- Selecting the case requires that the researcher establish a rationale for his or her purposeful sampling strategy for selecting the case and for gathering information about the case.

- Having enough information to present an in-depth picture of the case limits the value of some case studies. In planning a case study, I have individuals develop a data collection matrix in which they specify the amount of information they are likely to collect about the case.

- Deciding the "boundaries" of a case—how it might be constrained in terms of time, events, and processes—may be challenging. Some case studies may not have clean beginning and ending points, and the researcher will need to work with contrived boundaries.

THE FIVE TRADITIONS COMPARED

From these sketches of the five traditions, I can identify fundamental differences among these types of qualitative research. As shown in Table 4.1, I present several dimensions for distinguishing among the five. At a most fundamental level, the five differ in what they are trying to accomplish—their foci or the primary objectives of the studies. Exploring a life is different from generating a theory or describing the behavior of a cultural group. Moreover, although overlaps exist in discipline origin, some traditions have single-disciplinary traditions (e.g., grounded theory originating in sociology, ethnography founded in anthropology or sociology), and others have a broad interdisciplinary evolution (e.g., biography, case study). The data collection varies in terms of emphasis (e.g., more observations in ethnography, more interviews in grounded theory) and extent of data collection (e.g., only interviews in phenomenology, multiple forms in case study research to provide the in-depth case picture). At the data analysis stage, the differences are most marked. Not only is the distinction one of specificity of the analysis phase (e.g., grounded theory most specific, biography less well defined), but the number of steps to be undertaken also varies (e.g., extensive steps in phenomenology, few steps in ethnography). The result of each tradition, its narrative form, takes shape from all the processes before it. A detailed picture of an individual's life forms a biography; a description of the

TABLE 4.1 Dimensions for Comparing Five Research Traditions in Qualitative Research

Dimension	Biography	Phenomenology	Grounded Theory	Ethnography	Case Study
Focus	• Exploring the life of an individual	• Understanding the essence of experiences about a phenomenon	• Developing a theory grounded in data from the field	• Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group	• Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases
Discipline origin	• Anthropology • Literature • History • Psychology • Sociology	• Philosophy, sociology, Psychology	• Sociology	• Cultural anthropology Sociology	• Political science, sociology, evaluation, urban studies, other social sciences
Data collection	• Primarily interviews and documents	• Long interviews with up to 10 people	• Interviews with 20-30 individuals to "saturate" categories and detail a theory	• Primarily observations and interviews with additional artifacts during extended time in the field (e.g., 6 months to a year)	• Multiple sources - documents, archival records, interviews, observations, physical artifacts
Data analysis	• Stories • Epiphanies • Historical content	• Statements • Meanings • Meaning themes • General description of the experience	• Open coding • Axial coding • Selective coding • Conditional matrix	• Description • Analysis • Interpretation	• Description • Themes • Assertions
Narrative form	• Detailed picture of an individual's life	• Description of the "essence" of the experience	• Theory or theoretical model	• Description of the cultural behavior of a group or an individual	• In-depth study of a "case" or "cases"

essence of the experience of the phenomenon becomes a phenomenology; a theory, often portrayed in a visual model, emerges in grounded theory; a holistic view of a social-cultural group or system results in an ethnography; and an in-depth study of a bounded system or a case (or several cases) becomes a case study.

In a comparison of the five traditions, two issues of overlap that need clarification arise. The first issue is that an apparent overlap exists between an ethnography and a case study. In the former, we examine a cultural system; in the latter, we examine a bounded system. Thus, confusion exists when studying both as systems. In my mind, however, there are some fundamental differences. In an ethnography, an entire cultural or social system is the focus of attention (except in a microethnography). In a case study, on the other hand, a system of people is typically not the case. In case study research, one works with a smaller unit such as a program, an event, an activity, or individuals and explores a range of topics, only one of which might be cultural behavior, language, or artifacts. Furthermore, in an ethnography, the researcher studies a culture-sharing group using anthropological concepts (e.g., myths, stories, rituals, social structure). These concepts may or may not be present in a case study.

The second issue of overlap arises when one studies an individual. In a biography, the researcher studies a single individual; in a case study, either a single individual or a number of individuals may be the case. Although it certainly is possible to conduct a case study of a single individual, I only recommend such a practice when the researcher can obtain substantial contextual material about the individual (e.g., the individual's family, daily life, work life). For the researcher desiring to study a single individual, I recommend a biographical approach. More accepted, I believe, are case studies of several individuals, usually three or four, in which one can establish depth through both within- and among-case analysis.

Regardless of overlap, relating the dimensions of Table 4.1 to research design within the five traditions will be the focus of chapters to follow. But it might be useful at this point to take the narrative form I have described in general terms and suggest a preliminary structure for the content of a study within each of the five traditions. As shown in Table 4.2, I advance an outline for each type of study. These outlines may be used in designing a journal article-length study; however, because of the numerous steps in each, they also have applicability as

TABLE 4.2   Reporting Approaches for Each Tradition

Reporting Approaches	Biography	Phenomenology	Grounded Theory	Ethnography	Case Study
General structure of study	• Introduction (problem, questions) • Research procedures (a biography, significance of individual, data collection, analysis outcomes) • Report of objective experiences • Individuals theorize about their lives • Narrative segments identified • Patterns of meaning identified (events, processes, epiphanies, themes) • Summary (Adapted from Denzin, 1989a, 1989b)	• Introduction (problem, questions) • Research procedures (a phenomenology and philosophical assumptions, data collection, analysis, outcomes) • Significant statements • Meanings of statements • Themes of meanings • Exhaustive description of phenomenon (Adapted from Moustakas, 1994)	• Introduction (problem, questions) • Research procedures (grounded theory, data collection, analysis, outcomes) • Open coding • Axial coding • Selective coding and theoretical propositions and models • Discussion of theory and contrasts with extant literature (Adapted from Strauss & Corbin, 1990)	• Introduction (problem, questions) • Research procedures (ethnography, data collection, analysis, outcomes) • Description of culture • Analysis of cultural themes • Interpretation, lessons learned, questions raised (Adapted from Wolcott, 1994b)	• Entry vignette • Introduction (problem, questions, case study, data collection, analysis, outcomes) • Description of the case(s) and its (their) context • Development of issues • Detail about selected issues • Assertions • Closing vignette (Adapted from Stake, 1995)

NOTE: Table shows general structure of study. Bulleted points might be a separate section in a journal article or book or a separate chapter in a dissertation.

chapters of a dissertation or a book-length work. I introduce them here because the reader, with an introductory knowledge of each tradition, now can sketch the general "architecture" of a study. Certainly, this architecture will emerge and be shaped differently by the conclusion of the study, but it provides a framework for the design issues to follow. I recommend these outlines as general templates at this time.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I took the reader through each of my five traditions—biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study—and identified a definition for the tradition, offered a few remarks about origin and history of the type, specified varieties within the tradition, and detailed useful procedures for conducting the form of research. Finally, I identified challenges for individuals choosing each form of qualitative research. In concluding the chapter, I presented a matrix of dimensions on which the five traditions differ: focus, discipline origin, data collection, data analysis, and final narrative outcome of the study. Finally, I went one step further about the narrative outcome and suggested and advanced outlines for drafting a study within each tradition.

▼ ADDITIONAL READINGS

Several readings extend this brief overview of each of the five traditions of inquiry. The two books by Denzin (1989a, 1989b) provide the interpretive biographical perspective. For a more traditional approach to biographical writings, see Bowen (1969), Plummer (1983), Lomask (1986), Angrosino (1989a), and Barzun and Graff (1992). A procedural guide to the more traditional biographical approach is found in Helling (1988).

Angrosino, M. V. (1989a). *Documents of interaction: Biography, autobiography, and life history in social science perspective.* Gainesville: University of Florida Press.

Barzun, J., & Graff, H. (1992). *The modern researcher* (5th ed.). New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Bowen, C. D. (1969). *Biography: The craft and the calling.* Boston: Little, Brown.

Denzin, N. K. (1989a). *Interpretive biography.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. (1989b). *Interpretive interactionism.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Helling, I. K. (1988). The life history method: A survey and discussion with Norman K. Denzin. *Studies in Symbolic Interaction, 9,* 211-243.

Lomask, M. (1986). *The biographer's craft.* New York: Harper & Row.

Plummer, K. (1983). *Documents of life: An introduction to the problems and literature of a humanistic method.* London: George Allen and Unwin.

For phenomenology, a solid grounding in the philosophical assumptions is essential, and one might examine Husserl (1931, 1970), Merleau-Ponty (1962), Natanson (1973), and Stewart and Mickunas (1990) for this background. I feel that the best procedural discussions of psychological phenomenology are found in Giorgi (1985), Polkinghorne (1989), and Moustakas (1994), with additional remarks in Van Kaam (1966), Colaizzi (1978), Spiegelberg (1982), Dukes (1984), Oiler (1986), and Tesch (1990). Giorgi (1985) in psychology and Tesch (1990) in education provide useful references to specific phenomenological studies.

Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. Vaile & M. King (Eds.), *Existential phenomenological alternatives for psychology* (pp. 48-71). New York: Oxford University Press.

Dukes, S. (1984). Phenomenological methodology in the human sciences. *Journal of Religion and Health, 23,* 197-203.

Giorgi, A. (Ed.). (1985). *Phenomenology and psychological research.* Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Husserl, E. (1931). *Ideas: General introduction to pure phenomenology* (D. Carr, Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.