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Book Review

Harding, Jamie. 2013. *Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish*. London: Sage

Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish is a scholarly and significant work which attempts to provide researchers, especially novice researchers, with the experience of qualitative data analysis. The need for an expansion of *qualitative data analysis* beyond a mere theoretical interest in research disciplines has long been recognized, and *Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish* has already been introduced as a procedure for step-by-step instructions for those "who have wanted guidance as to how analyze qualitative data" (p. 2). Concerned with the issues of understanding qualitative data analysis, Jamie Harding has presented a general overview of qualitative research as his starting point. He manages to touch upon features, modes, types, and techniques of conducting and analyzing qualitative research while providing examples and exercises to put the researchers well on the way of making accurate judgments in their studies. As the title implies, the volume is an invaluable contribution to *analytic status of qualitative research from start to finish*, including 10 chapters.

The first chapter illustrates a broad image of topical areas of qualitative research and focuses on the points of relationships between steps of establishing qualitative research. Harding touches upon concepts of the structure of the book, the interviews and focus groups, introduction to data analysis, validity, and definition. In fact, the introductory chapter elaborates the content of each chapter of the book in a step-by-step fashion, and on this basis the author provides a brief description of each chapter. His intention is to provide fairly coherent and elaborate considerations about next chapters so that he can go on to analyze and discuss them later. Harding ends the final section of the chapter with a recap of key definitions that are used in later chapters.

With this general conceptual framework, chapter 2 illustrates more specifically the factors and decisions that affect the earlier stages of the research process. Like some other scholars (e.g., Holliday 2002), Harding highlights underlying principles of qualitative and quantitative approaches in establishing research, as well as considerations about mixed methods and critical research. Moreover, he touches upon the concept of methodology and decisions about deductive and inductive research approaches. According to Jamie Harding, "the theory to be tested, research question(s) to be answered, or research objective(s) to be met by a study should be reflected in the design" (p. 15). In this way, he starts elaborating on research designs which include ethnography and case studies, sampling, negotiating access, maximizing responses, as well as forms of data collection. In the final section of the chapter, he provides fairly coherent and elaborate considerations of the ethical issues and researcher's moral responsibility to conduct social research ethically.

Chapter 3 on practicality of data collection may be especially useful for novice researchers as the author has provided good pieces of advices for them. "Collecting data through interviews and focus groups" (p. 170), as two forms of qualitative data collection, are considered as initial steps in conducting qualitative research. Face-to-face, telephone, and online data are introduced as modes of data collection in this chapter. In his detailed discussion of data collection, Harding provides a basis for deeper and broader understanding of data collection and moderating a focus group. Following the explanations, the author indicates the importance of pilot study, both for interviews and focus groups. He discusses the importance of a pilot study aimed at reducing the amount of flawed data, on the one hand, and that of difficulty of pilot focus group research, on the other. Finally, he draws the attention of his readers to the advantages and disadvantages of recording and transcription of interviews and focus group data. Perhaps the most valuable and most interesting strategy that Harding uses in this chapter is showing similarities and differences between collecting data through interviews and focus groups.

The next three chapters deal with analyzing interview data, from the very beginning, when the researcher uses observation, interview, focus group, et cetera, to look at the gathered data, up to the time s/he can identify the integral outcomes of the research. Chapter 4 focuses on two processes including making summaries and the use of the constant comparative method. In this way, Harding admirably provides his readers with "the processes which can assist in the identification of themes running different transcripts" (p. 56). By making summaries, he explains how to reduce the full transcript to a summary of about one paper, and by constant comparative method, he indicates how to identify two cases based on their possible similarities and differences. Jamie Harding used many easy-to-understand examples and exercises which can help learners in the first stages of data gathering. Along with valuable exercises, he adopts a three-step approach to the constant comparative method, which involves: making a list of similarities and differences between the first two cases to be considered; amending the list as further cases are added to the analysis; and identifying research findings once all of the cases have been included in the analysis. Then, the author refers to the concept of decision-making in qualitative research and the fact that the researcher's judgment will lead to one's subjective decision-making.

In chapter 5, the author "introduces codes as an important tool for conducting a comprehensive thematic analysis of an issue" (p. 82). After briefly portraying the context of using codes in qualitative research, as well as a distinction between a priori codes and empirical codes, the author

covers the idea of using codes to analyze an illustrative issue by suggesting a four-step process. The process involves a scrutiny of: identifying initial categories based on reading the transcripts; writing codes alongside the transcripts; reviewing the list of codes; revising the list of categories and deciding which codes should appear in which category; and looking for themes and findings in each category. Identifying categories following the reading of transcripts and providing a list of categories are discussed as the initial step for the coding process. This stage is almost too time-consuming, in which the researcher should provide the initial list of categories in order to sort the gathered data of qualitative research. The second step in coding process deals with writing codes and transcripts, which includes summarizing, selecting, and interpreting codes in qualitative research. The author believes that in the selecting stage, the qualitative researcher gets involved in a difficult decision-making process about how to either treat their findings or exclude them from the qualitative research. Revisiting the lists of codes and categories is the main discussion of the third stage of the coding process. In fact, "This third stage of the coding process is central to the search for commonality" (p. 92). The author explains how finding connection between codes and similar themes can be helpful for novice researchers in a step which shapes one of the most important steps for qualitative researchers. In stage four, Harding elaborates on identifying findings and explains that the aim of this stage is the thematic analysis of findings, which includes examining commonality and differences, as well as relationships between factors. To further lay the foundation of his analyses in

this chapter, Harding appreciates exercises and examples among each stage.

More elaborate discussions on conceptual themes are presented by Jamie Harding in chapter 6, where characteristics of conceptual themes are discussed. As to the importance of conceptual themes in qualitative research, the author goes on to assert that a conceptual theme *is*, in fact, a finding in its own right—because it is a commonality which depends on the ability of the researcher to see something that may exist behind the surface of what is said. In this chapter, data memos and tables are considered as helpful tools in qualitative research; the former can be used as a tool to note emerging ideas and the latter can be helpful to identify patterns of response. Harding also reminds the researchers to keep a record of main decisions made in data analysis. He admirably provides his readers with an example of a four-step process for analyzing conceptual themes and identifying relationships between gathered data and categorization in order to build a theory, which covers a large amount of the chapter. The process involves: identifying the conceptual theme and creating a category; bringing together codes from different illustrative issues into the category; creating sub-categories to reflect different elements of the conceptual theme; using the conceptual theme to explain relationships between different parts of the data and to build theory. For a better discussion, each step is followed by data memos or tables and exercises.

Chapter 7 "provides an insight into some of the alternative methods of analyzing qualitative data"

(p. 128). The approaches involve deductive coding and analysis, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis. Much of Harding's writing on deductive coding and analysis is taken up with demonstrating a considerable view of application of a priori codes to data. Harding also exercises two feasible forms of narrative analysis, including thematic and structural narrative analysis. His concern about discourse analysis was to heighten the awareness of the role of language by providing a practical choice for novice researchers. Finally, Harding briefly discusses computer assisted qualitative data analysis (CAQDAS), as well as the advantages and disadvantages of specialist software programs such as NVivo. Unlike some other authors (e.g., Bazeley 2013), Harding does not take a critical glance at specialist computer software to see whether the use of such software will help or hinder the process of data collation. Considering the technology and the technology-related discussions in the field of qualitative research, such discussions are not highly prominent in this volume.

The distinction between specific features of focus groups and interviews is the major feature of Harding's qualitative perspective in chapter 8, in which he explores techniques for analyzing focus groups. In his discussion on the main lines of analyzing group data, Harding adopts broad working definitions of individual data analysis, group data analysis, and group interaction data analysis. The inclusion of examples, experts, and tables is helpful in expanding the ideas in this chapter. Moreover, he deals with the problem of validity. This is what Harding discusses in chapter 9, where he specifically concentrates on checking validity. Of

course, the author had to deal with the tough task of explaining validity problem. He could have grouped these parts in to a section in ways which would make it easier for the readers to establish conceptual links between the various aspects of validity.

Harding devotes two chapters specifically to writing qualitative research. In chapter 9, he deals with writing methodology and findings of qualitative research. In line with the broad perspective developed in the previous chapters, he discusses thoroughly the methods of validity. Throughout his discussion on writing methodology and then findings, based on sound reasoning and examples, he makes a strong case for the view that using individual examples and quotations, as well as presenting focus group data are essential in writing qualitative research. Having devoted a chapter to discussion on how to write methodology and the results of qualitative research, the author devotes the last chapter to two sections, including how to write literature and how to make links between the literature and research findings. In the concluding chapter of *Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish*, Harding recognizes the importance of the role of the qualitative research conclusion. In order to make this very clear for readers, he provides beneficial recommendations and examples, as well as exercises.

The precious insights presented in *Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish* would highly benefit novice researchers and students, as well as those who teach qualitative research. In his illuminating discussion on key concepts of qualitative data

analysis, Harding supports his ideas with a wide range of examples and exercises in order to pave the way for learners in qualitative data analysis. Moreover, beyond the context of each chapter, the readers of *Qualitative Data Analysis From Start to Finish* will find a well supported reference section including the rich references of recent publications in the field of qualitative research. It is surely a rich and scholarly work which is written in an easy-to-understand language by Jamie Harding. It should be read; for which I can only give a taste.

Acknowledgements

References

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