Conducting thematic analysis on brief texts: The structured tabular approach

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Abstract

In this article I present a structured approach to thematic analysis that is designed for working with brief texts. It is grounded in both the ecumenical thematic analysis of Boyatzis and the reflexive thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke. The process of structured tabular TA is conducted in spreadsheet software such as Microsoft Excel. As with other forms of thematic analysis, it permits inductive, deductive or hybrid approaches to theme development and analysis. Its logistical processes are well suited to working with the large samples that can be achieved when gathering brief text data. It can be used to conduct purely qualitative analyses, while also eliciting frequency data that can, in principle, be analysed quantitatively too. The processes of checking agreement between analysts are outlined as integral features of the method. I discuss the practical and epistemological implications of the approach and its applicability to various qualitative and mixed-methods research designs.

Keywords: thematic analysis; brief texts, short stories, flexibility, qualitative psychology, mixed methods

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The development of qualitative research methodologies in psychology and the social sciences has from the outset been bound up with an emphasis on gathering in-depth data. This emphasis on depth in qualitative research has presented an important counteractive to the reductionist tendencies of quantitative psychology. Qualitative research emerged in psychology initially in conjunction with analysing individual cases or critical incidents in depth. Examples of early work include Erik Erikson's biographical case studies of Ghandhi and Luther (1969; 1993), Festinger's quasi-ethnographic case study of a UFO cult (Festinger, Rieken, & Schacter, 1956), and Flanagan's work developing the Critical Incident Technique and his applications of it on learning to fly (Flanagan, 1954). From the 1980s, as qualitative methodology became explicitly recognised within psychology and the social sciences, early sourcebooks on qualitative methods all focused on in-depth data collection from each case (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Reason & Rowan, 1981). Interviews and focus groups subsequently became the most widely used data collection methods in qualitative psychology (Howitt, 2016).

This focus on long texts (i.e. thousands of words per person or per conversational interaction) has remained integral to qualitative methods in the intervening decades. Analytical approaches such as Grounded Theory, the Comparative Method, Conversation Analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis were all developed with the aim of analysing these in-depth texts. Until recently, little has been provided by way of methodological injunctions for how to work analytically with brief texts, and what the theoretical and practical arguments are for doing so. To meet this need within a flexible epistemological framework, in this article I set out a variant of thematic analysis (TA) which offers an adaptable technique for working with brief qualitative data in a relatively structured way. Firstly, I will present the arguments for why brief textual data is appropriate for some studies and why working with it is becoming increasingly salient to the social sciences.

The forms and functions of brief texts in qualitative psychology

There are various theoretical and practical arguments for acknowledging the important role that brief texts (i.e. typically one paragraph or less) currently serve in the social sciences and why they are likely to become even more important to research in the future. The first argument is the sheer growth in their prevalence since the rise of social media. Qualitative studies have already been conducted on social media texts in the form of

YouTube comments (Carpentier, 2014; Mejova & Srinivasan, 2012; Schultes, Dorner & Lehner, 2013); Facebook posts (Vraga, Thorson, Kliger-Vilenchik & Gee, 2015); Twitter feeds (Giles, 2017; Lyles, Lopez, Pasick and Sarkar, 2013); and forum-based online discussions (Giles, 2016; Giles, 2014). The accounts of life events and experiences that are conveyed in social media are referred to by some theorists as *small stories* (Georgakopoulou, 2014). They have some advantages over depth data that is elicited in autobiographical interviews. For example, compared with the generally retrospective nature of interviews, social media postings typically represent events and experiences that have happened that very day or may be ongoing, hence they are less heavily filtered by memory. Furthermore, the socially interactive nature of social media postings, being composed as initial texts with subsequent comments and replies, can convey how experiences can be framed and interpreted within an intersubjective frame (Georgakopoulou, 2017).

As well as social media, another important phenomenon that has boosted the availability of short forms of qualitative data is the online survey platform, such as Qualtrics, Typeform or QuestionPro. Through these, participants can write brief stories, reflections or respond to open-ended questions. Such data is important for qualitative psychology for at least the following reasons. Firstly, it allows access to hard-to-reach sample groups or geographically dispersed populations that standard depth methods struggle to reach (Terry & Braun, 2017). Secondly, such data collection allows for total anonymity, which can be an ethical strength when asking individuals to disclose information about highly personal or sensitive topics (Slepian & Moulton-Tetlock, 2018). Thirdly, using online platforms allows for gathering a larger, and hence potentially more representative, sample than in-depth methods. This can be an advantage if the aim of a qualitative study is to make inductive claims about a broader population group from which the sample is drawn. Such an aim is, for example, often the case in qualitative evaluation studies that make claims about intervention efficacy (Thomas, 2006).

For an extensive exposition of the functions and potentials of qualitative surveys, the reader is directed to Terry and Braun (2017). These authors present a theoretical and practical guide to this form of data collection, exemplifying their approach with a qualitative survey study on views about body hair removal, which was conducted via this method with a sample of over 600 participants from New Zealand. Another technique for eliciting data that can be captured via online survey platforms is the story completion method. In this method, the first sentence of a story is provided about a specific topic. This must then be completed by participants, typically of a few hundred words in length (Clarke et al., 2018). This method has

recently been used with data collected online to explore parents' perceptions of the future for a child with a chronic pain syndrome termed Complex Regional Pain Syndrome (Coningsby & Jordan, 2019).

Along with the pragmatic opportunities and benefits of working with brief data, there is a pluralist epistemological argument for working with brief data alongside depth data. According to this argument, the more varied forms of qualitative data that can be meaningfully analysed, the more effectively we can grasp the complexities of human behaviour, inner life and interpersonal interaction that can be conveyed through words and text (Frost et al., 2010). Put another way, much qualitative data is available in small texts, so to include them fully within the auspices of qualitative methods is to ensure that psychology and the social sciences reach out to all possible forms of textual data and the potential insights they contain.

Some methods for analysing online data have already been developed. For example, Digital Conversation Analysis has been devised for analysing online discussion (Giles, Stommel, Paulus, Lester, & Reed, 2015). Content analysis is sometimes used for analysing open-ended written response data (e.g. Zick, Granieri, & Makoul, 2007). The approach to thematic analysis devised by Braun and Clarke (2006) has been used in some studies with brief data already (e.g. Deighton-Smith & Bell, 2018). Below, I set out the case for creating a structured version of thematic analysis (TA) that is conducted in spreadsheet software such as Excel and is specifically designed to meet the challenges and opportunities of working with brief texts. To illustrate some points, I use data, tables and a figure based on a study on how perceptions of parenting relate to authenticity in young adults (Omotola Ayoola & Robinson, 2017).

The tabular approach to thematic analysis on brief texts

The structured tabular approach to TA for brief texts integrates the influences of two established approaches. It employs aspects of the approach to thematic analysis by Boyatzis (1998) and also aspects of Braun and Clarke's approach (2006). Both these approaches embrace a flexible ethos in which an ecumenical range of epistemologies can be catered for, including those that assume social and physical reality to be real in some sense beyond the observer (realist) and those that assume reality to be, at least in part, constructed in the act of perception and interpretation (constructionist). The approach of Boyatzis is more structured than that of Braun and Clarke – it puts a greater emphasis on frequency calculation and reliability and these are central to the approach described here.

An important assumption that underpins structured tabular TA is that the reflexive injunctions of Braun and Clarke (see Braun, Clarke, Hayfield & Terry, 2018) are complementary to the injunctions for reliability and consensus that are advocated by Boyatzis (1998), when it comes to working with brief texts. In other words, it is epistemologically coherent to both acknowledge the subjectivity and situatedness of the researcher *and* aim for a high level of agreed inter-subjective consensus.

At a procedural level, structured tabular TA follows a hybridised process approach that incorporates elements of Braun and Clarke's TA process (2006) and Boyatzis's TA phases (1998). Below I describe each phase in turn and whether it applies to inductive research, deductive research or hybrid designs that combine an inductive and deductive focus. Table 1 summarises the phases for inductive, deductive and hybrid options. As you can see, the majority of phases are the same for all three kinds of designs.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Phase A: A-priori theme development (Deductive and Hybrid only)

Thematic analysis that is purely deductive in approach does not require the generation of new codes and themes. It commences with a set of themes prior to data collection and analysis, taken directly from a previous study in the topic area and then seeks to apply those to a new sample. Research objectives suitable for a deductive approach include: (a) replicating an existing thematic analysis study or (b) developing, extending or testing an existing thematic framework or theory. In order to develop a set of themes for a deductive study, one can take either a broadly theory-based approach, in which themes are inferred from a theory, or a prior-research-based approach, in which themes are taken from the findings of an existing thematic analysis study (Boyatzis, 1998).

Deductive and inductive approaches can be combined in hybrid designs (Robinson & Smith, 2010). A hybrid approach is appropriate where there is (a) substantial qualitative literature on the topic of study to draw on, meaning a purely inductive approach would potentially omit existing insights and knowledge, but also (b) a clear sense that existing knowledge is partial, and hence there is a need for continued development of thematic frameworks and theory.

In such a hybrid approach, the analyst will firstly deploy an initial set of themes or concepts from existing work to orientate the analysis process. These provide a starting point as *orientating constructs*. The process of generating codes and themes is then worked through

with this opening set of constructs or themes in mind, and these are modified or added to depending on whether the data fits the scheme or not. For example, in a study on admiration in young adults, myself and colleagues used this hybrid approach to organise our analysis of brief written descriptions of an admired individual provided by young adults from three cultures (Robinson et al., 2015). We employed a thematic framework from an existing qualitative study (Schlenker, Weigold & Schlenker, 2008), and then refined this set of themes as we analysed the data. So, the final set of themes only partially drew on the initial themes.

In summary, if you are intending to conduct a deductive or hybrid analysis, you will need to select a set of constructs or themes from existing literature and provide a robust rationale for why you have done so.

Phase B: Deep immersion in the data (Deductive, Inductive and Hybrid)

For this phase, you will need to transcribe or import your data into Excel in such a way that each brief text occupies one cell in a column, as illustrated in Table 2. You will also need to include a column with an anonymised participant identifier or number, and columns with demographic details. Two key injunctions that Braun and Clarke emphasise in their methodology, which are also essential to this first phase of the tabular approach, are (a) repeated reading of the data, and (b) taking initial notes for codes. To facilitate repeated reading of the data in Excel, make sure to select the 'Wrap Text' option (right click > Format Cells > Alignment > Wrap Text). This ensures that all text is shown in each cell. To facilitate taking notes, next to the column of data, create a column labelled *initial notes*. See Table 2 for an illustration of the layout of the spreadsheet. Carefully and slowly read each data segment, adding notes for possible codes, or other initial analytical ideas, as you go. If you have started with an a-priori theme set, you might make notes on any cases that you think do not fit the scheme. For this task, you can either do this on screen or print the spreadsheet out, depending on your preference. Follow this process of immersive reading of the entire dataset *at least twice*, until you feel a strong familiarity with all the data and start to get an early sense of any patterns therein.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Phase C – Generating initial codes and themes (Inductive and Hybrid Only)

After the initial process of familiarising yourself with the data, you can move onto the development of codes, if you are using an inductive design. For the process of generating

initial codes, add an additional column to your spreadsheet and add the title in the top row of 'Initial Codes', as shown in Table 2. Based on your immersive reading and initial notes, add in names of codes into this new column. Enter terms or words that you think, based on your repeated reading, subsume or describe content in multiple data segments or texts. By so doing, you are taking the first step towards finding common patterns, words or ideas, which is always your ultimate goal in a thematic analysis.

Once the process of code development is complete, you will have at least one code entered in every row. For the next step, copy and paste the full column of code words into another worksheet in the same Excel file (NB. click the ⊕ button at the bottom to do this). On this new sheet, use the copy and paste function to move codes around and group them into clusters. You can use different columns for different clusters to aid visualising the process. Each cluster of codes is a prospective theme. Then, you need to name your clustered codes using phrases or terms that are clearly anchored in the data and are as idiosyncratic to your study as possible (that can sometimes mean using a longer, rather than shorter, theme name). A common error is to name themes with terms that are so generic that they have no clear relationship to your specific study or research question.

You can continue to move codes between clusters, combine clusters, and re-name themes until you have a framework that you are satisfied will allow all, or nearly all, of your brief texts to be linked to at least one theme. A popular way of creating an additional layer of order in your themes, which Braun and Clarke discuss, is to have two levels of theme: main theme and sub-theme. Main themes are more abstract and therefore include more semantic content than sub-themes, hence provide an additional quality of analytical parsimony, should that be desired. Whether or not two levels of theme are appropriate to your study depends on the research questions you pose, and whether a more abstract level of thematising helps to convey clear and coherent answers to your questions.

The structured tabular approach to thematic analysis is open to searching for semantic or latent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Semantic themes are manifest in the surface meanings of the data; they are descriptive and minimise inference from the textual content. Latent themes require further interpretation, as they are not manifest in the data, but are implicit beyond or below the surface content. Latent thematising is more strongly theory-led than semantic theorising, for theory provides the justification for making more contentious and extended inferential leaps from data to themes. Hence most latent thematising requires at least some deductive theory-led focus.

Phase D – Tabulating themes against data segments (deductive, inductive and hybrid)

Phase D involves attaching data segments to themes in a tabulated form, an example of which is shown in Table 3. This provides a foundation for the agreement-checking and frequency calculation processes outlined in Phases E and F. The practical process of Phase D is as follows:

1. If you are working inductively, open a new worksheet in your Excel file and copy a duplicated version of your Phase B spreadsheet, including participant number, demographic data and qualitative text data in the left-hand columns. Delete the notes and themes columns (make sure to keep the original worksheet with those notes and themes on file).

2. Insert a row at the top of the new spreadsheet. Write your theme names across the top row, starting with the column to the right of your qualitative text column. If you have just one level of theme, then one row at the top will suffice. If your themes are differentiated into main themes and sub-themes, insert two rows at the top and put the main themes across row 1, and the sub-themes across row 2. For main themes, merge the cells across the columns that main themes refer to, as shown in the example in Table 2. You can add colour to these top rows for ease of reference. Keep theme columns narrow, so that you can fit many on the screen at once – this helps the process of analytically allocating texts to themes.

3. Select the top row or top two rows (depending on whether you have one or two levels of theme), then go to *View > Freeze Panes > Freeze Panes (based on current selection).* This will mean that your theme names remain visible as you scroll downwards.

4. Once you are sure that you have your final set of themes, go down through each brief text and wherever a sub-theme is represented in the data, *add a 1 in the relevant column*. Do this until all have been allocated to sub-themes. You can attach each text to multiple themes if appropriate. Table 3 shows an example in which texts from 5 participants have been allocated to three themes, extracted from the authenticity and parenting study by Omotola Ayoola & Robinson (2017).

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

This process of tabulation allows the relationship between data and themes to be visually related in new ways, so may lead to continued theme development. If themes are further

developed at this point, make sure to keep a dated log of all changes. This helps your analytical process to be fully transparent to others. One option for keeping a log of thematic developments is by creating an additional worksheet in your Excel file and using it a log. In this way, it will also be found in the same place as your analysis.

Phase E: Checking agreement

Phase E involves the process of checking the level of thematising agreement between yourself and another analyst. The structured tabular approach to TA is conducive to agreement checking, as the unit of coding (i.e. the brief text) is clear, and the tabulation process of Phase D provides the foundation for an easy protocol for checking analyses across researchers.

This process of agreement checking has often been referred to previously as checking inter-rater reliability (Boyatzis, 1998), but this term does not work for the tabular approach to TA for several reasons: firstly, thematic analysts do not *rate* data, and secondly reliability is a term that comes laden with meanings from psychometrics and classical test theory, which conflates the logic of seeking agreement in a qualitative analysis with the arguments for consistent self-report or test-based measurement tools. Therefore, the term preferred here is *inter-analyst agreement*. One way of reaching agreement is through an informal discussion-based approach where the two researchers discuss the themes they have attached to the brief texts and resolve differences and debates in order to end up with a more consistent, coherent and clear set of themes. A more structured set of processes for checking agreement across analysts is as follows:

1. Two individuals are provided with a blank version of the data tabulation spreadsheet with no. 1s entered. Both individuals should ideally be familiar with the theme names and codes developed or employed for the study.
2. The two analysts should allocate texts to themes independently of each other.
   a. If the dataset is large, an option is to select a subset of participants for this agreement check (20-30 is an appropriate number).
3. Having both done that, one of the analysts combines the two spreadsheets into one for checking, by inserting the theme columns from one into the other.
4. For each row, the analysts must then calculate the number of agreements (where both analysts have a '1' in the same cell), and the number of disagreements (one analyst has a '1' in the cell, but the other does not).

5. The total number of disagreements and agreements should be calculated across all cases. A percentage level of agreement is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{Total no. of agreements}}{\text{Total no. of agreements + disagreements}} \times 100$$

The aim of this process is to end up with a level of agreement that supports the proposition that the analytical scheme and process is *transparent, rigorous*, *coherent* and *trustworthy* (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017; Yardley, 2000). If a thematic scheme is clear and coherent, and themes are described with rigour and transparency, analysts should have little problem agreeing on which texts are allocated to which theme. Conversely, a weak analysis, in the words of Braun and Clarke, is where "the themes do not appear to work, where there is too much overlap between themes, or where the themes are not internally coherent and consistent" (2006, p.94). If themes are vague, poorly defined, or poorly labelled, two analysts will find it difficult to tabulate themes against brief texts, and this will be shown up in this process.

An appropriate rule-of-thumb to aim for, originally put forward by Miles and Huberman (1994) based on extensive trialling of inter-analyst checking, is 80% agreement. If this level is not achieved, the two analysts can convene and discuss their disagreements and consider ways of adapting theme names or theme descriptions to come to a higher level of agreement. This second stage of reaching consensus need not be done blind, but rather should be done as a discursive process of continued theme development between the two researchers until a consensus position is achieved.

Ultimately, qualitative research should *always* have an interpersonal element between researchers as well as between researcher and participant, and Phase E facilitates this via extensive interpersonal interaction and discussion between researchers in the process of agreement-seeking. It is important to emphasise that there is nothing positivist or essentialist-realist in the injunction of checking inter-analyst agreement. Using a constructionist or interpretivist framework does not mean giving up on reaching agreement, but instead involves interpreting agreement across analysts as *inter-subjective consensus within an agreed interpretive or discursive framework*, rather than discovery of an objective 'fact'. Ultimately, most researchers working with thematic analysis who want the outcome of their research to be a foundation for further research will be concerned about whether other analysts can follow their work and apply their thematic scheme in a way that shows fidelity

with the original, and carefully following the processes of Phase E will support that possibility.

Phase F – Exploring Theme Frequencies

Frequencies in qualitative reports provide evidence for the *relative prevalence* of themes, and thus help convey key information on the salience and importance of a theme to the study's message. Frequencies do *not* by themselves convey the centrality or salience of themes, as the relationship of aims and research questions to themes are also key in discerning theme salience during an analysis. Themes may be commonly cited but not central in providing meaningful responses to research questions. However, without any reference to the prevalence of a theme's occurrence, there is no way of knowing if it is a minority or majority concern in relation to the phenomenon being studied. Whether or not frequencies are formally established, qualitative research generally involves reference to the proportion of participants who have text linked to a theme, even if that is just by the way of fuzzy quantifiers such as 'most participants' or 'some participants' in the results section.

The use of structured tabular thematic analysis provides for a higher degree of precision with which statements of a theme's prevalence across the sample can be made. Having such prevalence data increases the trustworthiness and transparency of the findings, in line with other injunctions for trustworthiness in thematic analysis (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). It is, however, important to emphasise again that frequency of a theme does not equate on its own to how relevant or salient a theme is within a study (Braun & Clarke, 2016).

To calculate the frequency of participants allocated to each theme, add a frequency calculation cell at the bottom of each column, as illustrated in Table 3. To calculate this automatically using an Excel formula, write =SUM( ) in the cell, with the brackets containing the top and bottom cell code, separated by a colon. So, for example, if a theme is shown in column D and there are 40 participants, the first of which is in row 2 (because themes occupy row 1), the formula would be = SUM(D2:D41). The resulting frequency data is primarily to provide accurate statements about the prevalence of themes when writing up the report in Phase 6. You can also choose to explore frequencies by comparing them across key demographic groups, for example, comparing males and females, if that is considered appropriate to the research question.

Frequency data present the opportunity of further quantitative analysis beyond total-sample frequencies. For example, if a researcher had data from males and females and was

interested in gender differences in terms of theme prevalence, they could transfer the spreadsheet into a statistics package, insert 0 for all the instances where a theme has not been coded, enter gender in a column as a nominal variable, and run a frequency-based test such as Chi Square to test the difference. This process fits within a form of mixed-methods research design referred to as the *data transformation model* (Creswell & Plan Clark, 2010).

Phase G: Developing thematic maps and diagrams

Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise the benefits of thematic maps and diagrams to thematic analysis. These can aid analysis by presenting a visual representation of relations among themes that stimulate an integration of themes into a model or a conceptual framework (Robinson, 2011). Maps and diagrams are also integral to the structured tabular approach to TA, both as a way of helping to develop and relate themes, and as a way of presenting analytical patterns concisely and coherently. See Figure 1 for an example of a diagram developed from the Omotola Ayoola and Robinson (2017) study on authenticity and parenting in childhood.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Phase H - Producing the report

In any thematic analysis study, writing the report is an active part of the analytical process, and this holds true of the structured tabular approach. The nature and structure of the report depends on whether a tabular thematic analysis is used as (1) a stand-alone analysis, (2) alongside in-depth qualitative methods, or (3) with quantitative methods. If brief texts are the sole form of data, the report will contain a singular results section that presents the themes using the typical structure of a qualitative results section. If forms of in-depth qualitative data have been collected concurrently as part of the study, it is recommended that the two are presented in two subsequent results sections, with an integrative discussion to systematically compare the brevity-and-breadth findings of the tabular approach with the length-and-depth findings of the other method.

Another option for a report including a structured tabular thematic analysis is a mixed-methods paper that combines qualitative and quantitative findings. As mentioned earlier, a popular option in mixed-methods research is to concurrently gather numerical and brief textual data about a specific phenomenon by way of an online data collection tool, then integrating these forms of data to inform findings. For example, the Omotola Ayoola &

Robinson (2017) study from which the data extracts in Table 2 and Table 3 are taken, included (a) brief texts on how parenting during childhood is perceived to influence adult authenticity, as well as (b) psychometric data on trait authenticity and retrospective ratings of parental care and/or neglect during childhood. The qualitative and quantitative analyses were discussed in the report and interpreted in combination.

Further issues: Epistemology, sampling, prospects

In structured tabular TA, the analyst always elicits qualitative data from brief texts, whilst having the option of drawing out some quantitative data too. A common criticism of the merging of qualitative and quantitative research is that they are based on fundamentally different epistemologies, with quantitative research being positivist and qualitative research being interpretivist (Wiggins, 2011). I contend that this does not reflect the plurality of epistemologies in both qualitative and quantitative methods. Quantitative methods in psychology and the social sciences have in fact rarely been associated with positivism, but with a plurality of at least three paradigms (Robinson, 2014a). The first of these is Popper's falsification paradigm, from whence comes the focus on hypothetico-deductive logic (Popper, 2002). Popper was explicitly critical of positivism; whilst positivism conceives of science as eliciting solid facts and objective truths, Popper's approach sees science as eliciting tentative and provisional hypotheses that are never actually true but can be only said to be not yet proved false. The second influential paradigm in quantitative methods is the pragmatism of William James (1907). James supported the use of qualitative and quantitative data. He based this on the reasoning that all research should primarily be directed towards some productive end, and thus have an instrumental benefit. We should use whatever kind of empirical information can help solve that problem, and not determine a priori if that evidence should be verbal or numerical. A third paradigmatic foundation is the introspectionism of Wundt and his followers, which formatively influenced the development of psychometrics (Otto, 2018). This introspectionist paradigm provides a justification for self-observation and hence for self-report questionnaires, and this in turn supports the edifice of quantitative research based such methods.

Given that tabular thematic analysis traverses some traditionally conceived dividing lines between qualitative and quantitative methods, this pluralistic framework for quantitative and qualitative methods is an important meta-assumption. A further point to bear in mind is that numbers are semiotic signifiers that, when used as scientific data, need just as much interpretation as words. The language of number that we used today has evolved over

millennia out of a combination of Arab, Hindu and Roman systems, and as such has a cultural linguistic heritage just as written language does. To be qualitative does not entail negating the language of number but does entail the assertion that numbers are arbitrary signs that assume meaning via complex cultural and cognitive networks of sense-making, just as words do (Seife, 2000).

Another pertinent issue that relates to structured tabular TA is the matter of sampling. Qualitative methods that have traditionally been associated with depth data have been associated with *purposive* sampling (e.g. Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Purposive sampling involves the intentional selection of specific kinds of participant from the target sample to ensure variability of the sample along key parameters (e.g. ensuring a balance of males and females or young and old). It is designed to elicit a sample that represents a broader population when the N is low (Robinson, 2014b).

When structured tabular TA is used, the sample N will usually be larger than in-depth qualitative studies. Therefore, it can employ random sampling. Random sampling uses the logic of randomness to help ensure all relevant kinds of participant are included and works when a sample N is large. Purposive sampling can be combined with such random sampling (Robinson, 2014b). For example, a researcher can purposively select to have 30 males and 30 females in a sample, but then randomly sample within each gender to reach that sample target. In sum, a problem-focused and flexible approach to sampling, which can incorporate purposive and random sampling or combinations of the two, should accompany tabular thematic analysis.

To conclude, I have presented the structured tabular approach to thematic analysis as a way of flexibly and rigorously analysing brief texts. Such an approach that is tailor-made for brief texts is of growing importance given both the increasing availability of such data via social media along with the rising popularity of brief response or short story elicitation methods (Clarke, Braun, Frith & Moller, 2019; Terry & Braun, 2017). The approach synthesises injunctions from two approaches to thematic analysis and adds in a range of processes for working with brief texts, including the practical advantages of using a spreadsheet when dealing with a larger sample and a tabulated form of analysis that provides opportunities for frequency and agreement calculation. It requires no specialist analysis software, thus is widely accessible and user-friendly for researchers at any level. The protocols and processes I have described above are flexible guidelines, and I encourage the reader to adapt them to their needs and to innovate further as and when appropriate. Brief

texts remain an important frontier for qualitative psychology and I hope this method will act as encouragement for researchers to explore their full potential as a source of data.

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Table 1. Analytical phases for deductive, inductive and hybrid research studies

Deductive	Hybrid	Inductive
Phase A: A-priori theme development	Phase A: A-priori theme development	*SKIP PHASE A*
Phase B: Deep immersion in the data	Phase B: Deep immersion in the data	Phase B: Deep immersion in the data
SKIP PHASE C	Phase C – Developing revised codes and themes in context of, and influenced by, a-priori themes.	Phase C – Generating codes and themes (as uninfluenced by existing theory as is possible)
Phase D – Tabulating themes against data chunks	Phase D – Tabulating themes against data chunks	Phase D – Tabulating themes against data chunks
Phase E: Checking agreement	Phase E: Checking agreement	Phase E: Checking agreement
Phase F – Exploring Theme Frequencies	Phase F – Exploring Theme Frequencies	Phase F – Exploring Theme Frequencies
Phase G: Thematic maps	Phase G: Thematic maps	Phase G: Thematic maps
Phase H - Producing the report	Phase H - Producing the report	Phase H - Producing the report

*Table 2: Spreadsheet format for Phase 1 with illustrative textual data from parenting –
authenticity study*

No.	Gender	Qualitative data segment	Initial notes	Initial codes
1	Male	Yeah. I think so. My parents were honest with me and about themselves and I think it fostered that in me, too... So, I try to stay true to myself as much as I can.		
9	Female	My mum made it very easy to be whoever I wanted to be and I saw how she accepted all my friends growing up in spite of anything that could make them different/stand out. She took an interest in me and who I was and so I had a strong sense of self from an early age.		
27	Female	I believe that it helped a lot. My mum always encouraged me to be myself and it was fun to sometimes shock my dad with who I am. So, I have learnt to know myself and to be myself.		
33	Male	The love my parents have for me show that I don't need to pretend to be someone else as they love me just the way I am.		

*NB. Cases selected for this table represent main theme of perceived positive effects of
parenting on authenticity*

Table 3: Spreadsheet format for Phase 4 – illustrative five cases, one main theme with three subthemes shown

No.	Gender	Qualitative data segment	Main theme: Perceived negative effect of parenting on authenticity		
			Subtheme 1 – Cultural / generational disconnect	Subtheme 2 Parents as negative role models	Subtheme 3 Criticism or disapproval of characteristics
10	Male	I feel I am true to myself, but there are some parts of who I am I feel I have dismissed or choose to hide from my parents as I feel that they would disapprove or not fit the image that they have of me.			1
15	Female	I think they gave me a foundation. However, I've come to being my own adult sometimes in disagreement with my parents. I think it's because they were born and raised in Africa and I in London.	1		
35	Female	Being criticised for my personality by my family has caused me to feel insecure as an adult. If I was ever feeling upset about something that my parents didn't believe to be a big deal, they would brush it off, leaving me to feel like I was too sensitive.			1
41	Male	My parents are very particular people and so the parts of myself that do not match their picture of me have to be hidden. I try to be as authentic as possible but it is not always possible, but only in some aspects of life.			1
48	Female	Seeing how much my father neglected his own emotions and needs completely, I feel obligated not to make the same mistakes and live a life being as authentic as possible but find it difficult as I feel the impression my father gave has stuck with me and is difficult to counterbalance.		1	
		SUBTHEME FREQUENCY	**1**	**1**	**3**

NB. Cases selected for this table represent main theme of perceived negative effects of parenting on authenticity

Figure 1. A map of themes developed in a study of how parents are perceived to influence adult authenticity in young adults

Perceived negative effect of parenting on authenticity

Criticism or disapproval of characteristics

Perceived lack of importance to parents

Parents as negative role models

Cultural/generational disconnect

Self-concealment, insecurity, avoidance of self-disclosure

undermine

Authenticity as a young adult

facilitate

Confidence to self-assert or self-disclose, sense of security

Perceived positive effect of parenting on authenticity

Support for choices and decisions made

Parents positive role models; honest & open

Acceptance of personality & friends

Unconditional love and care