The Lowlands Session

Lowlands or The Low Countries is the historic name for the region. It owes its name to the lay of the land: flat, low-lying, and in many places at or even below sea level. The land may still be low but the level of thinking on mental health care and philosophy is not!

A growing number of initiatives are bringing both fields together in research, clinical practice, expertise by experience and education. The Lowlands Session puts a selection of these initiatives centre stage, with a diverse mix ranging from PhD projects to reading groups, and educational initiatives. This session is designed as an overview with different current projects and initiatives in the Netherlands.

How does it work?
The session consists of 6 pitches organised around a shared theme. Each speaker presents their current work or ideas at the intersection of philosophy and psychiatry. After the pitches, there is space for questions and discussion from the floor.

Moderator
Prof. dr. Sanneke de Haan
is professor of philosophy and psychiatry at Utrecht University, the Netherlands. She is known for her enactive approach to psychiatry and leads a NWO VIDI research project on the philosophical foundations of mental health care.

Speakers and presentations

Grietje Keller on Reading Groups
Grietje Keller organises Dutch Mad Studies reading groups since 2014 (via Stichting Perceval). In 2026, she published the book "Gekkenkennis. Inleiding in Mad Studies," a Dutch introduction into Mad Studies.

dr. Alan Ralston on Working Together
In his talk, dr. Alan Ralston will introduce the Dutch Foundation for Philosophy and Psychiatry (Stichting Filosofie en Psychiatrie), its aims, history, and current activities. The talk also addresses the foundation's connections with initiatives such as Too Mad To Be True, and explores a selection of works that received the Van Helsdingen Prize.

Bram Salman on the Values in Psychiatric Practice
Clinical decision-making is inherently value-laden. It requires both clinicians and patients to engage with normative questions about what matters, what constitutes improvement, and which goals are worth pursuing. However, these value negotiations extend far beyond the clinic. Psychiatric practice involves a diverse range of stakeholders whose values and interests actively shape clinical decisions. While traditional bioethical approaches articulate important ethical principles, they offer insufficient guidance in complex, real-world situations where values are often in conflict. Alternative frameworks, such as Values-Based Practice (VBP), have been developed to address these shortcomings. In this talk, I will present my recently initiated PhD research on this topic and discuss how empirical qualitative research can complement these existing theoretical frameworks.

prof. dr. Derek Strijbos and Afra Koks on Training and Learning
In this short presentation we provide an overview of current initiatives that aim to introduce philosophy to psychiatry residents in national and local training programs in The Netherlands. We present some opportunities and challenges that we have experienced so far and hope to exchange ideas during discussion.

Karlijn van Vlerken on Psychiatric Diagnoses and Classifications
Psychiatric diagnoses and classification are widely contested. Currently, the DSM struggles with including postpartum psychosis as a distinct diagnostic category. But how does that influence the experience of women that have had a psychotic episode after giving birth? Through a phenomenological, qualitative study, Karlijn van Vlerken explores the dynamic between classification and the first-person, subjective experience of postpartum psychosis.

Cato Benschop on Words and Narratives
Anyone dealing with mental suffering or psychological distress seeks words to make sense of that experience, whether they are the ones suffering, their loved ones, or their care providers. However, we know very little about which words and narratives work for whom. As part of the project "Diverse, disordered, or 'just me'?" Cato Benschop researches this question on the basis of interviews and philosophical analysis.