Questioning the symbolic boundaries between people who use illicit drugs

Michelle Van Impe
Ghent University
WHO ARE YOU?
“I am an interesting young woman who bores herself to delirium. And a comedian who can’t tell a joke ... I love to be me and yet I am different around others ... I am a good listener who hates to hear people speak ... I put people in their place and yet others walk all over me ... I am very opinionated and yet know nothing about the world ... I know how I feel but I am confused. I know what I mean but I confuse myself ... Honestly, I am too much to put into words.”

Erica Arenas, a Fed Up Honey, Cahill, Rios-Moore & Threatts, 2008: 111
“While the boundary defines the group it is the narrative that defines the boundary”

Copes, 2016: 209
“There’s all these different characteristics that, the stereotype of what a stoner is, and I’m not like that so it can’t be that bad. Like, it gives you the power to de-identify from that stereotype.”

Quote from respondent, Willis, 2016: 165
WHAT IS PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH?

- Those closest to the experience are the closest to the research
- PAR is about ACTION - ask a question you want to answer IN ACTION
- PAR is an affirmative process where you form a question that builds toward solutions
“Lot of the times for me the sense of distress around my drug use comes from a mismatch between my own experience of, yeah, my own experience and the interpretations or meanings that broader social cultural explanations put on my experience”

(Quote Lucy, interview, in Willis, 2016: 121)

“I find it kind of interesting. We’ve got a room full of opiate users here, and you’re, ‘Oh no, ‘ice’ is bad’ [...] Well why?”

(Quote Ursula, focus group with injecting drug users, in Lancaster, et al., 2015: 228)
“A good piece of qualitative work makes sense out of human differences in terms of human similarities. It shows the outsider how if he/she were an insider, he/she might very well act and think in similar ways. Since a large number of problems in the world can be explained by a lack of empathy, this goal strikes me as a worthy moral basis for the research.”

Agar (2002: 253)


