

# SOCI2013: General Sociology January Intersession 2024

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Chapter 2: Sociological Research Methods

Textbook: Sociology in Our Time, Diana Kendall 12th edition


# Chapter outlines

- Social Media and the Teen Bullying and Suicide Crisis
- Why sociological research is necessary
- The sociological research process
- Ethical issues in sociological research
- Looking ahead: research, social change, and your future

## Social Media and the Teen Bullying and Suicide Crisis

- “Why are you alive?”
- “You’re ugly.”
- “You should die.”
- “Why don’t you go kill yourself.”
- “Can u die please?”
- —After more than a year of receiving online bullying comments like these, Rebecca Ann Sedwick, a twelve-year-old Tampa, Florida, girl, jumped from a concrete silo tower to her death at an abandoned cement plant.





## Social Media and the Teen Bullying and Suicide Crisis

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Although suicide may seem like a depressing discussion for the study of sociology, it is a relevant topic because suicide is one of the first social topics that some early sociologists studied.

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These thinkers believed that identifying the *social causes* of such behavior sets sociology apart from psychology, philosophy, and other areas of inquiry.

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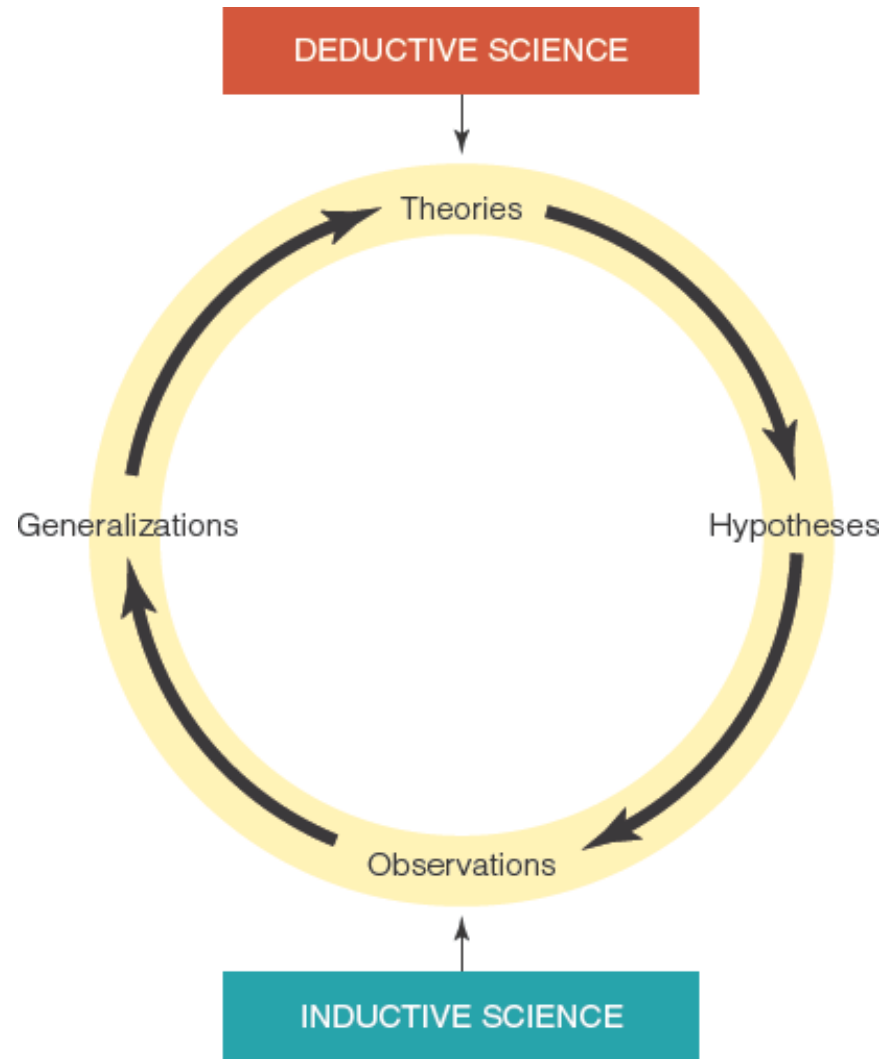
These early sociologists also wanted to show others how many acts we think of as purely *individual* in nature are also social in their origin and consequences.

# Why sociological research is necessary

- Debunking commonsense (refuting or falsify)
- Consider suicide, Common sense may tell us that people who indicate suicidal thoughts or behavior will not die by suicide.
- However, sociological research indicates that this assumption is frequently incorrect: People who threaten to kill themselves are often sending messages to others and may indeed attempt suicide.
- Common sense may also tell us that suicide is caused by despair or depression.
- However, research suggests that suicide is sometimes used as a means of lashing out at friends and relatives because of real or imagined wrongs.

# Why sociological research is necessary

- theories generate hypotheses,
- hypotheses lead to observations (data gathering),
- observations lead to the formation of generalizations, and
- generalizations are used to support the theory, to suggest modifications to it, or to refute it.



# The sociological research process

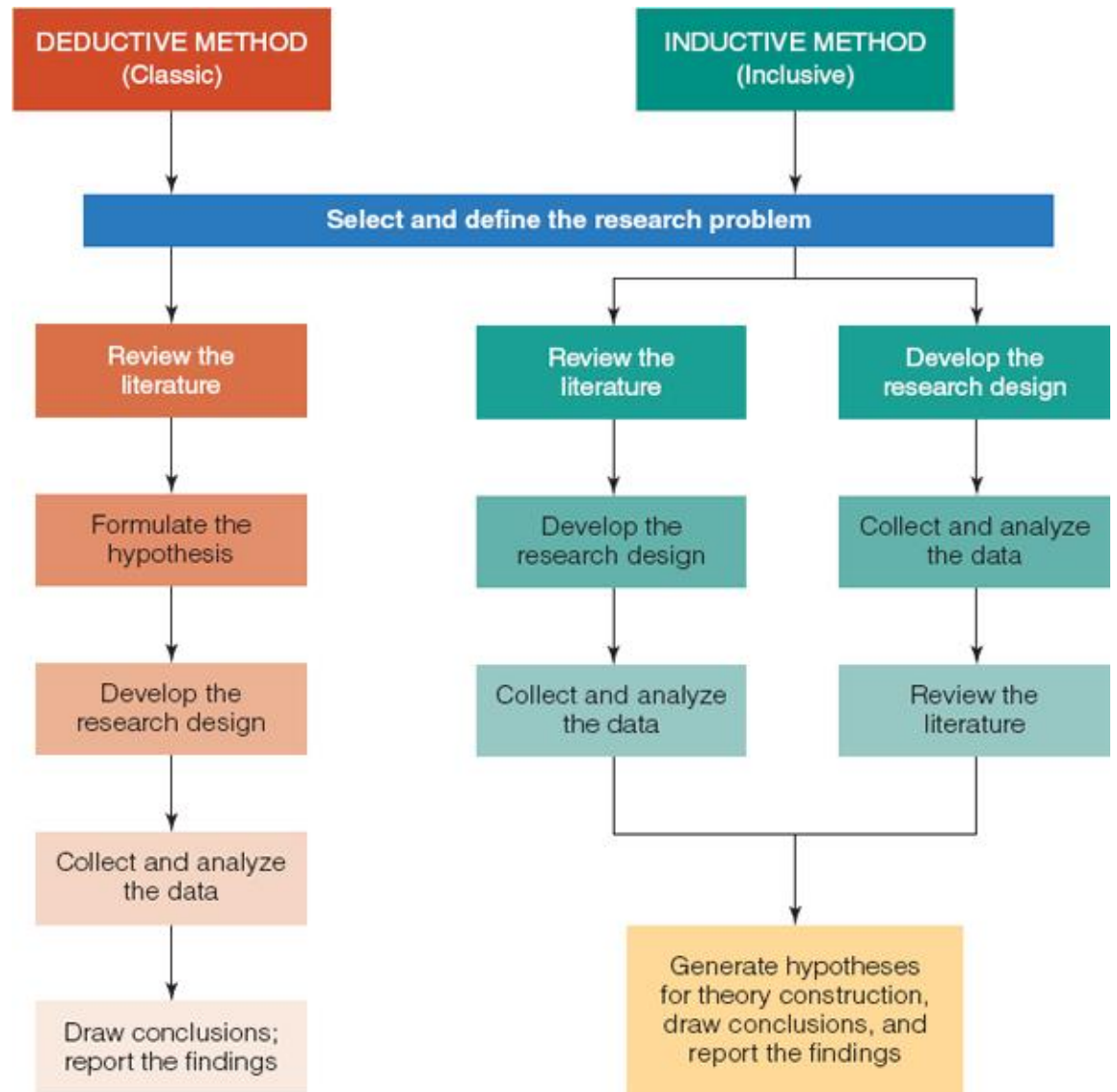
*Quantitative research* uses numerical analysis or manipulation of observations with the aim to describe or explain the topic of inquiry.

- in one quantitative study, researchers found that Latinxs (Hispanics) consistently had lower suicide rates than Whites (non-Hispanics), particularly when they remained strongly attached to others in their own culture.

With qualitative research, interpretive description (words) rather than statistics (numbers) is used to analyze underlying meanings and patterns of social relationships.

- An example of qualitative research is a study in which the researcher systematically analyzed the contents of suicide notes to look for recurring themes (such as feelings of despair or failure) to determine if any patterns could be found that would help in understanding why people kill themselves

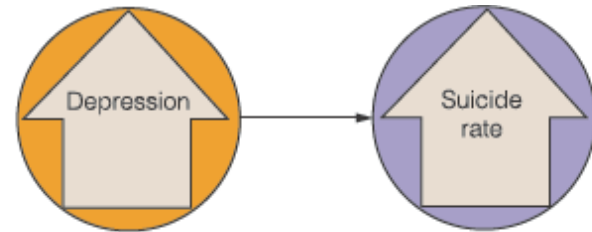
The sociological research process/The Quantitative Research Model





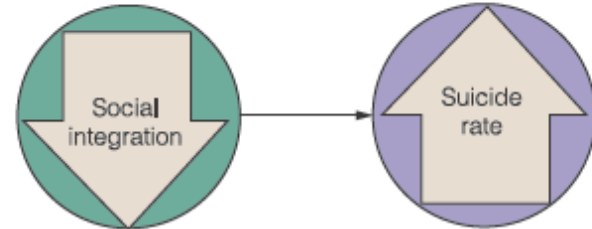
# The sociological research process/The Quantitative Research Model

## a. Causal relationship



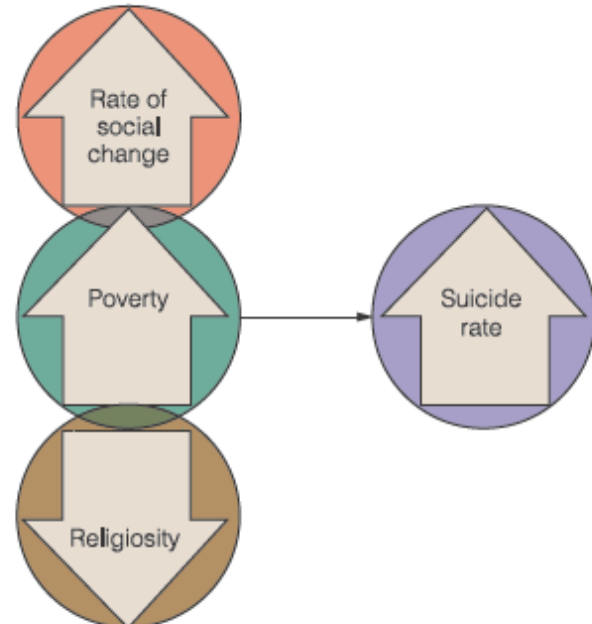
"Depression causes suicide."

## b. Inverse causal relationship (Durkheim)



"The lack of social integration causes suicide."

## c. Multiple-cause explanation



"Many factors interact to cause suicide."

The  
sociological  
research  
process/The  
Quantitative  
Research  
Model

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<b>Method</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>
Homicide	11.0	2.0
Suicide	13.0	4.0
Firearm- Related Deaths	17.0	2.0

The sociological  
research process/A  
Qualitative Research  
Model

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qualitative research is more likely to be used when the research question does not easily lend itself to numbers and statistical methods

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As compared to a quantitative model, a qualitative approach often involves a different type of research question and a smaller number of cases.

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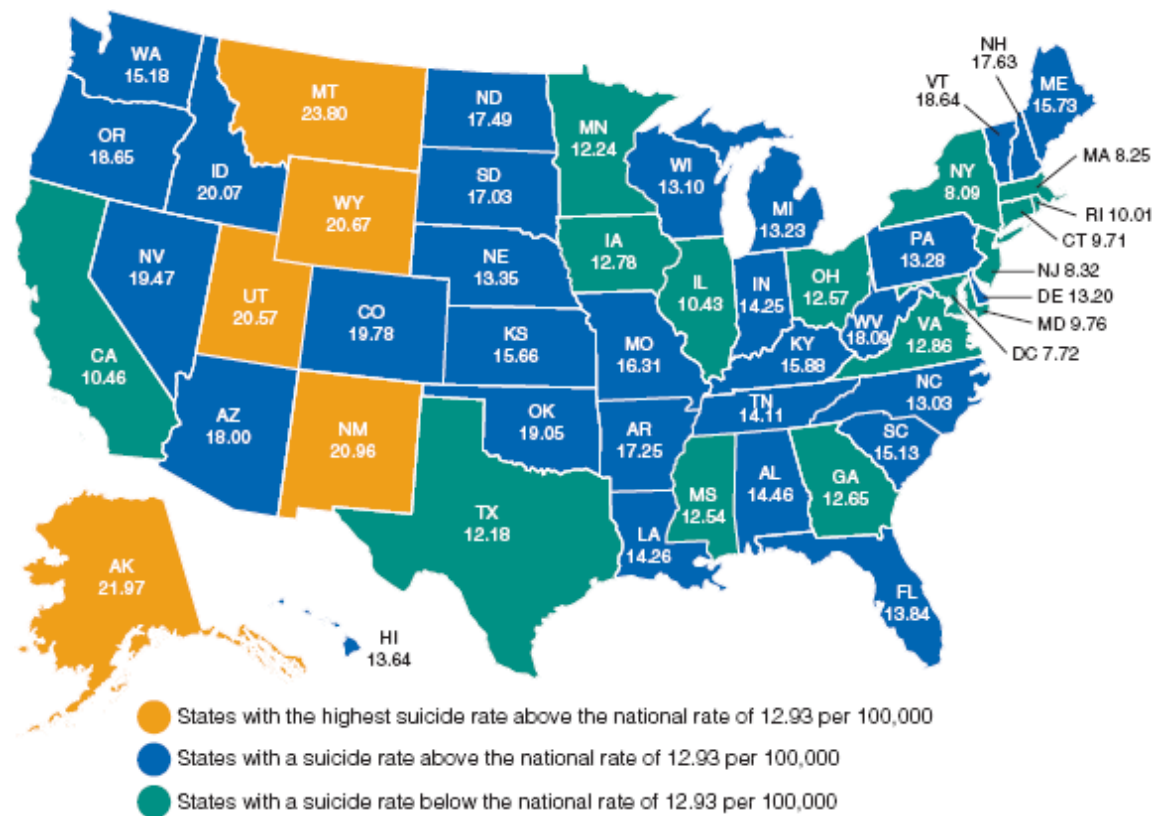
Researchers using a qualitative approach may engage in *problem formulation* to clarify the research question and formulate questions of concern and interest to people participating in the research.

# Research methods/surveys



# Research methods/Secondary Analysis of Existing Data

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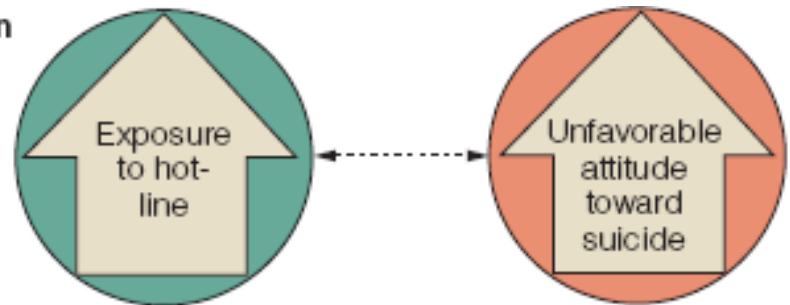
# Research methods/Field Research

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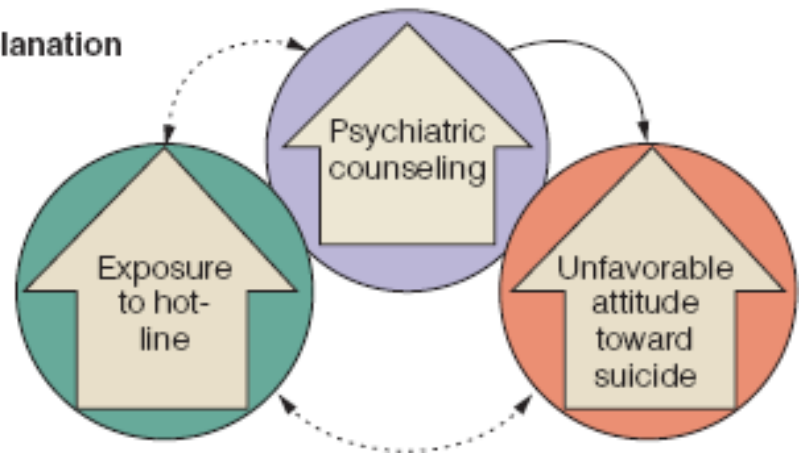
- Field research is the study of social life in its natural setting: observing and interviewing people where they live, work, and play
- Some kinds of behavior can be studied best by “being there”
- a fuller understanding can be developed through observations, face-to-face discussions, and participation in events.
- Researchers use these methods to generate qualitative data: observations that are best described verbally rather than numerically



**a. Observed correlation**



**b. Possible causal explanation**



# Research methods comparison

Research Method	Strengths	Weaknesses
Experiments (laboratory, field, natural)	<p>Control over research</p> <p>Ability to isolate experimental factors</p> <p>Relatively little time and money required</p> <p>Replication possible, except for natural experiments</p>	<p>Artificial by nature</p> <p>Frequent reliance on volunteers or captive audiences</p> <p>Ethical questions of deception</p>
Survey research (questionnaire, interview, telephone survey)	<p>Useful in describing features of a large population without interviewing everyone</p> <p>Relatively large samples possible</p> <p>Multivariate analysis possible</p>	<p>Potentially forced answers</p> <p>Respondent untruthfulness on emotional issues</p> <p>Data that are not always "hard facts" presented as such in statistical analyses</p>
Secondary analysis of existing data (existing statistics, content analysis)	<p>Data often readily available, inexpensive to collect</p> <p>Longitudinal and comparative studies</p> <p>Replication possible</p>	<p>Difficulty in determining accuracy of some of the data</p> <p>Failure of data gathered by others to meet goals of current research</p> <p>Questions of privacy when using diaries and other personal documents</p>
Field research (participant observation, case study, ethnography, unstructured)	<p>Opportunity to gain insider's view</p> <p>Useful for studying attitudes and behavior in natural settings</p> <p>Longitudinal/comparative studies possible</p> <p>Documentation of important social problems of excluded groups possible</p> <p>Access to people's ideas in their words</p> <p>Forum for previously excluded groups</p> <p>Documentation of need for social reform</p>	<p>Problems in generalizing results to a larger population</p> <p>Imprecise data measurements</p> <p>Inability to demonstrate cause/effect relationships or test theories</p> <p>Difficult to make comparisons because of lack of structure</p> <p>Not a representative sample</p>



# Ethical issues in sociological research

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- Sociologist William Zellner (1978) wanted to look at fatal single-occupant automobile accidents to determine whether some drivers were actually dying by suicide.
- He sought to interview the family, friends, and acquaintances of persons killed in single-car crashes to determine whether the deaths were possibly intentional.
- To recruit respondents, Zellner told them that he hoped the research would reduce the number of automobile accidents in the future. He did not mention that he suspected “autocide” might have occurred in the case of their friend or loved one.
- From his data, Zellner concluded that at least 12 percent of the fatal single occupant crashes were suicides—and that those crashes sometimes also killed or critically injured other people as well.
- Was his research unethical? Did he misrepresent the reasons for his study?

# Ethical issues in sociological research/ASA code of ethics

1. Researchers must endeavor to maintain objectivity and integrity in their research by disclosing their research findings in full and including all possible interpretations of the data (even those interpretations that do not support their own viewpoints).
2. Researchers must safeguard the participants' right to privacy and dignity while protecting them from harm.
3. Researchers must protect confidential information provided by participants, even when this information is not considered to be "privileged" (legally protected, as is the case between doctor and patient and between attorney and client) and legal pressure is applied to reveal this information.
4. Researchers must acknowledge research collaboration and assistance they receive from others and disclose all sources of financial support.

Looking ahead:  
research, social  
change, and your  
future

- CSS: Computational social science
- Social media and big data
- Social network analysis

