2

HOW DO WE KNOW? THAT IS THE QUESTION

We are curious about how you understand "research"—not in the sense of a (right or wrong) formal definition, but in terms of your own starting place in understanding what research means to you and how that understanding makes you feel. How about if you take just a few minutes to jot down some of your ideas?

In this chapter, we explore some basic underlying assumptions of research and knowledge. To do this, we first present two ordinary scenarios where one is seeking information to figure something out. Then, we discuss five core concepts that help us articulate underlying assumptions associated with knowing. This is followed by a research scenario. There is a chapter synthesis to tie these three pieces together, followed by a list of further resources. Throughout the chapter, we intend to involve readers in thinking about their own assumptions of research and knowledge. It is not our goal to provide a set of definitions, but rather to engage in a process of articulating ways we might think about research and knowledge. For example, can you identify something about which you would like to learn more? Why is this topic interesting to you? Do you have an idea about what to do to learn what you want to learn? What would you say is the same and different between learning and research?

MUSING UPON THE EVERYDAY: ENQUIRING MINDS WANT TO KNOW

Remember the first time you felt butterflies in your stomach around someone you liked? You might remember it like this: Your heart would beat so fast when you walked close to that person, although you tried hard to pretend you were indifferent. Before you knew it you had become focused on learning as much as you could about this person—googling,

Facebooking, checking with mutual friends, spotting your love interest from a distance (involuntarily), and soliciting every "coincidence" to be nearby despite a rush of anxiety. Eventually, you collected sufficient courage to drop a hint indicating your interest—words just poured onto the screen (or paper) across hours and several drafts with an eye to integrating the perfect amount of self-disclosure with a desired level of protection.

Time forward. It's 10 o'clock at night. You are situated at your favorite corner of the library. In front of you sits a huge coffee, your laptop, and a stack of articles with yellow highlights covering the pages. Your smartphone vibrates regularly with pop-ups that always successfully lure you away from those books. "Focus!" you remind yourself. A 10-page research paper is due tomorrow morning! Your professor insisted that it should include at least 20 sources. Although you are genuinely attempting to avoid another late-night work session, you just can't keep your fingers on the keyboard. Instead of squeezing out "scientifically" crafted sentences, your mind seems to wander in a stream of consciousness, something like this: What does the professor want from me? Am I just repeating what "she says, he says," or can I write about my own ideas, too? Why am I doing this? What does this have to do with me? Why does grad school have to be like this? Boring.

> **Pause and Reflect.** Perhaps you can take a moment to do a quick body scan—how do you feel in your body in each of these scenarios? Are they different? If so, why do you experience them differently, despite the fact that both situations involve collecting and making sense of some kinds of "data"? How do you think of yourself in relation to the two experiences? What sort of narratives do you generate about yourself from each story? What aspects of the experiences are important to how you think of yourself as a person?

One of the obvious distinctions between both scenes is that one's motivations and engagements with them are different. Differences in motivation are among the many ways in which we notice that the learner is involved in the process of learning regardless of the topic to be learned. We are invested for varying reasons in the knowledge we seek. Thus, efforts to get to know something are not merely efforts to know something outside of ourselves, but efforts that ultimately have something more or less at stake for us as learners.

In this text, you are going to be asked to learn about research itself. Well, that doesn't happen in a vacuum. You come to the book with motivations, assumptions, experiences, ideas, and a history of learning about "research"—you are not just beginning with a blank page. Those existing experiences likely will explicitly or implicitly impact your new learning. For example, what kinds of images and feelings come up for you when you think about the word *research*? Would you think of either of these two scenes as research? Why or why not?

NARRATIVE AND CONCEPTUAL INTERLUDES: THE MEANING OF "RESEARCH"

We will begin by developing a specialized vocabulary and set of concepts. Some of the words might seem vaguely familiar and some will be unfamiliar to you. As we begin using these concepts, we will anchor them in ordinary understandings. All five of the concepts introduced here speak specifically to ways one might think about knowledge and its relationship to research. Before jumping into these new concepts, let's articulate where we are starting.

> **Pause and Reflect.** Draw a picture depicting the relationship between knowledge and research. For example, does one lead to the other? Once you have completed your drawing, take a closer look and ask these questions:
>
> - What elements did you include in the drawing?
>
> - Was there a person in the picture?
>
> - How difficult was it to create the drawing?

It was a lovely spring break day. Karen, Pengfei, and Barbara were at the park with other friends. The three of them were working together in a class using photography for research. They decided to take pictures of each other taking pictures.

In this photo you can see Karen taking a photo of Barbara taking a picture of Karen. You can even see the shadows of them both. What you can't see is Pengfei, the photographer of the actual photo you see in Figure 2.1.

FIGURE 2.1 ⬤ Karen Taking a Picture of Barbara Taking a Picture of Karen

FIGURE 2.2 ⬡ Barbara Took a Picture of Pengfei

FIGURE 2.3 ⬡ Pengfei Took a Picture of Barbara While Barbara Was Taking Pictures

Interestingly, what appears to be happening in Figure 2.1 is different than what actually occurred. If you look closely you can guess that Barbara was not really taking a picture of Karen. Barbara took a picture of Pengfei, while Karen took a picture of Barbara (see Figure 2.2); all the while, Pengfei took a picture of Barbara (Figure 2.3).

These images introduce some of the core ideas we hope to draw out through this conceptual interlude. The five concepts we present in this chapter include epistemology, criticalism, partisanship, reflection, and intersubjectivity. What do you guess these concepts mean?

Epistemology is a large term we use to talk about theories of knowledge. **Criticalism** is one epistemological orientation—that is, one theory of knowledge. The concepts of **partisanship**, **intersubjectivity**, and **reflection** are characteristics of a critical epistemology. We can imagine knowledge development as a conversation. The structure of the conversation represents epistemology. The values and norms entailed in how the conversation is carried represent criticalism. The conversation requires that we take one another's position in the conversation in order to understand each other. Taking each other's perspective in the conversation is best described through the concepts of partisanship, reflection, and intersubjectivity.

Epistemology: How Do We Know What We Know?

Our assumptions about "research" are linked with our basic views on what constitutes knowledge. Philosophers use the word *epistemology* to refer to the study of knowledge and knowing. We can use this philosophical term to say that research will always be linked to epistemological claims—that is, research will always be linked to assumptions we implicitly make about knowledge and knowing. Engaging in research will be an epistemological endeavor, but we are also epistemologically engaged every time we are using, claiming, developing, and acquiring knowledge—including knowledge about a love interest or a topic for a research paper.

For a long time in Western philosophy, "seeing" was a primary metaphor for knowing—"seeing is knowing," "let me *see* the evidence," "I *saw* it with my own eyes," and so on (see Carspecken, 2003). However, seeing is already interdependent with

language, culture, self-identity, and power, for example. To say that we know what is going on in that photograph of Karen and Barbara taking pictures on that sunny day in the park involves more than just our visual acuity. What kinds of things can you say you know from that photograph just by looking at it? Does the image give you information about the two women—who they might be culturally and racially, whether or not they seem to know each other? Would different people "see" the photo differently? What about the assumption that we are "seeing" the same thing? What are the differences between the image itself and your interpretation and understanding of that image?

This chapter started with a scenario of interest toward some potential romantic partner. In addition to how we might learn about such a person through observations and inter-actions, we can also search potential information sources. Internet surfing is a typical way to learn about persons of interest. Perhaps we find a Facebook page or an article the person wrote, or we see that the person is involved in a club. Some of this information is written about the person, some is written by the person, and some is written to the per-son (like when a friend posts on the person's Facebook page). In order to expect that we might actually learn something about our beloved through this process we have to make a few assumptions, such as that people can be identified on the internet and that we can understand the language being used. Some of our assumptions will be more subtle. For example, we will think differently about what we read depending on the source and the content. A friend who posts something sarcastic on Facebook might indirectly indicate that a love interest has a sense of humor. Discovering that our beloved has a police record might point to a different kind of information and alternative types of interpretations. Our interpretation of the information is what constitutes our developing knowledge about this beloved. Our interpretations will also depend on our own values.

In the second example at the beginning of the chapter, we asked readers to imagine being in the middle of writing a paper. Typically, when people are writing a research report, they might find articles that support one perspective and articles that contradict that infor-mation. By seeking a balance of information, writers are able to develop and articulate previously held ideas about the topic and potentially shift earlier ways of thinking. They also are able to identify different perspectives on understanding the information. Let's say we are writing a paper on capital punishment. We will find some legal and historical information, some information about what people believe, and some information about the actual practices. We might even find statements from victims or family members of those executed through the use of the death penalty. We will find different information about organizations that oppose the death penalty and some that favor it. Our own ideas are likely to change in some way by examining the various claims to knowledge that are out there. When you think about knowledge of a person you might love and knowledge of a topic you might research, how are these kinds of knowledges and knowledge-seeking activities the same or different?

In both of these endeavors, epistemological claims are embedded in our information-seeking. We can also use the word *epistemology* to talk about the body scan you performed earlier in the chapter when thinking about how you felt in each of the scenarios posed at the beginning of this chapter. Knowledge of yourself, your own feelings, desires, and motivations is also part of the field we think of as epistemology. However, this kind of knowledge is not something we can look up on the internet as you access it in a different way.

Another epistemological aspect of these two scenarios has to do with our ideas of what is good and bad, right and wrong. For example, it might be perfectly okay to look up a love interest on the internet, but most of us agree that taking this to an extreme would not be. Also, in order to understand the legal history of the death penalty, we would have to understand what the community agrees is the right thing to do. Following Habermas (1984), community agreements are communicatively established and referenced when members of a group hold each other accountable to a norm or value. For example, we might have community agreements that killing is not okay. Knowledge of this sort is different than knowledge about our own feelings (fear of criminals or sorrow over the loss of a loved one, for example) and knowledge about the facts about the use of capital punishment (for example, who has been put to death in the last 3 years). Chapter 5 focuses specifically on questions of epistemology, knowledge, and meaning. In Chapter 5 you will learn more about these three differing epistemological categories.

Criticalism: Not Taking Knowledge for Granted

Criticalism is an umbrella term that houses a range of social theories, all bearing a *critical epistemological* orientation: Knowledge is a communicative, social achievement and knowing is the process that engages one in the social communicative efforts to know, *including the questioning of claims to knowledge.* There are important characteristics of *criticalism* that are embedded in the way all four of us think about research. The most important one is not to take knowledge itself for granted. In other words, all knowledge and assumptions associated with that knowledge should be open to question, in principle. In practice, it would be impossible to call everything into question, because even our questions have assumptions embedded in them. The point here is that criticalists assume the questionability of knowledge as one of the most basic assumptions (Habermas, 1972, 1981). Another important characteristic of a critical orientation toward knowledge is an understanding that social actors can use knowledge to make the world better or worse. Researchers who assume a criticalist orientation share an explicit value orientation toward positive social change and justice, and as a result attend to subtle and covert forms of privilege, inequality, and oppression, and aim for developing ways to raise awareness and balance unequal situations (Freire, 1970/2000).

Anything we find out about our love interest or about the death penalty should be subject to relevant questions because as knowledge-seekers we explore relevant questions in order to better understand that which grabs our interest. This is what is meant by the word *critical.* The phrase *critical epistemology* will be used at the start to imply that knowledge is questionable. Even factual knowledge about the external world—scientists are constantly posing questions of existing knowledge. For example, between the world's 1970s knowledge about both Pluto and planets and 2015 knowledge about both Pluto and planets, Pluto's status as a planet came under question. At one point Pluto was declassified as a planet and then reclassified. Science depends on the ability to question and re-question established knowledge, even knowledge that has the status of being a fact.

Partisanship

Our common ways of thinking about *partisanship* equate it with bias. Under this way of thinking, it would be bad to think of one's research as partisan. However, criticalists acknowledge that all knowledge is partisan. Let's look closely at what that means. Are you familiar with the example of blind people touching different aspects of an elephant and drawing conclusions about what they touch? Each one comes to a different idea about what they are touching. Aspects of this story will help us understand what we mean by partisanship. The idea that we cannot be all-knowing when we are knowledge-seeking is depicted through the metaphor of blindness, which is dependent upon that visual association we mentioned earlier. There is no way to know that you "see" the whole picture. In other words, the metaphor indicates the challenge of being able to identify the *whole,* or take a perspective from that whole. Everyone's "sight" is limited. When we try to find out information about a potential love interest, we are aware that there is no way we can know everything there is to know about the person. The information gleaned from each of the people seeking knowledge about the elephant is valid when understood from the perspectives through which that knowledge was generated. A description of the tail makes sense when you know where the describer is standing and what they are touching. This assumption that all knowledge is generated from a perspective is what we mean when we use the word *partisanship*. We must do our best to articulate and understand the positions and perspectives through which we are seeking and generating knowledge.

Whether trying to learn as much as we can about our love interest or about the death penalty, it becomes quite clear that the source of the information is vital to knowing how to interpret the information. There is no knowledge that does not come from a source or from a particular perspective. Think about it. Start with something you know to be true and trace that knowledge in your mind to its source. This doesn't mean the knowledge is biased; it just means that it is embedded within a perspective and an interest (Habermas, 1972). Some philosophers use the world *relative* to express this

idea that all knowledge is relative to/related to its community, its context, and its source. Other philosophers use the word *partisanship* to indicate that knowledge is not neutral, and that it seems always both to assume particular perspectives and have outcomes in the world. By assuming that knowledge is not neutral, researchers challenge the conception of knowledge as something outside the knower. This challenge shows the existence of conflicting *epistemological assumptions*, in this case between the assumption that knowledge is not neutral and always involves the perspective of a knower, and the assumption that knowledge exists as something outside the knower. *Critical epistemology* has the assumption that knowledge is not neutral, including knowledge of knowing. Methodology is a kind of knowledge of knowing; thus, by drawing on a critical epistemology, researchers do not assume their own methodological decisions and practices are neutral.

Across our two primary examples, we can see that in the first place the knowledge-seeking itself is motivated and positioned by the seeker. Thus, anything produced as an outcome of these efforts will bear the mark of that motivation and seeking. The motivations and positions taken up by the seeker should be accounted for when discussing what one has learned. Likewise, each of the sources of information we might turn to bring to bear a particular perspective. For example, information from the love interest's Facebook friends will bring a different perspective than information from the police record search. Both are valid, but they are different and must be interpreted in light of these differences. This is what is meant by *partisanship*. We must be mindful of the perspectives that are engaged through the knowledge we obtain. Each perspective is always partial, and that partialness is best understood when the engaged perspective is well articulated. The old saying that there are two sides to every argument comes up here. Think about the last argument in which you were engaged and see if you can identify at least two sides. How do the "sides" and the "arguments" go together?

When you saw the photograph of Karen and Barbara seemingly taking each other's pictures, you implicitly knew that there was another photographer involved—the one who was not in the frame of the picture itself. Given what you saw in the photograph, you could almost guess where this other photographer, Pengfei, was standing when she took her picture. Then, when you looked more closely at the photo, you could recognize that Barbara was not actually taking a photo of Karen. We want to think of these visual effects as metaphors for understanding the interpretive positions that are involved in research. Interpretive positions are a topic we discuss more in the remaining chapters of this cluster.

Our epistemological orientation is critical. We wrote about this in Chapter 1 and we will continue to develop it throughout the text. This means that you should query that perspective and interpret the knowledge we offer through this perspective.

Intersubjectivity

Another important aspect of *critical epistemology* is something philosophers refer to as *intersubjectivity.* Habermas (1981) uses this concept to imply the possibility that two subjects can expect to understand one another. One's basic experience with knowledge suggests that it relies on this expectation. For example, when someone posts something about my beloved on Facebook, the one posting expects that people will be able to read and understand the posting. Now, perhaps not everyone will understand it and not everyone will be able to read it, but in order to post, one relies on this expectation. If someone replies to the post writing: "What do you mean?" the replier is also relying on the expectation that the original poster will understand the question. When questions surface, efforts are made to explain, again relying on the idea that this communicative effort can, in principle, be understood. Knowledge is fundamentally a subject-to-subject phenomenon, rather than a subject-to-object phenomenon (this particular claim is an example of an epistemological claim). Even if a researcher is studying the pros and cons of the death penalty, the point is that this knowledge is of value because of the subject-to-subject relationship—what those pros and cons mean for the social use and understanding of the death penalty. Therefore, knowing and knowledge are fundamentally relational and are constituted in dialogues between subjects rather than in a monologue by a single person. In this way of thinking, a metaphor for research is *a conversation.* Most of those conversations are indirect. For example, when you are looking up information about your love interest, you are indirectly conversing with those whose perspectives you find on the internet about your beloved. You are also using a language that you share.

Pengfei's photograph of Barbara and Karen provides a visual example of this expectation. That is, Pengfei expects that those who see the photograph will share the cultural knowledge necessary to notice that cameras are being used, that the picture takers are aware they are photographing one another, and that a conversation about this activity could ensue.

> **Pause and Reflect.** Think of the most deeply personal knowledge you have. Some people say that our most deeply held knowledge cannot be communicated—perhaps a spiritual knowledge or a deep feeling you have associated with a person or place. Perhaps it is some knowledge that illustrates an awareness of yourself. Notice any communicative or imaginative aspects of that specific knowledge. What would it take to share this knowledge with others?

Reflection

We engage in *Reflection,* as a process, when we are looking at how the subject–subject relationship is tied up in the knowledge. If we take seriously the idea that knowledge is a subject–subject endeavor rather than a subject–object endeavor, then we have to see

how the subject-to-subject relationship is embedded within all forms of knowledge. This means that knowledge will inevitably reflect that subject–subject relationship. Remember from the section on criticalism that a most basic similarity across researchers who describe their work as critical involves a willingness to call assumptions into question, including assumptions about the research process itself. Being aware of the subject-to-subject nature of knowledge is one of the first aspects of reflection. Additionally, reflections on assumptions of knowing that one brings into the research process or self as knowers/subjects are implied through the knowledge itself. For example, when one is seeking information about a beloved, the ideas of what kind of lover one deserves, how loveable one is, and so forth are nestled within the act of seeking to know the beloved other. One can engage in reflective practices by articulating these notions of subjectivity and the feelings one has about oneself alongside the feelings one has toward this particular love interest.

In quite obvious ways, Pengfei's photograph of Karen and Barbara taking pictures is a reflection of her own activity in the scene. In order to get at this, we have to talk about how the photograph is being taken and what that means for the photographer. The photographer-as-subject is part of the overall conversation, and part of what it means to think about the photograph itself.

RESEARCH SCENARIO: RESEARCHING THROUGH COLLECTIVE VALUES: THE FEMINIST RESEARCH COLLECTIVE

Through this research scenario we hear from the Feminist Research Collective (FRC) regarding its commitments and values as a collective and how those commitments and values drew it to create its WomenWeLove research project. As you read its narrative, you will see how tightly its values and interests are linked with the project.

The historically significant Combahee River Collective (CRC) was an outgrowth of the U.S. National Black Feminist Organization of the 1970s. The CRC promoted equality, intersectionality for Black men and women, the inclusion of lesbians in the Black feminist movement, peace, and togetherness. The CRC was clear in its purposes and steadfast with its commitments. Feminist collective examples are important history for the formation of our Feminist Research Collective, which began at Indiana University in the fall of 2017.

The vision for our group focused on three areas: activism, shared collective feminist scholarship, and support of individual and collective academic endeavors. Democratization, equity, inclusion, and justice were important principles as we gathered and began to coalesce into a dedicated, engaged, diverse group of women. During the spring

semester (2019), we spent time focusing on a research project to guide us all in our pursuit of doing feminist research. We wanted to find a project idea that everyone would enjoy working on. In a moment of pure collaboration and cohesion we found ourselves enthralled with a project that allowed us to map out the stories of women in our lives, later to be known as the WomenWeLove Project (ofwomenwelove.org). In the conception of the project, ideas and agreeance occurred organically and surprisingly. We found connections, inspiration, and synergy that brought us all together. For example, Pengfei had an idea of telling stories of the women in our lives, which could be located on a world map so that we could visualize the global experiences of being a woman. Sam chimed in that she had a family member who worked for ARCgis, a storymapping digital tool. Sam's sister-in-law was able to guide us in the use of the software, which was available free to us through Indiana University. It is difficult to describe how this special moment unfolded, but our experience speaks to the way in which the FRC has continued its becoming a collective.

Through our WomenWeLove project we establish connections amongst women from disparate places and times, and connect scholarship with those outside the academy. To begin the project, FRC members conducted interviews with ordinary, everyday women they love in order to learn about that person's life. Oftentimes pictures, newspaper articles, yearbooks, and photo albums from the person's life were included as well. The researcher then created an online digital story space using the ARCgis storymapping software to build a personally focused set of narratives with our participants. The FRC created a website through which the stories are brought together on a single landing page. Once fully developed, people from around the world will be invited to interview a woman they love and add to the page. This project embodies our values and commitments. Namely, we believe in drawing on our love for women (mothers, grandmothers, daughters, friends, lovers) to establish a knowledge base of often-erased women's lives. The project also puts expertise into the hands of ordinary folks. The project requires active collaboration based on equity, justice, and respect. Perhaps it is easy to see how our values as a collective translated into the values of this project.

We entered the interviews with our loved ones, open and ready to hear whatever they wanted to share with us. We listened to them with care and interest—their lives were already considered important to us. Each participant was active in the development of their storymap and in reviewing their interviews. However, our participants did more than this. For example, during the first workshop we led on the project (in 2019), two of our participants were present (one in person and one over the phone) to help us facilitate the workshop and to share their experiences with the project.

The values we hold in relation with one another are values we carry forward into our research, which is aligned through love with those values. For example, our value of difference and inclusion is seen in the following conversation:

Dajanae: *What is our definition of women? What's our definition of women's centered voices? We need to acknowledge the history of the definition of women, and say how we challenge that. We need to deconstruct the traditional notion of "women's voice at the center."*

Barbara: *Keeping "women's voice at the center" is saying that it is a unified place. We are actually trying to dislodge that.*

Pengfei: *Women's voices are not one voice.*

Barbara: *The image people will get is that we have a solid, unified center. This is problematic because such spaces are inevitably marked as a white woman's space.*

We also value a capacity to speak freely, both in terms of disagreeing with others, but also in terms of protecting the collective.

Barbara: *Effective collectives can work through confrontations, but we need to rethink the idea that, in order for the group to be legitimate and authentic, there have to be confrontations. The queer youth group I work with wouldn't talk about their activities using the concepts "confrontation" or "disagreement." Members of the group do disagree with one another, yet their way of being inclusive refers to honoring both the positiveness of the group and what individual people care about and do. Forcing members of a (minoritized) group to publicly air their differences would increase their vulnerability as a group and as individual members. If you allow multiple perspectives, then differences do not have to be erased.*

Sam: *Thinking about confrontation in this way is also a very paternalistic way of thinking about disagreement, and it has a violent connotation to it. It also stereotypes women's groups.*

Pooja: *It's creating binaries about how groups should work. There's a confrontational theory operating in elitist scientific institutions in India. Open confrontation and aggression is a symbol of maleness in Indian academia. There's also a lot of disagreement and conflict showcased in entertainment.*

Lucy: *Our discussions are a part of a safe space. People may disagree in a safe space. If you don't allow multiple perspectives, then reaching consensus is very*

superficial. I used to be part of a community-building group in Houston, where it was considered important that people were able to express divergent views. The key was not to do this in an accusatory way—"You did this"—but in an honest way—"I felt this."

Lucy: *What matters most is not whether we are a collective or individuals but how power is distributed within the group.*

Our commitment to equity and justice demands that we stay aware of structural and interactive power differences without, but also within. For example, as a collective and in our research, we are diligent to undermine traditional hierarchies, to destablilize roles that rely on hierarchical power relationships, and to give everyone a chance to participate and to set the priorities. Our agendas are mutually established and we take turns facilitating and taking notes. We seek to express our work as a mutual collaboration while also allowing for varying availabilities, energies, and interests. Through our collaborative research, and as seekers of justice, we build community and scholarship as manifestations of our love for and commitment to women in the world both near and far. Pengfei said, "This space allows for multiple interpretations to coexist. For example, the interviews all mean very different things to us and our relationship with our participants/women we love, but also collectively, we are creating some synergy, forging some conversations, and so on."

As part of this unique collaborative community, it is our responsibility to destabilize existing hegemonic social structures and simultaneously be open and frank about our (and our participants') burdens, limitations, and discomfort. So, while we are not personally accountable for the statements made by our participants, the onus is on us, in the future, to work as allies and subtly restate our positionality and inclusivity to defuse any potential instances of disquiet and/or distress.

Having read the research scenario, we can locate some of the concepts at work within this research study. In what ways do you think the study is critical in its epistemological orientation? In other words, how is knowledge being called into question? The study is unapologetically partisan—that is, oriented toward telling the often-left-out stories of ordinary women, through loving perspectives and within a context of love. Intersubjectivity is established between the researchers and their participants through dialogue, but also in the generation of the storymap pages that make it possible to think about the lives of women across time and space as it puts those lives in dialogue with one another. How would you describe the subject-to-subject reflection in the knowledge of women being produced through the study?

☑ **YOU AND RESEARCH**

How are these conceptions of research similar or different to the two ordinary examples with which we started the chapter? What is the difference between thinking of yourself as a knowledge-seeker in the sense of these first two examples and thinking of yourself as a researcher? How does thinking of yourself as a researcher connect or not with other ideas you have about yourself as a professional? It is important to be aware that knowledge is not produced in a vacuum and that it is never a matter of neutrality or a reflection of disinterest on the part of the knowledge-seeker. Let's draw on the metaphor of the conversation as we imagine what the insights of this chapter contribute to both our interpreting and our doing of research.

When Interpreting Research

When interpreting research, we take a critical orientation toward the knowledge produced through research, recognizing that this knowledge is being produced with purposes, perspectives, and assumptions already in place. We want to encourage all of us as researchers and practitioners to take this questioning and open orientation into how we interpret research with which we are presented. This contrasts with the idea that one could just read the results section of a study and apply those results to their own work without taking into account purposes, perspectives, and assumptions.

When Doing Research

The questions and concepts of this chapter are brought into our efforts to do research through reflection. We want to encourage researchers to think about the assumptions and everyday practices of knowledge-seeking and how these might be carried forward in the research process. Take care to make your perspectives, motivations, and epistemological assumptions clear for those with whom you will be doing the research and sharing the outcomes of the study.

SYNTHESIS: AN OPEN DIALOGUE

At the beginning of this chapter, we introduced two ordinary scenarios for us to start to ponder the idea of "research" and how you may (or may not) relate to it. You did a body scan to check on how you *feel* about research, and you contemplated what research means to you. In Chapter 1, you also read our story of becoming researchers, and a description of how we approach research projects, including the specific project that was a catalyst for writing this textbook.

Conceptual Synthesis

Looking back at your response to describing what "research is," did you talk about solving a problem, answering a question, or gathering information? Did you list examples of things you might research? We noticed that there was, at times, a disconnect between how our students

defined and described research and how they related to it themselves. Almost all of our students defined research in very formal terms, using formal language and describing it as a very formal activity. Yet, when they described their relationship as a person to research, they expressed uncertainty and used informal language. Such a contrast implied that the students experienced a disconnect between who they imagined themselves to be and what they envisioned as the work of research. Below, we provide some examples from our students and the study we conducted. Perhaps you can compare how you defined research with these examples.

Is Research a Way to Solve Problems?

Perhaps you, like many of our students, think of research as a way to "solve a problem," "answer a question," or "gather information." As one student put it, "I now can research anything I want at my fingertips. Broadly, I believe research to be a quest for further knowledge about a desired topic. We research everything: products to buy, vacations to go on, job descriptions." Another student wrote, "Research is not that unapproachable. Everyone can design and conduct a research project. And even, research shares the similar logic with the process of problem solving in our daily life." These students drew a parallel between the act of research and everyday activities. They described themselves as people who are regularly engaging in research to solve ordinary problems in life. Can you relate to this type of conceptualization? Why or why not? Do you think this type of conceptualization captures the essence of research? If not, what could be missing, in your opinion?

Are Researchers Experts?

Some of our students thought of research as a form of expertise that required specialized knowledge and skills. For instance, one student noted that research was a "serious" endeavor with "more opportunities to mess things up." Students who conceptualized research in this way tended to assume that they lacked the expertise to be involved in doing research. Our students expressed feelings of "intimidation," cynicism, or alienation toward being that kind of expert. In other words, when students thought of research as a form of expertise, they also imagined themselves outside of that expertise. One student commented that research constitutes "an academic process that requires enormous amounts of talent, time, and effort in hopes of boosting one's reputation in the overly competitive world of academia." Can you relate to those emotional qualities in your own experiences? Have you ever felt intimidated by research or statistics? If so, where do you think those feelings come from?

Is Research Science?

Another conceptualization is one in which students equated research with science and presented research as a process of testing hypotheses, or acquiring evidence to prove or disprove certain beliefs. Students who conceptualize research in this way often focus on the position of a scientist in relation to research. Their conceptualizations emphasize notions of "objectivity," "scientific methods," "numbers," "experimentations," quantitative methods, and statistics. One student described research specifically as "the pursuit

of information through the scientific method." With respect to this conceptualization of research, our data indicate both complementary and mutually exclusive student identity claims. For instance, the identity claims that emerged from the assignment of one student who was raised by two parents working in professions related to natural sciences, and who also was an undergraduate researcher in a university-based laboratory, suggests that he perceives himself as someone who is both comfortable with and who can be a part of the research process. On the other hand, another student with a similar conceptualization of research described herself as being "overwhelmed" by the research process when encountering it in an undergraduate class; her narrative presented her position as being "intimidated" by the research process. What is your view on the similarities and differences between "research" and "science"? Do you think they are the same thing? *Science* and *scientific* are buzzwords that are used quite often in our professional life nowadays, but have you thought of what they mean when you use them?

Is Research a Situated Form of Practice?

Finally, a very small number of our students discussed research in terms of it being a set of practices of very particular communities of people, like academics. For these students, research entailed members of particular communities reaching some kind of communicative agreement on norms and standards for their research, and for how they will relate with one another. For instance, one student noted, "Sharing the results with the scientific community is an essential part of research. The objectivity and the validity of research can be confirmed by others within the community by the discussions and further explorations of the topic by others in the field." Students who conceptualized research in this way could imagine themselves as part of a research community, even if they presently considered themselves on the sidelines for the moment. Looking back to your definition of research, how did you position yourself in relation to the broader research community? Did you see yourself inside or outside of such a community? Do you know the norms and standards of a research community, perhaps in counseling or the field of peace and social justice?

Methodological Synthesis

"Research" is certainly not one thing, although we often have a stereotypical image or perception associated with it. Looking back at what you wrote, do you think it reflects or, on the contrary, is in conflict with how research is generally portrayed or understood?

This question is closely related to some of the findings from the "researching research" project we first described in the Prelude (Ross et al., 2017). Remember that one of our findings involved a relationship between how our former students defined "research" and how they positioned themselves as either insiders or outsiders to the research process they defined. Our analysis helped us see that our former students tended to define or conceptualize research in one of four ways on the content level—that is, research as a means of problem solving, research as a form of expertise, research as science, and research as a situated practice.

Personal Synthesis

As you read through those examples of conceptualizations, is there anything that resonates with you and your own experiences? Do you experience any tension between your thinking and feeling about research? If you consider that "research" is something external to you and feel intimidated and alienated from it, you certainly are not alone. As revealed in our analysis, many students perceive research to be truncated to a set of steps and techniques that are presumed to follow in a linear manner and in a "scientific" fashion, and are conducted and practiced by experts. This may create a sense of alienation for you if your own internalized conceptualizations of research don't resonate with how you identify with knowledge in your ordinary life.

MOVING FORWARD

The next chapter focuses on research, identity, and relational processes. The chapter will build upon the five core concepts introduced here. We want to think even more subtly about how research is relational and will always involve the identity of the researcher and assumptions about what it means to know *with* others.

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