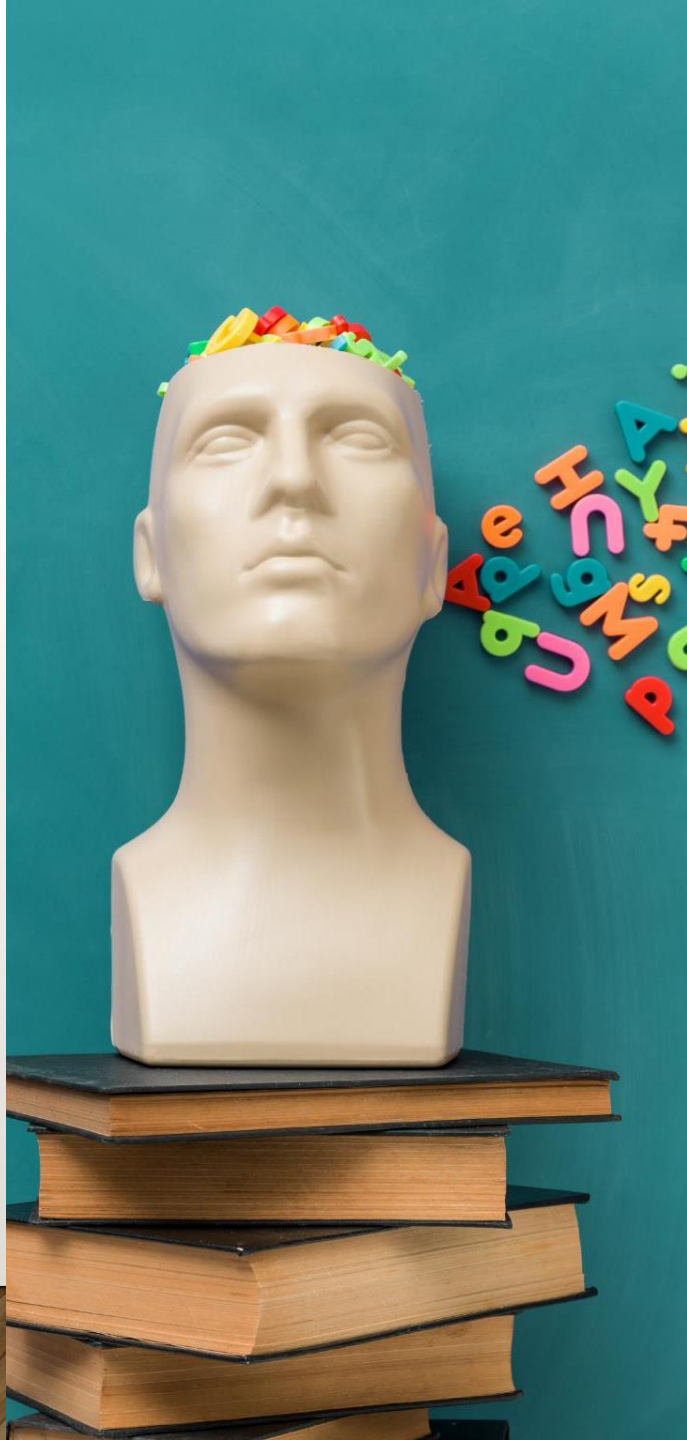


MSC APPLIED
PSYCHOLOGY:

QUALITATIVE
APPROACHES IN APPLIED
PSYCHOLOGY





RECAP:

Role in Applied Psychology

Qualitative research offers deep insights into human behaviour, emotions, and experiences beyond numerical data.

Focus on Descriptive Data

This research approach emphasizes detailed, rich descriptions to understand complex psychological phenomena.

Critical Evaluation Skills

MSc students must understand qualitative research strengths and weaknesses to evaluate and select appropriate methods.

Practical Application

The presentation highlights qualitative designs' relevance in real-world psychological contexts and research.

RECAP: DEFINITION AND COMMON METHODS

Qualitative Research Definition

Qualitative research seeks to understand human behavior through non-numerical data like words and images.

Interviews

Interviews explore individual experiences and perspectives deeply to gather rich psychological insights.

Focus Groups

Focus groups facilitate group discussions to explore collective views and social dynamics among participants.

Observational Studies

Observational studies involve watching and recording behavior in natural settings for context-rich data.



ADVANTAGES IN APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY



Rich and Detailed Data

Qualitative research captures the depth and complexity of psychological experiences in rich detail.



Flexibility in Research Design

Qualitative methods are adaptive, allowing changes based on emerging findings during research.



Exploration of Complex Issues

Qualitative research effectively explores complex psychological issues like emotions and identity formation.

SAMPLE FOOTER TEXT

LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

5

Subjectivity and Bias

Qualitative research often involves subjectivity and researcher bias, impacting the validity and reliability of findings.

Limited Generalizability

Small, non-random samples limit the generalizability of qualitative research results to broader populations.

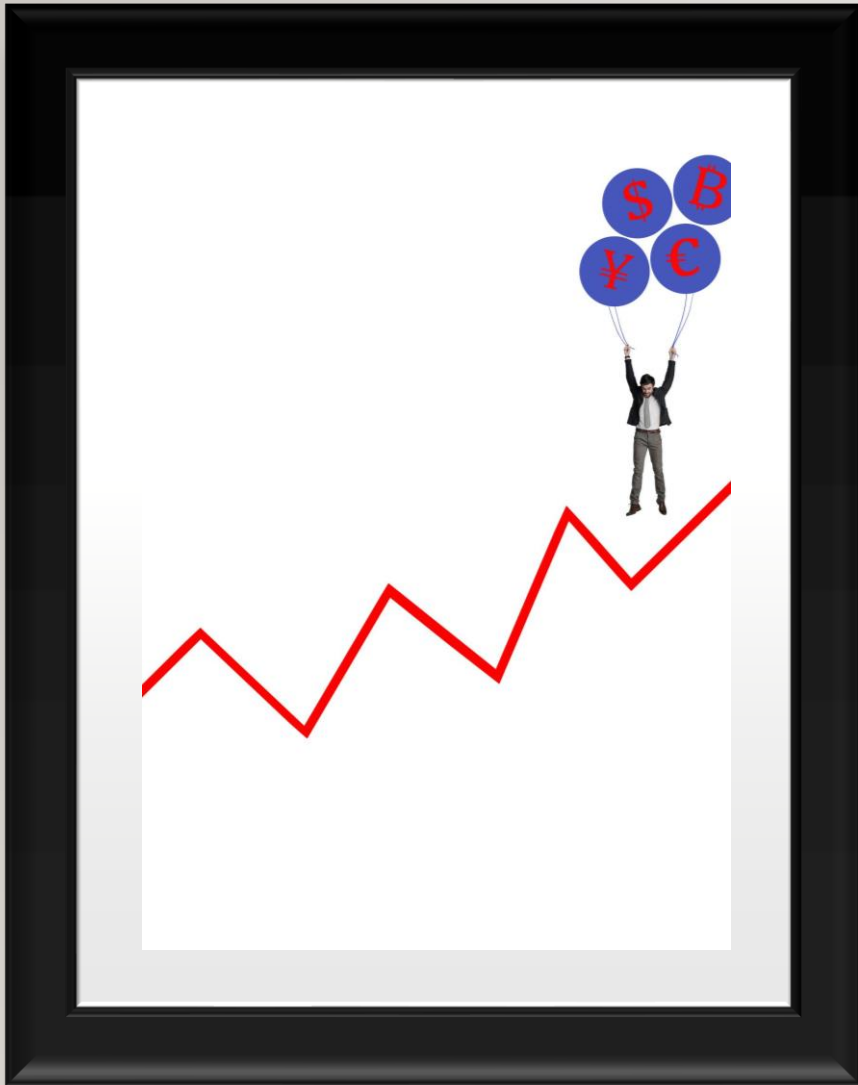
Time-Consuming Process

Extensive data collection and analysis make qualitative research a time-consuming process.

Lack of Standardization

The absence of standardized procedures hinders replicability and verification of qualitative research findings.

11/12/2025



“Qualitative research is an enquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of enquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” Creswell, 1998/2007



WHAT DOES QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INVOLVE?



An understanding of which approach you are following



Significant amount of time spent gathering data



Time-consuming and complex data analysis – reducing large sets of data to a few themes or categories



Long pieces of text/writing incorporating quotes

WHAT DOES QUALITATIVE RESEARCH INVOLVE?

Important to decide
which one to use before
data collection.

Different
methods/approaches – all
valid

However, there are
common values:

Analysis must be
thorough and academic.

Recognition that
researcher plays an
central role – reflexivity.

Quotations are
supporting evidence.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Often a psychological approach e.g. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA, Smith et al. 1997)

Aims to describe the meaning of lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon

Draws on previous research/theory to inform the research questions

Preconceptions held by interviewer are highlighted so as not to bias the study

Data analysis is systematic – often a thematic content analysis

BRAUN AND CLARKE'S REFLEXIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Understanding patterns in qualitative research data analysis

INTRODUCTION TO REFLEXIVE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Qualitative Method Overview

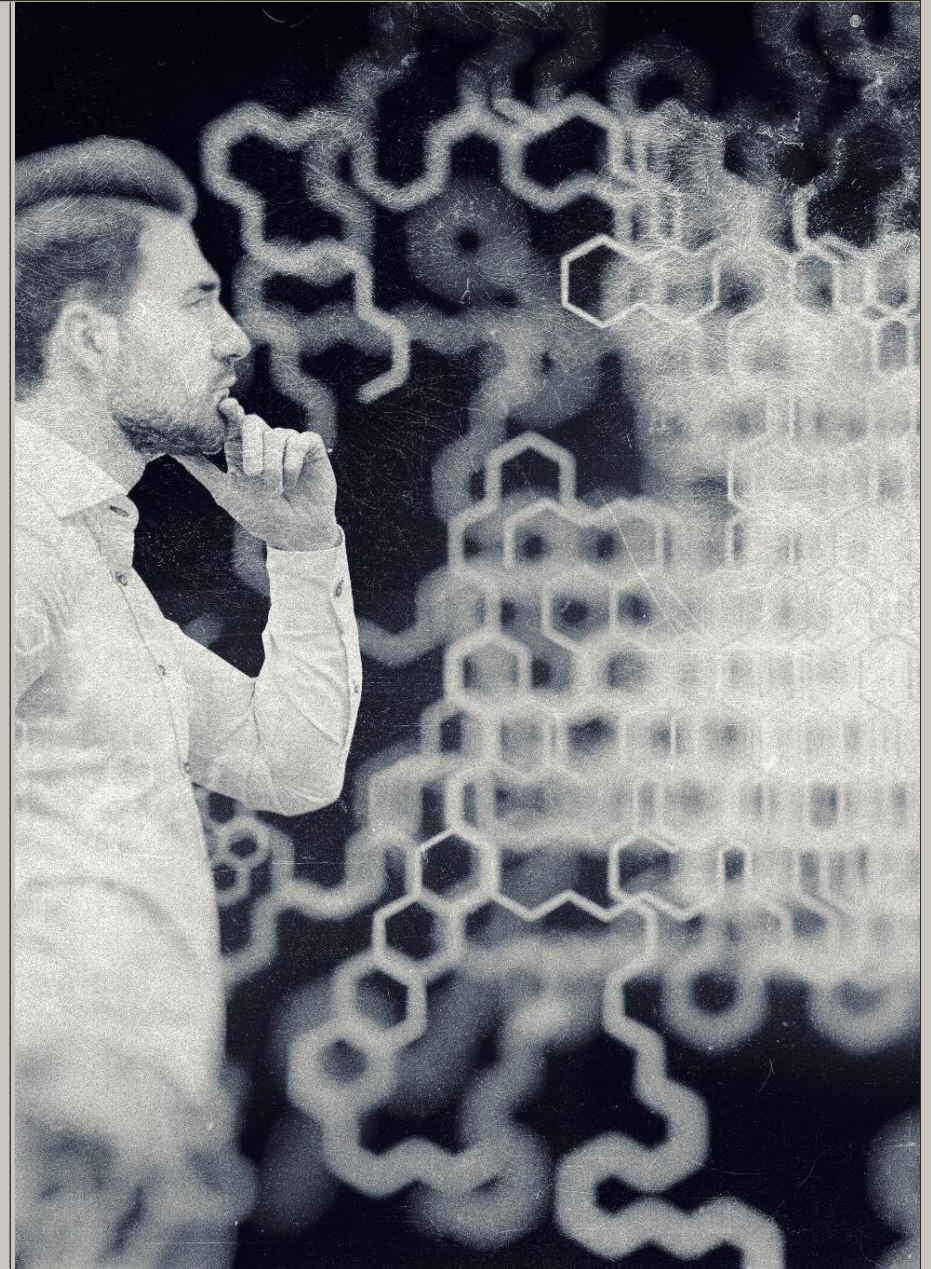
RTA is a qualitative method to identify and interpret meaningful patterns called themes in data.

Researcher's Active Role

RTA highlights the researcher's active role in constructing themes through interpretation and reflexivity.

Flexibility and Theoretical Freedom

RTA allows flexible coding without rigid frameworks and is adaptable to various epistemological approaches.



PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Interpretivism and Constructionism

RTA is based on interpretivism and constructionism, emphasizing meaning as co-created by researcher and data.

Researcher Positionality

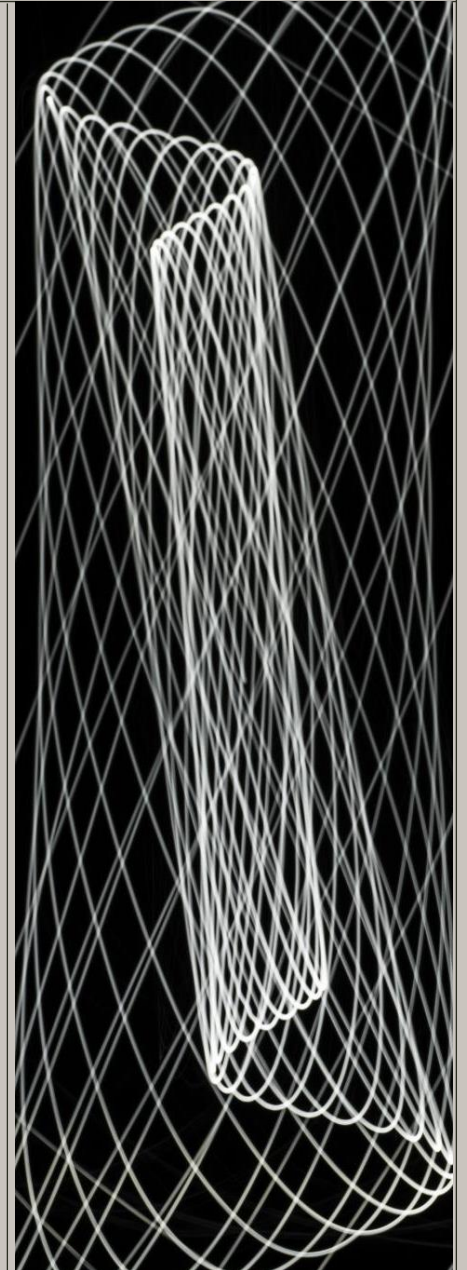
Researchers' perspectives and experiences influence theme interpretation, highlighting the importance of positionality.

Reflexivity in Research

Reflexivity requires critical self-examination of biases and assumptions shaping analysis outcomes.

Contextual Understanding

Embracing these philosophies enables nuanced, context-rich insights into subjective experiences and social phenomena.



SIX PHASES OF ANALYSIS

Familiarization with Data

Read and re-read data to understand deeply and note initial ideas for analysis.

Generating Initial Codes

Systematically code interesting features throughout the entire dataset.

Searching for Themes

Collate codes into potential themes based on shared meaning across data.

Reviewing Themes

Check themes against data

Defining and Naming Themes

Define clear theme names and meanings.

Writing Up

Integrate analysis with literature and questions to present coherent findings.

KEY PRINCIPLES AND FLEXIBILITY

Themes as Shared Meanings

Themes represent patterns of shared meaning and interpretive insights, not just summaries of data.

Researcher Reflexivity

Ongoing critical reflection on the researcher's role is central to Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Theoretical Openness

RTA allows application across multiple epistemological paradigms, enhancing research flexibility.

Creativity and Depth

Encourages creativity and deep analysis to develop nuanced themes capturing human complexity.



STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

Flexibility and Accessibility

RTA's flexibility suits diverse research questions and supports both novice and experienced researchers.

Depth and Engagement

Encourages deep engagement with data and development of rich, interpretive themes.

Need for Reflexivity

Requires high reflexivity and transparency, which can be challenging to maintain consistently.

Risk of Superficiality

Risk of superficial analysis if researchers do not fully engage or reflect critically on their process.



PRACTICAL TIPS FOR RESEARCHERS

Maintain Reflexive Journal

Keeping a reflexive journal documents thoughts and decisions, enhancing transparency and analytic depth throughout the research.

Engage Deeply with Data

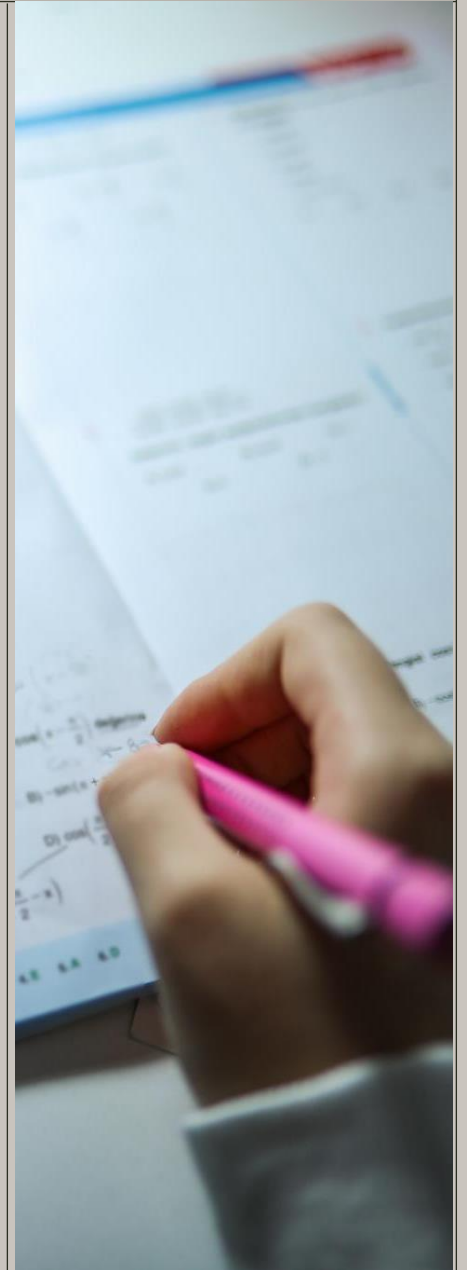
Immersing in data before coding ensures comprehensive understanding and supports meaningful theme development.

Develop Coherent Themes

Themes must be internally consistent and clearly distinct to maintain analytic rigor and clarity.

Use Illustrative Data Extracts

Including data extracts in reports grounds interpretations and enhances credibility and richness of findings.



RECOMMENDED READINGS ON RTA

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health*, 11(4), 589-597.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis?. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 18(3), 328-352.

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Hayfield, N. (2022). 'A starting point for your journey, not a map': Nikki Hayfield in conversation with

Braun, V., Clarke, V., & Hayfield, N. (2022). 'A starting point for your journey, not a map': Nikki Hayfield in conversation with Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke about thematic analysis. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 19(2), 424-445. h Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke about thematic analysis. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 19(2), 424-445.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

WHAT IS IPA?

Qualitative methodological tool

How an individual makes sense of their life world– individual viewpoint and experience (Phenomenological)

Interested in personal perception of an object or event

- “*Insiders perspective*” (Conrad, 1987)

Recognises access to a participant’s world is dependent on the researcher’s own conceptions which are needed to make sense of that other personal world

- double interpretation

WHAT IS IPA?

- Phenomenological
- Hermeneutic
- Idiographic

“the approach is phenomenological in that it is concerned with the individual’s personal perception or account of an object or event as opposed to an attempt to produce an objective statement of the object or event itself...Access [to the participant’s personal world] depends on, and is complicated by, the researcher’s own conceptions and indeed these are required to make sense of that other personal world through a process of interpretive activity. Hence the term interpretive phenomenological analysis is used to signal these two facets of the approach” (Smith, Jarman and Osborne, 1999: 218-219)



COLLECTING DATA THROUGH IPA

Homogeneous sample

Select method of data collection
– semi-structured interviews,
focus groups, participant diaries
and self reporting tasks

STAGES OF IPA

Step 1: Familiarize yourself with the data

- Read and re-read your data, which is often a transcript from a semi-structured interview, to become deeply familiar with it.
- Listen to the original audio recording while reading to fully immerse yourself in the participant's words and tone.

Step 2: Develop initial notes and themes

- Go through the data again, making detailed notes on anything that stands out, such as interesting comments, linguistic choices, metaphors, or emotional tone.
- Begin to cluster these initial notes into emerging themes that capture the essence of the participant's experience.

Step 3: Look for connections

- Analyze the relationships and connections between the themes you have developed within the first case.

STAGES OF IPA

Step 4: Move to the next case

- Repeat the same process of reading, note-taking, and theme development for the next participant's data.
- As you work through each case, you are constantly developing and refining your understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

Step 5: Look for patterns across cases

- After analyzing individual cases, look for similarities and differences across all participants to find patterns.
- This step moves from an individual's experience to a broader, shared understanding.

Step 6: Interpret and write up

- The final step involves creating an interpretative account of the participants' experiences, focusing on the deeper meanings and connections you have found.
- Use direct quotes to illustrate your findings and explain your interpretations clearly and thoroughly.

THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER



In IPA – an awareness of researcher's own role in the process and any biases/preconceptions



E.g. would a CBT therapist and a Humanistic therapist identify the same themes from an interview?

Why?

RECOMMENDED READINGS FOR IPA

- Eatough, V., & Smith, J. A. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. *The Sage handbook of qualitative research in psychology*, 193-209.
- Smith, J. A. (2011). Evaluating the contribution of interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Health psychology review*, 5(1), 9-27.
- Smith, J. A. (2017). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Getting at lived experience. *The journal of positive psychology*, 12(3), 303-304.
- Smith, J. A., Larkin, M., & Flowers, P. (2021). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research.