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Towards Better Reflexive Thematic Analysis in HCI: A Scoping Review of Practice at CHI

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Abstract

Reflexive Thematic Analysis is an increasingly popular method of qualitative analysis in many disciplines, including HCI. However, previous work has questioned the quality of its application, often finding it misunderstood and misapplied. To establish a snapshot of current practice in HCI, we performed a scoping review to examine 147 CHI papers from a single year that purported to use the method. Markers of good and poor practice were assessed based on writings and guidelines by the method's originators. Similar to reviews in other domains, we found widespread issues such as methodological incongruence, insufficient detail, and poorly conceptualised and reported themes. Despite this, we highlight encouraging pockets of good practice. We conclude that HCI researchers should engage more holistically with Reflexive TA, and question whether it is always the most appropriate choice of method. To this end we offer several recommendations for improvement.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Human computer interaction (HCI)**.

Keywords

Qualitative research, interpretive research, research methods, epistemology

ACM Reference Format:

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1 Introduction

Qualitative research is common in HCI, due to the discipline's focus on exploring subjective experiences with technology. Thematic analysis (TA) is a widely-used method of qualitative analysis, which is used to analyse and interpret patterns of meaning (or "themes") within qualitative data sets [10]. In their seminal 2006 paper *Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology* [10], Braun and Clarke recognised inconsistencies around how TA was defined and used, and provided a set of guidelines to support conducting TA in a more deliberate

and rigorous way. This paper has since become a touchstone for TA across a wide range of fields, and at the time of writing, has gained over 260,000 Google Scholar citations and is recognised as one of the most highly cited papers of all time¹. Oppenlaender and Hosio [58] also note the "extraordinary popularity" of this paper at CHI, referencing how its inclusion as a reference in CHI publication has grown year on year to total 770 citations as of 2024.

In recent years, Braun and Clarke have since written about how the approach they outline in their 2006 paper [10] has been misunderstood and misapplied, e.g., by misunderstanding or ignoring the theoretical underpinnings, assuming TA is a single monolithic approach, and presenting themes that simply summarise topics rather than construct deeper meaning [14]. They have also since reflected on how their thinking on TA has evolved over time (e.g., [13, 25]), and their "failure to fully articulate our qualitative values and assumptions in our 2006 paper" [14, p. 592]. In particular, they are keen to point out how their approach to TA stems from a *fully* qualitative orientation that sees qualitative research as something "creative, reflexive, and subjective, with research subjectivity understood as a resource (see Gough and Madill [44]), rather than a potential threat to knowledge production" [14, p. 591]). Recognition of the need to be clearer about the underlying values and assumptions of their approach has resulted in the authors further defining their approach as *Reflexive Thematic Analysis* (Reflexive TA) from around 2019 onwards, specifically named to highlight the role of the researcher and the subjectivity of the process [14, 25]. In addition to publishing the book *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* [25] to further support researchers in understanding and conducting reflexive TA in particular, they have also published a number of criteria for what constitutes "good" Reflexive TA e.g., [16], including a recent set of *Reflexive Thematic Analysis Reporting Guidelines* (RTARG) [23].

Braun and Clarke have also carried out a number of recent reviews focused on the reporting of TA in health psychology [20], and within specific journals, such as the *International Journal of Transgender Health* [21], *Health Promotion International* [22], and *Palliative Medicine* [23]. However, they note that while there are examples of good practice, a number of common problems are still occurring, which relate to issues including methodological incongruence, a lack of reflexive openness, a lack of detail around the analytic process, fragmented themes, and the use of topic summaries as themes. As TA is a common method in the field of HCI, we were curious about the uptake of Reflexive TA in this context and whether we would see similar challenges in this area. While



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¹<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-01124-w> (last access 10th September 2025)

a recent publication has examined the use of thematic analysis in Healthcare HCI at CHI [8], an exploration of whether Reflexive TA is conducted and reported *well* across the many research areas represented at CHI has not been conducted. In this paper, we perform a scoping review of Reflexive TA at CHI to investigate the extent to which our discipline generally conforms to a set of quality criteria derived from those of Braun and Clarke, and also offer some recommendations to help improve potential areas of weakness.

2 Related work

2.1 Qualitative approaches in HCI

Qualitative research has long been a part of HCI, from requirements gathering to evaluating technology in use [6]. As HCI has progressed to a focus on experience, meaning-making and embodied interaction [7, 45] and beyond [42], qualitative approaches have helped us to better understand users — who they are, their contexts, and the rich and varied experiences that have resulted from their interactions with different technologies.

However, not all qualitative work is the same. While there are many different qualitative data collection methods (e.g., interview, diaries, ethnography), there are also various analysis methods (e.g., content analysis, grounded theory, discourse analysis). Additionally, qualitative research varies in terms of the underlying values associated with it. Research outside of HCI has discussed these values by differentiating between “Big-Q” and “small-q” qualitative approaches [49]. In a Big-Q qualitative approach, the research is fully situated within a qualitative paradigm where the approach is flexible, evolving, and interpretive. This approach is compared to small-q qualitative research, which uses qualitative tools and techniques but sits atop a positivist paradigm (i.e., assumes the existence of an objective reality and strives to uncover it). While small-q research would be concerned with issues such as reliability and the need for researcher objectivity, Big-Q research has been explained as being “non- (or anti-) positivist, theorising knowledge production as partial, situated and contextual, and acknowledging, and valuing, researcher subjectivity as a resource for research rather than a problem to be managed” [22, p. 2]. As an in-between position, Clarke and Braun [33] have used the term “medium-Q” to refer to approaches that deliberately and coherently combine qualitative values with a more structured approach. They have also discussed “confused-Q” research, where both Big-Q and small-q elements are incoherently combined [16].

Though qualitative methods are widely used in HCI, often with quantitative methods as part of *mixed-methods* research, full recognition of the value and principles of qualitative research has not been straightforward and is ongoing. Soden et al. [63] and Crabtree [37] have highlighted the manifestation of these issues in relation to peer reviews of interpretive qualitative work in HCI, where reviewers unreasonably request reliability measures, code frequencies, discussions of reliability, and so on. The authors note how HCI has a tendency to default towards positivism, possibly due to a lack of awareness of qualitative research and the theoretical foundations on which it sits. The HCI community is clearly still grappling with holistic acceptance of qualitative and interpretive research, presenting considerable barriers to researchers intending to adopt a Big-Q qualitative approach.

2.2 Thematic Analysis

While there are many qualitative analysis methods, thematic analysis is very common, and is used to examine patterns and trends in data. Braun and Clarke’s seminal paper “*Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology*” [10] was something of a watershed moment for the method, as the authors argued that thematic analysis was at that point “poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used” and more clearly set out a usable method that could be applied to a variety of contexts. Since then, the popularity of TA, and more specifically Braun and Clarke’s approach to TA, has grown considerably.

Braun and Clarke have stated that, although their 2006 paper sought to more clearly situate thematic analysis and describe their particular approach, there is still a lot of confusion around thematic analysis and misuse of their approach [14, 25]. As a result, they differentiate between three broad types of TA [16]:

- *Coding reliability TA*, a positivist approach which emphasises the need to for apparent accuracy and measuring agreement among coders — a small-q approach.
- *Codebook TA*, a qualitative approach which combines qualitative values with a more structured approach to coding — a medium-Q approach.
- *Reflexive TA*, a fully qualitative approach that emphasises the researchers’ skills, experiences, and position, and explicitly rejects positivism — a Big-Q approach.

Therefore, “thematic analysis” is better described as a *family* of methods rather than single method of analysis. Furthermore, the different types of TA can be fundamentally incompatible due to their different theoretical underpinnings — e.g. Coding Reliability TA embraces positivist notions of quantitatively assessing researcher agreement, whereas Reflexive TA roundly rejects these notions and fully embraces differences between researchers as “a feature, not a bug”. The “Braun and Clarke approach” to TA is *Reflexive TA*, and from around 2019 [25] onwards the authors have used this term as a way of clearly distinguishing their particular method from others.

2.3 Reflexive thematic analysis

Reflexive TA has a number of elements and features that differentiate it from other types of TA [17]. Firstly, it embraces a fully qualitative Big-Q approach (see Section 2.1). Secondly, as the name suggests, Reflexive TA prioritises *reflexivity* — the critical examination of researchers’ own backgrounds, beliefs, and approaches and how they might affect their research — which is engaged with throughout. Reflexivity is thus an integral feature of Reflexive TA which cannot be reduced or avoided, and means that the approach rejects positivist notions of measurable reliability and bias. Thirdly, Reflexive TA is interpretative — themes are not hidden in the data waiting to be found, but rather require active work to construct them. Notably, themes do not “emerge” from data [14]. Fourthly, themes tell stories — themes should encapsulate shared patterns of meaning, rather than simply shared topics. The analysis should be “artfully interpretive” rather than “scientifically descriptive” [22, 40].

Braun and Clarke also detail the different phases of the Reflexive TA process, which are similar to those in their original 2006 paper [10], but have been refined to emphasise the active role of the researcher in creating themes (e.g., *searching for themes* is now

referred to as *generating initial themes* [20]). The six phases are: *Familiarising yourself with the dataset*, *Coding*, *Generating initial themes*, *Developing and reviewing themes*, *Refining, defining and naming themes*, and *Writing up* [17]. These phases are not intended to be linear, but should be recursive to allow for in-depth engagement with the data and an analysis that goes beyond the superficial [19].

2.3.1 Assessing quality and good practice in Reflexive TA. Confusion surrounding Reflexive TA and its subsequent misuse has led to a number of publications reflecting on possible explanations for this, and offering guidelines for good practice (e.g. [14, 16, 17, 19, 23]). Notably, Braun and Clarke [16] identify ten common problems:

- (1) *Assuming TA is one approach*
- (2) *Citing without reading*
- (3) *Unjustified or incompatible ‘mash-ups’*
- (4) *Assuming TA is atheoretical*
- (5) *Assuming TA is only realist/essentialist or experiential/phenomenological*
- (6) *Assuming TA is only descriptive*
- (7) *Confusing codes and themes*
- (8) *Confusing themes and topics*
- (9) *Emerging themes — confusing ‘themes-as-pre-existing analysis’ with ‘themes-as-the-outcome of analysis’*
- (10) *Uncritical acceptance of what we [Braun and Clarke] say*

As a result, Braun and Clarke [16] also offer a tool for evaluating TA in the form of twenty “critical questions” (e.g. “Do the authors explain why they are using TA, even if only briefly?”). Note that these are positioned as a tool for TA in general, but can also apply to Reflexive TA. More recent guidance includes guidelines on reporting standards [19], and the *Reflexive Thematic Analysis Reporting Guidelines (RTARG)* [23], which is the latest guidance for Reflexive TA specifically at the time of writing. The RTARG consists of set of guidelines that offers extensive advice and *dos* and *don’ts* for researchers.

These various publications have resulted in a collection of reflections, checklists and guidelines, some of which apply to TA in general and some to Reflexive TA specifically. Though Braun and Clarke point out that their thinking has changed over time, and that often their more recent writings supersede their older work, this does nonetheless present a potentially confusing landscape for researchers seeking to employ Reflexive TA and/or judge the quality thereof. In the interdisciplinary field of HCI, it is possible to see how someone choosing to use Reflexive TA without prior knowledge or expertise could come unstuck.

2.4 Thematic Analysis in HCI

TA and Reflexive TA have become increasingly popular in HCI. Oppenlaender and Hosio [58] acknowledge its popularity by finding that Braun and Clarke’s original 2006 paper [10] is the most-cited paper *ever* at CHI, calling it a “super milestone” paper. Two of Braun and Clarke’s other publications on the subject [11, 14] are also among the top-ten most cited papers at CHI, with Oppenlaender and Hosio [58] estimating that around one in six CHI papers cite their work.

Bowman et al. [8] examined the use of TA in Healthcare HCI research at CHI through a scoping review, also finding that TA,

and Reflexive TA specifically, continues to increase in popularity in that subdiscipline. Additionally, they found that reporting standards left significant room for improvement, with many important details being omitted and a high degree of heterogeneity in what was actually reported. Furthermore, despite many papers citing Reflexive TA sources, they found a lack of discussion about reflexivity and positionality, and often grounded theory techniques were used alongside TA. Their findings mirror many of the general findings around problematic practice that Braun and Clarke have detailed extensively [16]. Bowman et al. [8] also highlight that local norms tended to dictate practice rather than any best practice guidelines. As many researchers in HCI come from a positivist or mixed-methods background rather than a fully qualitative, Big-Q one, these norms become expectations, which could explain problematic practice and reporting. Beyond the work detailed above, we did not find any other significant work critically examining the use of TA or Reflexive TA in HCI contexts.

2.5 Summary

This section described how Braun and Clarke’s Reflexive TA was a result of differentiating their approach to TA from other approaches, which have often been conflated. However, this approach has often been misused and misapplied, which has led to an assortment of guidance from Braun and Clarke (and occasionally others) addressing and good practice. In HCI, we note confusion within the community around qualitative approaches, and that, despite its popularity, there has been no research examining Reflexive TA specifically across HCI. We address this gap by conducting a scoping review of CHI papers to assess application of the method HCI.

3 Current study

To assess how Reflexive TA is being used at CHI, we performed a systematic review of papers purporting its use, and evaluated them against signifiers of good and poor practice (described below). We situate our review as a *scoping review*, serving to examine particular research practice and provide an overview of our research topic [55]. Our initial discussions conceptualised the aims of this research, and experimental searches were used to assess the practicality of a review. Following this, we formalised our proposed method in a review protocol, which guided the process (the majority of the information within is reproduced here). We also used the PRISMA ScR guidelines [68] and Rogers et al.’s umbrella review of systematic reviews in HCI [61] to guide our method.

Braun and Clarke began referring to their method as *Reflexive TA* from around 2019 [25], and as detailed above, have since written widely about its application and have conducted reviews thereof. Given this continual development and critique, we assess the most recent year of CHI papers (2025 at the time of writing) as a snapshot of current Reflexive TA practice in HCI. We believe this should have provided enough time for the community to engage with the evolving literature since 2019, and for the literature’s guidance to be reflected in current practice. Furthermore, there is precedence for sampling a single year in other HCI reviews (e.g., Aeschbach et al. [2], Kjeldskov and Paay [51]) and at CHI specifically (e.g., Caine [29]). Our review ultimately included 147 publications (see Section 3.3), which is considerably more than many prior reviews

of Reflexive TA usage outside of HCI (e.g., Braun and Clarke [21]: 20 papers, Braun and Clarke [23]: 20 papers, Braun and Clarke [22]: 31 papers, and Braun and Clarke [20]: 100 papers). Furthermore, as noted by Rogers et al. [61], there is also precedence for limiting reviews to CHI only (e.g. Caine [29], Linxen et al. [53], Liu et al. [54], Singh et al. [62]), which can be a “defensible, purposeful limitation” [29] due to CHI’s influential status as the flagship HCI conference. CHI has by far the highest impact factor among HCI venues², and the interdisciplinary nature of the conference also allows us to sample a variety of HCI research domains.

We addressed the following research questions:

- (1) How prevalent is the use Reflexive TA at CHI currently?
- (2) How well is Reflexive TA being performed and reported, according to Braun and Clarke’s suggested good practice and guidance?

The novel contribution of this research is a detailed view into how Reflexive TA is being used in HCI *specifically*, including highlighting areas of good and poor practice — though Braun and Clarke have drawn attention to common problems observed in other disciplines, the extent to which this is applicable to HCI has not previously been explored (with a possible exception of [8], though they do not focus on *Reflexive* TA specifically and only examine the Healthcare HCI subdiscipline). Despite the publication of research within other domains, our results will show that prior research drawing attention to poor Reflexive TA practice does not seem to have permeated CHI in a significant way. Thus, our hope is that the findings presented in this paper will be taken on board by the HCI community to inform better practice in the future. Furthermore, our research serves to strengthen the important evolving conversations around the use and value of interpretive research methods in HCI, such as the arguments put forward by the likes of Soden et al. [63] and Crabtree [37]. We extend these conversations by providing a specific focus on Reflexive TA and through supporting our arguments with empirical evidence from our review. Finally, we also reflect on our findings to question whether Reflexive TA is actually an appropriate method to use in many HCI studies.

3.1 Researcher positionality

We do not position ourselves as experts or authorities in Reflexive TA. We have employed the method ourselves, and are continually learning and attempting to engage with its development to conduct better research. Indeed, we openly admit that we are guilty of many of the problematic practices identified in this review. Part of our motivation for this work is to improve our own practice.

In an attempt to become more “knowing” researchers [21], we recognise the importance of articulating our own epistemological position, but also want to highlight how this has been challenging. The authors are both European HCI researchers who have conducted mixed-methods research at European universities, where our backgrounds in Computer Science and Psychology mean that our initial research training was primarily influenced by positivist perspectives. Since then, we have been exposed to different ways of thinking and research approaches, and our own understanding

of epistemology and ontology is currently evolving. Author two especially has seen their own approach to qualitative research become more interpretive over time, and would describe their current position as contextualist i.e., one that recognises that it is not possible to separate knowledge from the knower but that also retains the possibility that there may be some underlying truths [17, 30]. Author one feels they lean more towards *pragmatism*, valuing findings based on their utility in answering research questions, and selecting research methods based on “what works” [60, p. 153].

In line with the review conducted by [61], we acknowledge that we conducted this review from a pragmatic position, where we followed a systematic approach to the scoping review, synthesising key insights and sharing examples of good practice.

3.2 Search strategy

Our search strategy intended to capture a large number of papers that could *possibly* be using Reflexive TA, which could then be screened based on their actual usage. Therefore, our initial search sought papers published in the 2025 CHI proceedings that satisfy any of the following conditions:

- (1) Mention the term “reflexive thematic analysis” or “reflexive TA” in the paper body.
- (2) Mention the term “reflexive thematic analysis” in the bibliography, to return CHI papers that cite papers about Reflexive TA.
- (3) Cite the Braun and Clarke book “*Thematic Analysis: a Practical Guide*” [17], as this contains extensive guidance on Reflexive TA, but does not include the exact term in the title.
- (4) Cite the Braun and Clarke paper “*One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis?*” [16], as this is a highly cited paper about Reflexive TA, but the title’s parentheses mean it would not be covered in the above bibliography search.

We used two literature databases to perform the searches. Firstly, the *ACM Digital Library*³, which supports full text search of the publications it indexes, but does not include the bibliography in this searchable data. Secondly, *Scopus*⁴, which supports searching of metadata including bibliography sections, but does not index the full text of publications. Using both databases obtained full coverage of our search criteria.

To find CHI papers referencing the term “reflexive thematic analysis”, we searched the ACM Digital Library using the following query:

```
"query": { "reflexive thematic analysis" OR "reflexive TA" }
```

```
"filter": { Conference Collections: CHI: Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, E-Publication Date: (01/01/2025 TO 12/31/2025), ACM Content: DL }
```

To search the references section of CHI papers, we performed the following search using Scopus:

²https://scholar.google.com/citations?view_op=top_venues&hl=en&vq=eng_humancomputerinteraction (Last access 28th Nov 2025). CHI has an H5-index of 139 at the time of writing.

³<https://dl.acm.com> (last access 4th September 2025)

⁴<https://www.scopus.com> (last access 4th September 2025)

REF ("reflexive thematic analysis" OR "One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis?" OR "thematic analysis: a practical guide")

AND PUBYEAR = 2025

AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTSRCTITLE, "Conference On Human Factors In Computing Systems Proceedings"))

The searches were performed on 20th June 2025. The search of the ACM Digital Library yielded 160 papers, and the Scopus search yielded 186 papers. Records were exported to a collaborative spreadsheet to organise the papers. Using automated spreadsheet formulas, 113 duplicates and 12 extended abstracts were removed leaving 221 papers.

3.3 Eligibility

Inclusion in our corpus was based on the following Inclusion Criteria:

- IC1:** The article is a full-length research paper
- IC2a:** The article states that “Reflexive Thematic Analysis”, or unambiguous variations of this terminology (e.g. “reflexive inductive thematic analysis”), was used as a method of analysis
- OR**
- IC2b:** The article shows some level of engagement with Reflexive TA for the analysis (e.g. “drawing from”, “inspired by”, or “in line with” reflexive TA. It may use the exact term “Reflexive Thematic Analysis”, or unambiguous variations thereof.
- OR**
- IC2c:** The article *very strongly* implies (beyond reasonable doubt) that Reflexive TA was used for the analysis, but may not specifically use the term (e.g. stating “Braun and Clarke’s method of thematic analysis”, accompanied by unambiguous citations that specifically discuss *Reflexive TA*)

The 221 papers returned from the searches were screened based on the above criteria to assess whether they were using Reflexive TA. The first author performed the initial screening, and any papers that could not be unambiguously categorised for inclusion or exclusion were flagged. Fourteen such papers were reviewed and discussed with the second author to make a final decision. The entire screening process led to 74 papers being excluded, leaving 147 papers in our final corpus, which we include in our supplementary materials. The entire identification, screening, and inclusion process is detailed in Figure 1. Section 4.1 indicates how many papers satisfied each of the criteria, and gives a detailed description of the characteristics of the resulting corpus, including the language used to refer to the analysis method.

3.4 Data extraction

Following the creation of our final corpus, each paper was assessed in terms of key areas of good and poor practice by using a set of signifiers that were operationalised as a checklist. We describe how this was derived below.

Multiple publications have addressed good practice for Reflexive TA, including the publication of good practice guidelines (e.g.,

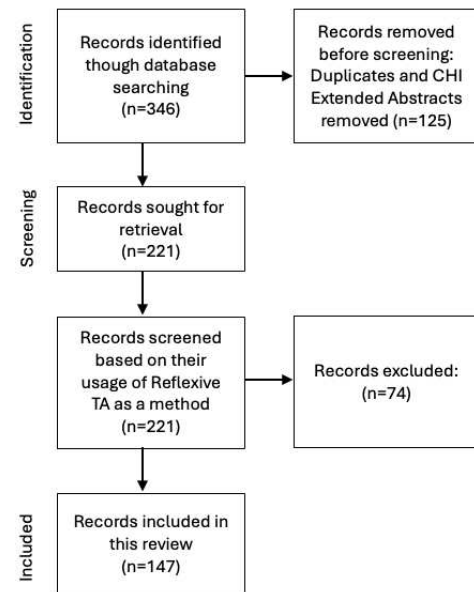


Figure 1: Diagram showing the identification, screening, and inclusion process for the final corpus.

[16, 23]). However, there is no single publication or set of guidelines that can be used to conclusively judge best practice for the purposes of a scoping review. At the time of writing, Braun and Clarke’s most up-to-date guidance is the *Reflexive Thematic Analysis Reporting Guidelines* (RTARG) [23], but is not suitable for our uses for multiple reasons. Firstly, some points raised in prior publications (e.g. citing “*Braun and Clarke (2006)*” [10] in a tokenistic manner) are not covered. Secondly, some criteria (e.g. “*provide a robust context and rationale for the proposed research in the introduction*”) are redundant as they would already be expected for any CHI paper. Thirdly, some criteria are not currently suitable for CHI or HCI in general, as they (rightly or wrongly) challenge or deviate from widely-held expectations (e.g. “*separating a description of analytic ‘Results’ and their interpretation with reference to scholarship and theory in a ‘Discussion’ section*”), and so it would be unfair to judge publications by these criteria at the present time. Fourthly, many items in the RTARG contain multiple “dos and don’ts” and other advice, rather than a single clear guideline. This is likely due to the guidance being intended for researchers and authors intending to use Reflexive TA, rather than for a large-scale analysis of papers. Finally, the authors themselves state that the RTARG offers “*guidelines and not a checklist*”. Because of this, we drew from the RTARG and previous guidance to synthesise a set of signifiers of good and poor practice suitable for our purposes that 1. incorporates the relevant best practice guidelines from previous guidance, 2. is tailored for use in the HCI discipline (and specifically CHI), 3. lends itself for use with a large corpus of papers.

The set of signifiers arrived at was created collaboratively by the two authors using the following process:

- (1) We reviewed publications that discuss good practice guidelines for Reflexive TA, notably Braun and Clarke [16] (as it is very highly cited) and Braun and Clarke [23] (as it is the most recent at the time of writing).
- (2) The authors read through and discussed these recommendations and guidelines, extracting two sets of tentative signifiers (one from each document). To facilitate the analysis of a large corpus, we wanted to ensure each signifier was atomic, as many of the guidelines offered in the documents assess multiple issues, and we tried to pose each signifier as a “yes” or “no” question where possible.
- (3) We omitted guidelines that assessed something reasonably expected in any CHI paper (e.g., “provide a robust context and rationale for the proposed research in the Introduction”)
- (4) We omitted guidelines that significantly challenged or deviated from expected norms at CHI, e.g. avoiding “the positivist tradition of separating a description of analytic “Results” and their interpretation with reference to scholarship and theory in a “Discussion” section”. Though we acknowledge that some of these norms may be indicative of a small-q approach, we also accept that researchers submitting to CHI are working within long-established processes and expectations. Changing problematic norms is part of a larger conversation beyond the scope of this paper, where we seek to establish current Reflexive TA practice at CHI.
- (5) Following this, we had two sets of potential signifiers with significant overlap. We subsequently conducted a mapping exercise between the two to establish where there was duplication and where they diverged.
- (6) The two sets were merged to create a candidate set of signifiers, which were grouped into categories describing what they were assessing. Where possible, language similar to that of Braun and Clarke was used. The categories were: *Engagement with Reflexive TA literature*; *Ownership of perspectives*; *Compatibility with the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of Reflexive TA*; and *Data interpretation and reporting*.
- (7) The candidate set of signifiers were piloted with four papers by the researchers independently
- (8) Problems encountered and disagreements were discussed. The signifiers were modified accordingly, e.g. by rewording and removing extraneous ones. Some were made into sub-signifiers that were dependant on the response to another question.
- (9) A further round of piloting and discussion took place with another four papers, resulting in some additional modifications. Notably, we modified some signifiers to include a “somewhat” answer in addition to “yes” and “no”, though this was implemented sparingly (e.g., “Do the authors state different roles of the researchers?”, where “somewhat” was added for cases where the authors describe the role of some of the researchers but not all).
- (10) A final round of piloting took place where the researchers applied the criteria to another four papers. After discussion, some further minor modifications were made for clarity. The researchers were then satisfied that the signifiers were suitable for use. The final set can be seen in Table 1.

The final set of signifiers of good and poor practice were used to extract the corresponding data from corpus of 147 papers. Some additional data was extracted to describe the papers included in our analysis, e.g. the number of authors and the data collection method(s), which we grouped in the category *Publication details*. The majority of the data extraction required “yes” or “no” answers, with some allowing partial “somewhat” responses (see Table 1). The *publication details* and *engagement with Reflexive TA literature* categories required some free-text responses (e.g. “what was the data collection method?”), and questions about the number of themes required numerical responses. All signifiers were addressed within the scope of the Reflexive TA presented in the paper — i.e. if multiple, entirely distinct analyses were presented, signifiers found outside of the scope of the Reflexive TA were not recorded. However, general reporting and discussion that did not clearly exclude the Reflexive TA was considered within scope for our purposes.

We split the final corpus equally between the authors, who independently performed the data extraction on their subset. Further rounds of discussion took place during this process when necessary, e.g., when one researcher sought the opinion of another about borderline cases. The results were recorded in an online collaborative spreadsheet created and refined during the piloting stages described above. The researchers also used this to record summaries of the papers, any notes or reflections they had about specific papers, and flagged any noteworthy examples of good and poor practice.

4 Analysis

As our review focuses on prevalence of signifiers of good and poor practice, the primary method of analysis was the calculation of descriptive statistics. We support good practice with examples and extracts where applicable. In general, we found that adherence to good practice guidelines across the majority of dimensions was quite poor. None of the papers reviewed demonstrated consistently good practice across the board, and there are only a small number of papers we flagged as consistently good examples of Reflexive TA. Nonetheless, we do find pockets of good practice in some areas. In this section, we focus on the signifier groupings referred to in Section 3.4: *Publication details*; *Engagement with the Reflexive TA literature*; *Ownership of perspectives*; *Compatibility with the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of Reflexive TA*; and *Data interpretation and reporting*. We support our broad findings with frequencies and percentages, though note that the presence or absence of a particular signifier (e.g., whether the Reflexive TA analysis was situated on the dimension of inductive or deductive) does not necessarily mean it was engaged with meaningfully.

Following [22], we have deliberately chosen not to single out specific papers for their perceived “poor” practice, allowing us to draw attention to common issues rather than unfairly targeting particular authors. Instead, we prefer to highlight areas of good practice we have found. However, it is important to make clear that demonstration of good practice in one area does not necessarily permeate to others, and so examples illustrated below should not be assumed to be exemplars of good practice outside of the areas we describe.

Table 1: Signifiers of good and poor practice used for data extraction. Excluding those in “*Publication details*” and those regarding the number of themes, items are answered “yes” or “no”. Further exceptions are items marked with †, which were allowed a “somewhat” answer.

Category	Signifiers
Publication details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which domain(s) does this paper sit in? • What was the data collection method(s) (e.g. interview, workshop, survey)? • How many authors are there?
Engagement with Reflexive TA literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which sources are being cited to support and/or guide the use of Reflexive TA? • Do the authors state they are doing Reflexive TA, but only cite work that does not specifically mention <i>Reflexive TA</i>? • Do the authors state they have carried out Reflexive TA “drawing from” or “inspired by” Braun & Clarke, or other terms implying deviation or lack of methodological commitment?
Ownership of perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the authors give a rationale for using Reflexive TA?† • Is there any mention or discussion of the researchers’ positionality (even without use of the term)? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Have the authors included an explicit positionality statement (i.e. a section titled “positionality statement” or similar)? – Do the authors include any information about their personal positionality? – Do the authors include any information about their epistemological and/or ontological positionality?
Compatibility with the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of Reflexive TA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the authors refer to use of a codebook? • Do the authors carry out inter-rater reliability? • Do the authors use GT terminology (e.g. saturation, line-by-line coding, open/axial coding)? • Do the authors use IPA terminology (e.g. emergent themes or superordinate)? • Do the authors combine/supplement Reflexive TA with other techniques? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Have the authors tried to explain why their combination is compatible with Reflexive TA? • Do the authors use the term “generalisability” (or any variation thereof)? • Do the authors use the term “sample” or “sampling” (or any variation thereof)? • Do the authors use the terms “accuracy” or “reliability” (or any variation thereof)? • Do the authors use the term “triangulation” to justify use of different data sources or methods? • Do the authors use the term “replication” (or any variation thereof)? • Do the authors discuss researcher bias (as something negative that should be reduced rather than being unavoidable)?† • Are there any other notable indicators suggesting incompatibility with a Big-Q standpoint? (e.g. qualitative and quantitative methods combined without justification) • Have the authors used passive language of discovery, e.g. themes “emerged” or were found, discovered, or identified?
Quality of data interpretation and reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the authors provide non-generic, project-specific details on the phases of Reflexive TA (as defined by Braun & Clarke)?† • Do the authors locate their Reflexive TA on the dimensions of deductive and inductive? • Do the authors locate their Reflexive TA on the dimensions of semantic and latent? • Are frequency counts used as justification for the themes presented? • Do the authors state that they engaged in reflexive journaling? • Do the authors state that multiple researchers are involved in the Reflexive TA process? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Is the analysis process discussed reflexively with colleagues? – Are there multiple coders? – Do the authors state the different roles of the researchers?† • Is an explicit overview of themes and subthemes, or entire thematic structure, provided (e.g. list, map or table)?† • Are the themes explicitly identified to the reader?† <i>If yes or somewhat:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – How many top-level themes are there? – Are there subthemes? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * How many subthemes there? * How many sub-subthemes are there? • Have the authors presented any one word themes? • Are themes given an explicit definition up front?† • Have the authors presented any themes that are obviously topic/domain summaries or “bucket themes”?

4.1 Publication details

We examined 147 full papers (as per inclusion criterion IC1; see Section 3.3 for a full description of the criteria) containing 152 studies purporting to use Reflexive TA (five papers included multiple studies). With regard to deciding whether papers conducted a Reflexive TA, the counts for meeting the inclusion criteria were as follows: IC2a — 123 papers; IC2b — 13 papers; and IC2c — 11 papers. The supplementary materials indicate which criteria each paper satisfied.

As part of our analysis, we also examined the language used to refer to the analysis method, and specifically usage of the *exact* term “Reflexive Thematic Analysis”. Note that this does not map directly to the inclusion criteria, as these criteria were not based *only* the terminology used — e.g. papers included in the corpus under IC2a or IC2b can use the *exact* term “Reflexive Thematic Analysis”, but engage with the method to different extents, and papers included under IC2a also may not have used the *exact* term as the criteria also allowed for unambiguous variations (e.g. “reflexive

inductive thematic analysis”). The following is a breakdown of the terminology used to refer to the method, grouped by the inclusion criteria for our corpus:

- **IC2a** — of the 123 papers included under this criterion, 116 papers used the exact term “reflexive thematic analysis”. Two used “*reflective* thematic analysis” (assumed to be a simple mistake or typo). The remaining five used unambiguous variations such as “reflexive thematic strategy” or “reflexive approach in applying thematic analysis” accompanied by appropriate references that were focused on Reflexive TA.
- **IC2b** — of the 13 papers included under this criterion, 11 used the exact term “reflexive thematic analysis”. One used “*reflective* thematic analysis” (assumed to be a simple mistake or typo). One specifically referenced Braun and Clarke’s approach to TA, accompanied by appropriate references that were focused on Reflexive TA.
- **IC2c** — in line with the definition of this criterion, none of the 11 papers included under it used the exact term “reflexive thematic analysis”. Eight referred specifically to carrying out Braun and Clarke’s approach to TA (e.g., “following the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke”, “thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke’s six-step analytic process”), and their descriptions were accompanied by appropriate references that were focused on Reflexive TA. One contained extensive discussions of reflexivity within the context of their TA, and was accompanied by appropriate references that were focused on Reflexive TA. The remaining two papers contained unambiguous referencing that indicated they were using Reflexive TA.

While the list above highlights some exceptions, the vast majority of papers, a total of 130 (88% of the corpus), used the *exact* term “Reflexive Thematic Analysis” (this includes the three that referred to “reflective” TA as we assumed this was a simple mistake).

The papers covered a variety of domains. Each paper was assigned up to two main subject areas during the data extraction process, the most popular being AI ($n = 41$), Health ($n = 18$), and Virtual and Mixed Reality ($n = 17$) (see Table 2 for overview). We include this only to characterise our corpus — as we are only examining one year’s papers, this tells us more about the popularity of certain domains at the time of writing than about their propensity to use Reflexive TA. It is clear, however, that Reflexive TA is being used widely across HCI.

The source of data on which Reflexive TA was performed was also varied. Interviews were the most common data collection method ($n = 96$), and workshops ($n = 25$) and user studies ($n = 14$) were also popular. We also found analysis of some more unusual data sources that are less commonly represented in Reflexive TA literature, such as videos ($n = 5$), images ($n = 3$) and game and application analyses ($n = 3$). Full results are shown in Table 3.

There were no single-author papers; every paper had a least two. The mean was 4.99 authors (median = 5, SD = 2.17). The mode was 4 and the maximum was 15. Frequencies are shown in Table 4.

Table 2: Paper domain frequencies (note that many papers had more than one category)

Category	Papers
AI	41
Health	18
Virtual and mixed reality	17
Accessibility and assistive tech	16
Design	16
Older adults	11
Games	10
Social media and online communities	9
Work	9
Interfaces and devices	9
Education	8
Children and young people	7
LGBTQ+	6
Personal informatics and wearables	5
Audio and music	4
Robots and human-robot interaction	4
Privacy and security	4
Social justice and communities	4
Neurodiversity	3
Food	3
Finance	3
Research and methodology	3
Monitoring and sensors	3
Visualisation	2
Environment	2
Ethics	2
Performing arts	2
Remaining combined “singleton” categories	11

Table 3: Frequencies of data sources for Reflexive TA.

Data source	Frequency
Interviews	96
Workshops and co-design sessions	25
User studies and evaluations	14
Questionnaires	10
Surveys	7
Focus groups	7
Social media posts and discussions	7
Notes	6
Observations	5
Diaries and journals	5
Videos	5
Ethnography and auto-ethnography	4
Literature reviews	3
Images	3
Game/application analysis	3
Reflections	2
Town hall discussion	1

Table 4: Author count frequencies

Authors	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Frequency	12	23	36	26	25	11	5	3	2	1	2	0	0	1

4.2 Engagement with the Reflexive TA literature

Table 5 gives an overview of the literature cited in our corpus to support usage and descriptions of Reflexive TA. There were a total of 252 citations of the 18 papers listed. Individual papers in our corpus cited a mean of 1.71 (SD = 0.98, median = 1). The maximum was 6 papers cited; one paper did not include any citations.

Table 5: Commonly cited literature and citation frequencies from our corpus.

Publication title	Authors	Type	Journal/book title	Year	Pre-“reflexive” TA?	Citations	% of corpus citing
<i>Using thematic analysis in psychology</i> [10]	Braun and Clarke	Article	Qualitative Research in Psychology	2006	✓	58	39.46%
<i>Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis</i> [14]	Braun and Clarke	Article	Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health	2019		52	35.37%
<i>One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis?</i> [16]	Braun and Clarke	Article	Qualitative research in psychology	2020		30	20.41%
<i>Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide</i> [17]	Braun and Clarke	Book	-	2021		27	18.37%
<i>A worked example of Braun and Clarke’s approach to reflexive thematic analysis</i> [28]	Byrne	Article	Quality & quantity	2021		14	9.52%
<i>Thematic analysis</i> [11]	Braun and Clarke	Book chap.	APA handbook of research methods in psychology	2012	✓	11	7.48%
<i>Thematic analysis</i> [32]	Clarke and Braun	Article	The Journal of Positive Psychology	2017	✓	8	5.44%
<i>To saturate or not to saturate? Questioning data saturation as a useful concept for thematic analysis and sample-size rationales</i> [18]	Braun and Clarke	Article	Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health	2019		7	4.76%
<i>Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis</i> [19]	Braun and Clarke	Article	Qualitative psychology	2022		7	4.76%
<i>Thematic analysis</i> [25]	Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, and Terry	Book chap.	Handbook of research methods in health social sciences	2019		7	4.76%
<i>Doing Reflexive Thematic Analysis</i> [24]	Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, Davey, and Jenkinson	Article		2023		7	4.76%
<i>Can I use TA? Should I use TA? Should I not use TA? Comparing reflexive thematic analysis and other pattern-based qualitative analytic approaches</i> [15]	Braun and Clarke	Article	Counselling and psychotherapy research	2021		5	3.4%
<i>Thematic analysis</i> [66]	Terry, Hayfield, Clarke, and Braun	Book chap.	The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology	2017	✓	4	2.72%
<i>Successful qualitative research: a practical guide for beginners</i> [30]	Clarke and Braun	Book	-	2013	✓	4	2.72%
<i>Thematic Analysis</i> [35]	Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield	Book chap.	Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods	2015	✓	3	2.04%
<i>Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and becoming a knowing researcher</i> [21]	Braun and Clarke	Article	International journal of transgender health	2023		3	2.04%
<i>Thematic analysis in HCI</i> [27]	Brulé and Finnigan	Blog	-	2020		2	1.36%
<i>Developing the craft: reflexive accounts of doing reflexive thematic analysis</i> [67]	Trainor and Bundon	Article	Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health	2020		1	0.68%
<i>Thematic Analysis</i> [31]	Clarke and Braun	Book chap.	Encyclopedia of critical psychology	2014	✓	1	0.68%
<i>What can “thematic analysis” offer health and wellbeing researchers?</i> [12]	Braun and Clarke	Article	International journal of qualitative studies on health and well-being	2014	✓	1	0.68%

The most frequently cited papers were Braun and Clarke’s original 2006 paper *Using thematic analysis in psychology* [10] (58 citations; 39.5% of the corpus); 2019’s *Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis* [14] (52 citations; 35.4% of the corpus) which reflects on how implicit assumptions made by the Braun and Clarke may have led to the misunderstandings seen in published work, and 2020’s *One size fits all? What counts as quality practice in (reflexive) thematic analysis?* [16] (30 citations; 20.4% of the corpus) which contains guidelines for good practice. Interestingly, Byrne’s *A worked example of Braun and Clarke’s approach to reflexive thematic analysis* [28] (14 citations; 9.5% of the corpus) was one of the few publications cited which did not include Braun and Clarke as authors, and contains a clear example of how to apply Reflexive TA in research.

The majority of papers in our corpus (116/147; 78.9%) cite at least one publication that explicitly refers to *Reflexive* TA. However, this means that 31 papers (21.1%) cited *only* papers that do not specifically refer to *Reflexive* TA, despite apparently employing the method. In terms of overall citations across the corpus, 90 of 251 citations (35.9%) referenced literature that does not refer specifically to *Reflexive* TA specifically. While this is not *necessarily* problematic — authors may be discussing TA in general, or discussing how Reflexive TA has evolved — this could suggest a poor level of engagement with recent literature, or potentially sloppy citation practices such as the “citing without reading” identified by Braun and Clarke [16]. Without citations of appropriate papers, it is not always clear why authors are using the term “reflexive” to describe their approach

to TA, nor is it easy to assess their familiarity with the underlying values associated with Reflexive TA.

In addition, we note that a small number of papers (17/147; 11.6%) use language such as “inspired by” or “drawing from” the Reflexive TA method, suggesting an intention to deviate from the method and/or a potential lack of methodological commitment. During the review, we also noticed a some citations being used inappropriately, e.g. Braun and Clarke [18] being used as a reference after stating that saturation had been reached, despite the paper actually arguing against the concept.

The findings indicate that most authors are generally citing some appropriate literature. However, many are still exhibiting questionable citation practices, possibly due to lack of engagement with the literature, which can make it difficult to assess the research. We do note a somewhat confusing literature landscape – Braun and Clarke have written extensively on the Reflexive TA, developing their approach since 2006 such that there are currently over 20 publications that could be referred to. Furthermore, six publications cited by our corpus were called simply “Thematic Analysis” [11, 25, 31, 32, 35, 66]. However, this does not entirely excuse the practices described above.

4.3 Ownership of perspectives

Part of being a knowing researcher, and one that engages with reflexivity, is clearly stating one’s position and critically analysing how this may impact research. One aspect of this positioning can relate to the researchers’ personal and/or professional characteristics, but it should also involve being explicit about the theoretical values and assumptions that underpin the research being conducted [21]. Research does not occur in a vacuum – through explicitly “owning one’s perspective” [39], others can better understand the theoretical assumptions shaping the work, and will be better placed to assess its methodological coherence [21].

When examining details of researcher positionality within the reviewed papers, at least some mention was provided in 57.1% of papers (n = 84), usually within an explicit positionality statement or section (n = 59; 40.1%). Most commonly, positionality was discussed in terms of personal positionality, e.g. demographics such as gender, age, and ethnicity, or personal experience within the domain of study. Kritika et al. [52] provide a good example of their personal positionality in their paper about neurodivergent masking in online communities, clearly stating relevant characteristics and experience that informs and influences their research:

“All authors have a background in human-computer interaction, with two members holding expertise in disability studies and assistive technology research. Some members of the research team identify as neurodivergent, disabled, or both. Through our work, we do not aim to represent our participants’ perspectives but rather amplify their voices and co-construct knowledge with their perspectives to better support technology design that caters to neurodivergent people. We also recognize the role of various affordances of social media platforms in influencing, shaping, and

sustaining these perspectives, as well as providing opportunities for collective sense-making that are typically unavailable to neurodivergent people in their day-to-day lives. Finally, we acknowledge the limitations of our own experiences while prioritizing the safety of the communities we engage with, taking steps to protect their privacy.”

However, with respect to theoretical positioning, i.e. underlying ontology and epistemology, this was rarely mentioned explicitly (only 19.7% of papers; n = 29). Some example positions include *realist*, *critical realist*, and *constructionist*. Some authors did go further in describing their positions, such as Kapania et al. [48] who state:

“Our research is grounded in an interpretivist paradigm shaped by ethnomethodologically-informed feminist sensibilities. As we set out to examine the ethical, epistemological, and methodological concerns associated with using LLMs to simulate community perspectives, we drew on science studies scholar Donna Haraway’s concept of situated knowledge, recognizing that all knowledge is partial, contextual, and shaped by power and identity”.

In general though, most references were quite brief, and did not always indicate a good understanding of the position expressed or whether it was compatible with Reflexive TA. For example, Braun and Clarke [17] note that a purely realist position, which views reality as something exists independently of the knower and as something that can be uncovered in accurate and objective way, conflicts with Reflexive TA’s Big-Q values and emphasis on subjectivity. We also noted a conflation between the terms “constructionist” and “constructivist”, which are sometimes used interchangeably within the literature but can also be used to describe different theoretical positions [17]. Without additional explanation (or use of references), it was not always clear which particular concept was being referred to. Though not always explicitly stated, most of the research aligned with an experiential orientation, with a focus on “understanding and interpreting human experience, which is typically viewed as socially embedded and/or contextually located”, as opposed to a critical stance which aimed to “interrogate the social construction of meaning and treat language as shaping reality not just conveying reality... the focus moves away from (socially embedded) individual experience and sense-making to consider sense-making as a social practice” [22]. Braun and Clarke [22] also note that while the word “critical” can also be used (particularly by US researchers) to describe social justice research with a focus on power relations, the research being carried out does not necessarily entail the critical orientation they describe in their own work.

Theoretical positioning should also extend to explaining the choice to use Reflexive TA to ensure it is compatible with the researchers’ underlying research values and philosophical assumptions [21]. However, in terms of providing a rationale for using Reflexive TA, few papers include a clear and robust justification for its use (n = 9; 6.1%). In an example that does attempt to do so, Ali and Dasgupta [3] explain:

“we felt that reflexive TA was particularly well suited to our research questions and data because there truly is no “one” answer to the questions we explore about

student experiences. Our primary goal was to ensure these students' perspectives—currently missing in the greater body of research surrounding teaching computer science—were heard. Reflexive TA provided us with a rigorous way to analyze our student interviews while remaining true to the spirit of what these students needed to convey.”

Some papers provide a brief justification ($n = 26$; 17.7%), e.g. that Reflexive TA “enables a thorough exploration of the collected data to identify and interpret patterns therein” [4], but most provided no justification whatsoever ($n = 112$; 76.2%), and rarely attempted to explain the choice of method in relation to the researchers' theoretical positioning.

These findings suggest that papers would benefit from further explanation of why Reflexive TA is an appropriate method, which could also be linked more strongly to the authors' underlying theoretical positioning. While we are seeing over half of authors engaging in some form of reflexive practice by considering their personal positioning, there is a noticeable lack of information about epistemological and/or ontological positions, making it harder to understand what perspectives the research has been conducted from.

4.4 Compatibility with the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of Reflexive TA

Reflexive TA makes some assumptions about the researcher's position and approach to research. For example, it rejects positivist notions of reliability measurement and reduction of bias, but embraces reflexivity and interpretivism as part of a Big-Q approach. In practice, this means that certain practices are incompatible with Reflexive TA, but despite this, it is still common to see applications of Reflexive TA that include them [22]. Braun and Clarke identified some clear markers that imply deviation from such an approach, which we directly looked for in the data extraction phase (see Table 1). These include references to the “mash-up” of practices [21] used within other types of TA (namely, coding reliability or codebook approaches) and/or methodologies (including Grounded Theory or Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)).

Though Braun and Clarke are clear in their writings that reflexive TA should not include use of a codebook (e.g., “Reflexive TA does not use a codebook or coding frame for coding” [20]), 42 papers (28.6%) papers referred to using a codebook or coding scheme. The use of inter-rater reliability checks were very low ($n = 4$; 2.7%), though there were quite a few papers (41; 27.9%) that referred to using grounded theory processes (similar to Bowman et al.'s findings [8]) such as *open* or *axial coding*, *line-by-line coding*, or *memoing*, as well as to the concept of saturation. We did not see any use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis practices.

There were also nine papers (6.1%) where authors explained how they combined reflexive TA with other approaches. As opposed to simply mentioning use of a codebook, these papers mostly explicitly stated their analysis involved both reflexive and codebook approaches, despite these being described as separate methods (e.g., in Braun and Clarke [14]). Only two of them attempted to justify these mash-ups. One example which did so [69] referred to a different sort of mash-up, where the authors explained the use of AI in part of their reflexive approach to thematic analysis. They provide

an explanation for why they considered this to be appropriate: “To complement or [sic] thematic analysis, which covered only a subset of the data, we conducted an LLM-based semantic search over the whole dataset. We considered this a reflexive activity, aiming to challenge or ‘sense check ideas’ and explore alternative assumptions or interpretations thus helping us refine our final themes”. Importantly, AI was not used to code data, or to replace researcher interpretation, however we note that use of AI for qualitative analysis is generally controversial, particularly for interpretive forms of analysis [46], with many strongly objecting to its use in reflexive TA [47].

In addition to implicit or explicit mash-ups, Braun and Clarke have also identified a number of terms that are markers of positivist concerns [23]. We noted frequent occurrences of such terms used in relation to papers' analyses (see Table 1 for the full list). The most commonly used were “sample” ($n = 75$; 51%), “generalisability” ($n = 39$; 26.5%), and “accuracy” and/or “reliability” ($n = 19$, 12.9%). We also looked for “bias” being discussed as something to be minimised rather than being an inherent part of the research, finding that 31 papers (21.1%) did so. Across the corpus, we found that at least one of the above problematic terminologies were used by 110 papers (74.8%).

Furthermore, 61 papers used passive language of discovery, i.e. describing themes as having “emerged” or being “identified” or “discovered”. Braun and Clarke have been adamant that “themes do not emerge” from data [17, Ch. 8], such that they renamed one stage of Reflexive TA from *searching for themes* (in their original 2006 paper [10]) to *generating initial themes*. In general, they are very explicit that language used in Reflexive TA should reflect the active role of researchers in generating themes [14].

The review also indicated that 36 papers (24.49%) reported using mixed methods, i.e., both quantitative and qualitative methods. While these papers sometimes used mixed methods within the same study, some discussed using them across more than one study, e.g. an initial quantitative survey and then an additional interview study. In both cases, this was not recorded as a mash-up in our review as the Reflexive TA was applied separately from the quantitative analysis. Notably, no papers provided an explanation as to why it was appropriate to use reflexive TA as part of a mixed methods approach, making it difficult to see if or how the chosen methods were compatible. We also often saw significant “bleed” between analyses when the qualitative and quantitative parts were not fully compartmentalised, and it was difficult to unpick whether this was simply indistinct reporting or indicative of the research practices.

4.5 Data interpretation and reporting

As the reporting is often the reader's only view into how the analysis was performed, the data interpretation and its reporting are closely intertwined. Due to the situated and reflexive nature of Reflexive RTA, previous guidance has highlighted the importance of clear reporting that describes the specifics of the processes and decisions involved in the analysis [22].

When reporting how the six phases of Reflexive TA are engaged with, clear and project-specific information is preferable to generic description [23]. We found that most of papers ($n = 92$; 62.6%) provided no project-specific details about how the analysis was

performed in relation to these phases, with the rest including only some detail ($n = 46$; 31.3%), and only 9 papers (6.1%) describing the analysis comprehensively. An example of a more detailed description is demonstrated by Spors et al. [64], who emphasise the recursive nature of the analysis:

“The resulting texts were analysed through Braun and Clarke’s self-reflective six-phase thematic analysis. Our smallest meaningful unit was defined as a single word. VS familiarised themselves with the data through re-reading and reflecting on the interviews (Step 1). Then, they went through the texts to develop a first set of codes (Step 2). All transcripts shared the same, iteratively refined set of codes (Step 3), to ensure consistency in our analysis across calls. Through this cyclical process, VS began to shape codes and data points into theme sketches (Step 4). Through collective work in the author team, the sketches were finalised into coherent, congruent themes (Step 5), which we report on in this paper (Step 6). Throughout Step 1-4, VS communicated closely with OB, who acted as a sounding board. This inductive analysis led to the construction of three themes.”

There are different ways to approach Reflexive TA, such as coding *inductively* and/or *deductively*, and whether to code for *semantic* (i.e. explicit, descriptive) and/or *latent* (i.e. implicit, underlying) meaning. In our corpus, very few papers located the analysis in terms of latent and semantic ($n = 26$; 17.7%). However, 75 papers (51%) specified whether the analysis was inductive, deductive, or a combination, though there were no examples of a purely deductive approach. With respect to describing a deductive approach, there was some evidence of confusion. For Reflexive TA, a deductive approach would involve the use of prior theory as an interpretive lens. It does not entail using prior theory to develop a coding scheme and then applying this to the data (which would be more appropriate in coding reliability or codebook approaches) [17, 22]. In our review, the latter tended to be more common. Encouragingly, the overtly positivist practice of presenting frequency counts in relation to themes was rare, with only 14 papers (9.5%) doing so.

Somewhat surprisingly, we found little mention of using journaling as a way to engage in reflexivity during the analysis ($n = 12$; 8.2%). Additionally, all of the papers that did show evidence of this actually referred to the use of memos (a technique more commonly associated with grounded theory) as opposed to a reflexive journal.

Much more common was the involvement of multiple researchers in the reflexive TA process ($n = 133$; 90.5%), particularly in relation to discussing the codes and/or themes with the research team ($n = 104$; 78.2%), and use of multiple coders ($n = 86$; 64.7%). Although we found that use of inter-rater reliability was low (see Section 4.4), we saw frequent references to “consensus” being the goal of discussion and/or using multiple coders. The different researcher roles were also not always clear, with some papers offering no information about this ($n = 38$; 29% of papers involving multiple researchers in the Reflexive TA), or only partial explanations ($n = 77$; 57.9% of papers involving multiple researchers in the Reflexive TA).

When presenting themes, Braun and Clarke recommend beginning with a clear overview of the thematic structure. However,

only 51 papers in our corpus (34.7%) included such an overview in the form of a list, thematic map, or table. While a few papers ($n = 23$; 15.6%) did provide an overview of some of the themes (e.g., higher-level ones but not sub-themes), 73 papers (49.67%) did not provide any overview at all. Perhaps most concerningly, only 47 of the analyses within the papers of our corpus (32%) were explicit in identifying all themes and sub-themes. A further 50 analyses (34%) identified only some themes (typically the main themes but not the subthemes). We frequently saw a large number of unexplained headings, or unexplained text in bold ($n = 86$ papers; 61%) within the sections describing the outcomes of the analysis. These could have potentially have been themes and/or sub-themes, but could equally be subheadings within the text — this was never made clear to the reader. In these cases, the word “theme” was often only used in the section describing the analysis process, and was not mentioned in any other section. Additionally, themes were also rarely presented with explicit definitions up front as a way to introduce the theme to the reader ($n = 16$; 16.3%).

Within the 47 analyses across our corpus that explicitly identified all of their themes, and the 50 papers that partially identified themes that clearly denoted all of their top-level themes, the mean number of top-level themes was 4 (SD = 2.45; range: 1-17). Of the papers explicitly included sub-themes, there was a mean of 10.97 (SD: 6.44; range: 2-38). Four papers also included sub-sub themes, where there was a mean of 24 (SD = 16.21; range: 4-41). While there is no absolute guidance on the number of themes, we generally find that the number of top-level themes is within Braun and Clarke’s suggestion of between two and six (including sub-themes) for an 8,000 word report (they note the number could be greater for longer outputs) [17, p. 80]. However, simply having a small number of themes does not necessarily signify a in-depth analysis. Additionally, papers reporting larger numbers of themes and subthemes are unlikely to be using them “judiciously” [23], and potentially imply a fragmented and “under cooked” analysis [20].

Braun and Clarke have drawn attention to the care that must be taken when conceptualising, creating, and naming themes [14, 21]. Themes should be “shared patterns of meaning” and not “shared topics”, i.e., themes are not simply groups of codes referring to the same topic (sometimes called “bucket themes” connoting a bucket holding everything said about one topic [14]), but should provide rich insight. Furthermore, good theme names should clearly describe the essence of the theme, and one-word names should be avoided. Of the 97 analyses detailed in our corpus that identified at least some of their themes, 62 (62.6%) included at least one theme that could obviously be described as a bucket theme, and 22 (22.2%) included at least one one-word theme name. We struggled to find exemplary theme names in our corpus, which were the exception rather than the rule. Some good examples that go beyond surface-level descriptions include “nature-in-games as a personal idyll” from Spors et al.’s work about how people make sense of nature in games [64], “reuniting what treatment has divided” from Offerman et al.’s work on post-cancer sexual experiences [56], and “life lessons in perseverance and resilience” from Väkevä et al.’s work on gamers using the game *Dark Souls* to cope with depression [69].

5 Discussion

We identified 147 papers purporting to use Reflexive TA at CHI 2025, accounting for around 11% of accepted papers [1], which clearly underlines the popularity of the method. However, our work highlights a significant lack of good practice in how the method is conducted and reported. Below, we focus on three main issues: a lack of engagement with the reflexivity that defines the approach, issues around reporting, and a need to consider whether Reflexive TA is the appropriate choice of method.

Based on our findings we also provide recommendations to improve Reflexive TA practice in HCI and when selecting research methods in the first place. These are an important contribution for a number of reasons:

- While Reflexive TA is clearly popular in HCI, we believe that it is actually *underutilised* in terms of its full potential. Reflexive TA can be a powerful tool for interpretive research, leading to rich and complex insights, if engaged with fully.
- Poor practice leads to the creation of problematic norms, which self-perpetuate and become the expected standards that guide authors and reviewers.
- Selection of appropriate research methods can save time for everyone involved. Researchers using a method more closely matching their approach and aims will likely result in a better and more coherent analysis. Reviewers will also not have to spend time trying to unpack methodologically incongruent approaches.
- Though typically not deliberate, employing Reflexive TA poorly can also lead to a level of methodological and epistemological insincerity, whereby the researcher is claiming to do something they are not. Disciplines outside of HCI may then find it more difficult to value our research and take it seriously.

5.1 Engagement with reflexivity

Despite being called *Reflexive* TA, we did not find strong evidence that reflexivity was being engaged with in a meaningful way. While over half of the papers included some information on author positionality, this tended to focus on simply describing their personal characteristics (similar to TA review findings in HCI [8] and other areas [20–23]). This surface-level engagement has been referred to as “shopping list positionality” [41], and should be avoided in favour of a more *knowing* approach [21]. The conversation around researcher positionality statements in HCI is ongoing, where Singh et al. [62] stress the need to go beyond “performative positionality” and “be reflexive about what aspects affected the research beyond demographics”.

Reflexivity should also extend to more philosophical and theoretical assumptions. In terms of epistemological and ontological positioning, only 29 papers (19.7%) provided *any* information about the authors’ perspectives, many of which were extremely brief, making difficult to assess methodological compatibility. While there were some exceptions, this is clearly an area in need of improvement by the HCI community, who are apparently not engaging with this at scale (it is notable for instance, that theoretical positioning is only briefly considered in Singh et al. [62] and was not a focus of the analysis). To conduct Reflexive TA, researchers need to be aware of

and commit to the interpretive Big-Q assumptions and theoretical underpinnings of the approach. Despite this requirement, nearly three-quarters of the papers in our corpus used terminology that suggested incompatibility with this perspective, indicating a need for deeper engagement with literature on Reflexive TA and different ontological and epistemological perspectives.

Although we did see some evidence of reflexivity in the form of discussing the analysis with other researchers, this was not always referred to as an explicit reflexive activity. In some cases, papers also referred to these discussions as being used to reach “consensus” around codes or themes, and the use of multiple coders as a way to reduce bias. Even though inter-rater reliability was not carried out in many of these cases, these concerns still suggests a conflict with the underlying Big-Q values of Reflexive TA as they align more with a small-q perspective [17]. Furthermore, as with Bowman et al. [8], our review highlighted the large number of researchers that are often involved in HCI research, with the vast majority of papers having at least four authors. However, though 133 papers (90.5%) had more than one researcher involved in the analysis, only 38 (28.6 %) of those clearly described each researcher’s role. Thus, details around who was involved in what, and how reflexivity was conducted within the team were often lacking. Furthermore, while dealing with multiple reflexivities as part of team can be challenging, it can be beneficial [5], so there may be missed opportunities here.

No papers explicitly described reflexive journaling as part of the research process, despite being discussed in detail by Braun and Clarke [17, Ch. 1]. A similar lack was briefly mentioned in previous review outside of HCI [20]. Reflexivity should not be reduced to the inclusion of a positionality statement, and needs to be engaged with throughout as a core part of Reflexive TA, and discussed within a write-up describing how it shaped and influenced the research and analysis. From an interpretive perspective, reflexivity is not about minimising or reducing bias, it is key to harnessing subjectivity as a resource: “subjectivity is essential to the process of reflexive TA; it is the fuel that drives the engine, and reflexive TA doesn’t happen without it” [17, p. 12]. Reflexive journaling offers a way to engage with this more deeply (and evidence it). Though researchers may be using journals but not reporting this information, it would increase transparency to include and discuss this practice when reporting the research.

5.2 General reporting issues

In addition to lacking of detail around positioning and other reflexive practices, our review also indicated that papers often included insufficient information about how the analysis was conducted. Though there did seem to be general awareness of the six phases of Reflexive TA, descriptions of them were often quite short and generic (though there were notable exceptions). It is not that these papers necessarily reported the “wrong” thing, or did parts of the analysis poorly, but that many simply did not include enough information about their analysis to effectively evaluate it. This lack of detail is a recurring issue, both within the use of TA in healthcare HCI [8] and other areas [20, 23] where challenges have also been recognised around the space limitations of journal and conference publications. That said, concise descriptions are possible, and supplementary materials could be used to provide more detail if needed

[8]. Again, providing these explanations can increase transparency, which is an important part of building quality into qualitative research and helps to support other researchers in interpreting and evaluating it [6].

What perhaps surprised us most was the prevalence of poor reporting practices surrounding presentation of the themes themselves. Though noted as a potential issue by Braun and Clarke [20], we were particularly concerned that only 32% of analyses contained full and clear identification of their themes, and 61% of papers contained unexplained headings or bold text which were not clearly labelled as themes (these may have been themes, but this was often so unclear we were not able to count them for our review). This lack of clear labelling makes it difficult for the reader to make clear sense of the analysis.

5.3 Is Reflexive TA the right method to use?

It is clear from the vast body of literature on Reflexive TA (see Table 5 for examples) that fully engaging with Reflexive TA is not trivial, and takes a lot of time and effort to perform well. However, it appears that it is often approached in HCI as though this is not the case. Part of the issue may be due to Reflexive TA often being described as “flexible” [16, 17, 67], which is then taken to mean “applicable to any research context” — though we do not question Reflexive TA’s flexibility, we did often question its appropriateness within much of our corpus, and within HCI more broadly.

Prior publications have attempted to categorise HCI as a field, but as it has been described as “an eclectic intellectual community comprised of researchers from different academic backgrounds applying diverse methodologies to an array of research questions” [65], it can be difficult to pin down. Nonetheless, the applied nature of much of HCI [59, 71] is reflected in our corpus, where many papers focused on studies which involved carrying out some form user research to better understand users and their needs, and/or evaluating how users interact with a particular technology. Though there were some exceptions to these e.g. where Reflexive TA was used to examine games or applications, these were a minority.

We can draw a comparison with some of the research conducted by Braun and Clarke themselves and their colleagues which utilises Reflexive TA — e.g. that which investigates experiences of racism in universities [36], or around disclosing menopause symptoms in the workplace [38]. These very much focus on deeply experiential and societal phenomena about which participants are likely to have complicated and nuanced thoughts. Such a comparison would suggest that, within HCI, Reflexive TA may be better suited to more complex investigations like these, particularly those focused on trying to understand the lived experience of users and their contexts in more depth. Given the diversity of approaches and research areas within HCI there is clearly a place for Reflexive TA, but its application should be carefully and thoughtfully considered. It should not be seen as a method that can be picked up off the shelf after the qualitative data has been collected, nor as a simple, check-list exercise to perform or a simple step-by-step, black-box process to follow. In fact, the method requires deep and recursive engagement for it “to produce a meaningful, and useful, analysis that exceeds the superficial and the obvious” [19] — something we did not find strong evidence for in our review.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of HCI and the prevalence of mixed-methods research, researchers often use a wide range of methods to suit the situation (an approach that could be argued to align with the epistemological position of *pragmatism* [60]). As such, researchers may simply be looking for a “pick up and play” method that will allow them to incorporate qualitative data into their research, and the increasing popularity of Reflexive TA has likely made it seem like an attractive choice. However, that does not always mean they are looking for in-depth insights which go beyond the surface, thus alternative approaches would likely be more suitable.

5.3.1 Alternative approaches to Reflexive TA. There are particular findings within our review which also suggest that other forms of TA would have been a more appropriate choice than RTA. For example, the review found several papers reporting large numbers of themes, particularly in relation to sub-themes. Though our review did not focus on assessing the quality of the themes themselves, these numbers are potentially problematic — as explained by Braun and Clarke [20]: “The number of themes (including sub and over-arching themes) reported is relevant, because it speaks to quality, and how much rich depth/nuance and complexity an analysis can report.” Too many themes suggest an analysis that may be fragmented, and that may benefit from further iteration. If themes or sub-themes are too “thin” and unidimensional (i.e. they only focus on one facet) then they may actually be codes, which are generally not reported when presenting a Reflexive TA [17]. Secondly, we found a high frequency of themes that could be described as topic or domain summaries (i.e. summary of all the things a participant said about a topic), rather than “meaning-based themes”, which act as interpretative stories, with a key message they are trying to convey [22]. One-word themes are often unsuitable for “meaning-based themes” as it can be hard to communicate a shared meaning or pattern with a single word. Braun and Clarke also suggest that themes which are closer to topic summaries may indicate a realist/positivist perspective that perceive themes as real things that exist within the data waiting to be uncovered by the researcher (as if they are “fossil[s] hidden in a rock” King and Brooks [50]), rather than something that is actively constructed by the researcher through deep analytic engagement.

Such issues also speak to what Braun and Clarke [22] and [37] refer to as “methodological incongruence”, which occurs when different elements of a study do not “fit” together. Braun and Clarke suggest this can be due to “positivism creep” [17], whereby qualitative research tends to (often unwittingly) be influenced by positivist values which are often the default within many disciplines [22]. Thus we suggest that researchers would often be better off choosing a different qualitative analysis approach that better aligns with their underlying theoretical positioning. For instance, for those who are more concerned with reliability and minimising bias (i.e. positivist values), coding reliability approaches would be more appropriate (e.g. that of Boyatzis [9]). Alternatively, for those who view the creation of knowledge as context contingent, but would prefer a more structured format, then codebook approaches such as template analysis [26] or framework analysis [43] could be more suitable. In addition, while referring to healthcare research, Braun and Clarke [16] specifically flag codebook TA approaches as being particularly

suiting for applied research and for those taking a more “pragmatic qualitative” approach. Though compatible with a contextualist position, Reflexive TA is particularly suited to a constructionist one that also views knowledge as a social construct, but rejects the idea that is a reality that exists outside of human practices [17]. With respect to process, both coding reliability and codebook approaches to TA, themes tend to be created earlier in the process [16], in contrast to Reflexive TA where they occur much later, and likely require additional iteration and effort. In Reflexive TA, complexity is communicated through “the presentation of rich and multifaceted themes, with subthemes used judiciously to highlight a dimension of the central concept of the theme (subthemes aren’t a necessary feature of a reflexive TA)” [22]. As a Big-Q approach, Reflexive TA necessitates significant methodological investment and requirements on the part of the researcher that need to be engaged with throughout the research process (not just at the analysis stage). Careful selection of the correct type of TA could result in a more coherent and epistemologically-sound analysis that is better suited to both the researcher(s) conducting the research and the goals of the research.

5.3.2 Mixed methods research and Reflexive TA. Mixed methods research – the combining of qualitative and quantitative research – is common in HCI, and in our corpus 36 papers (24.49%) reported use of mixed methods. In our review, it was common to see a single “Results” section that merged findings together, and terminology that suggested an incompatibility with a Big-Q standpoint was especially common in mixed-methods papers (26/36; 72.22%). In many cases, making a clearer distinction between qualitative and quantitative analyses and findings could help disentangle them. Perhaps more significantly, the epistemological tension that surrounds combining these two types of research has been noted by Crabtree [37], van Turnhout et al. [70], and further highlights a question that we reflected on after performing this review – is Reflexive TA compatible with mixed-methods research? Given that Braun and Clarke have clearly stated that Reflexive TA cannot be approached from a positivist position, it can be difficult to see how it can be effectively combined with quantitative methods. Additionally, Crabtree [37] cautions that “mixing quantitative and qualitative methods may be seen as useful and expedient, but one should exercise care and respect the fundamental differences between the two, otherwise the blurring of methods allows quantitative reasoning to seep into and color qualitative research”. While Braun and Clarke do not appear to have directly addressed how suitable Reflexive TA is for mixed methods research, they do state that research coming from a position of “qualitative pragmatism” – i.e., selecting research methods based on “what works” [60, p. 153], which perhaps accurately characterises a lot of HCI research – may be better suited to using medium-Q codebook TA approaches [16]. Nonetheless, we can refer to their general guidance around becoming “knowing” researchers, practising reflexivity, and transparently reporting the research. At the very least, researchers should clearly state *why* and *how* they are combining their chosen method with Reflexive TA in their research, and acknowledge tensions and potential incompatibilities and how they could be overcome (if at all).

5.4 Actions for researchers

As a result of this scoping review, we identify six broad actions for authors that we believe can lead to higher-quality implementations of Reflexive TA in HCI:

5.4.1 Make a deliberate and informed choice to use Reflexive TA. As discussed above, doing Reflexive TA *well* is not easy or quick. To produce rich and complex themes, Reflexive TA requires an intensive and recursive process that involves reflexivity throughout. Therefore, researchers should make a very deliberate choice to use Reflexive TA after taking the time to more fully understand what it entails. Reflexive TA should only be selected after carefully considering its suitability, and whether it appropriately aligns with the researchers’ theoretical positioning. If this is not the case, we encourage researchers to select different methods that are better suited to their position and research questions (see Section 5.3.1). In particular, if the main goal of the qualitative analysis is to summarise different topics covered by participants, and/or if there is an intention to code the data deductively using an existing framework for at least part of the analysis, then we recommend using coding reliability (e.g. Boyatzis’s approach [9]) or codebook approaches (e.g. Template Analysis [26]) instead. We appreciate that engaging with the large variety of potentially confusing theoretical perspectives is challenging, but it is a necessary part improving our practice so we can make appropriately informed research choices [21].

5.4.2 Engage more deeply with the literature (and actually read the articles). We suspect that many of the misunderstandings around Reflexive TA could be avoided through better engagement with the literature. Throughout this review, we often questioned whether authors had even read the papers they were citing, as the practices they reported were often in conflict with the cited literature. This issue is encapsulated by the large amount of papers still citing *only* papers that *do not* refer to Reflexive TA, despite claiming to perform it. Braun and Clarke have continually highlighted this issue themselves [16, 24], drawing attention to tokenistic citations alongside other writing that does not conform to the source.

Therefore, we recommend that researchers seeking to employ Reflexive TA should read widely on the subject, including both earlier and more recent works to see how (and why) the approach has evolved. Given the complexity of the approach, we do not believe it is possible to satisfactorily and sincerely engage with Reflexive TA by reading a single journal paper, and citations should reflect this. At the time of writing, the textbook *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide* [17] provides a good overview of Reflexive TA’s theoretical foundations and how to perform it, serving as a good starting point for interested researchers.

5.4.3 Use guidelines to inform good practice. Related to engaging with literature is the use of guidelines. A number of publications include general guidance or specific guidelines to inform good practice in Reflexive TA (e.g. [16, 19, 23]). Though sources containing such guidelines were frequently cited in our corpus, it appears that they are not being consistently applied to a great extent. Referring to and conforming to these guidelines throughout the research process could help raise Reflexive TA standards in HCI, but this should be approached *knowingly* – Braun and Clarke warn against procedurally following such guidance, stressing that the researcher

must make their own decisions [22] and not blindly accept what they say [16]. However, if deviating, this should be an intentional, reflexive choice that needs to be explained in relation to alignment with the values underpinning Reflexive TA [17, 21].

5.4.4 Be reflexive! Braun and Clarke have been clear to foreground the need for reflexivity in their process, so much that they have included the term in the name of their approach. To be reflexive, we encourage HCI authors to consider both personal and theoretical positionality in a meaningful way, and engage in practices such as reflexive journaling and discussions with the research team. Furthermore, the write-up of the research needs to be more transparent about how this reflexivity has shaped the analysis and the research carried out. While we acknowledge the challenges around engaging in reflexivity within teams, Braun and Clarke [20] provide examples of how this has been approached in health research.

5.4.5 Clearly define and describe your themes. As the themes are the main product of the analysis, they should be clearly labelled and described – without such elementary information, it is difficult to make much sense of the analysis. Ideally, the thematic structure should be described using a list, table, or thematic map that clearly defines themes and subthemes. This overview should be followed by a description of each theme (and subtheme, where appropriate). We would argue that this action is good practice for researchers conducting all forms of thematic analysis, not just Reflexive TA.

5.4.6 Improve general transparency and detail in reporting. To aid in the reflexive process and provide more transparency about the research carried out, researchers should be sure to include detailed information about how the analysis was carried out. This information should be specific to the project, to avoid generic reporting, particularly when explaining engagement with the six-phases of Reflexive TA.

5.5 Actions for reviewers

Our review also allowed us to identify two actions for those involved in reviewing:

5.5.1 Be aware and accepting of different qualitative approaches when reviewing. As we discuss above, there is an entire gamut of qualitative research approaches, from those that fully embrace positivism to interpretive approaches that reject it (such as Reflexive TA). Previous research has lamented the hegemony of positivism in HCI [37, 63], despite the widespread use of interpretivist qualitative methods in the discipline. As such, research taking a fully Big-Q qualitative approach is not the norm and can face barriers – the expectation of particular sections in the publication, or unfair demands of uninformed reviewers asking for inter-rater reliability, code frequencies, etc. We therefore encourage reviewers to be more accepting of non-positivist approaches, and refrain from making such requests. It may be that it is better to decline a review request for research that uses unfamiliar methods, rather than making epistemologically incompatible demands of the authors.

5.5.2 Hold researchers to higher standards. There is clearly evidence of reviewers not fully understanding qualitative research making unfair demands of authors [34]. However, it also appears that many papers are not being held to account at the review stage

in the way they should be, as we found many papers that could have been more strongly critiqued (in terms of their implementation of Reflexive TA) before acceptance. We therefore encourage reviewers to ensure that research is ostensibly making a good-faith and theoretically-sound attempt at Reflexive TA, which is clearly and transparently reported. If this is not the case, consider recommending “revise and resubmit” where applicable, or even rejecting the paper if the analysis is not up to basic standards.

Based on the recommendations in this paper, and others such as [22, 22, 23], we would encourage reviewers to request additional, *specific* information from authors to help them better engage with Reflexive TA, or to reframe their analysis if an alternative approach is more suitable. For instance, reviewers should request clarification on the type of TA carried out where this is not clear (coding reliability, codebook, or reflexive, whether analysis was inductive or deductive, whether the coding focused on semantic or latent meaning, what reflexive practices were engaged with (such as keeping a journal), the authors’ underlying epistemological and ontological positioning, more detail about how the six-phases were carried out, etc. In addition, we would advise reviewers to highlight any markers that indicate methodological incongruence e.g. phrasing that suggests themes “emerge”, concerns about positivist values such as “generalisability”, “bias” and “reliability”, or confusing mash-ups involving different qualitative analysis techniques (e.g. from grounded theory). Moreover, reviewers could also recommend specific literature to further improve the quality of the Thematic Analysis presented by authors (e.g. [21]). Helping authors to address these sorts of issues at the review stage should help to improve the quality of qualitative work being carried out within HCI.

6 Limitations

As with any research using systematic literature searches, it is possible that the search strategy did not uncover all relevant papers. However, we believe that our strategy of searching both the body and references section captured the vast majority of relevant papers.

When performing the data extraction phase, we made a deliberate attempt to employ easily identifiable signifiers of good and poor practice. Our research therefore gives broad-brush view of current practice at CHI that may lack some of the nuance of a more detailed analysis. Despite this, we believe our review method was well-suited to our research questions and provides a good overview of how Reflexive TA is being conducted at CHI.

We also acknowledge that CHI does not necessarily represent HCI in general, and that there are many subdisciplines and research communities that may favour other publication venues. However, as a premier HCI publication venue, CHI acts as good barometer for the state-of-the-art research and thinking and “can serve as a reference standard for the entire field and discipline of HCI” [57]. Furthermore, we limited our search to a single year at CHI – while this has precedence in reviews like ours (see Section 3) and can effectively provide a snapshot of current Reflexive TA practice, it does mean that we were not able to include examples from other years in relation to how the method has been implemented well. We therefore wish to make clear that our examples of good practice are by no means exhaustive, and there likely exist examples from

previous years' CHI proceedings and from other publication venues. However, we hope that the points raised in our paper mean that such examples of good practice can be more readily recognised when researchers encounter them.

7 Conclusion

Our scoping review revealed 147 papers that purported to use Reflexive TA at the most recent CHI. However, we found concerningly low alignment with established good practice. We conclude that there is a clear need for deeper engagement with the method by HCI researchers to enable them to adequately conduct research using the method. We hope this paper serves as a catalyst to instigate better practice in Reflexive TA across the HCI community, and look forward to reading future research that fully utilises this approach.

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