

**A LONG-TERM FOLLOW-UP TO DR. TIMOTHY LEARY'S 1961-1962  
CONCORD STATE REFORMATORY REHABILITATION STUDY**

*by Michael Forcier, Ph.D., Social Science Research & Evaluation, Inc.,  
and Rick Doblin, Harvard Kennedy School of Government*

THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE of the State of Massachusetts has recently approved our application for access to the files of the Department of Corrections in order for us to conduct a thirty-year follow-up to the Concord State Reformatory Rehabilitation Study, conducted in 1961 and 1962 under the supervision of Dr. Timothy Leary. Our study will be the second long-term follow-up of Dr. Leary's pioneering Harvard psychedelic research. The first long-term follow-up was conducted by Rick Doblin who located 19 out of the original 20 subjects in Dr. Walter Pahnke's Good Friday Experiment into the potential of psilocybin to facilitate mystical experiences. (*J. of Transpersonal Psychology*, Vol. 23, No. 1, p. 1-28, 1991, reprints available from MAPS).

**Forty-five percent of the entire inmate group underwent a mystical, transcendent death-rebirth experience.**

**The Original Experiment**

In 1961 and 1962, then Harvard Psychology Professor Dr. Timothy Leary conducted a study at MCI-Concord in which the psychedelic drug psilocybin (an extract of certain mushrooms) was administered to 32 inmates in an experiment to test the hypothesis that criminal behavior, measured by recidivism rates, could be reduced in prisoners exposed to the therapeutic use of psilocybin. Dr. Leary believed that the "consciousness expanding" properties of psilocybin could provide the inmates with insights into their own criminal behavior patterns that they could then use to change their future behavior. As part of the experiment, inmates participated in an intensive six-week program which included two or three psilocybin sessions and intervening discussion and therapy meetings. Post-release support groups were also provided for a short time.

Two follow-ups were conducted with the inmate participants. A short-term follow-up occurred a mean period of 18 months after the first treatment. Twenty-four subjects who participated in the program were paroled within 10 months of first treatment. Of these 19 (77%) showed evidence of good adjustment while five were returned to prison during that time. The recidivism rate was 23% compared to an expected 65%.

A second, longer-term follow-up occurred roughly 3 years after the first treatment and all 32 inmates participated in the project. Of these 32, 27 had been released while 5 were still confined at Concord. As of January 27, 1964, 11 (41%)

of the 27 released inmates were still out of prison, 13 (48%) had been returned as parole violators, and 3 (11%) were reincarcerated for new crimes. At this follow-up, the actual rate of recidivism was 59% as compared with an expected rate of 56% for the Concord inmate population as a whole. However, it was also expected that recidivists would be equally divided between parole violators and those committing new crimes when in actuality, those returned to prison were predominantly parole violators.

In his second annual report on the project, Dr. Leary reached three major conclusions. First, psilocybin is safe. There were 131 inmate ingestions of psilocybin with no episodes of violence, lasting disturbances or negative after-effects.

Second, psilocybin was said to produce temporary states of personal and spiritual insight. Forty-five percent of the entire inmate group underwent a mystical, transcendent death-rebirth experience. By the end of the experiment, all of the inmates underwent such an experience. The life-changing therapeutic effects of the psilocybin experience do not last for more than 72 hours unless the subject is in a situation which encourages him to maintain his emotional and spiritual insights. Therefore, psilocybin must be used in on-going programs of therapy or self-help.

Finally, Leary concluded that if ex-convicts who have had a psilocybin experience in a supportive environment meet regularly after release (the data suggested once a month) the chances of their remaining on the street would be dramatically improved. Thus, of those inmates who were contacted after release

by the therapeutic team 6 times or more, 2 out of 12 (18%) were back in prison. Of those inmates who were contacted post-release by the therapeutic team less than 6 times, 5 out of 10 (50%) were returned to prison.

**Rationale for a Long-Term Follow-up**

Results at the 18 month follow-up were generally impressive. Results after three years were less impressive and consisted chiefly of the intriguing finding that study participants had a lower than expected rate of convictions due to new crimes and a higher than expected rate of parole violations. This may be partially explained by the short life of the post-release support group, which ceased functioning around mid-1963 at the time that Dr. Leary and some of his research associates were fired from Harvard. The best test of the experiment can be determined by a very long-term follow-up which compares the recidivism rates of the study participants to a comparison group of inmates matched on variables predictive of recidivism. At a time when the concept of rehabilitation has been almost totally abandoned, investigating the Concord State Reformatory Rehabilitation Study could help focus attention on strategies for rehabilitation in general and may perhaps bring to light a method that offers some promise.

There are two parts of the long-term follow-up. The first part consists of comparing the criminal histories of the original 32 subjects in the experiment with that of a comparison group of 32 matched inmates retrospectively assembled

through the use of Massachusetts Department of Corrections inmate records.

The second part of the experiment will consist of efforts to locate and interview the original 32 study participants. Subjects will be asked if they wish to voluntarily participate in the long-term follow-up. If they chose to do so, they will be administered an in-depth tape-recorded personal interview and will be asked to fill out a series of personal and psychological questionnaires. These questionnaires will include those administered in the original experiment. The interviews will be primarily informal and open-ended in nature allowing for subjects to recall their experiences with psilocybin and post-release after effects that may have been experienced.

In addition, the researchers will also use the National Institute on Drug Abuse's National Household Survey which obtains information on recent use of alcohol and illicit drugs. This will provide insight into post-release drug used by former study participants.

Results from the in-depth interviews and personality tests will be analyzed and compared to any data that can be found from the original experiment. In addition, the results of the interviews and personality tests will be compared to the criminal histories of the subjects following their original release after the original study was completed.

Dr. Leary has been contacted by the researchers and is searching his files for records pertaining to the original experiment. Contributions specifically for this project can be made through MAPS. ■

The second part of the experiment will consist of efforts to locate and interview the original 32 study participants.

**PSYCHEDELIC MONOGRAPHS AND ESSAYS**

*Psychedelic Monographs and Essays* is a several volume collection of the foremost in current psychedelic literature. It specializes in academia, psychotherapy, journalism, physics, chemistry, biography and sociology surrounding hallucinogen research. *Volume Six of PM & E* presents *Pharmacodynamics and Therapeutic Application of Iboga and Ibogaine* by Drs. Goutarel, Gollnhofer, and Sillans. Dr. Goutarel is research director at the C.S.R.N, the French science research facility, and Drs. Sillans and Gollnhofer are ethnologists there. Premier Ibogaine researcher Howard Lotsof has called this fifty-five page synopsis "the finest paper on current Ibogaine research available in the English language."

Since 1985, *PM & E* and publisher Thomas Lyttle have continued to provide outstanding source materials from both the scientific and underground research communities. Each 300+ pp. book contains 25 pp. + of photos and original striking color art on the covers.

*Psychedelic Monographs and Essays* Vol. 6; Thomas Lyttle (ed.), Boynton Beach, FL; PM & E Publishing Group; ISBN 1-880332-04-3 /ISSN 0892-371X \$20,00 postpaid, from PM& E Publishing Group, P.O. Box 4465, Boynton Beach, Florida, 33424. Back issues are also available.