Developmentally Oriented Thematic Analysis (DOTA): A Qualitative Research Method to Explore Meaning-Making Processes in Cultural Psychology

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Abstract: In this article, we introduce developmentally oriented thematic analysis (DOTA) as a possibility to study the process-oriented aspects of qualitative data analysis when undertaking the intra- and inter-individual analysis of case studies. We describe the main methodological considerations of this approach as a method to study the multi-layered nature of affective processes, which can recall both experiential and existential layers of meaning-making. We do so by analyzing the diary entries of study participants who attended a course taught at a Norwegian university and who used journals to reflect upon their experiences in class, such as the "silent time" they embraced each morning. Process-oriented narratives give account of the coexistent directionalities of higher psychological functions, and the degrees of differentiation or undifferentiation of the affective processes involved in them. One aspect that facilitated such amplification of the multiple layers of affective processes was the focus on silence-phenomena, due to the contrast they induce, and the way in which they promote attentional shifts.

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1. Introduction

When it comes to psychology, researchers recurrently find it difficult to adequately study the ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty that lie at the core of decision- and meaning-making processes (ABBEY & VALSINER, 2005; LEHMANN, 2018). This results in the need to "re-think the ways in which science can capture the general features of the deeply affective subjective processes of intra-psychological and inter-psychological kinds" (VALSINER, 2013, p.13). In practical terms, there is a need for further methodological developments that support the rigorous qualitative analysis of human phenomena. As qualitative researchers, the most we can expect when collecting data is that our data are rich enough to represent faithfully the experiences of our study participants. However, when analyzing qualitative data such as interview transcripts or journal entries, it is common to feel lost in the density of the pages one needs to summarize and code to give an account of the complexity of the phenomena under study. It can be difficult to categorize sentences that give an account of the coexisting layers associated with said phenomena. According with previous research (LEHMANN, 2018), these sentences might evoke, for instance, the tension between the diverse positionings of the self (e.g., I-as-a-good-student and I-as-a-mindfulness-practitioner) that are simultaneously activated in the stream of consciousness. They could also indicate the tension elicited by affective processes (e.g., I feel frustrated but I also want to feel motivated). In other words, while linguistic categories are sequential (e.g., a participant writes one word after another in a journal), psychological processes are simultaneous (e.g., a plurality of processes is occurring in the mind, and multiple layers of meaning are negotiated, both consciously and unconsciously). Thus, with such a multi-layered quality of the psyche that we aim to highlight, in this article we present a ground for acknowledging and studying the aforementioned simultaneity, when textual data are rich enough to acknowledge it. This multi-layered nature of the mind gives account of undifferentiated or nonarticulated aspects of cognition, meaning that including a focus on the silent aspects of our experiences might be a possibility for expanding the understanding of meaning-making. [1]

We, the authors of this article, have been teaching qualitative research in undergraduate and graduate programs. Good textbooks on research methodologies address the fact that the research question the researcher is attempting to address guides the selection of a method of analysis (SMITH, 2005). Thematic analysis is among the most used methods to analyze qualitative data, as it provides an account of a process that all rigorous qualitative research must undergo, that of identifying and developing categorizations that enable the further understanding of the phenomena being studied (THOMAS & HARDEN, 2008). However, the paradox of thematic analysis, as far as our experiences teaching and reviewing research articles for journals are concerned, is that it can be mistaken as a shortcut that fragments the methodological cycle. Yet, instead of being mistaken as a shortcut in the data analysis, thematic analysis can facilitate the description and categorization of the data as a basis for further interpretations and theoretical developments (BRAUN & CLARKE, 2006). [2]

Qualitative researchers using thematic analysis can aim to convey connections that are more explicit between a method of analysis and the methodology cycle. By understanding in theory and showing in practice, researchers could focus on methodology as a whole and not a fragmented state. The methodology cycle emphasizes the processual aspects of analysis and generalization. That is, making faithful generalizations of phenomena happens at the edge of the status quo of current theories, and the empirical aspects that the data evokes (LEHMANN & VALSINER, 2017). We present thematic analysis as a resource for analyzing qualitative data in cultural psychology, although some approaches to cultural psychology (VALSINER, 2007; ZITTOUN et al., 2013) are strictly developmental, involving an explicit focus on explaining processes. Thus, the main objective of this article is to frame further what LEHMANN (2018) coined as *developmentally oriented thematic analysis* (here onwards DOTA). DOTA is an attempt to increase the flexibility of thematic analysis as an analytical method to capture the process of meaning-making as it unfolds in time. We elaborate on the methodological aspects of the approach by drawing on the first author's doctoral thesis, while using empirical material to illustrate the method we are hereby describing in relation to the key principles of cultural psychology. [3]

Cultural psychology claims that affect is at the core of human experience, being a priori to cognition (VALSINER, 2007). Thus, affective processes are energy forces that either orient or disorient our higher psychological functions and therefore also influence our relationship and actions towards others or ourselves (SALGADO, 2007; VALSINER, 2007). We propose a developmentally oriented thematic method, which would offer a possibility to look into the multilayered quality of meaning-making processes and their affective nuances. In other words, we strive to understand the psyche as a compound that allows for the conscious and (or) unconscious coexistence of different layers of affective forces and positionings of the self, the dynamics of which can evoke tension. [4]

In addition, microgenetic analysis and case study research are *par excellence* the approaches for studying human development in cultural psychology (VALSINER & VAN DER VEER, 2000; WAGONER, 2009). However, conducting a microgenetic study demands deep knowledge of the theoretical models in cultural psychology, where complexity represents a challenge for researchers when undergoing data analysis. We are thus presenting DOTA, a developmentally oriented approach to thematic analysis as an interlude between microgenetic analysis and thematic analysis. We focus on the ambiguous, ambivalent and uncertain aspects of meaning-making processes and highlight their dynamic and multilayered nature. In the next sections, we expand on these premises, and we provide an example of how to undertake such an approach to qualitative research. We do so by studying diary entries written in an interdisciplinary Master's course that the first author taught at a Norwegian university. [5]

2. Towards a Developmentally Oriented Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is an interpretative approach to qualitative research based on categorizing data into particular themes, with the aim of grasping the complexity of meanings of the phenomenon under study (SMITH, 2015). There are several variants to thematic analysis, such as inductive, deductive or semantic approaches and one of the main benefits of using thematic analysis is that it is a highly flexible framework within which to work (BRAUN & CLARKE, 2006; SMITH, 2015), as it "can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions" (NOWELL, NORRIS, WHITE & MOULES, 2017, p.2). Some of the elements of applied thematic analysis include identifying key terms that can be subsequently used to improve general theoretical models, thereby improving both the evidence-based and theory-driven interpretations produced during the research process (GUEST, MacQUEEN & NAMEY, 2012). However, there is still a need to produce literature that focuses on the pragmatic aspects of using this method of analysis rigorously (BRAUN & CLARKE, 2006; NOWELL et al., 2017). In addition, some of the limitations of traditional methods of conducting thematic analysis might require reducing the data into codes, subthemes and themes, and researchers might be implicitly treating meaning-making as a state or an outcome, instead of looking at it as a process in the making. Indeed, this is the dilemma of most scientific quests, as reduction might be necessary for analytical purposes, yet:

> "The core issue of all holistic perspectives is the decision to recognize differences in quality between levels of analysis of phenomena. If such differences are denied, it becomes possible to reduce complex phenomena to their elementary components, and assume that such reduction gives the investigator a key to making sense of the phenomena" (VALSINER & VAN DER VEER, 2000, p.86). [6]

Hence, psychology needs methodologies that grasp qualitative transformations that occur through irreversible time and that look at individuals as wholes (WAGONER, 2009). This counts as well for the process of analysis of data, in line with the methodology cycle. For example, data such as those coming from interviews often refer to processes of co-construction taking place in the context of the research, as study participants might have never thought about the questions asked by the researcher, and such questions may change the course of meaning-making in their lives (KVALE & BRINKMANN, 2009). Following this, thematic analysis could provide explicit links between themes and the whole of the narrative, which goes far beyond choosing words that appear unambiguous in the data (ALHOJAILAN, 2012). Indeed, narratives are attempts to make sense of a rather chaotic and illogical world (MURRAY, 2015), and thus, ambiguity and uncertainty are not necessarily to be overcome in the analysis, being in themselves crucial aspects of meaning-making (ABBEY & VALSINER, 2005; LEHMANN & KLEMPE, 2017). Ambiguity and uncertainty are an existential given, and any attempt to study meaning-making processes might create strategies to focus on these qualities of the human condition and the ways in which study participants embrace them (LEHMANN, 2018). In this vein of thought, the DOTA aims to convey the processual quality of meaning-making, as well as create an

opportunity to qualitatively study the ambivalence, ambiguity and uncertainty that are part of meaning-making. [7]

3. Case Study Research in Cultural Psychology

Science develops in the space between both the abstractness and concreteness of particular phenomena that might have generalizable qualities (KLEMPE, 2014a). Indeed, WINDELBAND (1998 [1894]) suggested an interdependence between the general and the particular in research, even if he did not explicitly emphasize theoretical suggestions for how to reach generalizations by focusing on such interdependence (CASSIRER, 1968 [1932]; MOLENAAR, 2004). What the German philosopher did suggest is that it is not only possible, but also necessary, to generalize from single cases, as "the opposition of the ever-enduring and the unique is in a certain sense relative" (WINDELBAND, 1998 [1894], p.13; see also VALSINER, 2016). [8]

Historically speaking, case study research has been an important methodology used to explore the psyche (FREUD & BREUER, 2004 [1895]; VYGOTSKY, 1993 [1929]), and in this spirit, cultural psychologists have preferred both qualitative research and case study designs as a path to understanding sociocultural processes (MOLENAAR, 2004; VALSINER, 2013; ZITTOUN, 2017). Cultural psychology studies human development by focusing on the historical conditions that underlie the interaction and dynamics between the self and others (ZITTOUN, 2017), and in this manner, the discipline conducts research following the premise that: "*universality is necessarily present in the particulars.* In other terms, the absolute uniqueness of each and every, never to repeat itself, life experience is generated by a universal mechanism that operates in every person and guarantees their development" (VALSINER, 2016, p.6). [9]

With the aim of achieving an accurate understanding of the particular in the universal and of the universal in the particular, cultural psychology recalls PEIRCE's notion of abduction, which integrates premises from inductive and deductive logic (SALVATORE & VALSINER, 2008). Yet, to illustrate the crossroads between the universal and the particular qualities of human life is a great challenge. Thus, understanding abduction as an integrative insight requires explicit acknowledgment of the imagination and of the active logical reasoning of the researcher (ZITTOUN, 2017). The main approaches to thematic analysis are either inductive or deductive (SMITH, 2015), and we applied abductive logic to the study presented here. That is, during the preliminary intraindividual analysis of the journals written by the study participants, we induced theoretical premises that were expected to serve later interindividual explanations, while we deducted the analysis of the case on latter versions of analysis, based on theoretically-driven themes. [10]

Cultural psychologists, when studying the nature of human development, emphasize process-oriented research and functional explanations that provide a wider understanding of goal-orientation (VALSINER, 2014). The question then becomes how we can apply these premises of a case study oriented in cultural

psychology into research practice. Researchers could do so by following an abductive logic that enables them to test models and theories in such a way as to loop back and forth between the particular and the universal within the phenomena in question, looking for patterns and variations that give the sense of the cyclical flow between data and theory (ZITTOUN, 2017). One crucial strategy for achieving this goal in case study research is the amplification of the variability of cases, so that instead of homogenizing such cases, as is often done in psychological research (VALSINER, 2016), the researcher can prioritize the richness of individual differences over large samples (VALSINER, 2015). Comparing and contrasting cases can not only provide empirical support for theories, but also help in the further development of said theories (SALVATORE & VALSINER, 2008). Before discussing the challenges of comparing and contrasting various cases though, it is necessary to understand as much as possible about the richness of each case in itself. Thus, idiographic approaches to research in cultural psychology put intraindividual analysis first, and only on this firm foundation is it suggested to move on to the exploration of interindividual variations (MOLENAAR, 2004). Thematic analysis, we hereby argue, can enrich both intra- and interindividual analysis by offering an asset of themes that might be present or not in other cases, giving account of the crossroads between both the universal and the particular. [11]

4. Developmentally Oriented Thematic Analysis: Insights From Microgenetic Approaches in Psychology

Because cultural psychology has a strong developmental focus, DOTA was created in order to follow the multilayered nature of the trajectories of the meaning-making process, and not just the outcomes of it. We acknowledge the simultaneous coexistence of I-positions, thoughts, feelings and emotions, where awareness in the stream of consciousness evokes tension. Process-oriented perspectives in qualitative research are an invaluable tool for looking into the tensions involved in meaning-making (ABBEY, 2012). Indeed, VYGOTSKY, and other developmental psychologists, including WERNER and SANDER, shaped the microgenetic method to study human activity as a developmental sequence of ever-unfolding processes; yet, the generality of such an approach complicates any research efforts in microgenetic studies (VALSINER, 2001). One of the main potentialities of microgenetic methods, at least as WERNER framed them, is that they can enable researchers to focus on the polysemic, paradoxical and ambivalent character of symbols and meanings, given their affective-dynamic nature (WERNER & KAPLAN, 1984 [1963]). However, contemporary cultural psychology still faces the struggles of how to approach affective phenomena through language, whether theoretically or empirically (LEHMANN, 2018). Indeed, microgenesis, when studied through verbal reports, provides only glimpses of the resources that a person may use to adapt to a context (VALSINER & VAN DER VEER, 2000). These resources can involve meaning-making, decision making and value adding, which are developmental processes that give an account of higher psychological functions such as attention, memory and imagination. Thus, verbal reports and written accounts can be resourceful data for cultural psychologists, only if providing future-oriented directions and multilayered content

that conveys the dynamic nature of these processes and their affective quality. Precisely, *DOTA* emerged as a methodological strategy to study not only the polysemy of meanings associated with silence-phenomena, but also their polyphony. By polyphony, we understand the coexistent layers of tension that form affective phenomena and that emerge between different positionings of the self when presenting diverging goal orientations (LEHMANN, 2018). Affective processes result from perceiving somehow undefined forces in tension, and polyphony brings in a vertical axis to explore the simultaneous coexistence of these forces, be it in the form of I-positionings, beliefs, feelings, emotions or values (LEHMANN & KLEMPE, 2017). Thus, the implicit or explicit degrees of tension in the human mind shape a sort of polyphonic present, where multiple layers of meaning appear in temporal opposition and in different degrees of differentiation (LEHMANN & VALSINER, 2017). Furthermore, approaches to temporality in cultural psychology intend to understand how immediate experiences gain (or not) stability (SATO, KASUGA, KANSAKI & WAGONER, 2015). That is, following the trajectories of the meanings, their effects and their value orientations can give an account of the fact that "from a developmental perspective, dynamic concepts precede static concepts" (WERNER, 1912 in MÜLLER, 2005, p.34). [12]

However, conducting a microgenetic analysis of meaning-making, decision-making and value-adding processes—which are in themselves processes that clarify one's identity (LEHMANN, 2012)—requires that the data give an account of the unfolding co-construction of psychological functions through time. In addition, a profound understanding of specific theoretical models of high psychological functions in cultural psychology might be a requisite for a rigorous analysis of such data. Therefore, similar to the case of thematic analysis, few pragmatic texts in the field demonstrate how to conduct a rigorous microgenetic study, especially when analyzing writing processes. DOTA attempts to facilitate a microgenetic focus on narratives, when possible. [13]

5. Case Studies in Practice: Exploring Silence-Phenomena

5.1 Background of the study and research question

The research question of the first author's doctoral thesis, used here to illustrate how to conduct a developmentally oriented thematic analysis (DOTA) is: *What are the possibilities for the theoretical integration of affect, as a core element of human existence, into the heart of cultural psychology?* Indeed, it is both the nature of such a question, and the richness of the data collected that required a different approach for analysis. DOTA emerged as a strategy to reveal the polysemic and polyphonic nature of meaning-making processes (LEHMANN, 2018). That is, we understand the psyche as a multilayered compound of diverse I-positions (HERMANS, 2001), whose dynamics can evoke tension. While the notion of polysemy can indicate multiple meanings associated with statements given by study participants, polyphony can give an account of the diverging directionalities of their positionings or, even more, of the affective processes of which the study participants are trying to make sense while writing about their

lives in the journal entries. To explore these multilayered aspects of human experience and existence, we used silence-phenomena (i.e., different experiences associated with the word "silence") as magnifying glasses to look into the tensions that form affective processes. These tensions cannot always be articulated in linguistic categories, and sometimes a linguistic category might reflect the plurality of meanings that a person is simultaneously making sense of, while talking or writing. That is, silence-phenomena were used as tools to unveil the polysemy and polyphony of affective processes. The premise underlying the choice of these tools, is to expand the possibilities of language as a source for the exploration of affect (LEHMANN, 2018). [14]

In particular, the first author of this article taught a class at a Norwegian university. She taught this class twice, in 2015 with 23 students and once again in 2016 with 25 students. In addition to the experiential activities planned in the curriculum, she created a silent time, where she and her students embraced diverse silent experiences (e.g., poems about silence-phenomena, songs about silence-phenomena such as a performance of 4:33 by John CAGE, which (ZOOMOOZOPHONE, 2008 has made available). Following this, the students were asked to reconstruct their experiences by journaling about them and then asked to re-write their experiences using a poetic style, if possible. The students also used their journals to reflect upon other experiences of the class related to teamwork, and they wrote multiple times a day. [15]

5.2 Tools for data collection

Journaling was the main tool for data collection. By emphasizing that the writing acts occur in irreversible time, students were asked to investigate their own experiences during silent time immediately after it was over, in order to add a developmental perspective to the data collected. In addition, the act of writing in itself again occurs as a process, being future oriented. To follow such a developmental focus more explicitly, students were advised to write without thinking too much, as there were no "right" or "wrong" thoughts or feelings. They were also advised not to erase anything, but to re-write sentences if necessary. [16]

While analyzing the data, we prioritized the selection of journal entries that gave an account of the processual character of writing acts to address meaning-making as it was unfolding while writing non-stop and without erasing. Examples of these process-oriented narratives appear in Tables 2 and 3, in the data analysis section. The choice of such an immediate and future-oriented reconstruction of experiences came about from premises from the *Würzburg School* of studying processes of thought through self-observation (BENETKA & JOERCHEL, 2016; HUMPHREY, 1951; HOFFMANN, STOCK & DEUTSCH, 1996; WAGONER, 2013). This school focused on methodologies that prioritized the active process of thinking, instead of merely looking at the products of thinking, and they did so by means of analyzing rich quantitative data within the interdependence between study participants and researchers (WAGONER, 2009). Precisely, in her doctoral dissertation (LEHMANN, 2018), the first author of this article used the themes of *the internalization of silence-phenomena and*

poetry and *the meanings and effects of silence-phenomen*a to look into the process of thinking among the students as it evolved in the context of the class, given that the teacher-researcher was expecting that the students recognized the presence of silence-phenomena and poetry in their daily lives and estimated the impact of these experiences. [17]

Furthermore, from a developmental approach, journaling is a suitable method for generating qualitative data of a developmental type, as "the text is principally embedded in time as it is occurring to the participant; It is only retrospective in the limited sense of recalling events shortly after they have occurred rather than months or years later" (SATO et al., 2015, p.269). In addition, diaries enable self-exploration and inner dialogue (LEHMANN, 2018). Diaries are an effective methodological tool for accessing aspects of everyday life that are tacit and that people usually take for granted or do not stop to reflect upon (ALASZEWSKI, 2006). This is the case for silence-phenomena, as researchers often misunderstand them as failures of thought or speech that need to be overcome (POLAND & PEDERSON, 1998). Thus, by journaling, study participants have the opportunity to gain access to and reflect upon aspects of their everyday lives that they take for granted. At the same time, by reading and analyzing journal entries, researchers can gain access to the aspects of the inner speech and inner dialogues of their study participants. When describing the use of personal documents in research, ALLPORT (1942) explicitly linked their usefulness to case study research. He suggested that either intentionally or unintentionally, the author of such a document reveals information about the structure and functions of mental life. So, highlighting that awareness is a highly individual process and that it is experienced at different levels of intensities (HUMPHREY, 1951), the richness of the books of reflections in the classroom are a uniquely helpful instrument for collecting material for the case studies. Journals have repeatedly been shown to be an effective tool for the study of the ways in which persons interpret and give meaning to particular situations (ALASZEWSKI, 2006). However, even if diaries enable researchers to learn about daily life practices and experiences, they can also result in a reflection style influenced by the expectations of what "should" be written for the researcher (KENTEN, 2010). Discourses involve implicit or explicit addressees who might or might not understand the content of what is being disclosed (GROSSEN, 2015), so the researcher/psychologist might sense the dialogical nature behind the personal entries of participants (ALLPORT, 1942). Keeping a diary is a dialogical process that involves the reflections of the writer being mirrored back to the writer him- or herself, and routine writing itself becomes part of the life world of the diarist, facilitating meaning-making (MURAKAMI, 2014). The participants' journal entries reveal the dialogical tensions that participants often disclose in a diary, including both internal and external addressees, as it is possible to have auto-dialogues that inform the researcher about changes within the self (GROSSEN, 2015). That is, in the data, this tension can appear in the form of different I-positions, feelings, emotions, values or beliefs that appear as opposing or contradicting and that make a person turn to the quest of a decision to make, a meaning to make or a value to prioritize, while still acknowledging the other possibilities that could be actualized. [18]

5.3 Study participants: First *intraindividual* movement

Eight students voluntarily donated their diaries for this study once each course was over and after they had received their grades. Conducting a literature review of the research theme (i.e., silence-phenomena) and creating new theoretical models to approach it enabled the first author to give the basis for the codes and themes to each of the eight cases individually. Some examples of these theoretically driven modes of coding are: 1. silences in communication, such as turn taking and what persons are thinking or feeling while attending to their turns to speak (BRUNEAU & ISHII, 1988); 2. silence-phenomena as interdependent with noise, sound, movement or language (KURZON, 1998); 3. the affective arousals and (or) I-positions activated while experiencing silence-phenomena (LEHMANN, 2018). This first round of coding was done manually by highlighting and writing notes from the printed transcripts and transcribing the preliminary codes and themes into a Microsoft Word file having separate columns for the data excerpts and analytical remarks. Then, the word files were printed and the preliminary codes and themes were revisited to achieve greater abstraction of the categorization before moving towards the interindividual analysis. Whilst undertaking the preliminary thematic analysis and abstraction of codes, the teacher-researcher collected another set of data to address the question of how enduring the impact of the class was a year after each of the courses was finished. She contacted those study participants via e-mail to follow up in this regard, and to also clarify information arising from the preliminary thematic analysis. [19]

5.4 Study participants: First *interindividual* movement

Having created preliminary intraindividual codes and themes for each of the eight cases under study, and due to the richness of the data, the study focused on the four cases (two diaries per class) whose narratives diverged the most in terms of making sense about silence-phenomena and poetry in the context of the class. One strategy for achieving generalizations in case study research is focusing on the richness of individual differences, and thus, amplifying the variability of cases (VALSINER, 2015). As shown in Table 1, 128 of the entries written by Karin, Dana, Dario and Marcia (these pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants) were considered for analysis among the total entries that these students wrote at class over the 15 days of the course, plus e-mail correspondence. In the present study, the students filled out the diaries in the mornings during the silent time, in the afternoons as part of the structure of the course, and sometimes during the day as the result of the students' own initiatives. These entries were categorized by frequency, independent of their length. Some questions that guided this selection were: Which study participants present more contrasting experiences? Which cases diverge the most in terms of meaning-making processes and the meaning outcomes? Which cases diverge the most in the ways in which feelings and emotions are portrayed? The preliminary codes and themes from the selected cases were transcribed into separate Excel sheets at this point.

Occasions	Study participants	class 2015	Study participants	class 2016
	Karin	Dana	Dario	Marcia
Silent time	12	14	14	14
Poems in silent time	10	1	0	6
Day reflections	3	4	8	9
Afternoon reflections	6	8	3	8
E-mail follow ups	1	3	2	2
Subtotal	22	30	27	30
Number of entries selected for analysis (out of total entries)				128

Table 1: The number of journal entries selected for analysis [20]

After selecting these four cases, the preliminary codes were revisited and themes derived from the journal transcripts were examined through the lenses of these theoretically driven themes: the *internalization of silence-phenomena and poetry* and *the meanings and effects of silence-phenomena*. The main goal was to explore the affective processes that appeared in relation to these themes, and more specifically, whether these themes purposefully evoked a process orientation. The first theme regards the internalization of silence-phenomena and poetry through exploring the process of the co-constructive negotiation of meanings (VALSINER, 2009). This is about the ways the students made sense of their experiences within the context of the teaching goals of this university course. The second theme concerns what happens after the students embrace and reflect upon silent experiences in contrast with their own expectations and imagination, which conveys a sense of directionality to the meanings they gave to silence-phenomena. In addition, we generated theoretically-driven subthemes after working with the preliminary codes from the data. Some of these included *silence-phenomena and self-exploration*, *silence-phenomena and the acceptance of the uncertainty of life* and *silence-phenomena as room for affective experience*. [21]

5.5 Ethical considerations

Informed consent in writing was obtained by the first author prior to conducting the study. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participants' identities were ensured. The coordinators of the course (that the first author was teaching) approved data collection, given that the data were related to the class topics, that students already used journals for reflecting on the context of these courses. Following the teacher-researcher's information session, the students voluntarily signed a consent form and agreed to donate their journals after the class was over and after they had received their corresponding grades. In addition, this research project received approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) on 12 November 2014. [22]

6. Exploring Silence-Phenomena Through *Developmentally Oriented Thematic Analysis*

6.1 State- and process-oriented narratives: Second *intraindividual* movement

When conducting the intraindividual analysis of the four case studies in focus, based on the journal entries of the study participants, we identified both state-oriented and developmentally oriented narratives. We did so by writing the data analysis from each case study separately, following the theoretically driven themes, as well as any other emergent themes. For example, these are some of the state-oriented narratives in Dario's case. This one corresponds to the theme of *the internalization of silence-phenomena and poetry*.

> "I find it really romantic, almost poetic (...) to take a look at the vastness of the universe, helps me putting in context how futile and meaningless are certain problems of the mankind :) And I would say, the outer space is quite silent" (Dario, follow up, pp.12-13). [23]

Let us explore another example. One morning we watched a video of the performance of 4:33 by John Cage (ZOOMOOZOPHONE, 2008). Here, the musician stays still in front of a piano, without playing, for four minutes and thirty-three seconds. Dario wrote:

> "Only the movements of the spectators make the scene more real (...) it gives the audience the possibility to focus on the background noise, highlighting the importance of looking around what surrounds us. Silence is awkward and overwhelming because we are attending to something new and for some reason unexpected (...) time is subjective and few minutes can seem an infinite time when living in an awkward moment" (Dario, silent time, Day 3, p.4). [24]

This excerpt was categorized into the theme *the meanings and effects of silence-phenomena* and the subtheme *silence-phenomena and self-exploration*. In both excerpts, Dario is providing some philosophical reflections on the silent and poetic qualities of the human condition. [25]

In addition to a state-oriented analysis of the data, when the narratives of the study participants conveyed a process-oriented insight into meaning-making, we proceeded to put the excerpts into a table, listing the sentences in the order in which the study participants wrote them by separating them with letters (e.g., [t1], [t2], [t3], [t4], [t5], [t6]). This facilitated the analysis of the data, as one can refer to each time sequence when interpreting or theorizing the results. The first author of this article wrote down her analytical remarks of the data in a separate column. Table 2 shows one of Dario's developmentally oriented narratives corresponding to the theme the *meanings and effects of silence-phenomena* and the subtheme *silence-phenomena as a room for affective experience*. As the excerpt continues, Dario's writing process appears to be an effort to make sense of a silent eye-gazing experience with one of his classmates for four minutes. For instance, Dario noticed how his attention was shifting outwards towards the other person or the noises of the environment [t3], as well as inwards by engaging in a self-exploration process of his impulses and somehow undifferentiated affective categories, such as "quite uncomfortable" or "sense of imperfection" [t2, t4, t5]. This sense of imperfection appears, as well as a somehow undifferentiated description of his own self-exploration process, which gives an account of the implicit realizations of the unfinished and imperfect nature of the human condition. That is, as soon as Dario noticed he felt "quite uncomfortable" [t2] and sensed a "sense of imperfection" [t5], he is implicitly recalled not only existential layers of meaning-making, but also their affective significance.

Participant's entry	Analytical remarks
[t1] Staring at each other's eyes was *completely unexpected* in today's silent time.	Rupture of expectations
[t2] At the beginning, I found it *quite uncomfortable* and I felt the need to do something else with my hand as movements.	Wanting to avoid engagement in the experience due to uncomfortable feelings
[t3] *Environmental noises and laughter easily distracted us* and changed our experience. There were a few moments like this.	External noise as distractor
[t4] I tried to read her through the eyes but it was hard. I felt like her eyes were deeply penetrating and could read my thoughts.	Self-consciousness about the interaction; imagining the other
[t5] I felt a sense of imperfection.	Experience of vulnerability

Table 2: Dario's reconstruction of the eye-gazing experience (Silent time, Day 7, p.6, emphasis added) [26]

6.2 State- and process-oriented narratives: Second *interindividual* movement

To follow the interindividual analysis of the cases, we revisited the theoretically driven and the emergent themes from all the cases, looking for possibilities for re-organization. After having revisited all themes and subthemes, we moved on to a further theorization of the data analysis, looking at the implications of the data and possible generalizations. We did so by "braiding" each of the cases in the interindividual analysis one by one. That is, we interweaved the intraindividual analysis of the second case with the first one; the third one with the second and first; and the fourth one with the third, second and first. However, due to the length limits of this article, we exemplify just the comparison between Dario and Dana's cases. Table 3 presents an excerpt from Diana's diary entry, in which she provides a process-oriented description of her experiences while watching 4:33's performance (ZOOMOOZOPHONE, 2008):

Participant's entry	Analytical remark
[t1] Our own thoughts can make the world and our life enough colorful and *full of emotions, even in the absence of noise and external distractions*.	Contrast between external and internal stimuli
[t2] Silence helps to *get closer to ourselves* and to *get to know ourselves in a better way*.	Silence-phenomena as self-exploration
[t3] *I felt disappointed* that I didn't hear anything and *I had to think about my own stuff instead* of enjoying the good music.	Contrast between external silence and internal noise/voices
[t4] Expectations ≠ reality	Contrast between expectations and reality

Table 3: Example of Dana's self-exploration of silence-phenomena (Silent time, Day 2, pp.1-2, emphasis added) [27]

In [t3], Dana provides an account of the simultaneous coexistence of layers of meaning-making and the affective processes that form them. That is, she is feeling disappointed in a twofold sense. On the one hand, she is disappointed because she did not listen to any sounds in the musical performance. On the other hand, she is also disappointed because of the attentional shift that such a silent setting catalyzed and by the awareness of her "own stuff" or the inner speech she was undergoing. Similar to Dario, such a silent experience also enabled Dana to engage in a self-exploration process. In this process, she moves from interpretations about silence-phenomena ([t1] and [t2]), to the specifics of the video ([t3]) and from there to the generalization that expectations differ from reality ([t4]). This, at the same time, enables her to acknowledge other settings where the feeling of uncertainty guides her to stay quiet until she finds her way. It is possible that the contrast between her expectations and her actual experience

at class have elicited memories of different experiences of uncertainty, as well as memories of the way Dana has silenced herself to solve them in the past, as she specified in other entries of her journal. Such a self-exploration also indicates that the video of CAGE's silent performance (ZOOMOOZOPHONE, 2008) enhanced an attentional shift. Yet, while for Dario, such a video promoted a turn of the attentional foci outwards—towards external noises and movements—for Dana, it promoted a shift inwards—towards inner speech and memories. When recalling statements about the ways she related to uncertainty and the contrast between expectations and reality, Dana is also pointing implicitly towards the human condition and, in doing so, towards existential and not just experiential layers of meaning-making. [28]

7. Discussion

Journal entries and other types of qualitative data might be rich enough to evidence both state-oriented and process-oriented nuances of meaning-making. As our data suggests, focusing on process-oriented narratives gives account of different levels of differentiation of affective processes. These levels of differentiation vary from the perception of an affective arousal, to the categorization of emotions, or the recognition of the impossibility to label such an arousal into specific words (BRANCO & VALSINER, 2010). In particular, the journal entries indicate degrees of ambiguity and (or) ambivalence in such process of differentiation (e.g., "quite uncomfortable," "sense of imperfection," "awkward," or "overwhelming"). That is, rather than identifying with a particular emotion, the participants indicate the directionalities of such affective arousals, and the ways in which these directionalities appear in tension or not with different positionings of the self or belief systems. There are at least two aspects of these findings to be considered further. First, such tension between positionings of the self gives account of the multi-layered quality of affective processes, which we have introduced theoretically in this article. Second, the directionalities of such mental activity in relation to affective processes resemble notions such as polyvalence (BOESCH, 2007) or polyphony (LEHMANN, 2018). In a nutshell, the polyvalence of actions indicates the plurality of intentions or directionalities that coexist, while polyphony indicates the tension that emerges when the directionalities are opposing or have diverging trajectories. Further theoretical developments could address better integrating these notions in relation to affective processes, and their implications for meaning-making and decision making. [29]

Process-oriented accounts also show the development of self-exploration that human beings might undergo when making sense of an experience that brings in contrast and uncertainty. For instance, Dana uses linguistic labels such as "awkward" or "overwhelming" to describe silence-phenomena and aspects of affective processes that evoke tension. Indeed, silence-phenomena can be experienced as awkward or overwhelming, as they open up a phenomenological space of possibilities for the future. When relating to the unknown, silence-phenomena can amplify the perceptions of tension and uncertainty, which are at the same time an existential given (ibid.). Thus, while engaging in a process of

self-exploration through silent time, Dario and Dana are making sense not only of silence-phenomena, but also of the human condition, such as recognizing the uncertainty of life, they are implicitly recalling some existential layers of meaning-making, such as enlarging one's perspective on problems or relating to uncertainty by also contrasting one's own expectations (ibid.). This is so since ambiguity is not something one needs to resolve, but rather something with which one can learn to coexist (DE BEAUVOIR, 2011 [1947]). In a similar vein of thought, the ambiguity and the overwhelming quality of some silent experiences can relate to the levels of differentiation of the affective arousals in the stream of consciousness. That is, recognizing an affective arousal and actually being able to identify with an emotional category are different levels of semiotic regulation of affect (BRANCO & VALSINER, 2010). We further interpret the ambiguity that might characterize narratives that are alike in terms of the uncertainty that characterizes meaning-making processes and that demonstrate the limitations of linguistic systems to clarify the multilayered quality of affect (LEHMANN, 2018). It is possible that such ambiguity and uncertainty actually give account of the simultaneous coexistence of affective arousals and I-positions in the stream of consciousness, of which the participant is trying to make sense while journaling (ibid.). [30]

In addition, we identified that silence-phenomena, due to the contrast they induce, promote attentional shifts. Both the narratives of Dario and Dana reflect their efforts to make sense of the unexpected aspects of such a silent setting by becoming aware of the attentional shifts taking place in their stream of consciousness (e.g. towards external noises in Dario, or towards inner speech in Dana). In this sense, one of the main functions of silence-phenomena is that of enhancing attention (ibid.), which is a higher psychological function not sufficiently investigated in cultural psychology, as much as others such as creativity, imagination or memory (WAGONER, 2017; ZITTOUN & GLAVEANU, 2016). [31]

8. Conclusion

In this article, we provided an overview of the use of thematic analysis, case study research and microgenetic analysis in cultural psychology and offered a developmentally oriented approach to thematic analysis as an integrative approach to study journal entries among other types of qualitative data. This is because DOTA provides room to explore both state-oriented and process-oriented aspects of qualitative data. In doing so, we have shown that when the intra- and inter-individual analysis are incorporated into thematic analysis, can be a viable method for cultural psychology due to its explicit developmental and idiographic orientation to the phenomena in question on a research process. In a similar vein, we have also attempted to make the microgenetic analysis, which appears theoretically as the most faithful approach to studying human development in cultural psychology, more accessible for researchers. We suggest that this allows room for a more explicit focus on the methodology cycle, when conducting analysis of data similar to that which we illustrated in this article. In addition, we have highlighted some possibilities for integrating affective

processes and meaning-making in their processual and multi-layered nature, which, in close connection with developmental theories, helps researchers represent and analyze the complexity of psychological functions. We hope that more researchers befriend premises of cultural psychology and case study research by using DOTA as a method to study the process of meaning-making. [32]

By means of presenting silence-phenomena as a magnifying glass to study the tensions that form affective processes, we have suggested pathways for cultural psychology to advance the theoretical exploration of affective processes, in different degrees of differentiation, which reflect the possibilities and boundaries of linguistic systems to give account of the complexity of psychological functions. In this article we have argued for the multi-layered and processual nature of meaning making, by also suggesting a process-oriented qualitative analysis. This was done by means of highlighting that when studying the processes of meaning-making of experience, one is—either explicitly or implicitly—approaching layers of existential meaning-making as well. Silence-phenomena enhance attentional shifts, either outwards or inwards; therefore, they bring in possibilities of self-exploration, where the ambiguity and uncertain character of the human condition is also embraced. These multi-layered aspects of meaning-making on which silence-phenomena shed light could also be further approached in the development of qualitative methodologies, and theories in psychology as well. [33]

We have given some methodological considerations for a developmentally oriented approach to thematic analysis that can be used by psychologists or any other researchers interested in the developmental nature of meaning-making when analyzing narrative accounts, such as interview transcripts, pieces of literature or journal entries. In some cases, the data we gather as researchers are valid to answer our research questions, but they are not strictly as processual as are others. DOTA enhances the quality of analysis with its developmental and idiographic orientation, enabling researchers to assess both statements that appear as outcomes of a meaning-making process, as well as those that demonstrate the process in the making, which aligns with the theoretical tenets of cultural psychology. Thus, DOTA emphasizes the possibilities of looking into the process of meaning-making and its multilayered nature. Yet, a great part of the success of this method of analysis comes from shaping theoretically driven themes that evoke process-oriented aspects of meaning-making, decision making or value adding. By evoking future-in-the-making and the intentionality of acts. One of the limitations of this approach, as it is the case for a great part of research focusing on affective processes, is that the written accounts from the participants can oscillate between perceptions about personal reflections, representations of affective processes and disclosure of affective processes in themselves. One opportunity for improving this approach could be to better theoretically integrate the notions of intentionality, directionality, polyvalence and polyphony, which might give account of the multi-layered nature of the mind, and the complexity of affective processes in relation to the tensions that such diverse directionalities evoke in a person who is trying to make sense of a particular experience, or of existence in general. Further research could consider

alternating between journaling and interviewing, or even recording parts of the class carried out in other settings. [34]

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