CHAPTER 3

Activating Access and Success in Doctoral Studies: Critical Considerations of Black Females

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Abstract

Historically, women have been, and still are, excluded from full participation in some areas of Higher Education studies, especially at the postgraduate level. Their success rate in doctoral studies is also relatively restricted. This chapter draws on a baseline analysis of statistical trends relating to female doctoral students (their access to and success in doctoral education) in the democratic South Africa (Department of Higher Education and Training 2020). This background data is layered onto the theoretical tenets of intersectionality theory, foregrounding structural impediments that result in under-enrolment and relatively lower completion rates among Black females in specific disciplines and fields of postgraduate study. In addition, the lens of an intersectionality theory is employed to explore the complex confluences of race, gender, (inter)personal, professional and systemic factors which coalesce to create obstructive regimes. The chapter suggests that activating Black females' improved access and success calls for strategic targeted enrolment drives in specific disciplines, policies and regulations that challenge the cultural practices that support patriarchal regimes, the development of appropriate curriculum strategies to support the specific needs of the targeted group, and

engagement with alternative models to promote socially just supervisory-supervisee partnerships that redefine hegemonic masculinised roles and responsibilities within doctoral education. It proposes a targeted intervention framework to tackle matters of race, gender, and professional and personal situatedness to support Black female doctoral students, including a distinctive peer support strategy, a dynamic conception of supervision, and a dedicated mentorship programme.

Keywords: Doctoral students, Intersectionality theory, Peer support, Mentorship.

1 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of South Africa's Higher Education System, focusing on enrolment, graduation, and dropout rates disaggregated by gender and race. The advancement of women in South African Higher Education has been a particular focus of attention during the transformation of the sector. This is evident not only in enrolment and graduation statistics but also in acknowledgment that the university system, including across the African continent, still requires more female senior academics and scholars (Akala 2019). Whilst strides have been made in improving Black students' access in the democratic South Africa (Department of Higher Education and Training 2020), the chapter emphasises the need for further purposeful and unambiguous strategies to assist Black female students to progress from undergraduate to postgraduate levels. Students' varied backgrounds and career aspirations are reviewed through the use of an intersectionality lens which posits that the systemic, institutional, programmatic and personal demographic characteristics of the targeted group are interconnected in complex confluences at various levels, enabling or impeding access and success. For example, it might be necessary for South Africa to start introducing female students to research at the undergraduate level as this can help them to gain access and succeed in their doctoral studies. The chapter is directed towards constructing a proposition for a framework using intersectionality theory to guide its logic.

Section 2 provides a brief motivation for using an intersectionality lens in Higher Education. The elements of race, gender, socio-economic class, and systemic institutional and curricular factors are not considered as discreet, but rather as overlapping complementarities, sometimes in tension and contradict-

tion with one another. Section 3 presents a statistical overview of doctoral enrolment, graduation, and dropout rates in Higher Education in South Africa, covering its history and current situation. This data suggests an incomplete agenda of realising the social justice call for specifically Black female doctoral students' access and success in various disciplines. Section 4 draws on the literature to develop a proposed integrated framework of strategies to support Black female doctoral students. It is divided into the following subsections: increasing motivation through *mentorshi*p of students in Higher Education; promoting dynamic *supervision* via adaptable supervisors; and activating shared *support amongst peers* as a way to assist female students to succeed in doctoral studies. The chapter concludes (Section 5) by integrating these three elements into a proposed framework to support Black female students to succeed in Higher Education. Broader applications of the framework are dealt with in Section 6. Whilst it might be also valuable for doctoral students in general, the specificities for the targeted group are highlighted.

2 Intersectionality Theory and Gender Inequalities in Higher Education

Black feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw initially popularised the term 'intersectionality' in her seminal work in 1989 to describe the suffering that Black women in the United States continue to experience despite constitutional legal protection and professed institutional transformation goals. Following this foundational redirection of social sciences theory, intersectionality is now widely used as a term to define and explain how institutional and social policies, practices, and ideologies contribute to and exacerbate the unequal conditions that marginalised groups in society contend with (Lekgau 2021; Nichols & Stahl 2019).

Intersectionality involves the interactions between gender, race, and other identity categories. It holds that race, socio-economic class, and gender (as well as other ascribed statuses) do not work as discreet categories of experience, but are instead lived and experienced concurrently (Crenshaw, 1991). According to Harpur, Szucs and Willox (2022), it is appropriate when applied to access and support of previously disadvantaged people throughout Higher Education since marginalised groups are simultaneously negotiating systemic, structural, cultural, institutional and personal dynamics.

Intersectionality is also a useful method to examine how conflicting or overlapping identities affect people's experiences in society (Bhopal 2020). Systems of oppression that connect with one another include structural racism, sexism, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, and disability, in addition to other forms of systemic oppression (López, Erwin, Binder & Chavez 2018). Inequality cannot be explained by a single element; rather, intersectionality studies expose the interaction of multiple factors to create various patterns of power relations (Bhopal 2020). It investigates the positions that various stratifications have imposed on women and their experiences (Bhopal 2020). Intersectionality highlights inequalities related to gender, race and class. It also foregrounds the power dynamics that exist in Higher Education that continue to marginalise Black women. This lens can also be used to understand and problematise the challenges that women face in Higher Education and to address disparities and encourage inclusion (Unterhalter, Robinson & Balsera 2020). It is an appropriate framework of analysis to analyse the experiences of Black women in this sector (Collins 2016).

Historically, South African women were subjected to structural and cultural restrictions under apartheid, which is why White men made up the vast majority of students in Higher Education, especially in science and engineering courses (Mkhize 2022; Moshupi 2013). Black students who wanted to study these courses in previously advantaged institutions were required to seek special permission or were forced to study abroad (Mkhize 2022; Mlambo 2017).

Most South African and international universities still have a male-dominated leadership structure (Moodly 2021). These leadership positions afford them power on top of White and/or male privilege. Black women find it challenging to occupy these top positions and positions of leadership in a predominantly masculinised society and culture (Moodly 2021). This also means that women are less involved in decision making and have less power to influence policies within Higher Education Institutions. It has resulted in the prevailing gender and race disparities that are still witnessed in Higher Education today. Although the sector has attempted to transform and now reflects more diversity, racist and sexist ideologies persist.

In ways that neither Black men nor White women are subjected to, the quantitative data in Section 3 clearly demonstrate that there are still structures that consistently oppress Black women. While White women may encounter sexism, they do have White privilege. Black men experience racial discrimination, but enjoy male privilege. These two population groups are born

with a head start and power that Black women simply do not have. Black women are not born with any privilege; they face triple marginalisation based on race, gender and class.

In some cases, cultural practices and religion also marginalise women. Black women in Higher Education experience both racial and gender marginalisation (Mkhize & Idahosa 2021). White privilege and male privilege give automatic power to those born with it. Due to this lack of power, Black women are directly or indirectly marginalised in many spheres of their lives. According to Gushman (2021), they have to find ways of coping and operating in spaces where both racism and sexism are deeply entrenched. Higher Education in Africa and internationally is still dominated by structural and systemic gender and race disparities. The only way to address these power imbalances is to foreground the reality that Black women still face in this sector.

Gender equality practices appear to have changed as more women enrol in Higher Education. This may be due to the perception that race provides superior political capital (Mama 2007). Despite this change, gender, ethnicity and socio-economic class must still be studied as a whole because they present intersecting problems (Walker 2016). It is crucial to look at gender from an intersectional perspective because South Africa continues to experience historical and contemporary inequities.

The multifaceted lens of intersectionality is used to interpret a range of data from official statistics on doctoral education drawn from the Council on Higher Education report (CHE 2020).

3 A Statistical Overview of Doctoral Education in South Africa

The apartheid regime prohibited Black[1] people from entering particular professions or fields. People with disabilities and women were especially impacted by this exclusion. The regime came to a legalised end in 1994 but its effects are still felt today and are demonstrated by racial and gender disparities. In the words of Mabokela (2001, p. 207), the South African Higher Education system went through a transformation 'from a system plagued with racial and gender disparities to one that will uphold the ideals of non-sexism and non-racism'. Despite this, inequalities persist. Of particular concern is the fact that new types of racial and gender discrimination have emerged (Rabe & Rugunanan 2012), with fewer Black women completing doctoral studies and

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[1] Black in this chapter refers to Africans, Coloureds and Indians.

few gaining promotions to professorships. This section provides further justification for why a targeted emphasis on Black female students is required to realise the broader goals of social justice and democracy in the post-apartheid context.

3.1 Doctoral Enrolment and Graduation Trends by Race

The tables below provide national doctoral enrolment statistics for the years 2016 to 2020 and show the racial disparities that persist. They do not include data from the University of South Africa (UNISA)[2].

Table 1: % Doctoral Enrolments by Race: 2016-2020

Race	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
African	66%	66%	66%	65%	65%
Coloured	4%	5%	5%	5%	6%
Indian	6%	6%	6%	6%	7%
White	23%	24%	23%	23%	22%
Grand Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

(Source: CHE 2020)

The table shows that overall, Black students made up the largest percentage of enrolments between 2016 and 2020. By 2020, these stood at 78%, while doctoral enrolments among the White population constituted 22%. This seems to be in line with South Africa's population statistics.

As Table 2 below shows, from 2016 to 2020 there was an increase in graduation rates across all race groups. The grand total shows the average graduation rate for each year. In 2020, White students graduated at a slightly higher rate than their Black counterparts at 48%, compared to 42%, 34% and 41%.

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[2] UNISA data is complicated and differs from the rest of the sector. The tables that result from the UNISA data and the rest of the public institutions do not demonstrate synergy; the UNISA data contains variables for nationality. UNISA has an open distance learning mode with very few or even no contact sessions. The rest of the public universities in South Africa do not have a predominantly open distance learning mode. UNISA has thus been excluded from this chapter.

Table 2: % Doctoral Graduations by Race: 2016-2020

Race	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
African	1%	5%	16%	30%	42%
Coloured	1%	4%	10%	22%	34%
Indian	2%	6%	15%	29%	41%
White	2%	9%	20%	37%	48%
(Average)	**2%**	**6%**	**17%**	**31%**	**43%**

(Source: CHE 2020)

Table 3 shows an increase in dropouts from 2016 to 2020. There was a considerably higher dropout rate across all race groups in 2020, which could be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic and the move to online instruction. It could also be attributed to geographical location, language barriers, socio-economic class differences and disability if present.

Table 3: % Doctoral Dropouts by Race: 2016-2020

Race	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
African	16%	21%	26%	32%	58%
Coloured	13%	20%	20%	26%	66%
Indian	14%	17%	24%	27%	59%
White	14%	20%	22%	26%	52%
(Average)	**15%**	**21%**	**25%**	**30%**	**57%**

(Source: CHE 2020)

As depicted in Table 3, more than half the doctoral students dropped out during 2020. The race group with the lowest percentage of dropouts is White students at 52%; if an aggregated average is taken of Black students, this group still has a slightly higher dropout rate than their White counterparts. While the overarching generic trends seem positive when using a racial-based filter, a more nuanced interpretation is revealed when disaggregating the doctoral data according to gender disparities.

3.2 Enrolments, Graduations and Dropout Rates by Gender
While women make up the majority of South Africa's undergraduate students, they are relatively under-represented at doctoral level. However, this is a

generic trend that is not unique to South African women, it is an international phenomenon. The academic pipeline from undergraduate to postgraduate is cited repeatedly in various studies (the 1996 White Paper on Science and Technology (DST, 1996), the 2002 National Research and Development Strategy (DST 2002), the Ten-Year Innovation Plan (DST 2008) and Human Capital Development Strategy for Research, Innovation and Scholarship (DST 2016); Mouton, van Lill, Prozesky, Bailey, Duncan, Boshoff, Albertyn & Treptow (2022)). All these documents identify three common issues that need to be addressed to unblock the academic pipeline (from honours, to masters, and doctoral level and postdoctoral fellows). Firstly, they reinforce the need to increase under-represented groups' access and success. Secondly, they cite the need for interventions to tackle the dropout rates of doctoral students as well as established scholars from the university system. Thirdly, the studies advocate for transformation of the South African Higher Education academic pipeline by making it more inclusive of Black and female students (Mouton et al. 2022).

Table 4 presents enrolment data for 2016 to 2020, disaggregated by gender.

Table 4: % Doctoral Enrolments by Gender: 2016-2020

Gender	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Female	44%	44%	44%	46%	47%
Male	56%	56%	56%	54%	53%
Grand Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

(Source: CHE 2020)

The table shows that, from 2016 to 2020, males made up a higher percentage than females of students enrolled for doctoral study. This trend remained consistent over this period.

Table 5: % Doctoral Graduations by Gender: 2016-2020

Gender	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Female	2%	6%	15%	29%	42%
Male	2%	6%	18%	32%	44%
Grand Total (Average)	**2%**	**6%**	**17%**	**31%**	**43%**

(Source: CHE 2020)

The graduation rate climbed steadily from 2016 to 2020. Table 5 shows that slightly more males than females graduated with a doctorate.

Table 6: % Doctoral Dropouts by Gender: 2016-2020

Gender	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Female	15%	20%	23%	28%	58%
Male	15%	21%	26%	31%	56%
Grand Total (Average)	15%	21%	25%	30%	57%

(Source: CHE 2020)

The dropout rate disaggregated by gender shows a spike in 2020 in comparison to 2016 to 2019. This could possibly be due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Slightly more females than males dropped out in 2020.

3.3 Doctoral Enrolment and Graduations by Gender, Race and Field of Study

When one further disaggregates the data on race and gender participation in doctoral education, one notes that Black females are under-represented in various fields, with greater representation in the humanities, education and business than in the sciences and engineering (Council on Higher Education 2015). The data for doctoral enrolments, disaggregated by gender, race and field of study for 2005 and 2020 are presented in the following two tables. These years were purposively selected: it was in 2005 that universities began to be merged and the audited data for 2020 are the most recent available[3].

Table 7 shows that, overall, more Black males, White females and White males registered for doctoral studies than Black females. The proportion of Black women was highest in Education at 31%; however, even here, Black males made up a slightly higher proportion at 35%.

The 2020 figures show notable changes from those of 2005, with Black females making up a higher percentage of enrolments than White females or White males. However, except for Education at 44%, the proportion of Black males was higher than that of Black females.

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[3] Cases of unknown race and gender have been excluded.

Table 7: % Doctoral Enrolments by Field of Study, Race and Gender: 2005

Field of study	Black Female	Black Male	White Female	White Male	Grand Total
Science, Engineering & Technology	17%	30%	24%	30%	100%
Business & Commerce	11%	32%	19%	38%	100%
Education	31%	35%	22%	11%	100%
Humanities	16%	32%	25%	27%	100%

(Source: CHE 2020)

Table 8: % Doctoral Enrolments by Field of Study, Race and Gender: 2020

Field of study	Black Female	Black Male	White Female	White Male	Grand Total
Science, Engineering & Technology	35%	41%	12%	11%	100%
Business & Commerce	32%	51%	10%	7%	100%
Education	44%	43%	9%	3%	100%
Humanities	35%	41%	14%	10%	100%

(Source: CHE 2020)

Table 9: % Doctoral Graduation by Field of Study, Race and Gender: 2005

Field of study	Black Female	Black Male	White Female	White Male	Grand Total
Science, Engineering & Technology	14%	29%	26%	30%	100%
Business & Commerce	6%	19%	23%	52%	100%
Education	30%	29%	29%	12%	100%
Humanities	12%	25%	36%	27%	100%

(Source: CHE 2020)

The 2005 doctoral graduation statistics show fewer Black females graduating despite the initial high enrolment rates (See Table 9). White males graduated at a higher rate than Black females, Black males and White females. Fewer White males graduated with an Education doctorate.

Table 10: % Doctoral Graduations by Field of Study, Race and Gender 2020

Field of study	Black Female	Black Male	White Female	White Male	Grand Total
Science, Engineering & Technology	27%	44%	15%	14%	100%
Business & Commerce	23%	55%	12%	9%	100%
Education	40%	44%	11%	4%	100%
Humanities	29%	44%	16%	12%	100%

(Source: CHE 2020)

Table 10 shows that in 2020, Black females as a proportion of the total number of doctoral graduates increased. However, this percentage was lower than that of Black males across all fields. There are many inconsistencies between the enrolment rate of Black females and their graduation rates. The above statistics on race and gender show that, in contrast to Black women, White men, Black men, and White women continue to succeed in slightly higher rates in doctoral studies.

The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training records that women occupy subordinate positions even after leaving Higher Education (Department of Higher Education & Training 2013), while the Ministerial Report on Transformation (Department of Education 2008) reports that sexual harassment is rampant and that Higher Education in South Africa is tainted by gender inequality and discrimination.

Furthermore, women tend to select specific courses in Higher Education. They pursue programmes that are not dominated by men, mainly in business and the humanities while men favour the sciences or engineering (Smyth & Steinmetz 2008). This type of gender-influenced career decision-making is widespread (Charles & Bradley 2009; Darmody & Smyth 2005). It

is, therefore, crucial to examine gender differences to better understand what needs to be done to promote equality and fair employment opportunities (Lörz, Schindler & Walter 2011). In the South African context, this also needs to be examined from a socio-economic class, language and disability perspective.

In response to existing disparities, the Department of Science and Innovation (DSI) has put policies in place to ensure that there are more doctoral graduates (DHET 2020). This is supported by the goals set out in the National Development Plan (NDP) to increase the PhD cohort to more than 100 doctoral graduates per million South Africans by 2030 (National Planning Commission 2012). It might increase the likelihood of a knowledge economy that is both sustainable over the long term and meets South Africa's skills demands while enabling competitive global participation.

Gender inequalities have been addressed through affirmative action. However, to achieve the desired outcome, the use of affirmative action must be justified and social justice objectives must be properly understood and put into practice (Akala 2019). Furthermore, it is critical that Higher Education Institutions understand that the goal of affirmative action is not to single out particular people or eliminate jobs but to create new ones, particularly for women, in this sector.

The number of Black and female students enrolled in Higher Education in South Africa has gradually increased over the years. However, according to Akala (2018), a rise in the proportion of female and Black students does not necessarily indicate increased equity or equality. At the leadership level in Higher Education, women still struggle to 'break the glass ceiling' despite progressive policies (Akala 2019; Moodly & Toni 2015). The under-representation of Black women in this sector persists from postgraduate level into the workforce.

4   Towards an Intersection of Interventions

This section explores ways to address the foundational inequities of Black female doctoral students in specific disciplines. It consists of three sub-sections: exploring *mentorship* patterns, developing alternative *supervisory practices* (including reframed conceptions of roles and responsibilities), and valuing the role that students as *peers* can play to support their own progress through doctoral studies.

4.1 Mentorship of Students in Doctoral Education

Professional identity is formed in social interactions within communities of practice; mentorship is an important part of this process. Mentorship can be regarded as a unique and circumscribed community of dialogue between the supervisor and the student. While supervision (See section 4.2 below) foregrounds input related to a specific study (at various stages of development), mentorship pays attention to the broader induction of the doctoral student into the world of academia, career trajectory, and planning a life-work balance.

Supervision involves assisting students to make research decisions, developing their methodological skills and ability to design experiments, assisting them to communicate their findings, and offering peer support (Akerlind & McAlpine 2017; Motshoane & McKenna 2021). These do not in any way constitute mentorship. If supervisors meet the above criteria, they have done their job. Research supervision is generally viewed as a task-oriented endeavour (Akerlind & McAlpine 2017; Motshoane & McKenna 2021). Mentorship goes beyond these basic requirements. It involves pastoral care that is not often seen or even needed in supervision. Mentorship involves long-term care of the student's career beyond just obtaining a PhD (Khamis & Chapman 2017; Thackwell, Chiliza & Swartz 2018).

Mentorship of Black female students could take the form of inviting PhD students to faculty meetings. It can also be considered as a mini-apprenticeship as the student learns how faculty discussions are led and could also be invited to chair one of the meetings. This gives this group of students an idea of what an academic career entails (it is more than just research, supervision and teaching). It also involves the social aspects and socialisation that assist students in their PhD journey (Dhunpath, Matisson & Samuel 2018). This strategy also involves power sharing as the student can be involved in discussions for decision making around policies or other matters that directly affect the student body.

Invitations to participate in academic processions at graduation could become the norm. This is an important 'rite of passage' in academia. It could also reduce the visual power dynamics, where the professoriate is mainly male (Moodly 2021). Therefore, representation at graduation processions is dominated by males. Being part of a procession with university academics and executives might also motivate Black female doctoral students to remain and develop their career within academia. Academic graduation processions could also

provide networking opportunities for the student. This can also be viewed as positive affirmation that the student can and will complete their doctoral studies.

Mentorship is also the explicit disdain by supervisors who are Black females, White females, Black males or White males for behaviour that further alienates Black women. Furthermore, it involves an element of trust (Blunt & Conolly 2006; Dhunpath et al. 2018). Power sharing can be achieved by standing up against and speaking out about the current practices in Higher Education that continue to suppress Black women and Black doctoral female students. This also builds trust and could open avenues for Black female students to approach staff without the fear of victimisation when they are faced with problems in Higher Education Institutions. Staying silent under such circumstances seems like acceptance of the gender and racial disparities in Higher Education and perpetuates the current power dynamics in this sector.

In practice, supervision and mentorship overlap as supervisors /mentors increasingly have to attend to simultaneous and complex intersected factors influencing students' progress. While supervision policies are available, there are no policies for mentorship or any document that provides direction on its implementation (Dhunpath *et al.* 2018), which seems to take place informally. Too often the responsibilities of mentorship are omitted from the equation. We argue that the required mentorship qualities should be extended as the unique features of what it means to be a Black female need to be included in this dyadic relationship. Mentors themselves should embrace learning from the perspective of this targeted group. Paradoxically, mentors who frequently do not share the demographic and experiential profile of their students have to be mentored about unique experiences and reading the world from the perspective of Black females.

Instead, the considerable international literature on activating success tends to foreground students' personal motivation that affects success and throughput in Higher Education as if this is solely the responsibility of the individual learner. This shifts the burden of success to students alone. Furthermore, the literature tends to promote the activities of collective groups of students and makes little reference to gender differences (see further discussion of peer communities of support in section 4.3). It thus tends to focus on personal student motivation, peer tutoring and student attitudes and approaches to education (Harrop, Tattersall & Goody 2007). This somewhat deflects the responsibility of the Higher Education system to enact structural features to address specific challenges. For example, some Higher Education Institutions

conduct course evaluations without reference to gender differences; the implication is that such differences are unimportant and/or negligible. What kinds of formal developmental processes are designed by institutions to support the student, rather than the expectation that students themselves and their personal initiative will manage the transition into and out of doctoral studies? The focus on collective groups homogenises interventions and denies the particularities of specific individuals and their characteristics within the group.

Further systemic interventions are required to provide scaffolding support for targeted groups that are relatively under-represented or under-productive within doctoral studies or to manage their prospective career trajectory into academia. For example, how postgraduates are introduced to their careers and how their professional identities are developed in the early stages of their careers is crucial and could help to support incoming and future female doctoral graduates in their studies. In-depth research on Black women's experiences before enrolling in postgraduate programmes is also crucial and could provide information on how to motivate young women to seek graduate degrees. This should start at a young age, ideally when they are still at undergraduate level.

Effective supervisors understand that mentorship is a crucial part of their job (Pearson 2001). Effective academic supervision is defined as a positive working relationship between the supervisor and the student. As part of this relationship, the supervisor must help the doctoral student to learn how to carry out independent research, think critically and develop original ideas (Al Makhamreh & Stockley 2020). Mentorship is much more, since the changing relational dynamics and outcomes of mentoring involve heeding the specific demographic lived experiences of Black females which warrant specific kinds of interventions and acknowledged insights. Matching Black female students with supervisors/mentors who care about systemic, personal and developmental needs is crucial to student access and success. Such care is not a matter of reinforcing disguised patronising or patriarchal relations. The supervisor's/ mentor's role should be to support students' progress in both academic and broader life-work-career engagements. Supervisors/mentors assist students by engaging in discussions with them, listening to their concerns and sharing their own knowledge and experience (Al Makhamreh & Stockley 2020). This includes offering advice before students enrol for specific disciplines, topics and fields of study. Mentorship precedes access and promotes successful progress.

4.2 *Dynamic Supervision and Adaptable Supervisors*

Since doctoral students differ in terms of character, circumstances, gender, language, social background and experiences, managing student diversity is unavoidable and requires skill, patience, flexibility and adaptability from research supervisors (Maiztegui-Oate & Santibáez-Gruber 2008; Najjuma 2020). At the start of the supervision relationship, students and supervisors have different levels of experience, disciplinary specialisation and knowledge (DIES/CREST 2018). We argue that supervisors have the responsibility to develop dynamic, creative and adaptable supervision practices. When they are allocated supervision of Black female students, they should adjust and adapt their supervision practices to effectively support students in this population group.

Since doctoral supervisors hold power and influence in the Higher Education space, they are able to review current doctoral policies within their institutions. There is also a possibility that the policies are outdated. Doctoral education is very masculinised and impersonal (Mkhize 2022). The inevitable struggle of women in Higher Education is fuelled by subtle structural and policy obstacles (intentional or unintentional) that have gone unacknowledged and under-reviewed. This overhaul could also result in further curriculum reform that speaks to and supports the progression of Black female students. If these types of policies exist in Higher Education, they need to be reviewed and overhauled if necessary to support such students.

Given the important role that supervision plays in the success of doctoral students, the literature and data show that supervision of Black female students needs to be deliberate and to have the specific goal of ensuring that these students are retained within Higher Education through to doctoral level and beyond. Doctoral supervisors, regardless of race or gender have influence and their power can be used to support students. As discussed earlier in this chapter, one of the most important elements that Black women are not born with is power. Supervisors should use their knowledge and power to protect students' rights, facilitate deliberate dialogue, expose them to critical learning and support democratic justice to improve the community of practice (Najjuma 2020; Vilakazi 2016).

Fisher, Nyabaro, Mendum, and Osiru's (2020) study found that women in 17 African countries completed their doctoral studies one-and-a-half years later than their male counterparts and the ratio of paper acceptance was one less than males. Co-presenting a paper at a conference and allowing the student to lead the presentation with the supervisor being the second rather than the first

author facilitates the application and transfer of the research and writing skills that the supervisor has already been guiding her/his students on. This could also increase the chances of acceptance and publication of a paper. It could enable power sharing and empower the Black female doctoral student. Their name is also foregrounded and can become known in their field even before they complete their doctoral studies.

Supervisors could also teach a Black female doctoral student how to go about obtaining a book contract by introducing or recommending them to the supervisor's existing professional networks in publishing. Publishing a book or book chapter is an intimidating process; it needs to be simplified so that the student can access it and it does not require extensive financial resources. Candidates' access to informal knowledge such as book publishing that they could acquire via participating in a department's research activity is still somewhat restricted (Guerin & Aitchison 2021). These could be related to geographical location, language and disability. These barriers need to be removed for Black female doctoral candidates.

Creating opportunities for Black female doctoral students to participate in co-teaching can also demonstrate a supervisor's willingness to share power with their students. Doctoral students are not given the chance to consider lecturing or a foundation in academia while pursuing their PhDs (Bailey, Bogossian & Akesson 2016). In the South African context, this is usually seen at the postdoctoral research level or if the student manages to secure a post as a lecturer. This should exclude tutoring that is often seen in Higher Education Institutions and should involve co-teaching, with remuneration, where the supervisor shares their teaching load, not just marking and admin with the student.

There is currently little research on how supervisors are adapting their behaviour to accommodate student diversity, particularly in the context of online supervision (Najjuma 2020). In the South African context, diversity goes beyond race and gender. Socio-economic class differences, cultural norms and even disability are compounding factors for Black female doctoral students. Black female doctoral candidates are also likely to be affected by traditional female roles stemming from cultural or religious pressures within the home where women are expected to attend to their families' needs as well as their studies without any help from their partners or husbands. South Africa has many single parent households where women bear the burden of raising children alone. According to the Social Research Foundation (2023) 43% of the

country's households are run by single parents, the majority of whom are Black women (Social Research Foundation 2023). Online or a hybrid form of supervision can alleviate the burden on mothers who cannot always leave their children at home or are single mothers. Supervisors should make online resources available for Black female students through engaging other stakeholders within their institutions to ensure that a student is not disadvantaged by their financial position, family responsibilities or their disability when online resources are required.

The supervisor should emphasise a team rather than a hierarchical relationship. Through her/his supervision methods, the supervisor must deliberately demonstrate to the doctoral candidate how to also be a good supervisor and lecturer in the future. They should also be sensitive to the student's cultural and religious needs, avoid taking an authoritarian stance and show respect to the student. Doctoral education can prepare students for careers as researchers and university lecturers. Doctoral students' socialisation is closely tied to their interactions with their supervisors. Poor or non-existent communication and a lack of intellectual stimulation during the supervision process are major causes of student dropout (Castelló, Pardo, Sala-Bubaré & Suñe-Soler 2017). Since doctoral supervision is an authority relationship, power can be abused and supervision can become destructive. An important factor influencing supervision methods appears to be how supervisors were treated as PhD students (Al Makhamreh & Stockley 2020).

It is also important for supervisors to be sensitive to Black female student's cultural capital. They should be aware of the cultural demands that are placed on Black women, even if they do not share the same cultural capital. Numerous studies have been conducted on the overall learning environments of doctoral students. Some focus on issues relevant to creativity such as students' sense of agency and the development of their identities (Bengtsen & McAlpine 2022), the supervisor's capacity to meet students' dynamic need for exploration (Frick et al. 2014) or the advantages of incorporating various types of cultural knowledge into intercultural supervision (Brodin 2018; Manathunga 2017). They demonstrate that more educational leadership and doctoral supervision pedagogy are needed (Brodin 2018). Making space for creativity and the inclusion of cultural knowledge or even the student's heritage in the write-up of the doctoral thesis is one way of doing this.

Dynamic supervision can also involve inviting Black female students to work on a proposal for private consulting contracts that supervisors are in-

volved in and contributing some of the remuneration towards the student's academic and personal needs. This also develops the research skills students would need if they chose to join industry after graduating. In some cases, it could immediately address and alleviate any financial burden that the student is facing. Financial constraints are one of the reasons why many doctoral students do not finish on time or at all (Mkhize 2022). Given the doctoral graduation rate, specifically that of Black female students as presented earlier in Section 3, this might be one of the strategies to increase graduation rates in this population group.

Effective supervision, the cornerstone of doctoral education, is one of the most important requirements for on time completion (Kobayashi et al. 2017). Manathunga (2007) investigated the techniques that university administrators and supervisors use to identify early warning signs of student problems. In addition to building rapport with students and holding regular meetings, these supervisors used scaffolding in supervision to aid students' development (Manathunga 2007 as cited in Kobayashi *et al.* 2017). This technique could also be used to support Black female doctoral candidates.

In the South African context, doctoral candidates come from different cultural contexts and English, which is the language of instruction, is not a first language for many Black doctoral students (Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam 2019), especially those from rural backgrounds. This further frustrates their academic writing skills where support is not given. It is compounded by oppression related to class, race and gender that Black South African women still face in Higher Education (Akala 2018; Lekgau 2021). Supervisors should also raise doctoral candidates' writing proficiency to an acceptable level. They need to build rapport and trust with candidates to ensure that they can respond to critique effectively, without language barriers (Guerin & Aitchison 2021). Given that some doctoral graduates will seek employment as lecturers, Higher Education Institutions should also provide opportunities for socialising and building personal and academic connections (Levin 2017; Gu, Levin & Luo 2018).

The need to adjust in line with students' individual abilities means that supervision requires a personalised strategy that evolves over time, with more directive feedback required for students who perform less well and more high-level input for those aiming for a distinction. This should take place in an even-handed way, with all students treated equitably if not equally (Katikireddi & Reilly 2017). Difficult academic circumstances during doctoral studies tend to be harder to navigate if one does not have power (Gushman 2021). In the case of Black female students who already are at a disadvantage due to their gender

and race and do not have the inherent power to navigate difficult circumstances, supervisors should try to level the playing field.

The links between departmental practices, faculty and university rules and challenges related to national quality assurance of supervision practices are becoming more widely understood, with supervision increasingly an established methodology and a collaborative activity (Bengtsen & McAlpine 2022). There is growing recognition that doctoral supervision involves not only a student's relationship with her or his supervisor(s), but also institutional leadership practices, national and international policy objectives and other factors (Bengtsen & McAlpine 2022).

Black female students need supervisors who are responsive to their different cultural, language, race and class differences, and are flexible and open to change. This type of supervisor also needs to be confident and brave enough to challenge prevailing patriarchal and masculine norms in Higher Education, even at the risk of ruffling some feathers. Power sharing does not require policies or even resources; it requires flexible, culturally sensitive supervisors who are also interested in driving the Higher Education sector's transformation agenda. Not only should they be willing to challenge these structural barriers that oppress Black women, they also need to be creative. Times are changing at a very fast pace. The Fourth Industrial Revolution calls for supervision and mentorship practice that respond to these rapid changes that we are witnessing. Black women need allies in the form of White women, Black men and White men who are afforded privilege upon birth. The use of intersectionality as a lens to examine mentorship and supervision allows for a better understanding of how social positions (race, gender, class, culture, geographical location) affect Black female doctoral candidates' access to and success in these programmes. It is also used as a backdrop to suggest possible alternative forms of supervision and mentorship. Not only should supervision be a means to an end; it should also include deliberate and ongoing mentorship. Successful completion of doctoral studies rests on the shoulders of both the empowered candidate and her/his supervisor.

4.3 Shared Support amongst Peers

Doctoral candidates, including females, need to rely on one another and not only on their supervisors for support. Postgraduate students need extensive support, with many students describing feelings of despair, loneliness, anxiety and high levels of stress (Levecque, Anseel, De Beuckelaer, Van der Heyden & Gisle

2017; Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine & Hubbard 2018). Students who were at school together find their lives diverging and need to replace such friendships with other support groups at university, encouraging and counselling one another at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and sharing similar goals.

In such a situation, ongoing motivation and encouragement from peers is very important to motivate doctoral students to continue with their studies and complete on time.

Peers can support one another through feedback and constructive criticism. In discussion board postings, online candidates can inspire one another to reformulate ideas, thus improving one another's writing skills (Guerin & Aitchison 2021). It is not necessary for doctoral students to have a great deal in common in order to learn from one another. They should be flexible and open to new experiences and take the initiative to improve conditions for themselves.

The group setting gives form to several aspects of doctoral learning. The group's ability to draw on one another's knowledge and resources reduces the necessity for individualised training (Webber, Hatch, Petrin, Anderson, Nega, Raudebaugh, Shannon & Finlayson 2022). Students' peers are likely to be going through similar experiences in their studies and this enables them to confide in and support one another when academic and personal situations are challenging. Promoting group and peer assistance gives doctoral students examples of how to manage their own students in the future when they become doctoral supervisors.

It is recognised that the argument to activate peer support might be considered as antithetical to the original argument presented in section 4.1 above which highlighted the need for a move away from students being considered as solely responsible for their own progress. However, Section 4 as a whole emphasises that while the system and supervisors have a responsibility to exercise leadership and management of students' access and success, there is a co-responsibility of roles as both groups (students and supervisors/mentors) work collectively in the best interests of progress. This intersection is captured in the framework presented below.

5 Proposed Framework to Support Black Female Students Using an Intersectional Approach

This chapter has argued that South African Higher Education is fraught with inequalities that are a stumbling block for Black female doctoral student

success. These students also contend with socio-economic class, disability and language difficulties. The framework below is proposed as a way to address the current issues confronting Black female doctoral students and also to narrow the gap in their completion and success rates in doctoral studies. It was developed using the existing literature and the intersectional approach.

Figure 5.1: Suggested Framework to Support Black Female Doctoral Students
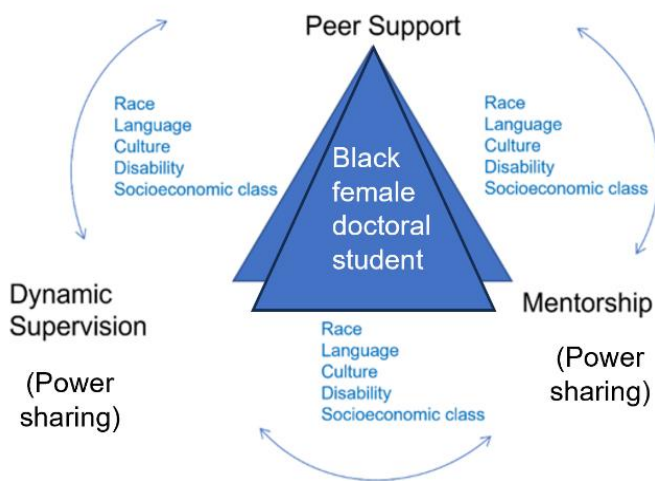
To recap the methodology followed to develop this framework, initial desktop research was conducted to gather the literature and data on the overall graduation and dropout rates at doctoral level in South Africa. These were analysed and key trends relating to gender inequality were highlighted. Intersectionality in Higher Education was also presented. Following this, existing literature and trends were used to develop a framework to support Black female students in their doctoral studies.

The arrows in the framework show that mentorship, supervision and peer support are interconnected, and it is difficult to treat them as disparate parts.

Intersectionality theory (introduced in Section 2 above) highlighted the integrated flow between the components of a dynamic system (Bhopal 2020; Crenshaw, 1991; Harpur, Szucs & Willox 2022; Nichols & Stahl 2019). At all points, the different intersections (race, language, culture, disability and socio-economic class) coalesce and overlap.

The framework also indicates that there are opportunities for power sharing in the mentorship and supervision components. The Black female student should be able to lean on the influence and power that her supervisor has within the institution and this should be leveraged to help her succeed in her doctoral studies. Instead of policies or even resources, power sharing calls for adaptable supervisors who are passionate about advancing the Higher Education sector's reform agenda. They need to be creative in addition to being willing to confront the structural factors that oppress Black women.

Consequently, the above framework integrates a range of sub-studies which are underpinned by intersectionality theory in Higher Education including:

- Gender disparities in Higher Education (Akala 2019; Moodly & Toni 2015, Mouton et al. 2022).
- A systemic analysis of dropout, throughput and graduation rates (the academic pipeline) (CHE 2020; Mouton et al. 2022).

Our analysis has shown that the specific characteristics and life experiences of Black female doctoral students need unambiguous targeted focus. The framework incorporates the debates raised in Section 4 suggesting that mentorship, supervision and peer support communities need to be brought into dialogue. However, these three elements are not disconnected from the systemic and personal characteristics unique to the targeted group.

Supervision can also take the form of mentorship. Mentors could be young lecturers who are also early career researchers and can be male or female; young women need female role models but also support from their male counterparts. Encouraging students to attend seminars to network with people within and outside their field is an informal form of mentorship. Mentorship thus also forms part of the research supervision process.

Peer support amongst doctoral students also forms part of the framework. Group and peer support provides doctoral students with examples of how to manage their own students when they become supervisors in the future. They can also draw from their peer support group to support them in

their studies. Intersectionality can be drawn on as a means to support female doctoral students to enable them to succeed. Gender/race and gender/class, language and disability can be compounding factors in doctoral success. The framework shows that intersectionality can be used as a vehicle to address gender inequalities in Higher Education. Intersectionality is also flexible and can be combined with other approaches and even theories.

6 Concluding Thoughts

This chapter examined the role of intersectionality in Higher Education. Such intersectionality involves not only the isolating singular demographic features of race, gender, disconnection from geographical location, language, socio-economic class barriers, and disability. Given South Africa's very difficult history, social and structural inequalities still exist in Higher Education. The chapter noted the numerous disadvantages that Black female doctoral candidates, in particular, contend with, compounded by the different intersectional contexts. Addressing gender disparities in South Africa needs to be approached through an intersectional lens. There are nuanced differences between race groups, including differences in enrolment and graduation rates between Black and White females and between Black females and Black males. While more Black females enrol in doctoral studies, more Black and White males graduate with doctorates. Given the high enrolment rate among Black females, there should also be high graduation rates among this population group. The data also show that the highest dropout rates are among Black female students. The common thread in policy documents on the academic pipeline is that Black females need extensive support. This suggests that they need differentiated support during their doctoral studies taking into consideration their various backgrounds and possible barriers (language, socio-economic class, cultural, religious, disability and geographical location).

Based on the findings in the literature, it can be argued that South African universities need to re-evaluate their approaches to support Black female doctoral candidates; that these candidates and recent graduates should consider how they can collaborate as change agents to support one another's academic endeavours; and that the candidates should endeavour to continually develop their professional identities. Supervisors should periodically assess their supervision methods to ensure that these do not alienate students based on their language, race, socio-economic class, geographical location, cultural

identity, religion and disability. The proposed framework needs further work once more data is collected on the experiences of Black female doctoral students.

These experiences are not unique to Black women in South Africa. The framework can be used in any socio-economic and geographical location where it is appropriate. It is asserted that on-going exploration through research on Black women's experiences within Higher Education in South Africa, on the African continent and also internationally is important. Mentorship and supervision practices within the African and international contexts can also be explored. Collection and analysis of empirical data can assist in the realisation of this objective. These experiences and practices can be woven together and also compared across different socio-economic contexts to show similarities and differences in experiences and practices. This would also create a better understanding of Black women's experiences in Higher Education and the marginalisation and difficulties they continue to face.

In all contexts, on the African continent and internationally, power from male privilege and White privilege can also be leveraged and drawn upon, especially where holders of said privilege are also supportive of the advancement of Black women. If the professoriate and males in Higher Education also voice their disdain for the structural racism, sexism and practices that marginalise Black women, then half the battle is won. Mentorship of Black women by members of groups who hold power will also assist in addressing some of the structural discrimination in Higher Education Institutions. Black women need allies in these population groups and power sharing is vitally important. Nonetheless, the framework should emphasise the significance of supervision, mentorship and peer support in an intersectional context.

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