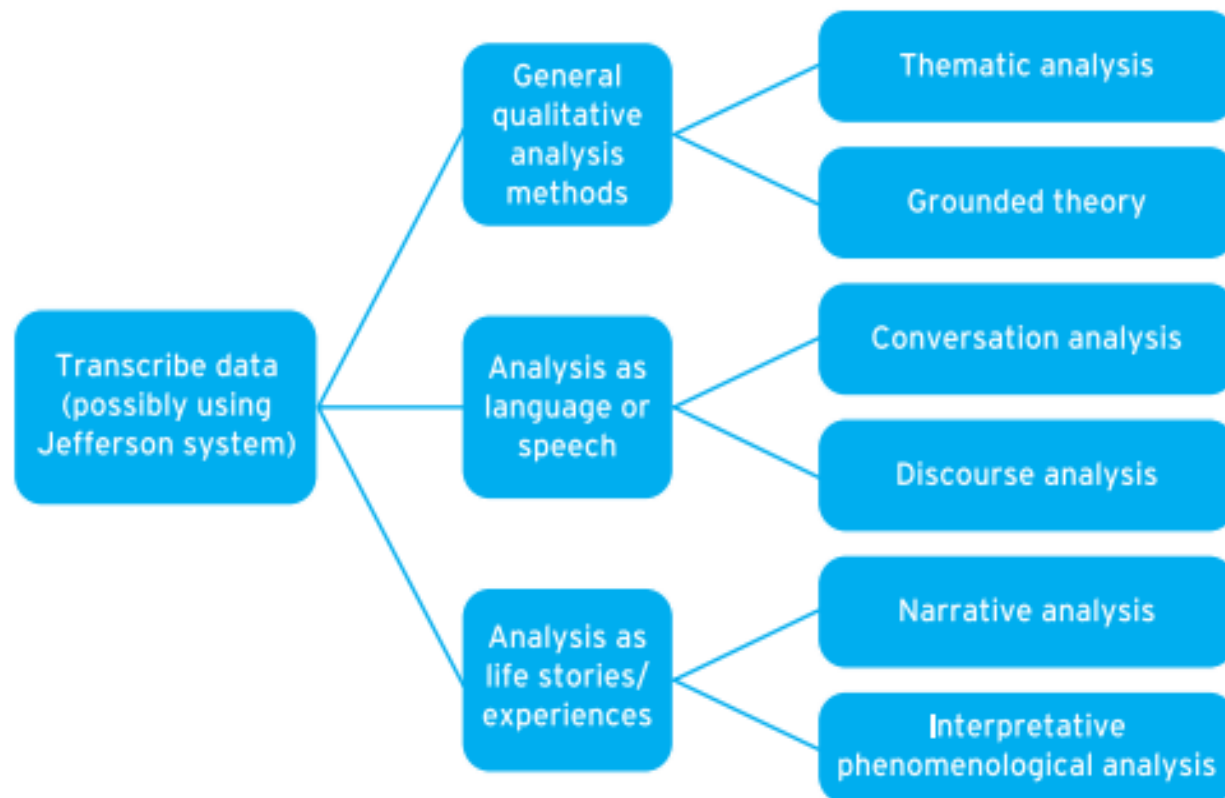# Qualitative Data Analysis

Dr. Sadia Malik

TABLE P3.1 Backgrounds and epistemological basis of qualitative analysis methods

Thematic analysis	• The epistemological basis of thematic analysis is relatively unspecific other than it follows the broad general features of qualitative approaches.
Grounded theory	• Grounded theory is a reaction to the large-scale social theory of sociology prior to 1960s. It provided rigorous methodological procedures for theory building.
Discourse analysis	• The roots of discourse analysis are in the idea of speech as action as well as Foucault's approach to social systems.
Conversation analysis	• Conversation analysis adopts a strongly ethnomethodological approach to language in its attempt to understand conversation as a skilled performance.
Interpretative phenomenological analysis	• Interpretative phenomenological analysis is strongly based on phenomenology and a number of related approaches. It concentrates on experiences as experienced by the individual.
Narrative psychology	• Narrative psychology concentrates on life-story data which it interprets from a critical realist perspective. In many respects it shares many of the perspectives of interpretative phenomenological analysis.

FIGURE P3.1 Pathways through Part 3 of the book

- Most qualitative analytic methods tend to be dependent on transcribing the data from, usually, an aural to a written form. Thus the figure starts with transcription. This is dealt with in Chapter 6. Of course, if the data are already in written form, it will not be necessary to involve transcription. For the most part, just a word-by-word transcript is sufficient but for conversation analysis and some aspects of discourse analysis it is important to use the Jefferson transcription system. This includes more additional features of language such as overlapping speakers and gaps in the conversation.

- Thematic analysis and grounded theory are fairly generic qualitative data analysis methods. Thematic analysis is basically various methods for categorising the data into a number of major themes or descriptive categories. Grounded theory does this and more, and is better conceived

as a strategy for data collection and data analysis since it has procedures for sampling to maximise the relevance of the data to theory as well as ways of coding the data to produce themes. But then it goes further and involves ways of generating more general theories. Both of these approaches are less constrained by epistemological factors than any of the other methods described in the next few chapters.

- Conversation analysis is a coherent approach to the structure of conversation as an orderly aspect of social interaction. In contrast, the term discourse analysis is far wider and includes activities, at one pole, very similar to those of conversation analysis but, then, involves aspects of the work of the French academic Michel Foucault who provided a critical approach to social institutions at the other pole. Both of these can legitimately be called discourse analysis but to assume that they overlap greatly can lead to confusion.

- Narrative analysis and Interpretative phenomenological analysis are in many ways similar. They both rely strongly on qualitative data and, usually, in-depth interview data. They both can be seen as versions of critical realism since although they are sensitive to the qualitative idea of relativism (i.e. we can never know reality exactly – it is always perceived through a mirror), they both essentially take the view that there is something 'real' which is central to the experiences of individuals. Both concentrate on describing what this reality is. Nevertheless, interpretative phenomenological analysis has strong roots in phenomenology whereas narrative analysis is dependent on the developments in personality theory known as narrative psychology.

Data Transcription Methods

- Transcription is the process of turning sound (and video) recordings into written text prior to the further analysis of the material. Orthographic (or secretarial or playscript) transcription simply attempts to note down the words spoken. Other forms of transcription do more to describe more precisely the way that the words are said etc.

- There are a number of transcription systems but largely they have made no inroads into psychology. The exception is the Jefferson transcription system which is important in conversation analysis (Chapter 10) and the social constructionist version of discourse analysis (Chapter 9).

- The Jefferson transcription system was devised by Gail Jefferson, an important figure in the development of conversation analysis. It tries to give a clearer indication of how words are said but it does not include all relevant features such as the facial expression or gestures accompanying the words. That is, transcription inevitably loses information from the original speech though precisely what is lost depends on the method used.

- There is no requirement that Jefferson transcription is used for all qualitative data analysis though it is especially important when one is treating language as an activity which does things rather than simply communicating information. Transcription techniques are much better developed for auditory than for visual recordings.

- Transcription is a time-consuming process which is prone to errors. A researcher should always choose a method of transcription which matches the purpose of their research. The transcriber should avoid putting more into the transcription than their analysis calls for though this is not adhered to in many published studies.

- Jefferson transcription uses keyboard strokes which are universal on modern keyboards but uses them to symbolise different aspects of the way in which the words spoken are said.

which the spoken word exhibits in profusion but which the same words written down usually lack. Although it is perfectly possible for summaries of language data to be used for some research purposes, it is virtually universal in modern qualitative research that one works with a written transcript which is a *verbatim* (word-for-word) record of the spoken word or, in some cases, sections of spoken word particularly relevant to the research question. The basic choices of transcription methods which are commonly used in qualitative psychology are:

- The orthographic/secretarial/playscript transcription which concentrates solely on the words which are said, not how they are said. This is the form of transcription that most types of qualitative research use.

- Jefferson transcription which uses common symbols to provide additional information over and above what is available in the secretarial transcription. The additions are things like the way in which the words are said, where speakers overlap, and so forth. This system of transcription is used mainly in conversation analysis (Chapter 10) and in the type of social constructionist discourse analysis associated with Potter and Wetherell (1987) (Chapter 9).

Research imposes limitations on the data which are collected. For example, the decision to audio-record a focus group discussion imposes its own parameters and a decision to video-record changes the situation too. Should the researcher choose to take notes during an interview then this also has its influence. For example, the note-taking researcher might appear to be rather more formal. Whatever choices are made in research, they will have a bearing on the nature of the data and, as a consequence, what can be done with the data. Much the same is true of transcription: once a choice is made about who transcribes, what is transcribed and how it is transcribed then these choices have consequences. For example, Potter and Hepburn (2009) suggest:

same as the original spoken words on which it is based.

In just what ways do transcriptions differ in terms of spoken words being written down? These differences should identify some of the limitations of the orthographic/secretarial/playscript transcription. Among the additional non-verbal communications that occur during an interview or focus group are the following:

- *Proxemic communication* The use of the physical space between persons in a conversation. For example, think of the way in which ordinary women on television reality shows will physically move their chairs apart to indicate their loathing for an ex-partner who refuses to believe that her baby is his.
- *Kinesic communication* The range of body movements and postures which may reveal more than the spoken word does. For example, the individual who folds their arms during a conversation might be perceived and interpreted in a particular way.
- *Paralinguistic communication* This includes the changes in volume, pitch and other characteristics of the voice. For example, it is known from research that many people's voices rise in pitch when they lie.
- *Chronemic communication* The variations in the pace of speech and the silences which are introduced into speech. For example, people may speak faster when they are in an emotional state.

None of these appears in a word-for-word orthographic/secretarial/playscript transcription but some transcription methods do allow for their partial inclusion. Other methods of transcription, such as the Jefferson transcription method, partly include these 'missing' elements. However, no transcription method is available which includes all of the above. There are some aspects of human inter-

TABLE 6.1 The Jefferson transcription system (as described in Jefferson, 2004)

Jefferson symbol	Example	Usage
Pitch indicators		
↑	absol↑utely	Pitch rise symbol. Bearing in mind that there are continuous variations in the pitch of speech, ↑ indicates that the following has an 'unexpectedly' markedly higher pitch than the previous speech. Multiple arrows may be used to indicate greater extents of this.
↓	absolutel↓y	Again considering the normal variations in the pitch of speech, ↓ indicates that the following is spoken at a markedly lower pitch than the previous speech.
*	I'm sor*ry	What follows the asterisk is spoken in a squeaky or creaky voice.
.	sure.	The word before is spoken with a falling intonation possibly indicative of stopping though it does not have to be followed by a pause.

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TABLE 6.2 Steps in transcription

Step 1: tuning into the recorded interaction	Step 2: rough transcription	Step 3: adding Jefferson symbols and transcribing sequencing accurately
• Listen to the recording several times	• Names of speakers for each segment of conversation	• Add the fine detail of the transcription symbols taking special care with overlaps, etc.
• Decide whether all of the material needs transcribing	• The words said written down as pronounced typically	• Make sure that the transcription is in its clearest form for readers
• If not, decide what parts need to be transcribed	• Put any non-transcribable features in brackets, e.g. ((gun fired))	
	• Only use continuous capitals for loud passages and nowhere else	
	• Indicate pauses, etc. for later more precise measurement	

How to lay out a transcription

According to Potter and Hepburn (2009), the following is the best way of laying out a Jefferson transcription:

- *Font*   It is important to use a proportional font otherwise the spacing of overlapping conversation, for example, is very difficult. Their recommended font is Courier in 10pt size.
- *Line numbers*   Each line of a Jefferson transcription includes a line number. Although these can be typed in manually, they can be inserted automatically by Word. The important steps are (a) end each line of transcript by pressing the Enter key to force a line break; (b) select all of the lines which you want numbered using your mouse; and (c) right click with your mouse and select number (or numbering in some versions). Remember that line lengths are arbitrary so you can force line breaks where you feel that it is convenient. The line numbering convention helps you identify an excerpt from a transcript since the line numbers will be part way through the sequence. The line numbering is fairly arbitrary and the same recording transcribed by a different researcher may have lines of different length and perhaps more or fewer lines for the same amount of the original recording. This arbitrariness is important in that it gives the flexibility needed to be able to indicate overlapping speech.
- *Layout*   (a) Use 25 mm (1 inch) margins at top, bottom, left and right of the page and (b) use a code number for the extract and ideally include some indicator of the source of the extract.
- *Speaker's/contributor's name*   Have the speaker's/contributor's name in bold and try to clearly separate this from what they say with some space.
- *Blank space*   Because you may wish to make notes on the transcript, it is important to include a copious amount of blank space to the right of the text. Judicious use of the Enter key will help you with that.
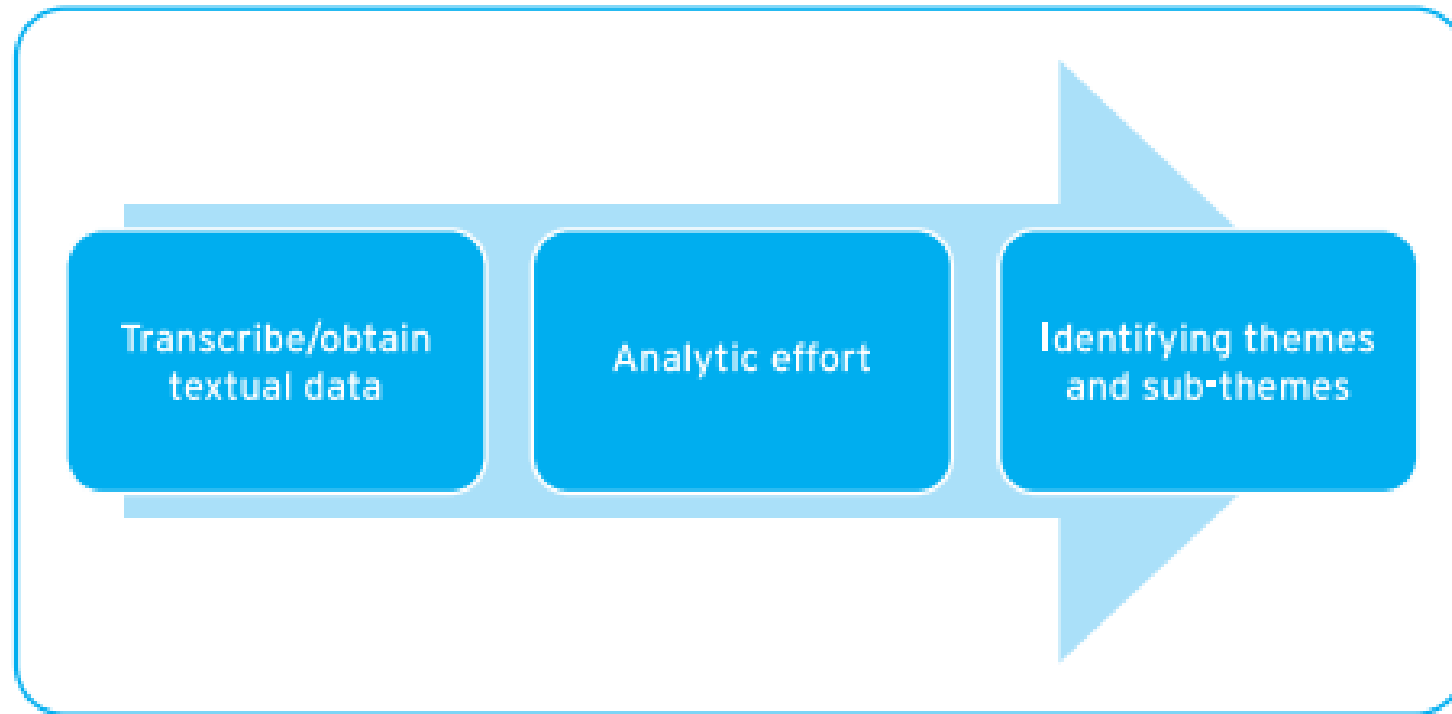
Thematic Analysis

- Thematic analysis is an important and relatively straightforward form of qualitative analysis. It is an excellent starting point to begin qualitative research as it is conceptually only moderately demanding.

- Thematic analysis is a commonly referred to qualitative data analysis method. However, it has been criticised in terms of lacking a consistent and transparent formulation. This chapter seeks to rectify this by outlining a more rigorous approach to thematic analysis. Studies using thematic analysis should always include detailed information about how the analysis was carried out. Accounts of how to do thematic analysis were scarce until recently.

- Thematic analysis is just what it says – an analysis of the major themes to be found in interview and other qualitative data. It is much less dependent on theory than are, say, discourse analysis (Chapter 9), conversation analysis (Chapter 10) and narrative analysis (Chapter 12). This makes thematic analysis a more accessible introduction to qualitative data analysis for students and other newcomers to qualitative methods.

- The history of thematic analysis goes back to the 1950s and the development of quantitative content analysis. Calls for a qualitative approach to content analysis emerged at that time. Thematic analysis shares a lot in common with qualitative content analysis though the latter has been more systematically developed especially in Europe.

- Thematic analysis requires the researcher to identify a limited number of themes to adequately describe what is happening in textual data such as interviews. This is easy to do superficially but a set of themes which describe in depth what is going on in the data is more demanding to achieve.

- Thematic analysis requires that the analyst has an intimate knowledge of their data which can be achieved by collecting the data oneself, transcribing the

data oneself, and reading and re-reading the data a number of times. Then the researcher begins to code the data – perhaps line by line or every two or three lines – to indicate the contents of small quantities of the data. Codings are brief descriptions of small chunks of data. There are no 'rules' to say precisely how this is done but the more 'conceptual' the codings are the better.

- The codings are a level of abstraction away from the data. From these codings the researcher tries to develop or identify the themes which describe the major features of the data. This process can involve the sorting of cards each bearing the name of a coding or a theme on a table. In this way, it may become more evident just which codings go closely together and, consequently, what the themes might be. Each theme needs to be carefully defined and differentiated from other themes.

- As the analytic ideas develop, the researcher may re-check the data or the codings in order to maximise the fit between the data, the codings and the themes.

- Thematic analysis is a descriptive method rather than a theory building approach to qualitative research (in contrast to grounded theory). Among its advantages is that it tends to generate research findings which are readily understood by the general public and policy makers.

What is thematic analysis?

Thematic analysis is the analysis of what is said rather than how it is said. Generally it can be recommended as an introduction to qualitative research because of its relative lack of complexity. Quite simply, one's data are examined in order to identify relatively broad themes which summarise the content of the data, hopefully, fairly completely. Recently there have been attempts to provide systematic guidelines about how to do thematic analysis in order to correct some of the perceived weaknesses of the method. Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed a more stringent version of thematic analysis though they do write a little disparagingly about the previous state of affairs with thematic analysis. They state: 'Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method within psychology' (Braun and Clarke,

FIGURE 7.1 Basic thematic analysis

Thematic analysis, even in its recent more structured forms, is a useful technique which is fairly accessible to novice researchers. As a form of qualitative data analysis it is less demanding than the other methods of qualitative analysis discussed in the next few chapters. The main reason for this is that the process of data analysis is not intimately linked to particular areas of theory as it is with other methods. In some respects, thematic analysis is most similar to grounded theory, though it does not involve the same level of sophistication in data collection and theory building. However, properly done, thematic analysis has quite a lot in common with these other analytic methods. Certainly, the practical skills of data analysis learnt through thematic analysis will help a researcher when they move on to these other approaches. None of this is a criticism of thematic analysis – merely a recognition of its more limited horizons.

Bringing these and other points together, thematic analysis is a useful analytic approach in circumstances in which:

- the data collection is complete;
- there are no strong theoretical perspectives to drive the analysis – though Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that there are two forms of thematic analysis whereby some are driven by pre-existing theoretical concerns and others are driven by the data;
- the data consist of detailed textual material such as interviews, focus groups, newspaper articles and the like;
- the data are rich in the sense of being full of detail and information such as will occur in in-depth interviews and materials taken from the media, etc.

According to Howitt and Cramer (2008), the central processes involved in thematic analysis are transcription, analytic effort and theme identification. While conceptually these are three separate processes, in reality they do not follow this rigid order and the processes overlap considerably. Just as in grounded theory (Chapter 8) and many other forms of qualitative analysis, the researcher may feel it necessary to go back-and-forward between stages in order to check and refine the themes that are being developed (see Figure 7.1):

- *Transcribing textual material*   Any form of textual material can be used ranging from, say, material from the Internet to transcriptions of in-depth interviews or focus groups. The transcription method used in most published thematic analyses is a secretarial/playscript one (see Chapter 6) and, in general, there is no reason to use a more detailed Jefferson transcription. Of course, if you can think of a reason for doing Jefferson transcription for a thematic analysis then there is no reason not to do so, though who can say what these circumstances might be? Transcription, in qualitative research, is not to be seen as a tedious chore since, in the hands of a good researcher, transcription familiarises the researcher with the data and is an early push or stimulus towards trying to understand and, hence, analyse the data. The familiarity that transcription brings with the data is very closely focused and systematic because of the nature of transcription. The analysis might begin

much earlier during the data collection phase for the in-depth interview or focus group, for example.

- *Analytic effort*   This is crucial in all forms of qualitative analysis and short cuts to a successful analysis are rarely to be found. Analytic effort is the work or processing that the researcher does on the text in order to generate the final themes – that is the thematic analysis. The analytic effort includes the following components: (a) familiarisation with the data so that it is known in detail to the researcher; (b) the detailed codings and conceptualisations which the researcher applies to their data such as line-by-line coding or much broader-brush approaches to identifying the overall themes; (c) the extent to which the researcher is prepared to process and reprocess the data analysis to ensure that the analysis fits the data as closely as possible; (d) the extent to which the researcher is presented with difficulties during the course of the analysis and what effort is put into resolving these difficulties; and (e) the frequency and thoroughness of the researcher's checks between the analysis of the data and the data.

- *Identifying themes and sub-themes*   While the naming of themes and sub-themes is the end point of thematic analysis, there is considerable varia-tion in the extent to which researchers refine the themes for presentation in reports, etc. A researcher might decide that five or six themes effectively describe what they have identified as the key features of the data. Other researchers might well be dissatisfied with the same themes since they feel that they less than completely describe what is happening in the data. All of this continues with the analytic work through to the end product of the total thematic analysis. Since the identification of themes is partly dependent on the amount and quality of analytic effort the researcher has put into their analysis, it is likely that different researchers looking at the same data will end up with rather more or rather less sophisticated findings from their analyses. This underlines the importance of understanding precisely what the researcher has done to generate the themes which are discussed in the report. Of course, in
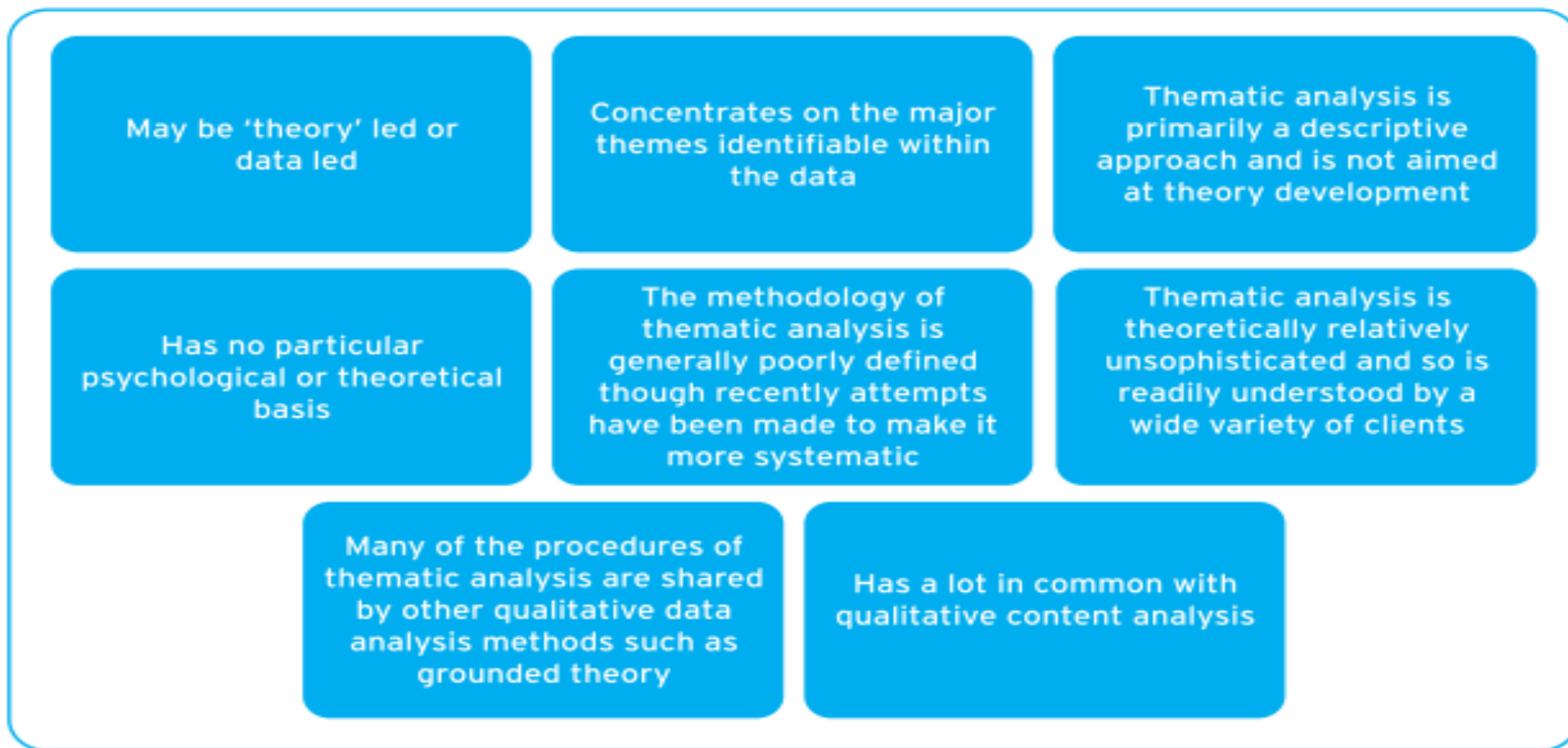
FIGURE 7.2 The key elements of thematic analysis

Figure 7.2 presents some of the key elements of thematic analysis which help to differentiate it from other forms of qualitative data analysis.

How to do thematic analysis

If one is looking for an up-to-date account of thematic analysis methodology written by psychologists then the guidelines that Braun and Clarke (2006) provide are the best available systematic approach to thematic analysis. Theirs is a toughened-up description of how to do thematic analysis which draws heavily on their familiarity and involvement with other forms of qualitative analysis. Their approach imposes high standards on thematic analysis and the work of the analyst with the aim of improving the end product of thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the process of carrying out a thematic analysis may be broken down into six separate stages though, as with most qualitative analysis, there is a great deal of unbridled going backwards and forwards between the different stages of the analysis. The process of thematic analysis may be visualised as being much as in Figure 7.3. The six steps of the analysis are clearly listed in sequential order but the overlap of the stages is patently obvious. While doing a thematic analysis the researcher may move backwards and forwards between stages with the purposes of checking one aspect of the analysis against one or more of the other steps in the analysis. Obviously checking is more frequent between steps which are close together but this does not preclude checking, say, what is written in the report against the original data. The distinction between different stages of the analysis is conceptual for the most part since the different stages may not be totally distinct
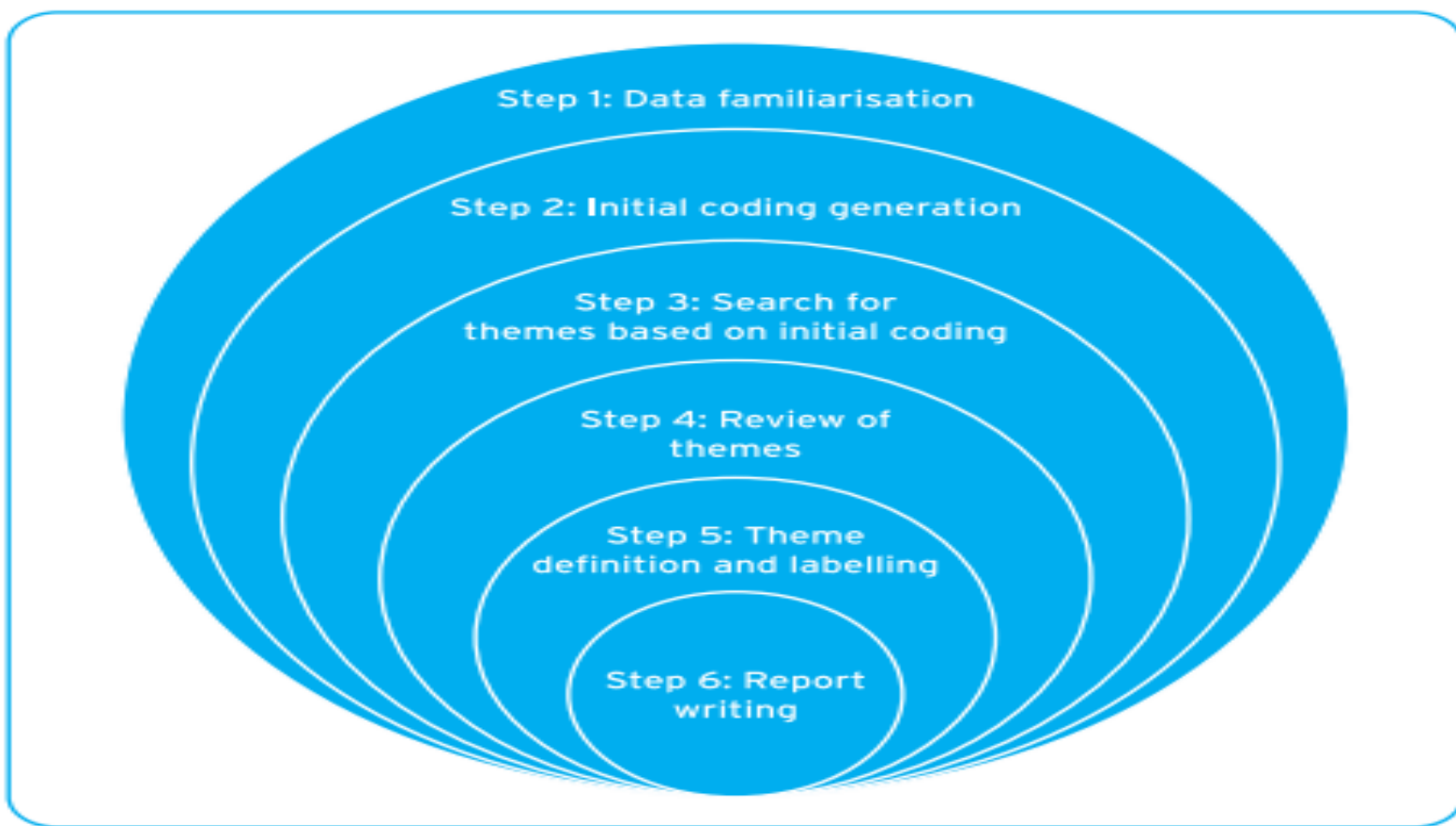
FIGURE 7.3 Braun and Clarke's model of thematic analysis: all steps may refer backwards and forwards to other steps

Step 1   **Data familiarisation**   In this early stage, the researcher becomes familiar with the close detail of the transcript or whatever other text is to be used. Quite when data familiarisation occurs will differ according to the details of the study concerned. If the researcher had conducted interviews and focus groups then they are likely to be actively processing these while the data are being collected. Data familiarisation will also take place during the process of transcription – if the researcher is transcribing their own data. Otherwise and additionally, playing a recording through repeatedly or reading a transcript through several times are important steps in data familiarisation. Although someone else may do the interviews or make the transcripts, no one but the researcher can do data familiarisation since this is a key stage in developing the analysis. During the data familiarisation stage, the researcher will begin to think about what is happening in the data – this is inevitable but the qualitative

Initial coding generation On the principle that higher levels of analytic effort lead to better research, the initial, formal analysis step in thematic analysis is the line-by-line coding of the data. These codings are not the themes that the research will generate, but a stage in the process of working towards those themes. By coding each line, the researcher is working with the detail of the data rather than the broad sweep of the data. A coding is little other than a label to describe the contents of a line (or two) of transcript or textual data. The lines are basically arbitrary as the text or transcript is usually surrounded by white space on the paper on which the researcher makes his or her notes. Since the themes are abstractions from the data, the initial codings are usually best if they are based on an abstraction rather than something more concrete. In other words, the more conceptual the researcher's codings the better the final themes are likely to be. The researcher's coding should indicate something that is interesting or important about that snippet of the data. Initial codings involve the researcher systematically working through the entirety of the data – or a subset of the data selected because it deals with a particular topic or matter of interest to the researcher. Coding does not have to be done line-by-line – if every line is not possible then every two or three lines would probably be all right. It really does depend on circumstances. There is no requirement even that the numbers of lines to be coded have to be equal every time. Furthermore, the researcher may choose a unit of analysis other than the line of text. There is nothing wrong with coding sentences in their entirety if the researcher feels that this might be advantageous. Initial codings seek to capture a segment of text's essence; it is not the intention at this stage to identify broader themes though, of course, ideas as to what the themes might be may and will occur at any stage in the analysis. Initial codings are not sophisticated analyses of the data – sometimes they may appear to be nothing other than jottings or notes which summarise bits of the text.

data. Coding do *not* emerge from the data according to Braun and Clarke (2006) but are actively created by the researcher trying out ideas in relation to their data. Codings and themes are not located in the data as such but created in the interplay between the data and the work that the researcher is investing in the data analysis.

There may be two different approaches depending on whether the data are data led or theory led according to Braun and Clarke (2006):

- *The data-led approach* This is dominated by the characteristics of the data and the codings are primarily guided by a careful analysis of what is in the data. This is the approach taken in the example in Box 7.1.

- *The theory-led approach* The structure for the initial codings is suggested by the key elements of the theory being applied by the researcher. Feminist theory, for example, stresses that relationships between men and women are dominated by the power and dominance of the male gender over the female gender in a wide variety of aspects of the social world including employment, domestic life and the law. Thus a thematic analysis based on feminist theory would be orientated to the expression of power relationships in any textual material.

Otherwise, things may be left alone until the following has been done.

At the point at which the initial-coding stage has been completed, the researcher will naturally need to understand better the material which Coding A includes compared with, say, the material which Coding C includes. In other words, the researcher should put together all of the transcript or text which has received Coding A, likewise for Coding B, Coding C and so forth. One way of doing this is simply to copy-and-paste the material from a word processor file under these different headings. On examining the material which has received Coding C, for example, it may become clear to the researcher that:

- The coding's label is not quite accurate or precise enough and needs to be changed.

- Some of the material which has received that coding is different in important ways and so a new coding may be identified for the parts of the data which do not really match with the other material.

- That the material which has received Coding C is not really different from the material which has received Coding F, for example. So the researcher may decide to combine these codings.

Obviously it is far better that you practise the process of coding on a small piece of text rather than for the first time once your data has been collected. You may find it helpful to copy some text from the Internet, say Chatrooms, etc. which have a lot of potentially usable material. Try coding some of this.

Step 3 **Searching for themes based on the initial coding**   The sequence is close reading of text, producing codings for each line or group of lines of text, and then turning these codings into themes. The question is just how codings can be turned into themes. The answer is more hard work: more analytic effort on the part of the researcher. At this point the researcher will probably notice that although the list of initial codings that has been developed seems to be useful in that the data and the codings given to the data make sense and distinguish one sort of material from another sort of material, nevertheless some of the codings on the list have more to do with each other than they do to other codings on the list. In other words, what are the patterns among the codings? To take a silly example, if the codings were dog, lettuce, cat, carrot, apple, rabbit, aardvark then one might be inclined to suggest that these different codings are related to two categories – (1) animals and (2) vegetables. Actually, one might suggest that the second group is fruit and vegetables – or a group and a subgroup perhaps. These groups are pretty much what a theme is. So themes are basically the result of categorising the codings into meaningful groups of codings. Of course,

Step 4 **Review of the themes** So far we have gone through the process of developing a set of tentative themes which help to understand the data. Depending on circumstances, it is possible that these themes are not fully defined or even particularly refined at this stage. It is essential, then, to examine these themes against the original data. Once again, the researcher needs to organise the data around the themes just as previously the data have been organised around the codings. This is simply a matter of cutting-and-pasting the material which had previously been organised around the different codings so that it is now organised around the different themes. In other words, all of the evidence in support of a particular theme has been drawn together. Like all qualitative analyses, any analysis can

→ or even the codings in the light of what is to be found associated with these developing themes. The more systematic the analysis is the greater becomes the task of data management during this process of theme development. With larger data sets, the researcher might prefer to analyse half of the data first then refine this analysis on the basis of how well it deals with the second half of the data set.

There are a number of possibilities:

- you may find that there is very little in the data to support a theme that you have identified, so the theme may have to be abandoned or modified in the light of this;

- you may find that a theme needs to be divided or subdivided since the data which are supposed to link together into the one theme imply two different themes or sub-themes; and

- you may feel that the theme works by and large but does not fit some of the data which initially you believed were part of that theme so you may have to find a new theme to deal with the non-fitting data. You may need to check the applicability of your themes to selected extracts as well as to the entire data set.

Step 5

Theme definition and labelling   Accuracy and precision are the watchwords of any academic research. It is unlikely that a researcher can define and label the themes emerging in their research without being prepared to reconsider and refine the analysis at all stages. While it may appear easy to give a label to a theme, it may prove more troublesome to define precisely what the theme is. Most important is the extent to which a particular theme that has been identified by the researcher can be distinguished conceptually from all of the other themes. That is, for each theme, can the researcher say just what it is and just what it is not? Of course, an analysis which attempts to deal with all of the data will be more exacting than one which deals only with particular aspects of the data. The process of developing sub-themes is likely to continue at this stage. As the themes become clearer, data which previously were hard to code just might become understandable in the light of conceptual developments during the analysis.

Up to this point, thematic analysis has been described in ways which suggest that it is all in the head (and on the desk) of the researcher. This is a somewhat solitary process. Going 'public' with your analysis is probably a good idea at any stage but, especially, in the step in which the analysis is being refined. Simply talking with other people about your ideas, in itself, will help you to identify problems in your ideas or your own understanding of your ideas. It helps you see the wood for the trees but also continues the process of clarification in a different modality. But, additionally, talking with others may allow them to question you about your ideas and, possibly, throw in analytic ideas of their own.

Step 6   **Report writing**   The report – which might be a student dissertation or an article for a prestigious research journal – is a sufficiently detailed description of the stages of the research (see Chapter 13). It tends not to be a 'warts and all' account in the sense that the write-up is usually more orderly than the research had actually ever been. Qualitative writing tends to include more description of the problems of analysis than other forms of research report. It is notable that many if not most reports involving thematic analysis fail to include much detail

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➔   about the analytic process. It is almost as if the analysis emerges fully from the data with little happening in the middle. This is an erroneous picture of qualitative analysis and good practice would insist on some detail of the process of analysis being included. Difficulties in the analysis should be highlighted – it is no use to other researchers if problems are swept under the carpet.

Report writing can be construed as the final stage of data analysis – that is, it is the stage at which the researcher may have to refine and alter the analysis in the light of problems which emerge when the analysis is put together completely during the process of writing-up. All stages of the analysis process relate

When to use thematic analysis

Thematic analysis is what it is and probably has little to offer the researcher whose perspective is in, say, conversation analysis and discourse analysis. It does not have the level of sophisticated theory associated with it that these do. On the other hand, this 'theory' may not really be the researcher's interest and it may not be found helpful. The following points may be helpful in helping determine whether thematic analysis is appropriate:
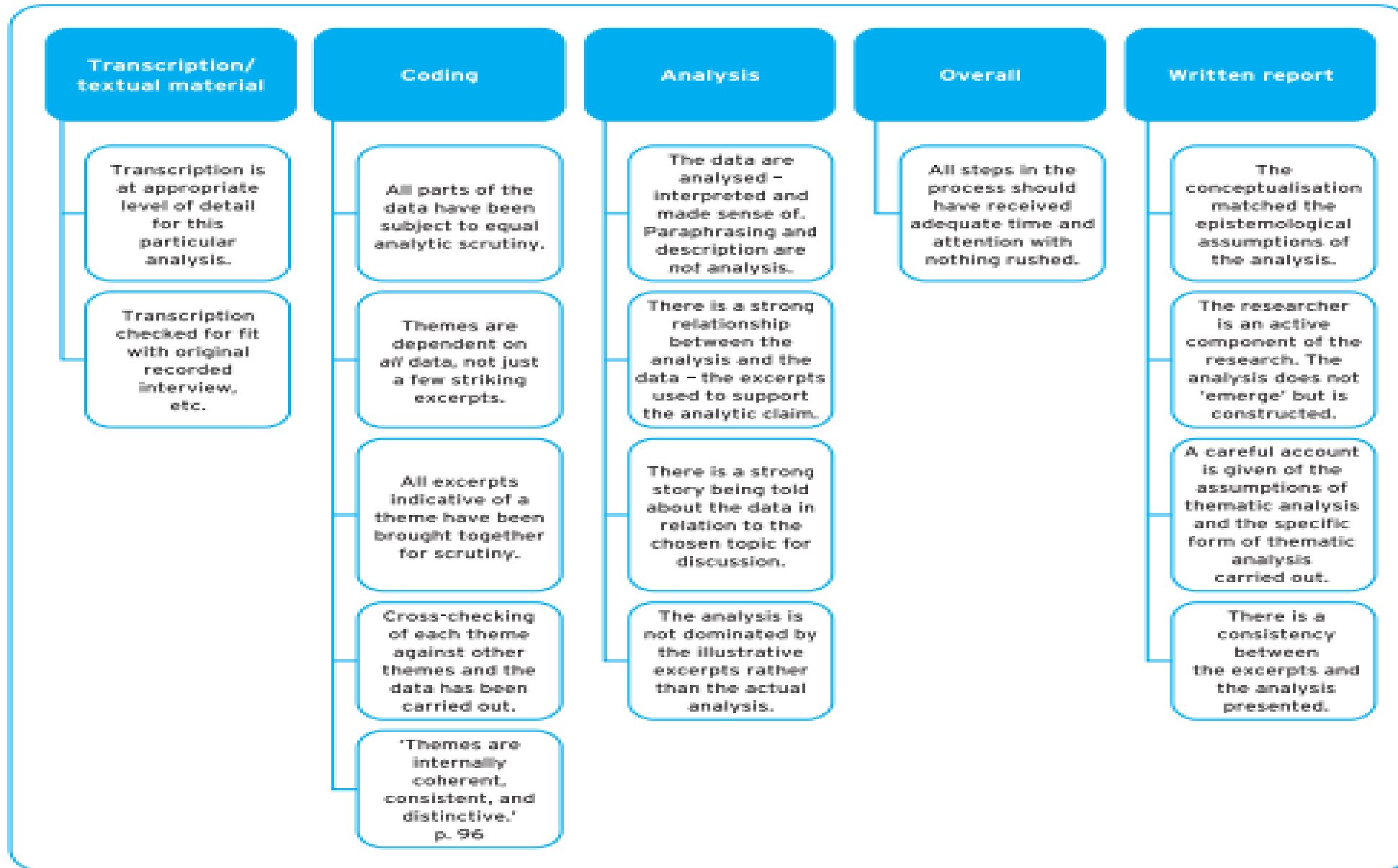
- Thematic analysis is best seen as a descriptive method in that it attempts to come up with a limited number of themes or categories to describe what is going on in the data.

- Thematic analysis, unlike grounded theory, is not aimed at theory generation although it may be helpful in this regard. For example, the themes developed in thematic analysis are not expected to be related or interconnected in some way, whereas the categories identified from a grounded theory analysis do need to be explored in terms of their relationships with each other.

- Similarly, thematic analysis is not primarily aimed at providing a detailed interpretation of the data as opposed to describing its broad features. While interpretation and description do overlap, thematic analysis can serve its purpose by simply describing what is going on in the data.

- Thematic analysis provides a rather broad-brush approach to data analysis as opposed to the fine-grained approaches which characterise some qualitative research methods.

- Thematic analysis does not have a strong voice on the data which are collected and the process by which they are collected. So, unlike grounded theory, thematic analysis may be used on a completed data set and there is no requirement that the data being collected are reviewed part-way through the analysis and new approaches to sampling, etc. instigated if necessary.

Evaluation of thematic analysis

When evaluating thematic analysis, it is important to remember that the Braun and Clarke (2006) version of the procedure may be substantially better than those adopted by other researchers claiming to use thematic analysis. That is, thematic analysis covers a range of procedures and not all of them would meet Braun and Clarke's ideals. So what may be true of their approach may not always apply to what has happened in practice. The following are some of the positive things which Braun and Clarke say can be claimed about thematic analysis:

- Compared with other forms of qualitative analysis, thematic analysis makes fewer demands in terms of data collection and fewer constraints in terms of data analysis.
- Thematic analysis is relatively easy to learn and understand compared with other qualitative methods. Consequently it may be used by a novice researcher with little difficulty.
- Thematic analysis findings are easily understood by intelligent and educated members of the community.
- Its accessibility to the general public means that it can be used for participatory studies involving particular groups and the researcher. For example, it is unlikely that a thematic analysis of interviews with staff in a casualty unit will produce findings which they will fail to understand.
- Thematic analysis summarises large amounts of data by offering descriptive themes which can be rich in information.
- Thematic analysis can be useful in qualitative research which may inform policy development because of its accessibility and use of data produced by involved individuals.

Transcription/ textual material	Coding	Analysis	Overall	Written report
Transcription is at appropriate level of detail for this particular analysis.	All parts of the data have been subject to equal analytic scrutiny.	The data are analysed – interpreted and made sense of. Paraphrasing and description are not analysis.	All steps in the process should have received adequate time and attention with nothing rushed.	The conceptualisation matched the epistemological assumptions of the analysis.
Transcription checked for fit with original recorded interview, etc.	Themes are dependent on all data, not just a few striking excerpts.	There is a strong relationship between the analysis and the data – the excerpts used to support the analytic claim.		The researcher is an active component of the research. The analysis does not 'emerge' but is constructed.
	All excerpts indicative of a theme have been brought together for scrutiny.	There is a strong story being told about the data in relation to the chosen topic for discussion.		A careful account is given of the assumptions of thematic analysis and the specific form of thematic analysis carried out.
	Cross-checking of each theme against other themes and the data has been carried out.	The analysis is not dominated by the illustrative excerpts rather than the actual analysis.		There is a consistency between the excerpts and the analysis presented.
	'Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive.' p. 96			

FIGURE 7.4 The quality criteria for a thematic analysis (after Braun & Clarke, 2006)