Mehmoona:[1] “Okay. Katie. So, thesis work.”

Katie: “Yes.”

Mehmoona: “Means you can’t disappear.”[2] (M. Moosa-Mitha, personal communication, September 6, 2024)

Episode 2: Memes and Methodologies

When I was in eighth grade, I kept a journal.

[Background drone fades in]

I was the kind of kid who loved notebooks and who’d started a million journals before. I would earnestly write entries every day for about a week, until I got distracted, and I’d forget to write for a day or two. Frustrated by screwing up my self-imposed writing schedule, I’d then abandon my journal completely. Or, I’d spell something wrong and have to scratch it out, making my beautiful new notebook ugly in the process. Again, I’d end up abandoning my journal. Sometimes I’d try to start fresh by ripping out the spoiled pages, but I could never get the magic of a new notebook back.

My eighth-grade journal was different. I wrote with a dying gel pen on a collection of loose-leaf pages in the back of a binder – no overwhelming new notebook pressure. I didn’t write down dates or stick to a schedule, instead writing whenever I felt like it. I scratched things out, I intentionally misspelled words, I wrote upside down and sideways.

In a lot of ways, the content of this journal was exactly what you’d expect of an eighth grader. The first page sports a warning that the journal “iz [*sic*] 4 MY EYES ONLY! (except if i gave u

[1] Purple text is not read aloud in the recorded podcast episode.
[2] Read by Mehmoona (M. Moosa-Mitha, personal communication, September 6, 2024).

special permission 2 read it!)"[3]. I wrote about my favourite bands, what I wanted for my birthday, my infatuation with a now-cringeworthy actor, interactions with my friends and classmates. In a particularly junior high school entry, I wrote about a cute guy in my class looking at me, only to realise afterwards that I had snot on my face. The entries are equal parts charming and nightmarish, the way anything to do with childhood might make you feel nostalgic and also horrified. In the middle of all these entries detailing boy-crushes and awkward preteen feelings, though, there's one entry that I find fascinating in a different way. In a tiny passage at the bottom of one page, I wrote: "i'm not a homophobic [*sic*], but i'm scared i might be a lesbian? is that bad?"

[Background drone fades out]

I read aloud from this journal at an event called Queer Folks Read Things They Wrote in the Closet a few years back. I chose to share these entries at the time because I found the awkward, earnest baby-queerness very silly, and very endearing. I'm sharing these entries now because I'm interested in what I *didn't* write on those pages. The only reason I knew the term 'lesbian' in eighth grade was because classmates kept anonymously telling me online that I was one. After some frantic researching on the family computer, secretly, late at night, Wikipedia told me that the term 'lesbian' referred to women who are romantically or sexually attracted to other women. I decided the word wasn't for me, although I couldn't put my finger on why. After all, journal performances of straightness aside, I was *definitely* into women. It would take me another decade to realise that the word 'lesbian' chafes a bit because I'm not one. A woman, that is.

In the end, my eighth-grade journal flamed out after ten pages or so, just like the journals I'd started before and have started since. But I'm still fascinated by the stories we tell ourselves, and share with one another, about our lives. That's what brings us to this podcast. [Theme music,

[3] Turquoise text indicates the sound of pencil writing on paper plays underneath the spoken words in the recorded episode.

"3am," starts playing in the background] I'm Katie O'Brien, and you're listening to TRANS FATS, a podcasted thesis exploring the research question: **How is my experience of trans corporeality mediated by pathologising logics?** Last episode, we talked about decolonial feminism and disability justice, the theoretical frameworks I'm using for this project. If you haven't listened to that episode first, I'd super recommend you start there! This episode, I'll be sharing a bit about my hopes and dreams for this work, and then we'll deep dive into my research strategy. In academic speak, this is an episode all about methodology. [Theme music ends]

Research Methodology

Research methodology describes how a research project is put together, including its broader politics and goals (Smith, 2012)[4]. Research *methods* are the specific techniques used to gather data. Methodology "is important because it frames the questions being asked, determines the set of instruments and methods to be employed, and shapes the analyses"[5] (Smith, 2012, p. 144). We kind of did the whole framing thing last episode when we talked about decolonial feminism and disability justice, but we haven't talked about my research objectives yet. Let's touch on that now.

Objectives and Implications for Social Work

Community organisers Craig Fortier, who's white and nonbinary, and Edward Hon-Sing Wong, who's Chinese, argue that "as non-Indigenous activists and social workers we must work through the process of unsettling through the dismantling of narratives, institutions, practices, and positions that structure the settler colonial project"[6] (Fortier & Wong, 2024, p. 122). In the last

[4] Red text is translated to an arpeggiated synth sound in the recorded episode.
[5] Green text indicates a typing sound plays underneath the spoken words in the recorded episode.
[6] Read by Ed Wong (personal communication, September 8, 2025).

episode, we talked about how pathologising anti-trans and anti-fat narratives are rooted in coloniality.

(Super speedy recap from last episode: we defined 'coloniality' as the ongoing legacy of colonialism that makes settler ways of being and doing seem natural (Moosa-Mitha, 2022; Wada & Fellner, in press). Anti-trans narratives are colonial because they're rooted in the idea of the gender binary as natural, when actually it's a super settler way of understanding gender (Lugones, 2007). Anti-fat narratives are colonial (Robinson, 2019) and specifically anti-Black (Harrison, 2021; Strings, 2019) because they're rooted in the idea of the thin white settler body as the 'right' kind of body, emblematic of moral superiority. And pathologisation more broadly, the idea of something becoming understood as a problem for the medical-industrial complex to solve (Sholl, 2017), is colonial because it "negat[es] indigenous knowledges of the body, health, and healing" (Rojas Durazo, 2016, p. 184). Okay, back to the episode.)

My goal for this project is to start the work of dismantling anti-trans and anti-fat narratives. I'm hoping that in taking apart those kinds of harmful stories, this project will help create a social work context where cis social workers can better understand how to effectively support trans folks accessing care. More importantly, I hope this project helps create a social work context where trans social workers and service users who are trans (recognising there's often a big overlap between those categories) can see and know ourselves. This kind of greater awareness ideally reduces gatekeeping of services, leading to increased care access. I would love to see this work leading to increased healthcare and community care access for trans and nonbinary communities, particularly fat trans and nonbinary folks who have complicated relationships with food and eating.

Now, I touched on Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang's (2012) work on the violence of settler colonialism last episode, but I think it might be helpful to chat some more about their article "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor" for a minute to explain how I'm using some terms. In this

foundational article, Tuck and Yang remind us that decolonisation refers very specifically to the project of abolishing settler states and de-occupying land, also known as Land Back (Yellowhead Institute, 2019). When the term 'decolonisation' is used to refer to anything other than returning land to Indigenous peoples, Tuck and Yang argue that this makes decolonisation into a metaphor. "When metaphor invades decolonization," they write, "it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future" (p. 3). This podcast can't do much in the way of land back – that is, decoloni*sation*. I'm hopeful, though, that this podcast can speak toward decoloni*ality* in beginning to dismantle pathologising anti-trans and anti-fat stories, which we framed as colonial narratives last episode. I'm careful to describe my work in this podcast as decolonial, rather than decolonising, for this reason.

Okay, so if those are my goals for this project, how am I trying to accomplish them? Well, I'm combining two methods: autoethnography and podcasting. Let's chat autoethnography first.

[Short version of "3am" plays before next section starts]

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a complicated word that can be broken down into three simple parts (Ellis et al., 2011). The beginning, *auto*, means the research describes and analyses personal experience. The middle, *ethno*, points to the research trying to understand cultural experience. The ending, *graphy*, means this method takes a specific approach to writing. Put them together, and autoethnography refers to research describing and analysing personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. In this project, I'm compiling and analysing stories about my own fat trans body to understand fat trans experience more broadly.

One of the reasons I feel drawn to autoethnography is that it explicitly treats the personal as political (Ellis et al., 2011). This classic feminist slogan has made inherent sense to me since I first

started understanding myself as queer in eighth grade, around the same time as the settler Canadian state was legalising same-sex marriage (Lenon, 2008). Black disabled lesbian feminist Audre Lorde (1982) described this understanding so beautifully in her biomythography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, when she wrote "I didn't know how I was going to bring my personal and political vision together, but I knew it had to be possible because I felt them both too strongly, and knew how much I needed them both to survive"[7] (p. 197). In treating personal story as political story, academic narrative as personal and political, autoethnography is a queer method: it refuses categorisation (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010). White queer autoethnographers Stacy Holman Jones and Tony Adams (2010) say that:

> autoethnography, as method, allows a person to document perpetual journeys of self-understanding, allows [them] to produce queer texts. A queer autoethnography also encourages us to think through and out of our categories for interaction and to take advantage of language's failure to capture or contain 'selves', ways of relating and subjugated knowledges.[8] (p. 207)

Thinking back to reading and reflecting on that journal I kept in eighth grade, it feels clear to me that I've been circling towards autoethnography far before I knew the word for it.

When I first started this thesis work, I thought about marrying an autoethnographic approach with community interviews. I figured that the only way to produce rigorous work would be to incorporate the perspectives of other participants. One of my first moves toward a decolonial approach to this project was recognising, with my supervisor Dr. Mehmoona Moosa-Mitha's guidance, that this thought process was rooted in a colonial, positivist critique of autoethnography (Bhimji, 2024; Dutta, 2017; Sharma, 2023). Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) describes

[7] Read by Nahomi (N. Amberber, personal communication, September 11, 2025).
[8] Read by Tony Adams (personal communication, September 2, 2025).

positivism as "the notion of research as an objective, value-free and scientific process for observing and making sense of human realities" (p. 166). It's a way of knowing that comes out of Western Europe that "colonized the intellectual world" (Murea & Josan, 2014, p. 82) and dismisses other, Indigenous ways of knowing as 'less than' (Barreiros & Moreira, 2019; Murea & Josan, 2014; Smith, 2012). As an example of positivism in action, those of you who went to grade school on Turtle Island may remember learning about the scientific method. The scientific method is a step-based process where you start out with a question based on something you've observed, then you make a hypothesis about what the answer to your question will be. After that, you come up with an experiment to test your hypothesis, analyse your data to figure out whether your hypothesis was correct, and communicate your results to other people. Ideally, after that, you get other folks to do the same experiment to check whether they get the same results as you – this is called 'replicability'. Scientists argue that if an experiment is replicable, that often means the results of that experiment are more rigorous, meaning they're less likely to come from a biased perspective. In other words, the scientific method – and positivism more generally – has the idea of objectivity baked into it. This approach to research isn't universal, though. As Black Portuguese artist Grada Kilomba (2015) emphasises,

> we all speak from a specific time and place, from a specific reality and history. There are no neutral discourses. When *white* scholars claim to have a neutral and objective discourse, they are not acknowledging that they too, write from a specific place, which of course, is neither neutral nor objective or universal, but dominant. They write, from a place of power. (pp. 7–8, emphasis in original)

Okay, so after all that, you might have an inkling of what critique positivism throws at autoethnography. To put it plainly, autoethnography as a method makes positivists grumpy because it's unabashed in its subjectivity, instead of pretending to be objective. When I brought up

this positivist critique of autoethnography to Mehmoona, she delightfully replied, "To hell with that critique. There is a decolonial embracing of autoethnography"[9] (Green & Carafell, 2021; M. Moosa-Mitha, personal communication, September 6, 2024).

Indigiqueer and disabled scholar-activist Autumn Asher BlackDeer (2023), from the Southern Cheyenne Nation, argues that "decolonial feminism challenges positivism through both critical reflexivity and positionality, beyond upfront statements of privilege but true critical reflection and application to the work"[10] (p. 623). Reflexivity in this case means being self-aware and open to challenge or critique (Smith, 2012), and it's fundamental to autoethnography (Varela, 2022). For me, approaching this research in an explicitly decolonial way means moving beyond just saying I'm a white settler researcher trying not to cause harm, toward being in meaningful solidarity with colonised folks and people of the global majority. For more about this term, check out Black-Biracial antiracist educator Britt Hawthorne's (2023) blog post, linked in the show notes. I don't want to pretend my whiteness and settlerness isn't influencing this research, but I also don't want to just name my whiteness and settlerness as a way out of the complicated work of digging into *how* and *why* it's showing up (Gani & Khan, 2024; Gregory, 2020; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). I'm constantly and intentionally learning in this space. If you remember from last episode, I talked about wanting to dig into the larger web of meaning around my experience of trans corporeality, pathologisation, and anti-fatness, and play around in the uncertainty – recognising that there's not going to be a simple answer to the research question I'm asking. Reflexivity asks me to lean into this questioning, learning space, instead of rushing toward answers (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021).

[9] Read by Mehmoona (M. Moosa-Mitha, personal communication, September 6, 2024).
[10] Read by Autumn Asher BlackDeer (personal communication, September 15, 2025).

It feels really hard to bring myself so explicitly into this project, particularly after having been trained to disappear myself in academic writing for years before starting thesis work. Part of the challenge is ditching the colonial, positivist, academic fuckery I learned somewhere along the way that says sharing about my experiences isn't scholarly or valid knowledge (Varela, 2022). Another part of the challenge is unlearning the overly formal academic voice I've developed in my decade-plus in university and figuring out what *my* voice actually sounds like. At this point, I hope the reason I included the snippet of conversation with Mehmoona at the beginning of this episode is starting to become clear. I can't, and don't want to, disappear in this work.

For this project, I assembled a few different sources of autoethnographic data. First, I collected some of my poetry referencing transness, food and eating, and my body. I've been writing poetry since I was a preteen, and these poems feel like a pretty transparent peek into how I was feeling when I wrote them. In her essay "Poetry is Not a Luxury," Audre Lorde (1984) posited "it is through poetry that we give name to those ideas which are, until the poem, nameless and formless – about to be birthed, but already felt"[11] (p. 36).

[Overlapping audio of poetic artifacts with underlying drone]

I used these 'poetic artifacts' (Sharma, 2023) to help me remember and map out experiences in my life that I thought might be relevant to this project. You can read more about why I use the term 'artifacts' in the show notes. I captured this remembering process through audio journalling, making voice memos on my phone. Often, I journaled while walking my tiny senior rescue dog, Louie, around our neighbourhood. This journalling practice called on remembered conversations with bio family members about eating disorder lineages and gender pieces, and experiences with chosen family members who supported me through my eating disorder recovery and coming to understand myself as nonbinary and trans. For folks who haven't heard these terms

[11] Read by Nahomi (N. Amberber, personal communication, September 11, 2025).

before, ‘bio family’ refers to my family of origin: my parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins. ‘Chosen family’ is a queer term referring to the friends I’ve made intentional relationships with based on mutual trust, love, care, and commitment. The term ‘chosen family’ emerged out of the HIV/AIDS crisis beginning in the 1980s (Jackson Levin et al., 2020). Many bio families rejected their family members with HIV/AIDS, while other queer folks cared for their terminally ill queer siblings (Jackson Levin et al., 2020). The experience of bio family rejection is still common among queer folks today (DeChants et al., 2022; Robinson, 2018). I feel very lucky to have strong relationships with both bio and chosen family (see Huang, 2022 for a reimagination of this split), and I reflected on these relationships in my audio journal entries.

[Overlapping audio from journal entries with underlying drone]

Thematic Analysis

The stories you’ve heard so far in this podcast, and the stories you’ll hear in the remaining two episodes, are the result of these poetic and audio journalling practices. But how did I figure out which stories to tell, and how to group them together and analyse them? To be honest, this was the part where I felt a bit like that Pepe Silvia (2017) meme of the guy ranting about a conspiracy theory while standing in front of a wildly chaotic evidence board. You can check out the meme in the show notes if you have no idea what I’m talking about. To keep track of the poetic artifacts and story snippets I was starting to piece together in my journalling practice, I kept a list of them on my computer. After a while, though, I felt like I needed to have something more tangible to play with. I printed off my list, chopped it up, and pasted all the items onto sticky notes. After that, I was able to group them in different ways, and start understanding how they related to each other. The initial story groupings that emerged using this method were stories about gender, stories about anti-fatness, and stories about access to services. You can take a look at the mapped sticky notes in the show notes. In a recent Instagram post, Two-Spirit Oji-Cree writer Joshua Whitehead noted that

"the funny thing about stories [is] they're never vacuumed, never siloed, and aplenty in their relations" (King's Co-op Bookstore, 2025). I really started to notice these overlapping relations through this mapping method.

In qualitative research like this, the process of analysing data is "always emergent, unpredictable, and unfinished" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, as cited in Sharma, 2023, p. 46). The two theoretical frameworks I talked about last episode, decolonial feminism and disability justice, guided me in deciding where to put each story. The nonbinary thinking of decolonial feminism helped me to recognise the importance of stories that fit into multiple possible groupings, and that story, reflection, and analysis aren't easily split apart. Disability justice, which "valu[es] the teachings of our lives and understand[s] ... our embodied experience as a critical guide and reference pointing us toward justice and liberation" (Berne, 2015, para. 20), helped me to recognise when my embodied experience was pointing me towards including or deepening particular stories. I decided to use my poetic artifacts to name these grouped stories and reflections to reflect these emerging processes – listen for them in the next two episodes. Using poetic artifacts in this way – keeping them poetic, instead of over-explaining the links – also lets you, the listener, imagine and reflect on connections for yourself!

Grappling With Coloniality

Now, when I was in the beginning stages of figuring out how to do this project, I thought all these practices might not be... good enough. I thought about trying to access case notes from my doctor, dietitian, and therapists. I felt like these external validations of my experience would back up the memory work. Mehmoona helped me realise that this impulse was also rooted in coloniality: positivism generally demands that the researcher is an outsider, as it figures only outsiders can be objective and neutral (Smith, 2012). But we've already established that objectivity and neutrality isn't something I'm going for in this project. Subjectivity is kind of the point. On top of this

decolonial critique, when I was digging into the literature about the medical-industrial complex for the last episode, I came across some pretty brilliant critiques about case noting from disability justice activists. In particular, I love the way Eli Clare (2017) writes about medical notetaking, so please forgive me for quoting him at length here:

> Sometimes all the medical-industrial complex leaves behind are case files – that scramble of charts, letters, clinical notes, diagnoses, photographs, birth and death certificates, and court orders used to track people's lives through medical care and confinement. In the era before electronic records, these files reduced countless body-minds to paper and ink, stored in vaults, drawers, and boxes upon boxes. Now the same reduction happens in bits and bytes, stored on computers. These files, whatever form they take, possess power. They document, prove, and defend treatment and cure. They transform people into diagnoses and 'expert opinions'. Tellingly they are called case files, not personal files, personhood itself receding. Thousands of stories vanish beneath their authority. … Case files will never provide the answers. Instead they tell stories entirely distorted, filtered through diagnosis, treatment, and cure; stories that flatten body-minds onto paper and computer screens, reduced to fit into vaults and servers. They lay claim to the truth. They lie.[12] (pp. 112–115)

Reading these critiques brought me back into some critical conversations about case noting I've had as a social worker. Social workers are often tasked with taking case notes about the clients we work with. There are lots of different schools of thought on how to do this ethically, and if ethical case noting is even possible. As a social worker, I haven't worked one-on-one with people all that often, but when I have, I've always felt uncomfortable taking case notes. I know that as a professional, I'll never get folks' stories quite right, which has the potential to cause violence. If that sounds like I'm overstating things, I promise I'm not: case notes are often provided to law

[12] Read by Eli Clare (personal communication, September 3, 2025).

enforcement and medical professionals, informing the way folks are treated by carceral systems. By 'carceral system,' I mean any "system that confines, entraps, and incapacitates, whether that be through the criminal legal system or by other means" (Hackett & Turk, 2017, para. 5). Case notes are part of what Edward Hon-Sin Wong (2024) describes as "the constellation of coercive apparatuses that involve the direct collaboration between mental health workers and the police" (pp. 42–43). All of these conversations, readings, and reflections helped me feel more secure in my decision not to engage with any case notes about me in this project.

Rigour

Just because I'm throwing positivism out the window doesn't mean this work isn't rigorous. In qualitative research, "researchers develop credibility by engaging over extended periods, observing persistently, and using triangulation" (Ahmed, 2024, p. 1). I've made my research as credible (Hernandez et al., 2015) as possible by using a bunch of different kinds of data, putting my experiences into context with the literature we explored in the last episode, engaging in reflexive analysis, and talking the whole thing through with my thesis committee and community. The goals of autoethnography are to encourage conversation, to work toward justice, and to produce research that's evocative, creative, and accessible (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). More than that, the queerness of autoethnography asks us to leave space for ambiguity, to advocate for trouble (Holman Jones & Adams, 2010). It asks us to be playful, which is a queer tactic of resistance (DeChaine, 1997; Holman Jones & Adams, 2010). All of these goals led me to my second method: podcasting.

[Short version of "3am" plays before next section starts]

Podcasting as Method

I feel like I got on the podcast train a bit late in the game. Podcasts have been around since the early 2000s, but only really hit the mainstream in the mid-2010s (McGregor, 2022). I had friends who were early podcast listeners, but whenever I tried to listen to a show or episode they'd recommended, I found it super hard to focus on an audio-only medium. That changed for me in March 2020. My wife Viv is a passionate gardener (love you Viv), and when the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I started weeding in her garden as a way to get into my body. I found that when I was weeding, I could listen to and focus on podcasts in a way I hadn't been able to before. The first podcast that I got super hooked on was a show called *Witch, Please* (McGregor & Kosman, n.d.). *Witch, Please* was a critical Harry Potter podcast, and listening to the show grapple with J. K. Rowling's rampant anti-transness in real time was really meaningful to me. The hosts, Hannah McGregor and Marcelle Kosman, both white queer feminist scholars, demonstrated a commitment to learning in public (McGregor & Kosman, n.d.) in their podcast that helped me start thinking about doing my own public learning, this thesis, in podcast form too.

Podcasting is both a popular way to consume media and an increasingly accepted form of academic publishing (Beckstead et al., 2024). McGregor (McGregor et al., 2025) describes their scholarly podcasting as

> gay shit disturb[ing]—gay in the sense of 'be gay, do crime,' in the sense of a political queerness and a queer politics, in the sense of rejecting the status quo and demanding that we imagine how things might be otherwise.[13] (para. 27)

I've been interested in the research part of a thesis project for a long time, but like I mentioned last episode, the idea of putting together a traditional written thesis that none of my friends would ever read has never been all that compelling to me. It's important to me that the knowledge I've

[13] Read by Hannah McGregor (personal communication, September 5, 2025).

compiled in this project is accessible to my community, particularly other trans folks. Podcasting has helped me imagine the thesis process otherwise and centre community accessibility, rather than treating it as an afterthought (Chandler et al., 2023; Ho et al., 2025).

I've been trying to figure out how to explain why this access piece is so important to me. I think it's tied with disability justice and the relational ethic driving this project: after all, "to make something accessible is to invite the audience into the work" (Jones et al., 2021, p. 36). Disability justice cares deeply about accessibility because – as disabled Asian American organisers Sandy Ho, Mia Mingus, and Alice Wong assert – access is an act of love (Ho et al., 2025). Podcasting helped me prioritise access in a few different ways in this project. First, once I figured out which stories I wanted to include, I thought carefully about how to structure my episodes so they made sense to you, the listener. Then, I had to learn how to write for the ear (Wilson, 2020). I spent a lot of time reading draft scripts out loud to Viv and asking, "does that even make sense?" to which her answer was often, "uhh... try again?". I also tried to centre accessibility in this project by including content notes and image descriptions in the show notes, and by making transcripts and reference lists available for each episode. I know I won't have succeeded in making this project accessible to everyone. If you have suggestions for how I can do better, I'd sincerely love to hear them – you can find my contact information in the show notes!

Scholarly podcasting also has the opportunity to do something interesting when it comes to what knowledge counts. White anti-racist educator Tema Okun (2025), in collaboration with Black organiser and educator Kenneth Jackson Jones, has argued that one of the characteristics of white supremacy culture is the worship of the written word. To combat this, she suggests we

> dedicate time to practicing and honoring other ways of knowing and expression: oral storytelling, embodied learning, visual and movement art, silence, meditation [... and that we] practice listening; because [Western] culture doesn't value oral traditions or

> storytelling wisdom, we are out of listening practice or remembering how to hold a spoken word with weight (without having to write it down). (Okun, 2025)

In an early draft of this episode script, my supervisor Mehmoona commented that "written work can hide behind the writing"[14] (M. Moosa-Mitha, personal communication, March 28, 2025). I want to challenge myself not to hide in the creation of this podcasted thesis, to register emotion, and to practice listening – both to the oral knowledges that the academy doesn't 'count', and also to my body.

This leads me to the other reason I'm using podcasting as method. Podcasting brings the body into the work by engaging with the voice. McGregor notes that "our voices bring our bodies with them, in a way that our writing doesn't necessarily … and there's an opportunity, if we want to let it, for podcasting to also put feeling and affect back into our scholarship"[15] (Llinares, 2020, 30:06). Colonial perspectives on knowledge only care about the body because that's where our brains live (Ng, 2018). In contrast, decolonial feminists care deeply about the body, which is always a target of colonial practices of violence, as a site of knowledge (see Moosa-Mitha et al., in press). Disability justice advocates also reject the idea that we can, or should, meaningfully separate our minds from our bodies. The term 'bodymind' highlights this rejection (Clare, 2017; Price, 2015; Schalk, 2018).

On top of the feelings angle, engaging with the voice can be both important and complicated for trans folks specifically (Gumble, 2020; Stryker et al., 2025; Zimman, 2018). Remember that whole thing about gendering from last episode? In our cisnormative society, we often assume folks with lower voices are men, and folks with higher voices are women – and other aspects of the voice are gendered, too, like vocal fry (Chao & Bursten, 2021). You might not think

[14] Read by Mehmoona (M. Moosa-Mitha, personal communication, September 29, 2025).
[15] Audio from Llinares (2020).

you're participating in anything particularly radical by listening to this podcast, and maybe you're not. But in listening to my nonbinary trans voice tell my nonbinary trans stories, I'm hoping some of those gendered assumptions based on the qualities of my voice crumble a bit.

[Short version of "3am" plays before next section starts]

Relational Ethics

So far, I've presented autoethnography and podcasting as pretty revolutionary methods, and I really believe they can be. That said, autoethnography can also be a navel-gazing and individualistic exercise (Ellis et al., 2011), and there's a stereotype of the podcaster as a lone white guy (McGregor, 2022) yelling into a mic in his basement with no care for contextualising or historicising his work for a reason. As an antidote to this potential pull towards individualism, or thinking of myself as the sole truth teller in this work, I'm grounding myself in relational ethics (Ellis, 2007).

Even though I decided not to incorporate community interviews in this project, I'm not the only person present in this research. You've heard me draw on work by other academics, activists, and artists throughout this episode and the last one; that's one way this work is in community with others. I've also explicitly cited my supervisor Mehmoona's input, and comments from my committee members – I don't know if that's super common in thesis projects, but their guidance has deeply influenced the way this thesis has come to be, and I'm not interested in pretending it hasn't. Importantly, the stories I share feature chosen and bio family members – I'll talk more about how I thought through the ethics around this in a minute. I think placing my work in conversation with other folks' has always been important to me. There's a story my mum likes to tell from when I was a little kid. Before I even knew how to write, I would narrate stories to her, which she would write down (love you Mum). I'd illustrate the stories, turning them into homemade picture books – and

then I'd insist we create library labels for the books so that they could live in the library with their friends.

I've been thinking a lot about my "relational responsibilities to … the unnamed, unwitting participants who are implicated in [my] self-stories" (Hernandez et al., 2015, p. 537). The idea of relational ethics, a practice which "recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers and the communities in which they live and work" (Ellis, 2007, p. 4), has helped me think this through. Disability justice highlights relationality through its principles of solidarity, collective access, and collective liberation (Sins Invalid, n.d.). Decolonial thinkers are constantly thinking of relationality, too: María Lugones (2010) argued that

> One does not resist the coloniality of gender alone. One resists it from within a way of understanding the world and living in it that is shared and that can understand one's actions, thus providing recognition. Communities rather than individuals enable the doing; one does with someone else, not in individualist isolation.[16] (p. 754)

In a decolonial framework, relationality and reciprocity goes beyond a commitment to report back to the community (Smith, 2012; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). For this project, it meant thinking about how to ask for feedback from my community members and bringing in their perspectives into the work, making their words count. I did this by submitting a research ethics application to the Human Research Ethics Board, or REB, at UVic for this project.

This REB is a group of UVic faculty, grad students, and community members who review all proposed research involving humans at UVic to make sure it meets their ethical standards. Submitting a research ethics application to the REB is required for graduate student theses engaging in research with humans. As my committee member Nate commented on a draft of this

[16] Read by Kéka (M. Guerrero-Quintana, personal communication, September 11, 2025).

episode, “it’s an interesting experience that our institutions require such application and approval, which reflect both the academic power you have critiqued above but also (ongoing) histories of research as violence”[17] (N. Lachowsky, personal communication, May 17, 2025). Now, it was a bit… complicated to do an ethics application for an autoethnographic project. The system is mostly set up for outsider research instead of self-reflection, and it cares more about individual and institutional risk than respectful and caring relationships (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). However, given that my stories always exist in a context and environment that includes other folks (Ellis, 2004), going through the REB process helped me to articulate some of my relational responsibilities to the folks involved in these stories. I’ve included links to my ethics application and consent forms in the show notes to make this part of my research process transparent to other folks who might want to do autoethnographic work. In short, once I decided which stories would be included in my thesis and had written the podcast scripts, I reached out to my bio and chosen family members who featured in these stories for their feedback, to make sure they felt comfortable with how they were portrayed in these stories. I sent over the entire episode script so my community members understood the context in which the stories were presented, with the stories I wanted feedback on highlighted. Then, we worked together to make sure the stories were presented well. I only recorded episodes once everyone felt comfortable with the way stories were presented.

[Short version of “3am” plays before next section starts]

Self-Care

Autoethnography can be kind of emotionally risky for a researcher: specifically, thinking back through painful stories can be… well, painful (Denshire, 2014). I don’t mean this as a

[17] Read by Nate (N. Lachowsky, personal communication, September 14, 2025).

metaphor, either. In a posthumously published chapter about embodied learning, Chinese-Canadian decolonial feminist Roxana Ng (2018) talked about the physical impacts of intellectual, emotional, or spiritual work:

> I came to the realization of this inextricable connectedness during my doctoral studies. The pains, discomfort, and other persistent … ailments I experienced during this intense period of intellectual concentration not only reminded me of the body's inevitable presence in our every endeavour; it also awakened me to the fact that if we ignore its presence, there can be consequences.[18] (p. 41)

With this in mind, I figured it would be helpful to think a bit about how to take care of my bodymind while doing this whole thesis thing. It would be easy to just say I took Louie for walks and made myself a playlist, and leave it at that. (I *did* make a playlist – it's linked in the show notes.) After all, that's kind of how we think about self-care these days. However, I think there's a disability justice perspective on self-care that's more helpful here.

In an essay made up of journal entries about her experience living with cancer as a Black lesbian, Audre Lorde (1988/2017) wrote that "caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare"[19] (p. 130). More than 30 years after her death, this phrase is basically everywhere online – but it's also been defanged, with few people talking about how Lorde's race, gender, disability, or sexuality informed her thinking (Schalk and Kim, 2021). I know lots of white folks in particular have used this quote as permission to unplug from community responsibilities and political conversations, focusing instead on individualistic and capitalist ideas of care. Sami Schalk and Jina Kim (2021) take up Lorde's theorising and bring a disability justice lens back to her words:

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[18] Read by Jenn (J. Lau, personal communication, September 11, 2025).
[19] Read by Nahomi (N. Amberber, personal communication, September 11, 2025).

> Lorde understood self-care to be: physical and mental, thoughtful, purposeful, necessary, political, and resistant to normative, capitalist approaches to time that stand in opposition to wellness for marginalized people. In concrete terms, Lorde described her self-care as thoughtfully taking care of herself to ensure both quantity and quality of her remaining time. This included things we would associate with self-care today … but it also meant educating one's self in order to make informed, conscious decisions about one's health and life.[20] (pp. 329)

I'm not about to call this podcast in and of itself a form of self-care, but this piece about education is helpful in understanding why it's felt so vital and healing to do this thesis work. Don't get me wrong – it's also been really, really hard. That's where this other part of Schalk and Kim's (2021) article comes into play for me:

> for Lorde caring for one's self was never about the individual self alone but, rather, … about caring for the self in order to do one's political work of change, including involving others in the work of care through networks of support. In other words, the self for Lorde was never about the individual, bounded body but about how the self exists in relation to and in support of other bodies.[36] (p. 339)

It took me about a year to write and record this podcasted thesis, all while I was working full-time. I wouldn't have been able to finish it without leaning on my community for support. I'll say more about the specific ways my loved ones supported me in Episode 4, but for now, I'll just name that going for coffee dates and walks, coworking together in person and online, commiserating through gifs and memes, sending snail mail encouragements, and body doubling were some of the ways that my community cared for me this year. As my committee member Gaben commented, this was "a beautiful reminder that nothing we produce is done in isolation. We are always part of a larger

[20] Read by Sami Schalk (personal communication, September 3, 2025).

web, and that is something to celebrate and carry forward”[21] (G. Sanchez, personal communication, May 30, 2025).

[Demo version of “3am” starts playing in the background]

Closing

Thanks so much for listening to this episode of TRANS FATS, a podcasted thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Social Work in the School of Social Work at the University of Victoria. Many thanks to the folks who sent in voice recordings of their work for this episode: Ed Wong, Tony Adams, Autumn Asher BlackDeer, Eli Clare, Hannah McGregor, and Sami Schalk. My pals Kéka, Nahomi, and Jenn read the María Lugones, Audre Lorde, and Roxana Ng quotes; thanks so much for lending your voices to this project, friends.

TRANS FATS was recorded at the Halifax Central Library in Mi’kma’ki. My sibling M helped with audio mixing and sound design and wrote the theme music; thank you love you miss you! Podcast artwork is by my friend Harmeet Rehal; thank you so much for your beautiful work. Many thanks also to my supervisor, Dr. Mehmoona Moosa-Mitha, and my committee members, Professor Gaben Sanchez and Dr. Nathan Lachowsky, for your support and guidance. And thanks to you, for listening! I’m super honoured that you spent time with my voice in your ears today.

[Background music swells before ending]

[21] Read by Gaben (G. Sanchez, personal communication, September 16, 2025).