

PhD. Supervision as an Emotional Process – Critical Situations and Emotional Boundary Work

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ABSTRACT

This empirical study focuses on emotional processes in the supervision of doctoral students. It takes place in the context of an increasing focus on institutional regulation, time to completion, funding and skills development. It investigates emotional boundary work involved in the doctoral student's experiences, identity formation, and the relationship of this to the supervision process. Through in-depth interviews we aim to capture emotional elements in this identity development process. The research questions asked are: How do doctoral students deal with the fragile borderline between private life and work?; Are conflicts necessarily bad for the process?; and How do doctoral students deal with the emotional aspects of having to change supervisors? The interviews are ongoing, and to date the material consists of 10 interviews with the doctoral students, and these form the basis for this research article. The interviews are performed at different faculties and in different disciplines in a single Swedish university. The results indicate that an important part of the supervision process is connected to the emotional management of the relationship with the supervisor. Students learn how to handle changes in their supervisor's temperaments and moods, and how to develop skills in emotional management.

Keywords: Critical situations, emotional boundary work, Supervision

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INTRODUCTION

Since early research into and publications about doctoral education in the 1990s, (Delamont *et al.*, 1997) the administrative context, regulations, demands and academic

setting for the production of a PhD have changed dramatically. The changes vary between different academic disciplines, and between different countries, but overall, there is an increased focus on a more managerial, administrative and controlling system in line with the concern for a more widely agreed standard time to completion (Liedman, 2011). Today, more attention is also paid to the sometimes problematic nature of the doctoral learning process. In this context, there could be tensions between the formalisation of the academic system and the writing of a dissertation as a life project, where the latter has a clear and emotional side. Although the reforms emphasise effectiveness (funding for a limited time), control and regulations for doctoral students (individual study plan following an accepted proposal), the actual reasons for writing a dissertation could be quite different from or in addition to professional achievement. These other reasons are likely to be personal, and some of these could lead to stress if the research and dissertation produce difficulties, some of which could be to do with time to completion. Other stresses students experience could be concerned with insecurity of finance, or with lack of structure and direction in the supervision (Wisker, 2012). Formalisation of the academic system regulating doctoral studies might also be seen as an attempt to handle some of the emotional and personal elements of the identity processes of becoming a researcher and of supervision. With finance guaranteed throughout a process which is itself regulated and formalised by the individual study plan

and certain rights aligned to it, the doctoral student should have a more secure position than previously. This is particularly likely in the sciences, where doctoral students are more frequently taken into funded projects and are salaried. While financial security is achieved for some, it also seems that there can be increased expectations for what it means to be a doctoral student; so, as more is expected of students, more tensions and stresses can appear.

While many of the difficulties students experience could be managed through more efficient institutional processes, some of the difficulties seem to be related to the 'human factor', that is, to relational issues and communication. The doctoral process is a very personal, demanding and sometimes highly passionate process, involving the individual's biographical construction of identity and career. It is also often described as an anxious experience, where people oscillate between fear and excitement (Owler, 2010), and one where doctoral students experience anxiety and stress (Morris, & Wisker, 2011; Wisker, & Robinson, 2012b). There is, today, an increasing amount of research on the unique and complex process of writing a doctoral thesis (Dysthe, 2002; Murray, 2002; Hair, 2006;). There is also an expanding field of handbooks on how to write and/or supervise a doctoral thesis (Wisker, 2005, 2012a; Lee, 2011). Although this paper deals with emotional issues, communication problems, and the sometimes fragile and vulnerable interaction between supervisor and doctoral candidate, there is still a lack of research on

the emotional work involved in academic work (see, for example, Ogbonna, & Harris, 2004; Grant, 2010; Nutob, & Hazzan, 2011, Wisker, & Robinson, 2012b), especially work which connects research on the supervision process and the sociology of emotion.

The research reported here comprises qualitative research and case studies on supervision, with a specific focus on the doctoral student's situation, emotional reactions, and ways of handling criticism, conflict and emotional rupture in the supervision process. There is already extensive literature on different aspects of this process, and also on the construction of an identity as a doctoral student, but we are hoping to make it possible to understand the doctoral journey, and the relational and emotional aspects of supervision, as a part of the creative learning process (see also Li, & Seale, 2007, 2008; Halse, & Malfroy, 2010; Halse, 2011).

In this study we focus on the doctoral student's experience of critical situations, and of different aspects of the supervision process, rather than on the views of the supervisors, which could form the focus of further reporting. The study is primarily exploratory, and the ambition is to capture some central emotional processes involved in supervision work. This is an interactional and social- psychological study of human experiences, emotions and aspirations.

Through in-depth interviews we aim to capture the students' experiences and, in particular, the emotional content that emerges in the identity formation process,

which we argue is part of being supervised and undertaking doctoral research. We have chosen a number of critical situations where PhD students need to handle different types of conflict, involving emotional boundary work. Because there are many similar experiences reported in the data, we have chosen to focus on three typical situations, using a number of case studies from the investigation.

The research questions asked are:

- How do doctoral students deal with the fragile borderline between private life and work?
- Is conflict necessarily bad for the process?
- How do doctoral students deal with the emotional aspects of having to change supervisors?

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

This study is a part of a larger research project, and is carried out in cooperation between a team of researchers at the University of Gothenburg and a researcher at the University of Brighton. The empirical material in the larger project consists of 40 interviews with both students and supervisors. The interviews are ongoing, and the data collection will be finished during 2013. At present the material consists of 10 interviews with Swedish doctoral students, which form the basis for this research article. The research comprises an opportunistic sample composition of doctoral students from different faculties, disciplines, age groups and gender. This provides a

rich, broad mixture of doctoral student experiences and responses, although neither the sample nor the analysis, is stratified. The goal has been to achieve a varied and multifaceted sample, making it possible to discern many different experiences, attitudes and conceptions of what it means to be a doctoral student and how students experience and manage the emotional issues that arise from that process.

The interviews were conducted in different locations in a single university, mostly at the doctoral student's department. The length of the interviews varied, but usually the interview lasted for one hour. The focus of the interview was on different issues connected to being a doctoral student, including, for example, institutional arrangements, supervision, regulations, career expectations and other aspects influencing the process of doctoral work. In this article we focus in the main on the emotional aspects of this process.

A narrative approach and methodology is used in the analysis (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Gee, 2003; Clandinin, 2007; Wodak & Krzyzanowski, 2008; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The interviews focus on the doctoral students' emotional experiences and perceptions, and highlight their emotional boundary work and handling of critical situations.

The Sociology of Emotions and Supervision

Many authors have pointed out the unwillingness among academic teachers to approach emotional and 'problematic'

aspects of teaching, and this is equally true in relation to the doctoral students. For example, bell hooks has elaborated on this issue: "To some extent, we all know that whatever we address in the classroom subjects that the students are passionate about there is always a possibility of confrontation, forceful expression of ideas, or even conflict." (1994, p. 39). hooks goes on to disclose that during her twenty years of teaching, she has observed a grave concern among professors when students want the professors to see them as whole human beings, with personal lives, including having families and a variety of experiences. Taking this as a point of departure, we focus on the emotional processes involved in being a doctoral student.

The work doctoral students undertake with their supervisors during their research can be defined as emotional labour/work; emotional labour/work focuses on how people deal with feelings and emotional rupture, and how feelings are controlled and displayed. There are, often, quite distinct rules regarding the regulation of emotions, for example, when and for how long you can cry. We use the concept of *emotional work* to point towards certain aspects of the supervision process, especially the relationship between student and supervisor, and we apply the concept of *feeling rules* to focus on the more or less explicit regulation of individuals' emotional expressions (Hochschild, 1983). We explore the kind of feelings doctoral students perceive that they are allowed to express and in what ways their supervisors deal with emotional

outbursts, conflicts and personal problems. We focus in particular on the emotional boundary work involved in becoming and being a doctoral student, using the term ‘boundary work’ to frame certain moments in the learning process, especially how students handle *critical situations* such as dealing with conflict and drawing boundaries between work and private life (Giddens, 1991).

These concepts of emotional work and emotional boundaries are closely connected to Goffman’s idea about an *interaction order*. Emotional work takes place within the framework of an interaction order, which regulates and controls certain aspects of people’s display of feelings. This order depends on the assumption that people adhere to and follow certain unspoken feeling rules and codes. These rules regulate what is right and what feels right or wrong in encounters with other people. According to Goffman, interaction order is characterised by a certain moral ethos, an informed attitude of trust, respect and tact. This moral ethos helps people to maintain their emotional boundaries and to engage with others without losing their feeling for where to draw the line between private and public life. The interaction order, which focuses on micro-processes and everyday life, is tightly connected to a *wider institutional order*. Giddens (1991, 1992) has pointed out that Goffman lacks a conceptual framework connecting micro-processes with wider institutional rules and cultural systems (Layder, 2004). Our goal is to point towards how the micro-processes of emotional work

and emotional boundaries we have studied are linked to and affected by the increasing focus on administrative processes and skills development, in a context of emphasis on time to completion for doctoral students.

The main concepts we apply in our study are, thus, *emotional work*, *feeling rules* and *critical situations*, concepts which are all part of a wider framework described by Goffman as an interaction order. This is in one sense a highly structured order, but it is also characterised by possible breaches, moments of change and ruptures. We analyse a number of key situations, where the order suddenly breaks open, and allows for change. When this happens, it can lead to a fruitful learning process or to a partial breakdown of the interaction order and emotional damage. Consequently, these critical situations can give us valuable information and knowledge about the supervision process and what is involved in the process of ‘becoming a doctoral student’.

FINDINGS

The empirical and analytical part of this text is structured in *three sections*. We use quotations from the 10 interviews to go deeper into different types of critical situations and emotional boundary work. We are also exclusively focusing on the parts of the interviews where informants are describing different types of emotional work, and pointing at feeling, rules and possible transgressions of these rules. We do not intend to analyse the whole identity process as a chronological experience and

formation but instead, limit our focus in this article to formative and critical moments in the doctoral student's trajectory. Firstly, we look into the issue of support, energy and the importance of enthusiasm. Secondly, we investigate and focus on incidents where there is sudden conflict between supervisor and student, and finally, we focus on what happens when the doctoral student wants to change supervisors.

Being a doctoral student or being a supervisor can each be looked upon as versions of emotional work. While this can be rewarding and can make a positive contribution to the development of a confident, successful sense of identity for the student as a doctoral researcher, learning from opportunities, relationships and challenges along the doctoral journey, there can also be potential clashes, boundary disputes and difficulties, for example, with regards to balancing life and work. Students in the study noted took note of the keeping of boundaries between work and personal life and the stress of excessive expectations of their time commitments; difficulties over perceived lack of boundaries relating to appropriate places to be supervised and the potential for blurring aspects of the supervisor- student relationships that might arise ; emotional boundaries which can get stretched excessively and stressfully in relation to supervisors' behaviours and moods; managing real and potential conflict situations, and testing and changing boundaries when the supervisor- student relationship has to change , and the current supervisor is replaced with a new supervisor.

Keeping the Boundaries

The distinction between private life and work is often diffuse and difficult to establish and maintain in research. The doctoral students in our study describe specific kinds of *emotional boundary work* required to keep a certain distance from work, and from the whole academic system. There are often subtle, almost invisible expectations both that people should work hard and that it is not either normal or necessary to establish and maintain strict boundaries between private life and work. Fulfilling these expectations might work for a while; indeed it seems to be easy to be drawn into this particular ethos and lifestyle. However, when personal life and this work ethos collide, many of the everyday elements of life tend to stop functioning, and this can lead to an emotional or mental breakdown, and potential burn-out. This is vividly described by Anna, one of the interviewees:

It was the first time in my life I was on sick leave for stress-related causes. I had worked really hard for two or three years, and I was exhausted. Then my mother died and at that time everything just burst and I was away for a while. Thereafter, it took a while for me to come back, and start to work again. I had constant headache for three months. It has been difficult too for people here to accept that I can just work for forty hours a week. The expectation here is that you work all the time (IT, Interview 1).

The expectations of the system, and the all-pervading but at the same time quite effective work code, are difficult to handle, and the collision between private life and emotional status and the demands from the 'system' can cause critical situations for doctoral students. This student actually brought up the question of demands and stress with her supervisor, and felt that he listened and supported her in her claim for a better and more manageable work situation.

Another kind of emotional border work, also located in the difficult boundary between private life and work, is found in the following example. This doctoral student tells us that her main supervisor often wanted to meet for supervision at her home. Even though at one level the student found this unproblematic, she had great problems with this at another level. She touched on the subject of sexual harassment, not that she experienced it during supervision, but that she was aware it presented a potential issue.

I want a professional relation, but of course that is what everyone wants, right. But when we have been working with our data, I have met one of my supervisors a lot. We have actually met a lot at her home, and people can have many different opinions on that. It has not become a problem, but at the same time I feel that we are crossing a boundary. It becomes more private, when meeting at home. /.../ Sometimes I also felt a bit uncomfortable (Medicine, Interview 2).

These two examples show how difficult it is to maintain and feel secure with the construction of boundaries between the private and public sphere. It is clear how the feeling rules get mixed up, and how the doctoral students start to feel unsure about themselves. They feel that there is something wrong with the system or how the supervisor acts, but also feel it is difficult to challenge existing codes and to bring up and discuss the problem. In these situations, the power relation between supervisor and doctoral students becomes apparent. The underlying structures make it difficult to question certain circumstances when based on a *feeling* that something is wrong.

Supervisor and Student Boundaries, Expectations, Struggling and Growing

The relation to the doctoral supervisor may be uncomplicated – and there are cases like that in our material – but often there are issues to deal with, not least concerning demands, mood changes and how to deal with potential conflict. We focus on two cases as examples of how doctoral students deal with these issues. The first case clearly illustrates that there are many different psychological levels present in the supervision relationship. This doctoral student draws a clear and distinct parallel between her father and her female supervisor. A part of the supervision process involves handling affective and angry behaviour, which is also a form of emotional boundary work, where doctoral students have to learn how to handle a supervisor's bad temper. The next example shows how

the student has to mobilise her own personal knowledge and skills in handling a ‘parent’s’ dysfunctional behaviour.

She has a reputation of being quite emotional, and a bit angry. It has been rumoured about her having conflicts with all her PhD students, and so on. Maybe that makes me relax a bit, and think it is all about her /.../ I think I can handle her quite well, because she reminds me a lot about my father, he can also lose his temper, so I think I can handle this, yes (Social Science, Interview 5).

During a four- or sometimes five-year process it is probably impossible to avoid conflicts and emotional turbulence. Our findings also clearly show how emotional boundary work is an important and central part of the supervision process. Sometimes conflicts and emotional outbursts can lead to improvements in the relationship between supervisor and student.

Then I told her that she was pressing me, bloody bitch, but then I thought this is really about me, and my history, different things making me act like this. So, then I was quite open, and told her about my personal things and hang-ups, and she was reacting in a good way, giving me good feedback. After this meeting other things has come up, but I trust her, and even though we had more ups and downs, I kind of

stuck to her. She has respected me and I feel confidence in her (Social Science, Interview 1).

This case illustrates how hard feelings can turn into respect and a good working relationship. The supervisor becomes a ‘partial and temporary psychotherapist’, a ‘good parent’. In cases where conflicts are not solved, but rather buried and not talked about, it could affect the work process in a negative way. The culture at the department is a crucial condition for discussing conflicts or disagreements. In our material, we can see examples where doctoral students decided not to talk about problems because they were unsure about the consequences, based on conceptions about what is right and wrong at the department.

However, conflict is not related to the relationship between supervisor and doctoral student. In the interviews, both supervisors and doctoral students indicated how the academic system had undergone fundamental changes over the past decades, and how these changes affect research, supervision and the relationship between supervisor and doctoral student. An older system where doctoral students were accepted without financing and where the writing of a dissertation could last for decades has been replaced by a new and perhaps more bureaucratic system. Financing is now required for admission, and an individual study plan has to be formulated and reformulated every year, regulating the process toward ‘disputation’, the defence of the thesis once submitted

for examination. An increasing emphasis on competition between researchers, institutes and universities for funding has also affected supervision. Doctoral students (and researchers in general) are under greater pressure to produce and publish articles (in English) in high-ranked journals. This also affects how the doctoral students comprehend their work, their relation to the supervisor and the development of an identity as a researcher. One of the doctoral students expressed this when talking about her relationship with her supervisor and the academic system:

There is less room for reaching an answer through discussion. Because that is how it is, through arguments, through the exchange of thoughts and by saying that you are wrong. Yes, but show me that I am wrong... /.../ My supervisor is 60-something, and I suppose one could say that he is "old school" with a different view on research and what it should look like at Swedish Universities. Conservative, one could say, another ideal of what knowledge ought to be, a view that I share with him. So neither me, nor my supervisor regard the publication of articles and this as important, but rather that I should think, think wisely and eventually be finished. /.../ I do not want another supervisor, as you said, the chemistry works between us and we both seem to be pleased

with the informal structure. (Social Sciences, Interview 4).

The example stresses how a supervisor and doctoral student can share not only the project of writing a dissertation, but also more fundamental apprehensions of what research should be about, that are subtle and emotionally charged. In this case, both the supervisor and doctoral student identified themselves and the idea of research in opposition to the ongoing changes in the academic system, which are seen as instrumental, controlling and less creative. The doctoral student's aversion to these changes had reached a point where she questioned her future at the university. Rather than being a representation of the academic system, the supervisor stood up for (traditional) values. In this relationship, the supervisor has become a mentor and an ally. The supervision is described as informal with few, if any, planned meetings.

Changing Supervisors and Bringing Back the Energy

The relationship with a supervisor is an ongoing, long, and in many cases, central relationship for doctoral students. Many students are satisfied with supervision, and have few complaints. However, international research suggests that there are also a number of students who feel dissatisfied with different aspects of the supervision process. Some of this can be theorised in terms of the work of Manathunga (2007) and Grant (2008), who upset the cosy dyad

of student and supervisor and identify the potentially problematic hierarchical relations, describing it in postcolonial terms as a 'master-slave' relationship. It is also not that unusual that doctoral students change supervisors. This can be a quick and unproblematic process, but it can also involve hurt feelings and broken relationships. There has been little research into the process of actually changing supervisors but Wisker and Robinson (2012b, 2012c) look at the possible stresses and emotional and intellectual development when what they term as doctoral 'orphans' change supervisors, both from the point of view of the students and that of the supervisors.

In this section we will not focus on the actual process, and all the technical matters connected to changing a supervisor, but instead, we will turn our attention to how supervision and emotional energy are linked when students change supervisors. Sometimes it seems that when a supervision process is drained of all energy and has come to a standstill, the subject of changing supervisors seems to hang in the air:

We never quarrelled, or had different opinions, but rather I felt that we had come to a kind of standstill. It was not exactly hyper-creative /.../ And when we were at a conference, all of a sudden, my supervisor said, maybe you should change supervisor, and try R instead /.../ Afterwards I was bit shocked, don't

*you want to supervise me any more?
I was in a precarious situation
(Social Science, Interview 3).*

In this case both the supervisor and the student felt that it was time to change something, but at the same time the supervisor left his student alone with her thoughts regarding the consequences of this decision. After a while, the student felt comfortable with the idea and process of changing supervisors, and the new relationship turned out well. The change was explained as something positive for the doctoral student, indicating that her previous and her new supervisor had an interest in her work. However, in retrospect, the doctoral student felt that the explanations given to her were, at least to some extent, false (a change motivated by an interest from the new supervisor). This shows how emotionally charged a change in supervisors can be, even when there seems to be an agreement that something is not working and a new arrangement could help improve matters.

The next case is also an example of a successful change of supervisors. This woman student describes how the new supervisor had brought new energy into her project:

Since I have got a new supervisor everything works out quite well. I have been so happy after our sessions, Oh yes! What is this all about? I think it is the way my supervisor have followed my

thoughts, and then helped me to change perspectives and see other aspects of my work /.../ It is important for me that my supervisor can help me to bring in larger perspectives, and also help me to connect to ongoing and hot research (Humanities, Interview 2).

She feels happy and understood. (is this one of the beautiful moments?) Supervision is here described in emotional terms, as bringing energy into the relationship and project. The supervisor has an intellectual function, but the most successful moments of the supervision process are described in terms of happiness and energy.

Finally, one more case of a failed supervision process:

I felt that my supervisor had a way of approaching academic work and research that did not synchronize with my own way of relating to this. After our supervision sessions I just felt totally exhausted and drained, and it was so negative. It was not primarily my need for emotional support, but my need of scientific guidance that resulted in disappointment with my supervisor. I feel that it is important that the supervisor show an interest in science and scientific work. It is supposed to be fun and a positive experience (Humanities, Interview 1).

This student describes not a lack of emotional support, but of intellectual guidance. At the same time, we would like to point out that emotional support, energy and intellectual guidance seem to be closely interconnected here. Working on science was “supposed to be fun and a positive experience,” states this doctoral student. She also succeeded in changing supervisors.

This highlights one of the points we want to make about the supervision process, from the point of view of the students. The cases reported in this section are all successful ones, where the student has changed supervisors and regained energy and emotional support. There are probably also a fair number of instances where this is not the case, when people get stuck and try to get by and manage. Using the concept of *fateful moments* we can discuss the important decision of actually changing supervisors. Sometimes this involves courage, and it can turn out to be a complicated business. The student could be seen as a troublemaker and he/she may feel that he/she has jeopardised a future career at the institution. Also, there are no guarantees that a suitable new supervisor can be found who will be able and willing to take on the supervision in a successful way. However, all our cases here have positive outcomes, and show that when the students perform this change of supervisors, they also describe the continuation of the supervision process in quite bright terms, showing how this process also involves emotional labour and relational skills, and if well handled, can lead to success in the doctoral project.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this article has been to focus on ways in which emotions and emotional work are involved in the supervision process, from the point of view of the students. We have exclusively looked into how 10 Swedish doctoral students deal with different kinds of emotional boundary work. The purpose of the article is not to generalise, although there are some patterns in the behaviour that are reported in our findings. Rather, the aim of this paper is to extract and study some interesting and highly relevant processes and situations related to our main focus. From this, we offer starting points for consideration of the ways in which emotional boundary work links effective research learning for doctoral students with the particular experience of working with supervisors (or changing supervisors), in the new context of stricter regulations of the doctoral study processes and more fixed times to completion.

In this article the concepts of *emotional boundary work* and *critical situations* developed by Giddens (1991) and Goffman (1967) have been in focus. As supervision of doctoral students necessitates long relationships, often stretching over four years or more, during which time many different things can occur. A life-long and positive relationship might be developed, but there are also things which might go wrong, and one reason for that might be that the relationship is not an equal one. Still, even if it is unequal, it is a relationship between adults, and some of the responses of doctoral students indicate emotional

tensions, difficulties and behaviour that enable both students and supervisors to cope with developing and maturing or changing relationships, as expected in adult behaviour.

The formalisation of the academic system could be regarded as an attempt to handle emotional aspects, where a more planned process can help scaffold the research learning and writing. On the other hand, however, there seem to be certain risks aligned with such an effort. For some students the idea of writing a PhD thesis means something more personal and emotional than what is indicated by a regulated process. If such a process is based on other preferences and concepts of knowledge, the formalisation can be a restraint rather than a contribution to a more secure position. It is also apparent that the supervisor often plays a crucial role when it comes to handling emotional and personal aspects in the supervisor /-student relationships as part of the customary experience of a doctoral research student. We argue that emotional elements of the research learning process are not replaced by regulation, and at the same time, they should not be in opposition to it; rather, they can be strengthened and managed by a mixture of a sensitive, planned process coupled with open discussion surrounding aspects of supervision that aim to support doctoral students.

In this article we have focused on a number of critical situations such as misunderstandings, supervisors behaving like authoritarian parents and the changing

of supervisors by doctoral students. The latter is a highly sensitive matter and a critical moment in the work of a doctoral student.

The cases presented here are all stories with positive outcomes. It is probably more difficult to trace and get access to failed processes and stories about broken relationships. Overall, what we can see is how students experience the break and change as a positive event, which puts new energy into supervisory interactions. Emotional support is talked about in different ways, but one way of addressing this is to describe, as these individuals do, how there is first a lack of energy and how this is replaced by a reloading and re-energising of the project. These moments can be described as critical situations, changing and improving the conditions for the supervision process.

We have also focused on how the delicate line between private life and work is drawn and defended. It seems that this boundary is fragile and sometimes hard to uphold. We have analysed two examples where the boundary is broken, with negative consequences for the students. There seems to be a great need for boundary work, and sometimes the *feeling rules* are mixed up in the border areas, in between private life and work. For many doctoral students the length of the research project, and so the supervisory relationship, means that they develop more or less personal-professional relationships with their supervisors. At the same time, it seems to be important to keep certain barriers and boundaries. An important part of the supervision process

is connected to the emotional management of the relationship with the supervisor. Students learn how to handle changes in their supervisor's temperament and moods and how to develop skills in emotional management. But sometimes this work breaks down, and there is a rupture, and sometimes the whole process is turned into a painful experience, which the doctoral student is keen to end. Such incidents indicate how important it is to discuss and analyse these fragile, diffuse, but important processes.

It is hoped that our early findings about this emotional work can be of use to doctoral students and supervisors in their own supervision relationships.

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