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: 112).

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?

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

1,253 Retweets 167 Quotes 9,440 Likes
Independence with impact
The “four-act play” of research reporting
Reflexive thematic analysis - methodology

1. Introduction/literature review
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‘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

38 Likes
QUESTIONS
“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
Independence with impact
The “four-act play” of research reporting
Reflexive thematic analysis – integrate or separate?

1. Introduction/literature review
2. Methodology
3. Results/Findings
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5. 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: 112).

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Independence with impact
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
Independence with impact

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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”
Independence with impact
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
Independence with impact
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?
QUESTIONS
Further resources 1

- [www.thematicanalysis.net](http://www.thematicanalysis.net)
- Chapter 5 in *Thematic Analysis*
- Chapter 13 in *Successful Qualitative Research*

For explaining why reflexive TA:
Further resources 2

For writing the methodology section:

For common problems to avoid:
References


Smith, B. (2018). Generalizability in qualitative research: Misunderstandings, opportunities and recommendations for the sport and exercise sciences. Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 10(1), 137–149.


