

**A meta-methodology to enhance pluralist qualitative research: one man's use of socio-sexual media and midlife adjustment to HIV**

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## Abstract

*Aim:* Our aim is to offer and illustrates a novel meta-methodology to enhance the rigour of method selection and understanding of results in pluralist qualitative research (PQR).

*Method:* To do so, we make innovative use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) articulation of four discrete dimensions characterising different forms of thematic analysis. We provide secondary analyses of an interview from the Social Media, Men who have Sex with Men and Sexual Health project using critical discursive psychology, dialogical analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis, and psychosocial narrative analysis.

*Results:* All four methods identified aspects of three central foci: Compartmentalisation, Detachment, and Jouissance.

*Conclusion:* We discuss how our proposed meta-methodology provides a rationale for the selection of methods in a PQR, offer evidence that it can anticipate the relative similarity in focus of the methods employed, and argue that our meta-methodology reveals the possibility of identifying an 'axial' or 'hub' method' of a PQR which might be particularly fruitful in exploring commonalities and differences in results. Finally, we examine the synergies and challenges of combining pairs of the methods we used.

*Keywords:* pluralist qualitative research, HIV, thematic analysis, meta-methodology, socio-sexual media

## **A meta-methodology to enhance pluralist qualitative research:**

### **One man's use of socio-sexual media and midlife adjustment to HIV**

Mixed-methods research in which qualitative and quantitative approaches are combined in a single project is well established (Bryman, 2006; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). However, until recently, with the emergence of qualitatively-driven mixed methods research (Hesse-Biber, 2010), the qualitative component has commonly remained secondary or been regarded as a precursor to the 'main study'. Further, despite evidence for its strengths, projects in which more than one qualitative approach is utilised are rare.

Pluralistic qualitative research (PQR: Clarke, Caddick & Frost, 2016; Frost, Holt, Shinebourne, Esin, Nolas, Mehdizadeh, & Brooks-Gordon, 2011), is a newly developed approach to mixed methods research in which only qualitative methods are used with the choice of each justified with regard to the focus of the research (Coyle, 2010). PQR designs can employ different qualitative methods sequentially or concurrently, determined at the outset or in response to the developing analysis, and can be conducted by one researcher or a team. The flexibility of PQR means that it is challenging because the range of qualitative approaches is highly variable in terms of methodology, theoretical stance, and analytical procedure. However, for these reasons, PQR has the potential to offer rich analytical insights given that methods are likely sensitive to different aspects of the data.

PQR was initiated with a study on transition to second-time motherhood (Frost, Nolas, Brooks-Gordon, Esin, Holt, Mehdizadeh, & Shinebourne, 2010) and has proved popular in health-related research in which it has been extended to explore, for example: perspectives on smoking (Dewe & Coyle, 2014), understanding self-injurious behaviour (Josselin & Willig, 2014), and the experience of combat veterans (Caddick, Smith & Phoenix, 2015). PQR has been useful also in designing and evaluating services where meanings are often contested between stakeholders (Frost & Nolas, 2013). PQR offers

exceptional potential to dialogue across differences in analytical approach (Stefaruk & Johnson, 2013) and existing studies have used up to four qualitative methods.

Bradbury-Jones, Breckenridge, Clark, Herber, Wagstaff and Taylor (2017) are favourable towards pluralism in qualitative research but “argue that it needs to occur knowingly and purposefully and be rooted in a sound understanding and reporting of the compatibility of different philosophical underpinnings and practical applications” (p. 11). These authors used Creswell’s (2013) five approach taxonomy to devise a ‘Qualitative Research Level of Alignment Wheel’ which might be used for such a purpose. This Wheel outlines Creswell’s five approaches in terms of typical focus, sample size, data collection methods, and data analysis. Although the Wheel may provide information useful for PQR, we suggest it has several limitations.

First, Bradbury-Jones et al. (2017), themselves, conducted a mapping exercise of qualitative research published in six representative journals in the first quarter of 2015. This revealed that less than 50% fitted Creswell’s categorisation: that is, 5.9% of publications utilised a narrative approach, 9.8% phenomenological, 6.9% grounded theory, 15.7% ethnography, and 6.9% case study. To account for all the publications, the authors had to add the categories ‘generic qualitative’ (42.1%) and ‘other’ (12.7%). Second, Creswell’s taxonomy arguably confounds phenomena of different kinds: ‘grounded theory’ denotes a cluster of related methods of analysis, ‘ethnography’ is an approach which can utilise many different methods of data collection and analysis, and ‘case study’ is a research design. Third, the high degree of variation possible within each of the five approaches used in the Wheel severely limits its usefulness as a tool to systematise or even guide the alignment of qualitative methods in PQR.

The aim of the current article is to develop PQR through offering a novel meta-methodology to enhance the rigour of method selection and understanding of results. To do

so we make innovative use of Braun and Clarke's (2006) articulation of four discrete dimensions characterising different forms of thematic analysis. We draw on Braun and Clarke's (2006) exposition of thematic analysis because: (a) it is theoretically flexible (Clarke & Braun, 2018); (b) most qualitative methods involve some form of thematisation (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) or, to be even more neutral, initial identification of foci, topics, or domains of analytic interest (Braun & Clarke, 2016); and, (c) because there can be distinct types and variation in the use of named qualitative methods (Braun & Clarke, 2013), exposition of its *specific* operationalisation on four relevant dimensions offers clarity.

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis “involves a number of choices which are often not made explicit (or are not typically discussed in the method section of papers) but which need *explicitly* to be considered” (pp. 81-82). First, consideration must be given to ‘What counts as a theme’ and, second, to where the analysis will be positioned on four dimensions: (a) “A rich description of the data set, or a detailed account of one particular aspect” (p. 83); (b) “Inductive versus theoretical thematic analysis” (p. 83), which might be thought of as ‘bottom-up’/‘data-led’ or ‘top-down’ analysis; (c) “Semantic or latent themes” (p. 84), possibly capturing how ‘descriptive’ or ‘interpretative’ an analysis might be considered; and (d) “Epistemology: essentialist/realist versus constructionist thematic analysis” (p. 85).

While a consistent epistemological position would be expected, Braun and Clarke (2006) observe that an individual analysis could draw variably on the other dimensions throughout the analytic process. They also observe the existence of epistemologies “sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism” (ibid., p. 81), such as critical realism (see Madill, 2008). Although these two observations provide support that the dimensions may be best conceptualised as *continua* (e.g., “descriptive-interpretative”: Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 199), we have selected the term ‘*dialectics*’ to capture the way in which

the poles of each might be considered distinct yet *in conversation*. Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest some potential clustering in practice in that, for example, analyses focusing on latent themes may tend also to be constructionist. We consider opportunities of these issues for our proposed meta-methodology for developing PQR throughout this article.

To illustrate and ground the proposed meta-methodology, we use PQR to provide secondary analyses of an interview from the Social Media, Men who have Sex with Men and Sexual Health project (SMMASH: Frankis, Flowers, Lorimer & Davis, 2013). An online survey of 2668 men was combined with qualitative data from twenty-four men who participated in one-to-one interviews and focus groups. SMMASH sought to understand the sexual health needs of rural gay men in an era of rapid growth of socio-sexual websites and telephone Apps which facilitate men to meet for sex. Our team of four experienced qualitative health researchers recognised a shared interest in the topic of ‘pleasure’ and viewed this as a relevant issue in relation to the use of socio-sexual media. Hence, the research question driving our analyses was: ‘Where is the pleasure in that?’ The wording was deliberately ambiguous to allow it to be interpreted as required within the framework of the four qualitative methods employed and to provide a focus for secondary analyses of material which, by definition, was generated for a different purpose.

### **Method**

This study was granted approval by the School of Community Health and Nursing Ethics Subcommittee, School of Health and Life Sciences, Glasgow Caledonian University: HLS id: B11/59). Participants consented to their transcripts being used for analysis and publication with pseudonyms used to protect their identity. Participants were recruited via opportunity sampling through the Terrence Higgins Trust from community-based support groups and volunteers in Scotland. Fifteen gay-identifying men participated in one-to-one interviews. As one of only four HIV positive men who took part, ‘Peter’ was selected for our study because

he reflected in some detail on his pursuit of 'pleasure' before and after his HIV diagnosis eight weeks prior to interview.

### **Participant**

Peter was 52 years old, single, and self-employed. He described his use of socio-sexual media as 'medium'. Compared to most SMMASH participants, he was considered to have high social capital in having a postgraduate level education, a wide social support network, and a well-paid professional career.

### **Data collection**

The interview took a semi-structure format with questions focused on the use of online socio-sexual media. Questioning funnelled from general accounts of experience to more detailed, retrospective accounts of specific thoughts and feelings and functional use of digital technologies. The interviewer was male and his aim was to follow and facilitate the participant's own narrative while keeping to topic.

### **Analytical Procedures**

Peter's interview was analysed independently and concurrently by four researchers each using a different qualitative approach in which they are expert: critical discursive psychology (AL), dialogical analysis (AM), interpretative phenomenological analysis (PF), and psychosocial narrative analysis (NF). Each had the opportunity to select the analytical method they would bring to the study and to provide a rationale for its use (see below). This transparency contributes to PQR meeting relevant quality criteria (Yardley, 2008). In line with good practice, the choice of methods was not made until the research focus of the research had been decided. Moreover, for the purposes of providing a good basis for the development of a meta-methodology, analytical methods were selected to represent diverse approaches to qualitative research: i.e., discursive, dialogical, phenomenological, and

narrative (Madill & Gough, 2008). We offer a brief description of each method and references through which further details can be found.

#### *Critical Discursive Psychology (CDP)*

CDP posits discourse, language, and action as socially situated (Wetherell & Edley, 2014).

Hence, CDP approached ‘pleasure’ as woven implicitly throughout Peter’s constructions that formed his (sexual) identity. CDP is interested in the way Peter’s life history and personal identity unfold in temporal, narrative form as he uses the interview questions to frame his story. Reading the transcript multiple times, the researcher explicates the prevalent, interweaving discursive constructions identified – along with their complexities and nuances - with regard to the way in which Peter presents his identity vis-à-vis ‘pleasure’.

#### *Dialogical Analysis (DiA)*

DiA is based on Bakhtinian literary theory and seeks to explicate rhetorical strategies conceptualised as shared, emotionally-invested, search for truth (Sullivan, 2012). Analysis utilises concepts such as: ‘the word with a sideways glance’ (disclaimers, reservations, hesitations which index anticipated disagreement); ‘sore spots’ (including defensive exaggerations which index a fear of being wrong); and ‘threshold moments’ (when truth is uncertain and the future full of potential). Four key moments were selected for detailed analysis on the basis that they appeared to address ‘pleasure’ from Peter’s perspective.

#### *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)*

IPA (Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 1997) draws upon phenomenology to deliver idiographic analysis of experiential, participant-led data. Analysis focuses on how the researcher interprets the participant’s account of his or her experiences. The analysis began with micro-interpretations of the potential meanings associated with particular words and phrases. Larger patterns were then identified to generate meaning-focused themes deemed important as key



ways in which Peter understands his lifeworld relevant to ‘pleasure’: that is, how Peter was thinking about his experiences of his gay life, sex life, and social media.

#### *Psychosocial Narrative Analysis (PNA)*

PNA attends to the structure and content of stories and considers them within a psychoanalytically-informed psychosocial framework. Complex inner realities are explored using language as a gateway and psychoanalytic theories as interpretative tools (Roseneil, 2006). Text relevant to ‘pleasure’ was first identified using Labov’s (1972) model to locate narratives with a beginning, middle and end structure. Analysis considered how the narrative was presented in order to hold the audience’s attention and the context in which the stories are situated.

#### *Mapping the four methods of qualitative analysis*

We mapped the similarities and differences across our four methods at a meta-methodological level. Table 1 shows how each researcher characterised the method they had selected to use with regard to the four discrete decisions Braun and Clarke (2006) provide.

Of the four methods, only DiA focused on a detailed account of one particular aspect of the data set: that is, on key moments. Although the other three methods could be operationalized in this way, more typically – and in the analyses undertaken here – they offer a rich description of the data set. Whereas CDP and IPA took a predominantly inductive (‘bottom-up’) approach, DiA and PNA were more theoretically-driven (‘top-down’). However, as recognised by Braun and Clarke (2013), all methods cycled between data and theory, inductive approaches working with some *a priori* foci and assumptions and the more theoretical approaches always answerable to the data. Only IPA utilised the idea of a theme as ‘semantic’: that is, staying true to the participant’s own apparent meanings in context, although making occasional use of ‘latent’ themes which employ more analytic interpretation. Similarly, CDP commenced with a semantic reading but moved into

explicating latent themes at the level of discursive construction. Finally, only IPA could be characterised as utilising a realist epistemology. DiA can be situated in ‘weaker forms’ of constructionism (Sullivan, 2011, p.5) but with the proviso that, more properly, the approach conceptualises knowledge as a tension between *pravda* (truth as lived) and *istana* (conceptual knowledge). Hence, DiA can also be utilised as a critical realist method (ibid.), illustrating how, as Braun and Clarke explain, thematic analysis “can also be a ‘contextualist’ method, sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism, and characterized by theories, such as critical realism” (2006, p.81).

Figure 1 provides a representation of the methods if positioned in space according to the *number of differences* between each on the four dialectics. For example, CDP differs from DiA on two of the dialectics, from IPA on two, and from PNA on one: i.e.,  $CDP=2+2+1=5$ . So, accordingly,  $DiA=2+4+1=7$ ;  $IPA=2+4+3=9$ ;  $PNA=1+1+3=5$ . Interestingly, this suggests that CDP, as the least overall divergent (given that PNA and IPA are at a distance of 3), could be considered a kind of axial, or hub, method of this PQR.

#### *Comparing the four analyses*

After completing analyses independently, they were circulated and each researcher produced a written comparison of the four reports. This comparison included what each researcher considered to be the main similarities and differences between analyses and the particular strengths of the analysis they had, themselves, produced. The Results as follows are based on the original reports and written reflections.

### **Results**

Given that the topic of the interview was socio-sexual media, ‘pleasure’ was explored within it predominantly as *sexual* pleasure. In this regard, all four analyses identified some aspect of three central foci: Compartmentalisation, Detachment, and Jouissance (i.e., excessive bodily states and affects [Lacan, 2004]) (Table 2). All analyses also featured in some depth sub-foci

*own body as an object*, otherwise each entailed interestingly distinct emphases and/or interpretation of these foci. In considering relative coverage, it is important to be clear that each analysis included more detail and nuance than can be included in Table 2 and that, where a method was judged not to emphasis a particular sub-foci, this does not mean it was completely absent from the analysis.

Each foci and sub-foci will now be explored with regard to the analysis produced through the four methods. Eight extracts from the interview are presented with relevant passages from the original reports. Where explication requires, shorter quotes from the interview are also included. At this stage, the four analyses are kept relatively separate to facilitate appreciation of their differential approach, while connected with short commentaries. Detailed comparison and reflection on the synergies between the four analyses is provided in the Discussion.

### **Compartmentalisation**

***Identity work/Rules and scripts:*** Both the CDP and IPA were particularly interested in Peter's *identity work*. For example, extract 1, in which Peter describes how the locations he meets men for sex has changed, was selected for analysis in the IPA.

#### Extract 1 - IPA

Peter: But I'm a great one for compartmentalising things, so even in those terms my sex life was compartmentalised, and my sex life was basically compartmentalised into having sex in saunas. I don't pick up people in bars. Never did. And my sex life just took place in saunas, with great frequency it has to be said at that point. And interestingly my life has now moved on where I don't have sex in saunas at all. My sex life has been compartmentalised into Gaydar and other sites.

The IPA considers how Peter's biography covers the exponential growth of digital media in transforming gay men's sexual cultures and mediating sexual experiences. The analysis points out that, whilst Peter maps his experiences in categorical ways, the topography of gay sexual cultures in which Peter's experiences and subjectivity have been realised are strongly constrained by heteronormativity and homophobia. Throughout the

interview, Peter's experiences of sex do not explicitly follow traditional, arguably heteronormative, narratives of 'romance', 'love' and sexual pleasure. In contrast, and in keeping with the hypersexualised culture of gay men, Peter tends to talk of sex with other men in commodified and sometimes dehumanised ways (e.g., people become quantified encounters).

On the other hand, the CDP enabled an analysis of how Peter constructed multiple identities, the main one of a cultured man who had compartmentalised his life. CDP demonstrated how his 'gay man' identity was divided between the 'thrill/pleasure-seeking,' 'highly sexualised' gay man and the 'thoughtful' gay man who, whilst not seeking specific relationships or monogamy, documented a clear set of principles in relation to his partners (e.g., not having sex with married or bisexual men). In this regard, the CDP explicated also Peter's *rules and scripts* associated with sexual pleasure. These, and detailed *identity work*, are for example noted in the CDP in relation extract 2 in which Peter's Gaydar profile is discussed.

#### Extract 2 - CDP

Interviewer: You don't get people speaking to you in a foreign language.

Peter: I do actually. I get some Polish guys writing to me. In fact this week I got a message from a Polish guy, and I get Swedish guys messaging me from Sweden. I've got a Swedish profile name. But generally no, they just want to see your dick, that's it.

Interviewer: They just want to see your dick.

Peter: See your dick and your muscles.

Interviewer: Do any of your pictures have?

Peter: I've got one face pic.

Interviewer: Face pic.

Peter: No, I've got no cock or arse pics.

Interviewer: Tell me about that.

Peter: Well, I'm one of these people, I mean I'm a highly sexualised man actually, but cock and arse pics just don't quite do it for me. I mean I like a nice cock and a nice arse as much as anybody else, probably a bit more, but some things don't have to be seen, and I get people messaging me if I'm arranging a meet and they say how big's your cock, and I'm just like who cares. I would never, I never have asked anyone that.

In this extract, Peter argues that the reason people are contacting him is to “see your dick, that’s it”, the generic “your” and its automatic nature “that’s it” implying a general rule of practice and intent on Gaydar. Peter continues that they want to “(s)ee your dick and your muscles” and confirms that he has “one face pic” and “no cock or arse pics”. The “one” here is significant, as is the lack of explicit images, as he works to mark himself as both a “highly sexualised man” and as refined, the latter produced also through an extreme case formulation: “they say how big’s your cock [...] I never have asked anyone that”.

**Entry into HIV+ world:** The DiA and PNA were interested in the impact on Peter of his HIV+ diagnosis. The DiA does so through focusing on how, for Peter, while the HIV status of others is always ambiguous it implicates different kinds of space into which he is beginning to move.

Extract 3 - DiA

Peter: Yeah. So they always would apply on Gaydar, as it always has done, because you assume you’re having sex with, you’re protecting each other, and I suppose on the bare back site you’re not really protecting anybody. The damage is done, the infection has taken place. But the bare back stuff is something that’s still quite new to me and I haven’t quite got my head around it yet. I’ve only ever had bare back sex as an active partner, so letting go as a passive partner would be something for me to be thinking about over the next few months.

Interviewer: And when you say letting go, what do you mean?

Peter: Literally letting somebody into your body without wearing a condom, which I presume I will do over the next few months, as and when I’m ready. But that’s something that I think will happen over the next short space of time I think. As somebody who hasn’t started treatment yet I’ve got some things to consider about infection and degrees of infection and viral load and things like this and how it affects other people.

HIV status is associated with particular spaces such that “on Gaydar [...] you assume you’re having sex with, you’re protecting each other”: that is, one might imagine one’s partner is negative but lack of certainty means that you work together to lower the risks. In contrast, “I suppose on the bare back site you’re not really protecting anybody”. The implication here is that bare back sites are associated with being HIV+, although the word

with a loophole - “I suppose” – indicates that the HIV status of another person is always a question mark. “As somebody who hasn’t started treatment yet”, the participant further subdivides the HIV+ landscape and implies another future transition to ‘on-HIV-treatment’ space. The transition from HIV- to known HIV+ does, however, open new territories of pleasure: “I’ve only ever had bare back sex as an active partner, so letting go as a passive partner would be something for me to be thinking about over the next few months”. And this transition is defined spatially as “(l)iterally letting somebody into your body without wearing a condom”.

The PNA, on the other hand, although highlighting also a sense of uncertainty focuses on the breach to Peter’s sense of self brought about by his HIV diagnosis. Peter can no longer conduct his sex life solely in terms of what he wants and in pursuit only of personal pleasure, but must now consider potential effects on his health and that of his sexual partners: “Am I going to make things worse by receiving?”, “Am I going to make things worse for others as well?” PNA notes that his questions remain unanswered, perhaps due in part to lack of knowledge about the implications of his new status: “issues I am not entirely clear about”, “a wee bit of an unknown, unknown territory for me”. This uncertainty and perceived choices that Peter describes suggest that, as he reconstructs his post-diagnosis identity, he is concerned to more fully understand the implications of previous and new sexual practices and preferences, minimising the risk of making uninformed and potentially dangerous decisions, and reducing the anxiety associated with the status of not-knowing..

### **Detachment**

*Depersonalising others:* While all the analyses identify the way in which Peter appears to take detached approach to pleasure, only the DiA focuses in some detail on the way in which Peter can seem to depersonalise his sexual encounters.

Extract 4 - DiA

Interviewer: Why does it make you nervous?

Peter: Because I like to be bold and uninhibited and full on and passionate and unbridled, and if I sense somebody's inexperienced or I've, I mean I don't do anything that would be regarded as weird, it's just common gay sexual practices, but I have to know that that's all within the other person's sexual scope, and then that's great, I go for it. But there are certain things that have to be in place for me to feel, I have to be sure that the other guy is up for this kind of level of sexual intensity, and makes me feel very comfortable, and then I'm quite happy and uninhibited. But if I sense insecurity or uncertainty I become insecure and uncertain as well.

For Peter, finding a sexual partner is linked in the DiA to a routine cycle of events in certain places yet the encounter itself is a threshold moment of unpredictable outcome. He does not know the other's compatibility defined spatially in terms of range: their "sexual scope", and parameter: comfort with a certain "level of sexual intensity". However, approaching this moment, his 'nervousness' is allayed by incorporation of some known elements: "certain things that have to be in place", although this is specified only to the extent of having "to be sure that the other guy is up for this" and that he "makes me feel very comfortable". This unpredictability is linked to the implication that his partner is a stranger and that there is little or no prior discussion since he has to "sense" the other's level of experience. And, as in extract 1, there is also the echo of a distancing, clinical genre in his use of the terminology "common gay sexual practices".

***Own body as object:*** A second way in which Peter appears to take a detached approach to pleasure is by presenting his own body as an object. This is considered by the CDP, IPA, and the PNA, the latter demonstrating how Peter objectifies himself through linking body, age, and the immediacy of sex as a means of preparing his body and deciding his behaviours to increase the likelihood of being attractive to others, so reducing the tension of unpleasure and increasing the possibility of pleasure generation. The PNA explores how Peter uses his body as a display to attract sexual attention and describes bodies as 'engineered': "that's what people are doing when they go to the gym, they're engineering their bodies for the purpose of attraction". The PNA considers further how this self-

objectifying constellation of body, age, and immediacy is continued in Peter's story regarding his use of Gaydar.

Extract 5 – CDP & PNA

Peter: It's the immediacy of the response you get. And it's still the same to this day. When I'm on Gaydar and there are photographs of my body, my pecs and my biceps and things, and certainly the first messages I get are about my body shape. Great body, mate. Wow, love the body. Great pecs. Et cetera. So to this day, at the age of 52, that's the feedback I'm still initially getting certainly. And that gives you a confidence. It does give you a confidence, that something that you're presenting is attracting people.

Here Gaydar is narrated as enabling Peter's self-objectification through fostering immediate, usually positive, feedback about his body which boosts his confidence. Hence, he is reassured that his age and aging body are not barriers to being found attractive. These actions can be understood psychoanalytically as reducing the risk of unpleasurable tension and associated feelings of anxiety. The IPA explores how, in extract 6, Peter sets these self-objectifying body practices within his autobiography.

Extract 6 – CDP, DiA & IPA

Peter: Well, I'm an eminently pragmatic man and I never had the confidence in bars of meeting people, unless I was totally 100 per cent convinced that somebody fancied me. And the other thing is even from an early age I never liked having sex late at night. I'd just want to go to bed. So meeting somebody in a bar at 11 or 12 or 1 even from an early age was never appealing. Never. I didn't want to wait that late. I didn't want to wait until spilling out time when everybody was desperate and would start pairing off. I've never wanted that. And then go back to somebody's house and have sex and then it's three or four in the morning. So I never liked that at all. So gay saunas, you go there and you're on display and if somebody likes you they'll go into a cubicle with you and you have sex there and then. And the trouble is I became I suppose hooked on the immediacy, and at a certain point in my 30s I started acquiring a nice body, I was very gym conscious, so that tied me into the sauna thing even more because the body was on display, you were getting the positive reinforcement there and then, and very often in the bars and things nobody knew what your body was like, because I like big woolly jumpers and things, and so nobody knew that I had great pecs. But there they were, out in the sauna, and you would get the immediate feedback, you would get the immediate sex. So I suppose the key word there is immediacy.

Interviewer: You used the word display several times as well. Why did you use the word display? You're on display.



Peter: Yes, well you are. You're only wearing a towel. You're in the sauna, you're very often cruising around, you're only wearing a towel, and your upper body is there on display, and I have to say that I kind of engineered my upper body for that purpose, because that was my sexual outlet so that's what was seen. So I went to the gym to acquire that body and that's what was displayed.

The IPA notes how Peter describes starting to work on his body in his 30s as a way to gain sexual encounters at times and places that he preferred. As opposed to other settings such as bars, saunas provided the means to put his body on display. He links a nice body to having sex and got "hooked on the immediacy". Hence, by using the presentation and display of his body as a gateway to successful sexual encounters, he suggests that instant sex is both possible and has addictive qualities.

### **Jouissance**

*Immediacy in sexual encounters:* In addition to enhancing confidence in his body, immediacy is an important aspect of Peter's description of jouissance. The CDP notes that there are two main ways in which immediacy is drawn on in Peter's account: immediacy of the responses received through Gaydar (extract 5) and immediacy of the sexual act in the saunas (extract 6). Bodily display is central to the pleasure of receiving immediate responses on Gaydar and, as the CDP noted with regard to extract 2, Peter is clear to mark particular aspects of his body as on show. In extract 5, it is his torso, which he notes as "engineered" precisely for the purpose of display (extract 6). Furthermore, a jouissance is suggested in the way he implies having a magnetic physical attractiveness past the age that this might be expected: "It's the immediacy of the response you get. And it's still the same to this day [...]. So to this day, at the age of 52, that's the feedback I'm still initially getting" (extract 5). In extract 6, Peter also constructs a key aspect of his sexual pleasure to be through revealing his body and, in this case, the immediacy of the sex that would follow. Importantly, he builds the credibility of this claim through contrasting bars where "nobody knew what your body was like, because I like big woolly jumpers" with saunas where "you're only wearing a towel".

***Anxiety about rejection or disappointment:*** Extract 6 was also analysed in the DiA in relation to the depersonalised other, *own body as object*, and anxiety. Peter presents himself as a body, or as a *specimen*, even to himself since he can “acquire a nice body”; his sexual encounters are impersonal, take place in a “cubicle”, and with the unnamed generalised other; risks are calculated in percentages; the search for pleasure is alluded to in medicalised terms as an addiction - “hooked”; and accounted for through the scientific concept of “positive reinforcement”. Although the tone is therefore distanced and unemotional, the DiA suggests that anxiety is hinted in his sideways glance suggesting a criticism of the sauna: “*the trouble is I became I suppose hooked on the immediacy*”. His tentativeness: “I became *I suppose hooked on the immediacy [...] I suppose the key word there is immediacy*”, however, offers a loophole that his behaviour may be excusable, understandable, or not particularly problematic. However, anxiety appears also to infiltrate the search for reassurance about his attractiveness.

The PNA also considers Peter’s manifestation of anxiety in his use of digital media and careful decision-making about to whom to present himself, and in what ways. He acknowledges that all risk cannot be extracted from the eventual face-to-face encounters and that, although some people “are trying to take every element of chance out of a meet to make sure that it’s going to be exactly what they want, I don’t quite go that far”. Here, Peter positions himself as confident enough to risk unpleasure after he has taken all available steps to reduce its likelihood. The tension between the pleasure-giving confidence of being “quite happy for things to be left to explore” and the anxiety of possible rejection: “my main fear is opening the door and someone looking at me going I’m sorry mate, this isn’t going to happen”, is mediated by Peter’s assertion that “most of the time it works out fine”.

***Search for intimacy:*** Although the DiA notes positive sexual encounters, and PNA the pleasures of preparing for and having sexual success, the IPA focuses more than do the

other analyses on Peter's *search for intimacy*. The IPA suggests that behind Peter's description of recreational sex, there is a palpable desire to connect and engage with other people. For this to happen however, Peter must feel confident and have perceptions of being attractive; these have been constants across his life and there is sense that his focus on scripted sexual interaction has become a proxy for his emotional and relational engagement with other men. The ghost of romance, and a future orientation to relationships with other men, is tacitly present throughout the interview, for example in the way Peter discusses how he filters digital media profiles in pursuit of sex.

Extract 7 - IPA

Peter: Closet cases for various reasons, say they were teachers or something, and then this brings a whole other set of things to the table that I just find a bit wearing.

Interviewer: Like what?

Peter: Like you can never go out with them or be seen with them or you would never sit on a table full of men for fear of being identified as a gay man, so that kind of thing is a bit of a deal breaker for me actually.

Peter's *search for intimacy* and connection suggests the ways in which his subjectivity is constrained by sociocultural factors. There is a mirroring between the limited historic opportunities for gay life that have framed Peter's life experiences (e.g., the narrow range of spaces and places and a fixed sense of identity) and the somewhat regimented aspects of Peter's sense-making (the reification of age related categories and his compartmentalising of particular spaces such as saunas for particular functions such as sex).

The CDP, too, considers how Peter appears to distinguish sex from relationship and implies a desire also for the latter.

Extract 8 - CDP

Interviewer: Why bisexual?

Peter: That's just one of my own little foibles. It's just another variable I don't particularly want to have to deal with. It's just something I'm not comfortable with. Could be complicated further down the line, there could be complications.

Interviewer: When you say further down the line.

Peter: If the relationship went further than just being a purely sexual

meeting.

Peter is not interested in bisexual men because, he says, it “(c)ould be complicated further down the line”. Interestingly, when pushed to explain he clarifies that he means “(i)f the relationship went further than just being a purely sexual meeting”. Hence, despite an emphasis throughout the interview on sex (e.g., at saunas and via social media), there are junctures at which he appears to draw on a repertoire of romance although, pertinently, here at least, only under pressure from the interviewer and via allusion of what this would *not* be: i.e., “a pure sexual meeting”.

### Discussion

Our aim is to develop PQR through a novel meta-methodology that draws on the theoretical foundations laid out in Braun and Clarke’s (2006) description of thematic analysis as a method. To illustrate and ground the proposed meta-methodology, we conducted four independent secondary analyses of an interview from the SMMASH project using critical discursive psychology (CDP), dialogical analysis (DiA), interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), and psychosocial narrative analysis (PNA). The research question driving our analyses was: ‘Where is the pleasure in that?’ We will now consider what this case study illuminates with regard to the potential of our proposed PQR meta-methodology to enhance the rigour of method selection and understanding of results.

First, as can be seen in Table 1, of the methods used all provide a rich description of the data set except the DiA. This suggests that DiA might provide added value in PQR through explicating in more detail, and from a different perspective, pre-selected passages within a data set which are identified as important by a method with broader focus. Second, both CDP and IPA are inductive whereas DiA and PNA offer more explicitly theoretical analyses. This alerts researchers to the problems – and potentials – of accounting for (a) different ways in which qualitative analyses can be rigorously grounded in the data, and (b) to

consider the extent to which different theoretically-orientated approaches are compatible or provide synergies.

Third, while it is central to IPA to commence by staying true to the participant's lifeworld (semantic themes), the other three methods allow for more analytic interpretation throughout (latent themes). This suggests the possibility for selecting deliberately at least one method on each side of this dialect so that orientation towards both manifest and implicit meanings might magnify the added value of PQR in revealing avenues for analytic inquiry. Finally, only the IPA is situated in a realist epistemology with the others characterised as more constructionist. Combining realist and constructionist methods is acceptable in contemporary qualitative methodology but researchers need to demonstrate their knowledge by justifying the framework within which they do so (see Madill & Gough, 2008 for choices, particularly pragmatism and utilitarianism).

Our mapping (Figure 1) has also revealed that, of the four methods, IPA is a relative outlier in being the only semantic and realist method employed in this study. The mapping also identifies how IPA and DiA are distinct on all four dialectics, while the iterations of CDP and PNA are relatively similar at a meta-methodological level. These observations have implications for method selection. An IPA-DiA combination will likely produce analyses that are clearly situated in quite different approaches to the data. A CDP-PNA combination, on the other hand, may have commonalities in general approach but differ in their theoretically-informed interpretations. These implications for method selection of the meta-methodological mapping also have potential to offer a way of making sense of some of the differences in analytical focus of each method when this is portrayed diagrammatically as in Figure 2.

At the most general level all methods contributed to all the three main foci: Compartmentalisation, Detachment, and Jouissance. However, there is less commonality in the details with, at most, methods sharing only three sub-foci. Figure 2 provides a

representation of the methods if the differences between each on the eight sub-foci of the analysis are positioned in space. So that spatial distance equates to analytical distance, for convenience, a line of '1' equates to 3 shared sub-foci (the maximum found in this case study) and a line of '3' equates to 1 shared sub-focus.

Comparing Figures 1 and 2, first we can see that not only are the DiA and PNA most similar in terms of the meta-methodology, but also they are similar in analytical emphasis, each focusing on the following three sub-foci: *entry into HIV+ world*, *own body as object*, and *anxiety about rejection or disappointment*. Moreover, the CDP, which was closest to the IPA meta-methodologically, demonstrates also the most analytic similarity with the IPA. This indicates that the proposed meta-methodology could have validity in being able to anticipate the relative similarity in analytic focus of the methods employed in PQR, our comparison suggesting that the inductive (CDP-IPA) versus theoretical (DiA-PNA) dialectic may be particularly important in this regard. Second, supporting the idea of a PQR potentially having an axial method, the CDP analysis included the highest number of sub-foci identified also by other methods (i.e., 5) (while, possibly unrelated, also offering the highest number of unique sub-foci, i.e., 2). Hence, in terms of method section, an axial method – here CDP – might be anticipated particularly fruitful in turns of exploring commonalities and differences in a PQR. Third, the DiA, which included four of the sub-foci, may be a particularly *efficient* method for identifying central analytic phenomena through the technique of searching for key moments.

We now consider in more detail our comparative findings in light of our meta-methodological mapping of the four qualitative methods employed. The research question driving our analyses was: 'Where is the pleasure in that?' In PQR the assumptions and approach brought to the study by different qualitative methods are viewed as providing opportunity when used in combination to identify potentially fruitful contradictions as well as

triangulated agreements in understanding (Madill, Jordon, & Shirley, 2000). We compare analytical approach over the three shared foci, drawing contrasts across the four dialectics from those available while being sure to include all four methods.

First, in terms of a rich description versus a detailed account of one particular aspect of the data set, we compare the PNA and DiA on the sub-foci *anxiety about rejection or disappointment*. The PNA was the most difficult analysis to convey through the presentation of ‘block’ quotes and required, rather, illustration through the interweaving of shorter quotes giving the sense of one of Peter’s stories: here, of opening the door to his hook-up. On the other hand, the DiA selects key moments for analysis so, illustrating the method through longer extracts works well. Moreover, the DiA identifies several foci in these short extracts: e.g., in extract 6, *depersonalising others, own body as object, and anxiety*. These observations suggest that PNA and DiA may be particularly interesting methods to use together if key moments identified in the DiA took the form of a complete story as defined by the PNA. Specifically, the added value of this kind of PQR, could be the synergy in the way in which DiA explicates rhetorical features pointing to emotional investment with the grasp PNA offers on the gestalt in which the emotions are embedded. This passage also highlights how PQR straddling the dialectic rich description vs. detailed account may require creative strategies in the report of findings.

Second, in terms of inductive versus theoretical analysis, we compare the IPA and DiA on the sub-foci *own body as object*. Both IPA and DiA have a particular interest in embodiment. This appears in IPA’s focus on the lived experience of physicality within a lifeworld made meaningful by the individual and so operates within a mind-body dualism. Hence, the IPA explores Peter’s self-objectifying body practices but sets these within his autobiography. For DiA, embodiment is a central feature of *pravda* – personal truth as lived – which is contrasted to *istina* – truth as abstract as conceptual. In this way the DiA notes how,

although Peter presents his body as a specimen that can be moulded, and sex as a clinical encounter, this distancing may not be the entire truth of his embodiment given the leakage of anxiety in his discourse around these practices. These observations suggests a possible added value of this kind of PQR in the synergy between the autobiographical sensitivity of IPA and the way in which DiA considers how this autobiography addresses a question to, or is a response to supposed question from, an-Other.

Third, in terms of semantic versus latent themes, we compare the IPA and PNA also on the sub-foci *own body as object*. The PNA explores how Peter seems to objectify himself through positing links between how he talks about his body (as a display which can be engineered), his age (as no barrier to attractiveness), and his ability to secure immediate gratification in his stories about several different sexual arenas as ways of reducing anxiety felt by the tension of unpleasure brought about by the risk of rejection.. The IPA covers similar ground noting clear autobiographical descriptions, such as the way in which Peter tells the interviewer that he started to work on his body in his 30s as a way to gain sexual encounters at times and places that he preferred. These observations suggest a shared interest in the way in which Peter conveys his experience in space and time. The added value of this kind of PQR is the potential to consider meanings beyond the participant's own frame as suggested by the PNA – here his drive to reduce anxiety – strongly grounded in, and sensitive to, the participants own interpretations as provided by the IPA.

Fourth, in terms of realist versus constructionist analysis, we compare the IPA and CPD on the sub-foci *identity work*. The IPA approached Peter's social identity as something to be both inhabited and managed, and connected Peter to his socio-cultural and historical context as well as to his personal biography. On the other hand, the CDP explicated the ways in which Peter constructed and made use of multiple micro-identities throughout the interview. While recognising the different epistemological premises of IPA and CDP, the



added value of this kind of PQR is that, used together, the approaches could provide insight into participant identity from the perspective of both *being* and *doing*.

Finally, to complete the comparison of methods, it is interesting to note that both the CDP and DiA selected for analyses extract 6 with regard to the shared focus *Jouissance*. However, whereas the CDP emphasised *immediacy in sexual encounters*, the DiA emphasised *anxiety about rejection or disappointment*. This suggests a difference between interest in action and emotion. As for the CDP and PNA, both analysed extract 5, the PNA in terms of *own body as object* and, while the CDP shared this interest, it also explicated the sub-focus *immediacy in sexual encounters* and, hence, a differently nuanced interpretation. These comparisons are brought together in Table 3 and we offer Table 1, Table 2, Figure 1, and Figure 2 as examples of how aspects of PQR might be reported.

In this article, the proposed meta-methodology has been illustrated using a four-method PQR case study. Interestingly, as thematic analysis has developed, distinct forms have been suggested based on methodological emphasis. Braun and Clarke (2013) identify four varieties: inductive, theoretical, experiential (i.e., participant standpoint), and constructionist. And, currently, on <https://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/en/about/our-research/research-groups/thematic-analysis.html>, six ways in which thematic analysis can be approached are indicated:

An inductive way – coding and theme development are directed by the content of the data;

A deductive way – coding and theme development are directed by existing concepts or ideas;

A semantic way – coding and theme development reflect the explicit content of the data;

A latent way – coding and theme development report concepts and assumptions underpinning the data;

A realist or essentialist way – focuses on reporting an assumed reality evident in the data;

A constructionist way – focuses on looking at how a certain reality is created by the data.

It is also suggested on the website that that the following tend to cluster together: (a) inductive, semantic, and realist; and (b) deductive, latent, and constructionist. These developments cohere with our approach in this article in terms of: (a) the usefulness in terms of clarity of describing the operationalisation of a qualitative method on a small number of relevant dimensions, concepts, or criteria; and (b) the observation that these tend to cluster, hence allowing us to identify ‘method families’ in new ways. Although the identification of method families will have utility for PQR, there is overlap at this level, Braun and Clarke (2013), for example, describing grounded theory as “inductive yet theorised” (p.184). Hence, for the purposes of a meta-methodology to enhance the rigour of method selection and understanding of results in PQR, we find particularly relevant and useful in its flexibility Braun and Clarke’s (2006) original four dimensions conceived as dialectics.

It could be Braun and Clarke’s four dimensions are not suitable for mapping all qualitative methods, and there may be other key dialectics useful for capturing important features of qualitative methods that could be added to improve the usefulness of the meta-methodology. For example, the dialectic realism versus constructionism’ may be too simplistic to capture the range of epistemological stances available to qualitative researchers. It is also likely that some qualitative methods employ both semantic and latent elements in an analysis, as in the current study did the IPA and CDP: “that coding occurs at two levels – semantic or manifest meaning; latent or implicit meaning” (Braun & Clark, 2016, p.740). And that, as here, most methods cycle between data and theory. However, this is not a barrier to our proposed meta-methodology and, in fact, may be usefully articulated through it. Moreover, our novel use of Braun and Clark’s (2006) dimensions can also manage how many qualitative methods can be employed in different ways and can draw on a range of epistemologies. For example, as well as applying it as we have done with IPA, DiA, DCP and

PNA, the dialectics can usefully differentiate grounded theory analyses conducted as realist (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), constructionist (Charmaz, 2008), or critical (Oliver, 2011).

In conclusion, in this article we offer and illustrate a novel meta-methodology to enhance the rigour of method selection and understanding of results in PQR. Our insight is to have translated a basic procedural of thematic analysis into a meta-methodological principle of PQR, recognising that the four dimensions proposed by Braun and Clarke characterise key facets of most qualitative methods. Whatever the combination, however, the different analyses will require sophisticated methodological knowledge to lever a persuasive comparison or integration and our meta-methodology is an excellent guide to relevant features to consider.

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There are no conflicts of interest associated with this research in relation to any of the authors.

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Table 1: Characterisation on the four dialectics of the four qualitative methods employed

Method	Dialectic		Method
CDP IPA PNA	Rich description of the data set	vs.	Detailed account of one particular aspect of the data set DiA
CDP IPA	Inductive analysis	vs.	Theoretical analysis DiA PNA
IPA	Semantic themes	vs.	Latent themes CDP DiA PNA
IPA	Realist	vs.	Constructionist CDP DiA PNA

Note: CDP = Critical Discursive Psychology; DiA = Dialogical Analysis; IPA = Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; PNA = Psychosocial Narrative Analysis

Table 2: Shared foci of the analyses and particular emphasis of each

Shared foci	Sub-foci	Emphasis
Compartmentalisation	<i>identity work</i>	CDP, IPA
	<i>rules and scripts</i>	CDP
	<i>entry into HIV+ world</i>	DiA, PNA
Detachment	<i>depersonalising others</i>	DiA
	<i>own body as object</i>	CDP DiA, IPA, PNA
Jouissance	<i>immediacy in sexual encounters</i>	CDP
	<i>anxiety about rejection or disappointment</i>	DiA, PNA
	<i>search for intimacy</i>	CDP, IPA

Note: CDP = Critical Discursive Psychology; DiA = Dialogical Analysis; IPA = Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; PNA = Psychosocial Narrative Analysis

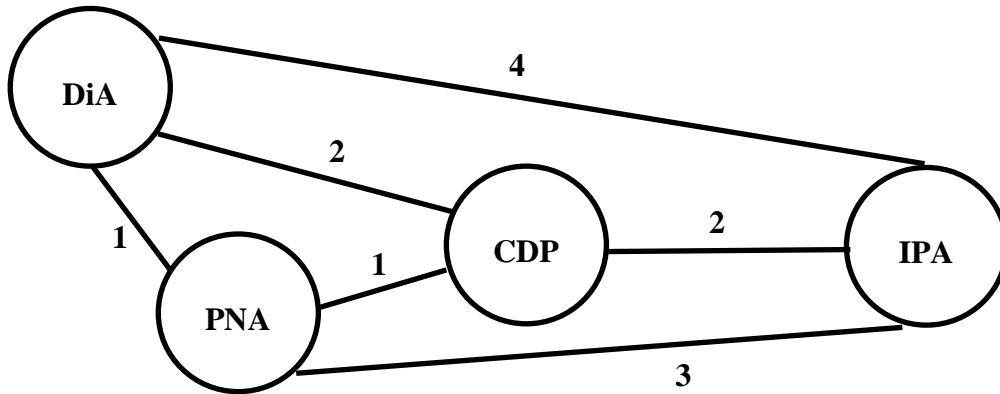


*Table 3: Synergies and challenges of combining pairs of the methods used*

	DiA	IPA	PNA
CDP	Action vs emotion	Doing vs being	Differently nuanced interpretations
DiA	/	Autobiography as response vs as context	Rhetoric vs gestalt; Meaning as timespace vs in timespace
IPA	/	/	Explicate vs expand meaning

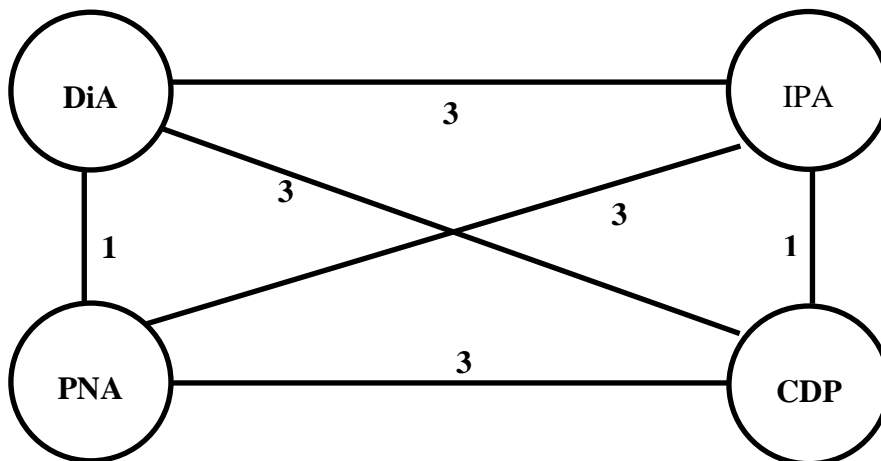
Note: CDP = Critical Discursive Psychology; DiA = Dialogical Analysis; IPA = Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; PNA = Psychosocial Narrative Analysis

Figure 1: Spatial representation of the comparison between methods on the four dialectics



Note: CDP = Critical Discursive Psychology; DiA = Dialogical Analysis; IPA = Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; PNA = Psychosocial Narrative Analysis

Figure 2: Spatial representation of relative differences between methods on the sub-foci



Note: CDP = Critical Discursive Psychology; DiA = Dialogical Analysis; IPA = Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; PNA = Psychosocial Narrative Analysis