Discourse, Context & Media

Podcasting Recovery: Host Discourse, Parasocial Intimacy, and the Production of Narcissistic-Abuse Recovery Narratives

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Abstract:	Podcasts have become an increasingly important site for mental health communication, particularly within online communities centred on trauma and recovery. In the context of narcissistic abuse, they offer survivors opportunities to narrate experiences, acquire therapeutic language, and participate in communities of recognition. While previous research has highlighted podcasting's affordances of intimacy and accessibility, less attention has been paid to the interactional processes through which hosts shape recovery narratives and therapeutic authority. This paper examines how narcissistic-abuse podcasters construct expertise, foster community, and co-produce survivor narratives through discourse. Combining semi-structured interviews with five podcast hosts and discourse analysis of three podcast episodes, we analyse podcasting as both a production practice and a discursive site of recovery. Our findings identify six interconnected dimensions of recovery podcasting: the construction of expertise, conversational authenticity, shared in-group lexicon, community-building, hybrid host identities, and moral framing. Across these dimensions, hosts do substantially more than facilitate storytelling. Through interpretive reframing, narrative guidance, validation, and recurring therapeutic terminology, they actively organise fragmented experiences into coherent narratives of abuse, recognition, and recovery. We argue that podcast intimacy is not an inherent property of the medium but the outcome of sustained discursive labour that simultaneously produces emotional legitimacy, therapeutic authority, and community belonging. At the same time, the interpretive frameworks that enable recognition may also narrow alternative understandings of complex experiences, highlighting the dual role of recovery podcasts as spaces of both empowerment and interpretive closure.
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Podcasting Recovery: Host Discourse, Parasocial Intimacy, and the Production of Narcissistic-Abuse Recovery Narratives

Morana Lukač and Stacey Copeland

0. Introduction

The term *narcissistic abuse* has emerged within survivor-led self-help communities, therapeutic discourse, and online support networks as a way of describing experiences of coercive control, emotional manipulation, and psychological abuse associated with persons with narcissistic personality traits. It refers to forms of psychological, emotional, and sometimes physical domination associated with coercive control and narcissistic relational dynamics (Lukač, 2024). Although the term itself is not formally recognized within institutional frameworks such as the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (*DSM-5*) (American Psychiatric Association, 2022), it has become established in survivor-oriented discourse as a means of naming experiences that often resist straightforward description.

Public and scholarly attention to the phenomenon has expanded considerably in recent years alongside growing awareness of coercive control and psychological abuse more broadly. Yet researchers have repeatedly noted that such experiences remain difficult to identify, document, and validate. Unlike many forms of physical violence, coercive control often operates through subtle, cumulative, and psychologically destabilizing practices that may be difficult for outsiders—and sometimes victims themselves—to recognize as abuse (Howard, 2022). As a result, many survivors turn to informal support networks and alternative sources of knowledge in search of explanations for their experiences, opportunities for validation, and communities of recognition.

One increasingly important site for such meaning-making is the podcast. Over the last decade, podcasts have become a prominent medium for mental health communication, self-help discourse, and peer-to-peer storytelling. In the context of narcissistic abuse, podcasts provide listeners not only with information and therapeutic language but also with opportunities to hear personal testimonies that mirror their own experiences. Through recurring narratives, shared vocabularies, and intimate forms of address, these podcasts create spaces in which listeners can reinterpret past experiences, construct survivor identities, and situate their stories within broader communities of recovery.

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0. Introduction

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While existing research on mental health podcasting has largely focused on accessibility, intimacy, and audience engagement, less attention has been paid to the narrative and interactional processes through which such communities are formed. In particular, little is known about how podcast hosts shape the

narration and interpretation of abuse experiences, or how shared understandings of recovery emerge through podcast discourse.

To address these questions, this paper combines discursive analysis of podcast episodes with semi-structured interviews with narcissistic-abuse podcasters. Drawing on theories of narrative, community formation, and digital labour, it examines how podcasts function as spaces in which experiences of abuse are narrated, interpreted, and connected to broader frameworks of recovery and belonging. Particular attention is paid to the role of hosts as co-narrators, interpreters, and community-builders, and to how these practices intersect with platform economies and personal branding.

1. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

1.1 Mental Health Podcasting in Media Context

The popularity of mental health podcasts can be understood within a broader historical context of media's entanglement with health and wellness discourse. Radio, for example, has historically been associated with both public health communication and therapeutic narratives, creating a long-standing connection between radio and wellbeing (Kirkpatrick, 2023, p. 168). Mental health podcasting can therefore be understood as both a continuation and transformation of these earlier traditions.

Podcasts have emerged as influential mental health education tools precisely because of their inherent accessibility, flexibility, and their capacity to engage listeners in intimate settings, often while commuting, exercising, or performing routine tasks (Caoilte et al., 2023, p. 2). This mode of consumption has been argued to create safe spaces for listeners, making podcasts especially valuable for individuals seeking information and support around sensitive or stigmatized experiences (Carrotte et al., 2023, p. 200; Caoilte et al., 2023, p. 1). Thus, podcasting's growth in mental health realms reflects its heritage in health-oriented radio and its evolution into an equally contested and celebrated contemporary platform for health communication and community-building around topics as specific and complex as narcissistic abuse.

All podcasts in our study leverage podcasting's perceived intimacy, authenticity, and niche-oriented nature to construct specialized communities and share critical resources and coping strategies surrounding narcissistic abuse. Drawing on Alyn Euritt's conception of intimacy as "a relation that is close in time and/or space" and culturally negotiated rather than inherent (Euritt, 2023, p. 2), these podcasts strategically produce feelings of closeness and immediacy through personal anecdotes and emotionally resonant narratives, cultivating a sense of safety and trust among listeners. This form of parasocial

interaction—where listeners develop meaningful relationships with podcast hosts—capitalizes on what Euritt terms podcasting's "hyper-intimacy" (Euritt, 2023, p. 2), making hosts seem accessible, empathetic, and personally involved in listeners' healing journeys.

1.2 Building Trust and Brand through Digital Content

Like television and radio talk shows, interview-based podcasts rely heavily on repetition and predictable narrative structures. As Susana Tosca (2023) suggests in their work on *Sameness and Repetition in Contemporary Media Culture*, repetition is not merely a passive reproduction of content but an active affordance providing emotional reassurance and community building. While not everyone is a fan of highly formulaic media, the cultural affordances of repetition facilitate learning and support storytelling, especially with media such as podcasting, where listening often occurs alongside other everyday activities, recurring formats, advertising breaks, and opening segments, help orient listeners when distracted by external factors.

John Sullivan (2024) highlights how podcasting, in its evolution from amateur to professional medium, has transformed familiarity into an important entrepreneurial strategy, branding hosts as relatable yet authoritative figures. Recurring introductions, emotional reframings, and concluding reflections provide predictable structures listeners rely on, simultaneously embedding subtle marketing opportunities. This professionalized repetition ensures listeners return regularly, embedding the podcasts within their daily routines and emotional lives, which ultimately serves commercial interests through audience retention and brand loyalty (Campbell & Keller, 2003, p. 294). Thus, podcasts strategically balance genuine emotional intimacy and community support with professionalization and commercial branding, leveraging repetition to sustain audience engagement and loyalty.

Podcasters, like many actors in the broader "digital labor" economy, often operate on the margins of traditional forms of capital and rely heavily on digital tools, platform infrastructures, and online distribution networks (Sullivan, 2024, p. 124). While many podcasts may emerge from personal, therapeutic, or advocacy-related motivations, they, nonetheless, are shaped by the conditions of the digital economy, where platforms play a central organizing role. As a result, narcissistic abuse podcasts can function not only as spaces of community care and emotional connection but also as extensions of larger personal or organizational brands, providing entry points into books, coaching services, speaking engagements, or online communities curated by the hosts.

This dynamic can be understood through the concept of "aspirational labor" whereby passion projects are transformed into entrepreneurial ventures, with the hope of achieving broader financial sustainability or

cultural visibility (Sullivan, p. 133). This blending of care work, community-building, and commercial ambition reflects a broader trend in podcasting we aim to study here, where the lines between personal storytelling, audience connection, and professional self-branding are increasingly intertwined.

1.3 Producing Community through Language and Narrative

While podcasting's affordances of intimacy and accessibility create conditions for connection, communities do not emerge from technological affordances alone. Rather, they are produced through recurring linguistic and narrative practices that enable participants to recognize themselves and others within shared frameworks of meaning. In the context of narcissistic-abuse podcasts, community is constructed both through shared vocabulary and collaborative storytelling practices that transform individual experiences into recognizable recovery narratives.

The use of in-group vernacular plays an important role in this process. As Brady Robards notes, "vernacular subculture" reflects how communities articulate belonging through "everyday, popular" discourses rather than formal or institutionalized language (Robards, 2023, p. 126). As found in our case studies, such vernacular involves informal psychological terminology and survivor-specific shorthand such as *trauma bond*, *hoovering*, and *gaslighting*, which render experiences intelligible within a shared interpretive framework. The use of vernacular language thus simultaneously empowers listeners by legitimizing their lived experiences and enhancing their sense of belonging within a distinct subcultural community while also potentially creating an echo chamber of hyper-in-group discourse.

Community is built not only through shared vocabulary but also through shared storytelling practices. Drawing on Ochs et al. (1992), we approach storytelling as an interactional achievement rather than an individual act. Storytelling is not normatively monologic but collaboratively constructed, with co-narrators contributing explanations, evaluations, and interpretations that shape the meaning of events. Language functions not merely as a medium for communicating facts but as a semiotic resource through which participants jointly construct understandings of the world and transform events into socially meaningful interpretations.

This perspective is particularly relevant to podcast interviews, where hosts frequently move beyond the role of neutral interviewer. Through validation, questioning, interpretation, and the introduction of psychological terminology, hosts actively participate in shaping how experiences are narrated and understood. In many cases, they supply explanatory frameworks, propose motivations for the actions of others, and help guests organize fragmented experiences into coherent narratives. We therefore approach podcast hosts as co-tellers who contribute, to varying degrees, to the construction of recovery narratives.

Narratives also play a central role in identity construction. Lindemann (2001) argues that individuals whose identities have been damaged or undermined often engage in processes of narrative repair through the creation of counterstories that resist oppressive characterizations and establish alternative understandings of self. Narratives of narcissistic abuse frequently perform such work. Guests recount experiences that were often dismissed, minimized, or misunderstood by others and reinterpret them through therapeutic and survivor-oriented frameworks. In doing so, they reposition themselves from confused or discredited victims to survivors whose experiences are intelligible, legitimate, and morally meaningful.

Importantly, the narratives circulating within narcissistic-abuse podcasts display a striking degree of similarity. Across episodes, listeners encounter recurring explanations, categories, narrative trajectories, and moral evaluations. Ochs (2004) argues that narratives help people make sense of disruptive experiences by providing culturally available schemas through which events can be interpreted. In this sense, narratives domesticate uncertainty by transforming complex experiences into coherent stories with recognizable beginnings, middles, and endings. The recurring concepts and explanatory frameworks found in narcissistic-abuse podcasts function in precisely this way, enabling diverse experiences to be understood through shared narratives of abuse, recognition, recovery, and healing.

The result is not merely a collection of individual stories but the emergence of a broader communal narrative. Through repeated exposure to similar accounts, listeners are encouraged to recognize their own experiences in the experiences of others and to understand those experiences through a common interpretive framework. This process resembles what Willer et al. (2019) describe as the creation of experiential unity, whereby collective storytelling practices foster recognition, belonging, and solidarity among participants. At the same time, the coherence that makes such narratives powerful may also encourage increasingly uniform interpretations of complex experiences, potentially smoothing over important differences between individual stories.

2. Methods

The study combines two complementary datasets to analyse how mental health podcasters construct therapeutic authority, create emotional legitimacy, and help shape recovery narratives in both production discourse and podcast interaction. First, we conducted semi-structured interviews with the podcast hosts to shed light on how they perceive their production practices, professional positioning, and audience relationships. We then carried out discursive and narrative analysis of selected podcast episodes to explore how these claims are enacted within podcast co-narration and interactions. This dual approach allows us to analyze podcasts as both media productions and discursive spaces of recovery.

2.1. Semi-structured interviews

We conducted five semi-structured interviews with podcasters selected from a broader sample of narcissism recovery podcasts identified during preliminary corpus mapping. The interviews provide a "direct, research-focused interaction between researcher and participant" to test findings against how the podcasters themselves perceive and produce their shows (Kazmer & Xie, 2008, p. 258). Twenty-five podcasters were initially contacted using publicly available contact information and existing professional networks, resulting in five completed interviews. Although the sample cannot fully represent the diversity of narcissistic-abuse podcasting, it captures a range of podcasting styles, audience sizes, and years in production, providing a valuable insight into the production cultures of this niche mental-health genre.

Tony Overbay is a licensed marriage and family therapist with four podcasts to their name including, and most pertinent to this paper, *Waking Up to Narcissism*. Active since 2021, the podcast is "dedicated to helping individuals recognize and navigate narcissistic traits and tendencies in their relationships and within themselves." (The Virtual Coach Network, 2026). As of February 2026, the show had published over 150 episodes, combining solo reflections with interviews with experts, coaches, and influencers.

Brandon Chadwick is the host of *Narcissist Apocalypse*, a storytelling podcast that amplifies the voices of individuals who have experienced narcissistic abuse, coercive control, domestic violence, and relationship trauma. Chadwick positions himself as a facilitator rather than an expert. Since launching in 2019, the show has developed a substantial audience, surpassing 1.5 million downloads in 2025. Episodes range from short Q&A formats to extended first-person narrative testimonies.

Brenda Stephens is a mental health therapist specializing in narcissistic abuse recovery and a co-host of *Two Queens and A Joker: My Narcissist's Ex & Me*. Brenda co-hosts the show with Sara, a healthcare provider who also was once partnered with the same narcissist as Brenda and they each have children with him. The podcast tagline reads "What happens when two women, each once entangled in the same narcissist's web, come together to share their truths?" (Two Queens and a Joker Podcast, 2026). Launched in 2025, the show is distributed through RSS feeds but primarily produced as a Youtube video podcast, featuring conversational episodes between the two co-hosts.

HG Tudor occupies a distinctive and controversial position within the narcissism-content ecosystem as a self-described narcissistic psychopath and "ultra narcissist." Across books, blogs, and podcasts, Tudor invites the audience to "learn about narcissists from the world's number one source. A narcissist himself" (HG Tudor - Knowing The Narcissist: Ultra, 2026). His Youtube channel, *Knowing The Narcissist: Ultra*, contained over twenty-six thousand subscribers and eleven thousand videos as of February 2026. HG Tudor does not visually appear in his videos, which range from general discussion of narcissism ('What is

narcissism?') to commentary on celebrity behavior ('Why is Meghan so inauthentic? [Meghan Markle]') and vary in length from ten minutes to two hours. White primarily monologue-driven, the channel also includes a variety of interviews dating back to 2020.

Kerry McAvoy is a retired psychologist, narcissistic abuse survivor, and expert host of *Breaking Free from Narcissistic Abuse* podcast. Active since April 2022, the podcast includes episodes ranging from ten-minute monologue style and reader question episodes to half-hour interviews. Dr. McAvoy's broader online presence includes courses, written sources, and a Youtube channel with over sixty thousand subscribers. The podcast describes itself as "the podcast that helps you spot the subtle signs of toxic relationships and reclaim your life" (Kerry McAvoy, PhD, 2026).

All participants provided informed consent prior to participation in accordance with the guidelines approved by the Research Ethical Review Committee (CETO) at the University of Groningen. Participants received an information letter outlining the aims of the study, data management, and their right to withdraw from the study any time prior to publication. Interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis. Interview transcripts as well as podcast episodes were coded iteratively in ATLAS.ti using a comparative discourse-analytic approach. Analytical categories were refined through ongoing reflexive discussion among the researchers.

2.2 Podcast corpus and discourse analysis

Alongside the interview component, we conducted a discourse-analytic examination of selected podcast episodes. The analysis focused on how hosts participate in the co-construction of abuse and recovery narratives, negotiate emotional legitimacy, establish therapeutic authority, and contribute to collective meaning-making. While survivor narratives are central to these episodes, our primary analytical interest lies in the recurring discursive functions performed by hosts as mediators of interpretation, validation, and recovery discourse.

Three episodes were selected from podcasts differing in therapeutic orientation, host identity, audience scale, and production style. . The aim was not corpus representativeness but the close examination of host intervention in narrative interaction across contrasting podcast formats. The selected episodes came from *Narcissist Apocalypse* (Brandon Chadwick), *Navigating Narcissism* (Dr. Ramani Durvasula), and *Fake Love and Flying Monkeys* (Nova Gibson). These episodes were not necessarily drawn from the same podcasts whose hosts participated in the interview component, as the two datasets were designed to capture complementary but distinct aspects of the podcasting ecosystem.

The *Narcissist Apocalyps*e episode features “Bruce”, a survivor reflecting on a relationship characterized by love-bombing, coercive control, physical violence, isolation, financial abuse, and post-separation conflict. Chadwick primarily adopts a facilitative role, encouraging elaboration while periodically validating and reframing Bruce’s experiences.

The *Navigating Narcissism* episode features stunt performer and author Kimberly Shannon Murphy discussing childhood sexual abuse, family secrecy, intergenerational trauma, and recovery. Durvasula actively introduces psychological concepts such as grooming, enmeshment, invalidation, and trauma, frequently reframing Murphy’s experiences through therapeutic and clinical lenses. The episode therefore provides an example of highly interventionist co-narration grounded in professional expertise.

The *Fake Love and Flying Monkeys* episode features Marie, a survivor reflecting on a series of abusive relationships and tracing recurring patterns of coercive control to experiences within her family of origin. Gibson repeatedly validates the narrator's experiences and introduces explanatory concepts such as narcissistic parenting, love-bombing, and trauma repetition, positioning the episode as both testimony and psychoeducational resource for listeners.

Taken together, the three episodes represent distinct positions within the narcissistic-abuse podcasting ecosystem: survivor-centred facilitation (*Narcissist Apocalypse*), clinically informed psychoeducation (*Navigating Narcissism*), and counselling-oriented recovery discourse (*Fake Love and Flying Monkeys*). This variation allowed for comparison of how different forms of expertise, authority, and community-building are enacted through podcast co-narration.

A final methodological consideration concerns the nature of the data. Unlike studies that observe storytelling as an unfolding interaction, this study examines podcast episodes as published media artefacts. As a result, editing decisions, production practices, and off-record interactions may have shaped the narratives ultimately presented to listeners. Rather than analysing storytelling in real time, we focus on the traces of co-narration preserved in the final podcast product, including hosts’ prompts, interpretive reframings, validations, and explanatory interventions. While these features do not allow a full reconstruction of the storytelling process, they provide insight into how hosts participate in shaping experiences of abuse, recovery, and identity once narratives enter media spaces.

3. Findings & Analysis

We organise our findings around six integrated themes derived from the comparative reading set out in Table 1. Across each theme we move from what hosts say they do in their production accounts to what hosts are observed to do in episode-level interaction with guests. The structure is meant to operationalise

our claim that recovery is produced at the intersection of medium affordances, narrative work, and platform economies.

Integrated Theme	Producer talk (host interviews)	Episode discourse practices (close analysis)	Frequency
1. Podcasting Expertise	• Host as trustworthy expert vs. wealth of bad advice • Narcissism as a hot topic to draw in clients and listeners • Performing educator and entertainer	• Interpretational reframing (psychoeducation, terminological stabilisation, citation of research)	21 / 84 *(interview coding)* 52 / 91 *(episode coding)*
2. The Conversational Form	• Minimal editing – authenticity and conversation flow • Editing for story and form rather than natural conversation • Following particular narrative/story formats and expectations	• Narrative guidance (sequencing, eliciting, structuring abstract/orientation/coda; sequencing trauma into a recovery arc)	10 / 84 *(interview coding)* 25 / 91 *(episode coding)*
3. The Audience as In-Group	• Repetition + in-group language structure • Host-coined branded concepts (“popcorn moments”, “put them under the Tudor scope”)	• Validation and alignment through recurring lexicon across episodes (“gaslighting”, “narcissistic supply”, “no contact”, “love-bombing”, “flying monkeys”, “DARVO”)	12 / 84 *(interview coding)* 26 / 91 *(episode coding)*

4. Podcast as Recovery Community	• Podcasts as recovery communities of practice • Podcast intimacy and listener bond	• Validation/alignment (affirmation, naming the survivor identity, sharing emotional rules)	21 / 84 *(interview coding)* 26 / 91 *(episode coding)*
5. Hybrid Host Positions	• Host as fellow survivor = the vulnerable expert • Digital labour and self-branding across platforms • Host as facilitator; host as narcissist; podcaster as learner; guest as expert through experience	• Validation/alignment through differential positioning across hosts: Ramani as clinical expert; Brandon as peer ally / tactical collaborator; Nova as therapist-activist	27 / 84 *(interview coding)* 26 / 91 *(episode coding)*
6. Truth and Moral Framing	• Memory, truth, trauma: fallibility + "felt truth"	• Validation/alignment combined with interpretational reframing to handle contested family narratives, estrangement and the moral revaluation of "family"	10 / 84 *(interview coding)* 26 / 91 *(episode coding)*

Table 1. Six Integrated Themes of Narcissistic Abuse Recovery Podcasts

3.1 Podcasting Expertise: Expertise, authority and the curation of "good" recovery advice

Across interviews, the most heavily populated code concerns the positioning of hosts as trustworthy experts versus wealth of bad advice in contrast to what participants repeatedly describe as a landscape of poor-quality mental-health advice (n=15). Tony Overbay frames the motivation behind his podcast in exactly these terms: "I just think that there's a lot of bad mental health advice out there … I took great pride not in just throwing out my random ideas because I was so worried about the bad advice out there being given." HG Tudor expresses the same impulse with a different metaphor of policing: "sometimes I see material elsewhere which is incorrect and so I will make a video about that explaining why what that

person is saying has got it wrong […] one of the things that irritates me is inaccuracy in the information." What is being claimed here is not only competence but custodianship over a vulnerable lay readership.

This curatorial work also extends to guest selection. Overbay claims he is "much more hesitant to bring a coach on" because "bad advice around narcissism can be detrimental and harmful," preferring guests with formal psychological credentials. Similarly, Kerry McEvoy repeatedly invokes her 25 years of clinical practice as the warrant for what she calls an "expert-informed podcast." The discursive accomplishment is to differentiate the show from peer hosts in a crowded marketplace while simultaneously aligning it with biomedical and therapeutic authority.

The episode analysis demonstrates how these claims to expertise are enacted interactionally. Across all three podcasts, the dominant discursive strategy is what we coded as *interpretive reframing*: hosts take fragments of guest experience and re-articulates them inside a therapeutic-conceptual vocabulary. Rather than simply eliciting stories, hosts actively shape how those stories are understood.

Dr. Ramani is the most prominent case. When Kimberly Shannon Murphy describes her mother's withdrawal in the aftermath of abuse, Ramani replies: "I think it sounds like you understand enough about trauma to understand why your mom just split away and what her trauma response was but her motherhood didn't supersede that response." Rather than leaving the mother's reaction open to multiple interpretations (abandonment, indifference, selfishness, betrayal, or emotional incapacity), Dr Ramani frames it as a trauma response. She does not fully remove accountability but introduces the mother's responsibility; she manages moral ambiguity here. The clinical term simultaneously explains and morally re-balances the action.

The same process occurs when Durvasula introduces the concept of the "enmeshed family system," translating Murphy's personal experiences into an established psychological category. Through such moves, she simultaneously educates listeners, establishes epistemic authority, embeds the narrative within therapeutic discourse, and guides interpretation toward a preferred reading.

This authority is made particularly explicit when Durvasula characterises one of her interventions as "an objective clinical opinion". The phrase positions her not merely as an empathic listener but as an expert capable of validating experiences through professional knowledge. Survivor testimony is thereby supplemented by institutional authority, producing a form of validation that derives not only from empathy but also from expertise.

Nova Gibson performs a structurally similar move in a more activist key. "He was doing what all narcissists do in the beginning, Marie … he was gathering data … he wanted to mirror you to make himself appear to be the person of your dreams." Here the host assumes expert authority by supplying a

generalized narcissistic abuse model ("all narcissists do this"), moving beyond facilitation into analytic explanation of survivor experience. Gibson then layers a quasi-forensic vocabulary on top: love-bombing, narcissistic supply, and coercive control. Each term arrives with the implicit promise that what felt confused and unspeakable is in fact already classified.

Chadwick's episode is the productive counter-example. Rather than presenting interpretations as authoritative explanations, he typically frames them as collaborative suggestions. Asking Bruce whether "it is fair to say" that his self-worth was gradually undermined invites confirmation, negotiation, or rejection. He is more emotionally affiliative and co-narrative. His extended analogy comparing custody documentation to photographing a rental car before use illustrates this difference. Rather than offering psychological explanation, he provides practical guidance and tactical support. The goal is not to classify experience but to help the narrator navigate it.

Read against the producer-side data, episode-level reframing is the technique through which the hosts' stated commitment to good advice is enacted in real time. The strategy carries an obvious benefit: it gives survivors a name and a category for experiences that have often been denied or pathologised.

3.2 The Conversational Form: Minimal editing, authenticity, and narrative guidance

A second cluster of interview claims concerns how podcasts should sound. Eight coded extracts cluster around what we have labelled minimal editing, authenticity, and conversation flow. Tony Overbay describes his editing practice as restricted to surface tidying: "The primary things I edit are the uhs and the ums." HG Tudor goes further: "I edit out very little, it's invariably done in one take" Brenda Stephens articulates an explicitly anti-staging stance, describing her opening segments as "pretty real time." The shared production aesthetic is one in which the host's authority is grounded in unmediated talk; editing is instead seen as a tool for helping to ensure better flow and clarity for the listener.

This claim is, however, undercut by the same data. Kerry McEvoy contrasts her unscripted podcasts with her live videos, noting that "if you watch my lives, that's pretty scripted. I'm working off an outline … But even then, I'm trying to like bring it back to life." Brandan tells us that he does edit for register, not for content: "sometimes our language is more coarse than it needs to be, so I edit a lot of that out." And Kerry articulates a structural principle that exposes how heavily curated the genre is at the level of architecture rather than turn-taking. Drawing an analogy from clinical practice she explains: "when you go into therapy, there's an arc to the hour … there's also an arc to a podcast interview. So that's what I'm doing that work, trying to make sure that the arc makes sense." Authenticity, in other words, is a surface effect produced by careful architectural work; the genre's ethic of un-shapedness is itself a shape.

The episode analysis confirms that the conversational frame is, in fact, intensively managed and that the management is mostly invisible because it is enacted through what we have coded as *narrative guidance*. Hosts frequently structure and organize storytelling through prompts that help guests coherently narrate emotionally complex or fragmented experiences. In several episodes, hosts also provide what Labov (2013) terms the *abstract* of the narrative: a framing that explains the relevance or reportability of the story before narration begins. These interventions are often subtle and therefore easy to overlook. Rather than directing stories overtly, hosts shape the conditions under which stories can be told.

The opening of the Ramani–Murphy episode is exemplary. The host here provides an abstract to the story in the Labovian sense: "Kimberly's real-life childhood starting when she was just two years old … Kimberly experienced severe childhood sexual abuse by a family member." This narrative introduces the guest by emphasizing her work as a public person, creating a parasocial link between her and the audience. The segment also includes a trigger warning which does not only serve as content advisory; it situates the forthcoming narrative within therapeutic media discourse and legitimizes anticipated emotional reactions from listeners. Only then is the storyteller invited to begin, and even the opening prompt: "I want you to begin sharing it with us wherever you want to begin." Here, the narrative is introduced through an open-ended invitation, creating safety for the storyteller. The apparent looseness is itself a structuring device that places the host as the one with permission to open and close the narrative.

The same pattern recurs in Nova Gibson's episode at a more directive setting. Gibson is opening space for Marie's story by inviting narrative, organizing chronology, directing autobiographical reflection, and positioning Marie as the primary speaker. Here the invitation is pre-framed: "often when victims find themselves in one relationship with a narcissist they can look back and start connecting the dots and … there's often previous trauma … so can you tell us what was your story uh in growing up". The question presupposes a developmental script of childhood trauma to adult repetition to narcissistic abuse to escape to recovery. Before Marie speaks; the guest's task is to populate the script with her own particulars.

What our two-sided design lets us see is the gap between metapragmatic claim and observed practice. Hosts describe their work as having low intervention. Their actual turn-level practice involves heavy structuring of when the trauma narrative may begin, what its categories are, and what end-state (estrangement, custody planning, recovery identity) it is moving towards. The minimal-editing ideology is not false but partial: editing has migrated out of the post-production timeline and into the question design.

3.3 The Audience as In-Group: Repetition, in-group lexicon and the production of recognisability

A third theme concerns the role of repetition and shared vocabulary in the construction of podcast audiences as interpretive communities. Across interviews, hosts describe their content as built around a recognisable. Tony Overbay, for example, catalogues his own: “I have a lot of concepts I have developed myself like one called popcorn moments, 5 rules of narcissism, get your PhD in gaslighting and learning to set healthy boundaries.” HG Tudor brands the analytic gesture itself: “It will be a very systematic approach … I call it putting them under the Tudor scope.” Chadwick articulates the function of this lexicon, which is at once linguistic and social: “we hope that it also gives language to your experience and not just the story of the experience, but the story of your feelings.” The community of practice in Leuckert’s (2020) sense is here being built through shared signs.

The narrative analysis of the three focal episodes shows that lexicon at work. Across the three episodes a common keyword set recurs: *gaslighting*, *narcissistic supply*, *love-bombing*, *no contact*, *flying monkeys*, *coercive control*, *trauma bonding*, *complex post-traumatic stress*, *communal narcissism*, *enmeshed family system*, *betrayal blindness*. The terms travel with their own micro-genres of explanation, and they do specific discursive work in situ. By referring to “gaslighting,” for example, Dr Ramani stabilizes interpretation. She translates an everyday interpersonal interaction into a recognizable narcissistic abuse pattern. The tone is pedagogical: she is teaching listeners how to interpret similar experiences in their own lives (“they’re just always trying to keep people off balance”). This type of interpretation can feel therapeutic to trauma survivors. An experience that before seemed destabilizing, confusing or difficult to articulate is now narratively coherent and socially recognizable. The introduction of “anhedonia” earlier in the same episode performs related work: it further medicalizes and systematizes emotional experience, translating feelings into technical psychological language associated with post-traumatic stress, complex trauma, and psychiatric symptomology.

The same logic operates at the level of catchphrases and host-coined terms. The hot air balloon metaphor that Ramani returns to is used for estrangement and boundary-setting as necessary conditions for personal growth and liberation. Toxic relationships become conceptualized as literal weights preventing movement, healing, and elevation. The podcast does more than validate trauma: it actively produces an aspirational recovery narrative and prescribes culturally recognizable pathways toward healing and transformation. Gibson’s closing slogan: “you are worthy of a whole lot more than a lifetime of fake love and flying monkeys” performs the same function in a punchier register. From a sociolinguistic perspective these are anchoring devices, sites at which discursive identity work congeals into ready-made tokens (Bucholtz & Hall 2005). From a media-studies perspective they are recognisable sonic branding.

Repetition is not a stylistic accident but a structural feature of recovery podcasting: it is the mechanism through which the show consolidates its community of practice, and it is the medium-specific activation

of what Tosca (2023) notes as the *affective affordance of sameness*. Importantly, the lexicon's capacity to do recognition work depends on its repetition across episodes.

3.4 Podcast as Recovery Community: Intimacy, parasocial bond and recovery as community of practice

Producers spoke emphatically about the affective character of podcasting as a medium. Kerry McEvoy articulates this most directly: "The reason is because podcasting creates an intimate experience between you and the listener. It's different than anything." She illustrates the claim with a recovery narrative: a woman who started listening on her morning runs, recognised herself, and left a damaging relationship as the result of hearing her own situation in the stories shared through the podcast. The episode is figured here as a private channel into a private listening practice; this resonates closely with Euritt's (2023) account of podcasting as an intimate medium, not simply through how listeners hear it, but through how it is produced for a particular community of listening ears.

That intimacy slides into other community formation endeavors for the podcasters. Tony Overbay for example describes the social infrastructure he has built around the podcast: a private women's Facebook group of around 800 members; a forthcoming men's group; biweekly free group calls in which he answers questions seeded by listener emails. Brenda explicitly redescribes her show as collective speech: "We is me and the guests." The pronoun work here is consequential: "we" extends from co-hosts to listeners to a wider survivor public.

Kerry's formulation of the recognition effect captures why the medium is felt to be different from other recovery channels: "I think podcasting really allows that experience to say, finally, somebody is saying all the things that I can't say. Finally, somebody is describing what actually happened to me." The implicit comparison is to clinical encounters and to peer-disclosure settings; the podcast provides recognition without requiring the listener to disclose. "What's really great about podcasting is you can have somebody in your ear talking to you about this without you having to tell anybody about it" (Kerry, interview).

The episode analysis identifies validation and alignment as the primary interactional mechanisms through which this recognition is produced. These moves are often short but they do dense relational work. When Kimberly apologises for crying, Dr Ramani interrupts: "don't you ever say sorry for crying please." This immediately rejects the idea that emotional expression requires justification; apologizing for distress is treated not as an individual habit, but as a learned trauma response. The follow-up remark that

“navigating narcissism means never having to say sorry” introduces humor while simultaneously reinforcing a therapeutic norm: survivors should not apologize for emotional expression. This contributes to the creation of shared emotional rules within the podcast space.

Similar forms of validation appear throughout the corpus. When Ramani thanks Murphy for her disclosure because “it's really important for people to hear that,” she transforms a private experience into a collectively meaningful contribution. Brandon Chadwick performs the same restorative work at his episode’s close: he emotionally reassures and affirms Bruce, praising his vulnerability, effort, and contribution while reinforcing him as credible, caring, and helpful to others, and framing his testimony as socially meaningful which positions him not only as someone harmed, but as someone helping others through sharing his story.

Read against producer talk, the relationship is reciprocal. The intimacy claim explains why validation moves matter (the listener is being addressed too); the validation moves operationalise the intimacy claim, in real time. The community of practice is not adjacent to the talk; it is brought into being by it.

3.5 Hybrid host positions: vulnerable expert, fellow survivor and brand

The largest cluster in our interview coding (n=27) concerns how hosts position themselves. Two findings stand out. The most-claimed position is that of a “vulnerable expert” (n=8): the host as someone who knows because they have lived it. Tony Overbay names the role directly noting that listeners often describe him as “a vulnerable expert.” He also stages his own survivorhood: “Here is where I would want to tell you, I have an incredibly narcissistic mom, like off the charts.” Kerry McEvoy goes further, narrating identity loss as the bridge between her clinical self and her audience: “I think for me, as a survivor, you lose your voice. I mean, this type of abuse is incredibly harmful to the self. It shatters … I was a shell of myself when I got out of that.”

Second, the vulnerable-expert claim sits alongside an extensive practice of digital labour and branding (n=13). Tony narrates the ambivalence sharply: “I’ve got a social media presence, TikTok, Instagram, and I’ve had a couple of videos around narcissism … go viral. I used to think I wouldn’t care, but then boy, when one does, it’s pretty fun. But then what comes with a clip that has 3 million views … even if 90% are positive that’s still a ton of people telling you you suck.” HG Tudor describes the strategic logic explicitly: YouTube as search engine, multimodality as accessibility tactic, an “increasingly crowded marketplace” in which reach is the issue. Brenda links the podcast directly to her clinical practice: “it’s a mix between marketing and my own selfishness of wanting to get closer to Sarah [her co-host].” Recovery podcasting is an identity marker and a brand at once; the two are not separable.

The episode analysis shows three distinct realisations of the vulnerable-expert ideal across the three focal episodes, each with different discursive consequences. Ramani is most strongly weighted toward the expert pole: she cites her own clinical practice, literature, and quasi-empirical evidence ("I was looking at a group of people's data"); the vulnerable-expert position appears in restrained metalinguistic asides ("this is rather metaphysical for a scientific gal") and in the closing takeaways, which speak in the voice of professional authority. Brandon Chadwick occupies the opposite pole. is authority derives primarily from relational alignment rather than professional credentials. He functions less as an expert interpreter and more as a supportive peer, emphasising empathy, affirmation, and collaborative meaning-making.

Nova Gibson sits between the two. Compared to Brandon's interpersonal empathy and Dr Ramani's didactic psychoeducation, Nova combines therapeutic validation with activist-structural critique centered on institutions, gender, and legal systems. She is theory-driven but less psychologically layered than Ramani and more advocacy-oriented; she shifts from interviewer into educator/advocate mode, occupying an expert-authority role and delivering long explanatory monologues grounded in legal, therapeutic, and institutional discourse, while the repeated use of collective pronouns ("we need," "don't we") constructs a shared activist/community stance between host, guest, and audience.

This continuum matters for our broader claim. "Vulnerable expert" is not a fixed position but a tunable parameter. Hosts dial up or down the proportions of credentialled distance and lived intimacy depending on platform, audience size, and brand strategy. From an analytic perspective, it is a careful piece of identity work that lets recovery podcasts hold together a clinical address and an intimate one in the same turn.

3.6 Truth and Moral Framing: Contested narratives and Memory

The smallest cluster in our interview coding (n=10) is also, we argue, the most ethically loaded. Hosts are explicit about the epistemic problem of abuse narratives: contested truths, memory gaps, and trauma stories. . On one hand, hosts treat memory as fallible (the "felt truth"), and they take seriously the possibility that an abuser's side of the story will never be heard. Kerry recounts a striking exchange with a PR company: "they were asking me questions like, so how do you vet that? I'm like, we don't … this is abuse victims. Like, what am I gonna do, call the abuser? … That's not how this works." On the other hand, hosts present themselves as gatekeepers of what counts as a credible recovery story.

This is also where the genre's moral work is concentrated. The narrative analysis shows that across the three focal episodes the most consequential interpretational reframings concern contested framing of

family. Ramani repeatedly revalues kinship: “that idea of always letting children know that the pain of the adults around them is not their fault is so absolutely crucial … you weren’t told that … holding space for that idea that no, adults don’t always do the right thing … that’s huge.” Estrangement, in this framing, is upgraded from a deviant act to a moral accomplishment: “I actually think it’s a remarkably courageous … when people can do that.” The move is given its strongest meaning-stabilizing form when Ramani tells Kimberly that “there’s no version of this … where you see it clearly and you stay in the system.” This passage eliminates ambiguity almost entirely, presenting two states as mutually exclusive (seeing clearly versus staying in the system) and framing estrangement as the logical and psychologically necessary consequence of genuine recognition. Earlier in the episode, the host justifies “going no contact” in the same key: what might otherwise appear abnormal, selfish, drastic, or socially deviant is translated into something recognizable and collectively intelligible. “No contact” becomes an established category within therapeutic discourse rather than an isolated individual reaction, and the host invokes empirical and expert authority (“I was looking at a group of people’s data … the number one thing was actually no contact”). This is a particularly strong form of interpretive reframing because it stabilizes the legitimacy of estrangement through quasi-scientific evidence.

Read at the level of the closing turns, these reframings carry an unmistakable architectural weight. In the closing segment of the Ramani–Murphy episode, Dr Ramani converts Kimberly’s story into generalized trauma knowledge, the story becomes representative. She stabilizes meaning: there is no space for alternative explanations. The interview is summarized in digestible lessons. She creates a coherent trauma-recovery arc (abuse, silence, betrayal, truth-telling, estrangement, healing); she cites research, invokes experts, references psychological concepts, explains mechanisms, synthesizes meanings. This gives her interpretive authority over the narrative. Kimberly supplies experience; Dr Ramani supplies explanatory structure. She moralizes the narrative, she explains what is good and bad and thus creates moral order, and the closing segment almost functions as meta-narration: Dr Ramani narrates what the narrative “really means.”

These reframings do important emotional work. They take fragmented or contested accounts and produce coherent moral orders inside which survivor identity can be inhabited without continual self-justification. They are also, however, the place where the analytic costs of the genre are clearest: the same moves that revalue kinship and institutional authority do so by narrowing interpretation. The genre handles contested truth not by pluralising it but by overwriting it with a single, recognisable interpretive frame. This is the point at which our two-sided design speaks most loudly. The producer-side discourse on “bad advice,” vetting, and the impossibility of calling the abuser is consistent with this overwriting practice: there is no

machinery in the genre for hearing the contested-other side, because the genre is built to repair the under-recognised first side.

4. Conclusion

We have shown that podcasting's much-celebrated affordances, intimacy, authenticity, accessibility, are not properties of the medium itself but outcomes of careful, repeated discursive work performed by hosts who occupy hybrid expert-survivor positions, who curate a shared lexicon. And who structure when, how, and on what terms abuse may be narrated. The recovery community of practice (Leuckert, 2020) is not simply filtered through or amplified by podcast technology, but shaped episode by episode through interpretational reframing, narrative guidance, and validation moves.

Taken together, our two pronged analyses argues that podcast-mediated recovery from narcissistic abuse is produced by a tightly coupled set of discursive practices: interpretational reframing (the recognisable category), narrative guidance (the architectural arc), validation/alignment (the affective contract), and a repeatable in-group lexicon (the shared repertoire). Each of these episode-level practices has an explicit corollary in producer talk from expertise/curation, minimal-editing aesthetics and storytelling structure, intimacy and community-building, to branded content. What our design shows is that neither analysis could show alone the gap between these layers: hosts describe themselves as light-touch facilitators of authentic, unscripted talk; episode-level analysis shows them to be heavy-handed architects of recovery narrative, often before the guest has spoken. The minimal-editing ideology is not a falsehood but a misdescription: editing has moved out of the timeline and into the question.

We have also argued that these practices have a moral and an epistemic edge. The category work that allows survivors to recognise themselves — to put a name to gaslighting, love-bombing, or coercive control — also works to flatten the ambiguity of the situations from which the recognition is drawn. The genre has, as Howard (2022) notes, opened up space for experiences that had previously been disenfranchised; it has also, we suggest, developed a characteristic interpretive closure around those experiences. The double effect is something that producers, listeners, and researchers should be willing to hold in view at the same time.

Three implications follow. For media and podcast studies, our findings support and complicate Euritt's (2023) account of podcasting as an intimate medium: intimacy here is not an ambient affect but a relational contract, and it is monetised. For sociolinguistic research on digital communities, recovery podcasts demonstrate how shared vocabularies, recurring narratives, and branded concepts can

simultaneously enable and constrain identity work. Finally, for mental-health communication, our analysis suggests that the question is no longer whether platform-mediated recovery discourse is helpful or harmful in the abstract (it is both) but how its hosts, audiences, and analysts can develop better tools for reading the genre's interpretive operations alongside its affective achievements. Future research might productively extend this comparative producer–episode design to recovery podcasts in other domains and could usefully incorporate listener-side data to test what listeners do with the recognisable categories that the genre supplies.

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