

Build good practice in reporting thematic analysis

**with Virginia Braun, Victoria Clarke, Nikki Hayfield
and Gareth Terry**

Overview

- The “four-act play” of research reporting – renaming, reworking and reconceptualising for reflexive TA
 - Finding a gap
 - “O&E stuff” (ontology & epistemology)
 - Rationales for reflexive TA – “I don’t want mash”
 - Behind the scenes
 - Making use of supplementary materials
 - Watching our language
- Common problems
 - Not owning your perspective
 - Themes don’t emerge
 - We are family!
- Let’s get real
- Further resources



The “four-act play” of research reporting (Tracy, 2012:

1) Quantitative research/small q
2) qualitative

1. Introduction/literature review
2. Method
3. Results/Findings
4. Discussion

The “four-act play” of research reporting

Reflexive thematic analysis - introduction

1. **Introduction/~~literature review~~**
2. **Methodology**
3. ~~Results/Findings~~ 3. **Analysis**
4. **Discussion/General discussion/Conclusions**

Finding a gap or entering a conversation?

← Tweet



Rachelle Chadwick

@DrRChadwick



We need to teach students that academic writing/ research is not about finding 'a gap' or creating an 'original' idea (very unlikely) but it's about building on the work of others, entering into conversations (& acknowledging debts). It is collaborative work. [#AcademicTwitter](#)

9:36 · 29 May 22

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The “four-act play” of research reporting

Reflexive thematic analysis - methodology

1. Introduction/~~literature review~~
2. **Methodology**
3. ~~Results/Findings~~ 3. Analysis
4. Discussion/General discussion/Conclusions

'O&E stuff' (Chamberlain, 2012: 293) in the methodology

“The epistemological stance taken in this study was a form of tempered realism. While assuming a broadly uncomplicated relationship between language and reality, the authors were aware that researchers and participants would impact on one another, and that the authors’ values and assumptions would contribute to both the questions asked and the reading of the data. It was therefore important throughout the research to reflect on the authors’ subjectivity and how it impacted on the collection and perception of the data [...] The analysis was conducted using an inductive ‘bottom-up’ approach in which there was no attempt to fit the data into an existing theory.” (Smith, Moller, & Vossler, 2017, p. 564)

“I don’t want mash”!



Michael Larkin
@ipanalysis



Replying to [@drvicclarke](#) [@RebeccaPadgett](#) and [@ginnybraun](#)

Yep, just give a positive rationale for your choice! If I order chips, I don't expect to have to also explain why I don't want mash.

15:35 · 16 Jul 22

22 Likes

Tweet your reply





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“Behind the scenes” (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017: 126)

- The importance of transparency or “reflexive openness” (Jacobs et al., 2021, p. 182).
- As Jacobs et al. (2021) note, the concept of transparency “rests on an ocular metaphor, implying the possibility of *seeing through* to gain access to things *in themselves* or things *as they really are*” (p. 181; emphasis in original).
- There might be practical constraints on reflexive openness (e.g., participant anonymity).
- Important for quality – reflexive TA cannot be assessed on its own terms, if the researcher is not reflexively aware of and explicit about what those terms are.

Make use of supplementary materials (journal publishing)

- **There is potentially more freedom and flexibility in dissertations/theses.**

“Watch your language!”

- Data or empirical materials
- Data generation *not* collection
- Participant group/data set *not* “sample”
- Statistical probabilistic generalisability *not* just generalisability
- Subjectivity and reflexivity *not* researcher bias or influence (‘the researcher *may* have influenced...’)
- Themes generated, constructed, developed, crafted *not* identified, found, discovered or “emerged”
- First person (I/my/we/our...) *not* third person (the researcher...) – passionate story teller not dispassionate scientist



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The “four-act play” of research reporting

Reflexive thematic analysis – integrate or separate?

1. Introduction/~~literature review~~

2. Methodology

~~3. Results/Findings~~ 3. Analysis

4. Discussion/General discussion/Conclusions

- A recognizable rhythm/pattern for weaving together data extracts and analytic narrative – e.g. introduce, display, comment (Chenail, 1995).
- *Overview* the themes with brief description/thematic maps/tables – no surprise headings in the analysis!

The “four-act play” of research reporting (Tracy, 2012:

1.1.2) Reflexive thematic analysis - discussion

1. Introduction/~~literature review~~
2. Methodology
3. ~~Results/Findings~~ 3. Analysis
4. Discussion/General discussion/Conclusions



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Common problems 1: Knowingness

Not *knowingly* owning your perspective

- **No or limited reflexivity – laundry list versus “nothing about us without us”**
- **What no theory?**
- **Methodological incoherence – unknowing positivism/positivism creep, checklists (gaahhh!)**
- **Not reflexively open**



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Common problems 2: Themes

“Themes emerged” and other troubles...

- Too many themes (and sub-themes...)
- Topic summaries, not themes
- Confusing and conflating themes and codes
- Themes are your destination, not your starting point – you can't “code for themes”



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Common problems 3: Unrecognised diversity

We are family!

- **Following Braun and Clarke... (then not!) – TA is a family, not a standardised approach**
- **Reflexive TA unfit for purpose**



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Let's get real!

- Pragmatics/practicalities always shape research
- Being pragmatic/practical is not a dirty compromise!
- Ask:
- How many themes can I realistically report in sufficient depth and detail in 8000 words?



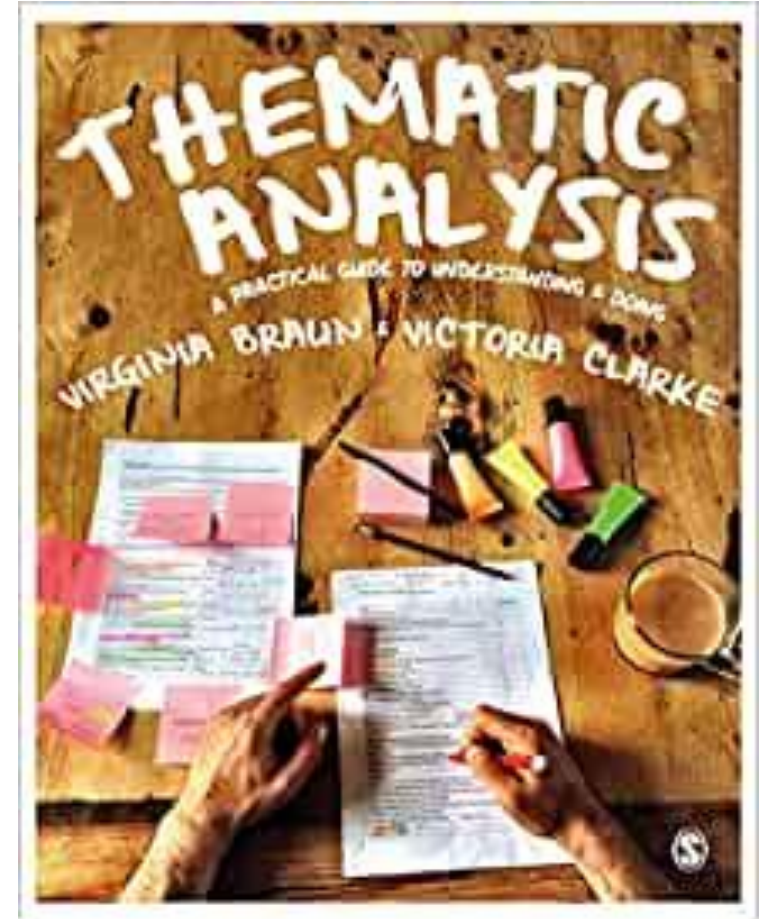
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Further resources 1

- www.thematicanalysis.net
- <https://edpsy.org.uk/blog/2021/tips-on-writing-a-qualitative-dissertation-or-thesis-from-braun-clarke-part-1/>
- Chapter 5 in *Thematic Analysis*
- Chapter 13 in *Successful Qualitative Research*

For explaining *why* reflexive TA:

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I not use TA? Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 21*(1), 37-47.



Further resources 2

For writing the methodology section:

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative Psychology*, 9(1), 3–26.

For common problems to avoid:

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 18(3), 328–352.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Is thematic analysis used well in health psychology? A critical review of published research, with recommendations for quality practice and reporting. *Health Psychology Review*.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a *knowing* researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 24(1), 1–6.

References

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- Tuval-Mashiach, R. (2017). Raising the curtain: The importance of transparency in qualitative research. *Qualitative Psychology*, 4(2), 126-138.
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