



The  
Queen's  
Nursing  
Institute

# Masterclass:

## Reflexive Thematic Analysis

### SUMMARY

Thursday 16 March 2023

1pm - 2pm, via Zoom

#QNIRearch



Dr Ben Bowers QN, Community Nursing Research Consultant, The QNI, [ben.bowers@qni.org.uk](mailto:ben.bowers@qni.org.uk), [@Ben\\_Bowers\\_\\_](https://twitter.com/Ben_Bowers__); Helen Marshall, Lecturer, School of Health Sciences, University of Liverpool

- Welcome to everyone.
- A brief overview of the forum: it's a national forum for community nurses who are undertaking or considering carrying out research and those keen to be more research aware.
- It aims to strengthen the capacity of community-based nursing research through peer support, mentorship, and supporting personal development and research opportunities.
- We offer monthly newsletters about research and research activities, webinars, masterclasses, this is the fourth of 6. There are website resources and we have a mentorship scheme, to help develop your research career.
- To sign up and/or find out more, go to: <https://qni.org.uk/nursing-in-the-community/community-nursing-research-forum/> or scan the QR code, below



This free 1-hour masterclass focused on an introduction to qualitative data analysis:  
Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Dr Emma Rowland, Lecturer at the Florence Nightingale Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery  
and Palliative Care, King's College London

- I am a social and cultural geographer - a social scientist
- I fell into research in 2005 and from my love of healthcare research began.
- Ethnography (the scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences) is my passion and my love. Qualitative research too.
- My work focuses on nursing workforce, emotion management, emotional labour, and emotion work of health professionals and the emotion work of families living with a long-term condition.
- We're going to be using some of data I've collected as examples as I'm talking through. The most recent study was on the impact of covid on nursing. A longitudinal study with nurses of all different levels and their experiences during the pandemic.
- Firstly, a reminder about qualitative data: it's subjective; exploratory; creative; theoretically underpinned; the methodology is important for robust/rigorous research.



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- The aligning data analysis technique needs to be systematic, thorough and well thought through.
- I used social construction to base my research. It used to be the poor cousin of quantitative research - the criticism was it was not as rigorous and robust. But actually it is, when we put these frameworks into place.
- It's about understanding we need the appropriate methodology. What comes next in the data analysis. We can built in this robustness within our research.
- The choice of data analysis technique is dependant on the research question, the aims and objective, the methodology and the theoretical framework.
- We also need to think about what our question is. And what is the best way to analysis this data? What language and tone are people using for example? Do we want to understand their journey through their disease? Do we want to bring theory out in our data? Thematic analysis is a very flexible data analysis technique, it maps over most methodologies. It can be applied in a flexible way, it can underpin our research. The choice of our data technique is dependent on this.



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- We need to understand that data analysis is a tool not a method. In the very early stages, the familiarisation, the coding, creation of themes, this part isn't analysis. This is about managing your data. It's about a process that we're trying to do. The photo below is very reflective, lots of post its, paper everywhere, especially if you're doing it by hand.

## Thematic Analysis

- Method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a dataset
- It is systematic and requires a process of coding
- It is not a methodology it is a data analysis tool



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- Braun and Clarke have moved forward with their thinking on thematic analysis since their first 2006 paper. They focus on reflexive thematic analysis asking questions about our subjectivity and decision-making and how this influences our research.
- As an ethnographer, the reflexive part has always been important to me. My reflexive diary guides my understanding, my interpretation of data. Collecting the data, how I'm influencing the data, it's really important to have that diary to ask questions of your data: why do I interpret data this way? Have I gone far enough? Too far? Questioning ourselves is very important.
- Very early on in the ICON project, an ambulance crew came in and shared their story, and I found their language very offensive, 'She wouldn't die, we kept resuscitating her, but she wouldn't die.' I was horrified and found the whole narrative horrifying. Yet it seemed normal to them. 18 months later I realised that I was no longer offended by the language or their narrative and I started to think about what I'd learnt and why I was not offended anymore. I understood they were saying, "we wanted her to go peacefully without all those unpleasant interventions". What I'd interpreted as crude and horrific wasn't at all. I was able to put that into my analysis.





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- Reflexive thematic analysis involves thinking about and reflecting on your subjectivity, positionality, your assumptions, decision-making and choices through the research process
- There's this notion of insider or outsider researcher. I'm always the outsider, I'm not a health professional, with the ambulance crew for example, I was the outsider in that situation. Our team during the study had lots of insider outsider perspectives (nurses in practice, nurses out of practice etc) and those perspectives are very useful. I remember reading a transcription of a patient with covid - at the beginning of covid there was so much confusion and fear - but the health professionals in this situation were not giving him what he needed, and on one occasion when a nurse came in he launched himself at the food trolley as he was so hungry and thirsty. The nurses felt compassion for the nurse who was there, saying they thought she must have felt so scared in that situation, whereas I saw it from the patient's perspective, thinking he was hungry. It's always really illuminating for us to understand all this sort of rich data.
- Reflexive diaries also create an audit trail, which is very important, a log of how our thoughts are changing.



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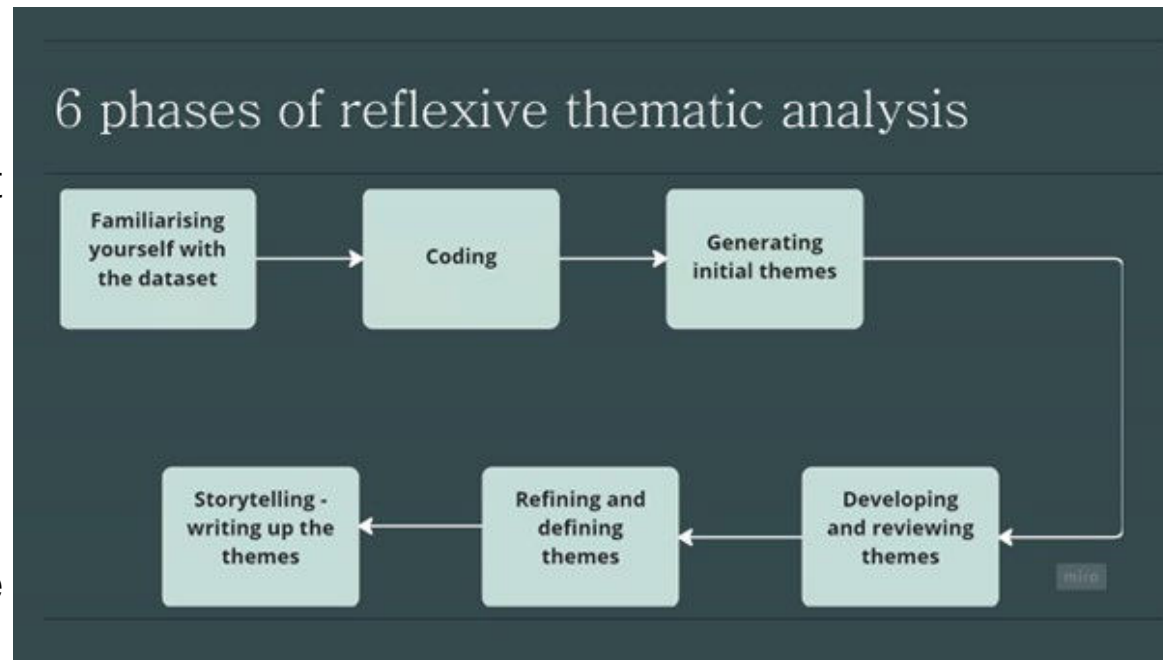
- A note on data saturation: there's a notion that says that at some point we will have to stop, what's our sample size for example? Data saturation is banded about, but having different researchers will give you different interpretations. The data isn't saturated, the problem is the researcher themselves can't think anymore, the research is saturated not the data.
- Often we stop collecting data for very practical reasons: no money, no time, no participants etc these would all be a reason to stop analysis or data collection. I can't remember ever being on a project where I've thought, 'OK job done'.
- Our life experiences change us, if I returned to a study I'd have a different lens through which to view it. Keep revising data, you'll always find something new.
- The process of reflexive thematic analysis is not linear but iterative, it's not a straight forward process.





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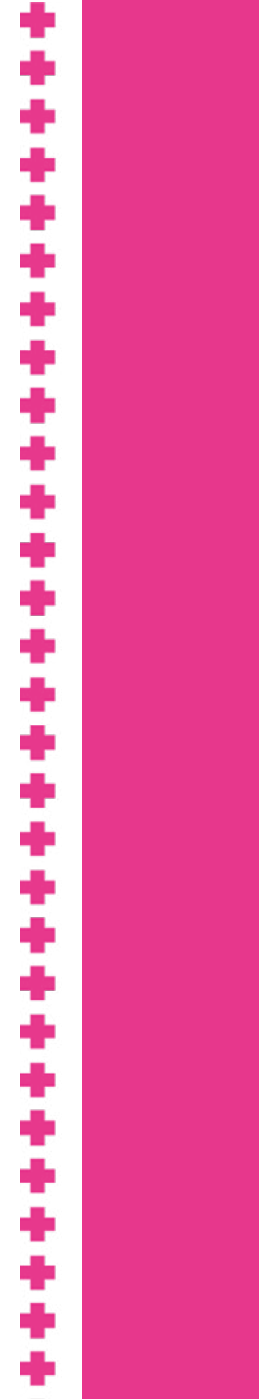
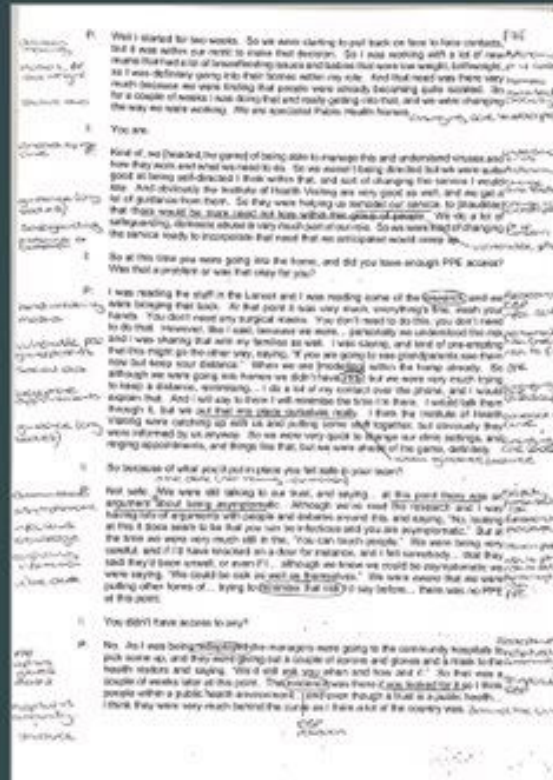
- Familiarisation: immersion in the data; critical engagement with the data; reading and re-reading transcripts; listening to audio recordings. Engage with the data: don't be passive, read them a couple of times, circle/highlight them. I'm always scribbling in the margins of books. There are different stages of familiarisation, if it's an interview you're transcribing, then it's about engaging with the listening of the recordings. It should still be an active process.
- Coding: start exploring, see if there are any patterns, applying any labels. A code is the smallest unit of analysis. Codes are labels that conjure the data content. It can be done by yourself or as a research team.
- One size doesn't fit all! You can mix and match, you might hand code or use software, I feel more at ease with hand coding.



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## Coding: An example

- Code labels, circled or underlined text
- Mixture of inductive and deductive coding
- Mixture of Semantic (surface level codes) and latent codes (interpretive, rich codes)
- Mixture of line by line and lumper coded text.



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- Developing themes: it's messy and convoluted. Use visual techniques to see connections between potential themes and sub themes. I like using spider diagrams see below.
- Thematic maps: overarching themes = umbrella concepts. From a big spider diagram, I can see broader arching themes, see different parts of the stories that could come out of there. Don't cut data too thinly ("salami slice"), with ICON data for example, we still have huge amounts of data left, it's hugely interesting and in depth.
- Checking themes: is there a clear story I can tell? If I can write a summary, where is the data, what data am I going to apply to tell that narrative? Most of the time, it's not correct the first time, there will be holes, you'll have to go back and look at it again.
- The content of the theme has to be consistent within itself too.
- Theme development: to move from description to analysis is hard.
- Telling the story: the responsibility of telling the story can be overwhelming. I feel I need to do justice to that data.



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## Theme Development:

- Interpretation of data - the researcher as active
- Going beyond description through to analysis require theoretical integration and dialogue with wider research
- Looking beyond description to interpretation and meaning

### Sub-Theme: "Increased patient death"

We were verifying eight deaths a night, that was unprecedented, you know, and that went on, it was just these massive amount of deaths.

Its traumatising, you know, the things that you see and everybody is really sick, (...) a lot of people are young. Everybody has the same disease (...) there's just so much death.

Theoretical underpinning: "Deathscape" Madsen (2020, 2016 and 2018).  
Deductively coded during the coding process. Linked to other theory - Emotion management.

Deathscape in health care are normally characterised as spaces in which death occurs frequently such as ICU or Care of the Elderly (Rowland 2022) but during Covid excessive deaths were occurring outside these spaces and with younger populations causing distress and trauma.

## Telling the story – Writing RTA

- Selecting the data to represent the theme
  - Choosing different participants - convincing the patterns existed across the data set
  - Choosing extracts that illustrate your analytic claims - "square peg round hole"
  - Editing out unnecessary detail
  - Not going to far - jumping to conclusions - themes and analytical content must be evidenced
- Ordering the themes so that there is a clear narrative
- Ethics and choosing the data to present can be challenging - the case of context vs extract content
  - "... the responsibility that the analysis did the participants narratives justice weighed heavy on my mind". (Reflexive diary, ICON study 2020)
  - "...I am conflicted...this extract illuminates the theme narrative in the most enlightening and illuminating way...BUT what are the implications for my participant...". (Reflexive diary, PhD writing up phase)

## Thank you to all 126 delegates who attended this Masterclass.

Free webinar: Developing the Community and Public Health Nursing Workforce and Research Careers:

30 March 2023, 1-2.30pm

Book here:

<https://qni.org.uk/news-and-events/events/research-webinar-developing-careers/>

Next masterclasses in the series:

### **1. Planning and navigating research ethical approvals**

20 April 2023, 1-2pm

Book here:

<https://qni.org.uk/news-and-events/events/community-nursing-bitesize-research-masterclass-20-04-23/>

## COMMENTS

### A selection from delegates:

Thank you so much. this is extremely interesting and useful session. Excellent presentation. My colleague and I have started collecting qualitative data and will be using reflexive thematic analysis.

Thank you really interesting and relating it to practice.

Thank you, this has been a really informative session

This is an excellent session. I'm so glad we have had the opportunity to attend. It makes so much sense with the practical application.

Thank you Emma, your expertise and enthusiasm is so inspiring.

Great content, delivered brilliantly.

Thank you. About to start analysing my data for my Masters and had already decided I wanted to use reflexive thematic analysis

Thank you Emma, really helpful and great to see examples.

Thank you for such an interesting talk and very informative with good guidance.

