Identity formations of doctoral students on the route to achieving their doctorate

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Research suggests that identity development is a crucial dimension of the doctoral student experience. This study explores what identity formations doctoral students exhibit in the doctoral journey and how these formations affect their experiences in the process of achieving a doctorate. The methodology employed was within the qualitative paradigm and adopted an inductive narrative approach to investigate the experiences of doctoral students. The article reinforces the claim that supervision is crucial to doctoral students' development of a professional scholarly identity. Its importance is inherent in better understanding the challenges and critical points of departure faced by doctoral students in the process of establishing themselves as academics. It brings to light the issue of supervisors' role in enhancing motivation and independence and also the role of academic communities in identity development of doctoral students.

Introduction

Identity development of doctoral students entails challenging and emotional experiences such as isolation, alienation and loneliness. The process of doing a doctorate is their first step into becoming academics ((McAlpine & Amundsen, 2009). In this process they are faced with issues concerning autonomy and independence and a quest for competence (Jones, 2013). This could be a critical factor in the students' route in doing a doctorate (Jazvac-Mrtek, 2009; Baker & Pifer, 2011). However, they are not alone in this experience. They are in a supervisory relationship which is a process of negotiation and part of identity formation. This could be critical in enhancing successful participation in the doctoral community (Hall & Burns, 2009). This study explores what identity formations doctoral students exhibit in the doctoral journey, and how these formations affect their experiences in the process of achieving a doctorate (Baker & Lattuca, 2010).

Theoretical perspectives

The nature of identity has raised fundamental queries among researchers in the late 20th century (Henkel, 2005). It has been argued that there is no 'fixed, or permanent identity' … Identity is a 'moveable feast … formed and transformed continuously' (Hall, 1987, p. 598). Hall (1990) argued that authors writing on these topics embody multiple possible identities that might be contradictory. Gee expanded on this idea and claimed that a person's identity is connected to how they are positioned in society; hence it is bound to change, depending on the situation and the context (Gee, 2006). These notions are articulated in Day's definition of identity as 'a composite consisting of competing interactions between personal, professional and situational factors' (Day et al., 2007, p. 106).

Yet, individuals control their identity by constructing 'who they want to become, based on their social and academic goals' (Hall & Burns, 2009, p. 52), or by filtering identities to match their beliefs in what will benefit them most in a particular context (Bullough, 2005). Thus identity construction is 'a continuous and reflexive process of internal-external dialectic of identification' (Jenkins 1996, p. 20; Leshem, 2016, p. 136), or as Akkerman and Meijer defined it, 'multiple I-positions' (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011, p. 315).

Another aspect which was developed by Holland et al (1998) and then adopted by Swennen et al (2010) is the anthropological approach which conceives identity as 'figured worlds'. These worlds are 'socially produced and culturally constituted activities' (Holland, et al. 1998, pp.40-41). They argued that individuals live in different 'figured worlds' which represent processes of transitions they experience and might not overlap. Identity is therefore represented differently in these worlds bound by place, status and power in that particular world.

Mezirow's theory of 'transformative learning' defined identity as a shift in frame of reference (Mezirow, 1996). Illeris elaborated on Mezirow's definition, by looking at it through a wider perspective of identity which includes cognitive, emotional and social dimensions, and is also 'the link between the individual and its practical, cultural, social, and societal environment' (Illeris, 2014, p.161). Illeris further proposed that motivation is central to identity formation but cannot be enforced. There must be a strong motivation for transforming elements of identity, however, it can be overwhelming when it is regressive rather than progressive. Both processes can be seen as a learning transformation (Illeris, 2014).

In the process of the doctoral journey, doctoral students are at a transition phase of developing new roles (Cast, 2003) and forming new identities (Leshem, 2017). In this transition phase, students might be more sensitive to the 'self', and also, how they are defined by others' expectations (Colbeck, 2008). They might accept or reject roles expected of them (Stryker & Burke, 2000), but accepting a role would change their internalised identity and cognitive framework of how to interpret new situations (Colbeck, 2008). This may have an effect on external behaviours (Colbeck, 2008) and affect the interaction between the supervisor and the doctoral student (Leshem, 2016). The transition state might also create conflict between identities and expectations, and lead to a feeling of stress (Colbeck, 2008), 'being stuck', unable to make progress, and 'akin to a blockage in understanding' (Trafford & Leshem, 2009, p.311). The student might experience 'uncertainty about the identity of self and purpose' (Meyer & Land, 2006, p. 22) and in van Gennep's terms, 'liminality' (van Gennep, 1960). Meyer and Land (2006) described it as a 'threshold' to new understandings. This is reinforced by Wisker et al. who described the process as 'identity construction, rites of passage, tensions and resolutions' (Wisker et al., 2010, p. 16). Passing through this threshold the student 'acquires transformed capabilities' (Trafford & Leshem, 2009, p. 311) from which there is no return to the pre-liminal experience (Keefer, 2015; Leshem, 2016). However, this is an important developmental phase where change takes place and can influence one's identity as a developing researcher (Trafford & Leshem, 2009).

The development of an identity as a professional independent scholar and researcher is crucial for a doctoral student (Council of Graduate Schools, 2005). However, as already mentioned, the student embodies multiple identities when entering the doctoral journey and some identities will inevitably be prioritised by the extent of commitment to each identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000). This in itself is a transition from one professional role to another, and might be quite a challenge for doctoral students who enter the doctoral journey possessing already well-defined and appreciated professional identities. They might discover that the assets they bring with them are not as respected as they had expected (Hall & Burns, 2009).

In the same vein, students enter the supervisory relationship with preconceived ideas of a researcher identity. These ideas might not comply with supervisor's values, or remain implicit in the supervisory relationship (Leshem, 2016). In this form of relationship, students might adopt identities which cause them to experience marginalisation and dissatisfaction (Robinson, 1999). Thus the interaction between the supervisor and the student, and the style of supervision, have a powerful effect on students' engagement, motivation and retention (Ives & Rowley, 2005). Both supervisors and students need to identify their perceptions of 'researcher identity' and how they negotiate between their embodied identities. When the supervisory relationship is based on negotiation and dialogue, where the student can construct a researcher identity with the help of the supervisor, it will bring about productive professionals (Hall & Burns, 2009). This is supported by Pyhalto et al. who noted that differences of perceptions between doctoral students and their working environment may even influence students' completion of the degree process (Pyhalto, Vekkaila & Keskinen, 2012).

These theoretical perspectives formed the research framework; thus, in order to learn about doctoral students' experiences in the doctoral journey through the lens of identity, the following research questions were derived:

- What identity formations do doctoral candidates manifest in the doctoral journey?
- How do these identity formations affect doctoral students' experiences in the process of doing a doctorate?

This study enhances the understanding of the development and shaping of doctoral students' scholarly identity and its effect on the supervisory relationship.

Methodology

In order to investigate the experiences of doctoral students, this study adopted an inductive narrative approach (Leshem, 2016, 2017). The epistemological foundation is that in storying ourselves it is possible to 'remake experience and to construct identities through our own and others' stories' (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p.252). The use of interviews allowed the participants to tell about their perceived realities of doing a doctorate, and 'to understand their own life… to learn who they are and who they are becoming' (Laboskey & Cline, 2000, p. 36). However, the study represents personal

narratives 'situationally rooted in cultural contexts, scenes and events that give meaning to action' (Bauman, 1986, p. 3). The narratives embody individual experiences and they do not 'mirror the wider world' (Bold, 2012, p. 30; Ye & Edwards, 2017) Thus the aim of the study was not to generalise about profiles of doctoral students but to gain insights on the lived experiences (Merriam, 1998) and to offer insights that might be further investigated by other researchers in other contexts (Leshem, 2017).

Participants

The study took place in Israel and South Africa during 2015-2016. A purposeful sample included ten doctoral students who were at different stages in their doctoral studies. Five students were colleagues of the researcher and familiarity facilitated access. The other five students were participants in a professional development workshop conducted by the researcher. Two students were at their final stages and near submission of their thesis; the other students were midway in their process. The students represented different disciplinary fields in the social sciences and were on PhD programs in different institutions supervised by different supervisors. Although the students came from two different countries, the aim of the study was not to compare between the two contexts but to provide multiple perspectives and thicker data on lived experiences of doctoral students.

Methods

Interviews of 60-70 minutes were conducted with each student who told their personal stories relating to issues of the reason for embarking on a doctorate and experiences along the journey - supervisory relationships, critical incidents, transitions, dilemmas and conflicts (Leshem, 2017). The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Given ethical considerations, all names assigned are pseudo names and details that could reveal identity of participants were changed or omitted. The participants were notified that data would be used in published work and have given their informed consent. All the ten stories were analysed to arrive at the journey routes identified. However, due to lengthy narratives of the candidates and the importance of providing thick description (Geertz, 1973) and rich contextual detail (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002), five stories were chosen to be presented in the article and represent the routes. The cases were chosen on the basis of their richness of description.

Analysis

The analysis draws on inductive recursive cycles of reading and identifying themes of identity related to students' experiences (Creswell, 2013). The first phase entailed the analysis of each story as a separate case. The description of the case of each participant is presented and then followed by interpretation based on the theoretical perspectives. In the second phase, a cross case analysis was conducted and three different journey routes were identified and further analysed to identify main themes within the routes, to arrive at profiles of doctoral students on their route to achieving a doctorate.

David

David is in his late forties. He was a secondary school teacher for a number of years and is currently a lecturer at an education college. He is in his final stages of his Ph.D. journey. He is married and has three children. Being a 'doctor' was not his dream life. He stated:

> I am a teacher more than a researcher, it does not fit my personality.

He decided to embark on the venture, as he wished to gain tenure at the college. When I asked David for a metaphor which depicted his doctoral journey, he responded without hesitation:

> *Germinal*, Emile Zola's book on the coalminers in the 19th century! I am deep inside now and I have changed! This venture has shortened my life not in a year or two but in a life time!

David explained that in essence he is a very organised person who favours a systematic time schedule. The process does not align with his expectations and personality. Feedback is delayed and when it finally arrives, the changes are endless and he has to start all over again.

> It is like a vicious circle. I am 46 years old, I cannot change. It paralyses me and right now I am stuck!

He added that a doctorate is something '*unhealthy*' for him and he would not recommend it to his best friends. When I asked him to elaborate on what had changed after all, he responded that he had experienced deep learning but,

> ... to sit for days in the library and talk with articles, is interesting, yet not my cup of tea. One has to go on with his life. I would have never embarked on this journey had I known how it would affect my life.

David explained that he was pushed to the edge doing something he does not like. He usually likes to interact with people and the loneliness of sitting in the library and being all alone in this journey has destroyed his joy of life.

He described his relationship with the supervisor as '*ambivalent*'. She is a very pleasant person but he does not feel she is a guide who has influenced his way of thinking:

> ... on a personal level, I really like her, but professionally, she has not given me what I needed. I feel that we have both failed in establishing an effective relationship.

He is sure that his supervisor might also be frustrated at the unsuccessful process, but she never shared her feelings with him. He concluded:

> She might have learned a lot about me, but not with me.

David admitted to be an enduring person. When things do not come easy, he perseveres. He is a slow reader and yet chose history as his discipline although it entails a lot of reading:

> I turned it into an advantage and likewise in the doctorate, but it seems not to work that well'. [David concludes] I do not feel I am wiser but I might be more knowledgeable. I wish to contribute to society and most doctorates do not! As a teacher in school, I can have a tremendous influence on people. When I finish my doctorate I might make a significant contribution to knowledge, but I am more interested in making a contribution to society at large.

Interpretations

In David's story, we recognise two main dimensions of his figured worlds: 'the self', as an internal world and the 'doctorate' as the external world. Each of these worlds exposes a web of identities which are constantly on the move.

The internal world of 'self' includes David's core identity. He is a family provider, a teacher at heart, organised, resilient and social. The external world of the doctorate manifests itself in activities which go counter to David's internal world. He feels that he cannot provide for his family, according to how he is positioned by the world around him (Gee, 2006; Colbeck, 2008). He likes to work with people but the role identity of a doctoral student assigned to him by the academic community obliges him to sit in the library and 'talk to articles'. This isolates him from his social environment and creates feelings of loneliness and bitterness. He feels that he is missing out on things, as he would like to be a teacher and contribute to society, rather than to the academic world of knowledge. He is resilient, but feels stuck, frustrated and at a dead end, on the verge of giving in; yet, he has changed and experienced deep learning. In his relationship with his supervisor, he is divided between his personal appreciation for her as a 'nice person' and her mal-functioning as a supervisor on the professional level. This creates an odd sense of closeness and yet detachment.

David's story exhibits multiple I-positions (Akkerman & Mekjer, 2011) which are in conflict and are pulled in different directions (Jenkins, 1996). He feels that he was pushed, by force of situational factors into a world which does not align with his personality and dreams of what he wants to become (Gee, 2000/2001). He experiences an identity conflict when the internal voices of his core identity and the external voices of the doctorate world create contrasting expectations and thus a feeling of stress (Colbeck, 2008). This feeling of uncertainty where David is 'wavering between two worlds… neither here nor there… betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed…' (Turner, 2011, p. 167) may exhibit features of 'doctoral liminality' (Keefer, 2015).

Ann

Ann is in her early forties, has five children and is currently teaching in a high school and also lecturing at an education college. She is in the third year of her PhD. Ann is a

researcher at heart. She will always look for something to investigate. When Ann was studying for her masters in physics, her supervisor suggested that she should proceed directly to a doctorate as she was an outstanding student. However, Ann wanted to be a teacher, started teaching in a high school and got immersed into teaching children with special needs. This experience enchanted her and evoked lots of questions, which later resulted in her research topic. Ann went for her love for education. She found a supervisor in the field who found her topic interesting, but the supervision contract had not been finalised. She said:

> Let's start and see how things proceed, we will then decide whether we adopt your theory or mine.

Ann was quite complacent about it. She delved into her supervisor's books and participated in her sessions.

> This was enlightening! I loved her way of thinking, her thoroughness, her unambiguous approach. I suddenly found what I needed most.

Ann explained that her supervisor accepted her as she was. They worked as a team:

> I am a thinking person, I tend to change my mind quite often… at one instance I felt she was going to give up on me… she is quite an opinionated person and might have quite extreme reactions, yet she is open, sensitive and is able to withdraw and say: you were right and I was wrong. Our relationship has ups and downs and we both laugh about it but out of appreciation.

Ann admitted to have learned a lot from it. She has been using many of her interpersonal skills as a teacher to manoeuver relationships with her supervisor and critical friends. She described her journey as a 'learning adventure':

> I am not sure how I see myself: a researcher? a teacher? a lecturer? I like them all equally. But whatever I choose to do, the doctorate will help me, as I am learning all the time. It is sheer pleasure, amazing, dynamic and I am determined to enjoy it all along.

Her supervisor urges her to write and publish, but Ann is reluctant:

> I want to enjoy myself. I do not want to enter any whirlpool of tension.

And yet, she is now writing jointly with her supervisor, enjoying it tremendously and quite flattered to be her supervisor's co-author.

Interpretation

The route to a doctorate was inevitable for Ann. She embarked on the doctorate due to her investigative nature of a 'researcher'. However, when she had to decide what her area of investigation would be her identity as a 'teacher-researcher' and her supervisors' contrasting expectations of a 'physics researcher' caused some confusion. However, Ann

filtered her identities to match her belief in what will benefit her desire most. At this stage, Ann's identity as a 'teacher researcher' became the salient identity.

Ann reached the 'Aha' moment when she found a supervisor who 'suited' her personality and accepted her as she was and also captured Ann's enthusiasm by her knowledge. They often disagreed but learned to accept each other. Both Ann and her supervisor found the contradictions challenging. In a sense, they were different and yet so much alike. Ann was granted the independence of thought she needed and yet, the supervisor as the 'authority of knowledge' was always in the back of her mind. They both identified the strengths and weaknesses of each other and turned it into a mutual learning process. Ann embodies many identities, as she mentions above, but while Stryker (1968) stated that individuals organise their identities in a hierarchy by level of commitment, so that one identity is more salient than others, Ann developed a sense of shared meanings across the different identities and integrated them all (Burke, 2003).

Kate

Kate is in her late forties. She is a historian who was working in an academic institution as an administrator. She is married, with three teenage children and is in the initial stages of her PhD journey.

> A doctorate was not on my agenda. However, when I finished my masters and took a break from academic work I started to miss it. I was captivated by my topic of investigation. I felt there is much more to be investigated. I submitted my doctoral proposal and received a lot of praise and encouragement.

Kate is doing her doctorate for her own self-satisfaction. Her enthusiasm is outstanding.

> I feel like I am on a roller coaster. There are days when there is a breakthrough and there are days when I am quite 'down' as I am unable to express my ideas properly, or I do not exactly find what I am looking for.

Kate finds it difficult to cope concurrently as a mother, an academic administrator and a researcher. Her doctorate though has become almost more important to her than her work:

> The doctorate fills me emotionally and intellectually.

She identifies herself as 'a researcher', though she embodies multiple identities:

> I am a historian who discovers new historical events which have never been investigated. There are lots of mines in history. This is an enormous challenge. It is a feeling of elation, happiness, success and a huge contribution to humanity. I always feel I am giving up on something… time with the family. They are very disappointed when I do not join them on weekend trips. At work, I also feel that I am not the same person. I am less involved emotionally. The doctorate has gained my utmost attention and significance. These are very delicate balances that I have to cope with and do not know how.

Her relationship with her supervisor is infrequent. She initiates the meetings and they entail mainly encouraging feedback. She has not figured out how to manage the relationship with her supervisor because she does not feel that her supervisor is needed at this stage of her doctorate. She feels that the considerable feedback she gets from her peers in the doctoral forums at the university and also from presentations at conferences cater for her needs. When she feels she is at a blurry stage, the supervisor puts things in order. Kate is a perfectionist and is still unsure of herself. She needs things to be perfect before sharing.

To my question of how she sees herself when she is awarded the PhD, Kate responded:

> I am not thinking about the future. I am enjoying the present. I will not continue with my current job but right now the process is the challenge and I avoid thinking about what I'll do next.

Interpretation

Kate entered the doctoral journey out of internal motivation. She was purely interested in her research. She was avid to discover why there was this gap in knowledge and why has nobody ever before investigated something which, in her opinion, could shed light on a crucial concept in history. Kate struggles to balance between her multiple role identities within the family, her social position at work and her doctoral identity as a researcher. Her core identity as a *'perfectionist'* inhibits her from approaching her supervisor on a regular basis and she finds socialisation with other academic groups enriching. As part of Kate's role identity she holds high expectations towards herself and likewise towards her supervisor who in her internal schemata is classified as the 'know-all expert' to whom she would refer only when she feels *'it is perfect'*. Yet, this state of mind grants Kate independence which allows her to maintain the pace that suits her personality. Kate's functioning in different role identities creates a feeling of temporariness and transience. She seizes the moment of enjoyment of 'what it means to be who one is' (Burke, 2003, 1), but her hierarchy of commitment has changed. She is in the process of crafting her professional identity.

Loraine

Loraine is in her fifties. She was an elementary school teacher for 15 years and is currently working at an education college. She has submitted her thesis and waits for the results.

> I feel like Alice walking down holes and tunnels and secret alleys not knowing where they lead to and if they ever end. On the road there are stops and hitches and only at the end of the tunnel I see the lighthouse.

Loraine embarked on her doctorate out of practical reasons – to keep her job. She likes to learn at her leisure time, but not under pressure. Loraine does not feel she is a researcher!

> I am only now starting to understand what research is. I feel that this is not a field I feel comfortable with although I am independent all along the journey. I did not know how

> to use my two supervisors. We met twice a year and the meetings were always very pleasant, but I felt confused. They each worked differently but always gave me the feeling that I am on the right track. What bothered me was the contribution… so, what will I say at the end… I felt I had so many gaps which I could not fill. They urged me to continue writing.

Loraine has learned a lot from the process. She is still undecided about her ability to write.

> I never thought I had something important to say… I look around and I see people talking eloquently about things they do not know much. I envy them! I have so much to say, but am afraid to talk.

She wants to see herself as a researcher, but this would never be something major in her life.

> I am an educator. In education I feel strong, with my two feet on the ground.

Loraine wants to go out into the world with her research, but she does not know how to do it. She was very lonely all along, sitting days and nights writing and thinking that whatever she produced was not good enough. Looking back, she appreciates her supervisors who did not pressure her and let her proceed according to her pace.

> I managed to have a life outside the doctorate, be with my family, enjoy them. It suited me.

Interpretation

Loraine is doing her doctorate due to practical and status motives. She seems to identify herself as a member of the social group of educators and this is where she feels most confident. Her role identity as *researcher* is externally defined by others' expectations (Colbeck, 2008). She does not identify with the discourses of the research community, due to her lack of self-confidence to 'belong'. She refers to people in this same social group as 'others': those who always know what to say. This identity ambivalence is also reflected in her interaction with her supervisors who did not push her or impose any values that fitted their conceptions of researcher identity. This approach suited her pace and yet she felt lonely. It seems that Loraine is enjoying the independence of controlling her time and different roles, but feels a bit lost and would still appreciate some guidance.

Theodora

Theodora joined the academy in 2014 and registered in 2016. She is in her early thirties and decided to embark on a PhD because she wanted to be an expert in her own area and also due to the university requirements. Theodora was one of the participants in a doctoral workshop for supervisors and candidates. She is in her initial stages of the journey and expressed herself moderately. She thought it would have been very effective if her supervisor joined her in the workshop. She said:

> I wonder whether the relationship would be the same. She has her style. I have knowledge now she does not have. I feel that the approach to supervision on my side would be different. I have seen things from different perspectives.

To my question whether she would share her insights with her supervisor, Theodora said that this would be inappropriate and it should come from her superiors.

> I think the community/the senior lecturers should do something about the training of supervisors. I am in the place where I would be reluctant to do it. I am sure my supervisor will be receptive to new ideas, but it might sound as if I am challenging the way she is supervising me.

Theodora said that before coming to the workshop and meeting other colleagues from different places, her whole approach to the doctorate was, just a 'get it done' thing.

> I am so motivated now, it is astonishing. It is no more a requirement, but an avid eagerness to find out about my research issue. I have changed! I am seeing my contribution not only from a localised perspective, but from a bigger global perspective.

Interpretation

Theodora is in the doctoral program due to external social expectations of becoming a doctorate. This probably influenced her internal motivation to be recognised as an expert in her field. She was seeking a defined professional role identity. What characterises Theodora's story is her first experience as participant in a community of novice and veteran researchers learning together. This seemed to have transformed how she feels about the journey. Through the participation in a social group she became associated with the 'research lexicon' of the 'community'. The knowledge she acquired provides an 'entrée into a community' (Baker & Lattuca, 2010, p. 812) and development of a role identity. Theodora has a dilemma regarding her supervisor. She feels that now there is less alignment between her and her supervisor's values and conceptions about supervision and doing a doctorate. In her cultural community, the expectations from the supervisors and the labels they are assigned as the 'knowledge base' and 'the authority' would not let her expose her new knowledge. She is in conflict with her role identity as being 'abreast of knowledge' and yet, being 'just a student'.

Putting it all together: Routes and themes

The study is a small-scale study advancing theory that emerged from an inductive approach to the research based on narratives of doctoral students. The analysis of the cases identified three different routes to the doctoral journey: 1. the unmotivated students; 2. the highly motivated and goal-oriented students; and 3. the practical students. The routes are characterised by different identity formations experienced by the doctoral students and their implications for the supervisory relationship.

Route 1: The unmotivated students

These students embarked on the doctoral route due to external constraints, mainly pertaining to policy requirements. They usually do not identify themselves as researchers. The struggle to balance between different 'I positions' or 'figured worlds', is frustrating and causes a state of uncertainty and loneliness. Some are on a solitary individual route, finding themselves at a liminal stage of 'paralysis' and 'attrition', as in David's case. He crosses 'a threshold' and enters a new zone of shifting identities and 'a transformed internal view' (Meyer & Land, 2003, p. 1). Using Bridges' construct, this is a developmental state of cognitive and emotional turbulence which needs nurturing at the neutral zone (Bridges, 1991). At this stage, the supervisors' role is to negotiate identities and to build on the 'cultural capital that agents bring with them to socialization processes' (Hall & Burns, 2009, p. 55) could be crucial. In David's case, he is in need of explicit guidance and support, but the supervisor's conceptions of identity remains implicit and causes David to experience a feeling of failure. Thus, implicit or explicit socialisation patterns can have negative or positive effects on the students' identity as researchers.

Route 2: The highly motivated and goal oriented students

Students on this route use their professional identity and expertise to initiate a dialogic supervisory process and facilitate transitions; they integrate different identities which may alleviate the tensions in the process. Ann and Kate have to shift from a position of great capital as teacher or administrator respectively to a less familiar capital of doctoral researcher, their reconceptualisation of their identities is less unsettling. Ann's neutral zone is a space where she 'experiments', observes, reflects and becomes aware of her self-identities. Her supervisor is more explicit about her socialisation patterns and is more collaborative. Kate is struggling between her different role identities, but has no doubts about 'who and what she wants to be'. While Ann is moving fast due to a collaborative supervisory discourse, Kate is 'living the day' and is determined not to push it or rush it (Bridges, 2004). Her liminal state is typified by uncertainty and slow, contemplative and investigative movements towards progress. She nurtures on random feedback from academic colleagues, but needs the space of independence to herself. Her supervisor respects her need for independence and refrains from imposing guidance. Thus supervisors' sensitivity, to the students' needs and reciprocal negotiations, facilitate positive interaction.

Route 3: The practical students

Students on this route study for a doctorate out of practical reasons, as the doctorate is the route to academic career and status. However, the analysis exemplifies tensions between different positioning of identities (Gee, 2006), which lead to a desire for independence and yet a need for guidance and at times a power relationship. Loraine is quite ambivalent in defining 'who she is' and 'where she would like to get to'. She is not ready to enter a research community and yet feels that this is what is expected of her 'by others' (Gee, 2006). She is at a stage now where she wants to nurture her role identity of a researcher and needs guidance, but also wants to preserve her independence to do it at her

own pace. Theodora's positioning of identities is different. Her scholarly identity development has emerged from participation in social networks, publishing, attending conferences and gaining the skills and the practices of the social community (Ibarra, Kilduff & Tsai, 2005). While such involvement is key to becoming a member in an academic community (McAlpine, Jazvac-Martek & Hopwood, 2009), she experiences tension between her performance as an academic and her 'assigned', or assumed identity by her supervisor, as student. The socialisation patterns in her case are hierarchical where the supervisor is the knowledge authority (Holland et al., 1998).

Students might experience conflicting conceptions of identity with supervisors' identities within their figured worlds. While students might reconceptualise their identities and enter the academic community through different socialisation activities, they are reluctant to position themselves as such. This might hinder guidance and support in the supervisory process, as they would be reluctant to 'challenge' the supervisor. Explicit acknowledgement of identity conflicts through negotiation and reconciliation is crucial for both the student and the supervisor in order to avoid negative feelings.

Implications

Doing a doctorate is a stepping stone to developing scholarly academic competences (Austin & McDaniels, 2006; Trafford & Leshem, 2012). The process entails identity development experiences which have been acknowledged by other researchers (Hall & Burns, 2009; Baker & Pifer, 2011; Leshem, 2016; Frick & Brodin, 2019). According to the evidence, students' 'figured worlds' embody experiences, indicating their identity capital. In their new role as 'doctoral students' they have to embody new identity capital which demands reconciliation of multiple roles and conflicting experiences, and has a social, emotional, and cognitive effect on the students and also on relationships with the supervisor (Leshem, 2016). The effects could be challenging experiences and also 'positive emotions' or 'pleasures', as described by McAlpine and Amundsen (2009). They could have an effect on students' motivation or lack of motivation, supporting Illeris's claim that transformation cannot occur without motivation (Illeris, 2014).

According to the Council of Graduate Schools (2005), transition to an independent scholar is an integral part of the process of doing a doctorate. This can be a 'tenuous' process for many students (Gardner, 2008, p. 347). The above dimensions, as illustrated in the narratives, raise some questions for further thoughts: What is the supervisors' role, in enhancing or sustaining students' motivation? How sensitive are they to students' identity transitions and change of roles? How are independence, guidance, space for contemplation, experimentation, notions of power and status, perceived or exploited by students and supervisor? These themes seemed to be influential on doctoral students' progress along the journey.

A given figured world may privilege certain behaviours and norms; yet, conceptions might not overlap (Hall & Burns, 2009). The cases of the doctoral students exemplify meeting points of tension between figured worlds and attitudes: supervisors who interpret 'less contact' as 'independence', supervisors who perform as equal partners and supervisors

who are implicit in their expectations. Students may have different interpretations of these attitudes, which can be a hindrance for some, and a space for experimentation and development for others. Furthermore, this surfaced the question of how much do supervisors recognise and acknowledge their students' critical junctions of transitions, thresholds or liminal zones? (Leshem, 2016). Identifying these notions might facilitate supervisory relationships for students' and supervisors (Keefer, 2015; Lepp et al, 2016) and have practical implications for planning doctoral programs and workshops.

This study illustrates the complexity of the doctoral students' routes to achieving a doctorate through their personal narratives and experiences. It demonstrates relational tensions pertaining to cognitive and emotional competences which are significant for developing an identity of an academic scholar. It supports recent studies which claim that the PhD process is 'a highly personal, demanding and often passionate process, involving biographical construction of identity…' (Strandler et al, 2014, p. 71). Respondents also recognised the value and contribution of belonging to communities of practice to overcome perceived isolation and liminality (Wenger, 1998; Leshem, 2007). The different routes also highlight the indispensable role of the supervisor in mediating identity formations students struggle with. The literature confirms the importance of the supervisor's role; yet, the notion of identity formation is mostly focused on the doctoral student. More research on how supervisors position themselves at different phases in the supervisory relationship and how identity manifests itself in *their* figured worlds, would add another aspect to existing knowledge on doctoral identity formations and on the emotional aspect (Wisker & Robinson, 2012) of supervisory relationships on the route to becoming doctorate.

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