Summer Adoption Research Institute (SARI) Materials

Rudd Adoption Research Program

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Critical Qualitative Methods and Epistemic Justice In Adoption Research

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CRITICAL QUALITATIVE METHODS AND EPISTEMIC JUSTICE IN ADOPTION RESEARCH

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READINGS

Required Reading:

- **Samuels, G. M.** (2022). Epistemic trauma and transracial adoption: Author(iz)ing folkways of knowledge and healing. *Child Abuse and Neglect.* https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105588

- **Samuels, G. M.** (2009). Using the extended case method to explore identity in a multiracial context. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 32* (9), 1599-1618. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870902749117

Supplemental Reading

- Homans, M., et al. (2018). Critical Adoption Studies: Conversation in Progress. *Adoption & Culture, 6* (1), 1–49.

- McGinnis, H. A., Baden, A. L., Kim, A. Y., & Kim, J. (2019). Generational shifts: Adult adoptee scholars' perspective on future research and practice. In *The future of adoption, Rudd adoption research program*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

- Sandelowski, M., and Barroso, J. (2003). Classifying the Findings in Qualitative Studies, *Qualitative Health Research, 13* (7), 905-923.

- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2021). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books.

OVERVIEW

What is Epistemic Injustice?

How does it relate to Adoption and Research on Adoption?

What makes a study or method *critical*?

Reimagining a Critical Research Agenda in Adoption

A WORD ABOUT WORDS…

Person-centered language

Adoptee versus people who are adopted…etc.

**Monocentricity**

The cultural value of singularity binaries in identities tied to race, gender, class, family, etc.

Monoracism

The idea that single and binary identities (individual and familial) are normal/natural, ideal, healthy, and superior.

Essentialism

The (false) belief that socially constructed categories are scientifically reliable markers of genetic traits, (in)abilities, etc.
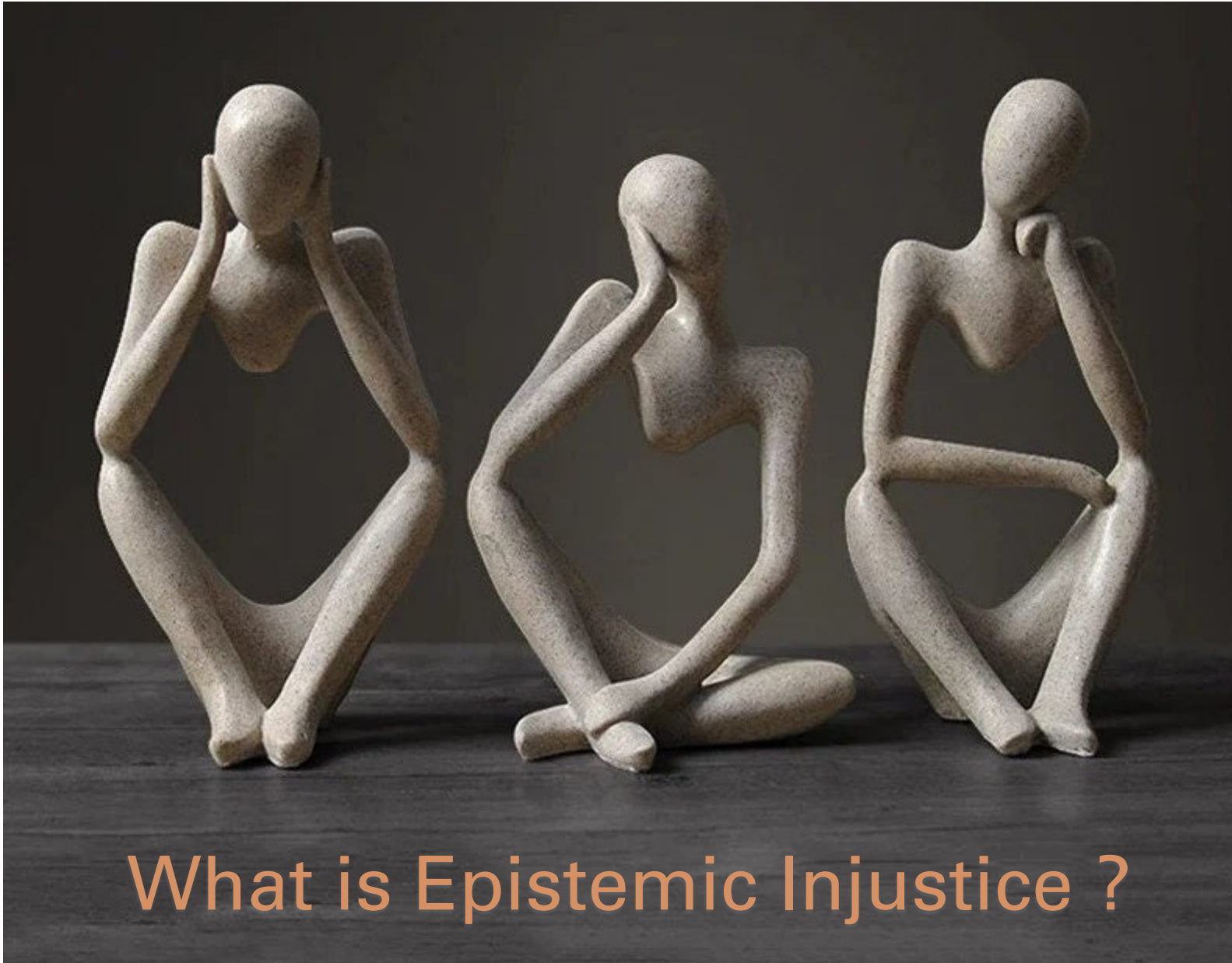
HARMS TO PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES AS KNOWERS BASED ON AN IDENTITY PREJUDICE

What is Epistemic Injustice ?

TWO KINDS OF EI

Testimonial: Speech, expression, content

Hermeneutical: Meaning making, interpretation

TESTIMONIAL INJUSTICE

The wrong committed against a person when their claims are dismissed as a result of identity prejudice

Example: #metoo

HERMENEUTICAL INJUSTICE:

IDENTITY PREJUDICE DISCREDITS PERSON AS A MEANING MAKER AND THEIR INTERPRETATION OF INFORMATION, EVENT, CONDITION

WHAT DOES ANY OF THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ADOPTION OR ADOPTION RESEARCH

DOMINANT NARRATIVES THAT OPPRESS DIVERSE ADOPTION EXPERIENCES AND EVADE POWER DYNAMICS IN ADOPTION

Dominant Narratives (cultural stories) that affirm white supremacy, classism, Westernism, colonialist representations of nations:

- Grateful, lucky, being chosen/rescued, (from lesser or pathologized family, race/culture, nation)

- Adoption as solely good/gain or solely bad/loss

- Superficial or optional engagement of race and identity development (culture camp)

- Dismissing or over-centering genetics, biology

- Race-evasive white supremacy: Rainbow families, colorblindness, best of both worlds

- Monocentricity and Monoracism toward TRA, multiraciality

IDENTITY PREJUDICES TOWARD ADOPTED PERSONS

Dismissing, marginalizing, silencing, pathologizing, tokenizing, exotification:

- The "angry adoptee"
- Special, unique, "our adopted son"
- Infantilizing and adultist views of adopted persons
- Biocentric notion of family (e.g., "real family" "natural mother")
- Not being X-enough—monoracist micro-aggressions (confused, mixed up, pathologizing of multiraciality)

WHAT ARE THE STORIES THAT YOU HAVE BEEN TOLD/TELL ABOUT ADOPTION, FAMILY? WHERE DO THEY COME FROM?
WHAT IDENTITY PREJUDICES (OR PRIVILEGES) ARE OPERATING?

These stories, prejudices and power dynamics(including our own) exist in our research.

How we study things can further oppression and injustices rather than disrupt them

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METHOD: Using research designs/measures that exclude, undermine, or distort full scope of lived experiences

CONTEXT: no engagement of context or centering only one context that matters

THEORY: using theories (implicit or explicit) that distort, obscure view/lens of interpreting findings and establishing their significance—your lens matters

EXAMPLES: HOW RESEARCH CAN FUEL OPPRESSION

- **Reinforcing Identity Privilege:** Asking only adoptive parents (mothers) and professionals (teachers, therapists) how children are doing.

    - Prioritizing this knowledge over what the adopted person is saying

    - Under-exploring effects of adoption on others: family and community of origin, culture of origin, fathers (both adoptive and biological), siblings (both adoptive and biological)

- **Decontextualized Measures and Theories:** of race, ethnicity and culture and identity development that have limited relevance to those living outside of their biological families and racial-ethnic communities and/or are monocentric/monoracist

- **Decontexualized Measures and Theories**: of child development that presume no displacements from home, birth parents, etc.

- **Ignoring variance:** and diversity in experiences (even contradictions within a single persons' story/experience)

- Others?

POSITIONALITY

WHAT IDENTITIES DO YOU BRING TO THIS RESEARCH?
HOW ARE YOU LOCATED WITHIN THE EXPERIENCE OF ADOPTION?

WHAT ARE CRITICAL APPROACHES?

Positivist Approaches: Research is a tool for uncovering laws and truths\of cause and effect of social behavior that are generalizable and/or universal

Interpretive Approaches: Research is a gool for understanding the realities and meanings of people as they are lived by those people

Critical Approaches: Research is a tool that should be used to improve conditions of the oppressed by exposing power inequities, oppressive narratives and processes

Table 1: Metaphysics of Scientific Inquiry Paradigms

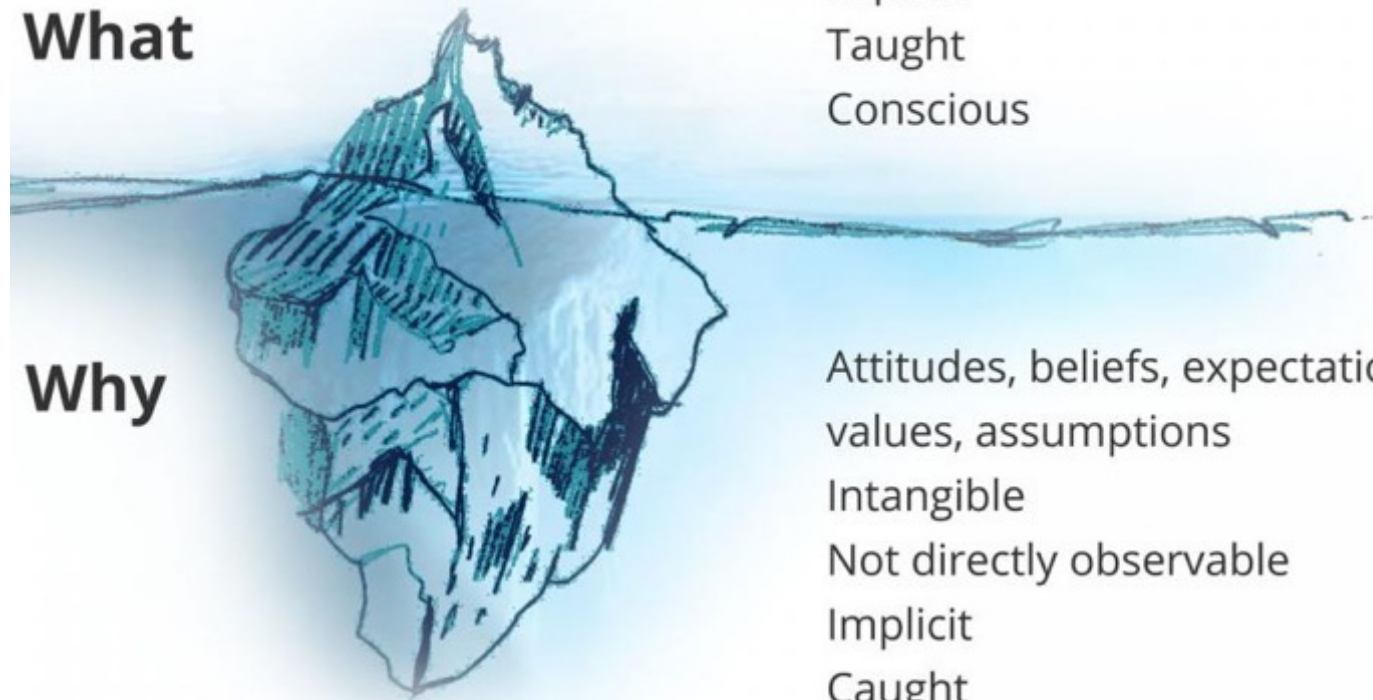|	**Positivism**	**Post -positivism**	**Critical Theory**	**Constructivism/ Interpretivist**
Ontology	Naïve realism—true reality does exist and can, in principle, be apprehended.	Critical realism—true reality exists, but can only imperfectly and probabilistically be apprehended.	Historical realism—virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values; crystallized over time	Relativism—local and specifically constructed realities.
Epistemology	Dualist/objectivist; findings=true reality/verifiable facts/laws	Modified dualist/objectivist; findings probably reflect "truth" or reality.	*Transactional/subjectivist; value-mediated findings. Structural/historical insights.	Transactional, subjectivist. Create findings through individual reconstructions & consensus.
Methodology	<u>Experimental-verification</u> of hypotheses; chiefly quantitative methods (& clinical observ.). Use of deduction to verify theory.	<u>Modified experimental.</u> Falsification of hypotheses using deduction; can include qual. data & methods	<u>Dialogic/dialectical</u>: Analysis of patterns of framing or logic within a person/group's verbal and written discourse, literature, politics, aesthics, music, etc.	<u>Hermeneutical Dialectical</u>: Interpreting patterns of individual and group meaning making
Inquiry Aim	Explanation→ prediction and control		Critique, transformation, & empowerment	Understanding, reconstruction
Role of Values	Excluded→ influence denied/controlled for		Included and Necessary→ informative, central to study's aims and quality	
Criteria for Quality	Conventional benchmarks of rigor; internal/external validity, reliability, & objectivity & generalizability—statistical significance		Historical and political situatedness & accuracy	Validity and Significance by individual, group, community

A CRITICAL RESEARCH AGENDA GOES BEYOND THE "WHAT" DESCRIPTIVE, TO CONSIDER AND EXPOSE THE WHY

What

Behaviours and artifacts
Accessible to the senses
Observable
Explicit
Taught
Conscious

Why

Attitudes, beliefs, expectations, values, assumptions
Intangible
Not directly observable
Implicit
Caught
Subconscious

The Cultural Iceberg, adapted by Sheri Lazarus (2016) from work by Hall (1976). Art by Anna Seeley and Abby Smith.

HOW DOES YOUR THEORY AND METHOD ALLOW FOR A KALEIDOSCOPE VIEW?

Critical and Decolonized Research Agendas (Tuhiwai Smith)

Reframing

Claiming

Celebrating Survival & Healing

Testifying!

Envisioning

Remembering

Connecting & Networking

Revitalizing

Story Telling

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Telling and Hearing stories is never a neutral act

YOU:
Agenda
Purpose/Goal
Motivations

Creating
Shared
Meaning
of Story

Audience:
Agenda
Purpose/Goal
Motivations

CAUSES US TO THINK ABOUT POWER, OPPRESSION IN OUR RESEARCH PROCESSES, THEORIZING, METHODS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Who gets to decide what is a important topic, fundable topic?

Who asks and creates the research questions?

Who designs study and collects data?

Who makes meaning of its results

How do we determine "significance" (what gets said the most often—dominant thinking versus what is unique, anomalous & unusual?)

Who are we producing this research for? Who gets to use it, in what form? For whose best interests and needs?

MEANS THAT YOU DO NOT JUST DESIGN A STUDY, USE A MEASURE, A METHOD, OR A THEORY BECAUSE "THAT IS HOW IT IS ALWAYS DONE"

Challenge of Socially Just Research

Critical and just research is often an uphill battle → must contest dominant knowledge taken for granted truths and theories, argue against the privilege and bias operating in how one's work will be received, and argue why dominant theories or methods might be "wrong" lens, and assert the knowledge itself.

Critical Adoption Research: Asks these questions...

Who defined the problem?

To whom is this study worthy and relevant?

Whose knowledge is built on/extended?

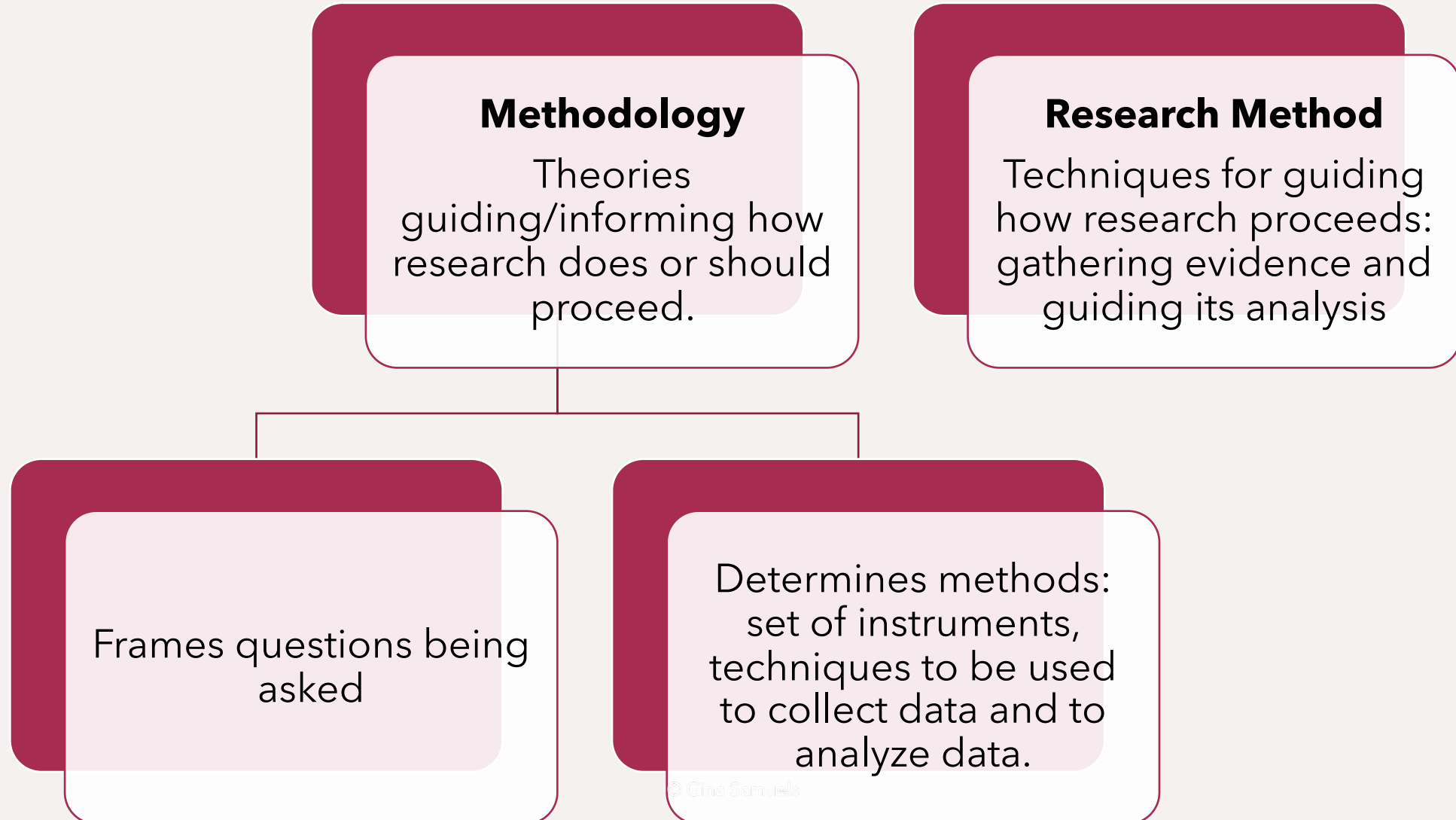What are possible positive outcomes ...to whom?

What are possible negative outcomes, to whom?

How can the negative outcomes for community be eliminated and positive outcomes protected?

To whom is the researcher (really) accountable?

What processes support the research, the researched, and the researcher?

This implicates both Methodology and Method

Methodology
Theories guiding/informing how research does or should proceed.

Research Method
Techniques for guiding how research proceeds: gathering evidence and guiding its analysis

Frames questions being asked

Determines methods: set of instruments, techniques to be used to collect data and to analyze data.

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Consider: Where can your research engage these agendas?

Purpose or Significance of Research?

Methodology, and Methods

Dissemination (content, form, process, timing)

Endings, Transitions

Research Design: RQs, data collected,

Analytic lenses, frames/interpretations

Theories used (what counts as a theory?)

Most people say that it is the intellect which makes a great scientist. They are wrong: it is character.

Albert Einstein