# Critically Evaluating Descriptions of the Reflexive TA Analytic Process Exercise

Read the following extracts from four published papers in which the authors describe their (reflexive) TA analytic process (note that some of these papers were written before we first designated our approach as *reflexive* TA). Holding in mind the practical constraints of journal publishing, and particularly the fact that the authors of these papers might have been subject to various different constraints (e.g. tighter or more generous word limits), reflect on what we learn from each description about the authors’ use of (reflexive) TA. Consider:

* Is there scope for improvement in any of these descriptions?
* What exactly can be improved and why?
* Do you think any of these examples are stronger or weaker?
* What informed this judgement?
* What are some of the features of the *stronger* examples?

You’ll notice that Ginny is a co-author on two of these papers. Don’t assume these examples are necessarily excellent and there is no scope for improvement! All authors are subject to constraints when publishing that can distort what we might consider ideal practice.

**Example 1: Extracts from an interview study on ‘being single’ as younger heterosexual women (Pickens & Braun, 2018: 435)**

Data were analysed thematically, using the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This version of thematic analysis offers flexibility and variability in theoretical and analytic scope. We utilised a critical realist framework to locate and make sense of the women’s descriptions of their experiences of being single. Critical realism contains elements of both realist and constructionist schools of thought by acknowledging the perspectival and located nature of knowledge, theorising an independent truth as possible but unreachable due to each individual’s different locatedness and perspectives (Braun and Clarke 2013; Chouliaraki 2002; Kuhn and Westwell 2012). Due to this foundation of truth, critical realism has become widely used in social sciences because it gives discourse the weight to acknowledge injustice as real, which presents an easier route and justification toward social change (Hepburn 2003). This approach meant we treated participants’ experiences as real and true to them, yet inextricably as mediated and (socially) shaped at the intersections of cultural context and by different aspects such as age, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and other individual experiences.

The process of analysis shifts though data familiarisation and extensive coding into theme development and review. Coding, which focused on both semantic and latent meanings, was undertaken by the first author[[1]](#footnote-1) and reviewed with the second author. Codes included positive and negative aspects of being single, various pressures and expectations to couple (e.g., from family, friends, media), stigma related to singleness, and perceived aspects of “attractiveness” or “desirability” for women. Theme development, which was led by the first author in consultation with the second, initially scoped singleness and femininity as potential themes. During the analytic process, we used a flexible and open coding system, which allowed for open engagement with the data and literature. This approach allowed us to analyse the “surface” sematic data content to produce latent patterns and themes in our analysis (Braun and Clarke 2013). […]

Our analytic review process resulted in a final analytic structure of four themes, each with two subthemes; we theorised these themes as “rules” […] to capture the way participants described certain behaviours as (almost) mandatory for acceptable/desirable (hetero) femininity and hetero-singledom, with negative social consequences for breaches or resistance. Constructions of undesirable femininity often incorporated negative images of the single woman, with singledom an (ultimately) undesirable and hence fraught position to occupy. Thus, we regard the four themes we identified as functioning as *four rules to rule them all*.”

**Example 2: Extract from a qualitative interview study exploring recreational runners’ views on running barefoot or with minimal footwear (Walton & French, 2016: 455)**

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| Data analysis followed the six phase procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Interviews were accurately transcribed verbatim by the researcher and identifying information removed. Each transcript was read multiple times in an active way by searching for patterns and meanings and noting these ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2006).  After familiarization, each transcript was independently analysed by identifying initial codes detailing pertinent features in each transcript. These codes were collated into potential themes for each transcript by combining similar codes which described recurring patterns of meaning. Each transcript was analysed using the above procedure so that new themes could emerge with each case and to decrease spill over between transcripts. A cross-transcript analysis was then conducted and patterns across cases were uncovered by comparing the themes generated for each interview, to create a new overarching set of themes for the group.  Themes were refined until they captured the ‘essence’ of each theme and until data within themes fit together (internal heterogeneity) and each theme was distinct from each other (external heterogeneity; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each new theme was checked to ensure that strong evidence existed in the interview transcripts to support it (level 1) as well as the entire data set (level 2). Finally, quotations were selected which clearly represented the identified issues within each theme.  The analysis was supervised at multiple stages by a psychologist experienced in thematic analysis, as suggested by the guidelines for best practices for qualitative research (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999). This supervisor reviewed themes generated and suggested new themes. The process used by the researcher to generate themes was also discussed with the supervising psychologist, ensuring logical and accurate analysis. |

**Example 3: Extract from a qualitative survey study exploring women’s body hair meanings and practices (Terry et al., 2018: 276-277)**

Analysis followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006; see also, Terry et al., 2017) method for thematic analysis, focusing on both semantic (i.e. closer to participants’ language) and latent (i.e. informed by underlying concepts) features of the data. Analysis was situated within a critical realist ontology, which allows exploration of the meanings, experiences, and material implications of body hair and body hair removal practices, while recognising the mediating power of language, ideology and social context in producing these, and the impossibility of ever accessing decontextualized or incontrovertible truth (Willig, 2013). Using an inductive approach to thematic analysis, we developed codes and themes from the data content. In practice, this meant familiarisation of the survey responses through reading and re-reading, then recursive coding of the data, where codes were returned to and revised. Examples of semantic codes included: ‘‘it’s about choice,’’ ‘‘body hair as disgusting,’’ and ‘‘smooth skin looks ‘nicer;’’’ examples of latent codes included: ‘‘liberal tolerance,’’ ‘‘neoliberal responsibility bind,’’ and ‘‘privileged bodies.’’ Codes were then clustered together into candidate themes, to give some indication of their prevalence, to test their value in giving an overall account of the data, and assess whether patterns described were evident across most or all of the dataset (see Terry et al., 2017). The coding process was led by the ﬁrst author, following initial coding by the third author. Theme construction was iterative and consultative, with the ﬁrst and second authors meeting regularly throughout this process to discuss the ﬁndings, and to help test the interpretations developed. Each theme cohered around a central organising concept, the key idea that underpins the thematic explanation of the data (Terry et al., 2017).

**Example 4: Extracts from an interview study of the experience of venous thromboembolism (Hunter et al., 2016: 11)**

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| Participants’ verbatim transcripts were analysed individually using inductive thematic analysis procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This technique was chosen because it offers a flexible method to gain a rich and detailed account of data and is a useful research tool in exploring the quality of life in health conditions (Nicolson & Anderson, 2001). During the analytical process, initial thoughts and ideas were noted down and transcribed data were repeatedly read and the recordings were also listened to several times to ensure the accuracy and ‘data immersion’ (Braun &Clarke, 2006). The next stage of analysis involved identifying and generating initial codes and textual units for interesting features and patterns in the data relating to the research topic. Analysis then refocussed at the broader level of themes, and different codes were used to label the potential themes, with relevant data extracts (‘quotes’) gathered within the identified themes. The same unit of text could be included in more than one category. The data were systematically reviewed to ensure that a name, definition, and an exhaustive set of data to support each category were identified. Gradually overarching themes and subthemes emerged, and these were then validated by PB to ensure the rigour of analysis, and any differences were resolved through discussion. […]  Thematic analysis of interview transcripts revealed four major themes and 10 subthemes viewed as essential to determine the experience of all the participants […] |

**References**

Hunter, R., Lewis, S., Noble, S., Rance, J., & Bennett, P.D. (2017). “Post-thrombotic panic syndrome”: A thematic analysis of the experience of venous thromboembolism. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, *22*, 8–25.

# Pickens, C., & Braun, V. (2018). “Stroppy bitches who just need to learn how to settle”? Young single women and norms of femininity and heterosexuality. *Sex Roles*, *79*(7/8), 431-448.

[Terry, G., Braun, V., Jayamaha, S., & Madden, H. (2018). Negotiating the hairless ideal in Aotearoa/New Zealand: Choice, awareness, complicity, and resistance in younger women’s accounts of body hair removal. *Feminism & Psychology*, 28(2), 272–291.](https://journals.sagepub.com/stoken/rbtfl/AKLAWJK33D94PYO1YTDRC/pdf/10.1177/0959353517732592)

Walton, P.D., & French, D.P. (2016). What do people think about running barefoot/with minimalist footwear? A thematic analysis. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, *21*, 451–468.

1. Reviewers of papers with two or more authors often want to know who conducted the coding and analysis – this can reflect a range of concerns (e.g. around the contributions of individual authors). Sometimes it reflects (post)positivist preoccupations with ‘researcher bias’ and coding reliability. We think it's good practice to specify how each author contributed to the analysis, but not in a way which suggests it is for managing ‘bias’. Instead, we see this as a practice that adds to reflexivity and transparency, and would ideally be accompanied by some discussion, even if only very brief because of word count constraints, around researcher reflexivity. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)