

“How (a)ffective Is It?": An Experiment in Affective Audio Journalism

Kelly Ann Pimentel-Lopes

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By: Kelly Ann Pimentel-Lopes

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Signed by the final examining committee:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Magda Konieczna Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Andrea Hunter Examiner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Elyse Amend Supervisor

Approved by

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Magda Konieczna  
Graduate Program Director

August 12, 2022

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Pascale Sicotte  
Dean of Faculty

## ABSTRACT

### “How (a)ffective Is It?”: An Experiment in Affective Audio Journalism

Kelly Ann Pimentel-Lopes

This research-creation project investigates how concepts of affect theory can offer insight into new models of journalistic storytelling that engage audiences through *affect*, particularly in audio journalism and podcasting. Affect is described here as an intensity of emotions that urges individuals to *feel* something and *do* something, driving them towards thought and movement (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). This motivation is equally shared in journalism, which urges audiences to provoke thought and inspire change.

This study develops an “Affective Framework” – narratives driven by compelling characters, emotive and non-stylized voices, descriptive and vivid language, moments of tension, a full-bodied soundscape, personal anecdotes – and applies it to the podcasting format to explore how journalists can produce engaging human-interest stories for news audiences that stimulate *deeper* levels of sense-making, connection, empathy and feeling by analyzing the composition of three podcast episodes produced for this research. Each episode recounts the story of a woman who spent her pregnancy and the first few months of motherhood in quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic but is structured differently to test the various aspects of the Affective Framework.

Podcasting transcends as the ideal immersive listening space for audiences to fully submerge themselves in a narrative due to the intimacy between the listener and the voices in the podcast. The “Affective Framework” offers direction on how to create empathetic value for listeners by embedding pockets of affect into the composition of the podcast (e.g., strategic use of sound, timing, and descriptive language). Structuring the podcast by emphasizing different elements of the framework at varied levels between episodes and comparing them will prompt an interesting discussion around how different applications of affective techniques may stimulate emotional responses from listeners and evaluate which elements might be more effective at eliciting the emotions and affects the producer is seeking.

Key words: affective journalism, affective audio journalism, personal narrative journalism, affect, affective framework, podcasting, audio journalism, emotion, feeling

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## Introduction

As a result of the journalism industry's pivot towards digital and online media, many news outlets struggle to compete with the fast-paced momentum of online news production (e.g., a 24-hour news cycle) and attempt to redefine their current practices concerning how they deliver information to their audiences in interesting and engaging ways. With one simple click, an individual can obtain an overwhelming amount of information that, too often, is a facsimile of other journalists' work. In other words, everyone is in some way doing the same thing, thus, diminishing the journalistic value of that singular news item (Picard, 2009).

To create journalistic value, journalists must have the creative freedom to tell the stories of everyday people in less conventional ways, moving beyond the inverted pyramid structure for storytelling and considering instead how the use of other semiotic systems can offer something different to journalism practice. It is these creative forms of output and the stylistic devices used in storytelling – that is, the use of digital technologies and literary codes and conventions to tell stories – that help embody 'the journalistic truth,' by framing news events in ways that captivate their audiences (Picard, 2009; Broersma, 2010; Markham, 2012). While technology can help with creativity, there are still some institutional and journalistic cultural norms that impede and restrain creative practice such as the dependency and availability of human and non-human resources and support, the associated economic implications and the immiscible differences between traditional concepts of journalism and notions of creativity, where the former relies heavily on hard-facts, truth and objectivity and the latter on art, imagination and perception. Podcasting, however, is reasonably accessible, not too expensive to produce and is dependent on the creator's creativity.

This research-creation project investigates how concepts of affect theory – an intensity of emotions that urges individuals to *feel* something and *do* something, driving them towards thought and movement (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010) – can offer insight into new models of journalistic storytelling that engage audiences through *affect*, particularly in audio journalism and podcasting. I propose the idea of an “Affective Framework” – narratives driven by compelling characters, emotive and non-stylized voices, descriptive and vivid language, moments of tension, a full-bodied soundscape, and personal anecdotes – and apply it to the podcasting format to explore how journalists can produce engaging human-interest stories for news audiences that stimulate *deeper* levels of sense-making, connection, and feeling.

To date, there remains little research on the connection between affect theory and journalism, and my work aims to shed light on a new perspective of journalism studies where personal narrative storytelling, affect theory and journalism practice complement each other to help researchers develop new, engaging storytelling models. This research also attempts to demonstrate how journalists can exercise creative ownership in their work to avoid conventional “reporting” or “re-reporting” journalism practices (Picard, 2009). Using this framework as guidance, I tell the story of Jasmine Davidson, a woman who spent her pregnancy and the first few months of motherhood in quarantine during the COVID-19 pandemic. This story is relevant and provides a personal account of current and shared realities experienced by new pandemic parents.

Finally, the written component of this research project will focus on affect theory in connection to audio journalism and podcasting. To begin, this report will offer a review of relevant literature on affect theory, audio journalism and storytelling in audio journalism by drawing connections between these three areas and putting them into conversation with one

another, which has not been done before. It will expand on the proposed idea of the “Affective Framework” and its relevance to pre-existing literature and this project. Then, the report will provide reflections on the practical and theoretical processes of producing these episodes and end with a discussion of the expected significance of this research and future research directions.

## **Literature review**

### *Audio journalism and podcasting*

In 2013, Apple released reports stating that the tech company recorded 1-billion podcast subscriptions over the course of one year (Weiner, 2014). Since then, the format’s popularity has surged, often deemed the general public’s preferable choice for consuming information (Slate, 2014). According to *The Infinite Dial: 2021*, a study on consumer media habits led by Edison Research and Triton Digital<sup>1</sup>, podcast listenership experienced significant declines at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic; however, this was short-lived. Interestingly, the study reported that by the autumn of 2020, listenership had experienced a rather significant increase wherein weekly podcast consumers were listening to podcasts half an hour more per week than they had been doing prior to the pandemic (Webster, 2021).

Podcasting, while not a recently discovered form of communication, operates similarly to, yet exclusively from traditional broadcast radio. As Street (2014) suggests, “broadcast radio is a medium of continuous disappearance. It is [...] ephemeral, giving multiple listeners a unique experience of the passing moment” (pg. 3). Here, listeners bear witness to an array of voices, characters, commercials, and stories that cannot ever be repeated verbatim again – a unique

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<sup>1</sup> Edison Research conducts market research for businesses and media organizations globally. Since 2014, Edison Research and Triton Digital have been delivering an influential study, called *The Infinite Dial*, which investigates consumer media usage in the United States, Canada and Australia.



experience of every ephemeral moment in radio. In contrast, podcasting stands as a format that is not bound by broadcast schedules; instead, the listener can choose to tune in to a podcast episode or a podcast series whenever they please by downloading or streaming it on their mobile devices – this afternoon, next month, or years after its original release. At their own convenience, the listener can control and manipulate the speed at which the podcast is operating; they can pause or replay a moment from the narrative and can correspondingly skip seconds or minutes ahead. Nonetheless, both media concurrently demonstrate the notion of intimacy, mobility, and space (Dowling & Miller, 2019; Lindgren, 2016), where radio and podcasting serve as “companionship for the lonely” and create “the illusion of company [and connection] in a way that no other media can” (Allison, 2010).

Podcasting transports listeners into a new experiential dimension of listenership characterized by its lower reliance on ad revenue and fewer commercial breaks<sup>2</sup>, and by its dependency on headphone technology to fulfill the complete immersive experience. Indeed, podcasting transcends as the ultimate individualized and intimate listening space for audiences to fully submerge themselves into a story. To this effect, Lindgren (2016) explains that:

“Unlike stories produced for screens where emotions are acted out in visual form, audio stories explore our lives through sounds and spoken words, intimately whispered in our ears. [...] The personalized listening space created by headphones further accommodates the bond created between voices in the story and the listener” (pg. 24).

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<sup>2</sup> Typically, podcasts acquire funding through crowdfunding initiatives, subscription-based business models, donations, sponsorships, and grants, to name a few (Carvajal et al., 2012; Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016; Forbes, 2021). The podcast *Serial*, produced from the creators of *This American Life*, for instance, received funding to continue the infamous podcast series from donations and sponsors, and it went on to win a Peabody Award in 2015 (Wahl-Jorgensen et al., 2016). Likewise, podcasters with a large fan-base often organize conferences and live events to generate extra revenue from ticket sales and event merchandise, using that income to monetize their podcasts (Forbes, 2021). For example, the numerous podcast spin-offs from *The Bachelor* franchise, produced by *The Bachelor* alumni like *Bachelor Happy Hour*, *Off the Vine with Kaitlyn Bristowe*, *Click Bait with Bachelor Nation*, to name a few. This also includes their on-stage North American tour, *The Bachelor Live on Stage*.

This moment of connection and intimacy is partly sparked by the ‘neighborly voice’ of the narrator, in contrast to the traditional authoritative and stylized voice of news broadcasters (Allison, 2010; Dowling & Miller, 2019; Lindgren, 2016). Frequently described as ‘friendly,’ ‘familiar’ and ‘casual,’ the human voice draws listeners into a deeper absorption of the narrative, an experience that emulates an ordinary conversation between two good friends. Lindgren (2016), who conducts a contextual analysis of the *Invisibilia* podcast, argues that while the podcast utilizes extensive research and complex stories in the *Fearless* episode (season 1, episode 2), the casual tone of the speakers and the delivery of the dialogue sustains the intimate connection and evades from alienating the listener from the narrative. Thus, deeper connections between listener and narrator may suggest a greater level of relatability, empathy and feeling towards the story and its speakers for audiences.

#### *Affect Theory and definitions of affect*

The definition of *affect* will vary depending on the field of research. In the humanities, *affect* is commonly recognized as a set of cognitive and physiological states that provoke how bodies are created, changed, adjusted, influenced, and affected by the ongoing interactions with one’s surroundings. In other words, *affect* refers to the immediate emotional or kinesthetic (physical) responses one senses in reaction to a stimulus before processing the meaning of what has occurred. For example, in response to humor, one’s physical response may consist of contractions in the abdominal area to prompt laughter and swelling up of the cheek muscles to form a smile; emotionally, one may experience feelings of delight, joy, and happiness.

The terms “affect” and “emotion” are often used interchangeably in affect studies; however, Massumi (2002) notes that they are indeed theoretically different. He suggests emotion

is personal and it is one's "emotion [that] enables us to understand emotion as articulated and expressed affect" (p. 28). On the other hand, Seigworth & Gregg (2010) refer to *affect* as an intensity of force(s), an intensity of emotions, "that drive [audiences] toward movement, toward thought and extension" (p. 1). It is the idea that something is happening *to* the spectator and *with* the spectator (Ridout, 2008; Hurley, 2010; Rae et al., 2017) – a physiological and emotional embodiment that passes from body-to-body, human and non-human, urging them to *do something*. And isn't this what journalism urges readers, viewers, and listeners to do as well? To feel something, to do something – to inspire change, critique, movement, or debate. This connection is significant to understand the powerful source of motivation that comes from both journalism and affect theory.

In her essay, *Happy Objects*, Sara Ahmed describes affect as "sticky" to explain the sustained connection between ideas, values, and beliefs (Ahmed, 2010, p. 29). She suggests that "the dynamic interplay between humans, objects and spaces invokes emotions that are then attached to objects and spaces to make them "sticky" and "saturated with affect" (Ahmed, 2014). Here, affect resonates with the familiar, the "in common," the shared experience and the self-reflexive. In other words, two individuals interacting with the same object will presumably each have their own memory tied to it: one object yet two different experiences. However, because they both share a personal memory with this exact object, *it* becomes sticky with affect – sticky with emotions, memories, and nostalgia (Ahmed, 2014; Badwan & Hall, 2020). Similarly, Badwan & Hall (2020) draw on Ahmed's research and further investigate affect in relation to places, spaces, and objects, suggesting that through a blend of "moments" experienced in places with others, they become "sticky places" – that is, places swarming with affect and "sticky" with emotion. In some ways, one could argue that a theatre's auditorium may be the stickiest of places

as the space frequently surges with aggressive and overwhelming waves of passion, emotion and feeling (Hurley, 2010).

Principles of affect, emotion and feeling, are frequently analyzed in theatre and it is notably fundamental to performance studies. Professional actors, for instance, will study and train their bodies to convey a character's emotions on stage by strategically adjusting and re-adjusting their bodies and by manipulating elements of their voices (e.g., pace, pitch, intonation, projection). Likewise, there is an assortment of acting methods and techniques that make use of the actor's personal and emotional repertoire to feed into their performance and into the portrayal of their character. Some of these methods include Stanislavsky's practice for "emotional recall," where an actor recalls a past memory that incites a similar emotion to their character's and urges them to "borrow" those feelings to bring the character to life (Stanislavsky, 1936); Richard Schechner's *rasaboxes* exercise that provides actors in training with a conceptual apparatus for how they can access and trigger emotion within a performance (Neuerburg-Denzer, 2014); and Rudolf Laban's "Eight Efforts" training that enables performer's to explore a character through expressive movement (Ewan & Sagovsky, 2018), to name a few. Indeed, using these techniques, actors will create a variety of semiotic symbols and visual cues that create an affective masterpiece.

Other theatre professionals like directors, lighting and sound designers also strive to provoke emotion and create an affective response from their audiences. Directors, for instance, will embed pockets of affect into the script by thinking about staging, blocking and timing/cues. Likewise, choices concerning the warm or cool tones of a staged production's colour palette, and the scenic soundscape will assist with conveying mood and inciting feeling (Hurley, 2010). It is precisely all these elements and semiotic devices combined that create the affect in a

performance; it is the composition – the way a production is orchestrated and produced – that stimulates emotion, mood, passion, feeling, catharsis, connection, and affect. It is not the script alone.

Reflecting on the written medium in journalism, the written word is a fantastic medium for explaining facts and clarifying information; however, it cannot effectively convey emotion, feeling and passion in the same way audio can. An article from a local newspaper reporting on the murder of a teenage adolescent and summarizing the family’s grief cannot – and does not – have the same emotional impact for the reader in comparison to the act of listening to personal accounts from the family members themselves; hearing them struggle to keep their composure while their voices begin to tremble as they fight through their pain, their heartache, their loss. It is the power of the human voice expressing the pain that makes us as listeners feel something—to empathize. The human voice is, as Lindgren (2016) suggests, “the intimate key to audience’s hearts” (p. 27). Having this moment echo in your ears resonates within the listener’s inner world, thus heightening the audiences’ experience and their expectations.

This research-project draws on a combination of theories, particularly Seigworth & Gregg’s definition of affect, Sara Ahmed’s concept of “affects = sticky” and Badwan & Hall’s notion of “sticky places,” to experiment with the “Affective Framework” and investigate its ability – or inability – to produce affect.

### *The interplay between audio journalism, podcasting and affect theory*

Storytelling is fundamental to sense-making in journalism—that is, framing reality and presenting news events in a way that offers deeper meaning and creates empathetic value for its audiences. Sense-making occurs when individuals articulate their own stories, in return allowing

us to reflect on current events and where we locate ourselves in the world around us (Broersma, 2010; Lindgren, 2017). As noted by Allison (2010), “we [as listeners] are blindly listening to [audio stories]. Our imaginations are [continuously] in play. We create the characters and envision the settings. Images are indelible because we participate in their creation.” This is what defines immersive media and the immersive storytelling experience. The audience assumes a significant role in the storytelling framework, and its members have an ethical responsibility to complete the storytelling cycle (Rae et al., 2019). The audience becomes responsible for legitimizing the experiences of the characters in the story – these accounts are not fictional truths about fictional characters, but experiences of ordinary people who reveal their personal truths. In response, audiences recognize, acknowledge, validate, accept and support these truths and by *listening* to these stories, it confirms these are stories worth telling.

Likewise, audiences are not simply passive members in this exchange of information; rather they actively participate in sense-making – that is, making sense of the narrative and what this narrative means to them. It is through this act of ‘earwitnessing’ or bearing witness to these ‘sticky’ stories through the podcasting medium that urges listener’s to “develop a sense of ethical responsibility through creating, receiving and listening to the sounds and voices” of the narrative (Rae et al., 2019).

By participating in the sense-making, the listener becomes a significant part of the narrative and becomes a ‘co-creator of meaning.’ Meaning is created through the legitimization of the *others*’ personal narratives, where the listener engages with those experiences and relates them back to their own lived experience, creating empathetic value (Broersma, 2010; Lindgren, 2017). The listener actively engages with their imagination, creating visualizations by calling upon old memories – like Stanislavsky’s method of “emotional recall” – to bring an element of

intimacy and relatability to the listener's experience, like a movie or audiobook playing in their minds. It is through this self-reflexive act that the listener is affected. This shared connection appeals to their imagination, sparks nostalgia and stimulates an array of passions and emotions. As a result, the moment has become stickier with affect.

These ideas of shared connection and co-creation of meaning are significant to this research project and the listening experience is elevated *because* of audio journalism's dependency on the imagination. Audio journalism forces audiences to engage internally with the information they are receiving aurally, rather than relying on visual cues to associate and validate their understanding of the information presented to them, and transports listeners from the realities of their world to the realities of the characters worlds. Consuming the narrative in this way deepens the connection between the listener and the voices in the narrative and compels listeners to exercise creative authorship, building their own interpretations of the events as they unfold.

### *Producing a tale worth telling*

In journalism studies, personal narrative storytelling continues to be critiqued by academics for its controversial use of subjective and confessional commentaries expressed by the journalists themselves, commonly seen in 'selfie-journalism,' 'confessional journalism' and 'personal journalism' (Coward, 2013; Lindgren, 2017). Critics argue that personal narrative storytelling as a stylistic form of storytelling is a practice of 'infotainment' and 'sensationalism' (Broersma, 2010), and that these subjective commentaries contradict the ethical vow journalists make in traditional forms of journalism, where objectivity is at the forefront of their practice and their framing of reality. However, as Coward (2013) suggests in her book *Speaking Personally*,

“reality can never be represented objectively without being filtered through the subjectivity and stance of the observer.” In other words, even a journalist writing a news story deemed ‘newsworthy’ can also exemplify a glimpse of subjectivity by consciously choosing the angle of the story, including what content to include and exclude. This in and of itself is a form of subjectivity.

Human-interest journalism is a highly debated form of journalism, one that captivates listeners by sharing and reporting stories of everyday people that spark human connection, empathy, and relatability. As noted by Allison (2010), “the [human-interest] story is more mysterious [than conventional forms of radio news]. It may be something [audiences] want to hear but don’t know [they] want to hear. It is one person speaking to another and falls outside the realm of perceived need” (pg. 236). It is the exposure to such familiarities that invites listeners to reflect on their own lives and uses this information to self-govern, a common interest for both traditional journalism and this subjective form of journalism (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007).

Inter-weaving human-interest journalism with personal narrative journalism, too, can produce deeper levels of connection among its listeners, where the omniscient presence of the narrator and their commentary create a greater immersive and intimate experience for the listener. Here, the proximity and intimacy between the narrator and listener welcomes an even greater emphasis on common and personal experiences that appeal to the imagination, spark nostalgia and self-reflexivity (Lindgren, 2016). These moments of critical reflection demand emotive engagement from the listener and together, stimulates these passionate emotions, memories, and shared experiences. It further enables emotional responses from its audiences who make these shared experiences ‘stickier with affect’ (Street, 2014; Badwan & Hall, 2020).



Academics and researchers in the field of journalism have argued that many media outlets and their portrayals, or representations of reality, encourage audiences to accept and believe that these depictions are natural (Mateus, 2018). However, as noted by Alan (2010), the emphasis should be on *representation* of reality, rather than the attempt to ‘present’ reality through the biased lens of each media outlet and journalist. This idea of *representation of reality* is assumed by using ‘codified techniques’ to frame the reality in a way that audiences can connect, reflect and criticize. And as journalism has become more creative in its practices and forms of delivery (Markham, 2012), personal narrative storytelling and podcasting are examples of ‘codified techniques’ that incite audiences to self-reflect and self-govern by virtue of these personal connections and the affective, emotional, and nostalgic responses one experiences while co-participating in the sense-making of these human stories.

*The “Affective framework” for storytelling in journalism*

To reiterate, this research explores a new creative approach to journalistic storytelling that uses a combination of literary devices and audio techniques to produce a story that stimulates deeper levels of sense-making, connection and feeling, for podcast listeners. The three podcast episodes described in the Methods section below experiment with what I have titled the “Affective Storytelling Framework,” which draws on concepts referenced in Tiffanie Wen’s (2015) “Inside the Podcast Brain: Why do audio stories captivate?” where she investigates the impact of audio storytelling and the mind-body response, and expands correspondingly on concepts from affect theory explained in previous sections.

The Affective Framework consists of six elements that aim to create an immersive listening experience for audiences and empathetic value for each listener. And while Wen’s

article clearly outlines the first five elements, it overlooks one powerful element that is essential to arousing feelings of empathy among listeners: the personal anecdote (Coward, 2013; Street, 2014; Lindgren, 2016). Thus, the six elements in the Affective Framework provide a guide for compelling audio stories that are:

- (1) **Character driven:** A character-driven narrative is driven by emotion and focuses on the character's development. All listeners should feel a sense of familiarity and understanding for the character and their personality; they should feel as though they are colleagues, peers, classmates, or friendly neighbors (Allison, 2010; Dowling & Miller, 2019; Lindgren, 2016).
- (2) Conveyed by **emotive and non-stylized voices:** A narrative conveyed by emotive and non-stylized voice(s) engages listeners to feel a sense of intimacy and closeness with the speakers in the story. According to Wen (2015), “[listeners] need a social aspect to a story that will enable [them] to empathize with the characters in the story.” Unlike the stylized, professional ‘news voice’ used in current reporting practices, which distances and alienates the listener from the speakers and the narrative, stories told by voices stripped of this style allow the stories to come to life where the audio stimulates listeners’ imaginative capacities, keeping them actively engaged as the story’s events unfold.
- (3) Employed by **descriptive and vivid language:** To amplify these imaginative capacities, audio stories must employ descriptive and vivid language where the strong imagery prompts listeners to become the directors and producers of their cinematic interpretation of the audio story, while guided by the narrator and the characters in the podcast. They create a movie in their minds with their own versions of the characters,

- developing a stronger and personalized connection with the characters and their story (Allison, 2010; Broersma, 2010; Street, 2014; Lindgren, 2017).
- (4) Balanced by **moments of tension**: Scripted, yet powerful. Embedding moments of tension throughout a narrative could take several forms; adding a pause after a character reveals an important fact or after a character has voiced a critical personal reflection of their own. Here, the pause (or “a beat” referred to in the theatre) serves as a moment where the audience, too, can digest and reflect on what has just happened, and what is happening to them in this very moment. Tension can also grow with sound or music such as incorporating music with rapid tempo to create movement in the audio, followed by an abrupt high-pitched sound to “break” the moment, which naturally follows a pause (Hurley, 2010; Abel, 2015).
- (5) Composed with **a full-bodied soundscape**: A full-bodied soundscape is necessary to transport listeners from their everyday surroundings into the narrative, muting the sound from the listener’s reality and replacing it instead with sounds from the character’s world. Here, sound is a collection of voices, ambient noise, white noise, sound effects, and orchestrated music with and without lyrics. While orchestrated music naturally assists with transitions from scene-to-scene, it can also “evoke unspoken levels of the story [and] punctuate action” (Abel, 2015), tell a story about the environment that the listener is temporarily co-existing in, allow space for emotion to grow and impact the listener. While critics have argued that the use of music in audio stories is manipulative, often coercing listeners to feel an emotion or a particular emotion that may not be natural to them in their individual experience, sound offers movement to the narrative and as Ira Glass suggests, “often the main

thing that music is doing is just holding the space, and letting the moment live for another three to four seconds” (Abel, 2015, pg. 152).

- (6) Accompanied by a **personal anecdote(s)**: This is the element that truly drives connection, emotiveness, and empathy; the element that humanizes the legitimacy of the bond created between the characters in the story and the listener. As Street (2014) suggests, “a story may use imaginary circumstances to illustrate a universal truth and images from our past, whether imagined, recalled accurately, or transmitted verbatim from the page, retain an essence of self that becomes heightened when communicated through voice” (pg. 20). The personal anecdote will equally transport listeners deeper into the story by urging them to dive into their personal memory, feel and empathize with the characters, the sounds, or the moments presented in the narrative—thus, creating an affective and immersive experience for each listener.

## **Method**

This research-creation project is based on Chapman & Sawchuck’s (2012) creation-as-research approach and Lindgren’s (2014) research *on* practice and research *through* practice approach, where the creation is part of the research, and the research inspires the creation.

First, I created three original stand-alone episodes that told Jasmine’s story using different applications of the Affective Framework and its elements described in the previous section. The project employs elements of ethnography and autoethnography (Cramer & McDevitt, 2004; Lindgren, 2017), including extensive notetaking and journaling to document how the framework and its six elements were applied throughout the production process. The

challenges, obstacles and successes encountered throughout the project will be discussed later in this paper.

Each episode is approximately 10 minutes in length and are intended to appear as stand-alone episodes. Using the focused-interview approach, which is fixated on drawing out an individual's unique perspective(s) and subjective response(s) to a particular topic or situation through a one-on-one interview (Iorio, 2010; Merton et al., 1956/1990), the episodes were built using recordings from my 60-minute conversation with Jasmine on November 14, 2021, and used audio techniques bridging sound design in audio journalism, live-theatre and music (Street, 2014; Abel, 2015).

- **Episode 1** is structured as a question-and-answer format to embody traditional interviewing practices, where the listener hears the interviewer ask the question and the interviewee answers the question. Here, the narration and soundscape are limited and occur only during the intro and outro of the recording.
- **Episode 2** uses Jasmine's voice, and Jasmine's voice alone; she tells her own story. Here, the soundscape and the editing technique is strategic to create a narrative of its own like a theatrical monologue. The soundscape includes musical instrumentation and ambient sound to symbolize space and Jasmine's reality.
- **Episode 3** introduces more creativity into its composition and applies elements from personal narrative storytelling where the subjective perspective is present, and the narrator appears as a character in the story. This episode is set up like an audiobook, giving the listener the impression that they are experiencing a movie in their minds. Here, the soundscape is creative. The soundscape includes musical instrumentation and ambient sound to symbolize space and reality. That is, Jasmine's reality – her life, her

surroundings, her space. The soundscape is present in the intro and outro and is woven into the narration to heighten moments of tension and emotion.

First, I focused on capturing what the mood and the atmosphere of the environment that we were recording in was like (i.e., Jasmine's home – an open and bright bungalow in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, QC), gathering descriptive information that would bring the space to life when crafting the podcast. Specifically, notetaking in this regard focused on recording what I was observing, hearing, smelling, and feeling. I captured these notes in a pocket-sized Hilroy notebook, actively jotting down these observations while I was co-existing in the space with Jasmine and Chloe, her seven-month-old baby girl.

During the interview, I recorded the timestamps of moments that I felt were significant and should be considered during the editing process, including elements from my conversation with Jasmine (e.g., the witty and sharp asides to depict her friendly, approachable personality and personal concerns she expressed about her pregnancy and being a first-time mother to drive the personal anecdote element of the framework). As we conducted our one-on-one interview, there were several instances where we needed to temporarily stop to allow Jasmine to tend to Chloe. I took this opportunity to take more detailed notes, revisiting what I noted down about the setting, the actions, behaviours, and conversations that I had previously observed to this point. The audio equipment, too, was still recording to capture the sounds and conversation occurring between Jasmine and Chloe that could not be captured as effectively through my written notes. Leaving the recorder on during these “breaks” was particularly useful for establishing a strong soundscape for the podcasts.

While extensive notetaking is a significant part of the research, it was equally important to find a fair balance between extensive notetaking during the research process and allowing

myself to simply participate and observe as per the participant-observation research technique of ethnography (Iorio, 2010, pp. 128-129). Following the interview, I sat down for 15 minutes and gathered my personal reflections on paper about the process, the conversation between Jasmine and me, and ideas that grew out of that exchange (e.g., about the framework, the project, her responses, what went well, what didn't go as well, etc). Documenting such information was helpful for the editing process, particularly when reviewing the storyboard, piecing together the narrative for the podcasts, and creating their respective soundscapes. This is not a podcast series, but rather an experimentation in telling one story in different, creative ways. That said, each episode needed to slightly differ from the others and yet still needed to illustrate the same story, told from the same space.

Following production, I attempted to gather a small group of 15 participants to assess their thoughts and reactions on the three episodes through listening sessions and a short anonymous survey (see Appendix A for Question Set). Altering the composition of each episode and then comparing all three to one another was expected to prompt an interesting discussion around listener responses to the different applications of the framework. It would have also provided a good understanding into which elements or combination of elements might have been more effective at eliciting the emotions and affects the project was hoping to arouse from listeners. Unfortunately, only eight of the 15 participants I recruited completed the listening sessions and the short anonymous survey, and the survey results collected were not significant enough to initiate a thorough analysis. Some of the comments and feedback revealed in the survey results, however, can still provide invaluable insight into the future research directions, and are addressed at the conclusion of this paper.

## **The “Affective framework” applied in practice**

This section analyzes three original podcast episodes (“The Diary of a Pandemic Parent”) as unique examples to demonstrate how the criteria in the Affective Framework can bring greater value to audio stories and potentially provoke deeper levels of feeling for listeners. The analyses below also provide a unique perspective on how elements from the Affective Framework can be incorporated in most podcasting genres, particularly ones focused on human-interest journalism and personal narrative storytelling. The six elements from the Affective Framework – character driven, emotive and non-stylized voices, descriptive and vivid language, moments of tension, full bodied soundscape, and personal anecdotes – are the focus of attention in all three analyses to address my point about immersing listeners into the narrative to create deeper levels of sense-making, connection and feeling. However, it is important to note that the potency – that is, the level to which the criteria were applied – may vary between the podcast episodes, some may be very apparent while others appear less dominant.

### **Episode 1: Question-and-answer-style**

The concept for this episode was inspired by the conventional interview format, where the reporter opens with contextual evidence based on a particular topic or situation, followed by several rounds of question-and-answer exchanges between the interviewer and the interviewee, and ends the report with a closing statement that summarizes the intent of the interview and a key takeaway for listeners.



*Criteria 1: character driven*

In the episode, the listener is introduced to three individuals: Jasmine, Chloe, and the interviewer (that's me). Although it is evident that the story circles around Jasmine's experience and branding her as the protagonist of the story, Chloe's role in this narrative is also important. Jasmine's personality was conveyed using her friendly demeanor and witty statements heard several times throughout the episode.

For example, at 01:13 – 01:46, Jasmine says:

“At the beginning, my biggest concern was, oh my god, I have to spend every day with my husband. That was my biggest concern. Twenty-four hours per day, that's who I'm going to see. But it ended up working out. I mean, we got married for a reason, right?”

The excerpt demonstrates Jasmine's playful personality as she teases that her biggest concern was spending every moment with her partner. This tongue-in-cheek statement and her honesty are what make the moment pure and, for many of us, relatable. In the pre-pandemic world, people were overwhelmed with their busy schedules – taking public transportation, commuting to work, commuting to school – and time spent at home with family and friends was limited. However, when the government ordered everyone to stay at home, perhaps you also shared the same realisation as Jasmine – *I'm going to have to spend every day with my \_\_\_\_? My parents? My partner? My siblings? My roommates?*

Conveying Chloe's presence and the relationship between mother and daughter, however, relied solely on the muffled sounds and gestures captured during Jasmine's responses (e.g., see 03:29 – 03:45). Unlike other forms of media that rely on visual composition to tell a story, audio journalism provokes the imagination for longer periods of time and engages each listener's unique inner world where they create their own images, characters, and settings (Allison, 2010). With Chloe's cooing and her unsolicited interruption at 03:29 – 03:45, for example, the listener

can envision the interaction during the interview through how they are perceiving the audio. By doing this, the listener becomes *affected* by their relationship (Broersma, 2010; Lindgren, 2017) – they may smirk, laugh, or even utter an “awe.” Thus, the moment shared between the listener and the characters in the episode has become *stickier* with affect (Ahmed, 2010; Badwan & Hall, 2020); that is, the moment has theoretically generated stronger levels of empathy, emotion and feeling. Formulaically, it may look like this: (a) the feelings experienced by the characters in the podcast + (b) the feelings experienced by the listener = (c) a sticky space (Badwan & Hall, 2020).

As the episode progresses, the listener may feel increasingly acquainted with Jasmine and Chloe as they witness other innocent exchanges between the two. At 06:10 – 06:17, for example, when asked what the most challenging part was about being pregnant during the pandemic, Jasmine begins to formulate her reply but is interrupted by Chloe’s sneeze, which causes Jasmine to laugh. Here, the listener is yet again invited to relish in this sweet, innocent exchange between mother and daughter – envisioning their interaction, becoming deeply captivated by their connection, wallowing in this shared moment between the two characters and the audience, and stimulating a visceral response from each listener (the “awe”).

The role of the interviewer, however, is a debated one. The listener is greeted by the interviewer who opens the episode by setting the scene and painting a picture of what the pre-pandemic and mid-pandemic world of becoming a parent looks like for an expecting first-time parent, like Jasmine. Although one could argue that the interviewer is indeed a character in the narrative, I would disagree and suggest that the interviewer instead acts as the orchestra’s conductor, if you will. The interviewer acts as a discussion facilitator, the messenger between Jasmine and the listener, where the audience is guided by the interviewer’s expertise in

questioning and identifying what information is key for audiences to develop a rich understanding of Jasmine's story (Abel, 2015).

Prior to conducting the interview with Jasmine, I produced a set of questions that utilized the top-down approach and drew from the inverted pyramid storytelling model, which focuses on emphasizing the most pertinent information first, followed by less relevant information (Coward, 2013). My hope was to embody the spirit of objectivity by asking open-ended questions and questions that did not sway Jasmine's responses in any particular direction, in an attempt to produce a complete and accurate story. Because Jasmine and I are friends, I spoke to her frequently during her pregnancy, and that meant I already knew about her hospital scare and her kidney stone diagnosis. Not wanting to persuade her to reveal that anecdote, I asked questions like: "How did the government restrictions impact your pregnancy?" and, "Tell me about a moment during your pregnancy where you would have loved more support from loved ones," rather than saying, "Tell me about your kidney stone incident that happened early on in your pregnancy. How did the government restrictions impact you during this time?" The former allowed Jasmine to decide what she wanted to reveal and, naturally, it was her kidney stone and hospital incident.

Some critics may argue that this desire to produce a "complete story" may have impeded my pursuit of objectivity as I strategically chose which questions to keep in the final edit of the podcast, questions that I believed could tell a more comprehensive story. That is, one with a beginning – *tell us how it all began*, a middle – *tell us what happened*, and an end – *tell us what life looks like now*. However, as Coward (2013) suggests in her book *Speaking Personally*, "reality can never be represented objectively without being filtered through the subjectivity and stance of the observer" (pg. 67). I am, as the interviewer, the observer. In other words, even a

journalist writing a news story deemed ‘newsworthy’ can also exemplify moments of subjectivity by consciously choosing the angle of the story, including what content to include and exclude. This in and of itself is a form of subjectivity.

Nonetheless, the interviewer is neither narrator nor character, but simply a gatekeeper.<sup>3</sup> This is not to say, however, that the listener may not feel a sense of connection and intimacy with the interviewer. The individualized listening space is intensified due to listeners tuning in to the podcast by use of headphones, creating a more direct and intimate bond between the characters in the narrative and the listeners (Lindgren, 2016). Naturally, listeners become spellbound as the characters convey what they feel and what they’ve experienced both through the words, resonances, and the emotion from their own voices (Dowling & Miller, 2019; Kaplan, 2007).

#### *Criteria 2: emotive and non-stylized voice(s)*

As noted above, the concept of the episode was inspired by the conventional interview and to embody this essence, the voice of the interviewer needed to encapsulate the professional “news voice.” That is, “intentionally bland, non-judgmental, quirk-free, responsible, and sober” and a voice that is “a useful presence interested in names and affiliations and times and numbers” (Kramer in Coward, 2013, pg. 18). In both the intro at 00:00 – 01:13 and the outro at 10:02 – 10:30, the listener witnesses the interviewer introduce the topic of the episode and the interviewee in a neutral, impersonal, and professional demeanor. Here, the interviewer is disconnected personally from the story, reporting exclusively on the hard-facts by painting a

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<sup>3</sup> The definition of the role of the gatekeeper, here, refers to Morris Janowitz (1975) in *Professional Models in Journalism: The Gatekeeper and the Advocate*, who writes: “The gatekeeper orientation emphasized the search for objectivity and the sharp separation of reporting fact from disseminating opinion. Coverage of the real world required that the journalist select the important from the mass of detailed information; therefore, the notion of the journalist as gatekeeper rested on his ability to detect, emphasize, and disseminate that which was important” (pg. 618).

portrait for listeners about the reality of pre-pandemic expectant parents vis-à-vis what the reality currently looks like for mid-pandemic expectant parents. The interaction between interviewer and interviewee is intentionally formal and conservative.

In fact, one challenging factor about embodying a neutral and impersonal tone of voice was the proximity of my relationship with Jasmine. The two of us have been acquaintances for five years and our interactions beyond the scope of the project are often informal. For the purpose of this episode, I recognized the importance of exemplifying neutrality and disconnection in the tone of my voice; however, this did not emerge naturally. The intro, outro and questions were recorded after my interview sessions with Jasmine to ensure the absence of personal and friendly exchanges, replaced instead with a professional, stylized voice.

Although the stylized voice threatens the empathetic connection that the affective framework is seeking to manifest from the audience, the juxtaposition between the interviewer's impersonal voice and Jasmine's personal voice strengthens the intimacy and bond between the character and the listener in this episode. As Allison (2010) suggests, "when we use the 'professional' voice to tell the stories of others, something may be gained in consistency of style, efficiency, and journalistic credibility, but something is lost too. When we let the other voices speak for themselves, we hear stories as astonishing as the world itself" (pg. 237). Letting other voices speak, voices that are stripped of style, can reach incredible, beautiful, and impactful heights. The story comes to life and becomes personal to the person even though it is not the listener's own story (Jones, 2010). As Silesen et al. (2015) have suggested, "[humans] are hardwired for empathy and the empathetic response increases as we learn more about each other" (qtd. in Lindgren, 2016, pg. 27). Thus, it is the sense of proximity to the narrative by way of hearing the accounts from Jasmine herself that intensifies the bond between the voices in the

narrative and the listener. For the listener, Jasmine has become a new companion, an acquaintance, a neighbour.

### *Criteria 3: descriptive and vivid language*

In the absence of visual information, using descriptive language becomes an important technique for eliciting strong imagery for listeners. According to Street (2014), “there is a fundamental connection between language, sound and memory that enhances meaning through imagery” (pg. 29). The language used by the characters in the story help paint a picture of the scenes unfolding in their minds and as noted above, the story naturally comes to life as the listener hears it directly from the source herself.

At 02:58, Jasmine describes the hospital scare she experienced early in her pregnancy, eventually discovering that the pain she was feeling was due to a large kidney stone. Jasmine’s description of the event offers a small glimpse of what she experienced and together, Jasmine and the listener, theoretically become more connected. Jad Abumrad, *Radiolab* host, confesses that when describing something to his listeners: “in a sense, I am painting something but I’m not holding the paintbrush. *You* are. So, it’s this deep act of co-authorship, and in that is some potential for empathy” (qtd. in Weiner, 2014). Here, the listener becomes a co-creator, or a *co-author* as Abumrad suggests, in that they are making sense of the retelling of Jasmine’s experience and what this may mean for them, how it makes them feel. This retelling also enables the listener to paint their own portrait of the event as the tale unfolds, where they may picture themselves in Jasmine’s place – *what would I have done, how would I have felt?* (Coward, 2013, pg. 10).

For this episode, however, the language the interviewer uses does not provide enough substance to provoke the listener's imagination. Aside from Jasmine's kidney stone incident and the exchanges heard between Jasmine and Chloe throughout the duration of the episode, listeners need to exercise more effort in visualizing the story and its characters as it unfolds, unlike the two other episodes of this series for instance, which offer other semiotic cues that guide the imaginative capacities of listeners, arousing stronger and more vivid imagery (see the analyses of Episodes 2 and 3 below).

*Criteria 4: moment(s) of tension*

As discussed in the Affective Framework section above, to stimulate strong levels of empathy, a narrative must be balanced by moments of tension. Moments of tension, however, do not always emerge naturally and are often strategically scripted in the storyboard to immerse the listener deeper into the narrative. Seeing as this episode intended to emulate the conventional journalistic interview, however, I did not want to forcefully embed moments of tension into the narrative, at least for this episode, and sought to allow moments of tension to build naturally as we progressed through the interview. The most significant moment of tension occurs at 02:59 when Jasmine describes her kidney stone incident. As described in the section above, Jasmine's explanation of the event offers a small glimpse of what she experienced and theoretically works to facilitate a connection between the listener and Jasmine. As Jasmine recounts the events, it enables the listener to paint their own interpretive portrait of the incident, influencing them to "get in Jasmine's head" where they can picture themselves in her shoes.

According to a study conducted by *The Annals of the New York Academy of Science* (2009), researchers investigated the physiological responses from participants who watched a

series of short video clips characterized as emotional and unemotional scenes. They concluded that moments of tension found in audio stories release and elevate oxytocin levels, a chemical in the body that allows people to feel empathy and emotion. For example, this could happen when listeners witness a character in the story struggle, or face some type of conflict, challenge or hardship (in Wen, 2015).

Thus, when Jasmine describes her kidney stone incident, it forces listeners to experience and reflect on what is happening to Jasmine and subsequently, to the listener in this very moment. As Jad Abumrad, *Radiolab* host, explains: “[it is] that moment of tape [...] when you [are] in [the character’s] head, in [their] emotional mind. You were: ‘oh yeah, [they’re] feeling it. I’m feeling it because [they’re] feeling it” (qtd. in Abel, 2015, pg. 94).

At 06:30, when reflecting on her experience during the pandemic, is another example of a moment of tension that emerges in the interview. Here, Jasmine discusses the unfortunate nature of not being able to share the evolution of the pregnancy with her family and recalls the overwhelming feeling she experienced when attending her doctor’s appointments without her husband, Matt. Like the kidney stone incident, this confession *affects* the listener and naturally drives them to empathize with Jasmine – *that must’ve been very difficult to go through alone; what a shame that this is the reality of so many expectant couples today*. It is through this self-reflexive act that the listener is affected. As a result, the moment has become *stickier* with affect (Ahmed, 2010; Badwan & Hall, 2020).

#### *Criteria 5: full-bodied soundscape*

This episode incorporates limited musical accompaniment, which primarily functions like a “commercial break” as is often witnessed in radio journalism. The first musical interlude occurs



at 00:30 – 00:48 following the interviewer’s introduction. Here, the music is muting the sounds from the listener’s current reality, transporting the listener into another realm with sounds from the character’s world. In other words, the musical interlude helps transition the listener from their everyday reality to Jasmine’s. We see this again at the end of the episode, when the musical interlude begins at 10:29 – 10:45, and proceeds to transport the listener from Jasmine’s reality back to theirs.

The soundscape, though it is limited in this episode compared to Episode 2 and 3 (see detailed analysis below), tells a story about the environment that the listener is temporarily co-existing in with Jasmine, Chloe and the narrator, and allows space for emotion to grow. Street (2014) suggests that “we [as listeners] have the ability to allow places [...] to speak through pure sound” (pg. 9). That is, ambient sound has the power to quickly transport listeners into a new place and setting, intensifying the feeling that something is happening, something is experienced (Abel, 2015). During Chloe’s unsolicited interruption at 03:29 – 03:45, for example, listeners witness a small exchange between Jasmine and the interviewer where she asks the interviewer for assistance with “grabbing the Ziploc behind you.” Throughout this interaction, listeners *hear* the voices in the podcast move through the space. Listeners *hear* them moving closer to the audio equipment, and at times further from the audio equipment. They *hear* a shuffling of a bag, indicating that there are objects in the space, and the suckling noises of Chloe’s pacifier, demonstrating that Chloe is attached to Jasmine. This is Jasmine’s space and listeners witness a small glimpse of her reality.

#### *Criteria 6: personal anecdote*

In all three episodes, Jasmine shares an anecdote about the hospital scare she had at the beginning of her pregnancy, learning shortly after that she was diagnosed with kidney stones which

was the main factor behind the pain she was feeling. First, she begins by reflecting on what she had for breakfast: “I remember the day. I was eating Eggos, which is something I don’t eat. So, it was totally a pregnancy craving.” Then, she reflects on the pain she was experiencing: “I couldn’t catch my breath. The pain was so overwhelming.” Here, the listener witnesses and shares the struggle with Jasmine as she reveals herself.

Interestingly, one survey participant noted:

“I feel like the first episode was too “Q&A style” if that makes sense. To me, it sounded more scripted than a casual conversation. I know it’s supposed to be more a “journalistic approach,” but I feel like podcasts are perceived as something more casual than question, answer, another question, another answer.”

Because the nature of this podcast episode was highly structured like a traditional, question-and-answer type interview, this personal anecdote was a pivotal moment in the story – the “aha!” moment – where listeners could begin to understand why they were listening to Jasmine’s story and why her story was meant to be shared and acknowledged. The anecdote brought an authenticity into the dialogue of the podcast *because* of Jasmine’s unscripted, casual, and friendly candor. In this moment, listeners naturally feel closer to her.

To guarantee listeners could arouse feelings of empathy towards Jasmine and her story, it was important for listeners to first develop a familiarity and connection with Jasmine’s character before she revealed more details about her time during the pandemic. As discussed earlier in this section, listeners become acquainted with Jasmine and her witty and playful personality as she reveals that when the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic and the Quebec government obliged people to quarantine at home, her first thought was: “Oh my God, I have to spend every day with my husband. [...] Twenty-four hours per day, that’s who I’m going to see [...]” (see 01:13 – 01:46). Though it is understood that she is teasing, the honesty in her reflection prompts an instinctive chuckle from the audience and perhaps they feel they can

relate to her – *I shared the same thought as Jasmine: how was I going to spend every day with my spouse, my parents, my siblings, my roommates, etc.?* Establishing this initial connection ensures that the anecdote, which appears halfway through the episode, will not be overlooked or disregarded. The anecdote is what brings purpose to her story and the struggle she experienced, and why it should be shared more widely with others.

### **Episode 2: a tribute to the theatrical monologue**

The concept for this episode was inspired by the non-narrated style that Joe Richman, founder and executive producer of *Radio Diaries*, describes in Jessica Abel's, *The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio*. According to Richman, the non-narrated style uses the recordings captured by the interviewee of their surroundings (e.g., sounds and interactions with others) to construct the narrative, like a digital diary. The non-narrated style is characterized by three staple elements. First, the interviewee is an active participant in the creative process; they are an active contributor, a "diarist," capturing their own digital diary entries and narrate their own lived experiences. Second, the interviewer (or reporter) is absent from the narrative, capitalizing on the idea that the characters in the story speak for themselves—they tell their own story. The interviewer, however, plays a critical role in the editing process, and brings the story to life by piecing together the recordings to produce a story with meaning and purpose. Finally, none of the recordings are scripted and there is no preconceived storyboard. Thus, the recordings are captured by the interviewee as they happen in real-time, and the story and its purpose are decoded during the editing process.

This episode, however, does not follow the non-narrated style exclusively. Instead, it draws on the idea of the absent narrator/interviewer, emphasizing the significance of the

characters in the narrative vocalizing their own lived experiences. To clarify, the episode was constructed using the recordings from my 60-minute interview with Jasmine and the questions that were asked during the interview were scripted and drafted before the interview occurred. Jasmine was not a “diarist” and did not have a role in recording the audio for the episode.

Furthermore, this episode also pays tribute to the theatrical monologue and pursues the idea of a character confessing their thoughts and feelings directly to an audience. I wanted this episode to reveal the power of Jasmine’s role as the storyteller, using her own voice to share her story. By doing this, the empathetic connection between Jasmine and the listener(s) grow progressively deeper, more intimate.

*Criteria 1: character driven*

In this episode, listeners are exposed to two characters: Jasmine and Chloe. The interviewer, who was previously present in Episode 1, is absent from this episode and the narrative unfolds using Jasmine’s voice. Crafting a podcast in this way allows the listener to “get into the character’s head,” (Abumrad, in Abel, 2015, pg. 94). “Getting in [the character’s] head” requires a deeply felt identification with characters. Telling a story this way is immediate, present tense, you-are-there. It’s like you’re looking through the eyes of the teller” (qtd. in Abel, 2015, pg. 84). Through the first-person narrative, the relationship between Jasmine and the listener transforms into a companionship; they become acquaintances, friends. In this episode, Jasmine speaks directly to the listener and confides in them – *this is my experience and let me tell you all about it, friend*. In response, the listener is captivated and alert. The relationship between the two grows progressively as Jasmine’s narrative arc unfolds and she shares her story.

At 00:34, Jasmine shares how she discovered she was expecting a child and how she shared the news with her husband, Matt. At 02:55, we learn about Jasmine's hospital scare she experienced early in her pregnancy, and she eventually tells the listener that she was diagnosed with kidney stones and the baby was safe and healthy. Then at 04:51, we witness Jasmine reflect on the struggles of expecting a child amid a global pandemic, specifically regarding the government restrictions that limited the number of individuals in one hospital room. She reveals that she was often overwhelmed when attending her doctor visits and struggled with retaining the ample amounts of information provided by the doctors and nurses. Finally, at 06:19, Jasmine reflects on her pregnancy and first few months of motherhood, sharing with the listener that, despite those adversities, there was something special about experiencing it alone and with her husband.

As Abel (2015) describes, “the most important, most magic ingredient of the kind of stories that make you just stop, and pay attention, is a character experiencing a change in his or her life, right there, as you listen” (pg. 80). Through these series of events, the listener has come full circle with Jasmine, having heard from her first-hand the highs and lows she experienced in 2020. As a result, the listener may have grown a deeper, more intimate connection with her. The listener feels a sense of closeness, an innate understanding of who Jasmine is and as a result, they feel compassion and empathy towards her—they have been *affected* by her story.

### *Criteria 2: emotive and non-stylized voice(s)*

The ability to be deeply *affected* by someone's personal story also depends on how the story is communicated. There is a notable difference between *telling* a story, as reporters and journalists are trained in journalism school, and *sharing* a story, as Jasmine does in this episode.

If a reporter or a journalist *told* an audience about Jasmine’s story, one might feel a sense of sympathy and compassion towards her and potentially others who have had similar experiences – *that is so unfortunate, I cannot begin to imagine what it must have been like for her*. However, hearing the story directly from the source itself conveys emotion, feeling and passion more effectively. As Kern (2008) remarks in *Sound Reporting: The NPR Guide to Audio Journalism and Production*:

“Certainly, there are photographs that touch us, and TV often can tell a story with vividness and intimacy, and newspaper stories often have great quotes. But people convey what they feel both through their words and through the sound of their voices. During a radio interview, we often can hear for ourselves that a politician is dismissive, or a protester is angry, or that a Nobel Prize winner is thrilled and exhausted; we don’t need a reporter to characterize this for us” (pg. 2).

In this episode, Jasmine’s voice is friendly, familiar and casual. Her voice draws listeners into a deeper absorption of the narrative, and it is the sound of the human voice, Jasmine’s voice, expressing her struggle that makes us as listeners feel something – to empathize. As Street (2014) explains, “the human voice concentrates the mind on the *spoken* text. A transcript may provide the sense and the meaning, but a recording demonstrates the nuances of speech, the hesitations, the inflections, the thought process and the emotion” (pg. 116). At 00:34, for example, when reflecting on the time she discovered she was pregnant, we hear that Jasmine is happy and cheerful, and we sense that she is smiling. At 03:47, however, when reflecting on her hospital scare, we hear the serious tone in her voice, the concern, and, in some way, the sustained disbelief that this is what she experienced several months ago. Having these moments echo in

your ears resonates within the listener's inner world. Thus, the audience's experience is heightened and so are their expectations.

*Criteria 3: descriptive and vivid language*

The listener relies on Jasmine as the sole protagonist to guide them through what is happening in the episode using her words and her descriptions, but also using the suggestive nature of the sound of her actions. At the beginning of the episode, for example, the listener hears Jasmine walk through the space, the echo of footsteps and the faint cry appearing in the distance, which grows louder as Jasmine and the listener approach. Together, they enter a new space, Chloe's room. These sounds alone employ a strong moving image in the listeners' minds and do not emerge because the actions were described to the audience. To this effect, David Kestenbaum, radio producer for *Planet Money* and *This American Life*, suggests that "for a scene to work, you need to create a vivid image in the listener's imagination. This does not necessarily mean you have to have ambient sound" (qtd. in Abel, 2015, pg. 120). Although I agree with this statement, this specific moment in the podcast shows that a strong sense of space and setting *can* emerge with a strong soundscape and the *absence* of descriptive language. The listener does not need Jasmine to narrate her actions – *I am walking down the hallway, I am opening the door and entering Chloe's bedroom* – to produce an image of what is happening in their minds. Through the diversity of noises and ambient sounds, vivid images emerge naturally in the listener's imagination through the suggestion of sound and ambient noise. Here, I want the audience to be *affected* by Jasmine's environment, to feel themselves moving with her through the space of her home and responding to the echo of footsteps, Chloe's cry in the distance.

However, this argument is not meant to discredit the powerful nature of speech and language. Descriptive language can indeed manifest strong imagery in the listener's mind, but it is the combination of speech, music and other sounds, that amplify a listener's imaginative capacities. Street (2014) argues that "the scenery people create in their heads is much more vivid than anything you could take a photo of" (pg. 120). In doing this, the listeners create a movie in their minds with their own versions of the characters, developing a stronger and personalized connection to the narrative and respectively, the voices in the episode.

Kestenabum (in Abel, 2015) also advises that the voices in an audio story "should always switch things from a descriptive voice to an active voice. It just creates a scene" (pg. 120). The audience witnesses this at 02:53 when they hear Jasmine share her kidney stone experience. Here, she describes the series of events of her time in the hospital, leading up to the moment she unveils that she was diagnosed with kidney stone, in an active voice and this produces a vivid image in the listener's mind; the listener does not *imagine* what is happening, but they can *see* what is happening as Jasmine continues her story. Thus, by placing strong imagery in the minds of listeners, they actively participate in sense-making – that is, making sense of the narrative and what this narrative means to them. It is through engaging with Jasmine's story, and through the listener's self-reflection – *what does this mean to me?* – that *affects* the listener and their listening experience, urging them to "develop a sense of ethical responsibility through creating, receiving and listening to the sounds and voices" of the narrative (Rae et al., 2019, pg. 1038).

#### *Criteria 4: moments of tension*

There are several moments in this episode where the instrumental music adds tension to the narrative and helps underscore Jasmine's self-reflexive confessions. For example, we see this



at the beginning of the podcast when Jasmine reflects on how she discovered she was expecting and when reflecting on the overwhelming feelings she often experienced when attending doctor visits by herself. We also see this at the end of the podcast, when Jasmine reflects on what she loves most about being a parent. The music, which appears periodically throughout the episode, is a form of *signposting* – phrases, words or sounds that guide or alert the reader that *this* moment is important and relevant (Abel, 2015). The signposting helps elevate the tension, keeping listeners engaged as the narrative unfolds.

Signposting can take on many forms (Abel, 2015). For example, Zoe Chace, producer at *This American Life*, says that when something is comical, she makes a point to giggle to indicate to the listener that this moment they are witnessing is an important and funny one (in Abel, 2015, pg. 128-9). While Chace as a producer may implement this signpost strategically in her podcasts, when the listener hears Jasmine giggle at 01:25 and again at 07:38, it is not an intentional form of signposting on Jasmine's part. In other words, Jasmine naturally giggles because of what she experiences in each of these moments; however, it *was* a strategic choice on the editor's part. To preserve this moment in the final cut of the podcast was used to indicate to the listener that the moments that occur at 01:25 and again at 07:38 are special—they reveal more about Jasmine's person.

Another moment of tension that is witnessed occurs at 02:19, when Chloe's voluntary interruption causes a temporary intermission in the narrative, a beat where the audience can reflect on what has happened leading up to this moment, and process what is currently happening. Here, listeners linger as Jasmine tends to Chloe, anxiously waiting for her to continue her anecdote. Here, the moment of tension grows. Again, this is another example of signposting,

and it further accommodates the idea that the listener is allowing this tension to *affect* them as they linger and await to see what will happen next.

*Criteria 5: full-bodied soundscape*

In this episode, the soundscape and the orchestrated music both play a significant role in creating a sense of space and conveying mood and feeling for the listener. Though some critics may argue their distaste for the manipulative quality of sound and music, it is precisely this forceful and confrontational use of sound and music that enable listeners to *feel, move, react* and *empathize*. As Joe Richman, founder and executive producer of *Radio Diaries*, asserts: “you want to experience something as the listener, not just be told” (qtd. in Abel, 2015, pg. 80). Music and sound heighten the experience for listeners so that they *feel* what we, as creative professionals, want them to *feel*. And when they *feel*, they can start to make sense of *why* they *feel* this way.

The music that appears at 00:15 – 00:36, for example, signifies to the listener that they are being transported into the story, into Jasmine’s world. Here, the music has agency—it is moving the story along, moving the listener from one scene to the next. At 00:36 – 01:45, however, the role of the music changes and its purpose is to enhance the mood. During this part of the episode, Jasmine reflects on the moment she discovered she was pregnant and how she shared it with her husband. Here, the music is light, upbeat and playful and remains audible for the duration of her confession. This selection of music was strategically chosen to punctuate this part of Jasmine’s experience, which was an exciting and happy moment for her and Matt. I also wanted to underscore this moment for listeners, some who may have children of their own, and compel them to reflect on the time they discovered they were expecting. To the listeners who may not share this experience with Jasmine, however, they are still *affected* by Jasmine’s memory because it offers

the impression that she is speaking to *you*, confiding in *you*. The listener is not just a listener, but an acquaintance, a confidant, a friend.

The soundscape of this episode, too, provokes the listener's imagination and provides a glimpse into a day in Jasmine's life. At the beginning of the episode, for example, the listener *hears* Jasmine walk through the space, the echo of footsteps and the faint cry appearing in the distance, which grows louder as Jasmine *and* the listener approach. Together, they enter a new space: Chloe's room. During this occurrence, the listener and their mind are actively engaged, and their curiosity for the space they are empirically maneuvering through grows progressively – *where are we now and where are we going?* The listener, too, becomes a part of the narrative, walking alongside Jasmine and allowing her to guide the listener through the space – *we've reached the end of the hallway, we are opening the door, we are in a new space*. According to Street (2014), "the strength of location recordings is that they provide [listeners] with a sonic window into a moment in time in a place" (pg. 101). Here, the soundscape is rich in imagery and invokes a strong sense of space in the audience members' minds. It offers an opportunity for the listener to grow their understanding about Jasmine's reality, the routine visits to Chloe's room, for example, and what that *sounds* like.

The listener's senses are heightened once again at 07:18 when they witness the interaction between Jasmine and Chloe, the opening and closing of drawers, indicating that they are in Chloe's room and Jasmine is attending to her child's needs. Here, the soundscape offers once again a glimpse into Jasmine's reality and what this mother-daughter interaction potentially looks like. This is another example where the listener becomes immersed into the narrative, not simply as a listener but as an acquaintance or a companion.

Street (2014) explains that, as listeners, “we may never go [to this place], but we ‘see’ through the sounds [of] the place whilst staying surrounded by the familiar environment in which we are hearing the sounds” (pg. 102). Even though the listener intrinsically knows they are not in the same space with Jasmine and Chloe, the soundscape offers the illusion that the listener is situated somewhere in this same room with them, and they are eavesdropping on their conversation. Witnessing this moment may, too, influence the listener to reflect on a similar interaction they may have had with their mother, father or another member of their family. Perhaps, they experienced a similar interaction with their child, a cousin, a niece or nephew.

In her essay, *Happy Objects*, Ahmed suggests that “the dynamic interplay between humans, objects and spaces invokes emotions that are then attached to objects and spaces to make them “sticky” and saturated with affect” (Ahmed, 2014). In other words, affect resonates with the familiar, the “in common,” the shared experience and the self-reflexive. Thus, as the listener entertains the self-reflexive and witnesses the interaction between Jasmine and Chloe, this shared experience has become *stickier* with affect (Ahmed, 2010; Badwan & Hall, 2020).

As described earlier in this paper, theatre professionals such as directors, set designers and sound designers, are masters at producing environments that convey mood and emotional resonance for their audiences vis-à-vis the colour palette of a set design and the cool, warm or eerie sounds that accompany a scene, whether to punctuate action, jar or influence feeling among audiences. These are, as Hurley (2010) remarks, “descriptors that indicate emotional resonance” (pg. 9). She also suggests that “being in a mood increases the chance of feeling” (pg. 21). Thus, to create *affect* and to stimulate an affective experience for listeners, these sonic descriptors are essential and help immerse listeners into the narrative.

*Criteria 6: personal anecdote*

As discussed in the analysis section above for Episode 1, it was important for listeners to become acquainted with Jasmine and develop an initial connection with her character *before* revealing details of her story and her pandemic pregnancy. The strategic linear progression of the narrative in Episode 1 – meet the character → tell us about life before the pandemic → tell us about life during the pandemic → reflecting on your journey, tell us your thoughts – aimed to provoke feelings of empathy towards Jasmine and her story. In other words, without that initial connection the anecdote would not have accomplished the same reactive and sympathetic resonance.

In this episode, Jasmine shares two anecdotes: at 00:34 when she recalls the moment she learned she was expecting and how she shared it with her husband, and again at 01:46 when she describes the events leading up to her kidney stone diagnosis. Unlike Episode 1, it is through the anecdote at 00:34–01:37 that the connection between Jasmine and the audience is initiated:

“The day I found out I was pregnant was actually an accident. We had been trying but only for a little bit. And I had taken a pregnancy test the Friday night when I got home from work. [...] So, I took the [pregnancy] test on Friday and it was negative and went about my weekend. And then on the Monday, I had a migraine. I have migraines and I used to have them a lot at that period, too. Before taking the medication, I was like: I’m just going to take another pregnancy test just to make sure [...]. So, I took the test and I was alone and my husband was at work and I was getting ready to go to work and I was like: “Oops, it’s positive.” So, I called Matt and I told him, and he’s like: “Are you serious? I’m standing in Rona [a hardware store].” And I was like, “Well, I felt like I had to tell you right away.” And he’s like, “you could’ve waited until I wasn’t in Rona,” [laughs].”

By sharing this charming anecdote at the very beginning of the episode, the audience is immediately propelled into the narrative. There is no formal introduction to Jasmine and her character like in Episode 1, thus accelerating the audience’s ability to relate and sympathize with Jasmine and her story. According to the feedback in the anonymous short survey, however, this

editing choice was not as well received as the technique employed in Episode 1, where the characters and the context of the podcast is prefaced at the beginning of the episode. It appears participants preferred the formal introduction and contextual overview at the beginning of the podcast like in Episode 1 and expressed feelings of confusion when this formality was excluded from Episode 2. While the survey response rate was too low to determine generalizable results, the preliminary participant answers provide some insight into how audience members reacted to the personal anecdotes included in this episode.

One survey participant commented that:

“The monologue style was a bit more difficult to stay engaged with as it was just [Jasmine] talking the whole time. There was no intro from the interviewer, but then there was a question at the end (“So what do you like about being a mom?”) which seemed a bit odd to have a question from the interviewer suddenly when there weren’t any questions [from them] prior to that.”

Another survey participant remarked that:

“For Episode 2, we knew that the topic was something 'baby' related, but not what the exact topic was. Jasmine jumped into talking about her experience, but [as listeners] we weren't sure why/what the topic was until the end.”

And one other participant added on to this, stating that:

“For Episode 2, without [the narrator’s] commentary, it felt like there was no context. I obviously knew the context since I had listened to the first episode. But I feel like without the first episode, I would have been lost; I wouldn’t necessarily know what the podcast episode [was] about until a certain point and then go, “oh okay, Jasmine is talking about her experience with pregnancy during the pandemic.”

Reflecting on these comments, it appears that propelling the audience into the narrative without context and a formal introduction to the characters in the story alienates and disengages listeners from the narrative; it contradicts the objective of this editing choice. As stated previously, adding the anecdote at the beginning of the episode served as an attempt to create an informal connection between Jasmine and the listener that would manifest naturally (i.e., without having

the narrator formally introduce Jasmine as the interviewer did in Episode 1). Interestingly, rather than establishing a connection between Jasmine and the listener as I hoped it would, it appeared to *disconnect* the two, thus, impacting their ability to empathize, feel and be *affected*.

### **Episode 3: a tribute to the audiobook**

This episode was inspired by notions and techniques used in personal narrative storytelling, where the subjective perspective is present. Here, the narrator appears as a character in the story – this is Jasmine’s story, but in some way, it is the narrator’s story, too. This episode is set up like an audiobook, where the narrative moves between scenes (or “chapters”), giving the listener the impression that they are experiencing a movie in their minds. Here, the soundscape is creative and includes musical instrumentation and ambient sound to symbolize space and reality. That is, Jasmine’s reality – her life, her surroundings, her space. The soundscape, too, is present in the intro and outro and woven into the narration to heighten moments of tension and emotion.

#### *Criteria 1: character driven*

In this episode, the listener is introduced to a new voice and presence that was not as active compared to the previous episodes. This is the voice of the narrator, and they appear as a character in the narrative; they do not solely narrate the story, but they participate in the actions as they unfold. In Episode 1, the interviewer guides the narrative, asks the important questions and summarises the driving point of the podcast for listeners – *this is why the story is important, and this is why you should care*. In this episode, however, the narrator *guides* the story and *tells* the story. Listeners gain a new perspective, a new angle, to the story and that is through the eyes of the narrator (that’s me). The audience tunes in to listen to Jasmine’s story and simultaneously

witnesses the narrator's story whereby the act of interviewing Jasmine and producing a podcast exposes audiences to the journalistic process of production – *the story is about Jasmine, but in some way, it is also about the narrator*. In this way, the episode is a metanarrative, a narrative about another narrative which refers to itself and the way it is being narrated (Dowling & Miller, 2019). I, as the narrator in this episode, become storyteller, reporter, producer and audience member all in one (Jones, 2010).

As noted in the previous analyses for episodes 1 and 2, there is a difference between *telling* a story, as journalists and reporters are trained to do in journalism school, and *sharing* or even *experiencing* a story. In this episode, Jasmine shares her story while the audience *experiences* the narrator's human and personal reflections, which naturally become part of the narrative. As Coward (2013) suggests in her analysis of writer Joan Didion's work in regard to New Journalism<sup>4</sup>, “by foregrounding [the writer's] own emotions and involvement, [the writer] somehow communicates a more profound understanding of the changing environment, mores and preoccupations than more impartial descriptions” (pg. 65). The monologue at the beginning of the podcast, for example, is one approach towards stressing the presence of the narrator as character in the story (see 00:21).

The narrator's monologue has two central purposes. First, it helps to establish an immediate emotional connection between the voices in the podcast and the audience. It is just like meeting a stranger for the first time—the first impression is important. Second, the monologue humanizes the reporter (or narrator). As Dowling & Miller (2019) write, “the

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<sup>4</sup> New Journalism is a literary movement that emerged in American journalism in the 1960s that challenged previous notions of objectivity in journalism reportage. These ‘new journalists’ used stylistic techniques and literary devices to tell the stories of real and ordinary people by employing subjective elements in the writing. For example, writers began using the personal voice (e.g., the direct use of “I”) and the author's personal identity surfaced (Coward, 2013).



journalistic technique of humanizing the reporter draws on older forms associated with literary journalism that honored rather than restricted the narrator's subjectivity and/or presence in the story as a character influencing events" (pg. 173). Consequently, this approach to storytelling is more effective at eliciting deeper connections between Jasmine, me, and the audience. We become companions *because* we are actively sharing and experiencing the story together.

For example, at 07:47 we hear the narrator's aside:

"When she changed Chloe's diaper, I sat back and observed her tending to the baby. I watched Jasmine tickle Chloe's toes and Chloe giggle in response. I nervously watched Chloe stare with her big blue eyes at my recording equipment, her tiny hand reaching towards the microphone in curiosity. And I wondered just how she really felt about her pandemic pregnancy. This is what she had to say."

This excerpt creates the impression that the narrator is speaking directly to the audience member and describing to them what the narrator is seeing and how they are behaving in this scene. Here, the narrator is providing details that the listener would not otherwise know because they were not present at the time of the recording. Therefore, through this blend of "moments" – that is, the sounds that characterize what Jasmine is doing in this scene, the narrator's description of their point of view and the audience's indirect involvement and presence at this moment – the listening space has become *sticky with affect*; one scene yet three different perspectives (Ahmed, 2014; Badwan & Hall, 2020).

### *Criteria 2: emotive and non-stylized voices*

Unlike the previous two episodes, this episode makes much more use of direct address, particularly for the narrator as they deliberately speak to the listener. At 08:06, for example, the narrator says "[...] And I wondered just how she really felt about her pandemic pregnancy. This is what she had to say [...]". Here, the narrator reveals themselves to the listener: *I am curious,*

and *I want to hear her response to my question, don't you?*' This, too, is another act of *signposting* where the narrator indicates to the listener, '*Hey, person listening! Jasmine is about to confess something important. Are you listening?*'.

In this episode, the casual tone of the speakers and the delivery of the dialogue sustains the intimate connection between the voices in the podcast and the audience. The informal and conversational language used in the dialogue, in addition to the warm and welcoming tone of the voices in the podcast, appeals to listeners. Listeners form a greater connection with the voices in the narrative *because* they are friendly, personal, and relatable.

As Weiner (2014) emphasizes, "voices convey warmth, empathy, personality and provide us with company" (qtd. in Lindgren, 2016, pg. 37). Allison (2010), too, writes that "voices go inside. [...] We are open and vulnerable to sound. A voice can sneak in, bypass the brain and touch the heart" (pg. 226). A transcript, for example, may not communicate a character's emotions or personality as effectively on paper compared to the sound of their voices. Instead, voices *affect* us, they move us, they make us *feel*. The hesitations, the enunciations, the *ugh*'s and *um*'s, the stammers—these nuances of the voice reveal the person. This is what makes them human. This is what makes their story relatable and universal (Street, 2014; Coward, 2013; Lindgren, 2016).

### *Criteria 3: descriptive and vivid language*

In the previous analysis of Episode 2, it was argued that the images which emerged in the listener's mind were provoked by the detailed accounts made by Jasmine throughout the episodes. The language Jasmine uses and how she communicates each occurrence is unscripted and natural, thus, conveying the feeling that she is speaking to *you*, confiding in *you*. Upon

reflection, however, the rich soundscape in Episode 2 may have been more powerful than the words themselves at eliciting strong imagery in the listener's mind. In this episode, while the soundscape helps provoke these images, the concrete and detailed accounts of the narrator further trigger the listener's imagination.

At 00:39 – 01:14, for example, the narrator says:

“It was the day the world made you stop in shock, made you cry in fear and made you panic, not a little bit but a lot. Breaking news headlines invaded our social media feeds. Every click, every tap, every scroll led to one breaking news story after another. And in an instant, we were submerged underwater, gasping for air, and desperately trying to find an opportunity to just shut it all off. But for some people, the pandemic was actually a blessing, an opportunity to start a new beginning [*transitional music*].”

In this excerpt, the strong poetic nature of the words forces the imagery into the minds of the audience where the narrator is telling the audience *what* to see and *how* to see it. For instance, the choice of words used in this phrase: “Breaking news headlines invaded our social media feeds. Every click, every tap, every scroll led to one breaking news story after another,” steers the listener's imagination and drives them to tap into their own memory, and recall the time they themselves were clicking, tapping and scrolling through their social media feeds in March 2020.

Likewise, the analogy in the phrase: “[...] we were submerged underwater, gasping for air, and desperately trying to find an opportunity to just shut it all off,” paints a lurid picture of struggle in their minds in hopes of the listener envisioning through their own eyes being submerged underwater and gasping for air – *what does that look like? What does that feel like?* I wanted them to *feel* and subliminally *experience* the struggle as the words were recited. In this moment, the listener is audience member, co-creator and co-author (Abumrad in Abel, 2015; Lindgren, 2016 & 2017; Broersma, 2010).

The descriptive narration that occurs at 07:47 – 08:10, too, pushes the listener to *see* through the eyes of the narrator – *hey person listening, do you see what I see?* In this excerpt, the narrator says:

“As she changed Chloe’s diaper, I sat back and observed her tending to the baby. I watched Jasmine tickle Chloe’s toes, I nervously watched Chloe stare with her big blue eyes at my recording equipment, her tiny hand reaching towards the microphone in curiosity. And I wondered just how she really felt about her pandemic pregnancy. This is what she had to say [...]”

Once again, the narrator is placing the image in the listener’s mind and *telling* them what to see:

“I watched Jasmine tickle Chloe’s toes” – *do you see it too?* – “I nervously watched Chloe stare with her big blue eyes at my recording equipment, her tiny hand reaching towards the microphone” – *and this? Do you see this too?* By arguing that the narration forces an image into the listener’s mind with the details the narrator describes (e.g., Chloe’s big blue eyes, Chloe’s tiny hand), suggests that every listener is *seeing* the same image; however, this is only true for a short moment. Initially, the image that is placed in their imagination mirrors what is being voiced. However, the listener paints their own portrait of the event as the tale unfolds; the image is placed in their minds, yes, but the interpretive act is individualized. Here, the listener becomes a co-creator, or a *co-author* as Abumrad (qtd. in Weiner, 2014). suggests, in that they are making sense of the images, what they mean for them and how it makes them feel.

#### *Criteria 4: moment(s) of tension*

Like Episode 2, there are several moments in this episode where the instrumental music and the soundscape create tension in the narrative, some of which are exact duplications of what occurs in Episode 2. To avoid repetition, however, this section will focus on the tension that builds during the exchange at 03:00 – 04:05 where Jasmine reminisces on the moment she

discovered she was expecting and how she shared it with her husband. With the upbeat and playful musical instrumentation underscoring the exchange, the audience senses the happiness in Jasmine's voice and naturally the listener is compelled to smile back. Then, at 04:00, we hear an abrupt and violent slam of a car door, and the sound of sirens travel into the distance. This is the turning point in the narrative, the part in the story that makes the listener stop and listen more closely. The series of events leading up to this part have been pleasant and uplifting: the audience is introduced to Jasmine and Chloe; they grow fonder of their relationship and learn more about Jasmine and the early days of her pregnancy. The sudden tension sparked by the slam of the car door and the ringing ambulance siren, however, breaks the moment, jars the listener and awakens their senses. It is like the instinctive jump you experience when watching a cinematic thriller and the murderer jumps out from the corner of the screen to ambush you. The audience is physically *affected*.

*Criteria 5: full-bodied soundscape*

One thing that Episode 1 and Episode 2 fail to do is underscore the global context in which Jasmine's story occurs. In both episodes, the voices mention that these events happen during the COVID-19 pandemic; however, these verbal affirmations do not effectively depict the bigger picture and the understanding of the global context slowly dissipates as the narrative unfolds. In this episode, the audience is greeted by the sounds of a city soundscape, and they hear a siren in the distance, the sound of vehicles driving to their destinations, and the voice of a dispatcher reporting that an elderly male needs medical attention. *This* is the context in which the story occurs, and the sounds are framing the notion of reality in which the listener is bearing

witness to in this episode. The sounds are emotive, they are eerie and jarring, and they transport the listener into the story.

Street (2014) suggests that “sound is a symptom of the place in which it was created, and whether the personal image of that place is based on realistic knowledge or not, it remains ‘true’ *because we have created it and therefore, it is of mnemonic importance to us [...]* (pg. 32). The sounds *affect* the listener and propel them to produce their own set of moving images – *where am I and what do my surroundings look like?* The listener’s imagination is continuously adjusting and readjusting, drawing from their subjective experience and their sound memory, to produce these moving images in their minds and to make sense of the narrative (Broersma, 2010; Lindgren, 2017; Street, 2014). By participating in the creation and management of the images, they are legitimizing the space and justifying that what they have created is authentic, real. Thus, this act of co-authorship has allowed the listener to interpret the sounds in a way that it makes most sense to them, and accordingly, it has strengthened the connection between the story and the listener.

Like the function of music in Episode 2, the music in this episode serves to assist with transitions from scene to scene, but also to convey emotional resonance as the listener witnesses the story unfold (Abel, 2015; Hurley, 2010). For example, at 00:23 as the narrator offers a detailed account of how the pandemic has affected how individuals interact with the world around them, the sombre and subdued music triggers the listener to evoke feelings of sadness, disappointment and concern. The music has agency and moves the listener from one emotional state to another emotional state. At 06:38, the audience hears a similar musical quality when Jasmine describes her hospital experience, indicating that she sat alone in a hospital room feeling perplexed and concerned as nurses frantically rushed in and out of her room, determined to find

an answer to her pain. Here, the music conveys the sombre and anxious mood of Jasmine's experience and attempts to trigger feelings of sadness, concern and worry. Additionally, as revealed in the previous analysis section, the music is a form of *signposting* and its presence indicates to the listener that *this* moment is important, *this* moment is concerning and *you* should *feel* concern, too.

To convey mood and feeling as theatre professionals do, and to create *affect*, these sonic descriptors – that is, the soundscape and the musical tone of the instrumentation – “manages the nature and moment of the audience's feeling response” (Hurley, 2010, pg. 29). By doing this, listeners can feel emotionally connected with characters in the narrative wherein they can empathize with them and be *affected* by their story.

#### *Criteria 6: personal anecdote*

An anecdote, as Ira Glass would describe it, adds suspense to the story; it is action-centered and moves the story along. He explains that “an anecdote has a momentum in and of itself, that no matter how boring the facts are [...] there is suspense in it, it feels like something is going to happen. In its form, you can feel inherently that you are on a train heading towards a destination” (Ira Glass on Storytelling, 2009, 01:19). The anecdote drives the narrative, inspires compassion among its listeners and helps the listener relate to the purpose of Jasmine's story: a woman navigating her first pregnancy, often alone, during a global pandemic.

In all three episodes, Jasmine shares an anecdote about the hospital scare she had at the beginning of her pregnancy, learning shortly after that she was diagnosed with kidney stones which was the main factor behind the pain she was feeling. First, she begins by reflecting on what she had for breakfast, “I remember the day. I was eating Eggos, which is something I don't

eat. So, it was totally a pregnancy craving.” Then, she reflects on the pain she was experiencing: “I couldn’t catch my breath. The pain was so overwhelming.” As she continues, listeners are captivated by the action, inching closer and closer, begging to learn more. Human beings crave stories that burst with experiences of everyday life. It is this type of human-driven and emotion-driven story that Walt Harrington, former award-winning writer for *The Washington Post Magazine*, claims that “as people try to make sense of their lives, these stories open up ‘windows of our universal human struggle’ (qtd. in Lindgren, 2016, pg. 26). Here, the listener witnesses, experiences and shares the struggle with Jasmine as she reveals herself. This act of revelation intensifies feelings of intimacy, proximity, connection and feeling among both the listener and the voices in the story.

For example, as one survey participant revealed while quoting Jasmine:

“No one was invited in. Not because we didn’t want them, but because that was the rule.” You didn’t have to be pregnant during the pandemic to understand this feeling, but it makes everything [Jasmine] said about her experience hit harder.

Another survey participant remarked that Jasmine’s hospital scare triggered a family-related hospital incident they also faced during the pandemic:

There were so many rules that had to be followed, it was overwhelming. You had to show your proof of vaccination (I was scared mine would be refused since I got them in another province), we had to sign in and sign out, we were only allowed two visitors at a time, constant hand washing and sanitizing, masks and distancing where possible, only a certain amount of people allowed in the elevator at a time, etc. It was already an overwhelming time for my family, the rules were just an unnecessary addition.

These two examples demonstrate this idea of human agency, where the listener engages in reflective action as a result their affective response to Jasmine’s story. It is the power of the Jasmine’s voice expressing her struggle that makes us as listeners feel something—to empathize. Thus, *affecting* our selves and prompting listeners to reflect inward and outward, on their experiences, their struggles and the experiences and struggles of others.



## Conclusion

### *Closing remarks*

To create journalistic value, it is imperative that journalists exercise creative agency in their work with the intention of framing news events in ways that captivate their audiences (Picard, 2009). Writing a news feature story may appeal to the avid reader; however, crafting this same feature story using creative forms of output (e.g., digital technologies) and the stylistic devices used in literary storytelling (e.g., codes and conventions), can offer more valuable significance and impact for audiences because the way the story is told and the way it is presented is different, unexpected, unique. In other words, I could have simply written a story about the many joys and struggles Jasmine experienced during her pandemic pregnancy and this may have appealed to some readers. However, using audio techniques bridging sound design in audio journalism, live-theatre and music as demonstrated in this research-creation project, may urge audiences to emotionally engage with the narrative by actively listening, feeling and reacting.

This research-creation project served to investigate how concepts of affect theory can offer insight into new models of journalistic storytelling that engage audiences through *affect*, particularly in audio journalism and podcasting. I proposed the idea of the “Affective Framework” – narratives driven by compelling characters, emotive and non-stylized voices, descriptive and vivid language, moments of tension, a full-bodied soundscape, and personal anecdotes – and applied it to the podcasting format to explore how journalists can produce engaging human-interest stories for news audiences that stimulate *deeper* levels of sense-making, connection, and feeling.

Though many journalism critics have characterized ‘good journalism’ as writing that is impartial, objective and based on hard facts (Allan, 2004 qtd. in Coward, 2013, pg. 16), this type of distant and emotion-less reporting, however, does not compel audiences as effectively as human-interest stories articulated through the audio medium. Human beings crave stories that burst with experiences of everyday life.

Commenting on human-driven and emotion-driven stories, Walt Harrington, former award-winning writer for *The Washington Post Magazine*, notes: “as people try to make sense of their lives, these stories open up ‘windows of our universal human struggle’” (qtd. in Lindgren, 2016, pg. 26).

Furthermore, upon reflecting on the written medium in journalism, the written word simply cannot effectively convey emotion, feeling and passion in the same way audio can. The human voice is, as Lindgren (2016) suggests, “the intimate key to audience’s hearts” (p. 27). It is the power of the human voice expressing the pain that makes us as listeners feel something—to empathize, to be *affected*.

In Episode 1, Jasmine’s personal anecdote about her kidney stone diagnosis and the soundscape, particularly the ambient sounds and Chloe’s cooing underscoring many of the scenes, were the two elements from the affective framework that were perhaps the most influential in this podcast. The personal anecdote influenced listeners to feel empathy towards Jasmine and the ambient sounds, particularly Chloe’s cooing, intensified the listener’s awareness of Chloe’s presence in the narrative and, naturally, their connection to her.

In Episode 2, the character-driven storyline, Jasmine’s personal and non-stylized voice and the strong soundscape that suggests the typography of Jasmine’s space are the three elements from the affective framework that were conceivably the most prominent in this podcast. The

listener feels a sense of closeness, an innate understanding of who Jasmine is because she is voicing her own story and listeners witness the narrative unfold through her eyes. Hearing the story directly from the source itself conveys emotion, feeling and passion more effectively. Thus, listeners feel compassion and empathy towards Jasmine—they have been *affected* by her story. Likewise, the episode's strong soundscape offers an opportunity for the listener to grow their understanding about Jasmine's reality—the routine visits to Chloe's room, for example, and what that *sounds* like. Here, the soundscape that illustrates the events forces listeners to consume the story through Jasmine's perspective and experience as if they are walking alongside her.

In Episode 3, the character-driven meta-narrative, the descriptive and vivid language used in the narration and the diversity of the soundscape and musical instrumentation, were possibly the three most effective elements from the affective framework that could elicit emotion and feeling among listeners in this podcast. In this episode, Jasmine shares her story while the audience *experiences* the narrator's human and personal reflections, which naturally become part of the narrative. This approach to storytelling is more effective at eliciting deeper connections between Jasmine, the narrator, and the audience; they become companions *because* they are actively sharing and experiencing the story together. The strong poetic nature of the words used in the narration forces listeners to engage with their imagination where the narrator tells the audience *what* to see and *how* to see it (see 07:47 – 08:10, for example). The soundscape, while also able further the intensity of imagery and space, is significant in two other ways: the musical instrumentation assists with scene-to-scene transitions and the ambient noise helps convey mood and feeling. By invoking a strong soundscape, listeners can feel emotionally connected with the characters in the narrative and the space in which they live, thus urging them to empathize and be *affected* by their stories.

While the results are not generalizable and require further investigation, this project's limited audience survey results indicate participants gravitated most towards Episode 1, the conventional style interview, and Episode 3, the narrative-first storytelling. Survey respondents generally mentioned they gravitated towards the use of music and soundscape, the descriptive language in the narration and the character-driven storytelling, because of the level of emotional engagement these elements offered listeners. In other words, these elements allowed them to *feel* emotionally charged and provided them with opportunities to react and respond, both emotionally and physically, as they listened to the podcast and witnessed the narrative progress. This indicates that affect has a meaningful place in podcasting and journalism studies, but is often overlooked and undervalued.

Upon reflection, creating the affective framework and applying it to podcast production reveals that journalists need to exercise more creative agency in their work and are sometimes required to strategically embed pockets of affect in the composition of the story's narrative. The affective framework proposed in this research project is not a concrete and highly structured framework; instead, it allows journalists as creators and as storytellers to have flexibility to employ one or several elements from the framework. In other words, there is no right or wrong way to apply these elements. The affective framework is a good starting point for thinking about how to intentionally incorporate affect in audio storytelling, and offers practicing and emerging journalists direction on how to create empathetic and journalistic value for listeners.

#### *Expected significance of the research*

This research demonstrates how student journalists and practicing journalists can exercise creative ownership in their work to avoid conventional "reporting" or "re-reporting" journalism

practices (Picard, 2009) by applying the criteria from the “Affective Framework” in their practice. The “Affective Framework” offers direction on how to create empathetic value for listeners by embedding pockets of affect in audio journalism (e.g., strategic use of sound, timing, and descriptive language). It also provides guidance on how different applications of affective techniques may prompt emotional responses from listeners and which elements might be more effective at eliciting the emotions and affects the *journalist as storyteller* is hoping to manifest.

To date, there remains little research on the connection between affect theory and journalism. It is my aspiration that my work will shed light on a new perspective of journalism studies where personal narrative storytelling, affect theory and journalism practice complement each other to help researchers develop new, engaging storytelling models and where journalism educators can share these models with the next generation of journalists.

Though the anonymous short survey did provide some noteworthy insights into the application of the affective framework, it could not provide sufficient evidence on the efficacy of the framework in podcasting and audio journalism because only eight survey participants completed the questionnaire. That said, there remains an opportunity to investigate how the affective framework can be applied, modified and perfected in other forms of journalism research. Continuing with this ongoing experimentation of the affective framework and applying it to other forms of journalism could also further the field’s understanding of the role of the audience and their emotional engagement with information, and potentially redefine journalism’s purpose and why journalists do what they do – *do we want our audiences to be affected? Do we want to intensify the audience’s feeling response?* (Hurley, 2010). *Or do we simply want to inform them so that they increase their awareness and can self-govern?* (Kovach & Rosenstiel,

2007). Either way, the affective framework serves as an opportunity to challenge conventional forms of *doing* journalism by foregrounding emotion and our audiences/listeners.

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## Appendices

### *Appendix A: Short-survey question set*

1. From the three podcast episodes, which podcast style did you like the best?
  - a. Episode 1 (interview style)
  - b. Episode 2 (monologue style)
  - c. Episode 3 (audiobook inspired)
2. Based on your answer above, why did you like this style the most? What resonates with you the most?
3. Based on the styles you did not choose, why did you dislike these styles?
4. What role does the music or soundscape play in each of the episodes? What impact did it have on you and your listening experience?
5. What do you think of the role of the narrator in each of the podcasts? What does their presence, respective to each episode, add or take away from the story?
6. In your opinion, which elements from the Affective Framework were most successful at connecting you to the characters and immersing yourself into the story?
  - a. In Episode 1?
  - b. In Episode 2?
  - c. In Episode 3?
7. What part of Jasmine's story made you feel the most connected to her?
8. What emotions, if any, did you experience during your listening sessions?
9. Is there an element that is not part of the "Affective Framework" but should be? What element would it be?
10. Do you have anything else to add? Is there something else you think I should know / consider?