Thematic analysis

- Many different TA approaches – long history

- Popularized by Braun & Clarke from 2006
  - Their latest book published 2021
6 phases of reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2021)

Phase 1: Familiarizing yourself with the dataset

Phase 2: Coding

Phase 3: Generating initial themes

Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes

Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes

Phase 6: Writing up

Today...

powerup your thematic analysis

how can we harness MAXQDA tools powerfully for tasks involved in thematic analysis...?
Phase 1: familiarizing yourself with the dataset

Braun & Clarke 2021:35

‘immersion’ = working at the data-level
- Can happen slow, low or fast, high

Reading and re-reading (slow, low)
- HIGHLIGHTING (before import or after)

Reading and re-reading (fast, high)
- MAXDICTIO TOOLS (Word Frequencies, Word Combinations, Interactive Word Tree)
**Phase 1: familiarising yourself with the dataset**

- **Making (brief) notes about analytic ideas**
  - Related to each data item: PARAPHRASES, COMMENTS
  - Relates to the dataset as a whole: MEMOS

- **Visualising those notes**
  - At the data level (margin view)
  - Gathered together (via codes)
  - Exporting

**How can MAXQDA help?**

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**Phase 2: coding**

*Phase 2: Coding*: Here, you work systematically through your dataset in a fine-grained way. You identify segments of data that appear potentially interesting, relevant or meaningful for your research question, and apply pithy, analytically-meaningful descriptions (code labels) to them. Your focus is specific, and detailed, with coding aimed at capturing single meanings or concepts. In reflexive TA, you can code at a range of levels - from the very explicit or surface meaning (we and many others term this **semantic**), through to the more conceptual or implicit meaning (we and others term this **latent**). Coding isn’t just about summarising and reducing content, it’s also about capturing your ‘analytic take’ on the data. You code the entire dataset, systematically and thoroughly. When done, you collate your code labels and then compile the relevant segments of data for each code.

*Braun & Clarke 2021:35*
Phase 2: coding

- Building on Phase 1 work – continuation not separate
  - Categorize paraphrases
  - And/Or...code separately from paraphrasing

- Capturing ‘analytic meaning’ – beyond code labels
  - colour, sets, hierarchy, memos

- Collate code labels then compile data segments
  - This happens as part of the coding process when working in MAXQDA – doesn’t need to be a separate step! This allows for continual retrieval/review/recoding - ITERATION

Phase 3: generating initial themes

Phase 3: Generating initial themes. Here, you aim to start identifying shared patterned meaning across the dataset. You compile clusters or codes that seem to share a core idea or concept, and which might provide a meaningful ‘answer’ to your research question. Although we originally identified this phase as searching for themes, that language can be misleading: the process is not like an excavation, where meaning is lying there, waiting to be uncovered and discovered through the right search technique. Rather, theme development is an active process; themes are constructed by the researcher, based around the data, the research questions, and the researcher’s knowledge and insights. Where codes typically capture a specific or a particular meaning, themes describe broader, shared meanings. Once you’ve identified potential or candidate themes that you feel capture the data and address your research question, you collate all coded data relevant to each candidate theme.

Braun & Clarke 2021:35
Phase 3: generating initial themes

- Identify shared patterned meaning across the dataset
  - Sub-code statistics, Code Matrix Browser, Code Relations Browser, Crosstabs, Summary Tables,
- Compile clusters of codes
  - Code hierarchies, Code sets, Maps, Creative Coding
- Collate all coded data relevant to each candidate theme
  - Happens incrementally as carry out earlier tasks

Phase 4: developing and reviewing themes

Braun & Clarke 2021:35
Phase 4: developing and reviewing themes

- Assess the fit / check themes ‘make sense’ – level of extracts & dataset
  - Numerous retrieval options – always connected to source context
- Radical revision
  - Smart coding, Creative coding, Sets
- Consider relationship between themes
  - Code matrix and relations browsers, crosstabs
- ...with existing knowledge
  - MAXQDA project as container for all project materials – e.g. literature and data

Phase 5: refining, defining and naming themes

Phase 5: Refining, defining and naming themes. Here you fine-tune your analysis – ensuring that each theme is clearly demarcated, and is built around a strong core concept or essence. Ask yourself ‘what story does this theme tell?’ and ‘how does this theme fit into my overall story about the data?’ Key activities in this phase involve writing a brief synopsis of each theme. You also decide on a concise, punchy and informative name for each theme. In this phase, you still need to be prepared to let the analysis go, if your refining process indicates more development is needed.

Braun & Clarke 2021:36
Phase 5: refining, defining and naming themes

- Ensure themes are clearly demarcated
  - Maps, coding queries
- Write brief synopsis
  - Memos, summaries
- Punchy, informative name for each theme
  - Code names, memos

Phase 6: writing up

In *writing up*, you finesse and finish the writing process. Ultimately, you’re aiming to weave together your analytic narrative and compelling, vivid data extracts, to tell your reader a coherent and persuasive story about the dataset that addresses your research question. Final writing up also involves producing the introduction, method and conclusion sections of a research report. And a lot of editing. Never underestimate the importance and value of editing.

Braun & Clarke 2021:36
Phase 6: writing up

- **Writing spaces integrated throughout**
  - Paraphrases, comments, memos, project log, summaries
- **Dynamic / grounded / visual representations of qualitative data and themes**
  - Maps, Models – that include coded segments
  - Quote matrices, Charts (e.g. heatmaps illustrating theme saturation)
- **Save evidence as proceed**
  - Export anything in many formats – e.g. versions of codebook as it develops
  - QTT tool (Questions – Themes – Theories)
- **Export selected project elements in structured report**
  - Smart Publisher & via QTT

Using MAXQDA for thematic analysis: maximize flexibility, iteration, transparency

– because everything is CONNECTED
Move the pieces around ...without losing connection

References

Thank you...

....questions, comments...

Online MAXQDA workshops coming up...
https://www.qdaservices.co.uk/events

20 & 21 April – Thematic Analysis using MAXQDA
9th -12th May – Qualitative Text Analysis using Digital Tools (MAXQDA)
19th & 20th June – Doing Evidence Reviews using MAXQDA