canada?

Hannah (Host): I sure am. How can you tell?

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- Jes: My God! It's really cute. It's really cute Canadian accent. [Laughs]
- Hannah (Host): [Laughs] Do I really like? Like, I really don't hear it.
- Jes: Oh, it's in everything you say. It's great. Thank you for having me.
- Hannah (Host): [Laughs] So let's talk. I have some, some more general questions about sort of your activism and the work you've done, but I'd like to start by talking about *Landwhale* and then we can sort of work our way backwards from there.
- Jes: Sure.
- Hannah (Host): So can you tell us a little bit about what *Landwhale* is about and how it's different from your first book?
- Jes: Yeah, absolutely. I think the first thing is it's completely different from *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls*. And the first book I wrote *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls* was kind of created because I wanted all of the information that I wish I had altogether in one book and I hadn't found that yet, so I wrote it. And I also wanted it to be really accessible, and so I wrote it like in a very casual way. And *Landwhale*, of course, is like, written like that because I write like I talk [Laughs] which is a lot of run on sentences and swearing. However, it's completely different in its content and in its reason for existence, I guess. It's a memoir. It's really raw and personal. And *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls* I kind of had an idea what I was doing, in that I had been talking about the content for years to other people, bouncing ideas off of people. Like it had been very well covered for me. And so I kind of had an idea of how it would be received because I had watched it happen for years and *Landwhale* and it's just completely new. I mean there's stuff in there that I discovered while I was writing the book that I had no idea about, and you know, even since I've written it, I've learned more. So it's just really kind of this moment in time of reflection on my past, on my present, on the future. There's some funny parts and there's a lot of sad parts. And it's structured in chapter form, but I feel like the thing, *Landwhale* itself is a mess.
- Hannah (Host): [Laughs]
- Jes: It just is, and that's okay. And that's like, I can't tell you how messy it is and that is okay, because it's where I was, it's what I had. And hopefully it speaks to someone and they don't feel as alone in their experiences. That's what I'm really hoping. That, and that it starts conversations around some pretty hard topics.
- Hannah (Host): Yeah. That makes a lot of sense to me because *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls*, it was born out of, you know, your Internet activism and your web presence that already existed, and sort of had a form built into it, like the sort of list form. Like, it had a structure that was inherent to it but, but memoir and autobiography like, that's taking a whole lot of messy, like, that's taking memory and trying to

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translate it into a form that makes sense, and that's a totally different kind of writing task.

Jes: Yeah. And sometimes memory and history, like you're trying to put it in containers and it doesn't make sense. And so what do you do then? Like you just. A lot of it is like I don't know the answers to these questions and that's just reality.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: So the place that came from for *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls* was kind of this place of like, "I have these answers. Let me share them with you because I wish I knew them a long time ago." And *Landwhale* is like, "fuck if I know."

Hannah (Host): [Laughs]

Jes: You know, and also I realized over the last few years— and there's a huge, there's a huge time gap between when I started writing *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls* and when I finished *Landwhale*. Like, they came out three-ish years apart, but you factor in the writing time that it takes for both and we're looking at probably a four or five year gap. And I'm a completely different person than I was four or five years ago. And so part of me is very aware that the more I learn, the less I know, and I think that's pretty evident in *Landwhale*. And *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls*, totally stand behind still 100%. I think it's really important when people are kind of first starting their journey, I would totally offer them *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls* because we have to start somewhere. But I wanted to take the conversation further than that. When you get further away it becomes a little messier. And that's kind of where *Landwhale* lives.

Hannah (Host): Yeah. I've sort of been thinking about this like, like, the way that that these two books fit into the larger history of body positivity and fat positivity and fat activism, in that there was sort of a moment when even the conversation was a new and so many of us needed these things that were like, "hi, you're a human," and that felt so revelatory, and for a lot of people it still is, but right now there are a lot of memoirs coming out. I mean I'm thinking of of your book, and Roxane Gay's book, and Lindy West's book, and, and how their space now to get at some messier realities and some messier stories that don't have to be totally sort of positive, inspirational, activist oriented, but that can sort of get at some uglier sides and some, some harder truths about the experiences that a lot of people who, who have been high-profile body positive activists have lived through. Does that make sense?

Jes: Yeah, absolutely. I'm glad you feel that way. For me, it's just been my journey and I guess I've kind of written the wave as it's been coming. I was one of those people that needed the basic outline and now I'm ready to talk about some more gray area items. And I realized that so many people are still finding this, you know, at the very beginning, I just spent a week at this retreat that's

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centered around people who are not even aware of the fact that you can be treated like a human. And so that was a really fascinating experience, to spend a week with these women that I just fell in love with, they're like family now. But watching the light bulbs, you know, as, as you talk about very fundamental concepts that I had just, I do take for granted because I learned them so long ago. And so that was really grounding to kind of go back and see where people are starting and also acknowledged where I am. So I think you kind of get that spectrum between the two of them, I think.

Hannah (Host): Yeah, and that's always going to be part of activism, which is a kind of teaching as well, is that you're gonna encounter students who are at all kinds of different levels and have to sort of figure out how to pitch your message to where people are at in their own journeys as well.

Jes: Yeah, it was really beautiful to see the beginning. I think I lost touch with that. I think there's always this pressure to be on the edge of, of wherever we're going and it was really humbling almost and not in like, a patronizing way at all, but it was humbling to get to experience like first steps with people because that gave me this perspective of how far I've come, one, and that's awesome. And two, where a lot of people are coming from, and three, how much I have left to do. Like, you know, I was there learning along with the rest of them. Like, I was there having my mind blown as well, just in different ways. So I have so much work to do personally for myself.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: It was great. It was great.

Hannah (Host): That sounds like it was really magical. It sounds really, it sounds really incredible.

Jes: It kind of, it kind of bowled me over to be honest. I walked in there and being like, "I'm going to be really critical this program and give them some feedback on how they can best serve, you know, x, y, z." And then I found myself just like, in the middle treading water with everyone else.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: And it's like, wow, this is really incredible how, you know, and these people are like, at the top of their game. They're CEOs and people who run huge programs across seas, and like all these different kinds of people, but we're all still learning the fundamental facts of existence. And so that was cool. So anyways, loved it. Loved it.

Hannah (Host): Yeah. [Laughs] That is amazing. Aren't we all still learning the fundamental facts of existence? Like, that seems perpetual.

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Jes: Yeah, we are. Yeah, and you like level up a little bit in your like, ability to understand and internalize, but there's always a level above and so we just, you know, keep going and it's pretty cool.

Hannah (Host): Yeah. And part of that's just growing up too, right? Like, looking back on, on where we were at when we were 18. One can always hope once gotten a little further.

Jes: Yeah. Well I think with body image it's really interesting because you'll meet people in their 70 who are still, you know, hearing about this for the first time. And because we've all been robbed of self worth and connection, I think we really have been robbed of is communication and connection between our mind and body. We've really separated them as a culture and in diet culture, you know, our body is like, trying to save us and our mind is saying "you're wrong, body. Stop screaming out for what you need. Diet culture is telling me to starve you." And so we've become completely disconnected, and it doesn't matter what age you are. And I totally understand what you're saying about being 18 and like, time lets us heal and move forward, but it's, it was so interesting to see different people at different ages learning the same thing as well. So I think there's something for all of us to learn no matter where we are, no matter where we came from. And I think *Landwhale* will speak to those people as well. I think the inherent nature of just living in a, in a plus sized body or feeling like you're not thin enough I think is the most common feeling. We all kind of feel like we're not thin enough, and that's what drives fat phobia, and that's what *Landwhale's* about.

Hannah (Host): So can we go back in time to sort of where your journey in this kind of activism began, how you sort of first moved into the sort of public realm of being somebody who comments on, on bodies and how we feel about bodies and how that connects to mental health in a sort of public capacity?

Jes: Yeah, it's total mistake.

Hannah (Host): [Laughs]

Jes: My whole life has just been like a series of like really painful and really wonderful that mistakes. I found a blog a long time ago called *The Nearsighted Owl*. I was just blogging about kitchen ware— vintage baking and kitchen ware— and it was a distraction and I loved it. And I ran into *The Nearsighted Owl*, written by Rochelle who lives in Portland. And she doesn't write there anymore. She still makes amazing illustrations. But she changed my life because she was living this life that I loved, which was a lot of thrifting, cats. It was back

Hannah (Host): Is Rochelle Rad Fat Vegan?

Jes: Yes!

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Hannah (Host): Recently rescued two rabbits?

Jes: Didn't see that, totally believe it.

Hannah (Host): [Laughs] Okay.

Jes: She's amazing. I got to meet her and hug her and be like, "thank you for changing my life" a couple of years ago.

Hannah (Host): That's so beautiful.

Jes: Yeah, so I found her and she had a purple beehive at the time. She's married. She loved all the things I loved, but she was fat and unapologetic and happy. And literally I was at a place, I was, I think it was like 25, 26 at that time. I was in a really bad relationship. That's why I started blogging, I needed something else in my life. And it never crossed my mind that I could be any size and be happy. And so I had this epiphany one night and I was like, "maybe I don't have to loathe myself or I hate myself for the rest of my life." And once you think something like that, you can't really go back. [Laughs] Like there's no way to go backwards truly, because it had planted that inside of me. And so I chased it. And my blog turned into just— I've always written to process life. I did it through college. Do you remember Xanga? Xanga was super big.

Hannah (Host): I absolutely do. Yeah. [Laughs]

Jes: Yeah, okay. So, so I like, literally wrote on a Xanga account in like, broken poetry.

Hannah (Host): Yes! Yes!

Jes: And it saved my life through college. So that's something I've been doing. It's great. I love it. I'm so grateful. So I just continued that and I kept writing about my journey so, you know, as painful— I, I actually, I need to go back and do this. I need to go back and kind of purge like the posts that are actually wrong. [Laughs]

Hannah (Host): [Laughs] Yeah.

Jes: I was starting out and so I just wrote what I was learning. And I think that, you know, people have been on this journey with me for years now, and it's just been what I've been learning as I go along. I got lucky again to the photo shoot to challenge Abercrombie and Fitch and ended up on the Today Show and that kind of just gave me this platform to talk from. And that plus a shit ton of privilege to where people would listen to what I had to say is really why I'm able to write books.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

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- Jes: So a lot of luck and a lot of privilege, and it was just where I was at the time. And it was a good time, but a good place as well.
- Hannah (Host): Yeah.
- Jes: There weren't blogs. I was looking for blogs and there weren't really blogs about this like there are now. There were some plus size fashion blogs that were like, outside of my periphery, but there was Tumblr accounts. Tumblr literally changed my life. And so I found all these very radical fat acceptance Tumblrs, and that was my feed for so long. And it, now we know this, but we can rewire our brains by what we, we look at, and it really changed and shifted the way I view bodies in a monumental way.
- Hannah (Host): Yes.
- Jes: And so I have Tumblr to thank for that.
- Hannah (Host): Yeah. One of the first episodes of this podcast, I talked about how revelatory and life changing and it has been for me to curate an Instagram feed that is 100% fat people. And how that has sort of given me a version of the world that I can look at and look at fat people every day who are being joyful, and fashionable, and loving, and that is like, actively rewiring my brain in a way that, that not only would I have never anticipated, but that would have been literally impossible without social media.
- Jes: Absolutely. And I realized that Instagram is Tumblr for people now.
- Hannah (Host): Yes.
- Jes: I'm sure there's lots of hardcore Tumblr people out there, but Instagram is where I found what I wrote *Things No One Will Tell Fat Girls* there was a list of where to find hundreds of resources and there were no Instagram, there were no Instagram handles because it wasn't a thing. And so now I have to go back. And I have a list of I think like 135 Instagram accounts that like--
- Hannah (Host): Oh wow.
- Jes: --if you want to put diversity in your feed, you just follow them. And, and you learn and you listen, you appreciate. And it really does change who you are and how you think.
- Hannah (Host): Yeah. I've been thinking about to what degree body positivity is— Are you familiar with the idea of a threshold concept?
- Jes: Explain it to me.

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Hannah (Host): It's something I learned from an ex girlfriend of mine who was a Education PhD. So a threshold concept is something that once you have learned it, it becomes fundamentally difficult to remember what the world looked like to you before you learned it.

Jes: Yeah.

Hannah (Host): And there's a lot of sort of political concepts that are also sort of threshold concepts, that once you've gotten there, the world, your perspective on the world changes so radically that it becomes incredibly difficult to remember what the world looked like before that. And there are a lot of those I think that we encounter during our learning experiences where sort of something like, you know, a switch is flicked and all of a sudden everything looks really, really different. And then that becomes, if we are people who want to spend any of our time educating people, that becomes its own set of challenges. So sort of look back and be like, what was it like to not know this?

Jes: Yes. Absolutely. And I also had that feeling. I was just in December, I was in Paris. The city's government was starting this really huge campaign that was anti fat phobia. And their, their word for fat phobia isn't even in their dictionary. So they are literally just like miles behind this when it comes to awareness. And I was walking into this event full of thought leaders, and activists, and social workers, and legislators, and government officials. And you know, my job was not to do the nuanced part. My job was to do the introduction about fat phobia, where it is, why it happens, and why it's important to get rid of it. And it felt monumental to me to compose a very, very brief speech, because it is so clear to me that fat phobia exists. In my world this is not up for debate. It's not a question. I see it everywhere. It is so hardwired into me and I see it and it was like, "how do I convince this room of people who are starting at the very beginning? how do I, where do I even start with this?" Because it is just truth for me.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: And, and on a cellular level, it's truth. And so that was really tricky to kind of take those steps back and say, "okay, where do we start?" And I think those are good practices. You know, if, if you are involved in this kind of work, we lose sight of the beginnings. And you know, I, I, I know that I will forever not be radical enough for some people.

Hannah (Host): [Laughs] Yeah.

Jes: Let's just, no matter how far I push the boundaries, there will always be those that look at me and say, "you're not radical enough," and that's okay. There's going to be inherent judgment and criticism, good and bad. And I've just accepted that. But for me, it's been very clear to me that my job in body politics is one, show up for fat people, and two, be a bridge between people who are

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just starting out when it comes to intersectional concepts and race, and ability, and all of those other facets of bodies, and to kind of carry them along in a very simple way. And so I can do that when it comes to the issues that I have privilege in, you know? It's, it's a little easier for me to step back and say, "okay, white person, I see you getting mad about being called racist, but you are. We all are. We were trained this way. Let me take your hand and guide you slowly through this conversation." That's part of my job. But when it comes to the fatness, because I've been living this for so long, personally, it's a little harder to step back and say, "Whoa, where, where are you really coming from?" And, and do I need to do that? Because some people are there for that. You know, we have this BoPo movement. Like those people are like— I'm making arm motions that you can't see— but they're like, they're like scooping in all these people that have never heard of such a thing and giving them this very like, preparatory lesson.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: And it's easy to look at that and criticize it, and I have, I've written about, you know, why it's not enough, but we have to acknowledge that there has to be a starting point. And for me like if you were to send like, people who have never even considered the concept of liking themselves or being okay, and you send them to me, this fat woman who's like, "you can be unhealthy and be happy and it's cool and whatever. You don't know anybody, your health. And health is a racket by the way." They're gonna run screaming because they're like, "you're a conspiracy theorist who swears too much, and you're just too much." So we have to start somewhere. So I'm grateful for those people who are doing, and you know, we need all of the different pieces and hopefully, you know, I'm a bridge. I'm not the end result. I'm just in between, and hopefully the people continue to work through what I have to offer and keep going to more radical and progressive people. Not that I don't have those morals and thoughts, but the way I share them has to be accessible I think. And so, you know, making sure they keep moving forward towards more outspoken and progressive ideas as well.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: That was a really long explanation for, I don't even know what it was.

Hannah (Host): No, it was great. And it really like, what you are modeling right now is a level of sort of— I, I get frustrated with the sort of very the non-radical version of body positivity, but I think that you are right, that there needs to be space for people to enter at multiple points and at multiple stages on their own journeys so to speak, and that, you know, the sort of insistence that like, everybody get right here with me to a fundamental critique of the discourse of health and the way that it's like, the state trying to legislate our bodies into obedience. Like, maybe not everybody needs to start there.

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Jes: Obliterate. It's obliteration. I got an email that was talking about how essentially—and I wish, God, I wish I could tell you the activist that said this, it was such a drastic, it's such a drastic statement, but they were talking about people's desire to eradicate fat bodies that inherently exist, always have always will, and that that is a type of genocide. And when I read that I was like, "whoa." Like, that's a big word to put on something like, like fat bodies, right? Because we've been taught that they're to be vilified forever. But when you sit down and think about it, you're like, we are literally trying to erase fat bodies. And so yeah, you throw that kind of stuff out there like, obviously this is the person that I would want people to keep going towards. I need you to go have this conversation and I will make sure to send you a link to whoever that is and their brilliance because I have it in my email. But absolutely. And I've been hyper critical of people who are at the beginning stages as well because it's frustrating as like, a fatter person. Like, if you know, a US size 16 or 18 like, people stopping there and using those words— here's what really just gets me, is when people learned the, the, the verbiage of BoPo and you know, then they use it against you as a fat person. They all of a sudden have this vocabulary to use against you to argue against your points. And so I do see the negative aspects of what happens when BoPo public and mainstream, and it's ugly sometimes, and I have people in audiences who are like, "I believe in loving yourself, but it doesn't apply to really fat people." And it's really violent. It's like, really emotionally violent. But we also have to have those people to bring in those who are actually interested in having the conversation.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: We just can't let them stop there I think is the tricky part. And also those, you know, the 18, 16, 18s need to not be the face of the fat acceptance movement. Just like this— I'm pointing to myself— this size, 22, 24 white fat girl in America needs to not really be the face as well because there's so much diversity. And I think something that's been being brought to the front of my mind a lot right now is Ashley of The Fat Lip podcast coined the phrase "infinifat," and it's body sizes beyond the 32. Beyond like, I think she kind of explains it like, bodies that are numberless because we don't even make clothing for them. Like, that's where the "infinifat" comes from and how forgotten they are.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: And they aren't forgotten. Even in my world, we kind of progress to the point that we can ,and we have to work hard to push ourselves further. So that's an area I'm working in. I really need to follow more accounts, listen to more voices, hear what they're saying, and listen, and advocate as well because we're all in this together.

Hannah (Host): Yeah, so that's that piece of the sort of the where our privileges intersect with our fatness I think is such an important part of this conversation, in the way that certain versions— not even of body positivity but of, you know, sort of fat liberation— have still been dominated by white cis women, white middle class

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cis women in a way that is sort of "let's be radical about this one thing, but not about bodies in general." And a sort of radical body politics has to be about fatness, and disability, and race, and gender, and many different elements of, of bodies that don't fit. So there's, there's exciting possibilities for allegiances there, right? For sort of figuring out the way that the work that we're all doing to sort of free ourselves intersects, but that always has to come with a conversation about like, "okay, why do people listen to me when I tell them that I count as a fat person?" Well it's because everything else about me already evidently quote unquote "counts," and so I can use all of that to push you on this one thing.

Jes: Right.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: Absolutely. Absolutely, and I think that it's going to kind of come crashing down around us. Hopefully we, we move forward. But you know, disability within the community— and it's amazing to me how we just get everything backwards when it comes to weight and health. Literally backwards. They literally took like the opposite of the problem and they were like, "this is the one problem." It's incredible, and it just causes so many more problems. But disability like, we're all going to be aging, you know, and with aging comes a transformation of our bodies, and we are so oblivious to all of it until it happens to us. And so it will be interesting to see. I really hope that our politics evolve so that we're not left later in life being like, "well shit, I totally left out that part of the conversation, but now it's relevant to me so I'll talk about it." So I'm trying to get there before I get there because it's very easy to not see things that don't affect you.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: But the reality is that this is all interconnected. If thin people want to feel good about their bodies, they need to be fighting fat phobia. And that's just the way it works and it works that way with all intersections like, it really is true. There is truth and you know, if one person is not free, no one else is. And that's important for people to know. And it's, it's a really interesting point that SURJ makes— the Showing Up for Racial Justice--

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: --chapters. I know that. I've heard that some are great and some are not great. So just want to put that disclaimer out there that I hope whoever's listening their chapter in your city is great. The one in Tucson seems pretty great, and they forced you to sit down with this thought. For people who are not familiar, SURJ is white folks educating white folks about racism, and they are very accountable in what they do. So they're not like, "this is a great idea. We're going to just do it." There's accountability there, which is very important.

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Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: And I remember sitting down and one of the exercises was essentially "how does racism affect you?" Because if you go into this, like I'm a white person who's going to save people, that's a savior complex, and that is the opposite of everything you should be doing. So we kind of have to check in and be like, "literally this affects everyone and it affects me." And fatness affects everyone, and if we liberate fat bodies, thin bodies will then be liberated as well. And so we kind of have to see that full circle as we go into this. And I think that's really important for people to remember. I'm not sure if your listeners are mostly plus size or not.

Hannah (Host): Yeah, I, I doubt they are because the podcast itself is, is about feminism in general.

Jes: Well, great. Great.

Hannah (Host): Yeah. And so I think there's a lot of, there's, I think there are a lot of thin listeners for whom this podcast, I don't know, may have been some of your first encounters with, with fat positivity.

Jes: Well thin folks, if you're listening, we're all in this fight together. So there's some great resources out there on how to be a fat ally. And I would recommend just googling "how to be a fat ally" and see what comes up, and it will be very much worth your time.

Hannah (Host): A, a conversation that my pal Sanara and I have quite a bit is the sort of experience of having people who have spoken of themselves as fat allies, then posting about diets on social media, and the way that that sort of, you know, the proof is in the pudding, so to speak. You know, the fact that that people will say they are allies and then will participate uncomplicatedly in the same kind of culture and discourse that is killing fat people is a, it's always a real bummer is what it is.

Jes: Well and how many, how many of us think that we're fighting for racial justice and equity, and then participate in structures of white supremacy like, every day. So--

Hannah (Host): I'd say almost all white people, if not all white people.

Jes: Yeah. Pretty much all white people. If you live in a white supremacist society, your almost undoubtedly participating in that structure because it just inherently benefits you.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: So there's always work to be done there for me.

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Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: That's where I really need to be doing the most work. And for thin people who really want to make a difference for themselves, and for the world, and for fat people who don't deserve to suffer because their size is different checking in with those really— and you know what? If it makes you uncomfortable and unhappy and feel gross, you're probably doing the right thing. Like this is not fun. It's not cheerful and it's not happy. And it's really difficult because you're looking at systemic oppression, and so if you're getting feel good butterflies 24/7, you're not pushing hard enough. And that's kind of the mental labor that we have to do as people who want to— I don't even know where this rant is coming from. It's just like spilling out of me. That's like, the fundamental work that we have to do, if we really want to see change that doesn't end at our comfort zones. When I feel sick looking at certain issues, that's when I know I have hit a point of actually seeing something differently. And so we have to look at those things in order to make progress. So if you get upset, if you get freaked out, if you are having a really hard time and you just feel like you can't do anything right, that's a good place to be. And you can take care of yourself, and like chill for a minute and internalize like, "wow, this world is a horrible place sometimes," and then keep going. Don't give up. I think that's really important to know.

Hannah (Host): Yeah, that's really, really great advice for anybody who is trying to be an activist, you know, either starting off or or well on their journey. That that, that edge of discomfort is exactly where the learning happens, and it's okay for that to be uncomfortable, and it's okay to need to take a step back and, and process that. But that edge of discomfort can't be where things stop for you because otherwise you're never really fighting for change. You were just fighting for, I dunno, comfiness.

Jes: Yeah. You're fighting for your own comfort really. Yeah. And it's so hard. And as someone who, like I remember in the beginning— here we go, not talking about fatness— but I remember in the beginning reading, you know, all of the posts to white people that, you know, so many people feel is an attack and you know, years ago they did feel as, like an attack because I hadn't gotten to that point, and I kept reading them. I kept reading them until I realized that it's much bigger than me. [Laughs]

Hannah (Host): Yep. [Laughs]

Jes: This is not about me. Maybe, Jes, the whole world isn't about you. This article isn't like, inherently about Jes Baker, but I was participating in this enormous oppressive system, and when I stopped taking them personally and I was like, "wow, I am engaging in white supremacy as a whole and I need to do better as a whole." Like, that was a really monumental shift for me. So now I can read things and be like, "Yep, you're right. I see and hear this." And it still does take processing. And I guess I'm sharing this because there is a lot of emotional labor that you must do in order to be okay while you're reading this stuff. If you are

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reading about fatness and the horrible health crimes that are perpetuated against fat people, you know, you kind of almost to become desensitized to it because it's so cruel.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: And you have to do that labor, you just do. You have to work through it. You have to process it. You probably have to cry and grieve the idea of a happy world going away, whatever you have to do and then keep going. That's all I will say on that. Sounds like fun. Everyone participate. Did I sell it? Did I sell it?

Hannah (Host): Yes [Laughs]. Selling it so hard.

Jes: Now everyone's gonna want it

Hannah (Host): I would venture to say that the experience of learning that not everything is about you is an important step away from white feminism, which often has us thinking that everything has to be about us and our feelings. And that learning that how things make you feel is not actually the most important thing about them. That maybe the most important thing is like, the radical liberation of people.

Jes: Yeah.

Hannah (Host): That that's, that's gotta be part of that journey and it's like, it doesn't mean you're not allowed to have feelings. It just means that you can't continuously center your sad feelings over justice.

Jes: And when you have sad feelings, if we were to apply this to the size realm, if you're a thin person, you're really grappling with, I mean there're just feelings of tragedy that come up when you look at the horrible things that are happening in our world. So if you're dealing with grief that's personal and it's real and valid, but like we all have our body stories, they're all mainly terrible. Find another person who is not fat, who is maybe your same size and then you have that conversation with them. That's where you share, that's where you're validated, and then you go back into fat spaces as a support. And that's kind of the way it needs to work. That's just a fundamental way to really support fatter people. It's not that you don't get to have feelings, you totally get to have feelings. It's who you processed the with that's really important.

Hannah (Host): Yeah. Across the board, like if you have feelings about your privilege, process those feelings with other people who share that privilege, don't make them the problem of people who are oppressed.

Jes: Yeah, and I'm trying to really distance myself from this and just say that also like, the person, if you were to find somebody who was similar to your size or smaller and you're really having like, this moment, they would probably

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understand better. Whereas the fat person would be like, "I literally don't understand what you're saying. I've never had that problem. I'm not sorry for you." So like one, don't pin it on fat people, because some people are here to educate, but not all fat people are. And some, a lot, most fat people I will say, are doing the work of surviving.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: And so it's important to find of your peers like somebody else's who's on that level with you. And please do have feelings and pleased to grieve and please do process because that's how we move forward. But do it with someone who can get you and meet you where you're at, and I guarantee it's going to be a better experience. So.

Hannah (Host): Yeah. Well said. You're making me think of a question than a listener asked me a little while ago, which was about sort of the tension between my talking about sort of your right to take up space as a fat person, and both sort of conceptual space but also physical space, and resisting the urge to make yourself small, and then how taking up space is exactly the thing that white women do in lots of sort of feminist and anti-racist movements is that we take up too much space and don't cede power and don't cede platforms when they need to be cede. And you know, how do I balance when the time is to take up the space and when the time is to not take up the space, to give away the space? Which I think is, is a challenge that a lot of people are negotiating on lots of different ways. Right? When is it my time to be loud and, and assertive and to insist on, on my platform, and when is the time to, to shut the fuck up and get out of the way?

Jes: Yeah. And that's something that we will all fail spectacularly at. And that is inevitably going to happen and it's just the way life works. So we're going to make mistakes. I make mistakes everyday and I, I hope that, you know, when mistakes are made there, you assess learning experiences.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: There's really no paintbrush have an answer for this. It really depends.

Hannah (Host): No, no. And, and a big part of it is going to have to be all of us working on continuing to get better at making mistakes and moving on.

Jes: Yeah. And I really love to allow people to make mistakes. I feel like that kind of compassion is really important when you're working on oppression and in healing spaces, and just acknowledging that we're all human and we're all going to fail and we're all gonna make mistakes. The follow up to that is it's really important to listen and then apologize, like a real apology, and then learn, and then do better. And I think that's all we can do. And I'm saying that as someone who fails and apologizes, who fails so often. It's just incredible. And sometimes I just find myself and I'm like, "holy fuck, what was I thinking?" You know, like,

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just, and there's nothing to do except really genuinely apologize and learn from that, and move on, and move forward. And, you know, share that with someone else who's just like you, if you see them making a similar mistake. You know? I think that goes back to the, you know, find somebody who's your size to have these conversations with, but share them with your other thin friends, you know, these really hard lessons that you've learned while trying to support fat people.

Hannah (Host): Yeah.

Jes: So education there is really important too. Yeah, it's, it's all a jumble though. And it's messy because we're humans and we're not perfect. And so there's no clear cut answers. Sorry

Hannah (Host): [Laughs] Sorry.

Jes: But please still try even though I didn't make it sound very fun at all.

Hannah (Host): [Laughs]

Jes: I don't know what else to say.

Hannah (Host): Well maybe we should leave it there then. So can you tell people when your book is coming out and where they might be able to get it?

Jes: Yeah. I love that we talked about everything that has nothing to do with my book at all.

Hannah (Host): Just gotta make your way back.

Jes: [Laughs] Kind of incredible. I don't know where all that came from. Yeah, so *Landwhale*, I feel like I should give it like, a preface, like tell people what it's about, aside from the fact that it's about a memoir. Can you tell you what's in it?

Hannah (Host): Please do.

Jes: Okay, so *Landwhale* has so many different parts. I pitched it with this chapter in the proposal called "I Was a Fat Kid." And then as I went to my mom's house to get photos of me being a fat kid, I realized that those don't exist because I was never a fat kid. So that was a total mind fuck. As somebody who's been doing body activism e-things. I don't like to call myself an activist because I feel like there's a lot of assumptions underneath that title, so I'll say advocate. As somebody doing body advocacy, I was amazed that I didn't realize that I was a thin child because I grew up all my memories thinking I was fat. So had write two chapters. One's called "I Was a Fat Kid" and the next one was called "I Actually Wasn't a Fat Kid."

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Hannah (Host): Wow.

Jes: And unpacked everything. I learned why I thought I was a fat kid at 31. I mean, that's just like mind boggling to me, how I had looked at those same pictures my whole life. I mean this was not a new scrapbook and I superimposed a fat child on them. It was just really amazing. So that whole process is in there. I went to Harry Potter World at Universal Studios with my friend Bevin, and we did an experiment to see like what kinds of fat people fit on their flight, flight of Harry Potter. Spoiler: I'm too fat to fly a broomstick at Universal Studios.

Hannah (Host): I, so I'd make another podcast that the feminist Harry Potter podcast.

Jes: Oh my God, that's so amazing.

Hannah (Host): Our listeners just sent us to Universal Studios like, a month ago. And so I went and we were asking listeners what they would like us to talk about in the episode on it, and a number of people said, "can you talk about fatness and what bodies don't get to participate in the magic of the wizarding world?"

Jes: Yep.

Hannah (Host): So I'm going to do my research, by which I mean read your book.

Jes: Yeah! Well, what's really fascinating also, spoiler, is Bevin and I weigh the same and we're the same size and she fit perfectly and I didn't.

Hannah (Host): Whoa.

Jes: So basically this book is all trigger warnings and all mind fucks.

Hannah (Host): Yes.

Jes: So that really speaks to like, the standardization of sizing. Right? How there's really no standardization. Actually, I talk about fat, sex, I talk about PCOS. There's definitely more than a few Harry Potter references in there. I talk about relationships, really bad ones, really good ones. I dated a carney. I went and lived on the circus train for a week, that's in there. All of the names that people call me and why they're awesome, like animal names because animals are the greatest. And then on the other side of that is also the actual harmful trolling that happens for me and how much that's impacted me. And we don't like to talk about that. We don't like to talk about how it really does harm you because it feels like then the trolls win. But I didn't write this book for anyone other than fat people. And I wanted to bring that conversation up and say it's really fucking changed me. And you know, there were days that it got me so— it got me close to suicide. I mean, it really did, like the "kill yourself" part really did push me there, and I'm not weak because of that. In fact, I'm resilient and I'm still here.

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And that's great. So there's really heavy discourse around that. Pros and cons of being fat. That's fun. Airplanes are in the pros and the cons. [Laughs]

Hannah (Host): [Laughs]

Jes: And then, you know, just a sprinkling of everything else. So *Landwhale* is available now and you can find where you can purchase it on website that is very personal. It's landwhalethebook.com. That way you don't forget it. So landwhalethebook.com has lists of where you can purchase it from your preferred book retailer.

Hannah (Host): I can't wait to read it. I'm so excited.

Jes: I can send you a PDF if you'd like.

Hannah (Host): I preordered it. I'm going to get a physical copy. Yeah. [Music: "Secrets" by Mary Lambert]

Hannah (Host): Guess what, you can find show notes and all the episodes of *Secret Feminist Agenda* on secretfeministagenda.com. You can follow me on Twitter @hkpmcgregor and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag #secretfeministagenda. Also, you can rate and review the show and you should. I noticed a bunch of new ratings and a new review up on iTunes just this week for which I am so, so grateful. The podcast's theme song is "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans off their album *Chub Rub*. You can download the entire album on freemusicarchive.org, or follow them on Facebook. Jes's theme song was "Secrets" by Mary Lambert. *Secret Feminist Agenda* is recorded on the traditional and unceded territory of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh first nations, where I'm grateful to live and work. This has been *Secret Feminist Agenda*. Pass it on. [Music: "Mesh Shirt" by Mom Jeans].