

## Letter from the **Editor**



**Jag Davies**

MAPS' organizational strategy prioritizes clinical research because cold, hard science is required to lay the foundation for the broad changes that we are aiming to generate. Although clinical research may persuade the FDA that psychedelics and marijuana are safe and have legitimate therapeutic applications, the re-integration of legal contexts for the use of psychedelics in our society can only reach its full potential if there is an honest, human side to the story as well.

The human stories are already there, waiting to be told. Furthermore, for some people in certain contexts, psychedelics are already somewhat integrated into their culture or society. Yet, thanks to prohibition and the associated stigmas and misunderstandings surrounding psychedelics, many potentially valuable stories and lessons are never shared.

One of the more insidious aspects of psychedelic prohibition is that it can trap its critics and civil disobedients in oppositional dualisms. As by-products of society and open to the subtle power of suggestion, even psychedelic users can't help but take some of society's implicit assumptions for granted.

That has been my experience, at least. Shortly after my eighteenth birthday, I had my first "experience," with a friend at a lush botanical park. In retrospect, I was not as well-educated or prepared as I could have been. For one thing, my primary motivation was "fun." While it was indeed fun at times, it was also one of the most startling, blissful, self-introspective, frightening, emotionally unsettling, surreal and thought-provoking experiences of my life. My expectation of mere "fun," as one might imagine, was somewhat counter-productive.

Another effect of prohibition is that it influences more than just laws; it also institutionalizes other forms of discrimination. Growing up in the 1980s and 90s in a mostly poor, multi-racial neighborhood in Miami, I not only saw the catastrophic effects of the "War on Drugs" firsthand, but I also gleaned from the city's racial and ethnic tensions that changing a law or policy—such as prohibiting race-based prejudice and segregation—does not necessarily change ingrained behaviors and assumptions. If psychedelics were made completely legal tomorrow, more subtle forms of harmful discrimination would undoubtedly persist. For MAPS to achieve its long-term goals of re-integrating the legal use of psychedelics and marijuana into our society, it is imperative that we facilitate cultural understanding, in addition to scientific knowledge.

While it may be practical for MAPS to identify specific clinical indications for which psychedelic-assisted therapy is safe and efficacious, MAPS also believes that with proper preparation and guidance, psychedelics can help improve the quality of life for "normal," healthy people without a diagnosed psychiatric disorder. The topic of self-discovery cuts to the heart of this.

On behalf of the MAPS staff, thank you to the thoughtful, open, and courageous individuals that contributed to this special issue. •