Who are we and where are we now?

Critical Participatory Action Research
with people who use illegal drugs

Michelle Van Impe
The origins of the study in a nutshell

• Essential role of symbolic boundary work in identity constructions and stigma management

• Maintaining and (re)producing stigmatising discourses through research and academic practice?

• Existential PhD-crisis (nr. 1): how to engage with this?

• Outcome: CPAR with a diverse team of ten PWUDs
Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR)

- Knowledge-building through interaction and by looking into other ways of ‘knowing’
- Heterogeneous team of ten PWUDs as co-researchers with a shared ownership of the study and data
- Action-oriented by working towards outcomes which are meaningful to the team members
- Critical theoretical and methodological orientation regarding ‘boundary work’ and conducting ‘CPAR’
Design of the CPAR-study

Three ongoing foci of reflection with a diverse team of PWUDS:

1) Collective process: group meetings, projects, activities, ...

2) Personal process of each team member: interviews, conversations, personal research/creative strategies, ...

3) An autoetnographical exploration by the PhD-candidate
Where are we now?

• *Ongoing recruitment-phase*
  - “Slow” process while establishing a diversity in gender is difficult

• *First personal interviews*
  - Tape-recorded and transcribed conversation *before* the team meets
  - Open(ening) talk – topics evolving around identity, stigma, experience, concerns and expectations of the CPAR-project
  - “Time-capusle”
“I think that sentences like ‘I am’ or ‘I am a’ are very powerful. Your words create your own reality [...] and I don’t really believe in ‘identity’. A person is a process, whom is always evolving and changing with every new experience [...] I really see it as something fluid [...] Drugs did play a role in this because I came across myself and I’ve noticed that ‘who I am’ is very dependent on the situation I find myself in.”

RA
“Everybody has his own story. Before you judge someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes first. Of course, unconsciously you always have prejudices, but I try to handle them very critically myself.”

Tamaroe
Expectations

“There’s stigmatisation on two sides and I’m curious what kind of reactions my discourse, or that of other psychedelic users, will bring about with people who don’t have any clue [...] they can be interested but also critical, which is a welcome thing when we can discuss it openly [...] because I hope I can adjust some of my own clichés as well.”

Olibrius
“It’s hard for me to imagine more specifically what I could do. That’s the reason I jumped at the chance to participate in this project because, it seemed to me, maybe I can help in this way because I would have no idea how somebody would listen to me because I’m just a drug user, I’m not a scientist, I don’t have a degree”.

Willy Henri

“We don’t have to expect too much from politics, society can do much as well.”

Tamaroe
“I’m curious about the evolution of the project, I’m curious what I will hear and see and if there will be something for which I can do more. I’m curious about the evolution of my own perception when, at the end of this project, I will listen again to the first conversation we’re having now, if I will be different as a person, if I will think differently about certain things or if some things in society will have changed. I don’t have any predefined wishes, I’m just curious.”

Willy Henri
Thank you for listening

M: “Any last words? Something you want to say to yourself in six months?”

RA: “Do you still like it? Is it chill? Is it like you hoped it would be? Did you learn something?”

M: “Those are the questions to yourself?”

RA: “Yes! Greetings from me, and do return them.” [RA and M laughing]