

Framing a Dissertation Study Through a Research Tradition

Chapter Purpose

This chapter marks a transition from discussing the dissertation more abstractly to outlining and detailing the first section of dissertation methodology: research design. First, the chapter briefly discusses how research paradigms inform research traditions in qualitative inquiry and then discusses in more depth the need to introduce and describe a research design at the outset of a methodological framework, including how research designs function and guide researchers in implementing studies in the field. The chapter moves to a discussion of how to connect research purpose and questions to an emerging research design. As a major area of focus, the chapter discusses major qualitative research traditions in the social and behavioral sciences—ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and case study—focusing on the historical development and current applications of the traditions in practice today. Detailing the focus, guiding principles, and procedures related to these traditions, these discussions offer sample research questions associated with each approach. The chapter ends with a presentation of sample discussions of research traditions in methodology sections of dissertation studies.

Chapter Objectives

- Discuss the relationship between research paradigms and research traditions in qualitative inquiry
- Describe the focus, guiding principles, and procedures of five major qualitative research traditions, including ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and case study
- Strategize about how to integrate research traditions across segments of a qualitative methodology chapter
- Think about how to conceptualize a research tradition section of the methodology chapter
- Identify approaches to organize and structure writing a research tradition section

Key Chapter Concepts

- Research paradigm
- Research design in qualitative inquiry
- Research tradition as a methodology chapter section
- Methodological integration

A Story About Research Traditions in Qualitative Dissertation Methodology

Recently, near the end of the spring semester, I opened my email and discovered a message from a student in the doctoral program. I had worked with this student as an instructor of an applied qualitative research class that I taught the previous fall semester. The message caught me a bit by surprise—probably the first time I had received a message with a specific request to discuss an issue with dissertation methodology as close to a proposal hearing as she was. Sure, I had discussed qualitative dissertation methodology with students with whom I had previously worked in class and certainly with my own advisees, but what was unique about her request is that she was asking me to help defend her use of a single qualitative procedure and, more generally, the application of a qualitative research design in her study to her dissertation chair. To be sure, she was not asking me to directly intervene in defense of her methodological choices. Rather, she was searching for support from another faculty member. Her search at such a late stage in her dissertation proposal development was a sign that she anticipated challenges to what she had proposed methodologically from her chair at her upcoming hearing.

I responded to this student's request to meet with hesitation. I generally do not cross advising boundaries by respecting the advisor–advisee relationship in the dissertation research process. Outside of contexts where I work with students on dissertation research methodology in class, I first tend to respond to students who approach me with questions about their design and methods with a question: Have you approached your chair about consulting me? Frequently, students have done so—and in the few cases where they have not, I ask them to send a quick email to their chairs to let them know that they plan to discuss an issue or two with me. In all cases, I generally advise students that what I share needs to be scrutinized by their chairs and negotiated within the advising relationship and/or committee contexts. In the case of the student who contacted me a few days before

her proposal hearing, this practice needed to be suspended. In her case, where she came to me in confidence and under duress, I set aside my usual collegial approach.

So here is the nature of this student's situation: Her advisor opposed her use of a single qualitative research tradition (phenomenological case study) and methods (semi-structured personal interviews), but she insisted that she needed to use this approach—given her research purpose and her student research expertise. The gist of her chair's argument opposing her qualitative research approach was this: Her study would be more robust with a survey research design, and she needed to triangulate her data with multiple methods. When the student raised her chair's issues about her study with me, my immediate reaction was to reassure her that she would—in all likelihood—move forward with her study as she had proposed. Worst-case scenario, I explained, would be to switch chairs or reconstitute your committee. But this was not the best way to resolve the immediate problem that she faced—in a matter of days—and would likely result in a delay for her study and frustration for her. We strategized about how she could secure her successful outcome at the hearing: the retention of her currently proposed research framework—in tact or with modifications consistent with the qualitative focus of her methodology. My first recommendation: Avoid an apologetic response for the use of qualitative research design and methods. Here, I'm reminded of what Peshkin (1993, p. 28) argued: "Many types of good results are the fruits of qualitative research. Its generative potential is immense." We discussed how qualitative research was good enough, that she did not need to use a mixed methods approach as her chair was recommending.

After listening to the student's concerns, I advised her to argue at her dissertation proposal hearing that her research problem, purpose, and questions begged for a qualitative approach for gathering and making sense of information; she would not be in a position to evaluate her research questions without doing so. There was a good fit between all of the components in her research framework (i.e., research problem, purpose, questions, design, and methods). Further, I advised her to argue that there are multiple approaches to ensure quality in qualitative research—that she did not need to "tack on" a survey to enhance her findings and recommendations at the end of her study. I recommended that she bring several published qualitative research studies that she cited in her literature review to illustrate her points.

In the end, this student argued persuasively—with the support of a committee member (not her chair)—for what she had proposed and managed to successfully retain her qualitative research design and methods. My interactions with this student, and her experiences with her faculty advisor and chair, bring to mind a few important principles that I follow with my advisees in the dissertation research process: Select a purpose and craft research questions that can be addressed by qualitative inquiry and connect your research purpose and question(s) to a qualitative research tradition.

Leading to Qualitative Research Traditions: Research Paradigms in Qualitative Inquiry

As discussed in Chapter 2, methodology is a model that guides what you do in an investigation. Methodology differs from methods in important ways. Whereas methodology functions as a lens to explore a phenomenon, methods are the overall approach that you use to do the exploring. In this way, methodology directs methods: How you view and what you believe about inquiry informs what you do in the field to gather and understand information. What occupies the center of a methodology is what Denzin and Lincoln (2013) refer to as strategies of inquiry, which are “a bundle of skills, assumptions, and practices that researchers employ as they move from their paradigm to the empirical world” (p. 29). Paradigms, they say, are “a set of beliefs and feelings about the work and how it should be understood and studied” (Denzin & Lincoln, p. 26). This set of beliefs is central to understanding any study—its research problem, questions and/or hypotheses, and design—and making sense of a study’s results and findings. In qualitative research, these beliefs tend to be articulated explicitly, even if not written in plain terms. And in a qualitative dissertation, these beliefs appear as an integral part of the methodology chapter. That is, through a discussion of a research approach, site and participant selection strategies, data collection and analysis procedures, and researcher roles, you tell who you are and what theorized approach you will take in your research work.

Behind a research paradigm, you can find philosophical questions that get at the heart of how you see the work that you do and how you understand it. In fact, research paradigms often present the answers, in the form of beliefs and feelings, to ontological, epistemological, and methodological questions. These questions, in simple form, can be put as follows:

- *Ontology* relates to the nature of reality, so you can ask this question to start a discussion: *What is the nature of reality?*
- *Epistemology* concerns how we come to know reality, and you can ask the following question to guide a discussion: *How do I go about learning about reality?*
- *Methodology*, as we have seen, is a theorized approach to investigating the social world—so a question here would be, *How do I go about examining the reality related to a specific problem of a group of people?*

These questions direct you to think about your personal beliefs, which in turn inform your academic and research work. They form the core of who you are as an individual and guide the academic and research roles that you assume in your scholarly work.

Key Questions to Ask Yourself

- What are my core beliefs about the nature of reality and how we learn about reality? potentially shape my dissertation methodology chapter?
- With which paradigmatic perspective do I identify? How will this perspective

Linking ontology, epistemology, and methodology, paradigms often operate in the background of an investigation and inform a wide range of methodological decisions. At the intersection of these philosophical questions sit research paradigms, which generally function as foundations of scholarly investigations and offer insight into your researcher assumptions, biases, and beliefs about the world and the relationship between these beliefs and your specific research approach in a study (Bazeley, 2014, p. 24). While an extended discussion of major paradigmatic perspectives is beyond the reach of this book, you can see from Table 3.1 below what Denzin and Lincoln (2013, p. 26) identify as four major interpretive paradigms: positivist-postpositivist, constructivist-interpretive, critical, and feminist-structural. These paradigms reflect core values that researchers share and focus the lens through which researchers adapt an approach to inquiry.

Table 3.1 Major Interpretive Paradigms in Qualitative Research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013)

Interpretive Paradigm	Features
Positivist-postpositivist	You see the world as being understood in an objective reality and seek validity—both internal and external—to deductively generalize from a sample to a population through experimental design in clinical or natural settings. With post-positivism (e.g., critical realism), you recognize that an objective reality exists but can be challenged because we truly cannot know everything about reality with complete certainty.
Constructivist-interpretivist	You understand the world as socially constructed through interaction where there are multiple realities and meaning is agreed upon in natural settings. As a researcher in social settings (vs. the natural world), you explore phenomena in the field and inductively arrive at an understanding of what is going on.

(Continued)

Table 3.1 (Continued)

Interpretive Paradigm	Features
Critical	You see the world in relation to identity categories and/or social strata (e.g., race, class, gender) and examine the structures that differentiate groups of people in society, which supports an emancipatory goal of your study for participants (and yourself).
Feminist-structural	You work to uncover narratives, or stories, of groups who have been historically marginalized in society because their lived experiences are not accurately reflected or reproduced socially.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2013). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (pp. 1–41). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

With a research paradigm operating in the background of a study, what you see in the foreground is the methodological foundation: research design. If you look at research design as a strategic approach tied to methods or specific procedures to gather information (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013, p. 26), you can see how they carry a set of values in their mechanic of action. For example, ethnographic approaches privilege cultural meaning, learning from folks in the field, and intimacy in fieldwork. Patton (2014) puts strategies of inquiry into motion when he discusses traditions in his work, referring to sixteen such traditions in qualitative research, and Creswell (1996, p. 47) also refers to traditions that guide qualitative inquiry. This theoretical center of inquiry can be seen as research design or tradition—a figurative camera through which you use a lens and filter to focus on a subject (Miller & Crabtree, 1992, p. 3). Just like with a camera—where the photographer has multiple ways to capture an image, especially if shooting manually—researchers have lots of ways to set up a study within these traditions. And a photographer’s assumptions, biases, and beliefs about the world shape where, what, and how to shoot a subject. Similarly, how and what you believe more broadly shapes how and what you explore in your dissertation study—so you must account for the relationships that run in the background of your dissertation research and work to make this stuff transparent to your committee and beyond. Table 3.2 offers a simple way to see the relationship between research paradigms and qualitative research traditions.

Qualitative Research Traditions in Dissertations

The strategies of inquiry or research traditions that we see in social and behavioral science research, if looking only at what falls broadly under the umbrella of qualitative approaches, allow researchers to use discretion in specific steps that

Table 3.2 Comparison of Research Paradigms and Qualitative Research Traditions

Research paradigms	Definition and constituent parts	Research traditions	Definition and constituent parts
Positivist-postpositivist Constructivist-interpretive Critical Feminist-structural	<i>A way of seeing the world—related to beliefs, biases, and assumptions about ontology (nature of reality), epistemology (how we come to know reality), and methodology—is a theorized approach to investigating the social world</i>	Ethnography Grounded theory Phenomenology Narrative inquiry Case study	<i>A specific approach to inquiry that directs how you gather information (sampling, participant recruitment, and data collection) and make sense of information (data analysis and interpretation—where applicable)</i>

they take and the nuanced ways that they direct their activities. In dissertation research contexts, the focus of design work and fieldwork activities do not necessarily need to reflect a strict adherence to rigid rules of a tradition or procedural steps of methods associated with a tradition (Piantanida & Garman, 2009, p. 79). Here, the idea of research traditions as frameworks within which doctoral student researchers can operate points to a less prescriptive function for project implementation and more to an organizing guide. This idea does not mean that you do not plan; you just plan meaningfully within a general structure—with the option to use specific techniques or variations of procedures associated with the tradition.



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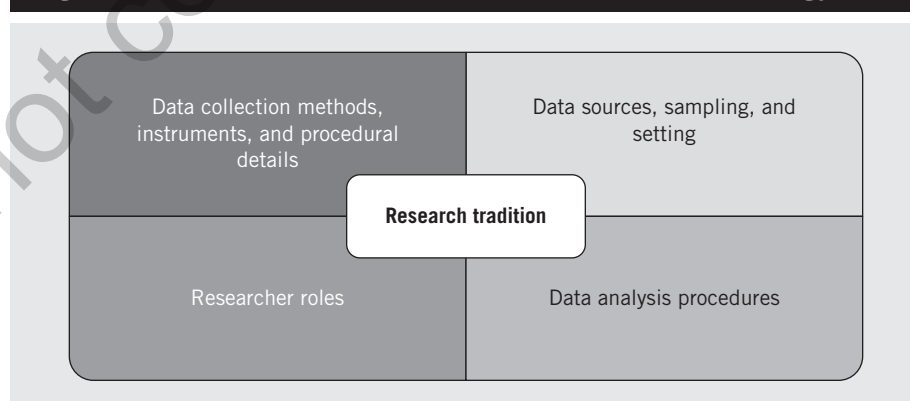
However you refer to an approach to inquiry—theoretical tradition, strategy of inquiry, tradition, approach, strategy, design—you must describe the specific plan that you use to gather and interpret information in the field. This plan serves as a guided set of steps to implement a study grounded in a problem from the empirical literature. The key to a plan is the guide, which implies more than just showing a way around a place or through a process. Indeed, the guided dimension of a research approach means that there are advice and opinions about whom to talk with or observe, how to talk with or observe them, and how to make sense of what they say or do. In fact, the guidance that accompanies a plan is value-laden and informs evaluative decisions about how to proceed in a study and offers researchers a set of structured choices to make that extend back to research problems, purposes, and questions and forward to data sources, data collection instruments, data

collection procedures, and procedures for data analysis and interpretation. So your approach is more than just a series of steps or set of rules to follow in fieldwork—it is embedded with broader meaning about what is important to you as a researcher and what you will explore in your study. You can see in Figure 3.1 how a research tradition sits at the center of methodology in qualitative inquiry, connecting what you do in the field to a central plan that guides your research work.

Examining qualitative research goals in Chapter 1 revealed how the overarching approach aims toward exploration and discovery of in-depth descriptions of human social life—where researchers move into the field to learn from folks in their daily lives. These broad research goals in qualitative inquiry structure the specific approaches that we use in investigations, and no matter how we go about our research work, Merriam (2009, p. 23) argues that researchers who use qualitative approaches focus on exploring what people do to understand their experiences. Accordingly, these researchers are interested in describing ways that folks make meaning from what they say and do in everyday lives (Merriam, p. 23). From this starting point, Merriam contends that if researchers focus on a specific unit of analysis or dimension in their studies, then they move into more specific types of or approaches to research. Indeed, while traditions share these three characteristics that Merriam described, they diverge in many more meaningful ways and are unique in the procedural lens that they impose on a study.

Whatever term you use to refer to an approach to inquiry—I use *research tradition* here—researchers have developed several types of traditions in qualitative inquiry. In their examination, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) discuss six qualitative research strategies: ethnography, grounded theory, case study, narrative inquiry, participatory, and case study. Similarly, Creswell (1996) focuses on five qualitative traditions of inquiry, including biography, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Finally, Schram (2003, p. 66) argues that phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography qualify as research traditions, while narrative inquiry, case study, and others (e.g., action research) do not. So what does

Figure 3.1 Dimensions of Qualitative Research Methodology



Schram mean by a research tradition? He argues that what distinguishes research traditions is a way of seeing inquiry that includes a set of principles that directs what researchers look for in the field. This is similar to the notion that a research tradition is much more than a set of methods and procedural steps and much closer to a structured system that guides a study—and this is consistent with the idea of a theorized approach to an investigation that Schwandt (2007) advances. That is, when you consider that a research tradition forms the foundational scheme that sets up almost every major aspect of a study, from site and participant selection to data collection instruments and procedures, you can see the immense organizing influence that such a tradition has on the work. And a tradition's reach extends far beyond how you set up a study: its guiding principles and procedural steps shape what you see and how you interpret what you see in the field.

While researchers agree on the overarching goals of qualitative research, the characteristics of what constitutes qualitative research, and the general outline of specific approaches in qualitative research, they tend to diverge on which approaches qualify as traditions in qualitative inquiry. What seems clear is that research methodologists who have published more recently on qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2014; Schram, 2003; Schwandt, 2007) generally include the same three research traditions: ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory. So these three approaches seem to be major traditions in qualitative research. As Schram (p. 66) puts it, they are “rigorous, discipline-based, carefully specified ways to conceptualize, describe, and analyze human social behavior and processes.” They are more than just methods—but certainly include methods—and transcend a basic qualitative research approach, incorporating a shared focus of understanding how humans interact and understand their world.

Beyond ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory, there is less agreement on which approaches count as a research tradition. For example, some researchers (Creswell, 1996; Merriam, 2009) include case study as a tradition; others exclude case studies from such discussions (Schram, 2003). While definitions of what comprises a discrete, unique approach to inquiry may differ, I argue that case study research can be considered a research tradition—that they are more than just procedural steps or products of investigations. In fact, researchers tend to use case study approaches in much the same way that researchers use ethnography, phenomenology, or grounded theory: They frame a way of looking at a phenomenon under investigation through a specific lens and form part of a larger theorized storyline from the empirical and conceptual literature. If you consider the focus, guidelines, and procedures associated with case studies, you find an organic system that guides researchers in what is important or worth knowing about a phenomenon and how to go about exploring it. More on this below—where I discuss case study approaches in depth. Here, I emphasize that the criteria by which major research traditions in qualitative inquiry direct us to see ethnography, for example, as a tradition, do so, too, for case study. In the same way, I argue that narrative inquiry can be seen as a research tradition.

Given the historical and contemporary focus on ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory and the seeming popularity of case studies in dissertation contexts, I include these four traditions—plus narrative inquiry—below and summarize them in Table 3.3. I discuss the focus, guidelines, and methods of each tradition, after which I examine how to write about traditions and use them to unify the methodological dimensions of your dissertation study. After discussing these five traditions, you can find a treatment of newer approaches in qualitative inquiry—organized around the historical approaches like ethnography. So you can see the following approaches: public ethnography, critical ethnography, critical collaborative ethnography, narrative ethnography, portraiture methodology, and visual and performance-based approaches. As a way to end a discussion of research approaches, I briefly consider the application of mixed methods approaches in qualitative inquiry.

Ethnography.

Far and away one of the most widely used research traditions in qualitative inquiry, ethnography is one of the oldest and most emblematic traditions (Marshall and Rossman, 2010; Patton, 2014). With a focus on exploring people as cultural groups and experiences of individuals in their everyday lives, ethnographers learn from

Table 3.3 Qualitative Research Traditions: Focus, Goals, and Methods

Research Tradition	Focus	Goal	Methods
Ethnography	Cultural experiences	Learn about how a group feels, behaves, and produces things	Participant observations, ethnographic (personal or group) interviews, documents, artifacts
Grounded theory	Experiences, events, processes	Develop a model to explain the relationships between factors that shape outcomes	Personal or group (semi-structured) interviews, observations, documents
Phenomenology	Lived experiences	Explore the structure of an interaction, event, or experiences	In-depth, sequenced interviews with a small group of participants
Narrative inquiry	Stories	Understand the structure and meaning of stories and broader patterns associated with stories	Participant observations, ethnographic (personal or group) interviews, semi-structured interview, documents
Case study	Bounded system or unit	Describe the uniqueness of a unit or entity (intrinsic) or larger trends the unit or entity may reveal (instrumental)	Personal or group (semi-structured) interviews, observations, documents

people in the contexts of their daily lives. Indeed, ethnography pushes researchers to transition to fieldwork as highly trained experts in social science research and as new members of the social and cultural groups from whom they gather information. And this activity is perhaps what makes ethnography not just popular in social science disciplines but also widely consumed by the public. On this point, Gans (2010) notes, “Ethnography has been most successful in reaching the lay public.” His proof? Here: “[O]f the 56 bestselling books by sociologists written between the 1940s and 1990s, about a third were ethnographies or made heavy use of ethnographic data” (Gans, 2010). Wholly systematic and rigorous in their research approaches, ethnographers balance a need to collect data and evaluate research questions in their studies with a responsibility to participate in the events in the lives of their participants—their struggles, challenges, and triumphs. As a distinguishing characteristic, this is what sets ethnographic approaches apart: a requirement to enter the field in a social setting and assume a place in the community or family *and* maintain fidelity to the standards of social science research and boundaries of a study.



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Ethnographic focus.

If one word could describe a tradition, *culture* would be the one for ethnography. What is culture? In simple terms, culture is what people do, say, believe, value, and make. And culture moves as people do—with a flexible character that functions systematically for groups. With a focus on cultural experiences, the structure of ethnographic inquiries leans toward how members of a group act and understand actions of the group or community. By learning about everyday interactions, community and individual roles, products and artifacts, and special rituals and ceremonies, the end goal of ethnography is to generate a holistic description of the group and an explanation of patterns of social life.

Sample Ethnographic Research Question

What are the experiences of U.S. postal carriers of color in predominantly white suburban middle-class neighborhoods in the Midwest?

Emerging from the field of cultural anthropology (Schwandt, 2007; Spradley, 1979; Wolcott, 2008) and qualitative sociology (Marshall & Rossman, 2010), ethnography explores culture. But what does this mean? Culture is a bit murky for anyone to discuss, perhaps in part because it is expressed through members of a group in both explicit and implicit ways—so for researchers, culture can be nebulous and difficult to pin down because it is so dynamic and changing (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 3). Still, if culture is reproduced through words, deeds, and products of a group, then there must be some ways to document, record, and understand these things, right? Perhaps the answer lies in how you do the documenting, recording, and understanding.

Sample Ethnographic Research Question

How do early career male teachers of color create a sense of community on campus in urban elementary school settings?

The essence of ethnography is descriptive representation. You learn from people (Spradley, 1980, p. 3) by being with people in the field. Of course, learning from people undergirds other qualitative research traditions, but ethnography requires the learning to be among people—in their everyday worlds—even if they are not native to the group and never fully achieve a within-group status worth much more than a researcher role. But ethnography is not about the researcher's status in the community. Rather, as Wolcott (2008, p. 73) argues, ethnography describes “what the people in some particular place or status ordinarily do, and the meanings they ascribe to the doing, under ordinary or particular circumstances, presenting that description in a manner that draws attention to regularities that implicate cultural process.” The emphasis here is on interpretation through description—a description of who people are and how they live at one point in time and what all of this stuff means to these people and others who care about them and/or who care to know about people more generally.

While traditional forms of ethnography focus on learning from people, other forms learn about people from oneself as a researcher or an organization. In autoethnography, the aim is on maintaining a focus on both the researcher as the subject of the exploration and the object or phenomenon of the study (Schwandt, 2007). As a branch of ethnographic research traditions, autoethnography balances a cultural study of groups and communities with a more personal account of what it is like to be a member of the group—from someone who has been raised in the group and can intimately understand the group's values, beliefs, and behaviors from a personally historical account. In fact, Davis and Ellis (2008, pp. 284–285) explain that autoethnography emerged, in part, as a response to the question of who can speak authoritatively about a group—who owns the story? Like autoethnography,

institutional ethnography emerged from earlier versions of methodology. In the case of institutional ethnography, disciplinary forms of methodology in sociology generally did not focus on people's experiences, particularly from their own standpoint (Smith, 2007). Institutional ethnography's solution: to focus on individual and group experiences in institutional settings as problematic and orient researchers on how language not only hides normative expectations for behavior but reifies systems of oppression.

Ethnographic methods and procedural steps.

The key procedural step in ethnography is working directly in the field that you are exploring and spending lots of time on site (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 19). So when ethnographers immerse themselves into the families, groups, communities, and/or organizations, they enter the field as a participant-observer on a continuum from complete observer to complete participant. Depending on study goals, field settings, permissions, and resources, ethnographers assume roles that facilitate relationship building and information gathering in highly localized and contextually bound environments. As field researchers, ethnographers assume a personal role in people's daily lives and are "directly and personally engaged in an interpretive focus on the human field of activity" (Miller & Crabtree, 1992, p. 5).

If one word can sum up ethnography (culture), then one word can also characterize ethnographic methods: fieldwork. "Fieldwork," Van Maanen (2011, p. 2) argues, "Is one answer—some say the best—to the question of how the understanding of others, close or distant, is achieved. Fieldwork usually means living with and living like those who are studied." But Schwandt (2007) warns us not to confuse fieldwork, which relates to methods that qualitative researchers more generally use, with field study, which is what ethnographers do. He explains that field study involves extended time in the field as you foster relationships with folks, gather information from many sources, and descriptively build a story with the field notes that you take (Schwandt, p. 98). In ethnographic field study, these methods must end in a way that says something about a group *as a member of the group*—which is what distinguishes the use of fieldwork in ethnography with fieldwork in case study or narrative inquiry traditions, for example.

Ethnographic fieldwork involves participant observations and ethnographic interviews. Wolcott (2004, p. 88) describes participant observation as "being there." As a participant in and observer of a group in social settings, ethnographers go where people are—where they meet, eat, talk, worship, play, sing and dance, and produce and exchange goods. In fact, Spradley (1980, p. 54) argues that participant-observers (emphasis on dual roles) enter field settings with two purposes: involve yourself in daily activities and/or special events and observe what these moments mean for folks in the local setting. In the field, ethnographers record what they observe via jottings, which transition to descriptive and reflective field notes that elaborate on dimensions of social life and detail researchers' impressions about their field experiences and observations (more on this in Chapter 6 and

Chapter 7). Coupled with observations, ethnographers get close to the folks from whom they learn by talking with them through conversational-type interviews. Indeed, ethnographic interviewing, distinct from a pre-regulated, semi-structured personal interview characteristic of qualitative research more generally, can be likened to conversational exchanges with folks—where you work to elicit information from informants to advance your descriptive and interpretive understanding of what goes on (Spradley, 1979, p. 58). The goal here is to clarify what has been observed and elicit more in-depth explanations of emerging patterns.

What to do with all of the field notes? Ethnography is as much a process as a product (Schram, 2003; Schwandt, 2007), so the end of all this activity needs to be a record of who people are and what meaning they ascribe to what they do and how they behave in their daily lives and through special events. This is a cultural portrait that presents patterns of beliefs, behaviors, and products of a group at a particular point in time. An ethnography—the final presentation of a cultural or social system—is necessarily challenging to produce. On this point, Spradley (1980, p. 160) argues that there is so much to know about a cultural group's system of meaning that you cannot possibly produce a full account. Still, he argues that through a process of translation, you can draw conclusions about cultural meaning among members of the group. This final cultural portrait is a summary of the local scene and tells a story of the group (Creswell, 1996, p. 61).

This cultural portrait requires interpretation of what an ethnographer learned. Indeed, cultural interpretation is at the center of ethnographic work. More than mere depiction, interpretive activity requires researchers to link patterns of behaviors, beliefs, and values documented in the field with conceptual understanding of their meaning to both the group that is the subject of the study and the ethnographer who is documenting, describing, and interpreting the patterns for members of the larger research community to perform cross-cultural comparisons. Both Jacobson (1991) and Spradley (1980) offer insight into analytical approaches in ethnography. While Spradley (1980) shares procedural steps to move from general statements to specific cultural meaning within the group, Jacobson frames these procedural steps in terms of comparative claims about a group viz. within-group, between-group, and cross-group lenses. Jacobson also discusses levels of analysis that impose an interpretive focus on a cultural portrait: thoughts and words or behaviors and actions. Each focus uses conventions about what matters to researchers: language and behavior. In these two areas of focus, ethnography splinters into more related but discrete forms of a research tradition—using frames to interpret meaning.

Grounded theory.

Among doctoral students in applied fields—such as education—grounded theory is a popular choice to methodologically guide dissertations studies. More generally, Birks and Mills (2011, p. 1), pointing to the innumerable studies that use grounded theory and texts on grounded theory, argue that it is one of the most

popular designs among qualitative researchers. Indeed, Wu and Beaunae (2014, p. 250) note findings from their study of graduate student use of grounded theory in dissertation studies:

In reviewing qualitative theses and dissertations published during the years (2005–2010) from the ProQuest database, we found that 2018 dissertations mentioned the term *grounded theory* in the title and/or abstract as opposed to 897 studies that used the term *narrative inquiry/narrative analysis* and 1049 studies that used the term *discourse analysis*. This suggests that GT [grounded theory] methods seem to be the most commonly used qualitative research methods with respect to doctoral theses and dissertations.

For graduate students in applied fields, what Jones (2009, p. 32) argues that grounded theory is particularly relevant to dissertation research contexts; focusing their thesis or dissertation projects on understanding relationships, people, processes, events, and so on shapes outcomes in places of work.

Methodologically, grounded theory structures inquiries so that relationships among factors can explain patterns of social problems, inquiries that seems to intuitively appeal to students who work as practitioners in applied fields. In fact, for educators, a persistent and shared area of professional focus is student success—at all levels in the educational pipeline—so a research framework that allows students who work in primary, secondary, or postsecondary institutional settings to investigate what factors enhance or impede student learning and development is naturally attractive. While grounded theory as a methodology may appear to be a single, unified system of inquiry, there are differences in how major thinkers go about their work in the field. For example, there are implications for what and how you conduct a grounded theory study with post-positivist versus constructivist versus feminist grounded theory. As you can see, differences between grounded theory approaches generally relate to research paradigms. That is, how you see, learn about, and investigate reality shapes the specific approach that you use in grounded theory. An extended discussion of camps of grounded theorists falls outside the scope of this book; here, the focus is on general, or classic, grounded theory tradition.

Grounded theory focus.

While we can talk about grounded theory's focus, we have to recognize that grounded theory itself has been constructed as both a research tradition and a general approach to develop a theoretical or explanatory model from (or grounded in) data. That is, grounded theory has been framed as both a methodology and a method—and in the latter sense largely a method to analyze data to uncover patterns of interrelated actions or events. On this point, Schwandt (2007, p. 62) argues that the term has been frequently used without specificity as a way of referring to approaches to collect and interpret data to form a theory about a phenomenon. And a set of major thinkers in this approach validates the definition.

Charmaz (2006) talks about grounded theory as a set of “methods” that guide inquiry as “systematic, yet flexible for collecting and analyzing data” to develop a theory from data. But perhaps no other pair can describe grounded theory like Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 2), who have been credited with the initial development of the approach and called it “the discovery theory from data systematically obtained from social research.”

Sample Grounded Theory Research Question

How do family pets shape the cognitive development of children who are on the autism spectrum?

The keys to understanding grounded theory as a way to frame a qualitative research study may be in Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) references to “discovery” and “systematically obtained from social research.” The latter idea relates to data collection, where only general procedural guidelines exist. In contrast to ethnographic and phenomenological approaches, grounded theory supports the use of data collection procedures that range from personal and group interviews to observations and structured journal guides or critical incident reports. Really, a major advantage of grounded theory is the flexible guidelines for collecting data—you can adapt the approach to meet the specific needs and unique circumstances of your study. Accordingly, issues related to data access and permission, participant recruitment and selection, and fieldwork conditions allow you to change up how you do things with a grounded theory approach. This flexibility is built into the procedural guidelines for data analysis, too, where “rather than formulaic rules” (Charmaz, 2006) you have more technical latitude. But proceed with caution here: Within general parameters, grounded theory structures data collection and analysis to direct researchers with an overall set of steps.

Sample Grounded Theory Research Question

How does contact with faculty in research contexts influence the decisions of undergraduate students of color in public universities to pursue

terminal degrees in engineering and computer science fields?

Grounded theory methods and procedural steps.

The core focus in grounded theory is in data collection and analysis—or how to make sense of the data collected to build a model that explains patterns in the social

world. With fewer specific guidelines about activities associated with gathering information, grounded theory offers researchers a framework to generate theory. As Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 3) argue, “Our basic position is that generating grounded theory is a way of arriving at theory suited for its supposed uses.” In practice, grounded theory’s procedural reach extends well into data collection and analyses—whatever specific techniques you use. Through a set of steps to explore data collected in the field, the approach facilitates what Charmaz (2006, p. 2) describes as viewing data in new or “fresh” ways by searching for meaning in what you find through analytic work that accompanies data collection. How does a grounded theory approach do this? The specific steps to generate an emerging idea of how concepts link to each other and categories associated with codes includes concurrent data collection and analysis, theoretical sampling during data collection, and constant comparative data analysis.

Concurrent data collection and analysis. The way that we typically think about the progression of a qualitative research study goes roughly like this: design, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, and presentation. While this outline is a bit rigid—and certainly linear—studies tend to unfold in much more recursive, iterative, and fluid ways; events in the field (and before and after fieldwork) may blend into each other, and data analysis often accompanies data collection (or even precedes it in the case of code development from an evaluation and synthesis of the literature). So while data collection and analysis generally co-occur, grounded theory offers a more prescriptive structure to do so—as Birks and Mills (2011, p. 10) describe when they say that you produce data, then do some preliminary data analysis (via segmenting, coding, and early thematizing) to shape what you do next in data collection. Here, you can see an explicit pause in data collection—a clear point in fieldwork activities that promotes the use of data analysis into the data collection, including participant recruitment and selection via theoretical sampling. You can see the insertion of data analysis early in the fieldwork process as a mechanism or tool to start to link concepts to coded segments and allow the production of linked codes to inform the direction of an emerging model.

Theoretical sampling. When you collect and analyze data together, you use meaningful information related directly to your study to gather more information. This is the essence of theoretical sampling—which is, in the words of Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 45), the process where you “jointly” collect and code data to direct what happens sequentially in data collection. And this is how data are “grounded” in what you do in the field: you sample participants and conduct a few interviews, transcribe interview data, segment and code transcribed interview data, and use the emerging patterns from coded data to sample additional participants for interviews. This is a transition from general purposeful sampling—say, snowball or chain sampling where you identify and apply standards to the selection of participants—to a specific purposeful sampling strategy characteristic of (and strongly associated with) a grounded theory tradition: theoretical sampling. Here, how you collect data in the field shapes how you analyze data, which in turn directs what you

do back in the field—searching for the most relevant participants, documents, archival records, events, and so on—whether at a physical location or online site—to the thematic patterns associated with actions and/or processes that have emerged from data analysis. Ultimately, as Glaser and Strauss note, a developing explanation directs the rest of the data collection process and procedural steps in the field.

Constant comparative data analysis. With an iterative process to collect and analyze data and a participant selection strategy directed by coded data, grounded theory's prescriptive steps move to further make sense of emerging patterns in data from initial data analysis. Glaser and Strauss (1967) offer insight into what grounded theory directs you to do in data analysis. Here, you can compare the general approach that most qualitative researchers use, thematic data analysis, whereby researchers code and thematize coded data into a narrative, with a theory-generating approach to data analysis, where researchers are “constantly re-designing and reintegrating . . . theoretical notions” to a sort of hybrid approach that combines the goals of both strategies (Glaser & Strauss, p. 101). A constant-comparative analytical approach merges segmenting, coding, categorizing, and thematizing with a process of developing an overall theory or explanation about what is happening (Glaser & Strauss, p. 102). The coding procedure in grounded theory's concurrent data collection and analysis starts the initial coding process in early fieldwork activities by segmenting and attaching codes (i.e., concepts) to textual data. You can use standard coding strategies such as open coding, in vivo coding, or a related coding strategy to link broader ideas specifically to incidents, events, or actions, which may prompt you to head back into the field to observe or inquire about the incidents or events in greater detail. Initial coding may proceed line-by-line or word-by-word (Charmaz, 2006), a practice that thematic data analysis also generally follows, or incident-to-incident, a process that is unique to grounded theory. What also characterizes initial coding in grounded theory is a type of comparative coding, involving comparative memos on how descriptive patterns in a set of data (e.g., an early set of transcribed interviews) differ from or resemble patterns in another set of data (e.g., a later set of transcribed interviews). With additional data—perhaps from additional interviews, observations, or documents or archival data—the focus turns nearly exclusively to more advanced analytical activities. And this step is where grounded theory's constant comparative data analysis tends to diverge from thematic data analysis as a general approach in qualitative research.

The next two steps in a constant comparative analytical framework—intermediate coding and theoretical coding—work toward developing a set of categories that form the structure of the model to explain what is going on in the field. Before you get to a point where theoretical coding allows you to substantiate initial coding, grounded theory requires you to perform intermediate coding, which includes two essential types of activities in moving from descriptive to explanatory results of data analysis. In intermediate coding, also referred to as focused coding, you cluster the most frequently occurring codes into larger groups

or families—identifying broader categories of meaning that underlie currents across coded segments of data. Similar to focused coding, axial coding moves you closer to understanding how initial codes relate to each other in more conceptual ways. Corbin and Strauss (2007) describe this coding scheme as an effort to group codes by comparing categories (or grouped codes) to subcategories (or smaller coded groups or even single codes). In doing so, you can literally separate (or “fracture”) segmented data and assemble segments into new groups to compare them to each other and broader conceptual ideas. But Wu and Beaunae (2014, p. 253) raise an important point about this task. They share a cautionary, forest-trees story about how when you fracture data to the point where you cannot see broad currents that run through textual data, then you may miss important thematic categories and results in the development of an explanatory model. The lesson that they learned: Your early reading and review of transcribed data may yield clear patterns that eventually emerge in the analytic process.

The third and final analytical step in grounded theory’s constant comparative method is to develop relationships among larger groupings of coded segments of data (categories) that explain narratively how a set of actions relate to an outcome or set of outcomes in a social setting. But how exactly do you code theoretically? Charmaz (2006, p. 63) sheds light on this question when she says that theoretical codes inform preliminary code and early thematic analytical work that you have done as fieldwork unfolds. When you move to this analytical step in your own dissertation research work, you can inject concepts or ideas from the unique combination of empirical and/or conceptual frameworks of your investigation into the analytical process at this point in a study. As you consider these three analytical steps in grounded theory, one final word of caution: They are not necessarily linear as presented here but tend to occur simultaneously (Wu & Beaunae, 2014).

Phenomenology.

If ethnography is one of the most easily accessible and widely used research approaches in qualitative inquiry and grounded theory one of the most popular today, phenomenology may be one of the most challenging. Perhaps phenomenology proves a bit tricky to use in research contexts because of its complex set of ideas that do not necessarily unify around a single system to gather and make sense of data. Or maybe phenomenology challenges researchers for reasons related to the multidisciplinary nature of its philosophical foundations, methodological concepts, and procedural techniques that straddle psychology, sociology, and other disciplines. Whatever the source of trial for researchers, phenomenology moves qualitative research in the direction of exploring the meaning that individuals attribute to experiences in their world—to the structure of how an individual or a small group of individuals experiences and makes sense of interactions in social settings. In doing so, phenomenology emphasizes the lived experiences of human interaction and what they mean in relation to the phenomenon in focus.

Phenomenological focus.

One way to understand phenomenology as a qualitative research tradition is to focus on feelings—feelings as they are felt and experienced in the moment and understood and made sense of after they are felt and experienced. This focus on the meaning of experiencing and feeling something—a phenomenon—from the perspective of an individual (from a psychological disciplinary lens) or a small group of individuals (from a sociological disciplinary lens) is the essence of phenomenology. This “something” generally is an object (a thing) or an interaction (a social act) that researchers explore through close work with individuals who have experienced it.

Sample Phenomenological Research Question

From the perspective of parents who lose children to cancer, what experiences with healthcare staff are healing in the grieving process?

While phenomenology’s roots can be traced to early French and German philosophers—Descartes, Kant, and Hegel—in some ways phenomenology was as a response to them. The chief architect of contemporary forms of phenomenology, Husserl, challenged Western philosophical ideas with his foundational work in the tradition. Husserl, who developed the transcendental line of phenomenology, also presented a critique of the research field in psychology at the time where “psychology as a science . . . had gone wrong by attempting to apply methods of the natural sciences to human issues” (Lavery, 2003, p. 4). In fact, Husserl believed that “knowledge based on intuition and essence precedes empirical knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26), leading to the “value of returning to the self to discover the nature and meaning of things as they appear and in their essence.” So how do researchers explore meaning of what appears to subjects in their studies? Husserl’s work points us to where we look and how we go about looking.

Sample Phenomenological Research Question

How do airline flight attendants describe in-flight interactions with combative passengers?

Husserl’s two concepts central to phenomenology, intentionality and bracketing (see “Phenomenological Methods and Procedural Steps” below for a discussion), are key to working with this tradition as a systematic approach in the

social and behavioral sciences. Intentionality relates to consciously knowing about something—an object, interaction, event, experience, and so on (Moustakas, 1994, p. 28). That is, what we experience and do is intentional—and associated with something external (Sokolowski, 2000, pp. 8-9) such that what we perceive and feel is not wholly internal but directed at something outside of us. Here, what we do—being conscious—and what we focus on—the object of consciousness—are meaningfully related. This position moves away from the interior self, a focus on the inner self, of an experience—how we think of or perceive something inside our minds—and toward a more complete picture of something through both the mind and object. But researchers need more than this—the intentionality of consciousness—to guide their work in the field.

Two dimensions of intentionality, noema and noesis, work to extend how we understand the tradition in the field of qualitative research and serve as useful tools for researchers. According to Husserl, noema is the perception of an object, while noesis is the meaning of the perception associated with an object. Put another way, noema is the outline or form and noesis is the substance or structure. Moustakas (1994, pp. 30–31) masterfully illustrates these concepts through his stories:

[T]he immediate, spontaneous noematic meanings that I associate with a physician's recommendation of drugs as a way of resolving bodily tensions are suspicion, doubt, images of physical and mental consequences, invasion of my body by harmful chemicals, interference with my natural healing processes, control of my destiny by external forces. . . . When I consider the noetic factors that account for my noematic meanings, I recall my experience with two physicians who injected drugs into my body when I was experiencing considerable pain from infections.

Here, you can see how the meaning of a noematic interaction or event, a patient consultation with a physician, is discrete from the noetic structure of the interaction, the experiences associated with the meaning of the interaction.

Against the backdrop of Husserl's early work in the field, phenomenology moved into current social and behavioral science research contexts from both hermeneutic and existential variations. Developed chiefly by Heidegger, hermeneutic phenomenology, which some folks just refer to as hermeneutics, focuses on interpreting interactions “to better understand the political, historical, and socio-cultural context in which it occurs” (Crabtree & Miller, 1992, p. 25). This is a departure from Husserl, who focused more on the immediate meaning of an experience from a life history of the individual. But this was a more personal story for transcendental phenomenology, even as you move outside yourself to explore the structure of experience in relation to the individual. For Heidegger and hermeneutic phenomenology, Lavery (2003, p. 8) argues, “Consciousness is not separate from the world, in Heidegger's (1927/1962) view, but is a formation of historically lived experience.” Lavery ties the idea of consciousness to culture, arguing that our personal history and cultural background frame how we interpret experiences.

While both Husserl and Heidegger, and their contemporaries, diverged in areas of focus of an inquiry—and what is important to explore—they shared common philosophical and methodological foundations, namely to go beyond superficial experiences and explore objectivity in natural settings (Schwandt, 2007, p. 235).

For Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the need to move phenomenology into the real world—the world in which we live—led to the development of an existential variation of the tradition. Here, Merleau-Ponty turned attention to an individual's lived experience in the world and focused on more concrete experiences—with the body central to the experiences. In so doing, he argued that the researcher contextualizes experiences of the researched, participants themselves, and situates the meaning associated with these experiences in real world circumstances. Accordingly, existential phenomenology follows how the mind and body interact to process and make meaning of an interaction or event. In contrast to Husserl and Heidegger, this focus meant that a line of inquiry of human experience in the world—a whole body-mind experience—is central to understanding the meaning and structure of something.

Phenomenological methods and procedural steps.

With the focus of phenomenology on an individual's or small group of individual's experiences with the consciousness about something and the need to explore the subjective meaning that we attribute to something in order to reveal its objective nature, researchers generally use personal interviews as the primary data collection method. What to do with data once collected? A type of textural-structural analysis can be used. But before you get to collecting and analyzing data, a phenomenological approach points you in the direction of bracketing, or epoche, as a practice to move more closely to the essence of what you observe or what your participants share. Husserl's concept of bracketing relates to a fundamental belief that we need to set aside our “natural attitude” about the world—what we are accustomed to thinking about something—to get at its core meaning. In this way, we account for our assumptions, values, attitudes, biases, and beliefs about something—for example, foster youth placement, college admissions process, protest movements, and so on—to prepare for gathering and describing information about the object, event, or process. Strategies that can be used to account for all of the researcher-generated factors that shape what we think about and how we approach data collection and analysis can include general reflexive practices such as researcher triangulation (especially in data reduction and analysis), memos, and member checks, among others.

While bracketing may be appealing and may enhance the quality of results and stability of findings, we tend to accept the idea that we cannot set aside everything in our qualitative research work. Indeed, as qualitative researchers, we embrace what we bring to an exploration and the fieldwork that it entails—our subjectivities; we are the chief research instruments after all! We influence what we see, hear, respond to, interact with, understand, and interpret. Granted, to enhance the credibility, dependability, and transferability of a study's findings, we use

strategies to mitigate the effects of researchers on the case. This type of reflexive work overlaps with bracketing in a sense, but bracketing starts with recognizing that we can control what we think about what is under investigation, and in most approaches associated with phenomenology we can work to describe what we see. And this dimension of a phenomenological research tradition is not unlike strategies used in grounded theory (or even ethnography), where techniques to segment, code, and categorize data also tend to mitigate researcher subjectivities in the final results and findings of a study.

Given the need to probe into the details of an event or interaction—or a series of them—personal interviewing has been the center of data collection activities for phenomenological researchers. In fact, the standard data collection procedure in phenomenology is in-depth interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Schram, 2003; Seidman, 2006), and Seidman advances the idea of a three-part, sequenced interview with participants. Seidman (pp. 16–18) describes this three-part interview series as follows:

Perhaps most distinguishing of all its features, this model of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing involves conducting a series of three separate interviews with each participant. People's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them. In the *first interview* [emphasis added], the interviewer's task is to put the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time. The purpose of the *second interview* [emphasis added] is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present lived experience in the topic area of the study. In the *third interview* [emphasis added], we ask participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience. The question of "meaning" . . . addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between participants' work and life.

This three-interview sequence may require three discrete but interrelated protocols. What is more, this interview approach hinges on establishing and maintaining long-term rapport with participants. Really, you must connect closely with participants to execute this type of interview series, which can yield incredibly rich data. With such an approach, fewer participants need to be invited, recruited, and interviewed, so data collection activities turn toward relationship management of a smaller sample—perhaps 5 to 15 participants.

With potentially rich data from sequenced in-depth interviewing, phenomenological approaches to data analysis direct researchers to identify the structure of what participants say. This type of textual-structural analysis moves from description of the phenomenon, the "something" or event or interaction in participants' lives, to interpretation of the phenomenon. While phenomenological analytical techniques vary, they share a core of procedural steps that get at the thematic structures in the data (i.e., transcribed interview data). The first general step is to identify the core textual segments (i.e., Moustakas's reduction or invariant

constituencies) by (a) listing “expressions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120) related to an experience, (b) segmenting and coding statements that illustrate or illuminate the experience, and (c) synthesizing coded statements to produce thematic descriptions of the structure of an experience. Ultimately, the structural description of the experience emerges and can be the subject of interpretation.

Narrative inquiry.

Stories are one of the most widely used and most accessible forms of communication today and really, of any age. And this is the appeal of narrative inquiry, which views stories as a means to explore broader social patterns under investigation. Because narrative inquiry relies on stories, both from participants shared with researcher and researcher-generated stories from information gathered from participants, “[n]arrative research has become a very popular field in contemporary social sciences” (Squire et al., 2015). Atkinson and Delamont (2006, p. 164) report that narratives have “become a central feature of qualitative research in many social sciences.”

Who doesn't like a good story, right? They are ubiquitous, seemingly everywhere in our lives in one form or another, and they can penetrate us with their characters, plots, and messages. On this point, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 17) share an insightful and compelling reason to turn to narratives in research work: “For us, life—as we come to it and as it comes to others—is filled with narrative fragments, enacted in storied moments of time and space, and reflected upon and understood in terms of narrative unities and discontinuities.” But stories are much more than that. Indeed, they carry all sorts of meaning among folks in local settings and may confer statuses associated with social and professional standing (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). And narrative inquiry is much more than describing and interpreting or compiling and relating stories. Rather, such an approach implies that the researcher is a storyteller, too. Of course, this is not uncharacteristic of other qualitative research traditions—we are all storytellers of sorts, collecting types of stories as field researchers and using results from data analysis to tell (i.e., describe and interpret) the story of what we observed and with whom we interacted in the field. In narrative inquiry, however, the storytelling role takes an elevated position and requires researchers to develop storylines with characters and plot structures—which is a bit of a departure from ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory.

Narrative inquiry focus.

Narrative inquiry tends to have multiple meanings (Polkinghorne, 1995), and some researchers refer to narrative inquiry as a broad term that includes life history and biography research approaches (Schwandt, 2007). Whatever term you use for the approach, narrative research focuses on narration or storytelling and the products of this activity (Squire et al., 2015). So what does this mean? Simply put, stories. For researchers, narrative generally relates to discourse that assumes a

formal apparatus: details in the context of experiences, special events, and daily rituals are sequenced and organized around a plot structure. Here, there is a sequence and order implicit in an account—they make sense and are understood or they risk irrelevance. These narratives are personal and familial accounts from daily life, cultural myths, folk- and elite-lore, grand social and political metanarratives, and so on, that we can treat as “performances” (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006).

Sample Narrative Inquiry Research Question

How do longshoremen at the port of New York and New Jersey construct and share experiences about injuries suffered on the job?

Historically, Bruner (1986) argues that two types of stories or modes of narration predominate. Looking at these types of stories as a binary, one type of narrative mode is logical, deductive, and scientific—what Bruner describes as making “use of procedures to assure verifiable reference and to test for empirical truth” (p. 166). By contrast, stories may be more imaginative, poetic, and artistic—attributes that tend to engage, entertain, and connect people to their histories even if the stories are not “true” (Bruner, p. 173). Here, Bruner suggests that we think about things in our lives in these two ways, framing what we do, see, and talk about along logical or creative lines. Whatever stories emerge from the field, narrative researchers tend to pursue two lines of inquiry: one focuses on “what people’s stories are about—their plots, characters, and sometimes structure or sequencing of their content”—and the other looks at how folks tell stories (Chase, 2013, pp. 58–59).

Narrative inquiry methods and procedural steps.

As storytellers, narrative researchers do what lots of social scientists do: They go into the field and interact with folks—observing, listening, and probing. The focus of fieldwork—and narrative inquirers in general—is on experience, which necessarily pushes you into the field to engage folks in their daily lives and environments. Not unlike ethnography (or even grounded theory), narrative inquiry directs us to engage folks where they are—with prolonged time spent with them. And because narrative inquiry focuses on stories as texts, it is more than just a way to look at what people say. Indeed, the approach generally calls for you as a researcher to assume a listener role as interviewees assume a narrator role—where you solicit stories that narrators share (Chase, 2013, p. 61).

With performative accounts in focus in narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 50) identify a set of three areas that you can investigate: time, space, and interaction. That is, you can explore temporal character of sequenced stories that relate to people, places, and processes—following the story lines as

they appear in various forms in the field. The idea here is to move beyond a superficial treatment of what folks share with you and what you observe, leveraging a structure that accounts for the temporal, sequential, and social dimensions of how people frame their experiences.

Ultimately, narrative inquiry asks you to produce a research story of folks who told stories in the field. In fact, Polkinghorne (1995) argues that narrative researchers can approach data collection and analysis from one of two lenses. Requiring researchers to make a decision early in the fieldwork process, Polkinghorne (p. 12) describes analysis of narratives and narrative analysis in the following way:

In the first type, analysis of narratives, researchers collect stories as data and analyze them with paradigmatic processes. The paradigmatic analysis results in descriptions of themes that hold across the stories or in taxonomies of types of stories, characters, or settings. In the second type, narrative analysis, researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories (for example, a history, case study, or biographic episode). Thus, analysis of narratives moves from stories to common elements, and narrative analysis moves from elements to stories.

Here, you have two discrete approaches to how you gather and make sense of information from the field—and what seems unique to narrative analysis is the latter: telling the story of what you recorded. While the analysis of narratives—this approach resembles thematic data analysis more generally—characterizes the prevailing approach in social and behavioral science research (i.e., in and between disciplines that use fieldwork to collect data), narrative analysis moves you into the artistic position of storyteller.

Whether you collect stories to explore their themes or record themes to retell them as stories, you tend to have creative license. Indeed, Van Maanen (2011) describes how researchers represent their fieldwork experiences as tales in an ethnographic record. Here, he argues that three types of tales can frame how you retell what you recorded in the field: realist tales, confessional tales, and impressionist tales. With realist tales, you describe cultural rituals, practices, and norms in a way that is acceptable to the broader community of researchers—necessarily using conventions of the social science discipline(s) with which you are associated (Van Maanen, p. 45). Moving away from more standard practices of social science research, Van Maanen suggests a second type of storytelling—confessional—where you as a researcher share stories that put us inside fieldwork settings by offering insight into how you entered the field, negotiated access, built and managed relationships, and gathered information (p. 73). Finally, impressionist tales are more stylized forms of stories, where you use dramatic literary techniques such as allegory and symbolism to “present the doing of fieldwork rather than simply the doer or the done” (Van Maanen, p. 102).

Whatever tale you tell about what you observed in the field, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) consider three components to convert jottings, field notes, transcribed

interviews, documents, and other archival or online texts into a research narrative. They argue that narrative researchers need to account for voice, or the sources of who talks in the story; signature, or the researcher roles that you present in the research write-up; and audience, or for whom the results are written. With balancing voice and signature, an inherent risk that remains in storytelling is the imposition of our own cultural meaning on the stories that others (our participants) share. As you transition from field to office, the tendency to use your cultural lens is natural in the interpretive process that accompanies in most analytical forms of qualitative research. Emihovich (1995) describes how what we say and how we tell a story is necessarily embedded in social power relations, and we are in unique positions of power as storytellers—so issues of voice and authenticity are important. And because narrative inquiry requires you to tell stories, there may be a tendency to operate from within a grand narrative, as we know it from our personal experiences. Speaking to this point, Clandinin and Connelly (p. 25) share that they battled attempts to get wrapped up in the “grand narrative.” They go on to say, “These tentacles seemed to find expression in a way to think about behavior” (Clandinin & Connelly, p. 25). What is more, you can utilize standard strategies to account for who we are in our research work, including working as a research team (through investigator triangulation), using member checks, and moving away from environments where researchers may be more inclined to describe and interpret stories from their personal experiences are all strategies to mitigate the effects of these influences.

Case study.

As one of the most popular approaches in graduate school and among scholars-practitioners—particularly in applied research fields—case study designs offer flexibility and a focus on a specific system (case). Creswell (1996, p. 62) explains that case studies appeal to his students because his students are familiar with the approach from their own fields of practice (Creswell, 1996; Merriam, 2009), pointing to a broad application across diverse disciplinary and professional contexts that speaks to what Stake (1995, p. xii) describes as case study’s unique openness. Indeed, case study as an approach to collect and analyze data draws on ethnographic, phenomenological, and narrative research traditions—and case study investigations can be explicitly embedded in these research traditions depending on the research problem, purpose, and questions. So you can conceivably frame an exploration of the experiences of elementary school teachers in professional learning communities in urban charter schools as an ethnographic case study.

Case study focus.

While some scholars argue that case studies do not constitute a distinct research design or tradition (Schram, 2003), I would argue that if grounded theory can be considered more than just a set of guidelines to analyze data, then

a case study approach is more than just a way to format a report of qualitative research (Schram, p. 66). Much like grounded theory, case studies are not usually associated with specific procedural steps for data collection, but the type of case (see below) that you select to explore may direct you to methods—interviews, observations, electronic or print documents, or archival records may work well for an investigation—and detailed procedures in data collection. Similarly, case study approaches do not generally guide data analysis—so analytical techniques may be applied within the specific parameters of the case or cases in the study. What further circumscribes case studies from conventional qualitative research designs is the focus on units of analysis—the case or cases—rather than the phenomenon under investigation.

This focus on a unit of analysis—what Merriam (2009) and Creswell (1996) describe as a bounded system—is a key distinguishing characteristic of case studies and can more concretely be viewed as “a specific, a complex, functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p. 2). Merriam describes this “functioning thing” accessibly in a way that we can all grasp: “a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 40). Imagine a college campus, an academic department, a school classroom, a nonprofit organization, a corporation, a small business, an online retailer, a homeless shelter, a church community, a classroom, a protest movement, or a legal statute—these all have boundaries, literally property boundary lines or four walls, a unit in a building or complex, a website with an Internet address, a group with eligibility criteria for inclusion, or a text that starts and finishes. These entities also share a start and/or end date, further delineating their status as single units around which lines can be drawn.

Beyond the boundedness of cases as a characteristic, Merriam (2009, pp. 43–44) describes three additional characteristics of case studies: particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Whether you have an interest in the case because the case is so unique, what Stake (1995) calls an intrinsic case study, or you are using the case to explore a broader phenomenon, you describe and interpret what you document at the field site or sites. Frequently, researchers use cases to investigate larger patterns. This approach to case study research is what Merriam describes as heuristic and Stake refers to as instrumental. When researchers use more than one case, they conduct what Stake calls a collective case study or what Houghton, Casey, Shaw, and Murphy (2013) describe as a multiple case study research approach. But take note: A multiple case study design is distinct from a multisite case study design, where in the former you select more than one program, for example, and in the latter, the single program may be observed in multiple locations.

Sample Case Study Research Question

How do volunteers at the YWCA offer participants opportunities to develop mentoring relationships with role models in the local community?

Case study methods and procedural steps.

Given the more general approach in case study research, you have almost every available qualitative data collection and analysis procedure open to you. An initial consideration for the selection of cases, where you naturally start a qualitative case study, is in how accessible they are to you. Stake (1995, p. 4) suggests that you select a case or cases that you can access and welcome you as a researcher and accept your investigation, including a place where gatekeepers, sponsors, and informants function to grant permission and help interpret what is going on. This approach may lead you to a site or sites that you know well or place where you can conduct backyard research. But backyard research can be challenging—as we will see in the next few chapters—and convenience sampling can be questionable and may not withstand close scrutiny. Why then consider friendly, familiar, or easy-to-get-to sites? Because as Stake (p. 4) argues, we select cases not by systematically sampling them so that they necessarily apply to other cases, but by identifying them as important to the study's goals. Of course, this reasoning is consistent with qualitative research more generally—and the transferability of one case to another may need to be discussed within the context of your investigation. But even if you do not use a formal sampling strategy, if you select a case or cases that meet specific criteria for inclusion in your study—based on your research problem, purpose, and question(s)—you are applying a type of system to identifying what you will focus on as a unit of analysis and where you will collect data.

If there are many ways to do a case study—design and methods—then you can use just about any qualitative research tradition to guide what you do and ultimately how you address the problem that you pose in your investigation. For example, Zeller (1995) describes how a narrative research approach can fit in a case study design, detailing how “[n]arration provides a sense of immediacy of an event unfolding before the reader's eyes” (p. 76). Ethnography, phenomenology, and grounded theory may be used as a case studies approach if a specific system—program, project, event, or process—is explored. Even if you just borrow components of one of these research traditions, then you can frame your investigation in dual terms. For example, if you focus on the cultural experiences of a group or organization—how they behave and what they believe—and use participant observations in your methods, then you can talk about an ethnographic case study. This is the more malleable character of case study research.

Whether you use a single case, multicase study, or multisite case study design—and whether you fuse case study design with a qualitative research tradition—case study research generally requires you to use multiple data sources and data collection methods. With several options to collect data, you can procedurally mix and match what you do in the field, combining personal interview and document reviews, for example, with member checks. The force that drives you to use multiple data sources and/or methods in case study research is triangulation, or the process of checking what you find by examining one set of results against another to ensure quality in your study. In Chapter 8, you will see an extended discussion of trustworthiness in qualitative research and the use of triangulation

in the research process, and Chapter 5 covers key elements of triangulation: data sources, data types, and data collection methods. Here, what you need to focus on is the general practice of triangulation in case study research that supports a robust approach in an investigation.

More qualitative research traditions: Competing approaches to conventional research design.

You can trace the roots of most qualitative research approaches to a set of values that researchers share. In fact, Gubrium and Holstein (1997) argue that qualitative research traditions present differently. They describe the following value orientations that qualitative research, and researchers, exhibit (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, pp. 11–13):

1. **Skepticism** about knowledge is what pushes us as qualitative researchers to design and execute investigations of human social life.
2. Where skepticism and criticism go hand in hand, **scrutinize** what people experience so that we are close to the phenomenon under investigation.
3. With a focus on descriptive detail, qualitative researchers explore aspects of **social life** that researchers who use quantitative approaches might miss.
4. Here, you can see an orientation to follow **processes** that transpire in daily life as they happen on the part of qualitative researchers.
5. **Subjectivity** is the idea that we are central to our studies, where “the subject and the subjective are integral features of social life . . . and . . . that the researcher is a subject in his or her own right, present in the same world as those studied” (p. 12). You can find a discussion of subjectivity in qualitative research in Chapter 8.
6. **Complexity** is an easy one, right? We recognize that “human agency and circumstance” are not easily understood—that our lives are “not straightforwardly describable” (p. 13). If we value being close to participants and we explore their lives and the need to challenge our assumptions about why they are and what they are doing, then we accept that we can never really know all there is to know about the phenomenon under investigation.

Over time, these values shaped the development of research traditions in qualitative inquiry. But, in part, as social conditions change and marginalized groups emerge from colonial and structural systems of oppression, newer lenses followed—leading to approaches that reframed how you view a problem, gather and interpret information, and impact the lives of local research participants. If you consider

what, as a scholarly community, we share—the values, beliefs, and assumptions about human social life—then you can see how we do not, and likely will not, reach consensus on how to go about exploring it systematically.

While ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and case study generally predominate in qualitative research studies, newer approaches—now well established—to frame social and behavioral science investigations challenged the focus and procedural guidelines of more conventional traditions. In fact, if you look historically at qualitative research methodologies, you will see how they have developed from early forms into more complex systems, and newer approaches that have developed over the last several decades extend this pattern. You can see this development not only in the overall research approaches—the assumptions and foundational principles of a research tradition—but in the methods associated with them. We know much more about interviewing techniques, for example, which appear much more sophisticated than previously seen.

How we go about social and behavioral science inquiry today—the historically and recently developed approaches—can be explained by both paradigmatic and technological shifts (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008). In fact, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (p. 7) argue that sociopolitical factors explain our social world and approaches to learning about it. “Emerging as a response to historical patterns, in part, new approaches that address social and economic inequities in marginalized communities include critical theories and standpoint epistemologies. These approaches work to expose the racialized and gendered ways that we behave and the racist, sexist, heterosexist, and xenophobic forms of discrimination and exclusion of subgroups in society. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (p. 7) sum up these approaches well by explaining that they promote “multiple subjective perspectives on reality that seeks to question and thus expose the power dynamics of traditional paradigms by illuminating previously subjugated knowledge on the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality.” And it is these positions and positionalities, of both the researcher and researched, that illuminate who we are and how we shape our research work—ultimately facilitating empowerment and improvement in the lives of local people. Frequently, the intersectionality of these positional dynamics in research settings shape how we relate to folks in the field (Hampshire, Iqbal, Blell, & Simpson, 2014, p. 225)

In the academy, the emergence and growth of interdisciplinary fields such as women's studies, Chicano/a studies, African American/Africana/Black studies, Asian American studies, and queer studies accompanied these shifts in how social and behavioral science researchers reframed their work—and how they went about exploring the social world. Through new academic departments and scholars to teach, research, and mentor students in new interdisciplinary degree programs that focus on marginalized and excluded groups from society, new fields offered opportunities to explore, experiment, and pilot new ways to design and conduct systematic investigations of long-standing patterns of structural inequality and the toll it takes on individuals, families, and communities. More recently,

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2008) argue that technological innovations have pushed traditional approaches to social and behavioral science inquiry in new directions. For example, web-based technologies, including social media, have served not only as newer modes to collect and analyze data but also as ways to conceptualize entire projects (see Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion here). The upshot? Social science researchers, and the communities of scholars associated with academic disciplines, have reshaped how we go about investigating our social world.

Ethnographic traditions.

While classic ethnographic approaches explore the experiences of groups or subgroups—they tend to focus on behaviors, beliefs, and products—from the perspective of a researcher who is not a member of the group or subgroup, newer forms of ethnography reframe who does the exploration, how they go about doing it, and what they focus on. These newer ethnographic approaches merge conventional methods—participant observations, interviews, and document reviews—with a critical focus (e.g., public ethnography, critical ethnography, and critical collaborative ethnography) or with a narrative or a self-in-focus narrative lens (narrative ethnography and autoethnographic narrative ethnography)—and reflect the evolving direction of the field toward challenging historical patterns of power and domination.

Public ethnography, critical ethnography, and critical collaborative ethnography. Emerging from traditional ethnographic work in cultural anthropology and qualitative sociology, critical ethnography applies a critical lens to research approaches. Thomas (1993, p. vii) describes critical ethnography as “a way of applying a subversive worldview to the conventional logic of cultural inquiry.” He goes on to say that this approach “offers a more direct style of thinking about the relationships among knowledge, society, and political action” (Thomas, p. vii). Indeed, the critical dimensions of this approach to inquiry adopt emancipatory aims and work to reverse repressive structures that groups and subgroups experience in society—all while remaining embedded within a broader ethnographic tradition. Whether the focus is on racialized or gendered systems of oppression—or any form of oppression—critical ethnography challenges multiple dimensions of human social life: organizations, policies, and so on (Thomas, p. 4). In critical ethnographic approaches, the researcher is a central instrument in the emancipatory goals of the investigation. Much like variations that operate within the boundaries of broader ethnographic research traditions, critical forms accept the subjective position of the researcher and the subjective and subjugated positions of the researched. With an orientation toward action—or praxis—critical variations of ethnography offer researchers not only a lens to explore the experiences of a group of people but also a framework for facilitating social change.

Emerging from this critical ethnographic tradition, C. A. Bailey (2008, p. 266) describes public ethnography as a vehicle to “reduce social injustice . . . critique structures and social processes that promote inequality [that] includes active

participation of the scholar in the fight against repressive conditions . . . [with] an audience . . . beyond academic fields to include some facet of the public at large.”

This characteristic of public ethnography—the public part of it—is what pushes the boundaries of traditional ethnography and moves this form into the realm of action. In fact, Fassin (2015, p. 594) argues that social science researchers often finish investigative work with scholarly publications and presentations—by disseminating work products at association meetings and in academic journals or monographs. Recognizing that many social science researchers push the reach of their work through scholarly and academic activities, Fassin calls for systematic investigations into the public extension of ethnography. So how do you extend ethnographic explorations conducted by academic researchers to a broad public so that they reach communities who could benefit from the findings? Recall one of the first rules of academic writing? You have to write to your audience, to develop something with your audience members in mind. In the case of public ethnography, members of a specific group or groups may be the consumers of your work. But Gans (2010) qualifies who you need to write to and circumscribes just who this public is—setting limits on who would likely consume and benefit from your work. Here, Gans (p. 98) argues that the primary consumers of public ethnography are individuals who are college educated. The hope here is that college educated members of groups or communities could serve as leaders for social change. Gans identifies two general rules for public ethnography: It cannot use technical jargon (but rather terms accessible to a general audience) and needs to be meaningful (relevant and applicable) to groups who may benefit from it.

Connecting research to researched communities is a key feature of critical collaborative ethnography, too, where researchers share their research roles with folks who are the subject of an investigation (Bhattacharya, 2008). We are not talking about functional (and somewhat superficial) fieldwork roles such as gatekeeper or informant, but this is collaboration on multiple levels and at various stages of the investigative process, including participant roles as co-researchers in conceptualizing, designing, executing, and disseminating research. But how is this done exactly? Lassiter (2005) suggests several strategies: individual and group reviewers, community-appointed editorial boards, and focus group procedures to facilitate input and feedback. These are more consultant roles for local folks, and Lassiter (p. 95) argues for working strategically when you collaborate in the field: co-construct final texts. Even here, though, there is a range of writing roles—from narration to formal participation in the writing process, and researchers must work closely with their local community counterparts to inform how these roles emerge and coalesce in a project. The critical component of critical collaborative ethnography pushes work together, emphasizing a “practice that focuses on projects that challenge dominant hegemonic global structures at the intersection of race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability” (Bhattacharya, p. 305). Ultimately, critical collaborative ethnography invites folks with whom you work in field contexts into the research process that spans the project—from pre-fieldwork to presentation to academic and lay audience functions—not only to account for the

effects of our own positions and positionalities—and issues of power and privilege in researcher-subject relationships in research settings—but also to enhance the relevance of our work to the broader public outside the academy.

Focusing on collaboration among researchers in the field, rather than between researchers and researched, Justice and Hadley (2015) hint at how collaboration shapes researcher stance. Indeed, they (Justice & Hadley, p. 66) argue that field relations often take shape unequally such that story ownership tends not to extend beyond the researcher. Within research teams, they (Justice & Hadley, p. 66) go on to recognize that individuals involved in or who support work in the field tend not to be assigned a role equal to a principal investigator or lead research as “co-investigators or co-authors in resulting publications.” This position leaves open opportunities to acknowledge collaboration between researchers and informants or local collaborators, who may not necessarily assume a formal researcher role but who facilitate the research process and informally function as researchers. Whatever the research relationships or arrangements in the local context, if as a researcher I am open to collaboration, Justice and Hadley (p. 74) point out that I may “better understand how my role as culture and tradition bearer affects my ethnographic stance.”

Narrative ethnography. Much like critical and public forms of ethnography that connect our research work with folks with whom we study and the broader public, with an aim on reversing historical patterns of repression, narrative ethnography pushes us outside academic circles and extends the reach of our work to lay audiences (Boylorn, 2016, p. 15). Also like critical ethnography, narrative ethnographic forms situate researchers within the contexts of local communities who do the storytelling—prompting researchers to account for who they are in relation to who others in their projects are. In this way, narrative ethnography seems to offer a narrative inquiry focus on “the production, distribution, and circulation of stories in society” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008, p. 250) and the thrust of emergent ethnographic forms that offer more meaning to and action in local communities by exploring “who produces particular kinds of stories, where they are likely to be encountered, what their consequences are, under what circumstances particular narratives are more or less accountable, what interests publicize them, how they gain popularity, and how they are challenged” (p. 250).

Portraiture methodology.

Incorporating qualitative case study and ethnographic research traditions, a portraiture methodological approach explores the experiences of individuals who share characteristics as narratives or life histories of who they are and how they present themselves (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Across qualitative research approaches that promote reflexive practices where researchers embrace and account for subjectivities in the contexts of their explorations, portraiture leverages the subjective lens of the researcher in an artistic depiction of the researched (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). Dixon, Chapman, and Hill (2005, p. 20) describe the process of portraiture:

Each author also extends herself to her audience by articulating her positionality and subjectivity with regard to the research. In each article, the portraitist/musician/poet makes known the personal and professional connections that are inherent in the chosen project. The beliefs, goals, and ways of knowing of each author and her participants come to life in the portraits/compositions/poems that have been created.

Here, the portraitist shapes the representations of the folks whom they follow, requiring extended time in the field and close, direct contact with participants who are being portrayed. But Hampsten (2015) cautions that this type of work requires individuals who are willing to trust you and spend an unusual amount of time with you—so recruitment and participation may challenge you.

Visual and performance-based approaches.

Like stories in narrative inquiry or narrative ethnography, arts-based approaches in qualitative research have emerged over the last several decades from more historical forms of traditions. Prosser (2013, p. 177) describes visual-based research as one that moves researchers to study what they see in the world “that . . . is mediated by physiology, culture, and history.” He goes on to say that visual research is generally how people perceive and attribute meaning to things (Prosser, p. 177).

As one variation of visual approaches, visual ethnography moves beyond earlier versions of inquiry of images and explores images as cultural texts—rooted in and intimately connected to their cultural contexts. Here, Hampsten (2015) describes an approach that blends a more collaborative (“participatory”) practice with an ethnographic focus and methods in learning from folks through the images that they produce. Without exclusive rights to interpretation or functional appropriation of their imagery, visual ethnographers attempt to facilitate empowerment in communities at the local level and enhance meaningful exchanges of understanding via images—such as with paintings, murals, photographs, and so on. If you use visual ethnography in your work and/or your arts-based research uses photography in the field, PhotoVoice may appeal to you as a researcher. An approach that has emerged recently and gained in popularity, PhotoVoice (<https://photovoice.org>) puts photography in the hands of people who are the subject of a study or project so that they can capture images that are important and meaningful to them. What distinguishes PhotoVoice is a participatory action research approach, a focus on advocacy for marginalized communities, and a support structure to design and implement a project in local settings.

Artistic approaches to ethnographic research may take the forms of dramatic texts. Indeed, Holm (2008, p. 329) describes performance autoethnography as a focus on cultural meaning through explorations of the researcher as self. These exploratory forms of research include self-reflective portrayals of who you are as a researcher and “may be communicated as a short story, essay, poem, novel, play, performance piece, or other experimental text” (Leavy, 2008, p. 349). As part of the performance, researchers may fictionalize stories—and their characters—to

present more nuanced, intimate meaning of cultural texts. Beyond a researcher's instrumental look inward in performance autoethnography, performance-based approaches may include entire dramatic productions, as in ethnodramas or dance-based forms of presentation (Holm, 2008).

Using mixed methods with qualitative research traditions in dissertation contexts.

As you consider an approach to designing your dissertation study and explore a research tradition that is the best fit for your broader research framework, you may have thought about or be thinking of a mixed-methods approach. Known widely as mixed methods research, the approach emerged over the last several decades as an alternative to the two dominant research approaches of quantitative and qualitative inquiry. Two common examples of this approach in a study are the use of a survey and interviews or institutional (numeric) data and focus groups. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007, p. 5) offer a concise definition of mixed-methods research:

Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies.

The overarching idea with mixed methods designs is that using two research approaches, in essence, is better than using one alone.

Mixed methods approaches are appealing as designs in dissertation studies. When students learn about the need to triangulate data or to ensure that their data are trustworthy, they tend to think that the use of more than one procedure—one each from both quantitative and qualitative research—means richer data, more meaningful results, and more widely accepted findings and recommendations. In some cases, instructors or advisors encourage this approach; in other cases, students discover variations of this approach in dissertation studies or other published studies. Wherever the origin, mixed methods designs can benefit a study. Particularly appropriate in evaluation studies, policy studies, and large-scale, multisite case studies, mixed methods designs can be effectively used in dissertation studies when they align with a research framework, resources permit the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, and students and their advisors possess the requisite methodological expertise.

While mixed methods designs have strengths, they need to be used with caution in dissertation contexts—and only in cases where they fit in a study's overall research framework. Indeed, this is probably the first and most frequent misuse of these types of designs among doctoral students. If your research questions require the use of a qualitative approach to gathering and making sense of information,

then why would you need to conduct a survey? Why would you need to perform either descriptive or inferential statistical procedures in data analysis? Why would you need to include tables in your results? What would all of this do for what you want to do in your study? From a qualitative perspective, a qualitative research tradition and methods will work just fine to evaluate your research questions and make a strong contribution to research and practice! For example, using ethnography as a focus, Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) advance the idea that using any research tradition implies that it is the best but not necessarily the only way to frame an investigative approach. How does ethnography go with a quasi-experimental survey research design, for example, if you have framed your investigation as an exploration of the experiences of a group? Or how about phenomenological case study with an ex post facto observational design if you are examining the structure of an interaction?

A guiding principle in any study is to let your research design follow your research framework. Put another way: If you include both qualitative and quantitative methods in your methodological framework, then you need to connect them to your research design. Mixed methods mean more than multiple methods. The use of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches integrated in a single design is the essence of mixed methods research—and must be used if a design includes quantitative and qualitative lines of inquiry in a study. The key with mixed methods research is to frame the study in such a way that it requires both numeric and textual data to evaluate the research questions (Wolcott, 2008, p. 73) and inform your contribution to research and practice. Otherwise, you risk conducting two studies that are fragmented but are presented as a single study.

Aside from the appropriateness or fit of a research design, the use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis procedures can be daunting—they can be time-consuming and resource intensive. Imagine the tasks involved—and the expertise needed—for survey instrumentation (or no instrumentation if using an already validated instrument), sampling, administration, processing, analysis, and presentation coupled with interview protocol development, sampling, recruitment, consenting, interviewing, processing, transcribing, segmenting, coding, clustering or grouping, networking, thematizing, and presenting results. It's exhausting just thinking and writing about it! This is a lot of work, to say the least. Of course, mixed methods designs need not be this complex—but the amount of time and resources needed to execute such designs nevertheless generally increase in comparison to single-methodology designs.

Integrating Methodology in Qualitative Dissertations Through Research Traditions

While research traditions are the natural building blocks of methodological frameworks, they do not stand on their own or exist outside of the broader research framework of a study. In fact, the work that leads to the selection and use of a



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research tradition that functions as the design or blueprint of what you do in a study starts with the research problem—rooted in an evaluative synthesis of empirical and/or conceptual literature. As discussed in Chapter 2, previous investigations related to the phenomenon under study in your dissertation study forms the basis of your research problem, purpose, and questions. In turn, the constellation of research problem, purpose, and questions directs the steps that you will develop and implement to gather and make sense of information related to the phenomenon. The directive role of your research framework is foundational, and the connective relationship between what you draw out of the literature as your research framework and your plan of action for data collection and analysis rests on your research tradition. How you make these connections matters.

As the origins of your study, the questions that accompany the problem(s) of research and practice that you identify tell a story about what you will do and hope to accomplish—your purpose. Later on, when you get to your results and findings, on the other side of data collection and analysis, you will return to the story—but this time the story relates to the data that naturally extends and resolves the plot that you developed earlier in your study.

While the structure of a study marks the work of most researchers in the social and behavioral sciences, qualitative researchers tend to storytelling in their writing. In their work, Golden-Biddle and Locke (2005, p. 26) argue that qualitative researchers must “craft storylines that draw on the theoretically relevant insights of field engagement and cultivate the optimal space for . . . work to contribute to the literature.” Borrowing language from fiction writing, they argue that researchers develop “theorized storylines” (Golden-Biddle & Locke, p. 25) from the literature by problematizing the literature (“complication”—p. 25), addressing the problem (“development”—p. 25), and offering new knowledge and practices (“resolution”—p. 25). So write-ups of qualitative research studies as storylines generally start with a hook—the significance or “so what?” questions—and move quickly to the literature (p. 27): establishing a problem with what we currently know and do in the fields of research and practice. The final dimension of this early storyline is a foreshadowing of how the study attempts to address the problem (p. 27). In fact, Golden-Biddle and Locke contend that this final statement “specifies how the present research intends to” address the problem posed earlier (p. 44).

But where does methodology and specifically, research design, fit into a study’s storyline? After the research problem, purpose, and questions, you present a final statement, through a research tradition, about the direction of the study and its unique approach to address the gaps in knowledge and practice that emerge from

a review of the literature. So what specific roles does a research tradition play? The answer lies, in part, in the literature from which the research problem emerges. With each study that you evaluate, you flag its methodological approach. As you review groups of studies linked meaningfully by topic or methods, you piece together a patchwork of approaches that researchers have used to address related problems. Naturally, *your* statement of the problem in previous research can include what's missing methodologically from these investigations. For example, in her dissertation study, Bertone (2016) argued that previous research on the roles of growth mindset in the transfer experience of community college students tended to use quantitative approaches. Her research problem and plan to address the problem, then, included direct methodological references to qualitative research.

The answer to the question of the place of research traditions in the early development of your storyline, too, can be found in the nuances of foreshadowing as a mechanism to connect the research framework to the rest of what you will do in the study—your methods. In fact, you can trace the ties between research traditions—in the case of this book, ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and case study—and the rest of a methodological framework. In Table 3.4, you can see how research traditions shape the direction of the other sections of the methodology chapter, from research setting to data analysis procedures. There is almost a network of nodes between each section and the research tradition, with an interplay between them.

The steps to arrive at a methodological framework in your study include question posing, which usually follows problematizing a set of previous related investigations. In research questions, implicit references—codes—to what you value and what lens will guide you in your study appear in what's generally considered three standard components of qualitative research questions: phenomenon, group, and setting.

Research question-tradition connections.

Given the centrality of research questions in a study—questions derive from the research problem, a direct descendant of the literature review, and inform the development of the research tradition—how research traditions manifest in research question(s) is one of the most significant issues that you must address. In fact, the connections between your research question(s) and research tradition need to be clear and direct; the language and focus associated with research traditions need to be woven into the fabric of a research question. If you proceed in an investigation with the research question(s) developed early in the research process uninformed by a research tradition, here is what you risk: Data that do not adequately evaluate your question(s). In such cases, you are left without a way to address your research problem. You would never really say, “Here’s my research problem, squarely grounded in the literature, that guide my research questions—let’s start data collection.” Of course not—you need a basic plan to collect and analyze data at the very least. In the same way, you really cannot say, “I have my research questions, informed by a literature review, and I have a methodological

Table 3.4 Integrating Qualitative Research Traditions in the Dissertation Methodology Chapter

		Methodology Chapter Sections			
Research Tradition	Research Setting and Context	Data Sources and Sample	Data Collection Instruments	Data Collection Procedures	Data Analysis Procedures
	Sampling strategies: criteria, then . . .				
Ethnography	Convenience, chain or network sampling for families, small groups, community organizations, and/or institutions	Single significant case, sequential, and emergence-driven, group characteristics	Descriptive observation guide; informal and semi-structured interview protocols	Ethnographic fieldwork: participant observations, ethnographic (personal or group) interviews, documents, artifacts	Cultural domain, taxonomic, componential analysis (Spradley, 1979); comparative cultural analysis (Jacobson, 1991)
Grounded theory	Convenience, chain, or network sampling for small groups, community organizations, and/or institutions	Comparison-focused, group characteristics, concept or theoretical, mixed or combination (with probability)	Semi-structured focus group and/or personal interview protocols; descriptive observation guide	Concurrent data collection and analysis: Personal or group (semi-structured) interviews, observations, documents	Constant-comparative method (Charmaz, 2006); initial, intermediate, and theoretical coding strategies
Phenomenology	Chain or network sampling for small groups	Single significant case, sequential, and emergence-driven	Semi-structured interview protocol	In-depth, sequenced interviews with a small group of participants	Textural-structural analysis (Moustakas, 1994)
Narrative inquiry	Convenience, chain, or network sampling for families, small groups, and/or community organizations	Single significant case, sequential, and emergence-driven, group characteristics	Descriptive observation guide; informal and semi-structured interview protocols	Participant observations, ethnographic (personal or group) interviews, semi-structured interview, documents	Narrative analysis and analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995); use of tales (Van Maanen, 2011)
Case study	Convenience, network, or maximum variation sampling of small groups and organizations or institutions	Single significant case, comparison-focused, group characteristics, instructional-use multiple-case	Semi-structured focus group and/or personal interview protocols; descriptive observation guide	Personal or group (semi-structured) interviews, observations, and/or documents	Thematic data analysis (within and/or cross-case)

framework. I'm prepared to start data collection.” What's missing is a link between your broader research framework and methodological framework; this is a sort of pivot point in your study where you turn from what others have done in their research work to what you will do in yours by uniquely mixing a research tradition and methods.

Research traditions embedded in research questions.

When you look closely, you can see how research traditions inform research questions—especially in dissertation research contexts. In Table 3.5 below, you can see a set of research questions by qualitative research tradition—all student samples of assignments from doctoral research classes and final dissertation research studies. The questions reflect about three years of work for students—from early graduate coursework in a doctoral program (Ed.D.) in educational leadership to doctoral candidates near the end of their dissertation studies. During this time, students drafted initial research questions that guided literature reviews and led to the development of a research problem. Also during this time, they were working on their methodological framework, so their background to and plan for their studies interacted. In a sense, students were looking back while looking ahead—not unlike many social scientists in their research work.

Table 3.5 Final Research Question by Qualitative Research Tradition

Research Tradition	Primary Dissertation Research Question
Ethnography	What are the social experiences of first-year, first-generation, low-income Latino college students as they transition from an urban charter high school to regional urban public universities in Southern California? (Michel, 2014, p. 5)
	What are the academic experiences of Latino middle school students who transition from alternative settings to traditional school settings? (Peralta, 2014, p. 6)
	What do LAUSD pilot school leaders experience as they use their autonomies to create innovative small schools? (Payne, 2013, p. 6)
	[W]hat are the experiences of transfer students of color in a faculty research program in engineering and computer science at a regional urban four-year public university? (Randolph, 2014, p. 5)
Grounded theory	What are the effects of the student-faculty interaction on student behavior related to academic honesty? (Bluestein, 2012, p. 7)
	What factors of an academic success course affect the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university? (Hampton, 2015, p. 3)

(Continued)

Table 3.5 (Continued)

Research Tradition	Primary Dissertation Research Question
	How do institutional policies influence academic success/achievement, high school completion, A-G requirements, or GED completion, of high school homeless and foster youth in large, urban public school districts? (Nix, 2015, p. 8)
	How do full-release mentors shape novice teachers' perceptions of their students' academic abilities? (Harris, 2015, p. 11)
Phenomenology	What is essential for women executive leaders at California community colleges to describe critical learning moments as meaningful in their leadership practice? (Ghaus-Kelley, 2014, pp. 7–8)
Case study	What services and practices do college internship programs use to most effectively facilitate internships? (Johnson, 2013, p. 6)
	[W]hat role does gender play in the leadership style of former, and current, female leaders in higher education? (Edwards, 2015, p. 11)
Portraiture methodology	What is the meaning of student leadership from the perspective of Black female undergraduate students in locally sponsored, culturally based student organizations at Hispanic-Serving Institutions? (V. M. Bailey, 2012, p. 7)

What you see in Table 3.5 are questions that reflect not only the empirical research framework but also the methodological framework that they later developed. In the case of Michel (2014, p. 5), the primary research question reveals the use of an ethnographic research tradition: “What are the social experiences of first-year, first-generation, low-income Latino college students as they transition from an urban charter high school to regional urban public universities in Southern California?” You can see the ethnographic focus on transition “experiences” (a key ethnographic term) of a specific group: Latino college students. Likewise, you detect an ethnographic focus on “experience” in what Peralta (2014, p. 6) developed as her research question: “What are the academic experiences of Latino middle school students who transition from alternative settings to traditional school settings?” The same goes for the research question work of Payne (2013, p. 6) and Randolph (2014, p. 5) respectively: “What do LAUSD pilot school leaders experience as they use their autonomies to create innovative small schools?” “[W]hat are the experiences of transfer students of color in a faculty research program in engineering and computer science at a regional urban four-year public university?”

Just like research questions structured by ethnographic research traditions, you can see how some students worked with grounded theory in the development of their research questions. With Bluestein (2012, p. 7), a grounded theory focus on relationships—in her case, between student contact with faculty academic honesty—can be seen: “What are the effects of the student-faculty

interaction on student behavior related to academic honesty?” Similarly, Hampton (2015, p. 3) settled on the following research question, which echoes grounded theory’s emphasis on explaining relational patterns: “What factors of an academic success course affect the academic self-efficacy of students on academic probation who are enrolled in a comprehensive public four-year regional university?” For Nix (2015, p. 8), the use of the term *influence* and the relationship between institutional policies and student outcomes are present: “How do institutional policies influence academic success/achievement, high school completion, A-G requirements, or GED completion, of high school homeless and foster youth in large, urban public school districts?” Rather than “affect” or “influence,” Harris (2015, p. 11) elected to go with “shape” in his question, reflecting a grounded theory methodological lens: “How do full-release mentors shape novice teachers’ perceptions of their students’ academic abilities?” In these four students’ research questions, the hallmark of a research tradition oriented toward developing a model to explain a phenomenon—how things relate to each other—can be found.

When we consider research questions shaped by a phenomenological research tradition, we find Ghaus-Kelley (2014, pp. 7–8) and her dissertation work on women executive community college leaders. In fact, her primary research question borrowed directly from phenomenology’s focus on the structure of an event or process or series of events or processes. Here is her question: “What is essential for women executive leaders at California community colleges to describe critical learning moments as meaningful in their leadership practice?” The use of “essential” to explore “critical learning moments” of leadership and the work with a small group of women executive leaders in the California community colleges uniquely ties Ghaus-Kelley’s question to her phenomenological research approach.

With case study approach’s focus on the unit of analysis—a bounded system or unit—what generally appear in research questions are references to a program, project, or group. In fact, Johnson (2013, p. 6) included a clear and compelling case study research question in her dissertation study: “What services and practices do college internship programs use to most effectively facilitate internships?” Edwards (2015, p. 11) also presented a case study focus on a group and looked at roles in female college and university leaders: “[W]hat role does gender play in the leadership style of former, and current, female leaders in higher education?”

Developing research questions informed by research traditions.

Your research problem, purpose, and questions lead the plan for your study, but they are insufficient on their own and cannot stand in for a research design and methods. Like most researchers who design and execute studies in the social and behavioral sciences, you probably developed a working research question or questions early in your study—maybe before or during your review of the current literature. With the background work of the study wrapped up, now comes the time for original data collection. What to do? If you craft a research question or

questions prior to adopting and developing a methodological framework, you are not alone—and you have lots of opportunities to reshape your questions.

Where research questions meet research tradition, the iterative, recursive process of social and behavioral science and, specifically, qualitative research can be seen early and ongoing in a study. Indeed, as you work within the general structure of qualitative research questions, you can incorporate terms characteristic or reflective of the research tradition that you use. The advice that I generally share with my graduate students is to use the formulaic structure of a research question that identifies the three components (phenomenon + group + site) to evaluate how you can see your research tradition reflected in the question. If you do not see strong connections between the current form of your question(s) and tradition, then you need to work to strengthen the links.

Key Questions to Ask Yourself

- How does my primary research question reflect the research tradition that I have selected?
- What key term or terms associated with the tradition appear in the research question?

For ethnographers, a typical research question may look like this: “What are the experiences of young Mexican women who are migrant farm workers in small rural communities in the San Joaquin Valley of California?” If we return to Michel’s (2014) work as an example, you can see how she experimented with her evolving research question by applying an ethnographic research focus to formulate terms linked closely to the tradition and the phenomenon that interested her. In fact, she used the research question formula (phenomenon + group + site) within the context of her developing methodological framework where ethnography functioned as her research design. Michel’s early version of a primary research question went like this: “What are the experiences of Latino high school students as they prepare to transition to a 4-year, comprehensive, regional public university?” This question could work well for an ethnographic study, but as she returned to the empirical literature related to her focus and developed a methodological framework, her question transitioned to, “What are the social experiences of first-year, first-generation, low-income Latino college students as they transition from an urban charter high school to regional urban public universities in Southern California?” Using Michel’s work, we can follow the development of her research questions using the formula (Creswell, 2014). Her early research question appeared as follows:

experiences in preparing to transition (phenomenon) + Latino students (group) + high school (setting or site)

While you see an ethnographic focus present in this above question and a clear group and site, Michel's later (and final) version of her research question promotes strong connections to an ethnographic research tradition and clarifies what types of experiences:

social experiences during transition (phenomenon) + Latino college students (group) + high school to university (setting or site)

Similarly, when we can look at Bluestein's (2012) dissertation work, we see how she moved from more general questions about academic dishonesty ("How is information about academic dishonesty communicated to students? What formal discussion is taking place?") to a primary research question that mirrors grounded theory's focus on developing a model that explains relationships among variables: "What are the effects of the student-faculty interaction on student behavior related to academic honesty?" Likewise, Ghaus-Kelley's (2014) research question started out as, "What are the most significant environmental challenges and uncertainties that force organizational change in their respective colleges currently?" Later, Ghaus-Kelley articulated a question with a clear focus on phenomenology: "What is essential for women executive leaders at California community colleges to describe critical learning moments as meaningful in their leadership practice?" Here's how her questions break down as a formula where the tradition can be detected immediately:

essence of critical learning moments (phenomenon) + women executive leaders (group) + California community colleges (setting or site)

In a final look at how research traditions shape questions, Johnson's (2013) dissertation work illustrates how a case study approach affects the focus and direction of a study. The initial form of Johnson's research question, "How do first-year teachers in secondary education perceive their previous student teaching experience during a university-based teacher education program," transitioned to, "What services and practices do college internship programs use to most effectively facilitate internships?" Using the formulaic lens for research questions, you can see how a case study's bounded system or unit appears clearly in the final version of Johnson's question:

services and practices for internships (phenomenon) + first-year secondary teachers (group) + **college internship programs** (setting or site)

In fact, what preceded the final iteration of a primary research question of the dissertation work of all these students evolved from early forms as you can see from Table 3.6.

Table 3.6 The Development of Research Questions by Qualitative Research Tradition

Research Tradition	Developmental Stage	Research Question
Ethnography	Literature review or pre-methodology chapter	“What are the experiences of Latino high school students as they prepare to transition to a 4-year, comprehensive, regional public university?” Michel, R. (2012, September 19). Introduction Narrative. Class assignment at California State University, Northridge, p. 1.
	Post-literature review or methodology chapter	“What are the social experiences of first-year, low-income, and first-generation Latino college students as they transition from an urban charter high school to a four-year, comprehensive, regional, urban public university in Southern California?” Michel, R. (2012, November 2). Chapter 3 – Methodology. Class assignment at California State University, Northridge, p. 3.
	Final dissertation	“What are the social experiences of first-year, first-generation, low-income Latino college students as they transition from an urban charter high school to regional urban public universities in Southern California?” (Michel, 2014, p. 5)
Grounded theory	Literature review or pre-methodology chapter	“How is information about academic dishonesty communicated to students? What formal discussion is taking place?” Bluestein, S. (2010, September 9). Chapter III: Methodology Introduction. Class assignment at California State University, Northridge, p. 2.
	Post-literature review or methodology chapter	“How does the faculty-student relationship cultivate shared norms with respect to academic dishonesty?” Bluestein, S. (2010, December 16). Chapter 3 Methodology. Class assignment at California State University, Northridge, p. 2.
	Final dissertation	“What are the effects of the student-faculty interaction on student behavior related to academic honesty?” (Bluestein, 2012, p. 7)
Phenomenology	Literature review or pre-methodology chapter	“What are the most significant environmental challenges and uncertainties that force organizational change in their respective colleges currently?” Ghaus-Kelley, H. (2012, September 16). Chapter III: Methodology Introduction to Chapter 3. Class assignment at California State University, Northridge, p. 3–4.
	Post-literature review or methodology chapter	“What is essential for female executive leaders at California community colleges to describe critical learning moments as meaningful in their leadership practice?” Ghaus-Kelley, H. (2012, December 4). Methodology Chapter III. Class assignment at California State University, Northridge, p. 3–4.

Research Tradition	Developmental Stage	Research Question
	Final dissertation	“What is essential for women executive leaders at California community colleges to describe critical learning moments as meaningful in their leadership practice (Ghaus-Kelley, 2014, pp. 7–8)?”
Case study	Literature review or pre-methodology chapter	“How do first-year teachers in secondary education perceive their previous student teaching experience during a university-based teacher education program?” Johnson, S. (2011, September 28). Chapter Three: Introduction Draft. Class assignment at California State University, Northridge, p. 1.
	Post-literature review or methodology chapter	“To what extent are the principles of experiential education exemplified during student teaching in a university teacher educator program?” Johnson, S. (2011, December 14). Chapter Three: Methodology. Class assignment at California State University, Northridge, p. 2.
	Final dissertation	“What services and practices do college internship programs use to most effectively facilitate internships?” (Johnson, 2013, p. 6)
Portraiture	Literature review or pre-methodology chapter	“What elements in culturally based student organization’s culture encourage or hinder the development of leadership practices amongst African American students?” Bailey, V. M. (2010, September 9). Class assignment at California State University, Northridge, p. 2.
	Post-literature review or methodology chapter	“How does participation in a local culturally based student organization hinder or foster student engagement amongst Black student leaders?” Bailey, V. M. (2010, December 10). ELPS 785 Signature Assignment. Class assignment at California State University, Northridge, p. 3.
	Final dissertation	“What is the meaning of student leadership from the perspective of Black female undergraduate students in locally sponsored, culturally based student organizations at Hispanic-serving institutions?” (Bailey, 2012, p. 7)

Conceptualizing a Qualitative Research Tradition Chapter Section

Explaining the selection of your research tradition.

Earlier in the chapter and in the previous chapters, we discussed how an iterative process marks qualitative research. Not only are these iterations present when you are working with the literature to develop the foundational elements of

your research framework or in the field gathering and interpreting data, but they also appear when you are building and linking a methodological framework to your research problem, purpose, and questions. In fact, while we may not conventionally think about the research process as linear, we sometimes get caught in the trap of logic where we frame the process to select a research tradition in relation to research questions. That is, the research tradition emanates or emerges from the research questions, which the research problem, in turn, informs. But things do not always work out that way in practice.

While parts of the research process may flow in a logical direction—from one to another—much of what we do in conceptualizing and writing research, from beginning to end, is distinctly nonlinear. Piantanida and Garman (2009, p. 75) speak to the recursive nature of qualitative research:

Conventional wisdom holds that one chooses one's research methods based on the questions to be studied. In one sense this is true. Yet we contend that an affinity for a particular research genre (and beyond that research tradition) predates any specific decisions about strategy, method or technique. In all likelihood this fundamental choice is based on an elusive mix of personal orientation, worldview, interests, and talents.

In my work with doctoral students, early questions that they raise tend to relate to logistics of how to get to the contribution that they want to make in their study—collecting data in this or that way, usually interviews or observations—without first discussing how they will frame their inquiry via their research questions or research design. This is a natural way to go about conducting a study. In this case, they are not really backing into a research question; they are exploring how their notions about gathering and making sense of information fit within their working understanding of what they want to do and hope to accomplish. This is not a cart-before-the-horse dynamic and perhaps is more characteristic of a chicken-egg nature in research development. If you have a particularly strong connection to a research tradition—let's say ethnography—then go with it and let this tie to an approach that guides your evaluation and synthesis of the literature and development of a research problem, purpose, and question.

However you arrive at a specific direction for your study, you need to explain—rationalize or justify, if you will—the selection of a research tradition. Why does this particular approach occupy a central place in your investigation—one that guides what you do in the field, the information that you collect, and the conclusions that you will draw? You can do this a number of ways in qualitative research—from a more holistic description of the connections between you as a researcher and the approach that you will adopt for your study to a more synthetic documentation of the links between your study's research framework and research tradition. Perhaps the best approach is somewhere in the middle, which seems to strike a balance between the researcher as instrument, the research process as systematic, and the research community as referee.

Situating your research tradition within your broader research framework.

When you reach a point in your dissertation study where you have done the background work—maybe you have passed this point or are here now—you naturally sense in which direction you will go methodologically. You tend to know how to get to where you want to be—what you hope to do and accomplish in your study. Here, you have conducted a thorough review of the literature, and now you must tie this broader research framework, grounded in your research problem and questions, to a methodological framework. In other words, you are prepared to plan for how to collect and analyze data that you need to evaluate your research questions and address the problem that you identified in review of the literature.

Your data collection and analysis plan begins where you ended articulating a research problem. You have evaluated and synthesized prior studies that relate to your proposed study, identifying how they do not tell as much as we need to know about the phenomenon. That is, the current body of empirical investigations may not quite fill in all of the gaps in current knowledge and practice related to what you have an interest in. As a group, they function to describe something about the phenomenon, but perhaps the group, setting, or specific circumstances differ slightly, or perhaps that information is a bit outdated. Whatever the case, you have established a clear need for your study and have articulated a statement of the problem in current research and in some cases, practice. But you're not quite done yet! Your research problem may not be complete until you have identified methodological gaps in previous studies. If you have done so, fantastic—you are on track to justifying the use of a research tradition in your study. But you need to go a step further and articulate the specific ways that current research needs to be extended through the design application in your proposed approach.

A common challenge with conceptualizing a research tradition is how to situate it in the broader research framework of the study. What methodological gaps did you identify in the current literature? How have colleagues approached their research work related to the phenomenon that interests you? What research designs—quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods—have researchers used to explore similar or the same phenomenon? Really, here is where you need to look explicitly at what constitutes the systematic approaches that these studies report:

- research design (or tradition),
- research setting (or site),
- data sources and sample,
- data collection instruments and procedures,
- data analysis procedures, and
- researcher roles.

Generally speaking, the items in this list parallel the components of a qualitative dissertation chapter. In fact, you can use Table 3.7 (or create a matrix or template) to support your methodological review of studies.

In this work, you can focus nearly exclusively on the approach to collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and presenting data of an article, book chapter, monograph, technical report, or other publication. Your explicit purpose is to develop an argument about why your approach is the best fit for your proposed study, given your research problem and purpose (i.e., an argument or justification for your study supported through a review of the larger literature). This is a sort of methodological literature review, and you do what Galvan (2013) suggests: Develop an argument for why your research design and methods are appropriate for what you want to do and hope to accomplish in your study.

Operating within what we generally associate with qualitative dissertation methodology—from research design to researcher roles—use the questions that Ridley (2008, pp. 117–118) offers for critical literature reviews: Does the author use sufficient and relevant evidence to support the use of a specific design or procedure? Does the author cite reliable sources in the methodology? Locke, Silverman, and Spirduso (2010, p. 51) offer an additional question that directly relates to the task at hand here: “Can the research question(s) asked be answered

Table 3.7 Matrix to Evaluate Methodological Frameworks of Empirical Studies

	Research design	Research setting	Data sources and sample	Data collection instruments and procedures	Data analysis procedures	Researcher roles
Study title (1):						
Study title (2):						
Study title (3):						
Study title (4):						
Study title (5):						
Methodological synthesis of studies reviewed:						

with the design and methods used in the study?” These questions can direct you to do what Ridley (p. 54) calls selective summaries, which she describes as “written when you need to extract some relevant information from a small part of the text for a specific purpose.” In this case, of course, your purpose is to summarize what you reviewed in the methodology of a source and then what you see emerging across sources.

With your review guide, you can note how, or if, authors connect a methodological approach to a broader research framework and how they present their methodological approach to their studies. If you are working with a large number of studies in your literature review, then you may consider organizing a methodological review by broad areas of the literature. Identify patterns that emerge across sources (Pan, 2008), the idea here is to synthesize methodologically—qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods—what is going on with the literature. In the end, you want to have a summary statement that describes how these studies collectively have approached gathering and making sense of information.

With a sense of how previous studies have gone about this task, you can work within your current research problem and enhance what you say about the literature related to your proposed study. What is more, you can move forward with arguably one of the most important components of your methodological framework: research tradition. After returning to the empirical literature to further articulate how previous studies methodologically relate to what you are planning to do, you can begin to construct your own approach. In doing so, you can articulate a research tradition and connect it to your study, including (brief) references to what the tradition has to offer you. Here is the sequence: identify, define, and apply to your study.

Once you have identified a need for your specific approach, you can articulate what research tradition you will use in your study. This next step is really where you identify, define, and describe a research design. That is, when you identify a research design or tradition for your study, you need to discuss its overall focus, guiding principles, and procedural guidelines—this discussion is what sets up the rest of the methodology chapter for your dissertation study. For example, let’s say you plan to use a case study. And then let’s assume that you identify your approach as a case study design—but you do not define what a case study is, nor do you discuss how a case study qualifies as the best approach for your research problem, purpose, and question or how you will use a case study approach to guide methods. Within broader social and behavioral science research practice, forgoing lengthy discussions or descriptive details of research design may be appropriate and frequently acceptable, but in dissertation methodology the thrust is on explicitly demonstrating your level of competence in how to conceptualize, design, and conduct a study—so this type of detail is generally expected. So if we return to the example of a case study approach, within dissertation contexts, you can describe the characteristics of a case study and detail how your study qualifies as a case.

steps, applications of abstract concepts and models of research to qualitative dissertation contexts appeared. An early consideration in the chapter was what research questions, and larger research frameworks, look like when constructed through the lens of these five research traditions. Connecting research traditions

to broader methodological framework—from one section of the methodology chapter to the next—the chapter ended by looking at strategies to conceptualize a research tradition section and structure to organize how you can write about your research tradition within the context of dissertation methodology.

CHECKLIST FOR METHODOLOGY CHAPTER DEVELOPMENT

- Situate a qualitative research tradition in your study, outlining the key features of the traditions and how they relate to your area of focus.
- Reshape your primary research question(s) through the lens of your research tradition, strengthening the ties between your methodological approach and overall research framework.
- Research paradigm work: Explore the ontological, epistemological, and methodological connections to your research tradition.
- Laying the foundation of your methodological framework, develop a way to structure this section of the methodology chapter.

QUESTIONS FOR APPLICATION

1. With which research tradition do you most strongly identify? What about the approach—focus, guiding principles, and procedural guidelines—appeals to you? How will the approach function in your study?
2. Conceptually, how will you approach the research tradition section in your methodology chapter? What does it look like and what is included as part of your discussion of an approach to collecting
- and analyzing data? What are the essential elements of this section?
3. What information do you still need to gather to design your dissertation study? At this point in your research process, what is missing that supports the development of an approach that will guide data collection, analysis, and interpretation?

Visit the SAGE website at <http://www.sagepub.com/qualitative-dissertation-methodology/book251768> for videos featuring Nathan Durdella on formulating qualitative research questions and writing a qualitative research proposal.

Writing a Qualitative Research Tradition Section: Methodology Chapter Template

First transition to the methodology chapter from the literature review, then introduce what you will do in the chapter. That's it—that's how you start your qualitative dissertation methodology chapter. After outlining what you will do in the chapter (see Chapter 2 for more information on the overall purpose and structure of the methodology chapter), you need to move quickly to the first substantive, and most conceptually meaningful, section: research tradition. Because your research tradition sets the direction for your methods, you are charged with articulating what your overall plan is in the research tradition. As you can see from Table 3.8, the structure of the research tradition section in a dissertation methodology chapter functions as a template of sorts to think about your research plan. Here, you can see that you start with two primary tasks: describe and rationalize your research tradition.

Describe your research tradition or approach.

Obvious, right? Share what you will do in clear and direct terms. Say what you are doing, then do it. The first task in writing a research tradition section is

Table 3.8 Methodology Chapter: Research Tradition Section

Elements of Research Tradition Section	Section Details: Research Tradition Section in the Methodology Chapter	
<i>Describe your research tradition or approach.</i>	Identify the name of the research tradition.	If you use a case study, identify the name (case study) and definition of your research design (special features of a case study). You may combine research tradition in your research approach. If you combine traditions, identify a case study + tradition.
	Identify and describe the tradition's key features.	Detail the research tradition's focus, purpose, and guiding principles. If you use a case study, answer the following question: How is your investigation a case study (apply the definition of case study to your study)? You may use the special features of a case study that you just identified to describe how your study conforms to the special features and qualifies as a case study.
<i>Rationalize or contextualize your research tradition.</i>	Describe the research tradition's connection to your study's purpose and/or suitability for addressing the research questions.	Include a discussion of the research tradition's implications for the research methods that you will utilize.

to identify which tradition you will use in your study, discussing two dimensions of your approach: identify a research tradition—by name—and describe the tradition's key features. These are the foundational elements that should be covered; you can elect to elaborate or expand on the tasks here, or you may work within this basic structure in your study.

Identify the name of the research tradition.

While this is a logical place to start, you need to consider how you will open this section with a statement about the research tradition or combination of traditions—frequently as a function of using a case study design with elements of a historical research tradition like ethnography, phenomenology, or grounded theory—that you plan to use. In my review of student dissertation advisee work, what strikes me as the most effective ways to introduce not just the research tradition but the entire methodological framework is to use the first sentences as a clear, explicit statement of your approach. For example, Peralta (2014, p. 47) started her research tradition section: “In this study, I used an ethnographic case study design. . . .” Similarly, Hampton (2015, p. 31) shared his study's research tradition early in the section: “The research tradition best suited for this study is a grounded theory case study.” So you can see here the structure of starting the research tradition section here: “This study will use a. . . .” or “I will use a. . . .”

A variation of this direct way of stating a research tradition is to extend the identification of the approach to the research purpose of the study. Here, you embed your proposed study's research purpose within a statement of the research tradition. This is really saying “This study will use a. . . because. . . .” or “I will use a. . . because I am focused on. . . .” For example, introducing his research design (critical case study) and tradition (portraiture) in the first three paragraphs of this section of his methodology chapter, Bailey (2012) shared, “This study uses critical case study analysis as a research design. Within the context of this research design, I use portraiture as a methodological framework to understand systems of power and differencing aspects of culture by exploring diverse voices.” Likewise, Michel (2014, p. 42) connected her research purpose to her tradition: “Using an ethnographic tradition, this study focused on describing a particular aspect of a student community participating in a faculty research project. The experiences and interactions of transfer students of color with faculty mentors represent *topic-oriented* ethnography. This case study narrowed the focus to one aspect of student life within the faculty research communities: student-faculty interaction. . . .” Returning to the example from Peralta (2014, p. 47), she articulates how her research tradition is well suited to her research focus: “In this study, I used an ethnographic case study design that draws on ‘the concept of culture. . . that describes the way things are’ (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 93). The cultural group I studied was first-year, first-generation, low-income Latino college students during their transition from an urban charter high school to regional urban public universities in Southern California.”

Identify and describe the tradition's key features.

While many research genres push right through from a brief statement of the research design to an extended focus on the methods and specific procedures, dissertation research methodology offers you the opportunity to demonstrate how your research framework informs your research tradition and serves to unify the diverse components of your study. On this point, Rossman and Rallis (2003, p. 135) argue, “Explicating the logical and compelling connections—the epistemological integrity—between the research questions, the genre, and the methods can be quite convincing.” They go on to say that “linking your study to . . . [an approach] depends on the focus for the research, the problem or issue to be addressed, the research questions, the locus of interest, and the considerations of do-ability” (Rossman & Rallis, p. 135).

The primary task in this effort is to elaborate on your understanding of the tradition and how you will use the tradition in your study—this is an application-in-context type question that answers the following question: How will you utilize the lens to direct your focus and plan for the procedural steps in your investigation? If you use a conventional research tradition—ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, or case study—then you may consider describing the following:

- how the tradition's focus informed your study's focus,
- which guiding principles speak to you and/or have directed what you will do in your study, and
- how the methods historically and currently associated with the tradition will shape how you will collect, analyze, and interpret data in your study.

As you can see, this is not exactly an exercise in how to “read and do” with an “assemble and install” set of instructions to conduct research—and the task does not require you to be in lock-step formation with the approach. Rather, use what you know about the tradition to shape what you say.

Your work in this subsection of the research tradition section is really about you: how the tradition enhances what you proposed to do in your study. For example, Payne (2013, p. 54) explains how an overarching value of institutional ethnography shapes his study:

One of the key recognitions of institutional ethnographies is that texts are integral part of human interaction, and often shape our interactions with institutions and one another. Institutional ethnographies often center on workplace texts, as these documents often define peoples' interactions and relations (Smith, 2007). I am concerned with school leaders' experiences with pilot school autonomies, as outlined in the LAUSD/United Teachers Los Angeles Pilot Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and

contract. Pilot school leaders' attempts to improve their schools' practices are defined and shaped by the MOU, and the discourse around altering the document suggests institutional recognition of this powerful document

Similarly, from her dissertation study, Bertone (2016, p. 40) offers a concise description of how grounded theory's structure supports her study's focus: "Finally, grounded theory presents an organized approach, a step-by-step guide that is useful to novice researchers and dissertation committees (Creswell, 2008). Grounded theory design principles provided structure to a complex conceptual exploration of the role noncognitive skills play and the student transfer experience."

If you plan to embed a research tradition within a case study as your overall design, then you may structure this subsection of the research tradition section as follows:

- introduce your study as a case study,
- identify the characteristics of a case study,
- describe how your approach is a case study,
- identify and define the research tradition, and
- connect your research tradition to the case.

There is no magic formula here, so how you elect to present a case study design plus research tradition is really up to you. In her dissertation study, Peralta (2014, pp. 33–34) shares an example of how to start this discussion:

Given that the purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the academic experiences of middle-school Latino students who have transitioned from alternative settings back to the traditional school setting, I used an ethnographic case study design. A case study is an exploration of a "bounded system", or a case, or multiple cases over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 1996, p. 62). As a bounded case study, this study was limited to a specific group of participants, sample, and sites which met the criteria necessary to carry out this research study. In order to understand the experiences that Latino students have had as they have transitioned between two distinct settings, principles of ethnography were used. Ethnography refers to the description of a people or cultural group (Glesne, 2011).

Like Peralta, Edwards (2015, pp. 41–42) describes her case study design: "The multiple case study tradition also lends itself to strong, open-ended research questions. Good case study research questions are written intentionally to get the subjects to delve into their experiences and allow for some themes and generalizations to emerge.

My research questions are directly aligned with the case study tradition, and will allow me to investigate the intersections of gender, communication, and leadership.”

Rationalize your research tradition.

All along the way in the research tradition section, you are making the case for why the approach that you have articulated is best suited for what you want to do in your study. Describing key features of a tradition and discussing what it offers you as a researcher and how it benefits your study naturally serves as a way to promote the approach. But while this work may lead to a clear justification of your use of the tradition within the study, it may also only tell part of the story. In such cases, you may want to include a final subsection in the research tradition section that explicitly documents how and why you came to use the approach and in what ways the approach strengthens your study’s plans. In his dissertation study, Harris (2015, p. 39) shares how grounded theory connects well with his research purpose: “In this study, I sought to understand how mentors shape the attitudes and perspectives of novice teachers. Grounded theory is a tradition concerned with discovering the underlying theory or mechanism of events or actions. . . . This tradition is suited to answering the questions of my research as they are focused on how mentors shape novice teachers’ perspectives of their students.” Similarly, Ghaus-Kelley (2014, p. 41) explained how a case study design helps her focus on the phenomenon of interest: “[B]y capturing first-hand accounts from the leaders’ perspectives on their lived experiences and organizational-change processes, this multisite case-study approach to analyze community colleges in California examined contemporary leadership experiences and practices of women executive leaders. This framework loaned itself well to the focus of this study. . . .” Finally, Bailey (2012, p. 41) describes how portraiture methodology offers him an opportunity to “illuminate” his participants’ stories:

The artist seeks to understand and make-sense of actors’ “contexts, culture and community” through the process of meaning-making (Waterhouse, 2007, p. 279). Waterhouse explains that meaning-making allows the researcher to expose the truth(s) of individuals who experience the world in very different ways. I hope to illuminate their internal and external stories of their experience as leaders in culturally-based organizations.”

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter moved squarely into qualitative dissertation methodology with the first section of a methodology chapter—research tradition. The chapter discussed the nuts and bolts of

qualitative research approaches as five research traditions: ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, and case study. Discussing the focus, guidelines, and procedural