14. Using Research Methods Effectively

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The decisions you make in developing an effective research question, matching it to an appropriate research method, and then responsibly analyzing the implications of your findings (research design), are especially important because research is subjective. Subjectivity is often seen as negative and is frequently leveled as a reason to mistrust a decision or judgment, as in, "You're just being subjective." But: all research is subjective, all research is communication. Of course, not all scholars and fields believe this, but let us try to convince you, because it is important. This belief is central to conducting ethical research.

There is no pure objectivity when it comes to research. Research is conducted by people, all of whom have different ideas about effective research, but researchers abide by a code of ethics that holds them to standards that help them maintain safety and develop meaningful research. Even quantitative research, even computer algorithms that identify trends—all of the methods associated with developing this data

are engineered by people and are, thus, subjective. And this is a good thing!

Instead of striving for objective research (an impossibility), we strive for ethical research. Ethical research takes into account the fact that people perform research and that their research designs are impacted by their own subjectivities: the thoughts, beliefs, and values that make us human. As researchers, it is essential to be reflective on our subjectivities, mitigate subjectivities that might make us conduct research unfairly, and adhere to high ethical standards for research.