Voices at the Margins: Podcasting as Neuroqueer Collaborative Autoethnography

Participants

- **Caitlin Hughes** (she/they) - Moderator
- **Sheldon Gay** (he/him)
- **Marni Kammersell** (she/her)
- **Bee Mayhew** (she/her)
- **Teena Mogler** (she/her)
- **Emma Nicholson** (she/her)
- **Chris Wells** (they/them)

Introduction

CAITLIN: This conversation forms part of a creative research contribution to *Neurodiversity: Towards a Critical Turn in Neurodiversity Studies*. It explores podcasting as a neurodivergent way of doing research—one that values voice, connection, and shared meaning. Through dialogue between seven neurodivergent podcasters, we will reflect on how podcasting helps us share knowledge differently: through conversation, emotion, and lived experience rather than traditional academic writing.

Our podcast collective includes academics, practitioners, community advocates, and podcasters at different career stages, many of whom are late-identified or multiply neurodivergent. We contribute from intersecting perspectives of queerness, gender diversity, cultural identity, and lived experience of navigating systemic barriers across academic and community contexts.

While our collective is predominantly white and situated within Western settings, we recognize how this positionality shapes and limits our perspectives. Rooted in neuroaffirming, relational, and critically reflexive practice, we share a commitment to reimagining knowledge, community, and healing through lived experience. Our work spans continents and modalities, grounded in the belief that storytelling, epistemic justice, and radical self-acceptance are pathways to collective flourishing.

I'm getting tingles just reading that—it feels so nice. My name is Caitlin Hughes, pronouns she/they, and I'm a queer, non-binary, multi-exceptional Australian social worker, researcher, educator, and advocate. I was late-diagnosed as autistic, ADHD, gifted, and PDA. I co-host the Divergent Dialogues podcast, which brings a lived experience-led perspective to my work. I'm committed to fostering epistemic healing through relational ethics, narrative reclamation, and accessible, lived experience-driven knowledge creation. I'd love to throw it over to Sheldon now to introduce himself.

SHELDON: My name is Sheldon Gay. I use pronouns he/him. I am a late-identified Black gifted man, and I am a speaker and podcast host. I host a podcast called *I Must Be BUG'N*—BUGN stands for Black, Unidentified/Underrepresented, Gifted, and otherwise Neurodivergent. All of my work is centered around normalizing Black, gifted, and otherwise neurodivergent experiences to help everyone feel seen, safe, and celebrated.

CAITLIN: Excellent. Thank you, Sheldon. Marni?

MARNI: I'm Marni Kammersell. I use she/her pronouns. I'm also an American late-identified neurodivergent adult, identified as autistic, ADHD, PDA, and gifted. I'm the parent of three neurodivergent children. I'm an educator, researcher, writer, and consultant, and I co-host the podcast *PDA: Resistance and Resilience* with Dr. Chris Wells. I'm very excited to be here today—it's gonna be fun.

CAITLIN: Thanks, Marni. bee?

BEE: Hey, I'm bee mayhew, multiply neurodivergent, she/her, living in southeastern Michigan. I'm a late-identified AuDHDer, former gifted kid, current sparkly adult. I'm the co-host of the *cosmic cheer squad* podcast and the communication coordinator for PDN Media, along with Chris Wells. I'm also the founder of Pragmagination, which is work that highlights my 30 years of applied systems thinking working in hospitality and raising children.

CAITLIN: Awesome. Teena?

TEENA: Hi, my name's Teena Mogler. I use she/her pronouns. I'm an Australian autistic, ADHD social worker, researcher, educator, and advocate. I co-host the Divergent Dialogues podcast, and I'm also mom to three neurodivergent teenagers—which, yeah, adds an extra layer. I'm really passionate about amplifying neurodivergent voices and disrupting epistemic injustice through lived experience-led, neuroaffirming, and critically reflective knowledge and practice.

CAITLIN: Awesome. Emma?

EMMA: Hi, I'm Emma Nicholson. My pronouns are she/her. By day I'm an Australian senior business analyst at a major financial institution, and by night I'm a creative. I co-host the *Positive Disintegration Podcast* with Chris Wells. I also blog at Tragic Gift and make videos at Adults with Overexcitabilities. I identify as gifted, dyscalculic, and I have all five overexcitabilities. I'm also bisexual, and I'm theologically divergent because I'm a heathen.

CAITLIN: Excellent. And Chris?

CHRIS: Hello, I'm Chris Wells. I use they/them pronouns. I'm non-binary and multiply neurodivergent—a writer, podcaster, and researcher. I co-host three shows you've just heard about through the Positive Disintegration Network. I identify as gifted, AuDHD, and PDA. My work sits at the intersection of lived experience, psychology, and developmental theory, especially Dabrowski's theory of positive disintegration. I see podcasting as a bridge between

research and human experience. I live with my partner and son in Madison, Wisconsin, USA. Glad to be here.

CAITLIN: Excellent. Thank you, everyone. I am so excited and grateful for all of you coming together for this podcast episode. I don't have words for how grateful I am. The vibe and energy just feel so great. Thank you so much—I really appreciate it.

We have a few questions to frame the discussion. This will be a submission to an academic journal, but we want to keep it free-flowing. I'm keen to hear your thoughts and keep it really real, because some of the things we're going to talk about can be challenging for us.

Question 1: What does podcasting make possible?

CAITLIN: To start: What does podcasting make possible that other forms of research, writing, or advocacy can't? You're welcome to speak or type in chat, and I'll read out text responses.

TEENA: I feel that podcasting really allows for elements of the spoken voice that written text just can't capture—things like laughter, tone, hesitation, pauses, and emotion. These are often erased from text, but they offer additional layers of meaning that, if not present, can't be considered in comprehension and interpretation.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I'm seeing lots of nods. Yep. Okay.

SHELDON: I absolutely agree. It's the voice that brings a different level of connection. I can read a book or look at an infographic, but when it comes to podcasting, it brings another level of the human experience into whatever I'm engaging with. For those of us who have been told that their voice is not one that needs to be heard, it's also a kind of resistance to that. Podcasting is a unique way to make things even more accessible. It can be daunting to pick up a thick book or read some abstract that feels distant from many people, but a podcast gives you an opportunity to engage with a much broader audience.

CAITLIN: Thanks, Sheldon. Emma, I think you had something you wanted to add?

EMMA: I think it's accessible because of the media type. If you've got a phone, you can make a podcast and you can listen to a podcast. There are no access barriers in that sense—in the modern world, most people have a phone.

On Sheldon's point about the conversational aspect, most podcasters use plain language with some awareness that whoever's coming to their podcast might be a new listener, not familiar with the terms. The format lends itself to being inviting to people who may not have come across a subject previously.

It's also lifestyle-compatible. Sheldon, to your point about people not wanting to sit down with a thick textbook—people are working nine-to-five jobs, maybe they've got kids, other

responsibilities. It's really hard to create time to sit down and do that reading, no matter how much you want to. Whereas a podcast, you can listen to it on your commute, while you're doing chores, while you're doing other things in your life. In that way, it's energetically easy to digest and consume. You don't have to carve out a certain space of time in your life to access the information.

CAITLIN: Yep, excellent. bee?

BEE: I feel hyper-conscious right now that I'm the only person without my camera on, but I'm looking at all your beautiful faces and enjoying it. One of the best parts about what makes podcasting so accessible is, first of all, it feels like there's a friend in my ear. Being able to be home, tend to my kids and my life, do what I need to do around the house or out in the world—I can flip one headphone off and still be listening, and I can go back to it as many times as I want. That feels really alive for me.

As someone who is a dialogic processor, I continually learn by engaging with people's voices. Storytelling and narrative engagement bring things to life for me in a way that reading doesn't. Even though I'm hyperlexic and can digest large chunks of text really rapidly, I don't internalize it or even come close to thinking about what embodiment looks like until I've engaged with another person. So podcasts bring immense accessibility to both my life and then when I get to tell people about what life looks like from what I've just listened to, I'm sharing that information further and it becomes a deeper story for me.

CAITLIN: Thank you so much, bee. My brain's going in a million different directions, but I want to give everyone else space before I say anything.

CHRIS: When I was thinking about this from the research perspective and as a podcaster, what's amazing about podcasting to me is that it allows for unfiltered relational creation of knowledge. That's what we do—we're thinking out loud together, discovering meaning together, allowing emotion and embodiment to be part of the record and the process. What's really beautiful is—I think bee just said this—you have your friend in your ear. Podcasting allows for a sense of belonging that is uniquely intimate in some ways compared to other media.

CAITLIN: Marni, would you like to add anything?

MARNI: Yeah, I was thinking about advocacy—that there are different kinds of conversations that happen around neurodivergence in particular, depending on people's level of comfort with the topic and familiarity with it. Part of what podcasting does, that idea of being in the room with people having a conversation that you wouldn't otherwise be in a room with—people can dip into that conversation, but it doesn't feel threatening in a way that it would for someone who's new to neurodivergence being in a room with a bunch of autistic people who are very comfortable with that identity and feeling really good about it. They probably wouldn't feel ready to partake of that conversation. So it's a really interesting way to share this different perspective around neurodivergence for people who want to understand that perspective but don't feel comfortable yet to hear some of it.

CAITLIN: Yeah, thank you so much for all your responses. Did anyone have anything else they wanted to add? Any sparks from other comments?

MARNI: I have one more. I love that podcasting is non-linear. With writing, you have to figure out how to get things down in a way that makes sense. I love that in a podcast, it's a conversation—you can bounce around, go on tangents, come back. That non-linearity, the complexity of that, is something I really enjoy.

BEE: I gave an elevator speech to one of my friends recently who was asking what cosmic cheer squad was about. I described it as: imagine sitting at a cafe or bar and you're listening to two people talk about something really intently, but they let you listen in so you can eavesdrop safely—and be invited into it. When Marni's saying that about if you're learning something new or overwhelmed by information, it's not like you have to sit and listen—it's not a lecture, and you can dip in and out. It's such a precious process in all the right meanings of the word precious. You can really nurture some intimacy and care in that space.

CAITLIN: For myself—my brain is literally going in so many directions right now—but if I think about why I started podcasting and what I wanted to use the medium for, it was really to express myself in a way that other people would be able to connect with the essence of what I was trying to convey. I think for me there was a lot of healing in it as well. I'm a verbal processor, so even just saying it to myself is really helpful, particularly in dialogue with others. I navigate the world a lot in relationship—how things connect, systems, all this kind of thing. I can sit back and listen to a podcast—as all of you have said, it's so digestible, it feels friendly, it feels resonant.

Particularly in research, it can feel quite cold and distant. I think research is changing a lot these days, but podcasting really brings the people into the room, so to speak. With writing, there are some amazing writers who can convey rich layers, but for myself, as a highly sensory person, being able to hear someone's voice just adds something extra.

In terms of advocacy, as a neurodivergent person, as much as we often love to advocate for challenges within our community or side-quest challenges we bump up against, podcasting is maybe not as effortful as some other avenues. It has broader appeal—you can get your message out quicker, easier, maybe not costing as many spoons as constantly posting on social media or going to rallies. I'm a social worker by trade, but as a neurodivergent person, turning up in person to those sorts of things can be sensory overwhelm. Being able to use my voice in a podcast format, I find really rewarding.

Did anyone have any thoughts or sparks from other people in relation to what does podcasting make possible?

EMMA: For me it wasn't about getting my voice out—it was about who would be listening. Particularly with the theory of positive disintegration, I thought it was really important to make it not only accessible but findable for people who are struggling and could use the framework. If people are looking for help about their internal struggles, they're not on ResearchGate. They're not going to places where there are academic papers. They're looking online—where's gonna

come up on a Google search? That was part of what motivated me with my content creation: I want this in spaces where people can find it when they're looking for help. They're not going to academic conferences or research articles. They're looking online in generalized spaces. That's also part of the magic—the person who's consuming this content, who probably needs the help, needs the connection, that's where they're gonna find you.

SHELDON: Yeah, I really love that, Emma. The core of my work is about helping people discover themselves. Usually when people are—what I'm starting to call "neuro-curious"—they're not at the end where they're looking at research papers that say "autistic people." They're not there. They're at a point where they're just looking for familiarity. Even just the other day, one of my friends reached out and messaged me about how she just figured out she was gifted. A lot of that was because of sharing humanized stories—not sharing stats, not sharing lists of characteristics, but just sharing stories that resonated. A podcast can offer that opportunity for someone to see themselves and hear themselves in a way they may not have. To me, that's super powerful. For the work I'm doing, where a core focus is around not having as many late-identified folks in the future—part of that is being able to tell these stories early so people say, "Oh wait, I thought autism or dyslexia or whatever was something different, but now that I've heard this person who identifies that way, that mirrors me." All of a sudden they're starting to ask questions they wouldn't have otherwise. Podcasting can be that bridge to get to deeper discovery.

CAITLIN: I just saw bee put in the chat: "It shifts the conversation from 'what's wrong with me' to 'oh, I'm like that too. I see myself.'"

SHELDON: Bingo.

CAITLIN: Marni?

MARNI: Yeah, just that the more voices that are out there that people can relate to, the more it feels like a human experience. I know so many people in my immediate life who, over the course of having conversations with me, have come around to recognizing different aspects of neurodivergence in themselves. We can all probably remember back to who were the people—probably maybe on YouTube or social media or podcasting—that we related to. Like Katherine May was one that I related to—if there's this educated British woman that's someone I can relate to, that's a different kind of portrayal of autistic experience than the way that outsiders portray it.

CAITLIN: Excellent. Any other thoughts or feelings? I think we all come from different places with different purposes, different intentions, but I think for a lot of us it sounds like we really want to show up in the service of others—showing up and sharing through our voice. A lot of us share that lived experience, so hopefully it resonates with others. Those are a few of the common themes I picked up on.

Question 2: Traditional Knowledge Spaces

CAITLIN: So I thought I might slide into the next question: Where have we felt excluded by traditional knowledge spaces, and how does podcasting disrupt or transform those barriers for us and our listeners? I think we've touched on this a little already.

TEENA: I have something to add. Something Marni said earlier about the non-linear approach that podcasting offers—in written academic space, knowledge has to conform to a whole bunch of rules and particular formats. You have to decide on your position and there needs to be logical flow from start to finish of an academic paper. But with podcasting, you can change your position or perspective in real time because that verbal processing allows you to consider different thoughts as they pop up.

Also, some of those academic rules—like having logical flow or a clear topic sentence—in podcasting, there's space to be hyperverbal and just disregard all of those little rules that would typically exclude our huge amounts of words or thoughts because they don't fit into a nice, tight paragraph that has a topic sentence and a concluding transitioning sentence that's all neat with logical flow. Talking things out allows for pivoting and tangential thought, which then adds perspective and might change direction.

CAITLIN: For me, it opens space for creativity. I do enjoy a nice journal article, but it can be quite rigid. There's not that space for fluidity. You can't change your mind suddenly in the middle of a paragraph. And in academia, you constantly have to justify yourself for everything—every single decision you make, every word you use. Chris, can you have a better go at it? But you have to critique every single thing. You have other people—maybe your supervisors or other staff—so podcasting feels like a free, fluid way for me to transmit my knowledge and lived experience that can hopefully resonate and connect with others in a way that's digestible for them. That's what pops up for me. I think Marni was first.

MARNI: Yeah, related to what you both were saying—I was thinking about the energetic cost of podcasting. Generally, because of the social aspect of it and that it's a time I've carved out to spend with people I enjoy spending time with, it generally feels like an exciting thing to look forward to. Whereas my writing projects—I could still be excited about them, but I'm usually more excited when I'm done than when I'm getting ready to do them. It's like, okay, I've got this thing, I want to do it, but it's gonna be a little bit of a slog because of writing—that linearity, trying to get it just right on the page, and then it's gonna be set. Whereas podcasting with its fluid social aspects—it's almost like a party every time. And you also get to edit it. If there is something that afterwards you think, "Actually, that part didn't come out well," you can take that piece out. It also tends to grow in different directions and unexpected directions, so you're never quite sure. There's an aspect of spontaneity and serendipity that is fun.

CAITLIN: Sheldon?

SHELDON: Yeah, can you restate the question? I want to make sure I'm answering it.

CAITLIN: Yep, that's all good. Where have we felt excluded by traditional knowledge spaces, and how does podcasting disrupt or transform those barriers for us and our listeners?

SHELDON: Brilliant, thank you. The thing that came up for me is epistemic injustice, particularly as it relates to marginalized experiences and voices. For me, what I've found as I started to do this work more deeply is that—with all due respect—a lot of the spaces look like what this recording looks like. Unfortunately, most of those spaces don't have space for my voice or my experience. When I talk about epistemic injustice, a lot of times when I'm showing up in spaces or when others are showing up trying to share lived experience knowledge—which is expertise, to be clear—it's disregarded because folks aren't familiar with it, because it didn't come from Harvard Journal or whatever. There are systems that get to determine what is acceptable, what is correct, what is worthy of being propagated from an intelligence, quote-unquote, perspective.

Podcasting gives me an opportunity to have a podcast called *I Must Be BUG'N* and not care whether or not you understand what that means, because that's for my people and for those who know. I know there are lots of different spaces where, overtly or otherwise, my way of being is excluded. The opportunity to claim a space that represents something that is divergent, something that is not normalized, something that is not readily accessible but is still 100% valid—that's what podcasting for me provides a unique opportunity to do.

CAITLIN: Thanks, Sheldon. Thank you so much. Chris?

CHRIS: I'm gonna try and capture two things briefly. First, in some ways I feel really blessed that I haven't had many experiences of feeling excluded from academic spaces. I realized that comes from my privilege in a lot of ways—the privilege of being a writer. I've never had issues with writing or struggled with it. My facility with language in that way has made that easier perhaps than for some other folks.

But on the other hand, it's taken a huge amount of courage to do the work that I do in academic spaces, especially when I was first getting started going to conferences and talking about autoethnography, which is my area of expertise. There was always this fear: are people gonna take this seriously? It's qualitative, it's based on my own lived experience as the data. Luckily, I have felt really welcomed in the spaces when I've tried to talk about it. But there is this fear—it's exhausting and emotional to even do that work, to get up in front of a room full of academics and say, "I have a history of what was perceived as mental illness, and now I study this theory that has reframed that and changed my whole understanding of myself." It's very expensive emotionally to do that kind of work.

But it's so different with podcasting. With podcasting, I can just show up, be myself. I've been so lucky to have three great people working with me. Especially starting with you, Emma—when we first started the podcast, you remember it was terrifying to do each of those early episodes. It was excruciating. I always use that word when I talk about it because it was so hard. That speaks to the second thing I wanted to capture: in traditional spaces we are expected to translate ourselves if we're neurodivergent and make ourselves palatable to the people who are listening to us. We're expected to mask ourselves and to be acceptable in the ways that we behave. If we have a need to pace around or something in a session, we have to figure out what to do to be in that setting, like at a conference. But on a podcast, we can turn off our video if we need to. We

can pace around, we can play—I have my little fidget toys all over my desk. That's something I love about it: it's not so formal and it's more inviting for somebody like me in that way.

CAITLIN: Yeah. Emma?

EMMA: Yeah, the whole reason I came to content creation in the first place was because of that experience of feeling like I was shut out. I found out about positive disintegration, overexcitabilities—it really sparked something in me. When I was ready to go down the rabbit hole, all I could find was research papers behind paywalls that I didn't want to pay for. When you did get some of them, they were talking about you, not to you. It was just garbage. It was a really bullshit experience. They were heavy going and heavy reading. As you said, Caitlin, that drive for perfection in the language just makes it so inaccessible to read.

Talking about what Sheldon said about the need for lived experience—you wouldn't go to a mechanic who's never driven a car. You wouldn't go to a dentist that was born without teeth. That would just be insane. This guy's telling me how to brush my teeth and he's never had to brush his own? We'd see that with other areas of trade—you would not go to someone who doesn't have the lived experience, no matter how much qualification they had. But for some reason, when it comes to these types of topics, we're quite happy to have people talk at us about who we are without ever having lived that themselves. It just seems like this ridiculous, hypocritical contradiction.

For me, that was the whole thing—I couldn't get accessibility to this information and I just went, "Well, fuck it, I'll do it myself." Because I don't expect other people to go down research rabbit holes and do all that when they've got jobs and lives and things to be getting on with. Particularly the type of stuff we're talking about—it's for helping people get to grips with who they are as people and help them through their struggles. Don't make them jump through hoops of fire, for fuck's sake.

SHELDON: I was gonna say, really quickly, as you were saying that, it just reminds me of one of the phrases I use: labels don't have to feel like pathology. A core part of that is the fact that you don't have to feel like you are being read to out of the DSM as you try to understand yourself. It's really important that you have this opportunity to not have that define who you are, particularly because, as we know, many of those definitions are based on experiences that don't reflect marginalized ones.

A lot of folks doing this work—even when we talk about things like stimming and fidget toys—one of the things that has been brought up in different spaces is that for Black people and others, dancing can be a stim. It's really expanding my work as I think about the spaces that wouldn't accept that as a stim. They're like, "No, no, no, stimming is this." But if we get down to what it actually is and not this pathologized understanding but the lived experience piece—this thing is helping me regulate and soothe—what things fit that model that are represented in this other group? How does that help that group understand something that may be missing from their dialogue or has been talked about in a way that doesn't allow them to get the support they need? Because it doesn't look like what these systems tell us are the only acceptable ways to be autistic,

dyslexic, schizophrenic, whatever. I just wanted to thank Emma for bringing that up because it sparked that point I wanted to make.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I think funnily enough, academia wasn't something I was naturally good at. I'm dyslexic at a baseline. Often when it comes to my expression, it can be quite nonverbal. I had to work really hard at being able to turn my thought process into words or into something that was palatable or understandable to others. A lot of my life I really struggled to be understood by others, not just because of my neurodivergence but the way I express myself. What I love about podcasting is I can speak from my heart and connect with that within others. For me, academia has been inaccessible because I think it's lacked some of that soul, or whatever you want to call it. If you are quite an emotional, sensitive type person, academia can be absolutely brutal.

There's a lot I've grown to love and enjoy about it—I do like doing my little nerdy thing. But as Chris was saying, it takes a lot of courage. If you're a bit different or want to do things differently, you have to go to war for it, to back yourself up and justify it. There is so much—as Sheldon was saying—racism, sexism, transphobia in academia because some folks, usually middle-aged white dudes, have decided there's one version of life or a way to be, or a way to understand or think about something. Whenever it doesn't fit within that, it's really hard. If you have multiple marginalized identities, it feels like everything is stacked up against you.

Podcasting—I just feel like there's some freedom there which I really enjoy. I wanted to check in—I think has everyone had a chance? I can't remember anymore. Everything's just so amazing. My brain's just like this beautiful soup of everything you've said.

Question 3: Reclaiming Lived Experience

CAITLIN: All right, I might segue to the next question then. When has our lived experience been dismissed, and how might we reclaim and honor it as valid, layered, and generative knowledge?

BEE: I was listening to everyone's answers on question two and realized my answer really bridges question three. Being able to listen to everyone's contribution was really profound for me. Thinking about being both dismissed in traditional academic spaces and my lived experience being dismissed—I come from a background with a career trajectory that is societally really undervalued: service, food service, hospitality. I'm a high school dropout, though I've since reframed that to be a self-directed learner thanks to Marni and the Positive Disintegration podcast and Emma and all the cascade effects of running into y'all.

Being here today is really flooding me with feeling. Restaurant work—I owned a restaurant for 11 years. I've lived and breathed the industry since I was seven years old. My mom was a bartender. I grew up in it. I got my first paid job in a restaurant when I was 14. I was a manager by the time I was 18—the day I turned 18, I got keys. All of this requires so much organization, finesse, a kind of executive function that doesn't always translate, certainly not to the academic world. But it is so comprehensive and in-depth. Knowing health codes, knowing how to manage

a rush, knowing how to order inventory—all of these things are very complex processes, and it's so easily written off by our culture.

When I look at what I do and how I translate these worlds—I love reading academic papers, I love taking deep dives, but I don't think that's a representative example of anything typical because I'm not a representative of something typical. When I realized that the people I work with in the trenches of the restaurant, or even with my children, raising kids with my husband who has a totally different internal architecture than I do—there's constant translation work. It's very skilled work and it's super undervalued. Whether that is trying to advocate for how lived experience is valid research and finding the right vocabulary for it has been the absolute crux of my work.

Being a part of this project—as my husband just said to me as I was setting up, "It's really cool that you get to be a part of this and you never went to college." Having that level of access to people who are open enough to recognize the value of my lived experience and how I translate it and then how I put it back in the world to reach other people is deeply meaningful. That's question two and three, so thank you all for your contribution and your encouragement and everything you do to make this circle really beautiful.

CAITLIN: My heart is so full right now. I wanted to throw it to others.

SHELDON: Really quickly, bee, I love the merging of questions—it wouldn't be a neurodivergent space without a little bit of blending and bending of rules. I loved everything you were sharing. Going back to this idea that lived experience is expertise—I mean, before these educational institutions existed, what was valid then? The elders, our ancestors, had wisdom that deserved to be heard, whether or not there was a piece of paper with some emblem that told them they were worthy of certification.

To bring it back to the question of when has our lived experience been dismissed—I can name several different things, but going back to the reason why I was late-identified: in part because the way that I showed up as a little Black boy was not seen as something that should have been rewarded. One of the first examples is in first grade where I was, quote-unquote, "sleeping through first grade." It was seen as disrespectful and disruptive—"he doesn't care about school." The short story is no, I was bored out of my mind. To this day, I still have memories of waking up, looking at the chalkboard—yes, I'm old enough for chalkboards to still have been used—and being like, "What, are we still talking about this?" and being like, "Okay, I'm going back to sleep because there's no way I can sit up and deal with this."

But the experience that was perceived outside of me was very different. If I didn't have my mom to advocate for me—not everybody does, not everybody has someone to understand and advocate for them—a lot of these behaviors that would at least spark some curiosity in, frankly, little white boys, were things that frequently, as I reflect back, were like, "Hmm, what's going on with this kid?"

The other example I'll share: whatever grade I took an assessment test for who would go into pre-algebra versus algebra, I took the test, had no idea about anything. I ended up doing

extremely well on it—no idea because I'd never taken algebra, but I did extremely well. At this point, this is the assessing—the straightforward idea would be, okay, put him into algebra. But instead, what the school did was say, "Hmm, one, was he cheating? Two, we don't trust that you will be able to do well enough, so we're gonna put you in pre-algebra." They told me there were people who took algebra that I did better than, so how have you put me down this path? These are questions that have many other discussions to be had around them. But these are times when how I showed up completely flew in the face of the ways in which people wanted to accept it. They tried to find a different way to explain what was in front of their face.

A big part of my work today is about saying no—when we see these things, we need to be curious first and ask, "Is there something else here?" versus automatically trying to reprimand and exclude people from the things that otherwise might enhance the experience for not only that individual child but others within that institution.

CAITLIN: Thanks, Sheldon. I think Teena was next.

TEENA: I love hearing about your mom advocating for you. I have a son who is dyslexic, cognitively delayed, and ADHD. In grade two, his teacher—amazing, amazing man—picked up that his effort level for reading was exceptionally high but his ability was exceptionally low. There's a real mismatch there, which set us on the path of trying to understand. By grade five, I was recognizing ADHD and he was still struggling in that school space. I spoke to his classroom teacher and mentioned what I saw, what I was thinking, and it was completely dismissed. He was just framed as a typical boy who's not interested, who needs to try harder.

Thankfully he has a social worker for a mom and a social justice advocate for a mom, and I didn't leave it there. But my lived experience in what I was trying to get across in that space with his teachers was just completely dismissed because he absolutely fit the mold of "disinterested boy." I think every time we hear that phrase "it's just your perspective"—especially in that dynamic when you are a mother trying to advocate for your children—there's often this suggestion that you're just making shit up to get them out of trouble or make excuses for them or whatever it might be. That phrase is so dismissive and really does ignore everything that we know about ourselves.

I think as neurodivergent people, when something's really interesting to us, we become incredibly passionate about it and absorb more information than I ever knew was possible. In terms of honoring and reclaiming that lived experience, when we prioritize research and podcasts that are backed by lived experience and people talking about their own experiences, we really give that credit. We know within ourselves that if we're talking about something, if we're learning about something, we're going down a million rabbit holes and gathering information from everywhere possible. There's something really powerful and beautiful about that.

CAITLIN: Marni?

MARNI: I was thinking about gatekeeping in relation to some of what others have shared, and also community within academic spaces in particular. I decided to stay home when I had children and had been a very intellectual and academically driven person, but it was important to me that

my kids had a lot of freedom and options. My midlife crisis was when they started to become teenagers and I had some space and wanted to figure out what I was going to do. I became interested in neurodivergence and self-directed education, alternative education. It's ironic that I chose to go back to school for a doctorate at that point because both of those interests push back against academia—the whole concept of it as this construct where "this is how you learn."

Yet that is part of my personal process, but it's also access to a community. A lot of what you get from something like a doctoral program is people who want to talk about topics at an intense level of interest, at a deep level. As a doctoral student, being able to have conversations with people around both of those topics has been fabulous. But that is also something that podcasting can open up for us. As bee and Sheldon both said, you get to talk to people who are not within the confines of academia. Sometimes you can have these deep conversations, but then you can realize you're not getting all of the broad view—you can get into the echo chamber of academia.

I love that podcasting is this way of accessing community that's much broader and that can put you in touch with people from all around the world on topics of interest. It's all right there in your phone, in the internet. You can go and listen to other people's podcasts and feel like you have friends all around the world and start to get those alternative perspectives from people from different cultures, different races, all sorts of different backgrounds, different socioeconomic backgrounds, different education statuses. You're able to really broaden your perspectives while doing the dishes or doing whatever it is you need to do to keep your life running.

CAITLIN: Chris?

CHRIS: Every time I go to talk, I feel overwhelmed by the requirement that I need to somehow be brief while saying something that is so long-winded and intense. I was still a doctoral student when I discovered the theory of positive disintegration. My program was in psychology, but the theory of positive disintegration has lived in gifted education for the past 45-ish years. Before that, it was a theory that came from psychiatry and psychology from Kazimierz Dabrowski, who was a psychiatrist and psychologist. The theory really is radical—it is a reframing of mainstream psychiatry in many ways.

When I discovered it, even though it was framed as something about giftedness, I immediately recognized the deeper connection with lived experience of mental illness because that was my history. I had lived through a decade on disability for mental illness. I've been diagnosed with many things, but by the time I discovered the theory, I was reckoning with the fact that I was gifted too, and that both of these things could coexist and were not mutually exclusive.

What connects to this question is that whenever I tried to talk with scholars in the field of gifted education about how to integrate my lived experience history with my new scholarly career, I was told, "It's your giftedness that matters, Chris. Let go of—you're not ADHD, you're gifted." They were constantly invalidating my lived experience. I'm sure they still would if we were still having these conversations. In some ways they are, because now as my work has gained traction in the field, I can see that I am threatening these people and their belief systems. What I'm saying about the theory is at odds with what they have believed for many years.

It's been really hard for me as somebody who now has to challenge the existing or mainstream narrative in gifted ed to say, "No, this is what this theory really means. It's off track in this field. There's a broader perspective of understanding all of this." I just always remember those moments of people telling me that I had to just keep this part of myself quiet or let it go or forget about it. For me, it was a crucible of learning how to truly accept myself and work with inner authority and to say, "Oh no, you don't get to define who I am and what my journey is. This was my path here, and it's your ableism and your sanism that has to be grappled with here, not my background and lived experience." That has been a whole journey in itself.

CAITLIN: Thanks, Chris. Emma?

EMMA: Yeah, backing off what Chris was just saying, I think lived experience being valued is not only something that needs to be pushed forward in academic circles, but I think we've gotta protect that really hard in the podcasting space. Chris, we've been podcasting for what, four years? We've got 80-something episodes. We've been invited on other people's podcasts together a couple of times. Through that time, you've been invited on other people's podcasts to talk about your lived experience. Do you want to know how many times I've been asked by myself to go on someone else's podcast? Zero. Jack shit.

Because I think there's still this thing that without Chris's academic legitimacy, I don't think my stories are perceived as having any value. And yet when I make my videos, much like bee takes from her restaurant experience and all the complexity in the process and systems there, when I make videos I'm pulling from project management like nobody's business. I'm using SIPOC and SWOT analysis and process flows and the five whys and all this stuff I've taken from my day job that I've been able to apply to my own transformation and journey. But in the podcasting space, I don't have as much currency or value as what Chris has. I know that part of that is obviously because of the deep work that you've done, Chris, around the theory and stuff, but I still think we need to make some sort of measure to make sure we're not only asking guests on who have a PhD. We're sharing other people's stories, and we need to continue to protect that, to get diverse voices in.

As Sheldon says, you can see the color palette in general of this podcast right here, and it looks a certain way. We've gotta be really careful about not falling into the same old traps that have been laid out before us. Because we want our podcast to have some sort of legitimacy or we want it to get a bigger audience or something, and so we tend to lean on the crusty old white guys because we think they're gonna give us some sort of stamp of merit. We've gotta get out of that headspace and stay out of that headspace.

CAITLIN: Well, I just want to say that I appreciate each and every one of you for how you show up. I've been so inspired by all of you through podcasting, through relationship and conversation as well. You're right, Emma—there is unfortunately still that bias there. Much like Chris, I'm gonna have to try and summarize, which is a struggle at times. But for me, I literally cannot show up without my lived experience being in the room, spoken, part of anything.

For context, I actually started out as a peer worker, and then I went into clinical work in academia, and then I went back into private practice. For me it was like embracing this lived

experience I had, although I didn't have a full understanding of everything that entailed until much later as late-diagnosed. Then I went into clinical and academia and it's like, "Okay, well you just gotta throw that out now or just ignore it or compartmentalize it. You can't think about it, talk about it, anything. You've gotta be this professional person and turn up in this particular way."

When I had a massive burnout and left my employment to go into self-employment, I was like, "You know what? I feel like there's some magic in this lived experience stuff. I feel like I'm onto something here." I went through this whole process of being late-identified as autistic, ADHD, gifted, and all this kind of thing. I thought, "I really want to prevent other people from going through what I did." Maybe if I share my story and my lived experience, some folks may resonate, some might not. But I've been on this whole journey—it would be such a shame for me to not have a space to share that.

For some people they might feel like it's talking about themselves, and obviously it is—it's your lived experience. But particularly for neurodivergent people, the feedback I've got and conversations I've had—bouncing off their lived experience with others, whether that's through podcasting or other means, really helps them understand themselves a lot more. Same for myself—being able to hear other people's stories. Sometimes it's not 100% my experience, and I really enjoy hearing the diversity of others' experiences as well because sometimes even if we are reflective, we box ourselves in. For me, I can't be me without integrating lived experience in literally everything I do. It doesn't feel authentic for me.

There's a few comments I wanted to check. A white guy wrote this, but he's young and I think speaks to what we're all talking about on one level or another: "They aren't looking for diversity of thought or experience. They're looking for people who look different, think the same." Yeah, 100%.

Question 4: Contradictions and Messiness

CAITLIN: I think we've touched on some of these anyway, but: What truths live in the contradictions, tangents, and half-finished thoughts that emerge when we talk like this?

For me, just being able to question my reality and my bias when I hear other people's perspectives. That's something I've really appreciated through this conversation—being able to kind of check myself, but also that emotional heart resonance I've been feeling. It's really lovely.

CHRIS: For this one, what comes to mind is that it's felt like such a paradox learning about neurodivergence, especially because it seems like coherence comes through contradiction. The messiness is the path or the method that reveals the depth. I think that's what I bring to my work—it's deep, there's a lot of depth to it. That immediately cuts through a lot of the bullshit, or meaning that a lot of people probably don't pay attention to it because it's more than they're looking for in this age of people looking for reels or just a soundbite of information and not doing the deep dives.

For podcasting, what I love about it is that the messiness is a part of it. It's okay for it to be this way. We get to play around with ideas, we get to go on tangents. It allows the complexity that we're grappling with to breathe. We're not forcing conclusions. To me, that's part of what makes it so special.

CAITLIN: Sheldon?

SHELDON: I was jotting down a note about lived experiences versus academics. What it brought up for me, especially as Chris was talking, is this term I'm not quite figured out exactly what I want to do with yet, but I've been saying that I'm like the people's platypus. What that means is my work is for the people. Being a platypus of the world where I demonstrate that these terms we have, these ideas, are just constructs—things we've made up.

A platypus is a mammal, but if we strictly thought about it from a book knowledge perspective, we would struggle to accept that a platypus is a mammal or that it even exists, period. We are told that the ways that it is don't exist in one being. But lived experience—if you've seen a platypus, it exists. There's no denying that. It's through realizing, okay, you can lay eggs, you can have a duck bill, you can produce milk, you can do all these different things and still be a valid creation, even if a book might tell you you're some sort of fantasy figment of somebody's imagination.

These are the things that exist for me—these truths about the world that go beyond what established knowledge could tell us. Things that come when we really dig in and truly understand a person for who they are, not for any symptoms of a disease or a mental health condition or a neurotype or whatever. When we go beyond those things and really get to know that you can be somebody who—I'm processing in the moment, but one of the things that has gotten a lot of talk recently in neurodivergent spaces is the prevalence of ADHD and autism existing together, which for many years were considered so different. People weren't looking for one or the other. If you're ADHD, you're like this. If you're autistic, you're like this. They don't go together. But there are so many people I know that hold both identities.

Their experiences are 100% valid, but the truth of it isn't because of some external validation. It's in the lived experience and listening to them about what it actually means to be existing in those bodies and in those minds and in their vessel. For me, the capital-T truth is what exists kind of in between these ideas of contradictions and different things of that nature.

CAITLIN: Sorry, Sheldon, if you saw me laughing—it was because of something Emma put in the chat, which I won't read out, but was absolutely hilarious. You're talking about very serious things and then I'm like laughing, and I just wanted to let you know that.

EMMA: Yeah, but this is like the typical neurodivergent distraction, right? Messiness. I put a fun fact that we were talking about platypus and I'm like, "They always look like they're farting because air bubbles get trapped in their fur, and then when they dive there's this little stream of bubbles coming." That's where my brain just jumped to during that conversation.

I think that's part of it—going down unexplored tangents and things. Sheldon says something about platypus, which I was not expecting, and then it just sparks this whole other train of thought. I think that opens us up to conversations we never thought we'd get into. The one thing I like about podcasting is being able to call bullshit.

A couple of you mentioned when we're talking about writing in academia that the difference with podcasting is you can change your perspective halfway through. You can't really do that with a paper. The other thing you can do in a conversation, if there's more than one person, you can call bullshit halfway through. You don't have to post something and then some troll gets in your comments and goes, "You're an idiot." You get that real-time—"Well, actually, I disagree with that." Disagreement, I think tangents and disagreement, are a great way to open our own mind and bring in thought that we didn't even know was in there. I didn't know I'd be thinking about platypus farting this morning, but here we are.

CAITLIN: My autistic brain was whipping out all these platypus facts, but I won't share that—maybe afterwards. But yeah, just briefly before I pass it over to bee, the amount of times I've learned about myself and the world through our guests on the podcast—I've learned some amazing things. bee?

BEE: I was very happy to hear Sheldon bring up the platypus because I remember having a conversation with him recently about how explorers/colonizers came back from Australia to Europe and said that the platypus couldn't possibly be real because there's no such thing. I was like, "What a white guy thing to say"—you're just gonna not believe it until you see it. What a lack of imagination, what a lack of just exposure to the world. So yes, now I'm thinking about echidnas, platypi, all the farting. This is all coming together.

But what I had jotted down was: the messiness is me showing up anyway. The question is, "What truths live in the contradictions?" In the spaces I find myself sort of shapeshifting through, I will check out sometimes—or it seems like I'm checking out. I might be doodling, I might be fidgeting, I might be off-camera, but I'm writing down notes. I'm jotting and doing all these things to keep myself engaged. That's a very important part of that work. It seems like I might be checking out of a specific conversation, but how I stay present is this movement and this aggregation of what I'm hearing from other people. Maybe the methodological debate isn't something super important to me, but I still exist in a space where I trust where it's all headed. Whatever my individual understanding limits are, the messiness is still me showing up anyway.

CAITLIN: Thanks. Teena?

TEENA: Yeah, I think sort of carrying on from that—the contradictions and tangents, in the process of doing a podcast, exposes the process of the learning and understanding. I think it is that messiness of changing direction, challenging, or realizing there are contradictions—that is the process of understanding and research. It is that methodological approach that is often hidden. You don't see that in a more traditional academic space. You spend so much time mapping out your methodology and your research design, and it's critiqued and you have to change it to fit or whatever that might be. But none of that exists in a podcast. It's raw and it's there and it's for everybody to see. I think it's really, really important.

I think it's a really important process to expose because it creates a safety for people that might be excluded because it feels like you have to know what you think before you're allowed to speak. When the truth is you really don't—you can wing it and just collect those ideas along the way. If with the half-finished thoughts you never actually get to the finish point of that thought, I think that can be seen as a good thing because you can never know when you've finished learning something. I think all thoughts should be half-finished.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I was just thinking back to when we first started the podcast, Teena, and how we were quite anxious and nervous and we had our little notes and our little structure. Now we just turn up and wing it, and it feels really comfortable and really nice. This thought keeps coming up, so I feel like maybe there's some importance in it. I think it was probably around a few things people showed up with, but the thing I love about podcasting is that we can talk in layers. With writing—maybe it's just not my strength in synthesizing writing together—but when I'm taking in auditory input and thinking about it, I can be with the information but also participate in it at the same time. When I'm reading, it's just a different experience—maybe because words aren't, because I'm dyslexic, there's just a lot more energy and effort involved.

Being able to turn up—a lot of neurodivergent folks, we are very layered. We need the space and safe space to be able to show up however we are and not feel nervous or stressed or anxious about how we show up. A lot of the folks that have come onto the podcast, or I've been really lucky to be part of some of your podcasts as well—there's just this shared understanding and there's no judgment. We'll forget things or whatever, and it's just really accepted. It's such a lovely feeling to feel kind of embraced in that way. Marni?

MARNI: I was thinking about how this is kind of like the process of qualitative interviews in a way. There's a similarity. Qualitative research was not recognized as valid for a long time and has struggled to gain legitimacy in the research world. Podcasting kind of lays bare—we might have conversations like this in the course of putting together qualitative research, which is different because you're usually trying to draw out someone's story. But in a podcast, many of us do that with others, and it's a more direct way to share those stories.

Whereas when you're doing it in an academic setting with qualitative research, you are synthesizing and there's the whole process of comparing and drawing out themes. It's a much longer, drawn-out process, which has some positives and some ways that it becomes richer. And yet you also lose a lot of the details that you can share by podcasting, by taking those stories directly to the public who can then sit in and hear that lived experience directly.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I'm just gonna read out a few of the comments: "All thoughts being half-finished—I like that. Feels like an opportunity to remain curious." "Bucking the need for perfectionism being completion obsessive. Remaining curious is so important to me." "bee, so I'm the only one that printed out the run sheet to do notes on her. I love this."

I love this that we can be recording this podcast but also have these little side-quest conversations in the chat as well. As you said, Marni, I'm a qualitative research nerd. Being a qualitative researcher, you get judged—a lot of people don't see it as legitimate. But historically, particularly in my area of research in the autism mental health space, a lot of autistic voices have

been left out of the research, and people have made really unhelpful, harmful assumptions about autistic people. I'm just kind of like, "Well, if we want to understand about a particular population of folks, shouldn't we ask them?" I feel like that should be the starting point. How can we understand these folks without actually trying to understand them? My brain boggles, but this is the world we live in. Teena?

TEENA: Yeah, with the PhD space, my research is with autistic ADHDers. Just the simple fact of trying to get through ethics—because I'm wanting to talk to people who are autistic ADHD, it instantly goes into high-risk ethics space, which is so much harder to get through and all the rest of it. There's just this assumption applied that because a person's autistic ADHD, there's some level of fragility there and they can't be spoken to without protection. That in itself just absolutely puts up this massive barrier to hearing what we have to say. It really pisses me off because I myself am an autistic ADHDer doing this research, speaking to these people. The thought of being viewed as not capable of being spoken to without some sort of protection really infuriates me because it devalues who I am, what I've lived through, and what I'm capable of, all because of my diagnosis. Yeah, I think it's—yeah, huge soapbox that I could bang on about for a very long time. But yeah, small win—I'm doing a low-risk ethics application. Go me.

BEE: Teena said something so deeply beautiful that I don't want to just crack a farting platypus joke, but back to the farting platypus: it's like we can do multiple things at once. One of the beauties of a space like this is that we can have side quests going on in a chat. We can be looking at each other's faces. We can be thinking and doodling about what we're gonna say, and we're listening and absorbing. All of these things are—in the neurotypical world, it's like, "Well no, you're supposed to sit still, pay attention, follow the agenda and do these prescribed Robert's Rules of Order type things."

This is where podcasting makes room for nimble adjustment to reading the room, knowing your audience, figuring out what's going on, and being able to hold space for the fact that many of us do multiple things. It might not seem like we are engaged in the typical way, but seeds are being planted, deep thoughts are actually occurring. I'm not going to be able to process this conversation fully until I have a good sleep and I wake up tomorrow, and then I will process that in the WhatsApp chat.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I agree. It's such a rich discussion. It's gonna probably take me like a week to fully process everything. Well, I think what inspired me to get us all together for this submission was a few different reasons. Number one, I kind of want to rebel against a lot of these things that pop up in academia—like Teena was saying, regarding assumptions around neurodivergent folks and completing research with them, but also the way that we are meant to show up as academics or researchers. But also I think it was a little bit of a celebration of this sort of meta-podcast of all our podcasts because I think a lot of us have really connected through each respective podcast. So it's just—much like bee was saying—this kind of synthesis, bigger picture look at the kind of work we're actually doing.

I don't know about yourselves, but for me, sometimes I'm just so busy doing the thing, and it's nice to take some space to step back and reflect about what I've been able to achieve through

podcasting and how that's hopefully rippled out for others that have listened. I think that kind of segues well into the next question.

Question 5: Community and Belonging

CAITLIN: How does this kind of podcasting ripple into neurodivergent community and belonging?

TEENA: I'll go. I think, putting my social work hat on for a quick second, this kind of podcasting really ripples into the neurodivergent community by embodying the very principles that social work upholds—things like being empowering and centering the lived experience voice, recognizing that knowledge is not only produced in institutions. It's in the stories and the relationships that the knowledge is shared. That creates that sense of belonging when you see yourself in other people's stories. I think it's a very social work thing to do, and I'm really, really proud to be a part of it.

CAITLIN: Chris?

CHRIS: That's perfect, Teena, for what I was thinking too. I think every episode becomes a mirror for someone who's never seen themselves in the professional discourse before, and it builds belonging. If there's one thing we've learned, especially over our four years with Positive Disintegration at this point, it's that we model authenticity. We are ourselves when we show up to every episode regardless of who our guest is. We're modeling in our conversations to the people who are listening to us: you are not too much, you are part of this conversation. I think that resonance builds community so much faster than writing can, or especially academic writing.

These conversations—they're like wildfire. I'm amazed at our download numbers over four years. Just to see how people connect with us, it's a beautiful thing. It's been amazing for me to see that. Sometimes I think back to my younger self in my twenties who just felt so isolated and alone, and just thinking, "I wish I had known what was gonna happen and that all of that suffering was gonna bring what I have now," which is kind of amazing. It's been really beautiful to be here in conversation with all of you today. That's for sure.

CAITLIN: Thanks, Chris. Sheldon?

SHELDON: For those that know me, this is officially my point at which I bring in a bell hooks quote. As I look around this space, although I've said before how folks present may be relatively similar, I want to be clear that I do not assume all of your experiences are the same. The bell hooks quote that comes to mind is one that I share pretty frequently around how do we define beloved community. bell hooks said that "beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference, but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world."

I share that because I think it's important to be mindful that we're not looking for communities where everybody has to be the same, where people are afraid to be their authentic selves, where even if we share the same neurotype, that same label, our experiences have to 100% align for us to find a way to feel like we belong together. I think with these podcasts, showing all the varying ways that you can show up and still be affirmed, still be loved, still be valuable, still be worthy of all the things that you may have been told you're not worthy of—I think that's super powerful.

A little bit to Chris's point, most of my life I've been told to hush up, to not speak, to save all that extra stuff for someone else or in a different space. But having spaces like this where there is a bond that is built—even if we had all of our cameras off, that energy, that synergy, that resonance would still be there. Providing a space for folks to feel that and to know that it's real, it's not fabricated—to me, that is a powerful thing.

CAITLIN: bee?

BEE: Well, I raised my hand to respond to Chris because it's canon now that I came in as a super fan at episode 39, listening to Dr. Joey Lawrence and hearing her speak at the cadence that she did, and the way that you and Emma responded and synthesized that conversation. I saw myself in all three of you—all different angles of how I show up in the world were on display in that podcast.

Then Sheldon went and I was like, "Shit, I don't think I ever told Sheldon"—I mean, I did tell you that I sent your podcast to my eldest kid and their boyfriend at the time, who was a Black man and did not know that he was neurodivergent. My daughter was like, "I don't know how to help him. I don't want to fix him, but he needs to hear another voice that sounds like him." I had just met you online and discovered your podcast, and I shared that with them. That led—that was like a direct connection to him getting professional counseling and scaffolding for him. My daughter broke up with him, which was probably for the best, but everyone's getting the help that they need.

This is the thing—there's no one path. There is no one capital-T truth. There are many tributaries, there are many ripples, there are many cascades that flood out in this world. Our voices all represent some level of flowing from a similar basin of attraction, from some similar sense of integrated values and care about discernment, care about doing the work really well. Regardless of our professional training, our academic training, our ability to translate, we all are here helping each other, amplifying each other, and bridging our voices to help the maximum amount of people possible. And chef's kiss—that's what's up.

CAITLIN: I'm like, yeah, I can't explain how I feel right now. It's just all the love is just so, yeah, it's really lovely. I think Marni was next.

MARNI: Did Sheldon, do you have anything you wanted to say in response first? That was pretty heartfelt.

SHELDON: I don't even have the words just yet. I don't have the words.

MARNI: Okay. Yeah, that was beautiful, bee. I was reflecting on this question about how podcasting ripples into neurodivergent community. I am an educational consultant—I work directly with families, and they are almost entirely neurodivergent families. Most of them are pulling their children out of school because their neurodivergent children are not able to thrive in those environments. Some of them have done a lot of work around understanding neurodivergence, and some of them are really new.

What I hear from parents is that podcasts are accessible. There's something they can listen to while going through their daily lives. Going back to what I said earlier, they feel like they can be in the room with people with wildly different perspectives without it being threatening. You can dip into a podcast and you can turn it off if what you are hearing is too much or not right. You might come back to it, you might not. I feel like having podcasts that you can direct people to allows you to invite them to the things that you may recognize they need to hear, but it's not—you don't have to do it in a way like, "Hey, have you considered your kid might be autistic?" which often doesn't go over very well with people.

It's a gentler way for people to explore these things. I work in this context where I'm talking to parents, but I know it's for adults as well. It's a gentler way to be able to explore ideas in a way that's non-confrontational. I think that's really beautiful.

CAITLIN: Thanks, Marni. Emma?

EMMA: This has been really beautiful, and it strikes me that it actually relates to a note that I had coming in this morning. It's just in caps: "You can't AI it yet." Podcast is one of the last frontiers of content creation—you really can't fake it. It's not like a deep fake video. It's not like someone's spitting out a blog post that they can use ChatGPT for. It's one of those last frontiers of authentic content creation. One, because it's really hard to fake that sort of stuff with AI. But two, because when you're in conversation with other people—bee didn't know bee was gonna say what bee said.

The whole thing I've learned about conversation from our friends at the CMM Institute is: you have control over your portion of it. You cannot control what the other person is saying. When we're talking about going down tangents and it being like wildfire, it's almost this last sort of piece of authenticity in the content creation space, which I love.

It also just proves—when we've been talking about the importance of diversity and difference—when it comes to being neurodivergent, the one thing I've brought up in our Adults with Overexcitabilities group before is that we are scattergraph unicorns. If you took a scattergraph with a bunch of dots on it, and mostly dots are kind of clustering around the middle, when you're an outlier, the chances are that you can be more different to someone else who is an outlier on the opposite side of the graph than you are to the typical.

It's actually a space where the hallmark of the group is not actually what makes us the same, even though we have similar lived experiences. The hallmark is what makes us radically different and sometimes makes us radically different to each other. I think that's a beautiful thing about this podcasting arena—you can have people who are wildly different and yet creating

community out of that difference. I think that's what other neurodivergent people need to hear: that you may not look like the next person to you who might be neurotypical. You might not even look like the next neurodivergent person next to you who is even using the same labels. But that's actually what makes us part of this community—being a bunch of outliers. So I think those are two important things about this space: the authenticity and the difference, which actually makes it a cohesive community.

CAITLIN: Yeah, I think for me, when it came to content creation, I really needed to think about what felt authentic for me and how I could show up. Podcasting is probably the closest I've come to that. Sheldon?

SHELDON: Yeah, really quickly, I want to thank bee again for reminding me of this story. This is the work. This is absolutely 100% what I do this work for. I mean, I tell people, when I started my podcast, it was really gonna be a few episodes just to tell my story about, "Oh, I've figured out this thing about myself." That was gonna be that. But it was when I had family members reaching out to me, telling me about their neurodivergent diagnoses that I had absolutely no idea about. When I had friends reaching out to me asking me questions about their son—"Hey, I listened to your episode, and I think maybe my son might be gifted, or can you help me?"—that's when I knew that there was a higher calling to all of this.

Going back to what Marni was talking about, one of my rules is that I don't pull people out of the matrix. My work is not to be somebody who is prescribing what any neurotype is defined as. It's really about—when my guests come on and when I share my stories—it's about the stories. It's not about "tell me exactly when you were diagnosed, tell me exactly the five things that they told you." That's not it. It's really about telling stories that help people see themselves, to hold up that mirror—that soft mirror—that allows people to see themselves outside of themselves in a way that is easier for them to then reach out and be present with themselves. I'm kind of working through this analogy in the moment, but this work is very much about people being able to help themselves feel seen, feel safe, and feel celebrated. All the rest of that stuff, that's for someone else, I'll say. But this story is really, really powerful. To me, it speaks to what this work is and what I hope it's doing for the rest of the neurodivergent community.

CAITLIN: Thank you so much, Sheldon. That's such a beautiful way to kind of wrap up with that question. I'm just reading bee in the comments: "We don't need to fix people, we just gotta build containers for safety. That work ain't for the faint of heart. 100%." I also wanted to acknowledge all the beautiful support that was in the chat as well for each other. I think that's really important to highlight.

Closing Reflections

CAITLIN: I'm just aware that some folk need to head off pretty soon. I wanted to wrap up with a little bit of a question or reflection around: What surprised you about this conversation? And also, where do you hope this article, this podcast, goes? What do you hope it ripples into the

community? I thought, Chris, I'd let you go first, seeing as you gotta go—if you would like to, you don't have to.

CHRIS: I mean, I'm sitting here thinking—this was such a beautiful experience for us to be together and to have this conversation. I just know from my experience as a podcaster that what we've just discussed is going to reach the people who take the time to listen to this. They are neurodivergent people undoubtedly who come to this because it's in Neurodiversity Journal. We're likely to be speaking to our people. They are going to get this message, and I hope—I know—that our hearts will come across to them. That's what this resonance is about. This is the work.

I guess that's really all I have to say—I love that we were able to do this. It was a beautiful thing to feel connected with all of you. Even though half of us are here in the United States and half are in Australia, that alone is amazing. That we have built these friendships together, that we have done this work together now—I don't even know what to say about it. It's a beautiful thing. I'm gonna just pass now onto the next person and say thank you so much for inviting me, for making this happen, and for showing up. I love all of you.

BEE: Love all of you. And I love you a lot, Chris. Thanks for bringing me into this world the way that you have.

CAITLIN: I mean, I don't know if it surprised me, but I think a theme is—obviously we all know each other, and hopefully that love and care is conveyed through our conversation. But a lot of us, we built our relationships through podcasting or we deepened our relationships through podcasting. Whether that was listening to each other's podcasts or being co-hosts. The deep connection you can build with each other in that space. I guess modeling to others as well. I think particularly when you do have atypical communication as well, and also having that vulnerability and that authenticity—as you said, Chris, it does take courage to be able to show up as yourself when you are standing in the face of everything that is just completely opposite or completely different to how you are told you're meant to show up.

It's scary, but it's also such a privilege that other people take the time to listen to our stories and to want to be a part of our communities or bring what we have to say back into their communities as well. So yeah, nothing surprised me, but it's just—yeah, kind of bringing all these little tangents and threads together and having a bit more clarity for myself moving forward.

MARNI: I just wanted to specifically thank Caitlin for putting all of this together and helping to just build a beautiful experience today.

TEENA: Yes, definitely. Caitlin is awesome for doing this, so thank you. I think also that it wasn't so much that the conversation surprised me, but it definitely excites me. It's conversations like these that just sort of get me really fired up and passionate and excited. So yeah, thanks for making it happen.

MARNI: I also get a weird thrill from people who are able to translate really embodied experiences into academic language, which you did really well, Caitlin. So thank you for all of that work. And the excitement of getting that out into people who feel like they need to engage with that kind of academic discourse and starting to shift—there are other people doing that work as well, specifically around neurodiversity, where you read papers that are bridging academic language and lived experience and doing it really beautifully. It's exciting to be part of that wave.

CAITLIN: Yeah, something I'm really passionate about is infiltrating spaces and shaking things up a little bit. You gotta learn the lay of the land, their language, and then it's like, "Okay, how can I mess with this a little to do things a bit differently?"

SHELDON: Yeah, I mean, before I'm remiss, I definitely want to say thank you, Caitlin, for putting this together and inviting me. This is a special opportunity to be able to lend my voice to this space. For this group, I mean, it's just been a dope experience. Most of us have engaged directly in many ways before this, but when is another time that we can kind of all do a podcast together? That's a unique thing about this. I'm not sure there was anything on a grand scale, on a meta level, that surprised me. However, I guess if you had asked me at the beginning whether or not my discussion of the people's platypus would be talking about platypus farts, I don't know that would've been on my bingo card. But I'm happy that happened because it just speaks to the beauty, the beauty that I've found and the resonance I've found in finding communities like this. Before, those kinds of discussions would've been sort of off-putting, but here we are—happy, we're giggling, we're not pretentious about such things. You've helped me feel seen through this conversation. I really hope that for anyone who listens to this, that does the same for them. That's what I would share.

CAITLIN: Thank you all. Emma?

EMMA: Sorry, you know me—I like to have a final thought. Bring it home. First of all, thanks Caitlin for putting all this together. It's been amazing. Thank you to everybody on the call. You are all wonderful, awesome people, and I love you all. You do fabulous work out there in the world—keep being you and doing what you're doing.

I think this podcast wasn't surprising, but it did kind of model everything we've been talking about. It took tangents to platypus farts. It was messy and complex and went off script sometimes. But it also—and I know bee likes to talk about holding space for people—it held space for all of us and all our opinions, and I really liked that. Particularly as a polytheist, I like to hold multiple opinions on things myself. But I think any space can welcome us all in. So no matter how different we feel we are, no matter what we think our stories are, I hope people listening realize they can bring their stories, their lived experience to these spaces as well and share them. They are just as valid as everybody else's lived experience and knowledge. They don't cancel anyone else out. You don't have to feel like you're treading on someone else's toes. That's how we build community—by realizing that yes, we can all be valid at the same time and share the same space. You are not knocking anyone else off a perch. You don't have to feel like what you are bringing to the table, even if it's in disagreement with someone, is invalidating anything. So please bring your voices because the more voices, the better the story.

CAITLIN: Thanks, Emma. I knew you were gonna do your thing at the end. I was counting on it. Yeah, so I have so many thoughts, so many feelings. It's gonna take me a week to process this with my delayed emotional processing type situation. But I just wanted to thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for being a part of this. I've been so inspired by each and every one of you before this podcast, and just being in this space together reminded me so much of why you are all so important and so unique. I'm just really glad to have been able to capture this moment in time with us all together.

CHRIS: Well, that's awesome.

SHELDON: Yeah, thank you all so much.

CHRIS: Yeah, thank you all. I gotta run. Bye everybody. Thank you. So beautiful.

BEE: Go. Thank you. Bye. Goodnight. Or good morning. Good day.

SHELDON: Take care.

CAITLIN: Bye.

[End of transcript]

Hughes, C., Wells, C., Nicholson, E., Mayhew, B., Gay, S., Kammersell, M., & Mogler, T. (2026). Voices at the margins: Podcasting as neuroqueer collaborative autoethnography and epistemic healing. *Neurodiversity, 4*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/27546330261437265