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Textbook Considerations for an MFT Qualitative Research PhD Course: The Relevance of Harding's Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish

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Abstract

Jamie Harding's (2013) *Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish* is a new, user-friendly book for beginning qualitative research students. The thrust of the book deals with analyzing qualitative data from interviews and focus groups. This reviewer considers the relevance of Harding's book for a Qualitative Research course in an MFT doctoral program.

Keywords

Qualitative Data Analysis, Qualitative Research Course, Interviews, FocusGroups

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Textbook Considerations for an MFT Qualitative Research PhD Course: The Relevance of Harding's *Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish*

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Jamie Harding's (2013) Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish is a new, user-friendly book for beginning qualitative research students. The thrust of the book deals with analyzing qualitative data from interviews and focus groups. This reviewer considers the relevance of Harding's book for a Qualitative Research course in an MFT doctoral program. Keywords: Qualitative Data Analysis, Qualitative Research Course, Interviews, Focus Groups

As an instructor in the Marriage and Family Therapy PhD program at Amridge University, I have the opportunity every spring semester to teach the course titled, "Theory and Methodology of Qualitative Research." As described in the University's Academic Catalog (2013):

This course provides an overview of the major modes of qualitative research. The underlying philosophical assumptions about knowledge associated with the various research modes will be investigated. The major strategies for collecting and analyzing relevant data will be studied.

Since this is the only qualitative research course in the program, my primary goals are to introduce students to the world of qualitative research and to facilitate their appreciation of the qualitative paradigm as a rigorous, worthwhile way to conduct scholarly research.

Currently, I utilize the following three textbooks: Robert K. Yin's (2011) *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, Douglas H. Sprenkle and Fred P. Piercy's (2005) *Research Methods in Family Therapy*, and Patricia L. Munhall and Ronald J. Chenail's (2008) *Qualitative Research Proposals and Reports: A Guide*. I utilize the qualitative chapters from Sprenkle and Piercy's text as a base to provide an overview of the major modes of qualitative research. I utilize Yin's text for the underlying assumptions about knowledge in qualitative research. And, I utilize Munhall and Chenail's text as a handy reference, especially for the students who plan to conduct qualitative research beyond the introductory course.

With that said, I've been searching for an informative, user-friendly textbook that addresses major strategies for collecting and analyzing qualitative data that is not necessarily connected to a specific qualitative methodology. Jamie Harding's (2013) *Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish* has piqued my interest in this regard. From the onset, Harding makes it clear that his emphasis is with analysis and presentation of qualitative data, as opposed to an extended description of qualitative methods such as grounded theory, phenomenology, action research, and ethnography. Howard writes:

This book was written largely because I have worked with many students, at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, who have wanted guidance as to how to analyse qualitative data. Being confronted with a set of transcripts from interviews, or the record of one or more focus groups, can create great

uncertainty as to what to do next. While acknowledging that there are no “correct” answers, this book will make suggestions as to how the analysis can be undertaken, using real data to provide examples and exercises. (p. 2)

After the introductory chapter and a brief second chapter addressing an overview of the qualitative paradigm, including a juxtaposition of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, Harding’s next six chapters provide an in-depth framework to analyze qualitative data particularly with interviews and focus groups. The book concludes with two chapters dealing with writing about qualitative research, including methodology, findings, and links to the literature review.

Harding’s in-depth discussion of analyzing data with interviews and focus groups is the underlying strength of the textbook. A novice qualitative student would not be intimidated with the contents of chapters three through eight because Harding has an easy to understand tone, along with a case study and a further reading section at the conclusion of each chapter. For instance, in chapter three, Harding discusses how to transcribe data from interviews and focus groups and whether to edit grammar or to include a full transcription. He provides examples for both ways (pp. 50-51).

Chapter five titled “Using Codes to Analyse an Illustrative Case” can be extremely helpful to beginning qualitative students learning how to conduct a thematic analysis. The four steps include identifying initial categories based upon the transcripts; writing codes in the margins; reviewing, revising, and deciding how to categorize the codes; and searching for themes and findings (pp. 83-104). Harding provides exercises for the reader to practice conducting each of the four steps.

Although, as a whole being impressed with the book, I was somewhat disappointed with chapter two titled “Beginning the Study.” Granted, Harding’s clearly intended focus of the book deals with analyzing qualitative data. And, the second chapter’s goal is for the reader to “consider some of the reasons for choosing a qualitative approach rather than a quantitative one” (p. 8). However, after reading the second chapter, I was not “sold” on the ideology of qualitative research. I am not staunchly opposed to quantitative methodologies, and I appreciate the role mixed methods can have in marriage and family therapy research. However, I would have preferred a more purist stance on the value and advantages of qualitative research in contrast to quantitative research.

Finally, as I select required readings for a course, I also try to be sensitive to the cost. The Yin and Sprenkle and Piercy textbooks are available at no cost to the Amridge students via the University’s comprehensive library services. The Munhall and Chenail textbook is approximately \$35, and the Harding textbook is approximately \$35. So, although there would be four required textbooks, the total cost is significantly under \$100.

Despite having approximately five more months to make an official decision, I am likely going to add Harding’s *Qualitative Data Analysis from Start to Finish* as a required textbook for my Qualitative Research course at Amridge University. Do you agree with that decision? Or, do you have any other suggestions? I welcome your feedback.

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Author Note

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