Understanding ego death: Psychedelics can be humbling for some people — but for others it inflates their egos. Why?

A commonly recounted experience with psychedelics is that it **dissolves one’s ego, blurring the boundaries between ourselves and others**. As the ego dissolves, we profoundly understand that we are all connected, all the same, all one.

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But how does psychedelic ego death lead to ego inflation? Why are some people going through these experiences and coming back not with humility but with a heightened sense of righteous purpose?

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Indeed, our ego springs back following a psychedelic experience — often in a different form, **whether positive or negative**. And according to [University of Western Australia philosopher Chris] Letheby the big factors that determine how one’s sense of self is reconstituted following a trip are set and setting: What happened to you during the trip? What community of people are around you?

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When talking about the way the über-rich take psychedelics and come back with a heightened elitism, [psychedelic counterculture expert Douglas] Rushkoff is very clear. These people are not neurotypical. Their brains are wired differently, he says. If your view on reality is one of a systems theorist, then your psychedelic experience will simply amplify that perspective. Combine the idea that reality is something to be “fixed” with a sense of embedded power — suggesting you are the one to fix it — and you’re getting close to a perfect recipe for entering the echelons of the hallucinogenic elite.

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