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‘Thematic analysis has travelled to places that we've never heard of’

Astrid Coxon meets Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, to hear about using thematic analysis.

Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke first wrote about thematic analysis – a technique for analysing qualitative data – in 2006, in a paper entitled *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology*. Thematic analysis focuses on exploring patterning and meaning in qualitative data. The method enables qualitative researchers to make sense of the data they have collected from research participants, and/or from other sources, and develop and report the most significant ‘results’ in relation to the question driving the research. The questions it can help researchers address are vast – such as what it’s like to live with chronic pain, how people who choose not to have children are viewed in a society where having children is understood as a ‘normal’ and expected part of adulthood, or the way ‘healthy eating’ is represented in the media. Their 2006 paper, and the approach to thematic analysis they outlined in it and subsequent writing, has become widely used and cited in psychology and in many other disciplines.

Unlike quantitative research, which values striving for objective knowledge of the world, qualitative approaches like Braun and Clarke’s approach to thematic analysis embrace the idea that any ‘making sense’ of data will be shaped by the researcher’s values and positioning in the world. Qualitative researchers using thematic analysis are conceptually more like story tellers or sculptors than scientists. They spend time ‘getting to know’ their data and becoming intimately acquainted with its contents – known as ‘familiarisation’ – before engaging in a systematic process of coding the data. With coding, the goal is to understand, parse and tag (with coding labels – pithy phrases that evoke the data content and its analytic relevance) the full range of meanings relevant to the research question. Coding produces a lot of codes, and the researcher then clusters together similar and related codes, to develop ‘themes’ – multifaceted meaning-based patterns. The researcher actively works and reworks the clusters, to determine a set of themes that best captures and tells a story about important meanings in the data, related to the research question.

So how and why did Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke come to think about themselves as helping qualitative researchers become (better) story tellers? In this interview with Astrid Coxon, they discuss their thinking about and writing about thematic analysis.

AC: How did the two of you meet and start working together?

VC: I had a major mental health crisis as a teenager. As is very common at that age, I had quite a severe depression. Bizarrely, because my dad was working at a local authority that decided to experiment with having private health insurance for the staff, I ended up in a private psychiatric clinic… that’s a whole other interesting story of the celebrities that were in there. It got me fascinated with understanding how people tick, and training to be a clinical psychologist. I did a placement in a psychiatric hospital as part of my degree at Brunel University, but then encountered people like Karen Henwood, Ros Gill, Corinne Squire, Irene Bruna Seu, Ann Phoenix, a young generation of feminist critical psychologists teaching at Brunel. Their version of psychology really resonated, so I ditched my ambitions for clinical psychology and therapy, and thought, ‘where can I learn more

about this?' That took me to Loughborough University Social Sciences. So why don't you say, Gin, how you got to Loughborough?

VB: I went all through high school with no clue what I wanted to do. After I didn't get into photography, I worked for a year after school and got thoroughly bored. Somewhere along the lines I latched on to clinical psychology as the thing that I desperately wanted and needed for my life. Our university system in New Zealand is different to the UK, and I got into all my courses *except* psychology. It added to my determination that I must study psychology.
There was one day where you could go to university to try to get into courses you hadn't gotten into. There must have been hundreds of people waiting in a line. I'd phoned up, shocked at not getting in, because my grades were good, and had been told to skip to the front. It felt really wrong, but I went to the front, got the stamp on my paper, and boom I was in.
When I got to my first-year lectures at The University of Auckland, it wasn't what I thought psychology was at all… but it was still engaging, and I was still determined to do clinical. Then my second year, like Victoria, critical feminist psychology lecturers were the ones that grabbed me. Nicola Gavey was the key person: her work was just fascinating, and felt so right as an approach to psychology. She's a clinical psych, but she doesn't practice, and she was the first person who encouraged me to think about academic psychology.
So, I did a Masters, and was fortunate to get a PhD scholarship and to go to Loughborough. I turned up there having never been to England, on a cold, miserable September, in 1997. Absolutely, completely overwhelmed, out of my depth and terrified, and met a whole lot of scary PhD peers at Loughborough Social Sciences.

VC: We used to tease her because we'd ask her to come to coffee, but she wouldn't… we didn't realise she was completely overwhelmed by everything that was that was going on.
We spent a lot of time together during our PhDs… part of a close network of PhD students doing critical qualitative work, critical feminist work, critical work around sexuality. And then there were lots of other students doing critical discursive-y work in various different ways. But we didn't work together as such, did we? The *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology* paper was the first work that we ever did together.

VB: We became friends very quickly, and we engaged with each other's work. We had such a rich culture as a community of students, reading each other's work, feeding back and talking about things. It feels like that has slipped away a lot. Everyone's stretched, but also the environment is set up so competitively now… 'do I want to risk giving those ideas to someone else?' I was reflecting on this the other day, the kind of engagement you get from your peers rather than with the supervisor, where there's differential power, the terrifying-ness, the awesome-ness, all those aspects.

VC: There are so many pressures on students… developing your Twitter profile as a PhD student? That terrifies me! We got to be clueless and stupid. There was no public audience, except when you embarrassed yourself at a conference. Although we felt so incredibly stressed, and pressured, that period was looser, spacious, less professionalised. You were more a student and less a professional academic.

AC: It sounds like a mutually supportive, collaborative relationship between the two of you and with your other PhD peers.

VC: Yes, warm and friendly. You understood each other's topic areas enough, and learnt about stuff from each other's research. The other thing was that we were literally surrounded by titans of critical psychology who were defining that area. They cared so much about methodology, about the doing of research, and transmitted that passion to all of us. Almost everyone who was part of that big peer group has written methodological work… we're not alone. It was only when we got out in the big wide world that we discovered what we had was really special.

VB: It also instilled a position that you have to think about what you're doing, and why you're doing it… come prepared to be able to defend what you're doing. That's part of the empirical research process, but I'm talking more of a fundamental level – an integral part of a process. Being a 'knowing researcher'… the idea that you don't just do things. You can be excited and explore, but you have to actually really think about what you're doing, why and how…

VC: …and defend it to the death! If you weren't doing things the right way, it was framed as if what you're doing has literally no value or credibility. A bit like MasterChef, that makes lunch feel like a life and death crisis… 'lunch might be three minutes late! Oh my god!'
When you think back on how we got here and what we see as important as qualitative methodologists, so much of it is shaped by that experience.

AC: From this experience came your 2006 methodological paper, which at last count had over 100,000 citations. It's a running joke in qualitative student circles: Braun and Clarke 2006, Bingo card! What inspired the development of what's now become known as reflexive thematic analysis?

VB: We both had years of frustration with the ways in which these things were being talked about and written about. Grand ideas that never eventuated, because I was burnt out… but then I had my first sabbatical. I was in Bristol, at UWE, and we seized the moment.

VC: Our ambitions were quite small. My joke was always that because I was doing LGBT research, I expected an audience of six people for a presentation… the interest in this kind of work was so minimal. We'll just write this little niche paper that reflects the way we value qualitative research, mainly for us to give to our students. We wrote it in the house that Ginny was renting a room in. We did the bulk of the work very quickly. We went to the library and got out books on thematic analysis… but even though we quoted people like Richard Boyatzis, what he was offering was not what we wanted to give to our students. So that was it: 'let's do this thing that will be useful for our students'. We didn't have a conceptualisation of researchers having an audience. Academics write papers, academics don't think about people reading those papers and those papers changing how people do things. I think sometimes people think we had an evil master plan!

VB: We did not! You know, 200 citations for a critical health, gender, sexuality paper is amazing. And now there's this thing, out there, that has blown that scale out in the water.

We literally wrote it together. That way of engaging and working things out – what we wanted to say and how we wanted to say it – was a good process. What's been lost with the pandemic is our ability to be in the same space at the same time, and for me, that's one of the real losses.

VC: It's about bringing reflexivity into the heart of our writing practice, isn't it? We were constantly questioning and challenging each other. Hopefully that's what makes our writing quite accessible and appealing to people – that dialogue between us when we're writing. I can remember having a 20-30 minute discussion over 'rich': people say that, what does it mean? Trying to think about the terms that qualitative researchers all use all the time, that to students new to the process seem like jargon. Every time someone asks you, 'What does that mean?', you understand what doesn't make sense to people, what needs explaining. It's a constant learning process… getting better at writing and getting better at explaining things to people.

AC: One of the things I love about thematic analysis, about that paper and subsequent ones, is how clear the language is, and the process. It's easy to follow, even if you're new to qualitative research. I work with a lot of my students who want to do their first qualitative project and I often say, 'Have you considered reflexive thematic analysis', and they fall in love with it. Every time I introduce new students to your papers, I get to see that process all over again and remember how excited I was to discover this approach.

VB: That's so lovely to hear! I don't think we get that face to face bit anymore. I don't see that. You know, you get a message sometimes, but to hear that description is lovely.

AC: What would you say is the key appeal of reflexive thematic analysis, what sets it apart from other qualitative approaches?

VC: You can bracket all the complex terminology, and all the theory, and find a way into the process to start learning the concepts, if that makes sense. Whereas I think approaches like grounded theory, there's so much theory and history around them, you need to understand the language and the theoretical foundations and then depending on which approach you're using, the foundations of that, and why that's different. So, Charmaz's constructivist version is in dialogue with previous versions developed by her PhD supervisors, and so on. I think TA creates a space where you can push that to the side, get into the practicalities of doing analysis, and then learn about those conceptual issues through the doing. When you do coding with students, you can see things clicking into place. They can understand through how they're engaging with data, why the more abstract concerns matter. Until you're working with data and starting to interpret it and make sense of it, you can't really see how the theory matters.

VB: When we first started writing, there was so much that was mystifying about qualitative research if you weren't immersed in the world. What we're talking about here – bracketing all that complex, theoretical, conceptual stuff, until after you've had a go with the data and engaged in the process – is anathema, really… you could be skewered for suggesting such dastardly things. But before I went to Loughborough, a well-known and senior academic who'd gone to the UK on a scholarship that was the same as mine, told me 'when you get there, all the British students will have read more than you, they will be vocal, they will be talking about it, you will feel like you know nothing, and that will be hard'. It really prepared me for that experience, because it did feel

exactly like that. I got there and people like Victoria had so much more training, had done more research or reading. It made qualitative research and discourse approaches feel overwhelming. Suddenly there were arguments about X or Y that I had no idea about. I think that's analogous to the experience of qualitative research for lots of people.
Part of this was about questioning ideas, and this idea you need to have all *that* sorted out before you get to your data… well, it's a privileged position. Being able to handle that knowledge and have all that understanding. But is it always necessary? Those understandings don't necessarily have to happen first, and they don't necessarily have to happen in the abstract. Ask a student who's never encountered qualitative research before, 'what do you think your data represent?', they might think 'What on earth are you talking about?' But once you've worked through that, you can have a conversation about it that is grounded and located in the kind of analytic work that they're doing. Then it can make sense.

VC: I think its flexibility probably explains why it's become popular beyond psychology. Often psychological methods don't travel beyond psychology. I think interpretative phenomenological analysis has done to health research and medicine and so on. But I think TA has travelled to places that we've never heard of… I regularly get asked to review manuscripts in areas of research, I think, 'I have no idea what that is'. It doesn't have that baggage that ties it to a particular discipline. Academics like teaching it, because it gives a way in to qualitative analysis without saying, you have to do it this way, this is the best method, you need to know all this kind of terminology and so on.
That wasn't by design: we called our paper 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', because we imagined we were talking to an audience of psychologists. But yes, it translates beyond disciplinary boundaries. We break down the concepts that can mean different things in different disciplines that prevent having conversations. It feels nice to have a method that's informed by psychology – in ways that readers might not imagine and understand, because it reflects our history and our biography – getting out there in the world and forming part of the broader methodological conversation. Sometimes the really exciting methods seem to come from sociology or from other disciplines. We've got something in the mix that represents psychology.

VB: It entertains me that people in disciplines such as engineering and business and human computer interaction are reading a paper that talks about vaginas!

VC: We've had a few emails, haven't we… 'I have students who refuse to read the paper because it includes the word vagina. Have you got other examples that I can give to them?' At the time we only had the chapter we'd written for the first *American Psychological Association Handbook of Research Methods*, and the example was LGBT students' experiences at university… he said 'No, that's no better. That's not helpful.'

VB: We have diversified the examples we use now… they're not all gender/sexuality related ones. We're doing a wider variety of projects.

VC: A colleague forwarded an email from her student who talks about the fact 'they use a pubic hair survey as an example, as if that's a completely normal thing to do!' Which I thought was rather sweet. But it *does* seem normal to us.

AC: Well, maybe it should be normalised! It's important to have diversity represented in the mix. One of the things I love about the fact that your paper is so highly cited is that you are two female psychologists who have dominated this field.

VC: I think methodology can be quite macho? For male academics, theory and methodology are ways of performing masculinity. So it does feel nice that we're in that space; but also, not something we take too seriously.

AC: There's something very macho about systematising and setting rules for how methods should be done. So it's nice to see that broken up a bit. Another thing I like about this approach is that you are both constantly evolving it and publishing further papers to clarify things: around your attitudes towards saturation, and sample sizes, and you've recently renamed the six stages of the process as well.

VC: Yes, in response to questions, but also reading things and going, 'Oh, my God, really?' When you've read scores and scores of papers claiming that you say saturation can be achieved in 12 interviews, when we say nothing of the sort… or one that says, 'following Braun and Clarke's process', and then mentioning things that we never talk about… you think, 'wow'. So it's seeing how our work was misrepresented, but also reflecting on how we contributed to that, in how we originally wrote about thematic analysis.

VB: Inadvertently.

VC: We were trying hard to be clear and to unpack our assumptions, but we weren't fully aware of how much of our training, and how that helped us to understand qualitative research, came into the TA process and how we described it. That the procedures associated with our approach and the way we conceptualise coding reflect a particular take on qualitative research.
'Searching for themes' is a classic example. We thought everyone would understand what we meant by that. But we were wrong, because some see it as a process of digging through the sand, trying to find the buried treasures, the themes that are fully formed within the data. But we didn't mean that at all.

VB: As you're talking Vic I realise that our process and evolution of writing is a good example of the way reflexivity is always a work in progress… your insight into assumptions, into the ways you are shaping what you're doing, is always only ever going to be partial and partly accessible to you. You never have that full crystal ball to see inside yourself and to see what is unstated, or what is assumed, or how your context is shaping what you see in various ways.
I think one of the advantages of us living and working in different contexts, albeit still Anglo-Western dominated contexts, is that we come into the writing together from different places. It adds to our ability to interrogate what it is that we're doing, but we don't think we're at the final point. This is what we think *for now*.

VC: I have done a thread or two recently on Twitter trying to explain that there are different understandings of 'emerge' and 'emergent', and we're critiquing something quite specific when we say themes don't emerge. We're critiquing the conceptualisation of themes as objects that preexist analysis, but also highlighting the researcher's role in crafting and creating themes. You're not 'discovering', you're active, you're sculpting.

VB: Your process as a researcher needs to be active and thoughtful and careful. The analysis is not waiting for you to discover, the analysis happens at the intersection of you and your data, and your reflexivity, your subjectivity, your disciplinary and social context, and all those sorts of things. Your analysis is a product of this cluster of things… you can be more or less reflexive, more or less active, more or less engaged. This idea of 'themes do not emerge' captures a much more nuanced and complex account of what reflexive TA ideally looks like as practice.

VC: I guess it captures as well 'Big Q qualitative' researchers' frustration with positivism creeping into definitions of good practice, into reviewing and editing processes and so on. By Big Q I mean qualitative research conducted within a qualitative paradigm or a qualitative research values framework – Louise Kidder and Michelle Fine's very helpful way of demarcating non-positivist and positivist qualitative research.

AC: What would you say makes bad TA?

VC: We talk about this concept of knowingness, and having some understanding of the conceptual foundations of what you're doing and why you're doing it. It's a striving, a deliberative process. You don't arrive at, 'tick, knowing practitioner, everything I do is now fully informed'. Bad TA comes from a lack of knowingness. People are mashing up code books, coding frames, and coding reliability measures, with things that we outline, because they don't understand the conceptual foundations of the different approaches.

VB: And the flipside is people who treat it as a recipe, a series of steps or phases. Like it's a procedure that you can approach mechanically, rather than thoughtfully. I can understand how that might sound contradictory… we've written about the processes as tools, ways to facilitate your analytic engagement. It's not like applying a statistical formula to a set of data, it's not like there are a series of kind of regulated processes that you must do. It comes back to that knowingness… my own analytic process is far more organic, the phases far more merged and blended and recursive. But that's because I have a lot of experience as a qualitative analyst. I understand what I'm doing in those processes, and why I'm doing it, and what I need to get out of those different phases and what I'm losing if I don't do one, or do another, or do them too soon, and so on. So it's not thinking about the process as the purpose, but the process is a tool to get you to where you need to be.

VC: I was thinking about this yesterday. People would be horrified if they saw how messy my approach was. It's not rigorously ticking off the phases and stuff like that. It captures the ethos and the spirit and understanding why the processes are there... I think that doesn't compute to some people. They think because we're so concrete about the process, we're over emphasising the process and not the values, but we're trying to show how the process captures and can enact the values.
We use in our just out book *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* the example of my grandfather John. He was a proper Downton Abbey, Upstairs, Downstairs style cook. When I was a little girl, I'd bake with him. He didn't use scales, he did everything by eye, by judgement, by feel. That disrupts this idea of baking – that you must follow recipes, and be really precise. With TA, what we're trying to achieve is a bit like how he baked; he knew the underlying process and chemistry of baking, he knew how ingredients work together. There was looseness and

freeformness to how he did things… he knew what he was doing, essentially, he understood the process and what he was trying to achieve.

AC: I wonder if one of the challenges of TA for new initiates to qualitative research is that they come from this very positivist world, where there are rights and wrongs. Students can be excited when they discover how flexible, exciting and exploratory it can be, and then there is that period of real discomfort… 'OK, so this depends on my personal context and my reflexivity? That doesn't feel right!'

VC: That is really on our quantitative colleagues in psychology to reframe how they teach quantitative methods, because these methods are often just presented as 'this is how we do research in psychology'. There's no framing about 'this is the dominant way. This is the scientific model. This is why we think it's really good. This is the philosophical underpinnings of it'. It's just, 'this is how we do research'. And so students go from 'this is how we do research in psychology', to some poor qualitative psychologist saying, 'actually, there's this other approach and this other way of doing things, and it's quite different. And what you've just been taught is that, and now we're going to do this'. That's really hard and challenging for the students – you're basically pulling the rug out from under them. It'd be great if there could be a more collaborative approach within psychology departments to teaching qualitative and quantitative methods. I know there are some universities where there is that collaboration… that must be wonderful for students, because they're not having to unlearn everything they just been taught in year one.

VB: I used to teach a second year, optional methodology course, which was called 'producing psychological knowledge'. The whole idea was to disrupt that idea that there is the right way to learn and the right way to do research. The context and practice of methodology teaching needs a lot more deliberation. There's increased popularity in qualitative approaches, but you're setting the students up for a really hard task when they have to grapple with not just learning something new, but a context where they've sometimes been taught – implicitly, if not explicitly – that it doesn't align with fundamental values of the discipline. A few immediately love qualitative approaches, because positivism has never sat comfortably with them.

AC: Where would you both like to see thematic analysis going? Any particular avenues where you would like to see it developing?

VC: Our core message is around knowing practice. Andrew Fugard and Henry Potts talk about it being a family of methods… all these different approaches that lay claim to the same name. We've developed a typology that draws out the key differences and characteristics for students in an accessible way.
I find it exciting that people are doing things with TA that we didn't imagine. Work that combines TA and narrative analysis, that explores themes, but also narrative structures; and approaches to combining TA and discursive approaches; using TA and case studies; just things we hadn't anticipated. This little industry developing slightly new variations of TA… some aren't awesome, but some are really interesting. You've created this thing, let it out into the world, and then people are doing their own things with it.

VB: We've started to see people use TA with visual data, not just in textual spaces. Neither of us come from a background of analysing visual materials. But there's interesting scope, to see where and how that becomes

something useful. In the book we give the example of Kate Gleeson's method for analysing visual data, and a student I've got is working with data that includes visual material. When textual data are so familiar to you… how do you even go there? I've dabbled, but it feels like I'm just making it up!

AC: I think that will be quite reassuring, particularly for student readers, to hear that we still experience some discomfort at new things!

VC: Those emotional reactions to data, I don't think they ever go away. I vividly remember reading a student's transcript and emailing my co-supervisor in absolute panic – 'there's nothing in the data, I've read it, there's nothing in it, it's terrible, what are we gonna do?' She was 'calm down, it's going to be fine'. And it was. The data was really rich, it's just that initial panic about, 'oh, my God, there's nothing there'. I want to normalise the emotional rollercoaster of qualitative research. It doesn't stop.

VB: Your first engagement with your data is not going to be your last. A data set that can seem fairly ho hum and boring can actually produce things that you get passionate about. In the thematic analysis book, we use a social media data set about people who choose not to have children to illustrate the process. At first, I was 'there's a bit there, it's a bit obvious', but I got excited by it in the end. The emotional shifts that you can have with data are really common.

AC: It sounds like social media and online data collections are playing a valuable role in your research generation.

VC: There are two methods we're interested in learning more about. The story completion method and the survey method, both are qualitative approaches that our PhD supervisors dreamed up. They are very innovative methodologically. Celia Kitzinger wrote a paper about story completion with a student and Sue Wilkinson developed qualitative survey methods with students. We picked up these two things, and they are excellent pandemic methods.
What I like about these methods is that we don't know a lot about them, we're finding out about them as we use them. You're not only learning about the topic, you're learning something about the method and how it works. The pandemic has taken methods that I used to have to pitch to students, and made them actually want to do them. It feels like the pandemic has accelerated certain things.

VB: It's funny, we worked with Deborah Gray a few years ago editing a book called *Collecting Qualitative Data*. The hope was to encourage people beyond the domination of face to face, in person interviewing and focus groups, to think creatively about virtual, textual and other methods. It was like pandemic preparedness… my approach to collecting data wasn't so heavily reliant on going out and interviewing people face to face. Research is always a pragmatic activity, and you have to make choices in the context that you're in. And we're currently in a bloody pandemic context.

VC: I'm a dissertation module leader, so I look at a lot of projects. In the last year it's been, 'I had to do interviews on Skype because of the pandemic'. That's quite a sad framing of things, as if doing things on Skype is a poor substitute, and not really engaging in the interesting methodological literature around video call

interviews. To any students and supervisors doing online research this year and beyond, I would say read the methodological literature around the method you're using, and try to construct a more positive narrative around what it is that you're doing.
We can't go back to normal if we're ever going to stop the planet burning. And that means doing more research online, rather than travelling all over the country to interview people as I did when I was a research fellow. We travelled all over the southwest, three, four-hour round trips to do a single interview. That's not sustainable.

AC: I work in psychotherapy, and I'm an Online Teaching Fellow, and before the pandemic, it was painted as 'if you do things remotely, it's less good', but people are starting to see the benefit and the accessibility of being able to offer things remotely. If participants don't want to be seen face to face, they could turn the cameras off, they can choose to be in their own home…

VB: I've got a student who is interviewing people with chronic pelvic pain. This is a group of participants who might be quite disabled by pain, travelling might be difficult… Zoom provides a potentially far more accessible and encouraging method. Hopefully, what will come out of this is an enriched understanding of all the possibilities for engaging and collecting data.

VC: There's a paper that describes this as an African proverb, 'the pond you fish in determines the fish you catch'… particular methods will mean certain people participate who might not otherwise take part. The method you use shapes the stories that you're hearing. That's something we know really well from sex research – the more intrusive the method, the fewer people will take part, men will be more willing to participate in some methods, women in others. Qualitative psychologists worship the face to face interview as the gold standard for data collection. We need to think more about what works for the participant group.

VB: I've got a brother who is 19 years younger than me… he's still my go to check-in with the youth! Young people never pick up a call if it isn't from a known number… a phone is not necessarily their way of interacting. That becomes a relevant consideration in how we do data collection. With a phone call, the conversation represents to young people a totally different type of encounter… a thing that produces anxiety and stress. When I first heard those kinds of narratives they blew me away – 'but that's not what they are, they're normal!' They're not, anymore. No one calls me, ever. That matters, methodologically.

AC: I'll finish on the book: *Thematic Analysis, A Practical Guide*, and the related website with all the resources in there. Did you want to say a little bit about the book and your hopes and your intentions with publishing this book?

VC: It was supposed to be written in 18 months. But every book we've done together, one of us has got an autoimmune condition. So *Successful Qualitative Research*, I got chronic fatigue syndrome, *Collecting Qualitative Data*, Ginny got post-Lyme treatment fatigue syndrome. This book, I got multiple sclerosis. It's your turn next Gin!

VB: No more books, no more books!

VC: So yes, the books have been really drawn out. But that has given us lots of thinking space. This book's a culmination of the journey we've been on in the last few years – reflecting on misinterpretations, misunderstandings, what could we articulate more clearly, what questions that we've been asked, and how can we respond to those. Ginny in particular has been all over the world, teaching in different contexts and settings. We've learned so much from that process.
The book represents where we are now in our thinking. That's exciting, but we're also nervous. Maybe people won't like it anymore. It's articulating a particular take on qualitative research. One of our main goals is to argue for non-positivist qualitative research, because at Loughborough when we did our PhDs, the conversation was about, 'you shouldn't be doing experiential qual, critical qual is where it's at'. Our argument now is about trying to get the positivism out of qualitative psychology – it has very limited value, usefulness and meaning. We make a case for big Q, fully qualitative, however you want to frame it, non-positivist qualitative research. And if that means we've passed peak popularity, that's not necessarily a bad thing! We'll retreat into obscurity.

VB: No more books. My health will just stay as it is, and yours too!

VC: Yeah, and no more second editions and third editions. Actually, that's when we realised we'd never be able to stop writing about this, when an editor emails us enthusiastically with, 'We're doing the third edition, we'd like you to revise your chapter'. We did have this ambition that we'd move on to other things, get back to our research and stop being just, or mainly, methodologists. But we're more or less resigned to our fate.

VB: We're on the Titanic. There's no getting off.

AC: Oh, wonderful. Well, that's that, unless there was anything else that you wanted to get out there in the world?

VC: I don't know. Can you think of anything, Gin? I think we've rambled so much! Hopefully you can make some sense out of it.

See https://uk.sagepub.com/en-gb/eur/thematic-analysis/book248481 for the book and additional online resources. And www.thematicanalysis.net for a wide range of other resources.

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