Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Weate, P. (2016). Using thematic analysis in sport and exercise research. In B. Smith & A. C. Sparkes (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of qualitative research in sport and exercise* (pp. 191-205). New York, NY: Routledge.

15 USING THEMATIC ANALYSIS IN SPORT AND EXERCISE RESEARCH

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Thematic analysis (TA) is one of a cluster of analytic approaches you can use, if you want to identify patterns of meaning across a qualitative dataset. The widely used version of TA we outline in this chapter is fairly unique in the canon of qualitative analytic approaches in that it just offers the researcher analytic tools to make sense of data. It is not tied to a particular theoretical framework, and it does not come with methodological stipulations about, for example, how to sample, or collect data. This gives the researcher great flexibility in how they use TA. Alongside the fact that TA is a relatively accessible qualitative analytic technique, these features make it an excellent and robust method for beginner qualitative researchers, for those wishing to do fairly descriptive work, for those working in teams across disciplinary contexts, or with researchers of mixed (qualitative) experience, and for those wanting to produce research for public consumption (e.g., policy- or practice-oriented research). That said TA also provides a tool that offers the potential for nuanced, complex, interpretative analysis. After introducing TA, and explaining why and when you might use it, we provide a detailed discussion of how you do TA, illustrated with examples from Paul's focus-group study exploring women's perspectives on, and experiences of, exercise.

An introduction to thematic analysis

The term "thematic" analysis has been in use as an analytic concept since the 1970s (Christ, 1970), but what it refers to has varied considerably – from quantitative content analysis (Christ, 1970) to something akin to contemporary versions of TA (Benner 1985; Dapkus, 1985). Similarly, qualitative researchers have a long history of describing as "thematic" their approach to analysis – but often without an explicit reference to a developed method called "thematic analysis." More recently, the writings of Patton (2002), Boyatzis (1998) and, latterly ourselves (Braun & Clarke, 2006), among others, have provided a foundation and set of procedures for thematic analysis. Since the publication of our original article in 2006, "thematic analysis" has gained hugely in popularity, and entered the "canon" as a recognizable and reputable method of qualitative analysis, evidenced by its inclusion in volumes such as this.

At its most basic, TA offers a method for identifying patterns ("themes") in a dataset, and for describing and interpreting the meaning and importance of those. However, right from its first entry into the method(ological) spectrum, TA has been described in quite different ways. It is now possible to identify two broad "strands" of TA: (1) a strand tied to a realist ontological framework (or what has been termed "small q" qualitative research; Kidder & Fine, 1987); and (2) a strand not anchored in a particular

theoretical tradition, which can therefore be applied flexibly across the spectrum of ontological and epistemological positions. This latter strand fits firmly within the "big Q" qualitative approach, the application of qualitative techniques within a qualitative paradigm (Kidder & Fine, 1987), and is the approach we have developed (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2013) – and the focus of this chapter.

The small q/big Q division has been used to classify qualitative research into that which retains a foothold in more (post)positivist/quantitative research models, and that which fully embraces a "qualitative" perspective (Kidder & Fine, 1987; see also Braun & Clarke, 2013). The "small q" versions of TA (Boyatzis, 1998; Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012; Joffe, 2011) are more "rigid" than our version. Authors such as Boyatzis (1998) advocate for the use of coding frames, and for the use of multiple, independent coders in order to generate "inter-rater reliability scores." In so doing, they implicitly (and explicitly) locate TA within a (post)positivist and (naïve) realist research framework, where a truth can be determined through research, and where clear and fixed meanings can be "found" within the data. Researchers who adopt a more qualitative orientation to TA (and research generally), and understand meaning "in" qualitative data as more contextualized and provisional, can find such criteria problematic – especially when they becomes proxies for the quality of any qualitative analysis (see Frieze, 2008). We discuss more appropriate quality criteria for big Q TA below (see also Chapter 25).

The "flexible" version of TA we have developed offers the researcher robust processes for identifying patterns, and interpreting them, in a number of different ways, but detaches these from specific, or inbuilt, ontological and epistemological anchors. What this means is the researcher needs to make some active choices about how they engage with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These choices include:

1. Do you primarily engage with the data at the level of: a) the obvious meanings expressed; or b) the meanings and frameworks that underpin the things explicitly stated by participants or in textual representations? We refer to the former as a semantic focus – this means you're coding and reporting on explicitly stated ideas, concepts, meanings, experiences, etc. For instance, if women reporting feeling ashamed about not participating in exercise, and you developed a theme around shame, this would be a semantic theme. The latter we refer to as latent – where you code and develop analysis around more implicit ideas or concept that underpin what's explicitly expressed. To continue the previous example, women experiencing their nonparticipation in exercise as shameful might suggest that "exercise" sits within a moral framework, so that nonparticipation can be experienced as individually blameworthy. To capture this you might develop a theme around "exercises as moral/good." Latent ideas can be harder to identity when they map onto cultural common sense; the idea of "exercise as moral/good" (rather than, for instance, exercise as a privilege) has become a dominant – common sense - assumption.

2. Do you approach your data coding and theme development in a "data-driven," "bottom-up" or inductive way, where the content itself guides the developing analysis? Or do you take a more "top-up" or deductive approach, where your analytic process is informed or driven by theoretical concepts beyond the data?

3. Is your approach grounded in conceptual, epistemological or ontological frameworks like realism, (post)postivism and essentialism (e.g., Kitzinger, 1995), or contextualist/critical realist approaches (e.g., Ussher, 1997), or critical/constructionist orientations (e.g., Burr, 2003)?

These choices combine in numerous ways, and form quite different versions of TA, although some choices do tend to cluster together more "naturally": critical/constructionist, deductive, and latent orientations; realist, semantic, and inductive orientations. At the same time, it is a misconception to view the first two of these questions as involving either/or choices (see Robertson et al., 2013); in practice, most thematic analyses include both semantic and latent, and inductive and deductive elements.

When and why to use thematic analysis

The question of when and why to use TA can be a tricky one to answer because TA can be used for many different purposes (as we outline here), more so than other qualitative analytic approaches, and it is not always the case that there is only one analytic approach ideally suited to a particular research question or design. So we are not suggesting that qualitative analysis starts and ends with TA! There are numerous types of research questions that TA does not work well for, such as questions around narrative and stories (Smith & Sparkes, 2009; see Chapters 4 and 20, this volume), or questions focused both on thematic patterning and individual narratives (Darker, Larkin, & French, 2007; see also Chapters 4 and 20, this volume), or questions oriented to language practice and discourse (Locke, 2004; see Chapter 18, this volume). Likewise, if your aim is to develop models and theories from data, this task is best achieved with grounded theory (Holt & Tamminen, 2010; see Chapter 3, this volume).

Research questions guide what we want to know, and good research questions are developed in relation to the purpose or intent of our research (e.g., knowledge generation, policy development); they also reflect our epistemological and ontological positions (Demuth & Terkildsen, 2015; see also Chapters 1 and 10, this volume). We can think of qualitative research questions as clustering into different "types" (Braun & Clarke, 2013), and TA suits a wide range of these different types. It can provide analyses of people's experiences in relation to an issue, or the factors and processes that underlie and influence particular phenomena. It can identify patterns in people's (reported) practices or behaviors related to, or their views and perspectives on, a certain issue. Or, in a quite different way, it can determine common ways an issue or topic is represented (e.g., in media), or explore the way(s) it is "constructed" as an object of interest. If (one or more of) these are the sorts of things you are interested in knowing about, and many of these are the sorts of things sports and exercise researchers are interested in, TA provides an excellent tool. Table 15.1 provides a list of suitable-for-TA question types, along with applicable theoretical frameworks, and examples from sport and exercise research.

As noted above, the flexibility of TA means it can be used with a wide range of different research designs and data-collection methods, and there is no "ideal" data type in TA. Semistructured interviews, one of the most common methods of data collection in qualitative research, are excellent for gathering in-depth accounts of "personal experience" (e.g., McArdle, McGale, & Gaffney, 2012); focus groups are ideal if you

want to explore shared/contested social meanings or perspectives around a topic (e.g., Hall et al., 2012). Such approaches involve the researcher generating data through interaction with people. TA also works really well with textual data, both researcher-generated (e.g., through diaries, story completion, vignettes), and preexisting (e.g., talkback radio or newspapers; see McCreanor et al., 2010), or any combination of these different data types (e.g., Smith, Tomasone, Latimer-Cheung & Martin Ginis, 2015). If your data are audio (or audio-visual), rather than textual, preparation for TA involves the transcription of all the data (see Braun & Clarke, 2013, for transcription notation suitable for use in TA).

Table 15.1 Examples of published thematic analysis studies

Research question type	*Example study*	*Data-collection method and sample*	*Approach to TA and themes identified*	*Theoretical frameworks*
Experiences	Investigating men's experiences of an integrated exercise/ psychosocial mental-health promotion program, "Back of the Net" (McArdle, McGale, & Gaffney 2012)	A focus group with 9 men; semistructured individual (telephone) interviews with 6 men	A combination small q/Big Q TA (B&C approach supplemented with measures to "minimise individual bias," p. 245); inductive and deductive coding and analysis. Two themes (each with two subthemes): "core structural features" and "the impact of a combined exercise/ CBT programme on participants' experiences" (p. 245)	Epistemological/ ontological stance not explicitly stated, but experiential and broadly *realist* in orientation; some theoretical confusion – concern with minimizing researcher "bias" yet results discussed in relation to *social constructionist* perspectives on masculinity
Views and perspectives	Exploring Welsh rugby fans' thoughts about their commitment to their team (Hall *et al.*, 2012)	Seven focus groups with a total of 45 participants (29 men; 16 women, aged 12–62)	Inductive TA, four themes generated: affective loyalty, involvement, distinctiveness, and individualism	Epistemological/ ontological stance not explicitly stated, but experiential and broadly *realist* in orientation; results discussed in relation to social identity theory
Influencing factors and processes	Examining the underlying mechanisms in the success of football-based health interventions for men (Robertson *et al.*, 2013)	Interviews with "16 staff responsible for delivering and/ or managing the initiatives" and "58 men who had participated in the initiatives" (p. 421)	Broadly inductive but also informed by existing theories and concepts. Two overarching themes: "Trust (including what processes it was key to and how it was developed/ sustained) and Change (including what it was facilitated by and what it impacted on)" (p. 422)	Epistemological/ ontological stance not explicitly stated, but broadly *critical realist* in orientation and analysis informed by critical masculinity theory
Practices/ behaviors	Leadership processes at the London 2012 Olympic Games (Slater, Barker, Coffee, & Jones, 2015)	Leaders' communication in 48 media interviews, 16 speeches or team announcements, and three blogs (92 pages of transcribed text), between April 17 and September 11, 2012	Inductive and deductive TA, five themes identified: creation of team identities; team values; team vision; performance consequences; and "we" achieved	Epistemological/ ontological stance not explicitly stated, but experiential and broadly *realist* in orientation, analysis informed by social identity theory

Construction/ representation	Representations of Māori participation and achievement in New Zealand newspapers' sports coverage (McCreanor *et al.*, 2010)	50 articles from 120 newspapers	TA used in combination with discourse analysis, two overarching themes identified: "Māori sport" ("depicted Māori as exotic and marginal to sporting life in Aotearoa/ New Zealand") and "Māori in sport" ("subsumed Māori within monocultural sporting codes," p. 235)	Critical and constructionist; analysis informed by a theoretical framework of "Māori self-determination and decolonization" (p. 235)

There are no strict guidelines around sample constitution and size, and sampling strategy for TA – these design decisions should be informed by your research question, purpose, and method of data collection, among other things. General guidance around sampling and samples in qualitative research apply (Patton, 2002), but the key thing to remember is that TA is about identifying patterns across a dataset. Therefore, you need to have a sample large enough to identify patterns in a way that is meaningful, and allows you to say something that carries some weight. We have suggested six interviews as a minimum sample size for TA, but this is a general suggestion that does not take account of the specifics of particular research questions and designs (some researchers have used TA in case-study research with a small number of participants; see, for example, Cedervall & Åberg, 2010). For publishable research, you may struggle if your interview sample is less than about 15 (some journals seem to automatically reject samples less than 30!), and therefore "purpose" is an important factor to consider as well. In general, the greater the depth and richness of each data item (e.g., an interview) the fewer individual items you will need.

How to do thematic analysis

We describe the process of TA using a six-phase model, and we outline these phases below. This model risks representing the process of TA as akin to walking (not running; qualitative research is not that quick!) up a flight of steps, where your progress from start to finish is clear and direct. Instead, the progression through TA is more like following a hose through long grass, where you cannot clearly see the way ahead, and the path is not direct: sometimes you move forwards; other times you coil back on yourself. Doing TA (well) usually involves a recursive, reflexive process of moving forwards (and sometimes backwards) through data familiarization, coding, theme development, revision, naming, and writing up. It is crucial, though, to remember that your analysis is not in the data, waiting for you to discover it; your themes do not simply "emerge." Instead, your analysis is produced through the intersection of your theoretical assumptions, disciplinary knowledge, research skills and experience, and the content of the data themselves. Analysis is an active process, and thus, although we describe TA as a method – as a way to analyze data, rather than a whole framework – these steps must not be followed in robotic repetition, without thought and deliberation; without conscious choices, action, and thinking.

As well as outlining the phases of TA (for more detailed discussion, see Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2013), we illustrate key aspects of the process using Paul's focus-group study exploring women's past and present experiences of, and participation in, exercise. The purposive sample consisted of 19 women – both currently (N = 11) and not currently (N = 8) engaged in regular exercise – aged between 18 and 78 (mean = 54; two-thirds aged 50 or older). The women participated in one of four focus groups. It is important to note that a key identified advantage of focus-group data collection is that you gain access to social interaction and the way meaning is "negotiated" in context. This means participants' accounts need to be considered in context, but such interaction is often ignored in pattern-based analyses like TA. Anyone using TA with focus-group data needs to be aware of this aspect of the data, and ideally incorporate it somehow (see Braun & Clarke, 2013, for further discussion).

Phases 1–2: Familiarization and coding. The first phase of TA is familiarization – the process of deeply immersing yourself in your data, so that you become intimately familiar with their content. What this practically involves is reading and rereading all data items, and making notes as you go about what grabs or interests you. What you want to achieve at this stage is both a sense that you really "know" the dataset, but also to be engaging with the data as data rather than as information. What do we mean by this? You want to be reading the data analytically, looking for ideas and concepts that can help you address your research question, and reading it in a curious and questioning way. The following sorts of questions can help facilitate analytic engagement:

1. Why might the participants be making sense of things in this way (and not that way)?

2. How would I feel in this situation?

3. How could the participants' accounts be different?

4. What assumptions underpin the data?

5. What worldview does the account imply or rely on?

6. What implications might this account have?

Familiarization involves critical engagement with the data, but is informal in the way you take notes and generate meaning. The next phase – coding – turns this into a systematic and thorough process. Familiarization ensures you begin coding with some sense of the sorts of things you will code for, but it doesn't delimit the scope of coding (remember, our version of TA does not advocate the development of a "coding frame" at this point; a practice which does delimit the focus of coding). Coding is a key step in TA, and systematic and rigorous coding builds solid foundations for theme development – don't be tempted to jump straight into theme identification! – and helps move your analysis beyond immediate or obvious meanings.

A code identifies and labels something of interest in the data – at a semantic and/or a latent level – that is of potential relevance to your research question (although it is important to note that in qualitative research, the research question is not fixed; it can evolve and be refined throughout the analytic process). It is a pithy label that you apply

to a segment of data, which captures the content and its analytic relevance. We advocate what we call the "remove the data" test for codes: do they clearly "evoke" the data without needing to read them? If so, they're probably good codes. This is important for the next phase of data analysis.

The practical process of coding involves closely reading the data, and "tagging" with a code each piece that has some relevance to your research question. You can do this in various ways (e.g., pen and paper, using a computer program). Text can be tagged with one or more codes, or it can be left untagged if not relevant. You work systematically through each data item and you code each new relevant extract of text you encounter. As coding is flexible and organic, you need to decide if an already-used code applies, or if you need to create a new one. You can tweak existing codes as you work through the data, expanding or contracting them, splitting them into two or more codes, or collapsing similar codes together, to better fit your developing analysis. Keep coding open and inclusive, as you do not yet know what your themes might finally be. Table 15.2 provides an example of a data extract and associated codes from the women and exercise study. We coded around the research question "How do women make sense of exercise and their participation (or not) in it?"

Table 15.2 Example of data extract* and associated codes from women and exercise study

Maria:	[The Wii-fit] was good if you couldn't go out. If the weather was poor then you could still do it.	Bad weather is a barrier to exercise. Outside is best.
Jen:	Hmm, well that's why I do the gym. Because my husband thinks I'm mad, you know, he'll say, "Why are you paying to go and walk?" You know, on a treadmill. "Why don't you just go out for a walk?" and I say, "Well, because I need that structure." If I, (if I didnt have it and I looked at home and I cleaned the bathroom), well not cleaned the bathroom, but you know, I'd do something else, where as if I know I'm going there I'll do it.	Bad weather is a barrier to exercise. Inside space facilitates regular exercise. Gym = bad. Structure facilitates regular exercise. There's always something else to do. Difficult to motivate yourself to exercise.
Maria:	It's a bit like swimming, I go swimming straight from work so I take all my things and go straight from work. If I went home to get my stuff and change it would be really a real effort to leave the house again.	Managing motivation. Difficult to motivate yourself to exercise. Being exercise-minded (disciplined).
Jen:	Maria is my role model for swimming ((laughs)) You know, knowing that she, it's something I want to do and I just don't seem to be able to get round to it and I know that you go every Monday night after and I think, "Oh, that's wonderful." One of these days, I'll get round to it ((laughs)).	Social/relational facilitator. Difficult to motivate yourself to exercise.
Maria:	But it's just a, a structure that I've put in place (Focus Group 1).	Structure facilitates regular exercise.

*Note: transcription conventions have followed those outlined in Braun and Clarke (2013):

- [text in square brackets] has been added to make the referent of the text clear.

- (text in single parentheses) is the transcribers best guess as to what was said – they weren't 100% confident about it.

- ((text in double parentheses)) refers to paralinguistic features of the interview that might be analytically relevant.

- "text in quotation marks" indicates the speaker is reporting someone else's direct speech.

It is normal for coding to evolve as you get more analytically engaged; we recommend going through the dataset twice when coding, to ensure a systematic, coherent and robust set of codes. A second coding round can also facilitate the development of more latent codes. In the example in Table 15.2, the codes are both semantic and latent (but mainly semantic). The code "bad weather is a barrier to exercise" is an example of a semantic code – it closely captures the manifest content of Maria and Jen's comments. "Being exercise-minded" is a more latent code. It captures the way exercise was often explained in terms of individual psychological differences (some people are "exercise-minded"; some are not). Jen's description of Maria as her "role model," combined with her own reported failure to swim regularly, implicitly frames Maria as disciplined and motivated ("exercise-minded") when it comes to swimming, unlike her.

There is no definite "stop" point for coding; no ideal number of codes. What you want is a set of codes that richly and thoroughly captures the analytically relevant aspects of your dataset. You end this phase with your data thoroughly coded, and all your codes, and the data relevant to each code, collated ready for the next phase.

Phases 3–5: Theme development, refinement and naming. These three phases involve the core analytic work in TA: organizing codes and coded data into candidate themes, reviewing and revising those candidate themes, and developing a rich analysis of the data represented by the finalized themes. A useful way to think of your TA is as an "answer" to your research question. What you are doing is developing a really robust, detailed, nuanced answer.

The process of theme development is about clustering codes to identify "higher-level" patterns – by which we generally refer to meanings which are broader and capture more than one very specific idea – you want your themes to have layers. Imagine your analysis is like a short guidebook to a city: your themes are akin to the chapters – there might be one for four to five different neighborhoods; your codes are akin to the different neighborhood features described in each chapter. Together, the features of the neighborhood (codes) cluster together to give you a coherent sense of each distinct neighborhood (theme). This is what we mean by "higher level" – moving beyond the very specific, which is what codes often capture. Your themes generally want to have texture and nuance, to capture some rich diversity, rather than just a single idea, which would be akin to a chapter that simply described one restaurant (this analogy only works so far, but it should give you a general picture). Another key aspect of higher-level analysis is that is moves your analytic narrative beyond simply summarizing and describing your themes to providing some kind of commentary on their implications and importance.

It is crucial to understand that a "theme" is more than just some coherent, patterned meaning across a dataset – it also has to tell you something important about the data, relevant to your research question. Start the theme-development process first with just the codes. This active process involves you identifying ways you can cluster your codes together around some (bigger) meaning or concept they all share. Not all codes need to be included in these clusters; some inevitably will not fit. That is fine – your analysis is never the complete story of what was in the data (that is the raw data themselves!). Once you have some provisional or candidate themes (there is no right or wrong number, but you generally want more than one, and probably less than six, in a 10–15,000-word report), you start a process of review.

Reviewing involves working first with the coded data, and then going back to the whole dataset. The process is about checking two things: first, whether your analysis "fits well" (or well enough) with the data and you are not misrepresenting them, inadvertently, through poor coding; and second, whether the story you're telling is a compelling and coherent way of addressing your research question. We generally do not subscribe to the view that there is only one way of analyzing qualitative data, or only one analysis "in" a qualitative dataset, so this also comes back to the purpose of the analysis: what is your aim with the research, and does your analysis enable you to fulfill that?

Revision can range from minor tweaks to a complete restart of the analysis – you have to be open to the possibility that you need to "let go" of some or all of your analysis if the review raises problems. In reviewing your developing analysis, there are a number of factors to consider:

1. Does each theme have a central organizing concept so that all the data and codes cohere around a single key analytic point?

2. Is the central organizing concept of each theme distinct?

3. What are the relationships, interconnections, and boundaries between the themes?

4. Do the themes together tell a coherent and compelling story of the data that addresses your research question?

These latter questions highlight the importance of considering the analysis as an overall story: when we say "story," we mean a coherent account that is necessarily partial and perspectival, that tells the reader something about the data. The use of visual tools like thematic maps (see Figure 15.1) can be really useful in the process of developing and then reviewing the analysis, and for exploring and revising the relationships between candidate themes (they can change dramatically; see the maps in Braun & Clarke, 2006). These relationships can be hierarchical as well as lateral. We recommend, in general, no more than three theme levels (Braun & Clarke 2013):

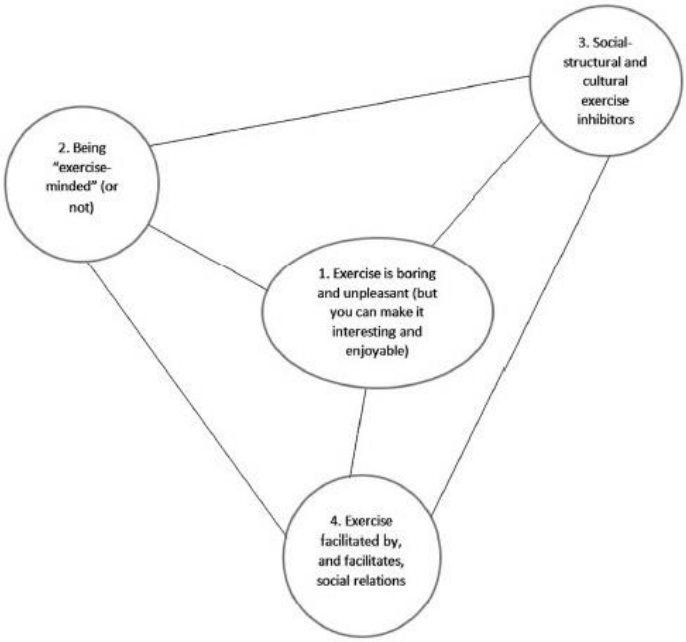
1. Overarching themes – which tend to organize and structure an analysis; they capture an idea underpinning a number of themes, but are rarely analyzed themselves in any depth, and are not a necessary feature of a TA.

2. Themes – which report in detail on meaning related to a central organizing concept.

3. Subthemes – which capture and develop an important facet of the central organizing concept of a theme. They are not a necessity, but can highlight an important aspect of a theme, or be used to identify notable distinct patterns within a theme.

In the women and exercise example study, the revision process helped Paul to settle on a structure of one central theme, which underpins all the other themes ("Exercise is boring and unpleasant"), and three distinct themes related to exercise "motivation." Figure 15.1 maps out these four themes, and the relationships between them. Before revision, Paul was undecided about whether "exercise motivation" should be a single (albeit huge) theme; review helped him to identify that "exercise motivation" codes and data clearly clustered around three distinct topics: (1) whether or not people possessed the personal attributes required to exercise regularly; (2) social-structural factors that meant access to exercise was not a level playing field (and hence not solely shaped by individual characteristics); and (3) the central importance of social relationships in exercise participation. Interestingly, the participants often vacillated between explaining exercise motivation in terms of individual differences and social-structural factors. This illustrates an important point – themes can express contradictory ideas, and TA can thus capture tensions and contradictions in the data.

Once you are confident that your TA captures the data content well, addresses the research question, and is mapped out in a way you'll probably not change drastically, you move on to defining the themes, clarifying and refining the scope and focus of each, and building a rich analytic narrative. Analytic narrative refers to the descriptive and interpretative commentary you present to the reader, which provides the context of quoted data, tells them about what is analytically important, and how this addresses the research question. So here you are building depth and detail into the analysis.



Final thematic map from the women and exercise study.

A useful exercise at this point, which can help clarify the "essence" of the analysis, is writing "theme definitions." A theme definition is a brief description (a paragraph or

two), which succinctly captures the "essence" of each theme (its central organizing concept), and its scope and boundaries. Writing theme definitions can help to sharpen your analytic focus. Box 15.1 provides (brief) theme definitions for the themes from the women and exercise study.

You also have to decide what you are going to call each theme. Theme names can range from the prosaic to the creative – to some extent, how creative you can be will depend on the purpose of the research. Ultimately, you want a name that captures the essence of the theme, but beyond this, it is up to you. Compelling data quotations can work well as part of a theme name, accompanied by explanatory text if necessary (the theme title "Being 'exercise-minded' (or not)" includes a short data quotation that captured precisely the essence of the theme).

Box 15.1 Theme definitions from women and exercise study

1. Exercise is boring and unpleasant (but you can make it interesting and enjoyable): although some participants described themselves as loving exercise, on the whole exercise was explicitly and implicitly framed as something inherently negative – particularly as boring and unpleasant – and this framing was strongly connected to the notion that some or all people are "naturally" lazy. Exercise was perceived as something separate from everyday life and something that requires "extra" or "special" motivation. However, the participants discussed various ways in which exercise could be made interesting and enjoyable, and enjoyment in particular was viewed as the key to regular participation (and, as discussed in theme 4, social relationships were in turn the key to enjoyment).

2. Being "exercise-minded" (or not): the participants often implicitly and explicitly individualized exercise motivation and participation, framing it in terms of individual differences in "nature" or personality. Sometimes whether or not an individual was "exercise-minded" was presented as a "fluke" and at other times, this concept had a moralizing aspect, with people who were "exercise-minded" being viewed as having the self-discipline required to overcome the natural laziness of human beings (whereas the nonexercise-minded succumbed to this vice).

3. Social-structural and cultural exercise inhibitors: Participants also described participation in regular (and particular types of) exercise as shaped by a range of social-structural and cultural factors, such as gender and social class. For example, women's greater responsibilities for housework, childcare, and care of eldery relatives, often alongside paid employment, could result in a lack of time for exercise, and concerns about personal safety could shape when, where, and with whom women chose to exercise. Likewise, social class could limit women's access to particular kinds of exercise.

4. Exercise is facilitated by, and facilitates, social relations: social interaction and relationships were the primary exercise facilitators for many of the women; the absence of social interaction was likewise a barrier to participation. Women also identified social interaction and relations as a benefit of doing exercise. Social relationships provided entry to new forms of exercise and encouraged continued participation. Ideal forms of exercise were sustained by, and organized around, social relationships; in such

instances, socializing (and enjoyment) came to the fore, and the physical activity was secondary.

Phase 6: Writing up. By this point, you will already have written a lot – "writing" is something you do from early in the analytic process in TA, as in many other qualitative approaches, as you cannot do qualitative analysis without writing. So although we call Phase 6 "writing up," we do not think of writing up as a separate phase you start after you have completed your analysis – and nor should you. It is an integral part of the analytic process. What this phase of TA involves is compiling, developing, and editing existing analytic writing, and situating it within an overall report (which generally contains an introduction, method section, results, discussion – often combined with the results in TA reporting, as in other qualitative research – and some kind of conclusion; see Braun & Clarke, 2013, for further guidance). However, writing in TA also involves some important choices. The two elements in your analysis are data extracts and analytic commentary, and you need to determine a good balance between the two – too much data, and your analysis is likely to be thin and confined to the most obvious observations. A 50:50 ratio works for fairly descriptive analyses; more critical/conceptual analyses often have a greater proportion of analytic narrative. Your narrative will also be proportionally greater if you combine the results and discussion.

Good data extracts are ones that clearly and compellingly demonstrate the relevant analytic point or feature. Throughout the analysis, extracts should be selected from across the dataset, to demonstrate the spread of your themes. There are two broad ways data extracts are used in TA, which we refer to as "illustratively" and "analytically" (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In the former, the extract(s) presented serves as an example of the analytic claim you are making. For example, to illustrate the notion that exercise in its "pure" form – "deliberate exercise" as Heather (FG2) called it – is an activity separate and distinct from everyday life, either or both of the following two (short) extracts could be used:

Extract 1 (Focus Group 2)

Lindsay: To me exercise is going to the gym or gonna go play squash or tennis – that's exercise.

Heather: Doing sport.

Extract 2 (Focus Group 1)

Maria: I think of exercise, of exercise as something out of your everyday life. Yeah, so we talk about housework and stuff like that, but it's something that you actually make the concerted effort to go out and do, like swimming or dancing or something like that.

The analytic narrative would still make sense if you used either Extract 1 or Extract 2 (Extract 2 does provide a richer, more compelling example), or switched one for the other; it would also still make sense if you removed the data extract(s). This illustrative use is common in more descriptive/realist versions of TA, but don't think that just because it is common that this means you can then avoid interpretation and simply summarize . . . You are still telling an interpretative story about the data and what they

mean. In contrast, an analytic use of data involves actually discussing specific features of a particular extract. This means you could not remove an extract – or replace it with another – and have the narrative still make sense. An example (related to Extract 2) would be:

by creating two separate categories – "housework and stuff like that" versus purposive, "outside the house" activities like "swimming or dancing" – Maria compartmentalizes exercise as something that happens outside the everyday, and therefore something that, implicitly, requires deliberate thought and effort to engage in.

An analytic approach is more common in interpretative/critical versions of TA, but in practice, TA research reports often combine both or some aspects of both.

Ensuring quality in thematic analysis

Quality has been a thorny issue in relation to qualitative research, and still is (e.g., Frieze, 2008). The development of "qualitative" quality criteria (e.g., Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999) has not always been treated with enthusiasm (see, for example, Reicher's, 2000, critique of Elliott et al., 1999), but completely qualitatively oriented quality criterion do now exist (Tracy, 2010; Yardley, 2008). We advise familiarity with these, and the assumptions they rely on – and criteria for judging qualitative research are an ongoing discussion so keep reading (see also Braun & Clarke, 2013; Schinke, Smith, & McGannon, 2013; Sparkes & Smith, 2009)! While we certainly don't advocate "methodolatry" – the privileging of methodological concerns at the expense of others (Reicher, 2000) – we do advocate for a rigorous, deliberative and reflexive process for doing TA, that keeps "quality" as a foregrounded concern. The "checklist" we developed (see Table 15.3) provides a summary of the points at which TA can fall short in relation to quality. They are the sorts of things we assess research on when supervising, examining or reviewing. Note, this shouldn't be read as the start and end point of quality judgment, but rather a guideline for where you can "fall down" in your analysis. Our "checklist" guidelines promote a thorough and systematic process, and highlight the importance of the active role of the researcher. Keeping a research journal, in which you both record and reflect on the process and practice of your research, can be useful for ensuring a robust qualitative practice (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Unfortunately TA is not always done well; there are far too many examples of poor TA out there! And the theoretical flexibility of TA can lead to epistemological confusion – the McArdle et al. (2012) paper in Table 15.1 provides an example of an epistemologically confused TA – or a failure to explicitly situate TA in relation to theory (or, indeed, to specify how exactly TA has been implemented). We often read papers where the authors cite two very different approaches to TA (e.g., those taken by Boyatzis, 1998 or Braun & Clarke, 2006), without explaining how these two approaches were combined. Furthermore, TA is frequently limited to descriptive – realist/essentialist – analyses, with limited or no engagement with the interpretative potential of TA. Weak TA is one of the reasons why we emphasize the importance of quality. Going forward, we hope to see many more examples of high-quality TA, in which the tools of TA have been used by researchers flexibly and reflexively to produce analyses that "go beyond the obvious," and capture the messy, contradictory, and complex nature of psychological and social meanings.

Process	*No.*	*Criteria*
Transcription	1	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 dataset.
	6	Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.
Analysis	7	Data have been analyzed – 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-organized 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 light once-over.
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."

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