Exploring Clinicians' Lived Experience in Borderline Encounters: A Phenomenological Contribution to Intuitive Diagnosis

Clinicians' subjective experience plays a significant role in intuitive diagnosis. In the context of psychosis, this phenomenon has been described as *praecox gefühl*. In personality disorders (PD), however, it is primarily examined through the concept of countertransference (CT) within a psychodynamic framework. We argue that intuitive aspects of diagnosis operates implicitly within CT research, as a prereflective, affectively charged mode of embodied knowing. Drawing on phenomenological psychopathology and empirical studies of clinician responses to borderline personality disorder (BPD), we reconstruct a distinctive experiential structure underlying BPD diagnosis intuitive unfolding.

This structure involves alterations in lived space (boundary dissolution and experiential constriction), heightened intersubjective hypervigilance, disruptions in self-experience (diminished agency, unstable self-evaluation), and a pervasive sense of temporal urgency. These dimensions are amplified by intensified interaffectivity, often preceding reflective appraisal. These phenomenological insights are compared with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with psychologists and psychiatrists (N = 20), analysed using a phenomenological variant of Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

By integrating psychodynamic, empirical, and phenomenological perspectives, this presentation is the first attempt of systematic understanding of intuitive diagnosis in BPD. It describes experiential qualities preceding diagnosis and critically examine its reliability in terms of embodied cognition, intersubjective understanding or simply – biased heuristics.