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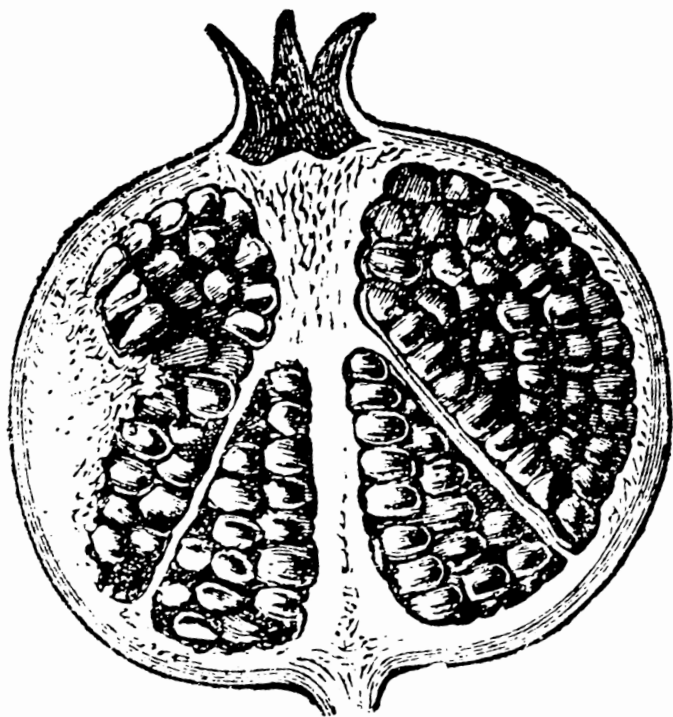
QUICK FIX:

**FIND THE
THEORY IN
YOUR RESEARCH**

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Everything in this book!

Section 1 Scholarly research lives within a particular school of thought. It is important to clarify where and how the study fits into a school of thought by explaining the ontological and epistemological positions that inform the study.

Section 2 Theories are what differentiates scholarly work from other types of research and writing. Theories help explain specific relationships between factors or variables the researcher hopes to explore.

Section 3 Scholars talk about theory in academic literature to describe research in ways others with similar interests will understand. Most disciplines have theories that serve as foundations for new research.



Section 4 Each type of research design has its own approach for using theory. Selection of the theory (or theories) means finding the one(s) that fits your quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods research. The ways theory aligns with your research questions or hypotheses creates a unique framework for organizing the study.

Section 5 Discover ways to think about theory. How you describe discoveries about emerging, contemporary, or classic theories allows you to make a theoretical contribution.

Section 6 Practical steps to integrate theory into your research start at the beginning. Finding and understanding the appropriate theory are first steps for scholarly research design.

Section 7 Theories can be difficult to define and understand, but you can ask questions of the literature in your field to identify and use the relevant important theories in your own research.



**Scholarly research
lives within a particular
school of thought**

Section



**What do
researchers
mean when
they talk about
epistemology,
ontology, and
methodology?**

A



summary



We use these terms to answer big questions:

What is real?

What knowledge counts?

How do we know what we know?



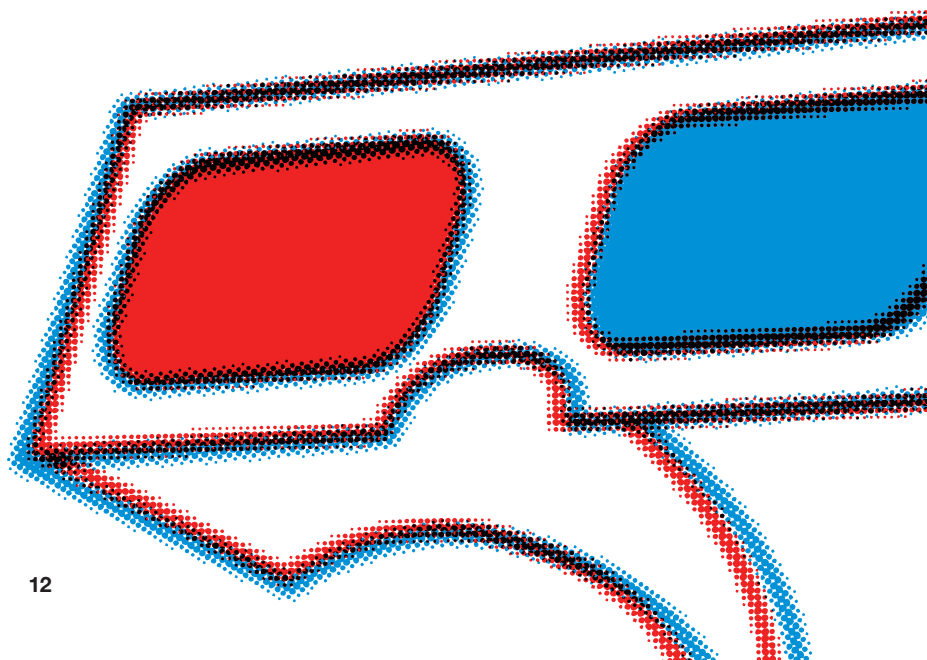
Research is about asking big questions

When we look at an everyday dilemma, we approach it with basic assumptions. If we are hungry for a particular cuisine, we understand the relationship between desires and financial constraints. We understand that if we fly to Paris for dinner, then we will need enough money for flights and hotels, but if we get a croissant from a local bakery, then we stay within our means. We don't stop to think about the if/then relationships when deciding where to eat.

When we conduct scholarly research, we do stop and think. We take ontological and epistemological positions to explain the nature of the problem, how we know what we know about it, and what is important to know to understand it.

BIG WORDS FOR BIG QUESTIONS

What, how, and why questions. *Ontology* is concerned with the nature of being and of reality. Ontology asks the ultimate question: 'what?' *What* assumptions do we make about the nature of the phenomenon we plan to study? *What* is real about this problem? *What* constitutes a fact about the problem?



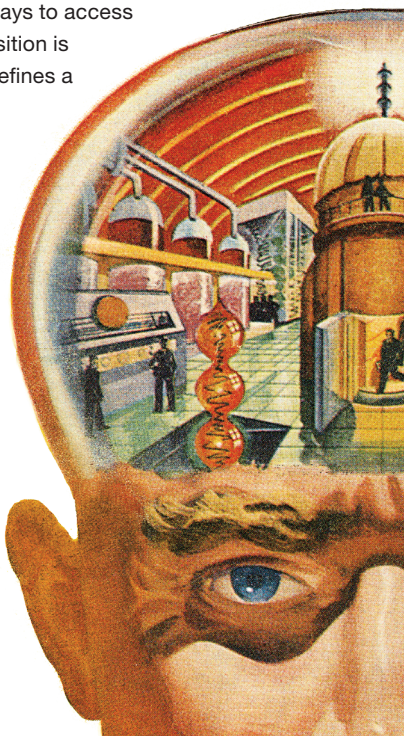
We ask 'how?' to describe an epistemological position. *How* do we know the nature of the problem? *How* do we know whether aspects of the problem can be defined as facts or not?

Positions influence methodology. Methodology helps answer: *why* will an approach be best for understanding the problem? Methodologies include qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods.

How will we conduct the study? Research *methods* guide how we collect and analyse data.

TWO VIEWPOINTS: POSITIVISM AND RELATIVISM

To create new knowledge, we need to first answer fundamental questions. Do we believe there is an objective reality that exists independent of us? Do natural and social worlds exist whether we are present or not? Alternatively, do we believe that multiple realities exist, and we influence them? Are there different ways to access or experience them? The first ontological position is associated with *positivism* and the second defines a *relativist* viewpoint.



COMPARING POSITIVISM AND RELATIVISM

Positivists believe it is possible for a researcher to objectively study a problem. Some have rejected a narrow definition of positivism in favor of *postpositivism*, recognizing that when studying people and societies researchers cannot always base assumptions on a common objective reality. From these perspectives, researchers objectively study problems through studies using the scientific method.

A relativist believes that the way people experience a problem is based on social, cultural, or other factors that influence their interpretations. This focus is called *interpretivism*. The premise of interpretivism is that we 'interpret' our experiences in the social world to produce unique meanings. The assumption is that we gain knowledge by understanding the ways people experience and understand the problem being investigated.



TAKING ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITIONS

Before going somewhere new, you need to know your starting point. How you define a real research problem will be based on the ontological position you take. How you define ways to learn about this problem will be based on the epistemological position you take.

Where you stand in regard to positivism versus interpretivism will influence your design decisions in a research study. Some researchers conduct all of their inquiries from the same broad ontological and epistemological positions, while others vary their perspectives depending on the research problem and questions of a given study.

There are many positions between these polar opposite viewpoints! When you start reading about ontologies and epistemologies you will see that they are not black and white. You will discover many shades of grey as you explore postpositivism, pragmatism, constructivism, and other schools of thought. As part of the research design process, you will consider which options are appropriate as the philosophical grounding for your research.



WHY BIG QUESTIONS ARE NECESSARY

- 1 Why does scholarly research ask us to take a position on big questions about the nature of reality?
- 2 Why does scholarly research ask us to take a position on big questions about knowledge and how it is acquired?

2 Because we need to decide how we will learn about the research problem.

1 Because we need to define reality in the context of a research

Answers





**Theories differentiate scholarly
work from other types of
research and writing**