

“Hear later”: An ADHD Podcast Through the Lens of Intimate Journalism

Andrea Pérez Millas

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By: **Andrea Pérez Millas**

Entitled: **“Hear later”: An ADHD Podcast Through the Lens of Intimate Journalism**

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Signed by the final examining committee:

_____ Chair
Dr. David Secko

_____ Examiner
Dr. Elyse Amend

_____ Supervisor
Dr. Andrea Hunter

Approved by _____

Dr. David Secko, Graduate Program Director

Dr. Pascale Sicotte, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science

Abstract

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This research-creation thesis integrates reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), intimate journalism, and podcast production to explore the lived experience of late ADHD diagnosis in women, using a first-person narrative and personal storytelling to go beyond a clinical, deficit-framed framework. The methodology combines reflexive journaling and two rounds of RTA: one to develop themes for the podcast, and another to examine the production process itself as a knowledge-making space. The dual positionality of researcher and research subject is embraced and analyzed as a key element of reflexive research. Ethical considerations, such as defining and implementing boundaries and resisting overexposure, are foregrounded throughout the journaling and production processes, drawing on the principles of intimate journalism. Ultimately, this research-creation thesis aims to enrich both academic inquiry and public discourse on neurodiversity by combining RTA, intimate journalism, and creative practice. The resulting podcast serves as both a creative and scholarly output, and by focusing on a personal narrative and using an accessible medium, the project aims to foster connection with the audience and promote a more nuanced, destigmatized conversation about female ADHD experiences.

“What is a story if not an enticement to stay?”

–Priya Basil

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Introduction

This research-creation thesis aims to contribute to the growing body of research through practice by exploring a personal narrative about the late diagnosis of ADHD in women through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). First-person accounts can provide nuances and insight that enrich clinical and deficit frames, two common approaches to addressing this under-researched topic (Ginapp et al., 2022; Long and Coats, 2022). To share my findings, I have produced a podcast that serves as a creative and scholarly output, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of ADHD while shaping an honest, nuanced, non-stereotyped perception of this neurodevelopmental disorder among the general audience.

As a female journalist diagnosed with ADHD five years ago, I believe reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) is a suitable methodological approach for exploring these experiences. Methodologically, I have conducted reflexive thematic analysis within a research-creation framework, combining journaling and creative production (the podcast) to convey my lived experiences as a woman with ADHD.

Furthermore, this project involved RTA in two different stages. First, using a dataset of journal entries and reflections on my ADHD experiences, I developed themes that added analytical depth to the podcast content. The second corpus, which describes and analyzes my impressions of the production process, enables critical reflection on how this reflexivity method shapes both the output and the creative process. To further strengthen the idea of the researcher's active role in this process, I have complemented the reflexive analysis with elements of intimate journalism in the production process. This approach helps shape the ADHD themes into narrative tools through first-person storytelling.

To address how reflexive thematic analysis, intimate journalism, and podcasting can be used cohesively and comprehensively, the thesis report accompanying the podcast delves into the following research questions:

Question 1:

How can reflexive thematic analysis be used as a methodology to create a podcast about female ADHD experiences?

Question 2:

How can an intimate approach contribute to research through creation as a tool to reflect on journalistic practices?

Question 3:

As a female journalist with ADHD, how does my positionality mold an intimate approach that adds value to the podcast narrative?

This research-creation thesis consists of a one-off or standalone podcast. By focusing on a single story, my goal is to deepen the intimacy level achieved and make it easier to create a bond between the producer and the audience. Adhering to the principles of intimate journalism, my intention is to provide an empathetic perspective and an explanatory, comprehensive approach to ADHD, connecting at different levels with women with ADHD, those new to the concept, and people who may hold stereotyped ideas about it.

As mentioned above, I have focused on my own story for this standalone podcast to immerse myself in a narrative, intimate journey, applying reflexive thematic analysis not only to my ADHD experiences but also to the journalistic process of producing a podcast. In doing so, I have aimed to intentionally avoid a victimhood viewpoint—a category in which people affected by an issue are commonly framed when their voices are included in traditional reporting (Riga, 2025;

Feith, 2025). Instead, I want to frame myself as a valid source to talk about a female ADHD experience.

Throughout the journalistic process, I also wanted to distance myself from the "superpower" narrative that has gained traction on social media when talking about neurodivergence, as it can be condescending and invisibilizes a very real, sometimes diluted but recurrent sentiment of "powerlessness" over simple and complex tasks alike (Jawed and Smith, 2023; Chatterjee, 2024). Similarly, in my personal experience searching through hashtags on social media, there is a tendency to romanticize ADHD, which prevents us from addressing this topic in a more empathetic, realistic, and constructive way (Singer, 2017; Wong, 2020).

Considering my positionality as a female researcher with ADHD, the most evident challenge for this research-creation project is my inherent subjectivity in addressing the topic in question. Although I consider subjectivity an inevitable component of any intellectual endeavour, I understand how it is particularly evident in this process. Despite acknowledging that it could be considered a limitation from a research and journalistic perspective, I see it as a strength because of the nature of reflexive thematic analysis and the depth it can bring to my analysis.

Nevertheless, I will be intentional in my critical examination of the data sets and subsequent analysis, reflecting on how my positionality influences my interpretation of the data I created as the research object. This constant awareness of my need to differentiate myself from my personal narrative will enable a deeper, more critical analysis, while incorporating the inherent value of being naturally immersed in the data sets.

Regarding engagement with a general audience, I believe neurodivergence is a topic worth focusing on from an outreach perspective to contribute to a more educated and empathetic society. I also believe that de-stigmatizing neurodiversity, specifically ADHD, is particularly relevant amid

a surge in assessments, self-assessments, and diagnoses (Martin et al., 2025; Sandra et al., 2025), and that podcasting is a generally accessible medium. Hoping to reach a broad audience, I have used simple, everyday language to explain medical terms, keeping in mind that the audience may not be familiar with the topic to begin with. The intention is to make the podcast feel more approachable, relatable and engaging.

Lastly, as mentioned explicitly throughout this introduction, I acknowledge that the podcast episode will consist of the story of my lived experiences with ADHD, which are distinct and, at the same time, possibly shared by others. Although evident, I will make it understood in the podcast that my experiences are by no means extendable to every woman with ADHD—even if the entire concept of the output is to focus on one story, as unique and as valid as dozens of different experiences of other women with ADHD.

Literature Review

This literature review examines the connections between intimate journalism and reflexive thematic analysis (RTA). RTA is a methodological approach that guides systematic interpretation of qualitative data, while intimate journalism conveys personal experiences into narratives for a broader audience. Despite originating from different spheres, they share a common ethos: addressing societal issues through situated positionality. Therefore, they offer complementary strengths to explore ADHD in women. While the RTA framework focuses on sense-making and developing meaningful patterns in the data, intimate journalism offers an engaging, accessible way to share those insights with a general audience.

First, I will reflect on RTA's core characteristics: flexibility, recursiveness, and an emphasis on the researcher's active engagement—from how they interact with the data to how their positionality shapes their interpretation and sense-making process. This process leads to identifying uniquely perceived patterns, which are then shaped into themes, weaving explicit and implicit aspects of the lived experiences portrayed in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). I will analyze how this approach is particularly well-suited to exploring a complex, subjective topic like ADHD in women through a first-person perspective. On a broader level, RTA also shapes the meaning of intimate journalism as a narrative tool for the podcast episode, ensuring it fosters engagement through my experiences as the researcher ethically—not for egotistical or exhibitionist reasons.

Consequently, I will discuss how intimate journalism can deliver an immersive, engaging podcast story, particularly given the role of parasocial relationships in today's online interactions (Vilceanu, 2025). It is an ongoing realization in newsrooms and academia that “Modern audiences now expect more intimacy and a shift in the relationship between journalists and the public” (García de Torres et al., 2025, p. 4), and that podcasting can organically narrow the gap between them. As

Lindgren (2021, p.712) notes, “The interplay between the human voice speaking and the human ear listening extends the key attributes in narrative journalism to create a distinct form of intimate journalism, infused with personal stories, shared feelings, interesting ideas, and surprising plot twists.”

To strengthen my research framework, I will explore how intimate journalism intersects effortlessly with autoethnography (Ellis, 2004, 2005). Therefore, a comprehensive review of autoethnographic research will follow, focusing specifically on the ideas of Carolyn Ellis, the field's primary contributor. Her interest in communication studies led her to explore connections between autoethnography and intimate journalism. Lastly, an introduction to ADHD and how it can be experienced differently in women will offer an overview of the subject addressed in the podcast, providing context from a scholarly perspective.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis: From Pattern-Finding to Meaning-Making

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) is an interpretive qualitative methodology that encourages knowledge production by meaning-making rather than theme extraction (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Therefore, the strength of RTA lies in its epistemic approach to knowledge: it is a construction built from reflexive interpretation of data, not a mere “discovery”. The themes “do not emerge,” as Braun and Clarke insist (2021a), but they are crafted following RTA guidelines and sourced out of a core analytic resource: the researcher’s subjectivity. Hence, the end-goal of this approach: “meaning-making rather than truth-seeing or discovery” (Braun and Clarke, 2021b). The analysis is done in a progressive yet recursive way, which is why Braun and Clarke chose to phrase the six components of RTA as “phases” instead of “steps”: the latter “evoke a passage up

and down, clearly segmented” whereas the phases of reflexive TA “are not always sharply delineated” (2021b, p. 34).

The researcher becomes an active, engaged knowledge producer, defining RTA as “a *subjective* process shaped by what we bring to it” (Braun and Clarke, 2021b). This subjectivity lends itself to an organic pairing with the flexible process that RTA’s six phases entail: considered analytical scaffolding rather than a method recipe, they incite back-and-forth movement across phases as meaning develops, evolves, and potentially contradicts itself. There are no hierarchies or one-directional roadmaps between phases, but an invitation to question each step as knowledge production unfolds. To better understand the RTA approach, I will describe each phase conceptually rather than procedurally.

Familiarisation, as its name indicates, is the starting point of the analysis. It requires abilities that might sound contradictory but are, in turn, complimentary: “developing deep and intimate knowledge of your dataset (immersion)”, (...) “and critically engage with the information *as data*, rather than simply information” (Braun and Clarke, 2021b, pp. 42-43), which refers to being an active reader or listener. The third ability, note-making of thoughts related to the dataset, is naturally interspersed throughout the six phases and should enable the other two practices. Active engagement in this stage translates into analytical sensibility, interpreting the data through questioning, looking for underlying meanings, and reflecting on them. This first interaction with the datasets will lay the foundation for future pattern recognition and sense-making.

Coding is, arguably, the researcher’s first conceptual imprint in the RTA process. The “codes” or “tags” in which the researcher collates the data are subjective and derived from their positionality and do not constitute factual information that summarizes the material into categories

based on topics or “conceptual buckets” (Braun and Clarke, 2021a). Instead, coding is based on analytic constructions and an initial search for meaning within the data. Although it is the second phase of RTA, it is understood that, due to RTA’s recursive nature, coding can constantly evolve as the reflexivity process deepens. Especially considering that coding is done within two spectrums: from an inductive to a deductive orientation and within a semantic and a latent level of meaning.

Generating Initial Themes involves pattern-seeking within the codes rather than the datasets, though returning to them is valid and even expected throughout the process. Theme-creation doesn’t mean grouping codes by topics or summaries, but building meaning structures that start telling a story instead of regurgitating the data. Braun and Clarke (2021b) emphasize this phase’s provisionality and its exploratory nature, since interpretative analysis lends itself to multiple layers of meaning-making and structure-building. These characteristics are seen as analytical strengths rather than liabilities, as they encompass responsiveness and continuous engagement on the part of the researcher. This first set of themes is considered the initial epistemic structure of the analysis.

The fourth and fifth phases can be explained together, given the broader goal of “tightening” the epistemic structure: Developing and Reviewing Themes and Refining, Defining, and Naming Themes. The fourth phase embodies RTA recursiveness, as continuous re-engagement with the initial themes, codes, and data proves crucial to this stage. In Braun and Clarke’s words, “You look for meaning-unity and conceptual coherence and a central organizing concept” (2021b, p. 78). Rather than confirming the work that has been done, the fourth phase is meant to question that initial body of knowledge and assess the coherence, cohesiveness, and analytic strength of the initial themes. Clear boundaries between them and sound logic around a central organizing concept

are goals rather than expectations, and the fourth phase should ignite a quest for this cohesion across all the previous phases.

The fifth one, Refining, Defining and Naming Themes, also relies on recursiveness to sharpen the themes and their descriptions. It is “more precise analytic work refining your analysis” (Braun and Clarke, 2021b, p. 108). The central organizing concept should precisely define the theme at a conceptual level, while remaining coherent across all the subtopics or codes that originated it. How themes interact with each other should be as comprehensible as the boundaries between them, and their names should provide a clear overview of a story that addresses the research question(s) while grounded in the data.

The sixth phase, Writing up, is a culmination of the reflexive process. “With TA, you will still be producing your analysis as you write it, not simply describing the analysis you finished before writing started” (Braun and Clarke, 2021b, p. 118). In this phase, the researcher’s interpretation and their RTA journey become structured knowledge. Positionality is not only disclosed but embedded into the analysis; analytic decisions are explained, and the new body of knowledge is presented as a coherent structure. In Braun and Clarke’s words, this final phase is “the work that has to be done to tell your whole analytic story, to bring it all together and convince the reader of the validity and quality of your analysis. It’s about understanding what makes a good TA story and then working to produce that.” (2021b, p. 118)

In conclusion, RTA is presented as an epistemic methodology, theoretically informed, rather than a procedural approach. The researcher’s subjectivity, reflexive engagement, and unique interpretation guide the recursive navigation of the six phases, actively constructing patterns and meaning as they immerse themselves in the data. Themes are, therefore, a product of interpretative

labour rather than truth-seeking, shaped by and written through the lens of an intentional, critically analytical framework.

Narrating (our own) life

Intimate journalism is an organically suited approach to enhance the intimate nature of podcasting, starting with the common practice of listening to podcasts with headphones. Newman and Gallo (2019, p. 34) link this seclusion within our personal sphere to the need for “a more intimate approach, as well as content that engages emotions.”

Referring to it as confessional journalism, Rosalind Coward (2010a, p. 234) describes this “experiential first-person writing” as “one of the most striking elements in contemporary journalism.” She frames it within a broader societal need for “real-life experiences” and witnessing others forge their identity: a “confessional society” (Coward, 2010b) that seeks personal stories in literature, films, reality TV and social media.

Coward (2010a, p. 235) describes journalism’s response to this as “one of the most dramatic changes in print journalism in recent years,” focusing on “the incorporation of domestic, personal and emotional issues which had previously been neglected and which were important for women” (2010b, p. 227). However, what was first seen as “democratisation and feminisation of content” (2010b) and even as “humanising of news values” (Christmas, 1997, as cited in Coward, 2010b) morphed over the years into what has been referred to as “fem-humiliation” where “female journalists expose weaknesses and failures, especially in relation to body image and body loathing” (p. 228).

Coward (2010b, p. 228) argues that this approach was initially seen as an entry point for discussions about larger societal topics, which valued vulnerability under journalistic authenticity standards. However, over time, it turned into a proliferation of confessional articles predominantly

commissioned from female journalists. As she writes: “It is also becoming evident that feature writers, especially women, are experiencing pressure towards this emotional striptease.” As journalist Jill Parkin (2009) explains, “Editors no longer want my shorthand or my interviewing skills, or even my way with words. They want my body and soul, two things I'm not used to hawking.”

This challenge highlights the need to prioritize first-person storytelling driven by agency rather than self-deprecation. An intimate approach should keep in the forefront the initial reason to open ourselves to the audience: “As people try to make sense of their lives, these stories open up ‘windows on our universal human struggle’” (Lindgren, 2016, p. 26, citing Harrington, 1997, xiv).

A similar desire to explore a broader societal understanding through an individual narrative can be found in autoethnography, which can be enhanced by the methodological scaffolding RTA provides through its patterned meaning-making. Devised as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience" (Ellis et al., 2011, as cited in Kara, 2020, p. 41), autoethnography was developed by U.S. ethnographer Carolyn Ellis in the 1990s. Far from just journaling life events with a narrative style (a comparison that has emerged within autoethnography's critics, as noted later in this literary review), autoethnography 'transcends mere narration of self to engage in cultural analysis and interpretation' (Chang, 2008, as cited in Kara, 2020, p. 41). As vividly described by Ellis (2004),

Autoethnography connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then,

they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations. (177-178)

Due to its purpose of seeking a connection with the audience through personal accounts of deeper topics or issues, autoethnography's relevance has been questioned in academic discourse. Critics have deemed this approach unacademic and irrelevant (Forber-Pratt, 2015, as cited in Kara, 2020, p. 41), "self-indulgent, narcissistic, introspective, and individualized" (Denzin, 2014, as cited in Kara, 2020, p.41). Delving into this approach collaboratively, for example, might introduce "more rigour through multiple perspectives that help to reduce bias and enrich analysis and interpretation" (Lapadat, 2017, p. 595). Considering autoethnography as a part of a multi-modal study (Leavey, 2009, p. 38) can also strengthen the overall research process, using complementary approaches that can provide scholarly research and "accessible texts that make [the] personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging" (Ellis et al., 2011, as cited in Kara, 2020, p. 41). The latter goal aligns with Bochner's role as "narrative researchers" who "try to make human sciences more human and make a positive difference in people's lives" (2002, p.78, as cited in Ellis, 2004, p. 5) through self-conscious, intimate writing.

Ellis (2005, p. 179), who coined the term and spearheaded the use of autoethnography, compares it to intimate journalism since the latter "calls for narratives that nurture civic transformation and change private troubles into public issues." As a way of branching out of social sciences and explaining how autoethnographic research is present in other forms of research and storytelling, Ellis (2004, p. 175) explains the connection between her approach and "intimate journalism, which tries to evoke the everyday, intimate lives of people and make emotional connections among the reader, writer, and story told."

These immersive, first-person narratives derive from the movement of New Journalism, which originated in the United States in the 1960s and is known for authors such as Tom Wolfe, Gay Talese, Joan Didion, and Truman Capote. Their recognizable style consisted mainly of inserting themselves into the narrative to make storytelling more immersive, while borrowing resources from non-fiction writing—such as attention to detail, realistic dialogues instead of long quotes, and space for the author's interpretation (Cumming, 2006).

These characteristics complement Lindgren's approach to intimate journalism, which provides "a narrative journalism framework, with a focus on the use of emotions and techniques to build experiences of intimacy" (Lindgren, 2021). Therefore, its bond with autoethnography is organic, and Ellis' (2004) description of her research approach might as well detail what intimate journalism entails:

Honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and self-doubt and emotional pain. Just when you think you can't stand the pain anymore, that's when the real work begins. Then there is the vulnerability of revealing yourself, not being able to take back what you've written or having any control over how readers interpret your story.” (xviii)

Although individually rich, autoethnography, intimate journalism, and RTA can be used in conjunction to expand the range of tools and approaches to addressing complex, "wider concerns such as ethnicity, gender, social class and key reference points in time" (Denzin, 2014, pp. 7-8, cited in Kara, 2020).

As Lindgren (2016, p. 24) argues, “the movement towards personal narratives is intrinsically linked to the intimate nature of the audio medium,” due to its “capacity to privilege the unique and emotional qualities of the human voice sharing personal experiences.” Therefore, podcasting and intimate journalism enhance each other in a synergistic tandem that can be

strengthened by RTA to avoid the risk of (self-)exploitation that comes with a confessional approach.

Therefore, this body of research aims to combine intimate storytelling with RTA to engage the audience in an immersive podcast experience that will hopefully open the door for conversations beyond the anecdotal experiences of a woman diagnosed with ADHD in her thirties, contributing as well to the promotion of research-creation as a valid approach for scholarly research.

ADHD: What is it and why a diagnosis matters

ADHD is "a neurological disorder characterized by a persistent pattern of inattention—with or without hyperactivity and impulsivity—that interferes with daily functioning." ("Why ADHD in Women is Routinely Dismissed") The acronym stands for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, although researchers continue to debate the accuracy of this terminology (Thapar, 2013; Banaschewski, 2024). The term "disorder" places ADHD in a spectrum of pathologies or diseases when ADHD is considered a "common neurodevelopmental condition described in diagnostic classification systems (ICD-10, DSM-5)" (Young et al., 2020). Additionally, the word 'deficit' can be pretty confusing for people diagnosed with ADHD since a more relatable impression (mine included) is that there is not "a deficit of attention; in fact, what they have is an abundance of attention. The challenge is controlling it" (Hallowell and Ratey, 2024).

The estimated global prevalence of ADHD ranges between 5.3% and 7.2%, depending on the variables considered (Espinet et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2015). Nonetheless, gender differences have been documented in terms of prevalence and referrals, which can determine a pathway of early assessment, diagnosis, and learning curve to build a set of tools to navigate

individual ADHD manifestations. Young et al. (2020, p.2) state that "clinical referrals in boys typically exceed those for girls, with ratios ranging from 3-1 to 16-1."

Contrastingly, this gap decreases in adult prevalence due to factors as varied as increased reliance on self-reporting and higher levels of remission in males and late-onset cases in females (Young et al., 2020). This means that plenty of women with ADHD get diagnosed later in life, reaching that starting point for better self-care and self-understanding later in life. Although challenging, a late diagnosis can also provide opportunities for self-understanding and improved life management, while potentially also fostering broader conversations.

ADHD is identified in three subtypes according to the most prevalent symptoms: primarily inattentive, primarily hyperactive/impulsive, and combined. There is a consensus among researchers (Young et al., 2020; Antoniou, 2021; Attoe et al., 2023) that "girls and women, compared to boys and men, are consistently under-identified and underdiagnosed for ADHD" ("Why ADHD in Women is Routinely Dismissed"), due to the practices and diagnose guidelines used by clinicians—such as the DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition).

Such criteria focus mainly on hyperactive/impulsive manifestations as ADHD predictors to the detriment of other ADHD presentations (Slobodin and Davidovitch, 2019; Hinshaw, 2021). However, girls and women mainly present the primarily inattentive subtype of ADHD (Young et al., 2020; Gershon, 2002). Furthermore, research shows that they are more likely to hide their ADHD manifestations and comorbidities (such as anxiety and emotional lability) and compensate for them (Dimitri et al., 2025; Hinshaw, 2021; Young et al., 2020; "Why ADHD in Women is Routinely Dismissed"). Therefore, since inattentive ADHD is less outwardly disruptive, Young et al. (2020) state:

It is unknown how often a diagnosis of ADHD is being missed or misdiagnosed in females, but it has become clear that a better understanding of ADHD in girls and women is needed if we are to improve their longer-term wellbeing and functional and clinical outcomes. (p.3)

Methodology

1. Research-Creation Framework

To provide a robust contribution to scholarly knowledge in the field of journalism studies, I conducted what Lindgren refers to as a “practice-led research “contextualizing, analyzing, and theorizing [the production process]” to find “new theoretical insights into the creative process of long-form radio” (Lindgren, 2014, p. 5). This “research on practice” methodological approach consisted as mentioned above, of a podcast—an *artifact*, as Lindgren articulates— and an "exegesis contextualizing the piece within a theoretical framework" (p. 6). This tandem has been theorized upon by Chapman and Sawchuk (2012) with arguments as to why research creation constitutes a valid and "recognized academic practice" that can help broaden the outreach and, therefore, impact of academic research.

Within the four modes of research-creation defined by Chapman and Sawchuk (2012, p. 16), this project falls into the ‘research-from-creation’ category. This concept refers to the idea that "performances, experiences, interactive art works, et cetera can also be ways of generating research data that can be used to understand different dynamics." The knowledge that will emerge from the creative aspect of this project will consist of a reflection on how reflexive thematic analysis can be used to create engaging content, shaped by the values of intimate journalism, to strengthen delivery and reinforce the bond between the audience and the producer. Therefore, the goal is for this research-creation thesis to contribute a theoretical approach to journalistic practices.

Due to the craft's fast-paced nature and its tradition of solely sharing with the audience the results of the work behind every piece, "Only by articulating and documenting the processes involved in journalistic practice can they be made explicit and understood in terms of a research process" (Duffield, 2009, as cited in Lindgren, 2014, p. 172).

2. Reflexive Thematic Analysis as Process Analysis

2.A) Physical Materials for Reflexive Practices

Given the fact that this research-creation project was based on my lived experiences with ADHD, the materials for the two rounds of RTA analysis consisted of reflexive journals created exclusively for this endeavour. Journaling was chosen as a suitable method to capture recollections, insights, emotional depictions, scene-recreation, and decision-making processes in a lightly structured way. Building the data from scratch allowed me to embed reflexivity throughout the data collection process, while consciously including any ADHD manifestations that arose during the journaling—deepening insight into this subject.

For the first RTA cycle, I built two complementary corpora through different knowledge-producing approaches. The first one consisted of flexible, unstructured, and nonlinear journaling, focused on capturing lived experiences, spontaneous reflections, recollections, and scene-based descriptions, recorded intermittently across different media (Notes app, notebooks, post-its, marginalia on academic papers, whiteboards, and a digital ADHD Diary) over the span of six months. The final document consisted of 20 pages (8,100 words) that preserved a stream-of-consciousness style. For a second corpus with greater critical distance, I focused on a more intentionally structured reflexivity process, yielding 17,218 words. Together, both datasets enabled a balance between immersion and analytic distancing, two key requirements for the first RTA phase: familiarisation with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2021b).

For the second RTA cycle, I built a dataset named “Production Diaries”, a reflexive corpus consisting of 30 pages. It documented the podcast production process, and I analyzed it as data, conceptualizing the process itself as a space of knowledge production. Therefore, it enabled an in-

depth examination of academic and journalistic practices, including decision-making, cognitive transitions, reflexive positioning, and meaning-making processes.

2. B) RTA Positioning: Journalist, Female, ADHDer

The parallel between practice-led research and researching about ADHD while having ADHD is a very meta-cognitive process. Braun and Clarke (2021, p. 78) state from the beginning that RTA not only relies on subjectivity but embraces it. The researchers' "personal positioning, knowledge and traditions they bring to the process" will not only impact how they approach the data but also the choices they make throughout the six phases and the meaning-making they are consciously and unconsciously influenced to create. There are no right or wrong codes or themes, but diverse starting points that forge different trajectories. Therefore, my stance as a female researcher with ADHD conditioned my academic labour even before I decided on the late diagnosis of female ADHD as the topic of my research-creation project. Even before deciding I would be both researcher and research object, my gender and my neurodevelopmental disorder would be at the forefront of my positionality.

While it is true that "[w]ho we are always shapes what we notice about our data and the stories we tell about them" (Fine, 1992, as cited in Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 56), I would argue that positionality precedes any data analysis. My ADHD surfaced in every step of the production process, starting with the creation of the datasets: the journaling. When writing for the first RTA process—the one seeking themes for the podcast content—I acknowledged in one entry that I could continue writing for even longer, and still doubt whether I would miss some enlightening insight that might have emerged if I had continued to delve into my memories and reflections. That struggle with transitioning from one phase to another happened several times throughout the production

process, and it is precisely what I had journaled about repeatedly: the need to put all my options on the table to be sure I am making the best decisions and not missing out on anything.

For instance, before phases 1 and 2 (Familiarization and Coding), I had to “prepare” the datasets to cater to my perfectionist impulses (now understood as a coping mechanism) and to scaffold the seamless reading of the data. This meant formatting everything, as visual consistency helps me focus when reading. Most importantly, it involved proofreading the texts before starting the RTA. Knowing that Researcher Andrea would be easily distracted and mildly annoyed by typos or grammatical errors, I proofread the datasets and ran them through the AI software Grammarly.

The task seemed easy. Except that, having a ‘crowded brain’ and the urge to do work to the best of my abilities consistently, I had to resist the impulse to edit instead of only proofreading. I started wanting to remove some extracts. To rewrite sentences to make the text better, to make myself look better. I did not second-guess the need to be vulnerable while journaling to achieve the connection I intended with the audience, but I did feel the urge to retell, trim, or rephrase some sentences so that the dataset would be “better”.

I refrained from doing so and kept the dataset that was the most honest. I also had to stop myself from analyzing the data as I read it, at the cost of forgetting ideas that might have occurred to me at that point. It was not time to code; it was only time to proofread. To set the scene. These three examples, which arose even before the RTA process—forcibly limiting the writing stage, refraining from editing, and stopping data analysis while preparing it—attest to the fact that ADHD is not strictly a matter of attention deficit. In my case, at least, it is more about restraining my attention and redirecting it. Constantly. This entire process was an ode to that challenge.

2. C) RTA Cycles: ADHD as Content and Production Process as Data

As mentioned before, this research-creation project involved RTA in two different stages. The first one aimed to provide me with an insightful analysis of my lived experiences as a woman with ADHD, in order to script the podcast with narrative coherence and a deep understanding of how ADHD is intertwined with my identity. The analysis of the journals that composed the first data set led me to create six themes that molded the podcast's narrative arc: *My crowded brain*; *Structure as care, not control*; *Overwhelm, freezing and mental load*; *Claiming ADHD on my own terms*; *Parenting as a mirror and heightening perfectionism*; and *The burden of 'doing well.'*

This first RTA cycle, although now invisible to the podcast audience and the readers of this essay, was foundational not only to the creative output but also to a better understanding of my positionality in the second RTA round. It heightened my awareness of what I was bringing to the analysis and, understandably, the comfort I felt with the organic recursiveness of the process. Outwardly, the legacy of that reflexive analysis around ADHD is the podcast script, which I believe honours the time and intellectual labour that it involved.

Nevertheless, this section focuses on the second RTA cycle, which analyzed the production phase through the reflexive dataset I named "Production Diaries." The process became the data, and the focus shifted from a more introspective analysis that guided the first RTA round to a critical reflection on journalistic and academic processes. Therefore, I explore how they can become meaning-making instances through RTA logic and re-signify the "Production diaries" as a methodological record.

As Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 594) emphasize, "quality reflexive TA is about the researcher's reflective and thoughtful engagement with their data and their reflexive and thoughtful engagement with the analytic process". This meant avoiding a procedural analysis and

conceptualizing the epistemology underlying it, which was difficult at first. I found my production notes meaningful and, at times, even influenced by a deductive framework—after all, this documentation period took place several months after I had become familiar with RTA.

Having already approached previous journal entries as datasets, I had learned that my journaling style was rather conceptual, heavily inclined toward reflections on memories and connection-making, while purposely including scenes and factual information to ease podcast scripting and properly document the process. Therefore, it made sense to approach the sense-making processes (coding and theme-building) primarily with a deductive orientation, thinking this would lead to richer analytical layering. Keeping in mind that this research-creation project was meta-cognitive from its early design, I made the conscious decision of letting my academic inquiry—concretely, my research questions—“reflect theoretical or conceptual ideas the researcher seeks to understand through the dataset” (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 57).

Since iteration, recursiveness, and openness to questioning one’s own analysis are core aspects of RTA and essential tools for meaning-making (Braun and Clarke, 2019), conceptualizing the data was a long process. As Braun and Clarke explain, “[d]eveloping a way of reading the data that involves both closeness and familiarity (immersion) and distance (critical engagement) [takes] time—qualitative research always takes *much* more time than you anticipate it will” (2021, p. 43). Three characteristics that stood out for me from analysing my “Production Diaries” were the friction between cognitive transitions, the non-linearity of research-creation, and the constraining nature of the reflexivity process.

Although the recursive nature of RTA provided me with a sense of relief about how easily I could shift back and forth between researcher and research object if needed, shifting between

cognitive realms was neither easy nor streamlined. As explained in the podcast, transitions tend to be hard for ADHD brains (Antoniou et al., 2021), both cognitively and physically. Still, I could not have anticipated how difficult it would be to switch from an academic to a creative register when I started scripting the podcast. Since I spent several months focusing on the theoretical aspect of RTA, at times it seemed like my ability to convey reflexive analysis and theorize upon a process had stunted my ability to actually go through that process. I struggled to find a narrative flow and connect with the more intimate layer I had envisioned for the script. To counter this, I intuitively turned cognitive self-regulation into a method: throughout the journal entries, I saw myself defining boundaries for the length of each RTA phase and time limits, constantly reorienting my intellectual efforts through constraining my attention (*“I am trying really hard not to create a perfect podcast, but A podcast”*).

On a broader scope, I realized then that the research-creation process is not linear—maybe it is even as recursive as RTA is designed to be. Unlike the scientific method, there is no clear pipeline from theoretical insight to creative output. The knowledge I acquired—from the two RTA rounds and from the research I did—did not translate to an immediate productive stage and a predictable outcome. The lack of a clear “pipeline structure” led to a content surplus, which, in turn, lengthened the production process (*“I harvest creativity even if I don’t end up using it”*).

Additionally, being a self-led project—from creating the datasets to deciding when I had enough data, to deciding how much re-reading and recursiveness was enough—resulted at times in a familiar situation for a person with ADHD: cognitive saturation. My comfort with the reflexivity process delayed the production phase, enabling rich analysis and providing me with a fallacious argument to postpone the next steps. This cognitive saturation or overload generated several moments of analysis paralysis, which show how embedded ADHD is in any task I undertake.

On a more practical level, it was interesting to notice how a helpful ADHD accommodation could interfere with the creative process: at times, scaffolding became restrictive. For academic writing, I always benefit from a clear structure in terms of subjects, depth, length, and the connections to be made. In that context, scaffolding works as a cognitive anchor to structure my thoughts. Still, when I structured the podcast script, it gave me both clarity and a sense of narrative pressure. Although it was helpful to get me started—again, to transition between one task and another—it also restrained me. While I used most of the podcast structure, I cut it and allowed me to digress from it when it felt necessary to embrace the intimacy level that I was aiming for, which meant that, at times, scaffolding and digressing were simultaneously contradictory and working collaborative towards the same goal—the same way as my brain and my body would sometimes, as I explain in my podcast. The meta-cognitiveness of this project was as constant as the ADHD manifestations.

2. D) Researcher and Research Object Dichotomy

The most evident standpoint from which I worked in this reflexive thematic analysis was the epistemic position of being both the subject and the researcher. Emphasizing this duality, I experienced two contradictory emotions while working on the reflexive thematic analysis: worry and relief. The former stemmed from my ADHD and my anxiety for potentially missing useful data when coding, and the latter came from the easy access I had to my research object: if I ever sensed my datasets were insufficient to create a meaningful podcast and a rich reflexivity analysis of the production process, I could always go back to journaling and enrich the RTA process with more data.

Although I considered this duality mainly advantageous because I was already immersed in the data before formally analyzing it, the main challenge was maintaining enough distance to

examine my life experiences critically. I needed to analyze not only what I had written, but also how and why, and what this meta-analysis revealed about me. It was a layered process, with purposeful breathing room throughout reading and coding, as I balanced the urge to further elaborate on some ideas and recognized that every re-reading generated new data.

Instead of constraining any intersection between the two roles, I approached each situation individually and assessed the potential value of going from one role to another as it happened, making the process more transparent. For example, as I built the datasets, I would occasionally start developing codes or themes while journaling. I would even write comments in parentheses, such as “apparently, THIS could be a theme.” It was not intentional, but I also did not want to lose that insight since I thought it might also happen to researchers during the interviewing process with their sources.

This overlap of intellectual labour is something I am familiar with as a journalist, too. Similar to the coding phase in RTA, when conducting an interview, I am continuously looking for themes or patterns (or the lack thereof), making connections between what the person says and how they behave, what they do, and what their environment reveals about them, as well as what I already know about them. Therefore, I did not refrain from making those annotations as part of my journaling experience, since I figured any researcher would have done the same if they were taking notes on my story.

Since the first step of RTA, familiarizing yourself with the data, involves “developing deep and intimate knowledge of your dataset” (Braun and Clarke, 2021b, p. 42), I reaped the benefits from being Research Subject Andrea from the beginning. I had been immersing myself in the data as I created it sporadically for more than seven months, and philosophically speaking, for years—

although with varying degrees of awareness throughout time. Whenever I read a scene I had written, I could remember how that moment felt and how it felt to recall it in writing.

Likely due to that analytic leverage, Braun and Clarke's (2019) suggestion to make notes while reading evolved into a revised version of the datasets. That marginalia brought continuity and added an unattainable layer of depth had I been working with someone else's experiences. Still, to avoid a narrow perspective, I intentionally reminded myself to step back and look for a pattern or conduct a meta-analysis of what I had previously written, rather than adding more details. "Quality reflexive TA" meant to acknowledge my feelings and recollections and reconnect with what I had written and, by extension, lived, while also being able to read it with enough critical distance to allow me to thread my feelings and recollections with their common inquiry: my identity as a woman with ADHD.

Alongside this realization, I also recalled one of RTA's biggest strengths: its flexibility. This allowed me to trust the process; however it unfolded in this particular research project. To embrace the relief and let go of the worry. Braun and Clarke (2021b, p. 97) have consistently described RTA as recursive, "Like following a hose that loops randomly across a long grass lawn, back and forth and round and round in every direction, rather than an escalator or a train sending you inevitably in one direction." Ultimately, this conscious recursive approach allowed me to capture more granular dimensions of the production process, alongside the expected outcome of identifying patterns and sense-making within the data. It created an ongoing dialogue between Researcher Andrea and Research Subject Andrea, directing my reflexivity process onto a more structured path that would lead to shaping my analysis into themes.

3. Intimate Journalism as Methodological Framework

Intimate journalism is far from a novelty or a response to current parasocial dynamics that influence audience media consumption—although it can certainly benefit from them. It draws elements from the 1960s’ New Journalism movement (Coward, 2013), it became a legitimate space for the feminist movement in the late 1980s to portray in mainstream media that the personal is, in fact, political (Tweedie, 1980), and its ethos even resonates with the spearhead that Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *Confessions* became for autobiographical writing from a secular perspective (Zwerdling, 2016). Besides being molded and inspired by their predecessors, current approaches to intimate journalism have also benefited from the learning curve and the challenges that arose, as well as the consequential ethical debates that followed.

3. A) Intimate Journalism as Methodological Lens

To frame intimate journalism as a methodological approach, I based my lens-definition mainly on the works of Rosalind Coward (2010a, 2010b, 2013) and Mia Lindgren (2014, 2016, 2021, 2023). I structured its main components into three pillars, Content, Style and Ethics, and organized each relevant element within those categories. For conceptual clarity, I will first explain each pillar and then detail how I applied them methodologically in the production process.

Three main components define journalistic content from an intimate approach: the subject, the narrative and transparency about the process. On the issue of subject, it is fruitful to choose topics that organically lend themselves to intimacy, such as everyday life, identity, transformation, lived experience, and, with clear, predefined boundaries, personal struggles. Lindgren frames this type of content as “inner emotional life, the opposite of subjects considered proper journalism” (2016, p. 24). Coward (2013, p. 100) emphasizes that these topics should not be considered merely as a space to include feminist standpoints or marginalized communities, as they were initially

introduced in mainstream media. In her words, these topics are “what makes us human: journalism which has no space for this excludes the most important part of our being.”

The narrative, or the way a story is told, should aim to connect with the audience by sharing personal experiences, reflections, and emotions, taking them on a journey rather than simply providing facts. Lindgren (2017) approaches “emotional expression” and first-person narration as methodological approaches in audio journalism, highlighting that the inherent subjectivity of a first-person account and the intimate nature of audio media organically foster intimacy and closeness with the listeners. That openness in the narrative should also extend to the entire production process, embedding transparency in the content naturally “to elicit and maintain engagement” (Coward, 2013, p. 111). This translates to acknowledging how the journalist got involved, what they didn’t know, the missteps or mistakes made during the production and the uncertainties that might remain. It builds trust from the audience.

To enhance the foundational, content-driven bond-making, the style of an intimate auditory piece should reflect that intention, focusing on the host’s delivery, emotional engagement, and sound design. When telling a personal story, the host should honour the subject by fostering closeness in the scripting phase and in the narrative style, especially considering that audio journalism “favours the human voice” (Lindgren, 2017, p. 187). This translates to an informal, conversational tone, as if they were telling the story in a one-on-one interaction. Inevitably, said closeness is strengthened when the host is open to being vulnerable with the audience, which can turn into “a way of humanizing the news, making it possible to care about the human being affected by the news” (Coward, p. 100).

That vulnerability should also be conveyed through intentional pauses, reflections, emotional language, and shifts in tone. Lindgren also suggests that addressing “the listener personally, telling them where to direct their thoughts and imagination as they listen” (2016, p. 35) could foster emotional engagement and invite empathy. In audio journalism, sound design is also a crucial style element. The focus should be on fostering a listening environment that supports intimacy, which means a quiet voice, speaking close to the microphone, minimal ambient noise, moments of silence, and, on the receiving end, headphones to facilitate more accurate immersion in the story.

Ethically speaking, there are three aspects to keep in mind when crafting intimate journalistic work: ethical reflexivity, journalistic credibility, and balancing intimacy and professionalism—although setting boundaries is common to all three. Ethical reflexivity involves being aware and transparent about the level of exposure required. Intimacy risks exploitation (Coward, 2013), so third parties should be informed of the project’s focus and provided with full disclosure before being involved. Coward (2013, p. 10) summarizes these “conflicting responsibilities” as being “scrupulously honest” while protecting the parties involved. Self-exploitation is also a risk that Coward details, advising to critically reflect on the persona that female journalists choose to portray: “When it comes to the raw confessionals—an area where women’s writing definitely predominates—the helpless woman stereotype can give way to women as psychologically disturbed and damaged” (2013, p. 105). Therefore, managing the audience’s expectations for how much they get to peek into the journalist’s life while maintaining engagement is an ethical stepping stone.

To ensure journalistic credibility, the emotional engagement mentioned above must coexist with factual grounding and clear sourcing. Maintaining these structural standards, along with

practices such as verification and contextualization, allows intimate storytelling to remain at the forefront without questioning its validity. Journalist and scholar Russel Frank crystallizes the challenge this balancing act entails, addressing the contradiction newspapers face while risking their tabloidization: “they must report the truth or lose credibility, while they must also tell stories or lose readability. (...) Overrating credibility (or underrating readability) results in a boring newspaper’ (2004, p. 47, cited in Coward, 2013, p. 101).

That struggle transcends to a more individual level when doing intimate journalism. Balancing intimacy and professionalism, the third element of the Ethics pillar, addresses the risk of “too much” closeness: undermining trust. Shifting intimacy from a methodological approach to a relational dynamic, as could happen in a parasocial relationship, turns proximity and relatability into anchors. Trust, then, is personality-based, not earned procedurally. Coward (2013, p. 96) states it clearly: “[Intimate journalism] may be straight from the heart but, inevitably, it also conforms to norms and expectations about what these stories should contain and how they should be told. Everyone who sets out to write in this form has other examples in the back of their mind.”

3. B) Intimate Journalism as Applied Methodology

Approaching intimate journalism as a system of knowledge production calls for a distinction in the role of the three pillars described above. Content, Style and Ethics work as a conceptual model, but not as a methodological application. Explaining how they shaped the production and reflection process does not imply that the pillars should act as an actual analytical structure, but rather that they enable knowledge production with intimacy journalism as the epistemic foundation. Therefore, the pillars are better suited here as internal classifiers, and the application of intimate journalism as a methodological approach can be better analyzed by focusing

on three broader lenses: how I produced knowledge, how that knowledge led to meaning and how intimacy was purposely built and, simultaneously, safeguarded.

Content-wise, I knew that intimacy could be achieved by providing detailed scene-setting: well-described moments that could situate future listeners in that moment with me, so that they could live it with me again. Therefore, when journaling about ADHD, I kept the scripting process in mind and intentionally focused the note-taking process on scenes—taking the time to describe the scene, the details, how I felt, and how I perceived others felt or reacted at the moment. For further analysis, I also considered how I carried that moment with me through life. Was it an *a-ha* moment? Was it clear to me then what it meant or how it affected me, or was I only able to unpack it and fully understand what was going on years later, after developing a more acute sense of self and self-awareness?

Another key element in the process of narrative construction was language, both epistemologically and stylistically. Journaling about myself –including childhood memories– in a second language added another layer of complexity. Reflecting on the ability to access my recollections in their most true and raw versions, I believe there is an inherent conscious and subconscious filter that strips some authenticity from journaling in a second language. Since languages are not built solely on equivalencies, I sometimes struggle to find a precise word to express a complex thought in English, especially on the emotional terrain. There are nuances in emotions and reflections that are harder to fully translate, preserving their underlying tone and initial depth.

Naturally, my vocabulary is richer and more precise in Spanish. Still, I never questioned the idea of journaling in English, because that is the language in which the podcast would be

produced, and I wanted to capture my raw impressions and thoughts directly in that language, rather than through translation. I wanted to be able to see how I felt about something in English because that would make me more vulnerable towards the audience, more honest. If I had an excellently written text in Spanish and translated it into English, it would possibly sound more polished, but also less me. If 'truer' meant 'less perfect,' I came to terms with that and actively decided to see how my life sounded in a language different from the one I had experienced what I was writing about. I recognized it as an active thinking process—and, most importantly, a structurally intimate one.

Stylistically, language also served as a constant focus for intimacy-building. When scripting the podcast, I wanted listeners to understand what ADHD felt like and what it entails chemically in terms of brain function, while avoiding medical jargon that would make them zone out if they didn't understand it. Therefore, I focused on simple, everyday language when explaining more complex concepts, such as the dopamine deficit in ADHD brains, stimming, and self-regulation. This editorial decision also influenced how I presented the podcast as a responsible, medically accurate and journalistic piece. To reinforce the intimacy from a stylistic perspective, I avoided constantly naming sources for each scientific fact or concept I introduced. Instead, I mentioned within the first few minutes of the podcast that I was not a medical expert, but that the script was reviewed and approved by three psychologists specializing in ADHD from different approaches. That distinction allowed me to validate the claims made in the podcast without drifting apart from an intimate setting.

The medical review process also influenced how I structured meaning from the production process. Although fewer than expected, some suggestions steered the podcast towards a more detached, source-oriented narrative, as if the text were an academic paper rather than a first-person

account of living with ADHD. That type of feedback reinforced my efforts to safeguard intimacy through language, leading me to discard some stylistic suggestions, such as writing “However” instead of “But”. Still, the most relevant change that came from the interactions with the psychologist was a comment from Doctor Claire Sira. When reading the depictions of what I called “little wins” (dopamine bursts that come from having control over minor things), she mentioned that she “would not consider these ADHD symptoms, but they may be ordering behaviours to feel more control.” I re-read how I had phrased it and, to emphasize the conversational dynamic, I wrote it in second person: “You do X, and then you feel Y.” That made it sound like a cause-and-effect of ADHD, as if it were an “official, medical-approved” one. Dr. Sira’s feedback made me notice that, unintentionally, I was taking distance from a very personal depiction of myself. By changing it to the first person and adding a line about how these examples relate to my personal need to gain control of situations, I not only made that excerpt more medically accurate but also more intimate.

Another relevant step of structuring the data was deciding what to discard. In the first datasets, many topics, although relevant, were not relevant to my lived experience. For example, although relatively common within women with ADHD, getting a late diagnosis only after they had their children assessed and diagnosed was not my story. Therefore, this podcast was not the right platform for discussing it. ADHD as a lucrative industry was a topic that I wanted to address in the beginning, discussing the multiple coaching services, workshops, online communities, apps and journals targeted to people with ADHD. Still, I realized that it drifted away from a personal narrative, and it was too broad to cover as part of my ADHD experience. Just as I do daily with my attention, I had to address all the data through a constraining lens, limiting the information I used to strengthen the story I was building.

This constraining effort was also embedded in the coding process of both RTA rounds. When reading the ADHD journals, I kept the producing phase in mind: although I knew I needed to have categories with a similar level of abstraction (Braun & Clarke, 2019), I created a separate category for ‘Podcast Scenes/Examples’, where I allocated what I considered were strong examples of meaningful manifestations of my ADHD. This code was specifically for scripting purposes, so I didn't mind that it didn't follow the same schema as the others and didn't consider it part of the coding that would then morph into themes. Similarly, I coded with the three pillars of intimate journalism in mind in both RTA cycles and constantly reviewed the table of contents I designed with them. I knew I was looking at my data—and approaching this production process—infusing it with an intimate epistemic structure.

Still, the most relevant constraining action throughout the production process was setting ethical boundaries. It could arguably be the aspect that slowed the script-writing process the most: by constantly reassessing what I wanted to share and what I didn't, while journaling with no filters put into place, I developed a continuum in my mind; a pattern of what I thought I would be comfortable sharing and what not. I was adamant to portray myself as a woman with ADHD, not as a victim of ADHD (as I stated in the introduction). This also meant balancing the desire for engagement and likability with the risk of creating a caricature of myself.

As Frank (2004, p. 52, cited on Coward, p. 102) explains, “[n]o-one likes a show-off (...), so the personal columnist cuts himself down to size.” Still, I intentionally avoided the pipeline of seeking connection through seeming helpless: in telling my story, I mentioned that I did well in school, excelled in college and indirectly let the audience know that I was proud of my journalistic career. Those facts were as true as the recurrent feeling of incompetence. When writing the script, I never pitied myself, but I showed that I struggled. At times, this effort translated into scenes and

examples that were too superficial, which called for a re-read of the data and a re-adjustment of the intimacy compass: I knew I needed to go deeper.

Simultaneously, this self-restriction acted as a clear ethical boundary to protect my intimacy and, indirectly, my family's. For example, I barely spoke about motherhood, although it is the most relevant aspect of my identity at this point in my life—and a terrain in which I could have easily found many struggles and accomplishments. I only mention it at the beginning, as part of the context for the story I tell in the cold open, and again at the end, when talking about the positive aspects of ADHD. That is intentional.

On a related note, that opening scene is critical when viewed through the ethical lens of the risk of falling into sensationalism in intimate journalism. I debated for months whether to include it: content-wise, it was undoubtedly a great hook, but I knew the line “I almost burned my house down” wasn't strictly accurate. After that episode happened, five years ago, I spent a few days googling how close or how far I was from actually setting my house on fire. Turns out, I was not even close. But what I felt in that moment was real: I thought I could have burnt my house down, and that truly was the last straw before getting assessed with ADHD, and that's what I wrote about. I didn't overstate the risk, I didn't exaggerate what happened: I wrote about what I felt. And that was intimately honest, not “closest to a sitcom” (Coward, 2013, p. 102).

Findings and Discussion

After recursively engaging with the datasets, analyzing the layered annotations I made, and re-reading the codes and initial themes, I developed four final themes that tell the story I found in my data: *Ethically Intimate: Reflexive and Editorial Value of Ethics in Intimate Journalism*;

Productivity Discourses and Neurodivergent Ways of Working; Writing and Producing as Knowledge Production; and Audience-Oriented Podcasting: Public Value Beyond Academia.

To ensure they formed a coherent narrative, I first made sure I could connect each theme to one or more of my research questions. Then, I assessed each theme's internal coherence and external distinction (Braun & Clarke, 2019). For the former, I reviewed the coded data to assess its consistency and coherence with each central organizing concept. For the latter, I focused on identifying interconnections between topics (for their relational value) while ensuring that each one addressed a different aspect of this research-creation project. Finally, I looked for at least three different data excerpts that exemplified and supported each theme. Therefore, the four themes I developed are layered, complex, and permeate one another as a sign of analytical coherence, since they foreground how ethical reflexivity and a neurodivergent positionality organically shape a recursive, research-creation practice that enacts knowledge production of public value.

Theme 1: Ethically Intimate: Reflexive and Editorial Value of Ethics in Intimate Journalism

Central organizing concept: Intimacy is used to engage the audience, and ethics shape the narrative to avoid self-exploitation and sensationalism.

The editorial principle of “Using my story as a vessel” translates into an ongoing awareness of needing to build journalistic credibility through reflexive transparency. This theme examines how podcasting and intimate journalism strategically align with RTA's values of positionality and accessibility (Braun and Clarke, 2021b), and the need to incorporate ethics as an editorial and analytic practice (2021b) instead of an external checklist subject to compliance.

Therefore, ethics shape the knowledge-making process by influencing decisions about what to disclose, what to keep to myself, and how to structure the narrative arc. This embedded practice

translates into journalistic editing, analytic interpretation, and ethical boundary-setting. Said boundaries enact an ongoing conversation about presenting a selective portrayal of myself (albeit honest), about self-care through safeguarding my emotions and wellbeing, and about omitting any storylines that directly and personally involved relational others.

The ethical reflexivity that guides the production process strengthens not only my agency as the research subject but also my journalistic credibility and values as a researcher. I allow myself to be vulnerable while taking care of myself by not over-sharing and by resisting compliance with algorithmic demands and the current attention economy. In this context, I prioritize my ethical responsibility to shape boundaries over rich(er) storytelling, if necessary, committing to the principle of positioning my personal experience as a medium for inquiry rather than an end product for consumption. Therefore, I don't approach boundaries as oppressive, obstructive, or self-censorship, but as constructive and safeguarding, and as a richer reflexivity process. Restraint enacts care.

Patterns that build this theme and topics foregrounded:

- Ongoing conversation about how much detail is necessary when addressing personal experiences.
- Reiterative efforts to omit exposure of third parties.
- Awareness and anxiety about the podcast being perceived as merely confessional.
- Constant restraint and boundary-setting.
- Ethics as applied self-governance instead of procedural compliance.
- Seeking connection through openness.
- Refusing confessional excess.

Theme 2: Productivity Discourses, ADHD and Self-Optimization: What leads the way?

Central organizing concept: Critically engaging with traditional discourses that shape research practices in terms of productivity and efficiency.

This theme reflects on the threefold friction between socio-cultural discourses within research practices, self-induced need for “self-optimization,” and a structural neurodivergent approach to intellectual labour. Rather than avoiding it or denying it by downplaying any of the elements involved, this tension is at the forefront throughout the RTA process: it is present in the data (the journal entries), as I move back and forth through the six RTA phases and when I share my work with third parties.

Being aware of and embracing this phenomenon creates a richer, layered, meta-cognitive analysis of the research and production process. Embedding ADHD as a topic and a fertile ground for reflexive analysis emphasizes the importance of positionality in RTA, lending itself to a healthy overlap with the ethical meaning discussed in Theme 1.

Situated within the broader context of approaching ADHD not as a deficit but as a specific thought-process structure, this theme examines how meaning is constructed through interaction with dominant productivity discourses, while also questioning apparent contradictions. Is it, in fact, contradictory to advocate for understanding and resist optimization narratives while consciously developing personal strategies that can make an intellectual endeavour less draining? The patterned meaning of this theme, which leads to re-framing scaffolding practices as practical, minimum, even ethical conditions to enable focus and work, answers that initial doubt clearly: scaffolding is not a set of “hacks” to optimize the output or to “gain” some kind of leverage, nor are they corrective measures: scaffolding provides enabling conditions.

Patterns that build this theme and topics foregrounded:

- Friction with linear workflow and writing.

- Constant recalibration of work rhythm, energy level, need for pauses and timing.
- Seeing neurodiversity as an epistemic structure, and ADHD as a cognitive prism that moulds intellectual labour.
- Understanding scaffolding as an enabling tool for knowledge-building and embedding it in the production process.
- Reframing accommodations as baseline conditions instead of “productivity hacks”.
- Reflexive awareness of the dominant productivity discourses.
- Debating about what “productivity” is and how it looks with ADHD.

Theme 3: Writing and Producing as Knowledge Production

Central Organizing Concept: Writing and podcast production are not where the research-creation ends: they are meaning-making spaces and fertile ground for recursive, reflexive analysis.

Aligning with Braun and Clarke’s emphasis on recursiveness as a key resource for RTA, this theme highlights transparency and the core value of research-creation: that process itself constitutes knowledge. Meaning-making (and its revision) is generated by sustained engagement with the data, the codes and the themes built, which embody the creative practice as much as the podcast production. The questioning, the reiteration, the thinking, the hesitations and the revisions enrich the analysis, aligning with RTA’s epistemological approach to knowledge-making.

Therefore, the editorial decisions made as early as in the journaling processes –such as deciding what to focus on, the amount of material, the language I used, and incorporating digressions as part of the data itself– shaped the analysis from the beginning of the research-creation project. Then, at the last stages of the RTA process, producing the podcast episode sustained the reflexivity ethos throughout the practices of scripting, recording, editing, and

soundscaping. After the theoretical part was mostly done, recursiveness took the form of revision, redoing, questioning prior editorial choices and, sometimes, opting for a new analytical direction.

Every technical decision, content refinement and second-guessing instance meant actively engaging with the process and embracing critical thinking until I saw it through. Every decision invited reflexivity. Embracing the ongoing analysis as part of the editorial criteria forefronted the knowledge-making nature that resides in any creation process. By being transparent about it and making the journalistic back-end visible, this theme rejects the linearity of traditional academic research and values the process of research-creation as an academic contribution in its own right.

Patterns that build this theme and topics foregrounded:

- Ongoing re-reading, re-writing and re-orienting the script, foregoing its initial structure.
- Writing as an active analytic process, not a mere report of findings.
- Getting progressively comfortable with incompleteness or “not-the-best-possible” as part of the process.
- Editing as a reflexive, meaning-making space influenced by RTA.
- Continuous emergence of new ideas due to ongoing reflexivity, while also practicing restraint and reinforcing transitions through phases.
- Layered difficulty of conveying emotionality with a communal mindset while working by myself.
- Reframing reflexive journaling as due diligence and process transparency.

Theme 4: Audience-Oriented Podcasting: Public Value Beyond Academia

Central organizing concept: The imagined audience and the overarching goal of broad outreach shape analytic, ethical, content and narrative choices.

This theme examines how the audience is omnipresent throughout the production process, aligning with RTA's orientation towards meaning-making instead of truth-finding. That goal transcends the RTA methodology and extends to the entire research-creation project: by aiming to branch out of traditional academic circles through podcasting as an outreach medium, this theme acknowledges that different modes of communication enable different forms of understanding.

Embedding the audience in the meaning-making process shifts it to an epistemic sphere, since it actively and constantly influences the knowledge produced and how it is articulated. Moreover, an audience-focused production process also interacted swiftly with the incorporation of intimate journalism elements, enhancing the relevance of choices about language, narrative style and tone.

Furthermore, by pursuing public value through knowledge accessibility, this project situates the production process as a two-fold contribution to general understanding: journalistic work is showcased as valuable in its own right, and applied qualitative research is shown to an audience beyond academia, maintaining its analytic strength.

Patterns that build this theme and topics foregrounded:

- Journalism as a sense-making space (interpretive versus informative role), aligning with RTA's main goal.
- Intentionally deleting previous work to align the script with the broader outreach goal.
- Conscious delivery of a single lived experience, not an official, sole understanding of ADHD.
- Focus on intelligibility while avoiding over-simplification.
- Podcasting as the best-suited medium for this research-creation project, despite being outside my comfort zone.

- Relatability and transparency as strengths for audience engagement.
- Valuing resonance and recognition over persuasion.

As mentioned in the chapter's introduction, these four themes are porous due to their inherent interconnection throughout the process of reflexive knowledge production. Analyzed structurally, themes 1 and 2 act as situated foundations—my positionality, aligning with RTA and a core component of research-creation. Ethical intimacy and neurodiversity enable a unique interpretation of the data and foster spaces for knowledge production throughout the writing and production process, while recursively going through the six RTA phases. Therefore, the journalistic labour becomes a site of analysis and reflexivity, enhanced by the transparent documentation of the process in the journals. Instead of being hidden or kept away from discussion and separate from the output, it provides scholarly value by contributing to the discussion of the knowledge infused into the journalistic process rather than the outcome.

Lastly, in this reflective knowledge-making model, the fourth theme emerges as knowledge in the public sphere, originating in the foundational, catalyzing positionality. There is no other way this specific interpretation of the data -therefore, this depiction of knowledge- could have been created. Positioning the project's public meaning in the last stage of this knowledge-making structure presents it as the logical culmination of the process, while also acknowledging that the audience is yet another epistemological layer embedded since the project's conception. Therefore, meaning-making was intentionally sought from an audience-oriented perspective, strengthening the relational thinking that Braun and Clarke promote (2019).

Beyond the theoretical principles of RTA, there is one “warning” that Braun and Clarke state that resonated with me throughout this research-creation project: “You might end up

somewhere quite different from where you started” (2021b, p. 78). I initially intended to produce a podcast that was structurally different, from a more constructive, solution-oriented perspective. Through RTA, I realized that there was a podcast I meant to create and one I needed to create. As a woman with ADHD, I am aware of the many other podcasts and social media accounts that provide useful, actionable content, from specific AI prompts to help you structure your day as an ADHDer to an ADHD toolbox to start and follow through on a creative project. Mine could have been one more.

There are also plenty of successful, empowering ADHD stories out there, which can be quite motivating and resonate with you personally—and some may even convince you to buy the guide, sign up for the coaching program, download the e-book or join the support group that is sold in between breaks. I wanted to tell a story. No redemption arc, no awe-inspiring climax, no belittling myself for compassion and no branded added value: my sole understanding of what having ADHD means to me. And, coherently, the podcast needed to be raw. Just me and my ADHD. It was meant to be endearing and funny and tiring and over-explanatory and smart and overwhelming and emotional and longer than it should be and great. And honest. The podcast, therefore, acted as a reflection of my lived experience.

Conclusion

This research-creation project aimed to jointly explore podcasting, RTA and intimate journalism to reflect on meaning-making as an analytic, situated practice. Foregrounding subjectivity through transparent positionality, a continuous and recursive engagement with the data enabled analytic insight throughout the production process. Podcasting offered a relational engagement with the imagined audience that contributed to the broader goals of resonance and accessibility beyond academia, and intimate journalism provided not only a set of content and style guidelines to foster a deeper connection but also an instance for reflecting on and defining boundaries. This situated ethical compass was reinforced by the reflexive analysis that guided the production process, molding the meaning-making ethos of RTA and, consequently, the *artifact* that accompanies this essay.

Regarding the journalistic value of works like this, Coward (2013, p.136) foreshadowed thirteen years ago that mainstream media should be open to let confessional takes branch out of the weekly columns as a way of adapting to broader, societal changes: “In any area of journalism, (...) the personality and intimate personal material are in the ascendancy. Speaking personally is what we do and what we want to hear now, and the internet and social media are the apotheosis of these trends.” Following those guidelines, podcasts like Radio Ambulante, Heavyweight, This American Life, and, to a certain extent, The New York Times’ The Daily (Thompeson, 2025) have proved that intimate journalism can be done responsibly. They provide engaging content with high journalistic standards, bringing to life Sarojini Nadar’s idea that “stories are data with soul” (2014). Steering away from sensationalism and over-exposure, podcasting projects that share “data with soul” could be a way to connect with an audience that might already be consuming audible content elsewhere.

There have been different adaptations of intimate journalism in mainstream media throughout seven decades: from the 1960s' New Journalism to women's magazines to weekly columns, and the increasing demands from editors for journalists to deliver first-person accounts with varying levels of care and ethical boundaries. This continuous change in approaches to confessional takes (I wouldn't necessarily call it an evolution) provides enough data to reflect on and define certain conventions for moving forward. As Coward (2013) says,

A new balance is still to be found between the creation of a fictional persona and the need, at some level at least, to be truthful. (...) And until this balance develops further, the appetite for extreme revelations, for stories which provoke fury as much as quiet empathy, will continue to favour writers with pronounced exhibitionist tendencies (p. 112).

A conscious, ethically oriented set of guidelines for approaching intimate journalism would make it easier to clarify what distinguishes a confessional journalistic piece from some "story time" posts on social media. More importantly, it could help assess the sexism inherently present in intimate journalism, considering its historically strong female associations due to societal roles and social constructs that link men to the public sphere and women with the private sphere. Coward also elaborates on the negative association surrounding the private sphere and gender: "Many of the journalists working in this genre are women, since domesticity and emotionality have strong female associations and it is around women that the more problematic aspects of these conventions surface" (Coward, 2013, p. 104).

Setting conventions that naturally expose this gender gap could, in theory, enact an approach that focuses on narrowing and eliminating it in the future. Intimate journalism shouldn't be about "emotional striptease" (Parkin, 2009), and we shouldn't demand as an audience that men

equally belittle and degrade themselves as women have done within the confessional realm in mainstream media (Coward, 2013). Collectively, both the audience and the media outlets should aim higher and look beyond drunk mistakes, binge-eating, body-shaming and stereotyped identities, which are all recurring examples of published work from famous columnists that Coward (2013) analyzes in detail. Journalists and journalism schools acknowledging that there are no agreed conventions on subjectivity would be a vital step moving forward. As Coward warns, “[i]t’s not just the technical issues thrown up by this writing that are being neglected by this snobbery, it’s also, more seriously, ethics” (2013, p. 138). She also exposes the contradiction of confessional journalism being “under-theorised and generally disparaged” while “its dilemmas are sure to increase given that the wider culture is pushing generally in the direction of witnessing ever more intimate and personal experiences. (2013, p. 139).

Regarding my podcast, I think that when forced to choose, I prioritized ethical boundaries to avoid fem-humiliation and overexposure, which may have resulted in a less engaging podcast episode. There are other genres that might indulge in self-exposure with less restraint, but that is not what confessional or intimate journalism should be about. For purely entertainment purposes, there is reality TV, tell-all books, and TV shows sold as documentaries by streaming platforms. Intimate journalistic pieces, in whichever medium, should promote conversations, further learning, introspection, hopefully empathy, and at least a better understanding of the world we live in. Entertainment is an entirely different industry.

Content-wise, the podcast episode embodied reflexive thematic analysis on different levels. Not only because of the two rounds of RTA that the project enacted, but also because it crystallizes the precise moment in my life in which I developed this research-creation project. During critical editing rounds, I removed many ideas from the final script not only because of the ethical

boundaries I previously discussed, but also to keep the podcast engaging. I decided, for example, that some scenes were too specific to fully convey the message to a general audience, or that too much detail could bore someone who doesn't share a particular trait. Many of the experiences I left out, as well as many of the ones I used, didn't exist in my life five or ten years ago, so they couldn't have shaped the podcast episode or my reflexive analysis.

There is a level of self-awareness that can only come after you have stayed with your thoughts and emotions for a certain amount of time, so doing this podcast five years after I got diagnosed with ADHD tells a completely different story than if I had done it right after the diagnosis. Time itself doesn't make the content necessarily better, but that idea reinforces how positionality deeply determines the outcome of RTA. Five years ago, I also knew I had ADHD and I had lived the exact same experiences in my childhood and early adulthood, and still, the outcome would have been another one entirely.

On a similar, reflexive note, at times it felt as if this essay was not “the truest” reflection of my approach to the process, and I had to get used to the idea of delivering the essay that came from a specific way I knitted my thoughts about this process. It may (or may not) have captured all the thoughts and depth of analysis that went through my mind during this process, and it is certainly unique in relation to my broader situated positionality beyond this research-creation project: a mourning daughter, a mother, a wife, *una inmigrante*. This reinforces Braun and Clarke's (2019, p. 592) idea of qualitative researchers: “[We] are always thinking, reflecting, learning and evolving—we do not reach a point where we have nothing more to learn. We are *journeying*, not arriving!”

To further broaden the impact of this research-creation project, I would like to develop this standalone podcast into a series, with each episode focusing on a woman who received an ADHD

diagnosis at some point in her adult life. By continuing to tell other women's stories with an intimate take, I expect to honour Coward's words about confessional journalism:

It is writing which, when it is good, is unbeatable. It deals with the emotions which make us who we are, and the issues that matter –childbirth, relationships, illness, grief. This writing humanises the news, illuminates why events matter and what impact they have on lives. (...) It is also democratising, exposing how the ordinary people's stories are as important as those of the powerful (2013, p. 112)

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