

**FACTORS
IMPACTING
AFRICAN
WOMEN'S
DOCTORAL
SUCCESS**

Lifutso Tsephe



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FACTORS IMPACTING AFRICAN WOMEN'S DOCTORAL SUCCESS

Lifutso Tsephe



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Research justification

This scholarly book aims to bridge a gap in the existing literature by investigating the strategies and abilities that enabled African women Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD) graduates to effectively complete their studies, thus uncovering the key factors contributing to their success in PhD programmes. This research offers a platform for African women who have earned PhDs, especially those who pursued their studies at South African universities, to voice their apprehensions, impart their insights that could benefit future generations and communicate to African educational institutions and governments the factors they perceive as instrumental in the achievements of this cohort of women. The findings could hold potential advantages for doctoral education in South Africa, particularly as previous research has not examined it from the perspective of both the capabilities approach and resiliency theory.

To gain an in-depth qualitative insight into the lives and ambitions of African women who have attained PhDs, this study utilises a narrative inquiry or narrative analysis that emerged as a discipline within the broader field of qualitative research. The focus is on exploring how life stories influence the participants' accomplishments and activities. Essentially, narrative inquiry aims to depict societal segments that are frequently overlooked in research regarding the viewpoints and encounters of African women engaged with doctoral study programmes.

Undertaking this study held significance as it aims to expand the realm of knowledge by delving into the multifaceted factors (including personal, social, cultural, economic, political and environmental aspects) outlined by African women, which either facilitated or impeded their accomplishments in doctoral education. Through interviews with a diverse cohort of African women PhD graduates from various African nations, their journey through doctoral education, along with the tactics and competencies that propelled or hindered their success, would offer insights to other aspiring women seeking to attain similar levels of education. Given the limited literature on the success of African women in doctoral studies, particularly within the African and South African context, this research illuminates a path for those who follow. The findings emerging from this investigation possess the potential to enrich our comprehension of the strategies employed by African women to excel in doctoral studies.

The target audience of this scholarly book is scholars specialising in educational studies, with a particular emphasis on the psychology of education. Additionally, it targets researchers who are dedicated to examining the intricate issues and obstacles prevalent within the higher education sphere, specifically those who hold influential roles in governmental bodies and higher education institutions. The aim is to facilitate the development of policies that bolster the journey of PhD candidates. Furthermore, the book is tailored to cater to postgraduate researchers currently engaged in PhD programmes, providing them with valuable insights to navigate and optimise their educational paths.

The author declares that this book constitutes original knowledge, is not published elsewhere and is not plagiarised. This manuscript represents a substantial (more than 50%) reworking of Tsephe, L 2021, 'A Capabilities Approach to African Women's Success in Doctoral Programmes in South Africa', PhD thesis, University of Pretoria (UP), Pretoria, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Education Management and Policy Studies at UP, South Africa, supervised by Dr Talita ML Calitz and Dr KS Adeyemo (https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/80526/Tsephe_Capabilities_2021.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1).

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Abbreviations and acronyms and tables appearing in the text and notes

List of abbreviations and acronyms

ADDRF	African Doctorate Dissertation Research Fellowship
BA	Bachelor of Arts degree; bachelor's degree
CA	capabilities approach
CARTA	Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CUT	Central University of Technology
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DST	Department of Science and Technology
EACEP	Existing Academics Capacity Enhancement Programme
FOMO	fear of missing out
HBI	historically black institution
HBIs	historically black institutions
HE	higher education
HEI	higher education institution
HEIs	higher education institutions
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
Hons	Honours degree
HWI	historically white institution
HWIs	historically white institutions
IAU	International Association of Universities
MDGs	millennium development goals
NDP	National Development Plan
NESP	Nurturing Emerging Scholars Programme
NPC	National Planning Commission
NGO	non-governmental Organisation
NRF	National Research Foundation
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy degree; doctoral degree
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SARChI	South African Research Chairs Initiative
SARUA	Southern African Regional Universities Association

SDG	sustainable development goal
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
SUN	Stellenbosch University
UCT	University of Cape Town
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UKZN	University of KwaZulu-Natal
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UP	University of Pretoria
USA	United States of America
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand

Table list

Table 5.1: Summary of the research participants.

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my late parents, Malekhoba and Mosuo Ts'ephe, who worked hard to provide everything I desired, but mostly for their unwavering support through my educational trajectory.

To my dearest late brother Bahlakoana Ts'ephe, for being a loving brother and friend.

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The author extends her gratitude to everyone who took part in the study and helped make it possible by taking the time to discuss their views and thoughts with her.

Epigraph

African women, we are able!

Preface

Because of its role in the growth of economies and the knowledge economy, doctoral education has long been a source of concern around the world. Even though its significance is acknowledged, there is still a lack of African women among doctoral graduates. As a result, there is little literature on African women's success in doctoral education. The aim of this book is to shed light on the factors that African women Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD) graduates attribute their success to, the difficulties they encountered while pursuing their doctorates and how they overcame those difficulties to realise their dreams. This book may motivate those who want to explore this path and aspire to obtain PhDs, as it will be accessible to a wide range of people from different walks of life. Additionally, higher education institutions (HEIs) and relevant policy-makers across governmental departments will find this book informative. Although this study cannot be generalised across all African women doctoral graduates, it echoes the voices of this silent group of women so that their narratives may be heard by those in authority and all their experiences can inform policy, which improves doctoral education.

There are various well-known key issues that negatively impact doctoral students' retention, such as lack of funding, lack of supervision because of overburdened supervisors, not having a good relationship with their supervisor and having to juggle studies with family life and work, to mention a few. Despite the availability of funding in the first three years of study, failure to complete one's doctoral studies within record time brought about financial challenges for some women, and this affected their concentration and, thus, their progress. As there is literature on factors that push students to drop out of doctoral studies, this book highlights the positive factors that enabled a group of African women to succeed.

This research is a qualitative approach. It is a narrative case study that provided in-depth knowledge on the strategies and capabilities that enabled fourteen African women PhD graduates to obtain PhDs from a South African university even though they come from different African countries. Participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

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Neglect of women in Africa within higher education

■ Synopsis

This chapter describes the broad neglect that women in Africa suffer within higher education (HE) and in doctoral studies specifically. Despite the efforts from governments, such as providing funding for doctoral studies (bursary obtained based on merit and normally granted for three years only), satisfactory supervision, culture, patriarchy and many other factors are still largely responsible for the underrepresentation of women in Africa among successful graduates. This shows that not only should the education system enable or motivate women to be retained until completion but also that the social environment and social systems need to be reconstructed to enhance the implementation of policies. A holistic approach is needed in the restitution of gender inequalities.

Although many studies have been conducted on women's struggles within the HE landscape with regard to doctoral studies, including high attrition rates, not much is known regarding the opportunities and freedoms that enable their success, particularly when using the resilience approach together with the feminist theory or capabilities approach as a theoretical framework. Levels of resilience vary from woman to woman, depending on the background, support from their spouses and immediate family members, supervisors and many other factors. To address this gap, this chapter will discuss the obstacles encountered by these women, setting a

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tone or building up a foundation for the whole book on how those who obtained their doctoral degrees described their individual journeys, thereby contributing to knowledge on the scholarship literature on the experiences of women pursuing doctoral studies in Africa.

■ Significance of the book

This book aims to showcase the approaches employed by some women in Africa that made the completion of their doctoral education possible. This book represents a substantial reworking of a Doctor of Philosophy degree (PhD) thesis. The research investigates the attributes of a group of fourteen women's success and the challenges they encountered during their doctoral studies. The relevant women, used as case studies, obtained PhDs from one African university but were citizens of five African countries, namely, South Africa, Nigeria, Lesotho, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Knowing more about these women's doctoral journeys adds to the literature regarding not only the challenges they faced but also how they overcame them. The research results produced by this book may inspire other women, particularly women in Africa, to persevere in doctoral programmes. The narratives recorded in the research may resonate with women who aspire to embark on their doctoral journeys and motivate those who are pursuing their doctoral studies to persevere, despite the demands and challenges, until completion. Therefore, the aim of this book is to contribute to new knowledge in doctoral education scholarship regarding the marginalised, specifically women in Africa, by addressing the gap in literature on African women's success within doctoral education. Not much is known about the attributes at work in African women's attainment of doctoral degrees. This book will provide a glimpse into how African women overcome challenges by narrating the experiences of their doctoral journey. The author aspires to not only motivate other African women through the narration of these experiences but also motivate their male counterparts with whom these stories may resonate.

■ Introduction

Research shows that increasing the number of doctoral graduates in higher education institutions (HEIs) is a key concern globally, given that the knowledge economy is now a major contributor to global economic development (Jørgensen 2012; Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh & Susuman 2018; Nerad 2011a). In the traditional (or Mode 1) PhD, which was designed only to produce academics, a student conducted an independent study and was required to prepare a thesis of between 80,000 and 100,000 words (Thomson & Walker 2010). Only one supervisor assisted in monitoring and guiding the candidate's progress (Nerad & Evans 2014). According to

Cloete, Sheppard and Bailey (2015) and Nerad (2015), doctoral education currently aims to produce interdisciplinary researchers (also known as Mode 2 doctoral graduates) who can engage in various professions outside of academia and who can successfully work in transnational settings with scientists and scholars from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines (Evans et al. 2014).

Despite doctoral education being seen as a gateway to jobs in research and innovation (Nerad 2011b), as well as other fields (Holley & Gardner 2012), and being perceived as an indicator of development capacity in South Africa (Herman 2014), African women still constitute a small percentage of doctoral graduates (30%) in sub-Saharan African countries (Khisa et al. 2019). The knowledge economy, according to Bratianu (2017), is distinguished by a greater emphasis on intellectual skills than on physical inputs or natural resources. Hence, the knowledge economy emphasises the importance of having scholars who can think critically and offer development prospects. Attesting to this statement, Desie and Tefera (2017, p. 91) state that 'doctoral education cultivates thinkers and researchers'. In other words, the knowledge economy emphasises the importance of critical thinkers and developers; as a result, many African women are excluded from the category of critical thinkers and developers because the majority do not hold doctoral degrees.

According to Altay (2019), however, no nation can grow without the contribution of women; thus, modern civilisation is the result of both men and women cooperating in modern society. Hence, it is important for African women to complete their doctoral education, and even though some do complete it, documentation detailing the available opportunities and freedoms they have, the challenges they encounter in their doctoral journey, as well as their motivation to overcome these challenges to attain their goal is lacking. There is a paucity of research on African women doctoral graduates. Not much is known about this category of women's attributes to success in doctoral studies.

Doctoral graduates are required in every country. This comprises engaging both men and women in the growth of their economies. However, the intersection of race, gender and class tends to disadvantage women within HE. Although Mokhele (2013) indicated that African women face dual oppression (that of being African and female), which puts them at a disadvantage compared to both African males and white women, this category of women's financial background impacts their educational choices. For example, some women state that they did not further their studies after matric because they did not have money to afford tertiary education even though they qualified to study at the university level (Tsephe 2014). Furthermore, as they pursue their HE studies, they find themselves subjected to an institutionalised culture of racism and

sexism (Robinson 2013). This is because of the educational environment which is influenced by patriarchal culture, prioritising men and limiting women's rights for dignity and freedom to embark on an HE trajectory (Loots, Tsephe and Walker 2016; Sultana 2012). The experiences of African women are exaggerated or aggravated in the South African context, according to Loots et al. (2016), because of racial discrimination and strong patriarchal norms that remain closely woven throughout South African culture despite the emergence of democracy in 1994.

During the apartheid era in South Africa, for instance, racial inequality resulted in black Africans receiving substandard education, which has had a severe impact on many parts of their lives. Apartheid laws prohibited African students from enrolling in the HEIs of their choosing among the current so-called 26 parliamentary-recognised universities. Among these HEIs, they were only allowed to enrol in six institutions that were specifically designated for their use. Apartheid laws restricted nineteen universities as 'white universities'. Furthermore, black Africans were discriminated against in medical service platforms as a result of existing structures. Apartheid regulations also prevented black students from health care professional training (cf. Van Rensburg 2014). The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996*, during this era, divided citizens into four racial categories at HEIs: African, coloured, Indian and white (Bunting 2006). Hence, two types of universities were created because of racial segregation: historically black and historically white universities. African students were prohibited and refused entry to the then nineteen white HEIs, which were significantly better endowed, with better study facilities, more senior lecturers and professors with doctoral qualifications, and thus better resourced than historically black universities (cf. Breetzke & Hedding 2018).

Universities play a critical role in the development of nations, endorsed by the National Development Plan (NDP) (National Planning Commission [NPC] 2011), as they educate and train highly qualified persons in preparation for work in both the public and private sectors. Higher education improves prosperity, social justice and democracy by allowing people to move up the social ladder (NPC 2011). Because education is viewed as a major determinant in economic growth and increased wealth, it is essential that women, particularly African women, pursue doctoral studies and get PhDs. This could assist African women students in becoming knowledge contributors and contributing to the growth of their personal lives, social mobility, gender and race equity, all of which can benefit their families and communities. Universities are platforms that support equality and diversity, as well as venues that foster original creativity and the development of life-enhancing education or any other concerns that contribute to society (Walker & McLean 2013). It is important to note that the United Nations (UN) (2007) states unquestionably that the right to an education is high on

the international community's agenda, as evidenced by the numerous human rights treaties that governments have recognised as critical to development and social transformation. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (UNESCO n.d.):

In 2015 world leaders signed up to the Education 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, a structured pathway to making education accessible to all and the foundation for sustainable development and peace. UNESCO coordinates the international community to achieve the education goals of Sustainable Development Goal 4 through partnerships, policy guidance, capacity development, monitoring and advocacy with the Education 2030 Framework for Action as roadmap. (n.p.)

While doctoral education is not a right, it remains a 'goal' that is vital for black women to pursue it as it is widely recognised as a way of advancing human development and economic development (cf. Stromquist 2006).

As a result of the complex relationship between women's and girls' education and sustainable development, women are prioritised for education. 'If you educate a man, you educate an individual', according to an African saying. But, 'educating a woman educates a nation' (Dlamini & Adams 2014). These terms, however, do not exist in the academic community, as women's dignity is still undervalued and African women continue to be underrepresented in doctoral studies. According to the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) (2015), African women doctoral graduates from South African universities made up only 16% of all doctoral graduates. In 2015, African women accounted for 34% of all African doctoral graduates and 37% of all female doctoral graduates of all races. It is important at this point to mention that 'African' women refer to black African women, which excludes Indian and coloured women as per HEMIS categorisation. According to a study conducted by Managa (2013, p. 212), African women, in particular, 'experience fractured doctoral careers or studies' because of difficulties stemming from the mix of working and caring for their families.

Aja-Okorie Uzoma, affiliated with the Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria (Aja-Okorie 2013), known for her aspirations to combat gender disparity and her research on women's education in Nigeria, attests in her 2014 work to the importance of HE and its contribution to economic development as it is acknowledged to be in line with the broader needs of economic development and competitiveness. Despite this knowledge, Nigerian women still face numerous barriers and inhibitions that prevent them from obtaining a high-quality education, even though it is essential for both men and women to have equal opportunities to enter HE. One example of the barriers is religious restrictions on women, which impede

their ability to enrol in HE. In the Boko Haram group in Northern Nigeria, some religious sects in Nigeria continue to preach and teach that women should not pursue a Western education. Although Nigeria's National Policy on Education (2004) stipulates the inclusion of each person into high-quality, worthwhile educational opportunities for all citizens, religion contributes a great deal to women's low participation in HE. Despite the policy indicating that all Nigerian children, regardless of sex, have complete access to high-quality education at all levels, the right to education and, thus, equitable access to education as a national objective for development has sadly not been realised, even though the UN and the Federal Government of Nigeria have recognised education as a fundamental human right. Although it is technically possible for men and women to have equal access to HE, traditional social beliefs regarding the suitability of HE for young Nigerian women are not changing as quickly towards social equality of the sexes. This evidence from Nigeria also refers to the South African context.

Despite the fact that both men and women have been known to drop out of doctoral programmes for a variety of reasons, including financial constraints, family obligations and a lack of progress in their research, women's participation rates in doctoral programmes have increased (Herman 2011; Magano 2011a). Rathgeber (2013), on the other hand, indicates that some public institutions have established parallel programmes with various selection criteria, where students who are studying part-time occasionally pay full tuition. This has helped students who would not have otherwise been able to pursue HE, including married women. However, it is possible that men have a higher percentage of completion than women, partly because of the masculine culture in HEIs, which includes things like having more male senior lecturers or academics (Brown & Watson 2010; Haake 2011; Ismail 2011). Several studies have demonstrated how a lack of role models, mentorship, insufficient funding, dual identities and a masculine environment impact African women's experience and performance in doctoral studies (Brown & Watson 2010; Johnson-Bailey et al. 2009). Despite these challenges, it is worth noting that some women do complete their PhDs. This book's aim is to showcase the approaches employed by some women in Africa that made the completion of their doctoral education possible. Having more literature on African women's positive narratives regarding their doctoral journeys may influence people who aspire to attain PhDs to see that such attainment is possible, and hence, they may feel encouraged to enrol and realise their dream.

However, in this book, I will demonstrate that because of the African culture, HEIs are not fully encouraging women's participation. This is seemingly because of the existing patriarchal system that still influences relationships between women and men. Despite these male-favouring systems, women started pursuing doctoral education to better themselves. The section that follows discusses how patriarchy affects women's status in society.

■ Women in Africa are neglected because of institutional culture influenced by patriarchy

Women all around the world may have experienced or still experience marginalisation in their lives because of patriarchy. Patriarchy refers to a system that activated and institutionalised male dominance over women and children in the family and the expansion of the supremacy of men over women in society (Sultana 2012). The patriarchal structure has shaped social connections in Africa in particular. Women and girls take on domestic and caring chores because of traditional gender roles, and this has an impact on women's economical participation (Uddin 2021). Chege and Arnot (2012) further state that the dependence on females for tasks involving caring for other family members, overseeing rituals connected with marriage, childbearing and their transitioning into adulthood affect young men and women's access to and outcomes from schooling. Women are consequently subjected to significant discrimination (Makama 2013), as they are expected to perform all duties at home as well as outside, putting them at a disadvantage compared to their male counterparts as men undertake minimal tasks within their families. Although males are not born to be breadwinners and women to be carers, both groups are socially conditioned to fulfil these 'traditional roles', and cultivate various mystified personality traits as if they are divinely ordained from creation (cf. Robinson 2013). For instance, girls are taught that their jobs are at home, and their mothers direct and educate them on how to care for their homes as they grow up (Magano 2011a). Women find themselves working at home rather than in a competitive environment like the office, and as a result, they are viewed as inferior to males. Mapuranga (2013) and Udoh, Folarin and Isumonah (2020) claim that religion and culture are the main reasons for women being seen as more helpful when coming to private issues and thus keeping women in the kitchen. In patriarchal societies, women are frequently viewed as subordinates who belong in the kitchen (Makama 2013). Although the Beijing Declaration of 1995 stipulated that there should be equal access to and equal treatment of women and men in education and thus empowerment of women through gender equality, African women are marginalised by a long-standing patriarchal regime. This is because a patriarchal system does not provide a conducive environment for women and girls to thrive, and their participation in household tasks is typically higher than that of their male counterparts. Despite the integration of modernity into human life in Africa, little progress has been made in this area. The challenging quest for gender equality is complicated by the continent's practically inescapable gender dynamics.

Women are rarely placed in management positions because they have historically been subjugated to men, whether at home or in business (Makama 2013). Therefore, male domination impedes the advancement and development of women as a result of cultural norms that oppress women (Sultana 2012). Thus, an obstruction to women's access to quality education is the assignment of patriarchal roles (Devkota 2021). This is a product of the male-dominated, competitive culture prevalent in HE, which disadvantages women (Magano 2011b). Particularly in sectors where white men predominate, like the natural sciences, it can be difficult for women to adjust to and integrate into HE (Tsephe 2014). The high female attrition rate from doctoral programmes may also be partially explained by academic environments that provide women with fewer opportunities than men. There are inequalities in academia that are exacerbated by a lack of a supportive environment. For instance, although African women are incorporated into previously white, male disciplines, the use of equipment requiring manual labour forces women to rely on their male counterparts for favours, which impedes the advancement of women and their retention (Managa 2013).

Because of the demands of being a mother or a working mother, it is difficult to enrol women in doctoral programmes and retain them until completion because they are more likely to become lost in the system and drop out. This is because many HEIs do not have family policies that support working mothers (Keen & Salvatorelli 2016). For instance, there is no documented literature regarding kindergartens within the universities where mothers who are studying can take their children. For instance, there is Little Professors Crèche within the University of the Free State, which enrolls children from the ages of six-months-old to six-years-old. This facility is open to everyone, but preference is given to university staff. Because there is no documented scientific literature on this facility, women students may not have the information on whether the facility is open to enrol their children as well because it is assumed to be open for staff and anyone who could afford it, leaving slim chances for student mothers because of financial challenges. The affordability of daycare for studying mothers was attested to by some African women graduates when they explained some of the challenges they encountered on their doctoral journeys (Tsephe 2021).

In supporting their spouses in achieving their goals, women put their dreams on hold and serve as the primary carers for their children. This enables the husbands to pursue their careers while the majority of women choose to postpone their enrolment in doctoral programmes, according to Prozesky (2008). Another factor influencing women's decision to pursue HE and one that contributes to the low enrolment of women in sub-Saharan African nations is the social stigmatisation they face should they defy social norms and beliefs that a good woman takes care of the home and takes

pride in motherhood because it has a high social value. Society expects women to always prioritise being there for their children and husbands; hence, their womanhood is questioned when one is a working mother and pursuing her dream. Women are expected to let their own dreams take a back seat. Consequently, the notion of a 'good woman' governs a woman's allocation of her time and effort (Carter, Blumenstein & Cook 2013, p. 341).

According to Tsephe (2014), who looked at the experiences of black women undertaking doctoral studies at a South African university, African women said that they felt isolated during their doctoral studies, both academically and socially. This is because of the demands that came with doctoral studies, which left no time for women to attend any events held by family or friends, which made their family or friends believe they no longer mattered in their lives. For some women, the pursuit of doctoral education was not only a loner journey as there were no cohorts within their departments but it also created a gap between them and their family members as well as their co-workers during and even after their completion, and most relationships could not be resuscitated. Bireda (2015) states that it is believed that having access to social support is crucial as it promotes well-being and lessens isolation. Furthermore, one of the findings indicated that the demanding nature of doctoral studies has led to couples getting divorced because they are unable to spend enough time with their families. Specifically, married women who felt that their marriage was impeding their pursuit of a doctorate occasionally chose to get divorced. For this category of women, one may conclude that some felt they were not supported by their spouses and felt that opting for divorce was a positive route if they were to attain their goal of completing a PhD because they could 'plan her life and her children's life without any distractions' (Tsephe 2014, p. 90). Women who were single said that as they were not married, they had time to study and finish their degrees, which could have been difficult if they had been in a relationship.

Charleston et al. (2014) conducted a qualitative study that examined African women pursuing doctoral degrees, seeking to understand how African American women perceived their participation in the traditionally white, male-dominated area of computer science. Their findings indicated that African women were isolated within academia because of their gender and race. Attesting to the isolation of African women within previously white institutions, Shavers (2010) stated that women felt this way as a result of the underrepresentation of women of the same race. African women, as a result, lack role models whom they can look up to and who are, most importantly, accessible to them for support and encouragement. These findings, although coming from studies conducted in the United States of America (USA), resonate with the findings that emerged from the work of Tsephe (2014), who attests to the fact that African women studying

within male-dominated and white-dominated disciplines such as the natural sciences, physics and chemistry emphasised feeling more isolated than those who studied education, for example.

■ Religion's influence on culture impacting decisions made by women in Africa regarding their educational trajectories

Fighting patriarchy is a difficult undertaking for women, but it is essential if women are to realise their full potential and aspiration to acquire positions currently held by men (Dlamini & Adams 2014). Therefore, it is crucial to recognise the systems that keep women under control and in inferior positions and work to alter them in order to promote women's growth (Sultana 2012). One of the main systems by which men oppress women is through religion, which instils specific cultural views that are transmitted from generation to generation. Culture and religion are arguably the twin significant concerns in Africa when it comes to eradicating patriarchal privileges and achieving gender equality (Rwafa 2016). Evidently, patriarchy becomes a barrier to quality education for women and girls. As such, women are underrepresented in leadership roles because of the existing structures and values instilled through religion and culture that promote and endorse men's leadership bids, which in turn preserves the status quo (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb 2011). Men dominate organisational hierarchies, and practices that correlate leadership with behaviour that is thought to be more widespread or acceptable among men unwittingly send a strong message that women are unsuited for leadership positions. Although Sultana (2012) claims that we live in a time when women have political positions of power, the reality is that the system is still male-dominated; women are simply accommodated in it in various ways. Women must overcome patriarchy if they are to realise their full potential and pursue careers in fields traditionally dominated by men, according to Dlamini and Adams (2014). This is not an easy task.

Africa's triple legacy is represented through the three major world religions: Islam, Christianity and indigenous African religions (Njoh & Akiwumi 2012). One of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), women empowerment, was adopted globally in the year 2000. However, it is necessary to note that the MDGs are related to the three religions that constitute Africa's legacy. For instance, Christianity is related to all four of the MDGs for women's empowerment, which include increasing the proportion of girls in school and the rates of female adult literacy, non-agricultural employment, representation in government and representation in the workforce. Women's liberation in Zimbabwe is prohibited by Christianity and other African traditional religions (Machingura 2012) and

they are not consulted when making decisions, which results in them being silenced (Manyonganise 2015). Therefore, it is important that the three major religions practised on the continent must be considered in any effort to improve women's freedom; factors that make religion sabotage women should be avoided.

■ **Women in Africa face social challenges that hinder their success in doctoral studies**

There are many reasons why education is crucial. Dreze and Sen (1999) and Robeyns (2006) assert that education has intrinsic value, meaning that it may be significant merely for the sake of knowledge. It also plays a crucial function that can be either personal or collective. For example, education can assist an individual in obtaining employment and engaging in the labour market to affect good change because it enables them to learn about available economic prospects. When a person receives education, they can positively influence their families, societies, countries and the entire world as they are now able to enhance their skills. This is known as the concept of collective importance. Tafere (2014) further states that higher levels of education are more likely to result in better occupations and, as a result, better contributions to development. Despite this understanding, African women confront obstacles that prevent them from succeeding.

According to Magano (2011b, 2011a, 2013), African women in South Africa are more constrained by societal responsibilities in their families, such as caring for the old or sick or engaging in funeral preparations, than their male counterparts because they play roles that take up more time. In the Nigerian context, the dynamics of gender have strongly interacted with culture to develop sex roles, stereotypes and demands that have significantly impacted how both men and women view various issues, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education (Aja-Okorie 2014). According to Rachels and Rachels (2012), because of the social roles they have been socialised to fulfil based on cultural conditioning, women are far more empathic and caring about close personal relationships, whereas men have been socialised to think about trivial relationships where they are providers and participate in a labour market that is characterised by competition in general (Nicolaidis 2015).

Magano (2013) goes on to say that, regardless of whether or not one is in academia, an African woman must volunteer at social events to exhibit a symbol of *ubuntu* despite the difficulties that come with pursuing a PhD. Trying to manage family, employment and studies has severe effects on women's academic performance, in addition to struggling for entry into university areas dominated by men in unfriendly institutional structures

(Magano 2013). According to some studies, *ubuntu* is a double-edged sword that empowers women on the one hand while perpetuating male authority and patriarchal norms on the other and consequently oppresses human dignity (Chisale 2016; Ngubane-Mokiwa 2016; Sultana 2010). Women also feel marginalised in male-dominated fields (Loots et al. 2016; Magano 2013). Tsephe (2014) claims that African women doctoral students are excluded from informal interactions outside the campus with their male mentors. Women in the physics department, for example, claimed that their mentors discriminated against them as their contributions were not valued as highly as those of men in the department. Women of colour face discrimination in identifying and working with mentors, as well as being excluded from the informal networks of their laboratories or departments, and are consequently viewed as invisible, according to Herzig (2010). Working with men often means women will seek help with equipment that involves manual labour, which the men misinterpret as a sexual advance from the women (Tsephe 2014). According to Park et al. (2013), female students are at risk of being sexually harassed during social interactions with their male co-workers.

■ A higher education institution's highest qualification is a doctoral degree

Globally, universities are compared to one another and graded according to how well they perform (Sinclair, Barnacle & Cuthbert 2013). Particular attention is given to universities' research outputs, which informs the ranks as a result of the weightage derived from the outputs. It is mainly after obtaining doctorates that scholars are regarded as contributors to knowledge and their continuous publications deem them to be active researchers; hence, a PhD is thought to be the pinnacle of education. According to Molla and Cuthbert (2016), doctoral training is also essential for developing the highly skilled workforce needed in an information economy. Scheinin (2017) states that students who complete a doctoral programme are given the analytical and critical thinking, problem-solving, creative thinking and intellectual independence abilities that are essential for survival in today's complex societies as well as the information economy (Backhouse 2011; Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard 2015; Lee & Danby 2012). By learning these skills, a nation would be able to engage in a global economic environment and generate high-quality knowledge (Breier & Herman 2017).

In South Africa, the *Higher Education Act 101 of 1997* is the main piece of legislation regulating the standards for PhDs. This law offers the framework for the establishment, administration and quality control of HEIs in the country. Each university sets its own standards for PhD programmes, including the coursework, the research proposal and duration. However, the general

guidelines specified in the *Higher Education Act 101 of 1997* must be followed by all PhD programmes. These guidelines include:

1. **The development of research skills and competence:** Doctoral candidates are expected to demonstrate advanced research skills, critical thinking and the ability to independently conduct original research.
2. **Supervision and mentoring:** Doctoral candidates must be provided with appropriate supervision and mentoring by qualified academic staff members who have expertise in the candidate's field of study.
3. **Assessment and examination:** The assessment of a doctoral candidate's progress and final thesis is conducted through a rigorous examination process, usually involving internal and external examiners. The examination is aimed at ensuring the quality and integrity of the research.
4. **Quality assurance:** Doctoral programmes and the awarding of PhDs are subject to quality assurance measures implemented by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE). These bodies ensure that the standards and processes of doctoral education are aligned with national and international benchmarks.

■ Where to go from here? Research gaps to be filled

With research mainly focusing on the experiences of doctoral students during their doctoral studies and the challenges they face that hinder their success, a few studies focus on African women's experiences specifically and what constitutes their success. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the factors that enabled women in Africa to complete their PhDs, the opportunities and freedoms that were available to them, the challenges they had to overcome and what motivated them to persevere to achieve their goals. This book would like to demonstrate that the majority of scholarship aiming at the empowerment of women to enrol in doctoral studies has been conducted within Western countries. Not much is known about the African context. The objective of my research is to make it challenging to improve on the increased representation of African women within doctoral studies within the African context. Identifying existing paucity in existing research and producing literature on African women experiencing obstacles when they probe to gain success in doctoral studies may inspire more women, specifically African women, to enrol in doctoral programmes as they will identify with and have role models to look up to. Considering the knowledge economy's current significance as a big global engine of economic development, a significant degree of achievement in HEIs is a crucial goal (see Matsolo et al. 2018). This book endorses UNESCO's sustainable development goal 4 (SDG 4) regarding education and shows that women who achieve the highest level of academic success, the PhD,

will obtain skills that are comparable to those of their male colleagues. They too can contribute towards addressing current and future difficulties. Modern civilisation is the outcome of the united efforts of men and women in current society since, as Sultana (2012) concurs with Dlamini and Adams (2014), no nation can develop without the assistance of women. Even if there are a few African women who have PhDs, their success stories need to be shared to encourage not only women to pursue PhDs but also provide insight into what women need their male counterparts to do in supporting their doctoral journeys. This support is not limited to husbands or partners of women pursuing doctoral education but also may provide clarity on how any man, be it a friend, colleague or neighbour, can be supportive of women across all spheres of their lives.

African women's challenges within doctoral studies

The first chapter of this book broadly described the neglect women in Africa suffer within HE, and in doctoral studies specifically. Despite the efforts that governments have made, such as providing funding for women within doctoral studies (bursary obtained based on merit and granted for three years only), satisfactory supervision and many other factors, including culture and patriarchy, are central to the underrepresentation of women in Africa in terms of successful PhD graduates. This shows that not only should the education system be enabling or motivating for women to be retained until completion of their degree, but the social environment and social systems also need to be considered for reconstruction through the implementation of policies. A holistic approach needs to be considered to fight the gender inequalities that women suffer.

Although many studies have been conducted on women's struggles within doctoral studies and the consequent high attrition rates, not much is known regarding the opportunities and freedoms that enable their success, particularly using the resilience approach together with the feminist theory or capabilities approach as a theoretical framework. Levels of resilience vary from woman to woman, depending on the background, support from their spouses and immediate family members, supervisors and many other factors. To address this gap, this chapter will discuss obstacles encountered by these women, setting a tone or building a foundation for the whole book on how those who obtained their doctoral degrees described their

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individual journeys, thereby contributing to knowledge on the scholarship of literature on doctoral experiences of women in Africa.

■ Doctoral education in Africa

According to Tettey (2006), a significant barrier to development on the African continent is the dearth of PhDs. Prior to the discussion on the discourse of the knowledge economy, African governments were allegedly restrained for decades from making investments in their HE systems, according to Molla and Cuthbert (2016). The African continent did not take part in the global knowledge economy because of the economic crisis, lasting from the 1970s to 1990s, that left African governments indebted to the World Bank. Because of this, Africa presently has the lowest rankings in key knowledge economy indicators like the number of skilled researchers and investment in research and development.

African nations, like the rest of the world, require doctoral candidates. Therefore, discussions on a variety of platforms, such as the International Association of Universities (IAU) and the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) (2012) have focused on the value-contribution of doctoral education to the knowledge economy, the role of a doctoral graduate in the knowledge economy and the need for doctoral candidates in Africa (Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard 2015a). To produce PhD graduates of the highest calibre necessary to meet local development demands, African universities are expected to offer doctoral training despite encountering a variety of obstacles. Numerous efforts have been made to improve research capacity on the continent as a result of these postgraduate training limitations (Kabiru et al. 2014). Even though there have been some initiatives on the African continent to boost research training, such as the Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa (CARTA) (Jørgensen 2012) to support doctoral candidates and universities' supervisory capacity, African nations continue to face similar difficulties in achieving their objective of increased PhD graduates (Molla & Cuthbert 2016). In most African nations, there is a lack of money, poor institutional capability that may be related to infrastructure for both students and institutions of higher learning and a lack of qualified supervisors, as well as faculty members who are approaching retirement age (Breetzke & Hedding 2018; Craig et al. 2023). The majority of students in Africa also support themselves during their PhD studies and pay for their own tuition, which frequently results in the risk that their studies will be interrupted and postponed any time they face financial difficulties (Cross & Backhouse 2014; Louw & Godsell 2016). This may be one of the explanations for why PhD students in Africa tend to be significantly older than their counterparts elsewhere in world (Cross & Backhouse 2014). The fact that doctoral

education 'takes place in intellectual environments that offer little to facilitate the critical, scholarly engagement of candidates relative to conditions in more advanced HE systems' (Molla & Cuthbert 2016, p. 641) presents another difficulty. For instance, doctoral education is mostly still offered in the traditional mode, where students have one supervisor, making it challenging for students who have not conducted research. Despite the complicated backgrounds of PhD applicants, Africa is no longer excluded from engaging in discussions on the importance of PhDs (Cloete et al. 2015a) and seeks to enhance doctoral education to satisfy local demands.

The second project, the African Doctorate Dissertation Research Fellowship (ADDRF) Programme, addresses the problem by offering doctoral fellowships and specialised training seminars to support rigorous research addressing governance, equity, health and population-related challenges in Africa. The ADDRf Programme offers a means to connect with more PhD students from Africa to give them the necessary mentoring and transferrable skills that will prepare them for academic and research roles. Sub-Saharan Africa, specifically, still has a severe shortage of PhDs, even though doctoral programmes are essential for developing subject-matter expertise and giving researchers the advanced skills they need to plan, carry out and assess development interventions and activities (Kabiru et al. 2014). Therefore, because of low completion rates, there are poor links to industry and often insufficient responsiveness to political, social and economic needs, to name a few (Cloete et al. 2015a).

However, the nature of doctoral training has been changing because some universities have deviated from having one supervisor for students and have adopted the approach of having two or more supervisors (Nerad et al. 2009).

With the increasing demand for PhD graduates, there is concern about the quality of the degrees that are awarded (Cloete et al. 2015a). Success in doctoral education, according to Bitzer (2011, p. 426), 'is taken as completing a doctorate degree in the minimum time at the highest level of academic/scholarly/professional quality'. This success, among other things, may be influenced by not only the kind of supervision students get but also the students' well-being, both internal and external factors such as the learning environment itself, the availability of resources such as funding (Bitzer 2001) and the individual's drive to be resilient, which can enable or hinder students' success. Pyhältö et al. (2012, p. 1) agree with Bitzer by stating that 'the politics of science and institutional factors, the recruitment system, supervision, knowledge, learning and assessment practices, and personal resources and various aspects of a doctoral candidate's life matter'. This implies that there are other factors at play in doctoral education besides supervision as the sole criterion for success (Igumbor et al. 2022). Three African nations - Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa - participating in

partnerships and collaborations on research training on both a regional and global scale is one example that helped those nations succeed (Molla & Cuthbert 2016). Cross and Backhouse (2014) purport that South Africa formed an international partnership with Stanford University and the University of Queensland, thereby forming a South African Doctoral Consortium. As a result of such collaborations, doctoral students are motivated by being exposed to the world and to what other people are doing at different universities as they engage in discussions and share ideas in similar fields of interest (Tsephe 2014). At the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), which was previously known as Durban Westville University, the Faculty of Education came up with a programme (cohort approach) whereby collective supervisors collaborated, complemented and supplemented each other, thereby allowing students to come together to learn in various disciplines and methodological approaches (Samuel & Vithal 2011). According to these authors, this programme showed remarkable success over time as graduate employees joined the programme and became programme managers and teachers, some of whom now lead their own cohorts of doctoral students.

■ Women in Africa are marginalised within higher education institutions

Despite the impact of patriarchy on culture and religion in Africa, women's experience within HEIs has been compromised, especially in historically white HEIs.

South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria are some of the countries regarded highly in terms of doctoral education in Africa (Cyranoski et al. 2011; Waghid 2015). Despite the common funding challenge that students from these countries face in HE, specifically doctoral studies, South Africa is known as an African PhD centre (Cloete, Sheppard & Bailey 2015b; National Planning Commission [NPC] 2012) and indisputably as the largest knowledge producer on the continent (Teferra 2014), while Egypt is also seen as a powerhouse for doctoral studies in the Middle East (Cyranoski et al. 2011). This, therefore, means there are success stories within doctoral education. As such, this research aims to explore such strategies and capabilities, enabling African women aiming to become PhD graduates to complete their studies.

Africa's number of PhD graduates is still low compared to other parts of the world. According to Teferra (2015, 2014), Africa's total contribution to the global knowledge capital is 1%. Even though there is an increase in the number, it is still very low compared to the number of undergraduates. In addition, the lack of funding for doctoral studies is a contributing factor to the low graduation rates of African women. In the next section, I turn to a discussion on the production of PhD graduates in South Africa.

■ Doctoral education in South Africa

Africans were marginalised in South African HEIs because of the policies of apartheid. As a result, colleges were classified according to their students' races and ethnicities, and racial disparities in funding and support for HE were prevalent (Bunting 2006). This meant that most of the universities that African students attended were underfunded, rural educational institutions with little access to academic resources and assistance. Additionally, because of their ethnicity and gender, the apartheid regime purposefully overlooked African women (Wangenge-Ouma 2013). After the 1994 elections, the South African government had to work to change the country's racially segregated HE system, which favoured the white minority, especially men (Jawitz 2012). South Africa has focused on creating a new education and training system to suit the demands of a democratic society. Economic advancements aimed at boosting access to education and training services, democratising the educational system, addressing unfair imbalances and raising the bar for research, training and education (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET] 2013). Only after this change to democracy were attempts made to boost the enrolment of black and female students (Breier & Herman 2017). After this incident, the number of PhD graduates increased. South Africa's doctoral production increased to 34 PhD graduates per million of the population in 2014, which is almost double the output in 2005. Universities were merged to try to stop the discrimination that previously occurred in the apartheid era (Breier & Herman 2017). Even though South Africa generated 36 PhD graduates per million of the population, this number was still incredibly low compared to Brazil's 70, Cuba's 60 and Argentina's 44. South Africa's doctoral graduation rate is still exceedingly low compared to other emerging nations (UNESCO 2015). In addition, despite the steps taken to undo the impacts of apartheid, the crippling effects of the discriminatory educational system are still evident today. For instance, 49% of working-age white people have university degrees compared to 16% of the black population (Statistics South Africa [StatsSA] 2016).

As part of its national development strategy, South Africa aims to increase the number of PhD graduates to at least 5,000 per year by 2030 (NPC 2012), with an emphasis on increasing the number of African female graduates because they were historically underrepresented (Mouton, Boshoff & James 2015). The South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI), established by the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and National Research Foundation (NRF) in 2006 with the aim of attracting and retaining research excellence in South Africa's public universities, is one of the initiatives that are being put in place to allow students to study outside of their national boundaries (NRF 2009).

South Africa is renowned for its excellent policy formulation, but its implementation is subpar because of a lack of resources (Cloete et al. 2015b). This is demonstrated by the fact that except for three South African universities – the University of Cape Town (UCT), the Central University of Technology (CUT) and the University of Johannesburg (UJ) – there is still a shortage of doctoral academic staff, despite the well-formulated policy (*Republic of South Africa's White Paper for Post-School Education and Training of 2013*) that promotes doctoral education in South African HEIs. Between 2005 and 2014, UCT observed a 100% increase in the number of employees with PhD degrees, CUT saw a 167% increase and UJ saw a 135% increase (Breier & Herman 2017). The competence of the supervisors to supervise at the doctoral level has a significant impact on the doctoral students' ability to successfully complete their doctoral programmes, which is necessary for HEIs to generate PhD graduates (McGregor 2013). Breier and Herman (2017) go on to state that additional academics with doctoral degrees are urgently needed in South Africa, particularly in historically underserved population groups. In terms of gender, male academic employees made up 53% of the workforce in 2015, a decrease from 58% in 2005, while female academics increased from 42% in 2005 to 47% in 2015 (Breetzke & Hedding 2018). It is important to highlight the fact that African female academic staff made up only 14% of the entire workforce, which is a very low representation given that this group makes up 41% of South Africa's population (StatsSA 2011).

According to Molla and Cuthbert (2016), the South African government has set a goal to increase the proportion of academic employees with PhDs from 34% in 2010 to 75% in 2030 under the NPC (2011). South Africa has a higher-than-average PhD enrolment rate compared to the rest of Africa, which has a very low enrolment rate (Cloete et al. 2015a). In 2014, South Africa produced 34 PhDs per every million people, an increase from the previous year. This number is still low, though, when compared to other developing nations like Brazil (70 PhDs per million) and Portugal (277 PhDs per million).

The HE system in South Africa is complicated, however, as a result of the intersection of the four policy imperatives for the development of doctoral education, namely, growth, transformation (to increase the number of black female PhD graduates), efficiency and quality. This presents a challenge in increasing the production of PhD graduates (Mouton 2016). This problem results from the most likely conflict and inconsistency between the policy objectives. For instance, South Africa needs more PhD graduates, but this objective may be hindered by a number of variables, including a lack of supervisory skill, efficacy and quality. The deep structures of the realities of both students and supervisors, such as sociodemographic differences, the area in which the student is registered and differences

among institutions may have a negative impact on the doctoral production and constrain the political imperatives, in addition to being in conflict with one another (Cloete et al. 2015a).

As South Africa faces the problem of an ageing group of professors, like the rest of Africa, it is under pressure to increase the number of PhD-qualified academic staff. For example, from 3% in 2005, the percentage of academic employees over the age of 65 increased to almost 5% in 2015 (Breetzke & Hedding 2015). Despite this slow increase, it is worth noting, however, that there are some South African universities that have a large number of academic staff with doctoral qualifications (Louw & Godsell 2015). The University of Cape Town, for example, had the highest number of doctoral workers (67%) in 2014, followed by the Stellenbosch University (SUN), the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) (62%) and the University of Pretoria (UP) (61%). Accordingly, the South African government intends to raise the number of PhD-qualified academic staff from 43% in 2014 to 75% by 2030 (NPC 2011). It is worth indicating that this is a substantial increase from 30% of staff with doctoral qualifications since 2005 (Herman & Sehoole 2017). Being aware of South Africa's overall lack of capacity, NRF/DST have suggested seeking international as well as private collaborations for students to participate in doctoral programmes within local and international institutions (NRF 2009).

Initiatives focusing on women's funding, especially African women, as doctoral students are still difficult to monitor through literature, and this leads one to believe that further research is required for this subject. Although there are many programmes to assist African students, they are sometimes not well-known to them, so small schemes providing little incentives have been launched (Herman & Breier 2017).

Given South Africa's history, Africans (both men and women) encountered challenges in the pursuit of HE studies. They were limited in their choice of universities at which to enrol, as race played a huge factor in which universities allowed Africans. These universities at which Africans were permitted to register had further infrastructure challenges, thereby disadvantaging the already disadvantaged group. This limits the exploration of African women's doctoral experiences in South Africa, as women often lack familial support, academic environment, institutional culture and social support (Magano 2011, 2013). Despite the government's attempts to rectify or redress the inequalities caused by the apartheid system during the democratic government, one would understand that more challenges faced this redress for the large number of people who had to be rescued, considering that Africans represented most of the population. This means that there was a possible 'fight' for already insufficient resources. Keeping in mind that patriarchy is a system that favours men and regards them as a priority and relegates women as being second-class, it is expected that

gender roles would then perpetuate this disadvantage, taking the problem of underrepresentation of African women in doctoral studies further.

The following section discusses interventions put in place by the South African government to enhance doctoral education.

■ The South African government's interventions to enhance doctoral completion

In South Africa, Cloete et al. (2015b) state that by formulating policies that enhance academic supervisory capacity, providing incentives for students to participate in the system up to the doctoral level and through student bursary-linked grants, the government makes significant investments in producing PhD graduates. Furthermore, the South African government rewards universities with funding for producing successful PhD graduates, and this funding is used by universities to offer fee waivers for successful doctoral students (Cross & Backhouse 2014) in the form of providing doctoral students with a bursary of about ZAR20,000 once they are registered.

According to Cloete et al. (2015b), scholarships for doctoral candidates have been given out by the government and organisations like the DST and NRF 'based on merit and equity'. According to the NRF's (2023) website, the Thuthuka programme:

[A]ims to develop human capital and to improve the research capacities of designated researchers (African, Indian or Coloured, female or persons with disabilities) with the ultimate goal of redressing historical imbalances. (p. 6)

One of the attempts to address historical injustices is to ensure that 60% of women and 80% of black people receive supported grants for PhD studies (NRF 2016). It is, however, concerning that these financial mechanisms are insufficient, particularly for students to support both themselves and their families (Herman & Sehoole 2017). Because of the fact that these bursaries are renewable each year for three years, students are also left wondering whether they will receive funding for the following academic year, adding stress to the already demanding schedule of doctoral students (Lynch 2008; Magano 2013; Tsephe 2014).

In light of the South African government's efforts to increase the number of academic staff (Breetzke & Hedding 2018), transformation is related to the ideas of equity and quality (Akoojee & Nkomo 2007). For instance, the goal of policy papers governing the transformation of South Africa's post-apartheid HEIs is to close the gap between white people and black people who failed because of institutional passivity (Price 2014), racism (Mangcu 2014) and the snatching or luring of black scholars into private sector jobs

(Makholwa 2015). Breetzke and Hedding (2018) pointed out that Dr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training, presented a new Staffing South Africa Universities System (SSAUF) with the intention of addressing the uneven racial composition of academic staff, overwhelmingly defining African undergraduate students and providing incentives to retain them until their PhDs are attained. The Nurturing Emerging Scholars Programme (NESP), one of three programmes offered by SSAUF, aims to identify significant black students with junior-level academic standing and to offer them possibilities for employment and resources.

The Existing Academics Capacity Enhancement Programme (EACEP) seeks to encourage the advancement of current African university scholars to complete their doctoral studies, and the Newt Generation Academics Programme seeks to recruit new academics in fields with high skills needs by drawing on equity concerns from senior postgraduate or past students (Breetzke & Hedding 2018). Although there is no information on the number of graduates generated since the programmes' introduction in 2015, they are a component of a development strategy to enhance the percentage of women PhD graduates.

African women lacked knowledge of accessible resources despite the South African government putting measures in place to improve doctoral education. Additionally, there were not enough staff members to support the studies because producing PhD graduates requires personnel who can supervise students. This was a problem, given that there is already a scarcity of PhD graduates. This shows that universities were ill-equipped to train African women, in addition to the fact that they lacked the necessary information.

The issues that prevent women from progressing through PhD programmes are covered in the next section.

■ Women in doctoral education and factors hindering their success

The percentage of women pursuing doctorates is increasing globally, but there are still major barriers to overcome, particularly for students who are also raising children (Brown & Watson 2010). To better comprehend the experiences of female PhD students in the United States of America (USA), Brown and Watson conducted a study in which eight women were interviewed. The results of this study revealed that having children had a big impact on doctoral-level research. This demonstrates that the environment PhD students work in affects their growth. Accordingly, the community of doctorate education is defined by Gildersleeve, Croom and Vasquez (2011) as the institutional, social and cultural context in which students reside and conduct their academic work. Wulff and Nerad (2006)

highlighted three important factors that are outside the institution, inside the institution and within a programme that students are enrolled in. All three of these factors have an impact on the status of doctoral education.

Lynch (2008) supports this idea and adds that women's daily lives are influenced by both structural settings and sociocultural systems. Lynch claims that the symbolic nature of the duties of a mother and a student is frequently at odds because of the blended identities, which raises the likelihood that student mothers may drop out of PhD programmes.

Boys are socialised differently from girls because of patriarchy (Cviková 2003). As a result, in the past, men were perceived as family providers and women were given the responsibility of bearing and raising children. Therefore, gendered roles that are created through socialisation make it difficult for women to survive in a competitive setting (Tosh 1994). Because of this social conditioning, girls grow up to lead stressful lives because of their employment, education and family obligations. Additionally, because they want to project an image of being 'good women', they make decisions about how to spend their time wisely between their families and their studies (Lafrance & Stoppard 2007). Springer, Parker and Leviten-Reid (2009) suggest that trying to balance the demands of work and home results in great difficulty and failure because being a mother and an academic becomes taxing to a woman's mind and body. This is because a woman must live up to certain expectations as a mother in order to be respected by society and by the child(ren) she is raising. Women consequently 'view the academic culture as being aggressive with rigorous job conditions and too much competitiveness, and therefore a system not suited to women', according to Haake (2011, p. 115). The student who is also a mother has obligations as a PhD student, such as submitting work on time to the supervisor (among others). If she fails to do so because of obligations outside of her studies, the study may not be completed in a timely manner (Lynch 2008). In a similar vein, Carter, Blumenstein and Cook (2013) argue that caring for elderly or disabled relatives automatically falls under the purview of women. As a result, they are forced to choose between their responsibilities to their families and their doctoral studies, which puts them under a great deal of stress.

Women generally struggle to balance employment and family, as well as family and doctoral studies. Women with children, in particular, 'leak' out of the educational system as a result of issues that do not typically affect men (Springer et al. 2009). It is difficult for women to adapt to and fit into HE, especially in fields that are predominately dominated by white men, like the natural sciences (Haake 2011; Tsephe 2014). This is because of the cold and competitive culture that is defined as masculine in HEIs, which places women in a disadvantageous position (Magano 2011). Additionally, HEIs frequently lack family policies that support women who have children, and

without enhancing these services, it will be difficult to attract women to pursue PhDs and succeed as they are more likely to fall through the cracks and not finish their studies (Keen & Salvatorelli 2016). According to Prozesky (2008), most women decide to put off starting their doctoral studies in order to raise their children and support their spouses as they pursue their ambitions. The social stigmatisation that women experience if they defy social conventions and beliefs that a good woman takes care of the family and takes pride in motherhood, as it holds a prestigious status in communities as opposed to studying and being seen as an inadequate mother, is another factor contributing to women's struggle over whether to pursue HE, which results in low enrolment for women in sub-Saharan African countries (Okkolin 2016).

Academic environments that provide women with fewer chances than men may also contribute to the high female attrition from PhD studies. The lack of supportive environments contributes to disparities in academia. For instance, African women are included in previously white, male disciplines where the use of equipment requiring physical labour to operate puts them in a position where they must ask their male counterparts for favours, which hinders their advancement and retention (Managa 2013). A cultural shift is required, according to Haake (2011). It is not unexpected that women entered postgraduate studies significantly later and frequently during gaps in their careers (Brown & Watson 2010), and as a result, they were outnumbered by their male colleagues in pursuing doctoral education because of obligations to their families. In a qualitative study conducted in the USA by Brown and Watson (2010), researchers looked at the experiences and feelings of female doctoral students regarding their doctoral journey. They discovered that because doctoral studies are so demanding, couples often end up getting divorced because they are unable to spend enough time with their children. Married women occasionally chose divorce as being married hampered their ability to advance in their PhD studies (Brown & Watson 2010; Tsephe 2014). Women who were single said it was easier to study and earn a degree without having a spouse, which might have been difficult if they had been in a relationship (Brown & Watson 2010). As a result, women may be more successful in getting doctorates because of their resiliency and emotional intelligence (Castro et al. 2011).

McAlpine et al. (2012) emphasise the importance of creating personal networks as a means of assisting PhD students in integrating their academic and personal lives. By pointing to a culture of institutional indifference, such as the absence of educational programmes intended to promote the establishment of personal networks that permit academic and individual convergence, their findings have led to the convergence of personal and institutional factors. Additionally, their findings suggest that these factors are important for the formation of future researchers' identities.

This suggests that to inspire them and help them understand the potential in work, African women PhD graduates should be integrated into academics during their doctoral training. Their continued enrolment in PhD programmes will be impacted by this. As a result, their presence in PhD programmes will increase. This increase may draw and spark the interest of academic researchers, telling stories of successful completion rather than the negative ones that currently dominate the literature.

Although some women enrol in PhD programmes because they need to in order to advance their careers, earning a PhD broadens their range of employment opportunities so they are not limited to a certain profession (Brown & Watson 2010). A qualitative study by Charleston et al. (2014), which predominantly examined African women pursuing PhDs, sought to understand how African American women perceived their participation in the traditionally white, male-dominated area of computer science. They discovered that African women were aware of their daily isolation as a result of being female and African, as well as their isolation inside academic settings. Shavers (2010) notes that a lack of support for the new degree, particularly for those who are not in contact with their peers in the programme because of the lifestyle change that comes with the demands of doctoral studies, may be fuelled by the underrepresentation of Africans within historically white HEIs (Hutchings 2015). As emotions of loneliness immediately jeopardise well-being and academic persistence or resilience, it is more challenging for students to ask for the support they need to stay in programmes when they are alone (Shavers 2010), which results in discouragement (Johnson-Bailey et al. 2010).

Robinson (2013) describes how, because of the numerical representation, the eleven African postgraduate women in the USA who participated in her study felt like a disadvantaged group, having feelings of isolation as they lacked allies and support. This finding of African women being isolated is consistent with Tsephe's (2014) findings that African women indicated that the doctoral journey was the loneliest time of their lives, both academically and socially; it caused a rift with family members and colleagues. Tsephe conducted her study using oral narrative analysis through the lens of Black Feminist Thought. In addition, misconceptions about African women and incompetence arose because of these factors (Tsephe 2014). According to Castelló, McAlpine and Pyhältö (2017), the sensation of isolation can happen at several points during a PhD programme. For instance, right after admission, students are placed in strange settings where they must figure out new definitions for their roles as students. Loneliness may strike in the midst of the programmes, accompanied by a lack of research advancement and, eventually, when they must write their theses (Castelló et al. 2017). For one to be effective in the researcher group, one must also have written and communication skills in the scientific field (Castelló, Lesta & Corcelles 2013; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw 2012).

Therefore, it was important to have some understanding of the reasons African women completed their doctorates, the opportunities and freedoms that were accessible to them, the difficulties they faced and what encouraged them to persevere in order to attain their goals. A greater degree of accomplishment within HEIs is a vital priority, given that the knowledge economy is now a significant contributor to economic development on a global scale (Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh & Susuman 2018). As a result, the PhD, the highest degree of educational success, provides women with skills comparable to those of men, enabling them to address issues of the present and the future. According to Sultana (2012), no nation can grow without the assistance of women; hence, modern civilisation is the result of the combined efforts of men and women in contemporary society. Therefore, regardless of the small number of African women who hold doctoral degrees, their success stories must be shared in order to inspire more of them to pursue doctoral degrees.

The following section explains African women in doctoral education in the scope of South African HE.

■ African women in doctoral education in South Africa

There is not much information available in South African PhD education about the approaches that enabled African women doctoral candidates to succeed in their studies. African PhD graduates made up 54% of all PhD graduates in 2016, up from 30% a decade earlier, according to the DHET (2016). For example, while they only made up 10% of PhD graduates in 2006, African women made up 18% of all PhD graduates in 2016 (DHET 2016). According to the percentages, there has been a minor increase in African women earning doctorates in South Africa.

Many studies address issues related to African women PhD students, access to HE and women in academia generally (Magano 2013; Prozesky 2008). Tsephe (2014) interviewed seven African female PhD students for a report on the experiences of black women pursuing doctoral studies at a South African university. The results showed that African women were motivated to pursue PhDs because they drew inspiration from female lecturers and women they met at conferences they attended while pursuing their PhDs. African women may decide to end their marriage in some severe instances, like what Brown and Watson (2010) discovered in the USA, when they believe it will prevent them from completing their doctoral studies (Tsephe 2014). The culture of the communities to which they belong puts pressure on African women who are doctoral students. In African cultures, women are expected to prioritise raising their families, putting aside their personal interests, hopes and ambitions in the process (Magano 2013).

Even though there have not been many studies on this group of women, the scant literature shows that doctoral education, particularly for African women PhD graduates, is still a problem in South Africa; as a result, the number of these graduates must rise. Despite an increase in female PhD graduates over the past 20 years, African women are still underrepresented in South Africa, and little is known about the factors that helped those who did graduate. Therefore, this study aimed to contribute by presenting the experiences of those who were successful.

Despite enrolling at a rate of 47% compared to 38% for white students, the number of degrees awarded to African graduates each year is lower (CHE 2014). Even inside HEIs, African women accounted for 76% of all academics without doctorates in 2014 (Herman & Breier 2017). In South Africa, African women made up 18% of all PhD graduates in 2016, a significant increase from 16% in 2012 (DHET 2016). Given the paucity of research on the factors that contribute to African women's success in doctoral studies, it is clear that more study is required. African women continue to complete their PhDs in South Africa, but little is known about what keeps them there and what factors contribute to their success. This study aimed to present success stories and the factors that led to success. Bringing forth positive stories on African women's success within doctoral studies may motivate other African women to embark on doctoral journeys as it would be evident that the chances of success are equally bright for them.

The next section elaborates on some of the factors that hinder women's success in doctoral studies in South Africa.

■ Factors hindering women's success in doctoral education in South Africa

Studies in South Africa, like those conducted internationally, indicate that women are more likely than men to discontinue their doctoral studies earlier (Magano 2013). One issue that doctoral students face is a lack of money (Herman 2011). Although there are many causes of inadequate funding, Lynch (2008), Loots, Tsephe and Walker (2016) discovered that women, particularly those who have children, need more financial assistance. Lynch (2008) argued that the cost of child-care makes it nearly impossible for many full-time student mothers to continue their research after business or working hours because they must pick up their children from daycare centres no later than 08:00. This makes studying particularly challenging for students who must be in the labs to conduct their experiments. In their 2018 study comprising college mothers in the USA, Kensinger and Minnick discovered that, among other barriers to women's advancement, participants heavily relied on student loans to pay for child-care expenditures, which exacerbated their financial difficulties as interest

rates rose. In addition to the expensive child-care options, student mothers who attended a community college discovered that the on-campus child-care facilities did not prioritise enrolment for mothers attending the college but instead opened the facility to the wider community. The average waitlist for these facilities was between six and eight months, with no assurance that the baby would be taken in. Therefore, the lack of on-campus child-care increases commute time, which cuts down on accessibility to university and study time, not to mention the accompanying travel costs for off-campus child-care. The mother then depends on the family to help take care of her children if she does not have the money to send the child to a child-care centre. Although there are universities with kindergarten services on campus, there is no literature in South Africa on child-care facilities intended to serve student mothers at higher learning institutions.

Another significant outside aspect that has an impact on doctoral students' experiences is their relationship with their supervisor or supervisors (Sverdlik et al. 2018). According to Orellana et al. (2016), the nature of efficient doctoral supervision is the interaction between the supervisor and the student, which is influenced by institutional requirements, student needs and abilities, attitudes and obligations, as well as supervisors' styles of supervision. Thus, supervision plays a key role in students' development (Bitzer et al. 2014; Castelló et al. 2017). For instance, when students experience slow or no progress in their studies, which can be caused by a variety of factors like frequent topic changes or a lack of communication with the supervisor, students lose motivation. Even though it does not specifically apply to women, the generation of PhD graduates of the highest calibre is greatly influenced by the standard of supervision and the availability of supportive settings and infrastructure (Mouton 2016). Additionally, a number of empirical research projects have demonstrated that doctoral students' feelings are significantly influenced by how well the supervisor and the student get along (Cotterall 2013; Gearity & Mertz 2012; McAlpine & McKinnon 2013).

The lack of female supervisors has a negative effect on the doctorate trajectories of female PhD students. Attesting to the important role that women supervisors play in women doctoral students' doctoral paths, Craig et al. (2023) mention that when women are supervised by a woman, they succeed at higher levels. Because of their perception that a supervisor of the same gender has greater compassion because they are also a woman, women emphasise the value of same-gender supervision (Ramohai 2013; Tsephe 2014). This is confirmed by Castelló et al. (2017), who also highlight the fact that having female supervisors may help female students retain their motivation to finish their doctoral studies. A barrier to more women in organisations at higher levels is the dearth of women in senior posts (Howe-Walsh & Turnbull 2016). Contrary to the claim that participants suffered

from having male supervisors, Brown and Watson (2010) and Fernando (2013) found that gender did not play a significant role.

The ability of students to maintain respectful and productive relationships with their supervisors is another crucial aspect of supervision (Goldman & Goodboy 2017; Wilson & James 2022). This shows the students' ability to adhere to deadlines and exhibit competence in their research, which inspires the supervisor because these are some of the elements that show commitment. Failure to do so might result in the supervisor becoming unhappy, which would result in the relationship being soured. This shows that the constancy of the supervisor-student connection influences doctoral candidates' long-term outcomes as well as their short-term performance during their academic careers (Lunsford 2012).

The gendered culture of HEIs (Haake 2011) summarises some of the barriers and difficulties women encounter along doctoral pathways that prevent their advancement, which lowers the rate of hiring and maintaining African faculty and students (Ismail 2011). It can be challenging for women to fit in at a HEI, especially in fields like physics and engineering, where the student body largely comprises white men (Haake 2011; Tanenbaum & Upton 2014). According to Tinto (1993), the academic and social cultures of the doctoral programme are inextricably intertwined because social interaction with teachers and peers is crucial for developing the critical thinking abilities needed to successfully complete the PhD.

Finally, because networks are seen as 'old boys' clubs' where male students and supervisors gather casually to discuss research, women feel excluded from networks, especially those who were enrolled in male-dominated disciplines (Tsephe 2014). Access to information, as well as social and administrative support, is restricted or denied to women if they are excluded from these events. Although these clubs did not specifically advocate keeping women out, membership required that women be open to social interaction in order to gain access to unofficial networks. For instance, women had to go out and drink beer with the men, be willing to debate and compete and have 'a thick skin', which meant they were not supposed to be overly feminine (De Welde & Laursen 2011). Women would even have to alter their appearance, specifically their way of dressing, in order to fit in with the club.

Women generally face much more difficult obstacles than men do just by virtue of being women. In addition to the usual difficulties that both men and women face, women are further constrained because they fear for their safety. The divide between African women and white women, as well as between them and their male counterparts, will deepen if one has to change who they are in order to fit the mould. Those who are not ready or cannot afford to adapt will be discouraged and finally drop out.

The factors that contributed to African women's successful completion of PhD studies are discussed in the next section.

■ Factors that contributed to African women's success in doctoral education

As was already said, there is not much documented about what enables African women to finish their doctoral studies. I shall talk about African women's achievements in doctoral studies generically in this part because I have not found any research on African women who have completed their PhDs in South Africa. I will then go through the main factors that African women believe have contributed to their overall success. South Africa will be the subject of particular emphasis.

■ Mentoring of doctoral students

Louw and Muller (2014) claim that many universities regard the supervisor as a mentor in addition to functioning as the doctoral student's research advisor. A mentor is a person who assists students with their academic work, offers career guidance and provides emotional support when needed. Only a small number of empirical studies in HE have looked at the connection between mentoring and African American women's advancement inside historically white institutions (HWIs) (Grant & Ghee 2015; Grant & Simmons 2008). However, it is indicated that mentoring¹ offers many advantages, including career progression, where new researchers can network and move about within their fields of specialisation, and job happiness and higher pay are crucial in doctorate education (Goldman & Goodboy 2017). Specifically, training African students for professorships in traditionally white institutions, from which they had previously been excluded, is also vital (Grant & Ghee 2015; Grant & Simmons 2008). Mentoring, according to Lindén, Ohlin and Brodin (2013), helps an individual grow on both a professional and personal level. It is expected that doctoral students have academic needs linked to research output and psychological requirements connected to their own and their career development (Lindén, Ohlin & Brodin 2013). Despite this information and research on the supervision of PhD students in South Africa (Bitzer et al. 2014; Pare 2010), there is no literature specifically focusing on mentoring African women PhD graduates in South Africa.

1. Mentoring will be used interchangeably with supervision to mean the mentor guides the mentee in acquiring knowledge in research, and this requires a relationship between the student and the academic scholar which is beyond just academic.

However, it is claimed that African women credit their mentors of the same race for helping them succeed in doctoral education because people like to identify with those who are similar to them, come from similar cultural backgrounds and speak the same language (Johnson-Bailey et al. 2008; Patton 2009). Although Grant and Ghee's (2015) study does not specifically focus on African women pursuing PhD degrees, they do stress the significance of finding a peer who shares one's identity in order to succeed in academia. The process of telling one's story and conversing with other African American women who have had comparable experiences is claimed to be powerful and helpful in understanding the difficulties encountered by African American women in academia. It is important to note that because there are few African professors to supervise African women, it is difficult, if not impossible, to provide for all African students who pursue doctoral degrees (Culver 2018). Grant and Ghee (2015) make a reference to this when they note that while African American women want to be mentored by other African American women, they often find it difficult to do so, particularly in HWIs.

Tsephe (2014) conducted a study in South Africa and discovered that most of her respondents attributed their academic success or completion of their doctoral studies to supervisors who showed encouragement beyond academic aspects, similar to studies conducted in America by Johnson-Bailey et al. (2008) and Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012). However, it is crucial to remember that in this study, appropriate supervision – where positive interactions between students and their mentors were crucial – was the key to success rather than gender or race. Both Bitzer (2007) and Magano (2011) acknowledged the value of excellent supervision and emphasised the necessity for supervisors to appreciate students as individuals in addition to serving as academic mentors.

■ **Personal qualities that contribute to completing PhD study**

As pursuing a doctorate is not an easy path, students must possess the endurance to persevere through any challenges. This indicates that students enrolled in these programmes generally need to be self-motivated or determined not to give up when things are difficult. Castro et al. (2011) found that resilient students have high levels of intrinsic encouragement. According to Devos et al. (2016), another ingredient for success is for PhD students to be aware of the direction their research is taking, as well as the goal and outcome they expect to attain. These researchers are saying that while supervisors may contribute to the issue under study, it is essential for PhD students to be interested in it; otherwise, disinterest frequently leads to dropout before completion.

According to studies conducted in the USA, the majority of black students who acquire PhDs at HWIs are female students (McGaskey 2015; Shavers & Moore III 2014). However, studies have revealed, for instance, that black students at HWIs encounter systemic challenges such institutional racism on campus, bad classroom experiences and inadequate support systems (Hannon et al. 2016). As an illustration, Carter-Black (2008) explored her experience as a black woman attending a HWI and credited her success in doctoral studies to a defiant act. During a class discussion, she claimed that a professor's racism caused him to doubt her intelligence. Research has demonstrated that racial tension and antagonism are frequent among black students in HWIs, which is important to note (Shavers & Moore III 2014). When she was a child, she had seen her mother and grandmother bravely face the challenges of life and saw them get through the most trying periods. She asserted that because of her family's history of resistance and the encouragement of friends, family and fellow doctoral students, she advanced through the doctoral journey in spite of societal expectations and the belief that success is only for white people who have an advantage because of their economic background (Carter-Black 2008). This is consistent with research conducted by Tsephe (2014), who found that women had to persevere in the face of obstacles, particularly in white-male-dominated fields where their male counterparts undermined their potential by failing to value their opinions. As a result, women had to put in extra effort to demonstrate that they had what it took to complete doctoral studies. In order to complete doctorate education, Nkambule (2014) attests to the importance of resilience by claiming that, despite being disrespected and undervalued because of her underprivileged upbringing, she had to work twice as hard to demonstrate her ability to achieve. Researchers emphasised that African American women had cultural traits that support resistance to marginal interactions at HWIs, such as self-efficacy (Shavers & Moore III 2014).

Women pursuing PhDs in the STEM disciplines said that in order to succeed, they had to alter their speech patterns, act assertively and confidently, eliminate words like 'I think' to express their thoughts in a particular way, portray only their scientific identities and reserve their social identities for interactions outside the study environment (Ong et al. 2011). Black women needed coping strategies for overcoming hardship in order to succeed in HWIs (Hannon et al. 2016); as a result, they had to be stubborn and tenacious, work twice as hard, and some had to be cautious about how they presented themselves to others, as Ong et al. (2011) showed.

According to Robinson (2013), she used silence as a coping strategy to get through her doctoral studies. Robinson's silence is consistent with Shavers and Moore III's (2014) research, in which participants reported that

hiding their true selves was a coping mechanism for pressure in doctoral programmes, particularly in hostile racial environments where there was an underrepresentation of African American doctoral students. The drawback of masking these women's true selves, however, is that it prevents them from acknowledging their suffering and asking for assistance.

Grant and Simmons (2008) attribute their success to their upbringing and having parents who were leaders in their fields and their communities. As they received assistance from parents who had had educational exposure, this helped them negotiate HEIs, particularly those that were primarily white. Their undergraduate education was completed at historically black institutions (HBIs), which also gave them leadership abilities that they later used at HWIs. Castro et al. (2011) are witness to the fact that parents who have high educational standards and who support their children in achieving those goals are the best examples of families supporting academic accomplishment. Additionally, being resilient is frequently aided by having siblings who look up to you.

This section presents the argument that mentorship and supervision are crucial to the success of African women who pursue PhD degrees. Furthermore, students' chances of success are increased when role models advise or oversee them. Unfortunately, there are not many role models for this group of women, which may have an adverse effect on their academic performance and prevent the PhD literature on women, particularly the already scarce literature for African women, from evolving.

■ Theories employed to study women's success factors in doctoral education

There is little research on how successful African women in South Africa were in completing their doctoral studies, with most of the literature focusing on the obstacles that African women face while pursuing their PhDs and the causes of attrition (Johnson-Bailey, Cervero & Bowles 2009; Magano 2013; Managa 2013). The following discussion covers the theories and methodology used in these investigations.

Black graduate students' experiences of support from their supervisors, colleagues and institutions were examined in the study by Johnson-Bailey et al. (2008) using the critical race framework. This study used a survey method and collected 586 questionnaires. Its conclusions included the claim that because of a lack of support from their departments, African students unknowingly experience racism. Although Robinson (2013) also referenced black feminist theory, she used oral research to delve into graduate students' accounts of their interactions with black women while pursuing their degrees. Findings showed that although black women still

experience gendered racism (being treated unfairly because they are both women and black) while pursuing PhDs, they may overcome this by showing perseverance. Shavers and Moore III (2014), using Black Feminist Thought as their theoretical lens, discovered that participants exhibited traits of a model student and professional behaviour to cope. These African women were successful in their doctoral programmes despite the difficulties they faced.

Another study by Magano (2011) indicated that black female postgraduate students needed mentorship and advice from supervisors in all areas of their lives. This study also used narratives to capture the viewpoints of the participants. Through the lens of black feminist theory, Shavers and Moore III (2014) looked at the viewpoints and experiences of African American female PhD candidates at PWIs. This study employed semi-structured interviews to learn how the participants' experiences affected their ability to persist in school and overall well-being. The results of this study showed that students employ academic masks as a coping mechanism for completing doctoral studies under oppression.

Nations are aiming to expand the number of PhD graduates worldwide as globalisation and the expansion of the information economy have revolutionised doctoral education. The fact that there are only a few studies discussing African women's experiences with doctoral education and the methods they used to finish their degrees and overcome their worries while pursuing their doctoral degrees in Africa, which is also among the nations trying to boost student retention until graduation, is worrisome. Additionally, South Africa has little literature on African PhD graduates. Particularly, there are no studies in the South African context that examine African women as PhD graduates from the perspective of skills.

This chapter provided some analysis of the gaps that have appeared in the literature on African women and PhD graduates, particularly in South Africa and other nations. The literature study makes it clear that studies on women in doctoral education have primarily focused on the difficulties that they experience, leading to their high attrition rates. As little is known about what supports African women's success in PhD education, the goal of this study was to investigate the techniques and skills that helped African women PhD graduates successfully complete their studies in South Africa. This study used the existing literature by looking at the experiences of African women who are PhD graduates from one South African university. Furthermore, by applying the capabilities approach, the research would contribute to the body of literature by highlighting the highly valued capabilities of African women who have completed doctoral degrees.

Supervision is one of the critical aspects of doctoral education

As indicated in Chapter 1, there is a paucity of literature on studies specifically dealing with African women pursuing doctoral studies for most of the available/current research is on doctoral education in general. Having said that, there are studies focused on black students within doctoral education. However, in the South African context, the black race includes African, Indian and coloured people. For this specific book, African women refers to black African women, and excludes Indian and coloured women. As such, women in Africa refers to black African women who undertook their doctoral studies within African universities, and excludes those who studied abroad. Lastly, it is important to mention at this point that the terms ‘mentor’ and ‘supervisor’ will be used interchangeably in this chapter. The reason for this is that effective supervisors are aware that mentoring is a necessary component of their work (Pearson & Brew 2002; Remenyi et al. 2002). A productive working relationship between the supervisor and the student is the definition of effective academic supervision. The supervisor must assist the student in becoming an independent researcher, critical thinker and inventor as part of this mentorship relationship (Manathunga 2005; Wendler et al. 2010).

Doctoral education has evolved over the years, and this has led to different ways in which supervisors supervise their students (Lee 2008;

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Thomson & Walker 2010). The traditional PhD was one where students were supervised by one supervisor, where a student only dealt with the supervisor and did not interact with other students and where they had to write a thesis of 80,000-100,000 words to contribute to scholarship, for instance. Furthermore, within the traditional PhD, students took longer to complete and studied full-time. This meant that they could be studying for years while writing their thesis. With the need for doctoral education increasing, there have been different types of PhDs emerging. A PhD was an entry into academia and 'many other professional fields such as school leadership, educational development roles in HE, professional fields such as health and social care' (Thomson & Walker 2010). As such, part-time students emerged: one would be a registered student but still hold a job elsewhere. One would want to get recognition at their workplace after completing their doctoral education and be promoted, hence contributing to their profession. For this type of PhD, different ways of supervision came about. For example, students had more than one expert supervising them. Also, the scope of learning broadened as students presented at conferences and were involved in projects and cohorts. Supervisors focused on the needs of the students and were fully aware of the diversity within a group of students. This means that supervisors are aware that different students require different guidance; students with disabilities, for instance, require different supervision. This success, among other things, may be influenced by not only the type of supervision students receive but also their well-being, as well as internal and external factors like the learning environment itself, the accessibility of resources like funding and the individual's desire to be resilient, which can either enable or hinder students' success (Bitzer 2007).

It is impossible to overstate the significance of the PhD supervisory relationship; at the very least, it is an intimate working partnership that lasts for a number of years and shapes the student's career prospects. However, it may be just as important to lay the groundwork for the student's future as an independent researcher (Madan 2021). According to Pyhältö, Vekkaïla and Keskinen (2015), a good match between supervisors' and doctoral students' views of supervision has been linked to a lower chance of dropout and higher levels of satisfaction. As a result, Africa has a problem of capacitated supervisors, which means that supervision may impact students' progress negatively because of a lack of skills. South Africa, for example, has high numbers of old professors who are advancing towards retirement. This may mean that these experts supervise too many students, thereby neglecting the needs of individual students. Those who have retired may be appointed on a contract basis, meaning they may be engaged in other projects and thus not fully attending to the students.

■ Supervision's role in the completion of studies

Research has been conducted on doctoral education supervision (Bitzer et al. 2014; Herman 2011, 2014) as the value of doctoral education increased globally. The idea that supervision is essential to both quality and efficiency in doctoral research is a central theory of many policy and management debates around doctoral education in many countries, but in contexts outside on the USA (Bastalich 2017). This is because effective and efficient supervision is crucial to the quality and success of postgraduate education and training (Mothiba, Maputle & Goon 2019). For instance, it has been discovered that doctorate students emphasise the value of social support and engagement with researchers during their PhD studies (Basturkmen, East & Bitchener 2014). Igumbor et al. (2022) define effective supervision as a two-way interactional process that calls for the student and the supervisor to work together to engage one another in an environment that values professionalism, respect and open-mindedness. According to Ismail et al. (2014, p. 1), 'supervision is an inter-relational process, including interior and exterior factors as well as the individual that occur between student and supervisor'.

Over the years, supervision has evolved and made supervisors have more students under their supervision than they did previously; hence, they are challenged to produce a diverse group of graduates, including those who can contribute to the field's academic community, collaborate with industry using the knowledge they have gained through doctoral training and serve as change agents at a global level (Bøgelund & De Graaff 2015). Frick et al. (2016) claim that supervisors typically take the initiative to build a relationship with their students that serves as the cornerstone of the learning environment that is built. Frick et al. (2016, p. 4) further state that 'it is important to understand supervision as a learning space of negotiated relationships', meaning that the supervisor and the student not only need to navigate their academic relationship but also how they relate in general to enable progress during the journey of supervision. For instance, their relationship as colleagues in cases where the student is staff and is also studying, and because their relationship is likened to that of a parent and child relationship (Tudor 2009), communication needs to be open, with clear contracts where both are empathetic towards each other and as a result trust each other. Doctoral supervisors and students may both be able to negotiate more fruitful learning environments by having a better understanding of how people communicate based on such identification positions (Frick et al. 2014). According to Abidin and West (2007), a bond may form between them, depending on how effectively they handle their connection. As Ismail and Abiddin (2009) attest, in

addition to providing tools for addressing potential conflicts between them, the supervisor should uphold an environment that fosters creativity and productivity. However, the supervisor's own experience, background, understanding and approaches may greatly influence how they engage with students (Igumbor et al. 2022). This can be difficult because supervisors have often experienced inadequate supervision themselves and therefore lack knowledge of what constitutes good supervision (Manderson et al. 2017).

Doctoral supervision is not just for academic and professional interactions; research demonstrates that students perform better when they feel supported, even in their private lives. A supervisor-student relationship is a key aspect of doctoral research (Orellana et al. 2016). The research supervisor-student relationship is primarily one of interpersonal interaction, and the supervisor attends to the student's pastoral needs as well as their educational and research needs (Andriopoulou & Prowse 2020). In other words, despite other important facets of the supervisory relationship, such as knowledge of the research process, the supervisors' interpersonal skills have the biggest impact on how well the supervision is being conducted. Because of this, even while it cannot be viewed as the main source of learning, the supervisor-supervisee relationship clearly determines how effective supervision is made possible and learning occurs (Roach, Christensen & Rieger 2019). Notably, it has been reported (Al Makhamreh & Stockley 2019) that when supervisors are accessible, approachable, attentive and supportive, students perceive supervision to be of high quality. Therefore, supervisors need to be more than just academic mentors for their students. They should also treat them like actual people. Orellana et al. (2016) state that efficient doctoral supervision depends on the interaction between the supervisor and the student, which is influenced by institutional requirements, student needs, abilities, attitudes and obligations, as well as supervisors' styles of supervision. If they are not given enough assistance in meeting the demands placed on them, doctoral students may be at greater risk of burnout and even attrition (Cornér, Löffström & Pyhältö 2017). Ismail et al. (2014) state that during one-on-one conversations or cooperative group exercises, the supervisor must encourage students to explain their thinking, problem-solving techniques, understanding and knowledge. Allowing doctoral students to compare their work, thought processes and approaches with others is a key component of reflection.

The ability of students to maintain respectful and productive relationships with their supervisors is another crucial aspect of supervision (Goldman & Goodboy 2017). This shows the students' ability to adhere to deadlines and exhibit competence in their research, which inspires the supervisor because these are some of the elements that show commitment. Failure to do so

might result in the supervisor becoming unhappy, which would sour the relationship. This shows that the constancy of the supervisor–student connection influences doctoral candidates’ long-term outcomes as well as their short-term performance during the course of their academic careers (Lunsford 2012). Despite not being specifically related to women, the production of PhD graduates of high calibre is not only reliant on the calibre of students enrolled but also greatly influenced by the quality of supervision and enabling conditions and facilities that support achievement (Mouton 2016). The emotional state of doctoral students has also been found to be significantly influenced by the fit between the student and supervisor in several empirical research projects (Cotterall 2013; Gearity & Mertz 2012; Lin 2012; McAlpine & McKinnon 2013).

■ Mentoring academic staff without doctoral degrees

Strebel and Shefer (2016) mention a case study that describes how a mentorship programme for academic staff who enrolled for doctoral studies in the Faculty of Health Sciences at a South African institution was conducted. The project’s primary goal was to help senior staff members get their PhDs to improve the units’ capacities for research and supervision. The project had been running for five years by the time the article was published and had started with one mentor working with six mentees, but their number had grown to ten mentees. Both the mentor and mentees were female. Supervision occurred in three ways; firstly, the mentor would have individual meetings with the mentees, which was regarded as ‘the foundation of the whole project’ (Strebel & Shefer 2016, p. 3). These individual meetings were regarded as a safe space where goals and challenges could be set and addressed. The mentor also met them as a group, and this is where they would learn from their peers as they would present their work to the team. It was at this point that collegiality was strengthened. Secondly, the mentor would at times invite guest speakers who would come and present on aspects of research and interact with the mentees. Lastly, the mentor and mentees took part in regular three-day residential writing retreats, which were held at a location outside of the institution and gave participants a chance to work exclusively on their research during that period. With occasional group sessions to report on their progress and get comments, mentees primarily worked alone. When necessary, they also sought advice from the mentor.

The results of this case study showed that, as has been observed at other regional HEIs and elsewhere, a combination of individual and group interventions, along with regular blocks of concentrated time away from

the university in the form of writing retreats, provided an appropriate and effective mode of mentoring (Geber & Bentley 2012; Mokone et al. 2012).

Both the mentor and the mentee may profit from mentoring interactions. For the mentee, the mentor can boost the student's self-efficacy and confidence, provide increased protection, support and guidance throughout the socialisation process, raise the student's level of academic and professional progress and present special opportunities for professional and personal growth within the organisation's culture (Warren 2005; White & Tryon 2007), as well as in their chosen career (Cho, Ramanan & Feldman 2011). As the mentor sees the mentee's development and supports the mentee's self-efficacy, the relationship might assist with 'validating the mentor's efforts and status' (Hayes 2005, p. 442). Along with aiding their employment and providing more exposure within the company, the mentor also obtains a potential colleague and friend in the business (White & Tryon 2007). The socialisation and instruction of the student with the operations of the organisation or institution benefit the mentor, mentee and organisation (Hayes 2005). In terms of professional activity and conduct, the mentor serves as a student's professional role model (White & Tryon 2007).

■ South Africa

Like the rest of Africa, the South African government's goal is to raise academic staff with doctoral qualifications through the NDP (National Planning Commission [NPC] 2011) from 34% in 2010 to 75% in 2030 (Molla & Cuthbert 2016). South Africa is the hub of PhD education in Africa as it attracts a lot of foreign students who want to pursue PhDs because the country has better resources and infrastructure than their nations (Cloete, Sheppard & Bailey 2015b). Consequently, compared to the rest of Africa, where enrolments in PhD programmes are quite low, South Africa has a high rate of enrolment (Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard 2015a). In 2014, South Africa produced 34 PhDs per million people, an increase from the previous year. This number is still low, however, when compared to other developing nations like Brazil (70 PhDs per million people) and Portugal (277 PhDs per million people).

Although South Africa is renowned for effective policy creation, the government lacks resources and the capacity for doctoral supervision; therefore, the execution of such policies is contradictory (Cloete et al. 2015b). This is demonstrated by the fact that except in three South African universities - UCT, CUT and UJ - there is still a shortage of doctoral academic staff, despite the well-formulated policy (*White Paper for Post-School Education and Training 2013*) that promotes doctoral education in South African HEIs. There was a 100% increase in the number of employees

with PhDs at UCT between 2005 and 2014, a 167% increase at CUT and a 135% increase at UJ (Breier & Herman 2017). It is necessary for doctoral students to successfully complete their doctorate programmes for HEIs to produce PhD graduates. This is greatly impacted by the supervisors' ability to oversee at the doctoral level (McGregor 2013).

Breier and Herman (2017) go on to say that additional academics with PhDs are urgently needed in South Africa, especially in historically underserved population groups. In terms of gender, male academics made up 53% of the workforce in 2015, down from 58% in 2005, while female academics increased from 42% in 2005 to 47% in 2015 (Breetzke & Hedding 2018). It is important to highlight the fact that African women constituted 14% of the academic staff, which is a relatively low representation given that this group makes up 41% of the South African population (Statistics South Africa 2011). As the rest of Africa struggles with an ageing professoriate, South Africa is under pressure to boost the proportion of academic employees with PhDs. For instance, the proportion of academic personnel over the age of 65 increased from 3% in 2005 to roughly 5% in 2015 (Breetzke & Hedding 2015). The fact that some South African universities have a high proportion of academic staff with PhDs should be noted, notwithstanding this gradual increase, according to Louw and Godsell (2015). For instance, UCT (67%) had the greatest proportion of doctoral employees in 2014, followed by SUN, Wits (62%) and UP (61%). As a result, the South African government wants to increase the proportion of academic employees with PhDs from 43% in 2014 to 75% by 2030 (NDP 2011). It is important to note that this is a significant increase from the 30% of staff who have PhDs since 2005 (Herman & Sehoole 2017). The NRF and the DST have recommended looking for international as well as private collaborations for students to engage in PhD programmes within local and foreign universities because they are aware of South Africa's overall lack of capacity (NRF 2009).

In PhD education, supervision is not the only criterion for success; additional elements also matter. For three African nations – Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa – participating in partnerships and collaborations on research training on both a regional and global scale is one example that helped those nations succeed (Molla & Cuthbert 2016). According to Cross and Backhouse (2014), a South African Doctoral Consortium was created as a result of South Africa joining forces with Stanford University and the University of Queensland. These authors claim that as graduate staff joined the programme and rose through the ranks to become programme managers and lecturers, some of whom are now in charge of their own cohorts of PhD students, this programme demonstrated exceptional performance over time. The Faculty of Education at UKZN, formerly known as Durban Westville University, developed a programme (cohort approach)

whereby collective supervisors worked together and enhanced and supplemented one another, enabling students to come together to study across disciplines and methodological stances (Samuel & Vithal 2011). These authors claim that as graduate personnel joined the programme and rose through the ranks to become programme managers and lecturers, some of whom are now in charge of their own cohorts of PhD students, this programme demonstrated exceptional performance over time. These partnerships allow PhD students to interact with people from various universities, learn about their work and exchange ideas in fields of interest that are comparable to their own (Tsephe 2014). As a result, doctoral students are inspired by their exposure to the outside world.

There are several skills associated with academia; for example, these include scientific writing, problem-solving, public speaking and data analysis (Weber et al. 2018; Wright & Vanderford 2017). An important duty of a PhD supervisor is to offer advice on skill development to doctoral students while taking into account their abilities and weaknesses (Madan 2021).

■ Supervision as experienced by African women within an African university

The study explored strategies and capabilities that enabled African women PhD graduates to complete their studies. As mentioned in the first chapter, these women studied in one South African university, though they came from different countries, namely South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Nigeria and Lesotho.

For students to succeed, supervision is crucial. As an illustration, students who work closely with their supervisors have a higher likelihood of graduating and, consequently, of pursuing certain career routes (Madan 2021). Not all fourteen participants in Tsephe's study (2021) reported having a great experience of supervision. However, most African women who had positive interactions with their supervisors said that these relationships were not based on their supervisors' gender, even though the literature demonstrates that same-gender partnerships are more successful (Ramohai 2013; Tsephe 2014). This was not supported in the study; participants who had male supervisors still praised them as being significant factors in their success. It was clear that having close relationships with their supervisors meant that those individuals cared about their personal lives, which encouraged them to do their coursework. Hope (PhD graduate, female) said that having a good supervisor who supported her and believed in her helped her to feel confident in who she was and what she was capable of.

The majority of participants indicated that they were encouraged by their supervisors during times when they felt they did not have what it takes to complete their education. A couple of extracts from their interviews are highlighted:

'It was not easy at all when I came in 2014. It was very difficult because I had to get used to the culture and the academic way of life here compared to where I was coming from. I remember my late supervisor asked me many questions that I could not answer because back home we focus more on theory than we do on practical. The first year was for me to get my rhythm, to try to understand how they do things here. My supervisor, however, was encouraging; she said okay, you are coming from Country N; we have supervised students from that country, and they struggle initially, but finally, when they get their rhythm, they will be fine, so I am not worried about you.' (Kari, PhD graduate, female)

Kari was an international student and struggled to adjust to how things were conducted in the South African HE system. However, the supervisor played a significant role by showing understanding and concern, as well as providing assurance that Kari would find her feet:

'I came to study in South Africa with a quantitative background. Before this, I had never heard of qualitative research. When I submitted my proposal to the supervisor, he told me it was a [*sic*] master's level work. However, he guided me on how to work on improving it. I had a baby in my second year, and I found it hard to concentrate. I spoke to my supervisor, and she told me she trusted and believed in me. She told me I worked hard; she did not even know I was pregnant. She reminded me that I gave birth, came back and continued working hard. After hearing this, I told myself I could do this!' (Pablo, PhD graduate, female)

Like Kari, Pablo was an international student and struggled to adjust. Her supervisor guided her, and she eventually improved on her work and completed her PhD within three years. Herman and Meki Kombe (2019) attest to the fact that international students struggle far more than South African nationals because they face triple adjustment difficulties as they must adapt to three distinct contexts, namely, their new country, their university and their new academic identities as doctoral students in certain subjects:

'My supervisor was a white female, never married, no children, so in a way sometimes she would understand that you have other pressures but sometimes she would not understand. Nonetheless, one needs a supervisor who is academic, and when I say academic, I mean one who is focused on the work but also human, one who understands that you can have family members that can get sick.' (Hope, PhD graduate, female)

Hope mentions that race was not a hinderance to a good supervisor-student relationship. This is consistent with the findings of Brown and Watson (2010) and (Lynch 2008), who found that gender did not significantly affect the results and that no participants reported suffering as a result of having male supervisors. She also shows that there were times

when she needed her supervisor to understand her journey outside of doctoral studies, which she did not seem to understand. However, she believes that is another factor that made her complete her studies because she had a 'strict' supervisor who managed to strike a balance even though one can conclude that it did not go down well with Hope, which is not abnormal as the learning journey has its ups and downs.

Tumeliso added that her relationship with her supervisor was excellent. She states:

'My supervisor was caring as well as very helpful when it came to my research work. We had an excellent relationship.' (Tumeliso, PhD graduate, female)

Most participants credited supervisors who provided support beyond academic concerns for their academic advancement or completion of their doctoral studies (Bitzer 2007; Johnson-Bailey et al. 2008; Magano 2011; Tsephe 2014). Their research suggests the significance of effective supervision and emphasises the necessity of supervisors who are concerned about students' overall well-being in addition to their academic progress. However, it is significant to emphasise that in this study, effective supervision – particularly strong relationships between students and their mentors – was the key factor in determining success rather than race or gender:

'I had the best! I had the best supervisor, I think. I am sorry I forgot her in the people that contributed to my success. You know, I would never submit work to her and it would stay for two weeks, never in the four years that I studied. And she also became a friend and during my loss she was there all the way. I mean, you know the woman, the professor that was my supervisor, did her best and I think she contributed to my success because I also hear some students saying they don't receive the kind of support they need from their supervisor, and I can see how much it delays their completion.' (Mpho, PhD graduate, female)

Mpho indicated that she received the best supervision and that her supervisor was efficient (Igumbor et al. 2022), as she was there for her when she lost her husband, thus applying a contractual style of supervision (Gatfield 2005). Confirming that the supervisor's role does not only end at academics but extends to helping at the personal level. Unlike one of the participants who complained that she did not receive feedback on time, Mpho states differently:

'[...] she went beyond being a supervisor because we work together, and also as a friend as well. I liked our relationship because she didn't push me, and that's what I liked, like she didn't say where is Chapter 2? She would just leave me do my own thing, and when I wanted to talk, we would talk, and yeah, we never actually fought, or I never hated her at any point.' (Lerato, PhD graduate, female)

Lerato explains that being a staff member and pursuing her doctoral studies in the department where she teaches, she was not only a colleague to her supervisor but also a friend. That fact enabled them to work well together:

'[...] she was excellent, she is an angel, she is no longer with the university, she retired this year or last year, but she is excellent, she is someone that I can't even forget, she supported me and she called me 'Glory', and when she [sic], there was another retired supervisor who helped her with supervising me, when she can realise that this professor is becoming harsh on me, she would just protect me, and I think that's one thing that really made me succeed.' (Tebogo, PhD graduate, female)

Just as research shows that a supervisor needs to help and protect the student (Warren 2005; White & Tryon 2007), Tebogo also confirmed that because she felt assisted and protected, she could successfully complete her education.

Supervision is one of the important pillars of a doctoral student's success. However, the problem Africa is facing is a lack of qualified supervisors with PhDs. Mentorship of academic staff to attain PhDs is a crucial aspect of doctoral education because then HEIs will have the capacity to produce PhD graduates. The increased number of staff will encourage more students to enrol and complete the degree. As a result, African women may have role models to look up to, whom they may be able to identify with as being from among their own. For this study, African women PhD graduates had different experiences of supervision. Some claimed they had the best support, while others indicated that they did not have support from their supervisors. With determination and hard work, these women managed to complete their PhDs within a range of three-six years.

African women doctoral graduates' journey through the capabilities approach and resilience theory lens

This chapter used the capabilities approach (CA) in conjunction with some aspects of the resilience theory because I believe that the two approaches complement one another. This is true especially when looking at the experiences of African women pursuing doctorates because they do not only need the resources and support but also the tenacity and drive to keep them resilient when faced with challenges along the way. Although researchers have employed a variety of theories to study PhD education (González 2007; Robinson 2013), I have not yet come across any literature that used both approaches as a framework to study doctoral education for African women. As a result, this study expands on the CA to address the dynamic and diverse nature of African women who have finished their doctoral studies in South African HEIs together with the resilience theory. This section offers the framework for the narrative study of the lives or lived experiences of African women and how their goals for education were impacted by these experiences. The chapter offers a theoretical lens for investigating doctoral education for African women especially and what strategies and capabilities made it possible for them to succeed in earning PhDs in the South African environment. There were two categories of these

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women from different parts of Africa; some came specifically to study while others moved to be with their husbands, and because they had not found jobs, they decided to enrol for doctoral education in South Africa.

■ Capabilities approach

The CA is a normative framework primarily used for analysing and evaluating an individual's well-being, taking into account the social structures that either support or impede their well-being and formulating policies and recommendations for social change within communities (Robeyns 2006). The CA was founded by Amartya Sen. The CA, however, is not a theory of social justice or of justice in general, and this is an important point to make (Alkire & Deneulin 2009). It challenges approaches to equality and development that solely emphasise the economic aspect of life to define well-being, arguing that while emphasising access to resources is important, it ignores the opportunities, skills and freedoms that different people have to transform those resources into useful functions and to help expand their range of options (Kabeer 1999). For instance, had some of the African women doctoral graduates' completion depended on financial support, all women besides those who worked for the university would have not completed their education because of financial constraints. Because Sen urges a shift in perspective from viewing well-being as having monetary worth to instead emphasising living a life that one has good reason to value, viewing HE through the CA lens further reflects the idea that other factors, such as the quality of life enjoyed by African female PhD graduates, go beyond the traditional emphasis on HE's financial benefits. My research focused on the well-being of African women while exploring the opportunities and freedoms that must be offered. Moving away from the traditional focus on African women's financial success and academic accomplishments is necessary to comprehend African women's well-being (Sen 1999, 2009). For Sen and other CA scholars like Alkire, education is a means, not an end (Alkire 2005).

The CA utilises fundamental ideas like functionings, capabilities, agency, well-being and conversion factors; it measures and analyses human development (Nussbaum 2006; Sen 1999). A person's functionings are the achieved outcomes or 'doings' and 'beings' that they have reason to value (Robeyns 2003; Sen 1999). Regarding the African women PhD graduates in this study, some wanted to be doctors and some wanted to change their narratives by being independent, financially and otherwise. The approach places an emphasis on what people can actually do and be, and it promotes the growth of their opportunities and freedoms to attain and enjoy the benefits of these 'valuable beings and doings' (Sen 1999, p. 75). These opportunities and freedoms are referred to as capabilities. People do not only have to have general opportunities and freedoms to realise functionings

that are valuable, but rather, what is also important is ‘what people are actually able to be and do rather than what resources they have access to’ (Walker 2005, p. 103). This is because there may be resources or opportunities put in place that not all students have access to. For example, there may be a library for all students to use, but if there are no ramps which will enable a student in a wheelchair to access certain parts of the library that would be helpful to them, it is as good as the student not having the opportunity at all. For African women PhD graduates like Mandisa, for instance, obtaining a PhD was a valued accomplishment. However, achieving this goal depended on her actual access to opportunities and freedoms to pursue education and contribute to her development and well-being. As a mother of four, she fortunately had a supportive husband who took on the responsibility of care for their child while she worked on her thesis. Obtaining a PhD was not merely intrinsic but rather equipped her with skills to pursue her job as a researcher in a better way and also gain status within her community. The most important thing for CA is to comprehend whatever individual freedoms (capabilities) allow African women to seek PhD degrees and lead lives they have good cause to value. The CA, according to Walker and Unterhalter (2007, p. 5), ‘requires that we do not only evaluate functionings [outcomes], but the real freedoms or opportunities each student had available to choose from and to achieve what she valued’. The CA differs from systems that measure well-being by academic accomplishment and financial rewards because it places a stronger emphasis on the actual freedoms and opportunities students have. Achieving the desired results depends on a woman’s agency or her capacity to act in a way that permits her to pursue an education that will support her personal growth and well-being.

The CA is thorough in that it takes into account the ‘conversion factors’ that affect a person’s ability to exercise agency in converting capabilities into functionings on a personal, societal and environmental level (Crocker & Robeyns 2010). Conversion factors either enable or hinder an individual in achieving the desired goals, depending on one’s willingness to push through the challenges or give up while faced by adversities. The ability to exert effort or take actions that will assist one in achieving one’s goals is referred to as agency, which is a core CA notion (Crocker & Robeyns 2010). For example, even if someone has all the tools necessary for success, they still need to put in the effort, read, write critically and be reachable for supervision, for example, to get the results they desire.

■ Resilience theory

Despite the lack of agreement on how resilience should be described, the majority of experts agree that it is multifaceted (Novotný & Kremenkova 2016).

Resilience is the ability to cope effectively with stress and adversity, according to positive psychology literature (Martin & Marsh 2006). Resilience, according to Kaplan et al. (1996), is the capacity to carry on operating capably in the face of sizable pressures associated with daily living. Resilience theory is a theory that 'addresses the strengths that people and systems display that enable them to rise above adversity', according to Van Breda (2001, p. 1). For a theory or idea of resilience to be regarded as true, it must include both adversity and constructive adaptation (Hunsu, Carnell & Sochacka 2021).

Hunsu et al. (2021) assert that the ability to adapt and bounce back from failures is a prerequisite for success in life. Students may have a range of problems in HE, such as difficulties with the course subject, personal problems that affect their performance in class or even social isolation as a result of victimisation or microaggressions (Yeager & Dweck 2012). Some theorists assert that it is preferable to speak to resilience in educational contexts using more explicit terms, such as academic resilience (Cassidy 2016). The notion of academic resilience provided by Hunsu et al. (2021) is appropriate for doctoral education even though their research was in the field of engineering studies. Academic resilience is a practical theoretical framework for examining how students manage academic stress, adapt, engage in academic work and achieve in engineering education, according to their definition.

Polk (1997) assembled four types of resilience from the research on individual resilience, which are described as follows:

- **Dispositional pattern:** The dispositional pattern is linked to ego-related psychological traits and physical traits that support resilience. Examples of traits that promote a resilient disposition towards life's pressures include a sense of independence or self-reliance, a sense of core self-worth, good physical health and a positive attitude towards life. This pattern resonates with a few women in the study; basically, these women wanted to be independent, particularly financially, and they wanted to not be reliant on anyone for their survival. One woman said, 'I don't think he will take care of me and my kids, so I must just make sure that I take care of my kids and myself'.
- **Relational pattern:** The interpersonal relationships and societal responsibilities of an individual are addressed by the relational pattern. Both close personal relationships and the larger cultural framework may play a part in these roles and interconnections. This pattern confirms that people are relational beings, and some women in this group demonstrated this when stating that they are regarded or even see themselves as role models, that they hope to inspire more other woman or girls to keep going even in the toughest of times because in the end they will reap rewards that will change their lives positively. One of the

women said, before attaining a PhD, that students treated her differently from her colleagues who had PhDs.

- **Situational pattern:** The situational pattern addresses problems with a connection between a person and a demanding setting. This may involve a person's capacity to solve problems, evaluate situations and potential solutions and take appropriate action. Having experienced challenges and seeking assistance where necessary or making means from their side to overcome the challenges, such as working from the office or the library for longer hours in a case where they saw their families as distractions, is evidence that African women applied critical reasoning.
- **Philosophical pattern:** A person's philosophical pattern is referred to as their worldview or life paradigm. This may include a range of resilient ideas, including the conviction that life has meaning, that all occurrences have a positive purpose and that self-improvement is essential. This pattern resonated with most women's convictions when they showed that everything has a reason, including the challenges they went through. They believed that made them stronger, most importantly because they believed God saw them through those dark times. One of the women said, 'what made me complete, for me, I am a Christian and the bible says all things work together for good [...] it's like having a child people admire, "oh you have got a son", but they don't know what you have gone through to have this son'.

The four patterns influence or foster resilience. The CA together with the resilience theory speak to agency, where an individual does not throw in the towel but continues taking actions which will lead to the attainment of goals. Despite not having supportive supervisors for instance, African women did not give up on their dreams, but rather took positive steps towards where they asked the dean or the head of department to intervene. Those who did not have funding or whose funding did not cover their basic needs, such as rent and food, moved to a cheaper place, found student assistant posts on the campus and talked to the staff about their challenges, and through that managed to get help.

In the HE context, educational resilience refers to having the capacity to balance work, school and personal obligations, being able to manage risk, demonstrating academic tenacity and being receptive to educational possibilities as well as adaptable to constrained circumstances (Walker 2006).

The aforementioned approaches were suitable and compatible in exploring women's strategies and opportunities that enabled them to succeed in their doctoral studies, as I could evaluate the freedoms and opportunities they had as well as the agency which demonstrated resilience as they encountered challenges. Each woman had a different motivation for pursuing a doctorate, such as to escape poverty or the economic crisis

in their country, to become experts in their fields of study or to take advantage of opportunities at their place of employment, to name a few. For these reasons, they were resilient in the face of adversity. All women wished to improve their own livelihood and that of their families, and so aid in the development or change of their own nations.

■ Doctoral education requires capacitated academics to guide students

According to recent university rankings, the majority of African universities – except for a few in South Africa – perform poorly (Times Higher Education [THE] 2017, cited in Desmennu and Owoaje 2018). To effectively supervise research and contribute to students' development, the supervisors must develop their key skills in these areas (Ismail et al. 2014). Africa's weakness is that it cannot supervise at a doctoral level because of most academic staff not having PhDs. In many African universities, the ratio of students to staff is increasing, which could, in practice, lead to inadequate mentoring and supervision (Igumbor et al. 2022). Bøgelund and De Graaff (2015) concur that supervisors now supervise more students than they did a few years ago, so they are faced with the challenge of producing a diverse group of graduates, including those who can contribute to the field's body of knowledge academically, those who can collaborate with the industry using the knowledge gained from doctoral training and an all-round facilitator in the global context who can act as change agents. As such, African governments have put initiatives in place to help increase this category of scholars. As Molla and Cuthbert (2018) indicate, a flagship project was approved by the World Bank in March 2014 that aimed to increase African universities' capacities to deliver high-calibre, strategically important applied research and research education to meet the requirements of the continent. Nineteen university-based centres of excellence were supported by the Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence Project (ACE) (2014–2018) in West and Central Africa. The governments of Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Togo and Gambia received loans and grants to finance highly specialised studies in STEM-related fields, as well as in agriculture and health. Desmennu and Owoaje (2018), however, stated that the majority of public universities in Africa had inadequate support from the national governments, which frequently translates into inadequate funding for research and the development of research capacity.

African nations have very low researcher-to-population ratios and low research productivity, according to the World Bank (2014). The World Bank highlighted the lack of any universities from sub-Saharan Africa, except South African universities, among the top 400 global universities by using

data from university rankings, a measurement regime that has arisen with the dominance of knowledge economy discourse (Hazelkorn 2009). According to the World Bank's assessment, this issue is related to the dearth of qualified researchers and research trainers in most African universities, where it is believed that less than 20% of the entire academic staff contingent have PhDs (World Bank 2014b), cited in Molla and Cuthbert (2018).

Although PhD candidates have complicated backgrounds, 'Africa is not left out of the debate of the importance of doctorate' (Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard 2015, p. 8) and so seeks to enhance doctoral education to satisfy local demands (Cross & Backhouse 2014). The 1990s saw a growth in interest in PhDs, according to Louw and Muller's (2014) analysis of the literature on doctoral studies. African countries, like the rest of the world, require doctoral candidates, so discussions on a variety of platforms, such as the IAU, the SARUA leadership dialogue and 'Doctoral education: Renewing the academy' (SARUA 2012), have focused on the value of doctoral education to the knowledge economy, the role of a PhD graduate in the knowledge economy and the need for doctoral candidates in Africa (Cloete et al. 2015). Additionally, Africa needs more PhD graduates to replace its ageing professoriate, advance research and meet the need for high-level skills in its developing economies (McGregor 2013).

Methodological stance

This chapter discusses the methodological approach employed in the study that explored African women PhD graduates' attributes to succeeding in doctoral studies through a narrative inquiry. I will first give a brief overview of my personal position and a reflection on my doctoral journey to build an argument on why this narrative inquiry was the most suitable methodology to be employed.

■ Personal positioning

I was born into a family of four; I had two parents who were teachers, as well as a brother. My brother and I were raised to believe in education and that it is the key to success. As such, I have always known, from my undergraduate days, that I would one day pursue doctoral education, though I did not put a time frame on it until later when I wanted to obtain a PhD at the age of 40. That was after I had been in the workplace for a number of years, but at a particular point in time, I felt I had hit the ceiling and could not see chances for promotion holding a mere bachelor's degree (BA). I began to question my worth as an employee and knew I had to further my studies to positively change my life in all aspects, not only financially. I started asking myself questions: 'did I study the right courses?' and 'why are men in the same field getting senior appointments when I am not?' After working in an area where men predominated, I reasoned that education was the only way to free myself from the web of male dominance, so I began reading more about women's development and empowerment.

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I decided to enrol for an honours degree (Hons) in South Africa and told myself I will not return to my home country, Lesotho, without a PhD. Since we cannot change our gender to become equal to men, I have always believed that education is a liberating force for women. However, obtaining an education meant putting myself in a position where even men would have to listen to me when I speak and consider my ideas seriously. Dreze and Sen (1999) and Robeyns (2006) contend that as education allows people to be open-minded and free from tradition and habit, it gives people an opportunity to see if they could live a better life than that of their parents (Nussbaum 2000). As a woman in an African country where it was widely accepted that women should be subordinate to men, I firmly felt that education would free me from the suffering that came with being a woman and would enable me to contribute to the development of my society. In order to achieve social justice, discriminatory cultural norms can be eliminated through education.

The fact that none of my family members had studied up to this level was one of the motivating factors for me. Although I studied to change my life for the better, I also considered my parents and how I would be able to provide for them in their old age as well as make them proud. However, a higher level of education also makes a greater contribution to society and leads to personal success (Calhoun 2006). Therefore, communal importance relates to the idea that after receiving an education, people can positively influence their families, society, nations and the entire world because they are able to increase their capacities. This idea is supported by Brennan and Naidoo's assertion that 'higher education can extend wider benefits to individuals who do not directly participate in it' (Brennan & Naidoo 2008, p. 296). These advantages consist of the advancement of new technologies and better citizenship (Calhoun 2006). Therefore, I firmly felt that, given equal opportunity, African women would want to pursue HE, earn PhDs and work in important positions, if only for the intrinsic value of doing so. They strive to be well-known members of society and engage in the pursuit of that goal. They are every bit as capable as men and white women.

During my MA programme, I learned that while women sign up in significant numbers for postgraduate courses, many of them fall through the cracks. I became curious about their experiences with doctoral studies as a result. This led me to investigate the experiences of black women pursuing PhDs for my MA programme. I was interested in the methods used by African women to obtain their PhDs after receiving my MA because I wanted to be one of them.

■ Reflecting on my doctoral journey

Like any other student, I was eager and enthusiastic when I started my PhD journey, but I do not think I fully understood what it meant. I had encouraging

bosses, the motivation to match the excitement and the expectation of finishing my degree in three years. I had no idea what lay ahead of me, especially how my personal life would affect my academic endeavours. In July 2017, seven months into the programme, I received a call informing me that my father had had a stroke. I felt compelled to return home to help my father at this difficult time because I was the only daughter and my mother had passed away in 2015. My father and brother lived in the same house, but like other African men, they required a woman to live with them at this time. I had to leave my son in South Africa so he could continue attending school, and I had to have faith that he would complete his homework as he was supposed to while I was gone. I worried about my son's ability to handle the situation, being left alone in a leased apartment and driving him to school every day. Despite the fact that we had a supportive community (especially from church) that often checked in on him and helped him with whatever he needed, I felt bad for neglecting him. When I got home, I discovered that my father was unable to take care of any personal needs, including feeding and washing. He needed help, and as his daughter, I had to help. The act of showering him was the most traumatic of all the ways I had to help him. I was not ready to bathe my father in the same manner that I would a child.

After a month at home with my sick father, I returned to school exhausted – both physically and mentally – from caring for him. In addition, I was dying from the guilt of not having read or written anything for my research for a month. I had to enrol in doctoral studies even though I was not psychologically prepared to do so. I can recall times when I went for supervision while being physically present but mentally disengaged. While I was frightened of coming across as disengaged as I was now attributing my lack of knowledge to my father's illness, I did not understand what the supervisors wanted me to do. I did not feel confident enough to tell my managers about my difficulties. I struggled to focus on my studies again, which caused me to miss the deadline for presenting to defend my PhD proposal at the end of 2017. My proposition was defended in January 2018. The unsettling part was that, as I studied the material, I found myself going through some of the same things that women in doctoral education go through. Hearing about other students who gave up and never finished their doctoral studies scared me. I worked hard and prayed as I went because I did not want to end up as one of the statistics. I finally succeeded in effectively defending my proposition. The accomplishment of this goal inspired me and gave me the drive to carry on.

When I was ready to gather data, I was able to conduct interviews with only African women PhD graduates who worked or lived in Pretoria because doing so was less expensive than flying to other locations. I lacked the funds necessary to leave Pretoria. As time passed by, I tried to manually analyse

the data after I had acquired it, but there was so much of it that I kept getting lost in it. The analysis chapter took a year to complete; this was another delay. Then, in 2019, I lost my only brother. I felt as though life had kicked me to the ground at this point. Although I have always considered myself to be a resilient individual, his passing left me feeling so weak that I was on the edge of quitting. Knowing that I never finish anything I start and, most importantly, my faith in God, who I think guides my path and helps me overcome life's problems, kept me going. I was still engaged in what seemed to be a losing battle regarding my analysis at this time. To complete the study, I sought help from my close friends who had already earned their PhDs and were postdoctoral fellows at other universities. My bursary had expired, so 2019 was going to be my last year of study. As a result, I had to take on duties inside the department to raise my income in order to pay for my child's schooling and to buy food for the family. Needless to say, this did not cover my living expenses. These jobs I chose meant I had to take time away from my studies even though they helped pay our rent and other living expenses. In my fourth year, 2020, I was able to enrol, but I was concerned about how I would pay for rent because my bursary had expired after three years. A fellow student urged me to apply for extended funding, but when I did, I only received half of what I had been given yearly. This made life more difficult for me because the full bursary offered annually already required me to work greater hours, which meant taking more time away from my studies. As my father's health continued to deteriorate, this was yet another difficult year. I was unable to go visit him because of the global COVID-19 outbreak. Despite the distress it caused me, the lockdown allowed everyone to work from home, which gave me the opportunity to advance my study until I turned in my thesis for review at the end of October.

Stating my personal positioning and reflecting on my doctoral journey, I believe, is what made me employ the narrative inquiry in my study. I needed to understand not only the academic challenges of African women but rather also their personal and social challenges. I found this inquiry relevant, as it would allow a qualitative approach. Further in the text is a discussion on the methodological approach adopted when conducting this research, the research design, the data-collection method and how data were analysed.

■ Research paradigm

This study investigated the strategies and capabilities that enabled African women to earn doctorates, as indicated in the introductory chapter. Research paradigms are fundamental worldviews founded on ontological, epistemological and methodological presuppositions (Smith, Denzin & Lincoln 1994). According to these academics, an ontological question

seeks to establish the form and character of reality and, consequently, what can be known about reality, an epistemological question examines the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known, and a methodological question seeks to establish the method by which the researcher establishes what he or she believes to be known. There are numerous subcategories that research paradigms might fall into. Guba and Lincoln (1994) identified positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism and interpretivism as the four paradigms of social research. Positivism holds that reality is observable facts; that is, that reality is objective and grounded in science (Maree 2010). Positive thinking therefore ignores any possibility of researcher subjectivity. Post-positivism emphasises objective and scientific understanding and also acknowledges the potential impact of biases (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Critical theory prioritises reflective assessments and criticism of society and culture (Guba & Lincoln 1994). According to interpretivism, it is impossible to conduct value-free, objective research because of the variety of realities and the impact that researchers' attitudes and worldviews have on their research. The CA is relevant to this study because it allows people the opportunity to pursue their priorities and the possibilities that are accessible to them in the quest of their desired functionings. As a result, the resilience theory is relevant because it calls for action in order to overcome obstacles.

The ontological premise of this study is that there is a small percentage of African women PhD graduates in South Africa (42%) (Academy of Science of South Africa [ASSAf] 2010). There are women who do, however, complete their PhDs successfully, though little is known about them. The researcher therefore assumed that it was necessary to investigate their success tales. Epistemological presumption concentrates on the pursuit of human knowledge and the process by which knowledge is created. As a result, learning more about the actual educational experiences these women had may help reveal the methods they actually used to succeed in their endeavours. Data were gathered to portray the distinct realities of these graduates because, despite having the same objective of earning a PhD, all the women came from different backgrounds. Thus, via the interpretation and analysis of the study's data, human knowledge was created. The interpretivist paradigm was used in my study because, according to Maree (2010), it is predicated on the following premises, which matched my area of interest.

■ Human life can only be understood from within

According to this paradigm, social scientists are interested in how people relate to their worlds and other people as they attempt to make sense of their

surroundings (Thomas 2017). The interpretive paradigm tries to ‘understand the subjective world of human experience’, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011, p. 17). Thus, within this paradigm, researchers attempt to explain or make sense of the universe through an individual’s experiences (Maree 2012). Therefore, this paradigm seemed to achieve my goal as I was interested in learning what strategies and capabilities my participants said contributed to their ability to complete their doctoral studies.

■ **Social life is a distinctively human product**

According to interpretivists, reality is created by society rather than being established by objective means. The finest instrument for analysis in this paradigm, according to Carcary (2009), is the researcher’s thinking because in this paradigm a researcher is not viewed as being completely impartial because they are involved in the study process. Furthermore, because the interpretive research paradigm seeks to comprehend complicated subjects, it does not use inflexible research methodologies but rather permits flexible, content-sensitive ones. My flexibility was illustrated in different conversations with different women, despite capturing one detail: what they attribute their success to within their doctoral studies. This was because I was aware that there is no one-size-fits-all narrative, but there are different and similar factors that resulted in the completion of their studies.

■ **The human mind is the purposive source or origin of meaning**

We can gain knowledge of the imparted meanings and improve our grasp of the whole by learning how meaning is produced (Maree 2010). As a researcher, I am aware that participant situations may differ, which necessitates the usage of an interpretative paradigm. This paradigm recognises that each situation is unique, necessitating the need for the researcher to look beneath the surface to grasp reality. For this study, I wanted each African woman PhD graduate to tell her story and describe what kept her going despite the well-known, documented barriers that hinder many doctoral students’ completion.

■ **Human behaviour is affected by knowledge of the social world**

This suggests that distinct realities can exist at separate times and places. Our theoretical and conceptual framework is broadened as we gain more knowledge and a deeper understanding of how the social environment is created. As a result, the more I learn about the many doctoral paths taken

by these various women, employing the CA, the more I can help develop the theoretical framework and produce better results when combined with the resilience theory. This is crucial because research projects like this one have not employed this approach, let alone integrating the two approaches. None of the women came from the same family or were even supervised by the same supervisor.

■ The social world does not exist independently of human knowledge

Our understanding and knowledge are constrained by the information we have been exposed to, as well as by the many experiences we have had and the interpretations we have made of them. Although all participants have a story or experience to share about their doctorate journeys, regardless of whether they had similar opportunities, how they converted those opportunities into the achievement of their desire will differ as many factors may have had an impact.

The primary objective of an interpretivist analysis is to investigate the scenario under consideration and offer a situation viewpoint to shed light on how a certain set of individuals interpret their circumstances (Maree 2010). To understand people's actions and behaviour, this paradigm therefore emphasises the value of contextual analysis and personal experiences (Denzin & Lincoln 2008; Reeves & Hedberg 2003). It does this by drawing on concepts like agency, freedoms, opportunities and beings and doings that are not possible in the positivist paradigm. The interpretivist perspective, according to Bassey (1999), aims to advance knowledge by both describing and interpreting the phenomena of the world in attempts to achieve shared meanings with other people.

This study used a qualitative methodology. Data in this technique are mostly in the form of words, and data analysis is frequently inductive, allowing for critical reflexivity and reflection, according to Bell, Bryman and Harley (2022).

■ Research approach

The study was qualitative for the following reason: a qualitative approach seeks to gain a deep understanding of the research participants. This research employed the narrative inquiry, one of the many qualitative research designs (Creswell & Poth 2016; McMillan & Schumacher 2001). It intended to understand participants' experiences of doctoral studies by examining elements that contributed to African women's success in doctoral studies. Additionally, a qualitative study is a type of understanding analysis that is focused on distinct methodological inquiry using techniques

to look into a social or human problem. In this type of study, complex, holistic pictures are created, and words and reports are analysed based on participants' in-depth perspectives (Creswell & Poth 2016). In order to understand the lived experiences of individuals and groups, advance social change and reveal hidden knowledge, the qualitative inquiry thus emphasises 'the why and how' of human interactions and experiences (Agee 2009; Hesse-Biber 2010).

Through an exploration of the strategies and capabilities that allowed African women PhD graduates to effectively complete their studies, this study filled a gap in the literature that demonstrates how they were successful in doctoral studies. To be successful in my PhD pursuits, I required a thorough grasp of the difficulties these women faced and how they overcame them. Because the literature review focuses primarily on the obstacles faced by women in doctoral studies, there is little information about the success stories of African women who have graduated from these programmes. This interest thus calls for qualitative research to hear the voices of those who have been silenced (Creswell & Poth 2016). One virtue of qualitative research that enables the voices of the oppressed to be heard is 'hearing the silent' (Oakley 1998, p. 708). I thought this strategy was appropriate because it minimises the power dynamics between the researcher and the study participants while simultaneously empowering individuals to share their experiences.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), researchers using a qualitative method observe things or people in their natural settings in an effort to understand or experience occurrences in terms of the meanings that people assign to them. According to researchers, only by speaking with individuals directly – for instance, by visiting their homes, businesses and places of education – and encouraging them to share their experiences can specifics of people's experiences be developed (Creswell & Poth 2016). Qualitative research is believed to be context-dependent because it is located within the context or setting of participants or venues. For instance, the researcher considers and aims to comprehend the contextual elements and their impact on the experiences of participants (Creswell & Poth 2016). I made an effort to comprehend the participants' personal, social and institutional contexts for this study because such factors influence how they perceive or make sense of their PhD trajectories. It was crucial for me to choose a strategy that enables the researcher to behave as an active learner who will later relate the story from the participants' point of view as opposed to acting as an authority figure who evaluates her participants. The qualitative method asserts that individuals create their own realities to make sense of their experiences and arrange them in a way that reflects their ideas or thoughts and beliefs, according to an interpretative conceptual model (McMillan & Schumacher 2001). Because of the nature of this study,

which is qualitative, I had to pay close attention to my participants to understand how they interpret their surroundings and use my expertise as a researcher to interpret the respondents' meanings. In this strategy, researchers are viewed as crucial tools because they independently gather data by evaluating documents, analysing behaviours or interviewing people (Creswell & Poth 2016).

Based on my desire to obtain qualitative insight into the lives and aspirations of African women PhD graduates, with a particular focus on how these experiences affect their valued beings and doings, the narrative inquiry method was employed in this study. In essence, the narrative inquiry seeks to consider social groups that are typically underrepresented, so it is more appropriate to portray their lives and experiences (Lincoln & Guba [1985] cited in Chataika 2005; Marshall & Rossman 1995). The research is also descriptive in character, taking into account the experiences, ideas, beliefs, information and goals held by African women who have earned PhDs. Methodologically, narrative inquiry allows for the interpretation of interview transcripts as stories, and analytically, it enables the development of in-depth theoretical accounts through the use of narrative (Clough et al. 2004). African women PhD graduates can reflect on their lives, perspectives, sociocultural contexts and aspirations thanks to the method's emphasis on participants' views as experts (Clandinin & Connelly 2004). By recognising each woman's life experiences and agency and giving others a chance to hear about their experiences, this method also fits within the theoretical framework of the study. Narrative inquiry in this study has allowed women's voices to be heard, having been silent about how they succeeded, hence the scarce literature on this topic.

■ Data-collection methods

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the aim of obtaining rich information. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

■ Sampling

According to O'Leary (2010, p. 162), sampling is the process of 'selecting elements of a population for inclusion in a research study'. Purposive and snowball sampling were both used for this study's aims. Purposive sampling, according to Neuman (2007), is used to study a subject more thoroughly without trying to generalise the findings to a larger population. I specifically targeted fourteen participants between the ages of 28- and 54-years-old who were African women with PhDs from University X who had graduated within the previous five years. There were supposed to be

at least 20 participants for the interviews; however, only fourteen agreed to take part in this study because of job commitments and the fact that some potential participants were out of the country, and we were unable to plan interviews with them, which resulted in a time and resource constraint. Two participants were connected via Skype and WhatsApp calls; however, the network was unreliable, making it difficult to hear some of the interview responses. Although it took a long time, we persisted with the interviews to the very end. In this study, 'successful African women graduates' refers to individuals who obtained their PhD and the title 'Doctor of Philosophiae'. One participant had obtained her PhD from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, and thirteen others had obtained their PhDs from the Faculty of Education; however, they were all graduates of the same university and represented different departments within the faculty. They varied in terms of age, marital status, nationality and ethnicity.

My initial step was to apply to University X for ethical approval. Once this was granted, I requested the alumni office to give me a list of recent African women PhD graduates. I had to wait for this office's approval before an automatic email was sent to women who fit this description (African women who had earned their PhDs within the previous five years), in which I was not copied because of them honouring the confidentiality aspect of the university's ethical adherence. I had to wait for them to reply and say that they were interested in taking part in the study. After they contacted me, depending on the platform they used, I reached out to them by phone and email to let them know about the study and to provide a formal offer to participate. We agreed on a date and time to meet, and once they indicated they were interested in being part of the research, I ensured that I honoured our meetings. With the exception of two women that I spoke with through Skype and one that I interviewed at her home at the university, all cases were at the participants' places of employment. To give myself enough time to find their offices, I arrived at my destination 15 minutes before our scheduled meeting times.

To find the reasonable number of participants, snowball sampling was used after the interviews when I asked the women if they knew any other African women who had graduated from the same university in the previous five years. Approximately 20 graduates responded, but only fourteen met the criteria and were available on the agreed dates and times, whereas some were also interested but found it difficult to meet. For instance, one graduate attended a seminar in Pretoria and wanted to schedule an interview during break and lunch times, but we kept missing each other because of a lack of connection; hence, we did not manage to make or receive calls while at the seminar venue. As a result, I had to resort to snowball sampling because the response rate to the automated email was

not very successful, as many did not respond to the call. We ended up not meeting as a result of the terrible Internet connection and the lack of network coverage for both of our cellular phones within the seminar hall. Another graduate was situated roughly 100 km outside of Pretoria, so finding a way to go there on a tight budget was difficult, especially when taking public transportation. She informed me that she was only free after working hours, and I therefore had to make accommodation arrangements which I could not afford. In addition, some were no longer in my range because of time and resource limitations. Some people also chose not to participate since they did not have access to Wi-Fi to use Skype or even make WhatsApp calls. Snowball sampling, also known as chain referral sampling, is a technique used to identify 'hidden populations', according to Maree (2010, p. 80), and it involves having previously contacted participants recommend the researcher to people in their social networks who might be interested in taking part in the study. Snowball sampling is a chain referral sampling technique, according to Koerber and McMichael (2008), that assembles a sample through recommendations from individuals who have similar traits to the researcher's target population or who are acquainted with them. This method was helpful because it gave individuals the sense that they could trust me because I had already interacted with people who knew them, which allowed me to conduct interviews. In contrast to this benefit of snowball sampling, some individuals volunteered to be interviewed but appeared reluctant to open up throughout the interview. My justification for this is that one member in particular provided only basic comments, even when prompted to elaborate on what was being discussed. She did not seem disinclined to participate, which led me to surmise that her personality prevented her from speaking freely like the others after an hour and a half of our conversation. It is important to note that I came into contact with eight people via purposeful sampling and six via snowball sampling. One of the participants reached via snowball sampling gave me a few quick answers.

■ Semi-structured interviews

This type of interview was employed in this study to collect data, and it is popular among researchers as it enables the researcher to adjust the questions as necessary and ask more questions to elicit additional information from participants as well as to clarify their answers. According to Maree (2007), semi-structured interviews give the researcher the best opportunity to define the subject of the study and give room for identifying new lines of inquiry that are directly relevant to the goals of the study and can be further investigated and questioned. Because they blend structure and versatility, these interviews are in-depth and employed in qualitative analysis (Legard, Keegan & Ward 2003). I used an interview guide, but even though I was not

required to just ask questions that were prepared, it served as a reminder of the important subjects or themes that were to be covered in the interview. Because of the semi-structured style, I was able to ask open-ended questions that allowed for delving and investigation. Depending on the interview's purpose, the subject's response might lead to more inquiries (Bryman & Bell 2003). Face-to-face interviews made it easier to establish a rapport between the participant and myself, allowing for a more in-depth exchange as participants felt at ease sharing their experiences (Maree 2007; Thomas 2017). Interviews with women are different from interviews with men, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), because they call for openness and emotional involvement from both the interviewee and the interviewer. This was made clear in this study as it actively engaged each person and valued their contribution, which helped to promote the CA's views. Semi-structured interviews were also chosen as a method of data-collection that fosters an understanding of people's experiences because of their flexibility in allowing the respondents to alter the flow of the conversation, thereby bringing out information that may not have been 'preconceived' but still pertinent to the study (Axinn & Pearce 2006, p. 6).

The length of the interviews ranged from 40 to 60 min on average, with the longest reaching 1 h and 22 min. I discovered that several of the interviews were brief because the participants were either quiet and reserved or rushed to wrap up because the interviews took place at their workplace, which they suggested. Potential participants refused to take part in the study, claiming that they were too busy to find the time for an interview; nevertheless, they were not coerced into doing so. The participants were asked to introduce themselves in the first section of the interview questions. I now had access to their biographical details, including their age, marital status, place of origin and the number of children they have. The other questions focused on their choice of career paths, what capabilities (opportunities and freedoms) and strategies helped them achieve their goals of becoming doctoral graduates, what they did as African women to take advantage of opportunities and demonstrate some agency, and finally, what elements helped or hindered their success throughout the doctoral journey. This final series of questions demonstrated, among other things, the participants' resilience, perseverance and determination as they overcame the difficulties they encountered during this journey.

According to Neuman (2000), interviews might produce false and skewed results because the researcher can influence the participants to deliver the researcher's preferred answers. To prevent this, I made sure to follow the instructions in the interview guide and dig further when I required more information on a topic that was brought up by the participants. Participants may also say what they believe the researcher wants to hear,

which undermines the study's 'trustworthiness' (Bowen 2005, p. 218). To prevent this, I stressed the importance of giving truthful responses because the information would be utilised for academic objectives. I also reminded them that our conversation was private and that the interviews would be treated as such, protecting their identities.

■ Summary of participants within the study

The study's participants are summarised in Table 5.1 that follows. The ages of these African women ranged from 28- to 54-years-old, and some were single, married, divorced or widowed. Although twelve were enrolled in the Faculty of Education, across various departments, two were from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences. They came from a variety of countries, including South Africa, Lesotho, Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Zambia.

■ Data analysis

Data analysis is the act of giving the gathered data order, form and purpose, which takes time and does not proceed in a linear fashion (De Vos et al. 2011). According to Henning (2004), qualitative data analysis is a process that structures a data set by breaking it down into manageable pieces, synthesising it, looking for trends and figuring out what is crucial for new information, ultimately deciding what to tell the readers. This method aims to 'understand how participants make sense of the situation under study' (Maree 2010, p. 103). In this study, a thematic analysis was used. In a qualitative study, the themes that emerge from the data were defined and summarised using a technique called thematic analysis. It was used to

TABLE 5.1: Summary of the research participants.

Name	Marital status	Nationality	Study duration (years)	Age	Country
Hope	Married	Zimbabwean	5	37	Zimbabwe
Mandisa	Married	Zambian	4	40	Zambia
Tsholo	Married	South African	4	38	RSA
Kari	Single	Nigerian	4	32	Nigeria
Lerato	Single	South African	4	28	RSA
Sibongile	Married	South African	5	33	RSA
Botle	Married	South African	4	47	RSA
Tebogo	Divorced	South African	6	52	RSA
Itumeleng	Married	Lesotho	4.5	44	Lesotho
Pablo	Married	Nigerian	3	35	Nigeria
Mpho	Widowed	South African	4	54	RSA
Keabetswe	Married	South African	3	53	RSA
Dineo	Married	Nigerian	3	53	Nigeria
Tumeliso	Widowed	Zambian	6	43	Zambia

Source: Tsephe (2021, p. 65); participant details listed with permission from the participants.
Key: RSA, Republic of South Africa.

analyse qualitative responses to open-ended questions in surveys as well as interviews. It examined the data from a number of perspectives to identify crucial terms inside a text that assisted the researcher in comprehending and interpreting the raw data (Maree 2019). I transcribed the interviews verbatim after they were recorded with the participants' permission. After transcribing, I coded the information, which involved listening to the tapes again and breaking the information down into themes and sub-themes that were represented by different colours. To analyse the sorted parts together for analysis, the researcher can 'immediately retrieve and collect all the text and other data that they have associated with some theme idea' with the aid of coding (Maree 2010, p. 105). As I alternated between the coding processes, new understandings and insights about the data began to emerge. There were times when I felt unable to make sense of the data or extrapolate certain sub-themes from the data because I was feeling so overwhelmed by the process. I then made the decision to use the ATLAS.ti (version 9.0.19; ATLAS. ti GmbH) program/software to analyse the data, which involved bringing nuances to the key themes that arose and letting the data speak for itself rather than just covering the key, obvious themes.

The study adhered to the ethical considerations as per social research requests. I informed the participants what the study was about, requested their consent and assured them of confidentiality and anonymity. No harm was to befall any of the participants, and I treated them fairly and with respect.

In this chapter, I provide the rationale for the qualitative nature of the research, elucidating the chosen research design that best aligns with the research objectives. My research includes a participant overview alongside a comprehensive account of the ethical principles that governed its execution. Notably, it engages with a limited pool of fourteen participants during interviews, rendering the data and findings ungeneralisable to the entirety of women across Africa because of the constrained sample size. This circumstance is further influenced by the diversity of origins among the PhD graduates from different African countries but converging at a singular South African university. Consequently, it is imperative to note that the perspectives of these individuals do not purport to represent the entirety of African women who have obtained PhDs, notwithstanding the encompassing range of regions, societies, cultures and ethnicities they embody.

Women in Africa's narratives of their doctoral journey

This chapter aims to highlight the important attributes that contributed to African women's success in doctoral studies. This chapter further shows how being resilient enabled success for African women PhD graduates. As mentioned in the earlier chapters, this chapter emanates from a doctoral study conducted in one of the South African universities and African women PhD graduates mentioned a couple of factors such as choice of university, being respected, being treated with dignity and recognition by supervisors and university staff, having the capability to voice one's own thoughts, educational resilience and self-efficacy, among others, contributed to their success (see Tsephe 2021). This section discusses the significant findings that were cited by African women PhD graduates as their attributes to successful completion of doctoral studies. Although the aforementioned factors may not be limited to this group of women, this chapter focuses on 'soft' factors that enabled their success. For this chapter, 'soft' factors refer to personality traits, support from loved ones, passion for helping others and so on. These factors were not necessarily visible at the doctoral level, but rather, women are born with strong characters or drew strength from their immediate support. Each woman's contributing factors will be discussed separately and linked to the relevant literature.

Firstly, Mandisa indicated that it was mainly her husband's support that helped her complete her PhD. Further in the text, Mandisa's demonstration of her husband's support from the decision she made considering the time

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of enrolment – choice to study in South Africa, factors that influenced her decision – window to pursue PhD, juggling life and him being a ‘rare species’ is discussed.

■ Window to pursue a PhD

Contrary to the norm, which is that of women supporting their husbands in building their careers (Brown & Watson 2010; Carter, Blumenstein & Cook 2013; Magano 2011a, 2011b, 2013), Mandisa had a supportive husband who, despite running his own business with all its demands, managed to prioritise her achieving her goals. It is important to note that the timing to enrol for doctoral studies played a major factor in her decision-making:

[...] my husband quit his job. He didn't like working for somebody, so he was doing business and has been doing business, so sometimes his business wouldn't be working, so we would have debts and so on, but at the end of the day, we told ourselves that I need to get this degree. I decided to do my PhD right before my kids started going to high school, because I knew that if they start going to high school there would be more responsibilities, so I did my PhD when my first-born was in grade four or something, just before high school, so I thought that was a good opportunity, then the rest were still in primary, one was not yet born and the 3rd one was still very young and I thought that was a window when I can do my PhD.' (Mandisa, PhD graduate, female)

Having made the decision to pursue doctoral education while the children were still young meant that her husband had to take care of the children. Fortunately for Mandisa, her husband, as an African man, did not feel he was not supposed to be fulfilling roles that are usually seen to be limited to women.

■ Choice to study in South Africa

Being an international student, from Zambia to be exact, Mandisa and her husband made sacrifices to commit to her obtaining a PhD. As much as she wanted to further her studies, Mandisa felt that coming to study in South Africa was worth the sacrifice because of the country's reputable universities. Because of the South African government investing in research to increase PhD graduates through improving the supervisory capacity of academics as well as the country being relatively cheaper than studying abroad, many international students are attracted or pulled to further their studies (Cloete, Maassen & Bailey 2015). Mandisa stated:

'I wanted something different because I did my master's, primary, kindergarten in Zambia, so I wanted something different, have a new experience, meet new people and also I heard from people that have done their PhDs that universities in South Africa have got equipment, good facilities so I didn't want to be left out, and I was also working as a senior research officer, so I wanted an institution that was vibrant in terms of research, so not to say that Zambia is not vibrant in

terms of research, but knew that South Africa is better, beyond so I wanted to get skills in research and also wanted international exposure, I was tired of being home.' (Mandisa, PhD graduate, female)

Mandisa mentioned that though she was a senior researcher, it was a post below management level. She chose to come and study in South Africa because she had heard that South African HEIs have good facilities which would equip her with the necessary skills as well as expose her to the world of research, bearing in mind that it is considered to be the African hub for research.

■ Juggling life

According to studies on women in HE (Carter et al. 2013; Magano 2011b), gender socialisation causes women, unlike men, to assume many duties, which has a detrimental effect on their PhD studies. Mandisa was a registered full-time doctoral student who came to South Africa only to attend research training sessions and meet with her supervisor. As well as keeping a full-time job back in Zambia, she raised her four children full-time. She also attended support sessions when they were offered. She did all this knowing she has her husband taking care of the children. This was to a point where she emphasised that the children are more attached to her husband. He did not conform to the gender roles but did everything that needed to be done. She stated:

'I never missed any support session, attended all, and in fact I would always spare money and come. Sometimes his business wouldn't be working, so we would have debts and so on but at the end of the day we told ourselves that I need to get this thing so whether we had money, we didn't have money we have to put aside. This culture where you need to submit, where you cannot be more educated than your husband, yah maybe that one thing I can say also, my husband is comfortable in his own shoes, he is comfortable with his business, he says go be a professor if you want to be a professor, me I am comfortable.' (Mandisa, PhD graduate, female)

As Mandisa stipulated in the quote, she did not miss any support sessions. As a team, she and her husband ensured that they made the necessary sacrifices just so that she could come to South Africa to attend the training sessions as well as for supervision. Despite the support she received from her husband, Mandisa indicated that she feels bad for not looking after her children as the mother:

'I feel bad I left my children because not being there was a big sacrifice. You are in an African setting and you want to be around, but I think the support of your spouse, you mother and father is important.' (Mandisa, PhD graduate, female)

This feeling is not unusual. It could fall within the academic guilt that Collins (2021) defines as 'a socially induced feeling of negative self-judgment'. Most working women often feel like this because of failure to live up to the

cultural ideas of 'good mothers'. The idea of a 'good woman' determines how a woman allocates her time and energy, as society expects mothers to take care of their children in order to be considered good mothers (Carter et al. 2013, p. 341).

■ Rare species

The majority of women prefer to delay beginning their PhD studies in order to raise their children and support their spouses as they pursue their aspirations (Prozesky 2008). African men, because of religion and patriarchy, hardly conform to gender roles. It is therefore interesting and admirable to see this African man letting his dreams take a backseat while teaming up with his wife to help her in achieving hers. Mandisa regards her husband as a rare species. She indicated:

'I would be working 0-3 in the morning and the baby is crying, sometimes he would say, "Okay I will go out with the baby, you continue studying". He is one of the rare species. I sometimes think that a female academician should have a husband who is not an academician because if both of them want to be that, one of them must bow down, certainly the woman must bow down, but if you have a businessman and they are in their own world, it's a bit okay, so I am thinking that one of you must be, the lady, if the lady wants to do the PhD, then the husband must be someone who is busy with other things, otherwise you will break your marriage and break your children.' (Mandisa, PhD graduate, female)

■ Same vision as a couple

It is clear from Mandisa's story that sharing the same goal is important because the one spouse is the other's biggest fan. Working as a team brings a win, and this is what Mandisa's husband saw, that Mandisa's success was also his own. Despite what people around them said, sometimes family, they did not let that tear them apart because they had a common goal for their family. Unlike some women who had to leave their marriages because of a lack of support from their husbands (Tsephe 2014), Mandisa had a husband who showed up for her and her children when she could not do so herself. Mandisa stated:

'[...] a family friend talked to me in private and said "Mandisa, what you are doing is not good. You keep and [*sic*] going and going and your husband is left behind. Do you know that at some point you will be ashamed of your husband? Don't you know that at some point you will feel bad that you are married to someone who doesn't have a PhD?"' (Mandisa, PhD graduate, female)

Mandisa also indicated that she cut ties with friends or family members who did not support and respect the choices she made together with her husband. Fortunately, despite people also going to talk with her husband

separately, he always mentioned they should keep their eyes on the goal – the completion of her doctoral studies. She concluded by saying:

‘I think the spouse factor is important, especially in Africa, where women are supposed to be submissive, where women are not supposed to be too educated. Maybe, when the husband has a PhD, you can also have it. How can you have a PhD and your husband doesn’t have it? How can you leave him behind? However, I also got encouragement and support from Tebello. I talk to people, so when you go through stuff, you talk to people who can relate. Yah, so I discovered that Tebello’s husband also is not a PhD graduate. She used to tell me, “You need to be grateful for your husband, he is the one who has brought you to where you are. In future when I go to conferences, become professor, when I go to UK, I will make sure that I go with him, especially in our old age, like there is a conference, we will put aside money and will say let’s go and see the world because you supported me, so those are my plans, but I have never told him, but when I grow up and we are good with finances we will be site-seeing the world together”.’
(Mandisa, PhD graduate, female)

For someone to succeed in whatever they are doing, it is important to identify peers who are going through what one is going through or have gone through it, as well as role models they look up to and seek advice from when encountering challenges. Kurtz-Costes, Andrews Helmke and Ülkü-Steiner (2006, p. 139) attest that ‘women doctoral students who had female role models reported higher levels of self-esteem, instrumentality, work commitment and career aspirations than women with male faculty role models’.

Looking at Mandisa’s narratives, she and her husband were working as a team. Even though he had not studied at this level, he was not intimidated by a woman who aspired to pursue her dream of being a PhD holder. He understood how important that was to his wife and did whatever needed to be done to help her realise her dream. This is why research shows that while in most cases women choose to leave their marriages because of a lack of support from their spouses (Brown & Watson 2010; Tsephe 2014), Mandisa experienced doctoral education differently.

■ Hope

Hope mentioned that her family has always been tight-knit. However, she and her father shared a closer bond. He has been of great support, particularly in her educational journey. She indicated that her family had been her strongest cheerleaders. Also, coming from an economically compromised country made her strive for a better life for herself, which she believed would come about by going as far as possible education-wise. It was this state that aroused in her the desire to help children; as such, she kept pushing, even on her most challenging days, because she knew many children besides herself needed someone who could help them change their own lives.

■ Cheerleaders

As Hope started her doctoral education prior to being married, she attributed her success to the unwavering support she had from her immediate family since she left home to study in South Africa. Her family cheered for her through all the stages and were proud of her for enrolling for a doctoral programme. She further mentioned that she met her husband later, during her doctoral journey, and he also played an immense role as he became an additional support system. Having attained his PhD earlier himself, he understood what his wife was going through and provided the necessary support. Regarding having cheerleaders, Hope stated that:

'I think the biggest thing is family support. I mean, I had cheerleaders. My parents were cheerleaders, my sisters and brothers were cheerleaders.' (Hope, PhD graduate, female)

■ Sought education as an escape from social, economic and political instability

Hope, like any international student, was drawn to study in a foreign country but did not really weigh or compare countries. South Africa was an easy escape as during the time she came for her first degree, she was fleeing to a country with better opportunities compared to hers, where they were almost non-existent. Having a supportive father who believed in education, it was easier for Hope to leave her home country in 2005.

Coming from Zimbabwe, with the social, economic and political instability that the country experienced, Hope mentioned she fled to come to a better country where she could pursue her dreams, that of mainly escaping the instability in her own county. She states:

'[...] when your country is going through social, economic and political instability, you are just pushed to furthering your education, so there is this drive that you know what, my own country is on fire so I need to make things work for me here and if you look at the legal profession, if you are doing LLB in South Africa and you are a foreigner, even if you write the bar exams you can't be admitted as an attorney as a foreigner, so most people just proceed to do their masters and then PhD, so in a way that affects law international students.' (Hope, PhD graduate, female)

Hope's motivation for continuing her education to the doctoral level shows that she sought to alter her own narrative because education is seen as a means of empowering women (Murphy-Graham 2012). A person's fundamental need to be educated is met through education, and once obtained, it has a significant impact on the development of other abilities (Terzi 2004). Moreover, the fact that Hope fled to acquire HE in a foreign country illustrates the point that focusing on HE teaches and expands students' analytical and creative skills in that she worked hard on her studies to build a better future for herself.

■ Passion for humanitarian work

Hope also indicated that her love to change people's lives fuelled her drive, and as someone who does not quit, specifically considering she wanted to impact positively on protecting children as well as coming from a disadvantaged country where she needed to escape through furthering her studies, she found herself going the humanitarian route. She states:

'[...] law was my love. Initially, when I started, I wanted to do the court thing, but eventually, when I got the feel of it, I discovered I actually don't want this. It's really not my thing, I am bored, I am passionate about research and what I eventually want to go into is go into the NGO sector where I actually improving [*sic*] lives, humanitarian work, that's what I'm passionate about, so also my topic is on child labour, trying to improve lives of children, so that's somehow my contribution.' (Hope, PhD graduate, female)

Coming to study in South Africa was a way of escaping the hardships in Hope's home country. These hardships shaped her to be passionate about making a change in people's lives. As such, she enrolled for law, and during her doctoral education, Hope researched child labour and how it affected their education. As this was her passion and having had to flee her home to seek education, she became resilient despite the challenges she encountered specifically during doctoral studies.

■ Botle

Although Botle mentioned that her mother was still alive, and even though she was not the one who raised her, she did not know her father until the age of 23. She was raised by her grandmother, and they survived on her pension grant. This meant that they did not have an easy life. As such, she found herself married at a young age.

■ Thought marriage would be a better way out of poverty

Seeing how difficult it was for her grandmother to provide for her and that she could not afford to further pursue her studies after completing high school, she left her rural village and went to Johannesburg to look for a job. She had aspired to be a soldier because she wanted to protect young girls like her who had no fathers to look after them, but she did not get into the country's armed forces. With no post-high school education, she quickly learned that she needed a job to survive, and she worked for a businessman selling clothes on the streets of Johannesburg. It was during this time that she met her husband, a grown man who seemed like he would 'take care' of her. She states:

'I didn't have the good life. I got married to this guy. When you grow up as a woman, you grow up without a father, chances are when you get a husband

you will look for a father figure, so I ended up with a husband who is a father figure, because he came through for me during those years when I had matric. I didn't have proper a job, I was here in Johannesburg, but I have never been happy as a married woman. I can't even describe to you what marriage feels like because I have always been alone even though he was in the picture, so he doesn't support me financially. I have to look after my son and myself, and it costs money to do those things.' (Botle, PhD graduate, female)

It was through this challenging experience that Botle decided to convert her disappointment into getting something positive for herself. She indicated that in the absence of a present husband, she directed her energy to attaining her PhD. Even though Botle was not a teenager when she got married, which is usually the case for girls in developing countries (Montazeri et al. 2016), she got married shortly after completing her matric because she needed someone to take care of her as she did not work and could not afford to further pursue her studies.

■ Self-motivation

Botle mentioned that one of the factors that contributed to her completion was self-motivation. She stated:

'[...] it's just that sometimes you wake up and go work on your thesis and only to find that nothing is coming out, for the whole day. It happens, but that is something that you have no control over. It's the mind, because when my mind allowed me, I would work for a very long time. And another thing that I think can be a barrier is lack of self-motivation. For me the challenges were minimised by self-motivation, because I would graduate when I am in the shower and see myself on the stage and confer the degree to myself. When I left the shower, I was on fire. I could work for the whole day, so without that I wouldn't have made it.' (Botle, PhD graduate, female)

She mentioned that none of her family members other than her husband knew about her pursuit of the degree. They would not understand her journey, and so she did not inform them. She adds:

'[...] my parents, my family other than my husband, they had no idea about this journey, so they would not understand. You could tell them that you couldn't see them because you are working, they wouldn't understand, they would ask what is it that you are doing, because it is a Saturday, whereas a life of a student has no holiday, has no Saturday, as long as the mind allows you to, so I think it's my inner strength that made me survive.' (Botle, PhD graduate, female)

According to Botle, with a family that could never understand that she was still studying even though she was a qualified teacher and also had a husband who was not supportive, she had no other way but to motivate herself. Unlike most of the women who had a supportive family, Botle did not have that crucial support system.

■ Supportive friend

Botle indicated that she does not believe in having friends but rather having brothers and sisters who are birthed out of relationships. One might conclude that one of the possible reasons for this is the lack of family support she experienced as she grew older. Having her grandmother in the rural area and no family in Johannesburg, she had to hold on to relationships that were meaningful to her. She met a colleague who ended up being a brother, who was supportive in her journey. She states:

'[...] a former colleague, who has always been a brother, that one understood. When things were going well I would call him and he would be happy for me and that would make me even more happy. If things were going bad, like when things were going bad with the supervisor, I would share with him. He is a spiritual person, so we connected a lot. He is one of the reasons, also, that I made it this far. He was the one who showed me the advert for the scholarship, and he never turned his back on me, from the beginning until the end. Even on my graduation, he was there, he was the one informing other people about my success while I was on stage. Yah, so he played a big part.' (Botle, PhD graduate, female)

■ Sibongile

Like Botle, Sibongile came from a poor background and was raised by a single mother who worked as a domestic worker. Even though they lived in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal, Sibongile was an inquisitive child when growing up and always wanted to know what was going on and why things were the way they were. She indicated that she was a curious child. Further in the text is a discussion on how she overcame her challenging childhood and always had a reason to want to know more.

■ Curious child

'[...] as a child, I asked myself a lot of questions. I have always been curious. I went with my mom to her work as a domestic worker, I would say "Mama, I am going to assist you", but while we were there, I was not assisting her but rather reading these books.' (Sibongile, PhD graduate, female)

Having these books to read at her mother's workplace, Sibongile fed her curious side as a person, and as a result, she pushed to know more. This trait played a huge role in her completion of doctoral studies as she felt that every challenge she encountered she could win or solve. She regarded herself as a scientist and believed the fact that she was a woman, a mother and a wife did not precede what she was capable of achieving at work. She states:

'I am a human being like you, I am a scientist like you. Did I tell you that I need to settle down? You know that kind of a thing, but always think that you know. I don't know how to put it, but they can. Males tend to think that. I don't know how to put it in words, but they make such comments about you

in front of you that I don't understand. Maybe also it's also the difference in gender. Whatever, maybe we tend to be very sensitive as well, but for me, I wouldn't want people making decisions for me just because I am a woman. Well, I don't think she is going to attend this meeting because she has to rush to daycare. Did I say I wasn't going to be able to attend this meeting? Why don't you ask me first and hear it from me and hear that you know why I am not going to make it for this meeting.' (Sibongile, PhD graduate, female)

Being a curious child, Sibongile mentioned she always wanted to solve problems within her community.

■ Having a dream bigger than herself

Growing up as a curious child, Sibongile had a passion for impacting her community positively. However, as she grew older, she found that she was passionate about science, especially on issues that threaten people's quality of life, such as diseases. She states:

'I would say that challenges are guaranteed, failures are guaranteed. You have to have a vision that's bigger than yourself, and for me, what was bigger than me and is still bigger than me is tuberculosis and HIV. You must have that thing that is bigger than you. If it doesn't make you scared, then it is not bigger than you. If it doesn't make you doubt yourself, don't do it, because it's not bigger than you. When you are faced with challenges, you will give up, but when it's bigger than you, and it means a lot to you, ask yourself what does this project mean to you. That kind of a thing. And sometimes it doesn't have to be HIV and TB.' (Sibongile, PhD graduate, female)

Sibongile's narrative clearly states that she is one person who is not scared of challenges and draws strength from bringing about change. Having an interest in the sciences, which is a male-dominated field, Sibongile felt there should not be any difference between her and her male counterparts. She strongly believes that female scientists should not be regarded as subordinate to men. For instance, being pregnant should not be regarded as a weakness where colleagues assume she needs time off when she is not sick or due for labour. One would argue that the spirit of knowing that she is capable of performing well in her academics carried her through to the completion of her doctoral studies.

■ Dineo

■ Steadfast faith in God

Like all African women who participated in the study, Dineo acknowledged and attributed her success to available resources such as the library, supportive family, funding and many more. However, she was also a strong believer in God. While narrating her story, Dineo indicated that God had paved the way for her to study. She even mentioned that when

she was struggling with registration money upon acceptance, she had a dream about a young man indicating that he would help her. She went to the university trying to request that she postpone her enrolment to next year as her husband could not afford registration, but when she arrived, she was referred to her supervisor's office, where she was surprised to see that the young man in her dream was actually the supervisor who offered to assist her, if only she could secure funds to register. The university would then continue paying for her tuition. She stated:

'I prayed, because I believe in God and in prayer and in the Lord Jesus. In that prayer, I saw somebody who told me, who was shown to be like a young boy, to say, "I will help you". God was pointing to a person like the person will be a source of help to me [...] I looked at him, he was such a young man, like the person in the dream. So, I sat down, so he kept asking me, and I said "What do I do?", this and that. We finished talking and I said I don't know how to break this, and he said "What is the problem? Do you want to do your PhD?" I said yes, he said "Then, come and register". He asked me three times: "Do you want to do your PhD?" He said, "I will help you", the same language that I heard in my dream. When he said, "I will help you"; I said "OK". He said, "We can get you a bursary for PhDs" and he was going to recommend me and the rest, "but I will help you, but you need to register first".' (Dineo, PhD graduate, female)

■ Referring to the times when God did it

Dineo indicated that when going through challenges, she looks back and reminds herself of the times when she encountered problems but always saw God's hand upon her. That on its own gave her hope that even the current challenges would be overcome. Her way of handling challenges demonstrated resilience and confidence in knowing that God has a plan for her life. She states:

'[...] when my father died, I was hallucinating and having the feelings [*sic*] didn't know, so I fainted in the exam hall. I sat in my first degree, God helped me. Second degree, I also did my own side of the work. So, this one, it was hectic, but I was taking those ones as a point of reference. I succeeded in a, b and c, then I will remind myself that other areas I have succeeded, so even now I will make it.' (Dineo, PhD graduate, female)

■ Brother's tough love

Dineo mentioned that of all her siblings, there was one brother who never stopped reminding her that from a young age she aspired to be highly educated. He supported her and was tough with her at times and said things that hurt her, although they came from a good heart. He specifically kept asking her if that was all she was ever going to be,

a mother and a wife, and if she did not want to advance her career. Dineo indicates:

'[...] when we relocated to South Africa in 2008, my brother kept asking me "What are you doing, what are you doing?" I said well, I am doing businesses, I am not working for now, so he insisted I get an application form and go to the university to apply. I told him I didn't have money for that because we relocated with three children. Then he kept calling me, "Have you registered?". I said no. So, one day, I remember we were in a prayer meeting, he phoned me, so I jumped out and said oh, he has not called for some time, let me go hear whether it is all well with them, and he asked me, "What are you still doing? Have you gotten any employment?", and I said it is not that easy to get employment with a different certificate, and at the end he said, "Go and get a form and fill it in!"' (Dineo, PhD graduate, female)

Dineo mentioned that he did not even assist with the registration money when she did not know how she was going to register because it is the university's policy that students register first before applying for university bursaries. However, despite all the challenges, Dineo completed her PhD and is grateful for the push she got from him.

■ Itumeleng

Itumeleng strongly emphasised the role played by her family in support of her studies. She indicated that her husband and brother were the strong pillars. The following sub-sections discuss what she states about her husband.

■ Spousal support

Like Mandisa, Itumeleng indicated that her husband took care of their two daughters while she was studying in South Africa. Although she chose to study at University X because it was not that far from home, she could, however, not go home as regularly as she had hoped, leaving her husband to act as the present parent for their daughters. She states that he kept encouraging her during the journey:

'My family was very supportive. My hubby, for staying with the kids and always encouraging me to finish, you know, he was very supportive.' (Itumeleng, PhD graduate, female)

■ Brother's support

According to Itumeleng, her brother had enrolled for doctoral studies but dropped out at some point. However, that did not stop him from cheering up for her and assisting and providing advice whenever she needed it. She states:

'[...] my brother, who couldn't complete his PhD, was very supportive. He was always full of advice to guide me on how to keep going.' (Itumeleng, PhD graduate, female)

■ Lerato

■ Love for research

Lerato was a lecturer at University X and enjoyed her job. Her passion for research contributed to the completion of her PhD because even though there were challenging times, knowing that she was doing what she loved kept her going. She states:

'[...] research is my job. It is what I do and love, so I knew I would do my PhD for the sake that I would contribute and do research that I love. You know, so it made sense to follow that particular path, because even now, as I say to you, it's not for school, it's not for anything, but I am continuing with my research, so it's a passion.' (Lerato, PhD graduate, female)

■ Love for her students

Lerato mentioned that she loved and enjoyed teaching, and she received the same warmth from her students. She indicates:

'I wanted to be an accountant first, like at first, when I was still in school, but after that, no. After that, people here leave and leave us here, so no, I think now that I am settled, no. being a lecturer is my passion.' (Lerato, PhD graduate, female)

From these quotes, it is clear that Lerato saw a gap in her workplace because she mentioned that staff came and left, but she then decided to settle and not look for jobs anywhere. As she had mentioned, throughout her life, she was there; she grew up there and went to school and university in that one city.

■ Tumeliso

Tumeliso is one of the two women I communicated with through WhatsApp as she was back in Zambia, and it is worth mentioning that the internet connection was not stable. Because of this challenge, we agreed that I send the questions via email and after receiving her responses to the questions, I had to email back for probing.

■ Peer reviews

She emphasised the positive impact of her peers who were already PhD holders in reviewing her work. She states:

'I had friends who were already doctors and I used to request them to read my work all the time and advice where necessary.' (Tumeliso, PhD graduate, female)

She indicated that it was not an easy journey for her, and she was in South Africa for a full five years, and was on study leave, but she had to return home and completed her degree in the sixth year.

■ Mpho

Mpho indicated that family support is what kept her afloat in her doctoral journey.

■ Being an empty nester

Despite the loss of her husband during this journey, Mpho mentioned that her house was a conducive space. Her daughter was always available to assist when she needed assistance with formatting her work or assisting in any way needed. She states:

'I think my house itself, tranquillity in my house gave me time to relax. My daughter, you know I am not very good with technology. She would ask me to send things to align them for me.' (Mpho, PhD graduate, female)

■ Prepared weekly meals

Considering how much time cooking takes, Mpho indicated that she was fortunate to have her mother assist in this area. As a lecturer, coming home where she stays alone would require her to spend time in the kitchen. She states:

'My mom, I mean, she has always been there for me. She would cook meals for the week and ask me to come and fetch my meals. You know, I would go home and food [*sic*] in my house. And yes, I have support from my family.' (Mpho, PhD graduate, female)

■ Pablo

■ Aims to inspire her brothers

Pablo understood that although she was living her life, she had younger brothers who could be watching how she lived and took it upon herself to be a big sister and behave in ways that would inspire them to make good choices regarding their lives. She states:

'Personally, I am responsible for myself, because I am the first-born. I am the only girl and I have three boys as my brothers, and these I [*sic*] people I believe they look up to me for motivation because, for instance, when I did my masters, my younger one was like "Now I am going to ask my parents to pay for my fees and do my masters", and I was like "It doesn't work that way, you sort yourself out, I sorted myself out for my masters", and he was like "Seriously? You mean you sponsored yourself?" "Yes, I did. You can't expect this woman to send you for your first degree and she will come and send you for your masters, it doesn't work that way". So he was like, "Oh, now I see". So when I came to South Africa, I was like, "Guys, I am doing my PhD", and he was like "Wow!! You are a girl, you are not a boy, we are guys, you are doing your PhD?" So I guess I was

a motivation for them, so that inspired him, he did all he could do, so today he is doing his master's in Canada, he pushed. So that is why I say I also see myself as a resource because I've always had belief that if you mess up your life, your siblings will mess up theirs, but just leave foundation for them. For example, with the last born, each time he tries to go astray I am like, who do you want to look like? You see now your first-born is a doctor, the second-born is doing his masters, the third one is a professional medical doctor in the UK. You want to mess up your life, who are you taking after?' (Pablo, PhD graduate, married)

As an older sister to three boys, Pablo knew that her brothers would be watching her steps and the decisions she made in life. As a result, she ensured that she behaved in a way that would inspire them to be the best versions of themselves.

■ Kari

■ Not married, no child and no boyfriend

Kari was not married and had no child or boyfriend during her doctoral studies. As a result, she indicated that she had no distractions because even her family members were in Nigeria. She dedicated her time to her studies; even though she had friends she met during her doctoral studies, they were new friends who were also busy with their studies. She states:

'[...] when I look at some of my colleagues that are married, not having an immediate family like a husband and kids also helped me, I was able to dedicate time to the PhD, and I didn't travel during the year from mid-January to mid-December, so I had that time, no distraction from family and all that, so that could have maybe helped me.' (Kari, PhD graduate, single)

As she did not have children or a husband, she did not need to take time off from her studies and go home to visit. She could also work throughout the university holidays.

■ Staying at the university residence

Because Kari did not have any family to take care of, she opted to stay at the university residence. This made her life much easier as she could walk to the laboratories to carry on with her work at night as well as work throughout the night without worrying that she has 'neglected' her children or her husband:

'I live in the university residence, so it was safe. I could work at night. I live in Jacaranda, just across campus, so I could just work at night and work at my own time, and it was fine.' (Kari, PhD graduate, single)

Not having children or a husband to take care of, or even family members close by, enabled Kari to dedicate time to her doctoral studies. Furthermore, she could afford to stay at the university residence where students staying

with their families could not afford to. This provided a good base for success, as she managed to utilise the facilities and the space to her advantage.

■ Keabetswe

■ Fear of missing out

Keabetswe described herself as someone who wants to develop herself constantly. She is observant of the good things that people do around her, and if it could positively impact her life, she adds it to her to-do list. She states:

'My children always say I have got FOMO (fear of missing out). I have that, I don't want to be left behind, that's just who I am. as a teacher you go for marking centre, and I always looked that some people are the examiners, how did they become examiners, I want to become one. You know, that's me, and then you see others are the moderators, and I am like how did they get there, I want to be a moderator. And as a result it's like, clearly I have got the bucket list, but the bucket list I always add things as I go, when I see something that I like, I add, and then I will work towards achieving it and tick it off once I have it. Next time I see you have achieved whatever, I say okay she has achieved that, I want that too, so that's something in me that just keeps pushing me.' (Keabetswe, PhD graduate, married)

■ Motivation to be a better version of self

Unlike most people who say they always wanted to have PhDs or got motivated to pursue doctoral studies as their career path unfolded, Keabetswe indicated that she had no intentions of pursuing a PhD. She states:

'I cannot specify that my dream was to achieve PhD and this and that, but my dream has always been to find myself being a better person, whichever way, whatever I see and admire then I want to achieve it and I want to better myself to an extend that I want to reach there, so that's just that inner motivation.' (Keabetswe, PhD graduate, married)

This desire to constantly improve herself brought her to the point where she enrolled for a PhD, and fortunately, as a staff member and having grown-up children who did not require her care, Keabetswe was able to work on her studies without many distractions from home.

■ Tebogo

■ Hated being a domestic worker

Coming from a family where her mother was a domestic worker and her father a gardener, Tebogo wanted a different life for herself. Her mother

used to take her to work for her boss during December holidays while she took leave and this made Tebogo want to be better than cleaning up after someone. She stated:

'[...] my mother came home for the holidays, and I had to go to Johannesburg to be a domestic worker for that month. I didn't like it because I was supposed to wear that uniform, I was very small and I had to wear my mother's overall, you know the attire that they wear. I didn't like it and the work was just too much. I had to clean the house every day, to clean the bathrooms, do the washing, iron. I used to iron even the underwear, it was a strange work. I didn't like it, but I had to do it. I had to be a domestic worker, during Christmas day I had to go and, you know, when my madam and boss go for lunch, I had to go with them so that I can carry the baby. Yes, on a Christmas day, they are having their lunch and then I had to carry the baby to make sure everything is fine.' (Tebogo, PhD graduate, divorced)

■ Getting married

However, her life took a different turn when she fell pregnant as a teenager at 18. She could not continue with her studies for a year while she raised the baby. She later returned to school but soon had a second child. This forced her to get married, and it was this experience that made her want better for herself, as she saw that she could not rely on anyone to take care of her and her children, because her husband did not take good care of them. She states:

'I became pregnant at eighteen and I had to stay at home for a period of a year just to raise the child, and then after that year my mother said to me, "Tebogo, you must go back to school, so your grandmother will look after your child". I had a second baby, that is where I have realised some challenges. My mother was a domestic worker. There was no way my mother would leave work and come and take care of the baby, so I just had to take the baby to the father's family, so that they can look after him until I finish. So I finished the study, then, afterwards, [*I broke up*] with this man. So, you see the challenges; [...] I had these two children, the one had a father, and this one had a father as well. You know things didn't work in both relationships.' (Tebogo, PhD graduate, divorced)

Tebogo later had other children and was married a couple of times but kept continuing with her studies. She mentioned that what kept her going was wanting a different outcome for her five children. She states:

'[...] with my husband, then it didn't work, it didn't work. I tried, I had the second one, I was still trying but I just felt this marriage is not working the way I want it to work, and the fifth one while I was doing honours and this man came to me and said, you know what, I am no longer going to pay for children's school fees because I am going to study with [the] University of Limpopo, so I have these five children, the marriage is just becoming more, things are not working and I could see that this man really wants to move out of this marriage, and he was in love with this girl who was working at SARS, boasting that you know, Ella is

doing a good job, she is confident, no, she is competent, [...] and I was a teacher. And I just felt, there is a lot of undermining here, because he got the person that he feels that you know, is successful than me. What can I do? Now I have five children, I am definitely not going to afford these children, we went to court for the maintenance and all those things, because we eventually divorced, went to the court for the maintenance, sometimes he doesn't come, there is just no money in the house, and it drags, it drags those cases, and I said you know what, I am not going to survive, I must just make sure that I develop myself.' (Tebogo, PhD graduate, divorced)

The pain of rejection she experienced in multiple marriages, as well as having to fend for her five children, drove Tebogo to fight for her educational freedom because she believed that could be the only way she could provide for her family.

■ Tsholo

■ Escape poverty

Being raised by her maternal grandmother, Tsholo indicated that she grew up in poverty because her grandmother was too old and took care of many grandchildren, including her own children, who were Tsholo's aunts and uncles. As they did not have enough to live on, she was unable to pursue tertiary education for three years after graduating high school and passing matric. It became apparent at this early stage in her life that she knew she wanted a better life for herself. However, she fell pregnant during the first year post-matriculation. Fortunately, a former teacher realised that she had not gone to university and, knowing how intelligent she was, he asked her to apply and offered to cover all expenses. She states:

'I can say I grew up in a poor family, I can say so. I didn't stay with my parents, I stayed with my mother's sister, so, who was not there all the time, so meaning our grandmother, is the one who uhmm, brought us up. So I think I grew up being that quiet, very observant child, who always wants to make impact.' (Tsholo, PhD graduate, married)

■ Gain independence

Having witnessed her mother being abused by her stepfather, Tsholo did not want to experience that for herself. She felt her mother stayed in that abusive marriage because she had no options. She had children that she could not take care of without her husband. Although she was not abused by her own husband, Tsholo indicated that she did not want to find herself dependent on anyone, worst of all a man. She indicates:

'So obviously challenges were, there were a lot of challenges, but the main drive was, I don't want to be suppressed by someone else, rather we should work together as partners. You know as a woman, especially married, you

want to have that sense of independence to say if you don't push yourself hard enough, men will always suppress you, because men will always want to be in charge, in control and all that, so if you show a man to be very dependent, then they step on you and do whatever they want to do, so I think looking at how my mom was treated in her marriage, that made me want to be different, to say I don't want a man to treat me like how my mom was treated. So I tried to avoid, not just because, not just in saying to say hey please don't abuse me or hey I don't like one two three four, but also with action, and action is towards improving yourself, to say even if they can say that this man is not around I am going to survive, I am going to live.' (Tsholo, PhD graduate, married)

To change her circumstances, Tsholo actively sought a different life for herself.

The ability to stay motivated inside to push through times when it felt like they could give up was a trait shared by all participants who successfully completed their doctoral studies. They said that while having support from the HEIs, supervisors, colleagues and family is a positive thing, their achievement was also largely attributed to their drive to earn the qualification. Because of their tenacity, they managed to finish (Nkambule 2012). However, this chapter touched deeper on 'soft' factors that enabled their success, such as spousal support, choice of university, escaping the socially, economically and politically unstable environments in one's home country, passion for humanitarian work, etc., which then pushed them even further. Their drive is demonstrated in their narratives.

This chapter demonstrates the huge role played by supportive husbands during their wives' pursuit of doctoral education. Rockinson-Szapkiw, Sosin and Spaulding (2018) attest to the importance of familial support, indicating that it influences women's progress and resilience in their doctoral journeys. However, because of gender roles, women are sometimes forced to put their dreams in the backseat while taking care of everyone else in the family (Morgan & Winkler 2020). In this instance, however, it is interesting to hear that an African man, despite being advantaged by the patriarchal system, chose not to conform to what society expected but rather chose to assume a role that is usually seen to be a woman's role, that of taking care of the family while his wife worked towards achieving a PhD. Despite the negative comments made by some members of their family and friends, Mandisa's husband kept reminding her that they could do it and that it did not have to make sense to anyone other than themselves. Despite feeling guilty for not acting as a 'good mother' in the eyes of the community, Mandisa is now able to contribute to her family in a more conducive way because, as is well-known, advanced education can enhance one's abilities.

Lessons learned from individual stories narrated by women in Africa

■ Introduction

This chapter discusses the lessons learned from each African woman's journey through to the completion of her PhD. However, it starts by discussing the individual backgrounds of each woman to enable the reader to get an idea of each person. This aims to drive the reader through their childhood and how they made their choices before pursuing their doctoral education.

■ How women's individual backgrounds contributed to the attainment of their doctoral degrees

■ Mandisa

Mandisa is from a middle-class family in Zambia. She enrolled for doctoral studies at University X at the age of 38. Mandisa was raised by both her mother and father. She comes from a home of eight siblings. Her father was a teacher, while her mother received no formal education. Having a large family made it difficult for Mandisa to grow up with all she needed, even though her parents provided for her and her siblings' basic requirements.

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She is married and has four kids. As a result of her upbringing, Mandisa was motivated to strive for a better life for her family. Her mother's lack of education also drove her to make it clear to her children that they had no excuse for not receiving an education.

As a first-generation female PhD graduate, Mandisa did not have any knowledge of educational degrees other than a BA. This means that she was not exposed to people who had studied beyond the first degree, but got exposed only as she continued studying. Mandisa obtained a university bursary that paid for only her tuition while she was pursuing her doctorate. She worked full-time in her home country while also attending school full-time. Because of this, she had to pay for her own lodging whenever she attended contact sessions and was not eligible for a bursary. She sometimes had to borrow money from her family to be able to make it to contact sessions provided by her department; this was a significant obstacle. Mandisa took four years to finish her PhD.

Mandisa was a postdoctoral scholar at University X at the time of the interview. She chose to take up a postdoctoral post because it paid better than what she would get back home going back to the same post she left. She claimed that everybody around her respected her because of her title of 'Dr'.

■ Hope

Hope is from a working-class, urban Zimbabwean household. At the age of 30, she enrolled at University X to pursue a PhD. Her mother holds a BA, while her father holds an Hons. Her father urged her to continue her education after she finished her primary and secondary education in her own country. Hope's parents were able to meet the necessities for her and her five siblings despite coming from a nation that is characterised by acute and pervasive poverty. Hope made the decision to study law in South Africa in 2005 and flee from the country's economic problems.

It was during her MA studies that she discovered that foreign nationals who study law in South Africa are never admitted as attorneys. Having found out that she does not enjoy attending to cases at court, Hope had to think about other options inside the legal profession. Through consultation and self-reflection, Hope found that she was passionate about humanitarian work and hence decided she wanted to work for an NGO where she could impact people's lives.

Though she was the first female PhD graduate in her family, Hope never had any aspirations to pursue doctoral studies when growing up, as she had no role models to look up to who could inspire her to achieve that level of study. But seeing the nature of the career path she chose, and also being a foreigner, she found it crucial to pursue doctoral education with the hope

that it would give her a better chance to pursue humanitarian work. It took her five years to complete her PhD because, adding to the already difficult journey, Hope got married and had two children during the progress of her studies. This transition was challenging and required some adapting and accommodating many people in her life.

Hope acquired a job after finishing her doctoral studies and was employed as a lecturer at University Y when this interview was conducted. She described how earning a PhD had given her access to better financial opportunities.

■ Botle

Botle is from a rural South African household of low socio-economic status. She began her doctoral studies when she was 43 years old. Although her mother was still alive when she was growing up, she was raised by her grandmother, who took care of her through the pension money she earned monthly, with no other source of income. Because of the financial challenges that Botle experienced growing up, she got married at an early age, thinking that would bring an end to her problems. She has one child, and, unfortunately, her husband did not take care of her and her child. She still had to fend for herself. She applied to enter the army after completing matric, but she was unsuccessful. After ten years of unsuccessful job searching, she was forced to sell garments on the streets of Johannesburg for a businessman.

She then met her biological father for the first time, when she was 23, and he offered to pay for her tuition if she applied to pursue her education at the College of Education, at University Z. This led Botle to enrol at the College of Education, and despite not wanting to be a teacher, she grabbed the opportunity when it was granted to her, hoping it would change her life for the better. For both her undergraduate and Hons studies, she specialised in special needs education. Later, Foundation X awarded her a scholarship so she could pursue her MEd. This grant gave her the opportunity to enrol in a PhD programme after completing her MEd, but it required that she study full-time. Botle finished her PhD in four years. She describes herself as someone who never gives up despite obstacles and perseveres. She views her doctoral study experience as difficult because, at one point, her supervisor left her, delaying the completion of her studies, but she did not give up. She admitted that her weakness is that she frequently puts the demands of other people ahead of her own, which forces her to put up with discomfort to appease them.

Botle was a lecturer at University X at the time of the interview. She said that receiving her PhD gave her confidence in herself and that she hopes to change many people's lives through research and sharing her experience.

■ Sibongile

Sibongile comes from a rural village in one of South Africa's provinces. She began her doctoral studies at University X at the age of 28. Her mother was a domestic worker, and her brother holds a BA. She is married and has two children, whom she had during her doctoral journey, and this made the journey more challenging, making her complete her PhD in six years.

Reflecting on how and where she grew up, Sibongile mentioned that holding a PhD was far from her thoughts and, hence, was never a possibility even in her wildest dreams. However, she became the first-generation female PhD graduate in her family. Because of a lack of knowledge when studying in rural schools, Sibongile did not know there was such a degree. She learned of this while she was pursuing an MA and her cousin was pursuing doctoral studies. This then inspired her to enrol for a PhD after her MA. She felt even more inspired to obtain this degree because she knew she could acquire a learnership programme job and, as a result, would be financially stable because she had a strong relationship with her supervisor at the MA level.

At the time of the interview, Sibongile was a full-time employee at the research institution where she was in the learnership programme. She explained that apart from holding the title of 'Dr', she has proved to be a researcher who contributes to knowledge in her field.

■ Dineo

Dineo comes from a Nigerian middle-class household. At the age of 46, she enrolled in University X's PhD programme. She has nine siblings and two of her brothers have PhDs. Although he did not have a tertiary degree, her father started out as a teacher and eventually became an entrepreneur. Dineo is married to a pastor and is a preacher herself. They have three biological children but care for numerous youngsters from disadvantaged families.

As a first-generation female PhD graduate, Dineo felt the need to continue her studies, but because she was married, her husband insisted that she take care of their children instead. Her motivation for enrolling for doctoral studies was her brother, who kept reminding her that she had dreams when growing up of becoming a doctor.

Dineo's experience in doctoral studies was difficult, especially given that she struggled with writing because of the English language. She was forced to ask her daughter to read her work before submitting it to the supervisor as a result. Financial assistance from her family, friends and the institution allowed Dineo to finish her education. She took four years to complete her studies.

By the time of the interview, Dineo was still busy with community projects where she assisted children with homework and taught some people to read and write. The attainment of her PhD has taught Dineo to look at different perspectives in every situation. Although she did not have a formal job at that point, she was still hopeful that her hard labour would bear fruit. She referred to herself as 'a go-getter', someone who overcomes obstacles to accomplish their goals.

■ Itumeleng

Itumeleng comes from a working-class family in Maseru, Lesotho. She is the second-born child in a family and has three siblings, and she is the first in her family to hold a PhD. However, her brother completed his MA and at one point enrolled for his doctoral studies but dropped out. Her other two siblings did not further pursue their studies after completing high school. Itumeleng is married, and her husband quit his undergraduate studies. They are blessed with two daughters. She enrolled for doctoral studies at the age of 41.

Itumeleng noted that since enrolling for her first degree, studying as far as she could go had always been her desire. She is the first person in her family to receive a PhD. She was further motivated by colleagues who had already begun their doctoral studies, as well as by attending conferences and listening to experts. Then, she convinced herself that she could not introduce herself as a 'Mrs' and that she had to acquire the title of 'Dr'. Therefore, her main motivation for pursuing a PhD was the title. It took Itumeleng four and a half years to complete her studies.

Describing her financial status as shaky, she indicated that the Lesotho government financed her doctoral studies. She had applied for study leave from her employer, and although she was studying full-time, she received 60% of her salary; she also received a bursary from University X and held an assistantship post at the university. Although he did not earn much money, her husband was a big help because he looked after their daughters while she pursued her doctoral studies in a foreign country.

By the time of the interview, Itumeleng was back in her home country and resumed her duties as a lecturer. She states, however, that the attainment of her PhD has not changed her financial situation, but she is hopeful things will change for the better soon.

■ Lerato

Lerato comes from a middle-class South African household. At the age of 24, she enrolled at University X to pursue a PhD. She is in a serious relationship and has a child who was born just before she received her PhD.

Only two of her family members have completed Hons-level coursework. Lerato says that since spending time as a student at University X since 2009, she has had the good fortune to also serve as a tutor. This made things easier for her because it meant she had some form of income and had free access to printing and photocopying. Although she does not come from a rich family, she indicated that she was not from a poor background either. What also assisted her financially was getting employment within the university.

With no intention of ever obtaining a PhD, she kept furthering her studies until she was the first and only person in her family to get this degree. Having been one of the youngest lecturers within the department without a PhD, she decided to enrol for doctoral studies, mainly because, as a staff member, she would be able to study for free. She also seized the opportunity because she had supportive colleagues.

By the time the interview was conducted, Lerato was working as a senior lecturer at University X. She earned respect from her students and family members because she obtained her PhD. She mentioned it was also financially rewarding to have obtained a PhD.

■ Tumeliso

Tumeliso comes from a rural middle-class background in Zambia. At the age of 37, she enrolled in University X's PhD programme. She comes from a family where all the members were educated up to BA level. She completed her primary, secondary and tertiary education in her own country before travelling to South Africa to pursue her PhD. She has two children and is a widow.

Tumeliso is a first-generation PhD graduate, although she never thought she would pursue a PhD. Her choice to enrol in doctoral studies was influenced by her employment; she was a lecturer at a local university that, in partnership with a foreign university, decided to empower its faculty by giving them the chance to pursue doctoral studies. Tumeliso had no choice but to apply because she was the only female candidate in her department who met the requirements for enrolment in doctoral studies. Tumeliso received a five-year study leave even though it took her six years to finish. She also got a scholarship, which made life easier for her financially and allowed her to continue caring for her children even when she was away from home. She was able to complete her degree thanks to a grant she received from the African University Association in the last year. She was the first in her family to obtain a doctoral degree. She claimed that earning a PhD had changed her outlook on life, given her confidence in her skills and enabled her to believe in herself.

■ Mpho

Mpho is from a working-class household in a South African city. At the age of 50, she enrolled at University X to begin her PhD studies. She has four siblings and is the family's first-born child. The second sibling holds an MA, while her other two siblings have earned honours degrees. Mpho was married and the mother of one child when she began her doctoral studies. She sadly lost her husband when she was busy working on her PhD.

Mpho had little interest in pursuing doctoral studies, although she was the first person in her immediate family to earn a PhD. After she received her MA, she felt proud and happy, which served as her inspiration. Even though she feels she might have finished her doctoral studies much sooner if it were not for the loss of her husband and having a full-time job, it took her four years to complete the degree. But Mpho had extra encouragement to finish her doctoral studies because she pictured herself wearing the PhD graduate regalia. Mpho said her completion of doctoral studies marked the beginning of her career in academics.

Mpho was a lecturer at University X at the time of the interview. Mpho went on to say that she observed a difference in the way people looked at her after she obtained her PhD, as they now held her in high regard. For instance, after she was introduced as 'Dr Mpho X' during a church conference, people started to favour her; for example, they would not let her stand in queue for food like everyone else but instead brought food for her.

■ Pablo

Pablo comes from a working-class family in a rural part of West Africa. At the age of 33, she enrolled in University X to pursue a PhD. In a family of four siblings, she is the only female and the first-born. A brother who is younger than her is a medical doctor, followed by one who was doing his MA at the time of the interview, and the last brother was still enrolled in undergraduate classes. Her parents are both retired. Pablo is married and has one child, who was born when she was pursuing her PhD.

Pablo, a first-generation female PhD graduate, never thought she would enrol in graduate school, but after moving to South Africa with her businessman husband, she did so as she was unable to find work there. Pablo finished her PhD in three years. She admitted that it was not an easy route because she had to go home to be a wife and mother after being a student from 09:00 to 16:00. At this point in her life, having a child did not prevent her from progressing in her research. She claimed that she started sending her three-month-old baby to a daycare centre to facilitate her progress. Pablo gained university financing for her doctoral studies and

was given a position as a departmental tutor, and her husband assumed the entire responsibility for taking care of their family's needs.

At the time of the interview, she was about to graduate. However, because of her love for research, she continued writing articles to publish and hence still utilised the library facilities. She indicated the attainment of a PhD earned her respect from people around her, and she was regarded as a woman of high integrity who could motivate and encourage the youth, specifically at church.

■ Kari

Even though both of Kari's parents are retired, she comes from a middle-class family in Nigeria. At the age of 28, she enrolled at University X to pursue a PhD. Her family consists of two brothers, two sisters and herself. She has never been married or had children. Her sister was pursuing a PhD in Canada, and all of her siblings had MAs by the time of the interview.

Kari had always wanted to pursue doctoral studies, and she was the first person in her family to receive a PhD. She quit her job in her own country to pursue her studies in South Africa. Kari had saved money while she was working to cover her educational expenses when she came to study, even though she did not have a bursary when she started. She also received financial assistance from her parents and siblings, so she had no troubles during her first year of doctoral studies. University X awarded her a bursary in her second year.

Kari studied full-time for four years before she finished. She said she had the time to devote to her research and expressed gratitude that she did not have a family to support or a child who needed her time. Kari, a postdoctoral fellow at University X at the time of the interview, stated that obtaining a PhD opened doors to conferences, networking possibilities and collaboration with other academics, but no financial gains. She indicated that she was still hopeful that even her financial side of things would change for the better now that she has obtained the degree.

■ Keabetswe

Keabetswe comes from a middle-class family in South Africa. She enrolled for doctoral studies at University X at the age of 50. No members of her immediate family had studied beyond a certificate level. Her husband has a BA. Keabetswe moved to Gauteng when she got married. She has three children, and all of them are working.

Keabetswe did not think she would ever pursue doctoral studies, and this was because she did not know anyone with a PhD. As a result, she was

the first member of her family to earn a PhD. Keabetswe, however, felt the need to keep improving her academics as she studied for her other certifications because she was afraid of falling behind. She found inspiration in the people she saw at work, on television and on any other platform to which she had access. University X provided her with support, including a bursary to study at this level.

Keabetswe said that her doctoral education has taught her to be critical about everything in her life, but most especially in her area of work. At the time of the interview, she was employed as a lecturer at University X, and with a PhD, she could apply for positions that call for a PhD holder.

■ Tebogo

Tebogo comes from a family of poor socio-economic status who live in a rural part of Limpopo, South Africa. At the age of 46, she enrolled at University X to pursue a PhD. Her father worked as a gardener and her mother worked as a domestic worker. Because their parents worked in another province and came home only once a month, she and her siblings were raised by her cousin. She has three siblings, and the oldest brother holds an MBA, while the other two have degrees and a diploma, respectively. She is divorced and has five children.

As the first-generation PhD graduate in her family, Tebogo's only motivation for getting an education was to get out of poverty. She was uninformed of the various levels of education. Tebogo, who was not among the brightest of children growing up, was motivated by her older brother, the first person from their community to attend university. Tebogo realised she needed to gain some sort of education if she desired a life other than what her parents provided and the nature of work they did. Most importantly, she wanted a different life for her children, whom she raised alone.

Tebogo applied for a second MA programme while she was employed at University X, but the head of department at the time informed her that the university preferred teachers with PhDs; as a result, she enrolled in doctoral studies. She received funds from one foreign organisation, and the university gave her resources and academic support, enabling her to successfully complete her studies. Tebogo felt that the fact that English was her fourth or fifth language resulted in her taking six years to complete her doctoral studies. Tebogo claimed that she learned in her native tongue throughout primary school, which hampered her ability to understand English.

She stated that having a doctoral degree has made her conscious of her social status, and this influences the way she does things. She provides a decent life for her children and, therefore, knows she is going to be a good role model for people around her, specifically the disadvantaged.

■ Tsholo

Tsholo was born and raised in a rural village in one of the South African provinces. At the age of 34, she enrolled in University X's PhD programme. Because Tsholo's mother was married and had five kids with Tsholo's stepfather, Tsholo was raised by her grandmother. At age 23, she finally got to meet her biological father. Tsholo was the first-born of nine children; her biological father was married and had three children. Tsholo was financially supported by her grandmother because she came from a low-income family. Sadly, despite having outstanding grades in matric, she was unable to continue her education because of a lack of funding and had to stay at home for two years. Tsholo became pregnant with her first child while out of school. After this experience, her high school teacher, whom she believes to be an angel from God, decided to take her to university and covered all her expenses. Tsholo later got married and had three children.

Tsholo simply knew she wanted good things in life and to get out of poverty because she was the first person in her family to earn a PhD. Tsholo then asked for a bursary after enrolling for a BA and was fortunate to be awarded one. After earning her BA, Tsholo looked for work but was unsuccessful. She and her friends made the decision to keep going to school so they could at least acquire bursaries to assist them in supporting their families and themselves. She continued to apply for jobs after earning her MA and was hired by a zoo. Soon after starting this job, Tsholo was accepted into a learnership programme that required her to work at one research organisation on condition that she pursue her doctoral studies. The fact that the stipend for a doctoral student was almost equivalent to the pay she received while working at the zoo motivated her to accept this opportunity. Therefore, she reasoned, it was preferable that the learnership programme come with a chance to continue her education.

Tsholo was enrolled in a learnership programme and was employed by the research institution at the time of the interview. People around her, especially her co-workers, look up to her because she is a doctor. She says that she is viewed as a role model by the public. She also highlighted the financial independence that she was experiencing.

■ Lessons learned from women's narration of their lives until doctoral completion

From these individual backgrounds, there are a couple of critical issues that impacted African women PhD graduates' career paths. Being a rural student, coming from a poor household, being a woman and other social factors all interconnect and have disproportionate effects on students

(Belay 2020). Although this research explored the strategies and capabilities that enable African women's success in doctoral education, I believe everything from their childhood contributed to the person each graduate was before they thought of pursuing doctoral education. Their lived experiences shaped them to be who and what they are.

These themes are discussed further in the text.

■ **Teenage pregnancy**

Some of the African women became pregnant as teenagers. Although this was one of the challenges that could have impacted negatively on their aspirations, considering they were from disadvantaged rural communities, it however made them aspire for a different life. Having children at an early age inspired them to pursue their dreams even though they did not have any knowledge of different levels of educational degrees.

■ **Early marriages**

Additionally, some of these women, at least Tebogo and Botle, got married young with the hopes that their spouses would provide a better life compared to the ones they had in their own families. Indeed, Tebogo was a teenage mother and continued with her studies; however, she was disappointed to see that she could not rely on her husband to take care of their child, mainly because he was also still a teenager. Botle, on the other hand, sought a mature man as she did not experience the love of a father, because she did not know her father until much later in her life. To her surprise, her husband did not take care of her and her child.

■ **Lack of information regarding different levels of study**

However, studies show that teachers in rural schools lack the same credentials and levels of confidence in integrating technology as those in urban schools. For rural schools, a persistent issue has been the lack of qualified, experienced teachers and technical training (Herselman 2003).

■ **Aspiring to be different from how they grew**

The majority of these women indicated that they pursued doctoral education with the hope of changing their financial situation or providing a better life for their children.

■ All women enrolled having worked before

All women in this study had to work at some point in their lives, specifically after or during their first degrees, before they reached doctoral study. Unlike in developed countries, where students continue with their studies until they complete doctoral education and then seek work, African women could not afford to study continuously because of the need to earn a living and take care of their families.

■ Similar yet different stories for women in Africa

Eradication of poverty, access to education for all, empowering the younger generation with education, minimising the brain drain, gender equity, and encouraging African women to participate in the development of Africa, have been high on African government agendas. (Khodabocus 2016, p. 25)

All women in this study indicated a few of these factors. They pursued doctoral education to escape poverty, as the acquired knowledge would help eradicate poverty by opening doors to grow as people and financially. Some indicated that this would make them better researchers, lecturers, scientists and so on. Being on the same platform, specifically in having voices and being listened to, was one issue that came up. Being able to provide for themselves and take care of their children, thereby demonstrating independence, thus not being at the receiving end of abuse as their husbands or partners deemed them worthy of respect and not seen as liabilities. Even though African women in this research highlighted their personal liberation, they also showed concern for being able to participate in the development of their communities and the world at large.

Having interviewed this group of women, as a researcher, I acknowledge the differences in their lives, backgrounds and responsibilities. However, their common desire to be whole human beings can never be denied.

Having gone through African women's backgrounds from the time they were growing up until they realised their dream of attaining a PhD, besides the most common challenges that women in postgraduate studies experience, such as lack of funding, supervision, juggling family, work and studies to mention a few, this chapter discusses issues such as falling pregnant as teenagers, lack of information regarding educational levels of study and being married at an early age, which could have hampered their success. However, their drive to be different, to be able to live the lives they led growing up and wanting something different for their own children fuelled their endurance not only within doctoral education but also throughout their lives. It is on this note that I emphasise the need for resilience, not only during doctoral education but throughout their lives,

which then resulted in them completing their doctoral studies. Because universities in Africa, specifically in South Africa, have developed or improved on their support for students, what also plays a role in success in doctoral education, clearly, is seeing oneself as deserving of better opportunities, which could be a result of being raised in disadvantaged families, support from teachers growing up (which is the case with Tsholo) and keeping one's eyes on the ball despite the challenges that one encounters along the way.

Recommendations on how to better prepare for doctoral studies and increase the number of women PhD graduates in Africa

From this book, recommendations can be drawn regarding increasing the number of women PhD holders in Africa. These recommendations will be drawn from narratives provided by successful women PhD graduates.

The problem statement for this research was outlined in Chapter 1, which stated that while there is little literature on the difficulties that African women face when pursuing doctoral studies and the causes of high attrition rates, even less is known about how successful African women completed their doctoral journeys. To help fill this deficit in the realm of doctoral education, this research aims to contribute by providing knowledge on how this category of women in this study succeeded. Having used the CA and the resilience theory specifically for this book, the general conclusions are therefore guided by two approaches. The CA founded by Amartya Sen (1999) takes into account the well-being of individuals. This is because he argues that people can reflect on their lives and are active agents in pursuing the lives they have reason to value. This point of being able to reflect and pursue lives individuals want for themselves is also an aspect

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found in the resilience theory, where a situational pattern attests to the fact that people have the capacity to evaluate their situations and make an effort to change them. Sen goes on to say that in order to support development, individuals need to have access to the chances and freedoms to live the lives they find meaningful. I felt it was crucial to conduct the study on African women's success in doctoral programmes because there is a dearth of research on the subject. For this book, I specifically used the CA in combination with the resilience theory lens because there are no studies like mine that have used these combined, and hardly any have been conducted in the South African context.

My recommendations in this book, unlike in my earlier thesis, are not policy-oriented. This time, I am speaking to women – or anybody who wishes to pursue doctoral education – based on African women's narratives regarding their doctoral education experience, looking deeper or starting from their childhood experiences. I went through these women's stories and lived experiences from as far back as their childhood because I believe we are shaped by our experiences in life to want certain things in life. Instead of repeating well-known issues such as a lack of funding or supervision, for example, even though I had addressed them coming from African women PhD graduates specifically, I dug deeper to find what I believe will help anyone who wants to pursue doctoral studies, highlighting some of the important issues that need to be addressed by the potential doctoral candidates for their preparedness, which may possibly reduce the attrition or dropout rate as well as lessen the burden or make the journey more tolerable. What African women PhD graduates said helped them succeed – attributes, research, family, friends and so on – is discussed further.

■ **Carefully prepare yourself and your life to enrol for doctoral education well ahead of time**

Although one could argue that there is no such thing as the 'right time' to do anything, it is crucial that one makes preparations instead of getting into doctoral education without planning. This path requires a lot of psychological, emotional, physical, financial and social preparedness. By this, I mean, for instance, that one must be psychologically ready for the hard work, mentally available, and fit to follow through with the programme successfully. One must be healthy and present to be physically ready since acquiring a PhD requires physical endurance. Financial readiness requires provision planning. For example, inflation rates play a large role if one has a bursary, and one may need to save for shortfalls before starting a PhD programme. Even though studying and working simultaneously is common, preparing oneself and attaining the necessary experience to support

oneself is recommended. One should have a choice and not be desperate to work to survive. The desperation can impact negatively on their mental, emotional and physical well-being and thus affect their performance.

■ Be intentional about knowing yourself

Anyone who wishes to enrol for doctoral education should have completed the job of knowing who they are and what it is that they love. Sometimes, people decide to enrol because, for example, they want a promotion at work. This often makes the journey unbearable, thus taking longer to complete. The delay in completion demotivates the scholar and has the potential to destroy relationships as family and friends grow tired and frustrated and choose to sever connections. It is also expensive and, as a result, will negatively impact one's mental health, which could then lead to deterioration of physical and emotional health.

■ Enrol in fields you are passionate about because passion influences resilience

As challenging times are a part of life, it is even more common to encounter a couple of these moments on the doctoral journey. Knowing oneself leads to one knowing what they are passionate about and what topics are of interest for conducting research, the reason being that passion influences resilience.

■ Research the possible university choices regarding where to study

When searching for a university where one will pursue their doctoral studies, one needs to take time to research issues such as how far the university is from home and whether it will be possible to travel home. The reason is that doctoral students, specifically in Africa, are mostly mature, meaning they could have families back home and may, therefore, need to travel for contact sessions or even stay in a foreign country; as a result, they may need to travel back to check on families. It is also important to check possible mentors or supervisors prior to applying because it could be time-consuming to register only to find there is no experienced supervisor within your area of interest who can supervise.

■ Have a dream bigger than yourself

It is good to pursue doctoral education for your personal growth, to want to be educated, hold prestigious job titles and acquire research skills.

However, because doctoral education is mainly centred on its contribution to the knowledge economy, PhD graduates need to be consciously aware of the fact that acquiring education at this level is beyond their own personal development. At this level, education (Tsephe 2014):

[...] plays an instrumental role which can be personal or collective: personal importance is where education can help one find a job and participate in the labour market to bring about positive change – having education helps people find information on economic opportunities. Collective importance refers to the fact that, once individuals are educated, they can have a positive impact on their families, societies, countries and the world as a whole, because they are now able to expand their capabilities. (p. 41)

That is why, being educated at this highest level, one also aims to contribute to or impact others' lives positively through the expansion of capabilities.

■ Family matters

The support system is one of the strongest pillars that helps one succeed in this journey. The doctoral journey requires teamwork and is not just about the PhD candidate. One of the major elements involved is family. Married or not, it requires the involvement of people who love you, be it one's parents, spouses, siblings, children or anyone close. For instance, a lack of understanding or involvement sometimes causes families to break apart; hence, divorce is not abnormal during this phase. It is also not surprising for one to say they lost their relationships with their families. Some people may not even understand what your journey is about. However, communication is key and letting your loved ones in goes a long way. It is when they feel included that they will cheer for you, help you with the children if you are a mother, step in to help with house chores and just allow you to work and rest when you need to. Family is not limited to blood, and one can have friends who end up being family. So, it is important to know your real friends and allow them to carry you at times when you need to be carried.

■ Hold on to your faith or beliefs

Spiritual connection is another major factor that helps doctoral students to endure challenges until completion. As the doctoral journey can be lonely, it requires one to dig deep into the core of what holds them together inside and what they believe in.

■ Self-motivation

Although doctoral education requires teamwork, one needs to have the inner drive to achieve their dreams. It is one of the reasons why one needs

to know who they are and where their passion lies so that when everything seems not to work and one feels overwhelmed, one can draw strength from inside.

■ Embrace everything about you

Embracing who you are, where you come from, your aspirations and challenges and the successes you have experienced throughout your life, acknowledging that all these prepared you or shaped you for who you are today, helps in who you are going to be. Life gives us lessons and opportunities which shape our decisions.

This chapter shows that it takes more than funding, supervision, working space and many other factors to attain a PhD. Recommendations indicate that success through doctoral education starts with the preparation of self. This means one needs to check how much time they have to fit into the doctoral education aspect. It is well-known that things do not always go according to plan, but knowing the demands of your work, such as how much time you can allocate to studying, especially when one juggles work, family and studies, will assist in knowing if one will have time for their studies. For example, suppose one just got promoted at work and that promotion comes with more responsibilities, it is wise not to enrol in the same year. Learn to adjust to your new work and then plan around it. Preparation also includes knowing who you are and what interests you. That way, you will stand a better chance of pursuing a topic that interests you and that you are passionate about. This passion plays an immense role in influencing or activating resilience.

One should have a dream bigger than just to develop themselves. As mentioned, we live in a knowledge economy-based world. This means that scholars are expected to impact global change and development. As we cannot change the world by working in isolation, one needs to have a strong support structure to contribute to the realisation of their dream. One needs family and friends to succeed. As such, one needs to communicate with their family members and friends, explaining the vision simply so that these people continue to be with you and provide the space and time for you to chase your dreams without feeling neglected. Once they buy into one's vision, they can move in a way that relieves the doctoral student, such as taking care of the children, preparing meals for them so as to grant them more time to work on their research, representing one at events where, because of lack of time, one could not possibly attend. One important issue is holding on to one's faith or beliefs. There are times when friendships or relationships come to an end and one needs to draw from a power greater than oneself to continue moving even on days when one is not motivated to do so. Self-motivation is another key factor because the war is internal

as much as external and requires psychological, emotional, physical and social preparation.

Embracing one's life journey is also a key factor to success. Acknowledging where one comes from allows them to want to be and do better in future. This is because each life experience contributes to the people we become.

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By exploring the strategies and abilities that enable female African PhD graduates to complete their studies successfully, this book seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature, revealing the key factors that make them successful during their time in these PhD programmes. In this scholarly book, African women with PhDs, especially those who studied at South African universities, have been able to voice their concerns, share their insights, and explain how they succeeded in achieving their academic goals in African educational institutions. The findings presented hold potential advantages for scholars researching PhD education in South Africa, particularly since previous research has not examined it from the perspective of both the capabilities approach and resilience theory.

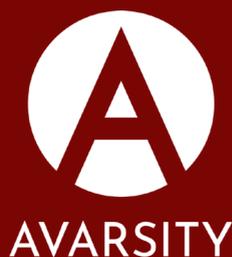
This book will expand the horizons of knowledge by delving into the multifaceted factors that African women outlined that enabled or hindered their success in doctoral education (including their personal, social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental aspects). Interviews with a diverse cohort of female African PhD graduates from various African nations may provide insights for aspiring scholars interested in the subject. Besides enriching scholars' understanding of how African women excel as doctoral students, this book offers insight into developing effective strategies to support these students in higher education. The research presented in this book provides insight and knowledge for scholars who want to expand and build upon the limited literature on the success of African women in PhD studies, particularly within the African and South African context.

This book is an important contribution to discussions on the production of meaningful scholarship in Africa and South Africa, which produce only a small percentage of the world's formal knowledge and too few knowledge producers, especially black women.

The book provides an interesting take on a methodological depth that transcends much empirical work that seeks to generalise participants across gendered and racialised categories. Instead, the author renders the study personalised in a focus on the narratives of a few individuals through the lenses of the capabilities approach and resilience theory. This distils information about human experience that avoids de-agentified victimisation through scopophilic re-narration of participant voices and presents the participants in terms of complexity and the demonstration of worth. In including participants from multiple African countries, the author drives a trans-continental social constructionist view of participants whose lives have been deeply impacted by patriarchy and colonialism.

The combination of subject matter and approach delivers research conclusions in the form of 'themes' rather than 'conclusions' that serve as welcome additions to the body of knowledge from a range of epistemic standpoints. Politically, it provides insight into issues that might be addressed from a systemic perspective beyond merely allocating more funds to young female scholars. Sociologically, it enables a complex view of women as both the objects of patriarchal norms and the subjects of their own trajectories. Psychologically, it focuses on the multiple difficulties women encounter from the perspective of what they 'can' do rather than what they are precluded from doing. As a result, the book gives the reader a sense that African women who pursue PhD studies are neither victims nor heroes but owners of their lives.

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