

Leary's thesis was that the consciousness-expanding properties of psilocybin would provide prisoners with insights into their own criminal behavior

THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE progress since we first announced our intent to conduct a long-term follow-up of prisoners who participated in the Concord State Reformatory Rehabilitation Study (see MAPS newsletter Vol. 3 No. 4) conducted by the former Harvard Psychology Professor Dr. Timothy Leary between 1961-1963. Moreover, that progress has been matched by intense media interest in the study (as reported in the *Boston Globe* and *Washington Post* and on CNN) following upon the revelations that Harvard and MIT scientists

criminal behavior and could therefore be used to change future behavior and consequently lessen criminality. With the full support of the Massachusetts Department of Correction, the experiment involved prisoners participating in an intensive six-week program which included their receiving between two and five doses of psilocybin during the experiment coupled with intervening discussion and therapy meetings. Post-release support groups for prisoners who had participated in the experiment were also provided for a short time. Our study represents the first substantial long-term follow-up to be conducted on the original sample of Leary's experiment and is one of the few longitudinal studies to be conducted in the area of psychedelics research generally.

Our efforts to conduct a long-term (30-plus year) follow-up have involved extensive review of the original prison records on participating subjects in an effort to assess their actual level of participation in the experiment and post-release criminality. We have gained the full cooperation of the Massachusetts Department of Correction in this study, especially the Central Office Records Room which has provided access to archival records, and the Investigation and Apprehension Unit, which is assisting in the actual search for former study participants. As this issue of the MAPS newsletter reaches you, we have located approximately half of the original study sample and established actual contact with two of the participants. We are currently in the process of designing a formal interview protocol, raising funds to cover research-related costs and arranging for the videotaping of those interviews in order to record the perceptions, experiences, and observation of the original study participants.

Heightened Media Interest

On January 1, 1994, the *Boston Globe* ran a front-page article titled, "Inmates Used in '60s Drug Test" which described Leary's Concord study and went on to allege that prisoners who participated in the original study did so without giving their informed consent and/or with the expectation of early parole. This article was subsequently picked up by the *Washington Post*. Our own review of the prison records of the study participants found these

longterm follow-up to leary's concord prison psilocybin study

MICHAEL W. FORCIER, PH.D. AND RICK DOBLIN

gave high doses of radioactive-laced milk and iron to mentally-retarded young people at the Fernald State School in Waltham, Massachusetts as part of nutrition experiments conducted in the 1940s and 1950s without the use of appropriate informed consent procedures. Many of the same allegations concerning violation of human subject rights leveled by the media at the "radioactive experiments" have been also aimed at the psilocybin research.

As previously reported here, Dr. Leary conducted a study at the Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Concord during the period 1961-63 in which psilocybin was administered to 32 inmates in an experiment to test the hypothesis that criminal behavior, as measured by recidivism rates, could be reduced by exposing prisoners to the therapeutic use of psilocybin. Leary's thesis was that the consciousness-expanding properties of psilocybin would provide prisoners with insights into their own

Michael W. Forcier, Ph.D., Social Science Research and Evaluation, Inc., 4 Austin Park, Cambridge, MA 02139, (617) 492-2503 and Rick Doblin, Ph.D. candidate, Harvard Kennedy School of Government

"I look back at it, and it was a very positive experience for me. I could see things about myself that I had to change."

allegations to be without basis. Specifically, all of the participants definitely knew they were going to receive a psychoactive drug. Moreover, we have received a letter from one of the original participants who indicated that he was aware that he was taking a mind-altering drug. In a follow-up *Washington Post* (January 4, 1994) article titled, "Leary: Hallucinogen prisoners gave OK," Richard Doblin is quoted as saying: "I haven't talked to any of the others, but from the written documents, it describes how they were informed about what was going on. I think any kind of claim that Leary acted as unethically as people who gave radiation" to unknowing subjects is "unwarranted." In short, prisoners participating in the Concord psilocybin experiment were able to provide informed consent although some may have done so in expectation of getting early parole.

Variable effects

This was later generally confirmed in a subsequent *Boston Globe* article (January 6, 1994) titled "Prison 'trips' altered 2 inmates' paths" in which two of the original study participants recounted their prison and post-release experiences. According to that article, "...while one said the experiment set him straight, the other said it led him down a road to habitual drug abuse, crime and despondency." The former was quoted by the *Globe* as saying that Leary's experiment "was instrumental in keeping me out of jail. I never went back to prison for a new crime after that. I look back at it, and it was a very positive experience for me. I could see things about myself that I had to change. I think I can still engage in very deep thought because of it."

By contrast the other participant (aged 17 at the time of the experiment) was described by the *Globe* as considering "the Concord experiment to be the event that opened the door to a lifetime of pain." This individual, whose first exposure to psychedelics ironically came in a prison setting, reported that he continued to take psychedelic drugs for 20 years, experienced increased criminality and multiple incarcerations, and was treated in five drug rehabilitation programs. He was quoted as stating: "I sometimes look back and wonder what would have happened if I didn't get involved in that experiment, if I would have gone down another road. That

experiment was a big thing in my life." It has only been recently that this participant reports having found a steady job and being free of drugs. Both former prisoners recall signing informed consent forms in exchange for the prospect of early parole.

Contacting additional subjects

The media attention to the original research has provided new impetus to our own long-term follow-up. As we begin the process of contacting the remaining study participants, we have received a letter from a former Massachusetts inmate in Leary's



Concord State Prison, 1994

original experiment who is now nearing release from a federal correctional facility in Texas. He has indicated his interest in being interviewed and videotaped as part of our study upon his return to Massachusetts. We are enthusiastic about the prospect of gaining cooperation from other study subjects in light of the renewed interest in research on human subjects in institutional settings and the promise of psychedelic drugs in treatment and rehabilitation across an array of physical and psychological needs.

Contributions specifically for this project can be made through MAPS. •