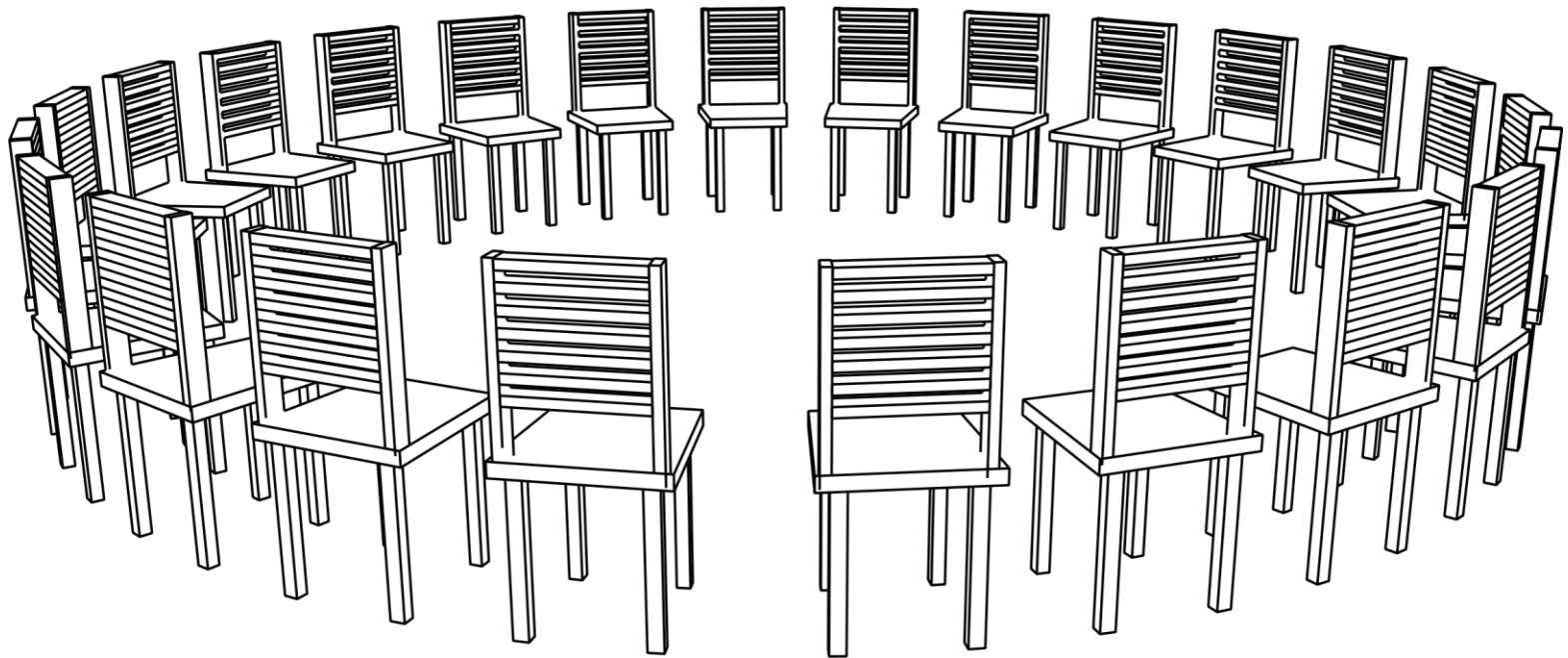


# EMPIRICAL RESEARCH MODULE

A Basic Introduction to Thematic  
Analysis

# OPENING ROUND:



THE AIM OF THIS LESSON IS:

\*TO GAIN A BETTER  
UNDERSTANDING OF  
THEMATIC ANALYSIS

WE WILL USE THEMATIC ANALYSIS TO ANALYSE OUR  
FOCUS GROUP DATA SO.....

# What TA is, and what it is not

# What is TA?

- “TA has recently been recognized as a method in its own right” (Joffe, 2012: 210).



\* “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data

- 
- \* It minimally organises and describes your data in (rich) detail.
  - \* (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 79).

# Is TA one thing?

- \* The term 'TA' has lots of different meanings
- \* It wasn't until the 1990s that ***procedures*** for TA as a qualitative method began to be discussed

- 
- \* Students learning TA not only have to learn how to do TA (the principles and procedures of TA), they also have to develop an understanding of the values & assumptions of different research paradigms, as well as their own subjective positionings



Braun and Clarke  
recommend 'learning  
by doing'.

You therefore have the opportunity  
to:

\*Develop your own research map



# ONE KIND OF RESEARCH:



# ONE KIND OF RESEARCH:

The researcher is like an archaeologist digging through soil to discover buried treasures

## Examples of epistemology.....

- Researcher as ***archaeologist***, digging to uncover a reality that exists independently [Positivist]





# ANOTHER KIND OF RESEARCH



# ANOTHER KIND OF RESEARCH

The researcher is like a sculptor,  
*creating* a work of art by  
chipping away at a block of  
marble



- Researcher as a *sculptor*, creating reality and involved in the production of that reality [Constructionist]

# Consider the difference:



Remember the SPAM analogy:



Two big words  
in research:

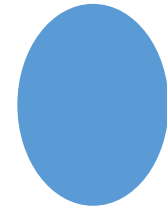
- Ontology

- Epistemology

- The nature of reality

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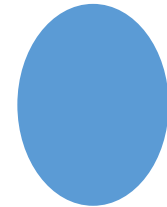
ONTOLOGY.....



- How we  
know what  
we know

---

EPISTEMOLOGY.....



# The Ontological Continuum.....

| RELATIVISM                                            | CRITICAL REALISM                                              | REALISM                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Reality is dependant upon the ways we come to know it | A pre-social reality exists but we can only partially know it | A pre-social reality exists which we can access through research |
|                                                       |                                                               |                                                                  |
|                                                       |                                                               |                                                                  |
|                                                       | Braun and Clarke (2013, p26]                                  |                                                                  |

| Type                               | Definition                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Example study                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Realist/<br>essentialist           | Reality is ‘out there’ and discoverable through the research process; people’s words provide direct access to reality.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Rance et al.’s (2014) study of women with anorexia assumes that anorexia is a real condition.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Critical realist/<br>contextualist | Reality is ‘out there’ but access to it is always mediated by socio-cultural meanings, and, in the case of qualitative analysis, the participant’s and the researcher’s interpretative resources (so direct access to reality is never possible). People’s words provide access to their particular version of reality; research produces interpretations of this reality.                              | Hayfield et al.'s (in press) study reports bisexual marginalisation from bisexual women's perspectives, but also locates their experiences within a wider interpretative context where sexuality is normatively understood in dichotomous ‘either/or’ terms.                                                                 |
| Relativist/<br>constructionist     | There is no external reality discoverable through the research process, instead versions of reality are created in and through research. The researcher cannot look through people’s words to find evidence of the psychological or social reality that sits behind it, rather people’s words become the focus of research, and the researcher interprets how these words produce particular realities. | Braun’s (2008) study explored the explanatory frameworks ‘lay’ people provide for sexual health statistics in New Zealand. Taking a constructionist approach, it treated these accounts as reflecting and reinforcing a certain reality that needs to be taken into account, if sexual health promotion is to be successful. |

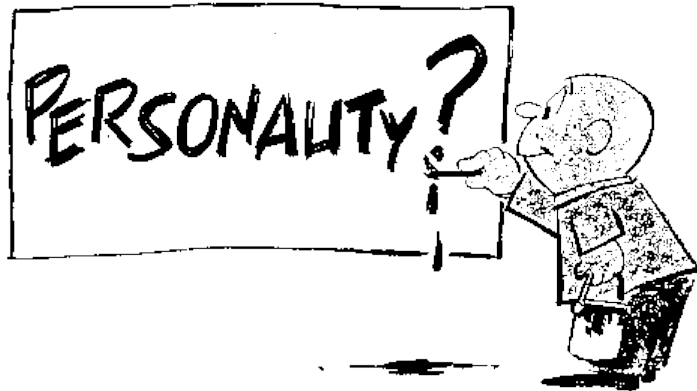
# ONTOLOGY THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS.....

- **REALISM**.....[perfect glass window]
- **RELATIVISM**.....[prisoners looking at the view from their cells]
- **CRITICAL REALISM**.....[view can only be seen through a prism]

[Braun and Clarke (2013)]

# EPISTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES : WHAT COUNTS AS LEGITIMATE KNOWLEDGE?

## Epistemology: Scientific



## Epistemology: Astrological



|                                                   |                                                  |                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| <b><u>ARIES</u></b><br>March 20-April 18          | <b><u>TAURUS</u></b><br>April 19-May 19          | <b><u>GEMINI</u></b><br>May 20-June 20               |
| <b><u>CANCER</u></b><br>June 21-July 21           | <b><u>LEO</u></b><br>July 22-August 21           | <b><u>VIRGO</u></b><br>August 22-September 21        |
| <b><u>LIBRA</u></b><br>September 22-October 22    | <b><u>SCORPIO</u></b><br>October 23-November 21  | <b><u>SAGITTARIUS</u></b><br>November 22-December 20 |
| <b><u>CAPRICORN</u></b><br>December 21-January 18 | <b><u>AQUARIUS</u></b><br>January 19-February 17 | <b><u>PISCES</u></b><br>February 18-March 19         |

# OUR ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY IMPACT THE WAY WE APPROACH OUR ANALYSIS AND ARRIVE AT OUR FINDINGS

**Archaeologist**



**Sculptor**



TA is a  
method not  
a  
methodology

- **METHODOLOGY?**
- **METHOD?**

# THEMATIC ANALYSIS

- \* Inductive (data-driven) approach
- \* Familiarisation
  - ↓
- \* Coding ( subjective )
  - ↓
- \* Theme development



# TA is uniquely flexible!

- ❑ Unlike all other qualitative methods, TA is not tied to a particular theoretical framework, so TA can be conducted in a number of different ways:
- ❑ Inductive versus deductive
- ❑ A essentialist versus constructionist theoretical perspective
- ❑ Researcher needs to actively make a series of *choices* as to what form of TA they are using, and to understand and explain why they are using this particular form

| Broad type of research                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Questions about...                                                         | Example studies                                                                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Experiential qualitative research</b> – assumes language is a tool for communicating people’s experiences, perspectives and practices; that such things can be ‘read off’ people’s words; language reflects reality. | People’s lived experiences of...                                           | Women’s lived experiences of body hair growth (Fahs, in press).                                                             |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | People’s perspectives on...                                                | Young adults’ views on pubic hair (Braun, Tricklebank & Clarke, 2013).                                                      |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | The factors and social processes that underpin particular phenomena.       | The role of experiential and gendered embodiment in regulating alcohol consumptions (Lyons, Emslie & Hunt, 2014).           |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Practices; the things people do in the world.                              | Young lesbian, gay and bisexual people’s clothing practices (Clarke & Turner, 2007).                                        |
| <b>Critical qualitative research</b> – rejects the assumption that the reality of people’s experiences sit behind language; rather reality is constructed in and through language.                                      | Representations of particular subjects and objects in particular contexts. | The representation of women’s bodies in women’s magazines, focusing on ‘love your body’ discourse (Murphy & Jackson, 2011). |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | The social construction of a particular topic or issue.                    | The construction of men’s talk about weight management on weight loss discussion forums (Bennett & Gough, 2013).            |

# Thematic analysis is uniquely flexible!

- \* TA can be used to analyse most types of qualitative data:
- \* TA can be used to address most types of qualitative research questions

# Typology of qualitative research questions

- \* Experiences ✓
- \* Understandings and perceptions ✓
- \* Reports of practice/Practice ✓
- \* Influencing factors ✓
- \* Representations ✓
- \* Constructions ✓

# A range of possibilities

## ‘Straightforward’

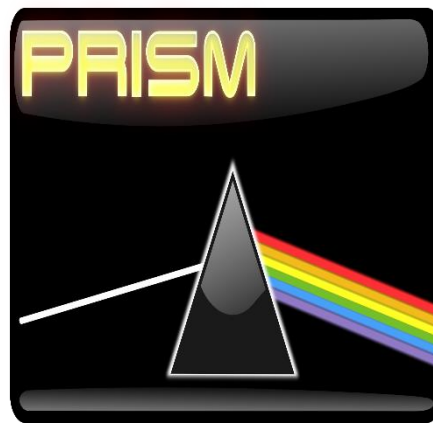
- \* Describes
- \* Summarises
- \* Represents

## ‘Sophisticated’

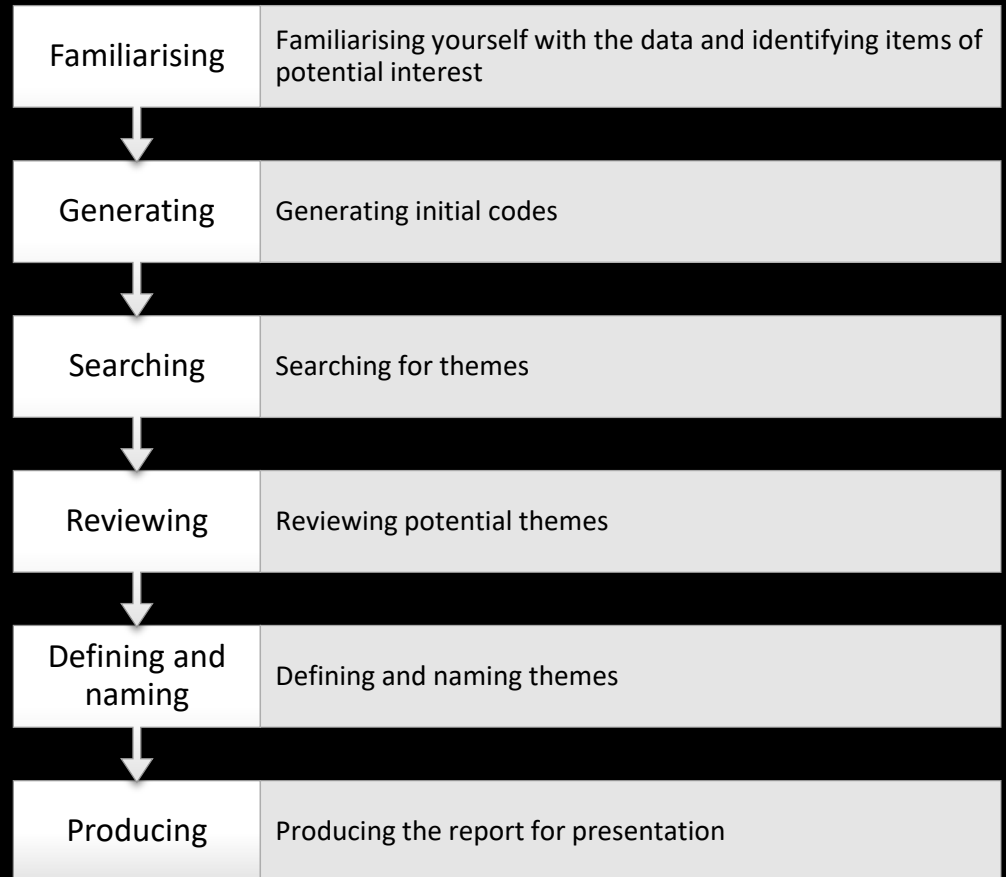
- \* Tells a story
- \* Locates data/participants within the wider social, cultural, historical, political, ideological contexts
- \* Interprets
- \* Theoretical/conceptual analysis
- \* Makes an argument

# The importance of reflexivity

- \* The theoretical flexibility of TA means that reflexivity is crucial to the successful implementation of TA
- \* The researcher makes *active* choices
- \* The research reflects on the assumptions underpinning their reading of data



# Six Phases of Thematic Analysis



# How important is coding reliability?

Reliable coding?



Unreliable coding?





# SUCCESSFUL QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

*a practical guide for beginners*

VIRGINIA SKAUM  
& VICTORIA CLARKE



Any questions?



# CLOSING ROUND:

