

**Exploring the Lived Experiences of Black South African Women who have Completed
Their PHD in Psychology**

by

Cherazaad Shereen Edries

submitted in accordance with the requirements for

the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY (98511)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: Dr EL Gordon

CO-SUPERVISOR: Ms S Terre Blanche

3rd January 2023

DECLARATION

Name: Cherazaad Shereen Edries

Student number: 42161355

Degree: Master of Arts Clinical Psychology (98511)

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Black South African Women who have Completed Their
PHD in Psychology.

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I
have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete
references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and
that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for
examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



3rd January 2023

SIGNATURE

DATE

ABSTRACT

Doctoral attrition and student retention remains an issue of contention within the South African context, and students of colour encounter many challenges that affect their participation and endurance in higher education. South Africa's educational landscape has been founded and influenced by Apartheid policies and structures, which marginalised black women and privileged the white minority. The introduction of a democratic state post 1994 allowed for access and a transformation of the educational sector not only in policy, but in inclusive racial access. Many students of colour struggle to retain their position within higher education institutions and throughput or successful completion remains debatable within the Humanities fields. There are many factors that influence participation in higher education such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and support structures. There are many studies that document the challenges and experiences of students currently enrolled in Universities, but a lack of retrospective studies conducted on alumnus black women who have successfully completed a doctorate and their experiences. It is within this context, that this study sought to explore the lived experiences of black South African women, who have completed a doctorate within the field of Psychology. The study further sought to understand their successes, challenges and coping resources which assisted them to manage and navigate the doctoral journey. Located within an interpretivist paradigm a qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach was used. Data was collected through semi-structured online interviews via Microsoft Teams and six black women were interviewed. Data was analysed using the interpretive phenomenological method of analysis. The theoretical lenses contextualising the study were Salutogenesis and Intersectional theory. The findings revealed that coping resources were paramount to managing the doctoral journey. Family support, relying on the supervisory relationship and claiming agency within the process was important. Having intersected identities such as race and gender impacted how they viewed themselves within academic spaces and produced psychological and emotional impacts. The results further indicate the validation and leverage that obtaining a

doctorate has for black women. Institutional support was considered vital to the success of the student and contributes to the retention of students of colour. It was concluded that institutions develop groups and programmes that facilitate student support and cultivate safety, and safe spaces where issues of racial tensions could be interrogated. Critical engagement and platforms of empowerment and opportunities for representation are recommended. The study offers insight into the experiences and offers insight into further support opportunities that could assist black women within academic spaces.

Key Terms: Intersectionality, salutogenesis, doctorate, education, coping resources, marginalisation, generalised resistance resources, gender, race, higher education.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

“He who promised, is faithful” – Hebrews 10:23

I thank my God for preserving me and preparing me for the things that we talk about. Completing this work is a testament to your faithfulness and promises and for that I am thankful.

To my supervisors whom none of this would have been possible. Dr E L Gordon thank you for extending yourself and mentoring with patience, passion and grace you saw passed my perceived limitations and encouraged growth, for this I am grateful. To my co-supervisor, Ms S Terre Blanche thank you for your support, guidance and honesty, it allowed me to build confidence, create perspective and anchor myself in the study.

To my parents Graham and Norma Edries thank you for your unconditional support in making my dreams come true, your sacrifices do not go unnoticed. A special thank you to my uncle, Dr H V King for your patience and time, the calls, conversations and learning from you has been invaluable. To my family and friends who extended love, care and kindness. Thank you for making the journey lighter and brighter.

To my participants, thank you. Thank you for sharing your lives with me and for letting me in. I do not take it for granted. This would not be possible without you and for that I am truly grateful.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS.....	ix
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Research Problem	3
1.3 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions.....	6
1.4 Clarification of Key Concepts	6
1.4.1 Racial Classification “Black”	6
1.4.2 Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology (PhD/ Doctorate).....	7
1.4.3 Doctoral Student	7
1.5 Structural Layout of the Thesis	7
1.5.1 Chapter 1 – Introduction.....	7
1.5.2 Chapter 2 – Literature review.....	8
1.5.3 Chapter 3 – Methods Section.....	8
1.5.4 Chapter 4 – Interpretation of Results and Discussion.....	8
1.5.5 Chapter 5 – Conclusion.....	8
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	9
2.1 Higher Education and Access	9
2.2 Factors Contributing to Successful Completion	14
2.2.1 Motivation.....	14
2.3 Mental Health and the Doctoral Journey.....	17
2.3.1 Loneliness, Isolation, and Student Engagement.....	20
2.4 Gender and the Balancing Act	24

2.5 The Flourishing Scholar	29
2.5.1 Family Support and Coping.....	30
2.5.2 Support from the Supervisor	33
2.6 Theoretical Framework	35
2.6.1 Salutogenesis.....	36
2.6.2 Intersectionality	43
2.7 Conclusion	45
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	46
3.1 Introduction	46
3.2 Research Approach	46
3.3. Sampling Method	50
3.3.1 Purposive Sampling	50
3.3.2 Description of the participants.....	54
3.4 Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews.....	55
3.5 Data Analysis	57
3.5.1 Step 1: Reading the transcripts.....	58
3.5.2 Step 2: Coding the transcripts.....	59
3.5.3 Step 3: Identifying themes.....	60
3.5.4 Step 4: Establishing connections	60
3.5.5 Step 5: Reiteration	61
3.5.6 Step 6: Cross-case analysis.....	61
3.6 Trustworthiness.....	61
3.6.1 Credibility	62
3.6.2 Transferability.....	62
3.6.3 Dependability	63
3.6.4 Confirmability	63
3.6.5 Reflexivity.....	64

3.7 Ethical Considerations.	66
3.7.1 Confidentiality.....	68
3.7.2 Justice.....	68
3.7.3 Informed consent	69
3.7.4 Beneficence	70
3.7.5 Non-maleficence	70
3.8 Conclusion	71
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....	72
4.1 Introduction	72
4.2 Outline of Themes.....	73
4.2.1 Superordinate Theme 1: Coping resources	74
4.2.2 Superordinate Theme 2: Navigating gender roles	90
4.2.3 Superordinate Theme 3: Psychological impact.....	95
4.2.4 Superordinate Theme 4: The vulnerable identity of the black woman doctoral graduate	100
4.2.5 Superordinate Theme 5: Purpose: The door opens.....	110
4.2.6 Superordinate Theme 6: Institutional support	114
4.3 Conclusion	120
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	122
5.1 Introduction	122
5.1.1 Research Question 1	122
5.1.2 Research Question 2	124
5.2 Limitations	125
5.3 Strengths.....	126
5.4 Recommendations	127
5.5 Concluding Remarks.....	128
REFERENCES.....	130

APPENDICES	143
Appendix A: Ethics approval	143
Appendix B: Approval from the Senate Research, Innovation, Post-graduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee	146
Appendix C: Invitation Letter and Consent Form	148
Appendix D: Interview Guide.....	150
Appendix E: Turnitin Report	152
Appendix F: Confirmation of Professional Editing	153

LIST OF TABLES

Table 4.1: Description of participants.....	72
Table 4.2: Themes	73

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
CREC	College Research Ethics Committee
GRR	General Resistance Resources
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
RPSC	Research Permission Sub-committee
SOC	Sense of coherence
SRIPCC	Senate Research, Innovation, Post-graduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction

There are many unique challenges that post-graduate students encounter structurally and psychologically, that may hinder their performance and participation in higher education which may impact degree completion (Silinda, 2019). The perception of institutional and academic support is vital to the success of students enrolled in academia. Individual demographic factors such as age, race, gender, socio-economic status and social support are all factors that contribute to student attrition rates (Silinda, 2019). There have been several studies conducted on South African students and their experiences at various South African universities (Loots et al., 2016; Mokhele, 2013; Zulu, 2022). The vast challenges, stereotypes and dilemmas have been documented within academia focusing on identity and race-specific to the South African context. South Africa has a long embedded unequal history of stratified social hierarchies based on gender, class, race and socio-economic status, which are all factors that influence how one experiences various social injustices or privileges within their social context (Mzangwa, 2019).

The introduction of the democratic government post 1994 ignited an urge to focus on post-graduate students, especially black women within the doctoral realm due to numerous factors (Herman, 2011). Herman (2011) argued that the majority of the black student population, experienced disadvantages under the apartheid regime which comprised of a flawed and under-resourced educational system. The oppression faced through apartheid law, which was founded on racist socio-political underpinnings, marginalised women of colour. The laws of apartheid which promoted segregation were further supported within the patriarchal society of South Africa perpetuating oppression (Alabi et al., 2019). The exclusion that black women experienced marginalised them in terms of access to education, which further stripped them of agency, and positioned them at the baseline of the educational hierarchy (Alabi et al., 2019). Many students of colour presently struggle to maintain their positions in higher education and the retention of black students is increasingly contentious.

A robust and intentional effort is required to address the retention of black students in higher education specifically with a focus on marginalised women (Herman, 2011).

The shift towards, and the introduction of a democratic state, allowed for transitions to occur socially, economically, and most importantly, politically with regard to governance (Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017). One of the most visible and inclusive changes was witnessed within the educational sector, whereby access was provided to all races and enrolment greatly improved. A shift in policy was also ushered in towards inclusivity with a disbanding of segregated policy within education (Herman, 2011; Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017). Belluigi and Thondhlana (2019) unpack the concept of access post democracy, and currently deem it as merely structural for the academic of colour, as academic institutions fail to translate transformative practices into reality. Although policy is inclusive, the practices and culture maintained in institutions perpetuate the status quo, preserving a privileged elite group which holds power. The notions of thriving and surviving are entrenched in the experience of the black academic. The focus shifts from access to means of enduring and suffering the higher education system until throughput and completion.

There are limited retrospective studies that have been conducted on black women who have succeeded in higher education, especially focusing on a specific doctoral programme. This study sought to uncover the lived experiences of black South African women who have completed a doctorate within the discipline of psychology at a historically white university. The women's experiences are considered personal and unique and to preserve the intimacy of the lived experience, a qualitative approach was utilised with Interpretive Phenomenology Analysis (IPA). The theoretical lens chosen to contextualise the study was the salutogenesis theory which offers explanations of wellbeing and resourcefulness in the face of stressful contexts. Owing to the nature and context of the study, understanding the intersections of inequality, race, gender and class is imperative and cannot be overlooked. A second theoretical lens was applied which suited and further contextualised the unique experience of being black and woman. These aspects highlight

the real acknowledgement, that not all women are the same nor do they experience the same social constructs of identity, and the same privileges awarded by society equally (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004). For this study, the classification of black refers to African black, coloured and Indian racial groups as defined by former racial subtypes established under apartheid law. This term acknowledges that all these racial groups were considered previously disadvantaged by racial laws implemented under apartheid (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). Social categories such as racial classifications are still utilised in society today in institutions for reporting and statistical means (Joubert, 2014). Racial categories are not endorsed for the unfair discrimination and segregation of persons.

In addition to the acknowledgement of the term black, all the participants identified with black as a grouping, and an encompassing term to mean not European or white identifying. The term black women is used throughout this dissertation and is inclusive of the unique experiences, accounts and narratives of the participants. The awareness is paramount to avoid homogenising them and to be aware that there is diversity even in inclusivity.

This chapter goes on to discuss the research problem and rationale for the study followed by the research aims and objectives. The definitions of key terms are explained which contextualise the study and finally, an overview of the various chapters that make up this thesis are presented.

1.2 Research Problem

Doctoral attrition is a growing concern, especially within the humanities fields of study (Herman, 2011). The retention of black students remains an area of debate as numerous factors that intersect and create a unique experience for the black academic are realised (Herman, 2011). According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2018), attrition rates are considered alarming and are not a true reflection of the enrolment rate. This overall dropout rate contributes to the concern, and it is thus important, to identify the factors that contribute to the attrition rate. This could be an important source of

information that can aid as a resource to address this growing concern within the South African context (Zewotir et al., 2015).

Despite the shift from apartheid to democracy post 1994, South Africa is still attempting to rectify the injustices of the past. Due to historical political, socioeconomic, educational and racial oppression experienced, which entrenched a legacy of inequalities which demand attention (Mzangwa, 2019). Subbaye (2017) acknowledges efforts of rectification through legislation, which aims to provide leverage for previously disadvantaged racial groups to gain access into spaces which were previously denied or limited. One of these prominent focus areas is the education sector. The educational landscape has made strides in terms of access and enrolment into higher institutions by amending policy and law which promotes inclusivity especially racially (Mzangwa, 2019). According to Breier and Herman (2017), South Africa has seen significant growth in doctoral production; however, in comparison to other countries such as Portugal and Brazil globally which are immersed in development, South Africa fares poorly in its throughput rates. The National Development Plan of South Africa proposed a target of 100 doctoral graduates per million of the population by the year 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2012). This requires a yearly throughput rate of 5 000 doctorates across various disciplines (DHET, 2018). According to the statistics provided by the DHET (2018), South Africa's doctoral production estimates are 3 344 graduates per year across all higher education disciplines. A further breakdown of race and gender was unknown.

The National Development Plan is only a single aspect of developmental legislation that aspires to improve the output and quality of education within South Africa. Mzangwa (2019) highlights the importance of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, which universities have to adhere to, and aims to address the injustices of the past and strives to equalise opportunities, by having to account for gender and racial representation. Apartheid disenfranchised women within the educational sector in South Africa, especially black women. A method of disempowering women was limiting their access to educational

opportunities and, in turn, academia was dominated by white men who occupied influential positions within higher education (Mzangwa, 2019)

There is a need to focus on black women within institutions of higher education to retain and sustain them within academia. According to the Council of Higher Education (CHE) (2021), course success rates per qualification level at post-graduate level indicate that black students have not performed well in completion rates. Black African student success rates stood at 67%, coloured at 72% and Indian at 72% in comparison to the success rate of whites at 84%. The CHE (2021) statistics further indicated that men enrolled to undertake more doctorates than women and were also awarded more doctorates in 2019. The dropout rate for doctoral degrees has been indicated at 46% which is an alarming attrition rate, indicating that many students enrol to complete the academic endeavour but are not sustained in the pursuit until completion (CHE, 2021)

Against this backdrop of increased enrolments which is an indication of access, there remains an issue concerning throughput rates for the black woman scholars. This study aimed to address the gap in that not many studies have been conducted on black women within the South African context. There has been a paucity of qualitative studies looking at doctoral cohorts and specifically women's experiences, within academia zoning in on a particular issue (Alabi et al., 2019; Loots et al., 2016). Other studies conducted on black women have been autoethnographic capturing a single experience of the educational pursuit (Maseti, 2018). Obtaining many accounts of the doctoral experience allows for the expansion of knowledge on a particular group of women. This study aimed to uncover the lived experiences of black South African women who have completed a doctorate in psychology. The importance of a reflective study is paramount in zoning in on the black woman's unique experiences and efforts. Highlighting the challenges and successes as well as identifying the various coping mechanisms employed by these women, can make a valid and important contribution to current students who are aiming to become knowledge generators and to enhance the retention of students. It is hoped that the university will use this study of

experiences to sensitise itself to the unique experiences of black South African women in academia and intercept the challenges faced by students where possible.

1.3 Research Aims, Objectives and Questions

This research study aimed to explore, describe, and interpret the lived experiences of black South African women who have completed a doctorate within the field of psychology at a historically white university.

The primary objective of the study was to explore and describe how black South African women experienced the doctoral journey, their successes, challenges and coping resources. Since the study was focused on black women, gender and race were social constructs that were considered in how these women experienced their academic journeys and influenced their personal lives. The lived experiences included the successes and challenges that the women faced within their personal context, and experiences of academia.

The second objective of the study was to uncover and describe the various coping resources and support networks that these women relied on to garnish wellbeing, and methods to endure the journey. Understanding the various relational and practical negotiations that these women had to navigate to persist and prove triumphant in the end, provides valuable information on the retention of students.

From the above objectives, the following research questions were established, and the study then set out to answer them:

1. What are the lived experiences of black South African women who have completed a doctorate in psychology?
2. What coping strategies do these women employ to manage their studies?

1.4 Clarification of Key Concepts

1.4.1 Racial Classification “Black”

The racial classification of black refers to African, coloured, and Indian racial groups as defined by former racial subtypes established under apartheid law. This term

acknowledges that these predetermined racial groups were considered disadvantaged and disenfranchised by racial laws implemented under apartheid (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). The racial classifications such as white, African, coloured, and Indian are constructed social categories. These categories are still used in society currently for reporting and statistical purposes. In South Africa there is constitutional protection against discrimination based on race (Joubert, 2014).

1.4.2 Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology (PhD/ Doctorate)

The acquisition of a doctorate is largely an academic pursuit that holds benefits for the student (Herman, 2011). The defining characteristic of this qualification is that there is a research component that demonstrates mastery, competence, and a new scientific contribution to the field of psychology. Consulting and pursuing work in academia, business organisations, and applied health disciplines, in addition to pursuing research work is achievable with a Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology.

1.4.3 Doctoral Student

A registered student currently enrolled at an academic institution registered for a doctorate in psychology. For this study, women who were previously registered and had completed their Doctorates in Psychology were considered, therefore rendering them alumni.

1.5 Structural Layout of the Thesis

1.5.1 Chapter 1 – Introduction

Chapter 1 presents an introduction to the research with a focus on the educational landscape from a historical perspective. The introduction further highlights the rationale for focusing on black women within the South African academic context within the post-graduate phase. The chapter then cascades into an elaboration of the research problem statement stressing the importance of the study. It then flows into the research aims, objectives, and questions of the study. The chapter clarifies key terms contained within the study and finally, the structural layout of the study is presented along with a conclusion.

1.5.2 Chapter 2 – Literature review

This chapter contains the study's literature review. Relevant literature is presented that pertains to the study's topic. The South African educational landscape is discussed, along with gendered expectations contained within academia. Factors that contribute to a successful academic are highlighted as well as unique challenges that may face the black woman academic. The chapter further discusses two theoretical frameworks used to contextualise the study namely salutogenesis and intersectionality. The chapter then concludes with a summary.

1.5.3 Chapter 3 – Methods Section

Chapter 3 contains the methods section of the study. The methodology of the thesis is discussed in depth and an elaboration on the qualitative design and interpretive phenomenological approach is given. The chapter additionally discusses the sampling methods of the study as well as the criteria and method of data collection. Data management and steps of data analysis were discussed. The chapter then highlights ethical considerations as well as the researcher's reflection specific to this study and ends with a summary and conclusion.

1.5.4 Chapter 4 – Interpretation of Results and Discussion

The findings of the study are schematically presented and discussed according to the themes generated via the interpretive phenomenological analysis. The findings are intertwined within the literature reviewed and theories to further assist in understanding the unique lived experiences of achieving a doctorate by these black South African women. The chapter then concludes with a summary and a conclusion

1.5.5 Chapter 5 – Conclusion

The final chapter concludes the study and presents information on whether the findings have met the research aims and objectives. A consideration of the study's limitations is presented and recommendations for future research are proposed.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a discussion of the relevant literature on doctoral students and the pertinent theoretical framework intended to support the literature. The literature review showcases the various challenges that doctoral students encounter during their studies. This includes the necessities for completion as well as factors that contribute to attrition rates. The literature draws attention to how black women within the field of psychology are impacted by the doctoral process.

The literature review commences by addressing why students enrol and take up the doctoral degree highlighting the motivations, followed by challenges such as race and gender, and the impact these have on academia and higher education. Challenges are further contextualised through mental health hurdles that may be experienced during the journey. This chapter then looks at various methods by which students manage this academic environment and the support structures available to them. Gender is then conceptualised through a feminist lens, looking at how women may be inhibited by structures such as gender and the societal roles that they are seemingly required to fulfil. Lastly, the review explores the issue of race and how black women specifically are marginalised within academia. The literature covers both personal and structural components that continue to impede the advancement of black women within academia and their pursuit of a post-doctoral qualification.

2.1 Higher Education and Access

It is well known internationally and nationally within the context of Southern Africa that black women are under-represented in their historical context and as contributors to knowledge (Spates, 2012; Teague, 2015). Spates (2012) argues that mainstream knowledge and epistemologies are governed by the western way of thinking. This was due to mainstream European knowledge being utilised to advance and propel the white race historically. The European epistemology was taken as true valid knowledge, while people of colour had to adapt to new ways of thinking and customs abandoning their own working

knowledge systems and ways of being (Spates, 2012). The author recites how people of colour specifically in the United States had their own unique knowledge systems which were compromised and silenced, to promote western ideals and advance western knowledge systems. Because of this, there has been a paucity of knowledge that emanates from alternative racial and cultural groups due to the repression that was imposed upon them. The indigenous knowledge systems lack representation, and the exclusion of minority groups has led to deficits in common knowledge, as viewpoints from people of colour were not considered in the construction of mainstream knowledge (Spates, 2012).

The historical construction and justification of racial groups were further motivated through the use of science and biology (Spates, 2012). The differences in biology motivated different laws and governed segregated social interactions. This is, however, similarly noted within the context of South Africa where an established economic and political structure known as apartheid, was enforced that preserved the privilege and rights of the white minority population (Bunting, 2006). The higher education system was grossly unequal and at the time did not serve the interests of a democratic state but rather served a minority group reserving privilege. It was known that the educational facilities for people of colour during apartheid were substandard and did not equip a large majority of the South African population with skills and knowledge. Post-apartheid, the educational sector inherited the poor performance of an engrained disproportionate and under-resourced educational system which left people unprepared and ill-equipped for the transition into higher education (Sehoole & Adeyemo, 2017).

It is well known that higher education is not exempt from the structural challenges of society for the economic benefit of society. Teague (2015) reports that higher education influences a country's economic prospects which advances and enhances the financial and social health of its society. A robust higher education system is essential to the country's overall development. This further highlights the importance of the education sector which contributes directly to the financial prowess of the country (Teague, 2015). This is done

through doctoral graduates using their academic skills and resources to contribute to the growing knowledge base of the country, thus, influencing policy and enhancing development. There has been much pressure placed on institutions of higher education to produce more doctorates to generate new knowledge that contributes to the betterment of society and informs policy (Zewotir et al., 2015). The more academics a country produces the stronger the economic output and influence over policy change. However, in the United States, women are unequally represented within leadership roles (Zewotir et al., 2015). This sentiment is shared by Chetty and Pather (2015) who state that in South Africa, even though access to higher education has expanded, it has not made a significant impact on participation rates. Access is impacted by a multiplicity of factors such as gender, race and socioeconomic status that influence how the black academic experiences higher education (Mgqwashu et al., 2020). The importance of access to higher education is still affected by the multi-layered intersecting elements that may produce a different educational result for previously disadvantaged groups who are considered under-represented and a minority (Mgqwashu et al., 2020). The access and privilege of educational continuity are still reserved for the privileged to middle class indicating the socioeconomic and financial reality of educational access and leverage. Mgqwashu et al (2020) argues that students from a rural background have to adjust and unlearn traditional practices of knowledge which have contributed to their identity development, to adopt new ways of surviving in academia as a new context. Chetty and Pather (2015) further state that only 11% of black youths ages 18-24 are at university. This points to a potential dropout of black students in the entry-level phases of higher education. Because of the division of the country along stringent racial lines, black people especially in rural areas were greatly disadvantaged. Rural communities were particularly starved of resources with long-term consequences in terms of social development and education. Students' abilities and knowledge were severely lacking, preventing them from attending and/or succeeding in higher education (Chetty & Pather, 2015). Access remains one of the pertinent aspects to consider when evaluating education

and Teferra (2014) explains that women in Africa are very much under-represented in the professoriate, particularly in the fields of technology, humanities and social sciences. One also cannot ignore overarching structural issues in South Africa such as the impact of apartheid which informs race and a patriarchal culture that informs gender (Chetty & Pather, 2015).

Despite the dismantling of apartheid and racial groupings, racial narratives are pervasive even in the present. The inequalities that apartheid constructed have had longstanding ramifications that affect access to institutions (Chetty & Pather, 2015). Although the South African education system has made strides since the 1994 democratic elections, it has not advanced without challenges. Chetty and Pather (2015) state that there has been an increase in dropouts especially viewed from a race perspective. Access to resources remains a high concern as well as increasingly poor student performance due to factors such as health, economic choices, supportive systems and relationships. A culmination of these factors as well as one's socioeconomic status influence how one thrives within the educational system (Chetty & Pather, 2015).

Verwey and Quayle (2012) posited that apartheid and Afrikaner nationalism sought to advance and propel the white minority race over people of colour. This known whiteness has always been associated with privilege in the economic, political and social spheres of society (Verwey & Quayle, 2012). Bunting (2006) further elaborated that under the apartheid government, white people and institutions were privileged for the purpose of promoting the preservation of the apartheid government and the white minority. Bunting (2006) further posited that race and gender were privileged, white men were seen as the dominant knowledge producers and dominated the academic field. This had ramifications for the people of colour who were marginalised even within the academic system, as they were not acknowledged as key resources and generators of knowledge. The aim was then to maintain the status quo which drove inequality.

Post-apartheid education has still largely benefited white students. According to the DHET (2018), statistics have shown that white students still dominate the success rates in the doctoral pursuit. In 2018, the highest graduation rate was recorded for the master's level at 48.8% but the lowest success rate was recorded for doctoral degrees which made up 14.1%. According to the statistics provided, white students appeared to perform above the national average, whereas black African students were below the national average indicating polarity in success rates. Subbaye (2017) posits that in academia there is a call to readdress and redress the damaging effects that apartheid has had on different racial groupings. Ways in which Subbaye (2017) proposed this redress, was through incorporating and employing more people of colour within the academic structures of higher education institutions. This proposed strategy aimed to acknowledge people of colour for their contributions, especially in the South African context where the education sector is showing growth, and the need for knowledge creation is increasing. An additional way in which redress could be implemented was through universities adhering to quotas, and accounting for racial and gender inclusion, to address the structural and social ramifications of apartheid. As much as post-apartheid created a flux of new opportunities and access for previously disadvantaged race groups, the issues of access, student participation and adequate racial and gender representation are currently issues that are of major concern in higher education (Mzangwa, 2019). In addition to recognising the attempted redress in numbers, another factor that is seen as an important focus is the climate and culture of educational institutions. Belluigi and Thondhlana (2019) address the notion of transformation and the movement toward decolonisation within the academic spaces of South Africa. The transformation narrative has been given much attention and becomes popularised in the vein of redress, however, it has not translated efficiently into praxis. The study highlighted that the markers of transformation are access, and structural changes post 1994 indicate that the most noticeable changes of universities have been in their approaches to accommodating race and gender. The most pertinent practical change which has not been notably attended to, and remains a contentious issue,

is the lack of cultural and institutional change (Belluigi & Thondhlana, 2019). Many higher educational institutions remain largely dominated by men, and positions of authority are privileged for white men, even in the face of a call to radically redress the demographics of the academic pool. The representation and mention of transformation in higher education institutions do not translate directly into equity. The results obtained from Belluigi and Thondhlana's (2019) mixed method study conducted on 27 respondents within a South African university, showed that transformation which was obligatory in terms of policy practice in higher education was not implemented, creating a sense of pseudo transformation (Belluigi & Thondhlana, 2019). The transformation agenda was experienced as reductionistic and lacking substance, as the institutions failed to address the social culture that maintains the dominant ideologies, and encourages compliance with the status quo (Belluigi & Thondhlana, 2019) This highlights the need for this current study, as it aims to give voice to an otherwise marginalised racial and gendered group of South African black women who have succeeded in completing a doctorate in psychology. Zoning in on their specific experience of conducting the doctorate, as well as highlighting their journeys navigating the higher education space, allows for new and relevant knowledge to emerge from a group that is often overlooked.

2.2 Factors Contributing to Successful Completion

The above discussion highlighted factors that have been historically engrained in the South African context that contribute to the shaping of the academic of colour. The following sections represent contributions that aid and impact the successful academic and can be seen as resources that contextualise the doctoral journey within the South African context.

2.2.1 Motivation

In an attempt to understand the lived experiences of South African black women who have completed their doctorate, it is important to understand what motivates one to pursue doctoral studies. In the United Kingdom, Wellington and Sikes (2006), conducted a qualitative study on a small sample of 29 doctoral students who were in the process of

completing their academic degrees. The study considered the impact that motivation had on the personal and academic lives of the students. The researchers found that the common reasons for attaining the degree were based on contributing to theory, knowledge generation, financial security as well as furthering career prospects and personal advancement. A South African study undertaken explored the experience, expectations, career motivations and creativity of doctoral students in three South African universities (Backhouse, 2009). This study yielded similar results to the UK study, although in the South African context, completing a doctorate for further financial benefit was a strong motivator for registering for a doctorate, as knowledge is seen as a key determinant in economic growth and financial generation. Matheka et al. (2020) showed that the main attributes needed to pursue a doctorate, are the determination and discipline it requires for one to be able to work independently, and sacrifice personally, as the doctoral pursuit requires immense responsibility on the part of the researcher. The demands that a doctoral pursuit elicits, requires one to produce much output with little to no coursework or engagement with peers. A personal internal drive as well as external motivations are paramount to success in the doctoral pursuit as they propel the candidate to engage in their writing.

Although there are several external motivations to pursue a doctorate, students will also endeavour to complete studies based on individual personal factors and motivations which, in turn, reveals how much effort they will generate towards fulfilling their study requirements and goals. The self-determination theory is a helpful lens as it highlights how motivation is an innate experience and will differ from person to person (Kusurkar et al., 2013). Motivation and the ability to work independently are considered to be strengths, while conducting studies and the more independent motivation generated the better the outcome of goal attainment (Kusurkar et al., 2013). A student who shows genuine interest in their studies is seen to have intrinsic motivation that sustains and propels them towards their goal attainment. A student who is externally motivated generates inspiration from their external environment and is lured by the potential gains to be earned from the endeavour

(Kusurkar et al., 2013). This is in accordance with the work of Goodman et al.(2011) who highlight how motivation is linked to strong goal-setting which allows the student to engage in their academic tasks mindfully, purposefully and autonomously. The authors further highlight that motivation has a direct impact on academic achievement. The study yielded results indicating that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation affects the effort students put into their academic pursuits. Backhouse (2009) indicated that the motivations for engaging in doctoral studies in a South African population differ from student to student. For some, conducting further studies was a result of genuine interest in a topic for further learning and engagement. For others, it was the accolade of eventually becoming a doctor that was instilled through their formative years. The study further uncovered that those students who had more control and self-direction over their studies, engaged with the material more often as they had increased intrinsic motivation that was governed by choice, and a desire to complete the task at hand.

Similarly, Fraser and Killen (2005) support the idea that external factors influence the motivation to fulfil study requirements and goals. In their study, Fraser and Killen (2005) found two aspects that were strong contributors to academic success. These were how students perceive and interpret their academic environment, and the ability to persist in challenging times with adversity through self-motivation. The study further elicited the concept of self-perception and confidence as key determinants of success. The confidence that the student feels in their capability to sustain and generate the required effort during the academic pursuit impacts their success or failure rate. The work of Matheka et al. (2020) indicates that self-efficacy is a valuable contributor to how much time and effort a student will put into their studies. The notion that self-perception and one's evaluated appraisal of the pursuit is a factor for students who ultimately complete their studies and who do not. Matheka et al. (2020) further emphasises that self-perception and confidence affect the motivations and efforts of the student, in addition to keeping a positive and realistic mindset concerning one's studies can produce positive outcomes. In addition, Fraser and Killen's

(2005) study highlighted that a student's apparent commitment and evaluation of the goal contributes to the attainment of it. It was further elicited in the study that productive goal setting, along with communication with lecturers during the academic period is an indicator of retention rates as well as completion.

The literature suggests that motivation is an important aspect to consider when completing a doctoral degree. How one balances environments and generates motivation to persevere through challenges is important for degree completion (Matheka et al., 2020). Motivation is generated from the individual based on external and internal factors, meaning that motivation is a complex phenomenon for the sustained pursuit of goal attainment and may vary from person to person (Wellington & Sikes, 2006). Ascertaining how doctoral students sustain and generate motivation is considered a key aspect in pursuit of a doctorate, and the present study aimed to look at motivation as an aspect that contributes to the doctoral journey. Although motivation is what allows students to endure and manage their personal journey, pursuing a doctorate is multifaceted and other factors may influence the pursuit as the student is situated within a larger context. Although motivation is an essential component in enlisting to undertake a doctorate, many structural, cognitive, and behavioural components deserve attention. Structural components such as race and gender may influence how one pursues, endures, and experiences the process of undertaking a doctorate, especially for black women (Mokhele, 2013). Cognitive components may refer to perceptions and thoughts around managing the process and behavioural aspects may refer to how one copes with and manages the process of the doctorate and the personal impact it has on them.

2.3 Mental Health and the Doctoral Journey

Dialogue around the experiences of academia and the effects it has on mental health has become more prevalent over the years highlighting its importance (Moulin, 2020). The effects it has on students are pervasive and contribute to eroding performance and wellbeing. Moulin (2020) further emphasises the concerning increase of mental health issues

amongst graduate students. The quality of the supervisory relationship is highlighted as an important relationship that cultivates a positive academic experience or a negative one creating feelings of despair and loneliness (Moulin, 2020). An international survey yielded alarming results indicating that graduate students are six times more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety symptoms than the general population, with women graduate students being more susceptible to depression and anxiety symptoms (Evans et al., 2018). Similarly, another international study conducted in Belgium by Levecque et al. (2017) aimed to indicate the prevalence of mental health issues experienced by doctoral students. The study found that 32% of doctoral students were at risk of developing mental health-related conditions, such as depression, general dissatisfaction, physiological symptoms such as lack of sleep and a loss of interest in pleasurable tasks. This was in comparison to masters and undergraduate students which was reported at 14% on the prevalence of mental health related conditions. The rate of developing a mental healthcare problem such as depression was significantly higher in the doctoral population than in the comparison groups. The study revealed that issues such as occupation, family responsibility, conflicting roles, a rise in job demands, and perceptions of academia as well as the quality of the supervisory relationship are linked to mental healthcare problems (Levecque et al., 2017). Concurrently within the African population, Lochner et al., (2018) with the caring universities project discovered that 24,68 percent of students had experienced at least one major depressive disorder in their lifetime and 20,8 percent had experienced a generalised anxiety disorder. This was found in a sample population from 18 universities in eight countries across the continent of Africa. The study further showed that gender had an influence on one's symptomology as women were found to be the most vulnerable population group.

Mental health issues within academia in South Africa have not been given much focused attention although they exist. Silinda and Brubacher (2016) conducted a study on masters and doctoral learners and the stress experienced during the writing process of a dissertation. The lack of certainty, finances, challenges related to competing demands

personally and occupationally and general wellbeing were found to be concerns of the participants. Financial assistance was a major factor in relieving stress for the students as they required financial resources that were not always readily available (Silinda & Brubacher, 2016). Uncovering the interplay between academics and mental wellbeing is important as it will help students to manage the academic space optimally.

Within the South African student population, intercepting mental health issues at entry into higher education could assist in the retention of students in the educational pursuit. According to Bantjes et al. (2021), the likelihood of failure amongst students diagnosed with major depression and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder¹ (ADHD) were higher, hindering progress within educational pursuits. The study further indicated that intercepting the challenges and providing visible mental health care support at entry level could reduce the attrition rates and contribute to the retention of students in academia. Mental health struggles affect academic performance and early intervention programmes are vital to nurture and support students through the academic journey. The results further revealed that although access to educational opportunities for students of colour was noted, students of colour from previously marginalised racial groups continued to be at high risk for failure or abandoning academic pursuits (Bantjes et al., 2021)

The above paragraph indicates that mental health concerns specifically in academic spaces are becoming prevalent and should not be ignored at all levels of the educational pursuit. It highlights the concern that mental health occurs within various contexts and does not occur in isolation. Environments influence the student, and the student influences the environment they are in. The perception of mental health issues in South Africa is an evolving topic, especially as it relates to students' wellbeing. Schreiber (2019) highlights that mental health care and educational institutions have a duty to create mutually beneficial relationships and cultures that serve the interests of the students and institutions. Following

¹ ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder defined by impairing levels of inattention, disorganization, and/or hyperactivity-impulsivity (American Psychiatric Association, 2022)

the introduction of mental health care as a pertinent factor that impacts the student and the perception of the doctoral pursuit, a discussion on mental health and specific aspects is provided in the next section.

2.3.1 Loneliness, Isolation, and Student Engagement

The higher educational landscape varies from undergraduate to post-graduate education. The focus according to Hyun et al. (2006) shifts from a more structured, passive, formalised school setting, where information is disseminated and students are considered passive consumers of knowledge, to a more independent and collaborative educational space, which is less guided in doctoral studies. This move toward a more independent mode of learning requires the student to become increasingly responsive and engaged in their academic pursuits and quest for knowledge. The motivation required is placed on the student to move through the academic process (Hyun et al., 2006). Hyun et al. (2006) additionally found that students are frequently under pressure to perform academically and in relation to their research outputs which, in many ways, can contribute to stress and isolation, and poses challenges to a person's mental wellbeing. Kohun et al. (2005) highlighted that doctoral students are often left to navigate their emotional worlds in isolation and that faculties are resistant to acknowledge the psychological struggles that students face, contributing to feelings of isolation. The feelings that are elicited in relation to their studies, such as feelings of self-efficacy and an evaluation of their capabilities and endurance to withstand the pressures of the academic pursuit of the doctorate, are all managed internally which may contribute to their quitting the doctoral programme.

A case study analysis conducted by Kohun et al. (2005) found three reasons why a student is most likely to drop out of a doctoral pursuit. The first is the expectations of the student once they are accepted into a programme. The second is how the student perceived and conquered their previous academic pursuits, and the bearing this had on their capabilities. The final and third aspect is the relationship between the student and their

educational institution, the culture the institution embodies and the perception of the support and understanding of the processes of the institution the student is enrolled at. The above factors are important in noting the interplay between various factors that make up a doctoral programme and the factors that influence the student and vice versa. Kohun et al. (2005) emphasise that the student is first an emotional being interacting with their respective educational context and interpreting the demands and requirements of the educational context. They further highlight that feelings of isolation while pursuing a doctorate are a prime contributor to doctoral attrition and cannot be ignored. Other factors such as lack of finances, social support and educational support cannot be ignored as contributing factors to dropout rates. This study conducted by Kohun et al.(2005) found that isolation amongst doctoral students is an important factor that contributes to a student completing or abandoning the pursuit. It was also recommended that educational institutions need to endeavour to reduce feelings of isolation by involving students in various communal activities, and to foster good relationships between supervisor and student.

According to Ahern and Manathunga (2004) women pursuing a doctorate reported higher levels of distress related to isolating behaviours. Isolating behaviours occur among students in relation to the discipline of study as well as isolation in relation to other students (Ahern & Manathunga,2004). A survey conducted at a Western University in the United States, on graduate students have indicated that students in the human sciences are particularly susceptible to stressors and present with higher mental health problems and role conflict, as well as issues relating to research output compared to professional groupings such as business law and information technology (Hyun et al., 2006). A perceived change in or lack of social support contributes to the increase in stress and the inadequate management of such stressors, can lead to isolation for the doctoral student (Kohun et al., 2005).

Sibai et al. (2019) found additional challenges experienced throughout the academic pursuit; for example, time spent alone focused on studies varies for individuals and may be more problematic for some. The study confirmed that more than 40% of academics consider loneliness as a contributor to mental health issues. Sibai et.al (2019) found that scholars are physically affected by the demands that the academic programme places on students. This is reinforced by the isolating nature of the academic course and the withdrawal tendencies of the student. Loneliness develops when students cannot make socially meaningful relationships within the programme, which perpetuates perceived social isolation. Pressure to perform in academic tasks contributes to the perceived isolation facilitating a negative feedback loop in the experience of being a part of and enduring the academic experience (Sibai et al., 2019). The doctoral experience is often depicted as a lonely, isolating and anxiety-driven journey which may impact on the student's wellbeing and psychological functioning (Janta et al., 2014). According to Janta et al. (2014), doctoral isolation may occur at different times for students during their journey. It was found in the study that doctoral students felt alone, expressed feelings of boredom, and required support, whilst other students developed more apparent concerns, such as depressive symptoms. This was confirmed by Ali and Kohun (2006) who highlighted that social isolation is a prime contributor to attrition rates in doctoral programmes, especially when doctoral students are faced with uncertainty about how to proceed within the programme and cannot talk to someone about the problem.

Within the South context Schreiber (2019) describes student engagement as an important buffer to mental health struggles. The author positions the student as an autonomous being and an active participant responsible for their mental wellbeing in educational spaces. Schreiber (2019) states that women may be particularly susceptible and at risk for mental health issues as they are a vulnerable population within the South African context. Furthermore, the author positions the student as an independent being who is able to make healthy proactive choices around their wellbeing when signs of ill health emerge.

Schreiber (2019) elaborated further and describes a remedy for mental wellbeing where a conducive interactional educational context is created so that a student can then feel heard and cared for while managing their mental health concerns. Thus, creating a mutually responsive space where help seeking is met with responsibility and care is seen as an optimal educational response to students, which assists them in navigating higher educational experiences. It was further argued that to hold educational institutions solely responsible for the mental health concerns of students was deemed regressive and parentified and ultimately unhelpful. It positions educational institutions as custodians of students rendering them responsible for students' wellbeing and progress which limited skills development and fostered a dependence on a system that could ultimately not be maintained. This in turn perpetuates the scapegoating of educational institutions for the failure of medical and public health services that are in place to support and nurture populations through their various life stages. Schreiber (2019) states that higher education is a single context in which a person immerses themselves and limiting help-seeking to educational institutions is reductive. This generated the notion that a student, for the most part, is required to be an active participant assuming agency, in combating mental health issues. Co-creating collaborative spaces between the student and the educational sector that support specific student needs through student support and student counselling centres is ideal (Schreiber, 2019). This in turn raises the issue of scope in how far an educational institution can assist and support a student without assuming sole responsibility for them and their various challenges without losing sight of educational responsibilities.

The mental health statistics for the onset and prevalence of mental health issues such as anxiety and mood disorders were considered higher in the United States and Columbia than compared to South Africa. The prevalence of mood disorders in South Africa, according to a World Health Organisation survey, were not considered alarming in comparison to other countries such as Germany, Mexico, and the Netherlands (Schreiber, 2019). This indicates that mental illness among student populations is a complex issue that

deserves attention and may be multifaceted with many contributing factors that may emerge throughout one's lifetime. The extent of mental health within academic spaces remains inconclusive, although it is evident that it is prevalent and the reporting of mental health issues within academic spaces has increased and gained traction (Schreiber, 2019).

The culmination of factors including mental health issues could obscure the already time-consuming process of obtaining a doctorate (Ahern & Manathunga, 2004). Isolation, role conflict and mental health issues are regarded as detrimental to the health of students which is a potential deterrent to successfully completing a doctorate. Exploring the concepts of loneliness and isolation within doctoral students could provide insight into and awareness of the challenges of this already laborious journey as isolation seems to impede students' progress to a great extent (Ahern & Manathunga, 2004; Loots, Ts'ephe & Walker, 2016).

2.4 Gender and the Balancing Act

Herman (2011) states that while there has been an increased interest in the pursuit of doctoral studies, the rate of attrition is very concerning amongst female candidates, especially black candidates. Increasing numbers of doctoral graduates are recruited from greater parts of Africa, leading to greater participation of international students undertaking doctoral pursuits (Herman, 2011). According to Mouton (2016), there has been an influx of prospective doctoral students into South African universities from other countries in Africa. Mouton (2016) further posits that South Africa's doctoral landscape would not have evolved to the extent that it has if it were not for the influx of African students from the rest of the continent, which highlights the scarcity of enrolments from South African students. The startling discovery indicated that while African and South African men dominate the doctoral cohort, from 2002–2012, the graduation growth rate for African women generally was 20.9% but was only 12.2% for South African women (Mouton, 2016). The graduation trajectory has evolved positively within recent years. According to statistics provided by Council of Higher

Education (2021) the headcount for graduates provided on doctoral students in 2019 indicated an influx of South African graduates at 1889 compared to other parts of Africa which was 745 . However, the statistics produced on a cohort of doctoral students from 2014-2019 indicate that men still capitalise the graduation field holding more doctorates than women (Council of Higher Education, 2021). Mokhele (2013) continues this startling observation that women in academia are seemingly invisible, and their absence is palpable given that doctoral representative is currently male dominated within the South African educational landscape.

National and institutional policies have been developed to serve the knowledge community, especially with regard to gender and racial representation within academia which aim to make academia more equitable. The issues facing women in academia are not novel and may be considered systemic to South African society which is predominantly patriarchal (Mokhele, 2013). The experience of the patriarchy then renders doctoral research as deeply gendered, which further highlights male dominance, a focus of growing concern.

After the 1994 democratic elections, South Africa revelled in its new-found democratic sovereignty which brought about many changes in terms of access to education. The democratic government implemented policy changes in higher education, making a bold move towards inclusion and a leap in the direction of the eradication of discriminatory practices and discriminatory policies that shackled many marginalised groups through racial and gender division (Breier & Herman, 2017). Mzangwa (2019) argues that, despite the radical policy shifts, major efforts to make education more inclusive and to follow best practices in education, these attempts have been futile as the effects of the apartheid legacy are considered pervasive and entrenched as South Africa is still desperately trying to remedy the consequences decades later. Presently, Mzangwa (2019) posits that access, participation and success are predominantly reserved for the privileged, while the impoverished majority of previously disadvantaged people of colour fail to benefit to any great extent from the education that is provided to them.

South Africa's attempts to redress the issues of race, gender, access, participation and overall transformation of the educational landscape is further hindered by mismanagement of funds, poor evaluation and non-adherence to policy which ultimately lead to the ineffectiveness of any attempts to realise change (Mzangwa, 2019). Similarly, Subbaye (2017) addresses the legislation that was established post-apartheid to address the entrenched apartheid legacies such as the Employment Equity Act (South African Government, 1998) which is underpinned by the South African Constitution. This sets out guidelines and regulations by which organisations and institutions of higher education need to abide. This Act was promulgated to address the principle of exclusion. It acknowledges that, during apartheid, previously disadvantaged people of colour were not afforded the same opportunities as their privileged white counterparts in all spheres such as educational access, economic access and political access (Subbaye, 2017). This legislation then mandated universities to account for their provision for gender and racial diversities and people living with disabilities within their organisations to ensure that there are no discriminatory practices. This aids in bridging the gap and promotes the fair treatment of all by promoting inclusion, access and diversity. The equality required by the Act allows many previously disadvantaged people in society to have access to and participate in decisions and opportunities to advance their lives (Mzangwa, 2019).

It is well documented in the literature that women are underrepresented in the doctoral field of studies internationally and localised in South Africa, specifically with a focus on research output and productivity (Casad et al., 2021; Loots et al., 2016; Mokhele, 2013; Snyder, 2014; Spates, 2012). There are many reasons for the inequalities which are perpetuated by the gender gap in academia and a cold academic climate (Casad et al., 2021). A reason Walters et al. (2022) suggests, is that gender inequalities are maintained by systemic problems that have now become established and engrained. South Africa is no stranger to patriarchal laws introduced by the apartheid system which excluded women from academic spaces (Alabi et al., 2019; Zulu, 2021). Zulu (2021) further states that the societal

structure was maintained and founded on the patriarchal identities of primarily white men, which supported their agenda of domination and, by implication, perpetuated the marginalisation of women, particularly black women in society. The notion of advancing white men in academia then resulted in academia reinforcing patriarchy, in turn, making it challenging for women to enter the space of academia as it inherently was not set up for gender inclusion. This afforded men the power to adapt knowledge systems and the academic space to ensure their personal advancement and elevation through a primarily masculine academic culture (Zulu, 2021). Mokhele (2013) states that some of the ways in which academia is moulded to align with men is through positions of influence. Menfolk govern research boards, editorial boards, and academic networking spaces. The academic space or higher education is a singular space whereby patriarchy is reinforced. Patriarchy is reinforced by the behaviours of men and rears its head in the various positions they occupy through their personal relationships, domestic life, organisational life and through the discourses men hold as well as their projected gendered expectations which manifested in their relationships (Mokhele, 2013; Zulu, 2021). Zulu (2021) posits that although there may be no overt attempts at maintaining gendered separation in higher education, masculine attributes are still favoured which is further maintained by patriarchal cultures which impact the learning experience and may present challenges for a woman trying to enter the academic environment.

The invisible structures such as racism and patriarchy are embedded and institutionalised and have now become systemic structures that have tangible effects on specific members of society (Walters et al., 2022; Zulu, 2021). Black women remain under-represented and marginalised within society further entrenching and institutionalising issues systemically. It is noted that both being a specific gender (woman) and belonging to a racial group (black) poses its own set of challenges and leads to discrimination based on racial and gender profiling (Maseti, 2018). In an autoethnographic study conducted in South Africa, which is based on a singular experience in a South African higher education institution,

Maseti (2018) records that feelings of authenticity and belonging in academia were always doubted and questioned. Another prominent concern for black academics was the notion of fulfilling quota systems. This led to questions about whether the academic appointment of a woman was related to educational capabilities and intelligence or related to quotas and administrative requirements which further aroused questions of incompetence. Maseti (2018) continued to reveal experiences of racial discrimination, isolation, and feelings of being disconnected from the work and academic culture that she found herself in. The motivation to constantly prove herself as a black woman highlighted the dual oppression faced in racial identity as well as gender identity which resulted in negative experiences of rejection and isolation. Because the nature of the study was an ethnographic one based on a single person's experience, there was an evident limitation in terms of the sample size.

A similar South African study conducted on a larger sample size of 24 black university students aimed to uncover their experiences at a historically whites-only university. The study aimed to uncover students' personal experiences following the dismantling of apartheid, the colonial discourses and the apparent transformation of higher education systems and its impact on students post 1994. The data was collected through participatory action research methods, on a group of 24 students using photo-voice methods encapsulating the students' experiences through visual stills accompanied by detailed written stories. The results indicated that many students felt isolated and inferior and were confronted daily by their racial identity which fostered feelings of exclusion. Racialising experiences further engrained a negative self-perception of being different accompanied by feelings of inferiority. The institutional ethos, practices and methods of learning were found to perpetuate the marginalisation of students of colour (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). Simatele (2018) in a personal reflection recounted the effects of the microaggressions and invalidations she experienced as a black woman in academia. The constant reinforcement of bias and repetitiveness of the invalidations such as her intellect being queried, her accent commented on and work contributions invalidated or met with silence (Simatele, 2018).

The ramifications of the invalidations left her with a sense of disillusionment, self-doubt, and a lack of confidence. The covert nature of the racial and gender microaggressions was subtle and rarely overt which fostered a blindness to privilege which made it challenging to outrightly identify and name the aggressions, reinforcing their palpable and lasting impact (Simatele, 2018). The manner in which the student coped with microaggressions which strategically fostered exclusion, was through asserting confidence and harnessing safe spaces for expression that offered validation for a black woman in academia. These methods of coping consisted of utilising the supervision space, mentoring, and relying on student engagement where topics of invalidation could be addressed and interrogated, with the idea of forming strategies to overcome aspects of marginalisation created by the pervasiveness of invalidation and aggressions (Simatele, 2018).

Despite the transformation of higher education systems and the introduction of inclusionary policies around gender and race, black women still face discrimination and prejudice. This highlights the importance of finding where the various constructs of gender, race, and class intersect which creates a unique and personal experience for the black woman. These concepts are interdependent and influence each other to create a unique experience that is reserved for this makeup of being black and being a woman. The factors that may hinder and challenge the academic in the doctoral pursuit are often beyond the control of an individual. In the following sections, ways of thriving, success and resourcefulness are discussed.

2.5 The Flourishing Scholar

The journey of writing up a doctorate is not conducted in isolation. It requires adjustments and support to aid the student in the pursuit. Support and various coping mechanisms are discussed below that may assist the student to complete the journey. Included in this support is the pertinent aspect of supervision and institutional support that is tentatively facilitated throughout the process of writing the doctorate.

2.5.1 Family Support and Coping.

Research shows that women leave studies incomplete for varying reasons (Akala, 2018; Smith et.al, 2006). A few of the known challenges women face when immersed in studies is the establishment and maintenance of role definitions internally and externally in the academic setting. According to various studies, women assume many roles, dictated by societal norms as well as cultural values (Alabi et al., 2019; Zulu, 2022). Many of a woman's roles and responsibilities are informed by patriarchal behavioural practices that can impede a woman's success within higher education in the South African context. The sociocultural practices have the ability to reduce the woman's role and function to a biological one which requires little to no formal educational requirements (Alabi et al., 2019). One of the most challenging roles is managing a caregiver role accompanied by an academic role. Smith et al. (2006) state that women have added concerns such as taking care of families, being part of a workforce, ageing parents as well as community obligations.

According to Hyun et al. (2006), female graduate students tend to acquire greater responsibility, be it familial or financial. In addition to the stress, the average age internationally for women entering their doctoral studies is 33.6 years, which seemingly overlaps with a women's childbearing age as well as career furthering aspirations (Hyun et al., 2006). Anane and Dankwa (2017) argue that many women are still bound to familial responsibilities and stereotypical homemaking duties. Thus, many women are required to consistently display flexibility in their roles according to their context. Women are seen as nurturers, marriage partners and academics, which poses challenges in engaging with academic material (Anane & Dankwa, 2017). Confirmed in South African literature, gender oppression through a feminist lens is seen as a factor that perpetuates unequal relations between men and women. Societal roles and cultural practices may reinforce the subordinate role women are expected to play in society (Akala, 2018; Alabi et al., 2019; Zulu, 2022). Contrary to this nurturing role embodying women, Mokhele (2013) posited that

this dated argument pertaining to women should not be seen as hindering factor as women are believed to be innately nurturing. Walker (1998) posited that for women the chances of obtaining equilibrium between social life and intellectual life are profoundly paradoxical. The gendered structures of masculinity and femininity, which inform behavioural practices are pitted against each other, especially within the academic environment. Thus, the gendered structure of academic workplaces, which is permeated with presumptions about the distinctions between women and men, reinforces women's relative inferiority at these locations (Walker, 1998)

Resilience is a personal factor that lends itself to coping, and is an important aspect of a person's personality traits that essentially enables one to cope with adversity and, in turn, mend speedily in the face of challenges (Lourens, 2016). According to Lourens (2016), factors that contribute to the development and sustenance of resilience are functional family relations, personal motivation, and self-assurance. Supportive family relations and open communication concerning the various expectations and roles members play within the context of the student are important. This will influence how the student negotiates relationships and support as they do not conduct their studies in isolation. Jairam and Kahl (2012) state that although families can prove to be optimal support structures, stress and tension can be generated within the familial environment that may impact how the doctoral candidate emotionally regulates themselves and essentially copes with the academic endeavour. Jairam and Kahl (2012) further revealed that family support and the perception of the support are important in the academic's pursuit of goals. The family can provide two types of support, namely, tangible and emotional support. Tangible support ranges from assisting with household management, child rearing, and assisting with allocating uninterrupted time for the student to work. Emotional support is vital to the emotional wellbeing of the students which appeared in the form of morale, reassurance, empathetic listening and encouragement (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). In a South African study giving a narrative account of five women of colour undertaking doctoral studies, Snyder (2014) found

that support and encouragement from family members, peers and colleagues assisted women in navigating doctoral education within a South African university. Relying on family members allowed for students to normalise the doctoral journey and establish mechanisms that fostered a connection to the end goal promoting completion. The importance of support for the doctoral student was highlighted in a more recent study where the assistance and support that women in post-graduate studies received from their family networks propelled them to achieve their academic goals. The support ranged from emotional and moral support provided by family and friends which had a positive impact on academic performance (Alabi et al., 2019).

As much as a family system can be described as supportive and willing to assist the doctoral student, Lourens (2016) describes the situation of stolen time. This is referred to when the family and even the student may resent their studies as it takes away from the time and valuable moments when families gather, limiting moments shared. This further describes the sacrifice the student and loved ones make to propel the student forward in writing the doctorate in order to give it the attention and focus it requires and demands. A study conducted by Aitchison and Mowbray (2013) indicated that women who undertake doctoral studies often engage in emotional labour. Families are seen as dual sites of emotional stress and solace. Students often feel a plethora of emotions when it relates to the family dynamic while immersed in the writing process. The study further revealed that feelings of remorse, grief, frustration, and neglect were evident in the students' experiences as many women felt that they were choosing the writing process over cultivating relationships with family which brought about conflicting emotions. Snyder (2014) reported that the emotional conflict of guilt coupled with the pursuit of the doctorate can pose a challenge for the woman as competing responsibilities can threaten persistence.

Family including spousal support is one of the most important factors of success in doctoral students. It is seen as one of the most accessible buffers to stress and a useful coping resource to use when undertaking the task (Lourens, 2016). The author further

elaborates that family commitments, career and student responsibilities are considered two sides of the same coin. They demand different resources from the person at different times and it is challenging to separate them. When a family system's values are aligned with the duality of the various roles of the career-driven student, realistic support structures and expectations can surface (Lourens, 2016). The author further elaborates that women in family systems who are undertaking doctoral studies may require additional support and communication around role expectations within the family system as studies may shift the balance and performance of traditional role expectations. The academic may need additional assistance with child-rearing responsibilities and domestic activities such as preparing meals and household maintenance (Lourens, 2016). Another study conducted by Walters et al. (2022) found that the Covid-19 lockdown exacerbated academic demands and simultaneously put pressure on the home life of the academic as they suddenly merged into one space. The study further found that women enrolled in academic studies struggled to meet the demands of childminding, assisting school-going children with schoolwork, and household maintenance such as meal preparation which impacted academic performance (Walters et al., 2022). Lourens (2016) emphasised the importance of work life balance, and support as well as prioritising family life and academic life meaningfully.

2.5.2 Support from the Supervisor

An aspect that is fundamental to successfully completing a doctorate is the supervisory relationship. The competence of the supervisor and the intellect of the student play an important role in the completion of the dissertation (Lessing & Schulze, 2004). A study at a South African university on 160 post-graduate students on their perceptions of supervision showed that students desired to have a supervisor who was properly matched to their interpersonal style and had knowledge of their research topic (Lessing & Schulze, 2004). Students desired assistance with realistic goal setting and feedback processes, along with the provision of emotional support to enhance confidence and self-efficacy. For black women occupying the academic spaces of educational institutions, it has been reported that

the desired support is challenging to obtain. For instance, Magano (2013) reported that black female post-graduate students face significant obstacles and hurdles, including concerns with power dynamics between the supervisor and student that make it challenging for them to pursue certain research areas. The issues of power dynamics and power relations are not foreign in higher education, specifically relating to the supervisory relationship. Okeke-Uzodike (2021) acknowledges the inherently hierarchical nature of institutions of higher education. He found that power flows from the student to the supervisor and the relationship is transactional in that supervisors impart knowledge and develop the skills of the student. In addition to skills development, the supervisor is responsible for nurturing and expanding the student's knowledge base. The student has power in the sense that they have influence over a co-created a space with the knowledge of self-performance and production of work. The student harnesses control, trust and power in entrusting their written drafts and working knowledge to the supervisor. The traditional top-down flow of information dissemination and oversight of work leaves little room for engagement and reflects a unilateral flow of information. This can lead to a breakdown in communication or collaboration between student and supervisor and highlights the control, influence and importance of dynamic interactions of both vital actors in the research process. If supervision expectations are not managed, the use of power can impact the supervisory relationship and either produce rewards or frustrations for the student (Okeke-Uzodike, 2021). In a study by Flotman (2021), it was recorded that supervisors were perceived as parental figures onto whom the student projected anxieties and competencies. The shared togetherness of the process of supervision and writing a doctorate allowed the student to share their anxieties as to lighten the load of the dissertation project. In the study, Flotman (2021) noted that supervisors are caretakers of students' academic development and that it is the quality of the supervision relationship that determines the success of the student. The element of trust is important in establishing and co-creating a working relationship between supervisor and student Okeke-Uzodike (2021) further highlighted that a lack of trust in a supervisor can hinder a student

from expressing dissatisfaction with processes. Similarly, Magano (2013) highlighted that a strained supervisory relationship can impact self-esteem, and frustrate the research process further. Exasperated by their inability to express themselves openly in consultations with supervisors, students frequently turn to peers or colleagues to find relief, thus highlighting the importance of the quality of the supervisory relationship (Magano, 2013). According to (Harper, 2013) same race role models and academic members foster a sense of belonging in the student and in the institutional culture which is important for the progression of the student's studies. The quality of the supervisory relationship as well as how well the student and supervisor negotiate the supervisory space of roles and expectations is vital to the success of the student. Qualities such as trust and vulnerability are seen to be vital factors for the relationship to thrive and achieve the shared goal of completion. The supervisory relationship has a profound impact on the student's trajectory and overall experience in higher education as the supervisor shapes the academic identity of the student (Cekiso et al., 2019; Flotman, 2021; Okeke-Uzodike, 2021; Schulze, 2011, 2015)

The above literature touches on the educational landscape historically and presently, taking the reader through some of the pertinent challenges that the female academic may face from mental health care challenges, support challenges, and systemic challenges brought on by historical injustices which continue to permeate the veins of society to this day. The chapter then flows into some of the resources that the prosperous academic may use to make the journey a successful one relying on coping mechanisms and resilience that are harnessed through the doctoral pursuit. Despite the challenges that scholars face they can harness resources to navigate the higher education space and prove it to be a success story and emerge triumphant from the pursuit (Mokhele, 2013).

2.6 Theoretical Framework

For this study, two theoretical frameworks were considered appropriate in order to fully encapsulate the context. The salutogenesis theory, which offers explanations for wellbeing and coping in the wake of tense life circumstances, is the first theory. The second

theory is the theory of intersectionality which provides a deeper understanding of the experiences of this diverse group of women within the spaces they occupy. While considering the demographic under investigation, it is critical to comprehend the connections between injustice, racism, gender, and class in order to make sense of the complexity of these individuals' experiences. Both theories are discussed below in relation to the context under study.

2.6.1 Salutogenesis

The salutogenic model of health is based on the premise that health is viewed on a spectrum or a continuum. An individual is considered an interactional being within their environment and will, therefore, encounter various stressors, psychologically, socially, economically and within relationships (Idan et al., 2022). During a person's developmental years, a sense of coherence (SOC) is cultivated which is the ability to perceive and evaluate the stressors in the environment and accurately mobilise the resources necessary to manage it. General resistance resources (GRR) are the coping resources that are available to the individual that facilitate and assist an individual to cope and manage the environment and specific stressors (Idan et al., 2022). The overall theoretical assumption is that when applied effectively in stressful situations, an individual will not be overcome by their stressors but rather will manage their life stressors through effective tension management strategies (Idan et al., 2022)

The theory of salutogenesis gives one an understanding of how various people cope in the face of stressors and can overcome stressors or stressful situations that demand resources from a person. The factor of coping was hinged on the question of what allows some to thrive and move towards wellbeing even in demanding tense situations (Antonovsky, 1980). Salutogenesis gives insight into coping mechanisms and resources employed by people to navigate the environment around them. Antonovsky (1980) proposed that life stressors and hardships are ever-present and inescapable in the human experience.

Furthermore, the author believed that successful management of life stressors and effective tension management led to a state of wellbeing and mastery over one's personal environment and life. Antonovsky (1980) was then led to dwell on the resources available to beings that assist them to navigate life's subjective perils, he then termed these GRR. GRR are considered mediating factors and resources used by a person to reduce the impact of life stressors, therefore, preventing illness or a sense of dysregulation or failure to master one's personal context. GRR contribute to a person's overall SOC.

SOC according to Antonovsky (1980) is a part of the salutogenic theory that concerns itself with perception. The construct that concerns itself with perception is SOC which is the stance of how one views life and its experiences (Cilliers & Ngokha, 2006). Lindstrom (2005) defines the salutogenic construct as an overall perception of the situations at hand and the selection of the appropriate coping resources to manage the situation. The SOC, according to Antonovsky (1980), at its core, is structured according to how a person views life and its circumstances. Whether or not a person is able to derive meaning from life's events is pertinent to how they will approach them. The questions of approach centre on whether they will be able to understand and comprehend the environment around them, and whether they are able to manage the environment around them. These aspects of the SOC together with the coping resources of GRR provide one with a coping arsenal through which life's experiences and stressors are filtered.

Before assessing and interpreting their environment through a stress resource model such as salutogenesis, they have to take into consideration the available resources at their disposal, so as to make optimal decisions and to make use of their resources in the best manner possible. Antonovsky (1980) further reiterated that it is not the number of resources a person has available to them but how effectively one selects and uses resources for optimal efficiency. Coping resources are, thus, employed for specific purposes to ensure wellbeing and vitality through challenging times. The GRR used by a person to navigate life's

stressors ultimately order and provide a coherent, meaningful life experience for a person as they are in interaction with the environment (Lindstrom, 2005).

GRR are found within individuals and are cultivated in the first few years of life through parental attachments germinating in infancy. A sense of belonging to a community, social engagement, personal hardiness, value systems and problem solving skills to combat life stressors are learned during development (Idan et al., 2022). The term GRR refers to learned resources and resources that are available outside of the individual that assists them to balance the demands of the environment and thus, in turn, affects how they respond to the demands around them (Idan et al., 2022). Eriksson (2019) highlights that conducting a doctorate can produce a period of prolonged stress that may impact specifically women negatively, various concerns may plague the student such as concerns of completion, timelines, supervisory relationships and maintaining an authentic autonomous self. These concerns may create stress and place demands on how the student copes in the academic climate of producing a doctorate. GRR are multifaceted and concern themselves with effective management and adaptability so that a person can overcome a stressor, propelling them forward (Antonovsky, 1980). Taking a closer look into the process of being an academic and specifically a woman academic who is impacted by multi-layered stressors, a salutogenic lens offers flexibility and adaptability and is considered to be a resilience model that can drive and assist academics to overcome their personal stressors. Compared to other stress models such as Selye's stress model which focuses on the body's response to stress, in three phases, namely, alarm, resistance, and exhaustion phase (Eriksson, 2019). The body's response to prolonged stress and adaptation to stress leads to an increased risk of chronic illnesses while GRR focuses on resources that one can use to overcome and manage stress. It focuses on features available to the person to cope and overcome their individual stressors allowing for accurate tension management (Antonovsky, 1980)

There are many features of a GRR that a person may implement. Antonovsky (1980) identified general resources that are cultivated individually. The author further elaborates

that GRR are not culture-specific and can be translated to any culture bearing in mind specific context and value systems. Salutogenesis offers the advantage of adaptability and universal application (Eriksson, 2019). This has value when looking at academics in South Africa, especially people of colour who may have had similar experiences of going through a doctoral journey but may have navigated the journey in different ways.

GRR can originate and be cultivated from the individual, psychologically, socially and culturally. A prominent GRR that is often overlooked that provides a basis of access to many other resources of resistance is wealth and financial accessibility. Antonovsky (1980) highlights that financial security is of paramount importance and is often used interchangeably in society as leverage. Finances, thus, equate to resources. This is in line with what Mzangwa (2019) highlighted within the South African landscape around equity and access to institutions of higher education. Within the South African education landscape due to inequality and poor access, higher education systems are still reserved for the privileged and for people who can afford access to these institutions, perpetuating the idea that money provides a resource of leverage. Antonovsky (1980) goes on to elaborate that financial security directly allows one to ease life stressors and explore alternative coping resources, as well as simultaneously leveraging access to different resources to ease specific burdens. Easing life stressors may include physical access to resources for childcare, clothing, food, and shelter. In acknowledging that financial security relieves stress and provides leverage to manage various life circumstances, it simultaneously creates a gap between the financially secure and the destitute (Antonovsky, 1980).

The second type of GRR that Antonovsky (1980) describes is psychological. This encompasses one's intellect and emotional world. Knowledge and skills development is considered a GRR. Encapsulating how one understands and comes to acquire knowledge and reasons with the world around them is an important resource. Idan et al. (2022) describe it as the resource of how someone acquires skills in the world and how they apply these skills for their benefit. This is important for presence in the world and a feeling of mastery

over one's environment. Idan et al. (2022) further elaborates by indicating that it is important for a person to reason and navigate the world as it gives a person autonomy and the power to choose alternative strategies and avenues of problem solving.

The emotional component refers to one's ego identity as a GRR. This refers to one's place in relation to the world. Antonovsky (1980) refers to a person who lacks ego identity as someone who waivers. He describes a structure of a person who conceals parts of himself to conform to the environment. The creation of a false self is displayed to the world that is immovable and fixed. The creation of a false self is maintained through fixed characteristics that approach the environment in the same manner. This fallacy allows for little accommodation of feedback from the environment and, in fact, cuts the person off from the environment around them resulting in the denial of life stressors. A strong ego development is favoured which is flexible yet consistent enough to withstand the ebb and flow of the environment and be able to navigate the environment without complete disintegration (Antonovsky, 1980). According to Matheka et al. (2020), one of the most important characteristics of a person obtaining a doctorate is the determination required to be disciplined and work independently as the pursuit entails enormous responsibility on the researcher's behalf. In addition to working autonomously and showing goal-directed behaviour over their studies, students need to display flexibility in managing various roles. According to Eriksson (2019), doctoral studies are considered intense and enduring. They test a person's patience and are accompanied by challenges, triumphs and failures especially related to research supervision. This requires adaptability, communication skills, and most importantly cooperation in working towards the specific end-goal of completion.

Another GRR that is considered extremely important for withstanding and enduring stressors is social and interpersonal relationships (Antonovsky, 1980). Social relationships that are deeply meaningful, communal relationships, and groups are considered to be protective factors in weathering the omnipresent stressors in the human experience. According to Eriksson (2019), a supervisor may play many different roles for the student

during the doctoral task. The roles of friend, leader, mentor, and at times an extremely emotionally close relationship may be established which is likened to kin or a parental figure, thus highlighting that individual engagement even within the doctoral sphere is vital and personal. Supervision, according to Eriksson (2019), focuses on the personal aspects of the individual as well as professional development as the person is considered holistically. Antonovsky (1980) postulated, in the theory of salutogenesis, that social support, such as kin, friends and work colleagues, can simultaneously be considered a GRR as well as a stressor if not managed optimally. People who engage in social activities and do not isolate themselves from engagement may be considered as protecting themselves against stressors, whereas isolation and a lack of social ties could be considered a stressor on its own and lead to a decline in health and functioning. A pertinent factor in social support is the commitment that fosters the necessary behaviours required to maintain and deepen interpersonal relationships to get one's specific needs met and for them to be considered meaningful (Antonovsky, 1980). The author further highlights that an individual can belong to a group or value interpersonal interaction. The defining characteristic of the relationship is the reciprocity. Reciprocal interaction is required for the longevity of the relationship and for the relationship to be considered meaningful. This is essential in doctoral studies as coping with the doctoral journey and motivation of the pursuit is mitigated by having a strong supportive social system. Lourens (2016) highlights that the most effective way to manage and cope with the doctoral pursuit is to have a support system of interpersonal relationships that buffer and mitigate the stressors of the pursuit and can ease the load for the doctoral student.

According to Antonovsky (1980), the construct that is concerned with perception is a person's SOC. Cilliers and Ngokha (2006) state that SOC is the perception of how one views life and its experiences. SOC refers to how one perceives their life experiences as a whole and a global orientation that exudes the confidence and surety that one's external and internal environments are predictable and understandable. It does not neglect the inevitable

challenges and triumphs of life's experiences, but it acknowledges the enduring hope and expectation that life experiences are manageable and understandable. Matheka et al.(2020) maintains that reliance on self-efficacy and the importance of one's perception of oneself concerning their capabilities determines how one will manage their academic environment and motivations to engage in academic pursuits. The experience of SOC and how one appraises themselves in relation to their environments and their capabilities underlie how one will navigate and overcome challenges and successes within their various personal contexts. This factor is important as it gives one a sense of control and directive over their choices and decisions regarding their life experiences, and that they are not dictated solely by the external context of the academic environment or context the person is submerged in.

The extent to which life events are significant, logical, and managed, according to Antonovsky (1980), determines a person's SOC. It describes how assured people feel that life events are foreseeable, structured, and understandable. They hold to the knowledge that they have the resources and funds of GRR necessary to satisfy the demands of life events ('manageability'), and that the demands are worthwhile of time and effort to complete or engage in (meaningfulness) (Antonovsky,1980). A person with a high SOC is said to be able to choose from a variety of efficient coping techniques to deal effectively with stress while sustaining good health. Antonovsky (1980) continues that the theory of salutogenesis is applicable cross-culturally, which was suitable for this study as the women were people of colour with similar but not identical backgrounds, who may have encountered similar experiences but managed them in various ways. The theory of salutogenesis applies to various cultures, and it ensures flexibility in that it takes into consideration that the person's SOC is developed through interaction with their philosophy, history, early interpersonal relationships and eventually through their own unique and personal problem-solving experiences (Thomson & Dykes, 2011). Salutogenesis offers a framework for stress and tension management within the individual as well as the strategies and resources that the

individual may consult, focusing on highlighting human capabilities and not just constraints, and human strengths and not just deficits (Sagy et al., 2015).

2.6.2 Intersectionality

It is well-known internationally that identity characteristics have historically been associated with exclusion and discrimination. Bowleg (2017) describes markers such as race, gender, sex, religion, culture, health status and even socioeconomic status that can intertwine to produce a unique lived experience for minority groups, especially black women. Congruent within the South African context, there are multi-layered structures such as race, gender, cultures, institutions and traditional stereotypes that hinder and intersect influencing how the black woman functions within the social world (Alabi et al., 2019). The concept of intersectionality signifies a deviation from the conventional approach of considering a single aspect such as race and gender, towards a more comprehensive outlook that takes on a matrix perspective (Bowleg, 2017). According to Kelly et al. (2021) intersectionality maintains that the experience of oppression and privilege is not fixed, but can vary depending on the context, and that every instance of being marginalised is valid.

Focusing on black women within the South African context intersectionality considers race, gender, socioeconomic status and cultural practice as part of the holistic context that a woman locates herself in. The additional theoretical framework of intersectionality further contextualises the unique experience of black women and assists in understanding the structures that may further cause oppression and limitations for her. The framework of intersectionality explains how different social identities such as race, gender and socioeconomic status all interact at the individual level of experience further reinforcing levels of privilege or oppression (Bowleg, 2012)

Crenshaw (1994) articulates intersectionality as factors that overlap and cannot be observed in isolation. Intersectionality is used to explain experiences in their totality. According to Crenshaw (1994), Grabe (2020), intersectionality is used to approach the

social world and expand on how members of the social world have different experiences due to differing structures that apply to them, such as race, gender and class and how these constructs are interwoven to produce a very personal experience of marginalisation that is unique. Intersectionality further provides an expanding basis and platform from which the social world is constructed and explained, highlighting the many identities that are embodied in a personal experience (Grabe, 2020).

Crenshaw (1994) describes identity in mainstream politics as ignoring the multiple factors that are at play for different race groups. For black women, these factors such as gender and race merge and create a unique experience of persecution that is distinct from any other racial group. Bowleg (2012) further describes intersectionality as a theoretical framework that reflects individual stories. Intersectionality unlocks and scrutinises social constructs that either elevate or oppress people based on their social standing. Systems such as race, classism, sexism and other systems can either create privilege or hinder and fuel people's experiences of society in a unique and specific way (Bowleg, 2012). Social identities are complex and multifaceted for a black woman and intersect at multiple identifying markers such as race and gender. This suggests that being a person of colour for a woman cannot encompass or wholly describe the totality of oppression experienced. This oppression is then multi-layered and has many factors that contribute to it; for example, being black has its own discriminations and being a woman has its own discriminations. Being both a person of colour and a woman becomes a double oppression that is experienced and lived, which makes it niche and unique (Bowleg, 2012; Bowleg, 2017). It is important to include intersectionality as it is engrained in the experiences of being a woman and specifically a woman of colour. Uncovering their unique expression within the academic pursuit is illuminating, personal and powerful.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter focused on a review of the relevant literature pertaining to the research question and topic. The chapter scoured the educational landscape from a broader international perspective then narrowed down to a consideration of a uniquely South African perspective of education and transformation. Reasons for the pursuit of a doctorate were explored in this chapter, as well as specific challenges and successes that specifically black women may face within academia. Literature and theories of coping were interrogated and factors that may assist South African black women in their studies were explored. The unique experience of being a woman in academia was interrogated and, in conclusion, the theoretical underpinning of the study was discussed. The following chapter focuses on the appropriate methodology, instruments of data collection, sampling, and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This study explored the lived experiences of black South African women who have completed their doctorates within the discipline of psychology. The objectives were to explore factors that have had an impact on post-graduate black women and their journey of the doctoral experience. In line with the objectives of the study, exploring the success and challenges of the experience gives one a detailed account of the holistic experience of this designated population group. The study explores how these women were able to manage the ever-growing demands of the academic pursuit to ultimately complete their doctoral qualifications. Accounting for these experiences in retrospect allows for in-depth reflection on the doctoral journey, which was a unique experience for each individual participant. This chapter provides the reader with a detailed discussion on the research approach and design that guided the study. The method of sampling, procedures for data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations for the study are all addressed in the chapter.

3.2 Research Approach

This study used a qualitative enquiry to provide insight into the participants' subjective experiences on completing a doctorate in psychology. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) state that qualitative research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of the experience studied. Qualitative research situates the observer within a context which then becomes the phenomenon under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research, thus, aims to study objects in their organic state which further brings into focus the unique world that participants occupy. This means that qualitative research aims at interpreting and revealing how subjects make sense of the space they occupy in the world with their

subjective realities. Based on the research questions posed in this study, an exploratory qualitative design was selected.

The experiences of black South African women who have completed their doctoral studies is considered a personal experience which, according to Creswell and Creswell (2013), is then concerned with shared experiences of this social occurrence. Experiences are extremely private, sensitive and valid to the participant. It is therefore of paramount importance that throughout the process of investigation the researcher respects, honours and listens to the participants. Thus, the nature of qualitative research allows for invaluable, deep and honest accounts of experiences and their meanings. According to Creswell (2013), the meanings of the participants are of central importance, not the researchers' denotations attained from the reviewed transcribed writings. Studying more than one participant provides diverse perspectives on a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

One reason for selecting a qualitative design was to hear the voices of black South African women that have been historically suppressed and to give an opportunity for empowerment through giving the women the opportunity to account for their experiences of the doctoral pursuit. Creswell (2013) states that qualitative research has a sense of flexibility engrained in it, allowing, in this case, for black South African women to relay their own narratives without restriction. According to Alase (2017), the interpretive component situates the participants' narratives in their cultural and physical contexts, and then tries to make sense of the mutually influential relationship between a person and the world from a psychological perspective. As a result, it was critical to pay close attention to how the participants relayed their narratives about the process of completing a doctorate and their lived experiences as this was where the meaning and value lay. This ensured that each participant's voice of experience was honoured and retained throughout the research process. Throughout the process of inquiry, the researcher was aware of the importance of refraining from allowing her own preconceived ideas, thoughts and behaviours to influence the meaning-making process. This is in accordance with Creswell (2013) where the

researcher does not influence the narrative and holds true to the participant's accounts refraining from assuming the role of an expert.

The significance of an individual's lived experience can be accounted for by using a phenomenological approach. This allowed for the black South African women's voices to be heard and acknowledged within their own personal contexts. Qualitative inquiry such as the interpretive phenomenological approach allowed for the exploration of experiences and the meanings associated with the specific phenomenon of the doctoral process. Because of the nature of the study, the design chosen was a qualitative exploratory study, which is suitable, as the phenomenological approach allowed for exploration and understanding of a specific phenomenon (De Vos, 2005). The researcher ascertained meanings and descriptions of challenges and coping mechanisms used by South African black women who had completed their doctorates in Psychology. The experience of the pursuit of a doctorate was captured and explored which assisted the researcher in understanding and making sense of the social world these women occupy. Meaning is ascribed to experiences in the individual's context. Thus, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was suited as it is a method of analysis that is complementary to the research design. IPA is a version of the phenomenological method that is applied to gleaning data (Willig, 2014). Phenomenology is concerned with the detailed inspection of a common experience. IPA further allows many participants who have experienced a common phenomenon, in this case undergoing a doctoral journey, the opportunity to relay their personal narratives without distortion or a predetermined expected outcome (Alase, 2017).

There are two types of phenomenology, namely, descriptive, and interpretive. Descriptive phenomenology aims to describe lived experiences from the participants' perspective. Interpretive phenomenology, according to Willig (2014), aims to integrate the descriptive experiences plus the interpretive accounts from the participants. It draws on hermeneutic principles as all descriptions are ultimately interpreted to make sense and meaning (Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutics hones in on interpretation and understanding

relies on interpretation (Willig, 2014). Interpretive phenomenology was suited for this study as it offered not only a detailed description of the experience, but also an interpretation of the experience. This interpretive phenomenological stance was suitable as it allowed the participants to engage and relay their narratives robustly and authentically. IPA allowed for the capturing of this experience in its totality preserving the participants' experience (Alase, 2017). According to Harper and Thompson (2011), IPA provides one with an understanding of someone's personal experience and how they make sense of the world around them. It was in this vein that the participants were asked to take the researcher on a journey of their doctoral experience so the researcher could examine and understand the participants' experience. Listening to the participants' accounts of the doctoral journey allowed for the research questions to be answered.

IPA posits that humans are interactional beings intertwined with their various contexts and that a person's context has an influence on meaning-making for the individual (Willig, 2014). IPA allows for exploration of a descriptive and interpretive meaning of the phenomenon in which these women found themselves. The goal of IPA is to unearth the meanings contained in the personal accounts of the participants about a specific phenomenon, which, in this study, is the experience of completing doctoral degree in psychology. Throughout this process, the research participants are invited to engage with the process and offer their own knowledge (Smith et al., 2009).

Because of the uniqueness of each participant's individual context, IPA has an idiographic component, which hones in on the particular experience that the black South African woman has had (Harper & Thompson, 2011). Exploring the participants' experiences of completing a doctorate in psychology, in retrospect, will engage the participants in rich reflection, accounting for and being aware of their expressions. The study provides a platform for participants' individual voices to be acknowledged from their own frame of reference (Harper & Thompson, 2011). This positioned the participant as an expert of their own experience. Therefore, phenomenology was best suited to this study as it intended to

unearth the deeper meanings of the black women's' experience concerning their attitudes, coping mechanisms and approaches to completing the academic pursuit. Phenomenology affords the participant a platform to be heard, acknowledged, and respected.

The use of IPA as an approach further complimented the use of the theoretical frameworks chosen, being intersectionality and salutogenesis. The framework of intersectionality is crucial for acknowledging the intricate real-life complexities associated with multiple interrelated social identities and the societal structures of power and advantage (Bowleg, 2017). With the individual being the unit of analysis unearthing their experience is vital and contextualised within the framework of intersectionality. This theory provides a framework to observe how social identities overlap with structural inequalities at a macro level, whilst also recognising the individual experiences at a micro level (Bowleg, 2017).

The second theoretical framework of salutogenesis provides a comprehension of how different individuals manage stressors and triumph over difficult circumstances that require them to expend resources (Antonovsky, 1980). The idea of coping centres around what enables some people to flourish and achieve well-being even in challenging and stressful situations (Antonovsky, 1980). Anontovsky (1980) further argued that life stressors are persistent and inescapable part of the human experience. IPA and the theoretical frameworks allow for the intricate accounts of the participants to be relayed within their uniqueness of their personal contexts. The research provides an opportunity for the participants to express their unique perspectives and have their voices hear (Harper & Thompson, 2011).

3.3. Sampling Method

3.3.1 Purposive Sampling

The study's population comprised of black South African women of who had completed a doctorate in psychology. The population under study had to have completed their doctorate through the same university to ensure uniformity of the data set. Studying

women's experiences is particularly important as Mokhele (2013) highlights that women are seemingly forgotten in academia and their absence in the doctoral realm is palpable given that the representation is male dominated. Herman (2013) further noted that doctoral candidates in the humanities and social sciences fields often do not complete their doctorates and throughput is not maintained in the academic system.

For this study, purposive sampling was used as the researcher was interested in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences of the selected sample. Purposive sampling was used as it is appropriate to the qualitative approach and complemented the IPA. Purposive sampling selects a specific sample of people for whom the study's topic has relevance (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), in this case, black South African women who had completed their doctorate. In this study, black women are a group of people who do not identify with the previously used racial category of being white (Joubert, 2014). The group of black women, in this study, have shared historical experiences which are unique to being a person of colour in South Africa. This includes people of black African descent, Indian and coloured ethnicity (Kessi & Cornell, 2015).

The researcher had to consider the parameters of the study and then used purposive sampling which allowed for the depiction of a wide range of experiences on a certain phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). According to Smith et al. (2009), a small diverse sample size is considered sufficient to conduct a detailed analysis of all participants' accounts, leaving room for differences and similarities to emerge within their personal narratives about their doctoral studies.

Purposive sampling yielded a specific group or population that the researcher was interested in. The result of this sampling method was a homogenous but not identical sample drawn from a similar demographic. The sample was diverse in socioeconomic status, culture and upbringing which may have influenced their experiences and ways of relating to the world.

The following predetermined criteria assisted the researcher in selecting participants for this study:

1. Black South African women with a valid identity document, over the age of 18 years.
2. They must have completed a doctorate in psychology through the specific university.
3. Furthermore, data collection required the use of technology with access to internet connectivity because of the Covid-19 pandemic which restricted face-to-face meetings. All participants were then required to have Microsoft Teams to be interviewed by means of this electronic medium. Having access to technology and Microsoft Teams was the safest option during the pandemic and was endorsed by the university as a safe and secure tool to collect data.

During the study the inclusion criteria were not amended, and the researcher was able to acquire six participants that met the above selected criteria. Participants who were not eligible for participation for the study are listed below.

1. Current students whether male or female.
2. Other disciplines of study that were not within the psychology sphere.
3. Students from other universities that would not produce a homogenous sample.
4. Persons who did not have any access to technology, which rendered them unavailable to participate in the study as the study relied heavily on technology and a stable internet connection. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the use of an electronic medium was deemed safe and user-friendly which allowed for participants to feel comfortable in the interview setting.

Direct communication with participants was used and invitations based on the previously selected participant criteria were sent out via email. The most recent ethics approval letter (Appendix A) was attached to the email as evidence that the required ethical procedures to perform the research were upheld. In addition, an invitation letter (Appendix C) indicating the parameters of the study was attached including contact details of the

researcher. Additionally, a consent form (Appendix D) was attached to the information pack for prospective participants to make an informed decision regarding participation.

The first phase of participant recruitment was lodged through the internal system of the university. The email attachments were sent to psychology alumni through the internal system inviting prospective alumni who met the selection criteria to participate in the research. Within a subsequent waiting period of three months, two of these calls were recorded, but no responses or indications of interest came from this method of participant recruitment. Other platforms for participant recruitment were then used such as LinkedIn, Facebook groups and direct communication with participants who met the selection criteria.

All six confirmed participants were recruited directly from LinkedIn. Direct contact was made through LinkedIn messenger giving a short description of the study as well as the researcher's contact information if the participant wished to engage. All six participants agreed, and formal contact was then made through email, telephone, and messenger for seamless and effortless communication and to answer any questions. The information letter and informed consent documentation were detailed in an email to participants who confirmed interest. All forms of participation and informed consent were signed and sent back to the researcher prior to conducting the formal electronic interviews and stored on a password-protected laptop. A suitable time and date was agreed upon by the participant and the researcher to conduct an online Microsoft Teams interview for the purpose of the study. The data collection point of the study was over Microsoft Teams, which is an electronic medium. This enabled the participants to have control over the setting or location of the study. This allowed control in the sense that participants were able to decide where they could set themselves up privately to accept a Microsoft teams meeting. A safe, private and convenient time for the interview to take place was a collaborative effort between the participant and researcher. The participant had control over the setting of the room they were in which ensured comfort throughout the interview process.

3.3.2 Description of the participants

The participants recruited met the above selection criteria and this was confirmed before the interviews began. Their profiles are provided below.

- Terri was a post-graduate alumnus holding a Doctorate in Consulting Psychology. Terri fell within the age range of 35-40 years and was married. She started out her academic career at a well-known established university in Gauteng. She then settled in the Pretoria region and delivers psychological services to individuals and groups.
- Gabby was a post-graduate alumnus holding a Doctorate in Psychology. Gabby fell within the age range of 35-40 years and was married with children. Her family was originally from Limpopo but at the time of the study, she resided in Pretoria. She worked in academia at a university in the Tshwane region.
- Lorna held a Doctorate in Psychology. She was married with children and was in the age range of 34–40 years old. She pursued her studies within the Tshwane and Gauteng regions and worked in academia and higher education within the Gauteng Region.
- Bonnie was a post-graduate alumnus, holding a Doctorate in Psychology. She was married and had a child. She is within the age range of 45–50 years. She originally grew up in the KwaZulu-Natal region and started her studies there. At the time of the study, she resided in the Tshwane region of Gauteng, and had a clinical practice attending to individuals and groups.
- Thandeka held a Doctorate in Psychology. She fell within the age range of 32-40 years and had one child. At the time of the study, she resided in the western Cape region. She initially grew up in Gauteng and pursued her educational qualifications within the Gauteng and Tshwane districts. She worked in academia.
- Zinhle held a Doctorate in Psychology. She was married with children and fell within the age range of 45–50 years. She worked in an organisational capacity servicing individuals and groups. She had worked in both the Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal provinces.

3.4 Data Collection: Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews conducted with research participants tend to follow traditional methods such as face-to-face interviews within the realm of qualitative research (Hawkins, 2018). Hawkins (2018) describes the use of electronic media as an expansion of the data-collection methods that could be used in qualitative research. Several factors are to be considered when selecting a data collection method. Hawkins (2018) cites that the category of study, the duration of the study, and the research question impact and inform specific data-collection methods. Societal issues and the country's battle with the Covid-19 pandemic influenced the data-collection methods of this study (Goldschmidt et al., 2021). To ensure safety during the pandemic, the researcher opted to collect data via an electronic medium which limited physical exposure. The electronic medium used in this study was Microsoft Teams which limited the physical contact that would have been required with face-to-face interviews. Carr and Worth (2001) posit that the use of electronic data collection is increasing and is a versatile method for researchers. The global Covid-19 pandemic required researchers to adjust their data-collection methods while also decreased the risk of contracting Covid-19 (Howlett, 2021; Carr & Worth, 2001)

In addition to the advantage of remaining low-risk health wise, Microsoft Teams offered end-to-end encryption which safeguarded information shared over the application. The use of Microsoft Teams was authorised by the university for data collection. Once, all relevant informed consent documentation had been received, a convenient private location was identified by the participant and researcher respectively to ensure privacy. The location was suitable for those who agreed to participate in the study as the participant had the autonomy to choose the most comfortable and safe location that suited them. This considered each individual and their varying personal circumstances.

One of the unforeseen circumstances was loadshedding, which occurred off schedule during Thandeka's interview. According to Laher et al. (2019), load shedding occurs when the demand for electricity exceeds the capacity of supply. Power cuts are then

required to manage the electricity shortage in South Africa. The researcher maintained continuity of the interview by using mobile data to hotspot so that internet connectivity on the researcher's part was not disrupted by the power cut.

According to Alase (2017), semi-structured interviews use questions that the researcher has predetermined to elicit detailed accounts of the participants' narratives. Semi-structured interviews allowed for adjustments and clarification during the interview process based on what the participant divulged. Based on emerging information during the interview, the researcher probed and clarified questions based on the participants' needs and emotional narratives of the doctoral journey.

Howlett (2021) argues that the authenticity of data elicited through online interviews can be compared to traditional methods such as face-to-face interviews. This further solidifies the use of online methods of data collection. The duration of the interviews was approximately 40–60 minutes with each participant and the interviews were audio and video-recorded over the platform with the participants' consent.

Before starting the interviews with the participant, the researcher made sure to distribute electronically via email, Informed consent forms and ethical considerations. These forms were emailed to the participant and signed to ensure that the participant knew what was required of them during the interview process. It was further explained that withdrawal from the study at any time was allowed and, in such a case, the data obtained would be destroyed. After the consent forms were distributed and signed, the researcher then conducted all the interviews in English, with audio and video recordings. This ensured that the researcher gathered all types of information such as verbal and nonverbal. The interviews followed the interview guide that was predetermined based on the literature covered. Open-ended questions were used to allow for honest, in-depth accounts to surface. The mode of questioning allowed for the participant to fully engage with their experiences while the interview schedule guided the researcher. The structure and duration of the interviews allowed for rapport and collaboration between the researcher and participant. The

interview style and structure gave space for the participant to reflect on issues that may have been of importance to them (Smith, 2009). The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to adjust the schedule as needed and to explore in detail the aspects that seemed to be of importance to the participant. The Microsoft Teams collection tool allowed the researcher to note nonverbal cues which supported the verbal data. Thus, the electronic interviews required the researcher to pay keen attention to ensure that the interviewee was engaged and there was a natural flow in the conversation (Farooq & de Villiers, 2017). The researcher accounted for this by asking clarification questions for accurate meaning-making. This further allowed for building rapport and engagement through probing and a genuine interest was established. Once the interviews were concluded, the researcher thanked each participant for their time and willingness to participate. A reflective question was posed to the participant asking them to reflect on the interview and their experience. If any discomfort arose, the participants were referred to the University psychology clinic. However, none of the participants required this service.

3.5 Data Analysis

The use of IPA was appropriate for this study. The use of IPA allowed the researcher to immerse herself into the experiences and the narratives of the participants who had completed a doctorate. The use of IPA allowed for the extraction of rich information from each of the participants. IPA was selected as it allowed for an extensive evaluation of each individual's experience of having completed a PhD in Psychology. IPA ultimately allowed the iterative process to take place in that it afforded the researcher an opportunity to make sense of the participants' experiences. According to Smith et al. (2009), the analysis is the combined product of the participant and the analyst. This is defined as a double hermeneutic which is used to describe "the concomitant production of meaning and meaning making within the research process" (Mills et al., 2022). IPA then allowed this

process to occur with analysing the experience of the doctoral journey and the personal context of the participants' lives pertaining to the academic pursuit.

According to Smith et al. (2009), IPA involves a detailed case-by-case analysis, aiming to understand each transcript and therefore preserving each unique experience. The data obtained included a video-audio recording of each semi-structured interview. This was then informally transcribed by programme of Microsoft Teams during the interview process. The researcher then had to go through the transcription a second time after the recording of the interview, accounting for the verbal and nonverbal information gathered assuring that it was original and true to the participants' expressions. This organisation of the raw data allowed the researcher to prepare and follow the IPA process outlined below.

IPA focuses initially on a case-by-case analysis so that the experiences considered are personal and unique. The researcher aspired to delve in depth into the women's worlds to explore how participants viewed the phenomenon of the doctoral process, and how they created meaning around the journey. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012), IPA emphasises interpretation on the part of both the participant and the researcher, which entails moving away from a simple description of the participants' experiences and aims to gain an understanding of the experience and the setting. The data analysis component followed the six steps of IPA as outlined by Smith et al. (2009).

3.5.1 Step 1: Reading the transcripts.

The first step entailed editing and checking the verbatim transcribed interview scripts that were automatically generated from Microsoft Teams. This was done initially so that the participants' words were recorded as is. The researcher then had to edit the transcribed interviews individually by listening to the video recordings of the interview while going through the transcript line-by-line ensuring each word was captured verbatim. She then checked for errors in the transcript and once edited, the data set was then read and re-read until it was thoroughly understood. Smith (2009) records that the researcher must apply time

to each transcript until data saturation occurs and no new information is obtained, reaching a sense of resolution before moving on to the next case. The researcher initially began with the interview transcript that was found to be the most detailed, comprehensive, and engaging. The transcripts were read and then re-read so that the researcher could gain an understanding of the data set. This initial phase is carried out to ensure that the participant is the subject of analysis (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher printed out each typed transcript, and simultaneously listened to the video-audio recording while reading the transcript. This gave the researcher an opportunity to submerge herself into the data and into the participant's account. Notes on nonverbal cues and content were made using underlining and highlighters. Inductive coding was used in line with the phenomenological framework in analysing raw data. Codes were generated from significant thoughts and phrases which were noted without prior expectations (Thomas, 2006). Different coloured highlighters were used to differentiate between emotional cues and content. The focus at this stage was on the participant and how they recalled their experience of the doctoral journey. This process was assisted through the double hermeneutic within IPA which required the researcher to make sense of the participants' experience of the doctoral process (Alase, 2017)

3.5.2 Step 2: Coding the transcripts

The second step in the analysis was the initial noting phase. According to Smith et al. (2009) noting focuses on the language, descriptions and meanings these may have for the participants. In doing so, the researcher was able to focus on the language used by the participants. It was then easier to ascertain what experiences were of importance to the participant. Initial noting then assisted the researcher to stay immersed in the data set allowing for the emerging themes to unfold. Preliminary interpretations were made at this stage and any links, connections, consistencies, inconsistencies, and possible patterns were identified while preserving the participants' original meanings (Lyons & Coyle, 2007).

3.5.3 Step 3: Identifying themes

The third step in the process was then identifying themes and commonalities across the data set. By this stage of the analysis, the data set had grown exponentially due to the initial noting and descriptions. Reducing the volume of the data set was done through emerging themes. This was done using the primary notes made initially as well as the initial noting done in the second step. This was done by considering the context of conducting a doctorate that had emerged across the set, grouping the emergent themes into a coherent set of themes with shared meaning. One useful way of carrying this out was to cluster the themes into objects of concern and their meanings attached to them which considered the experiential claims that participants had made (Harper & Thompson, 2011). An important consideration in IPA is that themes are informed by interpretations, which are based on the participants' accounts of events. IPA can be considered a dual process of interpretation where the participants and the researcher are jointly involved in the process of creating meaning (Smith et al., 2009).

3.5.4 Step 4: Establishing connections

The fourth step involved establishing connections between the themes that emerged. This involved searching the data for resemblances, links or contradictions that the participant made. This was done to elicit a superordinate theme from each transcript and eventually across all the cases (Alase, 2017). Grouping the connections together allowed for easy tracking of themes. The following strategies suggested by Smith et al. (2009) for identifying patterns between emerging themes were used:

- Abstraction involved grouping similar emergent themes with each other under one grouping. For example, in one transcript there was an emergent psychological theme of guilt and lack of presence around familial responsibilities due to the demands of the doctorate and the time it consumed.

- Numeration was another strategy employed to ascertain emergent themes. This was to look at the frequency with which a particular theme appeared within a transcript. Due to the open-ended nature of the questions and the narratives relayed by the participants, emotive themes appeared frequently; for example, for one participant the importance of support structures to assist in the pursuit of the doctoral journey. Smith et al.(2009) posit that frequency can indicate relative importance to the participant and is merely a single avenue to ascertain emergent themes.

3.5.5 Step 5: Reiteration

The fifth step then consisted of repeating steps one through five for each individual transcript. This is where the researcher needed to focus on each transcript independently and was careful to avoid being influenced by the previous transcript as to do each narrative justice. The researcher then had to bracket and limit influence by previous themes that had emerged from previous transcripts. In doing this, the researcher honoured the idiographic component of IPA research. Smith et al. (2009) state that by following the processes outlined above it allows alternative themes to emerge in alternative cases.

3.5.6 Step 6: Cross-case analysis

The sixth step involved searching for themes across cases. The researcher then started to look for patterns across all six cases and identifying themes which were most evident in all cases. The researcher looked at the data through a psychological lens and produced a list of themes that were similar for all cases and presented these in tabular form.

3.6 Trustworthiness

With the production of data, the researcher needed to be cognisant of the impact of research participation on participants. According to Hewitt (2007), trustworthiness is at the cornerstone of qualitative research. One of the imperative features of qualitative research is the importance of studying participants within their natural environments. The use of

Microsoft Teams reinforced this as the participants had greater control over their environment, minimising discomfort. Furthermore, the research process and collection of data required a trustworthy, open and honest relationship between the participant and researcher. An environment that facilitated comfort and growth was imperative to the research relationship (Hewitt, 2007). The researcher was aware that the research process is not conducted in isolation as it required interaction with the participants and that she would have to display an awareness of the process of interaction. This required reflexivity on the part of the researcher.

3.6.1 Credibility

According to Nowell et al. (2017), credibility is based on the integrity of the findings within the study. Credibility refers to the confidence that one can place in the research findings. According to Anney (2014), credibility refers to how plausible the findings of the study are. This relates to the data drawn from the participants and how well their original responses were interpreted. The study intended to draw on the alumni's past experiences and derive information that was true and pertinent from the data gleaned. The fact that participants were not compelled to participate in the study boosted the trustworthiness of their responses. The video-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to boost trustworthiness even further. The responses of the participants were precisely traced by this method. The opened-ended structure of the questions allowed the researcher to check and clarify the responses throughout the interview. This was implemented throughout the process of collection ensuring the participants' intended meaning was adhered to through reflection (Birt et al., 2016).

3.6.2 Transferability

Transferability of the findings refers to how well the data can be applied to other similar contexts (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher maintained the principle of transferability by providing detailed accounts of the participants' experiences, ensuring that

the detail provided allowed for the collection of rich data relevant to the inquiry. Another method of transferability was ensured through the use of purposive sampling, which allowed for the collection of data from a specified data set. Thick descriptions of the participants' experiences were provided so that transferability was potentially possible by other researchers (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher detailed how participants were recruited and was transparent throughout the research process.

3.6.3 Dependability

According to Anney (2014), dependability means ensuring that the findings are related to the data gathered throughout the study. Through the process of inquiry, the researcher maintained an awareness of her own perceptions, thoughts, preconceived ideas, and emotions that arose during the interview process. This was to limit her impact on the study's findings. Caution was taken to avoid entering the field as an expert but rather as a co-explorer. The researcher provided an audit trail of all decisions and steps taken throughout the research process, to have a record of process intentions and actions taken. Peer review was used as the research process was observed by the researcher's supervisors, who assisted in the research process by identifying any gaps in the research process. This was monitored when transcripts were sent back and forth for quality checking by the supervisors. (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

3.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is the extent to which other research can confirm the findings of the intended research. Findings need to be established from the data set and aligned with the research questions (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability is strengthened by keeping an audit trail, the researcher being reflexive throughout the research process and being mindful of the interview process, building rapport with the interviewees and ensuring that no harm was done (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The record of the research, the findings and the finished

product was kept so that no information was fabricated and to show that results were based on the data set (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

3.6.5 Reflexivity

My thoughts as an occupant of the world are given in this section. As a student myself, I had to think of myself as a researcher conducting a study. Reflexivity, according to Berger (2015), is the act of self-monitoring biases, subjectivities, personal experiences and opinions that may have an impact on the research process which are acknowledged and held by the researcher. The researcher assumes responsibility for all aspects of their role in the study, including concept development, question-posing, data gathering, analysis and interpretation.

I identify as a coloured female who has advanced her education within higher education, currently at master's level. I am aware that being a post-graduate master's student myself undertaking studies at the same university as the participants who had completed their doctorates would need to be considered at all times. This brought many of the similar challenges and experiences to light existing in the same educational institution, albeit at different levels, namely, master's and doctorate. There are some challenges that post-graduate students appear to encounter at all levels within academia such as feeling different or experiencing pressure to work harder to prove one's worth. Being a post-graduate student requires many individual sacrifices and hearing the narratives being told was illuminating to the field of education and psychological insight.

As a woman of colour, engaging with the participants at times became very intimate as some of the challenges or successes were not foreign and something that I could identify with. I had an awareness of similarities such as race, gender and similar educational background which may have made it easier to access the participants' subjective experiences.

However, I was aware of my role and that I was not a participant nor was this my story or account. I had to remain impartial although acknowledging that I could identify with the person that was in front of me and honour their narrative. Making use of psychological skills such as reflection allowed me to stay with the participants' experiences and limit over-identification. I was aware that overly identifying with the participants' experience could appear as validation or leading and I had to maximise the space for the participants' experience and not let my opinions influence the dynamic.

There were instances in reflection after an interview when I pondered on racial dynamics and similarities, and how that influenced the interview space. There were evident power shifts during the interview process. Power dynamics appeared, dynamic and in fluid nature. In the beginning of the research process, I held the perception that the participants had high status, they were powerful, commanding, and prestigious; however, as the interviews progressed, the relational dynamic became increasingly intimate. These women shared vulnerable aspects of their lives and hardships which shifted power. The power shifted to a more equal, identifiable, and compassionate status and my perception shifted to one of identifying and resonating with struggles and hardships that shaped their experiences. The perception became one of duality as in certain contexts there was a sense of disempowerment and in others, there was power and surety which stripped away the idealistic presentation.

In another instance, a participant of similar social identity and similar age range, became disengaged to certain questions around race and its impact on the academic space around herself as a black woman. This abrupt disengagement had an impact on me. It left me feeling helpless and powerless with a feeling of disconnection. Upon reflection, I acknowledged that it could have been due to demographic similarities, age proximity as well as social identity, power dynamics and evident attempts at control due to power relations within the interview process. Sharing experiences with a woman can create a sense of comfort and ease, simultaneously, it is wise to acknowledge the power dynamics that are

evident in the transaction (Berger, 2015). The power dynamics evident in the interview process had the potential to run the risk of mentoring as these women were in a position of power academically. They had completed a doctorate whereas I was a master's student. I had to remain open and honest with myself and realise that these women also understood what it was like to undertake research. In acknowledging this, it gave me valuable insight into probing, understanding frustration, resistance and listening for what was unsaid.

Knowing my position within the study as a researcher and from where I approached the study was important. As the researcher, I was aware that I was not immune to selecting topics of personal interest and the overall arching interest was similarly from the position of, identifying as a woman, a person of colour, currently operating in the field of psychology, aligning with the university and being a current post-graduate master's student. Participating in an institution of higher education gave me a view on being an insider who had an obligation to be aware of the similarities in the shared experiences, as to not dilute the participants' lived experience which was the focus of the research. With the reflection and awareness discussed, it was imperative that I considered the fundamental rights of the participants and took measures to uphold and preserve them. Ethical considerations and steps to ensure participant consideration are discussed below.

3.7 Ethical Considerations.

Due to the nature of the research topic and initiating contact with people and their personal experiences of conducting a doctorate in psychology, ethical guidelines are imperative. This study was implemented by following the ethical clearance guidelines granted by the university's Research Ethics Committee. The researcher made certain that ethics was a core part of the research and informed all decisions and acts undertaken in this study. How the ethical principles were implemented is discussed below.

The initial approval processes involved obtaining permission from the university as the researcher intended to send out targeted email communication to the alumni through the

university platform. This required collaboration between my supervisor and myself through which approval channels were engaged and communication sent out. The approval steps are outlined below.

The researcher applied for ethical clearance through the Universities College Research Ethics Committee (CREC) which was granted (Appendix A). The researcher applied for and obtained research permission from the Research Permission Sub-committee (RPSC) of the Senate Research, Innovation, Post-graduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) (Appendix B). The additional request for ethical approval was for permission to use student data from the university database of alumni students. This was granted by the ethics board subject to the adherence to the data protocol of the university. This meant that the researcher had to design and specify an information letter stating the parameters of the study and send it to her supervisor. No confidential university alumni contact information was allowed to be divulged to the researcher. All information had to go through the researcher's supervisor. The researcher's supervisor then contacted the university alumni office and logged a call through the university's internal student system (ICT) which emailed prospective alumni. Two of these calls were subsequently logged within a 3-month period, without any response or interest through this mode of participant acquisition. The researcher then wrote a detailed amendment which was further submitted to the RPSC detailing additional methods of participant recruitment in line with purposive sampling, posing no threat to the initial ethical approval of the study, nor did it compromise the integrity of the study.

The additional methods of recruitment required compiling a letter stating the parameters of the study and posting it over social media platforms such as LinkedIn and closed psychology Facebook groups. These platforms were considered as they were indicated to have a wide reach and Facebook groups were confined to professionals in psychology. This ensured it was targeted and not general and used for the purpose of the

study. The social media platforms were directly used for the purposes of the research and the platforms considered were in line with the research objectives.

3.7.1 Confidentiality

The researcher has an ethical obligation to safeguard the information provided by the participants (Willig, 2014). According to Creswell and Creswell (2013), confidentiality refers to a set of rules or promises that uphold the personal information of others. De Vos (2005) defines confidentiality as privacy indicating that individuals have the right to decide when, where, whom, and to what extent their personal information is revealed to the public. This is not limited to beliefs, experiences, attitudes, and behaviours. Each participant has the right to privacy and the researcher has an ethical obligation to safeguard the confidential information of the participants. This was introduced and maintained by discussing confidentiality issues with each participant. Anonymity was maintained throughout the research by not sharing any personal and identifying information with anyone. To protect and preserve the participant's confidentiality, the researcher did not share any of the participant's information with third parties. One-on-one interviews were conducted exclusively within the study. The participants' names were replaced with pseudonyms when reporting the findings, such as 'Thandeka' to further ensure anonymity. Any identifying information or identities mentioned by the interviewee were also altered to pseudonyms. The participant's responses were only available to the researcher and her supervisor. This restriction applied to all of the study's raw data. Furthermore, after five years, all raw data including audio recordings will be erased. In the interim, the electronic data will be kept safe on a laptop in a password-protected file.

3.7.2 Justice

According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), justice in research relates to the fairness of the sampling method. Justice refers to balancing the needs and rights of the participants as

well as the aims and objectives of the research study. The fairness of the sample was upheld as the use of alumni or past students were directly related to the research topic and the research questions posed by the study, and participants were not used for the sake of convenience. Personal information given to the researcher regarding participants was used only for the purposes of this study. The researcher had an ethical responsibility to ensure that participants were not maltreated, and discomfort was minimised during the process (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). This was further upheld during the process by treating the participants fairly and equally to avoid bias. Each interview commenced in the same manner and each participant was engaged in the same process.

3.7.3 Informed consent

According to Willig (2014), dishonesty should be avoided at all stages of the research process. Informed consent is an ethical and legal requirement for research involving human participants. It involves the process of explaining to potential research participants what is required of them during the process, as well as the purpose and nature of the research study (Creswell & Creswell, 2013). Taking this into account, the researcher outlined the entire research process which then allowed participants to decide about their participation before the investigation commenced. The participants were not coerced into participation and the information was explained in detail. The researcher ensured that all participants were informed about the study and if they wished to not participate or withdraw from the study at any time, they had the right to do so. Informed consent and an information sheet were sent via email and was signed and sent back to the researcher. This was to obtain permission to interview and video-audio record participants. A short reminder was then done before the interviews were conducted over Microsoft Teams. The researcher reminded participants that they had the option of declining to answer any questions that made them feel uneasy. Once the participants consented to the interviews, the conversations were recorded on Microsoft Teams for later review of the transcriptions. I assured the participants that the conversations,

recorded material, and transcripts would be safely secured on a password-protected computer to which the researcher alone had access. The researcher assured the participants that data would be securely kept for five years as per the university guidelines thereafter it will be destroyed.

3.7.4 Beneficence

According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), beneficence is the expression of benefit and gain to the participants of the study. This is in line with Hewitt's (2007) definition of beneficence positing that it includes an obligation to provide benefits to the participant and to balance the benefit against the risks of participating in the study. The participants benefited from this study indirectly by attaining insight into their own experiences through the reflective nature of the interviews. The research aimed to shed light on the support structures and how the university can fundamentally better support its doctoral candidates through the arduous journey. There was, however, no financial benefit to participating in the study. Each participant was thanked for the time spent on the interview and for taking an hour out of their day for participation.

3.7.5 Non-maleficence

According to Terre Blanche et al. (2006), non-maleficence is related to issues of support and harm reduction. The researcher aimed to uphold this principle by remaining transparent throughout the research process. In this manner, the participants were not exploited and were able to make informed decisions autonomously regarding their participation. To mitigate the aspect of harm, a reflective time at the end of the interview was offered to participants. This was to ensure that each person was considered personally, and their experiences were addressed in an ethical manner. This was done to mitigate any distress experienced during the process of the interview. The researcher was aware that experiences are personal and intimate and can impact people in various manners, and not

each person is the same. Each person recounted their experiences in a manner that was unique to them, and no participants were pressured into answering questions that were sensitive. This was done through keen attentiveness during the interviews and assessing nonverbal cues in the videos by the researcher enabled a positive and collaborative interview space that facilitated closeness between the participant and researcher. This allowed for experiences to be told in a safe and respectable environment.

3.8 Conclusion

The research methodology that informed the study, which was based on a phenomenological research design, was explained in this chapter. It featured details on the procedures that guided data collecting and analysis, which included finding important themes within the participants' responses. The chapter emphasised the importance of the research design used, which includes the study's sampling criteria, trustworthiness assessments, and ethical considerations. The study's findings are presented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter contains the results and findings of the transcribed interviews held with the participants supported by verbatim quotes from the interviews. The data analysis process was driven by IPA, which produced six superordinate and seven subordinate themes. The six superordinate themes were developed by looking at the patterns across all cases of individual interviews and several salient themes emerged based on prevalence. The subordinate themes that emerged presented a more concentrated view of the participants' experiences which highlight and elaborate the nuances of the main themes and provide unique perspectives. The discussion and findings are collated into one chapter to provide the reader with an integrated understanding of the study's findings as they pertain to the literature review and research question. This chapter presents research in an effort to comprehend the lived experiences of black South African women who have earned doctorates.

The participants were made up of South African black women who had completed their doctorate at a university in South Africa in the discipline of psychology. The chapter introduces each of the participants by means of a short table. Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the participants and age ranges rather than their specific ages. Table 4.1 presents a description of the participants.

Table 4.1

Description of participants

Name	Age Group	Race	Marital Status	Dependants (children)	Duration of doctoral study
Lorna	30-40	Coloured	Married	2	2017-2022
Terri	30-40	Black	Married	2	2013-2019

Name	Age Group	Race	Marital Status	Dependants (children)	Duration of doctoral study
Thandeka	30-40	Black	Unmarried	1	2017-2021
Gabby	30-40	Black	Married	3	2015-2020
Zinhle	40-50	Black	Married	4	2013-2017
Bonnie	40-50	Indian	Married	1	2009-2013

4.2 Outline of Themes

The analysis yielded six superordinate themes and seven subordinate themes. The superordinate themes emerged out of the analysis and proved to be prevalent across all participants' experiences. The subordinate themes were distinctive and specific to some participants and encompassed unique experiences and accounts that enhanced the analysis. The transcripts were recorded verbatim by the researcher encapsulating the spoken word. Because the interviews were video recorded through Microsoft Teams, nonverbal and verbal cues were captured. The physical transcripts were analysed according to the six steps of IPA as outlined by Smith et al. (2009). These steps entailed reading and re-reading the dataset which consisted of the transcribed interviews, noting, identifying themes, establishing connections, grouping similar themes, and then repeating the process case by case before establishing a final set of themes across all cases. Table 4.2 presents a list of themes presented in tabular form for reference.

Table 4.2:

Themes

	Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Themes
4.2.1	Coping resources	4.2.1.1 Family as a source of support 4.2.1.2 The relational experience of the supervisor 4.2.1.3 Supporting wellbeing

4.2.2	Navigating gender roles	
4.2.3	Psychological impact	4.2.3.1 Guilt and lost time
4.2.4	The Vulnerable Identity of the black woman as a doctoral graduate	4.2.4.1 Completion as a source of belonging and validation 4.2.4.2 Black women Academic role models
4.2.5	Purpose: The door opens	4.2.5.1 Professional Leverage
4.2.6	Institutional Support	

4.2.1 Superordinate Theme 1: Coping resources

This superordinate theme of coping resources was identified in each participant's experience. This salient theme emphasised the GRR of social support as a coping resource. According to salutogenic theory, social support and the presence of others can contribute to making life more manageable and comprehensible (Idan et al., 2022). This use of the resource can lower stress perceptions and lead to enhanced decision-making skills (Idan et al. 2022). The GRR of personal characteristics is reflected in the participants' experiences as they expressed a level of responsibility to themselves and their wellbeing. This was reflected in the choices they made, and the autonomy reflected in response to their academic journey Idan et al. (2022) speak of the knowledge and intelligence that cultivates autonomy. One reasons and engages with circumstances and environments to facilitate decision-making and responsibility. The theme emerged as a pattern across all cases within the data set. Each participant attributed their academic success to strong supportive structures. This is in line with Lourens's (2016) pertinent point of curating a supportive network that aids the female academic in meeting her academic needs. This theme potently described the asset that social support is to the academic during the pursuit of a doctorate. Participants expressed their tensions and ease within supervisory relationships, as well as the relationships in their personal capacity such as family and lastly the use of autonomy and

choice as a form of self- preservation in support of wellbeing. This theme captures how participants interacted with their supportive networks, their beliefs and values around the relationships and, ultimately, how they navigated their networks to enhance their experience and provide ease through the doctoral journey. The nuances of the theme are supported by the following three subordinate themes: family as a source of support, the relational experience of the supervisor and supporting wellbeing.

4.2.1.1 Subordinate theme: Family as a source of support

The six participants described the doctoral journey as one where various support structures were required to help them cope with the journey. Family was considered a primary source of support to the participants. The participants described meaningful relationships and shared values amongst family members. The numerous ways in which families and the spousal relationship provided the student with support was considered personal and invaluable. Support ranged and varied from physical, tangible support to emotional support. Physical support was described where families and or spouses removed distractions and created a conducive working environment for the student. The provision of emotional support or place of familiarity and comfort which provided platforms of ease and solace for the student was also described. Many of the participants reflected on instances where they felt supported by family on a decision they had made for their wellbeing. Zinhle had the following to say with regard to the support she experienced from her family, specifically the spousal relationship.

“Firstly, checking up on my progress and cause, I had a kind of a routine, and he would see if I’m not studying like OK, it’s been 2 weeks now – what’s going on and sometimes you get tired right cause it’s a long journey. And so, being, there to just be almost my accountability partner, how does two weeks pass? and I haven’t seen you or heard you talking about your books or anything – what’s happening? Secondly, and I used weekends to catch up, he would then say... tell me which weekend you want us to just not be here with the kids and depending on how much catching up

needed to be done, sometimes it was a day, other times I needed just the whole weekend and he would say. That's fine. So that's your weekend, literally, for that weekend, it's like I have no family."

Zinhle described her spousal relationship as a supportive one on two levels: an emotional one and a physical one. Her perception of the academic process of reading and writing up of academic material was described as exhausting and tedious. The process was described as enduring and there would be moments of disengagement where a supportive partner checking in and holding her accountable revitalised and reminded her of the academic pursuit. Secondly, support for this participant manifested in physical support where her husband would remove distractions so she could focus on her academic work. The tone in which the participant relayed the information was surprising when she said *"It's like I have no family"* – she was relieved of all other responsibilities to focus solely on her doctorate. Her tone expressed immense gratitude.

In the next excerpt, Bonnie expressed that support from her father was an encouraging factor for her, even after he passed. For Bonnie, the experience of support from her father was a value that she held close as a reminder which transcended time and space. The relationship between her and her father could be described as supportive, and the benefits of that supportive relationship were drawn on for encouragement. Bonnie highlighted a system that had shared values around education. She alluded to the encouraging relationship she established with her father around education and the value of pursuing education. This is confirmed by Lourens (2016) as shared values of a family which can then open the door for communication and realistic support within a safe and trusting environment. It is further supported by salutogenesis as relationships with a primary caregiver contribute to one's overall SOC. Secure attachment to fathers can contribute to coping resources especially linked to hope and effort (Idan et al., 2022).

"And the other thing was my, my late father. Now, of course he always, you know that by that point he had passed on, but he was always keen on me studying further and

he was alive when I started it up. But then of course he passed through the process, but he also, was very encouraging like go ahead and study and, you know, do the best you can see how far you can get.”

Bonnie described her help-seeking behaviour and the support she received as a source of relief so she could attend to her doctoral needs. The emotional closeness experienced in childhood from caregivers enhances support-seeking behaviours in adulthood, whereas patterns of emotional distance may increase impulsive behaviour with a likelihood of poor help-seeking mechanisms (Idan et al., 2022).

“My sister. So, my, my youngest sister lives with me. I’m in Pretoria, so she was a huge help, and she would assist me with like IT stuff, and you know and also with my daughter, helping out sometimes prepping a meal or just getting us takeaways or whatever, it was. Or just somebody to talk to. You know, I’m stuck here, and I can’t think, and both my husband and my sister helped with that. It’s like, OK, I’m just stuck, and I don’t know what to do or write here, you know.”

Bonnie described frustrating and emotionally taxing events that occurred during her doctoral pursuit. She described supportive emotional relationships with her husband and sister who eased the emotional load of frustration and allowed for venting. This sharing and venting of frustrations allowed Bonnie’s family system to be a part of her process and trusting the family system to emotionally support her through the stagnating elements of the writing process. This aligns with Lourens’s (2016) point that doctoral studies are not conducted in isolation. Within a coping resource model, engaging in meaningful interpersonal relationships is seen as a stress resource which assists a person to manage stress and move towards wellbeing (Antonovsky, 1980).

Thandeka had the following to say regarding the support provided by a friend who was like-minded in completing his studies. Having collegiate support or members who were able to identify with the unique challenges and demands of the doctoral pursuit was

valuable. She described the support as encouraging and uplifting as well as providing emotional closeness.

“Uhm, I have a close friend that we started the training together. We finished. He finished a year before me. Uhm, but we’ve developed a kind of intimacy through that journey. So that support I think was really important and uh, having my family. I think my family was also very supportive in terms of, I mean I couldn’t have done, finished it in three years if I was living with my child full time.”

Thandeka highlighted that the support in child-rearing was so important to her academic pursuit that she would not have finished in the allotted time she had set for the completion of her studies. Having a supportive network allows a student to make realistic plans and goals even when it comes to timelines and completion. Thandeka further highlighted that the shared experience of the doctorate created a sense of intimacy and closeness that assisted in managing the journey.

When speaking on the same topic, Lorna had the following to say:

“So just having someone that has gone through the process and being able to kind of just chat through and normalise some of the feelings. I mean that that was a great source of comfort but also motivation.”

Lorna reiterated the value of the emotional support of members of family who have experienced the academic process before, indicating that the shared experience allowed for a personal and supportive connection that expelled loneliness, by being heard and seen in the academic space. When speaking of the emotional support received by her family, it became tangible in the sense that family members gave up their time and energy to be present to engage and listen to the frustrations of the student. Lorna positioned her family as members that she could trust and be open with regarding her experiences of the academic journey and the various emotions that were elicited throughout. She attributed her success in academia to the support of her family and husband which in turn became sources of motivation in order to navigate the context of writing demands.

When talking about support systems that assisted her in her doctoral journey, Terri reflected on the following:

“I was determined to finish, and I had the support... I think that friendship, for the fact that I had a partner who was a friend and husband, and you know a caretaker for our children that for me did wonders, and I was able to complete, but not many people have that sort of support and I also had parents who are also supportive.”

Terri spoke about having shared values with her family members and originating from a family of doctoral graduates indicated that her family valued education and the end goal of obtaining a doctorate. Her spouse was also highly educated with a master's degree, and she would often rely on him for emotional support in the form of a listening ear or a sounding board for ideas and motivations. Terri mentioned garnishing various types of support from her spouse such as friendship and making time for intimacy and focusing on the relationship. She also referred to practical support where he would take care of the children so she would have uninterrupted time to focus on her academic writing contributing positively to her academic success. This is congruent with Jairam and Kahl's (2012) study which indicated that support is necessary and has positive and buffering effects on stress for the academic.

In conversing about support, Gabby reflected humorously, that her mother was involved in her academic journey. This involvement created a pressure that motivated her to persist as a student and she realised the value of the pursuit. Gabby positioned her mother as involved, nurturing and offering guidance. In addition to the guidance, she was portrayed as a monitor which added a pressure to the pursuit and further reiterated the seriousness of the doctorate and the accomplishment of it. Gabby reflected on experiences in her childhood where she witnessed her mother go through the doctoral journey, and how her personal approach differed from her mother's. The parental monitoring may have been attempts by her mother to control the doctoral experience having gone through it herself. The following excerpt describes Gabby's experience:

“Yeah, I had my mom, my siblings, my friends. So, I did have a good support system. I really did, my mom would call me at midnight. Oh, you can’t be sleeping – you need to be writing or reading or something like that. So, the support and the pressure was there.”

The findings of the current study are similar to previous studies conducted highlighting the importance of familial support for the academic (Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Lourens 2016; Alabi et al., 2019). Alabi et al.’s (2019) findings are alike in that all the participants placed high regard on supportive networks within their personal spaces that assisted them to complete their doctorates. The assistance that students received at all stages was crucial to their ability to reach their objectives and finish their degree. These support systems included the moral support provided by family and friends and highlighted the importance of parental involvement which had an impact on students’ academic performance.

The women academics at the time required different means of support from the relationships around them. The support was both tangible and intangible, such as emotional support to practical support (assisting with chores and childrearing) which propelled motivation and encouraged persistence. The support received additionally allowed students to set goals realistically and dedicate uninterrupted periods of time to their academic work. Lourens (2016) supports the above findings by highlighting that students who are supported by their family members are able to navigate their academic pursuits and can better emotionally regulate themselves to cope with the demands of the doctorate. The support of a familial network further allows the academics in this case to harness resilience and face adversity allowing for better coping resources. According to Jairam and Kahl (2012), social support can be categorised and made up of different sources such as familial, peer, occupational relationships and the larger community. Family and extended family is a large contributor to the success and support of the doctoral student (Jairam & Kahl, 2012). This was confirmed in this study as all participants had strong support networks comprising of

family members and peers who assisted them on this journey, providing spaces for belonging, vulnerability and safety. The findings of the study suggest that it is not only the extent of the support provided by family members that propel the student, but rather how well the student engages and allows the family into the academic headspace of the journey, which makes the support meaningful and valued.

4.2.1.2 Subordinate theme: The relational experience of the supervisor

This theme was a recurring theme mentioned by all participants relating to how they managed their doctoral journey. The quality of the relationship with their personal supervisor was seen as an important contributing factor to the success and completion of the doctoral pursuit. The characteristics of the supervisory relationship and how the supervisor and supervisee interacted and co-created the space of meaningful interaction and support was valued. The concepts of trust, intimacy, professional development, personal fit, mentoring and assistance were highlighted in most of the participants' experiences. The negotiation of the supervisory relationship to meet the students' needs created enriching spaces where professional and personal journeys could flourish. In the following excerpt, Zinhle reflected on an interaction that occurred between her and her supervisor.

"It's like, OK, I'm giving you space. But she didn't leave me because if she left me out, I just wouldn't have finished so, she knew when to give me space. She knew when to support. I mean, she went above and beyond the call of duty 'cause. she wasn't just focusing on the product.... So, we're not doing sloppy work here, you know, so it's a, it's a tough love kind of relationship, but I wouldn't change a thing."

Similarly, when communicating with Bonnie about her supervisory relationship, she reflected on a present and attentive supervisory relationship which acted as a reminder as described in the below excerpt.

"So he was very hands on. So, you can't forget your doctorate. You know, he was constantly reminding you, don't forget you need to do this. Don't forget you need to do that. So that really helped."

The above participants relayed positive supportive relational experiences with their supervisors, which allowed them to communicate their emotional world, and provide a practical space of academic support reminding them of the task at hand. The participants mentioned helpful feedback and motivational encouragement that positively instilled inspiration to move forward in the writing experience. The notion of being able to rely on a supervisor to give up time and impart knowledge and guidance to the student was valued. The value of independence and knowing that the supervisor was still a separate identity from the student allowed for effective engagement. There were elements of relief when the supervisory relationship worked, and a connection was fostered and maintained. Expressions of blessings and gratitude to the supervisory relationship were expressed in the participants' personal experiences. These sentiments were shared by five of the six participants. Lorna expressed the following.

"So, I chose someone that I had worked quite closely with someone that I consider as a mentor, so our relationship was very good and it's still good. So, I was lucky in that way."

Lorna described how her choice of supervisor was influenced by their definition of relationship and how their interaction was described as meaningful and fruitful. The relationship was able to transcend from mentorship to supervisor indicated flexibility and trust within their interactions.

Gabby highlighted the connection that was created through shared language.

"It was easier for me because I could talk my way through concepts that I didn't understand, my supervisor was also amazing. We spoke the same language as well, and I think that also plays a big role. Uhm I don't know. We connected."

The relationship was strengthened through open engagement, being heard and understood which fostered vulnerability and closeness to challenge and interrogate concepts for the furthering of shared knowledge. Terri's experience as a little different as was described as follows:

“So I think at the beginning I started to be frustrated but as time went on, I understood my supervisor’s personality and also the power dynamic at play in the department.”

Five out of the six participants cited positive interactions with their supervisors. They relied on their support and negotiated the space of supervision to optimally cater to their specific academic needs. This question gave the participants the opportunity to delve into their supervisory relationship and relay the support and guidance they received from a reflective stance. The results indicated that the support was multi-layered, ranging from professional guidance, personal and emotional containment and trust towards the research direction and feedback processes. This is in line with Flotman’s views (2021) that indicated that quality supervision is characterised by the relationship between the student and supervisor, and the knowledge that the supervisor possesses. This knowledge acts as a catalyst that pushes the student and the research forward (Flotman, 2021). This study revealed that the women felt supported when their supervisors were attuned to their needs professionally and personally, allowing for flexibility in the relationship which contributed positively to the learning experience. The results of this study indicated that the supervisory relationship was paramount to the success of the student and revealed that the supervisor’s shared knowledge was instrumental in providing spaces where these black women could expand their knowledge. Apart from the theses they were writing, the knowledge shared between student and supervisor indicated the reciprocal interaction between the supervisor and supervisee which fosters connection. Flotman (2021) indicated that the supervisor remains a caretaker of the student’s intellect, and facilitates the transition from student to professional, and ultimately cultivates their development in academia. Simultaneously, there is a responsibility on the student to engage, exercise aptitude and willingness to learn. Thus, a mutually beneficial relational space is created that is aligned to the final research output.

Thandeka, however, had a frustrating experience with her supervisor which fostered ambiguity. The participant spoke of the fit of the supervisor and the feedback processes that

in her experience did not foster a space for interrogation or engagement. She spoke of instances where she disengaged and did not clarify feedback or engage her supervisor on feedback, which fostered feelings of resentment and ambiguity towards the supervisory relationship. Her use of her words in the below extract assumes a passivity indicating a submissive role within the interactional space of the supervisory relationship.

“We didn’t have a relationship beyond the document....I didn’t really do anything about it, like I didn’t confront or mention it to him. I just let it go. But you know, like I said, I have friends and I had a good mentor besides him, whom I would call in crying, feeling like, I think my supervisor doesn’t care about my study.”

The above experience was highlighted by Thandeka which further indicated the importance of trust or lack thereof in the supervisory relationship. The participant reflected on feelings of frustration and ambivalence towards the supervisory relationship. The results indicated that the supervisory relationship is still vital and has a profound impact on how the student experiences the doctoral journey and the feedback related to research development. This confirms that although all the women may have undergone the same process of supervision, everyone’s experience was not the same. Cekiso et al.’s (2019) study revealed that the relationship between the supervisor and supervisee is important as there are aspects that can hinder the development of the student and the study or progress of the student. Without open clear communication and a clear definition of roles and responsibilities, it becomes challenging to identify the needs of the student which can lead to negative experiences of the supervisory relationship. This is further supported by Okeke-Uzodike (2021) who recognises that the foundation of successful supervisory relationships is the element of trust. A lack of trust in the supervisor can be detrimental to the supervisory relationship hindering the student from expressing dissatisfaction. According to Magano (2013), students who struggle to express themselves within the supervisory relationship feel constricted and resort to alternative figures of authority to alleviate frustrations or turn to students who are in similar circumstances to assist them to cope with the academic pursuit.

The experience of ambivalence or a disengaged supervisory experience can be explained by the traditional method of supervision which Okeke-Uzodike (2021) describes as one directional which reflects the power dynamics of the supervisory relationship, and the top-down flow of knowledge which is disseminated from the supervisor to supervisee. This flow of information leaves little room for communication or collaboration. Despite the differences noted in the supervisory experiences amongst the participants, there appeared to be an acknowledgement of power dynamics that were evident within the supervisory relationship, which intimated that for some participants conflict or dissatisfaction appeared to be managed independently.

The coping resources theme unveiled how black South African women managed the demands of the doctoral pursuit. It spoke to the various resources and methods the women engaged to buffer the tension and stress induced from the pursuit of the doctorate.

According to the salutogenesis theory, Antonovsky (1980) spoke of GRR. GRR are learned means that are available to a person which assist in buffering and managing the tension of the environment. A vital GRR mentioned by Antonovsky (1980) is interpersonal relationships. Various interpersonal relationships are available to people from their family context, social context and occupational context. Salutogenesis places emphasis on the quality and meaning of the resources available to the individual that make it effective in reducing stress. In this study, the participants placed high value on the relationship that allowed them to adjust and manage the writing space in academia. Familial relationship in this study was found to be a GRR that was selected by participants that assisted them to navigate academia and gain personal mastery over their respective environments.

Participants were able to select a resource and leverage the meaning and relationship to move towards a state of management and ease. These results are similar to Zulu's (2022) results which emphasised the importance of support of family especially for the black academic, as it assists them to cope and manage the separate demands of academia and their personal lives.

In addition to familial support, supervisory support was paramount to the successful completion of the doctorate, especially for these black women. Tributes were paid to their supervisory relationships which supported them through the doctoral pursuit. The multi-layered relationship was an interactional space for emotional support, motivation, skills development, and professional development. The conditions for the relationship were outlined and meaningful engagement was highlighted as reciprocal. Not all participants experienced a containing and developmentally safe space within the supervisory relationship where skills, knowledge and development regarding the study could be interrogated and scrutinised. Thandeka's relational experience highlighted the nuances in interaction from her perception and the minimal space within the relationship for feedback regarding her study to be processed and contained. Thandeka's experience signified a challenge in the relationship. Flotman's (2021) study highlighted the power dynamics of the supervisory relationship and the negative impact it can have on the relationship especially when feedback is given. This study found that the space for feedback was not considered a safe space nor were the conditions containing it so she could examine the feedback as it related to her study and professional development. Similarly, Okeke-Uzodike's (2021) research found that the relational elements of trust and lack of trust within a supervisory relationship can lead to dissatisfaction. Magano's (2013) research further found that students of colour when unable to express themselves in a supervisory relationship tended to turn to mentors, colleagues and same race persons to alleviate anxieties and stress around doctoral demands. Apart from this difference noted, this study uncovered positive relational experiences with supervisors indicating that negotiation and relational capacity can be established to suit the needs of the student and supervisor. Schulze's (2015) research revealed that supervisors can be a valuable source of knowledge and wisdom and can cultivate confidence and academic autonomy within the emerging academic. Navigating the supervisory relationship required communication and clear expectations that speak to the different roles within the relationship and acknowledge the differences in power dynamics,

such as the supervisor overseeing the thesis while simultaneously allowing for expressions of autonomy and agency for the student to grow and develop.

4.2.1.3 Subordinate theme: Supporting wellbeing

One of the themes that emerged during the analysis was the aspect of wellbeing and the steps these women took to ensure that their mental wellbeing was taken care of during the doctoral pursuit. The participants through conversation highlighted the ways in which they maintained distance from the writing experience to avoid becoming overwhelmed by it or being consumed by mental exhaustion. The measures implemented were seen as coping resources to ameliorate the anxieties and tensions of the writing process. Some of these women spoke of autonomy within the process of the doctoral pursuit. This autonomy was exercised often when it came to the choice of rest and managing life circumstances around the doctorate. For some participants, the autonomy reflected itself in the form of self-awareness and monitoring the process cognitively and internally in terms of academic perfectionism and the standard of “the perfect doctorate”. This autonomy was reflected in the overwhelming nature of the doctorate and the writing experience. It was noted that all the participants acknowledged that the writing of the doctorate could elicit a plethora of emotions ranging from frustration, elation, hopelessness, guilt and ultimately a sense of accomplishment. The single aspect that all participants acknowledged was that life goes on within the context of the doctorate and a delicate balance needs to be harnessed to survive and cope with the demands of the pursuit. The autonomy and implementation of choice within the doctoral space became a coping mechanism for creating space between the writing and the student, which led to positive wellbeing. The participants exercised choice as a key skill that contributed to self-efficacy to cope with the pursuit. Some women reflected that being self-directed and intentional was a saving grace that allowed for effective prioritisation within the writing process. The time away from the writing and awarding oneself with a break allowed for attending to other aspects of life such as family life, and it perhaps gave the participant an opportunity to quell the intense emotions that the writing process

elicited. When speaking about her effort to strive towards wellbeing, Lorna needed time to herself and to focus on herself. She was able to prioritise her needs within the demands of the writing process which, contributed to her resilience. She relayed the following:

"..and it was the ability to kind of step away from the PhD when needed. It was two or three months where I just needed to put that aside so I could focus on myself or my family and yeah, and I guess yeah being self-directed, being resilient."

With regard to steps taken towards wellbeing, Terri said that self-preservation was important. She stressed the importance of emotional wellbeing and reflecting a realistic attitude that allowed her flexibility to approach demands in various ways while being kinder to herself. She communicated the methods below:

"I cannot aspire to be, you know perfect in anything that I'm doing, and I think for me that helped a lot and I, I come from a background where I used to be quite hard on myself, but I think within the PhD I also learned not to be so hard on myself because it was gonna (going to) tax me. It's going to be quite taxing on my emotional wellbeing, so I think for me it was the running and also just not putting too much pressure."

When engaged on measures of wellbeing, Gabby spoke of being intentional with time away from the writing process of the doctorate. She spoke of ways in which she would intentionally cultivate other aspects of her life such as her relationship with her husband and children and revitalise and recharge by going on holiday as shown in the excerpt below.

Gabby: *"Going on a holiday with family and not bring my laptop with me or any book."*

Gabby mentioned skills such as being self-directed which fostered resilience and assisted in coping with the doctoral pursuit. The choice to step away from the writing of the thesis allowed her to be present in other aspects of her life that required her attention at that specific time. The act of time management and intentional choice reflects a mechanism that aided her in contributing to her wellbeing. This is in line with Byers et al. (2014) who found that compartmentalising life assisted doctoral students with management of their wellbeing

and aided in coping with the competing demands of the doctoral programme and the social strains of life.

Salutogenesis emphasises factors that promote and sustain health and wellbeing. For instance, GRR allow individuals to move towards wellbeing behaviours even in stressful situations, which contribute to the overall SOC. The SOC allows for the environment to be decoded into what is comprehensible and manageable and allows individuals to derive meaning from their personal circumstances (Antonovsky, 1980). A strong ego identity as a generalised resistance resource allows for flexibility within a person, and aids them in choosing to approach environments in different ways indicating that problem solving can take many forms (Idan et al., 2022). This was evident in the results as these women approached their stressful times with flexibility, which allowed them to focus on other aspects of their lives and reduce stress and tension. The participants were able to use goal-setting, self-awareness, and autonomy to engage in prosocial mechanisms to manage stress, which assisted in making sense of chaos. Sagy et al. (2015) highlight that the stronger the SOC in an individual the more they are able to engage in healthier coping mechanisms that move them towards preserving wellbeing by redefining contexts and situations.

The demands of the academic pursuit are often managed psychologically and emotionally. In addition to harnessing social support from outside sources such as family, management techniques were also generated within the individual such as intentional breaks (Byers et al., 2014). For some, engaging in running and activities away from writing assisted in enhanced focus when returning to the pursuit. Terri described herself as an athlete who used running as a coping mechanism. This was further intertwined in her individual identity as she considered herself an active person. She also considered herself a self-aware person who was aware of her tolerances emotionally and recognised how triggering a doctorate can be on emotional wellbeing. She then developed strategies that were incorporated into her daily life that assisted in her managing the writing process. This is explained by Fteiha and Awwad (2020) who suggested that a high level of emotional

intelligence in students allows for more prosocial and beneficial coping strategies. Such strategies as spiritual meditative practices, outdoor activities such as sporting activities and adequate sleep and nutrition impact how one responds to stress (Fteiha & Awwad, 2020). This is confirmed by Schreiber (2019) who highlighted that the student is an active participant in their education and wellbeing and thus is able to consider and participate in decision-making around mental health and wellbeing.

The prominence of this theme indicated that women in this study employed differing management techniques to enhance their wellbeing. However, the commonality was the intentionality with which each decision was considered. It was clear that all participants were deliberate about time away from the writing process which afforded opportunities to focus on other things. It is no surprise that each of the women managed the break away with differing activities, as each person has their own cultural influences, societal influences which impact choices and ways of being within the world, which is reflective of life experiences and differing SOC (Idan et al., 2022). A study by Loots et al. (2016) revealed that the doctoral process enhances skills like critical thinking, self-reflection, planning and engaging in reflection around one's life which is not limited to academic choices and permeates into the identity of the individual.

4.2.2 Superordinate Theme 2: Navigating gender roles

This theme was evident in the participants' experiences as gender roles were always being negotiated – a social aspect of life that was unavoidable for these women. Muberekwa and Nkomo (2016) and Zulu (2021) stated that gender and, by implication, gender roles created and reinforced by society, created role expectations for females that were engrained in behavioural practices. Most participants highlighted that their experiences within the doctoral journey were different from those of men. Frustration, anger and a sense of helplessness were evident in the participants' experiences. Differences were shown in the participants' experiences, and emotions, and it was evident that gender had an influence on how women dedicated time to their studies and interacted within their relationships and

academic spaces. This theme encapsulated how these black women who identified with the social category of being a woman viewed their roles in their relationships and in academia. Ultimately this theme reflects their beliefs about how being a woman impacted their doctoral process. When relaying her experience, Terri spoke of the struggles as follows:

“Initially people were saying when I registered to do the PhD because I was still single, they were saying, Terri, no one will marry you 'cause you are overqualified. Then you can imagine now at that time I was like I'm young. So, I'm turning 40 on next year. Yeah, I was 31 when I registered, and they were saying no one will marry me and at that time I had two master's degrees remember, so and already I was seen as too intelligent by many or that I'm doing too much too soon. I must wait to get married first before I register for a PhD. So, then there's that view that no one will find me attractive, or no one will marry me? Everyone will find me intimidating because of that, but I went ahead anyway with it.”

When asked the question on gender and its impact, Bonnie relayed that the experience and pressure came from her family environment and that cultural norms dictated a woman's roles and responsibilities as indicated in the excerpt below:

“They were very encouraging and very proud. But don't forget you need to still fulfil your role as a mother and a wife...So very traditional cultural background. If I look at my own family situation in terms of the cousins, my own cousins, it's probably just the three of us who have careers and I'm not at all suggesting that the rest didn't study. They studied, but one even did a master's in media studies and stuff, but once married stayed at home, so it was almost universally very happy for you to study. You just must do nothing with it.”

Gabby, however, reflected on a more generalised viewpoint rather than indicating a personal experience. She communicated that in general, society and specifically in relation to academia, a woman's experience was not the same as a man's. She referred to the inequalities and stated that men do not have specific responsibilities that a woman may need

to think of when it came to their academic journey. This suggests that being a woman is limiting and can present with its own struggles and challenges which men will not have to consider in society. She relayed an experience where her children would come to her when she was working but knew to allow the father space and time to work uninterrupted. She made a statement indicating that, within the world of academia, men advanced more quickly than women in the academic space due to fewer responsibilities related to gender roles.

“But if we were to compare men and women, I feel like men have it better.”

During the conversations, most women relayed frustrations around the expected gender roles and the additional roles such as wife and mother that they were expected to fulfil in addition to accommodating the academic requirements of the doctorate. Others relayed expectations that reflect a sociocultural nature. For example, the use of the phrase “people were saying” shows that many still hold the view that women have a responsibility to be desirable to a man, and that means subordination of the self, ambitions and intellect. The furthering of oneself academically is seen to be threatening to the identity and power of a man within a patriarchal society indicating the flow of relational power even in matters of intellect and autonomy. This supports the notion that a women’s identity needs to serve the masculine ideology (Muberekwa & Nkomo, 2016). This highlights the dual oppression and frustrations that may have been experienced by these women in terms of their gender and the sociocultural expectations that may be challenging to negotiate (Mokhele, 2013). Dissecting the experience through an intersectional lens showcases the multi-layered oppression that women experience by society. Crenshaw (1991) posits that there are many identity structures that are at work within society that disenfranchise a woman of colour and that focusing solely on a single identity structure such as race will not capture the overlapping discrimination that this demographic experiences. The gendered sociocultural expectations produced a niche experience for the participants as these structures of cultural practices and expectations of a woman impacted how they experienced their doctoral process producing feelings of helplessness, frustration, and resentment. The findings of this

study are similar to other studies in terms of gender and its influence on performative societal gender roles (Mokhele, 2013; Muberekwa & Nkomo, 2016).

The expressed shades of a patriarchal society were evident in the participants' experiences and the preservation of gender roles along with traditional practices were still respected. Crenshaw (1991) and Bowleg (2012) postulate that intersectionality crosses at the macro and micro levels. Racism, sexism, and structural cultures in society along with the engrained dominant culture intersects with the individual's social identity such as race and gender which maintains the status quo of privilege for some and exclusion for minorities. Social identities such as race and gender along with their stereotypes, reflected in behavioural practices, were shown to be present in the participants' experiences. The very real and experienced patriarchal system can marginalise and therefore exclude women. This aligns with Bowleg (2012) who indicated that black women are beset by stereotypical expectations of society. The theme of gender role inequality permeated through the participants' experiences, whether observed or personally narrated. Bowleg (2012) posits that women's experiences and specifically black women's experiences are not the same as those of men nor are they the same as those of white women. The interlocking experience of being a black woman within the South African society produced a sense of systemic imposition upon these women, creating a sense of helplessness around expected gender roles.

Not all participants shared the sentiments of frustration and helplessness or guilt in fulfilling gender roles. These women reflected that expectations of fulfilling traditional roles were mitigated by shared responsibility and effective collaboration with their partners or parents that assisted them in managing the role expectations realistically and optimally. Their experiences, however, do not mean that they were not subject to social or cultural expectations or pressures but rather that their perceptions and spaces of collaboration were open and flexible allowing for the women to meet their academic requirements without the creation of emotional tension in relationships.

The results indicate that gender roles are a reality that is still inescapable although there is room for change. It is the very real experience that gender still influences how women are viewed and accepted in society and within their own personal relationships. The theory of intersectionality is useful to understand that race and gender are not one-dimensional and cannot be readily separated out to explain experience. Intersectionality interrogates the traditional idea that gender is a universally consistent experience for all women. This idea emerges as reductive and negates the multiple social contexts in which people are located (Bowleg, 2012). Social identities join and intersect for the black woman indicating that individual social identity categories cannot encompass the full experience of the black woman as race, being a woman and cultural societal expectations are intertwined (Bowleg, 2012; Crenshaw, 1991). The results of this study are akin to Muberekwa and Nkomo (2016) as, although these women in academia experienced the same phenomenon, their lived experiences were made up differently and were impacted differently by social factors. Muberekwa and Nkomo (2016) further highlight that the identities of women are intertwined with social, political and economic structures all laced with influence that requires navigation.

The social category of gender requires further interrogation (Muberekwa & Nkomo, 2016). In line with phenomenology and the difference in experiences, this theme further highlights that black women are entering the educational landscape despite the challenges faced when it comes to gender and its impact. Black women academics are investing more time into career development, enhancing, nurturing and cultivating the woman that they want to be known as in academic, personal, and social settings. The reflective nature of this study highlights that it is possible for the black woman to negotiate spaces and role expectations in favour of her academic pursuit as all the participants were successful in obtaining a doctorate. The theme brings to light that there is a real shift towards progressive collaboration with regard to gender roles and sociocultural expectations in terms of shared roles and shared responsibilities along with noting that women are not a coherent homogenous group as experiences and contexts are navigated differently. The results

further indicate that there is still a lingering engrained perception that gendered prejudices are still prevalent in the South African society which reflects the patriarchal system.

4.2.3 Superordinate Theme 3: Psychological impact

This theme reflects the impact that the doctoral journey had on the participants psychologically. The pertinent theme of emotions such as guilt and loss were prominent in the participants' narrations. This theme arose from the disclosure of the emotions experienced by participants in relation to the doctorate and the consuming nature of the writing process. For some, the range of emotions were transient, and for some, they were longstanding, emotions, thus, made up an integral part of the doctoral process. The women acknowledged their negative emotions and persisted in the emotional labour and output of the research product. The theme which was generated from the conversational interactions with these women, highlighted the nuanced personal experiences of emotions and how they were channelled into modes of productivity and positive writing behaviour which ultimately facilitated output and completion. A prominent theme across all participants' communications was guilt and lost time which is reflected below.

4.2.3.1 Subordinate theme: Guilt and lost time

Guilt and lost time were prominent emotional states for most participants that arose in communication. The experiences of relational guilt, parental guilt and managing conflicting emotions was supported by literature. The nature of the gendered experience for women often led them to feel intense emotions around compartmentalising academia and personal life (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Walker, 1998). The result of this study aligns with Walker's (1998) idea of splitting one's life which involves separating personal and work contexts and rendering them exclusive. However, this is unrealistic as it creates an inauthenticity by creating forms of femininity and emotional expressions that are acceptable within certain contexts but not in others, instead of accepting femininity in its entirety.

The emotions that were elicited in communication with the women in this study ranged from frustration, guilt, shame and loneliness to delight and a sense of pride and

accomplishment upon completion. The contradictory emotions were often seen in the women's experiences where their sense of self-efficacy and performance in relation to accomplishing the doctorate was never questioned but they felt extreme guilt when they were not deemed present in their relationships and a focus on what they lacked in personal interactions was evident. This pressure, however, was seen to emanate from internal prescriptions and expectations around what a present mother or parent should be or behave like, indicating the presence of societal expectations. The societal expectations and sociocultural factors such as domestic abilities and nurturing and caring characteristics are traditional roles that are still imposed on women. This stems from the patriarchal context that prefers men over women and can hinder academic progress (Alabi et al., 2019). The internal scripts that are reinforced through socialisation and patriarchy, reflected in notions that women bear the roles of carer and nurturer which are viewed as feminine, can be seen as inappropriate in academic spaces which are considered to be masculine, and leave women with the unrealistic task of managing these contradictions (Walker, 1998).

In communication with these women, they relayed accounts of excessive guilt, shame and even self-blame for their absence especially when it came to family responsibilities, terminal illness and death. Some women described pacification over perceived parental guilt and attempt at quelling guilt regarding lack of presence. These results are similar to previous studies where women were found to experience conflicting emotions around the personal sacrifice that the doctoral pursuit demands (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013; Smith et al., 2006). In reflection, the women knew that this personal sacrifice was for a greater gain, and this is what motivated them to persist and continue with the writing process. The emotional challenges and negative experiences were channelled into positive and victorious outcomes of eventually obtaining the doctorate. The negative emotions were reframed and channelled into motivation and purpose for the pursuit. In conversation with Bonnie, she reflected on a moment in her life where she felt she was not present in her relationship with her father. This impacted her self-esteem and took an

emotional toll on her not only in the grief she faced for her father but in her capability to continue with the academic pursuit. She blamed herself and the doctoral pursuit for stealing time where she could have done better and perhaps elicited a different outcome in her personal life if it were not for the doctoral pursuit. This struggle is relayed in Bonnie's experience below.

"Yeah, it was when my dad died, I literally stopped for six months there. Just no sign of me. That was the last thing on my mind. I even felt guilty there because I felt like did I take too much of time and put into the research. I didn't notice 'cause, he died of cancer, and did I miss all of this because we just missed the diagnosis. I missed it all because I was so busy with my studies."

When asked about the impact, Lorna relayed that it elicited resentment. In addition to feelings of inadequacy by not being fully present as a mother and colleague. The feelings of inadequacy and wanting to abandon the doctorate because at times it became extremely overwhelming as indicated in Lorna's reflection below.

"I guess maybe resentment, resentment that I felt as if the PhD journey and experience and stole memories and moments away from me because while I couldn't be present and in like important events like sometimes, I'd be sitting with my kids but I'd be thinking about PhD. And then there was resentment about not being fully present and as a mom, as a wife, as a colleague. So, resentments and it's probably another one would probably be the sense of just giving up like it's been a waste of my time. And yeah, and I should just give up."

When speaking about the emotions elicited during the writing phase, Gabby indicated that she felt guilt. The guilt is specifically related to the parental relationship and the expectations of such. The reasoning and justification and convincing that all parties knew the sacrifice intended to pursue her educational dreams were evident. The doctoral process elicits many emotions that affect one's personal life and zones in on aspects of relationships

which may not often be considered. The women experienced conflicting emotions that were real and upsetting in addition to managing the doctoral pursuit.

"I mean, even though I said to you that my daughter never made me feel like I'm neglecting her but that's the guilt speaking because I felt like I was neglecting her, but she was very supportive, but then again, she knew she was going to come in and join me in the US. So, I think that there's something she was looking forward to, but there is a lot of that (guilt). You end up just OK, so it's hard, like parental guilt when I'm not available I probably buy them like a toy that they will play with for 1-2 days and then they just don't play with it anymore."

Zinhle did not recount feelings of parental guilt or anxiety when it came to competing demands or frustrations around the writing process. She reported that she was completely supported and empowered to pursue her academic aspirations guilt free. This was during a time she had a new-born and the challenges seemed insurmountable. However, guilt was not evident in her story highlighted below:

"So emotionally I felt, you know, even when I was lazy or tired, I can't do this. I just had no excuse of not doing this 'cause usually the excuse is I don't have time or I'm busy. I was busy with work, but as for everything else, I could literally be let off the hook."

The nature of this different experience highlights that meaning is personal to each woman and although emotions may still be elicited, the interpretation of them may be different. In this woman's account of her emotional experiences, it was evident that managing emotions was co-regulated for her. She was able to garner permission and be let off the hook from other responsibilities even with a new-born, challenging the gender role and the notion of the right time to pursue studies. This could have been used as a motivator and a reminder that failure or giving up was not an option as people had sacrificed for her to complete the task. In addition, her partner affirmed her pursuit and acknowledged her feelings which lessened the frustrations and guilt feelings. The results indicate that all

women wrestled with conflicting emotions, which impacted self-esteem and their perceptions on other roles in their lives such as parenting and caring for ailing parents, indicating that the emotional burden and sacrifice was prevalent throughout the various stages of the process. The results indicated that there is not a perfect or ideal time to start the doctoral journey but rather indicated that the management and navigation of emotions and life events as they surface were the important factors.

The women further reflected upon the real intense frustrations and experiences around feeling robbed and meeting the demands of the academic journey which was an emotional price to pay according to the participants. Feelings of anger, guilt, resentment and deep loss were prevalent in the participants' experiences coupled with a feeling of missing out on valuable personal experiences. Consistent with these findings, the study conducted by Aitchison & Mowbray (2013) indicated that the writing process can elicit many emotional states within the student that may not be responded to or acknowledged immediately. Some emotions may be fleeting while others may be deeper and long-lasting. Similarly, Zulu's (2022) study on various discourses within academic identities of black female South Africans found that a prominent discourse was the caring, nurturing role. Women still hold themselves accountable to societal standards and traditional roles, and family responsibility is still significantly skewed and loaded towards the woman. This is further solidified within the South African context of a patriarchal society which reinforces the traditional behavioural roles. Similarly, Smith et al.'s (2006) study found that during the doctoral process, women experience guilt, anxiety and worry over time not spent with family members and question whether they are adequately meeting the demands of their personal lives.

This indicates that emotional support and labelling emotionally, and allowing space for one's emotions to be acknowledged, is an integral part of the doctoral journey and cannot be separated from it. These women grappled with high intensity emotions which challenged their progression in the doctoral pursuit. Emotions challenged their perspectives on what a

doctorate meant and what it represented and challenged them to reflect on their own notion of roles and accommodations to stop the emotional aspects from becoming all-consuming.

The results of the study indicated duality, where emotional hardships and feelings of inadequacies were acknowledged and normalised. The women successfully resolved negative emotions and rationalised their experiences in favour of the doctoral endeavour while navigating complex emotions and interpersonal relationships. This aligns with Magano (2013) who indicated that emotional weight is often endured in silence to maintain a successful image, although it impacts the academic journey. Furthermore, Aitchinson and Mowbray (2013) showed that women used rationalisation as a means of coping with the emotional overload. This meant acting in opposition to how one felt in order to manage negative emotions so that they could complete the doctorate (Aitchison & Mowbray, 2013)

4.2.4 Superordinate Theme 4: The vulnerable identity of the black woman doctoral graduate

This theme encapsulates the women's personal experiences around academia and the doctoral space with unique intersected social identities and gendered identities. This theme relates to how they were influenced by the space and the emotions that were elicited in the space of academia in conjunction with how they viewed themselves and their capabilities which positioned them in a vulnerable space. Most women reflected on an internal journey of taking up space in academia as a woman of colour which led to a sense of belonging and validation upon completion. However, the experience during their studies appeared differently. The experience for these women encompassed completing the doctorate as a confirmation of belonging and validation of capability as a black woman participating in academia within the South African context. The theme of a lack of racial representation was evident and reinforced the perception of how hard black women need to work within the space of academia. The reflective nature of this theme emphasised that the nature of belonging and being heard in academia is often covert. The release of feeling vindicated and fulfilled by belonging and accomplishment in the face of adversity, overtly

gave voice to the internal struggles of dealing with inferiority complexes, differences and racial experiences in academia. Bowleg, (2012) highlights that intersectionality as a lens exposes the nexus at which marginalisation occurs within intersected identities such as race and gender. This theme further revealed the challenges faced by the participants dealing with intersected social identities and the prejudices, stereotypes and exclusion faced by them. Crenshaw (1991) affirmed that the discrimination women face is shaped by overlapping identity markers such as race, gender, class, culture and position in society. Intersectionality, therefore, rejects a universal encompassing experience. The experience of a white woman cannot be isolated to represent a universal experience for all women, owing to the stratified nature of social identities and various levels of marginalisation and privilege. Experiences are, thus, multi-layered and are impacted by various social dynamics.

Evidenced in the reflective nature of this theme, black women's experiences are still often misunderstood. The theme revealed important information about how black women view academia and themselves in academic spaces even at a post-graduate level, which echoed an unconscious sense of powerlessness and led to a need to defend oneself. The completion of the doctoral pursuit allowed them to take ownership of their space within academia and gave expression to their emergent scholarly identities as black women. The theme further relates to the pressure that the doctoral pursuit imposes upon a black woman academic. Whether known or not, the structure of a black woman role model is painted in these women's experiences indicating that socially the representation of black females is valued by communities and families. The complexities of this theme are reflected in two sub-themes, namely, completion as a sense of belonging and validation, and black women academic role models.

4.2.4.1 Subordinate Theme: Completion as a source of belonging and validation

Participants relayed vulnerable feelings of not being represented, having to work harder and a sense of belonging through what they observed or experienced. The doctoral pursuit held more meaning and became a corrective measure and rite of passage to be

seen, heard and take up space as a black woman. Some participants recounted observations of a handful of black women in their classes, or that they were the only black women in their classes. These women displayed an awareness of the stereotypes that were evident around the black woman's experience in higher education. Experiences of witnessing their peers dropping out and leaving the programme were evident and applying oneself and staying the course for a black woman proved to be challenging and rare. These women further felt the need to dispel any negative stereotypes associated with racial identity, especially in higher education. For these women who have completed their studies, to contribute to a white-dominated space which holds the knowledge capital as a black woman was seen as a victorious moment, which confirmed their emergent academic identities.

In conversation with Zinhle, she reflected generally on the responsibility of a black woman academic. She displayed confidence in understanding her contribution and the capability of her contribution to the knowledge field. She reflected on the challenge that academia is still predominantly white-dominated and, speaking from a place of accomplishment, chose to focus on accountability. The onus is on black women to rise up and take ownership of spaces and to become active in participation rejecting passivity. She reflected an assured, capable identity.

"So, it's also about us taking accountability, and to say I can get a PhD, I can actually be involved with universities from an academic point of view, so that my contribution can also be felt 'cause we can't sit and say our voices are not there and then, what are we doing about it?"

Effective transformation starts with the belief that black women can contribute and deserve to contribute to knowledge. The above excerpt contextualised her experience of her doctoral studies where her class was not representative of black women which surprised her. She was passionate about change and active participation in contributing as a key black woman academic. She confirmed that obtaining a doctorate was possible despite the

negative feelings and observable challenges with diversity in higher education. This highlighted the discourse on transformation which showed that transformation dialogues tend to become an additional load upon black students in paving the way through education (Kessi & Cornell, 2015).

In communication with Lorna and reflecting on the experience of being a woman of colour within the academic space, she reflected on discussions of value and questions of proficiency. The knowledge that white males and bodies occupy positions in academia without question of value or competency was irksome. For the black woman, the academic experience is laden with insecurities and constant attempts at proving one's worth in academia. The notion of obtaining a doctorate reinforced the fact that they belong in academia and validated the capability of the black woman which is often undermined and overlooked in higher education.

"I mean, I think it's challenging. I mean if I just look at myself as a as a woman, if you if you think about academia and leadership in higher education, I guess the picture most people would get is an old white man, that is the picture. I mean that is predominantly how it has been and so, I think not being that poses challenges and insecurities and doubts and the PhD or just having the title I think creates some. Well yeah, I, I mean it, it's validates why you should be there and that's a terrible thing to say! But it's almost like without that, your voice wouldn't be heard within those particular spaces (Academia).

Terri explained that the notion of validating herself and her capability was something she engaged in to cope in a space that otherwise undermined her. She was mindful and reflected on her capacity to make an impression in higher education and to ensure she validated her own intellect and capability to endure the academic task. The extract below refers to an attempt to combat negative prejudice based on Terri's gender and race and decision-making capabilities around her study. Her ability to finish her schooling career early and complete a doctorate validated her sense of accomplishment, self-efficacy and self-

concept. She combated attempts at white students trying to devalue her competencies as a black woman and presented with a capable sure identity of a black woman academic who thrived and flourished in the space.

“So, I started to question a lot of things, but I think in the end I reminded myself like, uh, where I have come from and also that actually, I have the ability, that’s why I’m laughing. I finished school at 16, so there’s nothing wrong with my intellectual functioning. being black in academia is hard. The space of academia generally is hard, so my view is the females feel they need to work three times harder than the other genders, but also the other races. I don’t know if that makes sense, so for the black female it’s almost like it’s a standard that she must work harder and sacrifice more of a personal life to achieve or she’s judged harder in terms of her production, so I don’t know if it’s because she judges herself or society judges her, or the academic space judges her.”

Terri further spoke to the notion of overcompensating within the space of academia as a black woman, moving from a personal experience to a more generalised expression of blackness and worth in higher education. The notion of having to prove one’s worth as a black woman in academia is complex as many intersecting social constructs may be at play such as race, gender and societal expectations suggesting that the black woman must prove herself and work harder as a precondition for being acknowledged and recognised.

Despite battling the prejudice and predisposing negative identity constructs, these women reframed and recounted experiences where obtaining a doctorate confirmed and validated their self-concepts which they knew to be true of themselves such as their capabilities as an academic. The black women, moving through the higher education system to a post-graduate position, did not doubt their innate capability and intellect to carry out a post-graduate degree, although it was interesting to note that feelings of doubt, insecurity and fear of not being seen or heard because of race and gender, carried their own preconceived notions of inferiority that were somehow beyond their control. Mahabeer et

al.'s (2018) study affirmed that black women continuously need to navigate higher education spaces that do not validate them and their unique experiences as they are considered invisible and mute.

This indicated a difference in the participants' self-assured personal identity and their social identity interacting within the academic space. Issues of belonging and self-doubt were evident in the participants' experiences that occurred within the interactional space of the institution and in relation to the whiteness of the predominant discourse. Similarly, Simatele, (2018) speaks of the micro-invalidations that black women face in academia that foster a sense of self-doubt, loss of vitality and confidence in ability. Micro-invalidations negate the experiences and thoughts of the individual leading to negative emotions as was evidenced in the results of this research. The notion of the black woman having to work harder to achieve the same goals in academia as their white counterparts were experienced. In addition to working hard, there was an acceptance that there is an ease of familiarity for white men and women in academia that is not afforded to black academics. This is supported by Simatele (2018) who indicated that it is not a question of intellect, capacity, and capability of the black woman but it is one of culture and apartheid ideologies that reinforce the skewed negative stereotypes about black capability. The prolonged negative stereotypes and microinvalidations experienced lead to a loss of confidence and fostered a sense of unbelonging in academia. Similarly, Kessi and Cornell (2015) highlighted the concept of symbolic exclusion, which is the unconscious manifestation of prolonged internalisations of negative stereotypes of race and gender which further foster feelings of inferiority and exclusion. The notion of working harder and obtaining a doctorate as validation of belonging is an attempt to promote and shift the academic of colour out of the shadow of their white counterparts. This is in alignment with studies conducted within the South African context on the black student (Kessi & Cornell, 2015; Maseti, 2018; Mokhele, 2013).

Further in, the experiences noted through conversation with these women highlighted a duality of experience – a recognition of two worlds. The duality of a narrative of apartheid

ideologies, and expressions of inferiority and fears of invisibility is perpetuated by historical narratives which reflect a patriarchal system based on gendered hierarchies (Alabi et al., 2019; Mahabeer et al., 2018; Maseti, 2018). The double oppression that was experienced by being a woman and black is not uncommon to the black woman's experience in academia, the marginalisation is based on gender and race which creates a unique identity experience for the black woman academic (Maseti, 2018). Intersectionality contextualises the double oppression that was experienced by these women in terms of race and gender and how it related to their personal experiences as black women (Crenshaw, 1991). The multi-layered marginalisation that black women have to endure in higher education is still prominent and the persistent feelings of inferiority produced an intimate experience for these black women which required much deliberation within themselves.

The victorious completion of the doctoral pursuit of these women, however, reframed their beliefs within themselves and reaffirmed their psychological and personal positive academic identities (Zulu, 2022). Transformation of the higher education system occurs on a psychological level, indicating that it is important to address the culture of institutions and ideologies of educational landscapes that influence how black women navigate the academic space in relation to their academic identities (Belluigi & Thondhlana, 2019; Zulu, 2022). Although the participants described methods that reframed the doctoral experience and ways of interacting within the academic space, the space eventually was converted to a channel of confirmation and validation for the black woman. The women highlighted the very real experiences and struggles with identity, showcasing that black women still need to trudge through the trenches of higher education to prove their worth, value and self-assurance which is funnelled through the lenses of race and gender (Mahabeer et al., 2018). The women navigated the throes of the doctoral journey and found safe spaces that validated their capabilities along with support structures that affirmed their goals and, through agency and capacity, they moved past the invisible negative stereotypes. The results showed that completing a doctorate is not without its challenges to identity, but it is

also a channel to affirm identity which produces positive attitudes by being validated by success, completion and taking up space within academia. The sense of belonging upon completion and recognition reaffirmed capabilities that were always a part of the black woman academic (Loots et al., 2016).

4.2.4.2 Subordinate Theme: Black Women Academic Role Models

This theme recurred throughout the conversations with the women. This theme highlights that those participants by representation, became role models for other black women, young girls and people within their community or families. The women relayed experiences of being regarded by others as a beacon of hope which they all subscribed to. This status was either bestowed or it emanated internally as a source of motivation that served as empowerment for the black woman. These women redefined, negotiated and completed the doctoral quest despite challenges and restrictions of gender, race, and sociocultural factors.

Some women recounted that they grew up in rural areas where education was not accessible to all but was valued in their immediate family settings. Socioeconomic status, race and class impacted access to education for people of colour and therefore may have been valued and privileged in the participants' family system as growing up. Some spoke of how their parents did not have the same educational opportunities afforded to them. The value of education and the sense of pride and accomplishment shared between family members and community is seen as a leap forward for access and accomplishment.

When speaking to Zinhle about the value of the doctorate, she expressed that it had far-reaching effects beyond her individual fulfilment as seen in the excerpt below. She agreed that she was probably regarded as a role model but this may be covert and is not necessarily transparent or managed. It appeared to be an unspoken agreement that is generated once one has completed a doctorate.

“And in the black community you’re kind of seen as a role model even if that’s not what you intentionally go out to be. And in many conversations in the community,

they'll say look at her see what she's been able to do as a way of encouraging the younger ones to stick it out because you know there's hope there's hope for you. If people that look like us are able to get to these levels, then it kind of inspires a level of hope in a broader sense."

Thandeka further relayed that the doctoral experience also had value that went beyond individual motivations. The doctorate holds significance that can create expectations that are not always agreed upon but can be thrust upon a black woman as she aspires for herself, but for others as well. Being a role model is seen as a social contract that one enters that develops aspirational capacity for others. The women told stories and passed down successful experiences in the context of higher education which has a legacy of oppression.

"For me, the PhD was OK. This is part of my career development, but the actual doing of it. It is about recognising about that it can be done for others, so it's not just about lifting the bar, but removing the bar altogether to say, look, walk this journey."

For Bonnie, the role model expression was personal and significant in her family system. She spoke of an instance where her daughter grew up during the process of her obtaining her doctorate. This sense of her daughter observing her, and her capabilities was important for her. How she was perceived by her daughter and other young women was valuable and important. She had to portray a sense of endurance and accomplishment, and the reason for her motivation to finish the doctorate was multi-layered. She narrated the following story when speaking about role modelling.

"I think you know, in the process she grew up while I was doing this doctorate. So, she even had a laptop. Her little computer that she would sit when I would sit, and she would type. And then she'd say, I'm doing my research and bring my research. So, I also felt I needed to honour that for her and I wanted to make sure that she sees her mom finish."

The evolution of the educational landscape post-apartheid in South Africa has aimed to redress issues of access for previously disadvantaged communities and races who were

affected by the segregated laws of apartheid (Mzangwa, 2019). The women in this study recounted experiences around persevering and realising that they were role models in families and communities was a proud moment for them. The experience in the social setting for the communities was shared joy and elevation for the black woman. Some women recounted moments where someone may not know the meaning of the doctorate but would be elated that one of their very own had completed school. The shared community engagement brought members closer together and shared success was indicative of the concept of “ubuntu”, showing that black people can share in each other’s successes and be empowered by them. The highlighting of black female representation and affirmation of capability was important in these women’s conversations. Similarly, Harper’s (2013) study revealed that due to the continuous marginalisation of black students, the desire for same race role models is imperative within higher education, as it fosters a sense of belonging, especially for black students. This is further confirmed by Kessi and Cornell (2015) who indicated that black representation in higher education promotes a sense of hope and aspiration. When students encounter and engage with same race professors, women, and leaders in positions of authority within higher education, it affirms students’ self-efficacy indicating a positive impact. Given the under-representation of black women and role models within higher education, there is a growing need for advocates of colour to motivate students within academia. The unique, intersected, multi-layered experiences of the identity of the black graduate which is shaped by gender, race, political and economic influences entrenched in power are most accurately understood by other black students and academics (Harper, 2013)

The theme further highlighted that for a black woman, the doctoral endeavour is about achieving in spite of the challenges. This is in line with literature which indicates that black people position themselves within learning in terms of the quality of interaction between attachment figures and environmental opportunities within formative years. Sociocultural values and socioeconomic status influence learning and identity development

and set predictors for how well one thrives in the academic context (Chetty & Pather, 2015; Lourens, 2016). Black women who recognise their influence once they have completed a doctorate are valuable contributors to society as they are active participants committed to the advancement of black students and foster a culture of success in academia (Nkambule, 2016; Zulu, 2022).

4.2.5 Superordinate Theme 5: Purpose: The door opens

Given the challenges of doctoral education and autonomous engagement with the research process, in this theme, the participants highlighted the many reasons why they pursued doctoral education. The black women highlighted many personal and professional reasons as to why they took up the pursuit. The women also highlighted the motivations that contributed to the pursuit of the doctorate. Having a clear goal and motivation for undertaking a doctorate that assists in managing the difficult parts of the journey. These black women spoke about the purpose and meaningful work which helped in their motivation. For these women, it was focused on academic leverage and meaningful work that contributed to their knowledge bases in the psychological field of study. Participants highlighted the many ways in which having a doctorate contributed to their professional lives and careers. This theme is symbolised in the subordinate theme of professional leverage discussed below.

4.2.5.1 Subordinate theme: Professional Leverage

The usefulness and value of obtaining a doctorate was a prominent theme for these women, which emerged through the many conversations. They relayed experiences of professional and personal advancement within psychology just by holding the title. Alabi et al. (2019) found that women undertake a post-graduate degree for reasons ranging from professional development, gaining access to opportunities that are reserved for a niche group of the population and advancing employment opportunities. An element of prestige was associated with obtaining the degree that sets one apart in their professional career which was revealed in the participants' experiences. South Africa's history of oppression due

to apartheid disenfranchised and subjugated black women to a low social status within society where a privileged education was offered to whites and a subordinate one to blacks. Oppression related to education was led by dehumanising practices of exclusion based on race, gender and class which further submerged women's social location in society (Akala, 2018). Zinhle had the following to say regarding the permanency of obtaining the title. She spoke of the doctorate as empowering and serving rather than disenfranchising. The title and the leverage that it awarded her as a black woman was valued. It became intertwined with who she is, that no one could undo or strip away.

"It's a title that nobody can ever take away from you."

For Bonnie, when speaking about the leverage, it became personal, and she highlighted the weight that the title carries. She communicated that it was a shame that society values prestige and that prestige awards social capital that one can benefit from. As a black woman in society having the title awarded privileges that may not be accessible without one.

"I think after everything, it really opened the door for practice. It also, there's a lot of weight and it's sad, but there's a lot of weight that the doctor title carries, you know, the minute there's a Dr in front of your name or PhD at the end of your name."

Gabby shared similar sentiments that having a doctorate leads to opportunities and sets one apart in departments and eligibility improves for career options and advancement. The benefits are endless, setting one apart and providing professional recognition. Gabby acknowledged that in higher education the prestige of a doctorate is regarded in any field and is not specific indicating that the societal benefits are transferred across disciplines.

"One of the things that was my KPA I had to have a PhD for me to be progressing in my career. Uh, but I also think that a PhD sets you up well, with more opportunities in any field or in any department that you might want to work in."

When speaking about the value of the doctorate, Lorna indicated that for her it held personal value and gave her a competitive advantage within her career. The leverage it

provided was important and necessary to make strides within a career in academia. She mentioned a love for learning, being able to stay relevant within the field of psychology and contributing to the growing body of knowledge in the field. The accomplishment of having her voice heard and in the field was a priority for Lorna.

“I guess my work, the being in academia and knowing the value of a PhD within the role is important, and so that is motivation because it actually opens particular doors for me career-wise.”

The participants relayed very practical and useful reasons for what completing a doctorate meant for them. Professional enhancement and plotting out career moves prompted them to engage with the doctorate. In addition to professional enhancement was the expansion of knowledge and the continuous learning and development within the psychological field. The results, however, indicate that acquiring a doctorate for academic or personal reasons in the field of psychology elevates the female academic. Similarly, Loots et al. (2016) discovered that completing a doctorate enhanced capabilities within the woman academic. The doctorate enhanced feelings of belonging to a prestigious elite academic community, it earned them admiration and recognition within their respective fields and they were valued for their contributions to the knowledge base and work. Alabi et al. (2019) revealed that women undertake doctorates as there are added advantages to employment and can further career aspirations, it afforded them greater access to opportunities than a general degree could offer and helped them to realise career goals. Nkambule's (2016) study uncovered a similar experience of perseverance and visibility during her doctoral studies. The knowledge contributions were valued, and the educational achievement opened up new prospects and they were better able to leverage employment opportunities.

The results, however, also indicated that through racist mechanisms, the educational system led to students of colour struggling to participate and remain in the psychological educational field. Through repetitive use of disparaging statements, and microaggressions students self confidence and self-esteem were negatively affected (Nkambule, 2016).

Crenshaw (2015) argues that privilege is challenging to comprehend especially when one is a part of intersecting multiple social identity categories. The experience is compounded when privileges or successes are laced with discrimination, sexism and racism reflecting power dynamics in society. This is evidenced in the results of this research as participants experienced a range of emotions such as shock, elation and anticipation in relation to the professional leverage and influence the doctorate awarded them as black women.

Intersectionality focuses on identity and its cohabitation with power that has the structural ability to include and exclude members of social categories. Intersectionality has provided marginalised minorities with a structure through which experiences can be leveraged to lobby against discrimination that breeds invisibility for black women in society (Crenshaw, 2015). Institutions of higher education are considered battlefields for black women to enter, as they constantly have to navigate, work harder to prove their worth and learn how to take up space within the academic realm, against the backdrop of gendered expectations, patriarchy, racism and sexism (Mahabeer et al., 2018)

Obtaining a doctorate for these women aligned with visibility and growth personally and professionally. It became invaluable and a representation of dignity that no one can strip or take away as evidenced in Zinhle's statement *"It's a title that nobody can ever take away from you"*. Alabi et al. (2019) indicated that black women and women as a gender were disenfranchised and deprived of educational opportunities during apartheid based on oppressive ideals such as gender discrimination and class discrimination which further smothered women's position in society. The patriarchal culture left women fulfilling traditional gendered roles which exposed them, and left them vulnerable and socially restricted as furthering an education was prohibited and seen by men as unnecessary (Alabi et al., 2019). The fall of apartheid resulted in increasing access to higher education. The results of this study indicated that the title of being or becoming a doctor is a high honour, and no one can disenfranchise or take away that power that was hard-earned. This is important for the black woman doctoral graduate who in so many ways bears a history of being disenfranchised by

racial and gender stereotypes (Alabi et al., 2019). The title alone has the potential to open doors and leverage interaction favourably whether in an academic career or within a non-academic career.

Some participants indicated that furthering their education was always something that was going to come next for them in terms of the overall academic journey indicating aspirational educational goals. The value of education and how education is perceived in familial contexts impacts how the women relate to education and position themselves in the academic field. These black women stated that having a doctorate gave them influence within their careers. This is in accordance with previous studies in the South African context that highlight that women who are motivated to advance their careers are likely to endure the challenges of the academic pursuit and complete their qualifications ensuring throughput (Alabi et al., 2019). The results of this study are in line with previous studies conducted within the South African context indicating that the aspiration to complete a doctorate is founded on leverage and advancement that the student becomes personally vested in (Alabi et al., 2019; Backhouse, 2009; Loots et al., 2016; Magano, 2013; Mahabeer et al., 2018). The underlying notion of promotion and respect that the doctorate awarded these black women opened doors and advanced career prospects beyond racial and gender lines.

4.2.6 Superordinate Theme 6: Institutional support

In this theme, the focus is on what the black woman as participants suggested would ease the plight of the black woman in academia. The experience of a black woman is multi-layered and unique. This theme indicated that these women knew what would be a resource to them that would assist them in completing a doctorate and ensuring throughput of black women. In addition to the social resources garnered by these women in terms of family support and supervisory support, additional factors were listed as potential resources to aid the black woman academic. Most participants cited that the supervisory relationship was paramount to academic success. Some indicated that the matching of supervisor and supervisee was important and mediation processes should be in place if the supervisor and

supervisee were in conflict. Most were satisfied with the level of institutional support provided by the university. The support ranged from practical support such as library services, workshops, funding and research assistance by the university. The above theme is encapsulated by the participants' excerpts below.

Bonnie relayed frustration and surprise at some of the processes around how supervisors were allocated to prospective doctoral students at the time. She indicated a level of disempowerment and a lack of control or input in selecting a supervisor. The uncertainty of a supervisor and whether the student and the supervisor would match interpersonally were a concern to her as there were no formal processes or introductions as the allocation of a supervisor was based on random selection. There was little consideration of interpersonal skills, relationships or regard for a working relationship. It appeared to be reduced to a game. It was a spontaneous process which lacked professionalism, respect, or decorum of higher education. She relayed the following about how her supervisor was allocated:

"So and you know the way my university had done it, it was like literally we picked from a hat (Supervisors)."

Zinhle expressed a similar feeling of frustration and lack of input with regard to the selection of a supervisor. The stress of *"that's how the process works"* was an indication that it was final, and the process was not to be questioned within the department. The uncertainty and imposed silence of not being able to choose a supervisor or engage in choosing a supervisor freely, placed limitations and doubts upon the quality of the imposed supervisory relationship. The university choosing supervisors was seen as a mechanism of control and management of the students and supervisors which left little room for collaboration.

"So they told us they're going to choose supervisors for us because that's how the process works."

Zinhle and Bonnie reiterated that the university could provide support through agency and let students take the initiative and be proactive in their choice of supervisor. Allowing agency and initiative in choosing a supervisor was suggested, with holding mechanisms in

place to manage the supervisory relationship such as mediation and channels of communication when the supervisory relationship was in distress or the student was not performing adequately. Making known institutional policies around expectations of the supervisory relationship was suggested which would limit the feelings of uncertainty as there would be clear expectations for feedback which would increase student retention. The results are similar to those of Schulze (2015) as the supervisory relationship and the agency of the student are important factors in developing an academic identity within the emergent student.

The study further stressed the importance of the supervisory relationship as a reflection of the institution and the support provided to the student during the academic process. According to the participants, the establishment of a collaborative space between the student and the supervisor should not be dictated by the power dynamics of the institution. However, according to Okeke-Uzodike (2021), the traditional academic space is still heavily influenced by institutional structures and policies that are geared toward a top-down approach. With an awareness of the power dynamics at work inside institutions, the participants desired a more collaborative approach while beginning their post-graduate courses. Schulze (2015) emphasises the necessity for increased awareness and understanding of the power dynamics at work within institutions to identify whether certain contexts assist academics or put them at a disadvantage. This is further supported by Silinda and Brubacher (2016) who found that professional and emotional support from the institution reduced the ambiguity and increased participation rates leading to student success and completion. A lack of understanding and clear description of the supervisory relationship can impede student participation, implying that supervisors and higher education institutions should endeavour to understand the individual student's needs in order to facilitate degree accomplishment and retention.

Other participants suggested that writing and focusing on the female academic at a grassroots level, and making research information and support accessible was vital for

retention and success. For the woman of colour to flourish in academia, Lorna stressed the importance of social connections and being able to engage academically in group settings with like-minded people. The notion of representation and making meaningful contact with women was important as was funding. Making funding available to generate alternative skills development activities and structured support such as writing retreats to facilitate learning and engagement was an important recommendation. Having black mentors and contact with other academics who might be experiencing the same challenges or successes was important to reduce the feelings of isolation and normalise the doctoral experience. When speaking about institutional support, Lorna stated the following:

“Funding, being able to go to an institution and to meet face-to-face. I mean through my university, it’s all done online but I think sometimes like working writing retreats where you can go and write together as a group. I think maybe some more contact and knowing there’s other people and you’re not so isolated in the journey is helpful.”

Terri, however, spoke to structural and formal skills development initiatives that would be beneficial to the black woman. She conveyed the following information when speaking around skills development. Terri implied that there is a lack of knowledge and expectations are unclear when it comes to the requirements for entering a post-graduate qualification. There is a sense of the black student needing to catch up in higher education, emphasising the lack of knowledge.

“We need research coaches. I don’t know if they have such, as much as you have a supervisor, I think overall I mean I’ve worked in different institutions as a uh, a lecturer, so I’m aware of the level of research knowledge in the South African institutions in that context and I feel like we lack. We don’t focus on research so when people get to the masters. Programmes or the PhD levels they don’t have good sounding foundation.”

The challenges of funding, supervisory support and isolation in doctoral programmes are not uncommon to the unique experience of institutional learning (Lessing & Schulze,

2004). The results indicate that during the process autonomy, collegial support and engagement were valued. The follow-up of institutional support at a grassroots level even before one reaches the doctoral phase is an indication of the expectations of higher education and the student. Chetty and Pather (2015) state that the disordered education system that South Africa experienced due to apartheid has had lasting ramifications for students, especially black students. Black women suffered double oppression under apartheid as they were marginalised in terms of race and gender with meagre educational opportunities. With the advent of democracy, women were still under-represented in higher education and underprepared because of the deprived educational context. Chetty and Pather (2015) further highlighted that black students would need additional support to address the effects of the past in the present. Education is valued and prized yet access is still limited and reserved due to issues of privilege that were engrained in societal practices. Black women systemically faced long and painful exclusion from educational opportunities and attainment from colonisation to apartheid which imposed and implemented disempowering and disenfranchising policies (Alabi et al., 2019).

Crenshaw (1991) indicated that one cannot separate structures of oppression of marginalised groups as it denigrates members of the population who may be impacted by more than one social identity or category such as race and gender. Looking at a single identity category or class such as race or gender distorts the many factors of oppressions and contexts in which people locate themselves. Intersectionality assists in understanding the workings of power that perpetuated marginalisation of the minority by practices that excluded people based on gender, race, class, economic capital and political power (Crenshaw, 2015). Intersectionality views all social categories simultaneously with power dynamics that inform and perpetuate marginalisation. The complexity of oppression resulting from being a woman and a black woman that the participants faced within higher education still disadvantages them today. The systemically engrained marginalisation that was executed through apartheid ideologies created a discrepancy in academic outcomes. Given

the historical and current financial, social and educational disadvantages and the low number of post-graduate students, black students start off at a disadvantage (Chetty & Pather, 2015) The results of this study indicate that educationally the woman of colour is at risk of underperforming and is seemingly under-resourced financially and educationally. A large gap is still identifiable and felt in the present day in terms of development and education. Students still show deficits in skill, knowledge and capabilities which may hinder or prevent their success in higher education, thus affecting retention.

The theme further highlights that students are interactional beings with the institution and require different engagement styles (Flotman, 2021). The frustration with the educational landscape may not be an institutional problem but a reflection of a systemic problem which still plagues the South African context, and specifically still impacts black students and their perceptions of academia and their capabilities. Finances and access to financial resources were recommended by the participants to assist the black women in their academic journeys. Funding was recommended to support the black academic through the layered journey of navigating institutions of higher education. If the issues of funding are not addressed, participants indicated that this could hinder and exclude academics from pursuing and completing their degrees as it makes academia inaccessible. According to Idan et al. (2022), finances or access to money is a GRR that can leverage individuals out of stressful situations to effectively manage tension. Funding is considered a resource that can empower women to manage stress and cope effectively with the doctoral journey as well as contribute to success in educational attainment. Simultaneously, other GRR such as social support through like-minded academics serve the function of reducing isolation and stress. Isolation and funding in academia has been recorded in literature and can contribute to the poor retention rate of students within higher education (Alabi et al., 2019; Mahabeer et al., 2018; Nkambule, 2016; Silinda & Brubacher, 2016). The results of this study indicate that additional finances to fund a doctorate are necessary to ensure the retention of students.

Insufficient funding could lead to premature drop out because studies become a secondary focus as primary needs such as financial security and provision are more important.

4.3 Conclusion

The study highlighted that although the doctoral journey presents many challenges for the female black academic, they were able to achieve and persevere. The perceptions of the academic environment were highlighted as well as how they positioned themselves within the academic field. The study reiterated that access to higher education is attainable for the black woman academic but that socioeconomic issues and issues of race, gender and power are not to be ignored as factors in attainment. The plight of the black woman doctoral graduate is still multi-layered which create a personal experience that can only be contained by these black women. The gender and racial stereotypes still impact self-perception and the psychological make-up of one's academic identity as a black woman. Thus, there is a continuous process of negotiation that the black woman must enter into within her personal environment before embarking on the doctoral journey. Gender stereotypes required navigation and at times created limitations that had an emotional impact on these women. There is a constant redefinition of multiple roles and identities that intersect along racial, gendered, and sociocultural lines. Furthermore, some women expressed frustration at the gendered expectations placed on them and the identity of the black woman having to work harder to prove themselves within academic spaces. The emotional expressions of invisibility and a sense of inferiority highlight the psychological toll that racialised and gendered academia has on the black woman.

The participants then provided valuable insights into the emotional aspects of the doctoral journey and its impact. The notion that life continues around academia and forms but a part of the woman's life, indicates the constant balance and acceptance that is required to complete a doctoral degree. The woman navigated feelings of invisibility, grief, loss and resentment and managed to reframe the doctoral journey into one of victory, triumph, respect, honour and validation.

Methods of endurance and coping were discussed, and resources of support were indicated by the participants for the institution. The relationship with the supervisor either enhanced performance or led to frustration with the doctoral experience. It is the lived reality of these participants that shaped their experience of the doctoral pursuit as black women in South Africa. However, regardless of the challenges experienced, they persevered because of academic support, agency, family support and institutional resources.

In the next chapter, the researcher provides a summary and conclusion of what the study aimed to achieve based on the research questions. In addition, the researcher presents the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This research intended to explore and understand the lived experiences of black women who have completed a doctorate in Psychology. The study further sought to explore the coping resources that assisted them in managing the academic journey. The research conducted was retrospective focusing on women who had already completed the academic task, in the hope that the results would enlighten and provide insight into the experiences of an under-represented group. The second reason for looking into the experience in hindsight was to attract prospective students into academia addressing issues of retention and recommendations.

5.1.1 Research Question 1

What are the lived experiences of black South African women who have completed a doctorate in psychology?

The results indicate that the doctoral pursuit was multi-layered and experienced differently by the participants as similarities and differences emerged. The similarities and the nuances of experience reflected a deeper understanding of the doctoral pursuit as experienced by these black women. The educational landscape is experienced differently for women with intersected social identities. Each woman's experience is influenced by gender, class, socioeconomic status and cultural prescriptions in addition to race or ethnicity. The stratified experience and diversity of accounts could be attributed to the South African context and historical legacy of apartheid and its effects which are still manifested today. The segregation, disempowerment and deep divisions based on race further intertwined within a patriarchal society had different impacts on the participants and their positioning in society, as well as how they saw their function in society (Walker, 1998) Women may have common interests, ideas and expectations of academia but they are by no means universal or reflective of the experience of all women. The experience of undertaking a doctorate frustrated and challenged many participants into new areas of growth. Intersectionality was

used to understand the interlocking systems that maintain marginalisation within experience (Bowleg, 2012). The results indicated that the doctoral experience has the potential to stir up emotional tensions emanating from past conditioning. The feelings of vulnerability, insecurity and racialised negative stereotypes were a part of the narratives of these women and their perceptions regarding their capabilities within academia.

The results further indicated that these women continuously struggled to navigate the gendered demands placed on them by society and within their own interpersonal relationships. The root of imbalance was ascribed to the historical implications of apartheid and the patriarchal context of South Africa which maintains that the woman is responsible for domestic management such as child-rearing and nurturing duties. These issues remained an issue of contention although the results highlighted a shift in sentiments and a shift towards duality was recorded, indicating a move towards shared gender roles without imposed prescriptions. There was an understanding of the shared gender roles that women have to navigate in order to pursue their academic goals. The study, however, concluded that gender and race are still significant constructs that have influence over the experience of an academic pursuit. Communication and interpersonal engagement are crucial in supporting the doctoral student to complete their studies and to mitigate uncertainty within the academic space and the personal space.

The study offered insights into the prestige of holding a doctorate. The accolades gained highlighted that black women became role models and represented hope and transformation for younger generations of colour. Empowerment is seen as a powerful platform and resource that can be used to motivate younger generations and increase throughput. When younger academics of colour see more women of colour in academia, representation is increased, and hope is ignited through representation and mentorship.

The second research question answered was in respect of the various coping resources that assisted the student through the doctoral journey.

5.1.2 Research Question 2

What coping strategies do these women employ to manage their studies?

The coping resources used were pertinent to the journey and assisted each woman to navigate, persist and overcome in the doctoral journey. The study offered valuable insights into the views and experiences of black women within the doctoral space. Each woman with intersected social identities relayed how they navigated relationships with spouses, families and supervisors. They accounted for gendered conflicts and role conflicts which impacted the balance between personal life and work. The experiences of the participants were laced with gender stereotypes which still inform behaviour. The research further highlighted that, despite the challenges and adversity faced, they succeeded by leveraging all coping resources that were available. The research findings highlighted the unequal past and racial picture of the higher educational landscape. The available support networks that were considered protective and buffered stress were family, the supervisory relationship and a reliance on agency that stems from choices that the academic can make. Support networks such as family, supervisors and individual coping resources that assisted in meeting the demands of the writing process in pursuit of the doctorate were seen to impact how the student navigated the doctoral process. Black women living with multiple socially intersected identities experienced the doctoral pursuit differently with gender, race, and stereotypes impacting and marginalising them (Crenshaw, 1991). The social categories such as gender, race, issues of non-representation and the complex emotions felt around inferiority due to engrained negative stereotypes regarding black competency produced niched experiences for these women. The coping resources were highlighted as they assisted these women positively and impacted the doctoral experience. They showcased flexibility, persistence and resilience when coping with the doctoral pursuit. It was noted that the participants desired additional support from their institutions such as financial assistance, writing assistance and consideration with a move for collaboration. It is important for an

institution to meet the desired needs of students as it assists in the retention and throughput of black students (Silinda & Brubacher, 2016).

The study recognised the changing roles of women within their personal and academic contexts. The desire for flexibility was challenging although not unattainable. Negative stereotypes remain in academia so that the participants questioned their worth and capability. Their personal and relational contexts impacted performance outcomes and, at times, placed limitations on the pursuit of career goals.

The analysis of the participants' experiences relied on the use of IPA. By using this mode of analysis, the meaning-making of the participants was revealed. Pertinent themes were unveiled and the findings were contextualised within the theoretical frameworks of the study. Salutogenesis and intersectionality were used in this study and were able to highlight where social identities crossed and created a unique experience for the black woman. The theoretical frameworks created a structure and offered an understanding of how these women constructed their realities and how they experienced their unique realities.

5.2 Limitations

Two methods of participant recruitment were used. The first recruitment method was through the university system whereby communication was emailed to participants through their alumnus email. This initial engagement did not yield any results, possibly because many alumni do not check their university emails regularly. It proved to be challenging to obtain an initial sample through the first mode of recruitment. Purposive sampling as a method was still used, although other forms of direct communication and reach were considered such as Facebook, and direct contact through LinkedIn with prospective participants. The participant inclusion criteria were ultra-refined which made it challenging to find participants. More research on methods of sourcing gender specific participants is required to assist in recruitment. Owing to the specialised criteria of the sample, qualitative methods then sought to gain a rich deep understanding of the lived experience of these women. Another limitation considered is the small sample size of only six participants which

affects transferability. The sample came from a single university allowing for a homogenous sample. Thus, the results cannot be applied to all universities. A final consideration was that not all participants were first generation doctorate holders and the time differed between degree completion. There could have been a difference in experiences and challenges if everyone was a first generation candidate compared to a third- or second-generation doctorate holder.

5.3 Strengths

A strength of the study is that it contributes to the field of psychology and education. The cross-disciplinary reach is valuable as the study provides insights into possible ways the institution could assist with retention for the woman of colour. The second aspect was the focus on the psychological and emotional impact the experiences of academia had on the women, showcasing coping resources and mechanisms that promoted wellbeing and methods of buffering tension and stress. The homogenous sample and various ages of the participants provided a more in-depth account of the experiences. Obtaining a homogenous sample further provided in-depth and specific information about the experiences of women with a similar educational background as all participants acquired the doctorate at the same university. Researching the plight of an under-represented group of black women who experienced marginalisation from multiple contexts, also revealed specific ways in which meaningful support can be rendered to this group which still experiences marginalisation in present society. The study indicated the narrative of behaviours that perpetuate gendered stereotypes which inform behaviour such as that women are still considered responsible for nurturing and domestic activities within the home, which can limit or make the pursuit of higher education challenging for women. The alternative ways in which to support women in academia were made known making it a healthier progressive context promoting interaction between institution and student. The study also highlighted the shift in the educational landscape when it comes to support offered by family, spouses and supervisors which nurture and carry the potential academic to completion.

5.4 Recommendations

It was found that the negative stereotypes around black women and their capability were still prevalent, and that as black women, they felt they needed to work harder to prove their worth. Face-to-face contact with others on the academic journey and the establishment of writing retreats where engagement could be encouraged and fostered. Promoting a healthier academic environment that is driven by student engagement can foster development and discussion around shared interests and topics that may be important to the academic community. Funding was needed and considered important in retention and throughput. Funding could potentially be used to create dialogue around academic experiences and engagements to reduce isolation and address key issues such as gender, racism and provide emotional containments.

The need for students to feel heard by the institution was a strong factor. The concerns around funding and additional research support for the black academic were profound. A programme on writing retreats, which assists in strengthening the throughput and retention of the black student as skills are enhanced is recommended. Addressing the personal level where psychological issues and emotional challenges may be addressed, creating safe spaces for students to explore difficult emotions through connectedness. A group student programme for engagement could create conversational spaces that are facilitated to address anxieties and provide a holding space for containment related to academia. The call for institutions to be open-minded and collaborative in service of empowerment and retention of the black academic suggests that a programme for student and institutional engagement with supervisors that clarifies expectations could diminish uncertainty and build rapport. This research found that racial and gendered stereotypes still govern how a woman experiences academia. Critical engagement is required to create awareness so that behaviours that reinforce the stereotypes are challenged and social inequalities are interrogated.

The research highlighted the need for funding as a retention mechanism for black women within academia. It is recommended that research be done on students who have completed their studies without the aid of funding to ascertain what support networks assisted them to complete the doctoral journey. A further recommendation for future research would be on empowerment and black academic women role models within the space of academia. Many participants positioned themselves as possessing influence due to obtaining a doctorate. The creation of platforms for empowerment and opportunities for representation could be explored.

5.5 Concluding Remarks

The study established that black women are underrepresented in the doctoral realm and face many challenges during the pursuit related to race and gender. The journey is difficult and support networks are imperative to assist the student in managing the process. Even though the women have completed the doctoral journey, many women are still bound to traditional gendered roles reinforced by society and patriarchal expectations. However, the study concluded that this can be navigated and alternative lived realities can emerge regarding gendered stereotypes in service of the academic. Race and gender prejudices continue to impact the psychological and emotional makeup of the individual and experiences are filtered through the marginalisation that occurs which can hinder black women from participating in higher education. The multiple roles that women are required to negotiate demand constant negotiation and social acceptance is impacted by race, gender and sociocultural underpinnings. However, this exploratory study gave insight into coping resources that can provide ease and platforms of comfort to the academic. Larger active strides towards transformation are required to actively address the feelings of unbelonging in academia and the subtle racial microaggressions that can contribute to an unchanged culture in academia that preserves privilege.

From a reflective stance as an emerging scholar, this study has taught me to become more cognisant of social context and more so how one locates themselves within social

contexts. I learned that as a person of colour I, too, have inherited an intersected identity which can meet oppression, in the same manner, it can meet privilege. Being educated and developing a skill set and being able to exercise the knowledge that I have learnt in society and impact society is a privilege. With that privilege intertwined is power and influence for the use of advocacy. Advocacy requires confidence and boldness to represent something bigger than oneself, and this was done through this research project for which I am grateful.

REFERENCES

- Ahern, K., & Manathunga, C. (2004). Clutch-starting stalled research students. *Innovative Higher Education*, 28(4), 237–254.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/B:IHIE.0000018908.36113.a5>
- Aitchison, C., & Mowbray, S. (2013). Doctoral women: Managing emotions, managing doctoral studies. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 18(8), 859–870.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2013.827642>
- Akala, B. M. (2018). Challenging gender equality in South African transformation policies - a case of the White Paper: A programme for the transformation of higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 32(3). <https://doi.org/10.20853/32-3-1521>
- Alabi, O. J., Seedat-Khan, M., & Abdullahi, A. A. (2019). The lived experiences of postgraduate female students at the University of Kwazulu Natal, Durban, South Africa. *Heliyon*, 5(11), e02731. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e02731>
- Alase, A. (2017). The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 5(2), 9. <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.ijels.v.5n.2p.9>
- Ali, A., & Kohun, F. G. (2006). Dealing with Isolation Feelings in IS Doctoral Programs. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 1, 021–033. <https://doi.org/10.28945/58>
- Anane, E., & Dankwa, J. A. (2017). Changing roles of women: Examining the reciprocal effects of female academics' job and family roles in public universities in Ghana. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 7(3), 127–137.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/jesr-2017-0010>
- Anney, V. N. (2014). Ensuring the quality of the findings of qualitative research: Looking at trustworthiness criteria. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 5(2), 272-281.
- Antonovsky, A. (1980). *Health, stress, and coping* (1st ed). Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Backhouse, J. (2009). Creativity Within Limits: Does the South African PhD Facilitate Creativity in Research? *Journal of Higher Education in Africa / Revue de l'enseignement Supérieur En Afrique*, 7(1/2), 265–288. JSTOR.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24486288>
- Bantjes, J., Saal, W., Gericke, F., Lochner, C., Roos, J., Auerbach, R. P., Mortier, P., Bruffaerts, R., Kessler, R. C., & Stein, D. (2021). Mental health and academic failure among first-year university students in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 51(3), 396–408. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246320963204>
- Belluigi, D. Z., & Thondhlana, G. (2019). 'Why mouth all the pieties?' Black and women academics' revelations about discourses of 'transformation' at an historically white South African university. *Higher Education*, 78(6), 947–963.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-019-00380-w>
- Berger, R. (2015). Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219–234.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>
- Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research*, 26(13), 1802–1811. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870>
- Bowleg, L. (2012). The problem with the phrase *women and minorities*: Intersectionality – An important theoretical framework for public health. *American Journal of Public Health*, 102(7), 1267–1273. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2012.300750>
- Bowleg, L. (2017). Intersectionality: An Underutilized but Essential Theoretical Framework for Social Psychology. In B. Gough (Ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Critical Social Psychology* (pp. 507–529). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-51018-1_25

- Breier, M., & Herman, C. (2017). The PhD conundrum in South African academia. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 71(4), 352–368. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hegu.12134>
- Bunting, I. (2006). The higher education landscape under apartheid. In N. Cloete, P. Maassen, R. Fehnel, T. Moja, T. Gibbon, & H. Perold (Eds.), *Transformation in higher education* (Vol. 10, pp. 35–52). Springer Netherlands. https://doi.org/10.1007/1-4020-4006-7_3
- Byers, V. T., N. Smith, R., Hwang, E., E. Angrove, K., I. Chandler, J., M. Christian, K., H. Dickerson, S., McAlister-Shields, L., P. Thompson, S., A. Denham, M., & J. Onwuegbuzie, A. (2014). Survival strategies: Doctoral students' perceptions of challenges and coping methods. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 9, 109–136. <https://doi.org/10.28945/2034>
- Carr, E. C. J., & Worth, A. (2001). The use of the telephone interview for research. *NT Research*, 6(1), 511–524. <https://doi.org/10.1177/136140960100600107>
- Casad, B. J., Franks, J. E., Garasky, C. E., Kittleman, M. M., Roesler, A. C., Hall, D. Y., & Petzel, Z. W. (2021). Gender inequality in academia: Problems and solutions for women faculty in STEM. *Journal of Neuroscience Research*, 99(1), 13–23. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jnr.24631>
- Cekiso, M., Tshotsho, B., Masha, R., & Saziwa, T. (2019). Supervision experiences of postgraduate research students at one South African higher education institution. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 33(3). <https://doi.org/10.20853/33-3-2913>
- Chetty, R., & Pather, S. (n.d.). *Challenges in higher education in South Africa*. Sun Press.
- Cilliers, F., & Ngokha, G. (2006). Confirmatory factor analysis on the measurement of five salutogenic constructs. *Southern African Business Review*, 10(1), 17-34. <https://doi.org/10.10520/EJC92824>
- Council of Higher Education. (2021). *Vital stats public higher education 2019* [Statistics]. CHE.

- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Crenshaw, K. (2015). Opinion | Why intersectionality can't wait. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/09/24/why-intersectionality-cant-wait/>
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed). SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39(3), 124–130. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15430421tip3903_2
- De Vos, A. S. (Ed.). (2005). *Research at grass roots: For the social sciences and human services professions* (3rd ed). Van Schaik.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. 2020. *Are we producing enough Doctoral graduates in our universities?* Pretoria. Department of Higher Education and Training
- Eriksson, M. (2019). Research supervision as a mutual learning process: Introducing salutogenesis into supervision using 'The Collegial Model'. *Health Promotion International*, 34(6), 1200–1206. <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/day088>
- Evans, T. M., Bira, L., Gastelum, J. B., Weiss, L. T., & Vanderford, N. L. (2018). Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education. *Nature Biotechnology*, 36(3), 282–284.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/nbt.4089>
- Farooq, M. B., & de Villiers, C. (2017). Telephonic qualitative research interviews: When to consider them and how to do them. *Meditari Accountancy Research*, 25(2), 291–316.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/MEDAR-10-2016-0083>
- Flotman, A.-P. (2021). Academic research supervision: The unconscious role identity of a PhD student. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 35(6).
<https://doi.org/10.20853/35-6-4346>

- Fraser, W., & Killen, R. (2005). The perceptions of students and lecturers of some factors influencing academic performance at two South African universities. *Perspectives in Education*. Retrieved from: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/The-perceptions-of-students-and-lecturers-of-some-Fraser-Killen/bf48eae250e745b8c8dc2f8bf4f87385843f42f6>
- Fteiha, M., & Awwad, N. (2020). Emotional intelligence and its relationship with stress coping style. *Health Psychology Open*, 7(2), 205510292097041. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2055102920970416>
- Goldschmidt, L., Langa, M., Masilela, B., Ndhlovu, L. M., Mncina, B., Maubane, B., & Bujela, K. (2021). Telepsychology and the COVID-19 pandemic: The experiences of psychologists in South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 51(2), 314–324. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246321993281>
- Goodman, S., Jaffer, T., Keresztesi, M., Mamdani, F., Mokgatlhe, D., Musariri, M., Pires, J., & Schlechter, A. (2011). An investigation of the relationship between students' motivation and academic performance as mediated by effort. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 41(3), 373–385. <https://doi.org/10.1177/008124631104100311>
- Grabe, S. (2020). Research Methods in the Study of Intersectionality in Psychology: Examples Informed by a Decade of Collaborative Work With Majority World Women's Grassroots Activism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 494309. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.494309>
- Harper, D., & Thompson, A. (Eds.). (2011). *Qualitative research methods in mental health and psychotherapy: A guide for students and practitioners*. John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119973249>
- Harper, S. R. (2013). Am i my brother's teacher? Black undergraduates, racial socialization, and peer pedagogies in predominantly white postsecondary contexts. *Review of Research in Education*, 37(1), 183–211. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0091732X12471300>

- Hawkins, J. (2018). The practical utility and suitability of email interviews in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(2). <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2018.3266>
- Herman, C. (2011). Elusive equity in doctoral education in South Africa. *Journal of Education and Work*, 24(1–2), 163–184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2010.534773>
- Hewitt, J. (2007). Ethical components of researcher-researched relationships in qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17(8), 1149–1159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732307308305>
- Hoskins, K. (2015). Researching female professors: The difficulties of representation, positionality and power in feminist research. *Gender and Education*, 27(4), 393–411. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2015.1021301>
- Howlett, M. (2021). Looking at the ‘field’ through a Zoom lens: Methodological reflections on conducting online research during a global pandemic. *Qualitative Research*, 146879412098569. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120985691>
- Hyun, J. K., Quinn, B. C., Madon, T., & Lustig, S. (2006). Graduate student mental health: Needs assessment and utilization of counseling services. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(3), 247–266. <https://doi.org/10.1353/csd.2006.0030>
- Idan, O., Eriksson, M., & Al-Yagon, M. (2022). Generalized resistance resources in the salutogenic model of health. In M. B. Mittelmark, G. F. Bauer, L. Vaandrager, J. M. Pelikan, S. Sagy, M. Eriksson, B. Lindström, & C. Meier Magistretti (Eds.), *The handbook of salutogenesis* (pp. 93–106). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-79515-3_12
- Jairam, D., & Kahl, D. (2012). Navigating the doctoral experience: The role of social support in successful degree completion. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies*, 7, 311–329. <https://doi.org/10.28945/1700>

Janta, H., Lugosi, P., & Brown, L. (2014). Coping with loneliness: A netnographic study of doctoral students. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 38(4), 553–571.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2012.726972>

Joubert, R. (2014). *Race classification and equal educational opportunities in South African schools. 1.*

Kelly, C., Kasperavicius, D., Duncan, D., Etherington, C., Giangregorio, L., Presseau, J., Sibley, K. M., & Straus, S. (2021). ‘Doing’ or ‘using’ intersectionality? Opportunities and challenges in incorporating intersectionality into knowledge translation theory and practice. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 20(1), 187.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01509-z>

Kessi, S., & Cornell, J. (2015). Coming to UCT: Black students, transformation and discourses of race. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 3(2), 1–16.

<https://doi.org/10.14426/jsaa.v3i2.132>

Kohun, F., Morris, R., & Ali, A. (2005). Isolation feelings in doctoral programs: A case study. *Issues In Information Systems*. https://doi.org/10.48009/1_iis_2005_378-385

Kusurkar, R. A., Ten Cate, Th. J., Vos, C. M. P., Westers, P., & Croiset, G. (2013). How motivation affects academic performance: A structural equation modelling analysis. *Advances in Health Sciences Education*, 18(1), 57–69.

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10459-012-9354-3>

Laher, A. E., Van Aardt, B. J., Craythorne, A. D., Van Welie, M., Malinga, D. M., & Madi, S. (2019). ‘Getting out of the dark’: Implications of load shedding on healthcare in South Africa and strategies to enhance preparedness. *South African Medical Journal*, 109(12), 899. <https://doi.org/10.7196/SAMJ.2019.v109i12.14322>

Lessing, A., & Schulze, S. (2004). Lecturers’ experience of postgraduate supervision in a distance education context. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 17(2), 159–168. <https://doi.org/10.4314/sajhe.v17i2.25309>

- Levecque, K., Anseel, F., De Beuckelaer, A., Van der Heyden, J., & Gisle, L. (2017). Work organization and mental health problems in PhD students. *Research Policy*, 46(4), 868–879. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2017.02.008>
- Lindstrom, B. (2005). Salutogenesis. *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*, 59(6), 440–442. <https://doi.org/10.1136/jech.2005.034777>
- Lochner, C., Roos, J., Taljaard, L., Bantjes, J., Saal, W. & Stein, D. (2018). The Caring Universities Project, *presented at the SU DSAf Research Programme*, 2018
- Loots, S., Ts'ephe, L., & Walker, M. (2016). Evaluating black women's participation, development and success in doctoral studies: A capabilities perspective. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(2). <https://doi.org/10.20853/30-2-575>
- Lourens, G. (2016). Being a postgraduate woman: Relationships, responsibilities and resiliency. In L. Frick, P. Motshoane, C. McMaster, & C. Murphy (Eds.), *Postgraduate study in South Africa – Surviving and succeeding* (pp. 101–113). Sun Press. <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357247/9>
- Lyons, E., & Coyle, A. (2007). *Analysing qualitative data in psychology*. SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446207536>
- Mabokela, R. O., & Mawila, K. F. N. (2004). The impact of race, gender, and culture in South African higher education. *Comparative Education Review*, 48(4), 396–416. <https://doi.org/10.1086/423359>
- Mabokela, R. O., & Mlambo, Y. A. (2017). Access and equity and South African higher education: A review of policies after 20 years of democracy. *Comparative Education Review*, 61(4), 780–803. <https://doi.org/10.1086/693913>
- Magano, M. D. (2013). The lament of a female postgraduate PhD Student at a South African university: An academic wellness perspective. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 2(2), 211. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v2n2p211>

- Mahabeer, P., Nzimande, N., & Shoba, M. (2018). Academics of colour: Experiences of emerging Black women academics in curriculum studies at a university in South Africa. *Agenda*, 32(2), 28–42. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2018.1460139>
- Maseti, T. (2018). The university is not your home: Lived experiences of a Black woman in academia. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 48(3), 343–350. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246318792820>
- Matheka, H., Jansen, E., & Hofman, A. (2020). Kenyan doctoral students' success: Roles of motivation and self-efficacy. *Perspectives in Education*, 38(1), 115–129. <https://doi.org/10.18820/2519593X/pie.v38i1.9>
- Mills, A. J., Durepos, G. & Wiebe, E. (Eds.) (2022). Double hermeneutic. In *Encyclopedia of case study research*. Retrieved from: <https://methods.sagepub.com/reference/encyc-of-case-study-research/n122.xml>. DOI:<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412957397>
- Mgqwashu, E. M., Timmis, S., de Wet, T., & Madondo, N. E. (2020). Transitions from rural contexts to and through higher education in South Africa: Negotiating misrecognition. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 50(7), 943–960. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2020.1763165>
- Mokhele, M. (2013). Reflections of black women academics at South African universities: A narrative case study. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(3), 611-611. <https://doi.org/10.5901/mjss.2013.v4n3p611>
- Moulin, T. C. (2020). Mental health in academia: The role of workplace relationships. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 562457. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.562457>
- Mouton, J. (2016). The doctorate in South Africa. In M. Fourie-Malherbe, R. Albertyn, C. Aitchison, & E. Bitzer (Eds.), *Postgraduate supervision – Future foci for the knowledge society* (pp. 51–82). Sun Press. <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357223/04>

Muberekwa, E., & Nkomo, T. (2016). Exploring the perceptions of Wits academic women about women empowerment and the changing roles of women in 21st-Century South Africa. *SAGE Open*, 6(4), 215824401667501.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244016675014>

Mzangwa, S. T. (2019). The effects of higher education policy on transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. *Cogent Education*, 6(1), 1592737.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2019.1592737>

National Planning Commission. (2012). *National development plan 2030: Our future - make it work*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.za/documents/national-development-plan-2030-our-future-make-it-work>

Nkambule, T. (2016). Against all odds: The role of community cultural wealth in overcoming challenges as a black African woman. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 28(6). <https://doi.org/10.20853/28-6-437>

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>

Okeke-Uzodike, O. E. (2021). Postgraduate supervision in a South African transforming academic environment: A reflexivity approach. *Issues in Educational Research*, 31(4), 20.

Pietkiewicz, I., & Smith, J. (2014). A practical guide to using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in qualitative research psychology. *Czasopismo Psychologiczne Psychological Journal*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.14691/CP PJ.20.1.7>

Sagy, S., Eriksson, M., & Braun-Lewensohn, O. (2015). The salutogenic paradigm. In S. Joseph (Ed.), *Positive psychology in practice* (pp. 61–80). John Wiley & Sons. Inc. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118996874.ch5>

- Schreiber, B. (2019). Mental health at universities: Universities are not in loco parentis – Students are active partners in mental health. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.24085/jsaa.v6i2.3318>
- Schulze, S. (2011). A survey of students' views of supervision at Unisa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 25(4), 19.
- Schulze, S. (2015). The doctoral degree and the professional academic identity development of female academics. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 29(3), 260–276.
- Sehoole, C., & Adeyemo, K.S. (2017). Access to, and success in, higher education in post-apartheid South Africa: Social justice analysis. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa/Revue de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique*, 14(1), 1–18.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63–75. <https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201>
- Sibai, O., Figueiredo, B., Ferreira, M. C., & Conversation, T. (2019). *Overworked and isolated: The rising epidemic of loneliness in academia*. Retrieved from: <https://phys.org/news/2019-01-overworked-isolated-epidemic-loneliness-academia.html>
- Silinda, F. T. (2019). A transactional approach to predicting stress experienced when writing dissertations. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 49(3), 417–429. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0081246318801733>
- Silinda, F. T., & Brubacher, M. R. (2016). Distance learning postgraduate student stress while writing a dissertation or thesis. *International Journal of E-Learning & Distance Education*, 32(1), 1–14.
- Simatele, M. (2018). A cross-cultural experience of microaggression in academia: A personal reflection. *Education as Change*, 22(3). <https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/3132>

- Smith, J., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research*. SAGE.
- Smith, R. L., Maroney, K., Nelson, K. W., Abel, A. L., & Abel, H. S. (2006). Doctoral programs: Changing high rates of attrition. *The Journal of Humanistic Counseling, Education and Development*, 45(1), 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1939.2006.tb00002.x>
- Snyder, C. R. (2014). A woman's place: Women of colour navigating doctoral education in South Africa (pp. 15-35). *International Journal of Multicultural Education*, 16(2). <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v16i2.904>
- Spates, K. (2012). "The missing link": The exclusion of black women in psychological research and the implications for black women's mental health. *SAGE Open*, 2(3), 215824401245517. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244012455179>
- Subbaye, R. (2017). The shrinking professoriate: Academic promotion and university teaching. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 31(3). <https://doi.org/10.20853/31-3-831>
- Teague, L. J. (2015). Higher education plays critical role in society: more women leaders can make a difference. In *Forum on Public Policy Online* (Vol. 2015, No. 2). Oxford Round Table.
- Teferra, D. (2014). Charting African higher education: Perspectives at a glance. *International Journal of African Higher Education*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.6017/ijahe.v1i1.5642>
- Terre Blanche, M. J., Durrheim, K., & Painter, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Research in practice: Applied methods for the social sciences* (2nd ed). UCT Press.
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237–246. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748>

- Thomson, G., & Dykes, F. (2011). Women's sense of coherence related to their infant feeding experiences: Sense of coherence related to infant feeding. *Maternal & Child Nutrition*, 7(2), 160–174. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1740-8709.2010.00251.x>
- Verwey, C., & Quayle, M. (2012). Whiteness, racism, and Afrikaner identity in post-apartheid South Africa. *African Affairs*, 111(445), 551–575. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ads056>
- Walker, M. (1998). Academic identities: Women on a South African landscape. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 19(3), 335–354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0142569980190304>
- Walters, C., Mehl, G. G., Piraino, P., Jansen, J. D., & Kriger, S. (2022). The impact of the pandemic-enforced lockdown on the scholarly productivity of women academics in South Africa. *Research Policy*, 51(1). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2021.104403>
- Wellington, J., & Sikes, P. (2006). 'A doctorate in a tight compartment': Why do students choose a professional doctorate and what impact does it have on their personal and professional lives? *Studies in Higher Education*, 31(6), 723–734. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070601004358>
- Willig, C. (2014). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method* (2nd ed.). Open University Press.
- Zewotir, T., North, D., & Murray, M. (2015). The time to degree or dropout amongst full-time master's students at University of KwaZulu-Natal. *South African Journal of Science*, 111(9/10). <https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2015/20140298>
- Zulu, N. T. (2021). The struggles and the triumphs of South African Black women professors. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 35(6). <https://doi.org/10.20853/35-6-4272>
- Zulu, N. T. (2022). Academic identities of South African black women professors: A multiple case study. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v7i0.151>

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics approval



COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

02 February 2021

Dear C.S Edries

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 02 February
2021 to 31 January 2024

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
42161355_CRECHS_2021

Principal Researcher(s): C.S Edries (email: 42161355@mylife.unisa.ac.za)

Supervisor: Errollyn Gordon (email:longel@unisa.ac.za)

Title: *Exploring the lived experiences of Black South African Women who have completed their PHD within the discipline of Psychology, in the Pretoria region.*

Degree Purpose: Masters Research Project

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for three years.

The **Low risk application** was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, on **02 February 2021** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the



confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date (**02 February 2024**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **42161355_CREC_CHS_2021** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Signature :



Dr. K.J. Malesa
CHS Ethics Chairperson
Email: maleskj@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 4780

Signature : PP



Prof K. Masemola
Executive Dean : CHS
E-mail: masemk@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 2298



This Addendum modifies and supplements the attached Research Dissertation Proposal titled: Exploring the lived experiences of Black South African Women who have completed their PHD within the discipline of Psychology.

The amendment incorporates the following supplementary as follows:

The recruitment of participants:

In addition to the existing method of recruitment which is as follows: Making use of UNISA'S internal student data base (ICT) through the assistance of my supervisor. Ethical clearance has been obtained, and two calls have subsequently been logged via this method of collection. The addendum supports as additional methods of recruitment are proposed, which are outlined below:

The selection criterion will specify and refine the study's population. The study's population is refined with inclusion criteria which, in this case is South African, black women, who have completed a PhD, within Psychology. For the continuity of the data set, the population under study must have completed their PhD through the University of South Africa in Pretoria. Potential participants who are eighteen and older, with a valid South African Identity Document would be able to provide consent as an adult, as well as offer, a rich account of the process of completing a doctorate. Thus, purposive sampling will be used, and direct contact will be made with prospective participants using telephonic contact, email, and the distribution of an information sheet, which explains the parameters of the study. This will be distributed over social media platforms such as Facebook and Linked-in. In addition, snowball sampling will be used by requesting existing participants to encourage their learned peers to partake in the study. According to Smith et al. (2008) a small sample size is considered sufficient for Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. A sample size consisting of 4-6 participants is sufficient to conduct a detailed analysis of all participants' accounts, leaving room for differences and similarities to emerge within their personal relay of completing a doctoral study.

Based on the timeline of completing my qualification I, Cherazaad Edries student number 42161355, have decided, along with my supervisors' to add an additional method of recruitment, which will be snowball sampling to the sampling method. The use of direct communication and flyers will assist in obtaining a participant sample timeously, aligned with purposive sampling.

No other terms or conditions of the above-mentioned contract shall be changed because of this addendum. The changes to the sampling method will not affect the original ethical clearance integrity of the application received. The additional sampling method assists in acquiring a sample that is already niched and does not affect the risk of the study.

Student number:42161355
C. Edries



Supervisor
Dr E.L Gordon



Co- Supervisor
Ms S. Terreblanche

S. Terreblanche

***Appendix B: Approval from the Senate Research, Innovation, Post-graduate Degrees
and Commercialisation Committee***



**RESEARCH PERMISSION SUB-COMMITTEE (RPSC) OF THE SENATE
RESEARCH, INNOVATION, POSTGRADUATE DEGREES AND
COMMERCIALISATION COMMITTEE (SRIPCC)**

6 April 2021

**Decision: Permission approval 12
July 2021 to 11 July 2022**

Ref #: 2021_RPSC_018
Ms. Cherazaad Edries
Student #:
Employee #: 42161355

Principal Investigator:

Ms. Cherazaad Edries
Department of Psychology
School of Social Sciences
College of Human Sciences
UNISA
Cherazaadedries@gmail.com

Supervisor: Mrs. Errollyn Gordon, longel@unisa.ac.za, 0124298071, 0732344720

**EXPLORING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN
WHO HAVE COMPLETED THEIR PHD WITHIN THE DISCIPLINE OF
PSYCHOLOGY, IN THE PRETORIA REGION**

Your application and additional motivation for the rationale of the population group regarding permission to involve Unisa staff, students and data in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC) of the UNISA Senate, Research, Innovation, Postgraduate Degrees and Commercialisation Committee (SRIPCC) on 22 June 2021.

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for the study. You may include former South African black woman who has completed their PhD study in Psychology at Unisa, in your study. An online request to partake in the study must be sent by ICT as gatekeeper.



The Committee acknowledges the scientific merit of the study and requires the researcher to display social sensitivity to prevent harmful effects that might arise from the dissemination of the findings. Unisa supports the Statement on Ethical Research and Scholarly Publishing Practices issued by ASSAf CHE, DHET, NRF and USAf (2019). Paragraph seven of this statement raises awareness to the responsibility of researchers and institutions to demonstrate social awareness by displaying sensitivity to the potential impact of research on society, marginal groups or individuals.

The personal information made available to the researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) will only be used for the advancement of this research project as indicated and for the purpose as described in this permission letter. The researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) must take all appropriate precautionary measures to protect the personal information given to him/her/them in good faith and it must not be passed on to third parties. The dissemination of research instruments through the use of electronic mail should strictly be through blind copying, so as to protect the participants' right of privacy. The researcher hereby indemnifies UNISA from any claim or action arising from or due to the researcher's breach of his/her information protection obligations.

You are requested to submit a report of the study to the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC@unisa.ac.za) within 3 months of completion of the study.

Note: The reference number **2021_RPSC_018** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants and the Research Permission Subcommittee.

We would like to wish you well in your research undertaking.

Kind regards,



Dr Retha Visagie – Deputy Chairperson

Email: visagrg@unisa.ac.za, Tel: (012) 429-2478

Prof Lessing Labuschagne – Chairperson

Email: llabus@unisa.ac.za, Tel: (012) 429-6368



Appendix C: Invitation Letter and Consent Form



Ethical clearance #:42161355_CRECHS_2021

Research permission #:2021_RPSC_018

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

The purpose of this study is to determine the lived experiences of black South African women who have completed their PhDs, in the discipline of Psychology.

The procedure for this study will be an online interview over Microsoft Teams which, is an online platform. This is for the utmost protection of the participant and the researcher during the COVID-19 pandemic. A suitable time will be collaborated between the researcher and participant to ensure that it is of convenience.

The risks involved in this research are that it may be difficult or for you to talk about your experiences, as they could be very personal to you. The interview could result in fatigue after an hour as this requires setting aside time in your day to focus on the interview.

The benefits of this research would be to give you the opportunity to speak about your experience and to contribute to a growing body of knowledge. There will be no

Financial gain for participating in this study.

Should you decide to participate in this study please note that participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from participating at any time and without any negative consequences to you. The interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed onto a

computer and safely stored on a password protected computer and file, as well as a private external hard Drive. A pseudonym will be used for you during the research and any identifiable information will be removed to ensure anonymity.

If you do choose to participate you do not have to answer all of my questions and you do not have to attend the entire interview, should you change your mind and there will be no negative consequences of this decision. Once the data has gone through the analysis stage you will be contacted in order to discuss the findings to obtain your input on the analysis to ensure your intended meaning was adhered to.

You are entitled to receive the results from the study, and a copy will be made available to you should you wish to receive it.

If at any time you become unsettled or require debriefing after the interview, services will be recommended and provided at the Unisa Clinic, which would not be at a cost to you.

DECLARATION

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential. I agree to the recording of the semi-structured interview process.

Participant Name & Surname :..... (please print)

Participant Signature :.....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname: CHERAZAAD EDRIES

Researcher's signature: Date.....



University of South Africa
Pretorius Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Semi- Structured Interview Guide

Biographical information

- Age: How old were you when you started with your doctoral studies and how old are you now?
- What is your marital status?
- What is your racial group do you belong to
- Do you have any dependents? If yes, how many?
- Please tell me about the issue on funding, who funded your studies?

Broad experiences on being a woman in PhD

- Can you tell me about your experiences when you conducted your PhD?
- What would you say were the successes you've experienced whilst conducting a PhD
- What were the pertinent challenges you encountered during your studies? (Mentally, emotionally, physically, relationally)
- What made you consider undertaking a PhD?
- Can you tell me how or if your experiences of choosing and doing doctoral study has been influenced by gender? [In what ways? If not, why do you think this is?]
- How do you find being a woman and undertaking a PhD?
- What does the society/ culture you come from say about women in doctoral studies?
- What were the various roles you had to fulfil whilst you were completing your studies i.e.: mother, wife, student?
- What support structures were in place to assist in your studies?
(Postgraduate community for support? how do you commonly access these)
- How would you describe the support you receive from your support system?

- How would you describe the relationship you had with your supervisor at the time?

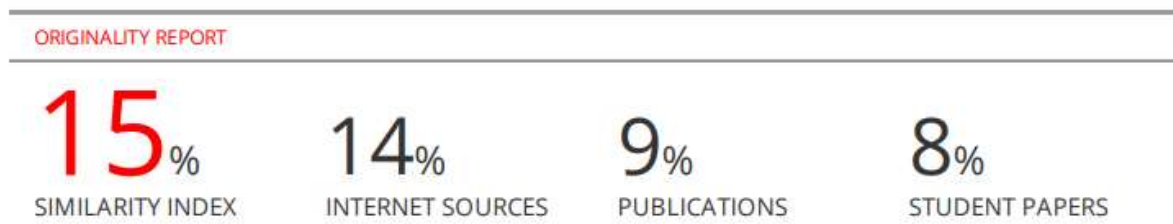
Self

- How do you manage to keep motivation throughout your academic pursuit

Academically

- What should be done to make the learning environment more suitable to ensure students' (particularly, women) throughput when it comes to doctoral studies?

Appendix E: Turnitin Report



Appendix F: Confirmation of Professional Editing



**Blue Diamonds Professional Editing
Services (Pty) Ltd**

Polishing your brilliance

Email: jacquibaumgardt@gmail.com

Website: www.jaybe9.wixsite.com/bluediamondsediting

3 January 2023

Declaration of professional editing

**Exploring the Lived Experiences of Black South African Women who have Completed their Doctoral
Studies in Psychology
by
Cherazaad Shereen Edries**

I declare that I have edited and proofread this thesis. My involvement was restricted to language usage and spelling, completeness and consistency and referencing style. I did no structural re-writing of the content.

I am qualified to have done such editing, being in possession of a Bachelor's degree with a major in English, having taught English to matriculation, and having a Certificate in Copy Editing from the University of Cape Town. I have edited more than 400 Masters and Doctoral theses, as well as articles, books and reports.

As the copy editor, I am not responsible for detecting, or removing, passages in the document that closely resemble other texts and could thus be viewed as plagiarism. I am not accountable for any changes made to this document by the author or any other party subsequent to the date of this declaration.

Sincerely,

Dr J Baumgardt

UNISA: D. Ed. Education Management

University of Cape Town: Certificate in Copy Editing

University of Cape Town: Certificate in Corporate Coaching

Full member: Professional Editors Guild (BAU001)

Intermediate member: Chartered Institute of Editors and Proofreaders (CIEP 21858)