

Candice Schutter: [00:00:00] Welcome to The Deeper Pulse and one of the final episodes in the 'cult'ure series.

If you want to keep tuning into conversations after the 'cult'ure series wraps, I'll continue rolling out regular content over on Patreon. And last week, I dropped an interview with award-winning memoirist, Joelle Tamraz, who spoke with me about her book, *The Secret Practice: Eighteen Years on the Dark Side of Yoga*.

She and I discussed her harrowing experience being married to a yogi guru con man who manipulated her for years, until she was finally able to break free from the cycle of abuse.

You can access this conversation and 60+ other bonus episodes over at patreon.com/thedeeperpulse. Membership is available on a sliding scale starting at \$5 a month, and every single dime [00:01:00] goes to supporting this work and keeping The Deeper Pulse content editorially-independent and entirely ad-free.

On to today's episode, which comes with a content warning for sexual abuse, altered states, and coercive control.

The stories and opinions shared here are based on personal experience and are not intended to malign any individual, group, or organization.

I wish I had more time. I'd tell you the whole story, but instead I'm just going to give you the nutshell version.

Back in high school, I guarded my body and my mind hypervigilantly. I can't say I ever *wanted* to experiment with drugs. But eventually the peer pressure would get to me. And at age 16, one night after a [00:02:00] few beers, I took a reluctant toke off of what I'd later learn was a stranger's pipe at a Black Crowes concert. And less than an hour later, I'd lay, strapped to a gurney, watching with wild eyes as the paramedic, whose face my mind was grossly distorting, spoke entirely without affect over the radio to dispatch.

We're on our way in with an overdose. Over.

I was never the same after that night. And 32 years later, I'm still entirely unwilling to brightside this experience. Try as I might, I've never been able to successfully mine this bad trip for spiritual meaning. Because truth be told, it really fucked me up.

As soon as the drugs hit me, I recall pleading with my friends. We all sat together in the nosebleed section. Friends, mind you, who would leave me to sit alone in that hospital until the show ended.

I said to them, *please*, [00:03:00] *please come in here with me*.

Whatever was or wasn't in that pipe, and the jury's still out on that one, peeled back the curtain on a buried trauma that I wasn't yet ready to face. From that day forward, my body

mercifully tried to protect me from the existential dread that had always been there, but that now seemed to consume me. Lights, certain sounds, a tone of voice, everything would trigger me. And I developed a debilitating panic disorder. I began drinking more heavily, and I finally gave up my virginity so as not to be left alone long or ever again.

Now, of course, a great many people that I know, at least the majority that I've heard from, have had much more positive and constructive relationships with drug-induced altered states. My partner Chris being one of them.

He used to follow The Dead and he's been a psychonaut for decades. And he spent the first few years of our relationship hoping to help me quote unquote heal my relationship to altered [00:04:00] states, and namely to cannabis. We did have some success at first, but then about six years ago I had another bad experience that set me back, and that's when I decided it just wasn't for me.

Why am I sharing all of this?

Well, because I really cannot count how many times, even as a grown-ass adult, I've been both judged and challenged around my choice to abstain.

As has been a theme throughout this entire series, my flesh and blood feeling self was standing between me and the Most High. All I needed to do was learn to relax and surrender, and then, praises be to heightened altered state salvation.

Now if I sound judgmental and bitter, well, it's because I am. Exhausted by the fact that my choices have so often been read by others as a sort of spiritual weakness.

And having said all of that, I'm sharing this not to diminish the experience of anyone who loves [00:05:00] psychedelics. I'm not here to make anyone wrong or even to prove that I'm right. My point really is that we're each entitled to our own opinions and experiences.

And I guess I do want to challenge the notion that psychedelics are either all good or all bad. Now that the war on drugs is swinging to the other extreme in an effort to glorify and monetize psychedelics for profit, maybe it's time we slow this pendulum ride down a bit and make room for more nuanced conversations.

One like the one we're about to have that is a sobering reality check around what can happen when clever humans leverage existing systems in order to capitalize on vulnerability for the sake of profit.

Today's conversation is going to focus primarily on what's become known as psychedelic therapy.

Lily Kay Ross and David Nickles are former insiders in the psychedelic underground. In 2021, Lily and Dave created and produced *Cover Story: Power Trip*, the first season of [00:06:00] New York Magazine's investigative podcast series.

In the season opener, Lily shares her story. How she was drugged and sexually assaulted by a shaman in Ecuador. And how after returning home, shattered and traumatized, she was silenced by the psychedelic community she loved.

Through a series of episodes, they share about the history of the psychedelic underground and document instances where so-called shamans and "psychedelic guides" abuse power, gaslight their victims, and exploit psychological vulnerability through the use of suggestibility enhancing substances.

If you listen to the end, you'll hear how their research draws an unmistakable through line from the psychedelic underworld's dark history to contemporary leaders who are perpetuating and profiting off of some truly shady shit. Advancing faith based formulas into the mainstream through well funded clinical trials.

And you're going to [00:07:00] hear Lily and Dave speak to this, but I want to be crystal clear from the get go. It's not the drugs that are the problem. Dave, Lily, and many others have had great and transformative experiences with psychedelics. Our issue is not with the substances. It's with the people who are weaponizing them.

For years now, Dave and Lily have faced backlash from the psychedelic community for their repeated calls for accountability. And they've been out of the spotlight for a while now. Which is why I'm all the more honored that they've trusted me, you, and this platform.

Take breaks if you need to, but be sure to listen to the end of this one. I promise you it'll be worth your time.

Here's my conversation with Lily Kay Ross and David Nickles.

Lily Kay Ross: Hello!

Candice Schutter: Hey, it's so good to see you two again.

David Nickles: Good too see you, too.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah. Um, we're getting our audio set [00:08:00] up together, which we haven't used for.

David Nickles: A little while.

Lily Kay Ross: A long time.

Candice Schutter: It's working great. Sounds really good.

Well, I'm really glad to be here with you two. I've been looking forward to this all day and all week really. And I feel like it was like a year ago when we first talked, it's been a minute. And I've learned so much and benefited from knowing your work. And, yeah, I'm, I'm gonna,

well, I'm going to ask you a question in a moment about why you decided to be here. Because you've been, you know, advocating in this domain for gosh, what? Like 15 years almost something like that.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah, just about that.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. It's a long time. And part of why I wanted you here. There's a lot of reasons, but two primary reasons I wanted to speak to.

One is, because of the fact that you've been doing this for so long and the resistance that you've faced which seems to be a continual theme in the direction that my work's going in as I'm stepping out of the wellness critique into the larger culture and seeing how [00:09:00] these systems just reinforce our silence. And in some ways demonize whistleblowers. And don't make room for critical discourse.

And the thing that I love the most about engaging with your work is just how much intelligence there is in it. It's not just you laying bare the facts. It's the way you examine things and, talk about the deeper pulse, like just really get in there. And I just have so much respect for that and aspire to do more of that myself in my work. So I just feel like I'm here to learn from you and watch you in action. Cause I've heard you in some other interviews. And, um, we'll talk about the series that led me to you in a minute.

But I want to share before we dive in and I invite you guys to speak, the second reason why it's really meaningful to have you here with me.

And I feel myself, you can probably hear my voice getting even a little shaky around it. Because my exploration has been very limited in psychedelics. And I did so beginning in high school, as a [00:10:00] complex PTSD survivor, and it took me to a place that was not good. And it really in some ways instigated a generalized panic disorder that I ended up living with for many years.

And then when I entered into wellness arenas, I was sort of gaslit for, like, not having the fortitude to have the spiritual maturity and will to have the breakthrough that I was supposed to have. And it was just this ongoing struggle for me. And whenever I would attempt to speak about it, I just felt like there wasn't room for the conversation.

And so when I came upon your work, even though I haven't experienced psychedelic therapy, per se, I was always sold that as a notion. And it's not the experience that I had. So thank you, from a selfish place for doing the work that you do. And thank you for the sake of all of us.

So on that note, given that you've been doing this for so long. And you've experienced so much pushback. And you've probably have the same conversation, I don't know how many times, why did you decide to [00:11:00] agree to sit down with me today?

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah. It's, it's a fair question. Um, and it comes at a time when I am actually not doing much, if anything, in the way of like interviews.

So I think it was just really clear to me and starting to listen to your work, that you are digging into the experiences of people who've been in cult and high-control groups. Which is a population of people that I think has a lot of overlap with the sorts of people we've talked to about difficult or abusive psychedelic experiences and practitioners.

I think, really, there's a lot of screwy dynamics in these spaces. And I think it's so important to listen to people who have had those experiences and to build out some of that discourse and some of that analysis. And explore kind of those overlaps between the, kind of, cultiverse and the [00:12:00] psychedelic sphere. Because there's a lot of overlaps. Not just in some characters, but also, um, yeah, the dynamics, the patterns, the tactics that are deployed. And so thematically it felt really important.

And I think it's just very clear to me that you are someone that wants to listen very deeply to people's stories and, and to what's, what's really, you know, underneath them and inside of them. And I think that's just an important space to step into and to explore. So it was sort of a, a no-brainer really from when we first started connecting. It was like, okay, this feels, this feels good. And then, yeah, just waiting. I appreciate your patience. Waiting until, um, we had just a little bit of bandwidth to be able to actually show up and have the conversation.

Um, yeah, we have done a fair number of interviews and panels and things like that. But I am starting to notice that taking time away from [00:13:00] speaking publicly or creating work that is intended for a public audience, I'm watching the ways that my ideas are changing and deepening and the ways that some of my strategies are, sort of, crystallizing. And I'm starting to sort of get intimations and hints of what, um, what is going to be like a sustainable path forward for me in continuing to do this work. So, yeah, I appreciate a sort of chance to tentatively explore some of that new perspective that I have in this space.

David Nickles: Yeah. I think too, sort of recognizing both some of the, the overlaps and divergences.

Um, I mean, you know, from sort of my late teens to mid twenties, I was, very much sort of in underground psychedelic subcultural spaces. And then sort of, as my own critiques developed, finding myself [00:14:00] advancing more into the sort of mainstream institutional psychedelic spaces. And sort of the initial response of people in those spaces of being sort of curious what I had to say. Oh, that's interesting. That's different. Nobody's really saying that.

And sort of, I could see in the early days, the sort of intrigue or the sense of, oh, this is different. We'd like, yeah, yeah, let's get some of that. And the realization of like, oh, you guys don't really realize the implications of this critique. Because if you did, you wouldn't be inviting me to your events. Or, or you think that this is just something that I'm peddling for some sort of cultural cachet rather than things that I actually believe and like the implications present like a, an inherent antagonism with you.

And so, you know, I would say the trajectory of then winding up sort of like, brought in and then kind of spat out, as people had that dawning or sudden realization. I've seen the sort of visceral [00:15:00] reactions to my critiques. I've seen myself expelled from real world events due to fear mongering type stuff. But also expelled from numerous virtual spaces,

right? I'm, I may be one of the most, uh, banned on social media, voices within psychedelia, just for trying to advance these sorts of critiques.

And part of it is probably a naivete of, you know, with some of the abuses or more egregious sort of horrifying stories we've uncovered and stumbled across, um, I think I'd had hope that people in these spaces would have cared and would have, you know, that that the reason that there weren't things being done was simply due to a lack of awareness. And so it seemed pretty simple. Okay, you can raise awareness. We see people respond, you know, hopefully, we get pro social, communal responses. And instead seeing such a visceral response to sort of shutting me down, [00:16:00] pushing me out, trying to silence these conversations.

Eventually the awareness was, oh, the terrain is not the way it is because people just don't know. Like people are invested in maintaining this as a status quo. And so, alongside that realization was sort of like, great, it's now time to stop talking to these people, because that is a huge waste of energy. And let's see who else actually cares.

And especially as this stuff is going more mainstream, or getting marketed as medical interventions, there are populations that would never consider taking psychedelics, except that it might offer whatever sort of potential healing. And so it seems like, rather than talking to the psychedelic insiders, maybe let's talk to some of the folks who don't know so much, who might not be aware of what's going on and hopefully help inoculate against some of the worst tendencies of these sort of psychedelic spaces.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Absolutely.

You know, it really [00:17:00] resonated. I mean, so much of what you said, but it connected to an interview that I heard the both of you do. And something you said, which was around the, um, "the bias of the true believer." And that, when you're in this space of talking to people who are already all-in, who've already decided despite, and Lily, you speak, really candidly about the lack of in-depth research to prove certain things that are being claimed and marketed around psychedelic therapy. And that there's this bias, in terms of the people who are doing the research in some cases, you're preaching to people who have already decided what they believe about it. And that's where in a way it almost feels like dogma. It's like, you're just banging your head up against a wall.

And that's why it feels so, like there's just so many tangled, gnarled pieces here. Which is why I really want to encourage people to listen to Cover Story: Power Trip, which is the first season that y'all were featured on. It's nine episodes and it's worth every second. It's so good. I've listened to it twice now. And it really dives into this, because there's so [00:18:00] much nuance. And the way that sort of the spiritual component connects in sort of this dogmatic way with this supposed research that's happening. And how everything's being pushed out into the world and marketed to people; so there's like this capitalist thing. Like all the things that I've been talking about in this series collide when it comes to this issue. And there's just a lot here and we're never gonna cover it all. So everybody, please listen to Cover Story. It's so good.

Um, but just to say, I really appreciate. That actually helps me too, even in the work that I'm doing what you just said, Dave, around, like, who are you actually speaking to? And it's

really easy to get pulled into that argument that you're never gonna quote, unquote, win, because it's not a true critical debate.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah, yeah. Well, and if you, if you have the audacity to show up and take a firm position that is counter to the person that you're talking to, then there's going to be a lot of ad hominem about, you know, what an asshole you are for disagreeing and disagreeing so impolitely. Or, you know, there there's, [00:19:00] there's no right way to have the conversation, you know, is, is kind of a, a message that I feel like we hear a lot actually within the actual psychedelic space.

Which is why, you know, I got out in about 2015, almost a decade ago. Gosh, where's the time going? Um, got out completely. Did work pretty unrelated to psychedelia for a number of years. And then got pulled back in around, you know, meeting the people who would become the sources that informed Cover Story: Power Trip, really, really drew me back in.

Um, but I continue to say that I'm actually, I don't identify as part of the psychedelic community anymore. I mean, that community has made very clear to me that it's not interested in my well being. It's not interested in the, the lives and the experiences of people like me. And, um, You know, I, message received, you know. That, that's not a place where I belong. That's not a place where I feel kinship or loyalty or connection anymore. But what I do feel [00:20:00] is an obligation as psychedelics and psychedelic medicalization in particular go more mainstream, I feel a real obligation to speak candidly to people who are on the outside who are considering getting involved, you know. The broader public who's being marketed to in really, quite aggressive ways. At a time when a lot of people are suffering and, um, you know, looking for the kind of relief that psychedelics are promised to offer.

Now, I wanted to respond briefly to what you shared about your own experience. You know, which I understand to be like a recreational kind of setting or, you know, not like a therapeutic setting. And having, having a difficult experience that left you with long term adverse consequences. I'm really sorry to hear it.

And I also feel that, you know, psychedelics as [00:21:00] medicine, it was a strong narrative in sort of more healing oriented spaces, even if they weren't terribly psychedelic spaces before it was the mainstream conversation that it is today. And there's been an effort to really normalize that way of understanding psychedelics. That they're healing, that they bring about all these positive things. But I think if we look at context where maybe that's not the main story, somebody might come forward and say, yeah, I was at a party and I took some mushrooms or I took some whatever. And I had a fucking horrible time, and it really, was really difficult. It was really uncomfortable. And I've, I've had these intrusive thoughts or anxiety or, you know, I don't know, breaks with reality ever since that I'm still trying to kind of grapple with. It's like, you know, when I was in college around other recreational drug users, like that, that wasn't a thing that people would have responded to, like, oh, that must be your healing journey. Or like, Ooh, why, or like, why didn't you have the great healing outcome that we [00:22:00] usually expect with these drugs?

Like if you're, if you're in a population that uses these drugs recreationally, some people like, yeah, that sounds like a fucking bumner trip, man. Like that, that sounds pretty awful. And like, that totally sucks.

And, you know, what a different, what a different and more appropriate reaction than like, you know, something that is, is saturated with ideas about how that should have been healing for you in some way, you know.

So I think there's a really profound change in the way that people are understanding psychedelics and what they're expecting from psychedelics that's not actually rooted in robust research. And that has really negative consequences for people, whether they're having bad experiences in the underground or in a clinical trial or taking drugs with their friends.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Yeah. Beautifully said.

Yeah. And I think that's where the, again, the Venn diagram of this, like the circles overlapping. It's like, really, I didn't start hearing that [00:23:00] framing around my resistance to going further until I entered into the wellness arena and the sort of new age spirituality that was infused into that and, and the messaging around it. And really the sort of unspoken shaming around the fact that I couldn't just get over it and have some transcendental experience.

Um, and I think, uh, part of why I highlight that is because I know who my listenership is and a lot of folks spend time in those spaces. And there's so much consistency in terms of what I hear you saying, the messages that you got. And I want to talk about how Cover Story came to be in a moment in a real general sense. But that led you to decide, okay, I'm going to grab a microphone and like, really dig into this and like amplify this message.

Because a lot of the things you said in those episodes, I was like, these are the same messages that I was sent having nothing to do with psychopsychedelics in all the wellness spaces around all the things. This isn't a unique message and the way that the simple act of exploring psychedelics has been co opted, not only [00:24:00] commodified but also spiritualized. And I think it's so important. And I'm glad that you underscored that.

So let's talk about, um, in preparation for this episode, I made a bunch of notes like I do. And when I sent out the notes, I included a bullet point as an option. And Lily, I loved the email that you sent to me around just this invitation that I had as options of things we could talk about of you sharing your story, quote unquote, around what led you into this work. Like there, there was sort of a catalyzing incident. And that you responded the way you did in the email, I think is just such an important thing to highlight for everybody. Because I think it's just such an amazing example.

So are you comfortable, not telling me your story? That's not what we're talking about. But just the opposite, you telling me what it's like to have people even ask you to go there at this point.

Lily Kay Ross: Sure. Yeah.

I mean, it's something I commonly see an inquiries about sort of, you know, what's your story? [00:25:00] Or what got you into this sort of thing?

And at this point, my position is that people who really want to know. Um, I mean, the, the super basic thing I'll say, you know, is, is that I experienced, uh, ongoing sexual abuse by somebody in the Amazon that involved ayahuasca and other psychedelic plants. But it's a very in depth, complicated story, uh, that in many ways is not what people think it is. Um, and it's pretty widely available at this point. It's, it's in Cover Story: Power Trip. It's been written about in, uh, New York Magazine a couple years before Cover Story: Power Trip. And so, uh, I just don't talk about it anymore, because I've done that and that's available to people. And, um.

But I, I feel like it's, it's important to remember that we don't owe anybody our stories. That there's plenty of people, and I don't mean this podcast, but like, there are plenty of people who will ask [00:26:00] survivors about their story without really realizing what they're asking. Or asking because they have a morbid curiosity about what happened. And they may not be prepared to actually hold that story or to recognize that, that telling those kinds of stories about trauma, um, is, is a, is a big ask, you know?

Um, and so, yeah. I, I, I think that's just the place I'm in now of just, I don't, I don't talk about it anymore, really, um, unless I'm motivated to do so for some reason. Usually I can state what that reason is, you know, so there's like a process around figuring out, like, am I willing to go there and why? And why is it worth putting myself through that?

Um, but yeah, I think in general, I I also just love reminding people that we can always say [00:27:00] no.

Candice Schutter: That's right. I love it so much. That's why I really wanted to just underscore it. Because it's like, you know, I could have just said, oh, yeah, we definitely won't go there. But it feels important to just name that for folks.

Especially, you know, that's the beauty of these mediums too, is that we can capture our story and send people a link. And be like, done did it.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: If you wanna know, give it a listen.

So if y'all want to know out there, listen to Cover Story and you'll hear the whole shebang. So, and it's beautifully produced. So yeah.

Even though these are really heavy topics, that's another thing. And one of the things you said also, Lily, in the Cover Story, you said "one of the ways I survived this was putting my brain on it."

And I remember when I listened. So I listened to Cover Story, maybe, gosh, it would have been maybe a year and a half ago walking on the trails out by my house. And I just remember just devouring it. And when you said that I actually stopped in my tracks, and rewound it and played it like two or three times. So I was like, Oh my God, that's what [00:28:00] I'm doing. I was moved to tears.

So putting your brain on it. This feels sort of like a good segue to how you and Dave connected initially around this issue. Because it really was, if I understand correctly, it was sort of a function of what was going on for each of you individually, and then your worlds colliding and realizing, oh, like, hey, we, we care about the same thing here.

Do you want to just kind of paint me a picture around that?

Dave? Yeah. Sure. I mean, we'd, uh, Lily doesn't remember this, but in, uh, in 2012 we were actually at a conference.

Lily Kay Ross: I remember the conference.

David Nickles: Yeah, yeah.

Uh, and, uh, Lily was giving a talk dealing with like power and authority and sort of questions about where it derives from and who decides. And at the time I was interested in a lot of the same questions and was pretty disappointed with the lack of engagement around those sort of [00:29:00] structural, systemic issues more broadly. And so it was really refreshing to hear somebody speaking directly to things that seem to be at the heart of dynamics and sort of power relations. You know, having at the at that point, I had grown really frustrated with the realities that I was seeing in drug using spaces where, you know, dealers or people who were supplying whatever sort of drugs were very quick to conflate themselves with the experiences that they were making available.

And, you know, Lily sort of opened with this story about this guy who calls himself a nomad shaman. Um, and like, just in the.

Lily Kay Ross: He looked like a pirate. And I said, are you a pirate, sir? Because you know, if you're at a pizza party and a guy walks in, and he looks like a fucking pirate, what else are you going to ask him?

And he very seriously was like, no, I consider myself a nomad shaman.

David Nickles: And I felt like that anecdote really underscored a lot of my own frustrations at that point. Because [00:30:00] I'd seen people who wanted to be in charge. They wanted to be seen as the facilitator or the person with the esoteric knowledge. Or, you know, as I would later comment, like, everybody wants to be a shaman until things go sideways.

And what I meant by that is, I was in spaces where, you know, somebody was on drugs, started having a seizure, or convulsions, or something that was unexpected, and suddenly the person who had facilitated it, or who had been going on and on all night about how, like, this was their calling, and this is what they're here on Earth for, suddenly that person is gone. And I'm the one that's there picking up the pieces.

And it's like, you know, there's a reality that these drugs are criminalized. And I think when the rubber meets the road, a lot of people who are keen to put themselves in that position of authority or power are not so keen to sort of reap the legal consequences of inhabiting that

position. And, you know, my thought is sort of, if you view this as your life's work, your spiritual calling or [00:31:00] whatever, then surely going to jail to ensure that somebody else's well being is cared for is part of your path. Um, personally, I don't make those you know, whatever.

Um, but having picked up the pieces enough times, when I saw Lily give that talk, you know, I felt like, ah, finally, here's somebody speaking to it. And go figure, you know, it's a relatively young person, not one of the more entrenched sort of institutional voices. Um.

Lily Kay Ross: I think I was 25. Like I was young.

Candice Schutter: Wow.

David Nickles: And yeah, like I was, you know. Again, like the fact that these questions were largely absent and when I would try to advance some of these issues.

I mean, for me, like caring about abuse in psychedelic contexts sprung from being invited to give presentations. At the time I was, sort of, eyeballs deep in some drug nerd, phytochemical research. We were sort of analyzing different plants used in ayahuasca, other psychedelic [00:32:00] preparations. And I was getting invited to sort of share some of those results and eventually kind of speak to broader cultural issues and what have you.

And at a event in, like, 2014, somebody involved in organizing the event came and made a disclosure to me about somebody who is fairly well known in the field at the time. And I was, I was kind of horrified and floored. And began collecting receipts, began sort of paying attention. Because I was being invited to speak, I was backstage. I had passes that allowed me into places where people who might be relatively buttoned up in public would sort of take off the mask.

And there were these moments where I saw, you know, behind people's masks. Or I saw these dynamics where it was sort of like, oh, we're all here because we want these other things. Like, yes, we do this performance or we put this on, and this is our public face. But then sort of behind the curtain, we can all let our guard down and talk about why we're really here.

And encountering that a few times, it was like, yeah, no. I'm not, not only [00:33:00] am I not interested in that, but if I, if I keep quiet, nobody knows who I am. I can be a fly on the wall. I can pay attention. And like, I didn't think it was ever going to become anything beyond sort of when other psychonauts or people in some of the underground communities I was a part of would sort of ask, hey, do you know this person? Have you heard anything about this person? I could warn people about some of the folks that I thought were bad actors. Or, you know, it was really just sort of building out this web for my own personal.

Lily Kay Ross: The web of bullshit.

David Nickles: Exactly. Uh, for my own personal interest and like, you know, contribution to folks that I knew or community or whatever.

And then over enough time, that understanding combined with.

I mean, I don't think it takes a whole lot, like showing up with a bit of empathy for somebody who says, hey, I've been harmed, I would say, ought to be understood to be the basic human sort of pro social response. And I'm, I'm floored by how

Candice Schutter: You would think.

David Nickles: How frequently that doesn't [00:34:00] happen. Um.

Candice Schutter: Yeah, same.

David Nickles: And so, sort of, between building out that intellectual side and then showing up for some of the emotional work, I found myself sitting with all of these different stories and harmed parties and people. And eventually, it grew to a point where I was so fed up with the things that I was seeing, I just sent a bulk email out with a bunch of people BCC'd. I was like, look, in the wake of this most recent instance, I'm really frustrated that like, it's the same song and dance again and again and again. And it keeps getting covered up. And everybody knows. And you call it an open secret. But come on, it's just if you're in the community you know. If you're not in the community you don't know. You can't really call that a secret.

And Lily was one of the people on that email.

Lily Kay Ross: I don't think I responded.

David Nickles: No.

Lily Kay Ross: But I, but I read it. And I was like, oh, like I'm not, I'm not dealing with that psychedelic bullshit anymore. But I'm really glad somebody else is kind of looking at it.

David Nickles: And in the course of sort of churning all that up, I got responses from some institutional heads who were trying to keep things quiet. They're like, oh no, [00:35:00] no, you just misunderstand. Everything's fine. Everyone's happy.

Lily Kay Ross: Nothing to see here.

David Nickles: Meanwhile, I'm, I'm in direct communication with some of the victims who are like, I'm too scared to come forward. Like people know what has happened to me. But if I come forward in this anonymous way, my story is still going to out me. Because nobody else has the details that are in my story. And it's, I'm going to be known, and can't do that.

Um, and so I'd sort of kept pushing, kept pushing. And then I think in response to one of those institutional heads doing the same old thing, as far as, you know.

Lily Kay Ross: Bullying, silencing.

David Nickles: Cover ups, etc. I published a piece on Medium just sort of documenting the lies and misstatements and, you know. Because this was a person who had a bunch of younger academics and is a very clear gatekeeper around sort of psychedelic anthropology, um, it felt [00:36:00] important to put this on the record in a way where other people could at least have some breadcrumbs. You know, if it felt off to them, they could look and say, hey, it's not just me.

And I think somebody sent that to Lily. Or Lily had seen that and that was sort of like, hey, let's talk about this.

Lily Kay Ross: Let's, let's chat a bit.

And yeah, the rest is history,

transition

Lily Kay Ross: I guess.

I think, you know, something I've been thinking about a lot lately is that doing this work of investigating, researching, understanding negative experiences and harmful behavior, and then speaking about it publicly or writing about it or sharing a story about it. I think requires a certain level of, disregard for other people's opinions about you.

I, I [00:37:00] don't, you know, we talked to a lot of people who are considering telling their stories. This was true, you know, before Power Trip and it's true after it. You know, people who have been through something that, that maybe really want to tell their story publicly or are thinking about it or wrestling with it. And, you know, I think, it's clear that it is taxing, you know. It, it, it takes something from you, you know.

And so, you know, I always kind of urge real caution. And, and that people have real clarity about what's their reason for coming forward? Not because I'm any arbiter of, of like, what's a good enough reason. But because I think there is a requisite resilience around trying to bring these kinds of stories forward. And I think that's really fucked up. Like I think that is something that needs change.

Um, and that sort of leads me to another thing I wanted to touch on, which is just [00:38:00] that, whether it's wellness spaces or psychedelic spaces, there is a really strong current of neoliberal ideology coursing through the sort of dominant ideas in those spaces. So a really obvious example is like personal responsibility. Um, you know, it is on you to engage in the right practices and rituals and whatever to make yourself whole after a traumatic experience that probably came about because of social injustice and oppression, like sexual violence or something. That was a huge part of my PhD thesis was exploring that, that thread.

But even more broadly speaking, it's like putting the onus on individual people to overcome social problems, and making it deeply, deeply personal.

And I think that becomes really evident when people are bringing forward a story of harm, because that's part of the logic of the blame that they're met with. And also, bringing forward those stories is asking something very subversive in a neoliberal [00:39:00] context, which is asking a community of people to give a shit, to inform themselves, understand the dynamics of abuse and harm in a more sophisticated way. And to respond to people with compassion and care.

Especially the last point of responding to people with care and compassion. It doesn't seem like it should be a big ask. But for some reason, it, it really is. And I, I have a lot of theories as to why that is, but the baseline is that like, by and large, people need to do better.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Yeah. I agree.

Well, and I think, what you just said around the sort of the myopia of the way in which we look at our problems. Exaggerated sense of personal ownership over things that really aren't our fault or within our control.

But then it also, and I see this a lot with like the organization that we've been speaking out about and folks who are leaving the organization and supporting what we're doing, [00:40:00] there's still this sense of holding it all at arm's length.

It's like, I agree with you and what you're doing. And, yay, keep doing that over there. And in some cases it is, it is a matter of resiliency. And I respect that a hundred and ten percent, because there was a time in my life there's no way I could have done this. For most of my life.

David Nickles: Sure.

Candice Schutter: But there's also something else operating there. Not just the pull yourself up by your bootstraps. We all do it on our own kind of thing. Lack of collectivism. But there's a real sense of I need to disown this because, for whatever reason, probably because I was brought up in a culture that didn't teach me how to engage in empathy on a daily basis. Like, I can't go there. It's, it's like, I have to keep it at an arm's length. And then in that case, people, they support from the sidelines and cheer you on in the background silently.

And I'm not ripping on people out there who are doing that for this podcast at all. I'm just saying like, let's all look at what are we really doing? And how is our silence by just cheering in the background where nobody can hear, how is that also holding [00:41:00] up this system?

David Nickles: Yeah. Well, and I think it's really, um, it's interesting. And I think it, it ties into something you were talking about earlier, where like, when you start looking around and seeing say, whether it's the wellness space or psychedelic spaces or whatever, and you start seeing who people are and what connections they have to other people in the spaces. Or what their motivations are for being there. Whether it's that they've got a business or a side hustle or a whatever. Some of the motivations, or lack thereof, to do things around these issues become more clear.

And, and in some cases, it may be simply that it is particularly confronting and invites a lot of uncomfortable emotions to consider that somebody that you have looked up to or trusted in or had affinity for has engaged in behaviors that you find destructive or egregious or, you know, what have you. [00:42:00]

Um, and I think, I mean, one of the comments we got around Cover Story: Power Trip was about, you know, people feeling that it was confrontational. And it's like, well, you know, if you feel confronted by this information, perhaps that is signaling to things going on inside you. You know, it's worth sitting with the discomfort and asking, like, what is it about this that feels so confronting? What is it about this that feels so difficult?

Um, you know, and I'm happy to talk with people about what they liked, what they didn't like, you know, what, what was confronting. I mean, we've had people who took issue with the fact that there was what they called emotionally manipulative music in the podcast. um, you which I thought an interesting critique light of the content being.

Lily Kay Ross: I mean, to be, to be fair, I have definitely heard podcasts before where, like, it was uber drama music and like, just felt very sensationalized and like they were trying to evoke [00:43:00] emotions with the music. I mean, you know, people will have their different experiences of different soundtracks to different things. But for whatever it's worth, you know, there was actually a lot of effort that went into pulling back on any kind music in the, uh, you know, on the production side of things.

But it was, it was interesting when, like, when then people would have a critique or wanted to, you know, criticize the podcast where it was like, there was no substantive engagement with any of the content and instead it was like the music made me feel ways. And it's like, was it the music? Or was it maybe the content? And like, it would be refreshing to see maybe engagement with the content and not the way it was delivered.

Because I can't really stress enough, like, people will often say this isn't the right place or your tone is incorrect, or, you know, they criticize the person trying to bring it forward or the manner in which they're trying to bring it forward or the place in which they're trying to bring it forward. You know, and all of that is just, all of that is silencing tactics.

David Nickles: [00:44:00] Yeah. And I think just to go back to the sort of pointing at the people that are involved. Like, some of the people who uphold some of these structures, bad actors, institutions, what have you, are rather surprising. You know, like there are accounts on social media, let's say, that are humorous critiques of wellness culture. And yet, some of the people who are steering those accounts work hand in hand with some of the most abusive, you know, people in positions of power.

And they know damn well what these folks have done. But their social media offers them a certain social cachet. It offers, oh, I've got whatever tens thousands, hundreds of thousands of followers and like, this is what I do.

And so one of the things that I find concerning about those influencers, or would be influencers, is that they sort of set themselves up, whether or not they intend to, I think in some cases it's quite intentional. I think in other cases it's a by product. Uh, they set

themselves up as like a, [00:45:00] a safe harbor. Or they give the impression that like, hey, here's somebody that you could reach out to. And the reality is, is quite far from that.

And so, like, we at times find ourselves sort of picking up some of those pieces. Because, you know, some of the people with the largest spotlight, or, you know, beacon, are actually not quite who you would think.

Lily Kay Ross: They're not equipped. Or, I mean, I generally say, when people are saying, well, where can I turn? Where do I go? It's like, in the case of sexual harm or coercive control in certain avenues. Like local rape crisis centers. Like, you know, seek out organizations and helpers who are not in the psychedelic space, where that's not the orientation. It's not, you know, if somebody is branding themselves as like, I help people who've been psychedelically harmed, and I'm part of the psychedelic community, often their loyalty is going to be to the psychedelic community first. And they may not [00:46:00] actually have a sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of coercive control. Or they may not really understand what therapist abuse looks like and what its consequences are. Or they may really have a, a very rudimentary or even regressive understanding of gender dynamics, you know?

Whereas if you can seek out help and support from people who really have a robust understanding of the dynamics of control, then it doesn't really matter if there's drugs involved or not. Their analysis and framework and the seat from which they are extending a hand to support is not loyal to psychedelia, is not interested in recuperating or reworking somebody's story to make it palatable and consistent with the narrative of the psychedelic movement. They don't care about that.

Um, and I think that that is kind of the, one of the foremost requirements. And I think why it can be so important to like, speaking more broadly to people in the cultiverse or people who are kind of, you know, [00:47:00] processing what it's like to leave a high-control group or something like that. Like, you know, reaching for hands that are totally outside of, of it. Which can be, I know, really, really difficult. Um, but I think that there is a, there's an anchor there that I think can really help people orient themselves in time and can potentially really meet people where they are and support them and their autonomy and their process. In the terms of like, what's actually going to help that person rather than being focused on, how do we protect the movement?

I mean, this, in the psychedelic space, this, you know. Oh yeah, it's a problem, but like, we got to protect the movement. And we're going to ram through medicalization and then we're going to address all the problems or whatever. Um, it's a really old story. I've just, I've been hearing it for well over a decade. And I, and we still hear it. We still hear examples of it.

And I just think, the position I [00:48:00] kind of took when I left is like, any movement that is going to justify keeping silent about harms that it knows are happening in the service to, to the proliferation of that movement is not a movement I'm interested in participating in. Plain and simple, you know? And now I say it's like, the means are the ends, you know.

If you're going to be participating in something because you think it's revolutionary, then the manner in which it does revolution has to be consistent with the outcome that it's, that it says it's aiming for. Otherwise it's just, it's just a lie.

David Nickles: Yeah, I agree wholeheartedly. And I think that also, you know, beyond the sort of, let's say we've been hearing this for a decade. I mean, we can look at the historical record and see that these tactics have been in play throughout the entire, you know, so called modern psychedelic renaissance. Let's say, going back to like the mid 80s, um, and the push to, you know, de-schedule MDMA following its [00:49:00] criminalization. I mean, this is, it has touched the biggest names in the field. And I think part of the reason too, like speaking to the cultiverse is that as certain notable figures in psychedelia set their sights on high-control group survivors as a target population to treat.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

David Nickles: Um, there are real concerns about a number of the psychedelic figures who are involving themselves in that. Some of whom have been the subject of public media scrutiny. Some of whom have not, but on whom there are litanies of behind the scenes mutterings and disciplinary filings, you know.

If you, if you start looking up psychiatrists, psychologists, therapists with their board of behavioral sciences and licensure websites, you know, you, you will, you can.

Lily Kay Ross: It's a horror show.

David Nickles: You can find quite a few really [00:50:00] disturbing allegations and relatively mild disciplinary sanctions. But the fact that you can find those sanctions, uh, gives you indication of sort of what's taking place and what's been able to be vetted out by these sort of licensing boards.

And so I think, you know, Lily's advice about steering clear of the sort of psychedelic institutions that I think largely exist to perpetuate the project of mainstreaming psychedelics, is quite significant. And I think as this whole industry continues to try to diversify, any vulnerable group or potential target population should sort of do what they can to inform themselves of what's coming down the pike.

Simply because, like, the people behind these industry efforts, they're plumbing the bottom of the barrel. I mean, at the point where, you know, one of these organizations, one of the leading, [00:51:00] "leading" companies in psychedelics, in a patent filing, one of their proposals for psilocybin was for pyromania, right? They are trying to prescribe these drugs for anything they can think of, and then some. And I think looking at how unscrupulous some of these people have been, whether therapists or clinicians or whatever. But also like coming from a whole bunch of these people are former investment bankers from Goldman Sachs. People who run boutique sort of regulatory capture firms where they facilitate meetings between extractive industry and government. And the whole, it, it's a mess.

And I think the most we can offer is sort of information about what has taken place in the hopes that people can arm themselves with that information and go safely, or go more safely.

You know, like, I think, uh, Lily and I are both proponents of decriminalization. Precisely because it presents one sort of pillar against the sort of, authoritarianism [00:52:00] that you

see. Whether it's the sort of like, I'm the shaman that gives the drugs and therefore I'm the experience. Or the medical model and the realities that we've seen unfold in clinical trials and elsewhere, trying to help figure out how to, I don't know, help promote broader, pro social responses that, you know, can be implemented on a more independent communal level. Rather than, you know, looking for the particular strong figure who's going to fill in the blank.

Candice Schutter: Right.

David Nickles: Sorry for the rant.

Candice Schutter: It's okay. Well, it's complex. You know, as I'm hearing you talk I'm like zooming way out and I'm zooming way in. And it's like I'm inside the the room where the so-called treatment is happening, putting that in quotes. And then I'm zooming out and looking at this system that's trying to monetize it and move it along. And there's toxicity everywhere.

And that's the thing that like, I, I continually want to shout from the rooftops is like this whole idea of, oh, these [00:53:00] dynamics, that's just, you know, that's just this particular individual. Or that's just that group or that. It's like, no, this is the water we swim in, folks. And it's, it's infiltrated all the things.

And we look at something that's supposed to be healing. And the thing that I wanted to really touch upon here for listeners out there who are exploring psychedelics or thinking about it, whether it's therapeutic or recreational is, is really understanding like, when you talked about folks who are vulnerable being marketed to and exploited potentially, is the way in which psychedelics, there's something really particularly unique that needs to be super highlighted around psychedelics and the potential of what it means to be under the influence while under the influence.

Lily Kay Ross: Oh yeah.

Candice Schutter: And it's such a bigger hornet's nest, in that sense. Um, so I would love if you could talk just a little bit to the listeners about. You know, I know you do a lot of this in Cover Story, but just give a bare bones explanation of the way that psychedelics function, how the risks are [00:54:00] compounded essentially.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah. That's a super important question.

So there's a couple of different things. Uh, MDMA in particular, is thought to inhibit one's fear response. Which means that if you are on MDMA, in a context in which you would otherwise maybe have spidey senses saying, this doesn't feel safe. This doesn't feel right. I don't know if I trust this person. Or I don't know if I feel safe in this environment. Those warning signs aren't going to go off with MDMA. Which is a huge. issue.

And another one is just, people talk about these drugs as enhancing suggestibility or making people more suggestible. And I'd, I'd heard that talked about for a long time. But I have to say that I, I didn't really understand what that meant until I started talking to the people who

ended up being our sources for Cover Story: Power Trip. Because in their [00:55:00] stories, I think, I started to learn just how desperate a lot of people were for healing when they came knocking on the door. Which translates for some to this idea of like, that they were sort of willing to do anything, especially if that anything was based on like the instructions of somebody that they believed they could trust.

But then adding to that psychedelics, which make it easier to manipulate, to plant ideas, to, you know, yeah, plant a seed in someone's mind that continues to grow and blossom long after the trip is over and can ultimately influence their behavior for days, weeks, months, or years after the fact, depending on how that seed of an idea is reinforced. People have told us about things that they believed about themselves or about the practitioner they were working with or, or about the world, things that they believed based on what was [00:56:00] said in a drug experience. But now they're like, how could I have believed that? You know, how could I have believed that? That's, that's just.

And it's like, well, I've heard it too many times to judge you for it. It's not, it's not a function of like your naivete. Like these drugs have a real capability to change the way we think and our openness to certain ideas.

David Nickles: Yeah. I think that openness, I mean, not only has that been the subject of research studies, but also like just anecdotally.

Like I used to be part of a, quite active on a forum dealing with psychedelics, including DMT. And there were, you know, you have chemists and molecular biologists and all sorts of well educated professionals who are also interested in drugs.

And, you know, one of the ideas many years ago was there was this question of, is it possible what they called a synchronized [00:57:00] hyperspace event? Is it possible if you have people smoking DMT all over the world, you know, when you break through and you go to whatever this other place is that seems to happen, is it possible to encounter other people? And it never, it was never successful. Surprise.

But also, fact that these are the ideas. The experience is weird enough that in a sense, to not be open to that as a possibility would possibly be even odder than just how bizarre. You know, because the notion I would say, having had some rather deep breakthrough experiences, the notion that reality can do that, that you can wind up in a space that is so fundamentally alien and strange and disconnected from consensus reality and yet is completely coherent in a sort of self referential way. It's really hard to explain how that [00:58:00] can make you question certain things about your reality.

I mean, I, I remember as DMT sort of grew in popularity, particularly after Joe Rogan and co made the Spirit Molecule documentary around, 2012. You know, we would have people who showed up on the forum in huge existential turmoil because they went to a concert or something and DMT had become so readily available and was so cheap that like, hey, I'm at a psychedelic music event, like I want to take some drugs. Oh, this is, this is here. This is cheap. Uh, you know, I don't really know what I'm getting into. But oh, how can I forget everything that I just saw? And it's like, yeah, you can't. Now you're in this position of trying

to sort of piece the pieces of your life back together. And, the number of people we had who showed up sort of trying to make sense of this unexpected experience.

I mean, going back to sort of the conversation at the top of the show. You know, nobody there said, hey, you [00:59:00] know, the fault is with you for not being able to just get over it. And like, move through your difficulties around this. There was understanding that like, yeah, you've probably just had a, an ontologically shattering experience that is making you question some fundamental baseline concepts of how you experience reality. You might need professional help. This could be a many months or even years period of trying to put yourself back together. Like, this is the, this can be the reality.

Candice Schutter: Raises hand.

David Nickles: Yeah, well,.

Lily Kay Ross: But also think of the difference between, you know, the way that people are encountering drugs in the world now. The proliferation of something as intense as DMT. Or just like the fact that, you know, psychedelic guides and therapists, the medical model has become so dominant in how people understand psychedelics and how to use them and what they can do. Whereas, you know, when, when you are in. I guess I've, I've had the good fortune of just at different times being in [01:00:00] proximity to people who just have taken a lot of drugs in a lot of different settings and have kind of a different perspective and an openness like, well, it doesn't have to be medical or healing or whatever to be a valid experience.

And I think, you know, this point where before medicalization was the dominant narrative, the people who were seeking out these drug experiences were the people who were interested in having those kinds of experiences because they were curious. Or because they thought it would be fun. Or because they thought there was something interesting for them there.

And I think, you know, if you've had enough drug experiences, then you might have a shattering, what might for someone else be like a shattering drug experience, but you come through the other side. And you're like, that was really uncomfortable. And I kind of feel like shit. But I've also done this enough times to know that in a few days I'm going to feel better. And I've had all kinds experiences that, you know, did or didn't leave different marks. And like, maybe it's not that big of a [01:01:00] deal, you know.

But I also think that because the medical model is the dominant model, it's very much the case now that even just in like news articles or other things talking about psychedelic medicine, those are functioning to market psychedelics to populations that otherwise might not ever have sought them out. And may not be well suited to psychedelic experiences, you know.

David Nickles: So, yeah, I think it's one of the things that's really interesting is the number of people, I think, within psychedelic spaces who are advocating for psychedelics as treatments for intractable mental health conditions, but who don't actually have those conditions, right? And so when they're thinking about psychedelic healing, they're not thinking about, ah, yes, I

have treatment resistant depression, treatment resistant PTSD, and I took psychedelics with a therapist. And my goodness, like, like that really helped.

What I think you have is a lot of people who say like, hey, I took a day with my friends. We all went out to the woods, and we [01:02:00] ate some mushrooms. And yeah, that felt really, really therapeutic. Which is not to say that you don't also find people who say, oh, I cured my fill in the blank with psychedelics. But when I see so many people without these sort of mental health indications, promoting them for these mental health indications, it sort of begs the question of what's going on here?

And like, look, I've had beautiful experiences with my friends where we've taken a day and set it aside and everybody's gotten their stuff in order ahead of time. And at the end of the day, sure, it's felt profoundly therapeutic. But is that because I took psychedelics? Is that because I took a day away from all of my obligations and spent it in a beautiful, natural setting with good friends, laughing at silly, absurd things?

Like you can't really.

Candice Schutter: Correlation is not causation, right?

David Nickles: Exactly. And, and there's a clinician who commented at one point. I really appreciate it. That, you know, not everything that's therapeutic belongs in therapy.

And, you know, it's like, when I think about [01:03:00] people talking about nature bathing. Or, you know, like ecotherapy or whatever. Like, yeah, fine, sure, whatever. But maybe this is a signal that, like, there are problems with modern industrial civilization. And we're not spending enough time attached to our land base and our ecosystems, you know. Like these are pointing at other issues.

Candice Schutter: And let me guess. Let me guess, you have a three day tour that I can spend 800 on and go nature bathe with you. Let me guess.

Lily Kay Ross: 800 per day, including

Candice Schutter: Per day, yeah.

Lily Kay Ross: raw vegan meals made by our special chef. And, but no lodging. Cause you have to sleep under the stars. That's part of the.

Candice Schutter: Right.

Lily Kay Ross: Oh, geez.

Candice Schutter: But you're paying for that part of the experience.

Lily Kay Ross: That's right. That's right. I paid this star ceiling.

transition

Candice Schutter: I don't know how much you know about Sedona, Arizona, [01:04:00] but I live 20 minutes outside of it. Um, but yeah, it's like spiritual tourism on steroids in Sedona. I mean, it is just beyond, beyond.

But yeah, you're right. I mean, and I think that kind of leads into this question I wanted to ask you around like, folks who do want to explore nature, psychedelics, healing, however, that's defined for you. My question being, people that do want to have a relationship to psychedelics, what do you say to them?

Because it sounds like to me, part of it is like, why are you going to these guides and these systems who are profiting off of these formulas that don't even necessarily work, listen to Cover Story, and opening people up.

I mean, one of my favorite stories, I think it was one who was in the MDMA trials. And she said something about, it felt like she had experienced open heart surgery, and then she was sent out into the world with an open heart.

Somebody said that. Do you know who it was?

David Nickles: I think that was Mel, right?

Lily Kay Ross: It might've been, yeah.

Candice Schutter: Was it Mel?

Yeah. But it just really deeply touched me. And I [01:05:00] thought about, you know, like what you were saying before, Lily. Like the lack of empathy there.

Like, okay, we moved you through this little cog in our wheel. And it spit you out. And you're left on the other side to deal with the consequences. And maybe there was some benefit there. But there's no follow through. There's no longevity. There's no.

You know, so anyway, for, for folks who are like, well, you know, I have had experiences with psychedelics that feel in some ways, quote unquote, medicinal or therapeutic. What do you suggest to people who want to explore that?

As people who've been in all the spaces. You know, that's one of the things I'm glad you led with your background. Because I think it's important. As somebody who's not a psychonaut and has never really been. As soon as I speak about any of this, people are just like, you don't even know what you're talking about. I'm not even going to listen. Which is fine. I respect that.

But coming from y'all, who understand the benefits of what we're dealing with here. And are also speaking out about the harm. And the reason you're speaking so loud about the harm is because nobody will fucking listen. [01:06:00]

Speaking of the benefits and people who want those benefits, what do you say to those folks?

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah. I mean a couple of things. Um, first of all, I think people, part of the reason people seek out guides is because they assume that they're going to get good quality, pure drugs through those guides. And I don't think that that's correct. So in the case of ayahuasca, there's a lot of admixtures and additional plants that can be added in that can really change the experience, either how it sits in your body or how intense the visions might be. You know, so you can get ingredients online and brew your own.

There's also, in the case of things like MDMA, a lot of street MDMA has all kinds of stuff that's cut in it. I think it's really important to be mindful where you source your drugs. And you know, take them to get tested, so you know what it is you're taking with a high level of confidence.

Um, then there's a lot of considerations around dosing. I think a lot of the time, going to practitioners and clinicians, the emphasis is like, well, this person is paying me for this experience, I [01:07:00] better like blow them out of the water and give them a really high dose. And it's like, well. And I've, I've heard some stories about like, you know, people kind of weighing up what kind of dose to give somebody that's at the very end of their life. You know, and really open and really kind of already in that kind of threshold space. And, and being appalled at how many of the other clinicians they knew were like, oh, I'd give them a really high dose. And it's like, no, don't think so.

Um, you know, there's a lot of good information on Erowid. It's a really outdated website, but the information's great in terms of like how to approach dosing. And I think, you know, with mushrooms and LSD and some of these things, you know, you have these different levels of like. I mean, I think microdosing is, has no evidentiary basis to it. I don't really encourage people to do it. But museum doses, which would be like a perceptual dose, but quite low. You could still go out in public and handle yourself. Maybe a little giggly, but like you could handle yourself pretty well and go to a museum. Or go to a, [01:08:00] whatever. You know, you can take that kind of a dose at home and do yoga or do whatever and see how your body's feeling with different lower doses of things. You know, you don't have to blow your mind out with five grams of mushrooms or 500 micrograms of LSD or 120 milligrams of MDMA with an 80 milligram booster. I mean, that's a lot of, all of those are, are really quite high doses.

So I think, you know, if you want to take it upon yourself to explore what psychedelics have to offer, I think going slowly and really kind of feeling out like, well, what is my relationship to this? What do I want out of this? Knowing that like, healing your PTSD or healing your treatment resistant depression, that there's not really a strong evidence base to suggest that you're going to have that kind of an outcome. And so I think, you know, if that's really what you're looking for, and that's what you're committed to, then I would urge extreme caution in proceeding down that path.

Whereas if you're sort of [01:09:00] like, have more openness to it. Or you kind of want to see where it goes and, and you're really willing to take decisions about the drugs you're taking and the doses you're taking and the context in which you're taking it into your own hands, like that, that tends to be my.

You know, and if, and if you're going to have other people with you, to be really clear that you trust those people. And to have really clear expectations in place in terms of what you can and can't ask of each other. Or, you know, what kind of support is on offer or, or not potentially.

Um, but I, I really, It does make me sad, and I'm by no means the first person to say this. But like, you know, the first times that I took drugs was in the, in the Redwood forest with my friends. You know, I was 18. I was a kid. And, and the awe and the wonder and the surprise of like these feelings and these thoughts that I've never had before. And like, [01:10:00] whoa, all the sparkly colors. And, you know, and everything's breathing. I mean, just the whimsy and the fun and the newness of that experience is something I really, I really hope hasn't been taken away from generations of young people who've just been fucking around with drugs in the forest, because they can for so long. Like I would make me so sad if that was just utterly lost and supplanted by like, time to get out your intention journal and sit down and, you know, like, meditate on my own suffering while I'm on drugs. It's like, come on man. Like put on some Jimi Hendrix and like, you know, or some Funkadelic and just, anyway.

David Nickles: Yeah. I, I think, speaking to the benefits, I mean, I would describe certainly my first trip on mushrooms to be profoundly therapeutic. You know, I, I had a, what I would describe as an ongoing existential anxiety tracing back to like my earliest memories of my [01:11:00] grandmother dying. And like, you know, that was gone at the end of that trip. You know, that was profoundly relieving. And it opened my mind and eyes to, I think, some really interesting political and sociological questions. And you know, I mean, at the end of the day, like I love psychedelics. I love these drugs. And I, I'm not at all opposed to people taking them.

Um, where I object is when I see coercive structures and institutions formed around them. When I see people harmed. When I see people misled or given sort of false promises. Particularly when it's in service to somebody else's agenda. You know, like it's one thing when it's like ignorant kids misinforming each other because like nobody's done basic research. It's another thing when you start manufacturing research or evidence in pursuit of specific political outcomes.

And so, you [01:12:00] know, what I would tell people who want to do this is do it. Like, you know, you don't need permission. You don't need medicalization, like, you know.

Candice Schutter: A shaman.

David Nickles: Yeah, you don't need a shaman.

Um, especially, you know, you don't need to travel to somewhere where you don't know the language to sit in a maloca with 12 other strangers and listen to their vomiting and whatever else.

Like, you know, when I, I had my first trip in my first semester of college. And I had decided by the time that I graduated, I wanted to be able to be self sufficient in drugs. And it's doable. Like, it's, you know, you can grow your own mushrooms. You can grow your own cactus. You can grow, if you're interested in morning glories, you can grow that too. Like I have a friend who used to say, with regards to extracting different compounds, you know, if you can bake a cake, you can bake a noodle. Um, I it really is many of the, uh. And at the point where you're extracting your own, there are relatively simple things you can do to ensure your own sort of [01:13:00] safety. You have a better sense of the purity around things.

But also as Lily said, getting your drugs tested. Like the reality is, I think the reason people seek out guides or shamans, in addition to like access to the drugs, is because it's easy. It's quick. It's you know, I don't have the time to learn how to do this and this that. And I'd rather just pay someone for it, and then I've got it. Okay, fine. Like personally, not the way I would suggest doing things. But if that's how you want to do things, you have to accept that there is a risk. Particularly now. I mean, with the fentanyl and other things in street drugs, so-called, you know, there are not sort of safe supplies. So given that that's the reality, test your drugs.

There's a wonderful outfit in Europe that you can mail your drugs to called Energy Control. They'll charge you for it. But, you know, they will do phenomenal testing. I think, Erowid is still, I think, doing the ecstasy data testing in the U. S. There's also, I think [01:14:00] DanceSafe, I think they finally got some equipment that will let them do like a more robust sort of onsite analysis.

But basically, like, if, if you're buying drugs that you don't know the source of, and frankly, even if you know, the source. There was an issue at this point, probably 18 years ago or something, a little bit less, maybe, where the head of a research chemical supply company, um, so sort of real esoteric drugs. Things that are like analogs of other drugs, designer drugs, I think they used to call them. Um, he died, because there was a labeling error. Where, where something that was active tiny, doses was mislabeled as something else. And he ended up overdosing unintentionally.

And so like, even if you think that you know your source. You know, if you're not extracting it, if you're not responsible for your supply chain of that drug, get it tested. Like worst case, you're out a little bit of money, and you have that peace of mind.

Lily Kay Ross: I mean, we've heard stories of practitioners that gave people MDMA that they knew had meth in it. And they were [01:15:00] like, this has a bit of speed in it, but that's going to, that's going to enhance your experience. It's like, fuck off, you know? And at least the practitioner told them that that was the case, you know. Uh, it's still bullshit. But like, I think these days, you know.

And I got to say too, just cause I feel like so many people are surprised by this. But like ketamine is not uber safe. I keep reading things and coming across things that suggest that a

lot of people are taking ketamine recreationally. Or taking it even in the hopes of having therapeutic outcomes. But like.

David Nickles: Let's point out the potential for addiction, potential to damage your bladder.

Lily Kay Ross: In ways that can't be undone.

David Nickles: And people don't realize it. You know, it's, it's really. It's, it's a shame that in the rush to promote this as like the one stop, you know, miracle shot antidepressant, all of that has kind of been glossed over. Especially when there have been notable sort of psychedelic figures who struggled with ketamine addiction in some cases, you know, drowning. In other cases, just, [01:16:00] um, real heavy patterns of use well into later life.

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Yeah, it's interesting you've mentioned ketamine. Because I have a friend who had a bad ketamine experience. And he had a bit of a psychotic break, I think.

David Nickles: That sucks.

Candice Schutter: And I think he probably had it. I don't know this for a fact, but I think it was probably at a festival or something. So who knows?

Lily Kay Ross: Yep.

Candice Schutter: Who knows?

Lily Kay Ross: I mean, I think it's worth mentioning that ketamine as a psychedelic was developed by Salvador Roquet. So, we talk about that quite a bit in the podcast, this Mexican maverick psychiatrist who was giving people, um, heroic doses of different psychedelics in high intensity, loud, highly stimulating sleep deprived settings. Um, and he, he's, you know, anyway. You can learn more about, more about it in Cover Story: Power Trip.

But, um, he really helped to pioneer [01:17:00] ketamine as a drug that could be, in sub anesthetic doses, used to induce altered states. And we've heard stories about some Roquet sessions in which, you know, people were given LSD late at night. They stayed up all night. There was, you know, the sounds of planes crashing and all the crazy kind of sound design that went into those trips. And then, you know, porn on the walls and battle on the walls and people giving birth and people having sex. And just like inundated with like all this sensory input.

And then as people kind of descend into this really intense overwhelmed place, then at a certain point, the atmosphere changes and they start injecting people with intramuscular ketamine and sending them out into the place of just like blissful nothingness, repeatedly. So they would just like, keep injecting them over several hours. And they would spend quite a long period of time in this sub anesthetic psychedelic place. Which like, is [01:18:00] just

such a mindfuck when you think about it. Of like, subjecting people to, to all the ingredients of a nightmare of a trip.

And then bringing them through the other side and this like really intense, prolonged bliss kind of, yeah, bliss state, so to speak. Um, that I think is worth bearing in mind, you know. That's, that's where this sort of started. And now.

David Nickles: It seems to have also laid the groundwork for the idea that bad trips can be the best trips and all that.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah, there's, there's like a piece writing.

Candice Schutter: The breakdown to breakthrough thing.

Lily Kay Ross: Exactly. And which I think, it's worth mentioning, Dave coined the term, psychedelic authoritarianism.

Candice Schutter: I love it so much.

Lily Kay Ross: It's so. It's, it's a really great umbrella term for understanding these dynamics of authoritarian and coercive control in these settings. Ideas like bad trips are the best trips. If it hurts it's healing. Um, I know what you need. I'm like the parent or the doctor that's addressing your psychic wounds, [01:19:00] and of course it's going to hurt while we clean it out. But you know, um.

David Nickles: If it goes wrong, it's because you're not cooperating. Or you're not a good.

And you know, these are things, these are dynamics that when we watch cult documentaries or speak with survivors high-control groups. It's like, it's the same stuff. You know, and it's just.

Candice Schutter: Textbook.

David Nickles: They've thrown in psychedelics, which offer a certain malleability.

I mean, the number of times we've spoken with people who said, look, at the beginning of the evening, there'd been a discussion. I was going to take this drug. I wasn't going to take that drug. But once I was high on this, they started pushing this, that, and the other. You know, it's like, yes.

It's look, I've been in situations where there's been peer pressure. And you know, it's having, having decided that I wasn't going to do those drugs earlier in the evening was sort of the one thing that made it possible to say no. But even to a friend, having to say like, hey, no. Like, I'm not, I'm not interested in that. I've, you know, this is what I'm doing tomorrow, so I need to be straight at it. You know, it's, there's a pressure there without.

Candice Schutter: It's hard enough.

David Nickles: Yeah, exactly. [01:20:00]

Lily Kay Ross: I want to finish the sentence you started a second ago, which is the idea that if it goes really well, it's because I'm such a great healer. But if it goes wrong, it's like, oh, there's something wrong with you.

Or like, listen really carefully to the ways people talk about resistance, you know. Oh, they were resisting the healing. They were resisting the medicine or whatever.

Like I come from a sort of feminist political orientation, in which resistance is what we do in the face of oppression. Resistance is not to be condemned and criticized. Resistance is to be, you know, lifted up. And, and we are to explore the ways in which we resist power that is productive and trying to move towards the sort of world that we want to inhabit.

And so yeah, the word resistance and the way that it was talked about was a really pronounced pattern in our investigations. Um, and continues to just be one of those words that I'm always listening for in how people talk about it.

The other one is power. Um, you know, [01:21:00] how, if people are.

David Nickles: The healing power of psychedelics.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah, if people are using the word power a lot, then that tends to suggest that they have an orientation towards trying to cultivate maybe their own, you know?

Candice Schutter: Mm hmm. Wow. That's, that's really, that's important.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah. I think in a lot of context, people who are using the language of power as descriptive. Like, oh, it's a powerful this. Or, you know, embrace the power of blah, blah, blah. Or empower yourself to such and such. You know, connect with your own power.

These are people who are telling you, they have a bit of a preoccupation with cultivating their own power.

David Nickles: This is a point that a clinician friend of ours made, and I think it holds up.

It's really interesting, you know, if you're talking about sort of healing people and how effective something is, you know, it's not always, you're not always looking for the most powerful thing, you know, the way, the way that.

Um, and then starting to pay attention to that, [01:22:00] in particularly like psychedelic research context. Like at conferences where you see all these researchers and clinicians and whoever else talking about the power. Um, it, it gets really hot.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah.

The other, the other thing I would suggest to people is, in the event that, you know, you're, you're really set on working with a clinician with psychedelics. And actually like anytime that there's, it's a wellness setting or whatever, and somebody's got letters next to their name or an understanding that they're a psychiatrist or a psychologist, don't take that for granted.

There are a lot of people that we have looked at with a really clear history of misrepresenting their credentials or allowing other people to introduce them as, um, you know, oh this person is a psychologist or this person is blah, you know.

They have a responsibility to correct that person to say, I, you know, that's not actually what my training is. Or I don't actually have that credential.

David Nickles: Or people who will present themselves as licensed in [01:23:00] one state, even though they're living and or practicing in another state and who then get really upset when you start asking questions about that.

Lily Kay Ross: So there's, you know, you can ask people where, you know, what state are you licensed in? Or you can go online and you can really try to look up. You know, there's, there's directories. There's online resources where you can vet out people's credentials. And where you will also, as you're doing so, see whether or not there are complaints against them. And if those complaints have been upheld. And if there's been any disciplinary action taken against them.

It's amazing that there's been moments where we'll pull somebody up. And it's just like a page long list of disciplinary actions, and yet they still have a license.

So, uh, you know, due diligence. And.

It's, it's a sad thing, right? Because there's a beautiful thing to trusting people, you know. Having faith in people, believing that people are who they seem to be or who they say that they are. I appreciate that when I come across it. And if that's what's driven [01:24:00] somebody into the realm or into the orbit of a dangerous person, it doesn't mean that it's that person's fault that they got hurt. It doesn't, you know.

Like it's, uh, it's a really precious thing to, to move through the world with that kind of trust. And, and the fact that somebody else decided to exploit that is, is the responsibility and the decision of the person who did the exploiting, not the person that they targeted. So I'm going to be really explicit about that.

Um, I do think that at this point, something I have learned is just check fucking everybody.

Candice Schutter: Totally.

Lily Kay Ross: You know, even when their credential, or even when they're referred by a friend, you know. How many times is it, oh, this person's the real deal. Ah, these people do the best ceremonies. Oh, like they're just, they're so wonderful.

And there are situations where that information was just, that referral was incorrect. Somebody didn't have all the information. And, [01:25:00] and then there are instances where after the fact it's like, oh yeah, I kind of knew that they like maybe raped some women. But I didn't think it would happen to you, you know.

Candice Schutter: Oh wow.

Lily Kay Ross: I mean, like, so, you know.

Or people who are potentially more participatory than that. You know, more interested in sort of, keeping somebody's appetite to abuse satiated for whatever reason. I mean, it, it gets really fucking dark, the more that we know, the more people we talk to. And we, we talk to people all the time, you know, about experiences that they've had.

And, and I'm, to be honest with you, uh, I still have moments where I have to pick my jaw up off the floor. There is seemingly no end to how dark these behaviors and the, this kind of abuse can get. I mean, having, you know, done the investigation in Cover Story, it's like, I really kind of thought we'd seen it all. And that's not the case. That's really not the case.

Um, [01:26:00] so. You know, I, I, I really want to caution people against, other humans is kind is kind of what it might down to.

Candice Schutter: That so resonates.

Lily Kay Ross: Um, you know.

David Nickles: Yeah, it's not the drugs, drugs.

Lily Kay Ross: That's right. It's not the drugs. It's the people. And, and also, you know, I can't remember off the top of my head who wrote about this, but the cultogenic effects of psychedelics.

You know, there's, there.

Candice Schutter: Oh, interesting.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah. I mean, part of what they were writing about was how if you're taking psychedelics in a group, even if it's like a group without a leader or a group of friends, you know. It's a, it's an experience in which the people who are inside the experience together can really kind of coalesce. And the people outside the experience don't understand the experience, cause they're not part of this kind of group that's, that's having the experience, you know? And so I think, um, that that's important.

I think another thing, you know, we talked about the suggestibility enhancing and like the fear response. But psychedelics [01:27:00] make plenty of people feel really grandiose and really big and really powerful and really important and really capable doing whatever. Leading the new startup. Or being the new shaman. Or, you know, whatever. It's like anybody who's taken enough drugs will have at some point had at least one trip in which it was like, oh yeah, I'm a shaman, too. You know, like that's old hat. You know, I wish more people talked about that, because it doesn't have to be this like hush, hush, special secret thing. Like it's a laughable, predictable space that people go into. Um, you know.

And so, um, so I think there's a real propensity for people to take that seriously and think that, you know, I, I got my training from the medicine. And I'm going to go forth and give the medicine to others, you know? And, Man, I just think that's pretty fucking dangerous and stupid and um, arrogant. And, and I just, I just advise against it. [01:28:00]

David Nickles: Yeah. That the paper is *On The Use and Abuse of LSD* by David X Freedman. It's a great paper. And Freedman's not the only one. I mean, there was a woman named Lisa Bieberman who was, she was like a grad student involved in Tim Leary's sort of Harvard psychedelics circle. There's a classic text she wrote called *Session Games People Play*. Uh, but she saw, you know. And I'd say Freedman saw as well, the sort of like, the way that people on psychedelics in group settings sort of rely on each other for meaning making and shared understanding. And the potential that seeps in around sort of charismatic leaders. And, you know, I think unsurprisingly, Bieberman wound up leaving psychedelia and going and living sort of her own quiet life.

Lily Kay Ross: As a Quaker.

David Nickles: Outside of this world. So, you know, I think.

Yeah, there's, there's a great story by Ursula K. Le Guin called, *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas*, that I think about a lot in relationship to [01:29:00] the so called psychedelic community. It's a short story. I'd recommend folks read it. It's, it's really good.

Lily Kay Ross: It's super short. And it's extraordinary.

David Nickles: Yeah, there are certain things that once you see them, you can't unsee them. And the question is sort of, what do you do?

Lily Kay Ross: How be, what do?

Candice Schutter: Can we link to it?

David Nickles: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's, it, it floats around the web. I'll, I'll shoot you a link when we get off.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. I'd love to read it and share it with the listeners.

And, and, and also just wanted to highlight when you were just talking about the grandiosity that can happen under the influence of psychedelics. That I also appreciated, I've heard you emphasize the way in which people, I think it was you, Lily, who said you had a real kind of problem with this idea of somebody being like a psychedelic therapist. Like that's their specialization. Because being in that position over and over again, where this experience these people are having this, what can be a really transformative or transcendent experience, I should say. That, that there's sort of this offloading of like, I made this thing [01:30:00] happen that you actually don't have any control over whatsoever.

Do you want to speak to that for second?

Lily Kay Ross: Sure. I mean, if a person is the purveyor of the experience and the drugs onto another person, say, in like a therapeutic, so called therapeutic setting or context. You know, it, it, it is unsurprising when the person on drugs might go into a state of profuse gratitude, adoration, love for the person who gave them the drug and was nice enough to, you know, let me trip in your house this afternoon or whatever it might be. You know, they, they can really shower somebody in praise and love. And I think it, it.

You know, I used to say it takes like a really particular kind of person not to believe that after a while, but I don't think that particular kind of person exists. You know, if, if you're really constantly in the shower of people's adoration, I don't think it's possible to not start to believe that in some way at some point, you know. And, [01:31:00] um, I think it's quite, quite concerning and quite disturbing.

I don't think people should be practitioners. I don't think there's enough evidence base. And I don't think that there's enough critical discourse and understanding about some of the unique clinical issues and ethical issues that are posed by introducing psychedelics to a therapeutic context. So I think the whole idea of being a psychedelic practitioner is just so premature, so profoundly premature.

But I also think that like, it doesn't make people better. You know, somebody who takes up that mantle or takes up that role. I, I just haven't seen that make people more gracious, more humble, more kind, more down to earth, you know?

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

Which is, seems sort of true of the way that the word shaman has been co opted and utilized, in at least the cultures near where I am. And the way that that Power Trip sort of goes to people's heads. And even just the label, like calling oneself that over and [01:32:00] over again.

You know, and there's a lot of these in wellness spaces. It's something that makes me crazy now that I, I couldn't see when I was really steeped in it. But like, all this transformation that happens and how much credit. Myself, like laying on the floor in this like mind body fitness class and having this amazing experience. And like, I gave like all the credit to these people and this practice. And it was just something that I, I created.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: It was an experience that I created within myself.

And like this lack of agency when we just projected onto the people around us. And of course, how could that not go to their heads? I mean, I'm sure it would go to my head if I was in that position. I, I just can't imagine it wouldn't.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah. What you said reminded me of something else our clinician friend has commented. Which is, you know, keep an eye out for catharsis without insight. It's actually not that hard to induce really intense states of high emotion or what feels like a really big release. [01:33:00] And people can end up really seeking out those kinds of cathartic experiences over and over again, but is there insight associated with it? Is there, is there knowledge? Is there something that someone can then, kind of, move forward from that point? Um.

Candice Schutter: Yeah. Well, I think that's where the story that people are telling themselves about the leader comes into play. Cause I think about hearing about ceremonies that someone close to me who's been to just dozens and dozens of ayahuasca ceremonies. And hearing stories. And they do a similar thing that we would do in our wellness culture, where we circle up at the end and reflect and share. And like, that's a communal thing to do, sure.

But I think a lot of times what happens, like, as I look back retrospectively, is like the leader helps make the meaning. So it's like not really anything. I mean, something maybe cool happened. But like something that is just a metaphoric kind of a cool thing that happened becomes literalized into this thing that is transformative.

And it's like, is that even true? Or is that just part of the sales pitch, too?

David Nickles: Well, that's just it. In sort of my early days of psychedelics, I, I [01:34:00] used to comment, and I still, I think there's a truth to it. But one of the things that really struck me is that no one can get between you and your receptors, you know. Like there's a powerful experiential immediacy where like, nobody can take away your psychedelic experience, because it's yours. Or the same friend who likes talk about baking cakes and baking noodles commented that, you know, his opposition to people selling DMT in particular, but psychedelics more broadly, is that these aren't your experiences to sell.

And the thing that struck me is with the rise of the integration industry, you have a whole bunch of enterprising con artists who, you know, they've created a sort of narrative that allows them to insert themselves, or attempt to insert themselves, into your immediate experience and derive meaning from it, make meaning from it, tell you what it is that you're experiencing. When the truth is, you know, nobody knows better than you.

Like, sure, it can help to talk people [01:35:00] and like bounce ideas off of them. But if you, if had therapist who was always telling you what your experiences meant, uh, you know,

rather than making space for you to sort of talk through them and make your own meaning, I think you'd start asking questions.

Candice Schutter: Red flag. Yeah.

transition

Lily Kay Ross: I think one thing I did want to touch on as we wind down is, circling back to this thread of neoliberalism as it runs through wellness culture and psychedelic culture.

I think there's a real pressure on people living in a society of neoliberal capitalism to, um, be constantly self improving. To treat ourselves like the entrepreneurial self. And I, what I mean by that is almost treating ourselves like a business and always looking for how we're going to grow. And how we're going to change. And how we're going to, you know.

And I, I think at a certain point, the more I really grappled with that [01:36:00] idea and started to see how prevalent that was for how people seek to better themselves.

And I absolutely did. I really felt when I was younger that I needed to be a better person in order to belong, in order to be loved, in order to be, hell, tolerable. Um, and in time I've come to see where those ideas come from and I've decided to reject them.

Um, you know, what if you don't need to improve yourself? You know. What if you don't actually need to spend money and time and energy trying to make yourself, what? Fit in better to a totally dysfunctional world? Like, I, I don't know. Um, I think there's something to be said about just enough. You know?

It's that, that shit, it's just, it's endlessly consuming. And there are endless opportunities for you to, you know, pay somebody [01:37:00] money to transform yourself or change yourself in some way. But, but towards what? You know, um, yeah.

David Nickles: Yeah, I mean, I think that this is also one of the things that I find interesting, compelling, worthwhile with regards to psychedelics.

I don't believe there are sort of, you know, values that are intrinsic to psychedelic experiences. But I believe that psychedelic experiences, like if you look through the historic literature, you can find a whole bunch of like themes and motifs that emerge. And I think there are inherent political questions that are begged by those themes and motifs.

So, you know, and Lily's sort of, the notion that you are enough jogged my mind on that. When, like, you know, you live in a world that tells you that you are not good enough. That, you know, you can only be loved or accepted if you buy the right clothes, the right whatever, makeup, [01:38:00] cologne, uh, accessories.

Lily Kay Ross: Plastic surgery.

David Nickles: Car, house, whatever, right. And yet, you have an experience where one of the common themes was, you know, all there is is love. Right.

I would say those two things are. There's a political tension between that experience and the world that you live in, where advertisers are spending billions of dollars to tell you that you are unlovable, right?

Or, the notion of the tree hugging hippie, right? And then you look at where industrial civilization is making the planet increasingly uninhabitable for huge swaths of living creatures, right? Again, there is a political tension there.

Now, that doesn't mean that people who have psychedelic experiences are necessarily going to engage in pro social political action, right? Like what you do with that political tension is still an open question. But I think again, like putting this in the context of the sort of [01:39:00] neoliberal imperatives. To me, there's a certain irony when I see those kinds of imperatives in wellness spaces or from, you know, psychedelic talking heads. Seeing the way that I think some of the wellness or psychedelic leaders institutions, what have you, seek to use some of those impulses for greater coercive control is something both to be wary of.

And then I think also to, to raise questions of like, can that be subverted? And what would it look like to subvert that in the different contexts in which it crops up?

Candice Schutter: Yeah.

So you, you two, I'm assuming have a plan to fix all of this.

David Nickles: Oh, yeah. The whole shebangabang.

Lily Kay Ross: Oh God.

Candice Schutter: Top to bottom.

David Nickles: Lily and Dave cure the world. Sorry, bad joke.

Lily Kay Ross: No, thank you. Um, I think.

I mean, I, I will say that, you know, my own experience with psychedelics has [01:40:00] called on me to address things I didn't want to look at. And to develop the language to articulate things that I didn't know how to articulate before. And to feel my way through things that I would prefer not to, thank you very much. That's not to say that I overcame my resistance at all.

It's to say that I think for me that that's what these drugs taught me. And what they have called on me to do, in very real ways, is to take action in the world, that extends care to people who have experienced harm and to people who are in different ways vulnerable. And

some of that work is evident in Cover Story: Power Trip and related things. Some of that work is, is in other areas of my life that people don't have visibility into.

But, but the baseline is that, I have decided to put my energy and my resources into, [01:41:00] not going deeper into myself and improving myself and expanding myself, but to instead finding the courage and finding ways to reach out to others, to organize in the communities where I feel I can belong with others who share my values. To take action in the world in ways where the process itself, we are engaging with care towards each other. And also there is a laughter. And also there's shared interest and delight in learning together and from each other.

To me, that's where I'm interested in putting my resources and putting my energy at this point. And it's, a little phrase I thought of probably on drugs many years ago was that hope lives in pockets. I don't have much hope for humanity. Now less than ever. Um, but, um. But I think that that there are little pockets of people treating [01:42:00] each other in ways give me hope for the world. And so I'm just trying to live in the little pocket where I feel I belong and do what I can there. And you know, what else is there?

Candice Schutter: Wow. I can't think of a more beautiful way to wrap than that, Lily. That was so well said. And it's so, it lands in my body like a thud. Because, yeah, it's like doing this work and living in this country right now, frankly, can be really disheartening. And, uh, little pockets of hope that's something I'm going to carry with me. No pun intended. But that's, it's beautifully said.

And I, I just really, I can't thank y'all enough.

It's just so refreshing for me coming out of the spaces I'm coming out of to finally be discovering and connecting with people who want to have the critical dialogues that I've been yearning to have for years. And that took me a while to learn how to have [01:43:00] again, quite frankly. Because I had sort of taught myself not to go there for so many years. And, um, it's just incredibly and profoundly. It gives me a lot of hope to be in this little pocket today. It really does.

So thank you for everything that you've been doing. And thank you for being kind enough and generous enough to sit down with me today and to share with listeners. Cause this is, yeah, this is one of my favorite conversations I've had on this podcast.

So thank you.

David Nickles: Thanks for having us.

Lily Kay Ross: Thanks for having us.

David Nickles: It's been really great.

Lily Kay Ross: Yeah.

Candice Schutter: I'd like to once again thank Lily and Dave for their eye opening investigative work. Visit the show notes for a link to listen to the entire Cover Story: Power Trip series.

I'm not entirely sure what's next here on the main feed as we wrap this series. But if you want to keep exploring 'cult'ure series topics, head over to patreon.com/thedeeperpulse.

And if you'd like to send me a message for any reason, you can reach me at [01:44:00] thedeeperpulse.com/share.

Thanks again for listening, y'all.

Bye for now.