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The Coding Manual for Qualitative Research: A Review

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Abstract

This book review comments on the second edition of Saldaña's (2013) *Coding Manual for Qualitative Research*. This review discusses the benefits of using this text as a qualitative coding guide and also discusses some perceived limitations. This review is intended to help researchers who are in the process of selecting qualitative coding reference texts.

Keywords

Qualitative, Coding, Qualitative Coding Software

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The Coding Manual for Qualitative Research: A Review

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This book review comments on the second edition of Saldaña's (2013) Coding Manual for Qualitative Research. This review discusses the benefits of using this text as a qualitative coding guide and also discusses some perceived limitations. This review is intended to help researchers who are in the process of selecting qualitative coding reference texts. Keywords: Qualitative, Coding, Qualitative Coding Software

The Coding Manual for Qualitative Research (Saldaña, 2013) is the second edition of Jonny Saldaña's international bestseller, providing an in-depth sequential guide to numerous qualitative coding approaches for novice and veteran qualitative researchers alike. The second edition differs from the first in that it provides more chapters, coding techniques and an additional glossary. The book is 301 pages long and contains six chapters, a glossary, references and computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) profiles in the section on analyzing visual data (pp. 25-32). The six detailed chapters (1) "An Introduction to Codes and Coding," (2) "Writing Analytic Memos," (3) "First Cycle Coding," (4) "After First Cycle Coding," (5) "Second Cycle Coding Methods," and (6) "After Second Cycle Coding" elaborately describe how to begin a qualitative research project from start to finish. Chapters 1-2 introduce the reader to qualitative research defining the term "code," what it means to begin "coding," how to code data and how to write analytic memos on data to organize data sets. Chapter 3 outlines first cycle coding methods, detailing twenty-five coding approaches. Chapter 4 discusses post-coding transitions first cycle coding mapping and landscaping. Chapter 5 outlines six second-cycle coding approaches, advanced ways to reorganize and reanalyze the data (if needed). Chapter 6 offers recommendations for post-coding and pre-writing. Additionally, each of the thirty-one qualitative coding methods discussed (in Chapter 3 "First Cycle Coding Methods" and Chapter 5 "Second Cycle Coding Methods") follow the same organizational format, listing sources, descriptions, applications, examples and a detailed analysis section.

The book's second edition (Saldaña, 2013) takes the reader through the "ins and outs" of qualitative data analysis beginning with an illustrative depiction of the curious mind of the researcher (coding as a heuristic), to codifying and categorizing, recoding and recategorizing and ending with data analysis. Saldaña cleverly weaves each chapter to clearly follow the preceding chapter allowing the reader to understand the patience, time, and consecutive revisions entailed by qualitative coding. After reading this text, I felt more assured of my own research and was able to understand, implement and follow my own action plan for coding my data. Most importantly, Saldaña provides multiple sources for coding approaches, helping the reader to value the unique attributes of each coding scheme and find the best coding approach for their data. As a novice qualitative researcher, I found the book to be very resourceful and easy to navigate, since each coding approach was followed by examples from Saldaña's students or his own research notes. I was able to use these personal examples to connect to my own intentions for my research project, selecting the coding approach best suited for aim of my research.

Saldaña's second edition is contemporary in its craft, including figures of current qualitative coding software (*NVivo*, *Atlas.ti* and *Wordle*) without neglecting more traditional qualitative coding (Manual Coding and coding approaches using *Microsoft Word* or *Xcel*

spreadsheets). For example, the CAQDAS section in Chapter 1 helped me understand how to use qualitative coding software like NVivo, but also demonstrated how the same coding processes can be employed using manual coding with pen and paper. Similarly, I found the subsequent chapters surrounding first and second cycle coding approaches (Chapters 4 and 6) to be especially helpful. The figures of code mapping and landscaping presented various ways for researchers to summarize and or present their data findings (e.g. versus coding for code mapping and the use of *Wordle* for code landscaping) for pre-writing ideas. I found myself turning to this text throughout the four years of my graduate studies as a reliable reference and, certainly, recommended it to colleagues.

There is much to be learned about coding from Saldaña, For starters, his text is not a single perspective coding tutorial. Instead, Saldaña helpfully points to other coding strategies and sources for further examples. For example, when discussing Dramaturgical coding (p.123), a naturalistic observational coding approach, the sources Bruce and Berg (2001), Feldman, (1995) and Goffman, (1978) are also listed as additional sources. The inclusion of additional sources is very useful during the writing stage of the research process giving the researcher more references to review for a clearer understanding of the specific coding process.

An area that could be improved upon in future releases is the lack of detail about how to code specific methodologies such as: discourse analysis, content analysis and semiotic analysis. While it can be argued that Saldaña does express (in his “Introduction”) that this manual is not intended to address qualitative research design or how to conduct interviews (p. 2), a novice researcher may need more guidance in their research design in order to be able to select the coding process most suitable for their research. For example, a novice researcher may have some difficulty navigating the text in the context of the other qualitative coding methods they have previously been exposed to. Where James Gee (2014) uses the term “discourse analysis,” (“little d” language in use), Saldaña may call the same data analysis process “Grammatical Coding”. Upon my first read, it took me awhile to figure out discourse analysis and grammatical coding could be seen as one in the same, thus, undermining the “entry level” feeling of the book. Someone might best understand this text with two or more qualitative methods courses under their belts.

Also, because *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Research* (Saldaña, 2013) provides 32 coding methods, profiles and analytic possibilities, the reader can become easily overwhelmed, not knowing which coding approach to use on their data. For example, when I first began my data analysis, I realized I had spent six months employing three different first cycle coding approaches, (*Descriptive coding*, *InVivo Coding* and *Process Coding*), realizing I should have begun second cycle coding or recoded my data according to one approach, not three. However, I do not feel the six months I spent trying different coding approaches was a ‘waste of time,’ because I was given a clear understanding of my data by doing so. Thus, I would advise readers to generate an action plan (timeline) to follow when using the text. Saldana reflects on the staggering abundance of the coding approaches discussed in his text stating, “This manual is intended primarily as a reference work. It is not necessarily meant to be read cover to cover” (2013, p. 3). As a qualitative researcher, I plan to keep this book as valuable reference point, not only for my future research but also in my future advisory roles as a university faculty member.

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