

# Sharon Kaye Edwards

Sociology 4910 – Skills Assessment Paper

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## Skills Assessment Paper

I plan to attend graduate school soon after completing my bachelor's degree because continuing my education is essential for the professional direction I am pursuing. Even though I intend to take a brief period of self-care after graduation to rest, reflect, and regain balance, my overall goal remains to transition into a master's program without losing the academic momentum I have built. Entering graduate school shortly after this intentional pause will allow me to deepen my understanding of human behavior and begin the advanced training required for licensure in the mental health field. Moving directly into graduate studies also ensures that the knowledge and skills I have developed during my undergraduate coursework remain fresh and connected to my long-term goals. By progressing in this way, I can strengthen my academic foundation, prepare for future licensure requirements, and position myself to serve youth, families, and communities with a higher level of competence and care.

The career I want for myself is to become a licensed Mental Health Counselor, specializing in supporting young people, families, and individuals who have experienced trauma, bullying, or emotional distress. This career aligns deeply with my passion for helping people who feel unseen, overwhelmed, or isolated, and it builds on the work I already do through the nonprofit my husband and I founded, *I AM INVISIBLE BULLYING AND SUICIDE*. My commitment to this field is also shaped by my own lived experience. When I was seven years

old, I lost my nineteen-year-old brother in a car accident, and the trauma and depression I carried as a child taught me firsthand how deeply loss can affect a young person's sense of safety, identity, and emotional well-being. Growing up without the language or support to process that grief has made me especially sensitive to the needs of children who are hurting but do not know how to express it. Through my nonprofit, I have supported young people who struggle with emotional pain, social pressure, and feelings of invisibility, which has strengthened my commitment to mental health advocacy. Counseling allows me to combine my personal experience, my academic training, and my dedication to community support into a profession where I can make a deeper and more direct impact. Becoming a counselor also fits my long-term goal of creating trauma-informed, culturally aware spaces where people can be heard, supported, and empowered.

I possess a range of hard skills that support my readiness for graduate-level work and my future career in mental health counseling. My professional certifications have strengthened my ability to respond effectively in crises and support individuals experiencing emotional distress. As a QPR Suicide Prevention Instructor, I have learned how to identify warning signs, assess risk, and intervene appropriately. My certification as a Peer Recovery Specialist has provided me with structured skills in documentation, recovery planning, and ethical communication. As a Harwood Public Innovator, I have gained experience in community engagement and public problem-solving, and my Youth Mental Health First Aid USA certification has prepared me to recognize and respond to mental-health challenges in young people. In addition to these credentials, I have strong written communication skills, experience conducting research, and the ability to apply theoretical concepts to real-world situations. These hard skills provide a strong foundation for the analytical, documentation, and assessment responsibilities required in

counseling and community-based work., documentation, assessment, and crisis-response responsibilities required in counseling and community-based work.

In addition to my technical abilities, I have developed soft skills that are essential for working effectively with individuals and communities. I am an active listener who can create a safe and welcoming environment where people feel comfortable sharing their experiences. I am patient, empathetic, and able to remain calm in stressful or emotionally charged situations. My leadership skills have been strengthened through my work in community programs, where I have coordinated events, collaborated with partners, and guided volunteers. I communicate clearly, adapt to different personalities, and build trust with diverse groups. These soft skills are especially important in counseling, where establishing rapport, showing compassion, and understanding nonverbal cues are central to supporting clients.

Earning my degree has given me a wide range of academic and practical skills that have shaped how I understand individuals, families, and entire communities. Being a non-traditional student has added an even deeper layer to my learning. Sitting in classrooms and being on campus has enlightened me in ways I did not expect, especially as I observe how younger students think, communicate, and navigate the world. My generation was not as technical or as independent as many of the students I have witnessed at APSU, and seeing their confidence, creativity, and adaptability has pushed me to grow in my own academic journey. Through my coursework, I learned to look beneath the surface of social problems and examine the deeper causes of inequality, injustice, and community challenges. Studying sociology has taught me how to evaluate the systems and structures that influence people's lives, and it has helped me recognize how environment, opportunity, and access shape a person's experiences and outcomes.

These classes strengthened my critical thinking, writing, and research abilities, allowing me to approach complex issues with clarity, depth, and purpose. Working with classmates, participating in discussions, and engaging with diverse perspectives also helped me grow in ways that go beyond academics. These experiences taught me how to collaborate, listen, and communicate effectively with people from different backgrounds and viewpoints. All of these skills, both analytical and interpersonal, have prepared me to think broadly about social issues and to approach community challenges with compassion, insight, and intentionality.

Being a Sociology major has given me a deeper and more meaningful understanding of how people are shaped by the world around them. Courses like Social Problems, Race and Ethnic Inequalities, and Methods of Social Research helped me see how social forces, cultural norms, and institutional systems influence behavior, opportunity, and life outcomes. These classes taught me to recognize patterns of inequality and understand how race, class, and gender affect the way people move through society. I also learned how social environments shape mental health and overall, well-being, which connects directly to the work I want to do as a counselor. Through my research and writing assignments, I gained the ability to evaluate studies, interpret data, and apply sociological theories to real-world situations. Most importantly, sociology has taught me to see individuals not only through their personal stories but also through the larger social contexts that shape their stressors, opportunities, and support systems. This perspective has strengthened my compassion, sharpened my awareness, and prepared me to approach people with a fuller understanding of the challenges they face.

I will utilize my sociology degree in my counseling career by bringing a holistic, system-based understanding of people into every session. Sociology has taught me to look beyond an

individual's behavior and consider the environment, culture, and lived experiences that shape their struggles and strengths. This perspective connects deeply to my childhood experience of losing my nineteen-year-old brother at the age of seven, a loss that led to anxiety, depression, and bullying because I didn't know how to express my grief. Understanding now, through sociology, how trauma, family dynamics, community conditions, and social pressures influence mental health helps me make sense of that early loss and strengthens my commitment to supporting others. This is also why our non-profit, **I AM INVISIBLE BULLYING AND SUICIDE**, has been such a vital part of my journey. The work we do with young people who feel unseen or unheard is one of the main reasons. Being in the community, listening to their stories, and seeing their pain up close made me realize how important it is to have professional training and credentials to support them in deeper, more effective ways. My sociology background prepares me to recognize the larger systems affecting my clients, advocate for their needs, connect them with resources, and create trauma-informed, culturally responsive care. By combining sociological insight with counseling skills, I will be able to support clients more effectively and contribute to healthier, more empowered communities.

To strengthen the Sociology and Community Development department, I would love to see more intentional spaces where students can truly connect, support one another, and feel like they belong, both online and on campus. As a non-traditional student who balances school, family, and community work, I know how important it is to have flexible ways to engage. Virtual discussion circles, peer-support groups, and online workshops would give students a chance to build relationships even when their schedules or responsibilities make it hard to be physically present. These kinds of virtual spaces help students feel seen and included, especially those who may be older, working, or caring for families.