**SR 950-32**

**Clinical and Applied Sociology**

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Omega Graduate School

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Professor

Dr. Joshua Reichard

***Assignment #1 – Core Essential Elements***

1. **Select One (1) Core Essential Element from the Syllabus Outline:**
   1. Create a 350-word original discussion paper (with cited sources) during the week of the residency. Be prepared to discuss and engage with other students during the live sessions. Post this document in DIAL.
   2. Professor will check for quality of content and word-count requirements. Grade assigned will be Credit or No Credit (CR/NC).

**Applied Sociology**

Applied sociology involves applying sociological theories, methods, and research to address real-world problems, including informing public policy. To apply action to sociological theories, the sociologist must understand the issues and intervene with the goal of making life better for society (Steele and Price, 2004). This differs from theoretical sociology, which focuses on examining and developing theory. I’m intrigued by this subset of sociology as my current research and inquiry have been focused on the legalities, efficacy, ethics, and theological issues associated with the use of psychedelic medications for the treatment of mental health issues. I believe applied sociology is a helpful lens through which to explore several aspects of the use of psychedelics in contemporary society.

One significant example of how applied sociology can be applied to this issue is the growing movement to decriminalize psychedelics, such as psilocybin and MDMA, for use in mental health therapy. Applied sociology can contribute to this movement by using traditional sociological theories and methods to analyze cultural attitudes, systemic barriers, and policy processes to provide evidence-based insights that inform public understanding and influence regulatory change.

The use of psychedelics for mental health treatment has gained traction due to promising clinical results showing their efficacy in treating depression, PTSD, and anxiety (Carhart-Harris et al., 2021). However, historical stigma and punitive drug policies, like the “war on drugs” that began in the early 1970s, have limited access to these therapies. Sociological research highlights the role of advocacy organizations in shifting public discourse and influencing local policy. For instance, organizations like *Decriminalize Nature*[[1]](#footnote-1) and *MAPS (Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies*[[2]](#footnote-2)*)* have played key roles in advocating for the decriminalization and regulation of psychedelics. By engaging in community outreach, legislative lobbying, and public education, these groups promote policies that balance harm reduction, therapeutic innovation, and social equity (Williams et al., 2021).

An interesting example of decriminalization efforts can be found in Oakland, California, where *Decriminalize Nature* successfully led efforts to pass a resolution in 2019 that decriminalized the personal use of entheogenic plants and fungi. Applied sociologists have studied this movement to understand the role of grassroots mobilization, collective identity formation, and evidence-based advocacy in effecting policy change (Noorani, 2021). Sociological research such as this can provide insight into how grassroots organizations can overcome public policy resistance and motivate change. *Decriminalize Nature* focused on addressing public misconceptions of psychedelics while emphasizing their therapeutic benefits.

Applied sociology can also provide a lens through which to examine *how* and *why* current public policy was established. Thomas O’Neill (2020) discusses psychedelics tangentially in his examination of how the Manson murders in 1969 impacted the zeitgeist of society at that time. Although not a sociologist, O’Neill tells the story of the Manson murders utilizing a multidisciplinary approach that I believe falls in the category of applied sociology. The events of Aug 1969 led directly to the way society reacted to psychedelic medication and directly influenced public policy.

My follow-on assignments for this course will also address this topic through the lens of applied sociology and the theory of social constructionism.

WORKS CITED

Carhart-Harris, R. L., Bolstridge, M., Rucker, J., Day, C. M., Erritzoe, D., Kaelen, M., … & Nutt, D. J. (2021). Trial of psilocybin versus escitalopram for depression. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 384(15), 1402–1411.

Noorani, T. (2021). Making psychedelics into medicines: The politics and paradoxes of medicalization. *Journal of Psychedelic Studies*, 5(2), 80–89.

O'Neill, T. (2019). *Chaos: Charles Manson, the CIA, and the secret history of the sixties*. HarperCollins.

Steele, S. F., & Price, J. (2004). *Applied sociology: Terms, topics, tools, and tasks* (Illustrated ed.). Thomson/Wadsworth.

Williams, M. T., & Labate, B. C. (2021). Diversity, equity, and access in psychedelic medicine. *Journal of Psychedelic Studies*, 5(2), 70–82.

Williams, M. T., Reed, S., & George, J. (2021). Cultural humility in psychedelic medicine: A framework for equity. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 631196.

1. https://decriminalizenature.org/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://maps.org/ [↑](#footnote-ref-2)