**Data Contextualisation and Interpretation Exercise**

**Part 1: Initial contextualisation and interpretation assessment**

It’s good practice in reflexive TA to contextualise your data and interpretation within the wider context. This means treating your data and participants as embedded within wider contexts that have inflected the data, rather than simply providing an account of relevant contexts (although this might be part of the introduction section of your report). The practice of contextualisation reflects the emphasis on situated and contextual meaning in Big Q qualitative. There are lots of different ways in which data and interpretation can be contextualised – in relation to history, policy and ideology, for example. But it can be difficult to grasp what contextualisation looks like in practice – this is why we have designed this exercise!

Read the following excerpts from four published TA papers and reflect on the ways in which the authors’ interpret their data and contextualise their analysis. What do they assume their data given them access to? This could include participants’ psychology, or meaning frameworks within the wider social context, or something else? In what other ways could the authors have located and interpreted their data?

**Example 1: An excerpt from a UK study of clients’ experiences of anorexia treatment**

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| “It appeared that therapy which focused narrowly on food and weight had the potential to encourage the women to remain in, rather than relinquish, their ED. For example, Lucy, who felt her food manipulation had been an expression of her inner battle with being lesbian, believed that therapy had led her to develop new ED behaviours: ‘*Then I start[ed] developing an issue with weight because the weight that wasn’t even a problem before now becomes a problem because I’m trying to keep myself in counselling to be able to talk about my psychological issues*’. And Megan found that [*I] spent two years with them [local ED service] … to get to the point where I realised that focusing on food and maintaining restoring weight doesn’t work for me, because all it does is push me further into depression … which I don’t handle very well … it makes me suicidal.*It was with relief that Megan explained how, after much fighting and being a ‘mouthy cow’, she had managed to get treatment from her community mental health team which focused not on her eating but on her depression. […]Amy also explained that you need time to build trust in your therapist. In discussing how she had done this with her current therapist, she said, ‘I found that relatively easy to do, it was within probably a six months or a year … I was able to feel that’. Services that offer only short term therapy are thus potentially inhibiting (or even preventing) the development of a trusting therapeutic relationship, a factor which is known to have an impact upon therapy outcome (Lambert and Barley, 2001; Norcross, 2002).” (Rance et al., 2017: 587-588) |

**Example 2: An excerpt from an Australian study of recovery from eating disorders**

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| […] Jane described the experience of anorexia as a rite of passage for many women, not just herself, at this particular sociohistorical juncture:*It’s like you’re dissembling, breaking yourself down and reassembling yourself the way you want to be. And a lot of people have described it as a kind of rite of passage, kind of like men go off to war, women go off to starve themselves to death and come back again, sort of thing. (Jane)*By drawing a parallel with men going off to war, overcoming an eating disorder is elevated to the level of a heroic quest rather than a personal mental illness, where girls and women must take themselves to the brink and face down death before they can return and move on with their lives. While [Garrett (1998)](https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.uwe.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1177/0886109915576519?utm_source=summon&utm_medium=discovery-provider) also identified women’s use of quest narratives to explain recovery from an eating disorder, as noted earlier, these had a specifically spiritual orientation and not uncommonly included ideas of forces beyond the material realm, religion, and the sacred. The quest narratives of the women in my study were presented in the more humanistic terms of a rite of passage, drawing on long-standing humanist discourses about the development of identity over time and self-actualization ([Erikson, 1980](https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.uwe.ac.uk/doi/full/10.1177/0886109915576519?utm_source=summon&utm_medium=discovery-provider)).” (Moulding, 2016: 74) |

**Example 3: An excerpt from a study exploring Donald Trump’s ‘political incorrectness’ on social media**

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| “In terms of the threat of non-white immigration specifically, when talking about Mexico in June and July 2015, Trump wrote on Twitter that he (4) loves “the Mexico people,” but that the United States is losing (4) “jobs and trade” to Mexico who is “not our friend.” According to Trump, Mexico is (4) “killing us at the border,” as (5) “billions of dollars get brought into Mexico through the border” while the United States gets “killers, drugs & crime.” For these reasons, Trump tweeted we (6) “must stop the crime and killing machine that is illegal immigration” and, most ominously, “take back our country.” In a succinct message in January 2016, Trump simply wrote: (7) “Strengthen the borders, we must be vigilant and smart. No more being politically correct.” These tweets about border and national security reflect the neoliberal belief that immigrants, despite being given the same opportunities and choices in life as regular US citizens, chose to break the law and come to the US out of selfishness and greed. Therefore, these immoral people might be dangerous, and it is logical that policies should be more punitive toward those who have deemed themselves unworthy through their own individual decisions. Once “political correctness” is quashed, and we stop wasting time discussing contextual factors for immigration, we can get down to business defending our prosperous, neoliberal, self-made (white) citizens.” (Gantt Shafer, 2017: 6) |

**Example 4: An excerpt from an international study of influences on drinking behaviour**

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| “Many viewed binge drinking as a short-term phase, which minimized the perceived health risks, as illustrated by this quotation: *When you are a student, you don’t think about things like alcoholic coma or illnesses; you drink to have fun. It’s only for a few years; you kind of assume that you will repair any damage you have done to your body later on in life when you don’t drink as much. (British woman vy2)*These attitudes are in line with previous research suggesting that people often base their drinking motivations and rationales on overstated expectations of positive benefits (i.e., alcohol will make them feel happy, relaxed, more friendly, and outgoing and will help them forget their problems) and understated measures of actual costs, such as the financial, physical, and social toll that heavy drinking takes on people’s lives (Jarvinen and Room 2007; Johnston and White 2004). These responses also support other research that has found that bingeing is often a transitional behavior, and although a minority of drinkers persist in bingeing as they age, leading to long-term health and social problems, most people leave binge drinking behind as they approach their mid-20s, when traits such as rebelliousness, risk taking, and experimentation diminish (Coleman and Cater 2005; Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology 2005).” (Hogan et al., 2014: 99) |

**Part 2: Going deeper…**

We encourage you to read the papers in their entirety and reflect on the contextualising work the authors do throughout. Keep in mind that the particular journal a paper is published in will tell you something about its contextualisation and framing. Given that there are likely many different ways a paper on a particular topic could be framed in the introduction, how do the authors contextualise and locate their research? What type of introduction do they the provide – in *Thematic Analysis* we discussed the possibilities of framing reflexive TA analyses with a conventional literature review or a more theoretically embedded account of relevant research and concepts. Which of these is provided in each paper, or does the introduction combine elements of both styles? Do the authors make reference to the wider context of the research? To wider meaning frameworks and ideologies? To existing research and theory? How does the contextualising work they do enrich their interpretation of their data? Would a more descriptive account of the data offer something different? Having done this assessment activity, do you feel well placed to understand the context of the dataset and topic in each paper, and of the interpretations the authors have made?

**References**

[Gantt Shafer, J. (2017). Donald Trump’s “political incorrectness”: Neoliberalism as frontstage racism on social media. *Social Media + Society*.](https://journals.sagepub.com/stoken/rbtfl/3RAPMY8BL83TE036HH71S/pdf/10.1177/2056305117733226)

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