

# Understanding Psilocybin (“Magic Mushrooms”) In the Context of the Modern “Psychedelic Renaissance”

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## Background

In the 1960s, the “war on drugs” was created to combat widespread use of illegal drugs in the United States. Hallucinogens, including psilocybin, were classified as Schedule 1 by the DEA, meaning they have no medical value. Recently, the scientific community has taken a renewed interest in these drugs and their therapeutic potential.

However, psilocybin is already being used by a diverse population for non-recreational purposes such as spiritual enlightenment, creative enhancement, and other self-help related goals. Medicalization of this drug may marginalize these communities. This research study uses ethnography and media analysis to understand the current state of the psilocybin economy in Cuyahoga County, as well as the attitudes surrounding it.

## Population

The population studied was individuals ages 18-80 who live in Cuyahoga County and have used psilocybin in the last 6 months.

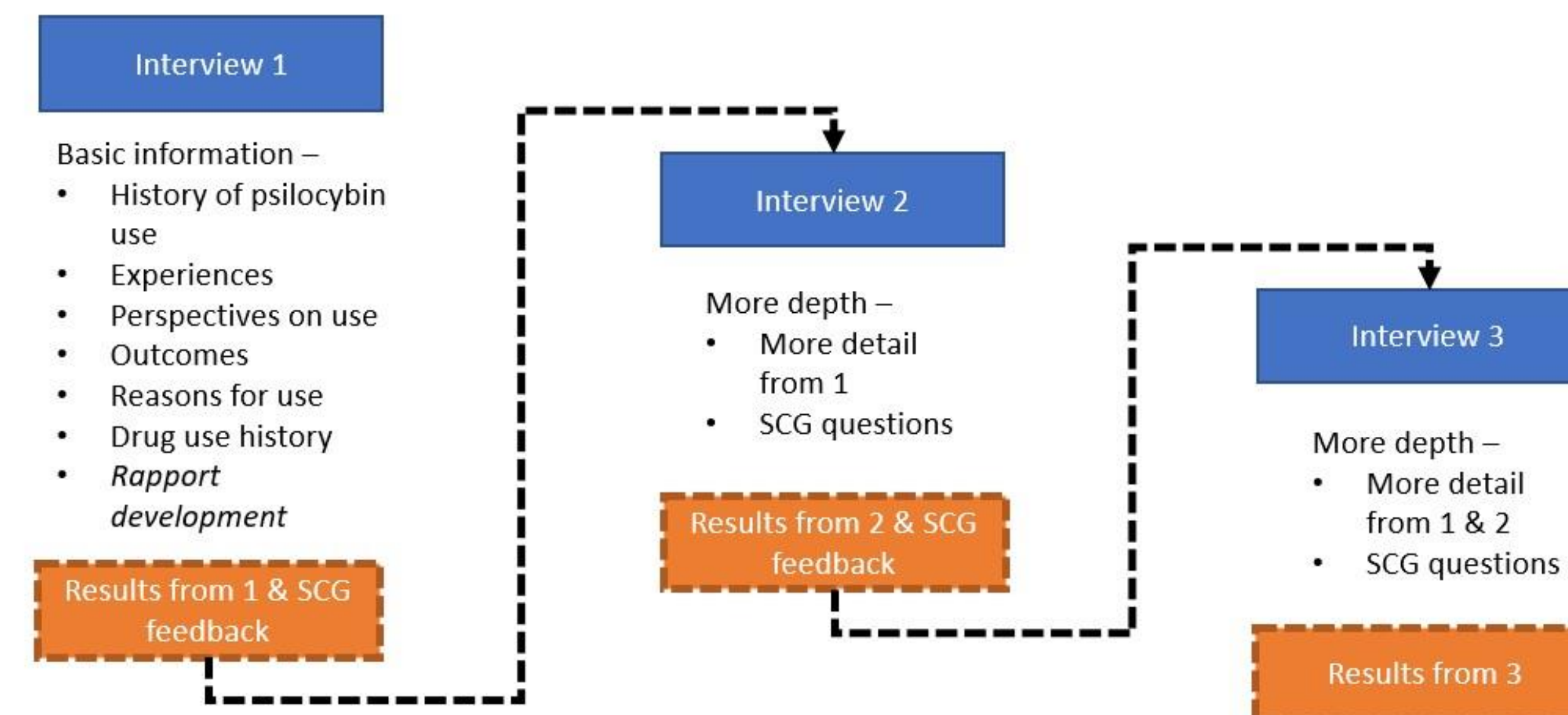
## Learning Objectives

- Understand how ethnographic fieldwork can intersect with narrative policy media analysis to produce comprehensive findings
- Apply mixed methods research skills to a public health project
- Analyze psychedelic drug use, including its social and cultural implications, in Cuyahoga County

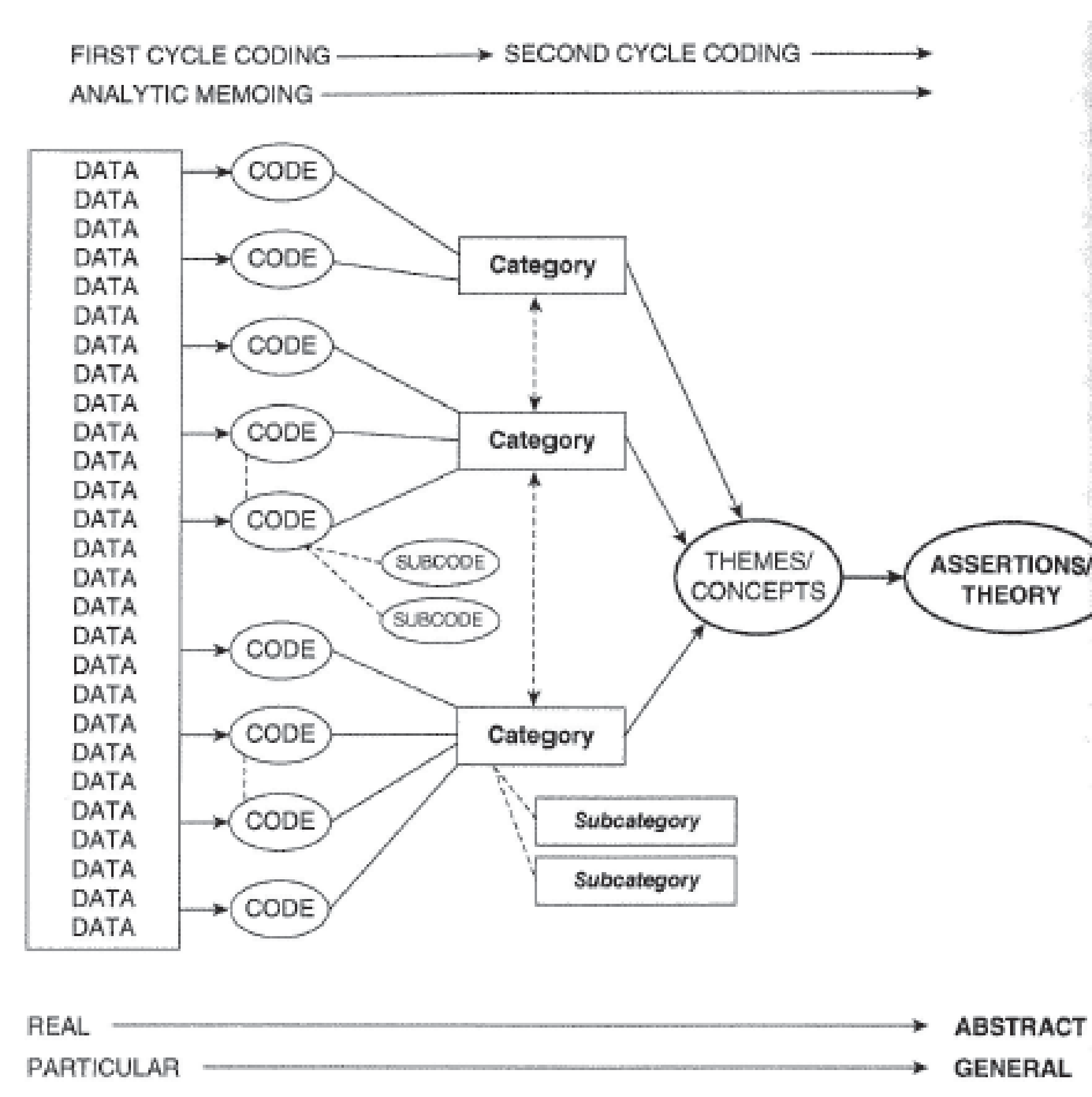
## Activities

- 1) Finding, communicating with, and interviewing psilocybin users and stakeholders (legal and medical professionals)
- 2) Taking ethnographic notes
- 3) Compiling news articles on magic mushrooms
- 4) Developing interview guides
- 5) Data organization and management
- 6) Collaborating with an interdisciplinary team
- 7) Presenting project at CWRU alumni donor event

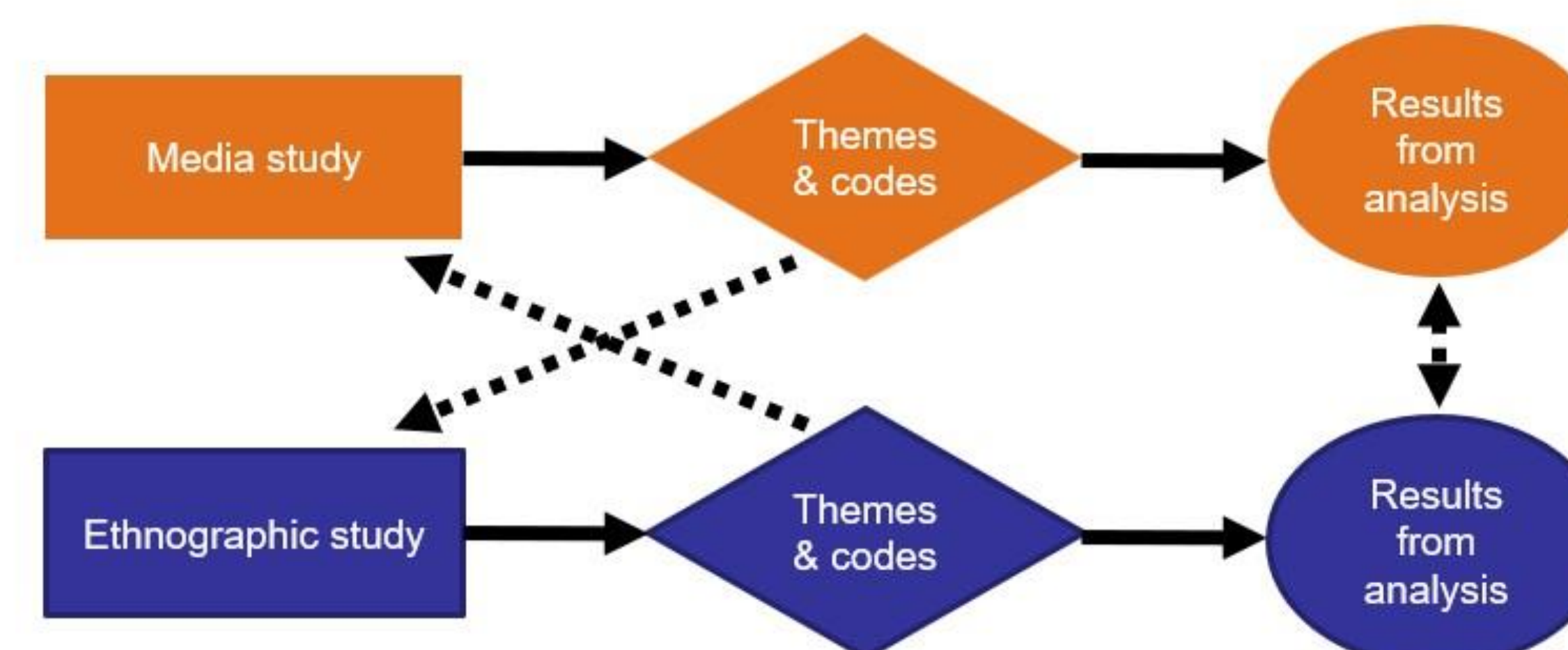
## Methods



**Figure 1—Iterative Interview Process:** This infographic models the approach taken when completing the ethnographic interviews with users. Results from the first interview as well as feedback from the project’s scientific consulting group (SCG), consisting of faculty from several disciplines, are used to develop questions for interview 2, which goes into greater depth on the content from interview 1 (Krystek, 2022).



**Figure 2—Coding Cycle:** This diagram details the process of qualitative coding, used to analyze the data from the interviews. (Hoffer, 2022).



**Figure 3—Elements One & Two:** This infographic shows how data from Element 1 (the ethnographic study) will be used in combination with data from Element 2 (the media study, which involves training artificial intelligence to track changes in attitudes in the news media surrounding psilocybin over time) to refine methods and produce findings (Krystek, 2022).

## Deliverables

- Interview Guide (questions to ask interviewees)
- Instructions Guide for Interviewers (steps for interviewing from prescreening to follow-up)
- Data (notes, interviews)
- Participant demographics survey and spreadsheet

## Lessons Learned

- Participant recruitment often involves understanding social networks and working with ‘gatekeepers’ to gain access to communities (ex. dealers and their clients)
- Building trust and using probes are important to successful interviewing
- Negative experiences with the healthcare system can lead to seeking alternative forms of treatment
- While there are similarities, there is not one common experience from using magic mushrooms

## Future Tasks

- 1) Coding interviews
- 2) Analyzing data
- 3) Assisting with preparing manuscripts

## Public Health Implications

The findings of this study will help to define the landscape of illegal, non-recreational use of psilocybin, as pertaining to Cuyahoga County. The exploratory nature of this study will allow us to identify existing gaps in knowledge and formulate specific questions for further research. This will be useful to help inform new policy as it emerges.

## References and Acknowledgements

Hoffer, Lee. (2022). Understanding Psilocybin (“Magic Mushrooms”) In the Context of the Modern “Psychedelic Renaissance.” EHI Project Overview.  
Krystek, Court. (2022). *Elements One & Two* [Graphic].  
Krystek, Court. (2022). *Iterative Interview Process* [Graphic].

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