



Episode 27: Climate Anxiety, Race, and Reproductive Choices with Dr. Jade Sasser

Transcript *(lightly edited for readability)*

[00:00:00] Roxy Manning:

Hi, I'm Roxy Manning.

[00:00:19] Sarah Peyton:

And I'm Sarah Peyton. We're the hosts of the Fierce Compassion podcast.

[00:00:24] Roxy Manning:

In this episode of Fierce Compassion, we're honored to welcome Dr. Jade Sasser, a professor at the University of California, Riverside. Dr. Sasser is also the author of the groundbreaking book, [*Climate Anxiety and the Kid Question: Deciding Whether to Have Children in an Uncertain Future*](#).

[00:00:42] Sarah Peyton:

Dr. Sasser takes us on a thought-provoking journey through the complex intersection of climate change, racial justice, and reproductive decision making in today's uncertain world.

[00:00:58] Roxy Manning:

We explore how climate emotions, particularly anxiety and grief, are shaping the choices of young people who are considering parenthood, with a special focus on the often-overlooked perspectives of communities of color.

[00:01:11] Sarah Peyton:

Dr. Sasser challenges conventional narratives about population and climate change, offering a nuanced view that centers on racial equity and environmental justice.

[00:01:24] Roxy Manning:

And we delve into the surprising findings of her research, including the resilience and optimism found among women of color in the face of climate challenges.

[00:01:36] Sarah Peyton:

Join us as we unpack the critical links between climate justice, environmental racism, and mental health, and explore how these issues are reshaping our understanding of family planning and community well-being.

[00:01:52] Roxy Manning:

Get ready for an eye-opening discussion that will challenge your thinking and inspire compassionate action in the fight for a more just and sustainable future.

[00:02:15] Sarah Peyton:

We are delighted to be joined today by Dr. Jade Sasser.

[00:02:19] Jade Sasser:

Thank you for having me. I'm excited to be here.

[00:02:22] Roxy Manning:

Oh, we're very excited to have you. Your work is phenomenal. The question that we ask every guest at the beginning is, how do you define self-compassion? And what is the role that self-compassion has played in your work in your life?

[00:02:39] Jade Sasser:

This is a really interesting question. Self-compassion is something that I think about a lot, and I am continually defining and redefining through various experiences. But for me, I think it really fundamentally comes back to acceptance, really being very accepting of myself wherever I am and with whatever I'm able to offer or not offer to do or not do. And what I mean by that is I generally tend to be someone who's very driven and very goal oriented, frequently working, you know, working toward goals and accomplishments and doing things. And I, on occasion, I'm brought up against hard limits where I just can't do that, whether it's through sickness or some event that has happened, loss, grief, et cetera.

And this year in particular, I have faced two major losses and a major sickness, all back-to-back, all of which have really forced me to focus on self-compassion. So I'm really sitting with that a lot now with an acceptance that There are real limits to the output that a person can put into the world, can put into their work, and sometimes those limits need to be embraced, and I am embracing those limits right now.

And for me, that acceptance is what self-compassion is all about. It is understanding that my worth and value have nothing to do with work output that they're an inherent part of who I am simply for being here. But I think that living in this capitalist society that is so work oriented and so production oriented I forget that. I lose sight of it all the time. And so that's why I say self-compassion for me is an ongoing work in progress. I have to remind myself of it over and over again.

[00:04:43] Roxy Manning:

Yeah, absolutely. I'm glad that you made that connection between self-compassion and capitalism because so many of us have been taught that our only value is in what we can produce. And when we get into those moments when, like you said, because of grief, because of other challenges, we can't produce, we're told we have no value. And so being able to be self-compassionate and acknowledge those limits and honor them is an act of antiracism. So it feels really empowering to hear you acknowledge and say that.

[00:05:13] Jade Sasser:

And I love that you say that it's antiracist. I often forget to really focus on that part of it, too. But I know that you're absolutely right; people of color are often told to question our worth and value or told that our worth and value is less than others, and especially work becomes the way that it we are often pushed to prove or demonstrate our worth and value. And so being resistant to that is exactly as you said; it's an antiracist act.

[00:05:41] Roxy Manning:

Yeah, and you know, we're talking about antiracism and many people who are listening to this podcast will only hear your voice, so could you share a little bit about your identity for our listeners? What would be important for you to identify?

[00:05:55] Jade Sasser:

Sure. So, my name is Jade Sasser, I identify as a black woman. I am in my late 40s. I'm from Southern California. I am a professor at a university, University of California at Riverside. I'm a daughter, a sister, an aunt, a great friend.

[00:06:17] Roxy Manning:

Thank you. I love that you're including those things as you talk about your identity, because it can be so easy to forget that that's what matters, right? The relationships that we build with people, and, you know, the other things matter because they impact how we're perceived by the world, but they're not the core of who we are. So thank you for including that.

[00:06:36] Sarah Peyton:

Jade, you have a new book out this year, *Climate Anxiety and the Kid Question: Deciding Whether to Have Children in an Uncertain Future*. What led you to write this book? What has taken you into the study of this relationship between climate change and emotions and having children?

[00:06:57] Jade Sasser:

Well, it's interesting because I have been thinking about and researching and writing about climate change and reproduction for a long time, but in the past it had been sort of the reproductive

politics side of things. And what I mean by that is policies; international development, international programs, how those things are influenced by an environmental agenda. And after my first book, I knew that I wanted to write a second that would be about how young climate activists felt about having kids. Because I had been around so many of those activists and knew that it was something that was weighing heavily on their minds.

And someone actually interviewed me for her book. Her name is [Britt Wray](#). She's a science writer and she wrote a book called *Generation Dread*, which is about climate mental health among Gen Z. And when Britt interviewed me for her book, she really talked in depth about climate emotions, which was something that I honestly had not thought anything about at that time. This was about five years ago. And the more I spoke to her, the more I looked at the website links that she sent me, I listened to podcasts, I really took a deep dive into climate change related emotions. And I quickly realized that you can't understand how young people today, especially those who are climate aware or climate active, you can't understand how they're thinking about this question of having children or not if you don't understand climate emotions and climate mental health. And what I mean by that is there are specific ways in which anxiety, depression, grief, and something called solastalgia, which is where you experience a sense of loss and nostalgia for a world that is changing while you're still in it. If you don't understand those things, then you can't really understand and really have understanding and compassion for where young people are when they're struggling with this set of questions.

So when I took that deep dive into environmental emotions, I said, well, this has to be at the heart of the book. I can't not write about it, because if I didn't write about it, I wouldn't be doing justice to the experiences that young people are sharing with me. So that was really the impetus for, for that focus in the book.

[00:09:32] Sarah Peyton:

I'm really struck by that, that you discovered this link, that it was a discovery for you. I'm very interested. And Roxy, it sounded like you had a follow up question there.

[00:09:42] Roxy Manning:

Yeah, I could imagine even this idea about climate emotions will be kind of both confusing and intriguing to our listeners. And so I'm wondering if you can give an example of how this manifests in the young folks that you've been working with, in these activists that you've been working with.

[00:09:58] Jade Sasser:

Absolutely. So first and foremost, I do want to say it's not just young people who experience climate emotions. Anyone and everyone can experience climate emotions and people across

generations often do. Climate emotions are things like... well I can tell you from my own experience, the anxiety that I feel every summer here living in Southern California when the temperature heats up, it gets over 90 degrees, and when it starts to get windy.

Because where I live, heat and wind together equal wildfire. And they actually equaled a wildfire that drove me away from my home a little over a month ago. I came home one day and found my neighborhood on fire, and it was by far one of the scariest things I've ever experienced. And I had to run into my home, pack a go bag, and leave, and I was in and out in five minutes flat. And the closest edge of the fire was about four blocks away. There were helicopters everywhere, sirens, everyone was fleeing, and I left for a night and didn't know what I would come back to the next day.

And for me, that's a dramatic example, but every year, as soon as the, the temperature hits a certain point and it is windy, it's the two things together, I'm immediately unsettled. And it's because of these experiences that we have had in California. There have been so many destructive wildfires in the past seven years in particular. They've become particularly destructive in the last seven years. So many people have had to flee their homes. So many have had no homes to come back to. So many people have gone through the enduring anxiety of should we leave? Should we not? Should we stay? What will happen? And it becomes a yearly occurrence. And that is in fact reflected among some of the young people. One of the people I interviewed for the book was a high school teacher at Paradise High School, in Northern California, who talked about the ongoing complex PTSD that her students faced after the Camp Fire in 2018, and how every summer since then, it smells like fire from May through September, and she herself as a teacher sees the ongoing lingering effects in her students, every year.

I am talking about wildfire because I live in California and this is the climate issue here for me and my community, but I know that there are similar kinds of reactions in places like Louisiana or Florida where hurricanes and intense storms are the ongoing climate concern. And there's a film, a documentary called Katrina Babies that tracks people who were children during Hurricane Katrina and follows and interviews them almost 20 years later to see how they're doing and how they, you know, sort of reflect on the storm. And it's very clear in this documentary, there are lingering mental and emotional impacts for those who experienced this really traumatic event and haven't had the tools and resources to really cope in the face of knowing that similar events can happen again.

[00:13:42] Roxy Manning:

You're naming this as PTSD, which I think is incredibly apt; there's a kind of hypervigilance and anxiety and depression and the sense of powerlessness that so many people face. And as I hear

you, you know, you're talking about wildfires and these massive floods, but I also have a sense that a lot of people are experiencing this even for like the subtle signs of climate change, right? Like I know friends who are saying every spring when the weather turns unseasonably warm there's this kind of tornness about like, I'm enjoying the warmth, and it's unsettling. It's a harbinger for so many other problems that we're facing. So I could imagine that there, just like with mental illness, there's a huge range of anxiety and emotions that people have in response to all of these signs of climate change.

[00:14:29] Jade Sasser:

Absolutely. And I do want to say, sometimes it's not quite as dramatic as feeling deeply anxious or feeling traumatized. Sometimes it's confusion. Sometimes it's kind of a more simple worry or a sense of concern. I'll give you another example. A year and a half ago in February 2023, it snowed here in Riverside, California. It's not supposed to snow in Riverside, California. And at the time that it was snowing outside, and I was filming the snow, I sent the film to my family members. My family is from Detroit, Michigan. It was 60 degrees in Detroit. And it really had not snowed all winter. And so my family members there were concerned and really they all commented just on how strange it was. Strange. For them, they weren't anxious about it, but they kept saying, it's so strange. It's supposed to be snowing here. Why is it snowing in Southern California? So the sense of concern, disconnect, questioning, confusion, those are part of what is loosely termed climate anxiety, too.

[00:15:51] Sarah Peyton:

Well, as we're discussing this, I'm really thinking about you and Roxy talking about self-compassion as antiracism, and I'm wondering about race in this picture, because this is something you've worked with extensively, Jade, with bringing together in such a stunning way questions of climate and race. Would you be willing to say a little bit here about that?

[00:16:15] Jade Sasser:

Yes. So in this book, *Climate Anxiety and the Kid Question*, I start with the premise that there is a narrative that has been built in the popular media over the last few years, which says that increasing numbers of young people are deeply anxious about climate change and because of that anxiety, they are questioning whether they can feel good about having children now and in the future. And that mainstream narrative overwhelmingly focuses on young middle class white people, to the exclusion of low-income people and people of color.

And that exclusion serves to present the idea that people of color don't care, that we are not impacted, that this is not a set of concerns that touch our lives. And I knew that to not be true. And so before I even knew that it was a book project, I just got very curious and started asking

questions of the young people of color in my life, of which there are many. I'm a college professor and I, I keep in touch with a lot of my former students after they graduate. And I teach at a Hispanic serving institution. So there's no shortage of young people of color who I can talk to and ask questions of.

And I asked a lot of my former students whether they ever thought about this question of climate change and whether it impacts how they feel about having kids or whether the prospect of having children is something that they feel different emotions about when they consider climate change. And unsurprisingly, their response was overwhelmingly yes. In fact, I mentioned this in the book, in the acknowledgments. In one of my classes, I simply asked that question. We had read a section of the book. It was still ongoing research at the time. It wasn't a book, but it was like raw data, and it was a research methods class, so I let my students analyze the data and discuss it. And then I simply asked, have any of you ever felt this way?

The floodgates opened. I have never in my life lost control of my classroom, and I lost control of my classroom that day because the emotions that students expressed were raw and deep and painful. They talked about not being sure whether they could ever have kids, not just because of climate change, but because of deep fears and concerns about being able to afford to have families. But what they also said was on top of that we have to worry about climate change, too. So we don't know whether we will have stable jobs or careers. We don't know whether we will ever be able to afford to purchase homes and provide stability. We don't know whether we will be able to manage our own mental and emotional health. Most of them talked about dealing with anxiety and depression. And they said, on top of that, we don't even know if we have a future to look forward to. Because we don't know where this planet will be at the time that we will be ready to have and raise children. And they really talked about how overwhelming it is for young people today to sit at the nexus of all of these kinds of concerns and then, you know, sort of think about looking forward to the future.

And I say looking forward to the future because often children really represent a sense of hopefulness or something to look forward to. And if you are not looking forward to the future, then it is going to be really hard to be excited about having children. Right? Because then you have these moral and ethical concerns. If I don't think the future is a good place to be, why would I feel good about bringing children into it? And that's the set of concerns that is at the heart of this book.

[00:20:24] Roxy Manning:

I know in the book that one of the things you talked about was this kind of dominant narrative that it was the, the moral thing to do to not have children because of the impact of population

growth on climate change and the environment. And you talk about that being an inherently racist stance. And I'm wondering if you could say a bit more about that to help our listeners understand. Like, you know, doesn't that make sense? Less children equals less impact on the environment?

[00:20:51] Jade Sasser:

Yeah. So that actually is the subject that my first book was about which is, you know, sort of the development of these ideas around population and how they became connected to environmental concerns.

Concerns about population growth have always been about concerns about the poor; numbers of the poor relative to the rich. Not in an individual group sense, but in a regional sense, on a global scale, the poor from these particular regions and countries. If they run out of food resources, are they going to migrate and come to our regions and countries?

So those kinds of concerns have long dominated geopolitics. They've dominated international family planning policy, et cetera, and they've dominated thinking among some environmentalists. I would say though, actually that young people today, especially in Gen Z are not so much concerned about those population questions. They have had enough critical education to understand that those ideas have really translated into population control in a very coercive way, which has harmed people of color, women of color in particular. Women of color have a long history of undergoing coerced sterilization or coerced use of experimental contraceptives. So young people are very critical of those population concerns today and more so critical of, or concerned about this question of, how will this planet, this earth, this environment, this atmosphere impact a potential child rather than what negative impact would that potential child have on the earth. So it's, it's a very different set of concerns and that shift has taken place quite rapidly because the population framing it was dominant and mainstream for decades, but it's really shifted.

[00:22:52] Roxy Manning:

Yeah, and I think there's people in my generation who might still be thinking, well, that makes sense. That's true. So it's lovely to hear that there's been a critical analysis of that narrative that has been resisted by younger folks these days.

[00:23:06] Sarah Peyton:

Was there anything else in your research that surprised you with this particular new book?

[00:23:13] Jade Sasser:

Yes. Two things surprised me, and they're linked together. In a section of the book, I talk about a national survey that I conducted of 2,500 people ages 22 to 35 all across the country. Lots of differences, all religions, different financial statuses, different education levels. In that survey, we oversampled people of color, meaning we included half of our respondents as white respondents and half of them were people of color, because we specifically wanted to look at the importance of race.

So, what was surprising in the results of that study were two things. First, women of color, black women in particular, were the most likely to express positive climate emotions when considering raising children in the midst of climate change. And when I say positive emotions, I mean emotions like motivation, determination, optimism, joy. And so we were curious about that. And it was a survey, so we didn't have interview data to put with it, but one of our hunches, based on other results, is that those kinds of more positive climate emotions are associated with religion, having a spiritual tradition that grounds you on a day-to-day basis. The other thing that we also found really interesting is that women of color are most likely to be planning to have at least one child less than what they actually want because their feelings about climate change.

So these are two very different results and they both actually make sense. And what I mean by that is the religion connection with positive emotions; that makes sense among African American women in particular, but the planning to have at least one less child than is wanted, that makes sense too, because in my interviews, it was women of color who said, I am overwhelmed. I feel like I can't take on one more thing. My climate emotions feel like one more thing added on to all of these other existing stressors. And when I think of all of these compounding stressors, as I confront the possibility of having a child, it feels like too much.

And so just to illuminate that for the people I interviewed for the book, very few people, very, very few people said I am not having children because of climate change. What most people said was I want to have children, but I don't think I can because of all of these reasons, existing preexisting reasons and climate change is the thing added on top of them that makes me say, this is overwhelming and traumatizing. I don't know if I can do it.

[00:26:18] Roxy Manning:

I have children who are at that age of the students that you describe, and it feels heartrending to imagine like the kind of ease in which I had children, you know, they don't have that freedom anymore.

[00:26:31] Jade Sasser:

It is heartrending and it's hard for me too. I am in generation X, and in our generation, we sort of grew up with a path laid out for us. To the point where I and my friends, we all had full time jobs before we graduated from college. That's not something that really any of my students have nowadays. And the path to sort of this linear expected future of a job, savings, a partner, purchasing a home, having children. When I talk to young people today, they feel strongly that that linear path is not there anymore. And it's, it's distressing.

[00:27:16] Roxy Manning:

And it's interesting as I hear you describe that path, I'm actually also... it raises questions about who believed in that path, right? Who had the idea that this path was available to them and how does that tie into antiracism and some of the norms and who the systems are set up for?

[00:27:33] Jade Sasser:

I think that's an important question, and I think it goes back to the very first question that you asked around self-compassion and antiracism because when we fall short of that linear path, it's easy to sort of see it as an individual failure, but it, it was never about individual capacity or capability anyway. It's about these systems that are set up to uphold privilege for some and marginalization for others.

[00:28:04] Roxy Manning:

I know whenever I talk about antiracism, I get a lot of pushback. So I'm curious what kinds of pushback you've received or what kinds of conversations, like really fierce conversations, you've had to have in response to this book.

[00:28:17] Jade Sasser:

You know, it's interesting. I will be completely honest with you. I haven't yet had a fierce pushback conversation. Maybe those who sort of feel fierce about my line of approach, which this book is all about an intersectional approach to how race, class, and gender operate when it comes to climate emotions and reproductive anxiety, I think that someone who doesn't want to deal with race on this issue wouldn't read the book. They might buy it, discover it's all about race, and then put it down. But those who don't want to see that perspective, they're not getting through it and then wanting to have conversations with me. So, so far, it hasn't happened.

[00:29:06] Roxy Manning:

Great. I hope it's reaching the people who need to hear it then. Yeah.

[00:29:10] Jade Sasser:

I hope so.

[00:29:11] Sarah Peyton:

I have sort of this... this leap of joy when you say it's all about race because it's, it's such a neglected area of discussion and conversation and it just kind of bobs along under the surface of things and I just have a deep appreciation that you're making it explicit and doing research and writing books. I'm really grateful.

Let me take you back a step before you were talking about kids to the stuff you were working on before that. Just because I am real familiar with that part of your work and I really want our listeners to walk away from this with a little bit of your wisdom about climate justice and environmental racism. If you'd be willing to define those two terms for our listeners and then make the link with climate anxiety, if that's possible, that would be amazing.

[00:30:03] Jade Sasser:

Absolutely. So climate justice is a social movement. It arose in the late nineties, and it came directly out of the environmental justice movement. So I'm actually going to start in a different direction; I'll start with environmental justice, which is linked to environmental racism, and then I'll come to climate justice.

So the environmental justice movement is a movement that began sort of in the 1970s, coming out of the civil rights movement, in which communities of color noticed that they were disproportionately being exposed to toxic chemicals. They were experiencing the effects of toxin dumping on their community's land, near their water sources, near the places where they lived. They noticed their children getting sick. They noticed women being infertile or having multiple miscarriages. They noticed community members developing cancer.

And initially, these community members had a hunch, they had a hunch that their communities were targeted for this dumping because they were low-income communities of color. And so in order to prove that hunch, they approached people who could do research to demonstrate whether there was in fact an association between toxic dumping and the demographics of the community.

A landmark report was written in the 1980s, and it was sponsored by the United Church of Christ. It was in 1987. And that report found that the race and class demographic makeup of a community was the single most important factor determining whether and where toxic industries would be located or toxic material would be dumped. And that landmark report is seen as sort of the first key piece of consistent evidence demonstrating the reality of what's called environmental racism.

So environmental justice is the movement that responds to environmental racism. And it says that, you know, there should be equity in the environmental benefits and burdens that people experience in the places where they live, work, play, and pray. And so that movement really arose as a formal movement in the 1980s and has continued since then.

Climate justice came along about a decade later in the 1990s and climate justice activists said, well, there should be also an equitable distribution of benefits and burdens when it comes to climate impacts as well. And that could be anything from living near oil and gas industry and being exposed to those impacts, or it could be... a lot of people think about climate justice in a global context because poor countries, low-income countries in the global south or small island nations historically have done far less to contribute greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere, and yet suffer the consequences of climate change first and worst.

How does all this come back to climate emotions? Actually, there is some really good research that is done by the [Yale Center for Climate Communication](#) that looks at different demographic groups, not just in the United States, but also around the world. But what's salient to me about the info that they have found, the analyses they've done in the U.S., is that they have found that African American and Hispanic or Latino communities are much more likely to report anxiety and depression about climate change at a diagnosable level, right? So not just the passing feelings of anxiety or depression, but anxiety or depression that could actually be diagnosed by a mental health therapist.

They've also found that people of color in the US are more likely to want to see a mental health professional about their climate emotions. There have been studies that have been done over the decades, especially coming out of Hurricane Katrina, looking at how African Americans in Louisiana were impacted after the storm, both immediately and in the longer term, and African Americans were much more likely to experience PTSD after Hurricane Katrina.

And so they all come together, and the challenge is that so many people in this space are not talking about race. And when I say this space, I mean, the climate emotions space. Race is central to environmental justice, it's central to climate justice, but we need to make it central to the discussion around climate emotions. And the reason why that matters is. We need equitable, accessible distribution of mental health care and emotional support services. We need communities of color to actually have culturally competent, accessible, affordable care. Our communities are hit first and worst by things like heat events and floods. And our communities

find it hardest to recover after disasters because relief and recovery funds are not evenly distributed.

And so one of the things I argue in the book is there is no climate justice without climate emotions and climate mental health. And what I mean by that is if climate justice interventions don't also take into account these mental and emotional impacts on low-income communities and communities of color, then they are not doing all of the work that they need to do.

[00:36:13] Roxy Manning:

As I hear you speak, there's some clear policy implications, especially as we're in the middle of an election year. And I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit about that.

[00:36:23] Jade Sasser:

Well, it's interesting. I think there are a lot of policy implications. And what's really interesting to me is that a group of elected officials in Congress several years ago, they proposed a bill called the [Momnibus Act](#) to protect pregnant people from a number of threats to their health, one of them being climate change. And there is a rapidly growing body of research that demonstrates that pregnant people are very vulnerable to the effects of heat waves, to the effects of air pollution, including air pollution from wildfire, are vulnerable to the impacts of having to evacuate from a storm, for example.

And when I say vulnerable, I don't just mean vulnerable to being stressed out. I mean, vulnerable in terms of preterm birth, miscarriage, low infant birth weight, stillbirth, and pregnant people are not being protected from the impacts of climate change. And the pregnant people who experience these impacts first and worst are women of color, primarily African American women who are already facing other kinds of disparities when it comes to pregnancy and birth.

So this is a very clear racial injustice, a racial health disparity, and it needs policy change. And that policy change, it would be great if it happened under the leadership of our first African American woman president. But really, it should happen at all levels. It doesn't only have to be something that comes about at the level of presidential or national politics. Because one of the things that becomes clear when you really study climate change is that every election is a climate election. When you're electing your city council members, you're electing people who have a big, big impact on local climate policies in the city that you live in. And that matters because that's where you live day to day, right?

I can just tell you where I live right now. My local city council members approving projects that would drastically worsen our air quality. And we already have some of the worst air quality in the

country. We can't afford for it to be even worse, but because our elected officials are more concerned with attracting development dollars, rather than protecting the health and wellbeing of residents of the community, it's then up to us to advocate for ourselves.

And so I would encourage people around the country to really think about the importance of local politics, too, when it comes to climate policy. It's not just at the national level. It is very important, the kinds of things that your mayor, your city council, and other elected officials are doing.

[00:39:25] Sarah Peyton:

Are there some initiatives that you could point our listeners toward or some things to look for in particular at the local level?

[00:39:38] Jade Sasser:

Well, I can say one thing that is going well in a city that is near mine, not in my city, but a city near mine, and that's the city of [Redlands, California](#). Their city council has created a climate council, an intergenerational group of people who advise the city council members on what they should be advocating for and supporting around climate change. Another thing that's happening also in Redlands is that one of their hospitals is offering mental health support, specifically to support people around their climate emotions and climate related mental health concerns.

I think those are the kinds of interventions we need on the local level around the country. Because right now what we have is we have private providers, private practitioners, psychologists, for example, who are becoming trained in climate aware therapy, which is wonderful, but that's a set of interventions on an individual scale, and it's kind of hard to scale that up rapidly, right? And also to make it affordable to people who really need it, and to also make it culturally competent, too. Because cultural competence in healthcare, I think of as a really important component of antiracist work. And so there's much work to be done there.

[00:41:11] Sarah Peyton:

I worry, as we're having this conversation, as you spoke about the, the mounting pressures on young people of color that are leading them to say, there's so many things going on and that's just the icing on the cake, I don't know if I can have kids... I'm worried about little people being born. I mean, is there... what's happening with reproductive future? What does your book say? Are white folks more likely to have kids? What's going on with that?

[00:41:39] Jade Sasser:

Well, actually, all people are less likely to have children compared to earlier decades. So starting in the 70s with the legalization of contraception and abortion in the United States, birth rates went

down fairly quickly, and voluntarily, and have continued to go down through the decades. Obviously, we no longer have national access to abortion and there are a number of states in which abortion is either outright banned or banned at six weeks or is on the ballot to be considered for bans this November. Right?

But, you know, to answer your question around birth rates, it's not that there's a racial disparity in birth weights in terms of birth rates, in terms of who wants to have children, who feels comfortable having them, because certainly white environmentalists are very deeply concerned about climate change too, and are also considering this kid question. The book is just simply saying, let's consider that people of color have been silenced in these conversations and really need to be centered. And the reason why is because people of color are hit harder by climate impacts, and so these mental and emotional effects need to be understood and prioritized so that we can appropriately distribute the resources and services that are needed.

Can I also just add, I also interviewed a number of parents in the book. And one thing that I want to say about that is that becoming a parent doesn't simply make a person feel like they are no longer climate anxious. There were a number of people I spoke to, including Britt Rae, who was the person I first sat down and had that first conversation with that led me to write this book. She was navigating very deep distress, climate grief, guilt, deep, deep distress when she and her partner were planning to have their child. They had their child. And for her, having a child was an act of committing to joy and rejecting fear. But for her to continue to navigate her climate anxiety after having her child, she really deeply had to continue to commit to fighting climate change. And that also is something that other parents that I have interviewed have said over and over and over again, which is that having a child can be and is very important part of being happy, building a family, transmitting your cultural legacy, etc. But, once you do that, the stakes change. They change quite a bit. And so, if you're committed to the fight against climate change, those stakes will get even higher when you have someone else to commit to, because one thing that the parents that I have interviewed have said is, we don't want our child to ask us 20 years from now, why did you bring me into this situation? And what did you do about it when you had the opportunity to fight for my future?

[00:44:56] Roxy Manning:

I think this is really raising, you know, some of the narratives that I've heard about the gap about who's making some of these major policy decisions in our country and like the ages of the people who are making it. So there's this big generational divide, and I'm wondering, what are your thoughts about how people across these different generational divides can have more understanding and compassion for each other as we all face the impacts of climate change?

[00:45:22] Jade Sasser:

First and foremost, I think it's really important to have open dialogue and to not deny or dismiss or downplay other people's experiences. One of the things that young people tell me all the time is that when they tell their parents or members of older generations about their climate distress, or especially about their climate distress when it comes to having children, is that their concerns and fears are often dismissed. And that they will hear from older people that they should "just don't think about that" or "just have a baby and all those concerns will go away." And for a lot of young people that feels profoundly dismissive and in some cases can even increase their distress. I think that it's important to also for young people to really understand that older generations did not grow up with the knowledge and awareness that climate change existed, nor that it is something that we are living with and facing right now. I think the biggest divide generationally is that those of us Gen X and above still see climate change as something that will happen in the future. And I think that most Millennials, Gen Z, Alpha Generation, they understand that it's something that we are living with now. We are in it, we've been in it, and they understand that they have been in it for their entire lives. That's a very big divide, and I think we have a lot to learn from each other if we can first and foremost accept each other's perspectives and recognize that each other's experiences are very different from our own.

[00:47:10] Roxy Manning:

That's really touching for me as I hear you talk about the ways that we can start to hear each other and to hold each other's anxieties and experiences with more compassion and understanding. And it just brings us back to one of the themes of the podcast, which is how do we create the Beloved Community, right? The world where everybody is going to thrive. And I'm actually curious to hear a little bit about how that concept of the Beloved Community, if at all, has touched your life and the work that you do and what you're trying to help create.

[00:47:39] Jade Sasser:

So for me, the Beloved Community... I don't usually use that phrase, but the concept behind it is actually a central part of my life. And for me, it's my spiritual community. I've been practicing Buddhism for eight years now, and I practice in an organization called the [Soka Gakkai](#), which is the most racially diverse Buddhist organization in the country. And one of our central principles is that to live from the perspective of the nature of a Buddha, every day you have to practice deep wisdom, courage, and compassion, and if you're not coming from a perspective of all three, then you're not living in the way that a Buddha would live and you're most likely not going to see the Buddha nature in other people. And without seeing that nature in others, it's hard to really deeply respect them. And we have to fundamentally respect others in order to be able to overcome difference with others. And so for me, the Beloved Community is about being in a commitment to

overcoming difference with others and really valuing and respecting everyone's inherent life of dignity, which we refer to as a Buddha Nature

[00:49:00] Sarah Peyton:

Now, we're coming right to the end, and I just want to make sure everybody knows that not only do you have a book, you also have a podcast. Would you be willing to tell us a little about your podcast and any actions that you'd like our listeners to take, either in regard to your podcast and your book, or anything in the world?

[00:49:20] Jade Sasser:

Yes. So the podcast has the same name as the book, *Climite, Anxiety, and the Kid Question*. There are two seasons, and you can find it on [Apple](#), Spotify, anywhere that you go to get podcasts. They're short conversations, about half an hour long, between me and people who are thinking deeply about these questions of climate change, climate emotions, and raising children or not. And I talk to people across the whole kind of spectrum of views; people who want children, people who don't want children, people who are sort of deeply ambivalent in the middle. And then in season two, I talk primarily to parents about how they navigate their ongoing climate anxiety in the midst of raising children. And I have to say, I go back and relisten to episodes and I'm inspired all the time by people all across that spectrum. And my youngest guest, who I interviewed, was nine years old, and then I spoke to her mother, and that was a very fun interview. And I hope that people will listen to the podcast. It's an easier way into this set of questions. And if you're interested after the podcast, maybe also check out the book.

[00:50:35] Sarah Peyton:

Thank you, Jade.

[00:50:37] Roxy Manning:

Well, we'll make sure that we put a link to the podcast on our page so that our listeners can find it easily.

[00:50:43] Jade Sasser:

Thank you so much.

[00:50:45] Roxy Manning:

Well, thank you for being with us. It's been a joy.

[00:50:48] Jade Sasser:

It has for me too. I appreciate you both.

[00:50:51] Sarah Peyton:

Thank you and thank you to our beloved listeners for being with us and being with Dr. Jade Sasser today. What a pleasure.

If you enjoyed this episode and are finding value in these conversations, please help us spread Fierce Compassion by taking a moment to share this episode with a friend and rate and review the podcast on your podcast app. This helps others find us and helps make sure these conversations reach everyone who might benefit.

[00:51:27] Roxy Manning:

If you would like to receive live one on one coaching from Sarah or me on a special episode of the podcast, or you want to find out more, follow the link in the show notes or visit our website. You can find our books, *How to Have antiracist Conversations* and *The Antiracist Heart* and learn about our podcasts, guests and new classes on our website, antiracistconversations.com.

[00:51:53] Sarah Peyton:

And Roxy and I love teaching and we're always offering new classes, courses and other opportunities for learning in our own individual work. You can visit us at roxannemanning.com and at sarahpayton.com to learn more about our individual offerings.

[00:52:12] Roxy Manning:

We hope to see you.