

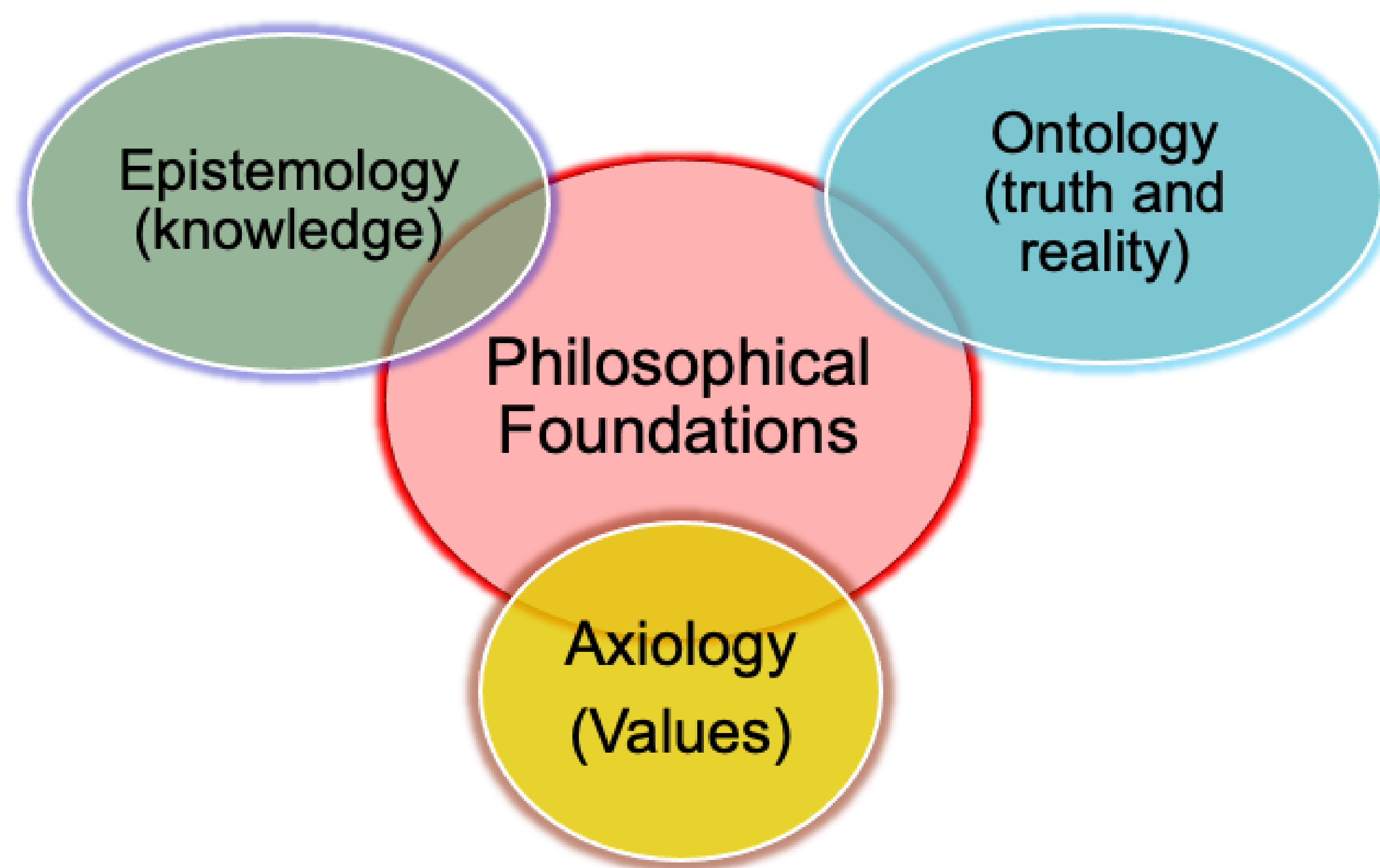
# AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS OF FIRST-YEAR PHD STUDENTS

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## Problem and Purpose

The philosophical foundations influence what we identify as researchable problems and the methods we choose to study these problems. However, the concepts that underpin our worldviews can seem mysterious and perhaps intimidating to new PhD students.

The purpose of our study was for two PhD students to examine their worldviews (philosophical foundations) and how these influence their research interests and methodologies.



## Conceptual Framework

### Philosophical Foundations:

- The term paradigm can be used to describe a researcher's worldview or philosophical way of thinking that informs the research (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006; Scotland, 2012).
- Epistemological, ontological, and axiological assumptions comprise the philosophical foundations.
- Understanding one's philosophical assumptions makes for stronger researchers (Mertens, 2010; Scotland, 2012).

## Method

### Researcher Participants:

- Two first year PhD students without previous knowledge of qualitative research
- One PhD instructor of research methods

### Design:

- Autoethnography
  - A research approach that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis et al., 2005).
- Self study
  - Readings and discussions as part of course work and as part of the study.
- Narrative inquiry
  - "Stories that reveal how people view and understand their lives" (Josselson, 2011, p. 225), aligning with autoethnography.

### Reflexivity and Validity:

- Acknowledgment of findings in relation to the researcher's standpoint
- Multiple sets of data
- Response validation (member checking)

### Data collection:

- Two autoethnographies
- Three narratives (1582 words)
- One discussion with 45 minutes of audio-recording (2900 words of transcription).

### Analysis:

- We used holistic coding combined with narrative coding (Saldana, 2021) to read the stories that comprised the data, looking for the intrapersonal thoughts and feelings and the interpersonal connections to culture. This allowed for the human condition and the social relationships. From this complement of coding strategies, we developed themes, leading to holistic understanding (Josselson, 2011)

## Results

**Theme 1.** Explicitly teaching the philosophical foundations of research is essential for PhD students' learning.

- Jerry.. "all graduate students should have at least some knowledge of their worldviews".

**Theme 2.** Writing an autoethnography provided an opportunity for students to think about their worldviews.

- Harvey.. "autoethnography exposed my ontology".

**Theme 3.** Students linked their worldviews with religion and childhood experiences, and thought that autoethnographic writing brought these relationships to the fore.

- Jerry linked research ethics to religion, while Harvey linked ethics to his childhood experiences.

## Conclusions

- Writing autoethnography provides opportunity for doctoral students to articulate lived experiences in a scholarly manner.
- **We recommend that:**
  - PhD students should be taught about the philosophical foundations of research. Professors of research methods should consider this pedagogical approach.
  - PhD students need to learn to value their own beliefs and interests, rather than solely following the values of faculty with whom they are working.

## Sample References

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