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# Project MK Ultra

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In April of 1953, CIA director Allen Welsh Dulles started the Project MK Ultra. It was considered a mind-control program headed by Sidney Gottlieb, intended to develop drugs and procedures for interrogations and torture with human subjects. Not only was it a response to the Soviet, Chinese, and North Koreans using drugs against U.S. prisoners, the paranoia during the

Cold War, the fear of communism, and the suspicion of a possible spy within the CIA sparked the Science Intelligence Division of the CIA and Special Operations Division of the U.S.'s Army's Chemical Corps to organize Project MK Ultra.

By 1975, the Church Committee of U.S. Congress and Gerald Ford brought Project MK Ultra to the attention of the public, where the effort was shut down. Though CIA director Richard Helms destroyed the files in 1973, the Freedom Information Act allowed for the discovery of twenty thousand documents relating to Project MK Ultra for the public today.

What made this project a topic of debate on ethics was not only the use of human subjects, but also the procedures and experiments conducted on these test subjects. This program was undertaken by eighty institutions including forty-four colleges and universities, hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, and prisons. Scientists within the program conducted illegal experiments on U.S. and Canadian citizens through different methods including hypnosis, sensory deprivations, isolation, verbal and physical abuse, the administration of drugs and other chemicals and more.

The most notorious of the drugs used was LSD. For many subjects, LSD was administered without consent. At first, it started with voluntary subjects and then to small secret dosages in drinks of CIA employees. However, in 1955, an elaborate trap was built in San Francisco, CA where prostitutes lured in men to be secretly dosed with LSD, known as the [Operation Midnight Climax](#). There were devices set up to record activity and a two-way mirror for scientists to observe the subjects. Even Gottlieb acknowledged that the Project MK Ultra “administered LSD to as many as 40 unwitting subjects... [where] at least one participant died” ([Mind Control Project MK Ultra n Washington Post](#)).

That incident was the [death of Frank Olson](#), a 43-year-old germ-warfare researcher and CIA employee. After twenty minutes of drinking his glass of alcohol, he learned it was spiked with LSD and had a bad reaction, including agitation and threats to resign. A few days later, the CIA claimed he suffered depression and paranoia leading him to jump off the 10<sup>th</sup> floor window of a New York hotel. Years later after an autopsy was conducted, it was revealed that he was slipped more hallucinogens and died from a blunt force trauma to the head prior to his fall.

Other examples of the illegal experiments conducted throughout Project MK Ultra include the [brainwashing of Linda McDonald](#). Under Dr. Ewen Cameron's supervision and directions in 1963, McDonald was induced with drugs, prolonged sleep, and psychological

isolation in addition to ECT (Electro Convulsive Therapy). The shock administered exceeded the maximum amount recommended, resulting in permanent and complete amnesia for McDonald.

Though seen as unethical today, these are just a few of the many experiments conducted that exemplified to the CIA that they could easily control and manipulate people during the war efforts, leading to the creation of [Manchurian Candidates](#). These people were super spies for the U.S. to carry out assassinations, terrorist attacks, sexual favors, and more “without conscious knowledge of their actions” due to the same drugs and procedures induced on the human test subjects prior ([CIA Mind Control Experiments, Declassified Documents Reveal Sex Abuse, More](#)).

These experiments and their horrifying results show just how important ethics are in the science world. Had there been stricter guidelines for safety, many people wouldn't have been subjected to such circumstances. Comparing to the Belmont Report that was created just a few years after in 1979, it can be seen how poorly the Project MK Ultra violated the test subjects involved. People were coerced into different experiments without consent, either being secretly spiked with LSD or being forced into unconsciousness to gain advantage in the war, which seriously violates respect to them. Some were even threatened to be given more drugs or harmed if they didn't comply during the experiment. It's even worse for the many subjects who have absolutely no power to refuse any testing because they were prisoners, psychiatric patients, or children.

Furthermore, Project MK Ultra caused lots of harm to their test subjects, violating the beneficence. Electric shocks, sleep deprivation, verbal and physical abuse, and isolation are just a few of the methods of harm they used.

Finally, justice is violated because vulnerable people were targeted for their studies. Despite working for them, the CIA employees were a convenient and close way for scientists to experiment on. Psychiatric patients were powerless in refusing any treatments, and even the general public were unknowingly induced with drugs.

The consequences of the actions brought out by Project MK Ultra show how ethics guidelines are needed more than ever for Cognitive Science research amongst many other fields. The implications of Project MK Ultra show how we need to protect human and even animal subjects from coercion or fear of any kind and harm during any experiment. Through the heart

wrenching outcomes of the lives of the test subjects for Project MK Ultra, if there is anything to be taken away, it is that we must aware of these unethical studies and treatments in our lives to protect ourselves and those around us, and to protect the future and credibility of science.