



# Thematic Analysis – Karen L. Andes, PhD.

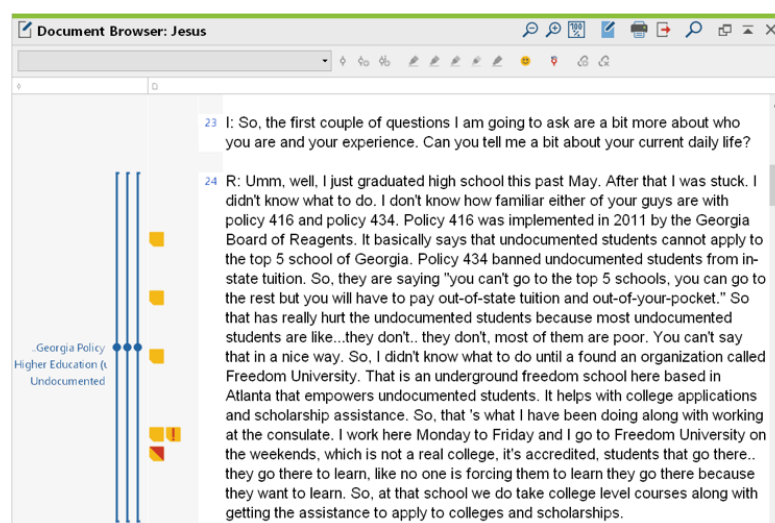
## What is Thematic Analysis?

Thematic Analysis is an approach to qualitative data analysis that focuses on *identifying* and *describing* prominent themes in the data. It typically also seeks to compare themes across different conditions or populations, and explore the relationships between themes.

## The Tools of Thematic Analysis

I typically think of Four Key “Tools” of Thematic Analysis: memos, codes, segments, and variables. The “Tools” are elements that we build into the analysis project that help to structure our interaction with the data.

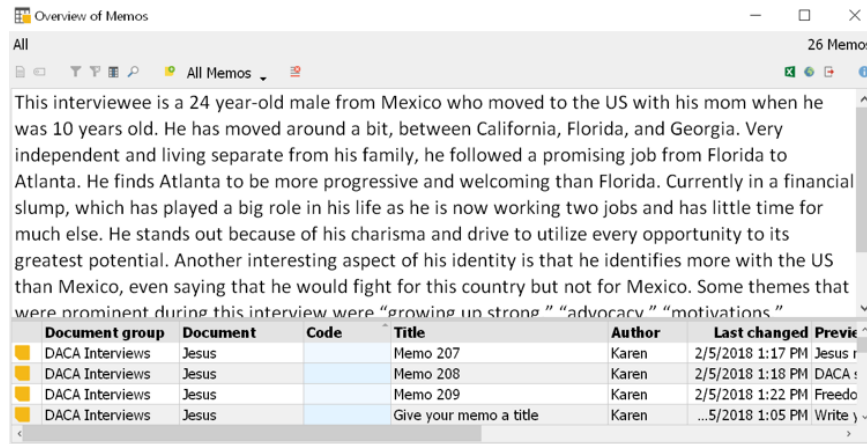
- **Memos:** Early in Thematic Analysis, we often engage in a very close reading of the data in an effort to explore meaning, open up ideas, and begin identifying potential themes. We record our thoughts in **memos** - as if we are writing in the margins of a printed page or on little yellow sticky notes.
  - ❖ In the **Document Browser** window, you can create new memos by double clicking in the little column directly to the left of the paragraph numbers in your document. You can add as many memos next to the text as you would like, and you have great flexibility in adding titles and even colors to the memos you write.



- ❖ I often use memo-writing to identify themes *inductively* as I read through the data, as well as to think about themes that I might have already identified *deductively* - based on my research questions.

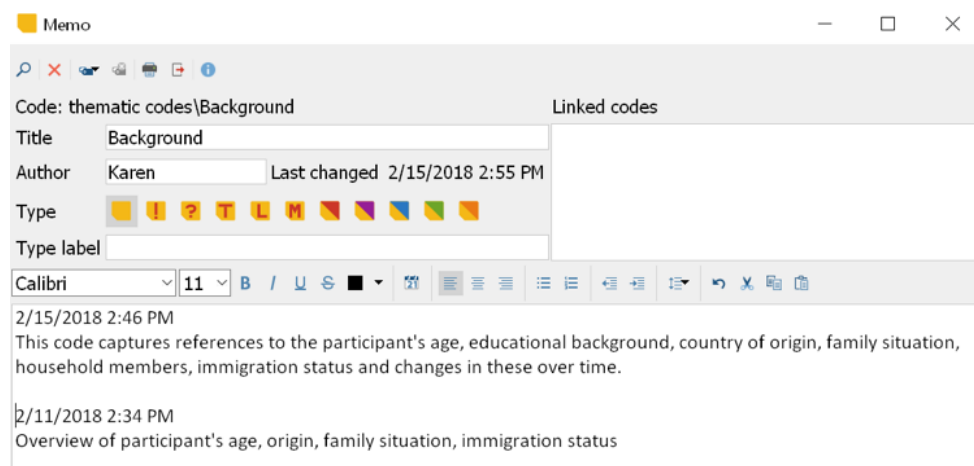


- ❖ You can always review all your memos by clicking on the **Overview of Memos** table in the **Reports** tab.



- **Codes:** Codes *operationalize* Themes. As we begin to identify themes we want to analyze, we need to define codes that will allow us to capture relevant data

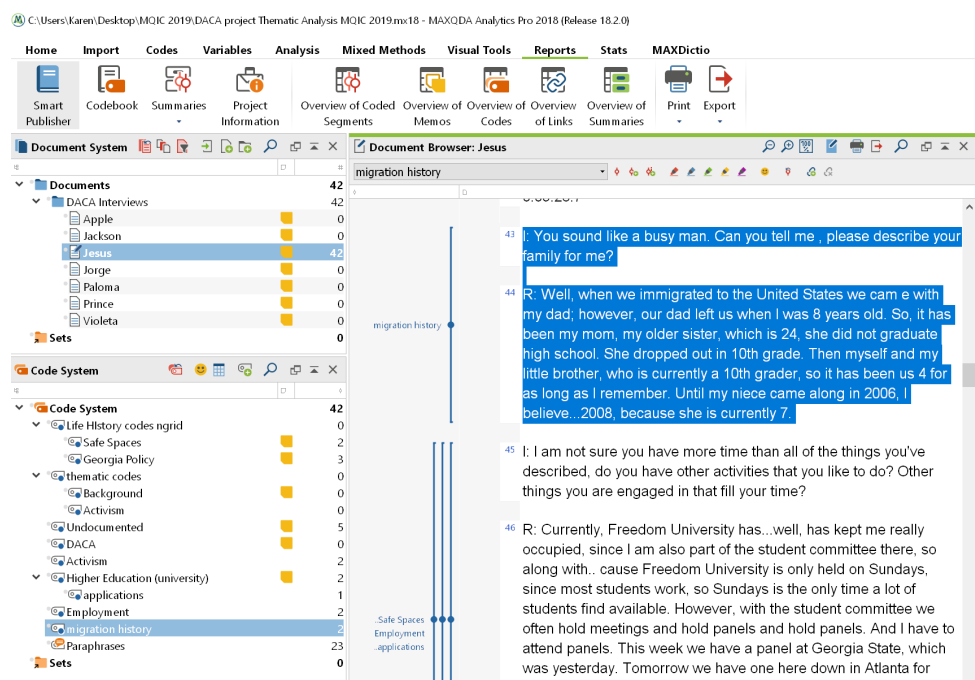
- ❖ In the **Code System** window, you can create a new code by right clicking and selecting **new code**, or by simply clicking on the new code icon.
- ❖ You will give the code a name (often the same name as your theme) and write a definition. The definition will appear as a code memo in that window; if you don't give it a definition when creating the code, you can always add a code memo later to provide a definition for the code.



- ❖ You will apply codes to relevant text by highlighting the text and then dragging the text over to the code (or dragging the code over to the highlighted text).
- ❖ I like to think of codes as the tool that allows me to capture data that I will later read in more focused ways as I develop my thematic analysis.



- **Segments:** Segments are the *units* of analysis. A segment could be a single word, or multiple paragraphs. You define a segment when you highlight the text and attach a code. When you search your coded data, the segment is the text that is retrieved.
  - ❖ We often confuse segmentation with coding, because we do both in the same step. The segment is the highlighted text; the code is the label we attach to the segment.



- ❖ Segments should be able to stand alone. They should contain both the key “nugget” of content that directly relates to the code, and also sufficient context to make sense of it without returning to the transcript/original.
  - ❖ You can always re-size a segment by highlighting the smaller or larger segment you would prefer, and applying the code again.
- **Variables:** Variables form the basis for comparison in Thematic Analysis. They capture key characteristics of our participants or elements of their data that allow us to build comparisons.
    - ❖ Primary Variables are collected at the same time as our qualitative interviews or focus groups. You can bring these in from an Excel sheet, or create and enter the variables directly in the **Data Editor** under the **Variables** menu.



Document Variables

Data editor - All documents 7 Documents

Document ...	Document ...	Author	Sex	Age	Origin	Advocacy/Activism
DACA Intervi...	Apple	kandes	Female	19	Mexico	DACA app
DACA Intervi...	Jesus	kandes	Male	22	Mexico	Freedom University
DACA Intervi...	Jorge	kandes	Male	21	Mexico	Freedom University
DACA Intervi...	Paloma	kandes	Female	23	Mexico	Teach for America
DACA Intervi...	Prince	kandes	Male	24	Mexico	none
DACA Intervi...	Violeta	kandes	Female	27	Mexico	None
DACA Intervi...	Jackson	kandes	Male	21	Guatemala	None

- ❖ You may also want to define “secondary” variables while reading the data. These variables often capture discrete information that is not really amenable to textual analysis.

## The Processes of Thematic Analysis

Once you have written memos on your data, created segments and coded your data, and identified primary and secondary variables, you are ready to begin the real work of analysis: making sense of the data! Here, you will use the various tools you have built into your project to focus your readings, develop comparisons, and explore relationships.

- **Searching and Retrieving Data:** MAXQDA allows you to focus your searches in exactly the ways you want.
  - ❖ The simplest way to focus your search is through **Activation**, which serves as a filter identifying which documents and codes you would like to review. There are multiple ways to activate documents and codes; the simplest is to click on the circle next to the document name or code name. The resulting segments will appear in the **Retrieved Segments** window.

MAXQDA interface showing Document Browser, Code System, and Retrieved Segments windows.

**Document Browser:** Documents (42) - DACA Interviews (42) - Apple (0), Jackson (0), Jesus (42), Jorge (0), Paloma (0), Prince (0), Violeta (0). Sets (0).

**Code System:** Code System (42) - Life History codes ngrid (0) - Safe Spaces (2) - Georgia Policy (3) - thematic codes (0) - Background (0) - Activism (0) - Undocumented (0) - DACA (0) - Activation (2) - Higher Education (universi... (2) - applications (1) - Employment (2) - migration history (2) - Paraphrases (23) - Sets (0).

**Retrieved Segments:** it is great seeing so many undocumented students and seeing like the power in their voice and the look in their eyes when they are chanting and like fighting for their rights.

R: Yeah. We were moving probably like every other year or every year. So we would... it would be like around the same area but we would have to keep moving since rent kept getting so high or my mom lost her job or something of that sort. So growing up it has been a lot of moving around. Well, it didn't start affecting me until high school years. Until you start figuring out that moving and being with different teachers, having a different schedule, having to make friends like every other years is really stressful along with trying to keep your grades up and stay at your present job. I got my first job when I was in 9th grade, in a restaurant, and I believe at that time they didn't check for citizenship because I did not have citizenship until... well I mean I mean I still don't, but I wasn't a DAC recipient until 2015.

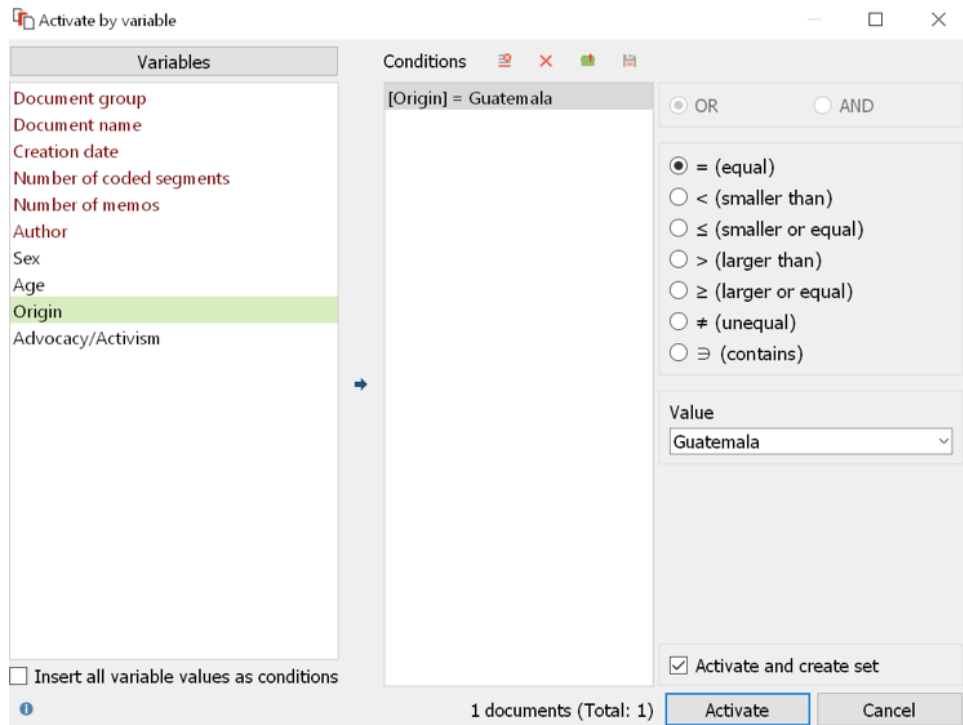
I: You mentioned that your sister is older. You have a younger sibling as well, were they born in the United States?

R: They were not. We were all born in Mexico.

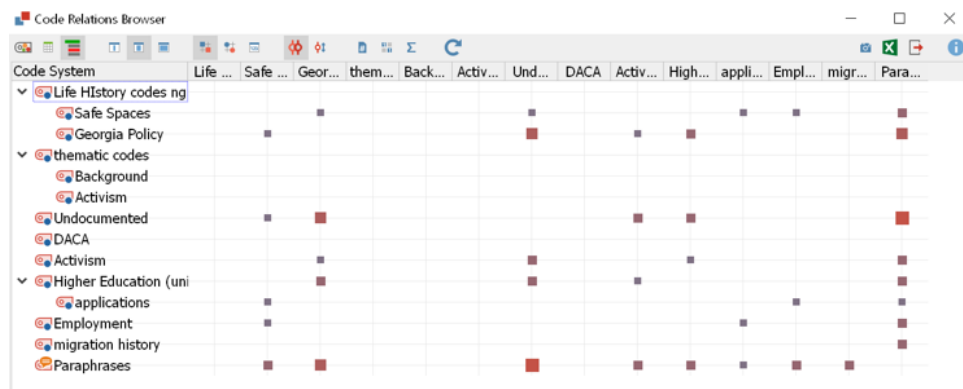
I: In terms of, so your older sister stepped out of high school at grade 10, does anyone in your family have college level education?



- ❖ You can also **Activate by Document Variables** by right clicking on **Documents** in the **Document System** window. After selecting the variables – or combinations of variables – you would like to activate, click on the “Activate and Create Set” box at the lower right if you would like to easily return to that category for multiple comparisons.



- ❖ To explore relationships between codes, go to the **Code Relations Browser** under **Visual Tools**. It will show you the number of times each code *intersects* with other codes in your project (click on the icon with numbers to see the number rather than squares or circles).



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- **Reviewing and Reducing Data:** Ultimately all processes of analysis result in a reduction of the vast quantities of qualitative data collected into concise descriptive, comparative and interpretive accounts.
  - ❖ The **Summary Grid** allows you to summarize coded data within each document and then use the Summary Table to summarize across codes and/or documents.

