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Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3 (2). pp. 77-101. ISSN 1478-0887 Available from: http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735

Using thematic analysis in psychology

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MS Word Length (incl. references, notes, tables and figures): 13510

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Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated, rarely-acknowledged, yet widely-used qualitative analytic method within psychology. In this paper, we argue that it offers an accessible and theoretically-flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. We outline what thematic analysis is, locating it in relation to other qualitative analytic methods that search for themes or patterns, and in relation to different epistemological and ontological positions. We then provide clear guidelines to those wanting to start thematic analysis, or conduct it in a more deliberate and rigorous way, and consider potential pitfalls in conducting thematic analysis. Finally, we outline the disadvantages and advantages of thematic analysis. We conclude by advocating thematic analysis as a useful and flexible method for qualitative research in and beyond psychology.

Keywords: thematic analysis, qualitative psychology, patterns, epistemology, flexibility

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Using thematic analysis in psychology

Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated and rarely-acknowledged, yet widely-used qualitative analytic method (see Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001) within and beyond psychology. In this paper, we aim to fill what we, as researchers and teachers in qualitative psychology, have experienced as a current gap: the absence of a paper which adequately outlines the theory, application, and evaluation of thematic analysis, and one which does so in a way accessible to students and those not particularly familiar with qualitative research.[1] That is, we aim to write a paper which will be useful as both a teaching and research tool in qualitative psychology. Therefore, in this paper we discuss theory and method for thematic analysis, and clarify the similarities and differences between different approaches that share features in common with a thematic approach.

Qualitative approaches are incredibly diverse, complex and nuanced (Holloway & Todres, 2003), and thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. It is the first qualitative method of analysis that researchers should learn, as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. Indeed, Holloway and Todres (2003: 347) identify "thematizing meanings" as one of a few shared generic skills across qualitative analysis.[2] For this reason, Boyatzis (1998) characterises it not as a specific method but as a tool to use across different methods. Similarly, Ryan and Bernard (2000) locate thematic coding as a process performed *within* 'major' analytic traditions (such as grounded theory), rather than a specific approach in its own right. We argue thematic analysis should be considered a method in its own right.

One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility. Qualitative analytic methods can be roughly divided into two camps. Within the first, there are those tied to, or stemming from, a particular theoretical or epistemological position. For some of these - such as conversation analysis ([CA] e.g., Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998) and interpretative phenomenological analysis ([IPA] e.g., Smith & Osborn, 2003) – there is (as yet) relatively limited variability in how the method is applied, within that framework. In essence, one recipe guides analysis. For others of these – such as grounded theory (e.g., Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998), discourse analysis ([DA] e.g., Burman & Parker, 1993; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Willig, 2003) or narrative analysis (e.g., Murray, 2003; Riessman, 1993) – there are different manifestations of the method, from within the broad

theoretical framework. Second, there are methods that are essentially independent of theory and epistemology, and can be applied *across* a range of theoretical and epistemological approaches. Although often (implicitly) framed as a realist/experiential method (e.g., Aronson, 1994; Roulston, 2001), thematic analysis is actually firmly in the second camp, and is compatible with both essentialist and constructionist paradigms within psychology (we discuss this later). Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data.

Given the advantages of the flexibility of thematic analysis, it is important that we are clear that we are not trying to limit this flexibility. However, an absence of clear and concise guidelines around thematic analysis means that the 'anything goes' critique of qualitative research (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2002) may well apply in some instances. With this paper, we hope to strike a balance between demarcating thematic analysis clearly – i.e., explaining what it is, and how you do it - and ensuring flexibility in relation to how it is used, so that it does not become limited and constrained, and lose one of its key advantages. Indeed, a clear demarcation of this method will be useful to ensure that those who use thematic analysis can make active choices about the particular form of analysis they are engaged in. Therefore, this paper seeks to celebrate the flexibility of the method, *and* provide a vocabulary and 'recipe' for people to start doing thematic analysis in a way that is theoretically and methodologically sound.[3] As we will show, what is important is that as well as applying a method to data, researchers make their (epistemological and other) assumptions explicit (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Qualitative psychologists need to be clear about what they are doing and why, and include the often-omitted 'how' they did their analysis in their reports (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

In this paper we outline: what thematic analysis is; a 6-phase guide to doing thematic analysis; potential pitfalls to avoid when doing thematic analysis; what makes good thematic analysis; and advantages and disadvantages of thematic analysis. Throughout, we provide examples from the research literature, and our own research. By providing examples we show the types of research questions and topics that thematic analysis can be used to study.

Before we begin, we need to define a few of the terms used throughout the paper. Data *corpus* refers to *all* data collected for a particular research project, while data *set* refers to all the data

from the corpus that is being used for a particular analysis. There are two main ways of choosing your data set (which approach you take depends on whether you are coming to the data with a specific question or not – see 'a number of decisions' below). First, your data set may consist of many or all individual data items within your data corpus. So, for example, in a project on female genital cosmetic surgery, Virginia's data corpus consists of interviews with surgeons, media items on the topic, and surgeon websites. For any particular analysis, her data set might just be the surgeon interviews, just the websites (Braun, 2005b), or it might combine surgeon data with some media data (e.g., Braun, 2005a). Second, your data set might be identified by a particular analytic interest in some topic in the data, and your data set then becomes all instances in the corpus where that topic is referred to. So in Virginia's example, if she was interested in how 'sexual pleasure' was talked about, her data set would consist of all instances across the entire data corpus that had some relevance to sexual pleasure. These two approaches might sometimes be combined to produce the data set. Data *item* is used to refer to each individual piece of data collected, which together make up the data set or corpus. A data item in this instance would be an individual surgeon interview, a television documentary, or one particular website. Finally, data *extract* refers to an individual coded chunk of data, which has been identified within, and extracted from, a data item. There will be many of these, taken from throughout the entire data set, and only a selection of these extracts will feature in the final analysis.

What is thematic analysis?

Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organises and describes your data set in (rich) detail. However, it also often goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998). The *range* of different possible thematic analyses will further be highlighted in relation to a number of decisions regarding it as a method (see below).

Thematic analysis is widely used, but there is no clear agreement about what thematic analysis is and how you go about doing it (see Attride-Stirling, 2001; Boyatzis, 1998; Tuckett, 2005, for other examples). It can be seen as a very poorly 'branded' method, in that it does not appear to exist as a 'named' analysis in the same way that other methods do (e.g., narrative analysis, grounded theory). In this sense, it is often not explicitly claimed as the method of analysis, when, in actuality, we

argue that a lot of analysis is essentially thematic - but is either claimed as something else (such as discourse analysis, or even content analysis (e.g., Meehan, Vermeer, & Windsor, 2000)) or not identified as any particular method at all – for example, data were "subjected to qualitative analysis for commonly recurring themes" (Braun & Wilkinson, 2003: 30). If we do not know how people went about analysing their data, or what assumptions informed their analysis, it is difficult to evaluate their research, and to compare and/or synthesise it with other studies on that topic, and it can impede other researchers carrying out related projects in the future (Attride-Stirling, 2001). For these reasons alone, clarity around process and practice of method is vital. We hope that this paper will lead to more clarity around thematic analysis.

Relatedly, insufficient detail is often given to reporting the process and detail of analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). It is not uncommon to read of themes 'emerging' from the data (although this issue is not limited to thematic analysis). For example, Singer and Hunter's (1999: 67) thematic discourse analysis of women's experiences of early menopause identified that "several themes emerged" during the analysis. Rubin and Rubin (1995: 226) claim that analysis is exciting because "you discover themes and concepts embedded throughout your interviews". An account of themes 'emerging' or being 'discovered' is a passive account of the process of analysis, and it denies the *active* role the researcher always plays in identifying patterns/themes, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers (Taylor & Ussher, 2001).[4] The language of 'themes emerging':

> Can be misinterpreted to mean that themes 'reside' in the data, and if we just look hard enough they will 'emerge' like Venus on the half shell. If themes 'reside' anywhere, they reside in our heads from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them. (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997: 205-6)

It is important at this point for us to acknowledge our own theoretical positions and values in relation to qualitative research. We do not subscribe to a naïve realist view of qualitative research where the researcher can simply 'give voice' (see Fine, 2002) to their participants. As Fine (2002: 218) argues, even a 'giving voice' approach "involves carving out unacknowledged pieces of narrative evidence that we select, edit, and deploy to border our arguments". However, nor do we think there is one ideal theoretical framework for conducting qualitative research, or indeed one

ideal method. What is important is that the theoretical framework and methods match what the researcher wants to know, and that they acknowledge these decisions, and recognise them *as* decisions.

Thematic analysis differs from other analytic methods that seek to describe patterns across qualitative data – such as 'thematic' discourse analysis, thematic decomposition analysis, IPA and grounded theory.[5] Both IPA and grounded theory seek patterns in the data, but are theoretically bounded. IPA is wed to a phenomenological epistemology (Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Osborn, 2003), which gives experience primacy (Holloway & Todres, 2003), and is about understanding people's everyday experience of reality, in great detail, so as to gain an understanding of the phenomenon in question (McLeod, 2001). To complicate matters, grounded theory comes in different versions (Charmaz, 2002). Regardless, the goal of a grounded theory analysis is to generate a plausible – and useful - theory of the phenomena that is grounded in the data (McLeod, 2001). However, in our experience, grounded theory seems increasingly to be used in a way that is essentially grounded theory 'lite' - as a set of procedures for coding data very much akin to thematic analysis. Such analyses do not appear to fully subscribe to the theoretical commitments of a 'full-fat' grounded theory, which requires analysis to be directed towards theory development (Holloway & Todres, 2003). We argue, therefore, that a 'named and claimed' *thematic* analysis means researchers need not subscribe to the implicit theoretical commitments of grounded theory if they do not wish to produce a fully worked-up grounded-theory analysis.

The term thematic discourse analysis is used to refer to a wide range of pattern-type analysis of data, ranging from thematic analysis within a social constructionist epistemology (i.e., where patterns are identified as socially produced, but no discursive analysis is conducted), to forms of analysis very much akin to the interpretative repertoire form of DA (Clarke, 2005). Thematic decomposition analysis (e.g., Stenner, 1993; Ussher & Mooney-Somers, 2000) is a specifically-named form of 'thematic' discourse analysis which identifies patterns (themes, stories) within data, and theorises language as constitutive of meaning and meaning as social.

These different methods share a search for certain themes or patterns across an (entire) data set, rather than *within* a data item, such as an individual interview or interviews from one person, as in the case of biographical or case-study forms of analysis such as narrative analysis (e.g., Murray, 2003; Riessman, 1993). In this sense they more or less overlap with thematic analysis. As thematic

analysis does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches such as grounded theory and DA, it can offer a more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in a qualitative research career.

In contrast to IPA or grounded theory (and other methods like narrative, discourse or CA), thematic analysis is not wed to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and so it can be used within different theoretical frameworks (although not all), and can be used to do different things within them. Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society. It can also be a 'contextualist' method, sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism, and characterised by theories such as critical realism (e.g., Willig, 1999), which acknowledge the ways individuals make meaning of their experience, and, in turn, the ways the broader social context impinges on those meanings, while retaining focus on the material and other limits of 'reality'. Therefore, thematic analysis can be a method which works both to reflect reality, and to unpick or unravel the surface of 'reality'. However, it is important that the theoretical position of a thematic analysis is made clear, as this is all too often left unspoken (and is then typically a realist account). Any theoretical framework carries with it a number of assumptions about the nature of the data, what they represent in terms of the 'the world', 'reality', and so forth. A good thematic analysis will make this transparent.

A number of decisions

Thematic analysis involves a number of choices which are often not made explicit (or are certainly typically not discussed in the method section of papers), but which need *explicitly* to be considered and discussed. In practice, these questions should be considered before analysis (and sometimes even collection) of the data begins, and there needs to be an ongoing reflexive dialogue on the part of the researcher or researchers with regards to these issues, throughout the analytic process. The method section of Taylor and Ussher's (2001) thematic discourse analysis of S&M provides a good example of research which presents this process explicitly; the method section of Braun & Wilkinson (2003) does not.

What counts as a theme?

A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set. An important question to address in terms of coding is what counts as a pattern/theme, or what 'size' does a theme need to be? This is a question of prevalence both in terms of space within each data item, and prevalence across the entire data set. Ideally there will be a number of instances of the theme across the data set, but more instances do not *necessarily* mean the theme itself is more crucial. As this is qualitative analysis, there is no hard-and-fast answer to the question of what proportion of your data set needs to display evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme. It is not the case that if it was present in 50% of one's data items, it would be a theme, but if it was present only in 47%, then it would not be. Nor is it the case that a theme is only something that many data items give considerable attention to, rather than a sentence or two. A theme might be given considerable space in some data items, and little or none in others, or it might appear in relatively little of the data set. So researcher judgement is necessary to determine what a theme is. Our initial guidance around this is that you need to retain some flexibility, and rigid rules really do not work. (The question of prevalence gets revisited in relation to themes and sub-themes, as the refinement of analysis [see later] will often result in overall themes, and sub-themes within those.)

Furthermore, the 'keyness' of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question. For example, in Victoria's research on representations of lesbians and gay parents on 26 talk shows (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2004), she identified six 'key' themes. These six themes were not necessarily the most prevalent themes across the data set – they appeared in between 2 and 22 of the 26 talk shows - but together they captured an important element of the way in which lesbians and gay men 'normalise' their families in talk show debates. In this instance, her thematic analysis was driven by this particular analytic question. How she 'measured' prevalence is relevant, as prevalence can be determined in a number of different ways. Prevalence was counted at the level of the data item (i.e., did a theme appear anywhere in each individual talk show). Alternatively, it could have been counted in terms of the number of different speakers who articulated the theme, across the entire data set, or each individual occurrence of the theme across the entire data set (which raises complex questions about where an 'instance' begins and ends within an extended sequence of talk,

see Riessman, 1993). Because prevalence was not crucial to the analysis presented, Victoria chose the most straightforward form, but it is important to note there is no right or wrong method for determining prevalence. Part of the flexibility of thematic analysis is that it allows you to determine themes (and prevalence) in a number of ways. What is important is that you are consistent in how you do this within any particular analysis.

There are various 'conventions' for representing prevalence in thematic (and other qualitative) analysis that does not provide a quantified measure (unlike much content analysis, Wilkinson, 2000) – for instance: "the majority of participants" (Meehan et al., 2000: 372), "many participants" (Taylor & Ussher, 2001: 298), or "a number of participants" (Braun, Gavey, & McPhillips, 2003: 249). Such descriptors work rhetorically to suggest a theme *really* existed in the data, and to convince us they are reporting truthfully about the data. But do they tell us much? This is perhaps one area where more debate needs to occur about how and why we might represent the prevalence of themes in the data, and, indeed, whether, if, and why prevalence is particularly important.

A rich description of the data set, or a detailed account of one particular aspect

It is important to determine the type of analysis you want to do, and the claims you want to make, in relation to your data set. For instance, you might wish to provide a rich thematic description of your entire data set, so that the reader gets a sense of them predominant or important themes. In this case, the themes you identify, code, and analyse would need to be an accurate reflection of the content of the *entire* data set. In such an analysis, some depth and complexity is necessarily lost (particularly if you are writing a short dissertation or article with strict word limits), but a rich overall description is maintained. This might be a particularly useful method when you are investigating an under-researched area, or with participants whose views on the topic are not known.

An alternative use of thematic analysis is to provide a more detailed and nuanced account of one particular theme, or group of themes, within the data. This might relate to a specific question or area of interest within the data (a semantic approach – see below), or to a particular 'latent' theme (see below) across the whole or majority of the data set. An example of this would be Victoria's talk show paper, discussed previously (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2004), which examined normalisation in lesbians' and gay men's accounts of parenting.

Inductive vs theoretical thematic analysis

Themes or patterns within data can be identified in one of two primary ways in thematic analysis: in an inductive or 'bottom up' way (e.g., see Frith & Gleeson, 2004), or in a theoretical or deductive or 'top down' way (e.g., see Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997). An inductive approach means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 1990) (as such, this form of thematic analysis bears some similarity to grounded theory). In this approach, if the data have been collected specifically for the research (e.g., via interview or focus group) the themes identified may bear little relationship to the specific question that were asked of the participants. They would also not be driven by the researcher's theoretical interest in the area or topic. Inductive analysis is therefore a process of coding the data *without* trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions. In this sense, this form of thematic analysis is data-driven. However, it is important to note, as we discussed earlier, that researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum.

In contrast, a 'theoretical' thematic analysis would tend to be driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area, and is thus more explicitly analyst-driven. This form of thematic analysis tends to provide less a rich description of the data overall, and more a detailed analysis of some aspect of the data. The choice between inductive and theoretical maps onto how and why you are coding the data as well. You can either code for a quite specific research question (which maps onto the more theoretical approach) or the specific research question can evolve through the coding process (which maps onto the inductive approach).

For example, if a researcher was interested in talk about heterosex, and had collected interview data, with an inductive approach they would read and re-read the data for any themes related to heterosex, and code diversely, without paying attention to the themes that previous research on the topic might have identified. For example, the researcher would not look to Hollway's (1989) influential research identifying discourses of heterosex, and code *just* for male sexual drive, have/hold or permissive discourse themes. In contrast, with a theoretical approach, the researcher may well be interested in the way permissiveness plays out across the data, and focus on that particular feature in coding the data. What this would then result in is a number of themes around

permissiveness, which may include, speak to, or expand on something approximating Hollway's original theme.

Semantic or latent themes

Another decision revolves around the 'level' at which themes are to be identified: at a semantic or explicit level, or at a latent or interpretative level (Boyatzis, 1998).[6] A thematic analysis typically focuses exclusively or primarily on one level. With a semantic approach, the themes are identified within the explicit or surface meanings of the data and the analyst is not looking for anything *beyond* what a participant has said or what has been written. Ideally, the analytic process involves a progression from *description*, where the data have simply been organised to show patterns in semantic content, and summarised, to *interpretation*, where there is an attempt to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications (Patton, 1990), often in relation to previous literature (see Frith & Gleeson, 2004, for an excellent example of this).

In contrast, a thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the *underlying* ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies - that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data. If we imagine our data three-dimensionally as an uneven blob of jelly, the semantic approach would seek to describe the surface of the jelly, its form and meaning, while the latent approach would seek identify the features that gave it that particular form and meaning. Thus for latent thematic analysis, the development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work, and the analysis that is produced is not just description, but is already theorised.

Analysis within this latter tradition tends to come from a constructionist paradigm (e.g., Burr, 1995), and in this form, thematic analysis overlaps with some forms of 'discourse analysis' (which are sometimes specifically referred to as 'thematic discourse analysis' (e.g., Singer & Hunter, 1999; Taylor & Ussher, 2001)), where broader assumptions, structures and/or meanings are theorised as underpinning what is actually articulated in the data. Increasingly, a number of discourse analysts are also revisiting psycho-analytic modes of interpretation (e.g., Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), and latent thematic analysis would also be compatible with that framework.

Epistemology: essentialist/realist vs constructionist thematic analysis

As we have argued, thematic analysis can be conducted within both realist/essentialist and constructionist paradigms, although the outcome and focus will be different from each. The question of epistemology is usually determined when a research project is being conceptualised, although epistemology may also raise its head again during analysis, when the research focus may shift to an interest in different aspects of the data. The research epistemology guides what you can say about your data, and informs how you theorise meaning. For instance, with an essentialist/realist approach, you can theorise motivations, experience, and meaning in a straight-forward way, because a simple, largely unidirectional relationship is assumed between meaning and experience and language (language reflects and enables us to articulate meaning and experience) (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Widdicombe & Wooffitt, 1995).

In contrast, from a constructionist perspective, meaning and experience are socially produced and reproduced, rather than inhering within individuals (Burr, 1995). Therefore, thematic analysis conducted within a constructionist framework cannot and does not seek to focus on motivation or individual psychologies, but instead seeks to theorise the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided. Thematic analysis that focuses on 'latent' themes tends to be more constructionist, and it also tends to start to overlap with thematic discourse analysis at this point. However, not all 'latent' thematic analysis is constructionist.

The many questions of qualitative research

It is worth briefly noting that qualitative research involves a series of questions, and there is a need to be clear about the relationship between these different questions. First, there is the overall research question or questions that drive the project. A research question might be very broad (and exploratory), such as 'how is lesbian and gay parenting constructed?' or 'what are the meanings of the vagina?' Narrower research questions might be 'how and why is lesbian and gay parenting normalised?' (Clarke & Kitzinger, 2004), or 'what are the discourses around vaginal size?' (see Braun & Kitzinger, 2001). These narrow questions may be part of a broader overarching research question, and if so, the analyses they inform would also provide answers to the overall research question. Although all projects are guided by research questions, these may also be refined as a project progresses.

Second, if data from interviews or focus groups have been collected, there are the questions that participants have responded to. Finally, there are the questions that guide the coding and analysis of the data. There is no necessary relationship between these three, and indeed, it is often desirable that there is a disjuncture between them. Some of the worst examples of 'thematic' analysis we have read have simply used the questions put to participants as the 'themes' identified in the 'analysis' – although in such instances, there really is not any analysis done at all!

To sum up, thematic analysis involves the searching *across* a data set – be that a number of interviews or focus groups, or a range of texts – to find repeated patterns of meaning. The exact form and product of thematic analysis varies, as indicated above, and so it is important that the questions outlined above are considered before and during thematic analyses. Those approaches which consider *specific* aspects, latent themes and are constructionist tend to often cluster together, while those that consider meanings across the whole data set, semantic themes, and are realist often cluster together. However, there are no hard-and-fast rules in relation to this, and different combinations are possible. What is important is that the finished product contains an account – not necessarily that detailed – of what was done, and why. So what *does* one actually do? We now provide what is hopefully a straightforward step-by-step guide to conducting thematic analysis.

Doing thematic analysis: a step-by-step guide

Some of the phases of thematic analysis are similar to the phases of other qualitative research, so these stages are not necessarily all unique to thematic analysis. The process starts when the analyst begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data – this may be during data collection. The endpoint is the reporting of the content and meaning of patterns (themes) in the data, where "themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs the investigators identify [sic] before, during, and after analysis" (Ryan & Bernard, 2000: 780). Analysis involves a constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analysing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing. Writing is an integral *part* of analysis, not something that takes place at the end, as it does with statistical analyses. Therefore, writing should begin in phase one, with the jotting down of ideas and potential coding schemes, and continue right through the entire coding/analysis process.

There are different positions regarding when you should engage with the literature relevant to your analysis – with some arguing that early reading can narrow your analytic field of vision, leading you to focus on some aspects of the data at the expense of other potential crucial aspects. Others argue that engagement with the literature can enhance your analysis by sensitising you to more subtle features of the data (Tuckett, 2005). Therefore, there is no one right way to proceed with reading, for thematic analysis, although a more inductive approach would be enhanced by not engaging with literature in the early stages of analysis, whereas a theoretical approach requires engagement with the literature prior to analysis.

We provide an outline to guide you through the six phases of analysis, and offer examples to demonstrate the process.[7] The different phases are usefully summarised in Table 1. It is important to recognise that qualitative analysis guidelines are exactly that – they are not rules, and, following the basic precepts, will need to be applied flexibility to fit the research questions and data (Patton, 1990). Moreover, analysis is not a *linear* process where you simply move from one phase to the next. Instead, it is more *recursive* process, where you move back and forth as needed, throughout the phases. It is also a process that develops over time (Ely et al., 1997), and should not be rushed.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Phase 1: familiarising yourself with your data

When you engage in analysis, you may have collected the data yourself, or it may have been given to you. If you collected it through interactive means, you will come to the analysis with some prior knowledge of the data, and possibly some initial analytic interests or thoughts. Regardless, it is vital that you immerse yourself in the data to the extent that you are familiar with the depth and breadth of the content. Immersion usually involves 'repeated reading' of the data, and reading the data in an *active* way - searching for meanings, patterns and so on. It is ideal to read through the entire data set at least once before you begin your coding, as your ideas, identification of possible patterns will be shaped as you read through.

Whether or not you are aiming for an overall or detailed analysis, are searching for latent or semantic themes, or are data- or theoretically-driven will inform how the reading proceeds. Regardless, it is important to be familiar with all aspects of your data. At this phase, one of the reasons why qualitative research tends to use far smaller samples than, for example, questionnaire

data will become apparent – the reading and re-reading of data is time consuming. It is, therefore, tempting to skip over this phase, or be selective. We would strongly advise against this, as this phase provides the bedrock for the rest of the analysis.

During this phase, it is a good idea to start taking notes or marking ideas for coding that you will then go back to in subsequent phases. Once you have done this, you are ready to begin the more formal coding process. In essence, coding continues to be developed and defined throughout the entire analysis.

Transcription of verbal data

If you are working with verbal data such as interviews, television programmes or political speeches, the data will need to be transcribed into written form in order to conduct a thematic analysis. The process of transcription, while it may seen time-consuming, frustrating, and at times boring, can be an excellent way to start familiarising yourself with the data (Riessman, 1993). Further, some researchers even argue it should be seen as "a key phase of data analysis within interpretative qualitative methodology" (Bird, 2005: 227), and recognised as an *interpretative* act, where meanings are created, rather than simply a mechanical one of putting spoken sounds on paper (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).

Various conventions exist for transforming spoken texts into written texts (see Edwards & Lampert, 1993; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Some systems of transcription have been developed for specific forms of analysis – such as the 'Jefferson' system for CA (see Atkinson & Heritage, 1984; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 1998). However, thematic analysis, even constructionist thematic analysis, does not require the same level of detail in the transcript as conversation, discourse or even narrative analysis. As there is no one way to conduct thematic analysis, there is no one set of guidelines to follow when producing a transcript. However, at a minimum it requires a rigorous and thorough 'orthographic' transcript – a 'verbatim' account of all verbal (and sometimes nonverbal [e.g., coughs]) utterances.[8] What is important is that the transcript retains the information you need, from the verbal account, and in a way which is 'true' to its original nature (e.g., punctuation added can alter the meaning of data - for example 'I hate it, you know. I do' versus 'I hate it. You know I do', Poland, 2002: 632), and that the transcription convention is practically suited to the purpose of analysis (Edwards, 1993).

As we have noted, the time spent in transcription is not wasted, as it informs the early stages of analysis, and you will develop a far more thorough understanding of your data through having transcribed it. Furthermore, the close attention needed to transcribe data may facilitate the close-reading and interpretative skills needed to analyse the data (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). If your data have already been, or will be, transcribed for you, it is important that you spend more time familiarising yourself with the data, and also check the transcripts back against the original audio recordings for 'accuracy' (as should always be done).

Phase 2: generating initial codes

Phase 2 begins when you have read and familiarised yourself with the data, and have generated an initial list of ideas about what is in the data and what is interesting about them. This phase then involves the production of initial codes from the data. Codes identify a feature of the data (semantic content or latent) that appears interesting to the analyst, and refer to "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998: 63). See Figure 1 for an example of codes applied to a short segment of data. The process of coding is part of analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994), as you are *organising* your data into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005). However, your coded data differs from the units of *analysis* (your themes) which are (often) broader. Your themes, which you start to develop in the next phase, are where the interpretative analysis of the data occurs, and in relation to which arguments about the phenomenon being examined are made (Boyatzis, 1998).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Coding will to some extent depend on whether the themes are more 'data-driven' or 'theory-driven' – in the former, the themes will depend on the data, but in the latter, you might approach the data with specific questions in mind that you wish to code around. It will also depend on whether you are aiming to code the content of the entire data set, or whether you are coding to identify particular (and possibly limited) features of the data set. Coding can be done either manually or through a software programme (see, e.g., Kelle, 2004; Seale, 2000, for discussion of software programmes).

Work systematically through the entire data set, giving full and *equal* attention to each data item, and identify interesting aspects in the data items that may form the basis of repeated patterns (themes) across the data set. There are a number of ways of actually coding extracts. If coding

manually, you can code your data by writing notes on the texts you're analysing, by using highlighters or coloured pens to indicate potential patterns, or by using 'post-it' notes to identify segments of data. You may initially identify the codes, and then match them up with data extracts that demonstrate that code, but it is important in this phase to ensure that all actual data extracts are coded, and then collated together within each code. This may involve copying extracts of data from individual transcripts or photocopying extracts of printed data, and collating each code together in separate computer files or using file cards. If using computer software, you code by tagging and naming selections of text within each data item.

Key advice for this phase is: a) code for as many potential themes/patterns as possible (time permitting) – you never know what might be interesting later; b) code extracts of data inclusively – i.e., keep a little of the surrounding data if relevant, a common criticism of coding is that the context is lost (Bryman, 2001); and c) remember that you can code individual extracts of data in as many different 'themes' as they fit into - so an extract may be uncoded, coded once, or coded many times, as relevant. Note that no data set is without contradiction, and a satisfactory thematic 'map' that you will eventually produce - an overall conceptualisation of the data patterns, and relationships between them[9] - does not have to smooth out or ignore the tensions and inconsistencies within and across data items. It is important to retain accounts which depart from the dominant story in the analysis, so do not ignore these in your coding.

Phase 3: searching for themes

Phase 3 begins when all data have been initially coded & collated, and you have a long list of the different codes you have identified across your data set. This phase, which re-focuses the analysis at the broader level of themes, rather than codes, involves sorting the different codes into potential themes, and collating all the relevant coded data extracts within the identified themes. Essentially, you are starting to analyse your codes, and consider how different codes may combine to form an overarching theme. It may be helpful at this phase to use visual representations to help you sort the different codes into themes. You might use tables, mind-maps, or you might write the name of each code (and a brief description) on a separate piece of paper and play around with organising them into theme-piles. A thematic map of this early stage can be seen in Figure 2 (the examples in Figures 2 to 4 come from the analysis presented in Braun and Wilkinson (2003) of

women's talk about the vagina). This is when you start thinking about the relationship between codes, between themes, and between different levels of themes (e.g., main overarching themes and sub-themes within them). Some initial codes may go on to form main themes, whereas others may form sub-themes, and others still may be discarded. At this stage you may also have a set of codes that do not seem to belong anywhere, and it is perfectly acceptable to create a 'theme' called miscellaneous to house the codes – possibly temporarily - that do not seem to fit into your main themes.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

You end this phase with a collection of candidate themes, and sub-themes, and all extracts of data that have been coded in relation to them. At this point, you will start to have a sense of the significance of individual themes. However, do not abandon anything at this stage, as without looking at all the extracts in detail (the next phase) it is uncertain whether the themes hold as they are, or whether some need to be combined, refined and separated, or discarded.

Phase 4: reviewing themes

Phase 4 begins when you have devised a set of candidate themes, and it involves the refinement of those themes. During this phase, it will become evident that some candidate themes are not really themes (e.g., if there are not enough data to support them, or the data are too diverse), while others might collapse into each other (e.g., two apparently separate themes might form one theme). Other themes might need to be broken down into separate themes. Patton's (1990) dual criteria for judging categories - *internal homogeneity* and *external heterogeneity* - are worth considering here. Data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes.

This phase involves two levels of reviewing and refining your themes. Level one involves reviewing at the level of the coded data extracts. This means you need to read all the collated extracts for each theme, and consider whether they appear to form a coherent pattern. If your candidate themes appear to form a coherent pattern, you then move on to the second level of this phase. If your candidate themes do not fit, you will need to consider whether the theme itself is problematic, or whether some of the data extracts within it simply do not fit there – in which case, you would rework your theme, creating a new theme, finding a home for those extracts that do not

currently work in an already-existing theme, or discarding them from the analysis. Once you are satisfied that your candidate themes adequately capture the contours of the coded data – once you have a candidate 'thematic map' - you are ready to move on to level two of this phase. The outcome of this refinement process can be seen in the thematic map presented in Figure 3.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Level two involves a similar process, but in relation to the entire data set. At this level, you consider the validity of individual themes in relation to the data set, but also whether your candidate thematic map 'accurately' reflects the meanings evident in the data set as a whole. To some extent, what counts as 'accurate representation' depends on your theoretical and analytic approach. However, in this phase you re-read your entire data set for two purposes. The first is, as discussed, to ascertain whether the themes 'work' in relation to the data set. The second is to code any additional data within themes that has been missed in earlier coding stages. The need for re-coding from the data set is to be expected as coding is an ongoing organic process.

If the thematic map works, then you move on to the next phase. However, if the map does not fit the data set, you need to return to further reviewing and refining your coding until you have devised a thematic map that you are satisfied with. In so doing, it is possible that you will identify potential new themes, and you might need to start coding for these as well, if you are interested in them. However, a word of warning: as coding data and generating themes could go on ad infinitum, it is important not to get over-enthusiastic with endless re-coding. It is impossible to provide clear guidelines on when to stop, but when your refinements are not adding anything substantial, stop! If the process of recoding is only fine-tuning and making more nuanced a coding frame that already works – i.e., it fits the data well – recognise this and stop. Consider it like editing written work - you could endlessly edit your sentences and paragraphs, but after a few editing turns, any further work is usually unnecessary refinement – like rearranging the hundreds and thousands on an already nicely decorated cake.

At the end of this phase, you should have a fairly good idea of what your different themes are, how they fit together, and the overall story they tell about the data.

Phase 5: defining and naming themes

Phase 5 begins when you have a satisfactory thematic map of your data – see Figure 4 for the final refinements of Virginia's thematic map. At this point, you then define and further refine the themes that you will present for your analysis, and analyse the data within them. By 'define and refine' we mean identifying the 'essence' of what each theme is about (as well as the themes overall), and determining what aspect of the data each theme captures. It is important not to try and get a theme to do too much, or to be too diverse and complex. You do this by going back to collated data extracts for each theme, and organising them into a coherent and internally consistent account, with accompanying narrative. It is vital that you do not *just* paraphrase the content of the data extracts presented, but identify what is interesting about them and why!

[INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE]

For each individual theme, you need to conduct and write a detailed analysis. As well as identifying the 'story' that each theme tells, it is important to consider how it fits into the broader overall 'story' that you are telling about your data, in relation to your research question or questions, to ensure there is not too much overlap between themes. So you need to consider the themes themselves, and each theme in relation to the others. As part of the refinement, you will identify whether or not a theme contains any sub-themes. Sub-themes are essentially themes-within-a-theme. They can be useful for giving structure to a particularly large and complex theme, and also for demonstrating the hierarchy of meaning within the data. For instance, in one of Virginia's analyses of women's talk about the vagina, she identified two overarching themes in women's talk: the vagina as liability, and the vagina as asset (Braun & Wilkinson, 2003). Within each theme, three sub-themes were identified: for liability the sub-themes were 'nastiness and dirtiness', 'anxieties' and 'vulnerability'; for asset the sub-themes were 'satisfaction', 'power' and 'pleasure'. However, these eventual final themes and sub-themes resulted from a process of refinement of initial themes and sub-themes, as shown in Figures 2 to 4.

It is important that by the end of this phase you can clearly define what your themes are, and what they are not. One test for this is to see whether you can describe the scope and content of each theme in a couple of sentences. If you cannot do this, further refinement of that theme may be needed. Although you will have already given your themes working titles, this is also the point to

start thinking about the names that you will give them in the final analysis. Names need to be concise, punchy, and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about.

Phase 6: producing the report

Phase 6 begins when you have a set of fully worked-out themes, and involves the final analysis and write-up of the report. The task of the write-up of a thematic analysis, whether it is for publication or for a research assignment or dissertation, is to tell the complicated story of your data in a way which convinces the reader of the merit and validity of your analysis. It is important that the analysis (the write-up of it, including data extracts) provides a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tell – within and across themes. Your write-up must provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data – i.e., enough data extracts to demonstrate the prevalence of the theme. Choose particularly vivid examples, or extracts which capture the essence of the point you are demonstrating, without unnecessary complexity. The extract should be easily identifiable as an example of the issue. However, your write-up needs to do *more* than just provide data. Extracts need to be embedded within an analytic narrative that compelling illustrates the story that you are telling about your data, and your analytic narrative needs to go *beyond* description of the data, and make an *argument* in relation to your research question.

Pinning down what interpretative analysis actually entails

It is difficult to specify exactly *what* interpretative analysis actually entails, particularly as the specifics of it will vary from study to study. As a first step we recommend looking at published examples of thematic analysis, particularly of the specific version you are planning to use (this is made somewhat more difficult in that thematic analysis is often not a named method, but you can find examples, e.g., Ellis & Kitzinger, 2002; Kitzinger & Willmott, 2002; Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). In order to provide a sense of the sorts of questions you should be asking of your data, and the sorts of analytic claims you should be seeking to make, we will discuss a particularly good example of an inductive thematic analysis, which emphasises understanding men's experiences in relation to the broader social context (see Frith & Gleeson, 2004).

Frith and Gleeson (2004) aim to explore how men's feelings about their bodies influence their clothing practices, and they use data gathered in qualitative questionnaires from 75 men to answer

this question. They report four themes: practicality of clothing choices; lack of concern about appearance; use of clothing to conceal or reveal the body; use of clothing to fit cultural ideals. Each theme is clearly linked back to the overall research question, but each is distinct. They provide a clear sense of the scope and diversity of each theme, using a combination of analyst narrative and illustrative data extracts. Where relevant, they broaden their analysis out, moving from a descriptive to an interpretative level (often relating their claims to existing literature). For example, in 'men value practicality' they make sense of men's accounts in relation to gender norms and stereotypes, linking the accounts individual men provided to the expectations that men – as members of society – face. What they do, as analysts, is relate the patterns of meaning in men's responses to an academic analysis of how gender operates. In so doing, they demonstrate the dual position that analysts need to take: as both cultural *members* and cultural *commentators*. Their 'discussion' section makes broader analytic statements about the overall story that the themes tell us about men's relationship with clothing. This story reveals that men "deliberately and strategically use clothing to manipulate their appearance to meet cultural ideals of masculinity" (Frith & Gleeson, 2004: 45), in a way more traditionally more associated with women. This analysis makes an important contribution in that it challenges perceived wisdom about clothing/appearance and masculinity.

As this example demonstrates, your analytic claims need to be grounded in, but go beyond, the 'surface' of the data, even for a 'semantic' level analysis. The sort of questions you need to be asking, towards the end phases of your analysis, include: 'what does this theme mean?' 'What are the assumptions underpinning it?' What are the implications of this theme?' 'What conditions are likely to have given rise to it?' 'Why do people talk about this thing in this particular way (as opposed to other ways)?' and 'What is the overall story the different themes reveal about the topic?' These sorts of questions should guide the analysis once you have a clear sense of your thematic map.

Potential pitfalls to avoid when doing thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is a relatively straight-forward form of qualitative analysis, which does not require the same detailed theoretical and technical knowledge that approaches like DA or CA do. It is relatively easy to conduct a good thematic analysis on qualitative data, even when you are still

learning qualitative techniques. However, there are a number of things which can result in a poor analysis. In this section, we identify these potential pitfalls, in the hope that they can be avoided.

The first of these is a failure to actually *analyse* the data at all! Thematic analysis is not just a collection of extracts strung together with little or no analytic narrative. Nor is it a selection of extracts with analytic comment that simply or primarily paraphrases their content. The extracts in thematic analysis are illustrative of the analytic points the researcher makes about the data, and should be used to illustrate/support an analysis that goes beyond their specific content, to make sense of the data, and tell the reader what it does or might mean – as discussed above. A second, associated, pitfall is the using of the data collection questions (such as from an interview schedule) as the 'themes' that are reported. In such a case, no analytic work has been done to identify themes across the entire data set, or make sense of the patterning of responses.

The third is a weak or unconvincing analysis, where the themes do not appear to work, where there is too much overlap between themes, or where the themes are not internally coherent and consistent. All aspects of the theme should cohere around a central idea or concept. This pitfall has occurred if, depending on what the analysis is trying to do, it fails adequately to capture the majority of the data, or fails to provide a rich description/interpretation of one or more aspects of the data. A weak or unconvincing analysis can also stem from a failure to provide adequate examples from the data – for example, only one or two extracts for a theme. This point is essentially about the rhetorics of presentation, and the need for the analysis to be convincing to someone who has not read your entire data set: "The 'analysis' of the material … is a deliberate and self-consciously artful creation by the researcher, and must be constructed to persuade the reader of the plausibility of an argument" (Foster & Parker, 1995: 204). In so doing, you avoid (the appearance of) what Bryman (1988) has referred to as 'anecdotalism' in qualitative research – where one or a few instances of a phenomenon are reified into a pattern or theme, when it or they are actually idiosyncratic. This is not to say that a few instances cannot be of interest, or revealing, but that it is important not to misrepresent them as an overarching theme.

The fourth pitfall is a mismatch between the data and the analytic claims that are made about it. In such an (unfounded) analysis, the claims cannot be supported by the data, or, in the worst case, the data extracts presented suggest another analysis or even contradict the claims. The researcher

needs to make sure that their interpretations and analytic points are consistent with the data extracts. A weak analysis does not appear to consider other obvious alternative readings of the data, or fails to consider variation (and even contradiction) in the account that is produced. A pattern in data is rarely, if ever, going to be 100% complete and non-contradicted, so an analysis which suggests that it is, without a thorough explanation, is open to suspicion. It is important to pick compelling examples to demonstrate the themes, so give this considerable thought.

The fifth involves a mismatch between theory and analytic claims, or between the research questions and the *form* of thematic analysis used. A good thematic analysis needs to make sure that the interpretations of the data are consistent with the theoretical framework. So, for instance, if you are working within an experiential framework, you would typically not make claims about the social construction of the research topic, and if you were doing constructionist thematic analysis you would not treat people's talk of experience as a transparent window on their world. Finally, even a good and interesting analysis which fails to spell out its theoretical assumptions, or clarify how it was undertaken, and for what purpose, is lacking crucial information (Holloway & Todres, 2003), and thus fails in one aspect.

What makes good thematic analysis?

One of the criticisms of qualitative research from those outside the field is the perception that 'anything goes'. For instance, this sentiment is echoed in the first sentence of Laubschagne's (2003) abstract: "For many scientists used to doing quantitative studies the whole concept of qualitative research is unclear, almost foreign, or 'airy fairy' - not 'real' research". However, although 'qualitative' research cannot be subjected to the same criteria as 'quantitative' approaches, it does provide methods of analysis that should be applied rigorously to the data. Furthermore, criteria for conducting good qualitative research – both data collection and analysis - do exist (e.g., Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Parker, 2004; Seale, 1999; Silverman, 2000; Yardley, 2000). The British Psychological Society offers relatively succinct online guidelines for assessing quality in qualitative research (see http://www.bps.org.uk/publications/journals/joop/qualitative-guidelines.cfm). 'Criteria' for assessing qualitative research is a not uncontroversial topic, with concerns raised about rigid criteria limiting freedom and stifling methodological development (Elliott et al., 1999;

Parker, 2004; Reicher, 2000). Reicher (2000) takes the critique further, by asking whether the incredibly diverse range of qualitative approaches *can* and *should* be subject to the same criteria.

Bracketing these critiques off, the issues raised in many general qualitative research assessment criteria can be more or less applied to thematic forms of analysis. As thematic analysis is a flexible method, you also need to be clear and explicit about what you are doing, and what you say you are doing needs to match up with what you actually do. In this sense, the theory and method need to be applied rigorously, and "rigour lies in devising a systematic method whose assumptions are congruent with the way one conceptualises the subject matter" (Reicher & Taylor, 2005: 549). A concise checklist of criteria to consider when determining whether you have generated a good thematic analysis is provided in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

So what does thematic analysis offer psychologists?

We now end this paper with some brief comments on the advantages and disadvantages of thematic analysis. As we have shown throughout this paper, thematic analysis is not a complex method. Indeed, as you can see from Table 3, its advantages are many. However, it is not without some disadvantages, which we will now briefly consider. Many of the disadvantages depend more on poorly conducted analyses or inappropriate research question, than on the method itself. Further, the flexibility of the method – which allows for a wide range of analytic options - means that the potential range of things that can be said about your data is broad. While this is an advantage, it can also be a disadvantage in that it makes developing specific guidelines for higher-phase analysis difficult, and can be potentially paralysing to the researcher trying to decide what aspects of their data to focus on. Another issue to consider is that a thematic analysis has limited interpretative power beyond mere description if it is not used within an existing theoretical framework that anchors the analytic claims that are made.

[INSERT TABLE 3 about here]

Other disadvantages appear when you consider thematic analysis in relation to some of the other qualitative analytic methods. For instance, unlike narrative or other biographical approaches, you are unable to retain a sense of continuity and contradiction through any one individual account, and these contradictions and consistencies across individual accounts may be revealing. In contrast to

methods like DA and CA, a simple thematic analysis does not allow the researcher to make claims about language use, or the fine-grained functionality of talk.

Finally, it is worth noting that thematic analysis currently has no particular kudos as an analytic method – this, we argue, stems from the very fact that it is poorly demarcated and claimed, yet widely used. This means that thematic analysis is often, or appears often to be, what is simply done by someone without the knowledge or skills to perform a supposedly more sophisticated – certainly more kudos-bearing – 'branded' form of analysis like grounded theory, IPA or DA. We hope this paper will change this view, as, as we have argued, a rigorous thematic approach can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions. What is important is choosing a method that is appropriate to your research question, rather than falling victim to 'methodolatry', where you are committed to method rather than topic/content or research questions (Holloway & Todres, 2003). Indeed, your method of analysis should be driven by both your research question and your broader theoretical assumptions. As we have demonstrated, thematic analysis is a flexible approach that can be used across a range of epistemologies and research questions.

[1] Boyatzis (1998) provides a much more detailed account of thematic analysis. However, we do not feel that it is a particularly accessible account for those unfamiliar with qualitative approaches. Moreover, his approach differs from ours in that, although he acknowledges the subjective dimension of qualitative analysis, his approach is ultimately, if often implicitly, located within a positivist empiricist paradigm.

[2] Dey's (1993) account of 'qualitative data analysis' which aims to identify shared techniques across the diverse range of qualitative methods, and demonstrate how to do 'qualitative analysis' reinforces this point in that his focus is largely thematic – but not claimed as such.

[3] Some authors, such as Potter (1997: 147-148) argue that one should not simply provide 'recipes' for qualitative methods, such as DA, because "a large part of doing discourse analysis is a craft skill, more like bike riding or sexing a chicken than following the recipe for a mild chicken rogan josh. … This makes it hard to describe and learn." While we do not disagree that the skills needed for qualitative analyses of all types need to be learned, others, such as McLeod (2001), argue that by not discussing the 'how to' of analysis, we keep certain methods mysterious (and thus elitist). Instead, if we want to make methods democratic and accessible – and indeed, to make qualitative research of all forms more understandable to those not trained in the methods, and arguably thus more popular – we need to provide concrete advice on how actually to do it. We are not questioning the importance of 'non-recipe' forms of training, but while 'recipes' necessarily diminish the complexity of certain methods, they are important for making methods accessible.

[4] Foster and Parker (1995) suggest one way to acknowledge the creative and active role of the analyst is to use the first person when writing.

[5] Content analysis is another method that can be used to identify patterns across qualitative data, and is sometimes treated as similar to thematic approaches (e.g., Wilkinson, 2000). However, content analysis tends to focus at a more micro level, often provides (frequency) counts (Wilkinson, 2000), and allows for quantitative analyses of initially qualitative data (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Thematic analysis differs from this in that themes tend *not* to be quantified (although sometimes they may be; and Boyatzis (1998) suggests thematic analysis can be used to transform qualitative

data into a quantitative form, and subject them statistical analyses), and the unit of analysis tends to be more than a word or phrase, which it typically is in content analysis.

[6] Boyatzis' (1998) definition of latent and manifest is somewhat narrower than our identification of latent and semantic, and he identifies thematic analysis as incorporating *both* to latent and manifest aspects. However, this results from the fact that he associates the process of interpretation with latent analysis – whereas we would argue that it should also be an important element of a semantic approach.

[7] We are assuming that you will be working with a 'good quality' data corpus and data set. We would argue that 'good data' are defined by a particular set of criteria regarding what, why, and how they were collected, and offer rich, detailed and complex accounts of the topic. Good data do not just provide a *surface* overview of the topic of interest, or *simply* reiterate a common-sense account. The challenge for the novice researcher is to interact with research participants in such a way that they generate rich and complex insights. Producing a good analysis of poor quality data is a far more demanding task for the analyst, although it can potentially be done by a skilled and experienced analyst.

[8] See Poland (2002) for a discussion of the problems with the idea of a 'verbatim' transcript, and what is left out, and retained, through this process.

[9] What we mean by thematic map is similar, but less detailed, than the 'codebook' Ryan and Bernard (2000) refer to, which involves the a detailed account of the hierarchical relationship between codes, as well as a description of each, their criteria, exemplars and counter examples, and other such detail. Like Boyatzis' (1998) account of a thematic code, this model is then applied to (and revised in relation to) the data. See figures 2 to 4 for visual representations of a thematic maps and its refinement. Another example of a thematic map – this time in table form – can be found in Frith & Gleeson (2004).

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Table 1: Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking in the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Table 2: A 15-Point Checklist of Criteria for Good Thematic Analysis

Process	No.	Criteria
Transcription	1	The data have been transcribed to an appropriate level of detail, and the transcripts have been checked against the tapes for 'accuracy'.
Coding	2	Each data item has been given equal attention in the coding process.
	3	Themes have not been generated from a few vivid examples (an anecdotal approach), but instead the coding process has been thorough, inclusive and comprehensive.
	4	All relevant extracts for all each theme have been collated.
	5	Themes have been checked against each other and back to the original data set.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7	Data have been analysed – interpreted, made sense of - rather than just paraphrased or described.
	8	Analysis and data match each other – the extracts illustrate the analytic claims.
	9	Analysis tells a convincing and well-organised story about the data and topic.
	10	A good balance between analytic narrative and illustrative extracts is provided.
Overall	11	Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately, without rushing a phase or giving it a once-over-lightly.
Written report	12	The assumptions about, and specific approach to, thematic analysis are clearly explicated.
	13	There is a good fit between what you claim you do, and what you show you have done – i.e., described method and reported analysis are consistent.
	14	The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the epistemological position of the analysis.
	15	The researcher is positioned as *active* in the research process; themes do not just 'emerge'.

Table 3: Advantages of Thematic Analysis

Flexibility.
Relatively easy and quick method to learn, and do.
Accessible to researchers with little or no experience of qualitative research.
Results are generally accessible to educated general public.
Useful method for working within participatory research paradigm, with participants as collaborators.
Can usefully summarise key features of a large body of data, and/or offer a 'thick description' of the data set.
Can highlight similarities *and* differences across the data set.
Can generate unanticipated insights.
Allows for social as well as psychological interpretations of data.
Can be useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development.

Data extract	Coded for
it's too much like hard work I mean how much paper have you got to sign to change a flippin' name no I I mean no I no we we have thought about it ((inaudible)) half heartedly and thought no no I jus- I can't be bothered, it's too much like hard work. (Kate F07a)	1. Talked about with partner 2. Too much hassle to change name

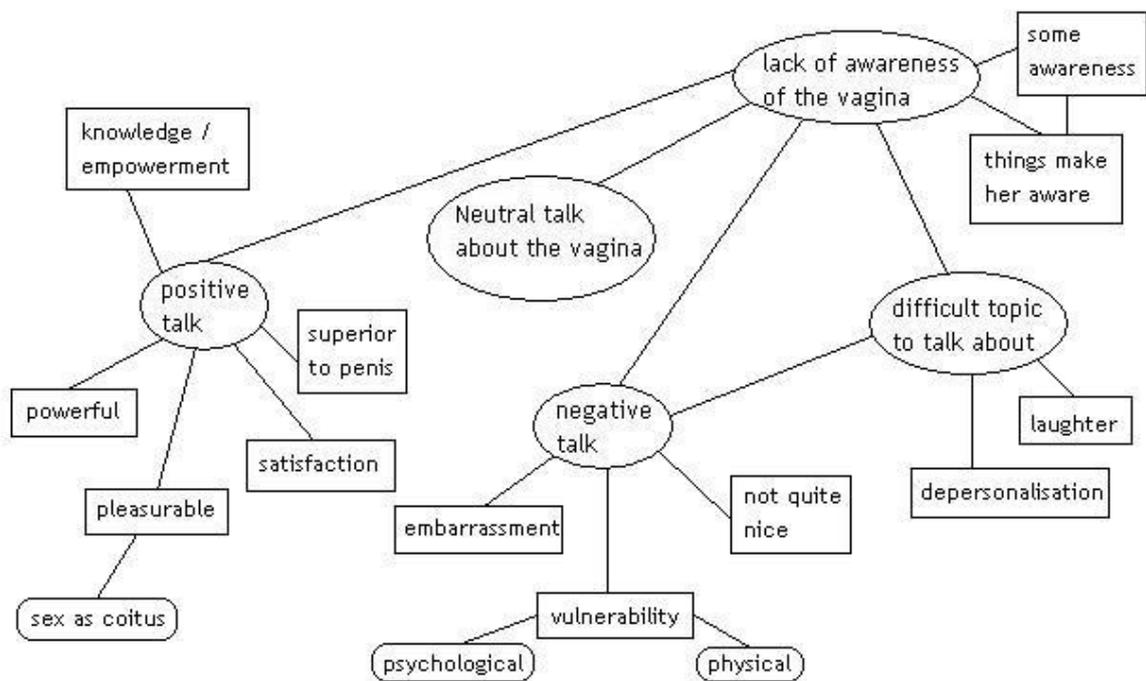**Figure 1: Data extract, with codes applied (from Clarke, Burns, & Burgoyne, 2005).**

Figure 2: Initial thematic map, showing five main themes (final analysis presented in Braun & Wilkinson, 2003).
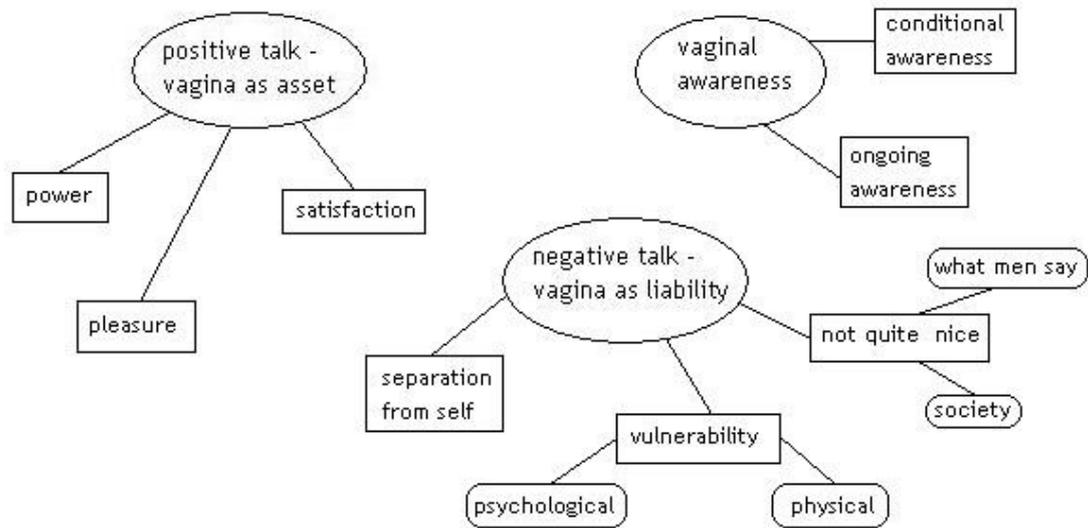
Figure 3: Developed thematic map, showing three main themes (final analysis presented in Braun & Wilkinson, 2003).
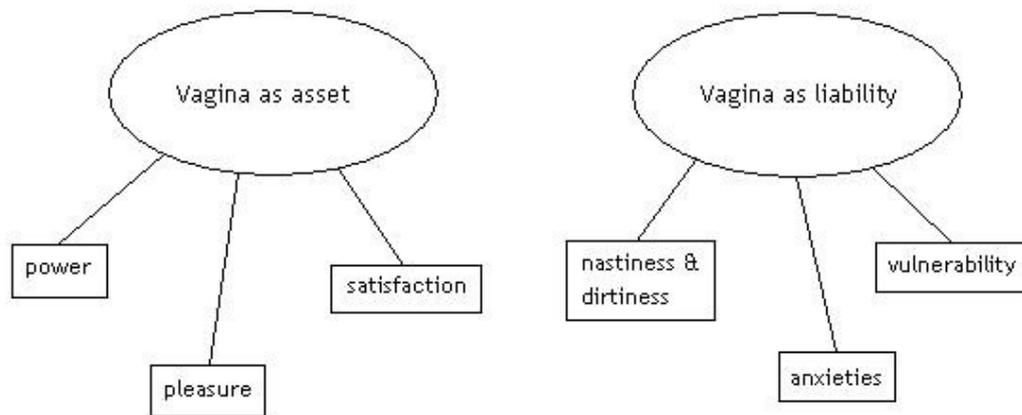
Figure 4: Final thematic map, showing final two main themes (see Braun & Wilkinson, 2003).