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**A Capabilities Approach to African Women's Success in Doctoral Programmes in  
South Africa**

by

**Lifutso Tsephe**

**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PHILOSOPHIAE  
DOCTOR (PhD)**

in the

**Department of Education Management and Policy Studies**

at the

**University of Pretoria, South Africa**

**Supervisor: Dr Calitz**

**Co- Supervisor Dr KS Adeyemo**

**January 2021**

## Declaration

**I declare that the dissertation/thesis, which I hereby submit for the degree of PHILOSOPHIAE DOCTOR (PhD) in Education Management Law and Policy studies at the University of Pretoria, is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.”**

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- Registered title, and
- Data storage requirements.

## Dedication

I dedicate this research to late mother, 'Malekhoba Tsephe. The seed you planted came to blossom and for that I will forever be grateful.

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SURY BISETTY  
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To whom it may concern,

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## Abstract

There are many documented reasons why both men and women fail to complete their doctoral studies such as insufficient funding, family responsibilities as well as demotivation due to lack of progress in their research (Herman, 2011c, Gardner, 2008, Magano, 2011). However, it is arguable that men are at an advantage of completing their doctoral studies at a higher rate compared to women, partly due to the masculine culture within higher education institutions, which includes aspects such as having more male senior lecturers/academics (Brown and Watson, 2010, Ismail, 2011, Haake, 2011). Several studies have shown how African women's experience and performance in doctoral studies are impacted by several relations within the learning environment such as lack of role models, mentorship, insufficient funding, dual identities and masculine environment (Brown and Watson, 2010, Johnson-Bailey, Velentine, Cervero, and Bowles, 2008). Despite such obstacles, it is important to mention that there are some women, who successfully complete their doctoral studies. This study, therefore, aims to focus on African women who have successfully completed their doctoral studies in South Africa in order to bring forth positive narratives of African women's success in doctoral education. Using the capabilities approach as the analytical framework, and in-depth interviews with fourteen selected African women doctoral graduates from a South African university, this study examines women's experiences of accessing, participating and progressing through doctoral programmes in higher education. The research adopts an interpretative model, which results in principles that are necessary for interpreting the actions and behaviours of people, such as agency, opportunities, and beings and doings in seeking to answer the following questions: 1) What capabilities using the capabilities approach enabled African women, doctoral students' success in higher education? 2) What functionings did African women, doctoral graduates hope for after completion of their doctoral studies? 3) How did African women use their agency to develop capabilities (opportunities and freedoms) for academic success? 4) What conversion factors enabled or constrained African women's success in their doctoral journeys?

Keywords: African women, capabilities approach, doctoral education, higher education.



## Abbreviations

CA	Capabilities approach
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
NDP	National Development Plan
NPC	National Planning Commission
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NRF	National Research Foundation
PWIs	Previously White Institutions

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This study explored African women's success in doctoral programmes in a South African context through the capability approach lens. This chapter contextualises the study as it presents the background to the problem. Outlined below is the statement of the problem, the research questions that governed the study, the aim, rationale and the significance of conducting this study, which states its relevance and potential contribution to the field of higher education (HE) research. This chapter also outlines the analytical framework; hence the capabilities approach (CA) is briefly introduced. Finally, the section explains the methods used in this study and summarises the chapters of the thesis.

### 1.1 Background

Women across the globe have been marginalised due to patriarchy. Patriarchy, in its broader sense, refers to the activation and institutionalisation of the superiority of men over women and children in the family and the expansion of the dominance of men over women in society (Sultana, 2012). Male supremacy hinders women's advancement and development through cultural practices that oppress women (Sultana, 2012). For instance, patriarchal societies tend to think women are second class citizens and belong in the kitchen (Makama, 2013).

Although men are not born as breadwinners and women as caretakers, to assume their predetermined roles, both groups are socialised accordingly and different personality traits are developed (Robbins, 1996). As such, while growing up girls are taught that their jobs are in the home, and have mothers direct them and teach them to care for their homes (Magano, 2011b). Women, as a result, find themselves working within their homes and not in competitive forums such as the workplace, and consequently, they are regarded as subordinate to men. Therefore, women are seldom named to hold managerial roles because women have often been subordinated to men, whether within families or in the workplace (Makama, 2013).

The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles validates existing structures and values that promote and endorse men's leadership bids, which in turn preserves the status quo (Ely, Ibarra and Kolb, 2011). Organisational hierarchies, in which men dominate, together with practices that associate leadership with behaviour that is assumed to be more prevalent or acceptable to men, strongly unintentionally convey that women are unfit for leadership positions. Although Sultana (2012) states that we live in times when women occupy positions of power such as prime minister, the fact is the system has not changed; it still continues to be male-dominated, women are merely accommodated in it in a variety of ways.

According to Sultana (2012), it is, however, essential to identify and acknowledge structures that keep women controlled and subordinated so that its operations must be unravelled to



function systematically for women's advancement. Dlamini and Adams (2014) indicate that challenging patriarchy is not a simple job for women, but this must be achieved if women are to achieve their full potential and aspire to those positions currently occupied by men. Despite this male favouring systems, women started pursuing doctoral education as a way to better themselves.

Doctoral education is not only recognised as an entry qualification into the academic career (Holley and Gardner, 2012) but also as an important pathway to research and innovation (Nerad, 2011a) and other professional careers (Holley and Gardner 2012). In knowledge-driven economies, doctoral education is perceived by many as a crucial engine for economic growth (Nerad, 2011a) and is perceived as an indicator for development capacity in South Africa (Herman, 2014). Bratianu (2017) further notes that the key component of the knowledge economy is a greater dependency on intellectual capacity than on physical inputs or natural resources. In other words, the knowledge economy emphasises the need to have scholars who think critically, and who can create opportunities for development. Having said this, it is of necessity to have doctoral graduates, to engage both men and women in the growth of their economies.

However, African women suffer dual oppression (that of being African and female), hence are at a disadvantage compared to African men as well as white women (Mokhele, 2013) as African women experience an institutionalised culture of racism/sexism (Robinson, 2013). This is because patriarchal culture gives men total preference and often restricts women's human rights to some extent (Sultana, 2012). Loots, Ts'ephe and Walker (2016) mention that the experiences for African women are magnified or worsened in the South African context; through racial oppression and strong patriarchal values that remain tightly knitted within the South African society despite the birth of democracy in 1994.

The racial discrimination that existed in South Africa during the apartheid period subjected Africans to inferior education levels, and this has had a negative effect on many aspects of their lives. African students under apartheid were legally barred from entering the 19 white higher education institutions and were only allowed to enroll in six institutions explicitly designated for their use. Furthermore, because of systems that were in place, Africans were at the receiving end of discrimination in medical service platforms; whereby apartheid policies also excluded black students from health professional training (van Rensburg, 2014).

In the Republic of South Africa, the former Constitution categorised citizens within higher education institutions according to four racial categories, namely, African, Coloured, Indian and White (Bunting, 2006). It was through this racial segregation that two types of universities

were birthed; these are historically black and historically white universities. These universities were differentiated along the lines of race and ethnicity, African students were forbidden and denied by law, access to attend the then 19 white higher education institutions which were much better funded, with better learning facilities, more senior academics and thus more resourced than the historically black universities (Breetzke and Hedding, 2018).

In South Africa, the National Development Plan (NDP) (National Planning Commission (NPC), 2011) indicates that universities have a crucial function in the nations' development as they educate and train highly qualified individuals, in preparation for employment in both public and private sectors. Higher education offers social mobility opportunities and thereby enhances wealth, social justice and democracy (NPC, 2011). Since knowledge is regarded as a key factor in the growth of the economy, and thus increasing prosperity, it is essential that women, specifically African<sup>1</sup> women embark on doctoral studies and successfully obtain their doctoral degrees. This could help them be contributors to knowledge, and contribute towards the development of their personal lives, social mobility, gender and race equity, which can further advance their families' and communities' welfare.

There is an intricate relationship between the education of women and girls and sustainable development, as a result, women are targeted for education. This is reflected in a well-known African proverb that states "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. But if you educate a woman, you educate a nation" (Dlamini and Adams, 2014). However, these words do not exist in the academic community since women tend to be an endangered species. Moreover, African women are still underrepresented in doctoral studies and this contradicts the above. According to the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS, 2015) (a system that operates in South Africa), African women doctoral graduates constituted 16% of all doctoral graduates. Of all African doctoral graduates in 2015 African women constituted 34% and of all women doctoral graduates (all races), African women constituted 37%. Unlike women of other races, African women specifically, "experience fractured doctoral careers or studies" as a result of pressures arising from the combination of working while taking care of their families (Magano, 2013: 212). According to Magano (2011a, 2011b, 2013), in South Africa, African women are bound by social responsibilities in families, such as caring for the elderly or the sick or participating in preparations for funeral ceremonies; more than their male counterparts; as they play roles that are more time consuming than those played by men. Rachels and Rachels (2012) indicate that women are far more empathic and caring about close personal relationships because of the social roles they have been socialized to play by

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<sup>1</sup> This study uses HEMIS categories - "African" women refer to black African women that exclude Indians and Coloureds.

cultural conditioning, whereas men tend to have been socialized to think about trivial relationships where they are providers and participate in the labour market that is characterised by competition in general (Nicolaidis 2015).

Magano (2013) further states that regardless of one being in academia, to avoid being discriminated against within communities, an African woman has to assist in social events to show a sign of Ubuntu<sup>2</sup>, despite the pressures resulting from embarking on doctoral studies. As well as competing to enter university spaces dominated by men in unwelcome institutional environments, trying to balance family, work and study have negative impacts on women's academic performance (Magano, 2013). Some research highlights Ubuntu as a double-edged sword that, through promoting values of equality, empowers women on the one hand and, on the other hand, perpetuates male authority and patriarchal ideals, and thus oppresses human dignity (Chisale 2016; Ngubane-Mokiwa 2016).

Furthermore, women in general feel excluded in male-dominated disciplines (Magano, 2013, Loots, Ts'ephe and Walker, 2016). According to Ts'ephe (2014), African women, doctoral students are excluded from informal meetings that their male mentors have with male students outside the university. For example, women within the physics department reported that mentors discriminated against them in that their input was not regarded as highly as that made by men within the department. Herzig (2010) conducted a study in the US on women's belonging in the social worlds of graduate mathematicians and found that women of colour experience discrimination in finding and working with mentors, as well as being excluded from informal networks of their laboratories or departments, and thus treated as invisible. Women also experience sexual harassment from their male counterparts as they are sometimes viewed as sexual objects and working with them sometimes means women will ask for help specifically on equipment that requires manual labour, and the men misunderstand that as a sexual advance from the women (Ts'ephe, 2014). Park, Park, Lee and Moon (2013) attest to this by stating that female students stand a chance of being sexually harassed during their social interaction with their male colleagues.

As discussed above, women's participation rates within doctoral studies have increased even though there are many documented reasons why both men and women fail to complete their doctoral studies, such as insufficient funding, family responsibilities, as well as demotivation due to lack of progress in their research (Herman, 2011c, Magano, 2011). However, it is arguable that men are at an advantage of completing at higher rates compared to women,

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<sup>2</sup> Ubuntu is "the essential unity of humanity and emphasises the importance of constantly referring to the principles of empathy, sharing and cooperation in our efforts to resolve our common problems" (Murithi, 2006: 25)

partly due to the masculine culture within higher education institutions which includes aspects such as having more male senior lecturers/academics (Brown and Watson, 2010, Ismail, 2011, Haake, 2011). Several studies have shown how African women's experience and performance in doctoral studies are impacted by several relations within the learning environment such as lack of role models, mentorship, insufficient funding, dual identities and masculine environment (Brown and Watson, 2010, Johnson-Bailey, Velentine, Cervero, and Bowles, 2010). Despite such obstacles, it is important to mention that there are some women, nevertheless, who successfully complete their doctoral studies. This study, therefore, aims to focus on African women who have successfully completed their doctoral studies in South Africa, what strategies and capabilities enabled their success in order to bring forth positive narratives of African women's success in doctoral education.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Doctoral education has been a worldwide concern with low completion rates over the past two decades (Holley and Gardner, 2012), hence there has been a focus on the increase of doctoral students in general (Nerad, 2011b, Nerad, 2012). Governments and institutions of higher education (HEIs) globally are committed to growing the number of African women in HE (Bitzer, Albertyn, Frick, Grant and Kelly, 2013), despite the well-documented factors that hinder African doctoral women students' progress within doctoral studies such as taking care of the families, supporting their husbands build their careers, taking care of the sick or elderly in their families. (Brown and Watson, 2010, Carter, Blumenstein, and Cook, 2013, Magano, 2013, 2011a, 2011b).

In particular, HE institutions and governments are working together in South Africa to develop the information structures within institutions by growing the number of postgraduate students who provide support for women doctoral students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Herman, 2011a). In addition, terms such as "equity" and "diversity" are incorporated in legislation and appropriate steps have been put in place to ensure equal and diverse representation of citizens in order to achieve social justice (DHET, 2014; Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill, 2013); the goal is to address the disparities promoted by the apartheid government (Todes and Toruk, 2018). With these actions in place, there is a rise in the number of females within doctoral studies. According to statistics in South Africa (HEMIS, 2015), there are more females than males (51%, 49% respectively) enrolled for doctoral study. Despite this, African women are still underrepresented as doctoral graduates, for instance, African females constituted 34% out of the total African graduates in 2015 (HEMIS, 2015) despite the fact that there have been efforts to increase female PhDs.

However, available literature still appears to focus on the difficulties faced by African women while studying for their doctorate and the reasons for attrition (Managa, 2013; Magano, 2013; Johnson-Bailey, Cervero, and Bowles, 2010), despite the increasing presence of women in doctoral studies, there is specifically limited research on how successful African women in South Africa have done so. As a result, students who aspire to enrol for doctoral studies may end up not registering because of the lack of available motivational stories, as existing literature is mainly on why students do not make it through once registered. Not having academic role models to look up to is among the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of African students in doctoral studies (Herman, 2011b and Jansen, 2010). This study, therefore, aims to tell the stories of successful African women, to share their experiences and to explore how they overcame barriers to achieve their goals. This study aims to explore what strategies and capabilities enable African female doctoral graduates to succeed in their doctoral paths using the capabilities approach.

### 1.3 Research question

The study is designed to respond to the following primary research question and sub-questions:

#### Primary question

What capabilities enabled African women, doctoral students' success in South African higher education?

#### Sub-questions

1. What functionings did African women, doctoral graduates hope for after completion of their doctoral studies?
2. How did African women use their agency to develop capabilities (opportunities and freedoms) for academic success?
3. What conversion factors enabled or constrained African women's success in their doctoral journeys?

### 1.4 Aim

The study aimed to explore strategies and capabilities that enabled African women doctoral graduates, to complete their studies successfully within the context of South African higher education.

### 1.5 Rationale

As an African woman embarking on a doctoral journey, this research is beneficial to me because it sought to explore methods attributed to the completion of doctoral studies in the South African context, which I may find useful, hence employ for my journey to be a success. It also gives me the chance to go beyond and deeper into the focus of my master's dissertation,

which investigated African women's experiences of doctoral studies at one university in South Africa. This study's findings resonated with the findings of prior studies on women in higher education, female doctoral students, African women, doctoral students, and women in academia (Magano, 2011, 2013; Muhs, Niemann, González and Harris, 2012; Carter, Blumenstein, and Cook, 2013) to mention a few. However, two of the participants were awaiting graduation, and thus triggered my interest to find out success stories of African women, what strategies they employed to make their doctoral journey a success. The findings of this current study brought forth voices of strategies that worked for African women, doctoral graduates, hence sharing their successful doctoral trajectories may impact positively on women within this category who are already within doctoral studies, as well as those who aspire to embark on this journey, despite the well-known documented barriers. As a result, I hope the findings will add to scant literature on what strategies sustain African women, doctoral students (Shavers, 2010; Carter-Black, 2008); specifically, in the South African context and thus contribute towards addressing this gap in the literature, because many studies focus on increasing the number of PhD students in general (Herman, 2011a, 2011b; Backhouse, 2009) yet little is specifically known about African doctoral women (Ts'ephe, 2014). Furthermore, since this study was explored through the capabilities approach lens, I hope to contribute to the theory itself through its application in African women's doctoral education, specifically in the South African context. Lastly, I hope the findings will contribute to the improvement of policy and practice of higher education studies, specifically for women.

#### 1.6 Significance of the study

According to Walker and McLean (2013), universities are regarded as platforms that nurture relations of equality, foster respect for diversity, as well as spaces facilitating the original creativity and production of life-enhancing knowledge or any concerns contributing to society. As such, looking at how African women doctoral graduates experienced doctoral education and what enabled or constrained their success was my point of interest. This study, therefore, intends to contribute to knowledge on the factors (personal, social, cultural, economic, political and environmental) that promoted or hindered their success. Thus, this study hopes to add to the scarce literature on African women, doctoral graduates' success in doctoral studies in the South African context, by having a group of African women, doctoral graduates take us through their doctoral education experience, strategies and capabilities that enabled their success. Findings from this research can contribute to the understanding of strategies used by African women to succeed in doctoral studies. This study is a platform where African women, doctoral graduates, particularly in the South African context will voice their concerns and articulate their experiences that may be of assistance to the upcoming generations as well as inform universities and government about what this group of women perceived to



contribute to their success. In addition, findings may contribute to the capabilities approach, specifically in the global South, and South African doctoral education.

### 1.7 Analytical framework of the study

The capabilities approach (CA) is a framework which I have used to explore African women's success in doctoral programmes in South Africa. This was a suitable approach to explore this group of women as it focuses on whether an individual has substantive opportunities and freedoms to achieve well-being (Sen, 1992). The capabilities approach allows the researcher to evaluate conversion factors (personal, social, cultural, contextual, political structures and arrangements) that affect students' capability sets to choose and lead valued lives both in and beyond higher education. Leading valued lives then means that CA individuals have the agency to participate in activities that yield desired outcomes such as, in this case, obtaining doctoral degrees.

What differentiates my study from other studies on women in doctoral studies, specifically African women, is that my study focuses on women's substantive opportunities, freedoms and agency to do or become whom they have reason to value in pursuit of and after acquiring doctoral education. Since it is grounded or based on the capabilities approach, my study places emphasis on African women's well-being as it explores what opportunities and freedoms need to be provided. In addition, I explore challenges that need to be navigated in order for this category of participants to achieve their well-being and exercise their agency, thus taking into consideration their diversity and contextual conditions. In this regard, a capabilities-informed framework offers a more powerful and multidimensional lens for evaluating successful African women, doctoral graduates' experiences, to consider how individual women students' capability to exercise agency and achieve well-being is either enhanced or constrained in and through higher education, specifically within South African doctoral education.

### 1.8 Methodology

This research falls within the interpretivist paradigm, as it is a qualitative approach. It involves 14 African women, doctoral graduates from a public institution of higher education (University X) in South Africa. These women come from diverse backgrounds. Some studied at University X from their first degree programme while others for their honours, masters and doctoral studies. Although these women were graduates of the same university, they enrolled for different disciplines within different faculties. This study is an in-depth narrative case study in which African women, doctoral graduates describe their experiences within higher education and the strategies and capabilities that enabled their successful completion. This provided me

with rich data as I was informed of how they grew up and made decisions that they did to pursue the lives they have reason to value.

### 1.9 Personal positioning

Growing up with parents who were both teachers, thus believed in education, I have always known from my undergraduate days that I would one day pursue doctoral education. The fact that none in my family members had studied up to this level was one of the motivating factors for me. I majored in Sociology and Development Studies in my junior degree, as such I believe that was the beginning of my interest in how people, especially women, interact and how they successfully change their lives for the better. I worked at the correctional centre in Lesotho a year after completing my studies. Being in a compound where I was regarded as a civilian, I often felt disregarded mainly because I was a woman and working within an institution mostly dominated by men. I thought being educated was the only thing that could unbind me from the web of male domination, thus I started reading more on women, development and empowerment. I have always seen education to be a liberating factor for women because we cannot change our gender to become equal to men, but acquiring education meant putting myself in a position where even men would be forced to listen when I speak and take my contribution seriously. Dreze and Sen (1999) and Robeyns (2006) argue that education grants people a chance to see whether they could live a life better than that of their parents since education enables people to be open-minded and liberated from custom and habit (Nussbaum, 2000). I strongly believed being educated would liberate me from the suffering the consequences of being a woman in an African society where the belief was women are subordinate to men because it would provide me with skills to participate in the development of my society. It is through education that discriminatory cultural norms can be abolished in the pursuit of social justice. Higher education, however, does not only bring about individual achievement but also a wider contribution to society (Calhoun, 2006). Thus, 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 because they are able to expand their capabilities. Brennan and Naidoo (2008: 296) affirm this point by claiming that “higher education can extend wider benefits to those who do not directly participate in it”. These benefits include the development of new technologies and improved citizenship (Calhoun, 2006). Therefore, I strongly believed that African women, given equal opportunities, want to be educated, obtain doctorates, and hold prestigious jobs, even if only for the intrinsic value thereof. They are as capable as men and white women and aspire to be prominent people in society and take action in pursuing that which they aspire to be.

I became aware during my master’s education that even if women do register in large numbers for postgraduate studies, they fall off between the cracks. That made me eager to know how



they experience doctoral education. As a result, I conducted a study for my master's programme looking at the experiences of black women within doctoral studies. After the completion of the master's degree, I became curious about what strategies were employed by African women who completed their doctoral studies, as I aspired to be among them.

Below is my reflection on doctoral studies within South African higher education.

#### 1.9.1 My reflection on my doctoral journey

When I embarked on my doctoral journey, I believe like any other student I was excited and hopeful but did not really understand what the journey entailed. I had supportive supervisors, I had the drive to match the excitement and anticipated finishing in three years. Little did I know what awaited me, especially the impact my personal life was going to have on my scholarly endeavours. Seven months into the programme, July 2017 I received a call that my father had suffered a stroke. As the only daughter, and having had my mother pass away in 2015, I felt the need to go home to go assist my father during this time. I had a brother who lived at home with my father, but like all African men, they needed a woman in the house during this time. I had to leave my son in South Africa to continue going to school and had to trust that he would continue doing his homework as he should, in my absence. As a mother, leaving my child alone in a rented apartment, to see himself to school every day, I worried about how he was going to cope. Arriving home, I found out that my father could not do anything for himself, from bathing, going to the loo and feeding himself. He needed support, my support as a girl child. Of all the ways that I had to assist him, the one that traumatised me was bathing him. I was not prepared to bathe my father like I would bathe a child.

I stayed at home for a month and when I returned to my studies, I was physically, mentally and emotionally drained from taking care of my sick father. Moreover, the guilt of not having opened a book in a month was destroying me. Although I was not psychologically ready to dive into doctoral studies, I had no choice but to do so. I remember there were days when I went for supervision, physically present, but mentally absent. I could not grasp what the supervisors wanted me to do, at the same time I was terrified to appear like I am now blaming my lack of understanding on my father's illness. I battled with getting my mind back to my studies, and this delayed my proposal defence which I was supposed to have presented by end of 2017. I defended my proposal in January 2018. The scary part was that I was experiencing some of the experiences of women in doctoral education as I read in the literature. It paralysed me to hear some even quit and never completed their doctoral studies. I did not want to be part of the statistics, hence I pushed myself, praying as I went, until I successfully defended my proposal. The achievement of this milestone motivated me and ignited the fire in me to continue.

When I was ready to collect data, financial constraints restricted me to arranging interviews with African women doctoral graduates who worked or resided in Pretoria as it was less expensive to travel to their workplaces or places of residence for the interviews. I did not have the money to travel outside Pretoria. As time went on, after having collected data, I tried analysing the data manually but there was so much data that I found myself going in circles. I spent a year on the analysis chapter, this was yet another delay. As that was not enough, I lost my only brother in 2019. At this time, I felt life had kicked me to the ground. I have always known myself to be a strong person, but his death hit me so hard I was almost at the verge of giving up. Two things kept me going; knowing that I never leave anything that I start incomplete, and most importantly my belief in God – I believe He directs my path and carries me through the challenges I face in life. At this moment I was still fighting what seemed like a losing battle regarding my analysis. I sought assistance from my close friends who had completed their PhDs and were postdoctoral fellows at other universities and eventually managed to finish the analysis. The year 2019 was supposed to be my final year of study, my bursary had run out. Needless to say, it did not cover my living expenses, hence I had to take up jobs within the department to increase my income so that I could pay for my child's education and provide food for us. Although these jobs that I took paid for our rent and other living expenses, it meant they took time away from my studies. In my fourth year, 2020, I managed to register but wondered how I was going to afford rent was another issue as my bursary had run for three years. I was advised by a fellow student to apply for extended funding and when I did, I was granted half of what I was given a year, making life more difficult for me considering the full bursary granted per year already required me to work more hours, as a result taking more hours away from my studies. This was yet another tough year as my father's health declined even more. With the COVID-19 global pandemic I could not take time off to go and check up on him. This caused me so much distress but at the same time worked to my advantage because lockdown meant everyone was working from home, I had time to push my research until I submitted my thesis for examination at the end of October.

#### 1.10. Thesis outline

This thesis consists of seven chapters in which an overview regarding each one of them is given below.

Chapter 1 introduces the study and provides background for women in doctoral education, specifically African women. It serves as a brief overview that highlights the research problem, aim, rationale, significance of the study, as well as a summary of the research design and methodology. This chapter also introduces the theoretical lens in which the study is explored.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on doctoral education for women, specifically African women. This chapter is split into parts whose goal is to inform the reader of doctoral education across the globe, providing demographics within doctoral education. The chapter further reviews African literature on women in doctoral programmes and narrows it down to South Africa. It is at this point that I indicate the need for more research on African women, doctoral graduates/students because of the scarcity of studies regarding this important group of graduates. Women's experiences noted include factors that foster or hinder their success. Lastly, theories that have been used when exploring this category of women are discussed. This was to make room for or situate the use of the capabilities approach in exploring African women graduates' stories, because it has not been in this group of participants, particularly in the South African context.

Chapter 3 is based on the claim put forth in Chapter 2. I discuss why I find the capabilities approach to be the most suitable theoretical framework for exploring African women graduates' success in doctoral studies. Building on the argument made in the previous chapter, CA concepts are explained, which form the core of the framework, its strengths and limitations are discussed. A brief discussion on studies that used the capabilities approach as a framework guiding the studies is made. Capability lists formulated by Nussbaum, Walker and Robeyns are discussed because they are relevant for this study as they look at central human capabilities for human development. It is an ideal theoretical list for higher education as well as gender inequality in Western societies.

The methodology and design used in the study are discussed in Chapter 4. I justify why this study is a qualitative study, the research design that I found suitable to carry on the research. A summary of participants within the study is provided as well as the presentation of the ethical considerations to which the study adhered.

A report on the study's results is given in Chapter 5. It starts by presenting biographies of participants to provide the reader with an illustration of the 14 participants under investigation. The capability approach anchored this study, therefore reporting of findings is done with the guidance of the research questions that were formulated, and to incorporate the capabilities approach concepts. As such, the capabilities and freedoms that participants had to achieve the desired goal of attaining doctoral degrees; what actions they made in order to realise those dreams, as well as the promoters, and constraints that they faced during their doctoral journeys and the beings and doings they hoped to achieve as a result of attaining doctoral degrees are discussed.

Chapter 6 is a discussion of the findings, and a link to theoretical framework and literature is made in order to what this means to the African women, doctoral graduates, particularly

because this framework has never been used as a lens in which this group of people is studied in South African background of higher education. This study's contributions are included at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 7 is the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the study, on what participants viewed as enablers and constraints of their success in doctoral education. It also notes the conclusions of the study as well as proposals made to increase the performance of African women doctoral students in doctoral programmes.

The next chapter reviews the literature on doctoral education across the globe. As such there will be sections that focus on doctoral education at an international level, then narrowed to doctoral education in Africa. It will continue discussing doctoral education in South Africa in general and eventually specifically address, the target group - African women.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

### 2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the study. Therefore, a background on doctoral education, in general, was provided. This was done to situate the research problem, and the four research questions that directed the study and the study's aim and significance were mentioned. This made way to introduce the analytical framework – capabilities approach (CA) methodology employed in the study.

The following section reviews both international and local literature on women in doctoral education, research that has focused on what stands in their way to obtaining doctoral degrees, as well as what contributes to their success in doctoral programmes. I will start by discussing doctoral education in general, then focus on women within doctoral education. This will be followed by a brief overview of African feminism, which will be followed by the experiences of African<sup>3</sup> women in doctoral studies will be discussed at a global view, and this will be an opening to the discussion of what African women attribute their success to, internationally. A specific discussion will be presented on attributes of African women, doctoral students' success in South Africa. Finally, I will relate the literature review to the capability approach as a framework for exploring, in the South African context, what contributes to the success of African women in their doctoral programmes.

### 2.2 Doctoral education across the globe

Although the need for an increase in doctoral graduates has been a worldwide concern in recent years, women's representation, specifically African women has been contrary to this high demand. The importance of doctoral education, however, has led many scholars to conduct research on doctoral education in general (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015; Herman, 2014; Herman 2011; Backhouse, 2009), and supervision thereof (Bitzer et al, 2014, Paré, 2010). With most of the discussions on doctoral education mainly centred on its contribution to the knowledge economy and the quality of knowledge produced (Nerad, 2011a), there has been a debate on how to strengthen universities as knowledge producers, producing highly-skilled scholars (Cloete, Sheppard and Bailey, 2015). Nerad (2012) claims that doctoral education is not only at the heart of a university's research capacity but is also seen as a primary source of research effectiveness and innovation in the global information economy. Anderson and Cutright (2013) testify to this by noting that the pillar of innovation and creativity in science is doctoral education and thus drives the worldwide knowledge

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<sup>3</sup> "African" in this research is used as it is used in HEMIS data

economy. They claim that having acquired the skills, doctoral graduates should be able to use their knowledge to solve today's and tomorrow's problems.

Molla and Cuthbert (2016) indicate that doctoral training is also the key to the growth of the highly accomplished workforce required in an information economy. They indicate that doctoral education provides candidates with critical thinking and analytical abilities, problem-solving abilities, imagination and intellectual autonomy abilities (Scheinin, 2017) and these high-level thinking skills are considered fundamental in the knowledge economy as well as for survival in today's complex society (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015; Lee and Danby, 2012; Backhouse, 2011). By learning these skills, a nation would be able to engage in a global economic environment and thus generate high-quality knowledge (Herman and Breier, 2017). As such, the emphasis on access and success in doctoral education is growing as doctoral education serves as an essential qualification for other specialist fields, such as health and social care, as well as its contribution to school leadership, to positions in higher education in the advancement of education.

Given the acknowledged importance of doctoral education, doctoral education programmes output rate has increased over the last two decades within countries that have systems in place to advance higher education (Nerad, 2014). This increase in the production of doctoral scholars is globally perceived as an indicator of development capacity (Nerad, 2010; 2011a, 2011b). However, South Africa's completion rate was at 46% in 2014, which does not compare favourably with other countries (which ranged between 71% and 76%) within the same year (Mouton, 2015). It is necessary to know, however, that South African doctoral candidates are mainly part-time students (70%) while in most developed countries doctoral students study full-time, and this could be one of the reasons contributing to the low completion rate (Mouton, 2016). Furthermore, doctoral production is not the same within all 26 universities, because some universities do not have the capacity to supervise doctoral candidates, thus many graduates are produced amongst the top universities (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015).

It must be pointed out that participation in doctoral education has widened because of globalisation. Globalisation refers to the "intensified movement of goods, money, technology, information, people, ideas and cultural practices across political and cultural boundaries" (Holtman, 2005: 14). Education systems through policies allow international movement of students beyond their national borders because of globalisation (Nerad, 2010) resulting in widened participation within doctoral education. Also, due to globalisation, there has been a change in the mode of research production. For instance, doctoral education has changed from being only a gateway into academia, to also training candidates who aspire to follow others or are already following professional career paths outside academia (Nerad, 2015). In

the traditional doctorate (also known as Mode 1 doctorate) that aimed at solely producing the supply of academics; a student did research alone and was expected to write a thesis of around 80 000 words to 100 000 words (Thomson and Walker, 2010). This was done with the support of only one supervisor to oversee and mentor the candidate's progress (Nerad and Evans, 2014). At present, doctoral education aims also to produce interdisciplinary scholars (also referred to as Mode 2 doctorate) who can participate in different professions outside academia (Cloete, Sheppard and Bailey, 2015, Nerad, 2015), who can perform positively in transnational settings with scientists and researchers of diverse backgrounds and disciplines (Evans et al. 2014). In the latter, research is not only interdisciplinary but also prepares academics, once the doctoral degree is awarded, to be able to address the needs of different stakeholders (Nerad, 2011a). There are both research and professional doctorates; whereby in a research doctorate, also referred to as traditional PhD, students often study full-time and upon completion of their thesis will demonstrate the ability to carry out academic research in which the end result is new knowledge production (Park, 2005). Professional doctorate on the other hand is the one whereby the student is in a fulltime job and wants to acquire skills to better do the job.

New doctoral holders are expected to know more than just doing research, they are expected to be good writers, with good presentation skills, who can present before diverse audiences, who can manage and be effective team members, with skills to communicate research goals not only to the university but also in different work environments (Nerad, 2010). It is crucial to note that supervision, therefore has changed. Supervisors now take many students under their supervision compared to a few years ago, hence they are faced with a task of producing diverse graduates, those who can make an academic contribution to the field, those who can partner with the industry with the knowledge acquired from doctoral training and an all-round facilitator in the global context who can serve as agents of change (Bøgelund and de Graff, 2015).

This shift from the traditional doctorate to new forms of doctoral degrees, for example PhD by publication, Professional Doctorates; provides opportunities for more people to embark on doctoral education programmes worldwide, specifically previously disadvantaged groups such as women, and specifically, African women. With these increased opportunities to embark on doctoral studies, there will be demand for greater success (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015). Various programmes have been introduced in recent times to improve doctoral education and training. Part of the reason in Europe, for instance, is because of policy recommendations by the Bologna Declaration of 1999, which caused many countries to re-examine the doctoral programmes they offered (Neumann and Rodwell, 2009). According to



Nerad (2011a), different countries have put different doctoral education systems and innovation practices in place. However, there are three common features pertaining to doctorate research. These common practices are namely: (1) doctoral graduates, through original study, should make an original contribution to the field of knowledge, (2) they should demonstrate the know-how in the field of their study, (3) the acquisition of transferable competences through doctoral education, as these competences are an integral part of being a researcher in one's field (Nerad, 2011a). Another important feature by Jansen (2011) in addition to the first two features indicated above is that doctoral graduates should be self-directed and carry out research independently.

Indeed, Nerad (2014) addresses the fact that there should not only be massive production of doctoral graduates, but the doctoral programmes should produce highly trained scholars whose work is regarded as efficient and excellent and considered to be as such worldwide. In this regard, it is assumed, all nations globally would be concerned about how best to prepare their doctoral candidates to be leaders skilled to confront challenging and complex issues across all areas of life (Nerad, 2015). With doctoral education being a contributing factor towards the knowledge economy, African women who as part of the society are still underrepresented, and not much is known concerning the few that graduate, also need to be able to contribute towards this international goal. This means that further work is still needed to increase the number of graduates in this group. Their successful completion needs to be documented for more women to enrol in doctoral programmes and participate at the highest level of thinking, which increases their potential to contribute towards development.

The next section below discusses the global demographics of doctoral education.

### 2.3 Global demographics of doctoral education

Doctoral students were mostly characterised as young white males, who enrolled for doctoral studies immediately after completing their junior degrees, studied full-time, and with no familial responsibilities (Brown and Watson, 2010, Gardner, 2008, Backhouse, 2009). However, Nerad (2011b) explains that with globalisation, there has been a change in demographics within doctoral education. First, there is increased access and growth in doctoral graduates production, secondly, more women are enrolling for doctoral education than in the past years (Nerad, 2015; Carter, Blumenstein and Cook, 2013), finally, more foreign students are enrolling for doctoral qualifications, more part-time and much older doctoral candidates, and universities are saddled with an obligation to train and prepare a whole range of doctoral qualification candidates of diverse backgrounds (Nerad and Evans, 2014). Castro et al. (2011) concur with Nerad on the point that now there are more women doctoral candidates than men. However, despite this being the case, women, specifically African women, doctoral graduates



are still underrepresented in South Africa (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015), even though having doctoral degrees could enable them to participate in the knowledge economy as their male counterparts. ASSAF (2010) indicated that of all the PhD being awarded in South African, only 42% are women. As intelligent and active learning participants, HE equips both women and men to be critical and challenging thinkers by stimulating their imaginations and emotions, thereby increasing their capability to function (Walker, 2006b).

Furthermore, due to globalisation, programmes are run which include or add international dimensions into the local context (Altbach et al, 2009, Nerad, 2011a). Since universities have now increased the enrolment of numerous students with different backgrounds, usage of English as a medium of instruction for doctoral study, resulting from the movement of students across borders, has been another shift (Nerad, 2010). The escalation in international students means there is a chance of increase of African women, doctoral graduates. Jaga et al. (2017) say that there is a greater need for the involvement of women in the workforce with transformation imperatives in South Africa, but very little is known about their experiences. With the fore-acknowledged importance of doctoral education, it is clear that African women, doctoral graduates' participation is beneficial in the knowledge economy. Hence the aim of this study is to explore what African women, doctoral graduates did to successfully complete their studies, what capabilities and strategies fostered their success.

Before getting into doctoral education in Africa, it is essential to give a brief overview of African feminism to help the reader to situate women in Africa.

#### 2.4 African Feminism

Hooks (2000) defines feminism as a movement in which everyone is allowed to partake in, against sexism, women's exploitation and oppression. Generally, speaking, feminism is a political movement in any given culture that acknowledges and criticizes gender inequality in order to initiate reform and make society more gender-just (Ongera, 2016). Although this movement started in Britain and the USA during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and was named the "first wave of feminism" or "liberal feminism" activists during this time focused on gaining women's suffrage, the right to be educated and better working conditions (Sorensen & Krolokke, 2006). During the wake of World War II, a period when many women started joining the workforce, the second wave formed. However, it was not until the third wave that occurred in the 1980s that African women joined the movement. This was because feminism has always been seen as a Western concept, but African women redefined and are still redefining it to suit the African context (Mangena, 2003). According to Berger (2008) the majority of women activists in Africa did not consider themselves to be feminists due to the origin of the concept.

#### 2.4 The doctoral education landscape in Africa

According to Molla and Cuthbert (2016), prior to the debate on the discourse of the knowledge economy, African governments were discouraged for decades from investing in their higher education (HE) systems. Due to the economic crisis of the 1970s to 1990s that left African countries indebted to the World Bank, the African region remained outside and did not participate in the global knowledge economy. This has also made Africa rank lowest in main measures of the knowledge economy, such as the number of trained researchers and investment in research and development. Africa invested at a later stage in the knowledge economy, thus doctoral candidates are generally mature adults unlike in Europe (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015) where more students have followed an academic path since school without any disruptions (Cross and Backhouse, 2014). Lack of finances is one of the reasons why most students in Africa are studying while they are working. Moreover, because of family and job commitments, African students do not have the luxury of continuously studying, which may be one of the reasons why doctoral students are mostly much older in Africa (Cross and Backhouse, 2014).

Despite this complex background of doctoral candidates, “Africa is not left out of the debate of the importance of doctorate” (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015: 8) and thus aims to improve doctoral education to meet local needs (Cross and Backhouse, 2014). Louw and Muller (2014) note in a literature review on doctoral studies that the 1990s led to a rise in interest in the doctorate. Since African countries need doctoral candidates like the rest of the world, discussions have taken place on various platforms such as the International Association of Universities (IAU), the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) leadership dialogue, ‘Doctoral education: Renewing the academy’ (SARUA 2012) for example, on doctoral education’s contribution to the knowledge economy, the position of a doctoral graduate within the knowledge economy and ways to improve and increase access and performance within doctoral education (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015). Furthermore, Africa needs to increase doctoral graduates to renew the ageing professoriate, to boost research as well as meet the needs for the high-level skills growing economies (McGregor, 2013).

A study conducted on eight flagship universities in Africa indicated that academic staff with doctoral degrees was below 50% in five universities in 2011, however, three universities, namely, University of Botswana, University of Cape Town as well as University of Ghana were exceptions (Bunting, Cloete and Van Schalkwyk, 2013). It is worth mentioning that in Kenya, the academic staff without PhDs was still below 50% five years later, and Ethiopia, even though it was not part of the flagship universities study, had 8% of staff with doctoral qualifications in 2016 (Nega and Kassaye, 2018). Within top South African universities,

completion rates ranged between 55% and 65% in 2012 (Mouton, 2016). These figures show that these countries have a long way in increasing doctoral graduates, as well as their supervisory capacity.

Although there have been certain interventions within Africa's sub-region to increase research training such as the Consortium for Advanced Research Training in Africa (CARTA) (Jørgensen, 2012), to support doctoral candidates and universities' supervisory capacity, African countries continue to experience similar challenges in achieving their goal of improved doctoral education output (Molla and Cuthbert, 2016). There is a shortage of funding in most African countries, a poor institutional capacity that may be connected to infrastructure for both students and institutions of higher learning, a lack of experienced supervisors and aging faculty (Teferra, 2015: 10). Supervisors need to be active researchers who are knowledgeable and well-informed regarding the developments in their field (McKenna, 2017 cited in Breier and Herman (2017)). Furthermore, most students in Africa pay for their own tuition and support themselves throughout the doctoral study, and this often means that their studies stand a chance of being disrupted and delayed whenever they experience financial challenges (Cross and Backhouse, 2014). In addition, due to low completion rates, there are poor links to industry, and often insufficient responsiveness to political, social and economic needs, to name a few (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015).

Another challenge is 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 and Cuthbert, 2016: 641), for example, the dominant mode of delivery is still the traditional mode whereby students have one supervisor, thus students who have not done research find it difficult to learn. However, the nature of doctoral training has been changing because some universities have deviated from having one supervisor for students and have adopted the two or more-supervisor approach (Nerad, 2009).

With the increasing demand for doctoral graduates, there is concern about the quality of the degrees that are produced (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015). Success in doctoral education according to Bitzer (2011: 426), "is taken as completing a doctorate degree in the minimum time at the highest level of academic/scholarly/professional quality". This success, amongst 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, Toom, Stubb, and Lonka, (2012: 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". Therefore, this means that supervision in doctoral education is not only the criterion for success, but other factors also come into play. An example that facilitated success in three African countries, namely Ethiopia, Ghana and South Africa was their participation in collaborations as well as partnerships on research training both regionally and internationally (Molla and Cuthbert, 2016). Cross and Backhouse (2014) purports 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, exposed to what other people are doing at different universities as they engage in discussions and share ideas in similar fields of interest (Ts'ephe, 2014). At the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 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 and Vithal, 2011). According to these authors, this programme showed remarkable success as overtime as graduate employees have joined the program and have become program managers and teachers, some of whom now lead their own cohorts of doctoral students.

South Africa, Egypt and Nigeria are some of the countries regarded highly on doctoral education production in Africa (Waghid, 2015, Cyranoskiet al. 2011). Despite these two countries' common funding challenge students face in higher education, specifically doctoral studies, South Africa is known as an African PhD centre (NDP, 2012, Cloete, Sheppard and Bailey, 2015), and as indisputably the largest knowledge producer on the continent (Teferra 2014), while Egypt is also seen as a powerhouse for doctoral studies in the Middle East (Cyranoskiet 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, doctoral graduates to complete their studies.

Africa's number of doctoral graduates is still low, compared to other parts of the world. According to Teferra (2015, 2014) Africa's total contribution to 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 doctoral graduates in South Africa.

## 2.5 The doctoral landscape in South Africa

As a result of the laws of apartheid, Africans were marginalised in higher education institutions in South Africa. As such, the higher education landscape was characterised by a racial and ethnic categorisation of universities, where education funding and support were inequitably distributed along racial lines (Bunting, 2006). This meant that universities attended by African students were mostly rural teaching institutions, poorly funded, and with little academic resources and support. Furthermore, the apartheid government deliberately neglected African women because of their race and gender (Wangenge-Ouma, 2013). The South African government after the 1994 elections had to work towards transforming the racially segregated higher education system that favoured the minority whites, mainly male (Jawitz, 2012). In order to meet the needs of a democratic society, South Africa has concentrated on setting up a new education and training system. Economic developments aimed at democratizing the education system, combating unfair disparities, expanding access to education and training services, and improving the standard of education, training and research (DHET, 2013).

It was only after this transition to democracy that efforts were made to increase black and female students' enrolment (Breier and Herman, 2017). Universities were merged to try to curb the discrimination that occurred prior in the apartheid era and it was after this incident that the number of doctoral graduates increased, South Africa's doctoral production increased to 34 doctoral graduates per million of the population in 2014, which is almost a double of the output in 2005 (Breier and Herman, 2017). South Africa's number of doctoral graduates is still very low compared to other developing countries; even though South Africa produced 36 doctoral graduates per million of the population, this figure was still very low compared with 70 in Brazil, 60 in Cuba and 44 in Argentina (UNESCO, 2015). In addition, the crippling consequences of the discriminatory education system are still apparent even today, despite the measures taken to reverse the effects of apartheid; for example, 49% of whites working have tertiary qualifications compared to 16% of the black population (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

South Africa intends to bring the number of doctoral graduates to at least 5 000 per annum by 2030 as part of its national development plan (National Planning Commission 2012), and specifically increase the number of African female graduates as they were disadvantaged (Mouton, 2015). Initiatives are being put in place to allow students to study outside their national boundaries, such as the Doctoral Education Partnership between Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe (CODOC) and the initiative, The South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI), founded by Department of Science and Technology (DST) and National Research Foundation (NRF) in 2006, whose purpose is to attract and retain research excellence in South Africa's public universities, through strengthening and improving research and innovation (NRF2009).

While South Africa is known for its good policy formulation, the lack of capacity and funding is causing weak implementation (Cloete, Sheppard and Bailey, 2015). This is evident in the fact that despite the well-formulated policy (White Paper for Post-School Education and Training 2013 in South Africa), which promotes doctoral education in South African higher education institutions, there is still a shortage of doctoral academic staff at most South African universities, with the exception of three; namely: University of Cape Town, the Central University of Technology and the University of Johannesburg. From 2005 to 2014, the University of Cape Town had a 100% growth in numbers of staff with doctoral qualifications, the Central University of Technology had 167% growth while the University of Johannesburg had 135% growth in the number of personnel with doctoral qualifications (Breier and Herman, 2017). For HE institutions to produce doctoral graduates, there is need for sustained doctoral candidates' enrolment that yields a successful completion for doctoral students in the doctoral programmes, which is hugely affected by the supervisors' capacity to supervise at the doctoral level (McGregor, 2013). Breier and Herman (2017) further indicate that South Africa needs more academics with doctoral qualifications, the need is direr, particularly in historically disadvantaged population groups. With regards to gender, males constituted 53% of the academic staff in 2015, which was, however, a decrease from 58% in 2005; whereas females academics constituted an increase from 42% in 2005 to 47% in 2015 (Breetzke and Hedding, 2018). Of these statistics, it is essential to note that African females constituted 14% of all academic staff and this is a very low representation considering that this group represents 41% of the South African population (Statistics South Africa, 2011).

Molla and Cuthbert (2016) indicated that the South African government's target is to raise academic staff with doctoral qualifications through the NPC (2011) from 34% in 2010 to 75% in 2030. Enrolments in doctoral programmes in South Africa are high relative to very low enrolments in the rest of Africa (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015b). South Africa increased its PhD production in 2014 to 34 PhDs per million of the population. However, in comparison with other developing countries, such as Portugal (277 PhDs per million of population) and Brazil (70 PhDs), this number is still low.

It should be remembered, however, that the higher education system in South Africa is complex because of the intersection of the four policy imperatives for the development of doctoral education, namely, growth, transformation (to boost the number of black female doctoral graduates), efficiency and quality, which brings a challenge in increasing production of doctoral graduates (Mouton, 2016). This challenge is as a result of the most likely tension and contradiction between the policy imperatives. For example, just as South Africa needs to increase the number of doctoral graduates, numerous factors however, such as lack of



supervisory ability, quality and effectiveness; may compromised this goal. The political imperatives are not only in conflict with each other, but also constrained by the deep structures of the realities of both students and supervisors, such as socio-demographic differences, the area in which the student is registered, within different institutions may negatively affect the doctoral production (Mouton, 2015).

As South Africa faces an aging professorial problem, like the rest of Africa, South Africa is under pressure to increase the number of doctoral-qualified academic staff. For example, from 3% in 2005, the percentage of academic employees over the age of 65 rose to almost 5% in 2015 (Breetzke and 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 and Godsell (2015). The University of Cape Town for example had the highest number of doctoral workers (67%) in 2014, followed by the University of Stellenbosch and the University of Witwatersrand (62%) and the University of Pretoria (61%) in third place. Accordingly, the South African government intends to raise the number of doctoral-qualified academic staff from 43% in 2014 to 75% by 2030 (NDP, 2011). It is worth indicating that this is a substantial increase from 30% staff with doctoral qualifications since 2005 (Herman and Sehoole, 2018). 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, doctoral students, are still difficult to monitor through literature and this leaves 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 there have been small schemes providing little incentives (Herman and Breier, 2017).

Given the South African history, Africans, both men and women encountered challenges in pursuit of higher education studies. They were either limited to the choice of university to enrol at, as race played a huge factor in which universities allowed Africans. These universities in which Africans were permitted to register had further challenges of infrastructure, thereby disadvantaging the already disadvantaged group. This limits the exploration of African women's doctoral experiences in South Africa, as women often lack families, academic environment, institutional culture and social support (Magano 2011; 2013; Nkambule 2014). Despite 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 considering the large number of people that had to be rescued considering that Africans represented the majority of the population. This means that there was a possible

“fight” for the already insufficient resources. Bearing in mind that patriarchy is a system that favours men and regards them as a priority and puts women into the second class; it is expected that gender roles would then perpetuate this disadvantage, as such, taking the problem of underrepresentation of African women in doctoral studies, further.

The section below is on interventions put in place by the South African government to enhance doctoral education.

## 2.6 Governments’ interventions to enhance doctoral completion

In South Africa, Cloete, Maassen and Bailey (2015) 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 doctoral production. Furthermore, the South African government rewards universities with funding for successful doctoral graduates, and this funding is used by universities to offer fee waivers for successful doctoral students (Cross and Backhouse, 2014) which is providing doctoral students with bursary of about R20 000 once they are registered.

Cloete, Massen and Bailey (2015) argue that the government and organizations such as the DST and NRF have awarded scholarships to fund doctoral students, “based on merit and equity”. The NRF introduced the Thuthuka programme which “aims 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 aim of redressing historical imbalances” (<http://www.nrf.ac.za/bursaries/opportunities>). As one of the initiatives aimed to redress the past inequalities, 80% of all funded grant holders within doctoral studies have to be black, and 60% female (NRF, 2016). However, it is a concern that such funding schemes are not sufficient especially for students to support themselves as well as their families (Herman and Sehoole, 2018). Furthermore, because these bursaries are renewable annually for three years, this situation leaves students with uncertainties as to whether the bursaries will be renewed in the next academic year, thereby increasing pressure on the already hectic life of doctoral students (Ts’ephe, 2014, Magano, 2013, Lynch, 2008).

With the South African government also working to improve the number of academic staff (Breetzke and Hedding, 2018), transformation, therefore, relates to the notion of equity and quality (Akoogee and Nkomo, 2007, Mangcu, 2015). For instance, the aim of policy papers regulating the transformation of South African post-apartheid higher education institutions is to close the gap between whites and blacks that failed due to lack of institutional will (Price, 2014), racism (Mangcu, 2014), as well as snatching or luring black scholars into private sector



jobs (Makholwa, 2015). Breetzke and Hedding (2018) noted that Dr Blade Nzimande, Minister of Higher Education and Training, outlined a new Staffing South Africa Universities System (SSAUF) whose aim is to tackle the unbalanced, racial composition of academic staff, thereby defining overwhelmingly African undergraduate students and offering incentives to maintain them until doctoral degrees are achieved. SSAUF has three programmes, including the Nurturing Emerging Scholars Program (NESP), which seeks to recognise and provide resources and opportunities for influential black students with academic capacity in junior degrees to employ them as employees. Second, the Newt Generation Academics Program to recruit new academics in areas with high skills needs, drawing on equity concerns from senior postgraduate or past students, and finally, the Existing Academics Capacity Enhancement Program (EACEP), which aims to promote the development of current African university scholars to complete their doctoral studies (Breetzke and Hedding, 2018). These programmes, however, are part of the development plan to increase African women, doctoral graduates eventually but no literature is available on the number of graduates produced since the programmes were introduced in 2015.

Although the South African government put in place measures to enhance doctoral education, African women lacked information on available resources. In addition, to produce doctoral graduates, there has to be staff with the capacity to supervise, so with the already low number of doctoral graduates, there were insufficient human resources to facilitate the studies. This suggests that not only did African women not have the information required, but universities were not equipped to train them.

The following section discusses factors that hinder women doctoral students' progress in doctoral programmes.

## 2.7 Women in doctoral education and factors hindering their success

Statistics of women in general within doctoral education is rising across the globe, however, completion of this degree is still a significant hurdle, especially for students who are also mothers (Brown and Watson, 2010). In the United States of America, Brown and Watson conducted a study in which eight women were interviewed in order to understand their doctoral study experiences as females. The findings in this research suggested that motherhood had significant consequences for the research at the doctoral level. This is proof that the atmosphere in which doctoral students work has an impact on their development. Gildersleeve, Croom and Vasquez (2011) therefore describe the community of doctoral education as the social, cultural and institutional setting in which students both perform their study and live. Three critical factors affecting the doctoral education climate are identified by

Wulff and Nerad (2006), which are outside the institution, inside the institution and within a program under which students are enrolled.

Lynch (2008) attests to this point and further states that both structural environments and socio-cultural systems shape the everyday lives of women. According to Lynch, the symbolic nature of roles, that of a mother and a student is often in conflict due to the blended identities, which increases chances of student mothers' attrition within doctoral studies.

Due to patriarchy, boys are socialised differently from girls (Cvikova, 2003). As such, in the past women were assigned roles of child-bearing whereas men were seen to be providers for their families. Thus, gendered roles that are birthed by socialisation result in women experiencing difficulty coping in a competitive environment (Tosh, 1994). As a result of this socialisation, girls at a later stage as grown-up individuals tend to lead stressful lives because of their work/study and family responsibilities, and their desire to portray a "good woman" image controls their decisions on how to appropriately allocate time to their families as well as their studies (Lafrance and Stoppard, 2007). Also, Springer, Parker and Leviten-Reid (2009) further allude that being a mother and an academic becomes strenuous to a woman's mind and body, thus trying to balance these two roles leads to enormous struggle and failure. This is because once a woman is a mother, she must uphold certain expectations, to be regarded by society as well as the mother herself, to be a good mother to the child/children. Consequently, "women experience the academic culture as being masculine with hard career conditions and too much competition, and therefore a system not suited to women" (Haake, 2011: 115). As a doctoral student, there are expectations to be met by the student who is also a mother, for example, submit work on time to the supervisor (amongst others); they may fail to do so due to commitments outside their studies, which may result in untimely completion of the study (Lynch, 2008). In the same vein, Carter, Blumenstein and Cook (2013) suggest that caring for elderly, disabled relatives also immediately falls into the role of women by default, hence they are torn between familial duties and doctoral studies, which puts them under enormous stress.

In general, women face difficulties in juggling work and family, family and doctoral education, women with children particularly 'leak' out of the education system because of problems they face that do not generally apply for men (Springer et al., 2009). This is due to the cold and competitive culture defined as masculine in higher education institutions, that disadvantages women (Magano, 2011a) as it is often difficult for women to adapt and fit into HE, particularly in predominantly white male fields such as natural sciences (Haake, 2011, Ts'ephe, 2014). Furthermore, HE institutions often lack family policies that help women with children, and without improving on such facilities within higher education institutions, it is challenging to

recruit women into doctoral degrees and succeed as they are more likely to fall into the cracks and not complete their studies (Keen and Salvatorelli, 2016). Prozesky (2008) mentions that most women also choose to support their husbands to achieve their goals as well as raise their children, thus postpone enrolling for doctoral studies. Another factor contributing to women's battle on whether to pursue HE, hence low enrolment for women in Sub-Saharan African countries is the social stigmatisation women face because should they go against the social rules and conventions that a good woman looks after the family, takes pride in motherhood as it holds prestigious status in the communities, as opposed to studying and be seen as an inadequate mother (Okkolin, 2016), women find themselves caught up between the two demanding institutions; the home and university that require women's full participation.

High female attrition from doctoral studies may also be explained to a certain degree by academic environments that offer women less opportunities compared to men. There are disparities in academia perpetuated by a lack of an enabling atmosphere, for example, African women are incorporated into previously white, male disciplines, or the use of equipment that still needs physical labour to function, leaving women at the point where they need to ask their male counterparts for favours, which hinders the advancement of women and their retention (Managa, 2013). According to Haake (2011), there is a need for cultural change. It is not surprising that women, entered postgraduate study much later, and often during their career breaks (Brown and Watson, 2010), thus they were not seen in great numbers in doctoral education as their male counterparts due to family responsibilities. Brown and Watson (2010) conducted a qualitative study in America, exploring female doctoral students' experiences and feelings regarding their doctoral journey and found that due to the demanding nature of doctoral studies, couples end up divorcing due to not having time for their families. Specifically, married women sometimes opted for divorce as being married hindered their progress in the doctoral journey (Brown and Watson, 2010, Ts'ephe, 2014). Single women indicated that without any marital relationships one had time to study and obtain the degree, which could have been a challenge had they been in a relationship (Brown and Watson, 2010). Women's doctoral success as a result could be attributed to their resilience and emotional intelligence (Castro et al. (2011).

In supporting the academic and personal integration of doctoral students, McAlpine et al. (2012) underline the value of developing personal networks. Their findings have contributed to the convergence of personal and institutional factors by referring to a culture of institutional indifference, such as the absence of educational programmes aimed at promoting the creation of personal networks that facilitate academic and individual convergence. Their findings also indicate that for the development of the identity of future researchers, these aspects are

significant. This suggests that for this research, African women, doctoral graduates be integrated within academia during their doctoral journeys to motivate them and see potential in employment. This will influence their retention in doctoral programmes. Therefore, their representation within doctoral studies will rise, and this increase may attract and be of interest to scholars doing academic research, thereby narrate positive stories of successful completion opposed to the negative that is currently flooding the literature.

Although some women embark on doctoral studies because it is a prerequisite for their career development, gaining a doctorate degree extends their work options so that they are not confined to a single type of job (Brown and Watson, 2010). Charleston et al (2014) conducted a qualitative study focusing primarily on African women in doctoral studies, which sought to explore the views of African American women regarding their involvement in the historically white, male-dominated field of computer science. They found out that African women were cognisant that they were not only isolated within academic spaces but also experienced isolation daily due to being women and African. As Shavers (2010) points out, isolation may be fueled by the underrepresentation of Africans within historically white institutions, hence lack of support in the new degree, especially of those that are not in contact with their peers in the programme, because of the change of lifestyle that comes with the demands of doctoral studies (Hutchings, 2015). Therefore, it is more difficult for students to ask for the support they need to remain inside programmes while alone, because these feelings of loneliness instantly jeopardise well-being and academic persistence/resilience (Shavers, 2010), leading to discouragement (Johnson-Bailey et al. 2010).

Reporting on the narratives of 11 African postgraduate women in the US, Robinson (2013) discusses that because of the numerical representation, as such, women in her study feel like a disadvantaged group, experiencing feelings of isolation as they have no allies and a lack of support. Having conducted her study using oral narrative analysis, through the Black Feminist Thought's lens, this finding of African women being in isolation concurs with the findings of Ts'ephe (2014) who reported that African women indicated that the doctoral journey was the loneliest time of their lives, both academically and socially; it caused a rift between family members as well as with colleagues. Furthermore, being African, and a woman brought forth stereotypes such as being incompetent (Ts'ephe, 2014). According to Castelló et al. (2017), at various phases of the doctoral study, the feeling of isolation can occur; for example, upon admission, students are in unfamiliar environments where they have to negotiate new meanings of their roles as students. In the middle of the programmes, loneliness may occur, associated with the lack of progress in research and, ultimately, when they have to write-up their thesis (Castelló, McAlpine and Pyhältö, 2017). Scientific writing and communication skills

are also required for successful participation in the researcher group (Castelló, Iñesta, and Corcelles, 2013; Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw 2012).

In this study, therefore, it was necessary to get some insight into the factors attributed to African women's completion of their doctoral degrees, what opportunities and freedoms were available to them, what challenges they had to overcome and what motivated them to be resilient to achieve their goal. In view of the fact that the knowledge economy is now a major contributing factor to economic development worldwide, a higher level of achievement within higher education institutions is a key priority (Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh and Susuman, 2018). As such, the highest level of educational achievement – doctorate, equips women with skills similar to their male counterparts, which assists them to tackle today's and tomorrow's problems. As Sultana (2012) ascertains, without the support of women, no nation can advance, thus modern civilisation is a product of collective actions of men and women in modern society. As such, African women, doctoral graduates' stories of success need to be known, no matter how few those with doctoral qualifications are, to encourage more women to embark on the doctoral journey.

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

#### 2.8 African women in doctoral education in South Africa

In South African doctoral education, not much is documented on what strategies ensured the success of African women, doctoral students through their doctoral education. DHET (2016) African doctoral graduates constituted 54% of all doctoral graduates in 2016, which was an increase from 30% a decade earlier. Specifically, African women doctoral graduates constituted 18% of all doctoral graduate in 2016, while they constituted only 10% in 2006 (DHET, 2016). The percentages indicate that there is a slight increase in African women doctoral graduates in South Africa.

Most studies investigate women in academia in general, access to HE as well as challenges faced by African women doctoral students (Prozesky, 2008, Magano, 2013). Ts'ephe (2014) conducted a report at a South African university on the perspectives of black women pursuing doctoral studies, interviewing seven African female doctoral students. The findings indicated African women are inspired to continue with their doctoral studies as they drew motivation from female lecturers and women whom they crossed paths with at conferences they participated in during their doctoral journey. In some extreme cases, like what was found in the USA by Brown and Watson (2010), African women may choose to leave their marriage when it was perceived to be an obstacle in completing doctoral studies (Ts'ephe, 2014).

African women, doctoral students are put under pressure by the culture in the communities to which they belong. Women are required to prioritise their families in African societies, rendering their own desires, aspirations and ambitions secondary (Magano, 2013).

While not many studies on this group of women have been undertaken, the scarce literature indicates that in South Africa doctoral education is still a concern, specifically African women doctoral graduates; thus, the number of these graduates must be increased. Although in the last two decades there has been an increase in women doctoral graduates, African women are still underrepresented in South Africa, and for those who managed to graduate; little is known about what contributed to their success. This study, therefore, seeks to contribute by bringing forth narratives of those who had succeeded.

Although African doctoral students have a higher enrolment rate in general (47%) compared to white students (38%), African graduates are awarded fewer degrees per year (CHE 2014). In 2014, even within higher education institutions; the highest proportion of academics without doctorates is African women, accounting for 76 % (Herman and Breier, 2017). In 2016, African women represented 18 % of all doctoral graduates in South Africa, which is a major rise from 16 % of doctoral graduates in 2012 (HEMIS, 2016). With the scant literature regarding attributes for African women's success in doctoral studies, it is evident that there is need for further research because African women still complete their doctoral degrees in South Africa, but little is known on how they stayed on board, and what contributes to this success. This study seeks to bring narratives of those that succeeded, what contributed to their success.

As stated in the problem statement, not much is known regarding strategies that enabled the successful completion of African women in doctoral programmes. As such, it may be possible that African women are demotivated to even applying for doctoral studies as the available literature is on what constitutes high attrition rates for doctoral studies. 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 there are chances of success even for them.

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

## 2.9 Factors hindering women's success in doctoral education in South Africa

Studies in South Africa, similar to international research, suggest that women are more likely to drop out of doctoral studies earlier than men (Magano, 2013). Insufficient funding is a challenge faced by doctoral students (Herman, 2011). While insufficient funding is not specific



to women, Lynch (2008), Loots, Ts'ephe and Walker (2016) found that women, especially with children, need greater financial support. Lynch (2008) explained that childcare for student's children is expensive and almost unaffordable for many full-time student mothers, which restricts women from continuing with their research beyond the business/working hours as they have to fetch their children from the centres at the latest at 8.00 and this makes studying especially difficult for students who have to be in the laboratories to run their experiments. Kensinger and Minnick (2018) in investigating college mothers in the US found among other obstacles that impede the advancement of women that participants depended heavily on student loans to cover childcare costs which leads more financial problems as interest rates accumulate. In addition to costly childcare services, student mothers enrolled at a community college found that the on-campus childcare centres did not prioritise enrolment for mothers studying at college, but rather opened the centre to the wider community, and without any promise of taking in the baby, the average waitlist was between six to eight months. Therefore, unavailable campus childcare leads to additional travel time, reducing accessibility to campus and study time, not to mention the associated off-campus child care travel expenses. In the absence of funds to take the child to a nursery, the mother then depends on the family to help look after her kids. In South Africa, there is no literature on childcare facilities meant to support student mothers within higher learning institutions although there are universities that have kindergarten services on the premises.

The relationship with their supervisor/s is another important, external factor that affects the experiences of doctoral students (Sverdlik et al. 2018). Orellana et al. (2016) suggest that the nature of effective doctoral supervision is the relationship between the supervisor and the student, which is affected by the characteristics and needs of students and institutional conditions, as well as supervisors' skills, attitudes and obligations and their styles of supervision. Supervision thus contributes significantly to student progress (Bitzer et al. 2014; Castelló, McAlpine and Pyhältö, 2017), for example, when students see slow or no success in their study, which can be triggered by different factors such as frequent change of topics or a lack of contact with the supervisor, students become demotivated. Although not specific to women, quality production of doctoral graduates is not only based on the calibre of students enrolled but is also highly influenced by the quality of supervision and enabling facilities and environments that foster success (Mouton, 2016). In addition, in many empirical studies, the fit between supervisor and student has been shown to have a substantial influence on doctoral students' emotions (Cotterall, 2013; Gearity and Mertz, 2012; Lin, 2012; McAlpine and McKinnon, 2013).

For women, doctoral students, the absence of female supervisors impacts negatively on their doctoral trajectories. As Elg and Jonnergård (2010) put it, it is potentially more difficult for women PhD students to excel as compared to their male counterparts if there are few women in prominent positions. As a result, women emphasise the importance of same-gender supervision as they indicate that they feel the supervisor with the same gender has more compassion as they understand and empathise with being a woman (Ts'ephe, 2014; Ramohai, 2013). This is attested by Castelló et al. (2017) and further notes that being supervised by women could encourage female students to stay motivated to complete their doctoral studies. In itself, the shortage of women in senior roles serves as an obstacle to more women within organisations achieving higher levels (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016). Contrary to the point of same gender supervision, Brown and Watson (2010) and Fernando (2013), found out that gender made no significant difference, no participants claimed to have suffered due to having male supervisors.

Another important aspect of supervision is the ability of students to uphold respectful and constructive relationships with their supervisors (Goldman and Goodboy, 2017); and these demonstrated the students' ability to meet to timelines, show capabilities in their research hence encourage the supervisor as these are some of the factors that demonstrate commitment. Failure to do so may create dissatisfaction from the supervisor and as a result, make the relationship sour. This suggests that the consistency of the supervisor-student relationship not only affects the short-term performance of doctoral candidates, but also determines long-term consequences that span throughout an academic career (Lunsford, 2012).

Some of the obstacles and challenges that women face along doctoral trajectories that impede their advancement are summarised in higher education institutions' gendered culture (Haake, 2011), reducing the rate of attracting and retaining African staff and students (Ismail, 2011). Women, particularly in predominantly white male disciplines such as physics and engineering courses, often find it difficult to blend into higher education (Haake, 2011; Tanenbaum and Upton, 2014). Tinto (1993) claimed that there is inseparable academic and social contact between the cultures of the doctoral programme, in that social interaction with faculty and peers is closely linked not only to one's intellectual growth, but also to the development of the critical skills required for the completion of the doctorate.

Lastly, women feel excluded from networks especially those who were registered within male-dominated disciplines because of networks perceived as "old boys' clubs" where male students and supervisors meet informally to discuss research (Ts'ephe, 2014). Exclusion from these gatherings limits or denies women to access information, as well as social and



administrative support. Although these clubs did not explicitly suggest that girls should be held out, participation in those meetings required women to be available for socialisation to gain access to informal networks, for example, women had to go out and have beer with the boys, be willing to debate and compete, and to have a strong skin, meaning they were not supposed to be too feminine (De Welde and Laursen, 2011). This would even mean women had to change the way they dressed and present themselves to fit in the club.

By mere virtue of being a woman, women in general experience far worse challenges as compared to their male counterparts. Besides the common challenges that both men and women encounter, women are restricted further due to not being safe. For instance, if one has to change who they are in order to fit the mould, then it means those who are not ready or cannot afford to change will be discouraged and eventually dropout, thereby widening the gap between African women and white women as well as their male counterparts.

The next section explains the contributors to African women's successful completion in doctoral studies.

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

There is little literature on what sustains African women through the completion of doctoral studies, as mentioned earlier. In this section, I will discuss African women success in doctoral studies broadly because I have not come across literature on African women doctoral students or graduates in South African context. I will then discuss what African women say contributed to their successful completion in general. Specific focus will be given to South Africa.

##### a) Mentorship for doctoral students

Louw and Muller (2014) notes that many universities consider the supervisor as a mentor to the doctoral student apart from being a research advisor; in addition to the supervisor, a mentor is regarded as someone who also offers guidance on thesis study, advises on career paths after graduation, and offers support and advice when students face challenging times. Higher education empirical studies have limited empirical awareness of the link between the progress and mentoring of African American women within the former white institutions (PWIs) (Grant and Simmons, 2008, Grant and Ghee, 2015). However, it is indicated that mentoring<sup>4</sup> is essential in doctoral education due to its many benefits, such as career advancement where emerging scholars have opportunities to make connections and thus manoeuvre within their fields of specialisation, job satisfaction and increased income (Goldman and Goodboy, 2017). Mentoring is also important for specifically preparing African

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<sup>4</sup>mentoring will be used interchangeably with supervision to mean the mentor guides the mentee acquire knowledge in research, and this requires a relationship between the student and the academic scholar which is beyond just academic.

students for professoriate within historically white institutions (Grant and Simmons, 2008, Grant and Ghee, 2015), from which they were previously excluded. Linden, Ohlin and Brodin (2013) mention that mentoring consequently develops the individual on both professional and personal levels. Doctoral students are supposed to have academic needs related to research productivity and psychological needs, which are related to their personal and professional development (Linden, Ohlin and Brodin, 2013). Despite this knowledge, regardless of studies conducted on supervision of doctoral students in South Africa (Bitzer et al. 2014; Pare, 2010), there is no literature specific to mentoring African women, doctoral graduates in South Africa.

It is mentioned, however, that African women attribute their success in doctoral education to having a mentoring relationship with their mentors of the same race because individuals tend to identify with people who are like them, from similar cultural backgrounds and speak the same language (Patton, 2009; Johnson-Bailey et al. 2008). Although Grant and Ghee's (2015) study is not specific to African women in doctoral studies, they highlight the importance of having someone similar to one's identity to survive through academia. They say that the act of sharing one's story and engaging with other African American women with similar experiences is powerful and can help to understand the challenges faced by African American women in academia. It is, significant to mention that since there are a few African professoriates to supervise African women, it is therefore difficult if not impossible to serve all African students who embark on doctoral trajectories (Culver, 2018). Grant and Ghee (2015) allude to this by stating that though African American women desire to be mentored by other African American women, they have a hard time finding such women, especially in PWIs.

Similar to studies conducted in America by Johnson-Bailey et al. (2008) and Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012), Ts'ephe (2014) conducted a study in South Africa and found that most of her respondents attributed their academic performance or completion of their doctoral studies to supervisors who showed encouragement beyond academic aspects. It is, however, important to note that gender as well as race were not the determinants of success in this research, but good supervision where good relationships were of great importance between students and their mentors. Bitzer (2007) and Magano (2011) alluded to the importance of good supervision and highlighted the need for supervisors not only to be academic mentors, but also to display respect for students as human beings.

#### b) Personal attributes to successful completion

Since a doctoral journey is not an easy one, students need to have within them the strength to stand even in tough times. This means that students within these programmes, in general, need to have that self-motivation or determination not to quit when the going gets tough.

According to Castro, Garcia, Cavazos and Castro (2011), there are high levels of intrinsic encouragement among resilient students. Furthermore, Devos et al. (2016) state that another recipe for success is PhD students knowing where their research is going; the aim and direction their study is taking as well as what they hope to achieve at the end. By this, these scholars mean that although supervisors may have a contribution to the topic under research, it is crucial that PhD students have an interest in the topic under study, otherwise disinterest usually results in dropout before completion.

Studies in the USA have shown that black students earn their doctoral degrees at previously white institutions (McGaskey, 2015), and the majority of these students are women (Shavers and Moore, 2014b). However, researchers have shown, for example, that black students at PWIs face systemic obstacles such as internalised racism across the campus, negative experiences inside the classroom, and weak support structures (Hannon, Woodside, Pollard, and Roman, 2016). For instance, Jan Carter-Black (2008) conducted a study exploring her journey as a black woman at a previously white institution and attributed her success in doctoral studies to an act of defiance. She indicated that her intellect was undermined by a professor due to race during a class debate. It is worth noting that research has shown that black students often experience hostility and racial tension within PWIs (Shavers and Moore, 2014b). Since growing up she watched her mother and grandmother go through the hardships of life boldly, seeing her mother and grandmother survive the most difficult times of their lives. She mentioned, “so armed with the legacy of defiance and support of my family, friends and fellow doctoral students” she progressed through the doctoral journey despite the societal expectations and prescription that success is only for the whites who have an advantage due to their economic background (Carter-Black, 2008: 119). This corresponds to findings by Ts’ephe (2014), where women had to be persistent despite the challenges, especially in white male-dominated disciplines, where their male counterparts undermined their potential by not regarding their views as positive contributions, and thus women had to work extra hard to show that they had what it took to complete doctoral studies. Nkambule (2012) attests to the point of being resilient in order to complete doctoral education by stating that despite the disrespect and being undermined as a result of coming from a disadvantaged background, she had to work twice as hard to prove that she was capable of succeeding. Nevertheless, researchers emphasised that African American women have cultural attributes that endorse resistance to marginal interactions at PWIs, such as self-efficacy (Shavers and Moore, 2014a).

Women within doctoral studies in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines stated that to survive through their doctoral studies, they had to change how they spoke, they had to act assertively and confidently, thus eliminate phrases such as “I think” to

articulate their thoughts in a certain manner, had to portray only their scientific identities and leave their social identities for engagements outside the study environment (Ong et al. 2011). In order for black women to succeed in the PWIs, they needed coping mechanisms to overcome adversity (Hannon et al. 2016) as such, had to be defiant and persistent; they had to work twice as hard, and some had to be careful on how they presented themselves to other as Ong et al. (2011) indicated.

Robinson (2013) highlighted that for her to cope with the doctoral study, she used silence as her coping mechanism. Robinson's silence resonates with Shavers and Moore's (2014a) findings in which participants reported that hiding their true self particularly in hostile racial climates, where there was an underrepresentation of African American doctoral students was a strategy to cope with pressure within doctoral programmes. The disadvantage, however, of hiding the true self for these women, is that providing masks prohibits women from acknowledging their pain and to reach out to others for help.

Grant and Simmons (2008) give credit for their successful completion to their familial background; having parents who held leadership roles both by profession and in communities. This helped them navigate higher education institutions, specifically predominately white institutions as they had support from parents who had had educational exposure. Having attended the historically black universities for their undergraduate studies, this experience also equipped them with a sense of leadership skills, which then came into play in the predominately white institutions. Castro, Garcia, Cavazos and Castro (2011) attest to the fact that family support for academic achievement is best exemplified by parents who have high educational standards and who encourage their children to meet those goals. In addition, having siblings who consider one a role model often helps one to be resilient.

This section suggests that mentorship/supervision plays a big role in African women, doctoral graduates' success. Furthermore, having role models who mentor or supervise students increases their chances of succeeding. Unfortunately for this category of women, there are not many role models to look up to, and this may contribute negatively to their studies, thereby not changing the literature on women in doctoral studies, specifically the already scant literature for African women.

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

Most literature tends to focus on the challenges that African women encounter when studying towards their doctorate and the reasons for attrition (Managa, 2013; Magano, 2013; Johnson-Bailey, Cervero and Bowles, 2009), however, there is scarce research on how successful

African women in South Africa made it through their doctoral studies. Theories and methodologies that were employed in such studies are discussed below.

In their study, Johnson-Bailey et al (2008) used the critical race framework to explore the support experiences that black graduate students received from the supervisors, peers and the institution. A survey was a method employed in this research, in which 586 questionnaires were collected and findings included the assertion that African students are negatively affected by racism unintentionally as a result of lack of support within their departments. Although Robinson (2013) also drew on the theory of Black feminism, she adopted oral research to explore the narratives of graduate students addressing their educational encounters with black women. Findings indicated that black women still face gendered racism (being discriminated against because of being women and black) within doctoral studies but through perseverance will continue to earn degrees. Shavers and Moore (2014b), using the Black Feminist Thought as their theoretical lens also found out that participants used academic masks to cope, which meant they portrayed qualities of a model student and professional behaviour. Despite their encountered challenges, these African women succeeded in their doctoral programmes.

Magano (2011) conducted another study and used narratives to capture black female postgraduate students' perspectives through the non-standard method of interviewing, and the study found that these students required supervisor guidance and mentoring in all aspects of their lives. Shavers and Moore (2014a) examined the perspectives and experiences of African American female doctoral students at predominantly white institutions through Black feminist thought. Semi-structured interviews were used in this research to gain an understanding of how their experiences impacted their academic persistence and general well-being. Findings in this study indicated that students use academic masks as a strategy to overcome oppression to complete doctoral studies.

As globalisation and the growth of the knowledge economy have transformed doctoral education, nations are working to increase the number of doctoral graduates worldwide. Africa, also being amongst the countries hoping to increase the retention of students until completion is concerned that there are a few studies talking about African women's experiences of doctoral education and what strategies they employed to obtain their doctorates. Also, there is scarce literature on African doctoral graduates in South Africa. Specifically, there are no studies in the South African context looking at the subject of African women, doctoral graduates through the capabilities' lens. This study will bring forth stories on how African women managed to complete doctoral education, through the capabilities' lens discussed in the next chapter.

## Conclusion

Some insights on the gaps that have emerged in literature on African women, doctoral graduates, specifically in South Africa, as well as other countries were presented in this chapter. It is evident through the literature reviewed that studies conducted on women in doctoral education focused mainly on challenges faced by this category of women, hence their high rates of attrition. Not much known on what promotes their success in doctoral education; as a result, this study aimed to explore strategies and capabilities that enabled African women, doctoral graduates to complete their studies successfully in South Africa. By examining the experiences of African women, doctoral graduates of one South African university, this study will draw on the literature available. Furthermore, the research would add to the current literature by communicating the valued capabilities of African women, doctoral graduates of their doctoral experiences, through the application of the capabilities approach.

The next chapter discusses the capabilities approach as a framework employed in exploring African women graduates' success in doctoral programmes in a South African context.



## Chapter 3: The capability approach

### Introduction

Chapter Two provided the context for both international and local literature on women in doctoral education. The chapter discussed the literature on the difficulties that women face in doctoral education and the factors that have made it possible for women to be successful in doctoral education programmes.

Chapter Three discusses the theoretical underpinning of the thesis. As mentioned earlier, the importance of doctoral education has led many scholars to research doctoral education in general (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2015; Herman, 2014; Herman 2011a, 2011b; Backhouse, 2009). The challenges women face in doctoral studies include being a student and a mother in a dual role, lack of support, and gendered racism (Brown and Watson, 2010; Lynch, 2018; Springer, Parker and Leviten-Reid, 2009; Johnson-Bailey et al, 2008). Additionally, not many studies have looked at African women within doctoral studies, specifically in the South African context (Ts'ephe, 2014). However, studies that have explored women's success in higher education indicated that their completion of the doctoral degree is still a significant hurdle.

Although scholars have used different theories to explore doctoral education (Gonzalez, 2007, Robinson, 2013), I have not come across literature on African women's doctoral education that used the capability approach as a framework. Therefore, this study builds on the Capability Approach (CA) to discuss the vibrant and diverse essence of African women who have completed their doctoral studies in South African higher education institutions. Building on the literature mentioned in Chapter Two, this section lays the groundwork for the narrative analysis of the lives of African women and how their educational aspirations were impacted by these experiences. The chapter provides a theoretical lens exploring doctoral education for African women specifically, what strategies and capabilities enabled their success in doctoral degrees in the South African context.

The work of the economist Amartya Sen (1999; 2009), who pioneered the CA calls for a change in the view of the concept of well-being from a monetary value to living a life that a person has reason to value. As such, looking at higher education through the CA lens reflects the view that the quality of life enjoyed by African female doctoral graduates, for example, is equally important and is not only the conventional emphasis on higher education of being monetary linked. Education is not an end for Sen and other CA scholars like Alkire, but the means to an end (Alkire, 2005). Understanding African women's well-being entails moving away from solely focusing on their academic achievements and financial returns, which was the traditional area of emphasis (Sen, 1999; 2009). The emphasis now is to understand which



individual freedoms (capabilities) enable African women to pursue doctoral education to achieve lives that they have reason to value. Similarly, Walker and Unterhalter (2007: 5) state that the CA “requires that we do not simply evaluate functionings [outcomes] but the real freedoms or opportunities each student had available to choose from and to achieve what she valued”. The emphasis on the real freedoms and opportunities students have is what distinguishes the CA from approaches which evaluate wellbeing by academic achievement and monetary returns.

I start this chapter by defining the CA, including its core concepts. Next, I will address the disparity between the views of Sen and Nussbaum on the CA, and the fertile functioning and corrosive disadvantages within the CA context. Thereafter, I will demonstrate the relevance of the CA to gender equality in relation to African women within doctoral education in the context of education and development. Lastly, I will draw on relevant studies to show why the CA is the most suitable framework for this study.

### 3.1 What is the capabilities approach?

The capabilities approach (CA) was introduced by the economist and philosopher Amartya Sen as an alternative approach to the utilitarian and neoliberal approaches. These approaches evaluate well-being based on resources people have; they evaluate only the economic progress of people and disregard other aspects of development such as happiness (Sen, 1993, 1999). In contrast, the capabilities approach focuses on an individual’s well-being which Sen defines as “the quality (‘wellness’) of a person’s state of being” (Sen, 1992: 39). The well-being of an individual can be determined by evaluating the essential elements of the being of the individual, which are perceived from the viewpoint of the wellbeing of that person (Sen, 1993: 36). The CA defines these elements as those beings or doings that are valuable to individuals, depending on the lives they want to pursue. Therefore, the CA varies from the quality of life interventions that concentrate on results such as wealth generation or milestones but say nothing about personal wellbeing or human flourishing, which includes things such as being in a happy state of mind, being safe and being educated amongst other factors. As such,

...the capability approach thus proposes a broad, rich, and multidimensional view of human wellbeing and pays much attention to the links between material, mental, and social well-being, or to the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of human life (Crocker and Robeyns, 2009: 65).

In this study, the focus is not merely the attainment of doctoral degrees, but rather African women graduates’ development and empowerment as a result of a having doctoral degree. This means that this study explores whether having doctoral degrees has contributed to living the life that they have reason to value.

The CA is not a (social) justice theory, but rather a framework that is primarily used to assess and evaluate individual well-being, taking into account social arrangements that facilitate or impede the well-being, as well as in the formulation of social change policies and proposals within communities (Alkire and Deneulin, 2009a, 2009b; Robeyns, 2006a). The CA is concerned with the freedoms that people have, the development of an environment that yields human flourishing (Walker, 2005). In this research, for instance, human development refers to the expansion of African women, the freedoms of doctoral graduates through doctoral education, to allow them to live their lives as they choose by placing them and their freedom at the centre of growth. This, therefore, grants African women graduates the chance to realise their potential as they overcome challenges they face during their doctoral journeys, hence increases their personal choices and thus grants them the opportunities to enjoy the freedom to lead the lives they value. As a human development approach, the CA conceptualises development as having freedom or being at liberty to choose what and whom a person wants to be, as “a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy” (Sen, 1999: 501). Thus, an achievement or outcome is not considered a functioning if it is not something that is valued by the person concerned. The aspect of choice is therefore crucial within the CA (Alkire and Deneulin, 2009a).

Sen acknowledges the importance of money as a resource, but not an end in itself. He argues that resources and commodities are merely objects that a person may use to improve their well-being (Sen, 1999). Mkwanzani (2017) supports this point by stating that for the CA, money is contributory to human development but is not an end in itself. Sen argues that a focus on access to resources, while important, does not take into account differences in real opportunities, abilities and freedoms different individuals have to convert those resources into valuable functionings that enhance their choices in life (Sen, 2009). For example, African women, doctoral students may have the same opportunities, such as access to the library, funding and supervision, however, these do not guarantee successful completion or attainment of a doctoral degree. What also contributes to the realisation of the desired goal is the actions put in place to pursue this outcome. In addition, different individuals come from diverse family backgrounds, so a woman with a young child might not have the same amount of time to work on their thesis when she gets home as one with no children or family to look after.

The CA looks at well-being through the four core concepts, namely: functionings, capabilities, agency and conversion factors that are explained below.

### 3.1.1 Functionings (well-being achievements)

Functionings or well-being achievements refer to the achieved outcomes or “doings” and “beings” which a person has reason to value (Robeyns, 2003). For the current study, functionings refer to the attainment of doctoral degrees by African women, which is their desired outcome.

### 3.1.2 Capabilities (well-being freedoms)

Capabilities are opportunities and freedoms that individuals have and can use to realise their valued functions. Capabilities also afford people the opportunity to choose who and what they want to be (opportunity freedom) and do “rather than what resources they have access to” (Walker, 2005: 103). Some real opportunities, or opportunity freedoms in the context of this research, which relate to African women, doctoral graduates include access to the library, working space, Internet, academic conferences, engagement in group discussions with other doctoral students, financial support, social support, and having a child minder for women with children, to mention a few. However, the realisation of the desired outcomes depends on a woman’s agency or ability to take action that enables her to acquire an education to contribute to personal development and well-being.

### 3.1.3 Agency

Agency is an important term within the CA that refers to the willingness of a person to function in relation to achieving his or her desired goals. (Crocker and Robeyns, 2010). Agency comprises agency achievements and agency freedoms. Agency achievements refer to the realisation of goals and values a person has reason to pursue, whether or not they are connected with their well-being (Crocker and Robeyns, 2010). An example of agency achievements in this study is studying further to get a doctoral degree. On the other hand, agency freedom is the liberty to achieve whatever an individual decides on the quality of life they want to live (Crocker and Robeyns, 2010). An example of agency freedom in this study is whether or not the participants had an opportunity to choose not to study in their registered disciplines. As such, agency is not passive, since one must act to bring change in their own life in order to achieve that which they value (Walker, 2005). Agency demands that an individual take initiative, seize available opportunities and convert them into valued outcomes or functionings. Even though people have the opportunity to live the life they have reason to value, the realisation of those valued functionings may be influenced or impacted upon by social arrangements. In the context of the capabilities approach, these social arrangements are referred to as conversion factors. Conversion factors may be analysed at three levels, namely: personal, social and environmental (Crocker and Robeyns, 2010; Robeyns, 2005). The conversion factors are discussed below.

### 3.1.4 Conversion factors

In the context of the CA, conversion factors influence the conversion of resources (the means to the end) into functionings (outcomes) (Sen, 1999). The CA takes a broader view of resources to include different human capital, including expertise and social resources, and is not limited to material resources (Kabeer, 1999). As much as access to resources is important to an individual's well-being, the quality of one's well-being is dependent on one's ability to convert resources accessed into functionings that they have reason to value (Sen, 1999; Robeyns, 2003). For instance, although all women have access to resources, some may not be able to convert them into valued functionings. The performance of African women doctoral graduates cannot be explained in the context of this study by access to resources alone, but also by their individual capacity to transform those resources, such as finance, social and academic support, library, and the Internet, into desired functionings.

In addition to one's ability to convert resources into functionings, there are other variables that can decide one's success, such as the environment, social interactions, agency and other individual differences. These different conditions are grouped into three categories of conversion factors by Robeyns (2005: 99): 'personal' (gender, age and sex), 'environmental' (physical environment and geographical location), and 'social' (policies, norms, class and race).

To better grasp the difference in the conversion of resources from person to person, Sen (1992) presents an example of a bicycle. Not because of its colour and design, we may be interested in a bicycle, but because it will take us less time than when we walk to places that we want to go. For example, for two individuals who may/ may not lack the ability to use it because of their capacity / inability to ride it, a bicycle has distinct uses. As a consequence, the bicycle does not have the same role for the two individuals in improving mobility. It may be productive for the person taught how to ride it, and it may be inefficient for the person who has no knowledge on how to ride it (Sen, 1992).

Adapting this example to African women, doctoral graduates, two women may have the same opportunity to enrol at a university and both may have funding to cover all their expenses, and could have achieved the desired outcome, that of graduating as doctoral scholars but differ in what and who they want to be after the completion of their studies. The CA, therefore, offers an appraisal that refers to interpersonal differences in the conversion of resources available into functionings. It recognises human diversity (Sen, 1992) as an essential element, and criticises theories such as distributive justice for not sufficiently acknowledging diversity among people. Therefore, the CA acknowledges that people of the same background may have different aspirations.

This study, although only focused on African women, acknowledges that their experiences differed in motivation and aspirations based on individual differences. For instance, studies have found that some African women pursued doctoral studies for various reasons. Some of the reasons include: to acquire the doctoral title; seek better employment or promotion at work; acquire knowledge and its application in life and serve their community (Magano, 2011a).

It is important to concentrate on personal and socio-environmental conversion factors and the possibility of transforming resources into functionings in recognition of human diversity, taking into account that each individual has a specific profile of conversion factors (Robeyns, 2011). One may account for a variety of societal influences, such as cultural influences on development, individual experiences and aspirations, by applying social and environmental conversion factors. Similarly, Sen (2009) acknowledges the influence of social arrangements on capabilities. In this study, I explore African women, doctoral graduates' ability to convert the personal, social and environmental resources into functionings that they have reason to value.

While the CA has been applied in different disciplines for its sensitivity to personal, social and environmental factors, scholars present views on its application. In the next section, I engage with the views of the two scholars, namely Sen and Nussbaum to set the tone for the application of CA in the current study.

### 3.2 Differences between Sen's and Nussbaum's view of the capabilities approach

Sen and Nussbaum are both leading CA scholars. However, with Sen being the pioneer of this approach, his approach differs from Nussbaum's because of their different goals and intellectual backgrounds. Nussbaum's background as a moral-legal-political philosopher influences Nussbaum (2000) while "Sen's roots lie in the field of social choice, and he, therefore, believes that we should search for fair and consistent democratic procedures to draw up the list" (Robeyns, 2003). Nussbaum, however, draws a list of the 10 central human dignity capabilities or entitlements that all human beings should have, which it says should be included in the constitutions of government.

Sen (2004) rejects the principle of having a fixed list of capabilities. He argues that the list should compose of functionings and capabilities important to people of the same community, they should collectively participate in the drawing of the list hence should be reasoned through public dialogue instead of having a pre-formulated one. By this, Sen argues for individuals' freedom to choose a life that is important to them other than that which is imposed on them.

Nussbaum's work, as a philosopher, draws attention to the aspirations, expectations, motives and decisions of people (Robeyns, 2005). Nussbaum's capabilities focus more on "people's

skills and personal traits as aspects of capabilities” (Robeyns, 2005: 104). As an economist, Sen, on the other hand, focuses on inequality and poverty (Robeyns, 2003). He rejects the monetary appraisal of welfare and supports an emphasis on the actual freedoms that individuals have to live the lives they have reason to value (Robeyns, 2003).

Taking note of the fact that there are differences between these two leading scholars within CA; I discussed those that are relevant to this study. For this study, I used CA as discussed by Sen (1992; 1993; 1999). This is mainly because Sen is for the opinion that a capability list should be formulated only after considering what the population under study perceives as important, having taken their unique context into account, unlike Nussbaum, who finds it necessary to endorse a list prior to any general social discussion or public reasoning.

### 3.3 Fertile functioning and corrosive disadvantage

Wolf and de-Shalit contributed to the capabilities approach further by exploring the disadvantage meaning (2007). These scholars are of the view that disadvantage is a multidimensional phenomenon which makes the most disadvantaged individuals be the ones most likely to experience disadvantage at various points in their lives, such as clusters of disadvantages. Additionally, “disadvantages and risks compound each other and cluster together” (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007: 10). In the sense of higher education, a student who only relies on one bursary funding aid would be an example of this. If the student is without any other form of income, at the beginning of each academic year he or she is worried and uncertain about the renewal of such a funding contract, and if renewed, the student is worried whether the amount will be sufficient to cover his or her living expenses. For instance, although the bursary may cover the student’s tuition fee, they may just afford one meal per day, as a result, the student stands a chance of falling ill due to poor nutrition as well as lack the energy to concentrate on her academic work. The student may not afford decent clothes to make her feel comfortable around colleagues or the rent where she stays, or s/he may afford to eat one meal per day. The student may then find other part-time jobs to supplement the bursary to sustain herself/himself and sometimes her family. As a result, her studies may be compromised because after working multiple jobs, she may be too exhausted to study, thereby performing poorly academically and failing to make progress in her academics, and risking losing the progress needed for the following year’s renewal of funding. This does not mean the student was not able to perform in her academics, but there are contributing factors that hinder her academic progress. The threats continue and cluster together, creating several degrees of disadvantage, as is evident in the example above.

In establishing their disadvantage theory, Wolf and de-Shalit apply two major new principles, fertile functioning and corrosive disadvantage, to the ability approach. Fertile functionings (or



capabilities) refer to functionings or capabilities that foster security of other functionings or capabilities whereas corrosive disadvantages are those that perpetuate additional disadvantage (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007). These authors suggest that people who are vulnerable are likely to be more disadvantaged by finding themselves in a situation where they face many disadvantages. As such, these authors mention that careful attention should be paid to how these disadvantage patterns form in order to be able to break them (Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007). In the case of higher education, fertile functioning is having a good educational foundation from the early stages, to prepare a student for higher learning.

The identification of fertile roles and corrosive disadvantages provides the means to recognise the disadvantages of these clusters as well as the possible measures to address them. The identification of fertile roles and corrosive disadvantages is of particular importance in order to understand the success of African women in doctoral studies in South Africa from a social justice / human development perspective, since they point to specific areas for intervention. African women face more discrimination because of the intersection between race and gender.

As a human development approach, the capabilities approach has a role to play in education as education is an expansion of freedoms and opportunities individuals. As such, the following section discusses its relevance in education and most importantly a link to African women, doctoral graduates.

#### 3.4 Capabilities approach and education

The country's wealth is its people, reported in the Human Development Report (2010). Education helps people to grow inquisitive minds and challenge problems, so they do not just take facts at face value. As Nussbaum (2006) posits, education enables people to respect different views from people while engaging in talks or discussions, even when they do not agree with what is being said. This is advantageous to all people because the world consists of different countries, so people, regardless of race, faith and other areas of dispute, must be able to peacefully overcome differences. People need to learn to have conversations or engage in discussion with other people of different nationalities, race, ethnicity, religion and social background (Nussbaum, 2006).

As such, universities should provide education for the benefit of the people, as institutions of higher learning and not just for economic benefit (Walker and Boni, 2013), as women's empowerment also comes through educating them (Murphy-Graham, 2012). The economy requires not only men, but women must also be trained in order to participate in the labour force and to expand their resources or abilities to achieve well-being. Doctoral graduates are in a stronger place to contribute to knowledge expansion (Allen and van der Velden, 2011),



since they are specialists in their fields of study, being pioneers in careers, industry, government and society (Nettles, 1990).

In addition, for a stable democracy, Nussbaum (2006) sees public education as important. According to Sen (1995), regarding human well-being, the capability approach concentrates on the freedom and opportunity to achieve and capabilities to function. Sen's opinion is attested to by Terzi (2007) and Unterhalter (2002) and mentions that the capability to be educated is a basic sense of fundamental freedom and a basis for other freedoms in the future. By this they mean that there are various opportunities we may not be aware of in our lives, and education may grant us an opportunity to make use of those opportunities that we did not think were possible for us (Saito, 2003).

Terzi (2007), Saito (2003) posit that education broadens people's capabilities, which in turn advances more complex capabilities by reflection, understanding, knowledge, and awareness of one's capabilities. In my study, African women, doctoral graduates may have aspired to obtain the doctorate qualification by thinking, for example, they would find jobs within academia. Having the degree may, however, open a wide range of freedoms and opportunities beyond just academic posts. This, they may have never foreseen when they started their doctoral trajectories. In support of this argument, Terzi (2007) explicitly notes that the expansion of capabilities through education applies to various professions and some levels of social, civic and political participation. Education not only meets an individual's fundamental need for education but once obtained, leads to the expansion of other capabilities (Terzi, 2004). Providing access to education and encouraging a particular set of basic learning outcomes, such as reading and writing (Unterhalter, 2002), provides possibilities for other, more evolved beings and doings, such as becoming informed of the 21st century challenges of sustainable growth. Simply put, Alkire (2005) mentions that people should have access to necessary positive resources and have the power to make choices that matter to them.

The CA claims that a critical understanding of his or her valued beings and doings should be valued by each person (Unterhalter, Vaughan and Walker, 2007). This applies as well to doctoral education, in this case, doctoral education for African women as education provides students with opportunities to pursue their own lives. It is important to teach students how to think and apply critical thinking rather than rotary learning, since memorising content will not help shape individuals into people who will engage positively in the creation of their nation. According to Robeyns (2006b), education plays three roles: first, it plays an intrinsic role (where one acquires education for the sake of knowledge), secondly, it plays an instrumental personal economic role (where it can help one get a job and compete in a global market) and can be collective for the benefit of other people, and lastly, education plays a non-economic

instrumental role (where education opens one's mind, thus one realises that there are different ways of living other than their own way, collective in that a child can learn that s/he stays in a society with different people with different views from her/him).

Despite the roles that education plays in people's lives, the capabilities approach highlights the need to identify one's ability to convert resources into capabilities. These factors demand that we not only know what is available to students but to know each individual student and appreciate the selective kinds or resources useful to them. All these potentially assist us in understanding people's functionings and their needs for those functionings. By virtue of being a doctoral student, one needs a range of functionings to adequately fulfil that role. These have already been introduced in the previous chapter. These can either be weighed by comparison to other individuals or by assessing an individual's freedoms to be and to perform. The CA can also be used to assess the choices that an individual has. Individuals are sometimes forced to make major choices between different functionings available to them. As a female doctoral student, am I able to study and make a home for my family? This is possibly a choice between an individual's basic need and societal moral duty. The CA can, therefore, be used to define trade-offs among various capabilities and identify areas where there can be none.

Having stated the significance or relevance of CA for education, it is evident that women, especially African women, must also have access to and successfully complete doctoral education in order to contribute to the development of their own countries. As such, it is of great importance that besides increasing the numbers of women students in higher education, more focus also should be on addressing multiple forms of gender inequities that continue to constrain women's equal participation and achievement in higher education (Morley, Leach and Lugg, 2009). In the development of other skills, such as the quest for jobs, education plays an important role, as well as being able to participate in and appreciate political processes (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999; Vaughan, 2007). Although a person can be educated for the sake also of acquiring knowledge, in the context of this study, the attainment of a doctoral degree plays a huge role in the development of other capabilities. The attainment of this degree helped participants professionally, to get a promotion or even recognition and respect at the workplace (Ts'ephe, 2014).

One would ask, "Why is the capabilities approach applicable in this study?" I outline the justification to this question below.

#### 3.4.1 Education as a collective action

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the approach to capabilities begins with an individual viewpoint and explores how social, cultural, economic and political arrangements influence or promote the capability of individuals to achieve well-being and agency, both individually and

collectively. According to Sen (1987), an individual's freedom is limited when a person lives in poverty, where their living conditions are compromised by factors as a result of lack of basic needs such as accommodation, food, as well as proper healthcare services. Wilson-Strydom and Okkolin (2016) further mention that an individual's freedom to be educated can be hindered due as a result of poverty. In the Global South, success in accessing education does not solely rely on an individual, but also on the environment in which the individual lives; for instance, one needs family support, resources, community support to make it through successfully. This is demonstrated in detail where supportive colleagues & environment is an important capability fostering the achievement of African women doctoral graduates' success in doctoral studies (see Chapter 5).

### 3.5 Why the capabilities approach?

In Chapter 2, I discussed traditional theories employed to study women's success factors in doctoral education. In relation to theories used to investigate doctoral education in general, as well as those theories specific to African women's doctoral education, findings on understanding women's experiences of doctoral education indicated lack of support from supervisors, peers, academic institutions, and gendered racism hindered or delayed their success. These traditional theories evaluated doctoral education in general, and do not focus on the individual person, and obtaining a doctoral degree is not an end, but the means to an end, as the end is a person living the life, they have reason to value, an individual being and doing what matters to them (Alkire, 2005). As much as African women, doctoral graduates are underrepresented, the question or focus for this study is not necessarily in the numbers but in the question, what capabilities enabled African women, doctoral students' success in higher education?

A fundamental strength of CA is clarity on the fact that for social justice and poverty reduction to be a reality in communities, marginalised people's freedom should be expanded in order for them to enjoy the beings and doings that they have reason to value (Alkire, 2005). Not only should they have access to resources but should be able to make choices that they value. I found this framework suitable to explore African women's success through their doctoral journeys because it does not only say if these women had resources, but also were they able to convert these resources into capabilities? Through CA's lens, an individual can choose the "capability to participate in education" (Vaughan, 2007, p. 116). Gaining education plays an important role in the creation and expansion of other skills, such as seeking jobs for a person, contributing to the understanding of political processes in discussions and engagements, and so on (Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1999; Vaughan, 2007). The capability to participate in education

as well as acquiring education to better one's life are the two focal points of this study. The explanation for this is that education promotes the expansion of other capabilities, and African women's engagement in doctoral studies is to achieve the desired outcome, that of graduating from doctoral programmes, and thereafter contributing to the growth of their communities and countries in general.

Many scholars have made use of the capabilities approach within the education context (Nussbaum, 2006, Unterhalter, 2007, Walker, 2006). Walker (2006, 142) argues CA is of value in striving for social justice in education because:

- (i) Recognition of higher education's intrinsic and instrumental importance,
- (ii) Recognition and redistribution are regarded as key elements facilitated by the approach,
- (iii) Agency is stressed in and by higher education as a measure of individual disadvantage and advantage,
- (iv) Individual agency and social and institutional arrangements are located on the same level, and
- (v) A forum is used to encourage the capacity to gain educational or pedagogical rights.

As indicated earlier, there are studies that used the capabilities approach as the theoretical framework. However, there are no studies I have come across that have applied capabilities approach to the African women doctoral graduates specifically, in the South African context.

### 3.6 Strengths and weaknesses of the capabilities approach

CA's core concepts, functionings and capabilities are properties of individuals (Robeyns, 2003) and this makes this framework an ethical and individualist theory. What this means is that each person is taken into consideration, they are not looked at from the basis of a household or communities. Furthermore, the conversion factors, however, do take note of the personal, social and environmental implications on an individual's well-being. Unlike utilitarian theories, CA is not only limited to the market but rather looks at their doings and beings in both market and non-market settings, because focusing only on income, earnings and achievements to assess and define well-being excludes important aspects such as household work and care which are mainly women's roles within families (Robeyns, 2003).

Another significant feature of CA is the fact that it respects human diversity, whether people have different roles or not, such as gender, ethnicity, age, family history (Sen, 1992).

According to Robeyns (2017:113),

human diversity is stressed in the capability approach by the explicit focus on personal and socio-environmental conversion factors that make possible the conversion of commodities and other resources into functionings, and on the social, institutional, and environmental contexts that affect the conversion factors and the capability set directly.

Robeyns (2003) further notes that different individuals may be body-related with different profiles of conversion factors, while others are shared with all individuals in the group, and still, others are shared with individuals with the same social characteristics (e.g. the same sex, class, caste, age, or race characteristics). As such, I found this framework applicable in this study as it assists in the thorough investigation of the subjects of this thesis due to it acknowledging diversity; African women who have diverse upbringing, backgrounds, aspirations, ethnicity, and nationality, financial and social support and so on.

### 3.7 Capabilities approach and gender

CA advocates for just social structures and organisations (Sen, 1999), which will enable individuals to achieve their desired functionings. As a result, CA calls for equal opportunity for all people in order for people to choose the lives they have reason to value. Globally, women lack support for basic functions that constitute decent human life; they are more likely to be sexually and physically abused by men, and not acquire education compared to their male counterparts (Nussbaum, 2000). Furthermore, some countries have laws in place that deny women ownership of land and taking care of the family is not financially rewarded. With the necessary support, from healthy eating, access to education and having support from family enables women to perform to their best ability as human beings (Nussbaum, 2000). For example, Nussbaum (2004) cites a woman who, after gaining some sort of education as an example, managed to leave an abusive husband. In this case, education has increased the potential for liberation.

Brown and Watson (2010) discuss, for example, that some married women end their marriages in pursuit of education, seeking to be educated at times liberates women from abusive relationships. This shows that having a dream is not enough but acting towards that dream is essential. However, contrary to this, Murphy-Graham (2012) states that some women remarry after divorce because they need a man to take care of them; they do so out of necessity, as the man provides economic support. This demonstrates how deeply rooted gender socialisation and patriarchy sometimes are in women's lives; how these at times continue to shape society. Despite the fact that girls and boys now have equal access to formal education, through gendered social norms and traditions that prevent women and girls from pursuing HE, girls' socialisation and patriarchal ways still keep women prisoners (Robeyns, 2003). There are parents and communities that encourage women to work in the home and

not compete with men in the public sphere. The explanation for this is clarified in the list of gender equality capabilities of Robeyns in a Western context, where she notes that this capability includes taking care of the home while taking care of the children and the whole home and not being financially paid for the work done as it is seen as the position of a woman.

Equal access to education is not demonstrated by having equal numbers of boys and girls enrolled in educational institutions; relationships and practices must be recognised (Unterhalter, 2007). In addition, a person's qualities need to be considered, which could change as a result of individual freedom and agency (Unterhalter, 2007). This implies that depending on the situation they are in, women will "do gender" differently. For example, because of the freedoms, opportunities and agency that a black woman has to acquire a doctoral degree, these may be influenced by what society expects her to be or do, such as prioritising her family, which is seen by taking care of her family, or helping her children with homework rather than using that time to continue working on her study. Stromquist (2006) argues that, in order for women to have equal participation as men in the public sphere, they need to take into consideration their needs that might be a barrier for equal opportunities to men, such as childcare and domestic violence.

### 3.8 Examples of relevant studies using the capabilities approach

It is important to reiterate that not many studies have been conducted of women and especially African women in doctoral studies using CA as a theoretical framework. As such, not much is written especially in the South African context. The following will be looked at from a higher education perspective, and particularly with regard to gender equality and women's agency within higher education studies that used the CA as a context.

Walker introduced the capability approach as a framework for assessing higher education pedagogy and student learning in the sense of social and pedagogical arrangements that affect prospects for equity in learning opportunities (Walker, 2006a, 2008, 2009). Walker focuses amongst other areas, on widening participation in the UK higher education context. In this work, Walker asks "How do we evaluate equality achievements in relation to widening participation?" (Walker, 2006a, 90). Widening participation is relevant in this research's context because this study focuses on hearing stories of African women as doctoral graduates, bearing in mind the historical experience or constraint for Africans and specifically African women in accessing higher education. Working with 14 students who were part of a Widening Participation project, Walker notes that while their individual experiences varied and many faced various obstacles in their studies (and the capacity approach acknowledges these discrepancies), all 14 students felt that engaging in higher education had offered them a chance to broaden their life choices and opportunities. This is similar to some of the findings



within this study (to be discussed in Chapter 5), in that doctoral education enables graduates to ask and search for better opportunities as well as be able to choose the desired job (Flores-Crespo, 2004).

Okkolin (2013, 2016) conducted a study in Tanzania aimed at elaborating the extent to which women had the freedom to exercise their agency, in order to be and do what they had reason to value. Traditionally, it is outside the norm in Tanzania and many Sub-Saharan African countries because culture elevates or puts the status on marriage and womanhood and holds a negative view for educated girls. Narratives of 10 highly educated Tanzanian women who indicated that educational decisions were made for them either **systematically** (once matric results came out, they were selected by the government into which courses to enrol for at higher learning institutions), or they were **educated by someone** (meaning that their parents, either the mother or the father had decided that their children were going to be educated, whether it was their choice or not). This meant that these women had limited autonomy in making decisions concerning their lives, thus had limited agency freedoms (Okkolin, 2016). Furthermore, some participants pursued postgraduate education through their **own reasoning**, it was at this point that they chose or had the liberty to study further, pursuing the careers of their choices even if it meant starting all over and studying different subjects to their junior degrees (Okkolin, 2016). Lastly, some women were **ambivalent**. This meant for instance, that they would not have chosen the career paths they followed but at the same time are happy with the decisions made regarding their education pathways. After teaching for years, for example, even though it was a career they would not have chosen, they eventually began to like their work.

What happened in Tanzania, shall be discussed in detail as it is relevant to my study in that some women pursued doctoral education because of the support provided by their families despite the fact that their mothers specifically had no high school training. Also, after obtaining their first degrees, these women felt motivated and aspired to pursue doctoral education.

Okkolin's (2013, 2016) study, although not specific to African women, doctoral graduates show that culture holds the potential to hinder women's progress within higher education. Women often do not have the liberty to choose what or who they want to be career-wise, they are often directed or fall into certain career paths because of the support they get from their families, constructions within the learning environments, which could be highly influenced by lack of gender equality policies despite the attempt to transform universities. Women have to go against what societies or even families believe should be their ways of doing things, thus risk being alienated and or discriminated. Although this puts pressure on the already hectic



educational journeys within institutions of higher learning, many women still beat the odds and acquire their degrees.

Loots and Walker (2015) indicated that despite the transformative national policies developed within South African institutions, gender inequalities still exist as a result of the absence of a national gender equality policy for higher education. Their opinion is that this absence explains the lack of a clear framework for higher education institutions to conceptualise equality between women and men, as well as the introduction of initiatives aimed at fostering equality between women and men in higher education. The authors as a result explore how the capabilities and human development approach can be used to inform the development of a gender equality policy for higher education. As such, they argued for a policy based on opportunities for valued functionings. Using a case study of one university, these authors used empirical data from in-depth interviews with 38 male and female students. Their analysis indicates that higher education expands as well as contracts students' opportunities and freedoms to choose and lead lives they have reason to value. Findings indicated that participants valued ***bodily integrity and safety*** (that they could move around campus without fear of being mugged or assaulted), ***dignity and respect*** (that they should be recognised as a human being and be treated with respect, and women expressing that they would want to be treated as equal to their male counterparts), that they should have their ***voices*** heard (that there should be representation of both women and men's voices in the classrooms, not just only men's voices being heard), and lastly they valued ***knowledge and education*** (acquiring knowledge sets participants in a better position when seeking employment as well as contributing positively to the communities they come from). They argue that these capabilities are multi-dimensional and are all important, as such, these capabilities should be expanded in higher education in order to achieve gender justice.

Wilson-Strydom conducted a study on learner preparedness for university transition and indicated that learners are less prepared, especially from township schools, due to various factors such as lack of resources and demotivating of teachers. The author aimed to "understand this myriad of factors that influence what young people entering university are able to be and do" (Wilson-Strydom, 2012: 105). Wilson-Strydom developed the following capabilities by using CA as a framework to facilitate the transition from school to university: ***practical reason, education resilience, social relations and social network, respect, dignity and recognition*** to mention a few.

Flores-Crespo (2004) used Sen's capability approach in higher education in Mexico in which he examined how one university was working regarding the expansion of human freedoms valued by its graduates. He further critiqued human capital approaches to higher education.

Using the sample of 177 graduates, and conducting semi-structured interviews with 28 graduates, he explored graduates' motivation to come to university, their aspirations and what they were able to do as a measure to identify their valued functionings. His list of functionings comprised of four personal achievements and three professional achievements. The personal achievements were being able to: ***feel self-confidence and self-reliance, visualise a life plan, develop further abilities, and transform commodities into valuable functionings.*** The professional achievements were being able to: ***acquire the knowledge required in a job position, look and search for better job opportunities and choose a desired job.***

### 3.9 Capability lists

There has been much debate on the capabilities literature, on whether there should be a proposed list of capabilities or not in order to strive for a minimum level of justice (Nussbaum, 2000, 2003; Robeyns, 2003; Sen, 1999, 2004; Walker, 2006; Wolff and de-Shalit, 2007). Sen argues against the formulation of a definite list but states that it is upon the people through public participation, to say what capabilities matter to them (Sen, 1999, 2006, 2009). It is of utmost importance for a concerned group of people to participate in the formulation of specific capabilities within specific contexts, thus, he does not endorse a generic or uniform list of capabilities, rendering his capabilities approach purposely incomplete to allow room for deliberation (Sen, 1993, 1999).

Scholars such as Nussbaum, however, have formulated a list and argue that if he wishes to apply the capability approach to social justice and gender equality, Sen should follow one definite list (Nussbaum, 2003). As a result, Nussbaum finds Sen's approach excessively ambiguous and therefore does not provide sufficient theoretical ground for establishing a normative interpretation of social justice (Nussbaum, 2003). "Women and Human Development", Nussbaum's prominent work, provides a strong case as to why a list of Central Human Capabilities based on universal values is necessary and relevant to all countries and in all contexts. She argues that "certain universal norms of human capability should be central for political purposes in thinking about basic political principles that can provide the underpinning for a set of constitutional guarantees in all nations" (Nussbaum, 2000, 35). Thus, Nussbaum argues that a threshold level of all the capabilities is essential for a life worthy of the dignity of a human being and failure to provide any one of the capabilities will then mean failure to live a fully human life. Below is Nussbaum's capability list:

Table 3. 1 Nussbaum's capability list: Central human capabilities (2000: 78-80).

1. **“Life:** Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length, not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living”.
2. **“Bodily Health:** Being able to have good health including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter”.
3. **“Bodily integrity:** Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and choice in matters of reproduction”.
4. **“Senses, Imagination and Thought:** Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason – and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain”.
5. **“Emotions:** Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development)”.
6. **“Practical reason:** Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance)”.
7. **“Affiliation:**
  - Being able to live with and toward others, to recognise and show concern for other humans, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)

- Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin and species”.
- 8. **“Other species:** Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature”.
- 9. **“Play:** Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
- 10. **Control over one’s environment”:**
  - “Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association”.
  - “Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods) and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human, exercising practical reasoning and enter into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers”.

Walker, however, argues that while there is a compelling case for a list, the list should be descriptive and include involvement, thus opening a dialogue without any acknowledgment of status between all individuals who are involved (Walker, 2006a). According to Sen (1990, 1993, 1999), it is important to draw up a list that addresses particular needs for a specific context in a participatory and deliberative phase, as such, he does not accept a standardised list of capacities such as Nussbaum.

Table 3. 2 Ideal-theoretical list for higher education capabilities (Walker, 2006, p. 128-129)

1. “**Practical Reason:** Being able to make well-reasoned, informed, critical, independent, intellectually acute, socially responsible, and reflective choices. Being able to construct a personal life project in an uncertain world. Having good judgment”.
2. “**Educational Resilience:** Being able to navigate study, work and life. Able to negotiate risk, to persevere academically, to be responsive to educational opportunities and adaptive constraints. Self-reliant. Having aspirations and hopes for a good future”.
3. “**Knowledge and Imagination:** Being able to gain knowledge of a chosen subject – disciplinary and/or professional – its form of academic inquiry and standards. Being able to use critical thinking and imagination to comprehend the perspectives of multiple others and to form impartial judgments. Being able to debate complex issues. Being able to acquire knowledge for pleasure and personal development, for career and economic opportunities, for political, cultural and social action and participation in the world. Awareness of ethical debates and moral issues. Open-mindedness. Knowledge to understand science and technology in public society”.
4. “**Learning Disposition:** Being able to have curiosity and a desire for learning. Having confidence in one’s ability to learn. Being an active inquirer”.
5. “**Social Relations and Social Networks:** Being able to participate in a group for learning, working with others to solve problems or tasks. Being able to work with others to form effective or good groups for collaborative and participatory learning. Being able to form good networks of friendship and belonging for learning support and leisure. Mutual trust”.
6. “**Respect, Dignity and Recognition:** Being able to have respect for oneself and for and from others, being treated with dignity, not being diminished or devalued because of one’s gender, social class, religion or race; valuing other languages, other religions and spiritual practices and human diversity. Being able to show empathy, compassion, fairness and generosity, listening to and considering other person’s points of view in dialogue and debate. Being able to act inclusively and being able to respond to human need. Having competence in intercultural communication. Having a voice to participate effectively in learning; a voice to speak out, to debate and persuade; to be able to listen”.
7. “**Emotional Integrity, Emotions:** Not being subject to anxiety or fear which diminishes learning. Being able to develop emotions for imagination, understanding empathy, awareness and discernment”.
8. “**Bodily Integrity:** Safety and freedom from all forms of physical and verbal harassment in the higher education environment”.

Robeyns (2003) suggested a list of 14 capabilities for assessing gender equality, some of which are applicable to education, namely: education and knowledge (the freedom to be informed and to generate knowledge), respect (the freedom to be valued and treated with dignity), and social relations (the freedom to be part of social networks). She argues that educational capability should go beyond credentials and degrees, but should also take into account structures, subject choices and career aspirations in schools and universities that create gender disparities. Below is Robeyns' capability list that entails all capabilities proposed:

Table 3. 3 Robeyns' capability list on gender inequality in Western societies (Robeyns, 2003: 71-72)

1. "**Life and physical health:** being born and able to live a healthy life. In Western countries gender difference in the expectancy at birth, with a higher life expectancy for women than men. It is caused by the biological intrinsic difference between genders, with no relevance".
2. "**Mental well-being:** related both to mental and psychological activity, it shows that women are suffering more often than men of mental disturbs, like anxiety and depression".
3. "**Bodily integrity and safety:** every kind of violence that could injure a person in its integrity. In this capability, there is an evident gender dimension since women are suffering sexual violence (usually victims of their household) more than men, which are most frequently victims of physical violence".
4. "**Social relations:** creating and maintaining social ties. Men and women have different behaviour: men have extensive social networks, which they use to get an advantage in economic and public life while women invest in informal network and social support".
5. "**Political empowerment:** political activity has historically been seen as a male activity, in the recent decades women appeared in the political arena, but now they are still few. there are inequality also in the behaviour required in their activity to female politicians, because they have to conform their behaviour to the masculine one".
6. "**Education and knowledge:** in Western countries, there is no gender inequality in access to formal basic education. The gender inequality is in the approach of the household to children's higher education. Actually, this difference is made up also by class background and by the gendered character of the school, colleges and university".
7. "**Domestic work and nonmarket care:** this is about housework and cares of children and elderly. It shows high gender inequality since it seems that this kind of care belongs quite exclusively to women".

8. “**Paid work and other projects**: this capability refers to all the activity outside to housework. In the working sphere women, take few and the worst places, while in the artistic one there are not great differences between genders”.
9. “**Shelter and environment**: it refers to the decision power and the freedom of action that people have in their environment more than to the environment in itself”.
10. “**Mobility**: as an instrumental capability that enables people to be independent. Its gender relevance is in the relation to other activities (e.g. caring children) that creates a kind of indirect gender inequity (women that usually travel with pushchairs can have difficulties in using public transports)”.
11. “**Leisure activities**: refers to free time. The real gender difference is not in the number of hours people spend on leisure activities, but in the way they enjoy it according to their gender”.
12. “**Time autonomy**: is the capability to allocate daily time between work, domestic and care activity and leisure activity. Many feminists underlined that the unequal division of labour becomes a disadvantage for women, because, even if the time men and women spent in those activities is the same, women have many responsibilities and that generates more stress for them”.
13. “**Being respected and treated with dignity**: feminist affirmed that women are devalued and that they frequently are treated as sexual objects otherwise they are belittled because of doing homework”.
14. “**Religion**: it goes beside the freedom to practice or not a religion or to become religious leaders. Moreover, the author focuses her attention on the influence that religious context could have on the developing of other capabilities”.

Capabilities list(s), from Sen’s perspective, can be understood to provide standards to assess progress in working towards more than just outcomes within a specific context but also provide possible means to identify and assess injustice in context as well as provide space for public participation and deliberation. He suggests that any list must always remain open to revision in the light of new evidence and further deliberation. Defending the importance of her list of the Central Human Capabilities, Nussbaum concludes that:

The bare idea of capabilities as space within which comparisons are made and inequalities assessed is insufficient. To get a vision of social justice that will have the requisite critical force and definiteness to direct social policy, we need to have an account, for political purposes of what the central human capabilities are, even if we know that this account will always be contested and remade (Nussbaum, 2003, 56).



It is essential to mention that a capabilities lens on data regarding African women doctoral graduates widens the range of research questions that can be addressed in doctoral education research, hence creates opportunities to expand general doctoral education but more specifically the African women doctoral education methodologies (Case and Light, 2011).

#### Conclusion

This chapter presented and defended my choice of the capabilities approach as an analytical framework for exploring African women graduates' success within doctoral programmes in South Africa. The next chapter presents the research methodology and design employed in this study.

## Chapter 4: Methodology and research design

The previous chapter discussed the capabilities approach as a framework or a lens to explore African women's success in doctoral programmes.

Chapter Four starts by indicating a suitable approach for this study and substantiating reasons for it. The paradigm in which the study is situated, and the reasons are discussed. Furthermore, the section describes the approach and procedures used to perform the analysis. It provides an overview of the approach to research, the methods used to collect the data, and the interpretation of data. In accordance with the purpose of the study, the design and data collection instruments that were selected to explore strategies and capabilities that enabled African women, doctoral graduates to successfully complete their studies by answering the following research questions:

What capabilities using the capabilities approach enabled African women, doctoral students' success in higher education?

- What functionings did African women, doctoral graduates hope for after completion of their doctoral studies?
- How did African women use their agency to develop capabilities (opportunities and freedoms) for academic success?
- What conversion factors enabled or constrained African women's success in their doctoral journeys?

I briefly start by discussing how the research questions were formulated. This discussion will be followed by the paradigm foundation of this research as well as the research approach. The relevant ethical considerations are also described.

### 4.1 Research context

This research was conducted on doctoral graduates who studied at University X. It was not limited to South African nationals only, but all nationals that responded to the call of participating in the study became my participants. As such, I had graduates who originated from various countries such as Lesotho, Nigeria, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. All but one participant were registered in the Faculty of Education, although in different departments. The one participant was registered within the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, within the department of Geography and environmental studies. By the time of the interview, some of the foreign nationals had returned to their home countries but wanted to be part of the research, hence, the interviews were conducted using Skype and WhatsApp calls.

#### 4.2 Research paradigm

As I indicated in the introduction chapter, the aim of this study was to explore the strategies and capabilities that enabled African women, doctoral graduates to complete their studies. Research paradigms are understood as “basic belief systems based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 107). According to these scholars an ontological question seeks to find what is the form and nature of reality, as a result what can be known about reality; the epistemological question is concerned about the nature of the relationship between the researcher and what can be known; and, 3. the methodological questions seeks to find out how the researcher goes about finding out what he/she believes to be known. There are various ways to classify research paradigms. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994) there are four paradigms in social research, namely, positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism or interpretivism. Positivism understands reality to be objective and scientific, meaning it understands reality as observable facts and are scientifically based (Maree, 2010). Positivism therefore disregards possible subjectivity from the researcher. Post-positivism emphasises objective and scientific knowledge but also acknowledges the possible effects of biases (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Critical theory emphasises reflective assessments and critique of society and culture (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Interpretivism believes that it is impossible to have value-free, objective research because there are multiple realities and researchers draw on their values and beliefs throughout the research process. Because of this reason, the capabilities approach is relevant in this study as grants an opportunity for individuals to pursue that which is important to them, with the opportunities available to them in pursuit of their desired functionings.

In this study, the ontological assumption is that the reality concerning African women doctoral graduates in South African is that they are few, constituting 42% (ASSAf, 2010). However, there are women who successfully complete their doctoral education but not much is known about them. As a result, the researcher assumed that their stories of success needed to be explored. Epistemological assumption focuses on the search for human knowledge, how knowledge is constructed. As such exploring the lived educational experiences of these women may shed some light on the truth regarding what strategies they employed to make their journeys a success. Because all women were from different backgrounds, although they shared one goal; that of obtaining their doctorates, data collected presented various realities of these graduates. The human knowledge was therefore generated through the interpretation and analysing of data in the study. My study employed the interpretivist paradigm because according to Maree (2010) it is based on the following assumptions, which aligned with my interest:

4.2.1 Human life can only be understood from within.

Social scientists in this paradigm are interested in how people make sense of their environments as they relate to their worlds and other people (Thomas, 2009). According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011: 17), the interpretive paradigm seeks to “understand the subjective world of human experience”. Researchers thus seek to explain or make sense of the world from an individual's experiences within this paradigm (Maree, 2012). As such, since I was interested in understanding what strategies and capabilities my participants attributed to the successful completion of their doctoral studies, this paradigm seemed to fulfil my aim.

4.2.2 Social life is a distinctively human product.

Interpretivists assume that reality is socially constructed rather than being objectively determined. Within this paradigm, a researcher is not seen as entirely objective because he or she is part of the research process, hence Carcary (2009) states that the best tool for analysis in this paradigm is the researcher's mind. Furthermore, the interpretive research paradigm does not employ rigid research methods, but rather allows flexible, content-sensitive methods as its goal is to understand complex issues.

4.2.3 The human mind is the purposive source or origin of meaning.

By uncovering how meanings are created, we can gain insights into the imparted meanings and thus enhance our understanding of the whole (Maree, 2010). This paradigm acknowledges that each situation is different, hence there is need for the researcher to delve below the surface to understand reality, thus as a researcher, I am aware that participants situations may be different, and this qualifies the use of an interpretive paradigm. For this particular study, I want to hear successful African women's doctoral journeys, what kept them going despite the well-known, documented barriers that hinder many doctoral students' completion.

4.2.4 Human behaviour is affected by knowledge of the social world.

This implies that various realities can vary at different times and locations. The more knowledge and understanding we have of how the social environment is formed, the more enriched our theoretical and conceptual framework is. As such, the more I know of the different doctoral journeys of these different women, using the capabilities approach, may contribute to the development of the theoretical framework. This is essential because this approach has not been used in studies similar to this one.

4.2.5 The social world does not exist independently of human knowledge.

This means that our knowledge and understanding are limited to what we have been exposed to, and to our own different experiences and the meanings we give them. Although all participants have an experience or story to tell regarding their doctoral journeys, no matter if

they had similar opportunities, their conversion of those opportunities to the actualisation of their dream will be different, because different factors could influence the outcome.

In short, the ultimate goal of interpretivist analysis is to provide a situation perspective and to examine the situation under review in order to provide insight into how a specific group of people make sense of their situation (Maree, 2010). Consequently, this paradigm, emphasises the importance of contextual analysis and individual experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, Reeves and Hedberg, 2003), hence draws on important concepts in understanding people's actions and behaviour such as agency, freedoms, opportunities and beings and doings that are not possible in the positivist paradigm. Bassey (1999: 44) further states that the purpose of the interpretivist perspective is to "advance knowledge by both describing and interpreting the phenomena of the world in attempts to get shared meanings with other".

This research followed qualitative approach. According to Bryman (2008), data in this approach is mostly in a form of words, data analysis often inductive hence allowing critical reflexivity and reflection.

#### 4.3 Research approach

As mentioned in the former section that this study followed a qualitative approach, the reason is because a qualitative approach attempts to achieve an intimate understanding of the research participants (O'Leary, 2010). Of all the various designs in qualitative research, this study used the narrative inquiry (Creswell, 2009; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

This study explored factors that contributed to African women's success in doctoral studies, as a result, it sought to understand participants' experiences of doctoral studies. In addition, a qualitative study is a form of understanding analysis, centred on distinct methodological inquiry employing techniques that investigate a social or human problem where the study creates complex, holistic pictures and analyses words as well as reports based on comprehensive views of participants (Creswell, 1998). The qualitative inquiry thus, asks the types of questions that emphasise 'the why and how' of human interactions and experiences (Agee, 2009), with the goals of understanding the lived experiences of individuals and groups, promoting social change and uncovering subdued knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

This study sought to address the gap in the literature that shows how African women, doctoral graduates succeeded in doctoral studies, through exploring strategies and capabilities that enabled African women, doctoral graduates to complete their studies successfully. I needed a detailed understanding of the challenges these women experienced; and how they managed to overcome them, in order to succeed in their doctoral trajectories. Not much is known of the success stories of African women, doctoral graduates, as the literature review mainly states

challenges faced by women within doctoral studies, as a result this interest calls for qualitative research, to hear silenced voices (Creswell and Poth, 2018). 'Hearing the silent' is one strength of qualitative research that allows the views of the oppressed to be heard (Oakley, 1998:708). I found this approach suitable because it is used to also empower participants to share their stories as well as minimise the power relations between the researcher and the participants within the study.

As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggest, under qualitative approach researchers study objects or individuals in their natural environment, seeking to make sense of or perceive phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them. Researchers state that only by communicating directly with them, for example by going to their schools, families, workplaces and encouraging them to share their stories, can specifics of people's experiences be created (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Research within a qualitative approach is situated within a context or setting of participants or sites, thus known to be context dependent. For instance, the researcher takes into consideration and seeks to understand the contextual features and their influence on participants' experiences (Creswell and Poth, 2018). For this research, I tried to understand the personal, social and institutional environs of the participants as those inform their interpretation of or make sense of their doctoral trajectories. It was important for me to opt for an approach that allows the researcher to be an active learner who will thereafter tell the story from the participants' perspective instead of as an expert who judges her participants. From an interpretative conceptual model, the qualitative approach suggests that people construct their own realities to make sense of their experiences and therefore arrange them in a way that represents their views or views and beliefs (McMillan and Schumacher 2001). Since this is a qualitative study, I had to look closely at my participants to understand how they make sense of their environments and using my experience as a researcher to analyse what the respondents mean. Researchers within this approach are seen as key instruments because by reviewing records, analysing actions or questioning people, they collect data themselves (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The narrative inquiry was used in this study, based on my interest to gain qualitative insight into the lives and aspirations African women doctoral graduates, focusing on how these experiences impact their valued beings and beings. Basically, the narrative inquiry aims to reflect on social groups that are otherwise underrepresented, so it is more fitting to depict their lives and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, [1985] cited in Chataika, 2005; Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The research is also descriptive in nature, allowing for the experiences, thoughts, values, knowledge and aspirations held by African women doctoral graduates.

Narrative inquiry can be used methodologically, in that it allows transcripts of interviews to be interpreted in the form of a story; and it can also be used analytically in that it allows detailed theoretical accounts to be developed narratively (Goodley, Lawthom, Clough and Moore, 2004). The method emphasises most importantly, the view of participants as experts and is an opportunity to reflect on lives, perspectives, socio-cultural circumstances and aspiration (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) African women doctoral graduates. In addition, this method fitted into the study's theoretical framework by valuing the life experiences and agency of each woman, as well as providing an opportunity for others to hear their stories.

#### 4.4 Data collection methods

I collected data through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the aim of obtaining rich information. I recorded the interviews and later transcribed them verbatim.

##### 4.4.1 Sampling

Sampling is the process of “selecting elements of a population for inclusion in a research study” (O’Leary, 2010: 162). For the purposes of this research, purposive and snowball sampling were used. According to Neuman (2007), purposive sampling is used to gain a deeper understanding of what is being studied, but with no intention to generalise the results to a larger population. I purposely interviewed African women, doctoral graduates who have graduated in the last five years at University X; gathering biographies of a sample of 14 participants, between the ages of 28 and 54. The intention was to interview at least 20 participants but due to time and resource limitations, only 14 participated in this study. Potential participants that were contacted were not able to schedule slots at which we could meet for interviews due to work and some were out of the country hence time and money became a limitation. Skype and WhatsApp calls were used for two participants, but the network was not clear and became challenging to hear some parts of the interview. However, we continued with the interviews until the end, although it took much time. Successful African women graduates in this research refer to those who completed their doctoral studies and have been conferred the title ‘Doctor of Philosophiae’. My participants were graduates of one university, one participant from the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences and 13 from the Faculty of Education, however from various departments within the faculty. They were of different nationalities, ethnicities, age and marital backgrounds.

My starting point was to apply to University X for ethical approval, which once granted, I asked the alumni office to provide me with a list of African women doctoral graduates who graduated in the last five years. I had to wait for approval from this office and an automated email was sent to women who fall within this category (African and have completed their doctoral studies in the last five years) in which I was not copied. I therefore had to wait for them to respond and



state that they would like to participate in the study. Once they contacted me, depending on which platform they used to contact me, I then contacted them via email and telephonically, to inform them about the study and sent out a formal invitation to participate in the study. After an interest to participate was communicated from their side, we agreed on a date and time on which to meet, I made sure I was at our meeting place. All cases were at their workplaces, except for one whom I interviewed at her place of residence at the university and two whom I interviewed via Skype. I reached my destination 15 minutes before our appointment so that I had enough time to search for their offices.

After the interviews, I asked the women if they knew any other African women from the same university who completed in the last five years, thus snowball sampling was employed to find more participants. 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, approximately 20 graduates responded but only 14 met the criteria and were available on the agreed dates and times, whereas some who were also interested, for instance, there was one who attended a seminar in Pretoria who wanted to have an interview during break and lunch times. That did not work because there was poor internet connection, and both our cellphones did not have network within the venue of the seminar, and we ended up not meeting. Also, another one was about 100 km outside Pretoria, as a result finances on how to get to her office was a problem, especially when using public transport. I had to make lodging preparations as she informed me that she could only be free after working hours. Furthermore, some were no longer within areas that I could reach due to time and money constraints. In addition, some did not have access to Wi-Fi in order to Skype or even communicate via WhatsApp calls, hence they declined to participate. According to Maree (2010: 80), snowball is also referred to as chain referral sampling and is a method used to find “hidden populations” and an event whereby the already contacted participants refer the researcher to their social networks, who could potentially participate in the study. Koeber and McMichael (2008) define snowball sampling as a chain referral sampling method that builds a sample through referrals among people who share or know people with characteristics of interest to the researcher. This method was useful because it made people feel that they could trust me since I had worked already with people who know them and therefore allowed me to interview them. However, contrary to this advantage of snowball sampling, although some agreed to be interviewed, they still seemed hesitant to speak freely. My reason for this is one participant, in particular, answered in short responses, and even when asked to elaborate on whatever was discussed, responded briefly. However, it did not seem like she was forced to participate, hence I believe her personality just did not allow her to feel comfortable speak freely like the others within an hour and half of our interview. It is essential to mention that I got eight participants through

purposive sampling and six through snowball sampling. This participant that provided brief responses was one of the participants I got through snowball sampling.

#### 4.4.3 Semi-structured interviews

This type of interview was used as a data collection method within this research and it is used by many researchers as it allows the researcher to modify the questions if need be and supplementary questions can be asked to probe as well as clarify participants' responses. Maree (2007) explains that semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to best define the topic under study, and provide room for identifying emerging lines of inquiry that are directly related to the study objectives, which can further be explored and probed. These types of interviews are in-depth and are used in qualitative analysis because they combine structure with versatility (Legard, Keegan and Ward, 2003). Although I followed an interview guide, it served as a reminder of the major topics or themes that needed to be covered in the interview, but I was not restricted to asking prepared questions only. Thus, the semi-structured format allowed me to have open-ended questions that provided space for investigation through probing. Depending on the nature of the interview, the interviewee's answer might raise new questions (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Since these interviews were face-to-face interviews, the relationship between the participant and I was simpler to create, thereby enabling a detailed interaction as participants felt comfortable telling their stories (Maree, 2012; Thomas, 2011). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), interviews with women differ from other forms of interviews because with women the process requires honesty and emotional engagement between the participant and the interviewer. This was evident in this study as it fostered the beliefs of the CA by engaging each individual and valuing their contribution. Furthermore, as a form of data collection that promotes an understanding of the experiences of people, semi-structured interviews were chosen also because of their flexibility in allowing the respondents to change the flow of the conversation, thereby bringing out information that may not have been 'preconceived' but still relevant to the study (Axinn and Pearce, 2006: 6).

On average the interviews took between 40 minutes to 60 minutes, with the longest taking one hour and 22 minutes. I realised that some of the interviews were short because the participants were either reserved people who did not talk much or since the interviews took place at their workplace, which they proposed, they didn't have much time to talk during working hours, hence were in a hurry to finish. There were potential participants who resisted partaking in the study, stating that they were too busy to afford the time for an interview, they were not forced into participating in this research. The first part of the interview questions required the

participants to tell me about themselves. This gave me their biographical information, the background of their age, marital status, where they are from and the number of their children. The other questions were on their choice of career paths, what capabilities (opportunities and freedoms) and strategies worked in their realisation of becoming doctoral graduates, what they did as African women to use opportunities to their advantage, thereby showing some agency and lastly what factors promoted or hindered their success during the doctoral journey. This last set of questions showed among other things, resilience, persistence and determination of participants as they overcame the challenges they faced during this journey.

Interviews can lead to inaccurate and biased results, according to Neuman (2000), as the researcher can manipulate the participants to give answers that the researcher wants to hear. However, to avoid this, I ensured that I asked questions in the interview guide and probed further when I needed clarity on issues mentioned by the participants. Furthermore, participants can also say what they think the researcher wants to hear, hence compromise the “trustworthiness” of the study (Bowen, 2005: 218). To avoid this, I emphasised the importance of providing honest answers as data was going to be used for academic purposes, as well as reminding them that our talk was confidential, as a result, the interviews would be treated as such – their identities would be protected.

#### Summary of participants within the study

The table below summarises the participants of this study. These African women’s ages range between 28 years and 54 years old and some are single, married, divorced or widowed. They were all registered in the faculty of education, although in different departments. Their nationalities ranged from South African, Basotho (from Lesotho), Nigerian, Zimbabwean and Zambian.



Table 4. 1 A summary of the study participants

Name	Marital status	Nationality	Study duration (Years)	Age	Country	Discipline
1. Hope	Married	Zimbabwean	5	37	Zimbabwe	Law
2. Mandisa	Married	Zambian	4	40	Zambia	Education management and Policy studies
3. Tsholo	Married	South African	4	38	SA	Natural and agriculture sciences - animal and wild life sciences
4. Kari	Single	Nigerian	4	32	Nigeria	Natural and Agricultural sciences – Food science
5. Lerato	Single	South African	4	28	SA	School of Management and Public Administration
6. Sibongile	Married	South African	5	33	SA	Natural Science – Biochemistry
7. Botle	Married	South African	4	47	SA	Education Management and Policy studies
8. Tebogo	Divorced	South African	6	52	SA	Education – Learning support
9. Itumeleng	Married	Basotho (Lesotho)	4 & a half	44	Lesotho	Communication Management
10. Pablo	Married	Nigerian	3	35	Nigeria	Science Education
11. Mpho	Widow	South African	4	54	SA	Early childhood
12. Keabetswe	Married	South African	3	53	SA	Early childhood
13. Dineo	Married	Nigerian	3	53	Nigeria	Early childhood
14. Tumeliso	Widow	Zambian	6	43	Zambia	Geography and environmental studies

#### 4.4.2 Data analysis

Data analysis refers to the process of giving the collected data order, form and purpose, so it takes time and does not follow a linear process (de Vos et al. 2005). Henning (2004) argues that qualitative data analysis is a process in which a data set is structured by dividing it into manageable units, synthesising it, looking for trends and discovering what is essential for new information, thus determining what to tell the readers. It is an approach aimed at “understanding how participants make meaning of the phenomenon under study” (Maree, 2010: 103). This study employed a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method that is used to define and summarise the themes that arise from the data in a qualitative study. It can be used in both surveys and interviews to analyse qualitative answers to open-ended questions. It looks at the data from various angles to define key elements inside a text that will help the researcher understand and interpret the raw data (Maree, 2016). Since the interviews were recorded with the participants’ consent, I transcribed verbatim. I coded the data after

transcribing, which means I frequently listened to the recordings and divided the data into themes and subthemes, which were illustrated with different colours. Coding helps the researcher to “quickly retrieve and collect all the text and other data that they have associated with some thematic idea” in order to examine together the sorted bits (Maree, 2010: 105). I moved back and forth between the steps of coding and had new insights and understanding emerging from the data. I felt overwhelmed by this process and there was a point where I felt that I did not know what to do with the data and there were sub-themes that were not extrapolated from the data. I then decided to analyse data using Atlas TI software, meaning data was thematically analysed using Atlas TI software, and bringing nuances within the main themes that emerged and in that way I let data speak for itself instead of just reporting on the main, obvious themes.

#### 4.4.3 Researcher positionality

Qualitative research is regarded by Holliday (2002: 149) as an interactive process where the researcher and participants “enter into a relationship of culture making” and “the presence of the researcher is entangled with the politics of the research setting” (Ibid: 145). The researcher is the one who collects data and makes inferences and conclusions; therefore, the research cannot be totally objective. This highlights the need for reflexivity, which is a method of objectively focusing on oneself as a researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 2000). As an African woman pursuing a doctoral degree, I was careful not to impose my experiences on the participants, I listened and asked questions that were derived from the conversations. However, sharing most of their experiences enabled me to delve further into their doctoral journeys. Acknowledging my positionality, I believe helped me to be reflective hence enriched the research process (Holliday, 2002).

#### 4.4.4 Credibility and trustworthiness

According to Maree (2010), reliability and validity are concepts associated with a quantitative study, these could be replaced by credibility and trustworthiness for qualitative researchers. In their qualitative studies, however, some qualitative researchers also make use of the terms, “reliability” and “validity.” As stated by Thomas (2009), in any research, it is important that the findings are trustworthy; thus, represent participants’ responses, reflecting their views on what is being studied. It is also necessary to note, however, that there is no such thing as absolute trust because knowledge is constructed differently (Thomas, 2009). Tracy (2010) further states that quality for a qualitative research is known by (a) worthy topic which is characterised by being relevant, timely, significant and interesting, (b) a study that is rich in rigor, (c) sincerity – where the research is self-reflective and is transparent about the methods employed and challenges encountered which may have limited the study, (d) research’s credibility, which is characterised by thick description, triangulation and member checking for example, (e) the

audience's resonance, (f) when the research adds significant contribution to the body of knowledge, (g) research that is ethical by adhering to the social science ethical considerations, and (h) lastly, a research that has a meaningful coherence.

It is important that I ensure that I used appropriate methods to design the study from qualitative or quantitative studies to data collection and analysis. To ensure trustworthiness in my study, I transcribed verbatim, which means writing word for word what is on the tape recorder (Maree, 2010). I then endorsed the themes from the transcripts with the exact words of the participants. I did member checking, which means give some participants the transcripts of their interviews to see if I have captured them well.

#### 4.5 Ethics

Ethics in social science research are rules or standards for guiding the behaviour of the researcher and ensuring that the researcher treats the participants as human beings with great sensitivity and not as objects, (Somekh and Lewin, 2005). Like all professional studies carried out in social science, this thesis has a duty to comply with the ethical principles of conducting research. Therefore, this study adhered to ethical considerations that were scholarly and professional and respected the participants of the study. Ethical principles observed in this study are informed consent, no harm, respecting autonomy, protecting privacy, offering reciprocity and treating participants fairly (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012).

##### 4.5.1 Informed consent

The purpose of the study was explained to participants in a form of participant information that stated the study's purpose and importance, disclosure of research procedures prior to requesting permission to perform the interview (Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler, 2008); thereby "fully informing the research participants about all aspects of the study" (Christensen, Johnson and Turner, 2015). A written consent form was given to participants to read and then sign at their own discretion, after which the interview began. Bell (2005) notes that the protocol for informed consent must mitigate the legal obligation of the researcher and guarantee the rights and security of the researcher, as it does for the participants. This implies that the researcher, as well as the participants, must be legally protected. Furthermore, I explained the need to capture all information the participants shared with me and asked permission to record our interviews to enable me to retrieve the interviews even in their absence in order to present their perceptions well. This gave the participant a chance to make a well-informed decision whether he or she wanted to carry on participating in the study. Once consent was obtained, it was the researcher's obligation to carry out the research procedures as she had outlined.

#### 4.5.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity were emphasised and adhered to, to ensure their privacy. I assured my participants that whatever they disclosed in the interviews would be held in confidence. I clarified to the participants, however, the degree to which confidentiality can be protected, as this research was carried out for academic purposes. Pseudonyms were given to participants to protect their identities (Maree, 2010). Lastly, identifying information was changed as a way of protecting their identity further.

#### 4.5.3 No harm

It is critical that the researcher does not harm the participants. Harm in this sense would mean any emotional distress by asking questions which harmed the participant. The participant must feel the need to willingly express their life experiences and not be put under emotional distress through the interviewer's disrespectful questions.

#### 4.5.4 Respecting autonomy

It is an obligation of the researcher to let the participants consciously participate in the study. Participants need to consider the purpose of the research and the effects of their involvement in the study, namely, how their lives will be influenced by being involved in the study. I claimed in the current study that the analysis could be written, and that participants' data could be included in the publication (Somekh and Lewin, 2005) I told the participants that their engagement in the research was voluntary and I valued their autonomy in choosing to participate in the study (Hammersley and Traianou, 2012). As such, participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point at which they no longer wanted to participate and that the data they provided would not be used if they so wished. I discussed with them the approximate time that may be spent on the interview in order to make an informed decision on whether their schedules were appropriate for participation.

#### 4.5.5 Offering reciprocity

Conducting this study must not only favour the researcher, but also the participants. As such, reciprocity does not have to be financial but may be by expressing the opinions of the respondents in the way they expressed them to the researcher. I acknowledged and was appreciative to participants who took time off their jobs without offering them any reward to participate in the research (Bassey, 1999).

#### 4.5.6 Treating participants fairly

I showed no favouritism among my participants, I valued them equally. As a result, I ensured equal treatment to all participants and thus avoided bias. As Bell (2005) says, there are several factors that could contribute to bias, for example, when the researcher has strong opinions on the subject being investigated, s/he could be biased, either intentionally or not. I was careful



not to impose my opinions on the research participants since this subject is of great personal interest to me. I used my phone to record the interviews and also took notes in order to compare with the recorded piece during transcription. I maintained a journal to write my observations, and then used them as I reflected on the interviews; I believe this helped me to minimise study bias.

In summary, Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (2001) argue that research ethics is simply about clarifying the essence of an arrangement that both the researcher and the participants have entered into by obtaining permission from those consulted, describing how the data will be used, and agreeing to the use of the data.

### **Contribution of the study**

#### **First study to look at African women doctoral graduates through the CA lens**

This is the first study to look at African women doctoral graduates, specifically in the South African context through the CA lens. Reviewed literature shows studies on doctoral education in general, studies on women within doctoral studies or both men and women but not specifically looking at African women doctoral graduates in the South African context through the CA lens. This, therefore, makes this study the first study because it explores strategies and capabilities employed by African women doctoral graduates that enabled their success through doctoral education in South Africa.

Many studies on women in higher education look at reasons for their attrition and how culture hinders their success but neglect exploring stories of success of African women within doctoral programmes. The successful completion of African women doctoral students is important to understand as their experience may encourage and equip other African women to enrol as they see that African women's completion in doctoral programmes is a possibility. I, therefore, envision that the contribution of the study will be to encourage not only more African women to embark on the doctoral journey but every person who wishes to attain doctoral education. Using the capability approach further contributes to human development discourses that are important for focusing on well-being from an individual perspective may hence influence capability-based approaches to inform policy in higher education, specifically doctoral education.

#### **Identifying a gap in foregrounding African Women doctoral graduates' voices**

This study makes an original contribution to doctoral education as it puts African women doctoral graduates' voices at the forefront to understanding what strategies and capabilities enabled them to complete their studies, having identified a gap in the doctoral education in

South African literature. As indicated in Chapter 2, the literature on women and higher education shows the reasons why women drop out before completion, but this study explores women's stories of success through doctoral education.

Furthermore, these women valued the capability of voice as indicated in Chapter 6. This capability is important not only as an opportunity in itself but provides a space in which these women further exercise their agency, which is essential for the realisation of their desired outcome. Not developing this capability deprives these women further capabilities and freedoms, as such women will continue to be marginalised, and will thereby not have the ability to untangle themselves from corrosive disadvantages but rather experience perpetual, additional disadvantage. Students' freedoms are expanded through removing various unfreedoms that leave them little choice and opportunities to being active participants of change.

### **Contribution to literature**

This study builds on the mentioned studies, for example, Okkolin (2016), Loots and Walker (2015), Ongera (2016). There is no literature specific to African women doctoral graduates in doctoral programmes in South Africa, therefore, this study contributes by giving voice to this small group of women. As such, it contributes to the body of knowledge on what constitutes their success and will be available for others to read, hence the literature on African women doctoral graduates' success in doctoral programmes will add to the existing literature on women and higher education, specifically doctoral education literature.

Furthermore, considering the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa, this study adds to literature of successful women, particularly African women as they are out-numbered by their male counterparts as well as white females in doctoral completion. As South Africa's goal, in attempting to redress the negative effects of apartheid, having increased African women doctoral graduates by bringing forth their voices is a step in the right direction, that of achieving the country's goal in increasing doctoral graduates, specifically African women doctoral graduates.

This study contributes to literature on gender studies both globally and locally. It contributes to knowledge in African women doctoral education by bringing to surface the "unnoticeable" inequalities these women experienced. Although in a subtle way, and unaware of being treated differently, some women's places in society may be dictated by their male supervisors. To have a male supervisor say he wanted the woman to finish and go back to where she came from (which meant to go back to being a woman in society and assume female roles such as starting a family) is not giving a woman a choice of freedom. This could mean the woman

could not be considered for opportunities within the institution as the supervisor assumes that she does not want to stay within academia. Assuming all women need to start families and not start a career as researchers, for instance, was somehow did not helping to increase African women staff with PhDs, therefore, working in contradiction with the government in trying to increase the number of women within South African institutions. This is because if supervisors do not encourage women to continue in academia, or at least want to hear the future aspirations of their doctoral students, then women may feel they are still not good enough and feel demotivated to stay. There are still fine layers of gender discrimination that people are not aware of and this may perpetuate gender inequalities. Thus, this study brings out such issues to be potential future research, which due to time and the scope of this could not be pursued further.

#### Limitations of the study

As explained earlier, this is a qualitative study, this means that the number of participants is too small to allow the generalisation of data and findings to all African women, doctoral graduates in South Africa. As a result, I am not making any claim that these participants speak for all African women, doctoral graduates because they are regionally, socially, culturally and ethnically diverse. However, this does not mean that the data and findings from the study cannot be deemed important. These findings contribute to understanding the complexities of African women, doctoral graduates' experiences and challenges they encountered and the motivation factors, capabilities and functionings they value as a result of their education. Another limitation was that of finding participants for the study. Initially, I had intended to interview 20 African women, doctoral students, but only 14 showed interest in participating, despite the referrals I had from the interested participants.

#### Conclusion

This chapter sought to present my research methodology and approach that I found appropriate to use in this study. I have justified why I chose a qualitative research method and as a result described the sampling procedures, research instruments, research process, approach to data analysis and ethical considerations. Limitations of the methodology of the study were acknowledged. The next chapter presents a report of the research findings which emerged from data. One main research question and three sub-questions guided this study and themes and sub-themes pertaining to the questions will be discussed. However, it is necessary to highlight that brief biographies of the 14 women who participated in the study are provided at the beginning of the chapter.

## Chapter 5: Empirical findings

As mentioned in the first chapter, the study sought to explore strategies and capabilities that enabled African women, doctoral graduates to complete their studies successfully within the context of South African higher education. Therefore, this chapter presents the findings derived from fourteen women interviewed in this study. The chapter is presented in three sections. Section 5.1 presents biographies of the participants focusing on their personal backgrounds, educational aspirations, doctoral study experience and life after completion. It is important to remember that participants were doctoral graduates of University X and some of them were working at the same university, as the biographies show. Section 5.2 presents the findings thematically, which were derived from the four research questions guiding the study. Section 5.3 concludes the chapter.

### 5.1 Participants' biographies

This section presents 14 biographies of the study participants. Pseudonyms are used to ensure participants' anonymity in accordance with ethical standards governing social research (Maree, 2010).

Below are biographies of the participants in this study, which summarise their unique doctoral journeys that are detailed in Section 5.2.

#### 5.1.1 Hope

Hope is from an urban, working-class family in Zimbabwe. She enrolled for doctoral studies at University X at the age of 30. Her father has an honours degree and her mother a first degree. Having completed her primary and secondary schooling in her home country, she was encouraged by her father to study further. Despite coming from a country that is defined by extreme widespread poverty, Hope's parents managed to provide the basic needs for her and her five siblings. In 2005, Hope decided to come to South Africa for tertiary education, thereby escaping the economic crisis in her country.

As a first-generation female doctoral graduate in her family, it was never Hope's desire to study until doctoral level. Upon completion of the LLB degree, she realised that she did not enjoy going to court. In addition, during her Master's degree programme she also realised that foreigners studying law in South Africa are never admitted as attorneys. As such, Hope had to consider alternative routes within the law career path. She developed a love for research and decided she wanted to go into the NGO sector where she could actually improve lives as she developed a passion for humanitarian work. It took Hope five years to complete her doctoral studies. During her doctoral journey, Hope received financial support from University X and her supervisor provided work opportunities. She also worked part-time for private companies. Hope got married during her doctoral studies and had two children, and this

change in her life was a challenge for her because she had to adjust, accommodate, consider and be present to the new people in her life.

By the time this interview was conducted Hope was working as a lecturer at University Y, a job she found after the completion of her doctoral studies. She stated further that it is through this journey that she was taught to think critically and become a good scholar as well as collaborate with other researchers. She explained that the attainment of a doctoral degree has opened financial doors for her.

#### 5.1.2 Botle

Botle is from an economically low-class family in the rural areas of South Africa. She enrolled for PhD studies at the age of 43. Her grandmother raised her, and they depended on her pension to survive. Her mother was training as a nurse but was disqualified in her last year of training because of apartheid. Due to being disqualified, her mother earned very little as she could not be promoted. Botle is married and has one child.

As a first-generation doctoral graduate in her family, it was never Botle's dream to pursue doctoral education. She aspired to be a police officer or a soldier. Her reason for this choice was that she wanted to revenge her mother's disqualification in the nursing profession, as she hated the whites for causing her struggles growing up. After matric, she applied to join the force but without any luck. She struggled to secure work for a decade and ended up in selling clothes for one businessperson in the streets of Johannesburg. She then met her biological father for the first time, and he offered to take her to the College of Education. Although Botle never aspired to be a teacher, she grabbed the opportunity when it was granted to her. As she continued with her studies as a teacher, specialising in special needs education until she reached honours level. She later received a scholarship from Foundation X to pursue her master's degree. This scholarship required that she study as a full-time student and offered her a chance to enrol for a PhD after master's completion. It took Botle four years to complete her doctoral education. She describes herself as somebody who perseveres, who never quits regardless of the challenges. She describes her doctoral study experience as challenging as her supervisor at one point deserted her, which caused the delay in the completion of her studies, but she did not quit. Her weakness, however, she stated was that she often puts other people's needs before hers and that makes her endure pain while pleasing them.

When the interview was conducted Botle was a lecturer at University X and indicated that the attainment of the doctoral degree has given her confidence in herself, and she believes she can influence many people's lives through her story. As a researcher, she no longer makes claims based on feelings but provides evidence. She has also learned that she cannot generalise.

### 5.1.3 Dineo

Dineo is from a middle-class family in Nigeria. She enrolled for PhD studies at the age of 46 at University X. She comes from a family of 10. She is married to a pastor and is a pastor as well. They have three biological children and take care of many children from underprivileged families. Her father was once a teacher but ended up being an entrepreneur despite the fact that he did not have a university degree. Dineo's siblings are highly educated; one brother is a Professor, and another one is a Doctor.

As the first-generation female doctoral graduate, Dineo had the desire to be a doctoral graduate but due to being married, she did not pursue her aspirations because her husband did not allow her to but rather insisted that she raise their children. Her brother asked her to register for Adult Education, even though she had initially wanted to study Urban and Regional Planning for her undergraduate studies. The same brother coerced her to register for doctoral studies; probably because he always knew Dineo's desire to pursue doctoral studies.

Dineo's experience of doctoral education was not easy, particularly because she had a challenge with writing due to the English language. As a result, she had to ask her daughter to read her work prior to submission to the supervisor. Dineo received financial assistance from the university, as well as family and friends and that enabled her completion. It took her four years to complete her studies. She described herself as "a go-getter", as one person who achieves her set goals despite the challenges. As a result, she considers herself resilient, hardworking and believes in God's strength to carry her through. Her weakness, however, is a difficulty to accept failure; she sometimes gets frustrated and becomes sick when things do not go as expected or produce desired outcomes.

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 the doctoral degree has taught Dineo to look at different perspectives in every situation. She indicated that she is motivated to do more. In addition, her social status has improved, people acknowledge her abilities. She stated that she had published a book and that has made people treat her as if she is important.

### 5.1.4 Itumeleng

Itumeleng is from a working-class family in the capital city of Lesotho. She enrolled for PhD studies at the age of 41. She is the second-born child in a family and has three siblings. Itumeleng comes after a brother who has a master's degree and at one point enrolled for his doctoral studies but dropped out. Her other two siblings studied up until matric. Itumeleng is married and has two daughters. Her husband did not complete his undergraduate studies.



As the first-generation doctoral graduate in her family, Itumeleng mentioned it was always her dream since she enrolled for her first degree to study as far and high as she could go. She was further inspired by friends who started the doctoral journey before her, and in addition, got inspired by attending conferences and seeing the presentations by doctors. She then told herself that she could not present as a “Mrs”; hence, she had to get the title. The title, therefore, was her ultimate reason to pursue doctoral studies.

During her doctoral studies, Itumeleng described her financial status as shaky. However, she mentioned that her government financed her studies. In addition, she was on study leave and still received 60% of her salary; she also received a bursary from University X and held an assistantship post at the university. Although her husband did not earn much, he was of great support because he took care of their daughters while she was pursuing her doctoral studies in another country. Since she was a full-time student, she regarded herself as having time, as well as discipline to concentrate on her studies. She feels she could have completed earlier had she had an academically supportive supervisor.

Itumeleng describes her biggest strength as being persuasive and not giving up easily. Her weakness on the other hand is a lack of patience. She elaborated that she would start calling her supervisor when she thought she was taking too long to provide feedback and that as much demonstrated a lack of patience from her side, it worked in her favour since she eventually managed to complete her doctoral studies. It took Itumeleng four and a half years to complete her studies.

By the time of the interview, Itumeleng was back in her home country and resumed her lecturer duties. She, however, she states that doctoral degree attainment taught her to be humble and considerate. This was probably because she took longer to complete her studies and that taught her that everything is possible.

#### 5.1.5 Mandisa

Mandisa is from a middle-class family in one of the SADC countries. She enrolled for PhD studies at University X at the age of 38. Mandisa comes from a family of eight children, her mother was not educated, and the father was a teacher. She is married and has four children. Despite the fact that her parents provided the basic needs for her and her siblings, coming from a big family made it difficult for Mandisa to grow up having all she needed. This inspired Mandisa to want a better life for herself. Having studied from kindergarten up to master’s level in her home country, she decided to explore and see what South Africa had to offer hence enrolled for doctoral studies at University X. In addition, since her mother was not educated, she made it clear to her children that they have no reason not to be educated.



As the first-generation female doctoral graduate, Mandisa did not know there were different degree levels, she only knew of a bachelor's degree. As she was already pursuing the bachelor's degree, she found out there was a Master's degree and she felt motivated to enrol after completion of her first degree. She later knew about doctoral education and grabbed the opportunity and pursued the highest degree. During her doctoral studies, Mandisa received a university bursary that covered only her tuition. Although she studied full-time, she still was employed at a full-time basis in her country. This meant that she had no bursary for accommodation whenever she came for contact sessions and had to pay for herself. This was a huge challenge because there was a time when she had no money but had to borrow money from her family. It took Mandisa four years to complete her doctoral degree.

When the interview was conducted Mandisa was a postdoctoral fellow at University X. She stated that having the "Dr" title has earned her respect from the people around her.

#### 5.1.6 Kari

Kari is from a middle-class family in Nigeria, although both her parents are retired. She enrolled for PhD studies at University X at the age of 28. She is from a family of four, two brothers and two girls. She is not married and has no children. All her siblings have master's degrees, and her sister is studying towards a doctoral degree in Canada.

As a first-generation doctoral graduate in her family, Kari had always had the desire to pursue doctoral education. She resigned from work in her home country to study in South Africa. Despite the fact that Kari did not have a bursary when she started, she had saved money while she was working, to provide for her educational needs when she came to study. In addition, her parents as well as her siblings assisted her financially, she did not have financial problems during her first year of study. It was in the next year that Kari received a bursary. It took Kari four years to complete her studies as a full-time student. She indicated that she had the time to focus on her research and stated that she was grateful she did not have a family to take care of with no child demanding her time. She indicated that she is "a go-getter" and is very passionate about research and as a result, she put all her effort in her work. However, this characteristic, she mentioned is a strength as well as a weakness, because she focuses so much that she is not even aware of the world around her that she leaves other important things behind, like socialising with other people.

By the time of the interview Kari was a postdoctoral fellow at University X and indicated that the attainment of the doctoral degree brought opportunities in terms of conferences, meeting people and collaborating with other scholars.

#### 5.1.7 Keabetswe

Keabetswe is from a middle-class family in one province in South Africa. She enrolled for PhD studies at University X at the age of 50. No members of her immediate family, her parents and siblings studied beyond a certificate level. Her husband has a bachelor's degree. Keabetswe moved to Gauteng when she got married. She has three children, and all of them are working.

As the first-generation doctoral graduate within her family, Keabetswe did not have a dream to pursue doctoral studies. As she studied for her other qualifications, Keabetswe felt the need to continue developing herself academically as she feared being left behind. This did not mean she had people close to her who were doctoral graduates, but she got motivated from seeing people at work, on television or any form of platform that she had access to. She received material, academic and financial support from University X. Despite having a weakness of procrastination, she indicated that once she decided to focus on achieving something, she achieved it.

When the interview was conducted Keabetswe was working as a Lecturer at University X and stated that her doctoral education has taught her to be critical about everything in her life, and most importantly in her line of work. It has also put her in a position where she can apply for jobs that require someone with a doctorate, while before she would not even attempt to apply for such posts.

#### 5.1.8 Sibongile

Sibongile is from a rural village in one of South Africa's provinces. She enrolled for PhD studies at University X at the age of 28. Coming from a family where her mother was a domestic worker, Sibongile indicated that she went to schools in rural areas as well. Her brother studied up to a first degree. She is married and has two children.

As the first-generation female doctoral graduate in her family, Sibongile did not dream of obtaining a doctoral degree. This was because as she grew up, she did not know there is such a degree; she only found out that her cousin was pursuing doctoral studies when she was doing her master's. This then inspired her to pursue doctoral studies. Furthermore, she had a good relationship with her supervisor at master's level and when she discovered he was affiliated to one of the big research institutions in the country, she felt even more motivated to pursue this degree because she knew she could get a learnership programme post, and as such will be financially sorted. She described herself as "a go-getter", and not scared of failure because she believed there is a lesson one gets from failing. She, therefore, regarded herself as a goal-driven person. These qualities, she stated are some of the factors that enabled her to complete her studies. Sibongile had both her children during her doctoral journey and this made the journey more challenging. However, she had support from her husband and her

mother in law who would take care of the children in her absence. Her husband was her strongest support system and provided all the financial support she needed. One research institution funded her studies, and this made a remarkable contribution towards the completion of her studies. It took Sibongile six years to graduate.

At the point 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 “Dr” title, it has enabled her to be a researcher who contributes to knowledge in her field.

#### 5.1.9 Tebogo

Tebogo is from an economically low-class family in a rural area in Limpopo, South Africa. She enrolled for PhD studies at University X at the age of 46. Her mother was a domestic worker, and her father was a gardener. Her siblings and she were raised by her cousin as their parents worked in another province and only came home once a month. She has three siblings; her older brother has an MBA degree, the one Tebogo comes after has a degree and the last has a diploma. She is divorced and has five children.

As the first-generation doctoral graduate in her family, Tebogo only had the desire to be educated in order to escape poverty. She had no knowledge regarding levels of educational degrees. Not being one of the brightest children while growing up, Tebogo drew inspiration from her older brother who was the first child in their village to go to university. During the December holidays, her mother often asked Tebogo to stand in for her at work and that made her realise that she needed to get some form of education if she wanted a life different from her mother’s. She felt being a domestic worker was not the life she wanted for herself and it is at this early age that she aspired to be a teacher. She further indicated that being divorced motivated her to pursue doctoral studies, as she wanted to provide a better life for her children.

While working at University X, Tebogo applied for a second master’s programme but the Head of Department at that time informed her that the university wanted lecturers with doctoral degrees hence she enrolled for doctoral studies. She received funding from one international institution, and the university provided her with material and academic support, which enabled her to complete her studies successfully. It took Tebogo six years to complete her doctoral studies and she feels the fact that English language was her fourth or fifth language, it contributed to her delay. Tebogo indicated that she learned in her home language through primary school, and this hindered her understanding of the English language. However, her bold character and her ability to face whatever comes her way became the strength that enabled her successful completion. She stated that having a doctoral degree has made her conscious of her social status, thus influences the way she does things. She knows she has to be a good role model for people around her. She has become more ethical as a researcher.

#### 5.1.10 Lerato

Lerato is from a middle-class family in South Africa. She enrolled for PhD studies at University X at the age of 24. She is in a committed relationship and she and her partner have a child who was born just before her PhD graduation. Only two members in her family have studied until honours level. Lerato mentions that because she has been studying at University X since 2009, she has been fortunate to be a tutor as well. This meant she had some sort of income and access to printing and photocopying without having to pay, and that eased things on her side. 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.

As the first-generation doctoral graduate in both her immediate and extended family, Lerato did not have any inspiration to study up until this level. However, as she kept progressing academically, and having employment doors open; she eventually decided during her master's degree that she would pursue doctoral studies. Hence, she chose to do research within the food and security area as she thought it was a global problem. In addition, being one of the few lecturers within the department without a PhD; she decided to enrol for doctoral studies. This decision was also influenced by the fact that as staff, she would study without paying. She also took into account that she has colleagues who were willing to assist her through the journey. Although she has a weakness of procrastination and not being organised, Lerato's strength is her commitment to seeing through what she started. As a result, having a supportive supervisor whom she could confide in even regarding her personal challenges enabled her completion.

By the time the interview was conducted Lerato was working as a senior lecturer at University X. She had presented papers at academic conferences. She earned respect from her students and family members because she obtained her doctorate.

#### 5.1.11 Tsholo

Tsholo was born and raised in one of the South African provinces. She enrolled for PhD studies at University X at the age of 34. Tsholo is married and has three children. Tsholo was raised by her grandmother because her mother was married and had five children with Tsholo's stepfather. She only met her biological father at the age of 23. Her biological father was married and had three children, making Tsholo the first-born child of nine children. Tsholo came from a disadvantaged family background and her grandmother financially supported her. Unfortunately, after matric, despite her good marks, she did not have money to study further and as a result, stayed home for two years. It was during this period that Tsholo fell pregnant with her first child. It was after this incident that her high school teacher; whom she

considers an angel from God, took it upon himself to take her to university, paid for all her needs.

As the first-generation doctoral graduate in her family, Tsholo just knew she wanted good things in life, to escape poverty. Then after registration for the first degree, Tsholo applied for a bursary, and was fortunate to get it. Upon completion of her first degree, Tsholo sought employment but never got work. She and her friends decided to continue studying because at least they could get bursaries that helped them take care of themselves as well as their families. After completion of her master's degree, she still applied for work and found placement at a zoo. Soon after getting this job, Tsholo was placed in a learnership programme that required her to pursue her doctoral studies while gathering experience from one research institution. Her decision to take up this opportunity was prompted by the fact that the stipend as a doctoral student was more or less the same as the salary she received while working at the zoo, then she thought it was better that the learnership programme came with an opportunity to study further.

At the time of the interview, Tsholo was working at the research institution where she had been taken on in a learnership programme. Being a doctor has made people around her, colleagues particularly, look up to her. She mentions that people regard her as a role model and that motivates her to ensure that she has something they can learn from her.

#### 5.1.12 Mpho

Mpho is from a working-class family in one of the urban areas in South Africa. She enrolled for her PhD studies at University X at the age of 50. She is the first-born child in a family and has four siblings. Her immediate sibling has a master's degree, and the other two have honours degrees. Mpho has one child and was married when she started her doctoral journey. Sadly, she lost her husband during the course of her studies.

As the first-generation doctoral graduate in her immediate family, Mpho never had the desire to pursue doctoral studies. Her inspiration came later from the pride and joy she felt as she graduated for her master's degree. It took her four years to complete her doctoral studies although she feels she could have completed it much earlier had it not been for the passing of her husband and having a full-time job. However, visualising herself in the doctoral graduation gown provided Mpho with the extra motivation to complete her doctoral studies. During her doctoral journey, Mpho received material, academic and financial support from University X, and that enabled her successful completion. While Mpho described her weakness as procrastination to complete her tasks, her strength is that she never quits. The "never quit" attitude enabled her to be resilient and persevere until the end. Mpho said her completion of PhD studies marked the beginning of her career in academics.

At the time of the interview, Mpho was working as a lecturer at University X, had presented papers at academic conferences, and published articles. Mpho further said that she noticed that people's attitude towards her changed after she received her PhD as they held her in high esteem. For example, at a conference where she was introduced as "Dr Mpho X", people began to favour her and would not even allow her to queue for food as everyone else, but instead brought food for her.

#### 5.1.13 Tumeliso

Tumeliso is from a middle-class family in the rural areas of one of the SADC countries. She enrolled for PhD studies at University X at the age of 37. She is from a family where her immediate family members studied up to bachelor's degree level. She studied for her primary, secondary and tertiary education in her home country but came to South Africa for her doctoral studies. She is a widow and has two children.

Although Tumeliso is the first-generation doctoral graduate, she never had a dream to pursue doctoral education. Her decision to enrol for doctoral studies was a job-related decision. She worked as a lecturer in one university in her country, which in collaboration with another university from abroad; decided to capacitate staff by providing an opportunity to pursue doctoral studies. Being the only female candidate in her department who met the criteria of minimum qualification to enrol for doctoral studies, Tumeliso had no choice but to apply. Tumeliso was granted study leave for five years, even though it took her six years to complete. On top of this, she had a scholarship, which made life easy for her financially; as a result, she could still take care of her children even when she was far from home. In the final year, she received a grant from the African University Association to enable her completion. She described herself as a determined person who believes in herself, who does not believe in failing, and never quits once she started something.

At the time of the interview, Tumeliso was back working as a lecturer at the university, which made her study for a doctoral degree. She mentioned that obtaining a doctorate made her a positive person, she developed confidence in her abilities, and hence she could now believe in herself.

#### 5.1.14 Pablo

Pablo is from a working-class family in the rural areas in West Africa. She enrolled for her PhD studies at University X at the age of 33. She is the only girl and the first-born child in a family of four siblings. Her immediate sibling is a medical doctor, and after him comes one who was doing his master's at the time of the interview and the last-born was still pursuing his undergraduate studies. Both her parents are retired. Pablo is married and has one child who was born during her doctoral journey.



As the first-generation female doctoral graduate, Pablo did not dream of pursuing a doctoral degree but after joining her husband in South Africa, who is a businessperson, failure to secure employment influenced her enrolment. It took Pablo three years to complete her doctoral degree. She stated that it was not an easy road as she was a student from nine o'clock in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon when she had to go home to be a wife and a mother. She mentioned that as a go-getter, once she sets her mind to achieve something, she did all in her power to achieve it, despite the hindrances she may encounter. As such, having a baby at this point in her life did not delay her completion. She stated that she took the child to crèche at three months old to enable her progress. During her doctoral studies, Pablo received funding from the university, was appointed as a tutor in her department, and her husband took full responsibility to provide for their family needs.

At the time of the interview, Pablo was awaiting graduation. However, due to her love for research, she was still busy writing articles to publish, just so she has something to do because she did not have a job and was not appointed as a postdoctoral fellow in any university. She indicated the attainment of a doctoral degree earned her respect from people around her, being regarded as a woman of high integrity, who can motivate and encourage the youth.

The biographical information provided above are of women from different countries in Africa, such as Nigeria, Lesotho, Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa as indicated in the methodology chapter.

Below is Figure 1 illustrating different capability lists from different authors. It is crucial to note, however, that I have grouped the capabilities into categories (those that are similar from all lists mentioned), including those lists that not all capabilities were mentioned that may seem to be relevant to my own research. It is also essential to mention that some of the lists are specific to education and gender, however, because my research focuses on African women, doctoral graduates, there is an intersection between the two concepts. Furthermore, even in those lists that are either educational or gender-based, there is an intersection, for instance, both concepts; education and gender do come into play. As such, Figure 1 serves as an ideal list of capabilities for African women, however, the pragmatic list will be discussed in Chapter 5. The capabilities approach concepts that will be used to construct my framework are:

- well-being achievement
- well-being freedom
- agency achievements
- agency freedoms.



The above concepts will help in understanding what African women, doctoral graduates manage to do or be, what opportunities enabled their state of being, what goals and values they have realised and what choices, decisions and actions they made to be or what they had reason to value.

## 5.2 Findings

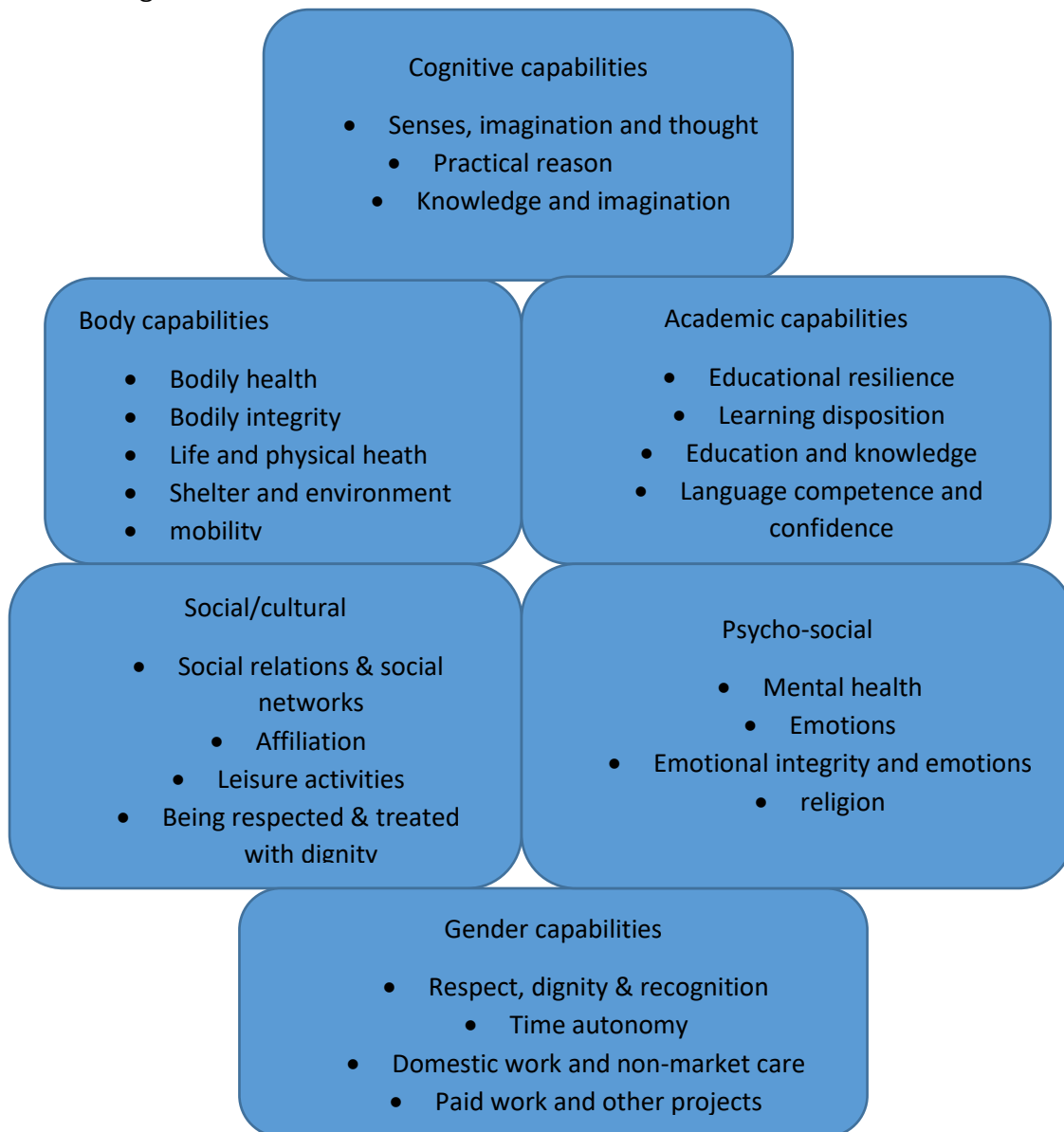


Figure 5. 1 Six categories of capabilities from different scholars' capability lists: Nussbaum (2000: 78-80), Melanie Walker (2006:128-129), Robeyns (2003: 71-72).

Figure 1 above illustrates six different categories of capability lists of different authors. The authors whose lists are presented are profound experts within the capabilities approach on central capabilities each citizen has to have (Nussbaum, 2000), focusing on gender even

though were formed looking at Western countries (Robeyns, 2003) and lastly looking at education within schools in South African context (Walker, 2006). Although this study was on African women, looking at these lists was important as they are human beings deserving of basic capabilities as each citizen, and they are women within the education sector. I grouped capabilities that I believed formed a holistic well-being for participants as doctoral education affected not only their cognitive capabilities but as well as their relations with other people as women, for example (gender capabilities). Some of the capabilities mentioned are applicable in this study; namely: practical reason, education resilience, knowledge and imagination to cite a few. I will briefly discuss the constraints that hindered the realisation of these capabilities in each category. In the **body capabilities** category, one of the constraints was not having sufficient funding, thus not being able to eat proper nourishing food and always being stressed on how one would pay the bills such as rent to secure shelter in a safe environment, due to lack of funds. Furthermore, regarding bodily integrity and safety what could have been a constraint was women's lack of security, which hindered their mobility as they feared being attacked. For instance, women who stayed outside campus had to leave the library while it was still early to avoid being mugged or even raped. This meant that even when they were not done with their work for the day, they had to leave to be safe from harm. **Social/cultural capabilities** were constraints by not having time to socialise with friends, family and their communities. Due to the demands of doctoral education, the graduates missed out on many social events that took place during their doctoral trajectories, such as attending funerals and weddings of their loved ones, which this made them feel excluded from their own people, and somehow longed for affiliation with them. **Psycho-social capabilities**; because doctoral education is a lonely journey, some participants mentioned that they experienced depression, meaning that their mental health was affected, and this somehow delayed their progress. **Gender capabilities**: regarding this category, the women emphasised the need to be treated with respect, dignity and recognition. This is because in some instances they felt they were not given the same respect as men for their contribution to their studies. They also believed that they were expected to put in more effort into domestic work as the literature shows, as well as take care of the elderly or the sick within their family, which was seen as women's work as opposed to men's work. **Academic capabilities**: constraints for academic capabilities may be as a result of not having conducive working space or not having the confidence to participate in discussions with peers as well as mentors, thereby hindering the learning process. **Cognitive capabilities** are closely related to academic capabilities because they have to do with the intellectual growth of a person regarding their choice of professional route. These could be constrained or compromised due to the lack of supervision that is vital in intellectual growth as the supervisor's role is to stimulate learning for the students.

Below is a table illustrating the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the main research question.

Table 5. 1 Themes and sub-themes that emerged from the main research question

<b>Main research question: What capabilities enabled African women, doctoral students' success in South African higher education?</b>	
Themes	Sub-themes
1. Choice of university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources and good infrastructure</li> <li>• Relevant course</li> <li>• Reputable &amp; high ranking university</li> <li>• Location of university</li> <li>• Studying for free (university employees do not pay for their studies within universities they work)</li> </ul>
2. Respect, dignity and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capability of voice</li> <li>• Encouraging supervisor</li> </ul>
3. Institutional support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Well- equipped libraries and laboratories</li> <li>• Knowledgeable academic staff</li> <li>• Research support sessions</li> <li>• University funding</li> <li>• Supportive colleagues</li> </ul>
4. Confidence	
5. Educational resilience	
6. Belief in God	
7. Capability for voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being able to communicate with their supervisors</li> <li>• Being able to raise their concerns to the Dean/HoD</li> </ul>

The table above shows what themes and sub-themes emerged from the interviews, what these African women graduates regard as opportunities and freedoms they have and value, that enabled them to complete their doctoral studies.

Below are the findings presented according to themes that came through the data from all the participants. The reporting of the findings interrogates the early lives of the participants with and without their families, as well as opportunities and freedoms to realise their goals. This section sought to answer the first research question that participants answered through individual, in-depth interviews, as such each section presents the themes that emerged from the data.

#### 5.2.1 Capabilities that fostered African women's success in their doctoral journeys.

With the root of the CA being to question what people can do and to live the life they have reason to value, thus, what they consider as well-being (Sen, 1999), this section informs the reader about what freedoms and opportunities seemed to matter, and which enabled their success in their doctoral studies. Below are the themes that emerged from the data regarding capabilities that enabled their success.

#### 5.2.2 Respect, dignity and recognition

According to Walker (2008: 473), recognition and respect mean "being able to have respect for oneself and others, to be treated with dignity, being recognised and valued equally with others by lecturers and one's peers". Most participants, except two, indicated that they felt respected, recognised and treated with dignity by their supervisors. They indicated that being treated with respect and recognition was demonstrated by allowing them to have a voice and being encouraged by their supervisors. Having the freedom to express their views and concerns to their supervisors is one of the capabilities that enabled these African women's success in doctoral programmes. The sub-themes that emerged from the theme are explained below.

#### 5.2.3 Voice

Most participants mentioned that they felt respected which indicated that they could raise their concerns and views without being judged by their supervisors. They stated that their supervisors allowed them to express their thoughts. Sibongile had two supervisors; one from the university and the other from the research institution at which she was on a learnership programme. She felt that she was acknowledged and was treated like a colleague rather than a student by both supervisors. She mentioned:

*My supervisor she showed me a certain level of respect as well, although I was a student, she did not treat me like a student, she treated me like a colleague. She would not make decisions for me without my knowledge, without consulting me; she gave me so much respect.*

*The supervisor from the university was an old white male, but what I liked about him was that he was very open, because we would even argue on certain issues.*

Tsholo also had three supervisors from three different institutions; one was from the university, the second one from her place of work and the third one was an international supervisor. Although she did not reveal much in her voice regarding her work, she indicated that she was free to call them whenever she felt they were taking long to provide feedback. She explained:

*I had supportive supervisors, I had one international supervisor, he was very efficient, you work with international people, and they will never disappoint you. You are only disappointed with people that you work with here, but with my supervisors, no. Because I could pick up the phone and say people, I sent you one two, three, four, could you please check, or I would send an email, reminder.*

Mandisa came from a background where a professor was someone important; students could not attempt to talk to the professor because they were made to believe they do not know anything, and their ideas are of no value. She experienced a different environment when she arrived at University X. Upon her first meeting with her supervisor, she was intimidated by the fact that her supervisor was White and back home they seldomly saw any Whites. She was a much older woman, old enough to be her mother. Although she was uncomfortable at first, her supervisor's kindness and her approachability made her feel at ease. She stated:

*Whites intimidated me because in my home country you rarely see a white person even at a mall, so when I came here, I saw many and I had to get used to them. I had to get used to my supervisor also. She asked for my opinion, I slowly began to come out, because this environment was different from what I had known, I could ask and make suggestions to the professor. When I first came into her office, I held on to my handbag tightly because this woman was white, she was much older than I was, she represented my mother, and she was professor, but she said, put your bag down Mandisa, hahaha relax. I expected, maybe I would have been comfortable if young black woman supervised me, but then she was white, much older, much like my mother and I was overwhelmed. She turned out to be kind to me and whenever I was quiet, she would always send me emails.*

Hope mentioned that she did not argue with her supervisor, but rather would listen to what she said, think about it, and then communicate her stand. This was because she claimed that her supervisor gave her room to think for herself and not just take on what she said. She stated:

*I was not a person who would fight my supervisor and insist my point is valid. I would actually listen to what she says, and she would give me that room to think for myself and express my views. Although I would actually listen to what she said you know, as the supervisor she has there before so listening to what she had to say enabled me to stretch myself to think deeper and make my contribution.*

The above quotes indicate that participants were respected by supervisors, and this was demonstrated by being granted an opportunity to voice their views. Although we do not have much known on what contributed to the successful completion of doctoral programmes by African women, it is evident that being treated like colleagues instead of students, made this group of women encouraged to work towards completion.

#### 5.2.4 Encouragement from supervisor

Two international students mentioned that they struggled to adjust to a foreign country due to a culture different from their own, as well as a different academic environment. Kari explained that she struggled to adjust to the different academic context upon arrival in SA. However, she mentioned that her supervisor was encouraging and supportive even though she had seen that students from the same country as Kari took longer to adjust to the new environment, and this made Kari feel respected and recognised. Feeling recognised therefore motivated her to do her best in her work, as she felt supported, which is one of the important factors that contributed to her successful completion:

*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.*

Coming from the same country as Kari, Pablo also encountered problems adjusting to the new culture that was different from where she came. She had three supervisors; the first one retired, the second relocated to another province and she had to find another one who supervised her until completion. However, she also indicated that she felt respected and recognised by her supervisors because of the attention and guidance they each gave her. She mentioned that when she came to present her proposal, even though the first supervisor indicated that her proposal was not up to standard, she felt valued and encouraged to study at University X because of the way he explained everything to her. She stated:

*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 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!*

In the above quotes, two African women, doctoral graduates mentioned that settling in was a challenge because they were foreigners. Herman and Meki-Kombe (2019: 509) echo the point where they stipulate that:

...international doctoral students have triple adjustment challenges as they need to adjust to three different contexts: to the new country, to the university and to a new academic identity as doctoral students in specific disciplines.

Hope mentioned that it was important that she had an understanding supervisor, whom she could talk to about her personal life, and who recognised her struggles, however, she still prioritised the academic work. Hope had a supportive supervisor who allowed her to voice her perceptions or suggestions on her study. She narrated:

*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.*

Tumeliso mentioned also that she had a great relationship with her supervisor. She states:

*My supervisor was caring as well as very helpful when it came to my research work. We had an excellent relationship.*

Many scholars (Johnson-Bailey et al., 2008, Ts'ephe, 2014, Bitzer, 2007, Magano, 2011) found that the majority of participants attributed their academic progress or completion of their doctoral studies, to supervisors who showed support beyond academic aspects. Their studies allude to the importance of good supervision and highlighted that it is essential that supervisors are not restricted to being mentors in academic work, but also care about students as human beings. It is, however, important to note that in this study, gender as well as race, were not the determinants of success, but good supervision whereby good relationships between students and their mentors was of great importance.



Unlike all the other women who had approachable, kind and supportive supervisors; Itumeleng also had a friendly supervisor but who unfortunately dragged her feet when it came to supervision. Itumeleng indicated that the main reason she had a relationship with her supervisor was for supervision, but the supervisor did minimum work. She would not respond on time, and that delayed her completion. She indicated:

*My supervisor was a problem. She was a very nice person, she was jolly, happy all the times but there were times, and many a time when she would not give me feedback on time. Research was the main reason I was here, as opposed to any social relationships, she was one of the reasons I could not get my degree in record time because of the delay in feedback. My lowest low was when she did not provide me with feedback. I believe if someone else supervised me, I mean, the fact that I am a teacher, I know what I should be getting from my supervisor, I know it should be a two-way thing, and that we both had responsibilities, but she would always delay.*

Both Mandisa and Sibongile mentioned that they fell pregnant during their doctoral journeys. They narrated that although it was difficult for them to tell their supervisors, once the supervisors knew, they felt relieved as they showed them support. Mandisa states:

*I remember one time during my PhD, I became pregnant and it was difficult for me to tell her. I thought she was going to burst at me and say why become pregnant when you are busy with PhD? Instead, she just wrote babies are nice; just know how to balance your time. That response just made my day. I was able to pick up myself and say babies are good, and from those words, I was able to plan.*

Sibongile proclaimed:

*I went to my supervisor's office and I said, 'Prof, I have something to tell you.' and he said, 'Oh you are pregnant.' I was not even showing because it was still early days, and I said, 'Yes.' In addition, he said, 'Ahh, it is to be expected because you are at that childbearing stage, and if you do not do it now, it is going to be harder to conceive, as you grow older.'*

The above quotations demonstrate that these women felt they were treated with respect, integrity and recognition. Participants felt that way because they mentioned that their supervisors allowed them to express their views regarding their research, thus they became contributors to their own work through their voice. They were approachable and easy to talk to even concerning their personal lives. For instance, some could even inform their supervisors of their pregnancies, as well as their struggles with being first-time mothers and were never made to believe they made bad decisions by having children during this journey. However,

even though Itumeleng attested to this, she was disappointed by the fact that her supervisor presented those qualities as a person but did not attend to her work to a point where it delayed her completion. Despite them being treated with respect, integrity and recognition, being international students was a challenge, but the burden was eased by being treated like a decent human being who has contributed positively to their work. For participants, this was empowering for them, and promoted their chances of success within doctoral programmes.

#### 5.2.5 Choice of university

All participants indicated that their choice of university for doctoral studies was influenced by the availability of resources within the university as well as its ranking. International students stated that prior to applying to the university; they inquired about the university and found out that it is one of the highly ranked universities in the country.

##### Availability of resources or good infrastructure

Mandisa stated that she chose to study in South Africa because she had heard from people who studied in South Africa that it was one of the most advanced countries on the continent; with advanced infrastructure that would help develop her as a researcher. She, therefore, used her agency to make her choice to study at University X. She mentioned:

*I heard from people that have done their PhDs in South Africa that universities in South Africa have got equipment, good facilities so I did not want to be left behind. As I was also working as a senior research officer, I wanted an institution that was vibrant in terms of research, so not to say that my home country is not vibrant in terms of research, but knew that South Africa is better; hence, I wanted to get skills in research as well as have an international exposure.*

The above statement indicates that Mandisa thought about which university to enrol at for her doctoral studies, and this was influenced by wanting a degree that would be of good quality from a recognised institution. This shows that she researched the university prior to applying and this demonstrated some form of agency on her part, she is an active individual regarding achieving her desired goal.

##### Relevant course

Kari stated that she researched institutions in SA that offered the course that she wanted to study and found out that only two institutions did but the exact course she wanted was only offered in University X. Furthermore, although she would have preferred to enrol with an institution situated at the coast, she chose University X because of its affordability as she had no funding in her first year of study.

*I had to research on the research areas within different universities because I did not want to do anything, I was not interested in doing. I was also looking at the standard*

*of the university, its affordability because I was not sure if I would get the bursary. SA is the best in Africa, and in terms of the rating, some universities compare with some of the best universities in the world. I narrowed my search down to the research areas, and because I was interested in studying at a place close to the beach, then I looked at two other universities where they also offer food science. I found out that the research areas were not so fantastic, there were not things that I could do, so I had to come to University X, and it was a good choice.*

Mpho had studied all her degrees at University X, and she said she did not find the reason to look anywhere else unless she struggles to find the exact course she had studied throughout, that she wanted to pursue to a doctoral level. She proclaims:

*I do not think I had much of choices you know, because my honours degree was in Augmentative and Alternative communication from University X, my master's degree was in Augmentative and Alternative communication from the same institution, so being in disabilities, I think the university presented itself for me to choose it, it offered what I wanted.*

Itumeleng also decided University X was the one at which to study because she states:

*Universities that offer Communication Science in SA are very few, so I would not go to University P, I would not go to my former university because I was looking for something better. I believed my degree at University X would be much better than if I went to any university.*

Lerato stated:

*I was doing food security, and this is one of the University X's institutional goals, so it linked very well with where I wanted to go as a researcher, so yah choosing University X was ideal.*

Participants' statements above indicate that University X offered the exact course that each of them wanted. This was not only the case for those who previously studied within the institution, but also for those who were new students enrolled for their doctoral studies. They all believed University X was their best choice academically.

*Reputable and high ranking university*

Lerato, like Mpho studied for all her degrees at University X. She mentioned that it is one of the reputable institutions in the country. She narrated:

*The reputation of the university is the reason why I do not mind saying I did all my degrees here, and I am a staff member here, so the brand, the University X brand is something that I like.*

Kari and Itumeleng also wanted a university that ranked high in academic performance. They proclaim:

*When I was looking for university for my PhD, I was looking at the standard of the university.*

*My number one reason for choosing this university was that it is ranked high in academic performance and I knew what I was looking for because I was not just looking for any university, so I thought let me go to one of the best universities.*

Itumeleng, like Kari, wanted a university that ranked high in academic performance. Furthermore, the above extract demonstrates that Itumeleng exercised a form of agency in university choice as she weighed what opportunities were before her, and what freedom she had in securing a university of her choice.

#### *Location of the University*

*Two participants chose to study at University X because they took into consideration that it was closer to home. Itumeleng explained:*

*Another choice I had was to go to universities in the Western Cape Province; so I believed University X was my best choice because it was in range with the other two universities but it was not as far from my home country as it was to study in Cape Town, for instance.*

Lerato's home was in the same city as University X, besides being staff and having an opportunity to study without paying tuition from her pocket; she decided to continue with her doctoral studies at University X because studying at another university would be costly. She indicated that it would separate her from her family as her life had always been staying in this city. She explained:

*Everything is here, home is here, so the cost of having to move would be too much.*

Both participants above mentioned that their choice of university was also influenced by its location; for the other, it was in her home city and relocating could have cost her more. The other mentioned it was closer to home, meaning that travelling to see her family would take much less time than it would take her travelling from Cape Town. So, the decision to study at University X was granting her an opportunity to study at a highly recognised institution which was not that far from home.

*Studying for free*

Lerato stated that as a lecturer and alumni of University X the choice to continue studying at this institution was easy to make as she did not have to pay for her tuition. She also stated that moving to another university in a different city would mean that she left everything and everyone in her life behind, as she is originally from the area where University X is located, this would mean the move would not only cost her money but relations as well:

*Firstly, I chose to continue studying with University X because of the fact that I work here, I did not have to pay for my studies; that was a big consideration.*

Mpho alluded to the fact that the university contributed to her success as it provided financial support for staff. She claims:

*I should call myself fortunate you know, because financially, the University X supported me, and this made it possible for me to succeed. If it was not for the financial support provided by the university, maybe I would have along the way ran short of finances.*

Like Lerato, Mpho had studied all degrees at this university, she found it necessary to pursue her doctoral studies at the same institution because as a lecturer studying at University X was free and funding was not a challenge that hindered their academic progress.

Applying critical reason in the choice of university demonstrated exercising agency. The above quotes indicate that participants weighed the pros and cons of their university choice hence put them in the right winning mind from the beginning, because of having a choice in which university suited their personal needs encouraged them to do their best even during the most challenging times throughout their doctoral journeys.

#### 5.2.6 Institutional support

All participants mentioned that the university granted them great support during their doctoral studies. The support ranged from libraries that were well equipped, with effective staff members and enough working space. Some indicated that the university had the best laboratories that were accessible all the time. Another important aspect is that participants confirmed that the university created a conducive environment for learning, and this is the first step towards their successful completion. Mandisa stated:

*There is this environment within the university that makes you feel like you can make it because they do not make you feel like you are nothing. Unlike in my home country, when I was doing my master's they would say master's is for intelligent people. Therefore, there is that fear that they instil in you. When I came to University X, it is as if they believed in me. It is as if once you enrol, they know you are going to finish one day, so for me that was a plus.*

The above quote confirms the importance of a conducive learning environment, how it motivates the students to do their best because they feel the institution has done everything on its part to ensure the students' success. Observing this created a safe space for students to learn, knowing the institution is already rooting for their success.

*Well-equipped libraries*

All participants stated that their library was resourceful in that there was a conducive working space with computers that had access to the Internet they could use. They also mentioned that the library staff was efficient and always responded to the emails, hence they did not have to come physically to campus for assistance, and this contributed to their successful completion. Dineo stated:

*The fact that you know I send an email to reach any office, including the library when I could not make it in person helped a lot.*

Mandisa lived in her home country and only came to the university for support sessions. She stated that she could still access help from the library through emails or calls. She pointed out:

*I would email or call and say I am looking for this article and then they would help, they would even propose more, they were willing to help and it was not like you were bothering them, they were willing to give you more.*

Pablo indicated that she would sit at the library from nine o'clock to until four o'clock and would work without any distractions. She mentioned that since she could not work from home, she would not even take any breaks to talk with other students, as she had to make the most of her time at the library. She said:

*From 9 to 4 pm I was a doctoral student. I made sure that when it is 4 pm I go back to being a mother, I go back to being a wife. Many people who are my friends now even though I never used to talk to them during the doctoral journey say, 'Oh Pablo once you sat on that chair you would not stand up.' They say, 'Even when people are taking a break you would not stand and talk,' and I would say, 'You people do not understand'. The library had all the resources I needed, the Wi-Fi, the connection, and I was also able to borrow books from other universities through the library, so that was the main resource I was able to use.*

Mpho attested to Pablo's statement of having the conducive working space at the library's research commons. She stated:

*We have the best research common that I know. It is a facility where one could go and study without distraction; it is conducive for studying. I think the research common, the*



*library, and the reading material that they have, the support, the librarian were of great help. We are allocated the librarian to help you with articles; you know we have many resources to help you succeed. It is up to you as a person, how much you use of those.*

Tumeliso also confirmed to having resources and facilities that enabled their success. She stated:

*I had access to the library, the research commons with computers and Internet, as well as the office space, which really made one to focus more because there were no distractions.*

From the quotations above, it is evident that participants not only were aware of the good infrastructure the university provided, but their responsibility also as students in making use of those facilities for their benefit. Not only international students emphasised the availability of resources to foster their completion; South African nationals also mentioned that the university had structures in place such as, availability, the Internet and printing facilities that enabled their success.

#### *Equipped laboratories*

Regarding the laboratories, Sibongile and Kari mentioned that the university had well-equipped laboratories, and this made it easy for them to progress in their work. The laboratories were accessible to them at any time. Sibongile stated:

*The university had equipped laboratories, which I think that was important. There were days when I had to go to the lab late in the afternoon, at night sometimes, sometimes early in the morning around three o'clock. I would actually drive to varsity.*

Kari mentioned:

*They designed the research such that almost everything you need is available here in our department, and if it is not here in our department, it could be in some other department within campus, so you do not need to stress yourself about getting equipment. I live in the university residence so it was safe, I could work at night, I live in Residence B, which is just across campus, so I could just walk at night and work at my own time and it was fine.*

The above quotations show that the university provided the best facilities for the students who used them effectively. Contradictory to what Vander Laar, Rehm and Achrekar (2017, 3) proclaimed, "that 20% of students starting doctoral studies do not complete despite the availability of facilities such library access, Internet access, office space as well as staff with



the capacity to supervise”, all women in this study emphasised the availability of resources provided by the university as one major contributor to their successful completion of their doctoral studies.

*Knowledgeable academic staff*

Most participants mentioned that the university appointed knowledgeable staff who assisted them and guided them during their studies. Sibongile stated:

*I also think another thing that was important was having professors in the department that are knowledgeable, so you could put up a presentation there and they would literally attack you, but you learn a lot from that, so for me that made me progress much faster.*

Kari attested to having a supervisor who was a great teacher. She states:

*She was a great teacher, because whenever I went into her office and she asks me questions I could not answer she would say bring your chair and sit next to me. She would pick a paper and a pen and would explain until I understand, only then would she let me leave her office. She was a very good teacher.*

The above quotations show that some participants had good supervisors who took the time to make them understand how to go about their work. It was also evident that for most participants, the gender of the supervisor was not the contributing factor to having good relationships. This is because most participants stated that although they were women, being supervised by men had no negative effect on their work. This resonates with Brown and Watson (2010) and Lynch (2008), who found out that gender made no significant difference, no participants claimed to have suffered due to having male supervisors.

*Research support sessions*

The university offered research training sessions for all postgraduate students. All participants stated that they were equipped with skills on topics such as writing a good literature review, analysis, academic writing and so on. This means that the university provided infrastructure or put systems in place that foster success for students.

Mandisa said that these sessions encouraged her as she saw that she was not the only one who did not know what she was doing, and they provided rapport amongst students because they shared their experiences and rejoiced whenever they met again for their progress. She also mentioned that she benefited from the sessions because she could hear questions, she struggled with asked by her fellow students.

*I was very good at hearing questions asked, you know those questions that were asked were very helpful to me because I never asked questions. Again, those questions that*

*were being posted exposed me to the fact that I was not the only one struggling. During informal meetings, we would talk about our struggles, and guess what; their struggles were my struggles. Then some of them overcame their struggles, when we met in the following session, they would say they actually finished analysing, for example, and that for me kept me going. I learned that people pursue doctoral studies are not any sharper, or immune to challenges but are ordinary people with financial problems, with social problems. Seeing this and relating with this kept me going.*

For Mandisa, these sessions provided social support for her, seeing that she was not the only one, made her gain strength to continue. She also made “friends” whom she could talk to concerning each other’s progress in the next sessions, somehow making her feel accountable to them for her progress update. Mandisa also emphasised the point that even though she did not even think she would make it through the doctoral journey as she progressed in the programme, the fact that she was admitted into this programme meant that the university saw her potential and that on its own motivated her to work hard. She indicated:

*When my application was successful, they said there were so many people who applied, and I was selected. The fact that I was selected I knew that I had the capability to finish, though I sometimes I did not believe in myself, but the fact that the university put me in, I knew that I would make it, I would get my PhD.*

Although Botle attended support sessions organised by the university, she also had sessions arranged by the funder, where an expert was hired to provide training on different research topics or stages. Botle stated that this also contributed to her success. She states:

*It was the two of us who were sponsored by the same company and the other student was already doing PhD, so he completed when I was doing my master’s. Both of us would be called to attend training where we were taught how to go about writing literature review. This was helpful for me because I had no idea of how to write the literature review even though I had been to college, as we never did this. Therefore, I had no idea what I was getting myself into enrolling for master’s and later doctoral education; so, their support enabled me, even the seminars they organised, I taught me how to present my work.*

Although all participants attested to the importance of having research sessions organised by the university, it was clear that within their departments, such support was not provided. There were no cohorts whereby students sat with their supervisors; with their colleagues under the same supervision and engaged in discussions relating to their work. Thus, many women indicated that their doctoral journeys were lonely.

Tumeliso attested to the importance of the research support sessions but indicated that they were not offered regularly, in the sense that it was not their weekly engagement as in instances where at some universities, cohorts facilitate regular discussions. She stated:

*We never had the departmental discussion communities. The research support sessions we had; we were assisted on topics such as methodology, how to write the literature and all, but it was facilitated by the university and not initiated by us students.*

Keabetswe stated:

*I was lonely in many different ways, I was lonely I did not get to work with my peers, I was lonely I did not even have that proper supervisor relationship.*

Although Keabetswe speaks highly of the support she received from the university throughout her doctoral studies, she proclaimed she had a terrible relationship with her supervisor and that increased the feeling of loneliness she had already experienced due to not having any buddy to walk the journey with.

#### *University funding*

Participants who worked as lecturers within University X mentioned that the university played a huge role in ensuring their success. This was because of the funding they received from the institution, time away on sabbatical so that they complete, as well as study free.

For students who were also working at the university as lecturers, all students indicated that they could focus on their studies better because they did not have to worry about the financial aspect of things during their doctoral studies as the university covered their funding. They also mentioned they could use facilities such as printers without paying as they could use the ones they had within their departments or in their offices. They were also allowed to go on sabbatical during the later stages of their work and this afforded them time to concentrate on completing their programmes.

Keabetswe also indicated:

*I am grateful for the funding that I got because if it was not for that I would not have been able to make it. It was the Vice Chancellor's grant, which is open for permanent staff, so I had to apply. One has to include one's budget and things like that so that they get a replacement. This funding helped me in two ways, so I must tell you, the fact that they gave me funding and I was not here even for a year, I appreciate it and I really was ever grateful and will always be. Secondly, the fact that I had that funding, I felt I was accountable to someone and had to complete.*

Mpho states:

*I should call myself fortunate you know because financially, the University X supported me. The university provided opportunities such as the research Indaba where we could present our work, those research support, the writing retreats and all, I think the University of Pretoria itself, made it possible for me to succeed. If it were not, maybe I would have ran short of finances. When I was completing, the last six months of my degree, the university gave me sabbatical leave, hired somebody to teach my modules, I think those for me, I don't think I would have completed by now, I would complete, but it cut my period short by supporting me in that area.*

Attesting to what Mpho said, Lerato mentioned:

*Chapter four of my thesis is for international perspectives, so I went to Brazil to do research, to see the difference between Brazil and South Africa. I was supported by University X, so it was easy because being a staff member helps because everything expense was paid for by the university.*

All participants mentioned that the university played a huge role in providing resources to foster their success. They indicated that they had the best library facilities, whereby they could even access one university close by if the material they needed was not available in their own university. This collaboration enabled access to the required material. They could also access the library anytime they wanted as there was provision for a 24-hour section where they could sit and do their work. Some participants who were not only students but worked as lecturers at the university mentioned that they never worried about their tuition as the university provided funding for them. One specifically mentioned that her study was a comparative one and she had to spend some time in another country, the university financed everything that she needed. She mentioned it would not have been possible for her to finance her trip. The university also allowed them to go on sabbatical in the last six months of their studies, which lifted the burden of preparing for and going to classes. As indicated by Cloete, Maassen and Bailey (2015), the South African government makes considerable investments towards doctoral production through policies that provide incentives for students to remain in the system up to doctoral level, and through student bursary-linked grants. The South African government also rewards universities with funding for successful doctoral graduates, and this funding is used by universities to offer fee waivers for successful doctoral students (Cross and Backhouse, 2014). The above quotes further indicate that the university, together with the government, provided resources to enable participants' engagement with their studies, with the intention of increasing the number of African women, doctoral graduates.

### 5.2.7 Supportive colleagues

All participants stated that they had great support from colleagues within their departments. They also received encouragement or motivation from the discussions that they had with their colleagues.

Mandisa states:

*People such as [my supervisor] would meet me in the corridors and ask, 'How are you doing, you are going to get there.' So, all those things were like encouraging me, I do not think I would have finished if those words were not spoken.*

The quotation above shows that the university created a supportive environment, and this social support is a form of recognition that was empowering for Mandisa.

Although Botle attests to having supportive people within her department with whom she could discuss her work; she mentioned that she also received support beyond her academics. As she struggled financially in her fourth year, because her funding was for three years, she received assistance with groceries. She stated:

*The support of the members, you know when they meet you, they were able to talk about your journey. However, one day my HOD just took me to Spar and said I should get every grocery that I wanted, it was amazing, and I had many people in this department supporting me.*

Just like Botle, Kari's supervisor would bring her food and that made Kari feel that she mattered and was cared for beyond just supervision. She stated:

*She was very good to me; she was extremely nice and sometimes she would just come look for me and give me food.*

The quotations above affirm the one mentioned by Mandisa regarding supportive colleagues. However, Botle and Kari went further to indicate that they received basic and financial support from colleagues. This also empowered them, as they felt recognised and cared for.

Tebogo mentioned that she got support from her colleagues and her HOD. She was given time away from work to work on her PhD. She also stated that they had contact sessions on topics such as the research methodology that assisted her to complete her studies.

*Secondly, I got support from colleagues when I came here because from the HODs, they know that a PhD colleague must be handled with gloves, so they do not give you a lot of work. Firstly, they recommend that one focus on their PhD, and that is the*

*support. They allowed me to stay at home so that I can just write my thesis, which is the support that I got.*

It is evident in the quotation above that Tebogo felt appreciated and valued by the university because colleagues allowed her to prioritise her studies before everything else. This to her meant she was recognised to be of value, respected and treated with dignity.

Keabetswe related that during her fight with her supervisor, when he would not provide clear feedback and refused to set time aside for them to meet in person although they were in the same city, she sought help from the HOD and stated below:

*When I was frustrated, I never even made an appointment to see the HOD. I just left the research commons, walked into his office, and said I need to talk to you. And when I explained everything, I don't forget his words, he said to me your supervisor is here around and you have not met him, not even once, I have students that I am supervising overseas and I have seen them several times, so you know what, this marriage is over, and that stood with me. It really became clear to me that the marriage is over.*

The extract above firstly demonstrates that Keabetswe sought help when she saw that her supervision was a constraining conversion factor in accomplishing her goals. It highlights the availability of capabilities – institutional support, that there are people in place to assist the students. It further shows that not only did she exercise agency but reflected on her journey, and thus applied practical reasoning in pursuit of her functionings. Also, Keabetswe's issue demonstrated that successful completion of students' studies is not only limited to the relationship between the supervisor and the student, but it is a goal for the academic staff at all levels, hence the HOD intervened and a new supervisor was arranged for Keabetswe. This goes back to increasing African women, doctoral graduates within higher education institutions, there are role players who are committed to seeing the number of this category of women increase.

Under this theme – supportive colleagues, most of the participants indicated that they received support from their colleagues. This support was not only limited to those who worked as lecturers within the institution, but rather, all the participants. For those who were only students, they also attested to getting support not only from their peers but rather from staff, even if they were not their supervisors, making or providing a conducive environment as they felt they matter.



#### 5.2.8 Confidence

Two participants mentioned that prior to enrolling for doctoral studies, they lacked self-confidence. However, the doctoral journey has developed their self-confidence. Tumeliso stated:

*I have become a more positive person than I was before. Before I attained my PhD, I was not sure of myself. I always believed I was wrong in everything I was doing. In other words, I was not confident of myself as I am now.*

Lerato, as a lecturer who has a passion for teaching and research, indicated that the attainment of a doctoral degree increased her level of confidence as she could now feel more respect from her students. She mentioned they took her more seriously, once she had the title, and whatever she said, they trusted her knowledge. She said:

*I think it has given me more confidence, so this is the first year obviously that I have my doctorate, so being able to know that I have achieved something so big, that a small percentage of people have, so yah, even for me my confidence level has gone up.*

Botle mentioned that the acquisition of a doctoral degree made her believe she can influence her world positively. She stated:

*It has changed it big time. I now I have more confidence in myself, I believe that I can change many people's lives through my achievement.*

The confidence these women demonstrate in the quotations above is strongly associated with developing an academic identity, as they are lecturers at universities. They are now able to continue lecturing with much confidence and not only that but are respected and recognised by colleagues and students. Furthermore, since Lerato is passionate about research, attaining a doctoral degree has made possible her career as a researcher.

#### 5.2.9 Educational resilience

All participants demonstrated resilience through their doctoral studies. This resilience is evident in the above section where they could have opted to quit but chose to pursue their dream until they achieved it, that of being doctoral graduates. As much as they were faced with numerous challenges, they never quit. They held on until completion, and thus gained knowledge as well as the degree.

Mpho lost her husband during her doctoral studies. However, despite this loss, she continued and never gave up. She stated:



*My husband passed on as I was doing my doctoral degree. He was always there for me and he understood the stress I was going through in pursuing the degree. I did not spend quality time with my husband in the four years that I was busy with the degree.*

Mandisa also demonstrated being resilient. While she got pregnant with her last-born during doctoral studies, she started working on her thesis a month after the child was born. She mentioned she had to work away from home to avoid any distractions, and since she was on maternity leave, she did not have any office space to work from. As such, she had to drive further from home and sit in the car, parked under a tree in the hot weather to work on her write up. For a mother to leave a new baby in the trust of family, husband and sister, meant Mandisa understood that she had to sacrifice her time with her new-born son, which demonstrated tremendous resilience. Mandisa demonstrated agency as she made a plan to find a place outside the home to work on her thesis, despite the discomfort. She made use of what she had; thus, she used her car as a work space while she could not work from home due to having a new-born whom she would be tempted to attend to although she had her husband, mother and or sister to assist with taking care of the child.

Botle indicated that when she ran out of funding, she had to find a job within the department. However, the earnings from that post could not cover her living expenses; thus, she had to move to a smaller room where she did not have space to work without distractions from her son. Despite these challenges, Botle stated that she had to work from her office until late and would go home, which was not within the university residences. As a woman, she had to drive alone during the night risking her life in these unsafe times, when violence prevalence is high. Similar to Mandisa, Botle had to find a place from which she could work on her thesis without distractions. She stayed long hours on campus to be able to work from her office after working hours. This means both women sacrificed time with their children to achieve their desired outcome.

Most participants were funded by the university or institutions that offered them a three-year bursary. The renewal of this bursary depended on their annual progress. This became stressful for them, as there were no guarantees on the renewal thereof. As a result, participants were always frustrated and stressed, wondering if they will have their bursaries renewed. Another issue was that funding was for three years and those that completed their studies in four years had to struggle financially, which put a greater burden on their already stressful journey (Ts'ephe, 2014). Tsholo and Sibongile did not have funding to buy their consumables for their laboratory work in the first year of their study. This demotivated and frustrated them, to a point where Sibongile contemplated quitting. Having to worry about the

availability of funding, and if it is available, having to worry about not covering one's needs may hinder progress within doctoral education.

#### 5.2.10 Self-efficacy

Four participants mentioned that despite the challenges they encountered on their doctoral trajectories, they believed they are well-able to succeed. Only one out of the four women came from a family where the mother did not have any qualification, the rest had either their parents or siblings having studied up to doctoral level.

As Dineo indicated in the interview, she had always wanted to study until doctoral level. Even though she got married and her dream was delayed, she did not give up. Moreover, she had a brother who would keep reminding her of her ambition even when it seemed impossible to ever afford to study further. However, she stated:

*I am a go-getter, when I set a goal, I want to achieve it, and when I don't achieve it, I sometimes get frustrated. However, I do not like indulging on what I would not throw my whole life into, I like to do something and then I do it to a point when I know I have satisfied my own desire, I would say I am resilient, I am a hard worker.*

Having one brother who is a medical doctor as well as one who had a doctoral qualification made her believe she could do it as well, despite being raised by parents who were not educated.

Kari also indicated that she knew from a young age that she wanted to pursue doctoral education. Even though both her parents had studied up until the master's level, she always knew she was going to embark on a doctoral journey. Her parents were always supportive in everything she did and did not feel pressured to surpass them, none of her parents made her feel that she was obligated to study beyond the master's level. She pointed out:

*I am a go-getter, if this is what I am doing, I put my mind to it and I see it to the end, and I just focus on it and one of the weaknesses would be leaving other things behind. it's a problem I have, I just focus on what I am doing at that time and it affects my social life, I don't socialise because I am tired over the weekend, evenings I just face my work, go home, sleep, eat, watch the news and I am back at work.*

Despite the fact that she regards herself as a go-getter, Kari acknowledges that she has a weakness of focusing on one thing and leaving other important aspects of her life behind. For example, she indicated that her social life suffered as she was pursuing doctoral education, she was not even interested in dating, unlike most of her friends who were long married at that age, thus she felt she was left behind and needed to catch up.

Pablo comes from a family of retired teachers who have been of great support throughout her educational path. Like Dineo, she has a brother who is a medical doctor and another one who is a doctoral graduate. She stated:

*I am a go-getter, if I am set to achieve something, I go all the way for it, that is one of the strengths I have, and I am a very stubborn person, so that's what makes me succeed. Haha, once I say I need this, I must get it, and nothing can stop me. It's when you go through the challenges that you know, oh this thing is putting me down and things like that, but my strength, I am a go-getter.*

Being the first-born of the four siblings, Pablo believes it is her responsibility to set a good example for her brothers, and she took it upon herself to show them that whatever a person can aspire to be, they can achieve it.

Sibongile, as indicated earlier in this chapter, she comes from a family where her mother was not educated and was a domestic worker. However, her mother ensured that she got some education and encouraged her to work hard in attaining it. She mentioned:

*I think I am a go-getter, if I tell myself that I am going to do something, I do it, I make sure that I do it, I am not scared of failing, I have had so many failures in my life, so I am not scared of failing. Maybe another thing is that I am persistent, I am a very persistent person, and I am determined, even as a child, also emotionally, I am very sensitive but at the same time, I am very mature emotionally.*

Sibongile indicated that what made her study further even though she did not know about this highest level of achievement within the education system, was her curiosity to know more. She mentioned she would always read more than what she was expected to and that kept her ahead of her classmates in school and made her hunger for more. Self-efficacy demonstrated in the quotes above has enabled participants to take action towards attaining doctoral degrees as they believed they have the capability to complete their doctoral studies successfully despite the challenges encountered along the way.

#### 5.2.11 Belief in God

Most participants mentioned that their belief in God held them together when they felt they could no longer progress with their doctoral studies. Keabetswe mentioned she had a church family she belongs to and who keep in contact with her; praying together was one of the reasons why she did not give up on her dream. She mentioned:

*I was already in situation where my supervisor and I were fighting. One of my church members called to check up on me and he asked, 'Are you okay?' I burst into tears because, and then I had to explain my challenges. We have a WhatsApp group and*

*he sent a message saying let's pray for Keabetswe, she is going through this with her studies and one of them phoned and said, 'We would like to pray for you, so can we arrange a prayer session with you?' You know, the people at church motivated me so much by the prayer sessions, we met several times praying for my situation. People gave me verses, which I had to live by, one of them was, very powerful to me, that one where God says just ask and I will respond. I never gave up asking, and I said You know my intentions, and You know how hard I have been working towards this, and You know what's best for me, but I am just asking that let the doors open. I had to live by that scripture.*

Dineo mentioned that at the beginning of her doctoral journey, she did not have money to register even though she had received an admission letter. She had asked her family, husband and siblings for registration money, but none came to her assistance. She stated that she resorted to prayer, as a pastor, she had to align her faith with her reality. She indicated:

*I woke up that day and 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 me to a person that this person will be a source of help to me.*

Dineo reflected on her life's journey and said the God that helped her through those challenging times will come through for her even with the PhD. She said:

*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, I will make it.*

Mandisa also attested to God's grace for her completion. She stated that she was given more time than the usual for her maternity leave. She stated:

*I am a Christian and the bible says all things work together for good. When I became pregnant and I went on maternity leave, by God's grace, they miscalculated; they gave me four months instead of three. Since I am a Christian, I let them know that they made a mistake; I wrote to the HR and I said you have miscalculated my leave and so on but then they were generous enough and they said it was their problem, let us leave it and it is good that you were honest.*

Botle as she indicated that she had initially wanted to be a soldier or a policewoman, she felt God changed her path to be a teacher, even though it was through her father saying he could only pay for her education if she studied towards being a teacher. She stated:

*I think it was God's plan that I change the lives, not the way I wanted to, so it came as I learned to be a teacher; that you are a lifelong learner.*

For Pablo, securing participants was extremely difficult because she was an international student. Every school she went to search for participants, teachers would not want to participate because of her nationality, stating that people of her kind were not trustworthy. She added:

*I needed two or three participants more to continue, so I had to go to [naming the area] to look for another teacher, that is where God helped me. The woman I got was also doing her master's with the University X, so the minute I told her; she was like, 'Oh I know what you mean'. She just called the teachers and said, 'Please, this is one of my friends.' so that was how I was saved.*

The quotes above demonstrate that these participants believed in God's power to see them through their doctoral journey. However, they did not just believe in God and not put in the effort, but their trust in God fuelled their agency. Quotes under the capabilities' theme and sub-themes show what capabilities African women, doctoral graduates valued during their doctoral journeys, which enabled their success.

As indicated at the beginning of this chapter, I used the research questions separately to stipulate the themes and sub-themes that came up from the participants' data addressing each research question.

Below is a table illustrating themes and sub-themes that emerged from the first sub-question.

**Table 5. 2 Themes and sub-themes that emerged from sub-question 1**

<b>Sub- question 1: What functionings did African women, doctoral graduates hope for after completion of their doctoral studies?</b>	
Themes	Sub-themes
Escaping poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Living off grandmother's pension</li> <li>• Mother married and left her with grandmother</li> <li>• Knowing father at 23 years old</li> </ul>



Dr title	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aspired to be called a Doctor</li><li>• Inspired by a female role model</li></ul>
Being educated and knowledgeable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Contribute to knowledge/passion for research</li><li>• Acquire knowledge to be lecture</li></ul>
Be an inspiration to others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inspire own children</li><li>• Set standard for siblings</li></ul>
Research career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exposure to academic world</li><li>• Writing</li></ul>

The table above shows what themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews, functionings African women, doctoral graduates hoped for after completion of their doctoral studies.

Below are the findings presented according to themes that came through the data while answering the first sub-question.

### 5.3 Functionings valued by African women, doctoral graduates

Unlike capabilities, which are the opportunities and freedoms an individual has to pursue the lives they have reason to value, functionings are the beings and doings that individuals achieve. As such, below are findings on reasons to embarking on doctoral journeys. Therefore, different participants had different reasons for embarking on their doctoral studies. These reasons varied from being influenced mainly by each woman's background, what they were exposed to or not. They were also influenced by their parents' love for education, despite their own level of education. Most of them were from disadvantaged backgrounds and believed education would change their narratives. Below are the functionings these women hoped for because of attaining their doctoral degrees:

#### 5.3.1 Escaping poverty

Three of the fourteen women emphasised that the reason they pursued doctoral education was that they wanted to escape poverty, and doctoral education was the vehicle that they thought would take them to their desired life.

Botle stated that her grandmother raised her, and they used to live on her pension money. After matric, she did not have money to continue with her studies. It was until she met her father for the first time, at the age of 23 that she got a chance to go to college, as he offered to pay for her education. She mentioned that she always had a voice inside of her that told her she was never going to die in a state of poverty. Although it took her 10 years after matric to continue with higher education learning, she did not give up on her dream of becoming somebody. She said:

*Although my mother was working as a nurse, she experienced the hardships of apartheid. She was not earning much, because I was told she was disqualified in her last year of training as a nurse, due to apartheid. As a result, she could not be promoted, but I survived with my grandmother's pension money because in the rural areas money was not that important while we were growing up.*

Similar to Botle, Tsholo was raised by her grandmother, because her mother was married and lived with her new family elsewhere. Like Botle, Tsholo did not know her biological father until she was 23 years old. Being in a big family, where her grandmother raised her with cousins, uncles and aunties, this meant that she could not get everything she needed as a child, and this motivated her to aspire for a different life for herself. Tsholo indicated:

*It all comes down to how you grew up; I grew up in a poor family. 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 brought us up. So, I used to want to have good things in life. I wanted to change where I am coming from, if other people are working, they are teachers and nurses, why could not I be one? I grew up wanting to be something in life, and I think I really tried to work hard to pursue that. It was very challenging because I did not have money.*

The two snippets above show that because of their background, Botle and Tsholo felt it was upon themselves to change their situation. They, therefore, aspired from a younger age, to change their lives for the better, and they knew at an early stage that they wanted to be educated. Their narratives provide an instrumental aspiration where they wanted a better financial state for themselves as compared to the families they came from. Botle stated:

*I ended up with a husband who was more of a father figure because he came through for me during those years when I had matric, I did not have a job.*

The narrative above builds on the above statement that Botle pursued doctoral education to be able to afford to do things for herself and live a better life. No matter how bad their situation



was, they actively chose to envision a better life. These conversion factors of coming from disadvantaged homes did not hinder them to achieve their desired functioning. It is important to state that even though Botle only went to university after ten years after completing matric, she did not give up on the dream. After completing matric, Tsholo also had to stay at home due to finances and ended up being a mother while she was still a teenager; that did not hinder her from pursuing higher education when she obtained an opportunity to do so. While trying to change their stories, the quotes above show that the participants desired better lives. Therefore, they embarked on doctoral journeys, without even realising that in itself works towards the country's plan of increasing African women, doctoral graduates. They saw this as an opportunity to get them the lives they aspired to and in the end attained their doctoral degrees.

### 5.3.2 Being called a Doctor - Dr Title

A few participants indicated that they enrolled for doctoral studies because they wanted to be doctors, to have the title "Dr" in front of their names.

Mandisa stated that although she was not aware of educational levels as she was studying, she, however, came across an article whereby a woman in her home country was a doctor and what interested her was that this woman was in Mandisa's area of interest. That made her realise that she too could accomplish being a doctor:

*I read it and I told myself the day that I read that article that I also want to put a Dr in front of my name.*

Botle mentioned she has always had a dream of becoming a doctor.

*I have always had a dream that before I leave this earth, I want to be called a doctor, so it was always in my plans.*

Tsholo indicated that she also had wanted to be a doctor and wanted to accomplish that before the age of 35. She stated she wanted the status that came with being a doctor. She said:

*I told myself that I wanted to be a doctor at the age of 35, and it was not happening. The drive of wanting to be a doctor and girl it is a status I am telling you.*

Itumeleng had a dream to study to as far as the highest level. She stated:

*It was my dream ever since I enrolled for my first degree, I had a dream that I wanted to go as high as I can, so it has been there in my mind. Friends who started before me also inspired me; I got more inspired by attending conferences and seeing the presentations by doctors, and I told myself that I cannot present as a Mrs, I had to get the title. The title ... well could be the ultimate reason.*

Itumeleng stated that she always wanted to be highly educated, and having friends who were doctors, and presenting their research at conferences fuelled her aspirations. She wanted the recognition and respect that came with the title, thus she took action towards this dream and achieved it. The quotes above indicate that these women desired to hold the title of 'Dr'.

#### 5.3.4 Being educated and knowledgeable

Most of the participants mentioned that they embarked on this journey so that they gather the knowledge and research skills, more especially because they were working on research within their jobs. Although Mandisa aspired to hold the title of 'Dr', she mentioned that she wanted to develop her research skills because she was already working as a senior research officer in her home country, this aspiration to develop research skills resonated with the findings of a study that was conducted by Ts'ephe (2014). Lerato, who was already working at the university before she enrolled for doctoral studies, indicated that her love for research influenced her pursuit of the degree. She mentioned that she needed to acquire more knowledge. She relates:

*I knew I would do my PhD, for the sake that I would contribute to knowledge, 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. I wanted to expand my knowledge so I could not quit.*

Lerato, as a result, exercised agency and embarked on doctoral education, not only because she did not have to pay any fees, as she was lecturer, she made use of the opportunity to pursue her dream, of being a researcher. She stated that she is passionate about research and teaching. This shows that Lerato applied practical reasoning, reflected on her work and personality and took it upon herself to apply for doctoral education. Unlike Tumeliso who enrolled for PhD because it was required of them as staff at her university.

*I have passion for research, and I chose a topic that I knew even at the hardest of times I would still continue with because for me it was something that I really wanted to find out about, even afterwards I am still continuing with the research, yah, so I think that is, that is a good strength. Another thing is, I think I am a good lecturer, my students seem to think I am a good lecturer. I wanted to be knowledgeable so that be able to teach, it's something that I love, and it's something that I enjoy doing.*

Most participants indicated that doctoral education equipped them with skills that prepared or developed them for their work, for instance, those who were lecturers mentioned they were able to do their work with more confidence and expertise. However, it is important to note that there are some who mentioned they acquired knowledge for the sake of knowledge. This was

probably because they had not applied what they learned and were still looking for jobs. The quotes above show that the participants desired to acquire more knowledge to do their work better; they had a passion for research and some, as lecturers wanted to be the best lecturer they can ever be. Having seen that there were not many African women in their line of work, they decided to better themselves to be set apart from the rest.

#### 5.3.5 Valuing family, work and pursuing PhD

Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) and Magano (2011) state that balancing doctoral education with family and work is a challenge. Most participants had children and were married at the time they were pursuing their doctoral studies. They indicated that juggling family, work and the doctoral studies was a challenge. However, having their families as much as pursuing their dreams was important to them. Therefore, they had to make choices on when to embark on doctoral studies, except for one whose employer made it compulsory for them to enrol. Keabetswe indicated that she had to wait until her children had finished school, and that was mainly because she could not afford to pay for their education and hers at the same time, so she chose putting them first. She stated:

*It was not going to work if the four of us were to study at the same time, which is why I said my children had to come first. I feel I have wasted so much time by not studying. However, in my defence, my children had to come first. I did not know about the funding opportunities for doctoral education, nobody told me about this, if I had known I would have long done it, there are times when I think it took me so long before I could decide to do this PhD, I should have done it so long.*

Even though Keabetswe mentioned that she chose to delay her pursuit of doctoral education, the quotation above also shows she lacked information regarding funding opportunities available for doctoral education. However, it is also clear in her statement that she did not take any initiative to research such opportunities, as she mentioned no one told her about it. She further indicated that it took her a long time to decide to embark on this journey, which could speak to her readiness or lack thereof to study,

Mandisa, on the other hand, chose to embark on this journey while her children were still young because she knew it was not going to be easy to juggle family, work and her studies when they were much older, thus demonstrating practical reason. She said:

*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. If a woman wants to do the PhD, then the husband must be someone who is busy with other things and is not within academia,*

*otherwise, you will break your marriage and break your children. I believe one parent has to be there, present all times for the children, just as my husband was taking care of my children when I was busy, he was busy with his business although taking care of the family.*

Although Mandisa had planned to study before her children started school, she had a child during the doctoral journey. This was also the case with two other women, Pablo and Sibongile. The above snippets indicate that for these women, the timing was everything. They did not just embark on this journey but did so at the times they each thought was the right time. Brown and Watson (2010) echo this choice as they found out that timing of when to start the doctoral journey is most important for females, that it is the key determinant of women's decisions to start doctoral education.

Both quotes show that participants waited for the right time for them to embark on doctoral studies, thus show exercising agency. This decision on its own reduces chances of failure, because they started when they knew they were psychologically ready before the children were much older as that would complicate their family life financially, as well as when children were older for one which meant the participant could afford to pay for her studies as the children would have grown up and been out of school.

#### 5.3.6 Being an inspiration to others

Tebogo aspired to be an inspiration to others, especially her children and other members of the family, her nieces and nephews. She wanted to show them that it is possible to be anything that you want out of life, that it only takes determination. Tebogo aspired to give her children a better life than the one she had while growing up. As a teacher, she wanted to provide good education, a house and a great life for her children. In addition, this aspiration came from being exposed to the lives of her mother's employers, who lived in a suburb in Johannesburg, in a beautiful home and owned cars; the lifestyle that was completely different from hers and her parents'. Although she did not have a dream to hold a doctoral degree, she knew she wanted to be highly educated so that she could give her children a life that she never had.

*Now, my mother said to me, Tebogo, they are building townhouses in Johannesburg, I think because you want your children to get better education. We [Tebogo and her husband] bought the house and we brought the children from Limpopo to Johannesburg.*

Hope, besides being a researcher also wanted to inspire her siblings and relatives to study, so she decided to pursue doctoral education. She indicated:

*You are also an inspiration to other people when you work hard, I believe hard work pays off. So yes, I think you are also an inspiration to your sisters and brothers that you know what, if you work hard you can achieve whatever you want to achieve.*

The above quotations show that even though the participants desired to obtain doctoral degrees, they also wanted to be an inspiration to people around them, as well as make life better for their families. They wanted to plant a seed of education and the desire to be better in the hearts of those around them.

#### 5.3.7 Sense of meaning, achievements

Even though none of the participants embarked on their doctoral journeys seeking to have a skill of practical reasoning, critical analysis; it emerged in the data that all participants acquired this skill through their doctoral studies. Below are statements regarding this:

Mpho stated that after completion of her doctoral studies, she started contributing to the academic world.

*I have just started pursuing academia, in the sense that I am beginning to write articles, present in conferences. Already, I presented in two conferences, one of my articles is published, three in the process of reviewing.*

Kari, like Mpho, the attainment of a doctoral degree opened doors for her to present papers at conferences.

*It has brought me more opportunities in terms of conferences, meeting people and collaborating, because now my PhD supervisor, maybe because I now have a PhD, somethings that they would normally go for, they would rather send me to go there and represent them; it has open doors and given me more opportunities.*

Keabetswe mentioned that although attainment of a doctorate has not influenced her life financially, she stated that she has become critically analytic.

*Well, not financially, but er it's such an eye-opener because you look at things, should I say with a critical eye, you see all the details and not only that but all the other opportunities up there.*

Botle, on the other hand, mentioned that this journey has taught her the importance of having empirical evidence to support her claims:

*It has opened my life; I am no longer the same person I was when I was still a teacher and had not furthered my studies. Through this research, I no longer make claims that*

*are based on my feelings, I now know that before you can generalise you need to have evidence.*

Itumeleng mentioned that taking a break from work after being employed in one institution for 20 years, she became innovative after being exposed to a different world, she now started doing things without only pushing for promotion, she did them because she had been exposed to better ways of doing things. The above quotations demonstrate that the participants had a chance to write articles and attend academic conferences. In addition, the attainment of doctoral degrees educated them to know they cannot make unfounded claims. All the above quotes are an indication that attaining doctoral degrees has widened participants' career paths, as such they are contributing to knowledge in their respective fields.

Below is a table illustrating the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the second sub-question.

**Table 5. 3 Themes and sub-themes that emerged from sub-question 2**

<b>Sub-question 2: How did African women use their agency to develop capabilities (opportunities and freedoms) for academic success?</b>	
Themes	Sub-themes
Self- motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “graduate from the shower” – while taking a shower she would imagine herself being conferred of the degree</li> <li>• Wanting to be relevant/Fear of missing out</li> <li>• Inner drive</li> </ul>
Self-exclusion from social activities/events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Off social media</li> <li>• Stopped participating in running marathons</li> <li>• No attending of social events</li> </ul>
Seeking management intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ruined relationships</li> <li>• Delays in getting feedback</li> </ul>
Improvising on working space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working from the car</li> <li>• Working from the office</li> </ul>

The table above shows what themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews, and what actions these women put in place to ensure doctoral completion.

Below are the findings presented according to themes that came through the data while answering the second sub-question.



5.4 Agency exercised by African women graduates in pursuit of their desired outcome  
As defined, capabilities are opportunities and freedoms that people have to accomplish their goals. Capabilities afford people the opportunity to choose who and what they actually want to be (opportunity freedom) and do “rather than what resources they have access to” (Walker, 2005: 103). This means that having these opportunities and freedoms alone does not guarantee the achievement of the desired goal; functionings. As such, these women not only have opportunities and freedoms to pursue doctoral education but applied effort into converting those capabilities into desired outcomes. This effort or action is referred to as agency, an individual’s ability to act in relation to the achievement of his or her desired goals (Crocker and Robeyns, 2010). All participants demonstrated some form of agency; that together with the capabilities enabled the successful completion of their doctoral studies. Agency in this study refers to the action that one does towards achieving their goals, while resilience refers to never giving up even when facing challenges, the participants found their way back to continuing with their doctoral journeys.

Below are the forms of agencies that enabled the successful completion of these women.

#### 5.4.1 Self-motivation

According to Spaulding and Rockinso-Szapkiw (2012), doctoral students’ motivation to persist in their studies is associated with their personal goals, career advancement and desiring the title. All participants in this study mentioned that the most important attribute that enabled them to succeed in their doctoral journey was self-motivation. They all indicated that one has to have the inner drive to see themselves complete, and that drive kept them even through trying times, as they knew they wanted to attain their dream no matter what. For Botle, the main thing that kept her going was her self-motivation.

*Self-motivation kept me going because I could smell the graduation every day, even when things were difficult. Moreover, the fact that I had told people that I was a doctor even before I completed doctoral studies, I could not go back on my word. I had to move forward, otherwise people would stop believing in me. For me, the challenges were minimised by self-motivation, because I would “graduate” when I am in the shower, 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 would not have made it.*

Although Keabetswe did not dream of pursuing doctoral education as she was growing up; she liked being relevant and admired to achieve good things in life. As she continued with her studies, she identified people who achieved that which she did not have and decided to do the



same. She regards herself as a person who fears missing out on any good thing. As such, she pushes herself to achieve things that she sees established people achieve. She pointed out:

*I cannot specify that my dream was to achieve PhD, 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, and I want to better myself to an extent that I want to reach there, so that's just that inner motivation.*

Mpho also pointed out that the decision to enrol for a doctoral degree has to be one's own decision, not influenced by external factors because if so, then when challenges come, one may give up easily if it was not their own desire to achieve it.

*The motivation for doing a doctoral degree comes from within and once you have that motivation, you will not quit even when encountering challenges. But when somebody tells you to go do a doctoral degree, you know in the first few months or early stages, when your supervisor comments on your proposal, and it comes back and forth, you will not even understand what is happening. However, if the drive comes from within, after a feedback, you will pack your feedback and after a day, you will say let me see what is happening here and you will continue.*

Kari emphasised that one's motivation to pursue doctoral education should be strong, and not just because one does not have any job or anything to keep them busy. She stated:

*Your motivation, the reason behind it should just be strong enough because you need it on days when you feel you cannot go on because that motivation will keep you going. Therefore, it is important that you are strongly motivated in the programme.*

The above quotations show that these participants demonstrated individual agency, and this was among other things a result of individual motivation to pursue their dreams, thus shape their own destinies by being active agents.

#### 5.4.2 Self-exclusion from social activities/events

All participants stated that they had to cut off many activities such as spending time with family and miss most of the family events, be it weddings or funerals to make time for their studies. Mandisa also had to cut back on her financial expenses to attend contact sessions. She said:

*I had to cut also on Facebook. I had to cut off most social media platforms, for instance, I had to minimise WhatsApp groups with friends. Some I did not even participate in the discussions, sometimes I would even withdraw myself from them. With regard to money, I had to cut on certain things, maybe cut my hair instead of going to the hair*

*salon. There was a time during my PhD when I just decided I was using too much money to do my hair, and then I cut it because it was cheaper to maintain short hair. I sacrificed social events such as funerals and weddings. I also like cooking for my family, but I surrendered, and my sister did the cooking because I never had the time to cook. Coming to my kids, I would not bath the kids and prepare their uniforms, for example, so my children are more close to my husband because he would prepare them in the morning for school, prepared their lunch boxes.*

Mpho also indicated that she had to cut back on attending family and social events, which led to some friends and family members thinking she no longer took them seriously. She pointed out:

*I am a runner, and my friends would invite me to races, and I would be saying not this weekend I am busy, I am busy studying, or I have this project to finish, and they were not happy. We are Africans, have a lot of even as Africans that we go to, my family represented me in those events I could feel that my extended family were not happy about that. They felt like I was choosing the PhD over them, or that I did not respect our relationship and all that.*

Keabetswe attested to the points made by Mandisa and Mpho regarding sacrificing family events because she was busy on her thesis. She stated:

*Family commitments such as attending funerals, weddings, and so on, my extended family was not happy with me because most of the events I missed, especially me coming from a different province, when we go there it means you miss out on a number of days if we have to travel there. Maybe there is a wedding on a Saturday, you must leave on a Friday and then come back on a Sunday. Actually, Friday, Saturday and Sunday you are extremely tired, maybe even Monday, you are still recovering from the trip and it meant no work on my thesis. As a result, I had to be very careful which ones to attend and this made people angry.*

The quotations above show these participants risked losing a lot, including family and friends in pursuit of their goal. Participants said more regarding their actions in pursuit of their dream, for instance, how they dealt with challenges experienced concerning supervision, finances and more.

#### 5.4.3 Seeking management intervention

Two participants indicated that they had to seek help from their Dean and HOD regarding their supervisors as their relationship with them was damaged.

Botle stated that seeking intervention from the Dean ruined the relationship with her supervisor. However, she stated that she would not let any relationship cost her the degree and thus ruin her dream. She indicated:

*There was a time when I decided I was going to report this to the Dean because I could see that I was not going to finish on time. With my funding going to stop soon, I had to face the supervisor and stand for myself. I did and it was ugly, but because she had no leg to stand on, she could not fight me.*

Keabetswe also mentioned:

*I had to go to the HOD there to try to make her aware of my situation, so they now allocated me another supervisor. When I went to the HOD I said that look, I cannot work with him, because the HOD wanted us to come together, and I just said you now have my story and I showed you the communication between us via emails, now you deal with it, you can talk to him, but I will not be in that meeting. Then relations have been strained to a point that nothing can be mended.*

The above quotations show that these participants' relationship with their supervisors had become toxic and this had the potential to affect their completion negatively. However, the participants reflected on their lives, what they wanted out for themselves and sought intervention from the HODs to enable them to have supervisors who could have a positive input in their lives as opposed to those that hindered their progress.

#### 5.4.4 Improvising on working space

Although Mandisa had a great relationship with her supervisor, she on the other hand did not have a conducive working space at home, as she just had a baby. She could not work from home even though she was on maternity leave. She then made a plan to leave home around 9 am and go to the nearby library. It was not long when she was denied access to the library as well. She stated:

*I started doing my work because it was a normal delivery so after one month, I was okay. What I used to do was go to the library, because the medical library was nearby, closer to where I used to stay. Suddenly they said they said they do not want anyone from education, only people doing medicine are going to be using this library. I used to charge my laptop until it was fully charged, and I would be working from my car, so I finished my PhD in my car. I would go and park under a tree to avoid being distracted in the house. I would go for three hours continuous, after I bathed the baby in morning, maybe around 8:00am and start at around 9:00am. I would be gone from 9:00am and maybe returned noon. I kept increasing the hours as the baby was growing, so maybe*

*every week I would increase maybe two and half, three hours, four, so when the baby was about three months, I would go away for maybe five full hours continuously, and I would type in the car.*

For Mandisa to start working a month after childbirth, working from the car when she could no longer access the library meant that she was prepared to do anything that she needed to do to complete her doctoral studies. As such, she left her children, even the new-born in the care of her husband, sister and mother. She sacrificed her time with her family, and most importantly, time to bond with the new-born, just so she attained her goal of being a doctor. This demonstrated having resilience as well.

Since Botle had to move houses because she could no longer afford rent, her new place was not conducive for her to work in as she had a young child who would want to press the laptop keys as she worked. However, she was working in her department as a research assistant, so she would stay long hours to work on her thesis. She stated:

*I was appointed as a research assistant at my department and therefore was given an office to work in. As a result, all the resources were available; if I wanted to use the Internet without being disturbed, I would work from my office. The fact that I had the office, I did not have to go work from the library worked to my advantage, I would come at any time to the office, unlike the library where there is closing time, so I would be here even at 12 o'clock and continue with my research.*

Botle also demonstrated a level of dedication and resilience by making use of her office to work on her research after hours. It also showed that she had agency to pursue her goals. These quotes above show women's effort towards acquiring their desired goal, that of being doctoral graduates to pursue lives they valued, such as being researchers, being able to transfer knowledge the best way they could through equipping themselves with skills that are a result of doctoral training, and so on, thereby increasing the representation of African women in doctoral graduates in South Africa.

Below is a table illustrating the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the third sub-question.

Table 5. 4 Themes and sub-themes that emerged from sub-question 3.

<b>Sub-question 3. What conversion factors enabled or constrained African women's success in their doctoral journeys?</b>		
Themes	Conversion as a constraint sub-theme	Conversion as an enabler sub-theme
Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hospitalisation</li> <li>• medication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sought medical help and enabled continuation of the doctoral journey</li> <li>• shared problem with colleague – assisted with medication</li> </ul>
Not respected or recognised by supervisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unavailable supervisor</li> <li>• abandoned by supervisor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assertiveness</li> <li>• confrontational skills</li> </ul>
Unsafe environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• witnessing someone be mugged</li> <li>• being in the foreign country during xenophobic attacks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• limited their movements and any social activities</li> </ul>
Unaffordable accommodation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• worrying about how to pay for rent</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• application of practical reasoning (moved to a smaller flat)</li> </ul>
Different English dialect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• academic writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• worked as a team with family members</li> </ul>
Gender and race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• no woman felt gender and race were a hindrance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• male supervisors support</li> </ul>

The table above shows what themes and sub-themes that emerged from the interviews, promoters and constraints on African women, doctoral graduates' success.

Below are the findings presented according to themes that came through the data while answering the third sub-question.

#### 5.5 Enablers and constraints for women's success in their doctoral journeys

Below are the enablers and constraints for women's success through doctoral studies which are referred to as conversion factors. It is important to note that although the themes below have been what hindered their success; they, however, turned around for their good to ensure success. These conversion factors are either personal, social and environmental and are factors that impact on individual agency – in other words, an individual may make use of, and develop capabilities towards the life one values (Crocker and Robeyns 2010).

##### 5.5.1 Depression

Of the 14 participants, two mentioned that their health was compromised during their doctoral journeys, they suffered from depression. According to Robeyns' (2003), mental well-being is related to mental and psychological activity and shows that women suffer more than men from mental disturbances such as anxiety and depression. Due to family challenges together with the PhD, Tsholo stated that she was depressed. As a result, she was admitted into a psychiatric institution for three weeks. Another issue that she thought could have contributed to her situation, was the fact that she knew that she had a time frame to complete the degree, and failure to do so, meant that she would have to pay back the bursary/scholarship. She was on medication that helped calm her and with less anxiety; she could focus on her work more. She felt like she had reached the end of her life but somehow managed to seek help. Tsholo stated:

*Marriage has its own challenges, as couples, I remember 2016 I was even admitted because I felt like I was going crazy, I could not cope. I was admitted at a psychiatric hospital. My husband and I had many challenges at home and at the same time, you are in this contract, that is for a certain period and when it ends you have to have finished, and you look at how things are going and you do not seem to be getting there and that is distracting, it is painful.*

Being diagnosed with depression could have been a possible constraint to Tsholo's doctoral degree achievement. However, she sought medical assistance. Being admitted to the psychiatric hospital for three weeks gave her time to rest, attend to the illness and learn how to cope with difficult situations.

Botle also suffered depression. However, she claimed she did not *suffer a silent death*. By this Botle explained that that she communicated her state with one of the lecturers within the department and he helped her get medication as she could not afford it herself. Botle also mentioned that she sought psychological help. She stated:

*I got so depressed but, because like I said before, I don't choke in silence, I told one of my colleagues, one professor here that I am so depressed, I am breaking down, he understood depression and he managed to get me medication, every month he was paying for my medication. I also sought professional help; I went to the psychologist that is available here for students.*

Botle also mentioned that although she was married, she was only married on paper because she did not receive any love from her husband. However, his absence, made her pursue her doctoral education without any disturbances from him. She mentioned:

*I have never been happy as a married woman; I cannot even describe to you what marriage feels like because I have always been alone. Even though he was on the picture, so he still does not support me financially, I have to look after my son and myself, and it costs money to do those things. At the same time, him being absent while present, worked to my advantage because I have a feeling I would not have finished because he was going to want me to focus on him, but due to him neglecting me I managed to complete and fulfil my dream.*

Although all participants mentioned how stressful their doctoral journeys were, only these two indicated that they suffered from depression. However, they sought medical attention and that assisted them in recovering and eventually managed to complete their studies.

Despite depression being a negative conversion for both participants, the fact that Tsholo was institutionalised and Botle reached out to her professor as she stated she could not *choke in silence*, turned out to be a positive conversion factor in that they both received the treatment and care that they needed. This, as a result, made them both get back into their doctoral journeys, as such this choice not only worked for their benefit as they attained the degree but to the country's goal of increasing the number of African women graduates as they finally graduated from the doctoral programme.

#### 5.5.2 Not respected or recognised by supervisor

Botle and Keabetswe on the other hand did not feel respected, recognised and treated with dignity by their supervisors. For instance, Keabetswe mentioned that the supervisor was never available to meet her in person even though they lived in the same city. She further mentioned that the supervisor was a bully. She stated:

*My supervisor had retired for a long time, he sort of was the only who could supervise me in African Languages, and the university still has to work with him so that he can supervise the PhDs. I had a problem with him, we could not even meet, I requested the meetings and he just said do as I tell you. Nevertheless, you know the comments*



*that you get, haha, you write something, and he would just comment like “why”, or maybe “what’s this”, then it takes you a good two weeks trying to figure out what he means on that. He was just a bully, and that was not only my experience. Our relationship was sort of strained to a point where I went to the HOD.*

Botle, on the other hand, mentioned that her supervisor abandoned her, left the university and did not care to inform her.

*I had a challenge of being abandoned by a supervisor as she moved to another institution. Fortunately, I had two supervisors, so the co-supervisor remained behind in the university, and while I was busy trying to get a supervisor to help me, I decided I was going to report this to the Dean because I could see that I was not going to finish on time and the funding was going to stop. I had to face the supervisor and stand for myself, I did, and it was ugly.*

Dineo stated that she was abandoned by her supervisor as well, because he had left to work in another institution. The supervisor did not say anything, and she only found out after three months that he was gone. She stated that a new supervisor was allocated to her but told her she was on sick leave and could not attend to her work upon allocation. Later on, the supervisor told her they would start working together after Christmas, as she had to go off on a holiday.

These three women felt they were not treated fairly, with dignity and respect because they hoped their supervisors were supposed to tell them they were leaving the institution, instead of hearing about it after some time. Since their supervisors abandoned them, the allocation of new supervisors took a while, and this delayed the completion of their doctoral studies. Contrary to the cultural expectations where women are expected to be passive and nurture the family, which enforce women’s lack of confidence, assertiveness, clear communication and confident management of power relationships (Carter, Blumenstein and Cook, 2013); these women demonstrated the ability to seek help, despite the damage this would do to their relationships with their supervisors. As a result, with the help that they received, they were successful in the end, graduated from their doctoral studies and acquired the qualification.

### 5.5.3 Unsafe environment

According to Robeyns (2003), bodily integrity and safety are important states of being and this capability is affected when people experience all sorts of personal violence, for instance, attacks in the street, domestic violence, rape and sexual assault. As Robeyns (2003,78) states, this capability has a gender dimension as studies show that women are the most affected and “bear a greater incidence of and more severe sexual violence than men, while men experience more physical violence of other kinds”.

One issue discussed mostly by participants was their safety or lack thereof during this journey. Even though safety was not much spoken of by South African nationals, most graduates who were from outside South Africa mentioned safety as a concern.

Even though Kari had mentioned that one of her colleagues, who also was an international student, almost lost his life from an injury while he was being robbed, Kari indicated that, prior to this, she had never heard of any cases of robbery within her circle of friends. However, one day she almost was mugged on her way to her residence, which was off-campus. She stated:

*My personal experience: I was not mugged but I was close to being mugged. The person (male) had a broken bottle, but I was quick to run and this was broad daylight, not in the evening.*

Mandisa, upon arrival in South Africa, felt terrified because the xenophobic attacks in this country that she had seen on the news. She stated that her parents were not pleased to hear she was coming to study in South Africa but were softened by one couple, who came from her home country and were already studying at the same university. She said:

*The whole experience, for me the first time I was coming everybody was worried saying SA was a dangerous place, they didn't know if maybe at the airport I would be attacked, so my mother and father were a bit worried and they actually thought I should have selected Botswana or Namibia, or even Lesotho, why go to SA?*

Safety is one important factor in enabling individuals to pursue the lives they want. As a result, lack thereof may hinder these women's movements; thereby hinder their freedom. However, finding ways to stay safe by limiting walking contributed to their successful completion as lives were preserved and could continue working until they completed their research.

#### 5.5.4 Unaffordable accommodation

Although all participants mentioned they lived in safe and secure places, it is important to note that three of the participants either lived at a university residence or rented a place to stay when the rest owned their own places. However, the fact that they were on scholarships or bursaries that was renewable only if they had met the requirements as stipulated in their contracts, for instance, an annual submission of a good progress report from their supervisors to their sponsors, negatively affected their concentration on their research because they were always uncertain whether their scholarships or bursaries would be renewed the following year. It was even more stressful to know that the bursary was only granted for three years, and all of them went into the fourth year of their study. This meant by the final year, they did not have bursary or scholarship, and they struggled to pay for their accommodation and other living expenses. Robeyns (2003) defines shelter and environment as the decision, power and

freedom people have in the environment more than the environment itself. This freedom and power to act were limited to these three women, because they were always wondering how they were going to settle rent each month, or how they will eventually afford to settle the piling up of rent, for those who stayed at university residences as they had until the end of the year to settle their debt. For Botle, she was forced to move into a one-roomed apartment with her son and his nanny, because she could no longer afford a bigger apartment. This then means that her work progress when she arrived in the evening was not a lot, as she had a young toddler who would want to type on the laptop once she opened it to start working. She stated:

*There was a time when my scholarship stopped, and I depended on this research assistant post and it was not enough to cover our needs. I had to move out of a flat that I rented and go stay in one room. The room was not comfortable, because we were in one room, my son, his nanny, and myself, so even when I was working on my thesis I would sit on the bed, while my son was moving the computer here, wanting to write while I am writing.*

Kari financed her studies in her first year but applied for bursary in the second year. She received the bursary. However, she received funding for two years, and because she did not complete in three years, she had to negotiate and motivate her application for the fourth year as she received funding for only two years instead of three. This, she claimed was the toughest year as the bursary was only approved in September. She stayed at the university residence, she had to worry about how she was going to pay her rent due to the delay in scholarship renewal. This put a strain on her, thus, made it challenging to concentrate fully on her work. She emphasised that no one should enrol for doctoral studies without having secured a bursary as it makes the journey even harder. She said:

*In my fourth year, the funder said they are allocating no funding for my fourth year although they had only funded me for two years and not three. I kept going to their office and writing emails and one of the arguments I put forth was that in the first year I did not get any bursary. So technically, it was my money because they should fund me for three years. I really thought people need to be kind enough to help me finish this project. I told them about the progress I made to that point and that I thought I deserve the money. Eventually sometime in September when I was ready to submit I did not even know how I was going to pay the rent, but you know with the university they do not usually kick you out, but I was stressing about how I was going to pay the rent for that year.*

Mandisa stayed at her home and did not have rental issues, however, she had no working space. She had to work from the car to avoid distractions from the house and this was not a

conducive working space because as she mentioned, it was too hot and the car did not have enough room for her to work comfortably. She added:

*For me, the car was my library, but it was still a challenge, sometimes it would be so hot, I would open the windows and then I would not have like space, legroom to stretch my legs. I would type on my laptop, in the car, when the battery is about to go low, I would go to a place that I found where I could go charge the laptop. I had no Internet, so when I wanted articles then I would, of course, do hotspot from my phone and google.*

The above quotations indicate that having shelter and environment is one of the most important factors when studying. However, these women did not have the luxury of having secure and conducive shelter for their doctoral pursuit. As such, their doctoral experience was affected by not having a secure and conducive environment to work. Despite this, participants demonstrated the ability to look at their challenges critically and come up with solutions, moving from a bigger apartment to one room, persistently applying for funding and following up with motivation for funding in the fourth year. In the end, she received the funding and managed to complete her thesis, thereby increasing the number of African women, doctoral graduates in the university and the country.

#### 5.5.5 Different English dialect

A significant number of participants mentioned that language was their main hindrance. For some, this was because of their accent that people felt they were discriminated against; for example, during data collection one participant struggled to secure teachers to partake in her study because when they realised that she was a foreigner due they were no longer interested in participating. Data collection, as a result, became a problem for other participants because they did not understand the native languages and it became a huge challenge to finally find participants for their studies who were willing to speak English. For others, the fact that English was not their first language, for instance, it was the fourth language of one participant made academic writing a challenge thus it became difficult to write up their work. Furthermore, coming from different countries, and having studied in a different English dialect, made it difficult for these graduates to write well, thus they battled writing up their thesis. Pablo related:

*I do not understand any native languages, any South African language. I was supposed to collect my data at a certain place, but my supervisor changed and suggested I go somewhere else. So, I tried to go to a remote town and every school I went to, the moment I greet them and when I start speaking English, the following visit they would tell me sorry, we cannot continue with you. It was very frustrating because I was not located in this place; I come all the way from the city to this remote place.*

Tebogo specifically mentioned that she studied in her mother tongue for her elementary schooling, therefore she has not been strong in the use of English and this contributed to her lack of confidence in her academic ability. She pointed:

*What they need to keep in mind is that we are not different from other racial groups; the only difference with us is that we do not have the language. English to me is my third if not the fourth language, that is one of my challenges, and I forgot to mention. Because as I say, I grew up, I studied in Sotho, I did not have a good English, but the main thing that we must always keep in mind is that we are not different, we might differ based on the support that we had when we grew up. I had a barrier in expressing myself, to put my thoughts down, that is the reason one of my examiners said I cannot get your voice, you just do not know how to express yourself, yes, how to put the proper words, how to write, yes English was a problem, I had to go an extra mile.*

Dineo also had a challenge in writing with clarity for the reader to make sense. She mentioned:

*I had a problem with my English, in my home country we learn Cambridge English, in South Africa, it is not so. I had to ask children to explain this to me when I speak, I say how does it sound, the same thing I am doing with my husband now. When I write, they do not understand my point, my supervisor keeps saying it is because you are not English speaking, that I speak English in my native language. Nevertheless, she as much as white person, she is Afrikaans, so she translates English into Afrikaans. Now I am a black taught by English Britain and South Africa has a mix of English, Afrikaans, German, and it has local languages, so some people translate English into their local language and in doing that they begin to feel, like getting it right.*

The quotes above indicate that there was a language problem for a few participants. Two were international students and even though English was their medium of instruction, they battled with expressing themselves in writing as the supervisors indicated that they were not clear. This was probably because different regions have different dialects and adapting to the South African way of writing English took a while. One participant, who was South African, indicated that she was taught in her mother tongue for the most part of her growing up. With the many South African official languages, English was not even her second or third language.

#### 5.5.6 Gender and race

Given the South African history, in particular, gender and race are still sensitive aspects that influence people's interaction. However, it is evident through the data that none of the women felt race influenced their relationship with their supervisors. For students, whose supervisors were females, except for one participant; they indicated that their relationships were in no way influenced by gender or the race. For those who were supervised by males, and specifically

white males, participants indicated that their supervisors were approachable and provided the assistance they needed. One, in particular, indicated that she felt the supervisor assisted more because he wanted her to finish and continue with her life. Kari narrated:

*I was transferred to the other supervisor who was male and very conservative, but the good thing with him is, he is very nice with women, so I think that also that helped me. The way I see it was that when you are a woman, he wanted you to finish and go start your life or go back to where you came from, but he was also a very good person.*

Keabetswe on the other, although she never experienced any discrimination, she thought she had to do her best to succeed because she received a grant from the university as a new employee. She felt she needed to prove to management and herself that she was worthy of the grant. This is because of the stereotypes African people find themselves prone to, being judged as lazy, incompetent scholars. She stated:

*I also thought, to be honest, the reality that I am black, these people [whites] are not going to trust us, they will say you know these black people, they never achieve anything; do not ever invest your money.*

The above narratives, especially Keabetswe's statement of the possibility of being looked at as incompetent should she not complete, due to gender and race. However, she stated that she felt she was accountable to someone and owed it to herself and other Africans to work hard to eliminate any cultural stereotypes that presented Africans as lazy and not having the ability to finish what they started. Gender and race did not affect participants' doctoral journeys negatively, rather, in the case of Keabetswe, being African and female motivated her to disprove the stereotypes that Africans are lazy.

## Conclusion

This chapter started with the presentation of the participants' biographies to provide the reader with a picture of African women, doctoral graduates who participated in the study. These women were from diverse backgrounds, namely, different ethnicities, marital statuses and some were international students while others were South African nationals, to cite a few. Findings regarding questions formulated out of the four research questions were presented and interrogated with the capabilities approach framework. Following this presentation is the discussion and analysis in Chapter 6. It is important to mention that some of the themes presented interlink or overlap; as such may be seen as capabilities, functionings and conversion factors. As a result, careful thought was made in order to choose which research question they suited better.



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## Chapter 6: Discussion of the findings

Chapter 5 presented participants' experiences and insights in accessing, participating in, and progressing through doctoral education. In this chapter, I revisit these experiences to explore the opportunities and freedoms African women had in and through higher education; specifically, within doctoral studies, and the extent to which they used, or were able to use, these opportunities to exercise their agency and achieve their well-being. I will first use Sen's (1992) concepts of well-being and agency to examine participants' opportunities and choices across their doctoral trajectory to highlight various conversion factors that constrained or enhanced their exercise of agency, as well as achievement of their well-being. Following this will be the identification of capabilities these women valued and how these capabilities and/or functionings were developed or not developed in and through their doctoral studies. This will be presented through a table that demonstrates the themes and subthemes that came up from the data, followed by an elaboration on each theme and sub-theme that will be supported with evidence (from literature and theory). The objective of the chapter is two-fold. First, to present an understanding of factors that contributed to their success and highlight those that need to be addressed so that African women can have and are able to use educational opportunities and freedoms to achieve their valued educational and life outcomes. Second, the chapter aims to identify a provisional and dynamic set of capabilities that are essential for African women, doctoral graduates and thus provide a basis for assessing the extent to which these capabilities are being fostered or constrained.

As indicated above, I commence by revisiting the concepts of well-being and agency freedoms and achievement in the context of higher education, which form a framework of theorising in this chapter.

### 6.1 Educational well-being and agency freedoms and achievements

As I discussed in Chapter 3, the capabilities approach ethically advocates for people's individual capabilities to be expanded to achieve well-being and exercise agency. Sen (1992) indicated four spaces within which we can evaluate well-being and agency: *well-being freedom*, *well-being achievement*, *agency freedom* and *agency achievement*. Mapping these in the context of higher education, specifically African women's doctoral education, *well-being freedom* would refer to the real opportunities and freedoms women students have to accomplish what they value in and through higher education.

*Well-being achievements* would be the realisation of outcomes that are considered valuable to these women, such as being able to access doctoral education, to actively and effectively participate in learning processes and equally achieve the doctoral degree; thus use and enjoy the benefits associated with doctoral education. On the other hand, *agency freedom* is the

choice African women, doctoral graduates have, that is, the opportunities (for instance, access to laboratories, supervision and financial support) individual graduates have in order to exercise their abilities to set, choose and pursue their goals, be it educational or otherwise; that are important for the lives they desire. Lastly, *agency achievements* are successfully pursued and realised educational and other goals and aspirations. Agency achievements in education normally intersect and overlap with well-being achievements since they contribute to students' overall well-being. Although it is not easy to tease them out, it is important to emphasise that students' freedoms (both agency and well-being) to achieve depend on various conversion factors that intersect to shape and impact the capability sets of different students and influence the choices they make from any given set of educational opportunities. The question below is formulated from the first research question that addresses the strategies and capabilities that were available to them to actualise their dream of obtaining their doctoral degrees.

## 6.2 Opportunities for success in higher education

This section addresses the first research question that focuses on the well-being freedoms (capabilities) and opportunities that African women, doctoral graduates said they had available to enable their successful completion of their doctoral studies. Well-being as explained by Sen (1992: 36) is seen in terms of the quality of the person's being. Sen further explains that there is a connection between well-being and capabilities because achieved well-being or well-being achievements depend on the capability to function (p. 41). Below are the valued capabilities or opportunities that influenced African women graduates' realisation of their goals/beings or doings. However, it is important to note that in this discussion, capabilities, functionings and conversion factors are mostly interlinked and at times overlap. As such, I will put sub-themes under the most relevant themes and will continue making the link to avoid confusing the reader.

### 6.2.1 Choice of university

Many reasons influence doctoral students' choices of university. According to Wiegnerova (2016), there are two factors; macrosocial and microsocial factors that motivate a doctoral student to pursue doctoral education. Macrosocial refers to factors to do with employment while microsocial factors are intrinsic; of one's own conviction. Walker (2006: 166) argues that "resources, (or we might say distribution) are only part of the story, what matters is the opportunities each person has to convert their bundle of resources into valued, rationally chosen doings and beings." For some participants, the choice of university is a capability while to others it is a conversion factor. What differentiates this is their ability to choose which university to enrol at, and the reasons for finding themselves having to settle for it. Furthermore, exercising agency to choose which university better suits the needs of each

woman, resonates with the capabilities approach as arriving at that decision of which university to go to, means that these women researched and found information that facilitated the choice. Some checked the research output and ranking of the institution compared to other universities, the availability of programmes that met their content need, the institution having an advanced infrastructure to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the distance from their country of origin should they need to go home as they had families were headed by men in their absence, namely, the day-to-day operations within a household. They also decided at which university to enrol looking at the financial affordability. All these factors that influenced their choice demonstrated critical thinking.

Reasons for choosing University X are discussed below:

#### 6.2.2 Being a reputable and high ranking university

Doctoral students' choice of university is influenced by many factors. These could be described as the pull and push factors that motivate students to choose an international or local institution of their preference. Specifically, for these participants, South Africa being referred to as PhD hub in Africa (Sheppard and Bailey, 2015), international students chose to study here as the universities in South Africa have better resources and infrastructure compared to universities in their home countries. For those who are South African citizens, four of them were employed as lecturers at the university, and with the university's good academic standard, they did not find any reason to enrol at a different university as the institution covered their tuition fee. This affirms the national development plan of the country where the country's target is to increase academic staff with PhDs (NDP, 2012).

#### 6.2.3 Offering a relevant course

Some participants had studied for all their degrees or studied for their master's degrees at University X and found no reason to enrol at a different university because any course they wanted to pursue at doctoral level was offered there. Some participants indicated that University X offered the relevant course they wanted to enrol in. They mentioned that when compared to other institutions, University X captured the exact content they wanted, whereas elements were missing in the content of their interested field at other universities. Choosing the relevant course contributed to African women, doctoral graduates' success because as Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) state, academic mismatch increases students' dropout rate.

#### 6.2.4 Having good infrastructure and resources

All participants attested to the availability of resources and infrastructure to support their doctoral journeys. This, however, is not the case for most institutions in Africa (Molla and Cuthbert, 2016). One participant's story, however, depicts that there was lack of supervisory

capacity within the university, in that she was supervised by a retired scholar with whom she parted ways without having met in person despite the many times she proposed a meeting. Although these women were pleased with the resources available to them, broadly speaking, a non-available supervisor indicates the opposite. Although this is one case (Keabetswe) out of ten, it is one of the most crucial factors because supervision is highly necessary for doctoral education. The fact that a retired scholar supervised this African woman supports the fact that there is a lack of supervisory capacity in South Africa (Herman, 2011a), also, Hope's first supervisor informed her that she could no longer continue supervising her as she did not with the direction Hope wanted to go. Hope stated: *when I started my PhD, I was her first PhD student, she had never supervised before, she had never co-supervised for PhD, and the topic was something that she wasn't familiar with it at all, so, somewhere along the line she was said, hey you know I'm finding it difficult to supervise you.*

#### 6.2.5 Being closer to home

All participants exercised their freedom to choose the university they saw best to study at. Two participants chose University X because, amongst other reasons, it was closer to home. As Itumeleng mentioned, she had a daughter and a husband back in her home country; she needed to afford to see them whenever she could. To make matters worse for her, unlike Mandisa who had a supportive husband who took it upon himself to take care of the children, Itumeleng's husband suffered a stroke earlier in the years and this meant Itumeleng had to be home frequently to not burden the already recovering husband. Itumeleng states that she could have applied to study at a South African province much farther from her home country since one university had the same programme as the one offered at University X and was still a highly ranked university, but the fact that it was farther from home made her opt for University X. This further demonstrates her ability to reflect on her life and make the best decisions for her life and her family's well-being – which further shows that she applied practical reasoning.

Lerato on the other hand, home for her was in the city where the university was located, and as stated, she had never been away from home. For her, it was going to be costly financially and emotionally to enrol at another university outside her hometown. This was the second major reason why she decided to study at University X, after the reason that the university ranked high when comparing the standard of education with other universities.

#### 6.2.6 Paying for their tuition fee as staff

Firstly, the majority of the women had studied at University X, either from the junior degree or had obtained their master's degrees and did not find the need to leave, as they believed it was amongst the best, and provided their academic needs.

The participants demonstrated the freedom of choice as they had an opportunity to search for a university of choice, bearing in mind what they needed from it. Kari took into consideration that because she did not have any bursary, she was searching for the university that she could afford and if it offered the exact course that she wanted. She saved money to pay for her tuition and accommodation in the first year of her doctoral studies and had her parents and siblings assisted her while she worked on securing a bursary for her second year. This demonstrates that she applied practical reasoning when applying for admission. Mandisa on the other hand did not leave her work in her home country to study full-time. She needed her job to help finance her studies and depended on her husband for financial support. She indicated that they did everything they could to ensure that she did not dropout due to finances, even if it meant borrowing money from her parents.

Some African women, doctoral graduates demonstrated the capability of practical reason when choosing which university to apply for in pursuit of doctoral studies. From a capability perspective, practical reason is defined as “being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life” (Nussbaum 2003: 41-42). Although this capability was demonstrated by the participants even prior to embarking on the doctoral journey, coming up with ways to finance their studies, for instance, was further developed on this journey. They could make decisions regarding their lives and their research, for instance, line of research.

Walker (2006: 128) elaborated the definition of practical reason as

being able to make well-reasoned, informed, critical, independent, intellectually acute, socially responsible, and reflective choices. Being able to construct a personal life project in an uncertain world. Having good judgment.

Some African women, doctoral graduates’ decision regarding the choice of the university was influenced by the ranking of the university, affordability (tuition fees, accommodation) as some did not have bursaries or scholarships to finance their studies; as well as the distance between the institutions and their home countries as they had to go home regularly to check up on their families.

For this study, having the freedom to choose which university one goes to has been one of the factors that enabled success for these African women. This is because each participant, except for one whose work directed her to University X, all participants felt they made the right choice; according to them, that was already a win for them. Although not having a bursary could have been a hindrance to completing their studies, participants made arrangements that

ensured they kept going, despite the hardships. This means that will power or self-motivation is one of the keys to doctoral completion.

#### 6.2.7 Respect, dignity and recognition

According to Walker (2006: 128), respect, dignity and recognition means:

being able to have respect for oneself and for and from others, being treated with dignity, not being diminished or devalued because of one's gender, social class, religion or race, valuing other languages, other religions and spiritual practices and human diversity. Being able to show empathy, compassion, fairness and generosity, listening to and considering other person's points of view in dialogue and debate. Being able to act inclusively and being able to respond to human need. Having competence in intercultural communication.

All participants brought up the issue of being respected, being treated with dignity and recognition as of great importance. Keabetswe mentioned that she had to work hard so as not to advance the stereotype that Africans are generally lazy people who cannot amount to anything despite the opportunities availed to them, because that would make her be disrespected by whites. This resonates with Nkambule (2012) when she pointed out that being from a disadvantaged background, they would be disrespected and undermined, thus had to work twice as hard to prove she was capable of succeeding.

#### 6.2.8 Capability for voice

According to Bonvin and Farvaque (2010:127), the capability for voice is "the ability to express one's opinions and thoughts and to make them count in the course of public discussion". Participants in my study mentioned that they had a platform to communicate their views. Some mentioned that their supervisors encouraged this by being approachable, and by asking them questions that made them think at a deeper level. The above quotation indicate that some participants were free to engage in discussions with their supervisors and not just accept everything the supervisors said. They also show that because of having a voice, participants could exercise agency whenever needed. For instance, Tsholo stated that she could pick up a phone and remind her supervisors she had sent through her work; that meant she had the courage to demand feedback. This further explains that she and her supervisors had a supervisor-student relationship in which both parties worked together with the aim to achieve and succeed in her doctoral studies. This resonates with Loots and Walker (2015) whose observation is that the capability of voice is important in education, the reason being that it helps in the expansion of other capabilities, such as critical thinking and confidence. The ability to express one's opinions builds on the capability of being respected, treated with dignity and recognition by their supervisors. This further resonates with studies conducted by Johnson-



Bailey et al. (2008) and Ts'ephe (2014). The majority of participants attributed their academic progress or completion of their doctoral studies, to supervisors who showed support beyond academic aspects; that is having a personal relationship with their supervisors who cared about their personal life. Magano (2011) also alludes to the importance of good supervision, hence highlighted the crucial role played by supervisors when not restricted to only being mentors in their students' academic work, but also caring about them as human beings. Showing care motivates students to feel they need to push through even in difficult times.

However, two of the African women, doctoral graduates mentioned that their supervisors treated them badly. Not having support from the supervisor is a negative conversion factor, which could have hindered these women's success. However, the women reached out to the HOD and Dean of the faculty for a solution to the problem of bad supervision. The findings in a study conducted by West and Gokalp (2011, 12), however, states that although having positive supervisor-student relationship contributes positively to students' throughput rates, supervisors "do not have time to play all roles at the same time which can serve as an impediment to completing doctoral degree for students".

Some African women, doctoral graduates posited that the attainment of a doctoral degree earned them respect within their families, communities as well as their workplace. This is one of the findings that also emerged in the study conducted by Ts'ephe (2014), where participants got a promotion or even recognition and respect at their workplace. Ongera (2016:161) mentions that (higher) education grants women a possibility of being respected as it shifts cultural constraints and inequalities in "women's lives such as lack of voice, non-recognition and inactive participation in public life". In addition, this is a capability similar to the one in Walker's (2006: 128-129) ideal-theoretical list for HE capabilities, which states that one should not be "devalued because of one's gender, race, and social class".

#### 6.2.9 Confidence

As many scholars (Robeyns, 2006; Sen, 1999; Loots and Walker, 2015) indicate that education is a capability that when acquired expands other capabilities, participants indicated that doctoral education improved and increased their confidence level. Those who were lecturers became more confident in their work, knowing they are well equipped to transfer education to the students. Those who never felt they had confidence in themselves, gained confidence through and after their doctoral journey.

#### 6.2.10 Educational resilience

Walker (2006: 128) defines educational resilience as being



...able to navigate study, work and life. Able to negotiate risk, to persevere academically, to be responsive to educational opportunities and adaptive to constraints. Self-reliant. Having aspirations and hopes for a good future.

All participants indicated that not having financial security or guarantee for the next year hindered their progress, studying under the financial uncertainties was strenuous for them. Herman (2011a) purports that the three-year duration NRF funding poses problems for PhD students because it is often insufficient, and students sometimes seek employment and drop out from the programmes. Women who were specifically international, full-time students embarked on the journey without any secured financial support and claimed this added more pressure on the already difficult situation of having to adapt to being in a foreign country. Contrary to this Yang, Volet, and Mansfield (2017) pointed out that tuition-paying international students, who were mature adults with families, “declared that the availability of a scholarship was a key influential factor in their final choice of destination” (p10) as securing income that would cover for their expensive tuition fees and living expenses.

#### 6.2.11 Self-efficacy

Four participants believed in their academic capabilities despite the challenges they encountered during their doctoral journey; they strongly believed they do not start anything and not finish. Crumb, Haskins, Dean and Harris (2020) conducted a study demonstrating women’s efficacy and resilience motivated their persistence through doctoral programmes.

The discussed opportunities and freedoms that were available for participants demonstrated that both the university and participants teamed up to contribute positively to doctoral education as the university made resources available for women. They, on the other hand, contributed to doctoral education and gender studies as they completed their studies, specifically contributed to gender studies in that the number of females increased due to their completion considering that South African universities continue to struggle with gender and racial environments, particularly concerning the experiences of women and non-white students and staff (Bhana 2014). This challenge is a consequence of women postponing their doctoral enrolment because they want to help their husbands achieve their ambitions and watch children develop before pursuing their own career goals (Prozesky 2008). Even in this study, women stated that they had to be careful about when to enrol, perpetuating the gender role stereotypes, even though they finally attained their degrees.

The next section focuses on what African women, doctoral graduates hoped to achieve during and after obtaining their doctoral degrees.

### 6.3 Achievements women doctoral graduates hope for after completion of their doctoral studies

Higher education equips women and men as critical and challenging thinkers, as intelligent and active participants in learning, which engages imaginations and emotions, enhances their capability (Walker, 2006: 113-114). The question above is formulated from the second research question that addresses the well-being achievements; these are the functionings below that the participants wanted to achieve as a result of obtaining their doctoral degree.

#### 6.3.1 Being called a Doctor - Dr Title

As explained in Chapter 3, education plays three roles; it plays an intrinsic, instrumental personal economic role and can be collective- for the benefit of other people, as well as a non-economic instrumental role (where education opens one's mind according to Robeyns, 2006b). Although some participants indicated that they pursued doctoral education because they wanted to hold the title of doctor, it was clear from a further talk in the interviews that they also wanted to enjoy the other two values of education. Although it could have been that they wanted to pursue doctoral education for the sake of knowledge in itself; that knowledge was to be used to improve on their work, namely, research work and lecturing to cite a few. Litalien and Guay (2015) confirm this by stating that doctoral education yields many rewards for both the individual who earned (as the individual stands to gain greater professional and personal mobility i.e. better income) it as well as the society (contributing to knowledge and dissemination thereof).

The functioning of being called a doctor, is linked with practical reasoning, where women's decision to embark on doctoral studies is an analysis that goes beyond the capital theory explaining the importance of education but also looks at the intrinsic benefits gained from acquiring education. This analysis forms the most important aspect of education, as human well-being cannot only be defined in monetary value.

#### 6.3.2 Escape poverty

Although some participants indicated that, they pursued doctoral education for the attainment of the title, which was not the only reason for this pursuit. Even those that did not mention the title as the goal, there were many other reasons why they embarked on this journey. Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) mention that students' persistent in pursuing doctoral education is because they focus on the monetary incentives and social recognition associated with promotions at work for doctoral graduates. Robeyns points out that the capability of education should focus on more than just credentials and degrees, but must also pay attention to processes, subject choices and career aspirations which produce gender inequalities in schools and universities (Robeyns, 2003a: 80). This is demonstrated where participants not only enrolled for doctoral education for the sake of attaining the degree but also aspired to

accomplish their goals that went beyond the actual degree, making the degree to be a means to an end and not an end in itself. CA differs from traditional theories which looked or evaluated doctoral education in general, and do not focus on the individual person. For CA obtaining a doctoral degree is not an end, but the means to an end, as the end is a person living the life that they have reason to value, an individual being and doing what matters to them (Alkire, 2005).

How African women doctoral graduates imagined their lives would change as a result of obtaining their doctoral degree is discussed below:

#### 6.3.3 Being educated and knowledgeable

Some women mentioned that their reason to embark on a doctoral journey was not only to have the 'Doctor' title or an entry into academia but also to be able to get the skills and knowledge to improve their research work. Being educated and acquiring knowledge is then an expansion of other capabilities as it is a fertile capability fosters the development of other capabilities that are important for individual and social well-being (Robeyns, 2006; Sen, 1999). This intention resonates with Holley and Gardner's point (2012) when they state that doctoral education is not only recognised as an entry qualification into the academic career but is also an important pathway to research and innovation (Nerad, 2011a) and other professional careers (Holley and Gardner 2012). In addition, Ts'ephe (2014) indicated that findings for her study stated that participants saw enrolling for doctoral studies as an opportunity to develop their research skills, for instance, Botle mentioned that the journey taught her that it was wrong to generalise, as well as not make claims that are not supported by evidence. Functionings, as defined as the doings and beings one has reason to value; although these women obtained their doctoral degrees, they are empowered to contribute to the development of their communities, for instance; contribute to their institutions of employment. They gained the knowledge and skills to participate in conferences, thereby contributing to research for new knowledge. Although knowledge is for personal growth, it also contributes to the educated citizenry as well as the creation of wealth (Walker, 2006). "Women's education, black people's education, mature students' education, all should arguably enhance agency through knowledge and skills" (Walker, 2006: 113).

#### 6.3.4 Be an inspiration to others

Some participants indicated that their doctoral education pursuit was because they wanted to inspire other people, especially their family members. They wanted them to see that goals can be achieved. They wanted to set a standard for their children or siblings. This motivates, as the result is known as the desired functioning within the capabilities approach. Such desire requires an individual to demonstrate tributes of self-determination that is seen through agency (Keogh, Garvis, Pendergast and Diamond, 2012). Two participants, on the other hand, drew

inspiration from their siblings who were already doctors. This motivation is supported in Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012) as it relates to their findings in their study which examined persistence factors associated with successful completion of a doctoral degree in the USA.

The section above speaks of the beings and doings that African women, doctoral graduates aspired to achieve after completing their doctoral studies successfully. This is evidence that for them, attaining doctoral education was not the ultimate goal, but aspired better life for themselves that would be a result of attaining doctorates. They wanted to use the degree as a tool to help them live lives they valued, which brought positive change not only in their own lives or families but to their communities.

#### 6.4 African women and agency

Below is a section that demonstrates agency freedoms participants had and the actions they took in pursuit of the actualisation of their goals. According to Sen (1992, 56) agency freedom refers to what the person, as a responsible agent is free to do and achieve in pursuit of the goals or values, he or she considers as important. Below are actions that kept these women afloat:

##### 6.4.1 Self-motivation

All participants attributed their successful completion of doctoral study to having the inner drive to continue with their studies even during the time when they felt they could quit. They indicated that although it is good to have support from the institution, supervisors, colleagues and family, the fact that they desired to attain the qualification contributed to their success. This resilience sustained them unto completion (Nkambule, 2012).

##### 6.4.2 Self-exclusion from social activities/events

Participants undergoing doctoral education indicate that their journeys are the loneliest, times as they feel they are in isolation and this threatens the persistence and academic progression (Shavers, 2010). These feelings of loneliness and isolation were evident in African women, doctoral graduates, although their emphasis was that they had to exclude themselves from family and friends in order to achieve their desired goal (Ts'ephe, 2014). These women demonstrated agency as an essential concept within the capabilities approach. All participants stated that the doctoral journey alienated them from family and friends as they had no time to attend to important social gatherings. Although this decision or choice was to enable them to succeed, it however caused them some emotional pain. They explained that one has to be committed to one's work in order to progress (Ts'ephe, 2014).

#### 6.4.3 Seeking management intervention

In cases where supervisors were unavailable, participants mentioned that they had to act towards finding ways to complete. They went to the HODs or Dean to report what their experiences with their supervisors were, and this demonstrated assertiveness and confidence in that they did not settle and hoped their problems will go away, but rather demonstrated ability to seek help and not wait and risk failing their doctoral studies.

#### 6.4.4 Improvising on working space.

Majority participants demonstrated the ability to create a working space for them to get the work done. For instance, Mandisa worked in her car under a tree away from home because she could not get any work done from her home due to a new-born baby. Keabetswe also had to work during her family's holiday trip during the night after spending time with her daughters. Dineo, on the other hand, had to ignore her duties in her home as a mother and a wife, and at times slept over at the library or at someone's place to be able to finish her work. At times, her husband would complain saying that he married her to cook for them and yet their daughter now prepares his food. Dineo mentioned that at that time she had to look at the husband and not reply, but rather pushed through the tough days. These are clearly not the favourable circumstances for women to work through, but each of them always went back to self-motivation, knowing the reasons why they embarked on this journey. At this point, participants were at the last stages of their research; these women had adjusted to academic and social communities within their departments and saw how their study related to their career goals (Tinto, 1993), thus felt they were almost done with their doctoral journeys.

As much as the participants had the inner drive to sustain them through their doctoral journeys, they also did their part to bring their desired dream to realisation. Therefore, they sometimes had to 'neglect' gender-related duties expected of them, such as cooking for their families, looking after children, attending social events like funerals, weddings and so on. To some of their relatives, their absence was mistaken for lack of caring for their families, as they were expected to assist in the preparations for such ceremonies as African women in demonstration of Ubuntu. This then put a strain to some relationships, and some never recovered even after they completed their studies.

The next section focuses on what promoted or hindered African women, doctoral graduates' success during their doctoral trajectories.

#### 6.5 Promoters and constraints to African women's success

Crocker and Robeyns (2010) describe conversion factors as factors that promote or hinder the conversion of opportunities into achieving or not achieving the desired outcome.

#### 6.5.1 Institutional support

All participants emphasised that the university provided and fostered their completion through the availability of resources such as the well-equipped library, with efficient staff to assist either in person or remotely. They indicated that there were enough computers even if one did not personally own a laptop; they were able to work in a conducive environment. They also mentioned that they had bursaries, for those who did. This resonates with findings of Herman (2011b) and West and Gokalp (2011) on doctoral education support in South Africa and the United States; that governments worldwide are increasing funding in order to support scientific academic research. Research training sessions were also prepared and informative to help them with their research. Although some indicated that they did not have good supervision, there was nothing bad from the university's side to hinder their progress. For those who had good relationships with supervisors, the majority stated that the gender of their supervisors was not the determining factor for such good relationships. Although the literature suggests that the same gender relationships work better (Ts'ephe, 2014, Ramohai, 2013). This was not substantiated in this study; participants whose supervisors were male still spoke highly of them, as major contributors to their success. It was evident that having personal relationships with their supervisors implied that supervisors cared about their personal lives and this motivated them to complete their studies. For Hope, she felt that she had a good supervisor who believed in her resulted and contributed to her confidence in herself, in what she can achieve.

It is important to note that facilitating writing retreats for students to enable timely completion of doctoral studies (West and Gokalp, 2011), not of the participants mentioned strategy to be available for them within the institution.

#### 6.5.2 Shelter and environment

Broton, Frank and Goldrick-Rab (2014, 4) state that

Maslow (1943) argued that basic physiological requirements including nutrition, warmth, and safety were prerequisites for self-actualization behaviours such as those required for success in higher education. He theorized that individuals would only be motivated to tackle higher-order goals once their basic needs (or "deficiency needs") were met.

Although Robeyns (2003) states that having a shelter and enjoying a safe and pleasant environment is good for both mental and physical health, two African women graduates did not afford this basic need at times. For example, Botle had to move out of an apartment into one room due to financial challenges, where she had to share the space with her son and his nanny. The fact that she desired to escape poverty, she worked as a research assistant within



her department to secure money to help with payment of rent and communicated her struggles with her colleagues. This enabled them to assist any way they could, including buying her groceries.

#### 6.5.3 Supportive colleagues/academic support

Research has shown that as much as PhD students have scholarly needs related to research productivity, they also have psychosocial needs which are related to their professional development (West and Gokalp, 2011). During the interviews, some participants mentioned how important it is to have supportive colleagues because it somehow eased the burden of them being loners in their doctoral journeys. Although all of the participants spoke highly of the research support sessions that the university provided, Mandisa, for example, mentioned that the session also facilitated friendships where they as students, could talk about their research with others, thereby know that they are not the only ones struggling. This provided support for her. West and Gokalp (2011) state that departmental climate and peer support influence completion rates of doctoral students. On the contrary, Pablo did not make time to make any friends because she felt she would be wasting her already insufficient time as she had to be a mother and a wife after 4 pm until 9 am. Botle on the other hand stated that she received support from the department, whereby the HOD bought her groceries when she could not afford to herself, and the other colleague bought medication for depression.

#### 6.5.4 Mental well-being

All participants indicated that their journey was full of challenges, from finances to academic writing and family. These experiences put pressure on them. For instance, the depression that some of the women faced due to bad supervision, family problems, having to worry about finances, and sometimes they would be able to pay for their fees but not cover their daily living expenses (Wilson-Strydom, 2012), became constraints through which these women found enablers to success. However, this would mean some participants would find part-time jobs to earn extra income and this then affected their academic work thus stand a chance to underperform or delay their completion.

#### 6.5.5 Respect, dignity and recognition

From the study, although some participants felt they were not respected by their supervisors; regarding the treatment they received, none of these participants explained this as a gender issue. Participants who were supervised by male supervisors did not feel their supervisors' behaviour was as a result of them being males and participants female. Furthermore, Pablo who was in the physics discipline did not feel the university or department had a gendered culture, which is described as masculine and cold. This is contrary to earlier studies conducted whose findings affirmed gendered culture in higher education institutions (Haake, 2011) – whereby women often find it difficult to blend into higher education, particularly in



predominantly white male disciplines (Haake, 2011). Nussbaum's capability of affiliation (2000) explains these participants' views especially on gender, as affiliation is defined as being treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal that of others. This entails, at a minimum, protections against discrimination based on race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, caste, ethnicity, or national origin. None of the participants felt they being African women influenced their supervisors' treatment.

#### 6.5.6 Bodily integrity and safety

Some participants, international students felt they were not safe. As discussed in the findings, Kari almost was mugged at one point. Either this as a result meant she could not walk freely or if she did, was always in fear for her life, and this probably limited her mobility hence this included walking to campus to carry on her work. Walker (2006, 119) states that

pedagogical or institutional encounters which are suffused with any kind of threat of harassment or humiliation, inside or outside university classrooms, are not situations for effective or confident academic learning or the full development of autonomy and agency.

#### 6.5.7 Language competence and confidence

For all participants, English is not the first language. For some, it is even their third language. One participant specifically, a fourth language. As a result, she encountered challenges in expressing herself. This also made her feel less confident, thus foregrounds the capability of oral and written communication being a hindrance to her success. All participants who were international students explained that they struggled to settle in at a foreign country because they could not understand native languages. Wilson-Strydom (2012) conducted a study on students' transition from school into university, one of her findings pointed out that students struggled with the multilingual environment of the university, which for some students was difficult to adapt to. Tebogo stated that she had learned in her mother tongue throughout high school, as such learning in English became a problem because she struggled to express herself. This goes back to education being an expansion of other capabilities; although the participant was educated, considering she had a master's degree to enrol for doctoral education, she is one of the cases where written communication was a challenge. Therefore, one would argue that education did not empower her as a woman as it is meant to do (Murphy-Graham, 2012). However, because she mentioned she would never quit, endurance or being resilient made her achieve her desired outcome.

#### 6.5.8 Belief in God

Robeyns (2003, 83) states that "men and women should have the same freedom to practice or not to practice a religion". For most of the African women graduates, they emphasised their

believing in God saw them through their doctoral journeys. There were challenging times, even before their doctoral trajectories, but they used those as points of references; that if God saw them through those times, He will see them through doctoral education. Even though they believed God will make a way for their doctorate desire, they believed they still need to put in some effort towards achieving their goals, thus, demonstrating characteristics of being active agents in pursuit of their dreams. This belief of God, being an influence to participants, however, is not limited only to African women, doctoral graduates, Yang et al. (2017: 8) found that participants from poor rural families “recalled that their parents, while unable to offer material wealth, provided a remarkably rich spiritual nest to accommodate and support their children’s dreams”. Looking at the African women, doctoral graduates’ upbringing, the majority come from poor backgrounds where they were raised by uneducated parents, whom some were domestic workers, raised by grandmothers who took care of them through their pension money. They emphasised that it was God who provided for them as they cannot fathom how they survived on such little income when they were not the only children taken care of by their mothers or grandmothers.

#### 6.5.9 Valuing family, work and pursuing PhD

“Child care facilities and other provisions that make the combination of market work with care easier are provided at relatively low cost by the government” (Robeyns, 2003a: 14-constellations). Sibongile, as a student on a learnership programme, mentioned that both at university and her workplace there were no affordable child-care facilities if they had any. Jaga, Arabandi, Bagraim a Mdlongwa (2017: 8) attest to the importance of having childcare facilities within organisations. They state

the provision of on-site crèches was specifically mentioned as a useful facility for mothers and as a place in which to exercise breastfeeding rights, allowing mothers to continue breastfeeding their young children even after returning to work.

Although Mandisa had support from family, she felt guilty that she was not there for her children and her husband had to take over. As much as the guilt could have affected her progress negatively, Mandisa converted it into a driving force to complete her studies. Pablo on the other hand, managed to take her child to crèche and this eased her of the burden to take care of her child during the day, and she resumed being a mother and a wife soon after she picked up the child from crèche at 4 pm. According to research on women in HE (Carter et al., 2013; Magano, 2011), women, unlike men, assume multiple responsibilities due to gender socialisation which, in turn, has a negative impact on their doctoral studies.

Women’s capability set often includes being a mother, thus a homemaker, and CA advocates for having the freedom to be or not to be. Robeyns (2003, 15) states that

the cultural and non-material social constraints on the choice that influence which options a person will choose from her capability set, must also be critically examined. In the capability approach, preference formation, socialisation, subtle forms of discrimination and the impact of social and moral norms are not taken for granted or assumed away but analysed up-front. For example, women should not feel social or moral pressure more than men to prioritize their families over other activities, while changes in cultural notions of masculinity should make it easier for men to effectively engage in equal sharing of care and market work, without losing social status or respect.

Having discussed the opportunities and freedoms African women, doctoral graduates had during their studies, what they valued to be or do once they complete, what they did to ensure they succeed as well as what promoted and constrained of their success in doctoral studies, these women mentioned the capabilities and functionings they valued before, during and after they completed their studies. Below is a table illustrating African women’s valued capabilities, desired and achieved functionings:

#### 6.6. Capabilities and functionings valued by African women, doctoral graduates

Below is a table that shows capabilities and functioning valued by African women, doctoral graduates:

**Table 6. 1** Capabilities and functionings valued by African women, doctoral graduates

Capabilities	Desired functionings	Achieved functionings
Choice of university	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To have a doctorate from a reputable university</li> <li>Escape poverty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attained the doctorate</li> <li>Employed in reputable institutions</li> </ul>
Respect, dignity, recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be seen and heard</li> <li>To have families, work and PhD</li> <li>Being active within their field of study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Confronted HODs and Dean (demonstrated being assertive)</li> <li>Supportive families, completed doctoral programmes</li> <li>Establishing an academic identity – presented in conferences</li> </ul>
Capability for voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To be able to communicate with supervisor regarding research and personal issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being able to express one’s views and be listened to, without being mocked and made feel stupid.</li> </ul>

Institutional support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be educated and knowledgeable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acquired knowledge and skill to do their job effectively and with confidence</li> </ul>
Confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be a good and knowledgeable presenter</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good presentation skills in lectures</li> </ul>
Educational resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be a doctoral graduate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtained the degree as a result obtained the Dr title</li> </ul>
Belief in God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing they could not complete without God's help</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The realised their desired goal – completion of doctoral studies</li> </ul>

The above table illustrates valued capabilities, desired and achieved functionings for African women, doctoral graduates in South Africa explored through the capabilities approach lens; thereby contributing to the theoretical framework itself as well as doctoral education in the South African context, specific to African women. While most of the capabilities in the list above are similar to the ones valued by participants in former studies by for instance Walker (2006) and Robeyns (2003), there are two capabilities that are of value to this category of women; namely choice of university and belief in God.

Below is a discussion of the themes that come under different capabilities:

**Choice of university - desired functionings were to have doctorates from a reputable university, escape poverty.**

Women chose which university to enrol for their doctoral studies based on the quality of education provided, because they believed acquiring doctorates from a reputable institution would put them at an advantage of getting employment hence would escape poverty as well as be financially independent. These would mean they would not depend on their husbands or look up to men for provision. Having proper jobs would afford them life that they desire and will be able to take care of their children.

**Respect, dignity and recognition –desired functionings were to be seen and heard, have families, work and having a doctoral degree, being active within their field of study.**

As women, these participants developed a strength of being assertive as they had to confront their HODs and Dean when supervision did not benefit or promoted their success in doctoral journeys. Despite their socialisation, where an African woman belongs in the kitchen and often does not voice her concerns, these women showed remarkable strength in standing for their

educational right. Some also felt they were contributors to knowledge in the fields of their choice as they presented work in seminars and conferences, thereby establishing their academic identities as African women scholars in an environment where men are still dominant.

**Capability of voice - desired functioning was to be able to express their concerns to the supervisors (both personal and academic)**

Given the literature that states that women in science disciplines felt their views were not taken seriously (Ts'ephe, 2014), participants of this study desired to be able to voice their concerns to the supervisors and not feel they are taken for granted because they do not fall within the Boys' clubs which is only for men and excludes women.

**Institutional support – desired functioning was to be educated and knowledgeable**

The participants valued the institutional support because it afforded them an opportunity to be educated, thus knowledgeable in their different fields. They mentioned that they acquired skills and knowledge to do their work effectively and with confidence, hence their presentation skills improved. They further explained that prior to obtaining the degrees, for those that were lecturers, that students did not fully respect them and often challenged their knowledge of the subjects they taught, but once they knew they had obtained their doctoral degrees, their behaviour changed. This resonates with what Ramohai (2014) mentioned that without a Dr Title on one's door, as an African woman, she experienced disrespect from both students and colleagues.

**Educational resilience – desired functioning was to be a doctoral graduate**

Despite juggling work, family and studies, participants defeated the odds. They continued their responsibilities of being mothers, wives despite being doctoral students. Some mentioned that they had to put their research on hold while taking care of their families, for example, it could be a birth of a child, a sick husband. This shows that the gender roles still came into play and these women pushed to complete.

**Belief in God - desired functioning was to obtain doctoral degrees**

Most participants indicated that although they aspired to complete their doctoral studies, they knew they would not have done it without God's presence.

**Conclusion**

This chapter discussed the findings of my study, what opportunities and freedoms African women, doctoral graduates had to enable their success in doctoral programmes, what they hoped for in and after their studies, what they did to bring their dreams to realities, how they

approached and overcame their challenges in order to attain their doctoral degrees and further their well-being. The next chapter is the conclusions and recommendation chapter.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion and possible implications

### Introduction

Chapter 1 presented the problem statement for this research, which is that although there is literature on challenges that African women encounter when studying towards doctoral degrees and reasons for high attrition rates, little is known on how successful African women in South Africa made it through their doctoral journeys. This research, therefore, aimed to contribute towards this gap in the field of doctoral education. Having used the capabilities approach as the theoretical framework lens for this study, the general conclusions are therefore guided by the CA by Amartya Sen. Sen's approach (1999) takes into account the well-being of individuals. This is because he argues that people are able to reflect on their lives and are active agents in pursuing the lives, they have reason to value. Sen further states that people need to have access to opportunities and freedoms to choose the lives they have reason to value which promotes development. The study aims to explore strategies and capabilities that enabled African women, doctoral graduates to complete their studies successfully in South Africa. Due to the scarcity of literature on African women in doctoral studies, I found it important to conduct the study exploring African women, doctoral graduates' success in doctoral programmes; specifically using the capabilities lens because few, if any studies similar to mine, have been conducted using this approach, and none have been conducted in the South African context.

### Summary of research findings

The study aimed to explore strategies and capabilities that enabled African women, doctoral graduates to complete their studies successfully in South Africa.

### **Research question 1: What capabilities enabled African women, doctoral students' success in South African higher education?**

The purpose of this first question was to explore the opportunities and freedoms women had to exercise their agency in choosing and deciding what they needed for the successful completion of doctoral education. This question sought to address the critical questions often raised by researchers regarding gender and higher education: equitable access by whom, to what and how? Results revealed that all women had set their educational goals for university level even though for some, the intention was not to make it this far because they did not have the knowledge of the existence of a doctoral degree. The findings indicated that the majority of the participants felt respected and were treated with dignity by their supervisors. They felt they were seen and heard; hence they had a voice to raise their concerns or contribute to their studies. This was because of the encouragement and motivation they received from their supervisors, as they treated them as colleagues. The two participants that felt disrespected



by their supervisors emphasised the importance of being valued, how lack thereof negatively contributed to their constraints.

Furthermore, having the freedom to choose which university to attend and being accepted into the doctoral programmes, encouraged the participants to feel the university believes in them, in their capabilities. This meant participants were motivated to work hard to bring their dream to a realisation. All participants indicated that the university as an institution supported them in the best way possible. There were facilities that enabled their productivity and progress with their research. There were supportive colleagues within their departments, as well as supportive librarians who made accessing information easy because they did not have to come to campus but communicated via email and telephone and thus saved the participants time and money. All participants attested to the point of having confidence as a result of embarking on the doctoral journey. Most of them mentioned that the attainment of doctoral degrees has developed their confidence and that is demonstrated in their work. Those who are lecturers emphasised their confidence when lecturing. This resonates with the point that education expands other capabilities; since they are more equipped in doing what they do, they further carry themselves in a way that students and other colleagues are more respectful of them since they earned the qualification. They stated that although it was challenging to get to the attainment of the degree, they had to remember why they enrolled, thus get the motivation to continue. In addition, most of them emphasised on their faith in God; knowing that this phase too shall pass.

## **2. What functionings did African women, doctoral graduates hope for after completion of their doctoral studies?**

As defined by Robeyns (2003) functionings are the achieved outcomes or “doings” and “beings” that an individual has reason to value. Although for the current study, the desired outcome refers to the attainment of doctoral degrees by African women, it was by no means the end. This means that although some participants mentioned attaining doctoral degrees was intrinsic, it did not end there. For instance, one participant mentioned she wanted to hold the title of doctor, and yet again that they wanted to acquire knowledge in their field of work. This shows that having the doctorate was not an end but rather a means to an end. Participants who mentioned that they pursued doctoral education to escape poverty further demonstrate this as it means they believed attaining doctoral degrees would improve their financial state, as they hoped for better job opportunities. Furthermore, most participants aspired to be an inspiration to their immediate family members as well as their communities at large. They wanted to inspire the children, whether it is their own children, siblings or

neighbours, that one can pursue their dreams and achieve them to change their circumstances.

### **3. How did African women use their agency to develop capabilities (opportunities and freedoms) for academic success?**

Despite the availability of resources, opportunities and freedoms, participants had to be active agents in the realisation of their desired outcome. This meant that having great support from family, the institution and supervisors was not enough to enable the successful completion of their doctoral journeys, they had to put in the effort in pursuit of their desired dream. As such, they had to change certain habits to make time for their studies. Some mentioned they had to stop attending social events or gatherings as they consumed time. For instance, they had to stop attending weddings or any other ceremonies during their doctoral studies. Some mentioned that they had to miss the funerals of loved ones. For those that battled with their supervisors, they sought help from the HODs and the Dean, and they were granted new supervisors. This means that had they not done anything about their state, chances of progressing would have been compromised. Because most of the participants embarked on the doctoral journey while they were still working and having families, they did not have enough room to carry on their work. This meant they had to make plans to work without any distractions.

### **4. What conversion factors enabled or constrained African women's success in their doctoral journeys?**

All participants mentioned the availability of resources; the library for access of relevant up to date books, librarians for assistance with articles for their studies, being able to communicate via email to get assistance, libraries being open at all hours hence they could work throughout the night if they had to. Even those who did not stay at the university residences could have access to the library or laboratories at any time they wished. A few participants mentioned how their colleagues, supervisors, HODs or friends within the department were of great support to them. There were times when they would give them something for it. As Wilson-Strydom (2012) mentioned that, the funding for students was not enough to cater for their tuition and living expenses, this was the case for some of the participants. Due to family responsibilities or challenges within their families, some participants suffered from depression. Although this could have been a constraint to their doctoral studies completion, participants sought out help and after taking time off, they managed to return to their studies and realise their doctoral degree dream.

The above findings demonstrate that despite women’s aspirations for higher education and better life outcomes, they experienced challenges in pursuing and achieving these aspirations (Tafere, 2014). “Therefore, it is crucial to expand their opportunities and freedoms to choose, pursue and realize their educational goals and aspirations” (Ongera, 2016). Below are capability lists that I have based my study on and my proposed list for African women, doctoral graduates.

### Comparison of capability lists

This section serves to introduce capability lists formulated by other scholars which relate to my study. Below are the sets of capabilities lists as proposed by Robeyns (2003) and Walker (2006), as well as the one that I propose. None of the lists is formulated from the African women, doctoral graduates valued capabilities; rather Robeyns’ list is of gender capabilities and is specifically aimed at conceptualising gender inequality in Western societies while Walker’s list, is compiled from South African schooling, whereby 40 black and white girls between the ages of 15 and 16 were interviewed. The environment in which Robeyns’ list was drawn from is different from that in which my study was carried out. In addition, I am aware that Walker developed an educational capability list from findings from school girl participants, while mine was drawn from women in HE, specifically doctoral graduates. I found both lists relevant to my study seeing that my study explores African women graduates’ success in doctoral programmes in South Africa.

Table 7. 1 Capabilities lists

<b>Robeyns (2003) gender capabilities</b>	<b>Walker (2006) education capabilities</b>	<b>Ts’ephe (2020) proposed African women doctoral capabilities</b>
Life and physical health	Practical reason	Choice of university
Mental well-being	Education resilience	Respect, dignity, recognition
Bodily integrity	Knowledge and imagination	Freedom to create academic identity
Social relations	Learning disposition	Capability for voice
Political environment	Social relations and social networks	Institutional support
Education and knowledge	Respect, dignity and recognition	Confidence



Domestic work and non-market care	Emotional integrity, emotions	Educational resilience
Paid work and other projects	Bodily integrity	Belief in God
Shelter and environment		
Mobility		
Leisure activities		
Time autonomy		
Respect		
Religion		

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, Robeyns' (2003) drafted a capabilities' list aiming to conceptualise and assess gender inequalities in post-industrialised western countries. I identified three similar or overlapping capabilities: respect, dignity and recognition, voice and belief in God (which she calls religion). It is important to note that education and knowledge appear on her capabilities list and is a functioning on my list where participants indicated that they enrolled for doctoral studies because they wanted to be educated and knowledgeable. It is important to mention that being educated and knowledgeable is similar to Flores-Crespo (2004) functionings as discussed in Chapter 3, where he states that people valued being able to acquire the knowledge required in a job position; being able to look for and ask for better job opportunities. This resonates with some of my participants' reason for embarking on doctoral studies, to be able to do their job with confidence that will be gained from being knowledgeable in one's field.

Robeyns' argument is that gender equality in education should not be limited to formal access but must bear in mind the gender practices informing educational institutions, how they enable or constrain women from gaining from the education system. This research emphasises the conversion factors that influenced on African women's access and participation within doctoral education as well as the attainment of their desired goal – doctoral degrees.

The relevance of Walker's (2006) capability list to my research is that she used Robeyns' (2003) five criteria to formulate her capabilities. In addition, her list focuses on gender equity in education in South Africa, although it was in a school setting, it is within education while my study focused on African women, doctoral graduates in the South African context. This

similarity enabled me to understand the capabilities needed for gender justice to promote and secure education for women. Although Walker's list is formulated using young girls as her participants, the context in which some of the African women were raised, as they are South African nationals hence could influence the capabilities valued by both these young girls and mature women. Similar to Walker's list, are two capabilities, education resilience and respect, dignity and recognition. In relation to my study, African women, doctoral graduates were from disadvantaged backgrounds, even though they aspired to attain doctoral degrees. This meant that they had to be resilient in order to make their dream a reality. In addition, being respected recognised and treated with dignity in the institution promoted their success.

Summing up, the analysis of African women, doctoral graduates having used the capabilities approach indicates the following valued capabilities in and through doctoral education:

Choice of university: the ability to choose which university to apply for, having the ability and freedom to reflect on one's personal life and see what their goals are and apply to the institution which meets their needs.

1. Respect, dignity, recognition: being able to respect and be respected, treated with dignity and being a platform to see one's view and be heard.
2. Freedom to create academic identity: the ability to participate in academic conferences and present one's work, thereby making oneself known and engage with scholars in the same field.
3. Capability for voice: The ability to express one's concerns, views and interests without fear of being judged or mocked. This includes the ability to be heard. It includes the ability to engage and participate actively in productive discussions for learning, both in academic and social lives.
4. Institutional support: the ability to receive fruitful assistance from the institution, academic, psychosocial, and emotional.
5. Confidence: The ability to believe in oneself, decisions and choices that have been made through careful consideration (reflection) and acting on them without fear or shame.
6. Educational resilience: the ability to pursue one's dreams despite the challenges encountered along the way.
7. Belief in God: knowing and believing in a force that is bigger than the self, trusting that all will be well, however, not indicating that one has be a passive agent of one's life.

Study's contribution to knowledge

This study aimed at exploring strategies and capabilities that enabled African women's success in doctoral programmes in the South African context, as such its original contribution

to the body of knowledge is bringing forth what African women, doctoral graduates say contributed to their success. In South Africa, especially, there is scarce literature on how this community of women succeeds in doctoral studies. There are several studies conducted whose results show the challenges women face in doctoral education, but a few successful journeys are documented. This research then identified the gap in doctoral education literature and explored this subject's contribution to the literature on doctoral education and gender studies as it focuses on women.

The major limitation of the research, however, is that its results cannot be generalised because of the nature of the design of the study. While this is the case, its strength lies in its contribution to scientific evidence that can inform policy and practice on issues relating to the progress of African women in doctoral education and gender studies in general.

Recommendations of the study

As indicated in the first chapter, not many African women graduate from doctoral programmes, hence not much is known about the strategies employed by those who do succeed because the literature focuses mainly on the reasons why African women dropout at a higher rate than men and white women. As a result, based on the findings of this research, I make suggestions as to how to improve African women graduates' success in doctoral programmes. Below I identify the gaps that need to be addressed to improve strategies and capabilities that enable African women, doctoral graduates to complete their studies successfully in South Africa.

### **Shelter and environment**

During their studies, African women need to be provided with shelter whereby the bursaries cover their rent at least for a year. This will make them concentrate on their studies without any worries.

### **Funding**

I recommend that no doctoral student should be admitted into doctoral programmes without secured funding because worrying about PhD and the next meal puts the student under enormous stress. From the study, it is evident that most graduates did not complete within the three years, as such, I also recommend that the bursary should be valid for four years provided there is progress in their studies.

### **Supervision**

The institutions of higher learning should ensure that doctoral students have two supervisors for each student, who are both in contact with the student. This will mean should one of them leave the university, the other will be able to carry on with supervision because s/he would

have been present at the beginning of the student's journey and know what their research is about to continue contributing positively to the study and would have built a relationship with the student.

### **Policies in higher education institutions based on the capabilities approach**

As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3, CA is a framework that evaluates the freedoms and opportunities that individuals have to live the lives they desire and have reason to value, it is therefore, essential that HE institutions formulate policies that are capability-based. Human development should not be measured only in economic terms, as other egalitarian approaches propose, but holistically in that individuals determine what is of importance for their well-being. This can be achieved by implementing individual-focused policies which will allow treating all students with different backgrounds as individuals who require unique assistance and support in order to have their desired functionings, in this case, doctoral degrees. This must apply not only to African women but all students.

#### Limitations of the study

As a qualitative study, the findings of this study cannot be generalised due to the small sample size. Furthermore, time and money were a limitation; the fact that this study was to be evaluated for a doctoral degree, it meant I had a time frame in which I operated; thus I could not wait longer to have the projected 20 participants, but continued with 14 that agreed to participate.

#### Conclusion

This has been the most challenging but exciting project to embark on; it has equipped with skills and knowledge which I would not have had had I not embark on this journey concerning doctoral education in general, and the study specifically showed that research at this level is complex. The reason is that despite living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with many opportunities available to women, there are still limitations towards what and whom women can be. For this group of participants, despite their level of education, women still feel taking care of their households is their sole responsibility, even though they believe men can help around the house. This way of thinking is embedded in their thinking despite the education they acquired. Hence, this thinking has raised questions that need further investigation especially on 'undoing gender'. As I mentioned that no studies on doctoral education have been conducted using this framework in the South African context, this study has shown that more studies still need to be conducted using the capabilities approach, not only on African women but on doctoral education as a whole. As indicated throughout the thesis, the capabilities approach does not only look at opportunities and freedoms one has but also at one's agency.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: INFORMATION SHEET

Dear doctoral graduate,

I am a PhD student at the Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria. As part of my studies, I am conducting a research project titled: **A Capabilities approach to African women's success in doctoral programmes in South Africa.**

The purpose of my study is to explore strategies and capabilities that enable African women, doctoral graduates to complete their studies. It explores how they experience their academic journeys and what they attribute to the completion of their studies.

I should therefore like to interview African women, doctoral graduates who have obtained their degrees in the past five years, from the University of Pretoria, South African. You are one of these graduates. Only my supervisors and I will know your real name, as a pseudonym will be used during data collection and analysis to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

If you agree to participate in the study, interviews will be arranged and will happen on the days, times and venues that are most suitable for you. Your participation will be voluntary, meaning that you can withdraw from the research at any time you feel uncomfortable. Your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected at all times. The interviews are expected to take a minimum of one hour and will be voice recorded to enable me to listen to the recordings in preparation for transcription, thus helping me to capture what you have said, even in your absence. Should the need for a follow-up interview arise, you will be contacted and asked to assist in this regard.

Should you have any questions regarding the study, please feel free to contact the supervisors.

Yours Sincerely,

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## APPENDIX 2: CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_(your name), agree to take part in the research project titled: **A Capabilities approach to African women’s success in doctoral programmes in South Africa**. I understand that I will be interviewed about this topic for approximately one hour at a venue and time that will suit me.

I understand that:

- my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time.
- my confidentiality and anonymity will be protected at all times.
- The interview will be audio taped.
- I am informed about the research process and purposes, and give consent to my participation in the research.

Signature:\_\_\_\_\_ Date:\_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me about yourself interview	Demographic section of the
Probes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How old were you when you embarked on your doctoral studies?</li> <li>• Where are you from?</li> <li>• What is your marital status?</li> <li>• Do you have any children? If yes, how many, how old?</li> </ul> <p>How would you describe your socioeconomic status?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Under which faculty, department were you registered?</li> <li>• What was your subject?</li> <li>• How long did it take you to complete the degree?</li> <li>• Have you attended your doctoral programme continuously? If no, please explain what happened</li> <li>• Did you study full-time or part-time?</li> <li>• If part-time, were you working full-time? If yes, please elaborate on this</li> </ul> <p>How would you describe yourself? What characteristics, strengths and weaknesses do you have to make you who you are?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what extent these characteristics helped (or hinder) the completion of the doctoral degree?</li> </ul>
<b>1. Previous institutions</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where did you study for your junior degree? For Honours, Master's?</li> <li>• If different institutions, why did you decide to apply for doctoral fellowship in this institution?</li> <li>• Are you the first-generation doctoral graduate?</li> <li>• To what level have your immediate family members (mother, father, siblings) studied?</li> </ul>
<b>2. Broad experiences on being a woman in doctoral studies</b>	
Probes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What made you decide to enrol for doctoral studies?</li> <li>• How has being an international student contributed to your doctoral experience?</li> <li>• Has it always been your dream to pursue doctoral education?</li> <li>• What career are you following/in? Is it in line with your doctoral degree?</li> <li>• Is there any other career that you wanted to follow?</li> <li>• How has attainment of a doctoral degree changed your life?</li> <li>• How do you describe your doctoral journey?</li> </ul>
<b>Attributes to your success</b>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What opportunities enabled you as an African woman to succeed in doctoral studies?</li> </ul> <p><b>Self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How did you find being an African woman embarking on doctoral studies in your department?</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What personal resources did you have, and how did you convert them into opportunities in order to realise your doctoral study completion?</li> <li>•</li> </ul> <p><b>Academic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe your supervisor?</li> <li>• How was your relationship with him/her?</li> <li>• Was the relationship influenced at all by gender?</li> <li>• What institutional facilities/resources that were available that assisted you in making your doctoral journey a success?</li> <li>• Was there any support discussions or community for support to assist in your studies?</li> </ul> <p><b>Social</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How would you describe the support of your friends and family during the doctoral journey?</li> <li>• Who, in your social cycles contributed to your achievement of your doctoral degree?</li> <li>• How did they contribute?</li> </ul>
<p><b>What challenges did you face during your doctoral journey?</b></p>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What were the main challenges you faced during your doctoral journey?</li> <li>• Were the challenges of personal, institutional, academic or social nature?</li> <li>• How did you overcome the challenges?</li> </ul>
<p><b>What kept you going despite the challenges?</b></p>	
	<p><b>Self</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What did you do to actualise your dream? What challenges did you have to overcome in order to complete? How did you overcome them?</li> </ul> <p><b>Academic</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What role did you that the institutional structure, the department as a whole, assisted you in achieving your goal?</li> <li>• How did you convert negative into positives?</li> <li>• If the institutional facilities were a problem for example, how did you address these challenges to realise your goal – attaining doctoral degree?</li> <li>• What do you recommend should be done to make the learning environment more suitable to ensure students' throughput, specifically African women?</li> <li>• Please tell me about the issue of funding, who financed your doctoral education?</li> </ul> <p><b>Social</b></p>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who did you reach out to in ensuring a successful doctoral outcome?</li><li>• What did you do, as a way of reaching out?</li><li>• How would you describe your family and friends' support during this journey?</li><li>• How is the state of your relationships since you embarked on doctoral education? Did you lose any friendships, relationships with family? Has there been reconciliation since you completed?</li><li>• From the friendships or relationships that have been strengthened since your doctoral studies, what could have been different from those that were negatively affected?</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What advice would you give other African women considering enrolling in doctoral studies in general? Is there any advice specific for those that enrol within your department?</li><li>• What is it that you wish you knew regarding doctoral education before enrolling?</li></ul>	





## APPENDIX 4: TRANSCRIPT

### Participant 2

**R:** Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study and granting me your consent. The first set of questions are about yourself, where are you from?

**P2:** I am from Zambia

**R:** are you married and how many kids?

**P2:** I am married, and I have been married for over 15 years and I have four kids.

**R:** alright. How old were you when you embarked on the doctoral journey?

**P2:** I was about 34 years old or somewhere around there.

**R:** under which faculty and department were you studying?

**P2:** Faculty of Education, department of education and management and policy.

**R:** What was your line of research?

**P2:** My line of research was on implementation, basically to do with projects that are initiated by donors, looking at what factors determine their sustainability, why they are sustained, why they are not sustained, yah so it was something about a literacy programme that was supported by UK, the department of hmmm, let me just say DFID, so it was a big project in Zambia and many schools benefited in terms of a pilot, so when it was scaled up, it suddenly started, it became shaky so I became curious to find out why, because it was not the only program, there were other programmes in Zambia that have been implemented and they were not sustained, so I wanted to find out why they were not sustained. So yah that was my focus.

**R:** How long did it take to complete your degree?

**P2:** Four years

**R:** 4 years

**P2:** yes

**R:** Have you attended your doctoral programme continuously or there was a break?

**P2:** No, there was no break

**R:** Okay

**P2:** But I would say there were just breaks and moments when id break because there is a lot of work, pressure of work, my child is sick, I have to attend to my husband, maybe he is also

sick, or there is a funeral, so I would say I would take maybe maximum, I think took maximum 2 months break in between just to attend to issues but otherwise I would say I attended it continuously, but there were those mini breaks that I took.

**R:** Okay, did you study full-time or was it part-time?

**P2:** it was full-time, I'd say it was full-time

**R:** hmm

**P2:** yah

**R:** were you working?

**P2:** I was working and it was supposed to be full-time

**R:** So the time when you were doing your PhD you were a fully employed?

**P2:** Yes, fully employed

**R:** oh ok

**P2:** and I wasn't given any study leave or time off to work on my research, so I had to pay for myself, I had to find time to do my PhD besides my work because I worked, I used to work for, an examinations body, so it's a busy job and so on but I need to get this thing so I told myself I will sacrifice my four years,

**R:** hmm, ok, how would you describe yourself, what characteristics, for example strengths and weaknesses that you have that make who you are?

**P2:** I think it was persistence and focus, knowing that you want this thing and have to get it despite the odds and yah, for me, and I don't like quitting, so I don't like quitting, when I start something I don't like quitting, but that doesn't mean I didn't feel like quitting at some quitting, at some point I felt like quitting because of some pressures and so on, but uh, I persisted because my character is, I am not a quitter, I don't like quitting.

**R:** so you are a fighter?

**P2:** hmmm

**R:** so you would say that nature is the one thing that kept you afloat?

**P2:** yes, yes.

**R:** how would you describe your socioeconomic status?

**P2:** uh, I wasn't like in senior management, I was a senior research officer but below management level

**R:** middle?

**P2:** yah, not even middle, maybe like the entry point of, like although it was a senior research officer position, but it was considered the lowest position just before management, so the money wasn't enough, and 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 thing so whether we had money, we didn't have money we have to put aside. And also 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 4 or something, just before high school, so I thought that was a good opportunity, then the rest were still in primary, the others, one was not yet born and the other was still very young and I thought that was a window when I can do my PhD

**R:** hmm okay. Where did you study for your junior degree, honours and MA?

**P2:** in Zambia

**R:** oh so you study up until your MA in Zambia?

**P2:** Hmmm

**R:** so you came to Pretoria for PhD?

**P2:** yes

**R:** what made you decide to apply for doctoral fellowship in Pretoria, particularly this institution?

**P2:** first of all SA because 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 and so on, yah.

**R:** are you the first-generation doctoral graduate in your family?

**P2:** yes, the first one to get the degree, first degree, first to get a PhD

**R:** and to what level have your immediate family members studied, your parents and siblings

**P2:** yoh, my dad has a first degree but he got it later, beyond, when he was 60, he got it very late, he had always had a diploma, but he thought now that Zambia is demanding that if you are a lecturer you have to have a degree, so it was something that he wanted to do, but my mom, she ended up in grade 5, so she is not educated so to speak [laughter]

**R:** so maybe that's where you got your fighting spirit from your dad?

**P2:** yah.. my dad always said education is important, and although my mom isn't educated, she saw the opportunities that her friends had, she always had to say you know what, when I stopped school in grade 5 I always wanted to go back to school but your father said aii (sigh) look after the kids and so on, and her friends who were maybe up to grade 8 and 9 they became secretaries and she used to admire them and used to say I would become a secretary or a teacher through you, yah she always washed our uniforms and do everything for us to ensure that we go to school

**R:** when you say that, you remind me of this weekend when I went to see my dad, he was I am glad you are studying for your PhD, but always remember I am a doctor or professor too because you are my product! *Hahahaha* so I understand what you mean when you say your mother said she will be a teacher through you

**P2:** hahahahahaha yah true

**R:** what made you enrol for doctoral studies?

**P2:** what made me enrol, yah research skills, but I wouldn't hide that I wanted to be called a doctor hahahahah, I would always admire doctors, not medical doctors but people who did their PhD, put their titles in front and one time I think I got inspired after reading a certain professor in Zambia, female, she was like the first educational administrator, I did Master's in educational administration, so here is a woman who did what I did at the university of Zambia and she said she did a PhD, of course she did her PhD in UK, but then they wrote a whole article about her, so I cut out that article, I read it and I told myself the day that I read that article that I also want to put a Dr in front of my name.

**R:** Because you are from Zambia and came to study in SA, and you were still full time at work, how often did you travel to SA?

**P2:** whenever there were support sessions, I never missed any support session, attended all, and in fact I would always spare money and come.

R: and how has being an international student contributed to your doctoral experience

P2: and maybe you can say that again?

R: you are Zambia and come to study in South Africa, how was that experience for you?

P2: the whole experience, for me the first time I was coming everybody was worried saying SA was a dangerous place, they didn't know if maybe at the airport I would be attacked, so my mother and father were a bit worried and they actually thought I should have selected Botswana or Namibia, or even Lesotho, why go to SA? So it was a bit scary but there was a Zambian who was at University X who gave me the courage and he said he was going to receive me and he had his own accommodation with the wife so they were the ones that received me and that made things a bit easier and my parents were like a bit at ease after hearing that they were Zambians, he was able to talk to my family and counselled them and told them that SA is okay as long as you don't go in dangerous places. But when I came in of course the language was a bit different, and ahh yah I met very good South Africans who are still my friends up to now, but some of them, you could feel it, like they were saying what are you doing here, why don't you go do it in Zambia, it's like we were taking up their places, you could actually feel and sometimes little comments, so what didn't you do your PhD in Zambia, don't you have universities in Zambia? So I could really read between the lines that these people are saying we are taking up their spaces, so that was my experience, but otherwise I can't lie, I have never had, of course I have heard about people being attacked but I have never been attacked but I've heard who said they have been attacked and so on, and then when it comes to the experience of research and so on, where I come from a professor must be worshipped, a professor must be respected a professor must not be challenged, you must not contest anything or be controversial, so when I came in I came into an environment where I found my professor could ask, to suggest stuff, asked my opinion and I could see that, you know I started coming out, I remember the first time I went into her office, I always tell this story, I held on to my handbag because this woman was white, she was much older than me, she represented my mother, and she was professor. I expected, maybe I would have been comfortable if I was supervised by young maybe black woman, but then she was white, much older, much like my mother and I was overwhelmed and I held on to my back and she said, put your bag down *Mandisa*, hahahaha relax. She was very kind to me and whenever I was quiet she would always sent me emails, so how are you doing and so on, then I remember one time during my PhD I became pregnant and it was difficult for me to tell her, I thought she was going to burst at me and say why become pregnant when you are busy with PhD, she just wrote babies are nice, just know how to balance your time, and that just, you know made my day, I was able to pick up myself and say babies are good, and that means that, and she

said just balance and it's like from those words I was able to plan, so when my baby's sleeping, in fact what made me complete for me I am a Christian and the bible says all things work together for good, so when I became pregnant and I went on maternity leave, by God's grace, I don't know, they miscalculated, they gave me forty days instead of thirty days, and so after they had written to me, I think their counting was wrong, so after they had written to me I was like, this thing I then thought since I am a Christian I must just let them know or make them aware that they made a mistake and I shouldn't keep it, so I wrote to them and told them, I wrote to the HR and I said you have miscalculated my leave and so on but then they were generous enough and they said eehh it was our problem, let's leave it and it is good that you were honest and we would give you those ten days extra, ya, so through those forty days, because it is forty days minus weekends so I had, not forty days sorry, it was four months, instead of three months they gave me four months. So I had many days so through those days whenever my child is sleeping I would find my space and type type type, yah

**R:** you just had a baby and here you are working hard??

**P2:** yes, one month later I started doing my work because it was a normal delivery so after one month I was okay, and so what I used to do, because the library was nearby, was a medical library closer to where I used to stay, so suddenly they said they said they don't want anyone from education, only people doing medicine are going to be using this library, so what did I think, oh! so I was charging my laptop until its full, fully charged and I would be doing it in my car, so I finished my PhD in my car, so I would go and park under a tree and

**R:** you parked on campus and worked in your car to access Internet?

**P2:** no, under a tree for me to get out of the house because I would be distracted, so I would go like three hours continuous, like maybe after I bathed the baby, morning, I would bath the baby maybe around 8 and start off at around 9, somewhere there, and I'd be there may be from 9, 10 11, maybe 12 and I would come back, then I kept increasing the time as the baby was growing, so maybe every week I would increase maybe two and half, three hours, four, so when the baby was about three months I would go away for maybe 5 full hours continuously, and I would type in the car.

**R:** in the car?

**P2:** yes and I would open the car windows, type in the car, when the battery is about to go low, there was a place that I found where I could go charge the laptop, but I had no Internet, so when I wanted articles then I would, of course do hotspot and just, yah, but then again that was the time when I was writing, so I didn't need a lot of Internet, yah, just writing and using my literature, yah, so through the maternity leave that's when I was able to finish the first draft,

and sent it to prof, so when I went back to work then I'd always work on the comments and so on, so between April, so the baby was born in January and by April I was back at work so we continued until probably that should have been maybe August or September so we had like three, four to five months of revisions so that was done at work, and if I didn't have that maternity leave I don't think I was going to finish, because I used to have 3 or 4 hours to myself, which was rare in the office, in office someone would knock at your door, you have a new report and so forth, so for me all things worked out for good. Then of course there was a maid and my mother to help when I went out, so those 5 hours they would be in charge, yah.

**R:** err, you mentioned earlier that you always wanted the title, so we say it has always been your dream to hold a doctorate?

**P2:** not really, it came as I went through, it was my dream to get a degree, but when I was getting my degree I didn't even know there was a PhD

**R:** okay

**P2:** because no one had a PhD, the dream was the first degree, and to be the first woman in the family, that was even before my dad got a degree, that was my dream to get a degree, then because now I am a post-doc, I didn't even know there was post-doc, it's like I didn't even know there was a PhD, there was master, I just went there and thought I want to have a degree, then I found that there was a master's, then I found that there was a PhD, yah

**R:** and, what career are you following now, because you mentioned you have a master's in education administration? What you are doing now is, how different is it now, than what you did in your master's?

**P2:** I think it is similar, after my first degree, I did education management, education administration and policy, that's how they call it in Zambia, then I did the same thing though the phrasing is a bit different

**R:** is there any other career that you would have liked to follow, or it has always been in education policy

**P2:** hmmm not really, when I was young I think I wanted to be something to do with journalism because I like writing, writing, being a writer, because undergrad I did literature and languages, yah in fact after finishing I completed, I managed to like contribute a lot of articles, a lot of poems, some of them which have been published, so I always wanted to be a writer, to write, but then I was placed in, my first choice was journalism, second was education, but then I found myself in education. Hmmm



**R:** how has the attainment of the doctoral degree changed your life, now that you are a doctor, what would you say is the good thing that happened?

**P2:** the good thing I would say is the title, and you don't feel it but its people around, they rub it in, doctor, doctor so they call you that, so even my dad was happy, like when he, the present that he bought me it's in my office, so he got a frame and he just typed something that through you all the Banda's are doctors, like through everyone has attained a PhD, so for me it was, yah, good.

**R:** generally how would you describe your doctoral journey, or maybe it can even come up in what attributed the success or you can answer on its own, how would you say your journey was?

**P2:** hmm it was a lonely journey, sometimes, many times not sometimes I wanted to quit because there were too many things on my plate, the babies, sometimes it's the money, the money isn't there to pay, some people had to borrow me some money, had to be kind to borrow me money, I had borrow money from my mom, from, so it was the money, the money was the problem, the time was the problem, so it's about the resources, yah.. then also family, funerals, and sometimes I never used to go to funerals, yah because I need to do this chapter, hahaha, there was a time when my husband's sister's daughter, our niece died and that was the I was typing to send to prof, I don't think I even told her, so when I had about the death I said okay I heard, I continued typing because I needed to submit, so I held on my emotions, I just typed and typed and typed, after I had sent and submitted that's when I started with the funeral hahahaha. So there were just those moments, there were moments when I would just miss, I think I cut my social life, there was a time on Facebook I was away for like one two years and when I came back, and commented someone said where did you go, because when I commented it was time of elections, did you go missing to campaign for the new president, how come you are only coming out now and everyone was shouting, during the process I also missed my friends, some of them misinterpreted and thought because I am doing a PhD I no longer want to be their friend, yah, some of them thought if I don't give them feedback on their WhatsApp they thought ahh she is in another class, and it wasn't like that, so of course I've tried to revive some of them, the relationships, but some of them have been strained, yah.. so

**R:** they were beyond reconciliation or restoration

**P2:** yah, some of them you send them a message and they would still feel ahh now what does she want. So I lost friends, I lost out on social issues, and err sleep, I lost out a lot of sleep, like there was a time when I needed my proposal, there was a time when I came for my support session, that should have been July, my professor said you need to defend by October, and

between July and October there was so many things I needed to do, she said fix this fix that, fix this fix that, so in order to meet my deadlines, I went home and I decided, I told my family, my sister was still staying with us at the time, that I would be going to sleep at 7 in order to wake up at 1, so I would work from one to three or four every day, because that time it was quiet and everyone was asleep, so every day, unless if maybe I was sick or something I would wake up between 1 to three and four and work, then I would sleep between 4 to 6 and wake up and go to work, and I didn't mind, I didn't mind because I looked at the PhD journey as a season, I think that is one thing that encourages me, whenever I am going through something I would tell myself that it's just a season, after four years, in fact I was calculating that by 2016 this would no longer be my story, I would be out of this thing, so this thing is not going to be with me forever, so if I don't sleep I would tell myself, I would sleep one day, it doesn't matter, so that is one thing that has always encouraged me, whenever I am going through stuff I just tell myself that it's a season, like during my pregnancies I would be carrying this baby feeling tired and all, then I would remind myself that it's just a season, the child will come out and yah, there are those depressing moments, those lonely moments, those times when you are misunderstood, but at the end of the day you just need to, it's not easy, and that why so many women, like I met somebody, who, like we did literature together and she was like, for me a degree is enough *Mandisa*, I don't need anything else, she says I have the money, hahah my husband works, I have kids, I am happy, so why should I hahahah you know it's like torture, what would I torture myself, for me I am happy, I have a degree, a degree is enough and surprisingly enough I met the sister and she said the same thing, I don't know if it's a family thing that just says for me a degree is enough and all they do are postgrad things, like postgraduate studies or certificates, they say me, even master's, I am done, PhD is a dream, for what?? It's not even on the list of to do things, I am a mother, I am a wife, I go to church and I have got businesses, but major thing they give is number one, they can't manage, number two they just say it's a sheer waste of time, it's beyond their dreams and for them they have arrived, for them if a woman doesn't have a degree in this era they say go and have the degree, but once you have your degree, what more??

**R:** yes, you have touched on, hmmm, because right now I am at a point of what attributed to your success, you have mentioned the social aspect, where you say you had your sister, you had your mom who were taking care of the family while you were out reading and writing, that is the social part, so what else do you think helped you?

**P2:** so maybe my supervisor, like she would always check on me, all the time, she would always check on me, there were times when I thought ahh why am I , I also thought like those other women, why am I torturing myself, maybe I am not cut out for this thing, so there were moments like that and then prof would suddenly write a message, how are you *Mandisa*, how

are you progressing? Then I would go back and also, you know there is this thing when people know that you are doing your PhD, people start calling you doc, doctor how are you? Then I was thinking, if I don't finish I am going to disappoint them, and I am going to shock them and disappoint them, so that is one thing that also pushed me, and my dad, my family would always ask, how far are you? So whenever I wanted to quit I would think oh so there are people that are watching, so that is one thing that kept me going.

**R:** yah okay, you touched on the academic side because you spoke about your supervisor, errr,

**P2:** and then also the space that I was given, there was space like the research common, there were

**R:** how often then did you utilise the working space, make use of the research common?

**P2:** whenever I came, I made use of the space, and also the library contact person, I would email or call and say I am looking for this article and then they would help, they would even propose more, they were willing to help and it wasn't like you were bothering them, they were willing to give you more and also prof would find an article and send, we have a Dropbox where we share yah, so she always send through stuff and say read this also, there is this thing that has come up, also I was thinking like this, so also the library and the people around me and there was also when *Prof Bradley* was the head of department at that time, whenever I came he would find time and maybe meet me in the corridor and encourage me, you will get there blah blah, so all those. And also my friends, like *Maki*, we call each other professor, and we always say we will get there one day, we will get there one day, so the social networks always help us, no the journey is difficult but you will get there, you will get there, so yah.

**R:** so *Maki* as you were calling each other professors, is the social network going in the same direction, because I remember you had other friends

**P2:** yah, that were like discouraging me, and I decided to cling on to people who were like talking my language, so people who were not talking my language I think I decided to like cut ties and I think they let me go as well. My circles, those who had done their degree before, we would always share

**R:** How would you say the relationship with your supervisor, Prof, was influenced by gender? You think the fact that she was a woman played a role?

**P2:** yes, it played a role, for example when I was pregnant she didn't have any, for me I think because she is a mother, she knows, yah so it did play a role. I can imagine if it were a man, maybe he would have thought why become pregnant at this time and maybe he could have

stereotyped me and you know, that's what I feel, and I was also, maybe if I had gotten someone who didn't have kids it was going to be a different story, so she has kids and she knows, also if I got a man who didn't have kids, you know, maybe we have, we stereotype people who don't have kids, but my thoughts are that if you have maybe a professor who didn't have kids and so on, they would have thought this is not for me, so I think that played a role, it did play a role. She understood me as a woman

**R:** okay, coming to your personal attributes now, how did you find being an African woman embarking on doctoral studies in your department?

**P2:** sometimes I was intimidated by whites because in Zambia you rarely see a white person even at a mall, so when I came here I saw many hahahaha many white people and I had to get used to them, even my supervisor and so on, but I found out that people are people, whether they are white or black they are the same, yah but, I think, if you look at it from a positive angle, being a black African woman gives you advantages to study, maybe people haven't discovered that angle, there are opportunities for you to grow, probably because we don't have so many black women, so those people whom I may say have eyes, they see that as an advantage, so for me I saw that as an advantage, that you can actually be supported as a woman, of course there are forces that fight you, but for me I thought, well there are a few women who have done educational management and policy in Zambia, so I want to fill that gap, so for me I saw it as an opportunity, so some people see it as a challenge as a disadvantage because you are an African woman, because there are so many whites maybe who have advantages and so on, but I saw my disadvantage as an advantage, so few women are doing it, let me do it, so on the other side when I talk to other women they think, being black disadvantages them because there is 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. So maybe it also depends on the spouse that you get because some, I just got an SMS, a WhatsApp, I will show you, one of my friends showed me a woman who graduated, and she twitted and sent something on Facebook that, I had to sacrifice my marriage in order to get my PhD, I will show it to you, I have it, so we have those cases where some men can just say you want a degree or a PhD here, get out of my house, but then we also have men who are different, so it depends I think, above all things it's important to have a spouse that supports you, otherwise, you can 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, so I think the spouse is also an important factor because many women, many, because even for me to do my post-doc people say, he allowed you? Hahahahahah, he allowed you, so actually some people think I have fed him something, and

you have read about Africa, where they say men who are like, that I gave him love portion for him to be who he is because he is always like agreeing, no it's okay, you can do your PhD, you can do, go and do your post-doc, so, they think I gave him love portion, or maybe I am an aggressive woman, like he has lost his control. And some people will be like, oh she is going to south Africa, she is going to find another person with a PhD, you don't have a PhD, and also, you know when women get educated, they become rebellious, pompous and so on, so there are all those stories, in fact one person, a very, I would say a family friend talked to me in private and said *Mandisa* what you are doing is not good, you keep and 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? Don't do this post-doc, it will bring problems, and on the other side talked to my husband and said don't allow a, b, c, and blah, yah she brought a bit of tension but you know when you want something, and have spoken about it, we just decided we do what we want to do, and to hell with people's comments, I think we are that strict, when we agree on the table and say we are going to do a, b, c, d, e, we don't care what people say, because even now, people say, ehh she is gone, ehhh she has left children, I feel bad I left my children which is 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, because when the post doc came, I even told prof I am going to think about it, I didn't want to come because of the little one, but my husband and my parents said such opportunities come rare, so just go, so they gave me the support, so you need to have I think, the spouse factor is important, especially in Africa, where woman 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, but not ehh, how can you have a PhD and your husband doesn't have it?? Hahahah, how can you live him behind, maybe he will just say ahhh this one.. but 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, yah so she just used to tell me that you know what you just need to be grateful, like to your husband, he is the one who has brought you to where you are, so 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.

**R:** he will be riding on this vehicle, the PhD.

**P2:** he would be site-seeing for all the sacrifices hahaha

**R:** true.. hahaha what personal resources did you have and how did you convert them into opportunities to ensure the completion of this degree?

**P2:** I think it's determination, having vision, being focused, not quitting, I think PhD is more about character,

**R:** ohh more about character?

**P2:** resilience, its more about character, it's not about having, you can have the money to pay for a PhD and not finish, you may fail to collect data, you may fail to analyse, you may fail to write, so it's about a vision, like envisioning yourself, what am I going to do, I want that title, I want to get that PhD, so you run towards your goal, I think those were my personal resources and they encourage me, so at a personal level, yah that

**R:** hmmm, what were the main challenges that enabled or hindered your completion, because some challenges motivate one to work harder, or make them give up, what challenges enabled or hindered you?

**P2:** the challenges were the finances, yah the same things, children getting sick, attending to social events and also being full-time at work, for example the was a time where I was the secretary to this committee for an African conference on assessment and I was like the desk officer, used to receive emails and so on and it was a very trying moment for me because I had to divide my time very well, I had to be at work, sometimes very late and that meant that I would go home very tired and so on, so it's sometimes its finances, like I said I would not have money to come, to fly here, I didn't want to use the bus because when you use here you get here tired and you travel for like 24 hours so you need to get more days, but when you fly it's like in one or two hours I am here, so on the final day I am back, so I needed money and also accommodation in SA is expensive, for me to rent a flat is expensive, and I needed the food, I needed, you know I didn't know there was Areyeng bus, so I always got a taxi, Uber for me to go around, so all the time, in fact I didn't even know about Uber, so I used to use these cabs and they would charge me R100, so every time I would put a big amount for transport, for food, security, because I needed to be in a place that I was safe and yah and all that, so finances were a problem, and time, mainly time. And also when I was collecting data yah I didn't have time, I needed to get leave and sometimes it would be denied, then I get appointments and sometimes appointments would be cancelled and so on, so then the data collection period dragged, yah and also transcription was a lot of work, it is a lot of work, and in Zambia we don't even have transcribers, I had to transcribe myself and it was a bit hard, there were 35 interviews and of course my brother helped me, but where he couldn't I had to listen, there were some jargon, you know there are words that are used in policy and so on



and they would certain words and he would type them wrongly, so I needed to go back and listen, so it was also a challenge, and when it came to writing, there were no writing facilities in Zambia, had to write in my car, so that was the challenges, I needed to find the time, I needed to find the space, in Zambia even though I did it at University Z, there is no space for PhDs, it's common space, we don't have national library like an open library, and even if it's there it's crowded, people are talking, they are eating, and they are moving around, so for me the car was my library, but it was still a challenge, sometimes it would be so hot, open the windows and then I would not have like space, leg room to stretch my legs.

**R:** and the back, because even from sitting at the library you feel the pain, the back aches, so I am trying to imagine how it is working in the car

**P2:** I have actually developed the back ache and it's been always there and it recurs when I don't sit properly, yah so also finances to do with data, needed to buy a lot of bundles when I needed something, I would go to an Internet café, print an article, so the resources were not there, but I needed to create them, so sometimes, okay so maybe porridge, instead of buying porridge for the baby you'd cook the maize meal because I needed to print, yah, it was quite hard

**R:** so, when you are answering the challenges question, for some you even brought out the solution, how you overcome them, where I said what did you do to actualise, or realise your dream, there are things that you indicated that you needed to cut, there are things that you needed to part with, there are alternatives that you had to make, e.g. you had to sit in your car to avoid a congested national library,

**P2:** hmmm yes, I had to cut also on Facebook, that means my social media, for instance even on WhatsApp groups with friends, some I didn't even participant in the discussions, sometimes I would even withdraw myself from them, so money I had to cut on certain things, maybe cut my hair instead of going to the hair salon, haha yah there was a time during my PhD when I just decided there was too much money going to my hair, then I cut it, and I thought that was cheaper, hahahah yah so certain things had to be sacrificed, like time, social events, funerals and so on, yah and I didn't do, I like doing my cooking but I surrendered and my sister did the cooking because I never had the time to cook, and I wouldn't bath the kids and prepare, so my children are more close to my husband because he would prepare them in the morning for school, prepared their lunch boxes, because usually I would wake up, even after I defended my proposal, it became like a lifestyle to always wake up in the middle of the night, one hour, two hours, but not frequently, but maybe three days a week, just to catch up, so then I would wake up late and it would be later than the time my children go to school, so my husband



would wake up, bath them, he loves it, he enjoys it, so he would pack the lunch boxes and so on, so I had to stop that in order to like, put in time, so many things

**R:** so then you are blessed with your husband, do you know African men? Hahahha him waking up to prepare the kids for school while the mother is sleeping??? Hahah

**P2:** hahahaha yeah hmmm he is one of the rare species, so sometimes I think that, well I am not too sure but my theory is that a female academician should have a husband who is not an academician maybe, 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, because there will be now one, and if there is no one, then the family, your husband, will say then you are not going you have to be here, so you just need somebody who isn't as busy, yah that's what I feel

**R:** so, uhhmm what kept you going all this, I keep going back to this question, because clearly as you put your life I can see challenges, what made you strive despite the challenges?

**P2:** hmm, I think it's also the people that believed in me, like prof would just say, every time I write she would just say ahh this is very good, this is a good chapter, you know sometimes I would think I submitted rubbish, but she would say, good, it's a good start and sometimes I would think she was trying to say it was not very good, hahahaha, she was trying to be polite, you know here first sentence would always be encouraging, it's a good start but try to change a, b, c,d,e, so the good start would always be encouraging because then I would think oh so I am good, so it's like she was encouraging me, then there were also cheerers, those people would comment Doc, Doc, Doc, ahh we know you are going to finish, oh my parents would say it's important to finish this thing, my husband would also say, you know we have sacrificed so much you need to finish, you cannot stop on the way, look at how what we have lost, we have lost resources, time, so why would you stop? And that kept me going. And also the red gown, every time I saw people graduate I would say to myself, one day I will wear that ahahahahh, one day I'm going to wear that. Then I kept this article for that prof because she told us her story, her story had challenges, so another I think is looking at role models, I would always look at Mandela and say hmm he stayed in that cell and 27 years is a long time but he endured, and 27 years compared to years is nothing, the environment he was in was bad, and I am able to see my family, so I would look at the worst situations and say I am lucky, I am blessed, then also I would tell myself that there are actually women out there who want to do PhD, but perhaps they were not selected at UP, so for me this was a privilege, why should I waste it, so for me I saw it as an opportunity. So it's not being selected at any university, it is

being selected at UP, that was another thing that kept me going, this is a South African university

**R:** and a good one.

**P2:** yes, yes when my application was successful, they said there were so many people who applied, and I was selected, so the fact that I was selected I knew that I had the capability to finish, though I sometimes I didn't believe in myself, but the fact that the university put me in, I knew that I would make it, I would get my PhD, and also, I began to discover that people around me were ordinary people. Before I would think that people who did PhD were really smart, hmm but you know during those support sessions people would be asking questions like, like I know hahaha, okay so I am not the only one. Then at times I would be blank and the courageous ones would raise up their hands and ask what does a theoretical framework mean? So I would think, oh so they also don't know? So this means that even people in this room don't know, so meaning that I was able to get that encouragement, also, from people's weaknesses, people's weaknesses showed me that they are people with weaknesses, so yah, I also discovered that people who were weak, because when we did support sessions, there were first years, second, third and fourth years, so there were some fourth years who were still struggling with theoretical framework, but they were writing, they still didn't get it, so I thought, so that one that was struggling has finished, then I will also finish; so that also gave me yah.

**R:** so the support sessions really assisted? They were of great help?

**P2:** they did, I networked with people, I was able to get, you know, I was very good at hearing questions, you know those questions that were being asked, I never asked questions, but those questions that were being post, were able to expose me to the fact that they also, they were also struggling, and then during informal meetings we would talk about our struggles, and guess what, their struggles were my struggles. But then some of them through their struggles, they, maybe when we met in the following session they would say oohh actually I finished that analysis, oh actually I finished writing, oh actually I...my thing has gone for editing, meaning that they had written something, so that for me kept me going, like people who do PhDs are not any sharper, they are not any, they are ordinary people with financial problems, with social problems, yah so that kept me going. But before that I thought people who did PhD had all the money, they were sharp, they knew what research was but when I entered I was able to see that ohh they are also struggling, their struggles were my struggles. So if they did, I can also do it.

**R:** so another thing that you give credit to is the facilities, the library

**P2:** yes, the library, the support sessions, because sometimes we would have a whole session on what is qualitative research, we would be practical, for example professor Kobus Maree, yah I used to like his sessions, he would tell us what is a theory, what is theoretical framework and then he would, yah and then they would send those presentations and I would go through those presentations, what is data analysis and sometimes we would also have hands-on, yah like hand-on sessions where they show you, where they actually show you how to find articles, Google scholar, so yah, all those helped me, how do you write an article, what is an article and also during those sessions they would sell books and I would buy books on research, simple books explaining what is research in a very simple way, so that also helped me. So those books may not have been available in Zambia, they are not available in Zambia but here they are available, and then also the fact that I was able to access the library even in Zambia, for me that was a big resource, because I didn't have to physically come, yes there was no need, once I have my UP number and password, I could explore, I could do anything in the library, and then also I could email and ask for anything, they would send it back, and also there is this environment in UP where they make you feel like you can make it, they don't make you feel like you are nothing and yah, like in Zambia when I was doing my master's they would say, master's is for intelligent people, master's is what.. so there is that, that fear that they instil in you, so when I came to UP it's like they believed in me, it's like once you enrol they know you are going to finish one day, so for me that was a plus, people like *Prof Bradley* would meet me in the corridors and ask how are you doing, yah you are going to get there, so all those things were like encouraging me, I don't think I would have finished if those words were not spoken, so words really stick and yah

**R:** and you mentioned that you financed your studies, everything you did for yourself

**P2:** yes but then there was what they called UP scholarship where they paid like tuition, so like every time I paid tuition they would pay it bank, and it encouraged me because I am a foreigner, I am a foreigner and I don't deserve it, but then they said all PhD students are getting it, so I said wow! In Zambia you don't get such, of course you can get a scholarship when you apply and so on, but this one but the virtue of being part of the university, so that also pushed me, and also they would say hey if you stop they will recover it, of course that was a threat but for me, these people are really nice, I am a foreigner and hmm this is good. And somehow that why maybe I decided to come back, because yah, you feel like they care about you and also people like Mitchell who is doing the support sessions, she would write emails to us, come to the support sessions and with an encouragement, please attend these, they are helpful, I wish you all the best and so on, and again she would send funding opportunities, resources, and then you would feel like ohhh I am not just a number, I am counted in the university, and that kept me going, like I am a person and I am recognised and so on.

**R:** hmmm yah. What advice would you give African women who are considering enrolling for doctoral studies? And particularly in your department?

**P2:** they can make it, you don't need to be sharp, of course you need the qualifications, you need a master's to be enrolled, meaning that you have some level of intelligence, yah so as long as you did your master's you have the capability, you are selected you have the capability, yah what is important is determination, but that doesn't mean that you should lose your family and so on, yah so for me I think, people who do PhD are ordinary people, they are not any special, the only special thing is determination, just determination

**R:** because blows will come as you go, storms will come

**P2:** yes they come but then you are just determined to go, yah so that's it.

**R:** is there anything that you thought would have made things easier had you known prior enrolling for PhD, is there something that you say had I known this was going to happen oh hmm

**P2:** but I think if I had the glimpse of the time and not resources, but the time I needed to put in, I don't think I would have enrolled, hahaha

**R:** so you think it's good that everything is a mystery, only revealed as you go?

**P2:** hahaha yess yah I wouldn't have done, because yah the journey was rough, haha it takes a lot

**R:** it takes a lot, not only from you, but from people around you too.

**P2:** hmmm, so the fact that I had enrolled, I told myself that I am not going to quit, but if I knew I wasn't going to punish myself hahaha

**R:** or probably if you understood, because probably somebody told you it requires time and hard work

**P2:** hmmm but I didn't know to what extent and extremes, but now I discovered, and I was like, what did I get myself into, but you know, there is a proverb in Zambia that says if you enter the forest, don't listen to all the noises, they will freak you out, so just stay focused on the road, don't listen to all these other things, so that's what I needed to, it's like a horror movie, you don't know what going on yah, maybe you are part of the movie and they put you in the forest, you don't know what is expected, but because you are already in the forest you cannot go back, you continue moving, you don't listen to the funny noises, you continue moving, because you know that yah, you might end up losing it

**R:** you might end up hearing a sound of an owl and then get scared

**P2:** you just die, you can't go back because it is dark, and so the better thing is go forward where there is light, so I followed the light until I saw the light.

**R:** Until you made it.

**P2:** yah, until I made it, until I wore that thing, until Prof Zandi called my name and I was like, am I dreaming, hahahaha, but I think it is one of the greatest achievements in life, it gives you satisfaction but it is not easy, it gives you satisfaction.

**R:** and that's just life, anything that is worthwhile is not easy, everything that is valuable is not easy

**P2:** yah, 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.

**R:** hmmm, yah, okay, thank you for your time

**P2:** thank you, I enjoyed the interview as well, it's good to reflect, and it is an important study.

**End.**