Taking on or leaving behind a doctoral identity:

Analysing narratives of attrition in South African doctoral education

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Abstract

This doctoral study aimed to examine supervision- and institutional-related issues of attrition in doctoral education in South Africa through elevating the voices of former doctoral candidates who withdrew from their programme of study. It accomplished this by conducting a narrative study on the doctoral education experiences of six former candidates who terminated their studies at a South African university. The study used a narrative research methodology and employed the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. The study participants were identified using methods of broad surveying via social media platforms, and a 'snowball' word-of-mouth approach within the context of existing academic and professional peer networks. The researcher conducted narrative and semi-structured interviews (referred to in the study as conversations) with the six participants as the study's primary source of data. Additional data were obtained from an examination of the higher degrees guides of some South African universities, as well as an analysis of the *South African Doctoral Degrees National Review 2022* document. A combination of narrative, thematic and document analysis was undertaken in working with the relevant data, using field theory to extract points of meaning and significance from the data. Field theory allowed the researcher to explore and illuminate important issues related to doctoral education and attrition.

These issues include how supervision practices and support structures impact candidates' identity and chances for success; the accumulation, preservation and impact of power in the field; and, the often hidden and implicit 'rules of the game' that influence who is advantaged and disenfranchised within the field based on the forms and volumes of capital they possess. Specifically, who gets to determine which capitals in the field are valued and which are not, and how this impacts upon progress in doctoral study. The study determined that attrition in doctoral education is complex and multi-faceted and can have long-lasting academic, identity and emotional effects on doctoral candidates. Furthermore, misinformed, mismatched and unmet expectations in the field potentially result in a myriad challenges in the doctoral supervision relationship and in doctoral education more broadly. The findings of the study may help universities consider more carefully candidate and supervisor preparedness and fit; may help doctoral educators critique and change doctoral and supervisor training and development, and update institutional support mechanisms; and help us understand better the production, protection and perpetuation of power in doctoral supervision.

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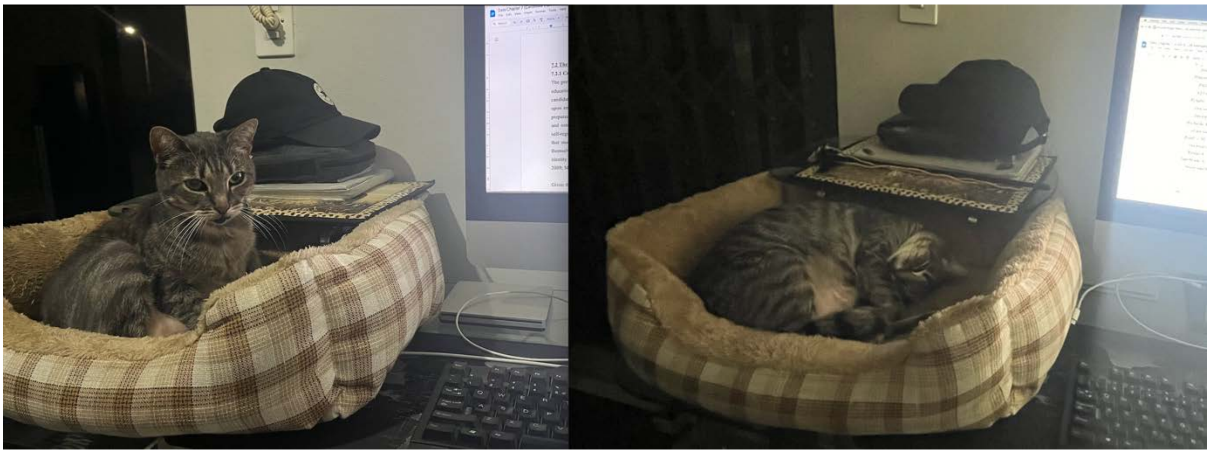

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In early October of 2017, nearly two years into my full thesis master's degree course in Education at a South African university, I de-registered from the faculty and quit the programme, giving up on almost two years of academic work and personal sacrifice. Depending on who you talk to, there are varying reasons explaining why I failed to finish – anything from being difficult to work with and unresponsive to feedback and correction/criticism, to being out of my depth and ill-prepared for what a degree of that level requires. You may hear that I was a stubborn and arrogant student, and unwilling to put in the effort required. What you will not find on any official department or faculty record, however, is my own account of events. The structures I found myself in as a student made no allowances for it.

By September 2017, I had failed to secure my first meeting of the year with my main supervisor – an internationally respected academic. By then I had learned that stories of this supervisor's master's students struggling for five years or longer to get their degree were not uncommon. My requests to my main and co-supervisor (another seasoned academic and a member of university leadership) for assistance were ignored for up to four months at a time. Around July 2017 I requested a change of supervisor, if for whatever reason their workload was perhaps proving to be too demanding. The response from my main supervisor was that I would get my degree within the current arrangement or not at all.

Days prior to my deregistration from the faculty, I sat in a meeting with a student psychologist (who I had been seeing to help me cope), the relevant head of department and the dean, in which I presented my case and respectfully asked for a change of supervisor. I shared detailed and exact records. I'll never forget the first words out of the head of the department's mouth after I presented my evidence and made my request: "Grant, I hear what you're saying but let me explain to you why this could all be your fault." I realised that my pleas for help at every structural level had fallen on deaf ears. Throughout the meeting, apart from the initial greetings, the Dean never uttered a word.

In August of 2019, two years after the above-mentioned events, I sat in my master's graduation ceremony – different research topic, department, faculty and supervisor. I watched the celebrations of students and their loved ones and could not help thinking how every year thousands of jubilant postgraduate research students walk across stages in universities around the world to receive their well-earned degrees. Their success is in many (if not most) cases championed by wonderful supervisors who make it their priority to be present and supportive. However, for countless other students, the academic journey ends in 'failure' and disillusionment. These students fall through the cracks, never to be heard from again. I came painfully close to being one of them. I could not help but wonder: who will tell these students' stories and make their voices heard?

The decision to apply for acceptance to a programme of doctoral study is a major one that carries with it a huge investment of time, effort, dedication and sacrifice. How many doctoral students make it that far in their academic journey – working hard over many years to reach the point where they are registering for their doctoral programme – having little intention of adequately applying themselves? How many of these students have an insufficient awareness and understanding of the personal and logistical circumstances they need to navigate, and lack suitable strategies with which to do so? What lesser acknowledged and documented issues may have a hand in the outcome of their academic aspirations?

These questions matter. When doctoral students drop out, feeling pressured to do so, everyone is the poorer for it. These students' inability to complete their degree results in a loss to the knowledge economy in their specific discipline and the country and world at large, with potentially valuable research never being completed and published. It weakens the notion of a socially empathetic and critically thinking citizenry and the cultivation of a thriving, vibrant knowledge democracy. If we are able to better understand the complexities surrounding doctoral research attrition, using the stories, experiences and perceptions of students as the vehicle to do so, perhaps we can more effectively facilitate a greater symphony of triumphant jubilation in university graduation halls around the world.

This doctoral thesis follows and in some respects builds upon the findings of my previous master's degree study. My master's research (Cyster, 2019) explored supervision-related problems in postgraduate research from the perspective of six current or former master's students at a South African university. A clear contradiction - that my master's research brought to light (Cyster, 2019), in the experience of the study participants at least - exists between what universities, faculties and/or relevant departments assure master's students of in terms of support and empowerment, and what they actually deliver in practical, real terms. Among the various factors that have been identified as impacting and impeding the completion of postgraduate research and associated throughput rates, this contradiction in the field of postgraduate supervision merits being named among them. It is a contradiction that I feel warrants further research, particularly in a manner that elevates the stories and voices of students who have experienced it.

Social justice research in higher education commonly examines issues of historic and current socio-economic disadvantage and disenfranchisement, and legitimately so. However, the aforementioned contradiction represents another, lesser-examined problem that has significant social justice implications for higher education – and for doctoral education especially – that negatively impact doctoral students across barriers of race, religion, culture, gender and class. There is little research that acknowledges this contradiction in the practical, real world field of postgraduate education and that chronicles its impact on students. This is particularly true of research that is focused on students' personal experience of this contradiction, and informed by and presented in their own words. My doctoral research aims to address this matter.

This first chapter introduces the reader to the study. First, it contextualises the research within the field of higher education in South Africa and doctoral education more specifically, outlining some of the significant global trends and ideologies that have shaped, and continue to influence, the sector. Following this contextualisation, the research aims are provided and justified in relation to the needs of the field[1]. (The concept of field, as relevant to this study, is discussed in detail in Chapter 3, section 3.2, and in Chapter 5.) Broadly speaking, field is representative of a structured social space that is also structuring in nature, within which individuals dominate and are dominated (Bourdieu, 1998).

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[1] The term 'the field' in this study refers to doctoral education. Other fields, such as doctoral supervision, are specified accordingly.

Following the research aims, the research questions that informed the study are provided. The chapter ends with an overview of the thesis. The aim of this chapter is to provide a discussion and overview of the field of doctoral education, globally, and in the South African context. I begin by providing a brief look into the higher education sector in South Africa, and the growing impact upon it of an increasingly global neoliberal ideology and agenda. This is followed by the complex and nuanced subject of success in doctoral education. Finally, the chapter examines the value and importance of prioritising doctoral candidates'[2] first-hand experiences and elevating their voices in the literature, and concludes by outlining the research questions relevant to this study.

1.2 Context of the Study

In this section, I delve briefly into the South African education system's historical context, including the 1997 White Paper and the idea of education as a public good. Next, the focus turns to the growing global neoliberal agenda and its influence on doctoral education in South Africa and beyond. This is followed, finally, by a discussion on the complex and multi-faceted subject of student success in doctoral education.

1.2.1 A brief history of the South African education system

The current South African education system has been shaped and largely compromised by significant educational disparities and backlogs which have resulted from four decades of apartheid education. In the apartheid-era system, white South African children received well-funded schooling at practically no cost, while their black counterparts were left with 'Bantu education', defined by relative lack. Dilapidated buildings, the absence of basic facilities and equipment, and an increasing majority of unqualified teachers became the status quo in these schools (Jansen, 1990). This stark disparity was a central pillar of the overarching apartheid structure. It is a structure that, although officially dismantled post-1994, continues to exert a powerful influence over South Africa's education system – not least of which is on the country's higher education system, and its doctoral education sector more specifically.

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[2] In the context of this study and its reference to doctoral education, the terms 'candidate' and 'student' are used interchangeably.

Badat (2007) observes three ways in which South African higher education has been and continues to be shaped by the apartheid era. First, all higher education (HE) institutions were profoundly moulded by apartheid planning and by the respective functions assigned to them as they related to the maintenance and reproduction of the apartheid social order. Robus and Macleod (2006) offer a thorough history of institutional racism in South African universities going as far back as 1829, with the establishment of two institutions for white students, namely, South African College in Cape Town, currently known as the University of Cape Town (UCT), and Victoria College (Stellenbosch University). Although there existed eight universities in South Africa by 1951, only three offered limited access to black students, and one university catered to black students specifically. The subsequent decades saw the establishment of separate universities for South Africa's different racial groups, with the more liberal, open universities prohibited by the state from welcoming black students, with the exception of a restricted number of black students who were allowed to apply for a state permit allowing them to attend white universities (Nicholas, 1994).

Established historically black universities (HBUs) were commonly under-resourced and considered inferior 'bush' or 'rural' universities. Furthermore, their graduates were deemed insufficiently skilled and inferior compared to students from historically white universities (Mamphiswana & Noyoo, 2000). HBUs never benefited from the same freedom as the historically white universities (HWUs) as it related to planning and managing budgets and, consequently, were unable to accumulate financial reserves. As the apartheid era ended, the common expectation was that redress funding would be made available by the state to address historical injustices and inequities in the education sector (Bunting 2002). However, the fact that this funding never materialised impacted greatly on universities that were under-resourced to begin with, and further challenged by the fact that the black working class students they primarily appealed to, and their families, lacked the ability to pay tuition fees.

It is important to note, however, that the patterns of advantage and disadvantage discussed above are not merely historical. They continue to influence the current capacities of institutions to offer high-quality learning and research experiences and equity of opportunity, and to make positive and practical contributions to the economic and social development of the country at large. Second, research and teaching were both thoroughly shaped by the socio-economic and political objectives of the apartheid separate development agenda (Badat, 2007). Third, the project of transforming higher education takes place within the context of a substantial overall challenge of simultaneously pursuing economic advancement, social equity and the broadening and deepening of democracy.

Bozalek and Boughey (2012) argue that the consequence of apartheid ideology and legislation was that the first democratic South African government elected in 1994 inherited an education system that was cracked along numerous lines. These lines included race, the type of institution (university or 'technikon'), geographic location and primary language of instruction (English or Afrikaans). Additionally, most universities lacked the resources and necessary faculty expertise to offer doctorates, and they and others were structurally constrained in the kinds of research they could perform. The authors claim that these fractures had profound implications for the calibre of education available to various population groups.

It stands to reason that the field of doctoral education in South Africa is not exempt from the adverse influence of these cracks. These fractures are exacerbated in South Africa's HE sector and its doctoral education landscape, partly as a result of a funding model that is influenced by powerful global economic and market forces which undermine public good values and initiatives in the country's universities. The notion of the purpose of education being to champion the public good, first and foremost, is discussed in the following section which looks at the 1997 White Paper.

1.2.2 The 1997 White Paper and notions of the 'goods' of education

As explained in the Introduction (section 1.1.), one of the key aims of this doctoral research is to explore the potential for disparities and contradictions that exist between expectations and aspirations in doctoral education and actual practical reality. These misalignments can occur at varying levels in educational structures, from the national stage to the context of the supervision relationship. From a national perspective, the much-discussed post-apartheid South African White Paper of 1997 (referred to as "White Paper" hereafter) put forward four purposes for higher education which were ultimately incorporated into the Higher Education Act:

- to meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes throughout their lives
- to address the development needs of society and provide the labour market with appropriate high-level skills
- to contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens
- to contribute to the creation, sharing and evaluation of knowledge (DOE, 1997, 1.1.3).

Surveying the four purposes of higher education as outlined in the White Paper, it is primarily the first objective, and by extension the third, that I wish to highlight as being of particular relevance to this study: the development of doctoral candidates' intellectual abilities and aptitudes, and their socialisation within doctoral education and beyond, as critical citizens. As the White Paper alludes, in order for society to benefit from an enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizenry, those citizens must first be afforded the opportunity, hopefully through quality higher education, of having their intellectual and philosophical capacity nurtured and refined. This imperative is as important in relation to the socialisation and development of doctoral candidates in South Africa and beyond as it is at any other level of the education system.

The White Paper argues that it is through a prioritised focus on the idea of citizenship in higher education that the reflection, evaluation and renewal of contemporary philosophy, practices and conduct can be pursued for the common public good (DoE, 1997, 1.3). Of the four purposes for higher education proposed by the White Paper, the facilitation of a critical citizenry has arguably been the most neglected, in Lange's (2012) estimation. The White Paper framed higher education as simultaneously being both a private and public good (Lange 2012). This neglected civic purpose of higher education related to citizenry is possibly the one most removed from any potential benefit associated with a neoliberal position – a position that increasingly results in misalignments between doctoral educational goals focused on public good objectives (Chambers & Gopaul, 2008; Singh, 2014) versus economically driven agendas, discussed in the next section.

1.2.3 Neoliberalism and its impact on doctoral education

There is increasing interest in shifts in doctoral education internationally (Lazurko, Alamenciak, Hill, Muhl, Osei, Pomezanski, Schang & Sharmin, 2020). It has previously commonly been regarded by academia and industry as the powerhouse for the generation of new, and at times, transgressive knowledge – and certainly knowledge that is pioneering and innovative in nature – and as a vehicle for preparation for academic life. However, these purposes have steadily been overshadowed by a new neoliberal language of 'training' and of economic value to both individuals and countries (Grant, 2018; Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Boughey and McKenna (2021) argue that neoliberalism in academia represents the financialization of all resources and activities within the university, resulting in 'value' explicitly being accorded through monetisation and metrification. In summary, neoliberalism involves framing human behaviour solely through the lens of economic growth. Consequently, whatever holds potential monetary value is worthwhile, whereas that which cannot be monetised (and typically therefore also not monitored and measured) does not have worth.

The doctorate has in many cases (d)evolved into what is now a ticket to a vague and pliable range of professional futures (Grant, 2018). This increasing shift in the purpose and focus of doctoral education exerts an eroding influence that undermines the concept and outcome of education as advancing the public good. Frick, McKenna and Muthama (2017) have expressed grave concern about reducing a qualification through which knowledge is established at the very frontiers of a field to a narrow notion of 'training' only. The authors point out that words matter greatly and argue that doctoral pedagogy must go beyond training for transferable skills and attributes. Frick et al. (2017, p.445) claim further that a policy rhetoric that centres around training alone compromises the true intention of a doctorate, which in their view is the 'cultivation of a love of wisdom, and the education of future scholars who may impart such wisdom with sound judgment, insight and criticality' (Refer to Chapter 2, section 2.2 for a discussion on the purpose(s) of doctoral education). Cribb and Gewirtz (2013) discuss the 'hollowed-out university' – an institution that no longer has a distinctive social role and no ethical, core reason for existing. Frick et al. (2017) express a pertinent point of critique in their view, associated with the neoliberal shift in focus from education, learning and pedagogy, to that of training.

Linked to this view of students as consumers of a service are discourses that frame the doctorate as ensuring a reliable supply of highly skilled labour for the ‘knowledge economy’ (McArthur, 2011). Regarding the notion of the knowledge economy, Boughey and McKenna (2021, p.32) argue that as opposed to being a ‘public good’ and existing for the good of humankind, ‘knowledge increasingly came to be understood as a commodity, a private good, with the potential to benefit those who had it or who could generate it’. McArthur (2011) points out that in the context of this knowledge economy, the doctoral candidate is regarded as ‘human capital’. Discourses that frame the doctorate in neoliberal ways in which the candidate is ‘human capital’ and where the responsibility of the university is ensuring the continued production of skilled labour for the ‘knowledge economy’ is highly problematic (McArthur, 2011).

Such neoliberal discourses have fundamentally restructured the contemporary education landscape (Pretorius & Macaulay, 2021). One of the main effects of this restructuring has been casting education as a service that is part of the market, and therefore offered competitively, which means that students have come to see themselves as consumers paying for a service (Vican, Friedman, & Andreasen, 2020), rather than as knowledge-makers participating in learning environments and processes that require their active engagement. This effect may manifest itself in the form of doctoral candidates who expect supervisors to spare them the challenge and struggle involved with actively engaging with literature and the processes of meaning- and knowledge-making and identity construction. Furthermore, an additional consequence of the shift to training in universities is that industry appears to determine the scope and nature of the doctorate, including within the South African context. Objectives such as those outlined in the White Paper are in this way increasingly undermined, and there are adverse consequences related to the increased pressure placed on academics to perform and produce results in all aspects of academic work (Boughey & McKenna, 2021), with knock-on implications for the cultivation and nurturing of doctoral candidates’ scholarly identity and completion rates more broadly. Problems related to doctoral degree throughput represent a persistent challenge in the South African context. As noted in the South African Doctoral

Degrees National Review[3] commissioned by the Centre for Higher Education (DDNR) (CHE, 2022)[4], the large number of doctoral candidates in the country who drop out before completion is of great concern.

The neoliberal framing of the PhD tends to ignore the role of higher degree research inside the university and in broader society as a public good – a good aimed at advancing both social justice and transformation. In the case of the doctoral candidate, this refers to the personal transformation towards ‘doctorateness’ that goes beyond the pursuit of individual gain and the focus on economic imperatives (see Chapter 2, subsection 2.2.2 for a discussion on doctorateness and doctoral identity). Framing the PhD from purely an economic perspective promotes a consumerist orientation to doctoral education, alienating candidates from their socio-cultural context and their roles as responsible scholars who are stewards of their disciplines (Barnacle, 2005).

The impact of neoliberalism goes beyond the propagation of a consumerist mindset. As a result of its influence in universities and colleges around the world, the global and local South African higher education environment is increasingly focused on metrics (Vican et al., 2020). As it relates to doctoral education, this emphasis on metrics has brought about the tightening of completion deadlines and an environment in which students (and academics) have to achieve a series of accountability milestones (Macaulay & Davies, 2019). Pretorius and Macaulay (2021) point out that this focus on metrics and students' growing need to cultivate their professional brand influences their understanding of what it means to be a doctoral scholar. It has given rise to an educational environment in which students' academic identities are increasingly shaped by neoliberal philosophies, values and practices. New and emerging doctoral graduates and academics are called upon and expected by universities to publish new research - an activity involving significant economic incentives and motivations. Simultaneously, carving out a career in research necessitates purposeful and unashamed efforts in self-promotion on the part of these emerging researchers. Keeping public good notions of education and knowledge front and centre in the mind is not always a simple undertaking for researchers in these kinds of academic environments.

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[3] The creation of which is explained in Chapter 1, subsection 1.4.5.

[4] Discussed and referenced further in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

In Grant's (2018) view, doctoral education is intimately entangled in the pedagogical hollowing out in universities brought about by the increased implementation of neoliberal policies and practices. Given these developments, she observes that the pedagogy of doctoral supervision, and the concept and role of the supervisor, have sparked intensified institutional concern and criticism. The growing tide of neoliberalism in higher education exerts growing pressure on academics who are often already working under significant strain. An expanding surveillance-based culture is emerging: 'how many students each academic supervises, how many workload hours per supervisor, how quickly those students complete, how often supervisors and students meet, what kinds of feedback students are given, and what records of progress are kept' (Grant, 2018, p.358). There has been a significant increase in the administrative and managerial burden supervisors contend with, and Grant (2018) argues that a consequence of these trends is the creation of a climate of anxiety and judgment regarding what constitutes 'proper' supervision. Added to the increasing responsibilities supervisors have to juggle, recent research highlights growing candidate numbers and the associated impact on supervisory practices and approaches, as well as retention and throughput rates (McKenna & van Schalkwyk, 2023). It all amounts to greater workloads and pressures that many supervisors find difficult to cope with.

Given the above-mentioned challenges and pressures facing doctoral supervisors, it stands to reason that these academics have ever less time and space at their disposal to explore and devote to forms and styles of pedagogy related to supervision. This includes aspects of supervision that might facilitate and enable the kind of supportive academic environment that promotes candidates' maturation as independent, skilled researchers. The consequences of neoliberalism introduce implications regarding mentoring and care as pertaining to the supervisory relationship. Tronto (2017, p.27) makes this observation:

> Neoliberal policies around the globe have made caring more difficult. Yet, many scholars seem to have accepted neoliberalism as an inescapable reality. Instead,... care stands as a major alternative way to the neoliberal paradigm, both conceptually and historically...

> a democratic form of care—which makes the reallocation of care responsibilities its central concern—can provide the basis for a theoretical challenge to neoliberalism.

Tronto's opinion of how neoliberalism has changed the nature of care and caring in doctoral education is pertinent. Despite her explicit assertion that neoliberalism may well prevail, she argues that it should not be viewed or framed as insurmountable. People are able to access and leverage impactful (theoretical) resources, such as care, to resist neoliberalism's influence on economic and social life. This influence, along with the consequences and implications associated with it in the field of doctoral education - for candidates and supervisors alike - represent a central research focus of this study.

1.2.4 Doctoral student success – a complex, nuanced issue

Despite significant increases in candidate enrolment in doctoral education in South Africa, a national review of the doctorate highlighted several questions regarding the models of doctoral education used in South Africa (CHE, 2022). The dominance of one-on-one and co-supervision models, along with the general absence of curriculated support measures such as coursework or departmental seminars, has been associated with South Africa's high attrition statistics for years (ASSAf, 2010; Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard 2016). Mouton, Boshoff and James (2015) claim that increasing pressures faced by supervisors are not merely a matter of growing candidate numbers. Many supervisors are emphatic that their primary challenges relate to the generally poor quality and unpreparedness of doctoral candidates, in addition to the fact that they often have to accept students they would rather not (given pressure from their university or faculty). The burden of supervision is also qualitative in nature. Feedback from supervision workshops reveals that supervisors often feel guilty about not devoting sufficient time to their candidates (Mouton, et al., 2015).

Several possibilities related to poor postgraduate throughput (or attrition) have been suggested throughout the research literature. For instance, when entering into postgraduate research, some students may struggle to adapt to the new one-on-one working and learning dynamic (Wisker, Robinson & Shacham, 2007). A large number of studies scrutinising factors influencing research completion have contemplated the technical and intellectual issues related to postgraduate research. Concerns related to withdrawal in doctoral education have led researchers around the world to examine the multiple different factors and processes which contribute to attrition numbers (McAlpine, Castello & Pyhaltö, 2020). These include students' experiences of stress, depression and loneliness (Hermann, Wichmann-Hansen & Jensen, 2014; Berry, Niven & Hazell, 2022), candidates' financial stress, personal or employment commitments (Larcombe, Ryan & Baik, 2021), not being given sufficient support in meeting the demands placed on them (Pyhältö, Vekkaila & Keskinen, 2012), inadequate supervision and frequency thereof (Cornér, Löfström & Pyhältö, 2023), and levels of academic preparedness and competency at and comfort with conducting effective research independently (Govender, 2011). Also included among the documented issues affecting postgraduate throughput, the potential apathy of students has been named among the possible causes of strain on the supervisory relationship (Mouton, 2010). Students may possess varying levels of personal determination and tenacity, or lack thereof, that can directly influence their ability to overcome obstacles encountered in the course of their studies (El-Ghoroury, Galper, Sawaqdeh & Bufka, 2012).

In light of this research on doctoral education and doctoral success, it is clear that the subject is multi-layered and multi-faceted, and one that resists simplistic black and white characterisations or 'common sense' presumptions. As such, a deeper exploration and understanding is required.

1.3 Research Objective

1.3.1 Giving voice to the voiceless

The purpose of my research is neither to demonise supervisors nor absolve students who fail of any responsibility for their lack of success. Master's and doctoral research and thesis writing are complex, and it is challenging to pinpoint specific factors which facilitate or hinder progress, with both student-centric and institutional influences having been found to impact student throughput and completion times (Amehoe & Botha, 2013; Luescher-Mamashela, 2015).

In an educational environment within which the overall wellbeing of doctoral candidates is typically alarmingly low (Lau & Pretorius, 2019), supervisors, academics and institutional policymakers need to direct efforts towards cultivating doctoral education environments where candidates’ voices are considered valuable (Pretorius & Macaulay, 2021; CHE, 2022). By elevating doctoral candidates’ voices within academia through sharing their stories, educators could enhance candidates’ sense of agency and belonging in the academy and improve their own awareness and understanding of the strengths that candidates bring to the process (Pretorius & Macaulay, 2021). Constructing a culture of belonging for all doctoral candidates may potentially significantly address the feelings of isolation that are commonly experienced during doctoral study.

Limited research has focused on the enhancement of doctoral education and supervision through the lens of the perceptions and feedback of candidates who did not finish their degree. The sense of intimacy often inherent in supervisory contexts and students’ anxiety regarding adverse career consequences are hugely impactful in a relationship dynamic commonly defined by differences in status and dependence (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004). The intimacy and secrecy in many doctoral supervision contexts and candidates’ awareness of relational dynamics influenced by an imbalance of power potentially result in many candidates opting not to share experiences of neglect or abuse for fear of reprisal.

Rajecki (1982) makes the case that perceptions are an important subject to devote research to because they influence what people think and feel about certain matters. He states that perceptions, which extend to attitudes, are vital in that they influence people’s convictions concerning how things ought to be done A focus on students' experiences and perceptions related to doctoral supervision is of great value, especially if one is mindful of the findings of Mushoriwa and Nyakutse (2014), who point out how the perceptions people have concerning various matters not only impact the measure to which they are committed to those matters and/or related tasks but also how they ultimately interact with and relate to those they engage with during the process. Based on this perceived gap in the field, focusing this research on the subject of student narratives in the context of doctoral supervision in order to gain insight into why some candidates reach the stage where they feel unwilling or unable to continue their doctoral journey is a worthwhile and meaningful pursuit.

Researching candidate experiences and perspectives on doctoral attrition may help lower dropout rates and, most importantly, according to Castelló, Pardo, Sala-Bubaré and Suñe-Soler (2017), yield valuable understandings to inform interventions aimed at improving the efficacy of doctoral programmes. This research is necessary given that there are very few studies, particularly of a qualitative nature, which examine the variables associated with doctoral attrition and its contributing factors from candidates' perspectives.

1.3.2 Research questions

There exist persistently high rates of attrition in doctoral study in South Africa (discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4), along with potential negative factors associated with certain models and styles of doctoral supervision. The DDNR (CHE, 2022) indicates that data gathered from one of South Africa's larger universities reveal that for a particular cohort of doctoral candidates who first registered in 2014, 19% dropped out within five years. Regarding the same five-year period, another university recorded a nominally higher dropout rate of 22%. Although percentage attrition rates fluctuate from year to year, these are nonetheless high figures, which the DDNR notes represent cause for concern.

There exists a lack of qualitative research into South African doctoral candidates' decision to prematurely exit their degree programme. Given these matters, and the complex and multi-stage process of undertaking a doctorate within the complex context sketched out in this chapter thus far, it is evident that a gap exists in the literature which this study will aim to address. Of the myriad factors that impact on doctoral study attrition, this research is framed within the context of doctoral supervision and associated institutional factors – a limited framing motivated by my professional interest and my own prior experiences of postgraduate study, in addition to capacity limitations relevant to this doctoral study.

Through telling the stories of South African de-registered doctoral candidates who have dropped out of their doctoral programme, this study seeks to understand the impact of both doctoral supervision on their academic journey and the role played by relevant associated institutional systems and structures in either enabling or undermining their academic progress To this end, the research questions posed are the following.

Main research question:

- What do the narratives of de-registered South African doctoral candidates reveal about how supervision practices and support structures enable or constrain doctoral students' identity development and chances for success?

Sub-questions:

- How do doctoral candidates define and experience power relations and autonomy in the doctoral journey, particularly in relation to specific models of supervision?
- What roles do institutional, faculty and departmental cultures and structures play in either facilitating or undermining students' attempts to resolve challenges that may be implicated in decisions to leave their programme?
- Who gets to determine what is valued within the field of doctoral education, and who gets included and who gets excluded as a consequence?

The answers to these questions will lead to insights regarding what doctoral candidates, supervisors and relevant academic institutions should be cognisant of in the interests of enhancing the doctoral study experience for all concerned.

1.4 Overview of the Thesis

1.4.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

The first chapter of this study serves as an introduction to this doctoral research, briefly articulating the South African historical context relevant to it and the global and national impact of neoliberalism on the purposes and functioning of higher education institutions. It then communicated the objectives of this research, along with the primary and secondary research questions that the study aimed to examine and address.

1.4.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review: Mapping the Field of doctoral education

This chapter presents a review of research literature relevant to doctoral education, both internationally and in South Africa, and articulates the argument for the value of conducting this study. The chapter begins by examining research pertaining to doctoral education studies broadly, highlighting and examining the research themes of doctoral supervision feedback and writing, candidates' identity and researcher development, inclusion and exclusion in doctoral education, and peer learning and communities of practice. Next, the chapter focuses on doctoral supervision literature more specifically, exploring the research themes of supervision as a pedagogic practice, forms and styles of supervision, and the construction and development of the supervisory relationship. Finally, the chapter focuses on the subject of attrition in doctoral education and the key challenges related to doctoral supervision, concluding with final remarks that position this doctoral research project and note its significance.

1.4.3 Chapter 3: Theoretical framework: Bourdieu's field theory

In this chapter, the theoretical framework and associated conceptual tools of field theory are introduced and discussed in detail. Field theory was created and developed by French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu. This doctoral study conceptualises doctoral education as a social field in which various agents with varying portfolios of capitals struggle and contest over the accumulation and preservation of power and influence. Field theory was chosen in light of its suitability for examining the nuanced and multifaceted nature of power relations within the field of doctoral education. The chapter begins by unpacking the nature and characteristics of a social 'field', which both doctoral education and supervision represent in the context of this study. It then goes on to discuss the concept of 'doxa', exploring the taken-for-granted dominant attitudes, cultures, discourses and rules that implicitly shape the nature of engagement in the field and powerfully impact agents' advancement or stagnation within it. The next concept examined in the chapter is that of 'capital', representing the various forms of assets that agents possess and accumulate upon entering and/or navigating the field. Finally, the chapter explores the concepts of 'symbolic violence' and 'illusio', which directly influence and speak to, respectively, an agent's capacity and willingness to continue navigating the field.

1.4.4 Chapter 4: Methodology

The methodology chapter presents the reader with a detailed description of the philosophical orientation that underpinned this research project and the practical approaches and tools informed by this philosophical foundation employed to carry it out. The chapter begins by laying out the relevant research aims and paradigms, discussing the matters of ontology and epistemology. This is followed by a detailed description of the chosen methodological approach, including a presentation of narrative research and its characteristics and uses. The chapter goes on to discuss the various methods employed that were relevant to the practical carrying out of the research, from the sampling process to the collection and analysis of the data. Finally, the chapter examines the various ethical considerations which had to be held in focus and navigated throughout conducting this research project. These considerations were designed and used to protect and serve the interests of the research participants, and to keep me as the researcher suitably and appropriately orientated towards the project and its participants throughout the study and beyond.

1.4.5 Chapter 5: Expectations and Responsibilities in Doctoral Studies

In this chapter the characteristics of the field of doctoral education are described from the perspective of its expectations of the primary agents who exist in and navigate it. In the context of this study, these categories of agents are the doctoral candidates, doctoral supervisors and university departments and faculties. The examination of the field's expectations was accomplished by reviewing strategically chosen data sources based on their usefulness in articulating this aspect of the doctoral education landscape. These include the higher degrees guides of some South African universities (chosen to represent a balanced sample of historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions), the DDNR[5] (CHE, 2022), in addition to relevant research literature. This examination of the field's expectations was undertaken in order to highlight what the field itself articulates as being the roles and responsibilities of the above-mentioned agents in the field of doctoral education. Being aware of what the field expects of those who traverse it provides a framework for understanding what the agents in the field are responsible and accountable for, at least in theory.

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[5] The DDNR Report was written after a lengthy process of consultation with all South African universities that award doctoral degrees. The first phase involved asking these universities to write a self-reflective narrative submission, with supporting evidence, on the nature, form, successes and challenges of their doctoral programmes. This information would have included data on enrolment, completion, time registered, attrition and demographic data. Following this phase, the CHE sent teams of academics, after training them, to interview various stakeholders identified by universities as being involved in supervising, enrolling, educating and supporting doctoral candidates. The purpose of these interviews was to corroborate and expand upon, and possibly challenge, universities' own narratives. This represented phase two. All of these data sources combined were then used to compile the comprehensive DDNR (CHE, 2022) used in this study.

1.4.6 Chapter 6: Experiences of doctoral education

In Chapter 6 of this thesis, the unique doctoral education experiences of the study participants are presented and analysed. The chapter begins by briefly introducing each participant, followed by a discussion of their preparedness for doctoral study and their early experiences of their programme. Next, the focus is on the candidates' experiences of doctoral supervision specifically, with particular interest in the power dynamics at work in these relationships and their impact on the candidates' academic progress and the development of their doctoral identity. This section also focuses on the supervisory feedback process and its influence on the candidate-supervisor relationship and the candidates' academic development. Thereafter, the chapter examines the influence of the relevant institutional culture in each candidate's doctoral journey, followed by the factors motivating and leading up to the candidates' decision to exit their doctoral programme prematurely. Finally, the chapter explores the ultimate impact of the candidates' doctoral experience, and their decision to withdraw from it, on their emotional and academic well-being.

1.4.7 Chapter 7: Conclusion

The final chapter of this study presents and discusses its research findings and implications, synthesised based on and out of the analysis conducted in Chapters 5 and 6. Beginning with the findings, the chapter discusses the issues of expectations and assurances in doctoral education as experienced by the participants, the enabling or constraining role of the supervision relationship specific to their unique doctoral education journey, along with the

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dominant rules operating in the field of doctoral study in their specific academic contexts, who benefited from these rules (or not), and how. The chapter discusses the implications associated with the aforementioned findings, starting with implications relevant to the reality versus expectations of doctoral study, implications relevant to observed supervision practices and associated departmental or faculty systems and structures, and implications related to the production, safeguarding and perpetuation of power and influence in the field of doctoral education. The chapter concludes with observations about the limitations of this study, the potential it opens up for future research, and final remarks.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Mapping the Field of Doctoral Education

2.1 Introduction

Chapter One provided a broad overview of the context for this doctoral study. It focused particularly on communicating the rationale for this research which was premised on the need to draw attention to and prioritise, in the literature, the voices and academic experiences of former doctoral candidates who exited their doctoral programme prior to completion. I noted that any attempted understanding of the subject of attrition in doctoral study would inherently be incomplete and undermined without the purposeful inclusion and examination of this key component: the stories of the candidates as they would have them told.

This chapter presents a review of the literature related to doctoral education as a field of research. It divides the landscape of doctoral study into key research categories that were deemed pertinent to the aims and focus of this study. Each category will be examined based on the kinds of research undertaken on it and what this research has uncovered, in addition to which concerns and questions have been left unresolved. In so doing, the chapter will make the case for the necessity of qualitative research focused on doctoral attrition, undertaken specifically from the perspectives and based on the experiences of doctoral candidates.

The chapter will begin with an overview of the main concerns in the field of doctoral education that have been addressed in the literature, including feedback and writing, doctoral identity and researcher development, inclusion in and exclusion from doctoral education based on varying kinds of capital and demographical traits (which are discussed in detail in subsection 2.2.3 and in Chapter 3), and peer learning and communities of practice. Thereafter, the chapter will move to consider the subject of doctoral supervision more specifically, focusing on the subjects of supervision as a pedagogic practice, forms and styles of supervision, and doctoral relationship building and development. Finally, the chapter will hone in on the matter of doctoral attrition and what happens when things do not go according to plan, examining the key challenges in doctoral supervision and highlighting the current research gaps in the field that this study intended to address.

The chapter concludes with a synthesis of key substantive concerns that have been researched in the field in reference to the research gap that has been identified. Regarding this research gap, the conclusion of the chapter proposes the relevant theoretical framework most suited to investigating and making meaning of this gap in the literature in a manner that advances a clearer and more comprehensive scholarly understanding of the field of doctoral education. This theoretical framework is then explored in greater depth in Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework.

2.2 Doctoral Education Studies

Doctoral education, and the degree to which it is successful, matters. Conventional understanding has held that the primary purpose of doctoral education is to advance the frontiers of disciplinary knowledge, equip and empower new generations of scholars who are standard-bearers for their discipline and keep research communities within universities vital and creative (Boud & Lee, 2009). The emergence of innovations and new knowledge around the world would not be possible in the absence of contributions from researchers at the forefront of various academic disciplines (Masek & Alias, 2020). Golde and Walker (2006) have articulated the main purpose of doctoral education as being to develop students to be stewards of their respective disciplines, echoing the sentiment of Barnacle (2005). The objective of such training is a scientific or scholarly ideal characterised by cultivating someone 'who can imaginatively generate new knowledge, critically conserve valuable and useful ideas, and responsibly transform those understandings through writing, teaching and application. A steward is someone to whom the rigour, quality, and integrity of the field can be entrusted' (Golde & Walker, 2006, p.5).

Research into doctoral education is often situated within a socialisation framework (Gardner, 2009a; Holley, 2009). In relation to doctoral training, socialisation is defined as 'a process of internalizing the expectations, standards, and norms of a given society, which includes learning the relevant skills, knowledge, habits, attitudes, and values of the group that one is joining' (Austin & McDaniels, 2006, p.400). Early socialisation experiences, for instance, those encountered during the first years of doctoral training, are significant. This is because they 'affect the course of long-term adjustment, triggering either a success cycle or a failure cycle' (Ashforth, Sluss & Harrison, 2007, p.2). Using this framework within doctoral education study is not without shortcomings, as some researchers have criticised this approach for tending to downplay the agency of the doctoral candidate as a socially active player who socially constructs their environment and seeks to impact and change it (Ashforth et al., 2007; Torka, 2018). This contrasts with a framework such as Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, for example, that specifically acknowledges the agency of all players in a social field and the struggle for power and influence between and among them (see Chapter 3, section 3.2).

This section considers studies that focus on broad subject areas in doctoral education. It considers three different areas of research that have particular relevance for this study, namely feedback and writing, doctoral identity and researcher development, and inclusion and exclusion in doctoral education contexts. Drawing on these three different areas of research, this chapter demonstrates what existing literature reveals about these three research areas and how these findings have come to be known, and argues for the need to qualitatively focus on and consider the perspectives of doctoral candidates in relation to these three areas.

2.2.1 Feedback and writing

Research focusing on feedback and writing represents one of the central areas of interest in the context of doctoral education. This research has used a variety of methodological approaches, both quantitative and qualitative. This is representative, perhaps, of the multi-faceted nature of the subject that lends itself to an array of research approaches.

The term 'feedback' typically encompasses two components (Kumar & Stracke, 2007): a judgemental component and a suggestion component that directs the writer – the doctoral candidate in the context of this study – towards desired literacy goals, with guidance that evaluates the work submitted with the goal of moving the candidate forward to the next level of development. The goal is not just a good thesis, it is also the development of a competent and independent researcher and writer (Overall, Deane & Peterson, 2011; van Heerden & Clarence, 2024). Both feedback and 'feedforward' can be provided in a variety of linguistic styles ranging from praise to suggestions and criticism (Kumar & Stracke, 2007). The inherent power supervisors have relative to their students, by virtue of their research experience and expertise, means that they tend to play the lead role in the feedback process, directing and advising students in their research process. This means that they ought to take particular care when providing feedback to doctoral candidates who are dependent upon supervisory evaluation and direction.

The feedback process is a central means by which the supervisor guides and supports the candidate on their academic journey. Ideally, this ultimately leads towards the development of an independent and competent researcher and writer (Wang & Li, 2011). In an exploratory qualitative study which aimed to contribute, via semi-structured interviews, to an understanding of the feedback experiences of international students in PhD supervision, Wang and Li (2011) proposed that supervisory feedback plays a crucial role in enabling the candidate's academic maturation throughout the academic programme. The doctoral candidate benefits from engaging in intellectual dialogue with their supervisor with the objective of receiving guidance on their research and writing. However, this research did not explore the factors that might contribute to a breakdown in constructive feedback practices, nor what the consequences of those might look like.

Research argues that while giving good feedback can achieve the two goals of a completed thesis and a competent, independent researcher (Carter & Kumar, 2017), this is not necessarily an easy task for many supervisors. There are some supervisors who may be good writers, but struggle to describe what it is they do, or what their candidates need to do differently or better, as McAlpine and Amundsen (2011) found in their research on supervision practice. In their terms, '[s]upervisors may often be inarticulate when providing feedback; this in turn reduces the potential of the advice they provide students' (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011, p.10). This finding supports Bazerman's (2009) research which indicates that there is a gap, for many academics, between knowing how to produce their own writing and how to guide the writing development of others (Bazerman, 2009 cited in Páre, 2011, p.60). Furthermore, some supervisors may hesitate to give feedback on the actual writing itself – the form and structure of the text – holding the view that this is 'the work of those in writing centres since, in the view of many supervisors, writing is a generic skill..'. (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011, p.10).

Thus, there is a need for supervisors to receive support in giving feedback and perhaps for students to learn more overtly how to work with and ask for the feedback they need (van Heerden and Clarence, 2024). Some students may benefit from having a peer or mentor who can translate supervisory comments on their drafts, but others would have little idea what a supervisor's comment points to or why a section labelled 'unclear' is so and how to make it clearer (Carter & Kumar, 2017). They may be unable to work out whether they need to make minor corrections by editing, or more serious revisions to their argument and structure. This can be another cause of reciprocal frustration that undermines progress and timely research completion. The sense that both writing and feedback are personal may often make constructive feedback more challenging to give (Carter & Kumar, 2017) because many students find feedback painful, demoralising and hard to receive and respond to (Aitchison, Cotterall, Ross, & Burgin, 2012).

The need for constructive supervisory feedback represents a central aspect of constructive doctoral education – a reality agreed upon by candidates and supervisors (Ali, et al., 2016; Friedrich-Nel & Mac Kinnon, 2019; Roach, Christensen & Rieger, 2019). Constructive and timely feedback positively reinforces candidates' sense of doctoral identity, empowering them to traverse the field of doctoral education with an increasing sense of belonging (Taylor, Kiley & Humphrey, 2019). The inability to provide high-quality feedback to candidates has been shown to be one of the main causes of candidate-supervisor conflict and candidate dissatisfaction (Chireshe, 2012; Stracke & Kumar, 2020).

The doctoral writing process has received considerable empirical attention, particularly with respect to the extent of the emotions (Aitchison, et al., 2012; Cotterall, 2013; Gearity & Mertz, 2012) and stress involved (Gearity & Mertz, 2012; Sala-Bubaré & Castelló, 2018). For example, Aitchison et al. (2012) found the doctoral writing process in STEM disciplines to be associated with the idea of natural selection, with those unable to 'measure up' to disciplinary writing standards being at risk of not successfully completing their programme. Their Australian study involved surveys, interviews and focus groups to gather data from candidates and supervisors about their experiences of doctoral writing and their attitudes regarding its development. Accordingly, these authors found doctoral writing to elicit a variety of emotions, both positive (joy, pleasure) and negative (pain, frustration, confusion), with negative emotions dominating writing-related discourses. Aitchison et al. (2012) argue that candidates are emotionally attached to their writing and perceive it as part of their developing scholarly identities. Given the potential for doctoral candidates' strong emotional connection to their writing, it follows that the process of receiving feedback, especially of the negative or critical variety, would exert a considerable impact on their sense of belonging and legitimacy in the field. For supervisors, on the other hand, writing was perceived as a means to an end, with the end being the dissemination of research and contribution to their field (Aitchison, et al, 2012). This discrepancy in the meaning of writing was further observed to lead to a lack of support and high expectations from supervisors, thus enhancing students' emotional experiences. This view tends to be more typical in the sciences, where forms of laboratory and practical fieldwork tend to be more dominant than writing, especially in the earlier parts of the doctorate.

Writing in the social sciences, arts and humanities is, of course, quite differently approached, as the writing is done throughout the process and is a form of 'lab work' in terms of its role in knowledge-making. In addition, one important component of feedback in the social sciences is less focused on the writing. Rather, it has to do with the writer themselves and about helping them think more critically, read more widely, and develop their knowledge. This aspect of feedback has a role to play in a doctoral candidate's identity construction and transformation towards 'doctorateness', mentioned earlier in Chapter 1, subsection 1.2.3. Research provides evidence showing that feedback experiences influence doctoral candidates' confidence, their identity as writers, along with their scholarly independence or lack thereof (Can & Walker 2011; Inouye & McAlpine 2017). Studies also indicate that writing practiced in and from the early stages of collaborative and structured academic contexts contributes to the cultivation of a greater sense of ownership of the writing, ultimately promoting the development of a disciplinary expert identity (Chakma, Li & Kabuhung, 2021; Wilson & Cutri, 2021). Research by Inouye and McAlpine (2019, p.15) argues that 'the development of academic identity involves a dynamic relationship between feedback and writing through which feedback encourages critical thinking about research, disciplinary knowledge and writing expectations, and how the author represents him/herself in the text'. The authors state further that, in turn, this dynamic relationship may promote changes in doctoral candidates' holistic sense of themselves as researchers and research writers. It accomplishes this by raising the candidate's awareness of the need to be autonomous in their work, developing confidence, and starting to be recognised as experts in their discipline (or not) by other researchers (Inouye & McAlpine, 2019).

Giving feedback and evaluating doctoral writing effectively serves multiple purposes linked to emotion and identity development. In Spain, Castello, Iñesta and Monereo (2009) explored the regulatory strategies tied to doctoral writing, revealing them to be crucial not only for achieving disciplinary standards but also for reducing anxiety and negative emotions. Wei, Carter and Laurs (2019) conducted research which gathered data from 80 doctoral candidates across one Australian and one New Zealand university who described the first time that they submitted writing to their supervisor and received feedback. The data was collected via an anonymised digital survey, analysed using NVivo and further hand-coded to highlight the main themes in doctoral supervision among the responses. The participants shared the kinds of comments that induced negative emotions, calling for a more diplomatic tone to feedback, with one candidate recounting a supervisor who 'largely lived up to the reputation of screaming and throwing back the draft with corrections' (Wei, Carter & Laurs, 2018, p.164). Overall, the study revealed that the intensity of negative emotions related to the first-time exchange of doctoral writing represented a dominant theme. In addition, receiving feedback was often a deeply emotional experience for candidates, whether positive or negative in nature (Wei, Carter & Laurs, 2018). This seems to further indicate, in line with similar findings discussed earlier (Aitchison, et al., 2012), the significant amount of importance and energy that candidates attach to and invest in the submission of work and consequent feedback.

A further purpose performed by good feedback is to help students understand how to progress in their work and to develop strategies for revising and improving their writing (Castello, et al, 2009). For example, in an exploratory study of the practices of 19 doctoral candidates, Castello et al. (2009) sought to understand the difficulties and effective strategies candidates use when regulating the writing process of their academic texts. The researchers found that candidates' struggles and strategies in the writing process emerge in five stages, with the first being the planning stage in which they make the writing task explicit. Next is the revision stage in which stylistic and grammatical revisions are incorporated. In stage three, the structure stage, candidates organise the text according to the writing objective. Stage four, the control stage, involves purposefully regulating their writing to adhere to disciplinary standards. Finally, in the voice stage, candidates incorporate aspects of their personal writing style that reflect their personal perspective and professional identity (Castello, et al, 2009). This echoes research by Kiley and Wisker (2009) on thresholds that candidates within the doctorate need to cross to make the requisite progress and develop both a competent contribution to knowledge and a doctoral scholarly identity. Candidates who are well supported in moving through these stages and crossing these thresholds, which all implicate writing, fare better than those who are not.

Various research studies have focused on the subject of expectations in doctoral education and the importance of and need for clear communication in the supervision relationship (for instance, Grant & Yu, 2017; Stracke & Kumar, 2020; Cardilini, Risely & Richardson, 2022; Casey & Rutledge-Prior, 2023). What is of particular interest in the context of this study and in relation to doctoral writing is what expectations supervisors have regarding the quality of the writing expertise that doctoral candidates possess upon entering the field of doctoral study. These expectations undoubtedly influence the nature and scope of the feedback that supervisors then feel is sufficient and appropriate to provide. Supervisors' own experiences of being given feedback during their own doctoral studies may further shape how much and what kinds of feedback they offer their candidates. Regardless of variations in the nature and depth of feedback, some researchers argue that candidates ought to engage thoughtfully and critically with supervisor feedback (for example, Grant, 2003).

Also relevant and interesting to this study is what supervisors' expectations are informed by, and what the implications are of these expectations being unmet in terms of how they support candidates' writing. Some of the expectations regarding the quality of doctoral candidates' academic writing and research originates from university higher degrees guides which articulate requirements along these lines (discussed in detail in Chapter 5, section 5.2.2 and section 5.2 more broadly, which deal with expectations the field has of doctoral candidates). However, some researchers argue that universities need to set out clearer expectations at the outset, as many doctoral candidates – even those who seem well prepared – may struggle to fully understand what a doctorate is, what it requires of them, and how it differs from prior levels of study (Kiley & Wisker, 2009; Cotterall, 2011).

The efficacy of supervisory feedback is significantly influenced by various tensions that may exist in the relevant academic context. Carter and Kumar's (2017) study involving doctoral supervisors from a New Zealand university highlights the tensions affecting the reality of supervisory feedback, indicating the key areas affecting the feedback process, including time pressures on the academic, candidates ignoring and/or not responding to feedback, and language concerns resulting in complications such as grammar errors and generally poor quality of work. The supervisor participants expressed awareness of the delicacy required when providing honest feedback without discouraging the candidate. They also observed that negative emotional responses from candidates to constructive feedback can disrupt doctoral learning (Carter & Kumar, 2017). The study offered useful insight into the participating doctoral supervisors' perspectives and experiences related to feedback provision.

In reviewing the literature on doctoral writing and feedback highlighted in this chapter, it is evident that there are a number of studies, particularly in the last decade, that are interested in academic well-being and how candidates navigate their PhD and how critical aspects of supervision, like feedback on their writing, impact their confidence, their self-belief and the development of their doctoral identity. There is an increasing focus in the literature on the use of research methodologies that prioritise candidates' voice in a way that enables them to share the impacts of poor supervision, poor feedback, poor support from their universities and poor social integration. This study is joining these ongoing conversations to argue for how important research is that highlights candidates' real doctoral experience through elevating their stories first-hand. Furthermore, this study offers a more distinctive focus in its objective to prioritise the voice of doctoral candidates specifically with regard to how consequences of breakdowns in supervision may contribute to their decision to exit their doctoral programme prematurely.

Doctoral writing is tied to the development of the candidate's scholarly identity, in that one of the main ways in which they develop and demonstrate who they are and what they value as researchers is through writing. Additionally, feedback is one of the main mechanisms supervisors have for shaping or influencing this doctoral identity development – a mechanism impacted by the challenges associated with increasing neoliberal forces at work in doctoral education. Consequently, this inevitably impacts upon the efficacy of the role supervisors play in guiding candidates' identity development.

The development of a candidate's doctoral identity and their maturation as an independent, skilled researcher during the course of the doctoral journey are among the desired outcomes of constructive writing and feedback engagement, and they are the focus of the next section.

2.2.2 Doctoral identity and researcher development

Neoliberal forces in global higher education contexts have exerted a significant influence on doctoral candidates' conceptions of what it means to be a PhD student. In very real ways, academic identities are shaped by neoliberal practices and discourses (see Chapter 1, subsection 1.2.3). Considering the concept of identity more broadly at first, Gee (2000), who explains that '[b]eing recognized as a *certain 'kind of person*' in a given context' (2000, p.99 (emphasis in the original text)) is what he means by 'identity', which simultaneously relates the idea to 'the person's own narrativization' (2000, p.111), or in other words, to stories a person tells about themselves. The motif of a 'person's own narrativization' recurs in the description proposed by Holland, Lachicotte Jr, Skinner and Cain (1998), even if conceptualised in different terms, where they explain that people tell themselves who they are and endeavour to behave in ways which confirm and strengthen these self-affirmations. These self-understandings, particularly those which strongly resonate with the teller emotionally, are what the authors refer to as identities (Holland et al., 1998).

Identity is thought of as constructed and as being continuously created and re-created through interactions with others (Holland & Lave, 2001), It is experienced and socially constructed over the course of time through participation, action and interaction (McAlpine et al, 2010). Stets et al. (2020, p.200) define identity as 'a set of self-meanings derived from being a distinct person, role player, or member of a group or category'. Consequently, identity is formulated by attributing meanings to particular social positions and is activated and legitimised through interactions with the actors of their social networks. Stryker and Burke (2000) argue that the processes of activation and validation take place through identifying or creating situations that facilitate the expression and negotiation of the identity with other individuals.

Academic (role) identity, social identity, and personal identity are defined as the identities that doctoral students form during their doctoral education (Burke & Stets, 2022). In the context of this study, identity is represented by and in the 'stories that people tell themselves and others about who they are, and who they are not, as well as who and how they would like to/should be' (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p.266). It is a definition that acknowledges and focuses on the agency of the individual, i.e., the purposeful actions made by an individual in response to the possibilities and constraints they encounter (see Hoang & Pretorius, 2019).

It is, however, as Pretorius and Macaulay (2021) argue, important to remember that identity and agency are impacted by politics, contextual norms, other individuals, and axes of power (Yuval-Davis, 2010). Van Schalkwyk (2014) questions the nature of 'doctoral' identity, pondering whether it is a mantle that the doctoral candidate wraps more closely around them as they progress to a place where they earn access to the discourse of a specific scholarly community. Perhaps it is a combination of qualities including intellectual competence and confidence, independent thought, enthusiasm and dedication, and/or skill at adapting to changing circumstances and opportunities (Denicolo & Park, 2013). Trafford and Leshem (2009) suggest that it resides in someone who has made an innovative contribution to the frontiers of knowledge. There seems to be no good reason why these definitions should exist in mutual exclusivity, making it at least possible that the formation of doctoral identity involves a combination of some or all of them, to one degree or another.

Denicolo and Reeves (2013) refer to the transition between prior higher education levels and the doctoral degree as 'metamorphic' in nature, given the scope of the resultant change in state. It is an educational process and experience that is transformative given the manner in which it develops and shapes the doctoral candidates' scholarly identity (Denicolo & Reeves, 2013). A central aspect of doctoral candidates' academic experiences is the comprehension of the doctoral identity they develop over time (Pretorius & Macaulay, 2021). An identity is believed to be dynamic and continuously constructed as a result of participation in the social world – it is an ongoing process of transformation (Hoang & Pretorius, 2019). However, the healthy and constructive development of candidates' doctoral identity necessitates an enriching set of experiences which contribute to and enhance candidates' training and development as independent and competent researchers (González-Ocampo & Castelló, 2019). The evolution of identity in doctoral studies occurs over time but may be associated with moments of dissonance and crisis that push or lead candidates to places of change and growth (Barnett & Di Napoli, 2007; Jarvis-Selinger, Pratt & Regehr, 2012). The doctoral candidate is expected not only to participate in the process of acquiring and creating knowledge but also to navigate the developmental path towards what some scholars refer to as doctorateness (Trafford & Leshem, 2009; Frick, 2011).

Denicolo and Reeves (2013) argue that doctoral candidates should become aware of the skills required to mature as successful researchers. This includes seeking appropriate training and developmental opportunities that will help them gain these skills (Duke & Denicolo, 2017). Some of the skills and attributes expected of doctoral candidates relate to things that must take place before researching the thesis begins, some are expected during the thesis writing process, and others are expected once the research and writing are completed (Clarence & van Heerden, 2024). While doctoral programmes may well measure a candidate's progress in terms of clear milestones (such as being admitted to a programme, completing the proposal, and eventually defending the thesis), the internal transformation towards feeling like a scholar might occur along a very different route (Savva & Nygaard, 2021). This is particularly true for doctoral candidates who start their journey with experiences of isolation and struggle to feel like they belong in some genuinely profound way.

Furthermore, in a university context of mostly full-time students, part-time and mature doctoral candidates stand apart. The latter, often with a strong professional identity, might potentially feel like foreigners in an institution focused on disciplinary knowledge and the cultivation of an academic identity (Savva & Nygaard, 2021). A sense of belonging as a doctoral scholar develops in association with a sense of belonging in other groups also; Mantai (2019) proposes that doctoral candidates' feeling that they belong in personal, social and professional contexts is crucial to their 'becoming'. With this in mind, it can be understood how, for the doctoral candidate who feels marginalised from the dominant culture or social environment in a department or faculty, feelings of imposterism might well begin to take hold – this, beyond and in addition to whatever feelings of alienation and inadequacy they may experience associated with receiving harsh, unclear or confusing supervisory feedback.

An important component of doctoral students' academic journey and experiences is the understanding that they develop their doctoral identity over time (Pretorius & Macaulay, 2021). While individuals can take on varied identities, the specific focus in the context of this study is on academic identity. Pretorius and Macaulay (2021, p.3) define academic identity as 'that which is reflected in the narratives people use to describe themselves within the context of academia'. In the realm of doctoral study, a candidate's academic identity is formed as they negotiate their various identities via the act of conducting research (Hoang and Pretorius, 2019). As candidates unearth and contribute to the values, expertise, norms, and attitudes of their discipline, they are socialised into their respective disciplinary community and the broader intellectual academy (Roksa, Feldon, & Maher, 2018; Weidman, 2010). Being a member of different relevant scholarly communities, and engaging with others within these communities, appears to be vital to developing a robust academic identity (Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine & Hubbard, 2018).

Existing literature reveals that doctoral candidates develop their doctoral identity by engaging in various academic activities including socialisation (Hughes & Kleist, 2005; Trujillo, 2007; Gardner, 2008), writing (Aitchison, et al., 2012), and research (Trujillo, 2007). Research by McAlpine, Jazvac-Martek and Hopwood (2009) examined specific events and activities described by doctoral students as contributing to their membership in academic communities. Their study drew on a subset of data originating from a large longitudinal research programme involving social sciences doctoral candidates and supervisors in Canada (and more recently the United Kingdom). While activities such as programmatic requirements (e.g., completing one's comprehensive examination) or candidate responsibilities (e.g., lab meetings) were highlighted as central to one's academic identity, informal activities (e.g., engagements with members of the scholarly community) were reported as contributing not only to identity formation but also a sense of academic membership and belonging (McAlpine, Jazvac-Martek & Hopwood, 2009). Of interest in this research is that candidates reported peer interactions as facilitating their academic identity development to a greater extent than interactions with their supervisors or other faculty. This would seem to highlight their perception of peers being valued members of their scholarly community.

Numerous scholars have argued that participation in team projects, having opportunities to tackle problems in collaboration with more experienced academics and regular contact with other candidates are key experiences necessary for the development of an identity and longevity as a researcher (Gardner, 2006; Bain et al., 2010; McAlpine et al., 2012; Pyhältö and Keskinen, 2012; Spaulding and Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). In contrast to collaborative doctoral education environments, candidates' experiences of isolation may be exacerbated in contexts such as those prevalent in South African universities, given the reality that most doctoral candidates in the country study part-time for the doctoral degree (CHE, 2022). This means that these candidates commonly do not benefit from social networks and support systems that full-time students are exposed to. Feelings of being alone are also particularly relevant for candidates simultaneously navigating stressful and challenging circumstances related to their doctoral journey, which might negatively impact their confidence as emerging scholars. Existing research on identity formation in doctoral students concerning academic tasks, doctoral progress, socialisation, and self-regulation underscores the importance of continuing to examine how doctoral students' self-worth develops over time and the implications of low self-worth for student persistence and well-being.

Research conducted by Pretorius and Macaulay (2021) in Australia aimed to explore the well-being of doctoral candidates during their candidature, involving the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data (including narrative research). A total of 29 PhD candidates participated in the study, which in acknowledgement of the dynamic and intricate power relationships that exist within doctoral education used the theoretical lens of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory (1977, 1990a; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu's theory of practice is designed to facilitate a more comprehensive understanding of how individuals vie for and acquire social success. The study found that doctoral candidates' lack of confidence in their human capital often manifested as a sense of being an academic fraud (popularly termed the imposter phenomenon or syndrome). This affected their sense of identity. This imposter syndrome was also evident in several published autoethnographies by other doctoral candidates (Handforth, 2018; Pretorius, Macaulay & de Caux, 2019). It is important to note that this sense of isolation and being an imposter can also be the result of inequitable practices and policies in doctoral education, motivated by race, gender or class, which may leave candidates feeling excluded and marginalised (see for instance, Arday, 2021; Dinsmore & Roksa, 2023).

In addition, as Pretorius and Macaulay's (2021) study revealed, even when candidates exhibited a high level of identity capital[6] (derived and formed in a particular professional setting), they remained uncertain about how to actualise this professional identity in an academic context. Also, many of the doctoral candidates who participated in this study were international students, which the authors suggest may have contributed to a lack of social connection (i.e., social capital) within the university to assist them in building their doctoral identity. The study reveals, among other things, that the formation of doctoral identity is a complex phenomenon and one influenced by various dynamics within the doctoral education context. What the study does not examine, for example (and this is characteristic of the literature in general), is how various institution-related challenges in doctoral education may impact candidates' doctoral identity and what the eventual outcome of this impact may be if these challenges are left unaddressed, including the risk of attrition in doctoral study. What is of further interest regarding this study is the apparent explanatory power of Bourdieu's theory of practice for making sense of doctoral candidates' experiences (as expressed in their own words) and of interacting power relations within the doctoral study context. It is a theory which resonates with the aims and objectives of this study (discussed in detail in Chapter 3).

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[6] Refers to an individual's sense of identity informed by skills and experience acquired in a particular professional setting (for instance, identifying as a chartered accountant or a psychologist).

The doctoral journey involves a sense of 'being and becoming' that is associated with the emergence of a candidate's academic identity throughout their studies (Green, 2005; Barnett & Di Napoli, 2007). Candidates begin their doctoral journey with different forms of identity – for instance, personal, cultural/ethnic and professional. Upon entering the field of doctoral study, the development of a further form of identity (doctoral or scholarly) becomes relevant and necessary. The degree to which they succeed in taking on this doctoral identity can exert a profound influence over their sense of belonging or isolation in the field of doctoral study. It is this consequent inclusion or exclusion in doctoral education that is the focus of the next section.

2.2.3 Inclusion and exclusion

Inclusion and exclusion have a significant impact on identity formation in doctoral education. Much of the research on this matter, evidenced in part in this section, has taken a qualitative approach, using an interview or similar type of methodological design, with narratives commonly employed (although the use of surveys was not entirely uncommon). The choice of employing narrative research methods to chronicle and highlight the lived experience of individuals in a particular social context is appropriate, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, section 4.4.

From the start of their doctoral journey, doctoral candidates are simultaneously engaged in the process of being socialised as doctoral scholars and as professionals (Frisby, 2019). Doctoral candidates engage in socialisation through associations with varied university communities: student support services, supervisors and employers, professional organisations, and peer groups (Jackson, 2016). It is through the process and experience of socialisation that doctoral candidates learn and emulate the attitudes, actions, and values of professionals in their field of study (Clarke, Hyde & Drennan, 2013). Pretorius and Macaulay (2021) argue that it is important for universities to acknowledge and ascribe value to the varying types of capital and ways of being that a diverse candidate body brings into the field of doctoral education. It is well known from research that feeling disconnected or unwelcome – lacking belonging and/or community – increases the risk of attrition in doctoral study (Kirby & Thomas, 2021; Pedler, Willis & Niewoudt, 2022).

A common experience among doctoral candidates is that of imposter syndrome (Richards & Fletcher, 2019; Nori, Peura & Jauhiainen, 2020). Doctoral candidates often feel that they lack the necessary expertise and acumen that would otherwise make them feel a greater sense of belonging in the field. They subsequently feel like frauds, carrying lingering feelings and concerns of being 'found out' as being unfit for doctoral education. These feelings may contribute significantly to the experience of alienation (Alves, Lopes, Cruz-Correia & Menezes,, 2023) that some doctoral candidates struggle with as they attempt to navigate the doctoral education landscape. A situation in which a doctoral candidate experiences insufficient acclimatisation and immersion into the prevailing culture of research and/or the university itself (or place of employment) ushers in the potential risk of significantly delaying degree completion times (Hovdhaugen, Frølich & Aamodt, 2013).

This risk disproportionately impacts candidates from minority groups, including ethnic/racial minorities and those representing first-generation students (Pedler et al., 2022). Much of the research focused on inequality in doctoral students' experiences tends to highlight a particular group that has been historically excluded from academia (e.g., women or candidates of colour) (Dinsmore & Roksa, 2023). Surveys and interviews of and with candidates from marginalised racial and/or ethnic groups reveal feelings of isolation and experiences of discrimination and stereotyping, along with limited access to and benefit from mentoring and other resources (Ramirez, 2017; McGee, Griffith & Houston, 2019; Griffin, 2020).

For instance, and more specifically, the results of a study involving interviews with 79 candidates pursuing PhDs in biological sciences in the United States indicate that white men were able to access institutional knowledge and resources consistently through relationships with supervisors and received support from advisors with respect to cultivating professional networks that facilitated scholarly collaborations and advancement (Dinsmore & Roksa, 2023). These white men also received the benefit of their supervisors acting as cultural guides and networking coaches who developed candidates' ability to independently solve problems, secure resources and build strategic professional relationships (Dinsmore & Roksa, 2023). Conversely, female candidates and/or candidates of colour were more likely to have supervisors block access to resources through, for example, denying attendance at conferences or training opportunities and withdrawing funding. As a result, these relationships with supervisors reproduced race and gender inequality (Dinsmore & Roksa, 2023).

Some doctoral candidates who have experienced apathetic or toxic supervisors who have exhibited bully-like attitudes and behaviours can feel unsupported due to a lack of guidance and constructive feedback (Stockley, 2020). Doctoral candidates in this position often hide their negative experiences because 'exposing one's experiences of bullying within an organisation with a bullying culture might lead to feelings of inadequacy, deviance or even social exclusion' (Lewis, 2004, p.286). McAlpine and Norton (2006) note that supervision culture has many layers, defining it as a 'nested context'. Furthermore, academic culture has been described as having hierarchies and power relations which are influenced by a 'culture of silence', in which doctoral candidates (and supervisors alike, where applicable) are hesitant to express dissatisfaction or go against cultural norms (De Welde & Stepnick, 2015; Nardone, 2018; Grubbström & Powell, 2020), And this, of course, can compound feelings of imposterism and may be disproportionately experienced by racially minoritised candidates, indigenous candidates, and in many disciplines, women, too - not to mention members of the LGBTQ+ community and disabled candidates.

Beyond the provision of academic support during the course of the research process, supervisors should also be mindful of the different motivational tensions, backgrounds, perceptions and research practices that candidates bring to the doctoral research process (Meyer, Shanahan & Laugksch, 2005; Wisker, Robinson & Shacham, 2007). This involves viewing the doctoral candidate holistically, as a human being with strengths and weaknesses. Sambrook and Doloriert (2009) argue that the task of the supervisor implies not only technical support but also emotional support. The overrepresentation of whiteness within certain universities and their relevant departments creates a context in which students of colour rarely see students and faculty who look like them or share a similar background and experiences (Winkle-Wagner and McCoy, 2018). This can lead to students (and faculty) of colour feeling isolated and, consequently, to a campus and departmental climate that feels foreign, resulting in a poor sense of belonging and a lack of socialisation (Zambrana, Ray, Espino, Castro, Cohen & Eliason, 2015).

The kinds of inequalities mentioned above can result in affected doctoral candidates experiencing forms of stress that are practically unique to minority groups navigating exclusionary dominant cultures. For these individuals, chances of success in doctoral education are influenced – beyond their control – by more than academic acumen or personal determination. McClain, Beasley, Jones, Awosogba, Jackson and Cokley (2016), discussing exploitation and abusive practices experienced by minorities in higher and doctoral education contexts, refer to and define minority status stress as varying forms of stressors that minorities face from dominant racial groups. These include discrimination, racism and microaggression (which includes inconsiderate comments and questioning whether they belong in academic settings). Following a quantitative examination of minority stress and imposter syndrome among 218 black college students in the United States, McClain et al.'s (2016) research found that minority stress status was tied to exacerbated experiences of impostor syndrome among black students. Also employing a quantitative study, Bernard, Lige, Willis, Sosoo and Neblett (2017) researched the impact of gender and racial discrimination associated with imposter syndrome and mental well-being among 157 black students attending predominantly white institutions, also in the U.S.A. Based on the findings, black women who reported high frequencies of discrimination were more prone to experiencing elevated impostor phenomenon levels (Bernard et al., 2017).

Doctoral candidates also express their perceptions of ongoing racially motivated comments that disparage their intellect. For instance, in a qualitative study involving 33 Mexican–American doctoral candidates who earned their PhDs in varied disciplines at 15 universities (Espino, 2014), these individuals reported having their academic competency questioned by faculty. In other research using a critical race theory framework, Williams, Brown, Burnett, Carroll and Harris (2018) interviewed 25 black doctoral candidates enrolled across 13 public research universities in the US. The researchers discovered related problems when eliciting candidates' views of racially motivated comments regarding their academic ability from members of the faculty. Candidates' sense of belonging and validity in the academy were undermined, negatively impacting their academic identity. It is clear that a strong link exists between how the doctoral academy and those representing the majority/dominant cultures within it, treat and welcome those considered 'other' or 'lesser', and the latter's sense of belonging.

Studies like those outlined above are useful for highlighting some of the power relations and dynamics that come into effect when different cultures and opposing practices come into contact with one another in the context of doctoral education. What is less known from this research is how supervision practices and departmental or faculty structures specifically either enable or constrain doctoral students' identity development and academic progress. Furthermore, also of interest is how doctoral candidates attempt to navigate these sorts of challenges, what is available to them by way of support, and what the impact is when that support is not forthcoming.

Given the above-mentioned USA-based research and their findings concerning discrimination and marginalisation experienced by minorities in doctoral education, it stands to reason that a country like South Africa with its deeply racialised past could present minority doctoral candidates with similar challenges. All South African universities have clear data about the demographic details of their students, their success and failure rates, and other related statistics. Despite this, as Boughey & McKenna (2021, p.71) point out, most institutional documents that the authors reviewed 'were silent on macro-level structures such as race and how this correlates with student success more broadly and their own institution more specifically'. The implications – for belonging and succeeding in South African doctoral education – of matters such as race, gender and class are interwoven in and form part of the experiences of the participants in this study, discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

One form of teaching and learning in the doctoral education context that has been shown to significantly impact the candidate's sense of belonging or isolation is that of peer learning, and related, the idea of communities of practice. These concepts and their implications for doctoral study are the focus of the next section.

2.2.4 Peer learning and communities of practice

Calls are increasing internationally for doctoral education to acknowledge and embrace more collaborative and structured approaches to teaching and learning, for example, doctoral writing groups (Kumar and Aitchison, 2018; de Caux and Pretorius, 2024). A wide range of studies have found that peer mentoring approaches to doctoral education yield both instrumental (career) and psychosocial benefits to doctoral candidates. For example, writing from an Australian context, Booth, Merga and Mat Roni (2016) explained their role as peer mentors within an official peer-to-peer service where candidate ambassadors were hired to assist other candidates with challenges specific to their research. The three researchers (themselves doctoral candidates in education and accounting) shared that peer mentoring improved their own learning experience, fostering reflective practice, providing teaching and research support experience, creating avenues for professional networking, and supporting their social needs.

Similarly, in their case study, Lowery, Geesa and McConnell's (2019) research objective was to understand first-year doctoral candidate participants' experiences in a peer mentoring programme. Using interviews and focus group data with 11 mentees and four mentors in an education cohort programme at Ball State University, the authors found that mentoring interactions helped participants with goal-setting and pre-planning for major exams, choosing a research topic, and professional goals and expertise. In addition, the findings of the study also revealed, importantly, that mentoring interactions improved mentees' self-efficacy. Mentees shared their enhanced capability to successfully navigate their doctoral programme, which they deemed a direct result of mentors sharing their knowledge about what to expect in their programme and their encouragement (Lowery, Geesa & McConnell, 2019).

In mixed methods research, Webb, Wangmo, Ewen, Teaster and Hatch (2009) explored faculty-student and peer-to-peer mentoring from both mentees' and mentors’ points of view at the University of Kentucky Graduate Centre for Gerontology. Peer mentors were paired with incoming candidates. Results from surveys (with responses from nine recent graduates, 12 current candidates, and eight faculty members) demonstrated that peer mentees saw peer mentors as providing critical social support, encouraging other candidates and reassuring them. In addition, mentees saw peer mentors as providers of social support and counsel, while mentees experienced faculty mentors as responsible for guidance and skill-building. Continuing the theme of research communities, O’Meara, Griffin, Kuvaeva, Nyunt and Robinson (2017) conducted an exploratory, cross-sectional survey study of doctoral candidates at four public doctoral and comprehensive universities in Maryland, USA. A total of 1,533 candidates from institutions completed the survey. To analyse their data, the authors used Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). Their research discovered that although professional relationships, microaggressions, and micro-affirmations affected doctoral candidates’ sense of belonging, a lack of professional networks and role models represented a greater barrier to their sense of belonging and ultimately to retention in doctoral programmes (O’Meara et al., 2017).

The findings above are also in line with a study by Shacham and Od-Cohen (2009) focused on the experiences and learning outcomes of doctoral candidates after involvement in communities of practice (CoP). In this setting, they frequently worked in small groups with other doctoral candidates and faculty to develop ideas, share difficulties and successes, and receive feedback on research. The researchers found that candidates preferred face-to-face interaction, which represented a significant contributor to their learning and development. Candidates also shared that they embraced reflective thinking habits, became more open to criticism, and benefited from a better understanding of concepts and ideas in their field. Finally, candidates reported receiving significant emotional support through their CoP participation, emphasising the otherwise rare nature of this form of support in their doctoral experience.

Although the implementation of more collaborative kinds of doctoral writing models has been slow in South Africa, interesting forms of structured models are beginning to emerge (Wilmot, 2024). Furthermore, while the doctoral thesis that is examined needs to be written by the individual scholar and be representative of their independent research, there are compelling arguments for more collaborative methods concerning the doctoral process (McKenna, 2017), particularly supervision.

The next section of this thesis examines the literature on the subject of doctoral supervision, first exploring the notion of supervision as a pedagogic practice, and then the various forms and styles of doctoral supervision. Finally, literature relating to relationship building and development within the supervision relationship is explored.

2.3 Supervision Studies

The focus of this doctoral study is on candidate perspectives and stories related to doctoral attrition, with a particular emphasis on their experiences of institutional-related factors broadly, and doctoral supervision more specifically. Before delving into these candidate perspectives, it is necessary to discuss doctoral supervision as a field of research in order to understand the context within which the candidate-supervisor relationship plays out and the factors that impact it.

Following challenges related to tuition funding (CHE, 2022), the next most impactful factor that affects doctoral candidates' experiences is their relationship with their supervisor(s). Supervisors play a central role in candidate satisfaction, persistence, and academic progress (Solem, Hopwood, & Schlemper, 2011; Gube, Getenet, Satariyan & Muhammad, 2017). In the field of doctoral education, the balance of power between candidate and supervisor favours the latter (Agu & Odimegwu, 2014). Supervision that is understanding and considerate in nature can facilitate trust and openness (Gunasekera, Liyanagamage & Fernando, 2021; Buirski, 2021) in the heart and mind of the doctoral candidate and cultivate a safe environment within which they can confidently engage in meaningful discussions and seek guidance. To be a supervisor is a great responsibility, as doctoral candidates entrust their supervisor with a crucial stage of their scholarly development (Bacwayo, Nampala & Oteyo, 2017). It is an experience that can have a profound impact on the student’s life and future. Some candidates become disillusioned with academic pursuits due to their experiences with supervisors, whereas others blossom into accomplished researchers because of their experience. Bacwayo et al. (2017) go as far as to say that addressing candidates’ needs, interests and expectations matters a great deal, and generally speaking, academics who are not prepared to take this responsibility seriously should not become supervisors.

To fully appreciate the significance of the student-supervisor relationship in the doctoral experience, it is essential first to consider the fundamental nature of this academic collaboration and how it is framed and understood in the literature. This is the focus of the next section which examines the notion of supervision existing, first and foremost, as a form of pedagogy.

2.3.1 Supervision as a pedagogic practice

Supervision goes beyond the scholarly process of guiding candidates to rigorously employ systematic research strategies (Diezmann, 2005); it is also ‘a dynamic process and a journey of growth and empowerment’ (Bailey, 2002, p.7). The pedagogic relationship that exists between the doctoral candidate and research supervisor(s) represents an important relational teaching and learning space – a space that exists irrespective of the doctoral programme structure (Manathunga, 2005). Supervision pedagogy, substantially shaped by the Oxbridge tutorial system at the time the PhD programme was introduced in the United Kingdom in 1917 (Simpson, 1983), was formulated on a transmissive approach to education in which students wished to soak up their supervisor’s knowledge (Grant, 2001). These scholarly apprentices were expected to possess sufficient 'genius' to absorb their supervisor’s experience and expertise (Yeatman, 1995). In their influential article on postgraduate pedagogy, Green and Lee (1995), expanding upon early arguments by Connell (1985) that supervision is a form of teaching, argue persuasively that supervision is a form of pedagogy involving intricate power relations concerning the supervisor, the candidate and knowledge. These power relations are further complicated and intensified in the master-apprentice supervision context, given that the private nature of the supervisory relationship is at times problematic (Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004; Manathunga, 2005, 2007). The increased privacy inherent in one-to-one supervision exacerbates the difficulty in accessing and researching these relationships (Manathunga, 2005), and these veiled pedagogical spaces are often breeding grounds for underlying problems related to identity and power (Grant, 2003).

It is, however, worth noting and appreciating that supervisors and candidates do not exist in a vacuum – they play out their roles in an environment which could either enable or undermine the fulfilment of their research endeavours. Masek and Alias (2020) state that it is therefore important to understand the responsibilities and characteristics that candidate and supervisor bring to the doctoral study process, the potential dynamics of interactions between them and the (in)adequacy of support provided by the context they work in so that a deeper understanding of effective supervision can be attained (Mkhabela & Frick, 2016). Doctoral pedagogy is a complex business, at least in part due to the intricacies of the candidate-supervisor relationship. Researchers like Barbara Grant have argued that candidate-supervisor relationships can be ‘complex and unstable... filled with pleasures and risks’ (Grant, 2003, p.175) and ‘unpredictable and demanding’ (Grant, 2011, p.247) for both candidates and supervisors alike.

This may be particularly true in cases of the ‘master-apprenticeship’ or one-on-one model of supervision in which doctoral candidates often work in relative isolation with one supervisor (Frick, Brodin, Albertyn, Scott-Webber, Branch, Bartholomew & Nygaard, 2014). Examining the master-apprentice model, Dysthe (2002), based on her analysis of responses of candidates and supervisors interviewed on research supervision experiences, developed three supervision models characterised by teaching, partnership, and apprenticeship. The teaching model is representative of the conventional teacher-student relationship, drawing on an asymmetrical power dynamic where the supervisor provides corrections to the student and exercises control and direction over the student’s work. The apprenticeship model is based on the student observing and mirroring the supervisor’s actions. In this model, the student acquires research skills by engaging in the actual practice of research, guided by the supervisor’s practical example. In the apprenticeship model, a stance of passivity may be adopted by the student, accepting feedback uncritically and inserting suggestions into the research document, while placing greater confidence in the expertise of the supervisor as opposed to their own ability to formulate a competent argument (Knowles, 1999 cited in Kumar & Stracke, 2007). However, as pointed out in the previous section, this model is becoming less popular in many contexts, due to a recognition that candidates, supervisors and research projects need additional support.

Supervisors are often assumed or expected to understand what makes the pedagogic relationship with candidates productive and ultimately successful, including which supervisory approaches/expertise are most appropriate during the evolving doctoral journey (Gatfield, 2005). Research literature suggests that teaching at the doctoral level is a specialised skill which needs to be cultivated beyond the level of a supervisor having been supervised themselves (Grossman & Crowther, 2015). It necessitates understanding the interconnectedness between research and teaching within the supervision development process (Lee, 2008). With the changed understanding increasingly brought on by neoliberalism of the doctorate as being for industry and not just academia, the pedagogy at the doctoral level has become more intricate.

For these reasons, Fulgence (2019, p.726) makes the case that ‘supervision development training needs to include multiple issues of which the training component should aim to enable the supervisor to provide support throughout the doctoral process’. Numerous universities offering doctoral education now provide training opportunities and resources to facilitate supervisory development and practice (Kiley, 2015; Taylor & McCulloch, 2017). Training of this nature is of great importance for facilitating effective doctoral supervision - supervision that necessitates a good relationship and engagement between supervisor(s) and candidate to ensure sound and successful research outcomes, as well as to understand various practices, processes, potential difficulties and triumphs associated with postgraduate research (Kiley & Mullins 2005; Sambrook, Stewart & Roberts, 2008). Appropriate supervisor training is also necessitated by the fact that, as Bitzer (2010) points out, there is ample evidence in the literature pointing to supervisors basing their supervisory approach on their own experiences as a doctoral candidate.

In the South African doctoral education context, this relatively private pedagogic relationship is potentially even more complicated due to the complex historical past that continues to impact current learning spaces. The racial inequalities that were representative of colonial rule and the apartheid regime have left indelible scars on the South African doctoral education landscape (Mkhabela & Frick, 2016). Grant (2010b, p.351) articulates doctoral supervision as a 'pedagogy in which our raced, classed and gendered bodies are present', and as Mkhabela and Frick (2016) observe, when such supervision occurs across ethnic cultures, as is the case in the South African context, it ‘becomes a pedagogical site of rich possibility as well as, at times, a place of puzzling and confronting complexity’ (Grant, 2010b, p.351).

2.3.2 Forms and styles of supervision

Models of doctoral supervision have a long-standing tradition in the areas of psychology, guidance and counselling, and education. Masek and Alias (2020) have discussed how doctoral supervision can be provided by a single thesis supervisor working independently with the candidate (also known as the master-apprentice model), by a team of supervisors with one assuming the role of a main supervisor while the rest serve as the co-supervisors or as a supporting supervisory panel, or a supervisory committee comprised of faculty members who each play specific roles that are allocated to them. There is also the partnership model that features a more symmetrical relationship with dialogue being the central strategy. This model is closely related to the peer-to-peer model (Wang & Li, 2011), with the supervisor regarding the student as an academic in practice and as a colleague.

Consequently, the process of feedback provision is mentoring in nature, characterised by the student and supervisor embracing the open exchange of research insights and possible directions. Lessing (2011) points out that in order to improve the throughput for doctoral candidates, supervisors will have to assume greater responsibility and accept a mentoring role, in keeping with the modern trend emerging and revealed in international literature (Pearson & Brew, 2002; Manathunga, 2007; Makhamreh & Stockley, 2020). Gurr (2001) argues that doctoral supervision represents a vehicle for empowering candidates to mature into competent, independent researchers through the alignment of the candidates' needs at each phase of doctoral study to the supervisors' supervisory styles. This process involves a transition between two proposed styles – 'hands-on' or 'hands-off' – depending on the needs of the candidate through the various stages of thesis research and writing.

McKenna and van Schalkwyk (2023) claim that in the South African context, despite rapid increases in doctoral candidate enrolments, a recent national review of the doctorate raises questions concerning the models of doctoral supervision used in the country (CHE, 2022). Although, as noted earlier, team supervision models are relatively widely used in the Global North, the South African context is lagging, with the one-on-one model remaining the dominant form of doctoral supervision in the country. The dominance of one-on-one and co-supervision in South Africa, along with the absence of curriculated support structures such as coursework or departmental seminars, have for a long time been implicated in South Africa's high doctoral attrition statistics (for example, ASSAf, 2010; For novice supervisors in particular, discovering what the supervision or co-supervisory role includes can be difficult (Wilkin, Khosa & Burch, 2023). Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard (2016) and Manabe, Nambooze, Okello, Kamya, Katabira, Ssinabulya, Kaddumukasa, Nabunnya, Bollinger and Sewankambo (2018) argue that more appropriate models of supervision than the one-on-one model need to be employed.

The continued dominance of the master-apprentice supervision model and approaches to doctoral education that neglect collaborative components are viewed as a central contributing factor to this issue (ASSAf, 2010; CHE, 2022). Conversely, around the world, there has been an increase in project-team approaches to doctoral education where a group of academics engage with a specific problem area and use a shared theoretical framework (McKenna, 2014). These approaches have in common an intentional focus on collaborative engagement between doctoral scholars, also creating support for supervisors. Joint or team supervision is the norm in contexts in the Global North, such as Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom, across the disciplines, which means supervisors and candidates benefit from additional perspectives on the research and support (see McAlpine, 2013; Olmos-López and Sunderland, 2017; Robertson, 2017).

In a wide-ranging review of two decades of international literature on supervision models, McKenna and van Schalkwyk (2023) offer evidence of the international trend towards collaborative and structured doctoral supervision models. The authors discuss how this trend has been informed by numerous factors that include: a growing knowledge economy and a resultant need for more efficient approaches to doctoral education; internationalisation and the necessity of providing opportunities for collaboration in knowledge-building and networking; and the increase of interdisciplinary research requiring a more comprehensive and diverse approach to supervision and understanding of quality (McKenna & van Schalkwyk, 2023). While the responses to more efficient approaches to doctoral education have involved a variety of different approaches and offerings, the authors make the case that there exists a ‘clear trend towards curriculating for more structure and towards more intentional community building’ in doctoral education (McKenna & van Schalkwyk, 2023, p.5).

Moving away from or at least diversifying beyond one-on-one supervision does not suggest that more structured approaches are not without challenges (McKenna & van Schalkwyk, 2023). Among these challenges in collaborative, structured models is the fact that varying rates of progress among candidates are more apparent. These models often involve having shared milestones, necessitating flexibility within the supervision team relating to managing candidates who progress at varying rates (Carr, 2021). In addition, Guerin and Green (2015), observe that doctoral candidates in Australia experienced difficulty with negotiating feedback from multiple sources. Challenges of this kind are also noted in the South African context with respect to supervisory feedback in cohort supervision models (Ngulube & Ukwoma, 2019). In more collaborative approaches to doctoral education, a degree of responsibility and accountability is transferred from the single supervisor or co-supervisors to the relevant university (Lachmann, Martius, Eberle, Landmann, von Kotzebue, Neuhaus & Herzig, 2020). This transfer yields positive consequences only in contexts where there exists a 'purposeful faculty nurturance, departmental collaboration, and administrative guidance' (Govender and Dhunpath, 2011, p.90). Conversely, where these broader departmental and faculty interventions are lacking, the risk of supervisory neglect or abuse may increase.

In Canadian, Irish and Australian doctoral education contexts researchers have observed that problems arise when it is unclear which roles ought to be fulfilled by different supervisors (Vanstone, Hibbert, Kinsella, McKenzie, Pitman & Lorelei, 2013) and that varying degrees of expertise need to be managed and negotiated while remaining mindful of the social hierarchies inherent in collaborations involving different actors (Robertson, 2017). Despite these and other challenges related to structured approaches to supervision, the advantages are argued to outweigh any drawbacks, consequently making structured and collaborative models worth pursuing. As Wilmot (2024) reiterates, calling on the research addressing the subject (Wisker et al., 2007; De Lange, Pillay & Chikoko, 2011), collaborative models, in particular, are deemed to lessen candidates' experiences of isolation and loneliness associated with the traditional one-on-one model. These models also mitigate the inherent unequal power dynamics between a single supervisor and candidate.

Team supervision is able to provide candidates with a broader intellectual and social support structure. In particular, it aims to address concerns associated with the master-apprentice supervision model, regarded as a private space (Manathunga, 2005), representing a potentially problematic means of inducting doctoral candidates into academic disciplines. Research by Chiang (2003) contrasted the learning experiences of full-time doctoral candidates in 28 education departments and 31 chemistry departments in universities in Great Britain. A questionnaire comprising two major aspects of the learning process, supervision and research environment for doctoral candidates, was shared with about 2,200 candidates. The results demonstrated that in natural sciences departments where there commonly exist teamwork research training structures in which candidates and supervisors collaborate on research projects, the former are significantly more satisfied with their doctoral programme. This is in contrast with social sciences candidates who participate primarily in research training structures that are individualistic in nature.

In natural sciences contexts, the candidate is usually viewed as a junior member of the research group, with interactions within the group generally being collegial and frequent. In social science programmes, however, the candidate is instead typically viewed as a learner, with supervisory interactions being more formal and hierarchical and often less frequent. This apprenticeship/protégé model of supervision has been characterised by Grant (2008) as a master/slave relationship, highlighting the intricate and contradictory mutual relations of domination and subordination inherent in it. This model of supervision is commonly defined as exploitation or abuse at worst, or apathy and neglect at best. It stands the greatest chance of succeeding if the supervisor and candidate are able to develop good rapport, and if the candidate shares a similar social class and ethnic background to that of the supervisor or is at least able to mimic the relevant attitudes, fashion, forms of speech and conduct (Manathunga, 2012).

2.3.3 Supervisory relationship building and development

The focus of this section is on the nature and development of the relationship between doctoral candidate and supervisor. This includes how candidates and supervisors come to be paired and what constitutes a good fit between them. A significant portion of the literature on these matters has used qualitative approaches such as semi-structured interviews.

In a study of six Australian doctoral candidates, Cotterall (2013) explored the most commonly occurring situations that elicited strong emotional interactions within doctoral programmes. The study employed three hour-long interviews per year over two years and the results revealed that most emotional episodes involved candidates' interactions with supervisors. It is worth noting that most of the feedback from the participants concerning supervisors was positive, acknowledging their efficiency and support. This is potentially significant because it suggests that these were not merely disgruntled individuals pursuing some form of academic 'witch-hunt'. However, it was the discrepancy between supervisors' and students' expectations that generated confusion, stress, and anxiety in candidates. This related to stress and anxiety beyond what is expected in any learning situation, particularly in the context of the doctorate, which especially involves a pedagogy of discomfort where the student is meant to be challenged in their thinking (Wilmot & McKenna, 2023). Candidate-supervisor expectations exert a significant influence over the nature of this critically important collaboration in doctoral education. It is however preceded by questions around how candidates and supervisors come to work together in the first place.

On the matter of matching between candidate and supervisor, Ray (2007) undertook a mixed-method study in India of 23 junior and senior doctoral candidates that identified the key elements influencing the choice of a research supervisor. From the findings of the study, it was evident that doctoral candidates are not only concerned with support related to subject matter and methodology. To a large degree, candidates valued productivity, partnership and commitment on the part of their supervisor. In similar findings, Ives and Rowley (2005) argue that while doctoral candidates were willing to sacrifice a match in methodology when deciding on a new supervisor, they were not prepared to compromise on research interests and/or interpersonal work values (for instance, communication style and frequency, honouring timelines, etc.), with the latter viewed as being most critical to the strength of the supervisory relationship.

Research in Australia by Ives and Rowley (2005) highlighted that candidates who were allocated a supervisor by the department tended to be dissatisfied with their doctoral programme in contrast with those who were able to choose their supervisor. This research result was echoed in Lovitts' (2001) study which discovered that doctoral programme graduates were six times less likely than non-completers to have had their supervisor assigned to them (7% versus 44%, respectively). Considered together, these research results indicate that a collaborative and collegial supervisory relationship is best facilitated when candidates can exercise agency in exploring a potential fit, and where shared interests and agreed-upon mutual responsibilities define the relationship.

Pertaining to the issue of fit in the supervision–candidate relationship, numerous empirical studies have found the nature of the fit between supervisor and candidate greatly impacts candidates' emotions (Lin, 2012; Cotterall, 2013; McAlpine & McKinnon, 2013) and academic persistence (Gube, et al., 2017; Leijen, Lepp & Remmik, 2016; Litalien & Guay, 2015). In 2018, a systematic literature review was conducted (Masek & Alias, 2020), on articles published between the years 2000 and 2018 that contained several combinations of the keywords, 'doctoral supervision in education'. The articles were selected and the review was framed based on the three central components of doctoral supervision: management system, students, and supervisor. Masek's and Alias's (2020) research highlights three key areas that are necessary for establishing effective doctoral supervision. These are fit in expectations between supervisors and candidates based on clear and open discussion, fit in thinking regarding what constitutes effective supervision (process and outcomes), and fit in personality and styles with respect to issues such as interpersonal working relationships and communication between supervisors and candidates (Masek & Alias, 2020). It is worth noting here that the 'personality and styles' aspect in the context of this study is located primarily as a social construct as opposed to a psychological one, with 'fit' related more to the context of supervisor-candidate relations than inherent characteristics of the individuals.

Of interest is that although extensive research links dissatisfaction with supervision to doctoral candidate attrition, a study from Gardner (2009) found that supervisors are commonly unaware of their possible role in candidate dropout. Semi-structured interviews with 60 doctoral candidates and 34 supervisors from doctoral programmes in the United States revealed that supervisors perceive candidate drop-out as being primarily due to candidates not possessing the competency or motivation that a doctoral education demands (Gardner, 2009). In the view of the relevant academics, this is followed by other problems such as complicated circumstances in candidates' personal lives that undermine their academic progress. Although candidates in the same study included disruptive personal circumstances as among the major problems that impacted their learning, they also named inadequate supervision as one of the central themes.

Qualitative research and using interviews and narrative methods, in particular, can be very effective when examining the experiences of candidates and supervisors in doctoral education. Of course, what this research uncovers is determined largely by the framing of the relevant research problem and the nature of the research questions. What is less known from the abovementioned and similar studies is how candidates attempt to navigate situations in which supervisory breakdown occurs, or what avenues are available to them, whether clearly communicated by the university or not. Furthermore, there is little known from the research concerning what kind of response candidates are met with from departmental or institutional structures or academics in leadership when looking for supportive intervention.

2.3.4 A brief word on the memorandum of understanding

In the South African context, the existence of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) is not uniform across the higher education sector. An MoU is a formal agreement between a doctoral candidate and supervisor(s) intended to clarify the ‘rules of engagement’ that define the nature of their academic relationship. These guidelines typically address matters including the regularity of meetings, in which format work is submitted and feedback is provided, how often submissions of work are made, the turnaround time for the provision of feedback, and so on. With these kinds of matters clarified, the candidate and supervisor(s) should ideally approach the relationship with clearer expectations regarding everyone’s roles and responsibilities. In some instances, an MoU is mandatory, while in others, a recommendation. Within many universities, the application of the MoU policy is additionally inconsistent with DDNR (CHE, 2022). An MoU between candidate and supervisor ought to clarify expectations with regard to research outputs, the submission of work and receipt of feedback, and other deliverables and deadlines. Furthermore, it should be useful as a guide in monitoring student progress and quality standards (CHE, 2022).

Of concern in South African doctoral education is that in many instances, records of student progress appear to be kept at a supervisor level and are not recorded centrally or formally. This means that while a supervisor may have knowledge of a student's progress, the records may not be available for monitoring at higher levels and therefore may not be useful in any cautionary or disciplinary proceedings (CHE, 2022). The DDNR (CHE, 2022) expresses further concern about the degree to which candidates appear to be unaware or insufficiently informed concerning the MoU that should be in place in their faculty/university, along with its terms and criteria.

The role that broader departmental or faculty systems and structures play in enabling or hindering candidates' progress in this regard is one of the matters that this study determined warrants closer scrutiny. The various supervisory and institutional factors that doctoral candidates may potentially experience in and during their programme of study have the capacity to influence their attitudes, emotions and choices related to exiting doctoral study prematurely. Attrition in doctoral education represents a persistent and significant challenge for the higher education sector, both nationally and globally, as the next section explores.

2.4 Doctoral Attrition

It has been noted in the literature that carefully considering their reasons for pursing doctoral study and possessing a keen interest in the relevant research topic are key factors that motivate individuals to undertake a doctorate (Leonard, Becker & Coate 2005; Moreno & Kollanus 2013). However, even with this enthusiastic interest present, it is often not enough to sustain a candidate's continuation of their studies in the face of varied challenges. Concerns related to candidates' premature withdrawal from doctoral education have motivated researchers worldwide to examine the multiple varied factors which may contribute to these withdrawal figures (McAlpine et al., 2020). Attrition in doctoral education is high among higher education institutions around the world (Geven, Skopek & Triventi, 2018), with reported rates as high as 40 to 50 per cent of postgraduate researchers in North America, for example, exiting their doctoral programme before completion (Litalien & Guay, 2015). In the South African context, although access to doctoral education has been widened in the post-apartheid era, participation, retention, and notably throughput rates in doctoral education remain low and racially skewed (Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard, 2016).

Attrition can be viewed as a process in which doctoral candidates weigh the costs and benefits of persisting with their studies or not, followed by actually ending their studies accordingly or not (Jaksztat, Neugebauer & Brandt, 2021) (Refer to Chapter 3, subsection 3.6 for a theoretical discussion related to weighing the cost of persistence). Maher, Wofford, Roksa and Feldon (2019) observe that high attrition rates have been a trademark trait of doctoral studies for decades (Berelson, 1960; Bowen & Rudenstine, 2014). Even if previous research indicates that at least some PhD candidates who exit doctoral study intend to re-enrol at some point in the future (Matias, 2013), there is a gap in the literature related to post-withdrawal experiences of PhD candidates and the factors and processes related to their decision to exit their doctoral programmes (Alves et al., 2024). This section discusses the state of doctoral education research and motivates the value and necessity of research into the doctoral candidate experience, particularly as it relates to the subject of attrition.

Doctoral candidates who reach the point of withdrawing from their studies face this decision for a variety of reasons. Among these reasons, for example, Castelló et al. (2017) argue that the intention to withdraw is linked to socialisation in the academic context or a lack of research resources, but is additionally also connected to an imbalance between work or personal life and doctoral studies, inadequate personal and research skills, eroded motivation and attribution of value to doctoral education, or unhealthy emotions and mental health issues associated with the demands of doctoral studies. Other research notes that at every level of doctoral education, finances are often a key factor in a candidate choosing to leave their studies (for instance, Ali & Kohun, 2007). Researchers have also highlighted the role of doctoral candidates' agency and self-direction factors (Maher, Wofford, Roksa & Feldon, 2020). Meanwhile, Jaksztat et al. (2021) conceptualises the decision to withdraw as a rational choice, dependent on an assessment of the costs and advantages of either dropout or persistence. This choice is influenced by the candidate's characteristics or conditions (e.g., upbringing; previous academic grades) and academic socialisation experiences.

As has been pointed out previously, this study is concerned with instances where the doctoral candidate's decision to withdraw is specifically connected to their experiences of institutional-related factors broadly, and doctoral supervision more specifically. Although several studies have investigated patterns and signposts of success among doctoral candidates (Hopwood, 2010; Martinsuo & Turkulainen, 2011; McAlpine, Paulson, Gonsalves & Jazvac-Martek, 2012), less research focus has been devoted to the well-being of students, particularly research that takes their own voices and stories into account. This represents a relatively new area of study in the field of doctoral education. Researchers such as Pyhältö, Tikkanen and Anttila (2023) have done some recent related work on supervisors' and candidates' well-being. However, the subject of doctoral candidates' well-being, elevated by their own voice, and particularly in the context of navigating significant supervisory and institutional challenges, requires further scholarly attention.

An analysis of factors that facilitate doctoral candidate achievement has suggested that the context of a student's education environment can either enable well-being and success or instead contribute to dysfunctional emotions and ultimately withdrawal (Pyhältö et al., 2012). Previous research has identified distinct categories of disengagement experienced by doctoral candidates, including cynicism and exhaustion or distress. Cynicism has been characterised by apathy and alienation from doctoral structures and processes (Vekkaila, Pyhältö & Lonka, 2013), a real or perceived lack of control, disinterest, and the sense that doctoral education has lost its value and meaning (Virtanen, Taina & Pyhältö, 2017). Disengagement experienced by doctoral candidates related to exhaustion is described by Vekkaila et al. (2013) as over-strain, deflated energy, and at times total exhaustion and depression. The subject of doctoral education losing its meaning and/or value in the heart and mind of the doctoral candidate is of interest to this study. For some of these students the nature of the challenges they face is such that they reach a point of uncertainty with regard to whether or not their doctoral education journey continues to be worth the effort and sacrifice. It is a question that is relevant to the theoretical framework chosen for this study, as discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.7.

For doctoral candidates who have felt forced to withdraw from their studies as a result of dysfunctional experiences and emotions – candidates who otherwise had every desire to and intention of continuing to pursue their doctoral education aspirations – these attrition rates represent a loss of time, talent, and sacrifice for departing candidates and their respective faculty (Golde, 2000; Hawley, 2010). In addition, these students' inability to successfully conclude their studies also results in a consequent loss to the knowledge economy related to their specific discipline and their country at large. It is impossible to quantify the potential significance and value of the research that never gets completed and published.

Research by Wood and Harris (2021) reveals that doctoral attrition is often viewed by staff or academics of a department as a personal choice made by candidates as a result of their shortcomings, such as an inability to measure up intellectually. This is particularly common with students from minority backgrounds. This observation echoes results from other research showing supervisors attributing candidate failure largely to these candidates' personal characteristics (e.g., Leijen, Lepp & Remmik, 2016; Wollast, Boudrenghien, Van der Linden, Galand, Roland, Devos, De Clercq, Klein, Azzi & Frenay, 2018; Vital, Lane, Perez & Patterson-Stephens, 2023). In reality, however, attrition in doctoral education is the result of a more complicated and nuanced range of forces. Research into doctoral education and experiences suggests that a complex combination of factors is responsible for dissatisfaction, frustration and completion difficulties for doctoral candidates (Coriat, 2021; Elliot, 2021). It is evident from a review of the relevant literature that prominent challenges contributing to attrition include a poor supervisory relationship (Ruud, Saclarides, George-Jackson & Lubienski, 2018), an unsupportive institutional culture (Lovitts, 2001), unreliable funding sources (Pauley, Cunningham & Toth, 1999), stress and emotional burnout (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Hunter & Devine, 2016), and challenges related to inadequate socialisation. Candidates who are at greater risk of dropping out are less integrated into the professional and social spheres in their faculties and departments (Ali & Kohun, 2006; Pyhältö & Keskinen, 2012).

Research conducted by Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine and Hubbard (2018) revealed that literature focused on the doctoral experience often reports two sets of factors that influence the progress and completion of doctoral degrees – university factors and candidate factors. Given this study's focus on the former, it is noteworthy that the authors found that university factors impacting attrition rates in doctoral education typically included concerns such as the candidate's fit with their supervisor(s) and institutional (particularly departmental) expectations and regulations. Related to university factors, the literature also points to external factors affecting candidates' academic progress, conceptualised as representing all relationships and systems/structures that involve people, resources, and institutions which exist outside the candidate. Among these, supervision, the departmental context and socialisation issues were found to impact doctoral degree completion (Sverdlik, Hall, McAlpine & Hubbard, 2018).

The findings above are echoed in the research of McAlpine, Castello and Pyhältö (2020), who undertook a qualitative systematised review of research on doctoral experience – focused on uncovering evidence of practices that influence retention, satisfaction, and completion among doctoral candidates. The authors also found that supervision and institutional-related problems are among the central factors significantly affecting candidates' academic experiences. Supervision and departmental contexts which encouraged and facilitated consistent meaningful engagement and accountability between candidates and peers and faculty, and institutional environments that emphasised and made available various supportive structures mechanisms, effectively mitigated attrition-related risks (McAlpine, Castello & Pyhältö, 2020). Based on the literature, success in doctoral education for the candidate goes significantly beyond the matters of research and writing expertise. These doctoral students stand the best chance to thrive and develop as scholars in the context of a broader social and collegial environment within which they feel acknowledged, welcomed and legitimated.

In a study in a social and health sciences faculty in a Portuguese university involving semi-structured interviews with 12 former doctoral candidates who withdrew from their studies, the interviews focused on (among other issues) the experiences that led to withdrawal and the emotions, thoughts and behaviours that followed. In this study, Alves et al. (2024) found alienation to be one of the core factors influencing doctoral candidate drop out. Alienation in the context of this study was described, for instance, as feelings of isolation or a lack of a sense of belonging to the academic community; it was attributed to a lack of programme structure, poor integration into the research/academic context, or insufficient support and guidance from the supervisors and faculty. After their decision to withdraw from their studies, experiences of alienation were reinforced for these former doctoral candidates due to the 'post-withdrawal detachment from the academic community, the weakening of the supervising relationship, interruption or procrastination and lack of progress in research work or by the belief that the support from the university is not worth the high value of the tuition fees' (Alves et al., 2024, p.12).

In addition, in a qualitative study involving biomedical science doctoral candidates – a study that sought to collect 'real time' data on attrition within the first two years of doctoral training – Wofford, Roksa and Feldon (2017) used conceptual frames of socialisation and social cognitive career theory to explore the experiences of 18 doctoral candidates across 16 United States universities as they engaged in the withdrawal process. The researchers found that problematic supervisory relationships drove attrition decisions in more than half of the cases. Ten candidates shared that the difficult nature of the supervision they received was a primary withdrawal factor. Furthermore, in cases when supervision was not the sole factor mentioned, it either represented the underlying factor that gave rise to other factors or it was the 'straw that broke the camel's back', driving the candidates towards definitive withdrawal decisions (Wofford et al., 2017).

Related to the relative lack of research focused on attrition (Jaksztat et al., 2021) in general and doctoral candidate well-being and its implications for attrition more specifically, is the dearth of research focused on the role that supervision and institutional-related factors play in influencing doctoral candidates' mental health (Jaksztat, et al., 2021. Much evidence has emerged in the past few years in particular to suggest that doctoral candidates experience high rates of stress (Hazell, Chapman, Valeix, Roberts, Niven & Berry, 2020), depression, anxiety and suicidality; seemingly at rates that exceed those seen in other student and working populations (Hazell, Niven, Chapman, Roberts, Cartwright-Hatton, Valeix & Berry, 2021; Levecque, Anseel, De Beuckelaer, Van der Heyden & Gisle, 2017). Overall, comprehension of the factors that influence doctoral candidates' well-being and persistence in academia remains insufficient (Hunter & Devine, 2016). Despite the growing popularity of doctoral education around the world, along with the fact that many of these candidates do not complete their programme of study, very little research data is available about them (Castelló, et al., 2017). Relatively little is known from the perspective of students themselves, about why they drop out of their programmes of study. The availability of data from exit interviews that might aid in understanding the reasons behind students' decision to self-terminate is difficult to find (Golde, 2000; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000).

Given the persistence of significant attrition levels in doctoral programmes globally, a distinction needs to be made between increasing diverse access to doctoral education versus empowering these candidates to succeed within the field upon entering it. Universities in South Africa and globally seek to and have been tasked with increasing diversity by promoting inclusive statements and recruitment practices. However, these initiatives tend to ring hollow once candidates arrive on campus (Mayorga-Gallo, 2019). Many diversity frameworks miss key elements related to addressing systemic abuses of power and historical marginalisation, and these omissions make institutional inequity and injustice virtually impossible to remedy thoroughly.

Given the importance of doctoral education on numerous levels, training the research spotlight on its various aspects against the backdrop of doctoral study attrition is relevant and of value. There is a need to shine the research spotlight on the experiences of former PhD candidates who faced hardships, particularly in terms of a lack of supervisory and associated institutional support, that were severe enough to make the continuation of their studies untenable. There is value to be derived in hearing from these former students, in their own words, sharing their own perspectives.

2.4.1 Key challenges with supervision

In light of the central role of doctoral supervision in the candidate's academic journey (as discussed in section 2.3), it follows that challenges experienced in the supervisory relationship can exert a major influence over time on completion and throughput. Given the complex and multi-faceted nature of doctoral education and supervision, it is unsurprising that difficulties of varying kinds emerge in these socio-educational contexts.

One key source of difficulties in doctoral supervision is the existence of significant mismatches in expectations between doctoral candidates' aspirations and the reality of doctoral programmes (with regard to foci, research areas and programme expectations). Much of what results in challenges in doctoral supervision has to do with misalignments in expectations and perceptions that candidates and supervisors bring to the process and the kinds of attributes and traits they value and consequently wish to see exhibited in the other. In significant ways, the story of success or attrition in doctoral education is one of the misalignments between what is expected and what is valued in the field by the agents who exist in and navigate it.

Expectations of doctoral study held by candidates may serve as a window providing insight into what the holders of those expectations value and prioritise. They potentially serve to communicate what matters and what counts as legitimate in the view of the party holding the expectations. These mismatches in expectations imply that instructors and programme administrators need to be more explicit with respect to what the doctoral programme entails (Ruud, et al., 2018). By purposefully improving advising efforts and more explicitly discussing doctoral programme expectations and goals, administrators may help reduce the factors that bring candidates to a ‘tipping point’ that results in their premature departure from doctoral study (Ruud, et al., 2018). One area in which these kinds of advising efforts may be incorporated is that of pre-enrolment processes.

Research done by Burford, Kier-Byfield, Dangeni, Henderson and Akkad (2024) on the subject of pre-admission doctoral communication (PADC) highlights the possibility of universities, and prospective supervisors, developing more intentional pre-application communication strategies in the interests of developing clearer systems for managing pre-application communications from potential candidates. The authors also mention the scope for departments to formalise systems and roles in relation to PADC (e.g., consulting with prospective candidates and staff regarding current processes, developing agreed timeframes and procedures, and sharing these clearly). The study suggests that supervisors and other faculty may benefit from enhanced information and induction regarding institutional processes for doctoral admissions and opportunities for professional development (Burford et al., 2024). One of the key aspects of PADC directed toward prospective candidates has to do with their responsibility to secure necessary funding arrangements, either independently or in consultation with relevant university entities that the candidate is made aware of. The issue of funding represents one of various aspects of doctoral education regarding which candidate expectations (and expectations held of them) may be addressed and clarified through enhanced PADC.

In a study of six Australian doctoral candidates, Cotterall (2013) qualitatively researched the most commonly occurring emotion-inducing elements of the doctoral process. The data collection involved three hour-long interviews per year for two years. What was revealed was that most emotional situations involved interactions with supervisors. While most views concerning supervisors were positive and recognised their efficiency and support, it was the mismatch between supervisors' and candidates' expectations that resulted in confusion, stress, and anxiety in candidates. Similarly, a longitudinal narrative inquiry study conducted by McAlpine and McKinnon (2013) involving 16 social sciences doctoral candidates (using biographic questionnaires, weekly logs and interviews) found candidates' interactions with their supervisors to be largely positive and reassuring. Conversely, their findings also revealed that candidates reported frustration upon perceiving their supervisors as not intellectually invested in their work or unavailable in times of need. What is uncertain from these particular studies is what doctoral candidates' expectations were based on and what impact mismatches in expectations had on the supervisory relationship. Unmet expectations, whether they are valid or not, may result in a sense of disappointment and mistrust directed at the party (the supervisor) that has failed to live up to them.

Of course, expectations in doctoral education are not held by candidates alone. Institutions recruiting doctoral candidates have been criticised for imposing unrealistically high expectations on applicants upon entry to their programmes (Andrews, 2023) – a phenomenon which has been referred to as the 'academic superheroes' effect (Pitt & Mewburn, 2016). This idea proposes that skills expected of doctoral scholars on completion of their degree are, instead, required of them at the entry point. Andrews (2023) states that the challenge facing universities has to do with how to identify candidates with the potential to succeed in doctoral study, while also making room for each candidate to develop doctoral attributes (see section 2.2.2) during their time spent studying. A problematic concern with holding seemingly high expectations of candidates at the entry point is that attention is not given to the university's or the supervisor's responsibility to facilitate and support each doctoral candidate's scholarly development (Mantai & Marrone, 2022). The nature of the specific expectations of the various agents in the field of doctoral study is discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Challenges in doctoral supervision cannot be separated from consequent mental health implications, for candidates or supervisors (Pyhältö, et al., 2023). Research into the mental health problems experienced by doctoral candidates revealed an alarming finding: one-third of doctoral candidates have developed or are at risk of developing significant psychological distress, being particularly vulnerable to the risk of depression (Levecque et al. 2017). The researchers used a sample of 3,659 doctoral candidates in Flemish universities, drawn from a cross-sectional survey. The results showed that 50% of the participants experienced at least two symptoms of mental health challenges. This research, transferable across geographical contexts, also revealed that the supervision style represented one of the key factors contributing to candidates' mental health challenges. The supervisors relevant to this research exhibited counter-productive attitudes, with a few viewed as bullies. The candidates in these situations lacked support and constructive feedback and tended to mask their negative feelings, including frustration and embarrassment, which had negative implications for their emotional well-being (Levecque et al., 2017). Adrian-Taylor, Noels and Tischler (2007) found that doctoral candidates reported a lack of feedback as the primary source of conflict between themselves and their supervisors, while some supervisors instead attributed supervision conflict to candidates' personal characteristics (e.g., inadequate research skills or a lack of discipline). The conflict in the supervision relationship reported by candidates may exacerbate their existing experiences of imposter syndrome, in addition to feelings of isolation and mental health challenges.

A 2019 German survey of 2,500 doctoral researchers found that around 18% exhibited moderate to severe depression symptoms and almost 63% exhibited a moderate to high level of anxiety (PhDnet Survey Group, 2020). Similarly, an analysis of more than 1,000 responses from a 2019 Nature PhD candidate survey and a 2020 Wellcome Trust research culture survey concluded that 37% had sought help for anxiety or depression (Cornell, 2020). Both pre-pandemic (Flaherty, 2018) and post-pandemic (Soria, Horgos, & McAndrew, 2020) results of similar research in the United States yield comparable results. In many instances where candidates grapple with such emotional challenges in relation to doctoral education and supervision dysfunction, their response is to remain silent out of intimidation or fear. Lewis (2004, p.286) observed that 'exposing one's experiences of bullying within an organisation with a bullying culture might lead to feelings of inadequacy, deviance or even social exclusion'.

The findings of the above-mentioned research not only suggest that a supervisor's toxicity (among a range of other key factors) can affect candidates' academic progress, but also that in these toxic scenarios, an entire departmental negative culture can be complicit, forcing bullied candidates to suppress their frustrations. Power relations and prevailing cultures within supervision relationships and broader institutional structures can operate so as to protect those in authority and marginalise the doctoral candidate. The form and impact of these power relations in doctoral education are a worthwhile and key focus of this study, discussed in greater detail in Chapters 3, 6 and 7.

Over several decades, doctoral education and doctoral supervision, both locally and abroad, have devolved to one degree or another as a result of embracing the previously discussed neoliberal ideology, often without a rigorous, let alone adequate, critique of it (Maistry, 2014). How students understand and, in particular, how they navigate difficulties encountered in doctoral supervision can either enable or undermine their learning and play a central role in the formation of their academic identity (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011). Challenges and risks associated with doctoral supervision include those related to the influences of neoliberalism and the private nature of the master-apprentice model. These influences have been discussed in Chapter 1, subsection 1.2.3 and Chapter 2, subsection 2.3.3 respectively. In the South African context, there are too few academics qualified to supervise at the doctoral level (Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard, 2016), no doubt compounding challenges associated with doctoral supervision.

Neoliberal influences may manifest in various ways. There might be, for example, the well-intentioned supervisor who is so wearied by the pressures of an excessive workload, managerial obligations, audits, writing and publishing, etc., that little time and/or energy is left for the task of supervision (Quinn & Vorster, 2019). For candidates, this may mean that the supervision engagements they require are few and far between, resulting in significant delays in degree completion times or, in extreme cases, a premature exit from the doctoral programme altogether. Another manifestation of the neoliberal impact on doctoral education may be that universities fail to acknowledge the pedagogic nature and nuances of doctoral supervision and consequently invest little to no resources in providing suitable supervision training programmes, leaving both supervisors and candidates disadvantaged (Motshoane, 2023).

Some candidates experience intense feelings of isolation, perceiving that they are on their own without social/emotional support to help navigate the varied demands encountered in the process of pursuing a doctoral degree (Lewis, Ginsberg & Davies, 2003). Isolation has been linked to the disconnect between candidates' expectations of the doctoral research experience and the actual situation they encounter once enrolled. This can potentially indicate a lack of understanding regarding the demands and challenges associated with doctoral study (Ali & Kohun, 2006). As discussed earlier in subsection 2.4.2, the idea of mismatches in expectations and the consequent sense of contradiction perceived and experienced by candidates in the field of doctoral education are recurring themes of this study. Given the doctoral candidate's potential experiences of isolation, neglect, abuses of power, bullying, etc. in the supervision relationship and universities, the subject of pastoral care becomes relevant as it applies to the context of doctoral education.

Care is an important part of a relationship that lasts as long as the average doctoral research study, yet doctoral candidates and their supervisors tend to perceive the role of or need for pastoral care differently. Research indicates that while candidates tend to expect their supervisors to provide personal support (Woolderink, Putnik & Klabbers, 2015; Roach, et al., 2019), supervisors have varying views concerning the pastoral care component. While in some research, supervisors have demonstrated a willingness to provide personal support to their candidates (Franke & Arvidsson, 2011), in others, they were less enthusiastic, believing that candidate-supervisor relationships should be purely professional in nature (Halse & Malfroy, 2010; Lessing, 2011) and that candidates should get attached to their work, rather than to their supervisors (Guerin, Kerr & Green, 2015).

Research into alternative models of supervision suggests that more collaborative approaches can mitigate challenges that are evidently inherent in this model, significantly, the sense of isolation (Carter-Veale, Tull, Rutledge & Joseph, 2016) and feeling like an outsider (Lau, Su, Chen & Dai, 2019). This is because collaborative forms of supervision potentially provide more robust support for students and supervisors, both by distributing supervision workloads and responsibilities among a broader base of expertise and by mitigating risks associated with privacy and secrecy linked to the one-to-one supervision model. Peer support networks further represent a collaborative means of mitigating problems candidates experience navigating supervision relationships (Lee, 2017; also see section 2.2.4). When institutions work to ensure the cultivation of supportive departmental intellectual climates, including systems designed to monitor candidates' progress and wellbeing, these efforts can contribute positively to candidates’ improved levels of overall satisfaction and ultimate completion rates (Trigwell & Dunbar-Goddet, 2005).

A review of the research literature on doctoral education found that discourses regarding the influence of neglectful or hostile supervision on doctoral degree outcomes mostly exclude the perspectives of doctoral candidates who did not finish their degree These under-researched perspectives include these candidates’ potential feelings of being let down by supervisors and relevant PhD systems more generally (Bastalich, 2017). The lack of focus on attrition-related candidate perspectives and the value of elevating their voices as it relates to attrition in doctoral education resonates with the observation made in Chapter 1, section 1.3, and elsewhere in this thesis.

2.5 Conclusion

The crafting of this chapter has highlighted some central ideas relevant to this study’s research focus and objectives.

It has been determined from the literature that doctoral education is a multi-faceted subject that involves a complex process of the candidate’s socialisation into scholarly practices and ways of being. Furthermore, relevant research has highlighted the fact that a complicated combination of factors contributes towards dissatisfaction, frustration and completion challenges among doctoral candidates. The issue of attrition in doctoral study does not lend itself to simple or quick solutions. This study argues, in line with the work of other scholars, that doctoral supervision is best understood as a form of pedagogy that is characterised by complex power relations and interactions between the supervisor, the candidate, knowledge and the broader university.

Upon embarking on a review of the literature related to doctoral education, and in particular the areas of supervision and attrition, it became evident that there exists a dearth of studies focused on the prioritisation of doctoral candidates' voices in relation to these areas of research. Specifically lacking are qualitative studies and data involving doctoral candidates, secured through interviews and analysed using narrative research, that elevate the candidate experience through rich, storied, first-hand accounts. These perspectives, collected and examined in this way, are consistently lacking in doctoral education studies. More needs to be known regarding what happens when things go wrong in doctoral study – when institutionally related factors at the individual and systemic level contribute directly to attrition among candidates. Little scholarly attention has been devoted to the well-being of candidates who take their own voices and stories into account.

This study seeks to further and build upon relatively limited forms of research and discussion in the literature, such as those conducted by Wofford et al. (2017) and Alves et al. (2024) – discussed earlier in this chapter – which highlight the role of supervision, and of feelings of alienation, in doctoral candidates' decision to withdraw from their programme. It seeks to probe the range of institutional-related factors which may over time potentially erode candidates' commitment to their doctoral aspirations, and examine the ways in which these factors may be made manifest. In addition, this study deems the examination of power relations between candidates, supervisor(s) and university, along with the idea of implicit and taken-for-granted rules in the field that influence these relations, as phenomena worthy of study.

This study, then, aims to contribute to expanding our understanding of doctoral attrition as a practice-process phenomenon, by presenting doctoral candidate narratives and analysing them in a manner that takes into consideration the broader doctoral education system, beyond the individuals and their stories. In doing so, the hope is that this study will be able to contribute to a more comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of how the system needs to be doing better in terms of practice, policy and beyond.

What is required to help realise this aim is a theoretical framework that empowers the researcher to understand these largely ignored and absent voices and stories in relation to their context. Given that this study sought to conceptualise and understand doctoral education as a social field, Bourdieu's field theory was identified as a framework suitable to the task at hand. It represents a theoretical approach that facilitates effectively addressing the research questions posed in Chapter 1, subsection 1.3.2. This was particularly relevant as it relates to examining concerns such as the struggle for power, the impact and role of institutional structures and systems in a social field, and the implicit, hidden rules in doctoral education that exert a powerful influence over the entirety of the field.

Chapter 3, then, presents a detailed discussion of Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory and its relevance to this study. Field theory was chosen because of its usefulness in understanding matters of power, capitals and cultures within social fields (including those of doctoral education and supervision) along with the interplay between them that shapes practices and policies in the field.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework: Bourdieu's Field Theory

3.1 Introduction

As has been discussed previously in Chapter 2, the subject of doctoral supervision is complex and multi-layered. It is comprised, among other things, of an intricate combination of relational and cultural dynamics, context-specific systems and structures of operation, struggles regarding challenging and safeguarding power, and the nurturing of emerging doctoral identities. In this chapter, I discuss the social theoretical lens through which I sought to understand the data that was generated during the course of this study. I used this theory to illuminate the various forces that influence the field of doctoral education and supervision as a key component of this field. In order to better illuminate and understand the doctoral education and doctoral supervision spaces, and the influences they exert on the role players within them, I chose Pierre Bourdieu's field theory.

French sociologist and researcher Pierre Bourdieu is considered one of the central social philosophers of the twentieth century, with the applicability and adaptive relevance of his work in many ways representing a measure of the worth of his approach to the social sciences (Grenfell, 2014). Grenfell (2014) discusses two features that characterise Bourdieu's work. First, it reveals a distinct understanding of the link between theory and practice, and how this ought to be employed in the practice of social science research. Second, it provides a unique set of conceptual terms to be used when analysing and discussing research findings. These terms, discussed in the sections below and which Bourdieu referred to as his 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1989, p.50), were constructed during the course of his empirical studies and were used to clarify and shed light on the social processes uncovered there.

In Chapter 2, subsection 2.2.2 of this thesis I touched on the notions of doctoral education as a field, the varied assets and liabilities that candidates bring into it, their backgrounds and experiences that influence their perceptions and choices in navigating it, and the degree to which they understand and are equipped for the 'rules of the game'. The nature of these rules is discussed in detail in section 3.3 of this chapter. Field theory is useful for defining the characteristics of the field of research (doctoral education in this case) and interrogating systems of power. There are concepts central to Bourdieu's field theory which must be discussed in order to understand the interplay between power, agency and identity in the field of doctoral education, and within the doctoral supervision relationship specifically. The first of these Bourdieusian thinking tools that I will discuss is field, in order to articulate the nature of the social space within which this interplay occurs.

Following the discussion of field, I will discuss the rules that govern it, and thereafter the various forms of assets (capitals, in Bourdieusian terms) that relevant agents bring into and possess within it. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of the Bourdieusian concepts of symbolic violence and illusio, which respectively deal with potential forms of emotional injury that agents can sustain in the field, and the mechanism that determines the extent to which these agents remain committed to their objectives within the field.

3.2 Field

The phenomenon of field is central to Bourdieu's work. Bourdieu made the case that in order to comprehend interactions between people or make sense of an event or social phenomenon, considering what was said or what occurred is insufficient. Instead, it is necessary to examine the social space in which interactions, transactions and events occur (Bourdieu, 2005) – the social *field* in which they take place. When writing about field, Bourdieu did not refer to the pretty and the benign, such as an image of a tranquil meadow which might be conjured up by the English use of the word. Rather, he used the French term, 'le champ', referring to an area of land, a battlefield, and a field of knowledge (Thomson, 2014). As Thomson (2014) observes, according to Bourdieu, the game of interactions and exchanges that occurs in social spaces or fields is competitive. Various agents employ differing strategies to maintain or enhance their position. At stake in the field is the accumulation of capital (discussed in section 3.3 of this chapter).

3.2.1 Field – structured and structuring

Bourdieu argues that field is a structured and structuring social space – a field of forces containing individuals who dominate and those who are dominated (Bourdieu, 1998). Each field will have its 'own way of doing things, rules, assumptions and beliefs' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.20). Bourdieu makes the case that, 'the social world can be represented as a space (with several dimensions)' (Bourdieu, 1985, p.723), contending that this social space, 'is a multidimensional space, an open set of fields that are relatively autonomous, i.e., more or less strongly and directly subordinated, in their functioning and their transformations, to the field of economic production' (Bourdieu, 1985, p.736). Furthermore, 'the social space of an individual is connected through time (life trajectories) to a series of fields' (Harker, Mahar & Wilker, 1990, p.24). Regarding the multi-dimensionality of field as a social space, and referring specifically to the field of doctoral education, Gopaul (2014) argues that doctoral education as a multi-faceted field comprises primarily the academic profession, the university as a location of activity, varied disciplinary components and broader labour trends. Inside these fields are a range of different kinds of individuals, including doctoral candidates and academic staff, who wrestle over defining, maintaining, and resisting notions of legitimacy and triumph inside and beyond doctoral education (Gopaul, 2014).

A doctoral candidate's 'space' could be made up of varying intersecting fields of family life, research peers, social circles, the doctoral supervisory relationship, romance, learning and research, and so on. Drawing on the framing of field theory, doctoral education can be conceptualised as a field of research, with doctoral supervision existing as a sub-field within it. In Bourdieu's view, a field is an arena of contestation, characterised by contest or tension (Martin, 2003; Wacquant, 2007). This tension or struggle in the field occurs as players strategically manoeuvre and improvise in their quest to optimise their positions. These players do not enter a field fully equipped with god-like awareness of the rules of the game (doxa) or of the various positions, beliefs and competencies of other players. Nor do they comprehend the full consequences of their choices and actions (Maton, 2014). Consequently, it is not uncommon for doctoral candidates especially to enter and navigate the field with a degree of uncertainty and self-doubt, given both their unfamiliarity with the dominant rules of the game and their relative lack of field-specific and valued capitals. Furthermore, this resultant lack of confidence would almost certainly influence the assertiveness (or lack thereof) with which these candidates confront and manage potential challenges in the field. This would in turn impact the nature and variety of possible options and opportunities available to them in seeking to optimise their position in the field.

3.2.2 Field – a space of positions and possibilities

There exists within a social field a link between the various positions that agents occupy within it and the consequent opportunities that are available to them. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, pp.16–17) claim that a field 'is comprised of a set of objective, historical relations between positions rooted in certain forms of power (or capital)..., a relational configuration... which the field imposes on all the objects and agents which enter in it'. These historical relations may become embedded over time to the point of being considered common sense – giving the appearance of how things are and always have been – and influencing both what is valued, the nature of interactions within a particular field and the range and depth of possibilities that are available to agents/players in the field, which Bourdieu refers to as the 'space of possibles' (Bourdieu, 2004). In the context of the field of doctoral education, this common sense and taken-for-granted knowledge may be encoded in universities' higher degrees guides, for instance, where the expectations the field has of doctoral candidates are spelt out. These expectations represent some of the rules candidates are required to abide by in seeking to navigate doctoral study successfully. These guides, along with other relevant university policy documents may also articulate the guidelines that supervisors ought to abide by in responsibly fulfilling their role and expected duties. They (these guides and policy documents) demonstrate the kinds of capitals that the field values and that, at least in theory, facilitate progress within it for those who have them. These expectations and rules contained in the field are discussed in detail later in Chapter 5, sections 5.2 – 5.4.

The resources of value contained in a field are varied, including things such as economic status, cultural background, social connections, familiarity with the dominant language and culture, education, professional position/office, etc. These resources are not only possessed in different measures among various players, they are also differently valued symbolically based on the aforementioned historical relations which have resulted in institutionalised value judgments that determine which capitals count and which do not. For instance, elements such as publications and scholarships serve as capital that candidates benefit from. They are mechanisms that possess value in the field and are deemed worthy of attaining considering the rules of doctoral education and academia that imbue these mechanisms with value (Gopaul, 2014). Another critical component impacting the experiences of doctoral candidates is the role of staff supervisors or mentors. Significant research indicates the key role that these individuals play in various facets of doctoral education – for instance, socialisation and acclimatisation to scholarly communities and publishing and presenting opportunities (Barnes & Austin, 2009; see also Chapter 2, subsections 2.2.4 and 2.3.1).

Candidates' understanding of the value and power associated with these capitals and resources and their successful attainment thereof, or not, reinforces a have/have-not culture in doctoral education. This is because those who are able to understand and accumulate these capitals are better positioned to leverage them to their advantage, and possess greater volumes of capital to leverage. The consequence is inequitable opportunities, experiences and relationships for candidates (Gopaul, 2014). Bourdieu explains, referencing the field of the sciences in this instance, that the space of possibles when perceived by dispositions and perceptions adapted to it (competent, endowed with a sense of the game),

> functions as a space of possibles, the range of possible ways of doing science, among which one has to choose; each of the agents engaged in the field has a practical perception of the various realizations of science, which functions as a problematic. This perception, this vision, varies according to the agent's dispositions, and is more or less complete, more or less extensive; it may rule out some sectors, disdaining them as uninteresting or unimportant. (Bourdieu, 2004, pp.59-70).

Key to this study is the fact that there exist different kinds or sets of possibles (possibilities) depending on who you are and where you are located in the field. If you have all the capitals that are desired – or can learn/get them – in addition to perceptions and practices that are well developed and familiar or comfortable with the rules and nature of the field, you can have many more possibles than someone without the desired disposition or capitals (or the means to get them). Understanding the choices and behaviours of the de-registered doctoral candidate participants in this study required relating the rules of the social fields of doctoral supervision and education (their regularities) to the practical logic of these individuals; their 'feel for the game' is a feel for these regularities.

Engagement in the field implicates a further field theory concept which is drawn lightly into this study, that of habitus. Habitus is the concept Bourdieu makes use of to explain individual and social behaviour, along with the link between structure (the rules by which the field is governed) and agency (the individual's or organisation's capacity to leverage their/its capital to advantageous effect within the field). Bourdieu (1990b, p.56) defines 'habitus' as the embodiment of history, 'internalized as a second nature'. Habitus is 'structured' by one's past and current circumstances, for example, family environment and upbringing, and educational experiences. Habitus is 'structuring', given that one's habitus contributes to shaping one's present and future behaviour and habits. Furthermore, habitus is itself a 'structure', in that it is systematically ordered as opposed to random or without pattern. This 'structure' constitutes a system of dispositions which give rise to perceptions, appreciations and practices (Bourdieu, 1990b, p.53). It is this internalised second nature that doctoral candidates enter the field of doctoral education with; depending on the degree to which their habitus operates in harmony with the established rules of the game and culture of the field, their chances of seamless advancement are influenced accordingly.

As Maton (2014) argues, the habitus does not act in isolation – Bourdieu does not suggest that human beings are like pre-programmed robots, simply acting out the influences and implications of our upbringing. Instead, behaviours are the result of what Bourdieu refers to as 'an obscure and double relation' (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.126) or an unconscious interaction between a habitus and a field. Behaviours are therefore not simply the result of an agent's habitus, but instead of the interaction between their habitus and current circumstances (Maton, 2014). Expressed differently, we cannot comprehend the practices of agents in a field solely in terms of their habituses, which represent but one component of the social equation. The characteristics of the fields they occupy and navigate are equally crucial.

Simply stated, habitus focuses on how we act, feel, think and be. It chronicles how we carry within us our experiential history, the ways in which we bring this history into our present context, and how we consequently make choices to behave in certain ways as opposed to others. This, as Maton (2014) observes, is a continuous and active process. Our choices, then, shape our future possibilities (our space of possibles), given that any choice involves foregoing the alternatives, inevitably setting us on a distinct path that further impacts our understanding of ourselves and of the fields we traverse.

Therefore, for the doctoral candidate (as for all social agents), the structures of the habitus are neither fixed nor constantly changing. Rather, their dispositions evolve, being durable and transposable but not impervious to flux. Simultaneously, as Maton (2014) states, the contextual fields these students navigate (doctoral education and doctoral supervision) are also evolving based on these fields' own logics – logics to which these students inextricably contribute. Therefore, in order to understand the choices, attitudes and behaviours of these doctoral candidates, we need to understand both the relevant evolving fields they occupy, along with the evolving habituses which these candidates bring to their social fields of practice (Bourdieu 1990b; 1991b).

Bourdieu focused much of his time and intellectual energy on analysing education through specific research into schools and universities. It was a priority for him to illustrate the socially (re)productive effects of formal education. Referencing the French schooling system, he asserted that far from it being an equitable institution via which any individual child had an equal opportunity to progress, those who ultimately benefited from that system were those who entered the field already possessing social and economic advantages (Thomson, 2014). Bourdieu contended that the purpose of the school system was to create and maintain dominant elites – that the schooling system functioned to categorise and sift children and young people into various educational trajectories in various kinds of universities.

Education, more than any other field according to Bourdieu, reproduces itself, and the agents who enjoy dominant positions within it are deeply imbued with its practices and discourses (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, 1979; Reay, 2001). Bourdieu (1996, p.273) argued further that education is one of a range of strategies employed by families to safeguard and/or advance their social position (Aris, 2020). Consequently, education as a form of symbolic capital (see section 3.3.1) operates together with other capitals as a formidable vehicle for either the advantage or disadvantage of agents in the field from varying backgrounds.

3.3 Capital

Moore (2014) states that it is impossible to explain the structure and functioning of the social world without taking into account capital in all its forms, as opposed to only the one form recognised by economic theory. Hence, he claims that Bourdieu's purpose is to expand the meaning of the term ‘capital’ by employing it in a broader system of exchanges through which assets of varying forms are converted and exchanged within complicated networks or circuits inside and between different fields. Bourdieu attempts to reposition the narrow subject of economic exchange away from economics alone (albeit a fundamental type) and instead into a more expansive system of cultural exchanges and valuations (Moore, 2014). However, generally speaking, and for the purposes of this study, it is important to remember that other forms of capital (cultural and social, for example) can be thought of as economic capital which has been transformed into other forms, and which can in turn be converted back into economic capital.

3.3.1 Forms of capital

Bourdieu identifies four categories of capital: economic (financial wealth), and discussed below, social, symbolic and cultural (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

Social capital references the ‘network of lasting social relations’ (Grenfell & James 1998, p.21) that agents have constructed and continue to build upon. It is generated through social processes and expressed as social relationships and networks (contacts and group affiliations or memberships, for example). In Bourdieu’s view, these social relationships and memberships represent potential and existing resources that agents in a social field have the ability to leverage to their advantage (Grenfell & James 1998). In Halpern’s (2005) view, social capital represents a valuable emotional resource for agents in their social connections. It includes distinctive norms, values and expectations that are shared by and among group members and maintained through a range of rewards and punishments. Furthermore, the value systems, tastes and lifestyles of certain social groups may be, either in a random or potentially calculated fashion, elevated above those of others such that social advantage (e.g., in education) is conferred upon the former groups (Moore, 2014). For instance, one might imagine a South African doctoral education project led primarily by black, Xhosa-speaking female academics which may intentionally or inadvertently (e.g., through cultural misunderstanding) foster an academic environment that feels unwelcoming to white, Afrikaans-speaking doctoral candidates. A black, Xhosa-speaking female candidate, on the other hand, might feel an immediate sense of belonging in that same context. The degree of match or mismatch could be significantly influenced by how the candidate's social and cultural backgrounds blend in, or do not, with the dominant nature of the field.

Social capital, in Bourdieu's view, interacts with other kinds of capital and is *symbolic* in nature. It reinforces other forms of capital and has an accelerative effect (Bourdieu, 1977; Grenfell, 2009). For instance, a doctoral candidate whose social background and practices blend well with the field may find it easier to forge relationships with peers and senior academics who share their social disposition. These candidates potentially benefit from a greater sense of belonging and rapport with those around them, and consequently greater and more seamless access to peer and supervisory academic support. They may be granted access to (or at least be more proactively made aware of) various contacts and structures in the university system which represent possible sources of guidance during the course of their doctoral journey. It stands to reason that an individual's habitus intersects with forms of capital – perhaps social capital especially – as their past experiences can shape the kinds of capital they bring into new relationships and practices, and how much they feel they 'fit in' or not (Lehmann, 2007). It is important to note that here is a link between economic and social capital. In an education context, for example, Reay, Ball, and David (2005) explain that working-class candidates, in contrast to their middle-class counterparts, face more than one transitional stage in their move to higher education: a pertinent one being from one social class to another.

Symbolic capital includes 'culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority' (Harker, Mahar & Wilker, 1990, p.13). In the field of doctoral education, social capital may take the form of family members or friends of doctoral candidates who have previously navigated the field, who are then able to share valuable practical insights, information about supportive resources, and/or useful strategic social connections. In this way, the doctoral candidate benefits from the accumulated experience and potentially enhanced social status of those who have previously walked a similar path.

Cultural capital refers to a system of attributes (for instance, language skills, cultural knowledge and mannerisms) that is partially derived from one's parents (Bourdieu, 1986). Lareau and Weininger (2003, p.568) argue that '[cultural capital] stresses the micro-interactional processes through which individuals comply (or fail to comply) with the evaluative standards of dominant institutions such as schools'. The authors emphasise 'micro-interactional processes' through which agents' (in a field) strategic use of knowledge, expertise and competence make contact with institutionalised measures of evaluation. In the context of doctoral education specifically, cultural capital is relevant given that the familiarity and competence with the implicit knowledge of academic processes and evaluative systems can differ dramatically among candidates, resulting in inequitable experiences of doctoral education (Gopaul, 2016). Doctoral candidates' familiarity and competence with the tacit knowledge of their academic context speaks to their awareness of the rules of the game and what it takes to succeed at it (see section 3.4).

Cultural capital is gained as an agent in the field attains increased levels of education and is 'connected to individuals in their general educated character...; connected to objects – books, qualifications...; and connected to institutions' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.21). Both the allocation and accumulation of capital in its various forms yield powerful implications relating to how social worlds are structured. Agents within a social field who possess a well-formed disposition – as defined by blending effectively and smoothly with the rules and characteristics of the social field in question – are typically able to attain and possess higher levels of cultural capital. All doctoral candidates enter the doctoral education environment with some measure of cultural capital, given that they would have attained various prior academic qualifications on their journey towards entering doctoral study. Cultural capital may also take the form of various specialist employment experiences that may carry transferable academic value in a higher education context. For instance, a doctoral candidate may have been enrolled into their degree programme without possessing all the typical prerequisite qualifications, but based rather on the strength of the expertise their professional background has afforded them. This is known at some universities as their 'recognition of prior learning' programme or initiative.

Expanding on the idea of cultural capital, I wish to discuss two of its distinct forms. The first of these is emotional capital. *Emotional capital* refers to an embodied form of cultural capital and is understood as a trans-situational capacity to express, manage, and feel emotions in a manner that is 'in tune' with dominant emotion norms and cultures in a particular social field. In this embodied state, emotional capital exists 'in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body' (Bourdieu, 1986, p.243). While it is distinct from emotional practice, it is what is enacted or activated in emotional practice (Scheer, 2012; Cottingham, 2016). A critical aspect of theorising emotional capital lies in distinguishing the resource itself from its activation and embodiment through emotional experiences and management (i.e., emotion practice). Emotion practice has to do with the enactment/embodiment of emotional capital, while emotional capital itself is trans-situationally available regardless of its use in practice (Cottingham, 2017). In the context of doctoral education, an example of how emotional capital may be at play within the field could be the capacity of the doctoral candidate both to build and manage their relationship with their supervisor(s) and to self-manage in terms of time regulation, deadline management, and an independently motivated work ethic, etc.

The second form of cultural capital I wish to draw attention to is that of educational capital. *Educational capital* is distinguished by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) as a form of institutional cultural capital, as opposed to the embodied cultural capital form of emotional capital. Kelly (2010) identifies two (that I will mention here) basic principles relevant to educational capital. First, it consists of qualifications acquired through formal schooling (whereas cultural capital is understood to refer to qualifications initially acquired in the home and subsequently developed through schooling). Second, educational capital is greatly valued in certain fields (e.g., education and the labour market) where formal expertise, knowledge and other educational qualifications are relevant. Bourdieu (2018) explains that educational capital comprises possible academic achievement and other academic experiences, in addition to their implications, used to gain or change a place in society. Educational capital represents a means by which an individual can enhance their social standing, which in turn creates a web of essential networks that facilitate academic and social success (Burawoy, 2009; Bourdieu, 2018). In the field of doctoral education, educational capital may take the form of a doctoral candidate possessing a master’s degree from an institution perceived globally as prestigious. Alternatively, educational capital may be represented in the doctoral candidate’s competency and fluency in academic writing or crafting a compelling scholarly argument.

The field of doctoral education, and that of doctoral supervision within it (the specific foci of my study), is home to various role players. These include doctoral candidates, supervisors, lecturers, policymakers, managers, deans and funders. Broadly speaking, as discussed previously in Chapter 2, doctoral education functions as an incubator for the generation of knowledge, as a driver of a country’s economic growth (McAlpine, et al., 2013; Cloete, et al., 2015), and as a vehicle for preparing doctoral scholars for academic life. In terms of preparing novice scholars for academic life, the fields of doctoral education and supervision do not always provide students with the necessary support to achieve this. Rather, there may exist a contradiction in these fields between what students are led to expect by way of support and what they actually experience (Cyster, 2019).

Doctoral candidates who enter the fields of doctoral education and doctoral supervision without a feel for the game and without the 'right' kinds of capital that are traditionally valued in these settings find themselves at a disadvantage, lacking meaningful sources of power or influence to advance their academic aspirations. Exploring how de-registered doctoral candidates constructed, understood, navigated and then chose to end their doctoral journey is a key element of this study. Perhaps, then, supervision was one space where who they were and what they brought was not valued, tacitly or explicitly, and so they were excluded from the field; they were disempowered through a process of devaluing who they are and what they know or can do or want to be. If those already in power win the struggle over controlling the ways in which the field is set up, and whom it values or privileges, they get to maintain the structure and characteristics of the field such that they remain advantaged. If those not currently in power win, they may seek to reshape the field to privilege or value different forms of culture and capital in a manner that benefits them.

3.4 Doxa

Perhaps most central to the experiences of doctoral candidates is the idea of 'doxa', which has been referred to as the 'rules of the game' – an expression used by Bourdieu to refer to specific ways of working within a specific field. Doxa refers to a set of unspoken perspectives and cultural practices such as traditions (Bourdieu, 1977). They are beliefs that have become so ingrained and internalised that they are seldom, if ever, questioned (Deer, 2014). In Bourdieu's field theory, doxa is defined as a perspective that is deeply embedded in a field to the point where, even if not codified and made explicit, it may well trump rules or ways of working that are formalised in institutional policies or mission and vision statements. As Bourdieu claims, doxa is 'a set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma' (Bourdieu, 2000, p.16). Like air, for instance, doxa are too common and natural to be perceived – they are simultaneously taken for granted and impossible not to be impacted by.

Deer (2014, pp.114–115) argues that doxa, broadly defined, ‘refers to the misrecognition of forms of social arbitrariness which creates the unformulated, non-discursive, yet internalised and practical recognition of that same social arbitrariness’. As such, doxa contribute to their reproduction in social institutions, structures and links as well as in the minds and bodies, expectations and behaviours of individuals navigating and interacting within various social and/or professional contexts (Deer, 2014). Doxa represent commonly held values, practices and beliefs that are accepted as true within a particular social context, and which are so deeply ingrained in the minds of individuals that they become naturalised and taken for granted. Bourdieu (1977) employs the term in reference to that which is self-evident and undisputed, and, when gone unquestioned, is reproduced. It is only as and when relevant doxa are recognised and acknowledged in a field – when the hidden rules are made explicit – that social agents within that field can begin to question them and consciously choose whether or not to abide by or challenge them.

In the field of doctoral education (as with any social field), doxa exert their influence over all the agents in the field in varying ways – candidates, supervisors and departments. All agents who are in some way subordinate or accountable to more authoritative (real or perceived) power structures in the field are impacted by doxa. This influence is often manifested as the pressure to conform to certain foreign or uncomfortable norms, ideologies and practices in the field that are valued and embraced by the dominant culture in the field. Given the fact that doxa commonly go undetected and unchallenged, the result more often than not is that these doxa are consciously or subconsciously reproduced by those who seek to make progress within that field.

It is worth pointing out that while there exist some overarching doxa in doctoral education, the disciplinary nature of doxa is also an extremely important and pertinent aspect. For instance, taking on the practices of a doctoral candidate in a chemistry lab will entail taking on quite different rules of the game compared with taking on the practices of a doctoral candidate in history.

Doctoral candidates enter the field of doctoral education with ways of working – with forms of doxa – which may blend seamlessly with the established rules of the game, or which may clash significantly based on their personal background and experiences, potentially resulting in internal dissonance and emotional stress, crises of identity, a sense of disenfranchisement and relational conflict (Leijen, Lepp & Remmik, 2016; Castelló et al., 2017). For instance, a novice doctoral supervisor may wish to advise a student in a manner that is at odds with the opinion of a co-supervisor who occupies a senior position in the university. The novice supervisor may be inclined to suppress their own ideas in favour of avoiding confrontation with their senior colleague. Alternatively, a white, English-speaking doctoral candidate from an affluent and Anglo-centric background may experience a smooth transition into a PhD environment where the dominant culture and attitudes closely match their own. A black, Afrikaans- or Xhosa-speaking student from an economically disadvantaged background may find that same context to be quite alien and challenging. In the case of students, potential mismatches in culture, perceptions, etc. carry significant implications for the development of the doctoral identity of these candidates, which, as discussed in Chapter 2, subsection 2.2.2, represents one of the key components of what doctoral education is meant to prioritise and accomplish. These mismatches also impact these doctoral candidates' engagement and sense of belonging in their particular academic context.

Doctoral education is meant to, in part, cultivate scholars who are independent and critical thinkers, equipped and emboldened to critique and hold to account systems of power (see Chapter 2, section 2.2). A particular field of doctoral education may pride itself on a formal ethos of valuing critical thinking and challenging convention, and yet, from an anecdotal perspective, there may be some doctoral candidates who enter this field to discover that the doxa is to know their place, to respect authority, to not rock the boat and to embrace and embody the dominant culture if they are to progress. In feeling they have no other choice but to comply, these students reproduce the same doxa – the same social arbitrariness – that lies at odds with who and what they believe themselves and aspire to be. In this way, their doctoral identity is gradually undermined and compromised over time. This being said, it is worth noting that many doctoral candidates are willing to comply with the doxa and culture they encounter in the field of doctoral study. This could be due to their background, dispositions and perceptions being a relative match with the nature of the field, making their compliance somewhat comfortable, or as the result of strategic choice and the exercise of agency on their part in the interests of facilitating their advancement in the field. These students may perceive and/or experience the field to be less foreign and hostile compared to those (aforementioned) doctoral candidates who potentially struggle with feelings of disempowerment or disenfranchisement.

As Bourdieu (1977) explains, challenging doxa (or orthodoxy) is difficult – people in a field become too familiar with its doxa, even internalising it as a result of being immersed in the culture embracing the doxa. Deer (2014) argues that doxa represent the cornerstone of any social field to the extent that they determine the stability of that field's objective social structures through the way they are reproduced and replicate themselves in the perceptions and practices of agents in the field. The mutual reinforcement that occurs between field, perceptions and practices fortifies the prevailing impact and power of the doxa, which in turn informs the appropriate 'feel for the game' of agents in the field via presuppositions that are lodged within the doxa itself (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992a, pp.66, 74). Doxa, as a symbolic form of power operating within a field, requires that those subject to their influence not question their validity or the legitimacy of those who exert them.

As just discussed, doctoral candidates entering and navigating the field of doctoral study encounter a unique social space with its own set of rules, norms and dominant culture. Each candidate will experience either a sense of blending with the field or being at odds with it or some combination thereof, to some degree or another. These candidates enter 'the game' with a certain measure of agency, and this agency is largely informed by the various experiences, expertise and assets they possess and adopt upon entering and subsequently progressing through the field.

As has been discussed in Chapter 2, subsection 2.2.3, what candidates enter the field of doctoral education with by way of capitals plays a central role in the likelihood of their progress or struggle in the field. Those whose capitals are not aligned with the field's doxa may face an uphill battle. These candidates may never be explicitly told that they do not belong – that they are of the wrong 'race', wrong culture, wrong gender, wrong socio-economic status, etc. – but the (tacit) rules of the doctoral education game may nonetheless be set up in ways that alienate and disempower them. For example, research into doctoral attrition among Chinese doctoral candidates in Canada reveals the challenges some of these students face with regard to, among other things, discrimination, a lack of connectedness to their academic and social environment, and overall culture shock (Gao, 2019). These concerns originate from the mismatch in social disposition, home language and culture, etc. between that of these students and their doctoral study context in (for them) a foreign nation.

The interplay between capitals and doxa in the field of doctoral education, and the ways in which they interact with power structures and relations in the field, determines who has power, how power is contested, and what the implications are of being in more and less powerful positions. Doxa may influence how certain supervisors treat certain students and senior academics treat novice supervisors. It may permeate the way feedback is given, the assumptions supervisors make visible in how they speak to or treat their students, and how supporting resources/events are potentially managed and planned in ways that burden or exclude some students more than others, and so on. This doxa may also impact how departmental or broader institutional systems and structures of accountability and oversight within universities respond to instances of dysfunction or abuse of varying kinds. Ultimately, the field (and its doxa) favour and protect those who possess the capitals that are most valued within it (Mohr, 2000).

These kinds of contests in the field over and/or between position and power, and the doxa underlying and influencing them, can potentially have a stratifying impact on the field, creating a hierarchy comprised of agents in the field who exert influence and those who are influenced. In this manner, the structuring of the social field of doctoral education is not entirely unlike the creation and perpetuation of social classes in society at large, as the next section briefly discusses.

3.5 On Social Class – Reproduction and Distinction

In discussing class, the starting point for Bourdieu’s approach is his claim that all agents (or players) within a particular society occupy an objective position in social space depending on their portfolio of economic and cultural capital (Crossley, 2014). He contends that power and dominance are not only based on the possession of material resources but also on the possession of cultural and social resources (Bourdieu, 1985). In addition, besides articulating the importance of general signs of social recognition, through the concept of symbolic capital Bourdieu draws attention to the fact that the value of any form of capital depends, at least in part, upon social recognition. Capital is considered valuable because society, as a collective and at times despite ourselves, values it. Each individual, based on Bourdieu's theorising, possesses a portfolio of capital – a specific amount or volume of capital – and their capital has a particular composition. These are individual possessions and attributes. To the degree that they can be quantified, Crossley (2014) posits that they have a distribution within any given population, and it becomes possible to create a graph or 'map' of that population upon which each individual occupies a position dependent on their individual volume and composition of capital. The same is true, for example, of a population of new doctoral candidates entering the arena of doctoral education at any particular university in any particular year.

Consider how this might apply in the context of education, and doctoral education specifically. The educated possess power by virtue of the official legitimacy of their (educated) culture and employ their power to maintain its legitimacy. Crossley (2014) posits how this point connects with Bourdieu's theme of 'distinction'. Bourdieu (1985, 1991a) describes distinction as a process whereby groups of individuals in a social space develop cultural peculiarities which differentiate them from one another. Over time, individuals develop and embrace a sense of where they belong in society – of what is, and is not, within their rights and their reach. This relates to the previous discussions in this chapter regarding the interplay between capitals and doxa, and how the measure of either synergy or mismatch between a doctoral candidate's dispositions, practices and capitals and that of their doctoral context contributes to their sense of belonging or alienation in the field. In a doctoral education context, what is relevant is not the creation and perpetuation of various social classes, per se. Rather, and albeit in a similar sense, it has to do with the ways in which the field and its doxa contribute to the sense of inclusion and exclusion experienced by doctoral candidates – who is 'in' and who is 'out'?; who are the 'haves' and who are the 'have nots'? In this sense, as with social classes, the field of doctoral education does not prepare nor empower all agents within it for success in equal measure – not candidates, supervisors or departments, among others.

Also of relevance to doctoral candidates' sense of belonging in the field is the notion of socialisation and its impact on candidates' doctoral identity and potential experiences of imposterism. Socialisation is a term used to describe the processes by which doctoral candidates accumulate the knowledge, expertise and values required for successful integration into the professional career of doctoral education and potential career environments beyond (Weidman, Twale & Stein, 2001). Literature on doctoral education does not focus substantively on how Bourdieu's concepts of capital and field may be connected to the socialisation of doctoral students (Gopaul, 2016).

The degree to which candidates experience socialisation in doctoral education is in part linked to their portfolio of accolades or accomplishments (i.e., capitals) within doctoral study (Gopaul, 2015). These accomplishments may take the form of presenting at conferences, securing external funding and research publication output, and are recognised (real or perceived) as a demonstration of a candidate's skill and proficiency concerning the rules and norms of the field and academia more broadly. Gopaul's (2015) research indicates that while accomplishments like those mentioned above all provide candidates with the opportunity to become familiar with particular dynamics in doctoral education and academia, not all activities possess the same value. Furthermore, candidates experience these different activities to varying extents. Consequently, not all doctoral candidates experience or benefit from socialisation in the field as comprehensively as others, inherently resulting in concerns about inequality.

Whether in society at large or within the relative confines of the field of doctoral education, it is to be expected that hierarchies of position and power will inadvertently or purposefully result in various kinds of inequality and abuses visited upon those most vulnerable in the field. Some of these abuses are overt and recognisable in nature, while others exert a more subtle, yet comparably damaging impact. One conceptualisation of the latter, in Bourdieusian terms, is that of symbolic violence, discussed next.

3.6 Symbolic Violence

In Bourdieu's view, contemporary social hierarchies and social inequality, along with the suffering that they cause, are created and maintained less by physical force than by types of symbolic domination. He refers to the impact of such domination as 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu 2001, pp.1–2; Grenfell, 2014, p.179). In his ground-breaking work on the subject of symbolic violence, Bourdieu (2001, pp.1–2) defines the concept as 'a type of submission... a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition, recognition or even feeling...'. Elsewhere, (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.167), Bourdieu refers to symbolic violence as 'the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity'. This complicit behaviour can be thought of as disposition – broadly understood as a set of behavioural mechanisms developed in men and women resulting from social conditioning (Bourdieu, 2001). In the context of doctoral education, then, the cultivation of dispositions of this nature may be the result of socialisation processes in a doctoral degree programme or a supervisory relationship, more specifically.

Within a given social field, systems of symbolism and meanings are imposed on groups or classes of people 'in such a way that they are experienced as legitimate' (Jenkins, 1992, p.104). Therefore, the incremental acceptance and internalisation of policies, ideas and structures that tend to disenfranchise certain groups of people, veil the underlying power relations that benefit those in power (Connolly & Healy, 2004). An increasingly widely recognised example is how the dominance of men is legitimated as the natural 'order of things' in numerous cultures and countries within which women are 'consigned to inferior social positions' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp.168, 173). In this way, hierarchies and systems of domination are reinforced and reproduced to the extent that the dominant and the dominated perceive them as legitimate.

Symbolic violence is a typically unperceived form of violence and both an effective and efficient means of domination, in that the dominant classes need to expend little energy in order to maintain their power. All they need to do is 'let the system they dominate take its own course in order to exercise their domination' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.190). Stated another way, as members of the dominant classes simply go about their usual daily lives, the rules of the prevailing systems and structures to which they adhere continue to expand and safeguard their positions of privilege. Symbolic violence is insidious. Its invisibility constitutes an efficient tool for silent domination and silencing the dominated (Thapar-Björkert, Samelius & Sanghera, 2016).

Although symbolic violence may in some ways appear gentler than physical violence, it is no less real. The suffering that results from it is often misrecognised and internalised by members of society, thereby exacerbating suffering and perpetuating symbolic systems of domination.

As a result, symbolic violence can potentially be a 'more effective, and (in some instances) more brutal, means of oppression' (Eagleton & Bourdieu, 1992, p.115). Systemic/structural reform needs to occur within a social field in order to ensure that those who are silenced within it are actually heard and accorded agency (Bhambra & Shilliam, 2009).

For the doctoral candidate navigating various challenges in the field of doctoral education, particularly those resulting, at least in part, from institutional-related factors, the difficulties they face in attempting to secure supportive intervention may be daunting. The mostly imperceptible and unchallenged impact of both the underlying doxa of the field, together with the various forms of symbolic violence that the field can generate, may make the plight of those who are silenced and disenfranchised that much more urgent. In Chapter 2, subsection 2.2.2, it was argued that how doctoral candidates navigate difficulties encountered on their academic journey, among other things, plays a pivotal role in the formation of their academic identity (McAlpine & Amundsen, 2011). Varying adverse circumstances can contribute significantly to attrition in doctoral study (Chapter 2, section 2.4), exerting a considerable, sometimes defining impact on candidates' motivation to persevere in the field. The internalised belief an agent in a social field possesses that the journey and/or struggle in that field remains worthwhile is a concept that Bourdieu's field theory speaks to.

3.7 Illusio

Illusio is the final Bourdieusian concept which I am including in this theoretical framework. It is an idea that speaks to the matters of attrition or completion in doctoral education. Colley (2014, pp.668–669) refers to the concept of illusio as a 'pivotal concept in Bourdieu's later work' and the central way in which he explains the interaction between an agent's perceptions and practices and the field. Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) defined illusio as the belief that the game (or in the context of this study, the pursuit of a doctoral degree) that an individual plays remains worth playing. Once convinced of the validity of an illusio, players of the game refrain from searching for a way out of the game, even though there may be alternative games with a better yield in which they might engage (Mergen & Ozbilgin, 2021). For Bourdieu, then, illusio represents a dedicated 'investment in the game' (Bourdieu, 1990b, p.195), and contended that '[e]very social field... tends to require those entering it to have the relationship to the field that I call *illusio'* (Bourdieu, 1998, p.78).

Those who operate in a field and become invested in achieving success in it tend to believe increasingly strongly in the value of the goal they are striving towards, whether they recognise that belief consciously or hold it unconsciously (Blackmore, 2016). In the field of doctoral education, illusio is that which enables doctoral candidates to remain committed to their academic pursuits and do everything in their power to achieve success. It follows then that when the illusio begins to erode for the relevant player in the game, for whatever reason, their dedication to remaining invested in the game erodes along with it.

3.8 Conclusion

The struggle for, and over, power is a key focus point of Bourdieu's work. Not unlike the influence of a magnetic field, the impact of the social fields of doctoral education and supervision on the perceptions and choices of doctoral candidates can be far-reaching and often imperceptible to the actors involved. The same holds true for supervisors. For both these individuals and the broader social structures within these fields, choices are not reached in isolation but rather in the context of an education system which exerts influence over the agent making the choices and imposes consequences inextricably tied to each choice, whether for good or bad. The concepts of doxa, capital (and habitus), field, symbolic violence and illusio provided me with useful theoretical and conceptual tools in striving to make sense of this struggle as it unfolds in doctoral education. Doctoral education and doctoral supervision are social contexts that are home to this struggle, no less than any other.

Doctoral education, as discussed earlier in this thesis, has to do with more than the production of knowledge or the generation of specialised skills for the workplace. Central to the doctoral education journey is the development of the candidate's scholarly identity, not least of which is achieved through the process of supervision. The theoretical lenses afforded by Bourdieu's field theory enabled me to examine the nuanced and complex ways in which doctoral candidates' varied perceptions, practices and capitals played out in relation to the prevailing doxa in their institutional contexts. Furthermore, they afforded insights into how this interaction impacted (or not) their process of identity formation. Field theory provided the necessary tools to delve below the level of the superficial in analysing the social interactions and power relations relevant to this study, to understand the underpinning mechanisms operating within both the agents and the field better.

As with a field of play in the sporting sense, having a sound conceptualisation of the structure of the field of doctoral education and its rules, of the assets that the role players possess in navigating it and the ways in which that structure and those assets hinder or help these role players, forms the basis of the relevance and efficacy of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory as it relates to this study. It provided a theoretical lens to understand what the rules are that shape what counts as legitimate engagement, what capitals are desired and valued in the field, and how they can be identified.

Every researcher approaches a project and subject of study with certain beliefs and perceptions about the world that they inevitably bring with them to the research process. This worldview influences the nature of the questions they ask, the research tools they employ, and the findings and/or recommendations that they share with their audience. The next chapter discusses the ontological and methodological frameworks that shaped and underpinned this particular doctoral research project.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the theoretical lens chosen for this study, namely French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, examining its key concepts and their usefulness and pertinence in relation to the aims and objectives of this research. Chapter Four focuses on the methodological approach that underpinned this doctoral project.

It begins by reminding the reader of the study's aims and research questions and then goes on to discuss the research paradigm that was adopted. The chapter then delves into a discussion on the research method of narrative research, chosen as suitable for conducting this study, followed by an explanation of the practical methods that were employed to collect and analyse the relevant data. Finally, the chapter focuses on the various ethical considerations applicable to this study and how they were addressed, ending with some closing remarks.

4.2 Research Aims

As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, my examination of the field of doctoral education identifies a lack of qualitative research into doctoral candidates' experiences, from their perspective and in their own words, as they relate to the complex and multi-stage process of undertaking a doctoral degree. It also expressed the need to illuminate the reasons, from the perspective of doctoral candidates themselves, that contributed to their decision to leave their programme of study, seeking to determine the impact of both doctoral supervision on their academic trajectory, in addition to the role played by associated institutional structures in enabling or undermining their success. Therefore, as a reminder, this study sought insight into the following research questions:

Main research question:

> What do the narratives of de-registered South African doctoral candidates reveal about the ways in which supervision practices and support structures enable or constrain doctoral candidates' identity development and chances for success?

Sub-questions:

- How do doctoral candidates define and experience power relations and autonomy in the doctoral journey, particularly in relation to specific models of supervision?
- What role do institutional, faculty and departmental cultures and structures play in either facilitating or undermining candidates' attempts to resolve challenges that may be implicated in decisions to leave their programme?
- Who gets to determine what is valued within the field of doctoral education, and who gets included and who gets excluded as a consequence?

4.3 Research Paradigm

As a novice researcher, endeavouring to tackle the above-mentioned research questions called for introspection and reflection on my part. I had to question the paradigm(s) I operated within (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) and inevitably brought into my research process, in addition to my views and understanding of the nature of reality in the context of this study and of my relationship to it. That is to say, I had to question my positionality. Neuman (2000) refers to these views and understanding as epistemologies and ontologies. Manning and Stage (2015) state that before the researcher can make any methodological choices, they must first understand their 'worldview' in relation to their intended research.

4.3.1 Ontological considerations

Through my reading and research, I became increasingly aware that my philosophical worldview would ultimately guide me as I considered my methodological choices. Whatever I desired the purpose of my research to be, I came to understand that it needed to be informed by my ontological and epistemological position and aligned with my selected methods of gathering and analysing the data relevant to my research. On reflection and informed by my growing understanding of various ontological paradigms, including pragmatism, phenomenology, postmodernism, structuralism, social constructivism and critical social theory, I would argue that social constructivism represents the philosophical worldview best suited to my study. A social constructivist paradigm is founded on the idea that ordinary people are experts in and of their own lives (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Silverman, 2017), understanding and interpreting their lived reality. Understanding and interpretation of this nature was relevant to this study, given that this research sought to highlight the unique experiences of former doctoral candidates, articulated in and through their own words and perspectives.

Creswell (2009) observed that social constructivists assume that people seek an understanding of the world in which they live and function. They therefore construct subjective meanings of their experiences – meanings which are typically varied and multiple. Therefore, my goal as a social constructivist researcher was to rely as much as possible on my participants' views and perspectives regarding their experience of doctoral education. I also remained mindful, as Creswell (2009, p.8) explains, that the aforementioned 'subjective meanings are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others (hence social constructivism) and through historical, social and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives'. In a study that uses a theory like Bourdieu's field theory, it is important to note that our version of reality is not reality itself. For instance, a researcher in a specific context may argue that a higher education environment is dysfunctional or undermined in some way; however, that contention would not and does not encapsulate the whole of reality or the whole of truth. For this reason, researchers use theoretical and methodological tools to help contextualise and understand participants' stories in relation to other accounts of reality and truth.

Social constructivists subscribe to the notion of the inseparability of understanding from interpretation. Embracing this paradigm for this study meant understanding social research as interpretive because all research of this nature is guided by the researcher's desire to understand (and interpret) social reality (Hussain, Elyas & Nasseef, 2013). As a paradigm, it assumes that there are no facts but rather interpretations (Bhattacharya, 2008). This study therefore sought to explore individuals' perceptions, share their meanings and cultivate insights about relevant experiences and contexts (Bryman, 2008; Grix, 2010). By employing a social constructivist research paradigm, I aimed to construct rich and detailed descriptions of the phenomena under study to allow the reader to gain a meaningful understanding of these phenomena through identification and empathy.

4.3.2 Epistemology

Just as there is a need to understand the ontological implications of academic research, there is also a need to consider how the 'nature of knowledge' (epistemology) is understood: what counts as knowledge, where/who does it come from, and what criteria does it need to meet to be considered knowledge? Epistemology is directly connected with the types of methods and techniques I employed in my research, inevitably determining the ways in which my data was gathered, interpreted and presented (Hussain, et al., 2013). Questions of epistemology are intimately linked to the question of the relationship between the researcher and the researched. The epistemological position adopted in this study shaped the types of questions that my research sought to answer, and what I could take 'inquiry' to be – these, in turn, both influenced and were influenced by the nature of the interactions between myself as the researcher and my participants. Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) describe the change in the relationship between the researcher and 'the researched' as the most significant shift in the 'turn' towards narrative research (see section 4.4 for a discussion on narrative research).

The appropriate extension of having identified my ontological position in approaching my study was to consider my relationship as the researcher to both the theory of knowledge and the theory of learning – the two components of epistemology (Ernest, 1994). Epistemological assumptions represent the second set of assumptions brought to this research, and these assumptions concern ‘the very base of knowledge – its nature and forms, how it can be acquired and how it can be communicated to human beings’ (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.7). The epistemology of the social constructivism paradigm is subjectivism. In embracing this set of assumptions as a researcher, I argue/hold that knowledge is both personal and unique; it urged me to get involved with my participants in research-related social interaction. Subjectivism required me to adopt a research methodology that not only functioned as a method through which I explored how my research participants remember, structure and story their experiences of doctoral education but also as a process that could lead me to a clearer understanding of the complexities of their human selves, their lives and their relevant relationships within the field of doctoral study.

In identifying field theory as a theoretical lens that facilitates analysis and understanding of these concerns, via its concepts of field, capital, doxa, symbolic violence and illusion, I thus had to choose a methodological approach that complemented and built on this. This study's chosen methodology illuminates both my participants' individual experiences and the social processes (including relevant doxa) that have shaped their experiences (Hussain, et al., 2013). Narrative analysis provided appropriate tools to integrate the individual details and complexity in constructing my participants' shared experiences, as opposed to analysing these stories based on predetermined categories (Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013). Narrative research enabled the analysis to recognise multiple and at times contradictory layers of meaning and to reconstitute meanings by connecting these layers. It also aided me in more clearly understanding the individuals who participated in my research and exploring the social processes they experienced and subsequently shared with me. In the following section, I discuss the nature of narrative research as my chosen methodology and its implications for the research methods I employed in gathering my data.

4.4 Methodological Approach

4.4.1 Narrative analysis – An introduction

The previously discussed research gap identified through the review of the literature on doctoral education, together with the research questions constructed for this study, pointed this study decisively in the direction of narrative research as the methodological approach. The ontological and epistemological perspective described by Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p.2) resonates with the aims and objectives of this study:

> The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are story-telling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world.

Dewey's (1938) seminal work regarding experience and education provides the foundation for narrative inquiry, the chosen lens for gathering and analysing data in this study. He advanced the concept of experiential knowledge, arguing that knowledge is both personally and socially constructed. Using Dewey's concept of knowledge, Schwab (1973) examined its practicality in education, with Clandinin and Connelly (1988, 1992, 2000) subsequently developing narrative inquiry, a form of research best conceptualised as a human lived experience methodology and a tool for understanding experiences through stories. They explain that the value and meaning people gain from or ascribe to education is generated in relation to their own past and present experiences and beliefs, their needs, and future goals and hopes. According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006), using a narrative research methodology means adopting a particular view of experience as the phenomenon being researched. Narrative research emphasises people's storied realities that are put into narratives (Herman & Vervaeck, 2005), comprehending that narratives are 'laced with social discourses and power relations' (Riessman, 1993, p.65) – the same kinds of concerns that Bourdieu's field theory, as discussed in Chapter 3, is useful for illuminating. Research methodology using narratives has a lengthy intellectual history stretching across such disciplines as geography (Sack, 1997), women's studies (Gilligan, 1982), psychology (Coles, 1989), history (Carr, 1986), and philosophy (Taylor, 1992).

Conventions and standards which define social constructivist approaches are well-suited to narrative approaches to research. Hart (2002, p.141) claims that narrative methods 'are always exploratory, conversational, tentative, and indeterminate'. These approaches do not produce the Truth, but rather offer 'a measure of coherence and continuity to experience' (Hart, 2002, p.156). Hart (2002, p.155) further explains that narrative researchers are not 'scientists seeking laws that govern our behaviour', but instead 'storytellers seeking meanings that may help us to cope with our circumstances'. For this project, I adopted narrative research as the research methodology, considering its ability to represent 'a way of honouring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and experience' (Clandinin, 2013, p.17). In light of this study, honouring the lived experience of my research participants mattered. It mattered because of the role higher education can and should play in advancing the public good at an individual and societal level (DoE, 1997, 1.3; Biesta, 2007; Lange, 2012), and because of the assurances often made to doctoral candidates regarding supporting and guiding them along their academic journey – assurances which are not always honoured, subsequently undermining notions of access to and success in doctoral education.

Beyond a method for gathering and analysing data, I needed ‘rather a process of meaning making’ (Hendry, 2010, p.73). Narrative research offered the means for me to examine how and why stories are told, and search for meaning from these stories and lived experiences of my participants (Riessman, 1993). We create meaning from our experiences in life through the stories we share about ourselves and others, and through how we interpret experiences and events (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Using narrative research necessitates an understanding that narratives represent real-life experiences that illuminate truths and offer avenues for expression (Andrews, et al., 2013).

I desired to give my research participants the opportunity to make meaning from their experiences in doctoral education through the stories they shared about themselves and those they interacted with on their academic journey and through how they interpreted these experiences and events (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). The subject of analysis is the narrative itself (Riessman, 1993). The stories my research participants had the opportunity to share granted me access to the details and interpretation of their lived experiences, making it necessary and important that they were actively involved in my research process. This involvement is represented in various ways, including (to name a few):

- first indicating their interest and volunteering their participation in the study;
- availing their time and openly sharing their personal experiences; and,
- reading and revising drafts of their vignette, relevant extracts from their conversations, and ultimately the entire analysis chapter draft to ensure their satisfaction with how their shared experiences were represented and subsequently examined in the thesis.

4.4.2 Types of narrative research

There are two central epistemological approaches to narrative analysis, namely the naturalist and constructivist approaches (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997). The ‘naturalist’ approach uses detailed descriptions of people in their natural habitats. For instance, this approach is suited to research that seeks to explore interpersonal interactions in specific conditions (e.g., trauma incidents). By contrast, the constructivist approach focuses on how a sense of social order is created through talk and interaction. This approach is useful for exploring how identities are constructed in varied psychosocial settings, education representing one such example. Esin

(2011) devised the following simple table (Table 4.1) to illustrate the kinds of questions that the naturalist and constructivist approaches to narrative research are interested in asking.

Table 4.1: Naturalist and constructivist approaches to narrative research

Naturalist approach: focuses on 'what' questions	**Constructivist approach: focuses on 'how' questions**
What happened?	How do storytellers make sense of their experiences?
What experiences have people had?	How do storytellers talk about their experiences?
What did people do at that particular time? What does it mean to storytellers?	How do storytellers position themselves while telling stories about their lives?

Source: Esin (2011, p.96)

While both naturalist and constructivist approaches are overwhelmingly focused on people's lives and experiences, the latter resonated with this study on account of its view that the social world is continuously 'in the making' (Elliott, 2005, p.18). This view stands in contrast to that of the naturalist view that the social world is in some sense 'out there' – an external reality open to being observed and described by the researcher. Comprehending the production of the social world, which shapes narratives, is key to the constructivist approach.

One of the most explored differences in narrative research is between research highlighting the spoken recounting of specific *events* that happened to the narrator of the story in the past – classically articulated in Labov's (Labov & Waletsky, 1967) work on event narratives – and *experience*-centred work (Tamboukou, Andrews & Squire, 2008), that explores stories ranging in length from portions of interviews to numerous hours of life histories, and that may have to do with general or imagined phenomena. These may include things that happened to the narrator or far-removed matters they have only heard about. There is value in pointing out here that the event-centred and experience-centred split is for many narrative researchers merely a heuristic one, researchers tend to regard the boundaries between the two as porous and overlapping (Tamboukou et al., 2008). This overlap between the two forms of narrative research is substantially applicable to this study, given that the experiences narrated by the research participants have been inextricably tied to and influenced by various life events they have encountered and lived through, both in and outside of the field of doctoral education. These events include (but are by no means limited to) such things as the birth of a child, traumatic interpersonal incidents, financial struggle, or indeed registering as a doctoral candidate.

What applies to both event- and experience-centred narrative research is the notion that there is the assumption that individual, internal representations of phenomena – events, thoughts and feelings – are always present and that these representations are given outward expression by narrative. As Tamboukou et al. (2008, pp.5-6) argue, 'event-centred work assumes that these internal and individual representations are more or less constant. Experience-centred research stresses that such representations vary drastically over time and across the circumstances within which one lives', with the consequence that a single phenomenon may give rise to substantially different stories, even from the same narrator.

Furthermore, beyond the (albeit tenuous) divide between event- and experience-based narrative research, Polkinghorne (1988) draws attention to the two primary forms of narrative research, i.e., descriptive/analysis of narratives and explanatory/narrative analysis. Descriptive narrative research is primarily interested in the question of 'what?' Using this form, the researcher collects stories as data and employs paradigmatic analytic techniques to create categories or themes based on common elements across the data set. The researcher endeavours to describe the following: events or stories of individual or group narratives, dominant or contradictory/conflicting storylines, individual stories as they relate to the entirety of cultural stories, and/or how particular life events mould a person's life (Polkinghorne, 1988; Sandelowski, 1991). By contrast, explanatory narrative analysis tackles the question of 'why?' Here the researcher gathers events and happenings as data, employing narrative analytic techniques to create explanatory stories. In the case of narrative analysis, the story is the outcome (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009).

Unlike the explanatory approach, the study required methodological tools that would take the analysis beyond the chronicling of narratives to interpret the data represented by these stories, identifying central, overlapping themes and potentially conflicting ideas. This was done in the interest of understanding what these ex-doctoral candidates' experiences might reveal about the nature of power, struggle, belonging, or lack thereof in the field of doctoral education. What happened to these individuals? What capitals did they bring into the field of doctoral education and in what ways did these align or clash with the prevailing culture? What was the nature of their response to these events and experiences and what role did the social and professional contexts, systems and structures at the time (explicit or hidden) play in alleviating or compounding their struggles? What does this mean in terms of the nature of doctoral education and supervision? It is these kinds of questions that in part motivated the use of field theory as the theoretical lens for this study. As explained in Chapter Three in detail, field theory is useful in examining matters of power relations, explicit and implicit rules in a social field, and how various capitals interact with field structures and forces, among others.

Through the process of researching and thinking through these different approaches to narrative research, it was determined, based on the aims and objectives of this study and the theoretical tool chosen, that the descriptive analysis of narratives methodology was best suited to addressing these kinds of concerns, along with those raised by the key research questions. These were also the concerns that the chosen theoretical lens, field theory, could assist me in focusing on, enabling me to remain aware of and recognise the interactions between capitals, habitus and doxa (among other relevant theoretical concepts) which are inevitably at play between agents in the social field of doctoral education.

4.4.3 A research-based narratives approach

As a narrative researcher, I endeavour to think narratively (Xu & Connelly, 2009) as I realise that properly understanding the perspectives, values and beliefs of the research participants can only occur as I learn about their particular experiences. 'Thinking narratively' refers to a way of thinking in which the narrative researcher does not jump to conclusions or translate the narratives into 'solvable problems' (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p.359), but rather thinks about and examines people's experiences – 'nothing more and nothing less' (Clandinin, 2013, p.38). Given that narrative research is not only about telling stories but additionally 'a way of thinking about life' (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p.221; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), I aimed to understand the experiences of my research participants through the use of storytelling and narratives. I then retold their stories intending to transfer this form of learning to my research audience (Clandinin, 2013). As a narrative researcher, I embraced being intentional about valuing the stories of the participants in my study. Through the course of conducting this research, I have learned through and been impacted by the stories that have been shared with me, and I have hopefully had a similar impact on the individuals who have shared their experiences with me (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007).

As has been mentioned previously, the unique personalities and experiences that doctoral candidates and supervisors bring to the supervisory relationship mean that no two candidates' experiences are identical. Because there cannot be one dominant kind of doctoral path to success, a field theory-led analysis helped this study to make sense of all the factors that influence what may count as success, and for whom, how and why. Furthermore, field theory can illuminate how doctoral candidates engage in the field – in that 'space of possibles' – to navigate their own academic journey. Stories that are decided on and told by participants, not directed by predetermined interview questions but co-created through conversation between the researcher and the participant, allow for the unearthing and understanding of these kinds of meanings.

Following on from the methodology applicable to my study, in the next section I will discuss the relevant research methods I employed in identifying my study participants and the process by which I elicited their doctoral education stories and obtained other relevant data.

4.5 Research Methods

In discussing the research methods employed for my study, I refer to the more practical concerns of choosing a suitable research design in pursuit of answering my research questions, and subsequently identifying and adapting instruments to generate the data (Cohen, et al., 2007). Expressed another way, the research methods represent the 'techniques or procedures used to collate and analyse data' (Blaikie, 2000 cited in Grix, 2010, p.8). The integrity and quality of this research not only relied on a suitable methodology and instrumentation but also on the appropriateness of the sample (Cohen et al., 2007).

4.5.1 Context of study (setting)

As it relates specifically to the collection of the interview data, there was no physical setting associated with my research. All my research participants lived in different cities from my own, making face-to-face interaction difficult. In any event, we found that using the online meeting platform Zoom functioned well in meeting the requirements for the study. My participants and I had stable internet connections with clear audio and video, resulting in the online context posing little to no obstacles to effective communication. The participants were therefore able to connect with me via their relevant electronic devices at a physical location of their choosing, aiding in their sense of feeling at ease during our conversation(s).

From a broader perspective, the physical setting relevant to all the participants was their enrolment in and involvement at a South African university. This represents a common geographic and national context within which this doctoral research was conducted.

4.5.2 Sampling

Given that this study focused on the experiences of de-registered doctoral candidates, these individuals were no longer a part of relevant university structures and databases. Therefore, calls for participation went out via select social media channels using carefully chosen academic-related hashtags – for example, #postac, #altac and #phdchat – on Twitter and Facebook. Potential research participants were invited to complete a Google Form survey, created in consultation with my supervisors and informed by the objective and research questions of the study. The primary purpose of this broad research survey was to identify suitable individuals who would be willing to be interviewed and to share their doctoral education experiences. My hope and expectation were that the sharing of this initial survey would yield initial respondents who could then be invited to participate further through sharing their story, by indicating their willingness at the end of the survey.

The survey also served to contextualise the profiling data to create a sense of the research population, providing some demographic information that would be used in the study and data analysis. This included the age, gender and race of the respondents, in addition to the age at which they registered for the doctoral degree in question. In the end, I only used survey data from the 6 individuals who participated in this study, because the overall number of responses was too small to yield detailed data. This demographic data was used in creating the vignettes relevant to each participant (see Chapter 6, section 6.2)

There was no pilot phase relevant to the distribution of the survey, in the sense that the responses received did not highlight any need for revisions to the document. The initial version of the document was used during this component of the sampling process. A few questions in the survey focused on the subject of doctoral attrition. This was intentional and necessary, given the objective of the study to specifically research candidate experiences and perspectives on doctoral attrition, as mentioned in section 1.3. The use of social media was the initial mechanism of outreach, however, this approach failed to yield the desired number of responses, with two individuals responding to the social media posts. This may have been because the call failed to reach the individuals in question or because some people were hesitant about or wary of sharing details regarding a challenging phase in their academic and personal lives. It is difficult to definitively deduce the reasons for the relatively low social media responses. In light of this, however, I employed a word-of-mouth (snowball) strategy, which included my own, my existing research participants' (at that time), and my peers' social and/or academic networks. The sampling procedure excluded contacting universities because the desired/prospective research participants were mostly expected to no longer be included on relevant university databases and networks. Twelve survey responses were received in total.

Although all survey responses were recorded anonymously, the form included an option for participants to self-select for a follow-up interview. Eight individuals completed this section. (Refer to Appendix C for details of the research survey that was used along with supporting, relevant information.) Of the eight people who agreed to be interviewed, two were unsuitable for the study. One potential participant exited their doctoral programme as a result of falling pregnant, and the other had not been registered at a South African university. The requirements for those participating in the study stipulated them having been registered at a South African university, and having exited their programme at least in part due to institutional factors. I emailed and thanked these two respondents for their time and willingness to participate in the study and explained why they were not suited to do so. Based on their response to this explanation, they both understood entirely and there was no sense of negativity or animosity associated with either of these exchanges.

Ultimately, the process of identifying prospective research participants was more challenging than had been anticipated. Eventually, I identified six suitable individuals who volunteered to be interviewed.

4.5.3 Regarding sample size

The matter of determining the optimal number of participants for qualitative research is not a simple one (Barkhuizen, 2014). Although I would personally have preferred to secure the participation of more individuals, I regard this as a preference, as opposed to a potential shortcoming of this study. This is for three reasons.

Firstly, the goal of this research was not to provide a broad-scale, macro assessment of the matter of doctoral study attrition in South Africa. There exists a significant amount of data in the literature on this topic, covered at least in part in Chapter Two of this study. Rather, the purpose of this research was to humanise and personalise the experiences of individuals, experiences which are typically lost amid the statistics, figures and percentages which are used in attempts to communicate the scope of the subject of attrition in doctoral education. This study sought to provide an in-depth window into the lives of six individuals who 'fell through the cracks' in the field of doctoral study – to elevate their voice, their story, and the impact of their experience on their lives.

Secondly, I am mindful of the argument put forward by Frost (2021) that narrative-based research methods are not appropriate for studies conducted with a large number of participants. In narrative research, as is the case in most qualitative designs, there exists no strict rule for deciding on the appropriate sample size for a study (Francis, Johnston, Robertson, Glidewell, Entwistle, Eccles & Grimshaw, 2010; Vasileiou, Barnett, Thorpe & Young, 2018). Rather, the construction of rich, detailed narrative accounts within the given research context is critical to a good narrative analysis. Given that narrative research aims to learn more about matters such as the participant's culture, historical experiences and identity, the emphasis is not on large sample sizes. Consequently, many narrative studies explore the story of one individual, selected based on their suitability for providing an understanding of the matters being addressed in the study (Moen, 2006, Haydon & Riet, 2014). There exist numerous examples in the literature of narrative research that have been conducted with just one participant (see

Zhang, 2020; Barkhuizen, 2021; Huang, 2021). Cresswell (2013, pp.73–74) argues that ‘narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories or life of a single individual or the lives of a small number of individuals’. This argument is echoed in other literature discussing sample sizes in narrative research (Palinkas, 2014; Nigar, 2020; Hong & Cross Francis, 2020). For these reasons, the number of participants in narrative research is not of significant concern (Frost, 2021), and if anything, tends legitimately towards smaller sample sizes yielding richer participant accounts (Squire, 2008; Lewis & Adeney, 2014).

Thirdly and finally, while the participant stories and interviews represent the primary source of data for this study, they are not the only data source that informed its findings and implications. Data was also collected and analysed from objective sources including South African university higher degrees’ guides, the DDNR (CHE, 2022) and peer-reviewed literature relevant to doctoral supervision and attrition. This approach was taken in an effort, as far as possible, to ground the conclusions of this study on a foundation in keeping with scholarly integrity (see subsection 4.5.5).

4.5.4 Data collection

The chosen method of interviewing was recorded, unstructured narrative interviews, with a few prompts used to facilitate the participants sharing the stories of their doctoral candidature as freely as possible Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p.1) make the point that it ‘seems so simple to interview, but it is hard to do well’. Mishler (1991) proposes that the impulse of human beings to narrate is such an integral part of their experience that interviewees will tell stories even when not encouraged to do so. However, Chase (2003) notes that ‘requesting and attending to another’s story in the interview context is not a simple matter and that it requires an altered conception of what interviews are and how we should conduct them’ (2003, p.274). If the idea that people make sense of experience and communicate meaning through narration is taken seriously, it follows that in-depth interviews ought to become occasions in which researchers request life stories – narratives about some life experience that is representative of deep and enduring interest to the interviewee (Chase, 2003). The interviewer’s success in eliciting these life stories is grounded in them undertaking the task to invite others to tell their stories, encouraging them to take the responsibility for the meaning of their talk. An effective interviewer succeeds in shifting the weight of responsibility to the interviewee such that they willingly embrace it (Chase, 2003).

In qualitative social science research there has been a significant amount of discussion around the idea of giving ‘voice’ to interviewees, particularly where matters of discrimination, under-representation and asymmetries of power are the focus of study (Mann, 2011). This is certainly true of this study. The qualitative interviewer is required to make important choices and progress in the areas of recruiting and arranging interviews, managing the interview itself, cultivating a reflective and sensitive approach, and employing this sensitivity in the process of analysis and representation (Mann, 2011). One important issue relevant to the interview process that the researcher needs to be more mindful of is, rather than simply ‘mining’ the products for data, Donnelly (2003) notes the challenge for qualitative researchers involving shifting from a ‘what’ perspective to a ‘how’ perspective. Researchers need ‘to articulate as fully as possible the processes associated with the data analysis of interviews’ (Donnelly, 2003, p.318). Sharing and explaining the processes associated with the analysis of interviews involves ‘epistemological reflexivity’ (Willig, 2001, p.32) and a careful examination of methodology, assumptions, choices and theories that inextricably influence the research and its findings. The latter has been discussed in section 4.3. whereas subsection 4.6.2 will discuss the former.

In light of the largely unscripted nature of the interview process that was adopted for this study, in line with the tenets of narrative research, I refer to these interviews as conversations from this point forward. Initially, I invited each participant to begin sharing their story in the same manner. In order to facilitate this process with as little interruption on my part as possible, I requested they take me through the entirety of their doctoral experience as they recalled it, from their decision to pursue their doctoral degree, to their pairing with their supervisor, the unfolding of their journey and the emergence of challenges, leading up to their eventual withdrawal from the programme. I requested that they share with us much detail as they desired and as they felt comfortable with. Most of the candidates were quite comfortable with this approach and required few prompts aimed at keeping their narration going smoothly, depending on their confidence and/or clarity with regard to what they wanted to share. When I deemed a prompt to be potentially useful, these took the form of simple questions or requests, based on the stage in their academic story that had been reached at that particular point. For example, ‘What factors motivated you to enrol in doctoral study and what were your expectations?’ or ‘Please describe the process by which you were paired with your supervisor and how the relationship initially took shape’. An unstructured conversation approach was also adopted to guard against the conversations being steered in a predetermined direction.

Typically, a weekday early evening, after office hours, represented the most convenient time for each participant to avail themselves for this study – when the demands of their profession had subsided, and before they were distracted with the usual responsibilities and tasks associated with their personal and home life. All the conversations were conducted via Zoom, allowing recording without requiring sign-ups and authentication from the participants. In the process of conducting the unstructured conversations, it became apparent that some key information was missing which could lend context and perspective to the narratives being shared. In light of this, I conducted a follow-up round of more structured conversations, to which all the participants agreed. This subsequent round of conversations was designed specifically to illuminate issues of capital (social, cultural, symbolic) relating to the participants’ experience and navigation of the field of doctoral education. The questions I used were designed to explore matters such as what capitals the candidates brought into the field, what forms they took, and how the candidates acquired and used them. I was interested to know how what they possessed (or not) upon entering the field impacted how the events they shared and reflected on in their narratives, unfolded. The initial round of conversations ranged between 60 to 75 minutes each, with the follow-up conversation lasting an average of 45 minutes.

In terms of the number of conversations I had with the participants, the initial conversation and the second follow-up session mentioned above ended up representing the entirety of this data collection method/stage with all six individuals. This was due to time-constraints on their part limiting their availability, but also, more importantly, the fact that each participant felt they had sufficient opportunity to share everything that had they wanted to, or that they felt was necessary to. In specifically checking this with each participant, both at the end of the conversations and in subsequent email exchanges, I determined that each of them felt their contribution to be a full representation of what they wished to convey. All recordings and transcribed data were securely stored on my personal laptop, in a password-protected space accessible only by me.

All participants in the study were assured of their anonymity and privacy, and before the conversations, I clearly outlined the aim of the research and the method of data collection. I acknowledged the possibility that the participants may feel vulnerable in sharing their experiences, given that they had not completed their doctoral studies, and in consideration of any possible sensitive emotions they may have been dealing with as a result. In dealing with potential vulnerability and harm that may have arisen because of their involvement, the participants were clearly notified of their right to end the conversation at any time, with no repercussions, and that any data obtained up until that point would be permanently deleted. I was always ready to suspend or terminate an conversation should a participant feel uncomfortable or emotional and in need of a break (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011). Furthermore, each participant was informed of their freedom throughout the conversation to cease talking about any specific subject that may have arisen, should they wish to.

Beyond the two rounds of conversations with the participants I kept in contact with all of them via email for the duration of the study. This contact served a few purposes. I kept each participant informed regarding the progress of my research – something each of them expressed their appreciation for. I shared their contribution to the study with them, allowing them the opportunity to make all the changes to their story that they wished to make in order for them to feel consistently safe and comfortable with their participation. I was also able to use the email platform to ask any clarifying questions which arose during my analysis of the data. Each participant expressed their gratitude for being kept updated, and were always willing to provide further clarity or input as the study or their needs dictated. My sense was that the sustained contact made the participants feel valued and respected, beyond merely representing a source of data for research. Refer to addendum E for an example of an email to a participant intended to facilitate the above mentioned revision process, along with an example of one of their responses,

Beyond the aforementioned broad research survey and conversations with the research participants, I obtained additional data that I deemed relevant to and necessary for this study via an examination of the South African Doctoral Degrees National Report (DDNR) (CHE,

2022) and several South African universities' higher degrees' guides. I selected the universities based on the availability and/or accessibility of the relevant documents, as not all universities make these documents publicly available. From those universities that do make these documents open access, as far as possible I chose a sample I believed to be suitably representative of the sector, and identified the most recently available versions of the relevant documents to work with. Having said that, the sample did organically end up being over-represented by research intensive, traditional universities. This may be due to the possibility that these institutions are more likely than others to have readily available documentation as, historically, they have always had the highest number of PhD candidates and more established doctoral study programmes.

This selection provides a snapshot of the relevant data across several South African universities, as the list includes comprehensive and traditional universities and a university of technology. The following table outlines the higher degrees guides that I consulted, listed in alphabetical order.

Table 4.2. List of university higher degrees guides consulted for this study

University	**Document Title**	**URL**
North West University (NWU)	Manual for Higher Degrees Studies (2020)	https://studies.nwu.ac.za/sites/studies.nwu.ac.za/files/files/postgrad/Higher%20Degrees%20Manual_Senate_1Sept2020.pdf
Rhodes University (RU)	A Guide for Master's & Doctoral Students at Rhodes University (2019)	https://www.ru.ac.za/media/rhodesuniversity/content/law/documents/10-students/HDG_Guide_2019.pdf
Stellenbosch University (SU)	Guidelines for Higher Degrees Research in the Faculty of Arts and Social	https://www.sun.ac.za/english/faculty/arts/cebita/Document

	Sciences (no date)	s/FAQ/Guidelines%20for%20Higher%20Degrees%20Research%20in%20the%20Faculty%20of%20Arts%20and%20Social%20Sciences.pdf
University of Cape Town (UCT)	Guidelines for PhD Candidates and Supervisors (2020)	https://uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/content_migration/postgradhub_uct_ac_za/62/files/Guidelines_for_PhD_Candidates_and_Supervisors.pdf
University of South Africa (UNISA)	Procedures for Master's and Doctoral Degrees (2020)	https://www.unisa.ac.za/static/corporate_web/Content/Colleges/CAES/Research/docs/Procedures_for_Masters_and_Doctoral_Degrees.pdf
Vaal University of Technology (VUT)	Higher Degrees Guide (2017)	https://lib.vut.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/vut-higher-degrees-guide.pdf

With respect to collecting data from the DDNR (CHE, 2022) and the university higher degrees guides, I achieved this by reading and combing the documents in search of key themes or concepts relevant to the research questions of the study and to the field of doctoral education more broadly (as presented and examined in detail in Chapter 2) – concepts such as attrition in doctoral education, doctoral identity, institutional support systems and accountability, and expectations in doctoral study. This process of reading and searching these documents resulted in the identification of the various data points and excerpts therein that were drawn upon in the analysis and conclusion chapters of this study. This data was valuable in terms of lending additional layers of richness and meaning to the key findings that emerged from the shared experiences of the study participants. Furthermore, these additional data sources served as a useful means of triangulation, lending deeper credibility and impact to the stories of the participants than might have been present had their narratives been shared and examined in isolation.

4.5.5 Data analysis

I began the data analysis portion of this study with a detailed analysis of the university doctoral and research degrees handbooks, mentioned in the previous subsection, to provide an overview of the field of South African doctoral education within which my participants experienced their truncated studies. This initial stage of the analysis process also involved an examination of the DDNR (CHE, 2022) document, regarding which information was provided in Chapter 1, subsection 1.4.5.. Insights gleaned from an examination of the DDNR (CHE, 2022) were useful for adding additional context to, and highlighting points of corroboration with, the central concepts that emerged from the analysis of the relevant higher degrees guides. I examined both these sources of additional data through the theoretical lens of field theory. This facilitated the shedding of light on issues such as, for example, the nature of doxa operating in the field of doctoral education, and which capitals are valued in the field and consequently inform the expectations within the field of those who navigate it. This stage of the analysis aims to provide the reader with an understanding of the expectations that the field of doctoral education has of doctoral candidates, doctoral supervisors and relevant departments/faculties/universities.

The resultant data that emerged from the conversations with the participants were recorded and transcribed verbatim and analysed using a framework of concepts derived from the theoretical framework used for this study. The transcriptions were achieved by referring to the digital recording of each conversation, saved directly from the Zoom online meeting application in real time, onto my personal home computer. I went through these recordings slowly and carefully, typing out each word or audio gesture of each conversation in Microsoft (MS) Word and saving these transcripts into separate MS Word files and folders on my computer, uniquely created and categorised for each participant. Beyond capturing each word of a particular conversation, I was also intentional about including my own commentary with regard to distinct or significant changes I noticed in the participant’s tone of voice and/or emotional state relative to any specific stage or aspect of their academic journey that they were sharing about.

The purpose of this commentary was to have a convenient reference point that informed me of and demonstrated how specific experiences impacted participants' emotional state, both at the time of the events unfolding, and as they were revisiting them through the telling of their stories for this study. This knowledge proved useful during my data analysis process, particularly when examining and presenting issues related to the emotional impact relevant to my participants' lived experiences. I encountered little to no technical problems associated with the transcription process described above, and I consequently felt no need for, nor explored any, alternate methods of capturing the data.

With the second round of conversations completed, I listened to all the conversations several times, making broad, general notes about each one with respect to key themes which resonated with or connected to my research questions and the central concepts of my chosen theoretical framework. This enabled the construction of a chronological summary of the events the participants experienced, as they unfolded. I then listened to the conversations again and made a record of time stamps in the recordings of verbatim quotations I could include as illustrations of the relevant participant's experiences. I chose these quotations based on their effectiveness at speaking to, elaborating on or reinforcing the themes and concepts that my research questions sought to explore, or that illuminated concepts relevant to my theoretical framework. I have opted not to include examples of early analysis documents as addendums to this study as these contain information that might potentially compromise the anonymity of the participants. However, during the initial rounds of listening to the audio recordings I began broadly analysing the conversations by applying the following categories to each participant's accounts:

- **Researcher Observation** – A record of any particular moments in the conversations that stood out as particular interesting or worth specifically following up on at a later stage (informed by the research questions of the study and the key themes discussed in the literature review).
- **Supervisor Pairing** – The process by which each participant was paired with their doctoral supervisor and whether any MoU or other parameters informed their academic interaction.

- **Challenge Form** – What the nature or form of the challenges were that each participant experienced.
- **Impact On Candidate (Academic)** – How these challenges impacted their academic progress.
- **Impact On Candidate (Emotional/Other)** – The consequences these experiences resulted in on an emotional, physical or other level.
- **Available Support (Personal)** – What sort of support was available to each participant within their personal social network.
- **Available Support (Institutional)** – Any form of institutional support or intervention that they were able to rely on.
- **Navigation Strategies** – The methods they adopted in their attempt to successfully navigate their respective challenges.
- **Hindsight Takeaways** – Any key conclusions a participant had reached regarding their doctoral education experiences with the benefit of hindsight.
- **Commonalities** – Any issues, experiences, emotions, etc. that were common multiple or all participants' experiences.

I continued the process of analysing the conversation data by crafting a vignette based on each of the participants' stories, consisting of a combination of my own reporting of the relevant conversation, and supporting direct quotations from the relevant participant. These vignettes formed part of an initial pass at analysing the data and have been developed further as brief character introductions which serve to provide the reader with a sense of who my research participants are before they read about their experiences.

Finally, the third stage of data analysis consisted of an examination of the research participants' unique engagement with and experience of the field of South African doctoral education. This examination of the participants' stories was carried out with reference to and in consideration of the aforementioned expectations that the field of doctoral education has of candidates, supervisors and universities. Bourdieu's theoretical concepts aided me in making sense of the various collected data by identifying, for instance, what sorts of capital the participants brought along with them into their programme of study, what sorts of expectations and rules were operating in their academic context and to what effect, and how their capitals and the rules and power relations within the field set the stage for either synergy with or conflict against the doxa they encountered in the field of doctoral education. I was mindful of how their forms of capital were valued or not within the field, how their habitus impacted their perceptions and behaviour, and how the dominant rules of the game either facilitated or undermined their progress, depending on the degree of dissonance or alignment between their personal history and identity and the workings of the field they entered as doctoral candidates.

Initially, I found the process of extrapolating meaning from the data using field theory to be extremely challenging. This journey of understanding and discovery took many weeks and numerous conversations with my supervisors and another highly experienced academic involved in my doctoral project who is familiar with field theory. A key bit of advice involved not making assumptions about what the reader might understand or recognise with regard to the presentation and analysis of the data, but rather explicitly explaining the significance and meaning of the data from a field theory perspective. During this phase of my doctoral learning journey I came to recognise the value of slowing down – of taking more time with each portion of data and carefully thinking through what meaning might be derived from each phrase and sentence when considered in the context of field theory. Multiple drafts were necessary, with this stage of the study representing one of the most frustrating and testing parts of my doctoral education experience. It required me to consistently struggle and grapple with the data and my attempted analysis thereof, all of which I found as emotionally taxing as it was intellectually draining. Eventually, thankfully, with each new attempt at analysis my comprehension of the process expanded to the point where meaningful and insightful engagement with the data become possible.

Addendum D of this thesis represents an example of an extract of data and analysis that I shared with the experienced academic mentioned above, as part of our discussions regarding using field theory effectively. The highlighted portions represent the additional analysis I added to the document following my consultation with this individual. The improved thoroughness and sophistication of the data analysis is clearly evident in this document,

4.6 Ethical Issues: Consent, Harm and Positionality

4.6.1 Consent and harm

I was mindful of the fact that securing appropriate permission prior to the collection of data is an ethical consideration intended to ensure that my research participants were adequately informed and that all aspects of the study process were conducted transparently (Cousin, 2009). I secured the necessary ethical approval (Application number: 2024-5287-8280) required by the Rhodes University (RU) Ethics Committee, indicative of my responsibility to treat the research participants with respect and consideration. This respect and consideration included making sure that they were fully aware of the purpose of the study, that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any point during the study.

I obtained written permission from each participant. My research was conducted in a trustworthy and transparent manner (Strydom, 2011), including the process of member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), allowing participants to verify the accuracy of all data collected from their involvement before the research was submitted to external examiners. I achieved this by sharing, via email, all portions of the data and constructed narratives relevant to each participant's experiences with them before any information was made public. Each participant had an opportunity to revise their contribution however they saw fit so that they were completely comfortable with the information being presented and analysed in this study.

4.6.2 Positionality

An ethical issue I needed to bear in mind during the course of this study was my own troubled experiences with postgraduate supervision. This position was potentially problematic given that my familiarity with the research context meant that I grappled with certain matters, as other researchers have. These concerns include instances in which researchers may find it 'more likely to take things for granted, develop myopia, and assume their own perspective is far more widespread than it actually is' (Mercer, 2007, p.6). In my specific case, I had to purposefully remain mindful that not all breakdowns of varying kinds in the supervision relationship result from supervisor apathy, neglect or abuse, whether conscious or not. Similarly, I had to guard against assuming that doctoral candidates are exempt from any responsibility related to academic progress and development challenges. In addition, I had to remain open to my own perspectives and interpretations about the narratives and data for this study being challenged, whether by my supervisors or critical friends, accepting that my perceptions do not automatically correlate with reality.

There are a variety of activities I engaged in to mitigate any risks along these lines. These included:

- Keeping a field journal about my reading, conversations, feelings and experiences – externalising them in the interest of raising my conscious awareness of them.
- Finding a critical friend[7] in my wider academic and/or PhD community who I could debrief with and who could help me talk through these issues as and when they arose.
- Keeping my study grounded in the theory and literature, to mitigate any risk of my own experiences clouding my judgement or evaluation.

With respect to the 2nd bullet point above concerning the critical friend, specifically, this was a practice and approach that I found particularly helpful in navigating concerns of positionality. During these conversations, this individual would ask me to share and reflect on matters such as to what extent the participants' experiences with supervision mirrored my own and what, if any, kinds of emotions this evoked in me and how I navigated them. I was also reminded and challenged, for example, to remain vigilant with regard to any potential biases, assumptions and agendas I might potentially introduce into the conversation process, motivated by my own unpleasant experiences with postgraduate education and supervision. Exchanges of this kind aided me in guarding against the conversations with my study participants being compromised by inappropriate behaviour or involvement on my part.

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[7] One example of this is a close friend and counselling psychologist with whom I was able to share and unpack my journey of collecting and analysing the data for this study, providing productive opportunities for thoughtful questions and reflections.

Finally, this discussion about positionality would not be complete without an acknowledgement of the potential influence (conscious or not) on the study of the factors of race and gender. I am a coloured male. Most of my participants are women (5 out of 6), with three being black, two coloured and one white. I had to consider how and to what extent race and gender dynamics might potentially influence the participants' sense of safety, freedom or confidence in sharing their stories. It was important to me to convey the sentiment, as best I could, that I am in no way, shape or form superior to my participants. In order to achieve this and to facilitate the participants sharing as comfortably as possible, I made a conscious effort to convey this fact – expressing it directly or sharing candidly (when I felt it appropriate or when asked to) about my own academic experiences that left me feeling inadequate and insecure. The participants all responded positively to a showing of vulnerability, humility and honesty on my part, and I sensed that an encouraging level of rapport was established with each individual fairly early into the process of interacting with them. At no point did I get the impression from any participant that either my race or gender posed a threat to constructive and comfortable communication.

4.7 Conclusion

As a subjectivist researcher working within the social constructivist paradigm, I remained mindful that my research efforts were not aimed at uncovering any objective 'truth' related to former doctoral candidates' experiences of doctoral education. Rather, the objective of this research was to chronicle these individuals' experiences based on their own recollections, perspectives and perceptions and articulated in their own words and on their own terms. I identified and chose narrative research as the most suitable methodological approach for accomplishing this task. In doing so, I also had to remain cognisant of my own biases and assumptions which I potentially brought to the research process which might influence my analysis of the data, and I had to take practical steps to mitigate this possibility.

Having clarified the methodological approach I adopted for examining the field of doctoral education and collecting the data relevant to this study, the next chapter explores the nature of the field. Chapter Five discusses the various expectations that the field of doctoral education has of the various agents that exist in and navigate it – candidates, supervisors, and broader institutional structures. Understanding these expectations not only helps to shed light on the influence they exert within the field, but it also provides clarity on the kinds of support that agents in the field – particularly doctoral candidates, being the focus of this study – can legitimately expect to receive as they seek to make progress in it. Finally, having a clear grasp of these expectations aids in identifying the synergy or the disparity that exists between the ideal academic context these expectations point to, versus the actual context that agents experience within the field.

Chapter 5: Expectations and Responsibilities in Doctoral Studies

5.1 Introduction

As was discussed in Chapter 3, doctoral education can be conceptualised as a field of research, with doctoral supervision as a subfield within it. As Bourdieu has stated, a field is an arena of contestation, characterised by contest or tension (Martin, 2003; Wacquant, 2007). Tension or struggle in the field may develop as players strategically manoeuvre in their quest to optimise their positions. Given this nature of field, in the Bourdieusian sense, the possible emergence of power struggles in doctoral education should come as no surprise.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the purpose of this research was not to provide a broad-scale, macro assessment of the issue of doctoral study attrition in South Africa. There exists a significant amount of data in the literature on this topic, covered at least in part in Chapter 2 of this thesis. Rather, the purpose of this study was to humanise and personalise the experiences of individuals which are typically lost amid the statistics, figures and percentages which are used in attempts to communicate the scope of the subject of attrition in doctoral education. This study sought to provide an in-depth window into the lives of six individuals who 'fell through the cracks' in the field of doctoral study – to elevate their voices, their stories, and the impact(s) of their experience on their lives.

The exploration of these experiences will take place in two stages. The first one, laid out in this chapter of the thesis (Chapter 5), examines the field of doctoral education concerning the various key expectations that it holds of doctoral candidates, supervisors, and relevant faculties and departments. The data relevant to this discussion was obtained from a few sources. These sources are South African university higher degrees guides, the DDNR (CHE, 2022), and pertinent national and international literature on doctoral education and supervision. The DDNR[8] (CHE, 2022, p.22), released in March 2022, was intended to provide a 'comprehensive overview of the state of provision of the doctoral qualifications that are being offered in South

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[8] Reminder: explained in Chapter 1, subsection 1.4.5.

Africa, as reported by institutions through their SERs (Self-Evaluation Reports), and assessed and reported by Review Panels'. The 28 higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa offering doctoral qualifications were requested to prepare for this review of their doctoral programmes. The national review was proposed by South Africa's National Research Foundation and prepared by the Council on Higher Education.

Chapter 6 will discuss what the relevant forms of capital are in the field of doctoral education, and what the implications are of having or not having the 'right' forms of capital as they relate to doctoral study and success at this level of education. Once the field of doctoral education and its expectations of relevant 'players' have been explored, Chapter 6 will go on to discuss the specific experiences of the participants who have volunteered to participate in this doctoral study. Their experiences and stories will be reviewed in relation to the expectations of the field, ultimately with the objective of gaining insight into the various factors and mechanisms that impacted their academic journey. However, as mentioned above, the nature of the field of doctoral education and its expectations will be discussed now in this chapter.

5.1.1 Forms of capital - a brief reminder

Bourdieu identifies four categories of capital: economic (financial wealth), social, cultural, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) (see Chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion).

Economic capital, beyond the obvious form of material wealth and the access and influence that it grants those who possess it, can be transformed into other forms of capital (cultural and social, for example), and can, in turn, be converted back into economic capital. In the context of doctoral education, having access to significant levels of economic capital may mean being able to study full-time without stress and pressure related to day-to-day living costs. It could mean having ready access to additional training or development resources and opportunities like conferences and writing retreats where academic guidance is shared and strategic social connections can be made, etc.

Social capital points to the 'network of lasting social relations' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.21) that agents have constructed and continue to build upon. It is generated through social processes and is expressed as social relationships and networks (contacts and group affiliations or memberships, for instance). In the field of doctoral education, social capital may take the form of having family members or friends who have previously experienced doctoral study and who are able to share valuable insights and potentially facilitate beneficial social connections. Another form of social capital may be entering doctoral study with an established, healthy supervision relationship developed during previous levels of education, etc.

Symbolic capital includes ‘culturally significant attributes such as prestige, status and authority’ (Harker, Mahar & Wilkes, 1990, p.13). Symbolic capital affords agents in the field the power to dominate it (Bourdieu, 1986). The symbolic capital a doctoral candidate enters the field of doctoral education with (based on previous academic accolades and achievements, for instance) may have limited value and influence in a field occupied by many who have already attained success in doctoral study and beyond.

Cultural capital is gained as an agent in the field attains increased levels of education, and is 'connected to individuals in their general educated character ... connected to objects – books, qualifications... and connected to institutions' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.21). Of particular relevance to this study are two specific forms of cultural capital. *Emotional capital* is understood as the ability to express, manage and feel emotions in a way that is in sync with dominant emotion norms and cultures in a social field. *Educational capital* consists of qualifications earned through formal schooling and is greatly valued in particular fields (e.g., education and the labour market). See Chapter 3, subsection 3.3.1 for more on cultural capital.

Broadly speaking, in the context of this study, the various forms of capital can be viewed as the resources doctoral candidates possess that afford them power within the field of doctoral education (Ronnie, 2008). Only pertinent, field-specific capital serves as a resource and can be used to wield power in the context of a particular field. The field of doctoral education imposes expectations on the agents that navigate and exist within it – agents here include doctoral candidates, doctoral supervisors, and broader institutional structures. It was noted in Chapter 2 (subsection 2.4.1) that the nature of the specific expectations the field of doctoral study has of the agents in it, would be examined in this chapter. Therefore, the following sections of this chapter discuss these expectations related to these three categories of agents in the field.

The three subsections that follow below explore what the rules of operation are in the field of doctoral education. These rules can be represented as the expectations that the field imposes on the agents that navigate it. In the context of this study, these agents include doctoral candidates, doctoral supervisors and broader institutional/university structures. The field of doctoral education has its 'own way of doing things, rules, assumptions and beliefs' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.20). Furthermore, it has distinct characteristics with regard to the specific forms of capital that are valued in it, and those less so. Doctoral candidates entering the field (and new/novice supervisors, for that matter) do not do so with a comprehensive awareness of the rules of the game, explicit or implicit (doxa), nor do they understand the full impact of their decisions and actions (Maton, 2014).

As was discussed in Chapter 3, there exist different kinds or sets of possibles (possibilities) that apply to the different agents in the field. Those who possess the capitals that are valued, along with perceptions and practices that are aligned with the rules and nature of the field, may benefit from many more possibles than those without the desired disposition or capitals. In order to achieve success in the field, doctoral candidates must play by and adhere to the expectations that the field has of them. What these expectations look like, and how doctoral candidates become familiar with them, are the subjects of Chapter 6, section 6.2.

5.2 What Does the Field Expect of Doctoral Candidates?

As this section seeks to illustrate and evidence, the field of doctoral education has particular expectations of what a 'prepared' student needs to be and do to be successful at the doctoral level. Within the field of doctoral education, there are various players or agents (including but not limited to candidates, supervisors, faculties, institutions, etc.) that each holds a unique set of expectations with respect to how the field operates and the role of the other players. In terms of expectations placed upon doctoral candidates, these may manifest in the form of supervisors and universities valuing varying forms of capital that a diverse body of candidates enter the field with, or not. These capitals are imbued with unequal exchange values in the field. An example of how differing capitals among doctoral candidates can lead to unequal chances of success based on how those capitals are valued in a particular academic context, or not, was discussed in Chapter Two, subsection 2.2.3 (see for example, Dinsmore & Roksa, 2023).

From the discussion of Bourdieu's concept of field in Chapter 3, section 3.2, it is known that doctoral candidates do not enter the field of doctoral education fully equipped with explicit awareness of the rules of the game (doxa) or of the differing positions, attitudes, beliefs and competencies of other players. This is to be expected, of course, given their first exposure to the new field of doctoral study. Furthermore, doctoral candidates do not necessarily comprehend the full consequences of their choices and actions within the field. For instance, the DDNR (CHE, 2022) notes the concern raised in some university contexts that doctoral candidates are often under-prepared for doctoral studies. One challenge related to this concern is that the ideal level of preparedness of a doctoral candidate is not clearly or consistently defined. However, what is clear in the report is that universities acknowledge that further capacity development in this area is required. Universities often provide information about what is expected of the doctoral candidate in their respective higher degrees guide or handbook. The criteria will differ from institution to institution and from document to document, but there are common expectations across the sector, as the following subsections will discuss.

5.2.1 Preparatory groundwork required of candidates

One key expectation of doctoral candidates revolves around the choice of programme and the clarity of relevant information the candidate should have when applying to that specific programme. This information can be derived from various sources and obtaining it may involve the candidate's own research into the discipline of interest, relevant faculty or research unit websites and university higher degrees guides. An analysis of various South African universities' higher degrees guides reveals their position that this responsibility lies with the potential candidate. For example, in the following extracts from higher degrees guides, it is evident that universities in South Africa expect the candidate to have exercised due diligence in familiarising themselves with the nature of the research programme they wish to pursue and its associated requirements, which are highlighted in bold text:

> Any prospective higher degree student should have a **very clear idea of the study programme** or field he/she wishes to pursue. In many cases, this will be a continuation of work done for a previous degree; this is especially true for candidates who have completed their previous study at the NWU. Candidates who have completed their previous study at another university are advised to consult the NWU website … and should visit the websites of the various research entities and **familiarise themselves with the research programmes of the relevant entity and admission requirements of each**

> **programme**… A prospective student wishing to apply for entrance into any specific programme **must first ensure that he/she has all the relevant information on the specific programme**… The relevant entity and/or school director may also be consulted. The applicant must also consult the information on higher degree studies (NWU, 2020, p.10).

Rhodes University's (2018) and UNISA's (2020) higher degrees guides express a similar sentiment when they state the following:

> It is the **responsibility of the doctoral candidate to be fully informed** about the degree requirements and procedures at Rhodes University before the project begins… and to **prepare thoroughly** for the research project (RU, 2018, p.14).
>
> The **candidate takes primary responsibility** for all aspects and phases of his or her own research from application to graduation… The candidate **must be familiar with and adhere to** UNISA's policies and associated documents regarding the postgraduate study (UNISA, 2020, p.14).

From these excerpts from higher degrees guides, we see that doctoral candidates are required by the field to possess a measure of emotional capital, which is to be activated and leveraged through various emotional practices. These practices constitute things such as self-determination and self-motivation, proactive foundational research into doctoral degree requirements and characteristics, identification of and communication with relevant individuals, etc. What is evident from the above excerpts is that a doctoral candidate who follows instructions as set out above would be expected to enter doctoral study with at least some understanding of what is required in terms of the volume and complexity of work. However, as has been noted previously in Chapter 2, section 2.2.1, research in the field has pointed to the need for universities to set out clearer expectations at the outset, as many candidates may struggle to fully understand what a doctorate is, what it requires of them (Kiley & Wisker, 2009; Cotterall, 2011).

In addition, these extracts also imply that prospective candidates possess an understanding of the 'hidden curriculum' of doctoral education, which is that they will know things such as how to write to a prospective supervisor, how to make sense of the policies and process of preparing a pre-application proposal, and how to research and make sense of prospective programmes. There seems to be an assumption that prospective students will engage with these guides and that they will be able to fully make sense of the expectations encoded in these guides and reflectively apply these to their own lives. This sort of understanding and engagement would likely necessitate measures of social capital and educational capital that transform these expectations from the vague or unknown to the clear and explicit. What is expected of doctoral candidates, and the rules that they need to abide by, need to be made explicit by universities. As the DDNR (CHE, 2022) notes, in order to address drop-out rates in doctoral education, universities need to ensure that candidates comprehend the full implications of committing to doctoral studies. This sort of comprehension on the part of candidates is necessary because, as the DDNR (CHE, 2022) states, an acceptable pass mark for a master's degree does not automatically translate to successful doctoral study or sufficient awareness of the commitment it requires.

As noted in Chapter 2, subsection 2.4, thinking through their reasons for pursing doctoral education, and having passion for their research topic, could prove instrumental in maintaining candidates' dedication to and perseverance through their studies. This thinking and passion may lead to the doctoral candidate's identification of and dedication to their particular research interest. This insight and dedication represent forms of embodied emotional capital – sources of current and future enthusiasm and determination – and may also contribute to the candidate's capacity for self-motivation In this context, self-motivation refers to their ability to independently regulate and manage their levels of enthusiasm and determination. Being able to work and function independently, including accomplishing early tasks such as choosing a supervisor or department, is the focus of the next subsection, and it is particularly valuable during testing and challenging periods. This interest in and passion for the research may constitute a key component of what Bourdieu refers to as 'illusio' – that which keeps the goal worth striving for amid hardship and difficulty (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

5.2.2 Doctoral candidates and independent work

The potential inability of master's study to adequately prepare a student for doctoral education may raise questions about what a well-prepared doctoral student looks like. Along these lines, another set of expectations the field has of candidates revolves around their capacity for and competency in relatively advanced independent academic research and working. A well-prepared candidate would be expected to possess this skill. For example, based on university higher degrees guides:

> The supervisor must provide appropriate guidance by alerting the candidate to helpful scholarly sources as well as provide guidance with regard to the structure and content of the dissertation or thesis. However, it remains the candidate's responsibility to **conduct independent research**. It should be pointed out to the candidate that it is his or her duty, and not that of the supervisor, to trace sources … The candidate must **undertake research with commitment; develop initiative and independence** (UNISA, 2020, p.14).
>
> The doctoral student undertakes to **work independently** under the guidance of the supervisor. This includes reading widely to ensure that the literature pertinent to his/her chosen topic has been identified and consulted (NWU, 2020, p.34) … In the case of theses – does the work (of the doctoral student) … illustrate the abilities of the student in terms of **independent thought, effort, and research?** (NWU, 2020, p.32).

The excerpts above point to the field's expectation that the doctoral candidate possesses relevant reserves of emotional and educational capital; emotional, expressed through traits like determination, proactivity and self-regulation, and educational, exhibited through competence at independent, skilled reading and research. In addition, in reference to qualities that the doctoral candidate must possess to be considered independent, they must, for example, have the ability to select a supervisor and a topic (Lovitts, 2005), plan and meet deadlines (Sverdlik, et al., 2018), and own decisions related to their research (Overall et al., 2011). Furthermore, candidates are expected to engage thoughtfully and critically with feedback (Grant, 2003), work with minimal guidance (Cotterall, 2011), and identify and make use of resources (McAlpine, 2012). These kinds of attributes have become an embedded part of prospective doctoral candidates' required range of expertise, to varying degrees.

The degree to which a candidate's prior education and training have enabled them to cultivate and learn these attributes will determine how smoothly or not they transition into doctoral study. If a doctoral candidate is prepared and capable of working independently, it could be expected that their day-to-day reliance on their supervisor(s) would be reduced. In such a scenario, the field could anticipate a related decrease in workload experienced by supervisors, particularly in the earlier post-registration stages of the degree programme involving the crafting of the research proposal. However, the DDNR (CHE, 2022, p.36) offers a word of caution on this expectation and raises important questions that need to be considered regarding the obligation of the supervisor, the university and the candidate, particularly in situations where no formal relationship between student and institution exists:

> There may be no obligation for the institution with respect to providing guidance and academic support during the preparation of the proposal, and this raises the question of whether the supervisor will guide the student or if the student is expected to work unguided in writing the proposal. This will inevitably have implications for the quality of a proposal, if the student may be required to work unsupervised until the proposal is completed).

Because a master's-level education is no guaranteed indicator of a candidate's preparedness for doctoral study, the above-mentioned scenario may present insurmountable challenges for some candidates. For example, a student may enter the field with expectations about what kind of support they will receive. If they do not have their expectations met, they may face challenges in their studies which could result in attrition or impact their time to completion. The potential for mismatches in expectations between the doctoral candidate and the supervisor/university with regard to the nature and scope of the academic support that a candidate has a legitimate right to is heightened when these expectations are not clearly defined in policy and differ according to the institution.

5.2.3 Entering the field with (and as) the right stuff

Related to the field's expectation of candidates researching and working independently, another expectation the field of doctoral education has of candidates is that they should begin their studies as academically literate, proficient academic writers, and competent researchers. For example, many of the higher degrees guides across universities mentioned the need for candidates to be able to produce particular kinds and standards of academic writing. This requirement universities have of doctoral candidates has to do with the level of accuracy and sophistication evidenced in the candidates' use of language and how they structure their research argument. These requirements are illustrated in the following excerpts:

> The student undertakes to submit written work that is **relatively free of basic spelling mistakes, incorrect punctuation and grammatical errors.** Responsibility for the **accuracy of language,** the overall structure and coherence of the final research proposal, dissertation or thesis rests with the student (VUT, 2017, p.8).
>
> It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure that the **quality of the language** of the dissertation or thesis, and **all technical aspects,** are acceptable. If necessary, the candidate should, at his or her own cost, arrange for language editing and, if so advised by the supervisor and/or the examiner, must do so (UNISA, 2020, p.14).
>
> … the writer (of a doctoral proposal or thesis) must meet two requirements: the information must be **structured in a clear, careful, logical and unambiguous manner,** and it should be conveyed to the reader in **correct, elegant language** … Language editing primarily remains the responsibility of the student (NWU, 2020, p.22).

Evidenced in the excerpts above are forms of educational capital that doctoral candidates are expected to possess when they enter the field of doctoral education. They relate to academic competencies such as formulating and articulating an academic argument, using accurate and persuasive academic writing, and ensuring technical accuracy (e.g., spelling and grammar). The field expects that skills of this nature would have been attained by the doctoral candidate during earlier levels of education. However, a doctoral project is not simply a second master's project. It is important for doctoral candidates to recognise that undertaking a doctoral degree is not merely an extension of undergraduate or master's study. In fact, it would be advantageous for universities to recognise this as well, to the extent that they make structured support and developmental learning opportunities available to candidates.

What the excerpts above also raise is the increasing fixation in many universities with surface level language correctness, and yet simultaneously an absence of reflection on the extent to which researching at doctoral level is about the gradual taking on of discipline-specific literacy practices (with all the identity implications associated with this process). Doctoral studies call for a higher level of cognitive engagement than prior levels of education in terms of competence at thinking creatively for original academic thought, expanding boundaries of knowledge, and working autonomously with self-regulated behaviour in the interest of being productive.

5.2.4 Managing the supervision relationship

A review of numerous university higher degrees guides reveals that there is little uniformity with regard to how supervision pairings are established. One of the key expectations the field has of the doctoral candidate has to do with the onus being on the candidate to manage the relationship with their supervisor(s). It is a task that requires a degree of confidence and assertiveness on the part of the candidate, embodied as a form of emotional capital. For example, in some universities, the candidate is expected to be proactive in researching, seeking out and approaching a prospective supervisor to gauge their availability and interest in supervising the relevant doctoral study (NWU, 2020, p.13). In other instances, the supervisor is allocated through department and/or faculty processes that are out of the doctoral candidate's hands (UNISA, 2020, p.7). Alternatively, the process may involve some combination of the two approaches (VUT, 2017, p.16). With regard to the faculty allocating the supervisor(s), much of this pairing process might occur quite pragmatically. Not all departments have large numbers of supervisors for candidates to choose from, and they have to manage supervision workloads to avoid overloading these individuals. Hence, assigning candidates supervisors as opposed to letting them choose outright.

Regardless of how the supervision relationship is established, there is a measure of commonality across higher degrees guides about the candidate taking the lead in setting parameters around regularity and forms of engagement. This is done in consultation with the supervisor, but the candidate is expected to drive the process. For example, as some university higher degrees guides point out:

> The candidate must record and regularly update the research plan, target dates et cetera agreed with the supervisor and provide the supervisor with a copy of such record. He or she must, to the extent possible, keep to timetables and target dates and plan and submit work on a regular basis (UNISA, 2020, p.14).

> During the course of the project it is **the responsibility of the candidate … to negotiate with the supervisor mutually acceptable arrangements regarding the sequence of tasks to be undertaken**, target dates, submission of work for scrutiny and the schedule of meetings between supervisor and candidate … to take the initiative in making and maintaining contact with the supervisor and in bringing to the supervisor's attention any research related problems which the candidate may be experiencing … to make positive suggestions to the supervisor about the next stage of the work (RU, 2019, p.13).

From the above extracts from higher degrees guides, it is evident that the field of doctoral education calls on candidates to exhibit significant levels of proactivity and confidence in leading and managing their research plan, goals and timelines with their supervisor(s). This speaks to the expectation of the field that the candidate will be, and will continue to develop as, an independent, autonomous researcher, with the capacity and confidence to design and manage their own research project. Given that the doctorate is, in essence, an advanced research(er) apprenticeship, and enables those who succeed to work as independent researchers in their own right, this expectation is legitimate. It is the candidate's project, their professional development process and their research. Each candidate's array of emotional, educational and social capital will influence how they interact with the field and the various agents in it, with varying low or high levels of self-assuredness and a sense of validity and belonging. The expectation of doctoral candidates to take the lead in their supervision relationship is echoed in the literature. Duke and Denicolo (2017, p.5) note the importance of candidates being proactive in managing their own development throughout the doctoral journey, 'not only communicating with supervisors about research skills and the progress of the research project, but also career plans and professional development needs'.

The expectations the field of doctoral education has of candidates, as discussed above, and the associated excerpts of data provided, highlight forms of cultural capital required of these individuals. In the context of doctoral education, this refers to capital amassed through the candidate's upbringing and journey of prior education, and among other things, this capital is 'connected to individuals in their general educated character' (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.21). It is this cultural capital that the field expects doctoral candidates to arrive with and possess sufficiently. For example, it would appear that universities expect that candidates applying to do a PhD will understand how to research a doctorate, choose an appropriate programme, know what is expected of them and know how to select a supervisor. While this may be the case for some candidates, it can be problematic to assume it will be so for everyone. As Pretorius and Macaulay (2021) have pointed out, it is important for universities to acknowledge and value the varying types of capital (and implied habitus) that a diverse student body brings into the field (in addition to supervisor diversity and varying levels of experience).

5.2.5 Securing necessary funding

While it may not be explicitly stated in this manner in all (or even most) university higher degrees guides, one clear expectation of the field is that a candidate registering for a doctorate can afford to pay for it. In cases where the candidate is unable to afford the relevant degree costs, it is expected that they will be proactive in exploring avenues through which funding might be secured. This includes contacting the relevant university's financial aid or similar type of administration office to enquire about available funding options. Addressing this issue, NWU (2020) states:

> To complete the registration process, the student must complete the online web registration or submit the signed documents together with proof of payment to the administration office. A web registration is provisional and not valid if the needed funding is not available on the account of the student. Thus, **the student must already have secured the necessary funds to continue with the study**. Information on funding schemes and bursaries, as well as assistance with how to apply for funding, may be requested from the relevant faculty, entity or school. (NWU, 2020, p.11)

Referring to academically deserving students who are experiencing financial uncertainty, RU (2019) describes the proactivity required of the student:

> Master's and doctoral candidates must pay the initial fee to register. … Returning candidates, in good research standing, who are experiencing financial challenges are encouraged to meet with the Finance Division Fees Office in order to explore and discuss options which will enable registration. (RU, 2019, p.25)

The successful completion of the doctoral degree necessitates the doctoral candidate having access to relevant reserves of economic capital. For those candidates who benefit from relatively affluent socio-economic backgrounds and existing circumstances, this expectation of the field does not pose any significant challenge. However, for many other doctoral candidates, the possession of emotional capital is required, activated in the form of traits such as proactivity, boldness, assertiveness and educational capital through which necessary research skills can be leveraged. Such doctoral candidates require these forms of cultural capital in order to identify and secure alternative forms of funding. Regardless of how the doctoral degree programme is paid for, the expectation of the field is that the onus is on the candidate (together with any support network available to them) to see to it that this requirement is met. Where there is institutional and/or private sector support available to the candidate in the form of scholarships or bursaries, it remains their responsibility to engage with and capitalise on these opportunities.

5.2.6 Closing remarks on expectations of candidates

In light of a consistently increasing and diverse doctoral candidate population in South Africa and around the world (as discussed in Chapter 2), it is difficult, if not impossible, to formulate a universally accepted definition of who the ideal doctoral candidate is. However, limiting the discussion to the South African context and drawing on the university higher degrees guides featured in this chapter and the literature, key doctoral candidate attributes can be named. These attributes are based on what the field of South African doctoral education expects of these individuals – on the field-valued capitals discussed earlier. With this perspective in mind, the ideal doctoral candidate has proactively engaged in preparatory groundwork in order to understand what a doctoral degree entails and what is required of them, and they are able to self-motivate and work independently. Furthermore, the ideal candidate is competent at academic research, writing and crafting their academic argument and exhibits confidence and proactivity in managing their supervision relationship. Finally, they have access, through whichever means is best suited to them, to the necessary funding for the duration of their studies to pay their tuition fees and associated costs, and to support themselves on a day-to-day basis.

The DDNR (CHE, 2022) states that it is expected that as candidates move through their doctoral journey, they will think and behave, at every stage of their study, in a manner that reflects their progress as researchers. However, there are key questions to be considered relating to these expectations, as universities may not have any obligation to assist candidates in the pre-doctoral or application period. In at least some instances, candidates may enter the field of doctoral education under-prepared by prior levels of education and possibly encounter an academic context that is less supportive than they expect. These mismatched expectations could potentially influence their experience of doctoral education in various ways. It is therefore pertinent that doctoral candidates familiarise themselves with the rules and guidelines relevant to the specific educational context they anticipate being enrolled in. Doing so would, to a degree, result in less mismatched expectations on their part and a more realistic understanding of the nature of the academic journey that lies before them.

The expectations and requirements of the field of doctoral education go beyond those that are directed towards the doctoral candidate. The next section will explore what expectations the field has of doctoral supervisors, who are not exempt from accountability associated with the requirements and responsibilities of their role.

5.3 What Does the Field Expect of Doctoral Supervisors?

The practice of doctoral supervision is multi-faceted, requiring a range of competencies resulting in the provision of academic, social and emotional support to the candidate. As has been noted (Chapter 2, section 2.3), the balance of power between candidate and supervisor favours the latter (Agu & Odimegwu, 2014). The supervisor occupies a higher position and possesses more status in the field than the candidate.

According to field theory, only field-specific and relevant capital can be used to wield power within the field. Compared to the doctoral candidate, the supervisor possesses (in the context of the field of doctoral education) a more influential portfolio of cultural capital (via increased levels of education), social capital (connectedness within the academic culture and structure), and symbolic capital (prestige, status and authority). Bourdieu notes how education, as a form of symbolic capital, operates together with other capitals as a formidable vehicle for either the advantage or disadvantage of agents in the field. Symbolic capital gives agents in the field the power to dominate it. As has been discussed previously in Chapter 3, possessing symbolic capital means ‘the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honorability’ (Bourdieu, 1984, p.291).

University higher degrees guides, the DDNR (CHE, 2022) and relevant literature (discussed in Chapter 2) significantly address what effective doctoral supervision entails, or ought to. At times, the requirements and responsibilities of supervisors as discussed in these data sources parallel with expectations the field has of candidates, as discussed above. At other times, however, it does not, and what appears as contradictions, emerge. Similar to the discussion in Chapter 6, section 6.2 of field expectations of doctoral candidates, it is also important to bear in mind that the expectations of doctoral supervisors are not identical from university to university across South Africa. Rather, this section highlights expectations of supervisors that are common to at least a few universities in the sector.

5.3.1 Accessibility and guidance

One of the expectations of supervisors has to do with being accessible to their candidates and providing relevant academic guidance. Various universities outline the supervisor’s responsibilities in this regard quite explicitly, as demonstrated by the following excerpts from higher degrees guides outlining these responsibilities as including,

> **Being accessible** to the student at appropriate times when they may need advice … **Giving guidance about the nature of research** and the standard expected, about the planning of the research programme (including facilitating any scientific and ethics approvals and reporting required), about literature and sources, attendance at taught classes, about requisite techniques (including arranging for instruction where necessary), and about the problem of plagiarism. (UCT, 2020, p.1)
>
> To be **available for guidance and discussion and to be prompt and comprehensive in response to stages of work completed**, in accordance with mutually agreed arrangements … To give guidance in the formulation of the research proposal, to ensure that the candidate is conversant with the relevant research methods and techniques and, where necessary, to help the candidate to acquire the relevant research skills. (RU, 2019, p.13)

> … **responsibility to be accessible to the student** … Undertake to **provide guidance** for the student's research project in relation to the design and scope of the project, the relevant literature and information sources, research methods and techniques and methods of data analysis. (NWU, 2020, p.34)

The above excerpts from higher degrees guides acknowledge that doctoral candidates have legitimate needs and expectations in relation to engagement with their supervisor(s), particularly with regard to the provision of academic guidance around the development of the research proposal. Given the previously discussed expectation of doctoral candidates working as independently as possible, including in developing the research proposal, candidates and supervisors reading and seeking to understand these different recommendations may experience some confusion. This potential confusion stems from attempting to navigate what working independently looks like for the candidate while simultaneously being adequately supported by the supervisor. Regardless of the possibility of confusion, at every stage of the doctoral candidate's academic journey, the supervisor has a vital role to play.

5.3.2 Managing the supervision relationship

Beyond the matter of accessibility to the doctoral candidate, according to other data, the supervisor is also expected to play an active role in managing the scope and nature of engagement with the candidate. This role should apply to the various components of postgraduate research to support doctoral candidates in successfully completing their degree programmes. Playing such a mentoring role is evident in some higher degrees guides which specifically point to supervisors providing practical guidance to candidates around issues such as time management, the setting of goals and associated deadlines, advice on research resources and structure, and so on:

> The supervisor should **initiate a discussion with the candidate on a research plan**; requirements in respect of appropriate deadlines and timetables, and other relevant matters … The supervisor must provide appropriate guidance by **alerting the candidate to helpful scholarly sources** as well as provide **guidance with regard to the structure and content** of the dissertation or thesis. However, it remains the candidate's responsibility to conduct independent research. (UNISA, 2020, p.12)

> [The supervisor will] **assist with the construction of a written time schedule** which outlines the expected completion dates of successive stages of the work, within the time frame as stipulated in the Continuation of Studies policy. **Keeping comprehensive records of all formal meetings**. These records should include dates, actions agreed upon and deadlines set, for reporting purposes and [the supervisor's] accountability. (VUT, 2017, p.7)

From the extracts above a possible contradiction (or at least, a source of potential confusion) may again be noted with respect to the expectation of the doctoral candidate to be responsible for managing the relationship with their supervisor(s), as described in Chapter 5, subsection 5.2.4. These excerpts suggest a more collaborative process of negotiation, based on mutual availability and convenience (RU, 2019; NWU, 2020). In addition, the extracts suggest that a doctoral supervisor plays a central role, acting in multiple capacities, to ensure that the candidate is able to successfully complete their research within the stipulated time frame. The supervisor is expected to approach their role with a range of skills and competencies informed by a diverse portfolio of cultural capital and supported by perceptions and practices imbued with versatility and maturity. Their role includes acting as a manager, director, friend, supporter, advisor, examiner, teacher, and facilitator (Masek & Alias, 2020).

This range of attributes, in addition to the expectations the field has of supervisors as discussed earlier, represent forms of acquired and embodied cultural capital, both emotional and educational in nature, that supervisors are required to possess. Whereas the field presumes that doctoral candidates would have attained their necessary portfolio of cultural capital during prior levels of study (at least in part), a question arises about how supervisors attain theirs. In light of this question, and of field expectations of doctoral supervisors, the issue of supervisor education and training becomes relevant. It is important to note that the reality of supervisor training in many universities is not in keeping with the ideal set out in policy, as will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis.

5.3.3 Feedback provision and quality control

Providing doctoral candidates with appropriate and sufficient guidance and support related to their scholarly development is a key expectation that the field has of supervisors. Feedback on candidates' doctoral research and writing represents the primary way in which this guidance and support is made available, especially as it relates to the content and structure of the thesis and its contribution to knowledge. This expectation of doctoral supervisors is two-fold in nature. Firstly, there is an expectation in the field that supervisors respond timeously to submitted work with constructive feedback. This feedback may involve, when deemed necessary, making the candidate aware of and directing them to available resources within the institution that provide support in academic research and writing. Secondly, a related expectation held of doctoral supervisors is that they will communicate candidly with the candidate should the situation arise where their research and writing falls short of required academic standards.

Candidate progress and ultimate success in doctoral education is often not a linear process. Even the most well-prepared student can be expected to encounter challenges and struggles associated with their academic development. The fact that postgraduate centres or units of this nature commonly exist within universities is potentially telling since it demonstrates the fact that most candidates require academic support at some point during their research journey.

The subject of the regularity and nature of supervisors' feedback on candidates' submitted work features prominently in university higher degrees guides. This feedback is intended to facilitate the doctoral candidates' academic progress and development and to caution them when necessary should their work be lacking in technical proficiency or overall progress over time. To these ends, supervisors are expected to (or are envisaged as):

> … **become acquainted with support services** available at the University such as the library and to **ensure** that the candidate is aware of such services and makes use of them where appropriate … To **ensure** at all times that the candidate is aware of inadequate or sub-standard work in order to avoid misdirection and wasted effort. This responsibility would include **alerting the candidate** to substandard linguistic **ability.** (RU, 2019, p.13)
>
> Requesting written work, as appropriate, and **returning such work with constructive criticism, in reasonable time** … **Ensuring** that the student is made aware of inadequate progress or of standards of work below that generally expected. (UCT, 2020, p.1)

> … **treat the candidate with courtesy and fairness and should suggest appropriate developmental goals and assistance** towards those goals by directing the candidate to workshops or lectures designed for this purpose, including training in the use of databases and research software. (UNISA, 2020, p.12)

These expectations of supervisors matter, and they have implications and consequences. Being in the position of being able to accurately and timeously point out a candidate's shortcomings concerning the quality of their academic work necessitates a certain level of engagement on the supervisor's part. The supervisor needs to be familiar enough with the candidate and their work so as to recognise any warning signs that may emerge. As previously noted from the literature, effective doctoral supervisors remain sensitive to various indications that their candidates may be struggling to make meaningful academic progress (Manathunga, 2005). These indications may include behavioural concerns such as regularly modifying the research topic, avoiding all forms of communication with the supervisor, isolating themselves, and failing to submit meaningful work for review (Manathunga, 2005).

Based on university higher degrees guides, the DDNR (CHE, 2022) and research literature, it seems appropriate that doctoral supervisors (along with associated departments, faculties and universities) remain mindful of the diverse backgrounds from which their candidates enter the field of doctoral education, along with the varying levels of support that they have access to upon arrival and during their academic journey. This is certainly true in the South African context (as it is in numerous others), given the country's troubled history, with negative lingering socio-economic consequences (see Chapter 1). In reality, the ideal doctoral candidate is difficult to identify in the absence of a universally agreed-upon understanding of what 'ideal' means and entails. There are only doctoral candidates – some more prepared for and matched with the field of doctoral education than others. All of them possess varying levels of social capital and cultural capital (amassed in part through success in prior stages of education) to succeed at doctoral study independently.

Furthermore, all these field expectations of supervisors require a significant investment of time and effort on their part. This necessitates an academic context in which adequate supervision capacity exists to begin with (CHE, 2022). In addition, it requires a context in which supervisors are not excessively burdened by administrative responsibilities brought about by the increasing impact of neoliberalism and managerialism (Grant, 2018). These impacts and other related factors have been discussed in Chapter 2. In a field consisting of increasing student numbers with increasingly varied backgrounds and needs, and insufficient staffing capacity juggling increasing institutional demands, the logical consequence is pressure across the board (Biesta, 2007; Mouton & Boshoff, 2015; Grant, 2018).

At times, challenges experienced within supervisory relationships require support that goes beyond an engaged relationship between candidate and supervisor. In such cases, institutional structures and/or mechanisms become important to support both parties in the relationship. Such structures include relevant faculty offices, postgraduate centres, student and staff counselling services, etc. With this in mind, the next section explores the expectations that the field of doctoral education has of university departments and/or faculties.

5.4 What Does the Field Expect of University Departments and Faculties?

It is said that it takes a village to raise a child. When it comes to training a skilled doctoral academic researcher and scholar, it can be argued that it takes a university community. As with doctoral candidates and supervisors, universities are themselves not exempt from the expectations of the field of doctoral education. According to the DDNR (CHE, 2022), university faculties and departments can and should do better at ensuring that robust systems are in place to keep records of student progress, with support provided to the candidate that begins from initial enquiry, through the life of the project, to graduation. Furthermore, the report states that departments and faculties must, to a greater extent, acknowledge and respond to the importance of providing adequate supervisor training, along with implementing policies and structures for constructively managing potential breakdowns in the supervisory relationship. The reliance on the one-on-one and co-supervision model *without* wider departmental/faculty/university support is implicated in the poor throughput and retention in South African doctoral education (CHE, 2022),. It means that the entire doctoral process is entirely dependent on the expertise of the supervisor(s) and the autonomy of the candidate. It also means that if the supervision relationship goes wrong, the whole doctoral study can potentially fall apart.

According to the DDNR (CHE, 2022), capacity development of doctoral candidates – such as ensuring that the applicant fully appreciates the scale of the decision to enrol for doctoral studies – forms part of the enhancement of the quality of the candidate from pre-registration and during their studies. This is a factor in the high failure and dropout rates in doctoral qualifications. Institutions that are providing support and training of candidates at entry level suggest that they are improving the quality of the candidates who use pre-registration programmes, with the result that many of their doctoral candidates complete their studies in the expected time and improve the institutional throughput rates (CHE, 2022, p.15).

For a variety of reasons, embarking on doctoral study may not be the right decision for all prospective doctoral candidates. For instance, either the nature of their career or the necessary commitment of time and effort required for doctoral study may motivate the personal decision that doctoral study is unnecessary, not worth it, or undesirable for the individual. Part of what pre-registration capacity development may theoretically achieve is to give these individuals the opportunity to assess the relevant factors, including the nature and volume of the doctoral workload, to determine if doctoral study is right for them. In the absence of this opportunity and pre-doctoral programme options, some candidates are at risk of feeling overwhelmed, disinterested and/or disillusioned at some point after registration into doctoral study (Wilmot & McKenna, 2023).

For those who do register for doctoral study, the existence of institutional systems and structures that track their academic progress may have a significant impact on whether or not these candidates complete their programme successfully and in the desired timeframe, as will be discussed next.

5.4.1 Monitoring candidates' academic progress

Having structures and mechanisms in place that aid in the monitoring of candidates' academic progress is one expectation the field has of university departments and faculties. These efforts should ideally complement the aforementioned mindfulness of supervisors who are expected to prioritise evaluating the progress of candidates and any associated signs of concern. For example, Rhodes University's guide comments:

> The Dean of the relevant faculty should **oversee the tracking of doctoral candidates' progress** on an annual basis and take what steps may be deemed necessary according to the faculty's approved practices … **Supervisors and candidates are expected to complete progress reports** on an annual basis. Where progress is not as desired, the Dean of the Faculty may write a letter to the candidate noting the slow progress and enquiring if an intervention is required to ensure that the candidate makes better progress. **Each faculty might set their own expected milestones and deadlines** and determine how best to ensure that the progress by candidates is appropriately tracked and encouraged. (RU, 2019, p.62)

At VUT, supervisors and candidates complete the same form:

> **Candidates and supervisors are required to submit a report** on a standard form to the Higher Degrees Unit. The report should be submitted at the end of June and end of November. **The reports will be reviewed by the Executive Director: Research**. The Executive Director will then address problems/inconsistencies with the Executive Dean after which it will be reviewed by the Supervisor and/or Head of Department. (VUT, 2017, p.9)

A recommendation made by the DDNR (CHE, 2022) is that all universities should have thorough systems in place to evaluate and keep records of student progress, in addition to ways of using these records to provide early warning of slow progress. In instances where the candidate's progress is not satisfactory, relevant barriers to progress should be identified as early as possible. Universities are also called upon to develop and implement action plans in response to matters of concern, including directing the candidate to support systems and programmes made available by the university, based on another recommendation from the DDNR (CHE, 2022). These supportive environments are particularly valuable and important when potential instances of supervisory relationship breakdown emerge, a topic to which this chapter now turns.

While there exist clear benefits for candidates and supervisors associated with more robust systems of evaluation in universities, it would be naïve to ignore potential pitfalls, particularly in the context of the neoliberal agenda. In the neoliberal system, such measures fall within a general move towards surveillance and monitoring – and such systems potentially become the means by which students who take longer to complete are ejected from the system. Such well-intentioned structures often have unintended consequences because they are implemented within a neoliberal culture.

5.4.2 Conflict resolution and intervening support

As has been conceptualised through the lens of field theory, doctoral supervision can be viewed as a field of research, and like all social fields, in Bourdieu's view, it is an arena of contestation characterised by contest or tension (Martin, 2003; Wacquant, 2007). This contestation exists between agents in the field who are engaged in the struggle for the accumulation or the preservation of power. In a context of this nature, the emergence of strife is to be expected.

Should a situation of disagreement or conflict arise between the doctoral candidate and supervisor in which they are unable to find a solution for themselves, university departments and faculties are expected to intervene constructively in an attempt to resolve matters (see higher degrees guide excerpts below). In particular, these interventions could be aimed at giving the candidate the opportunity for their voice to be heard.. In addition to a negative supervisory relationship impacting a candidate's well-being, a neglectful departmental or faculty culture (particularly one that does not promote or support candidates coming forward) can exacerbate a negative situation.

The potential emergence of conflict in the supervision relationship is acknowledged by various South African universities which have addressed the subject in their higher degrees guide. The relevant excerpts from these guides speak to the need for an intervening oversight structure that exists external to the supervision relationship – one that can be called upon to facilitate the resolution of supervision-related disputes. For example, VUT's higher degrees guide states that if

> … attempts to resolve the problem with their own supervisors/promoters and co-supervisors/co-promoters fail, **they should take up the matter with the relevant Head of Department and/or Executive Dean**. All unresolved issues at Department level may then be referred to the Research Directorate. (VUT, 2017, p.16)

At Rhodes University,

> **Disputes between any members of the supervision team**, including the supervisor and candidate, **should be managed by the HoD or his or her designated representative**, or in the case where the HoD is on the supervision team, by the **Dean of the Faculty**. Both the DVC: Research and the Director of the CPGS might be asked to assist with resolving the dispute. Where it is believed to be in the best interests of the research project and members of the team for a new supervisor to be allocated, **the HoD shall be responsible for making arrangements with the candidate for a replacement supervisor** as a matter of urgency. (RU, 2019, p.62)

The CPGS in the excerpt above is the Centre for Postgraduate Studies, which is similar to a Doctoral School or Graduate College. At NWU, the emphasis on dispute resolution seems to rest, in the first instance, with the student:

> If a student experiences any difficulties in the supervision process, **he/she should immediately raise these with the relevant director**. If the director is the supervisor, the candidates should raise the issue with the **relevant deputy dean or executive Dean of the Faculty** prior to submission for examination … If the student is of the opinion that the study is being delayed by the supervisor/promoter not adhering to the agreed-upon time schedule, and the student cannot obtain any response from the supervisor/promoter through a diplomatic approach, **he/she must bring the matter to the attention of the appropriate director (or applicable dean if the director is the supervisor/promoter) concerned.** (NWU, 2020, p.14)

While it is evident from the excerpts above that some higher education institutions have given thought and attention to the establishment of processes and structures for constructive intervention in the face of conflict, the recent Doctoral Review indicates that more work is needed in this regard. In particular, the DDNR (CHE, 2022) recommends that South African universities need to implement policies that address appeals and complaints of varying kinds. These include matters of poor supervision and disputes pertaining to examination processes.

As has been discussed in Chapter 2, the subject of supervisor training plays a crucial role in the provision of effective supervision, or lack thereof, with direct and significant implications for doctoral candidate time to completion and attrition in doctoral study. The successful personal completion of a doctoral thesis does not offer adequate experience to enable one to effectively supervise a doctoral student. Furthermore, neither does the experience of being supervised afford the new/novice supervisor enough exposure to gain a clear understanding of what the supervision role and process entails (Lessing, 2011).

5.4.3 Supervisor training

The DDNR (CHE, 2022) argues that the effective training of doctoral candidates requires that universities purposefully focus on developing suitably qualified and skilled supervisors, with training invested in both new and existing doctoral supervisors, as highlighted in the following series of related excerpts:

> **Training of doctoral candidates requires that institutions have qualified supervisors available** to provide expert guidance in all fields of specialisation where doctoral candidates are registered. **The Doctoral Standard requires that institutions have policies in place for provision of adequate supervision**, including coherence between the research expertise of the supervisor(s) and the research topic being supervised. (CHE, 2022, p.40)

Addressing the important issue of supervision capacity in South African doctoral education, the DDNR (CHE, 2022) points out the following:

> There is clearly a **need for additional supervisory capacity across the national system**, and programmes for training supervisors are in place in most universities. However, these are not generally mandatory, and there is usually no certification of the training. There were also **few reports on continuous professional training for practising supervisors.** (CHE, 2022, p.41)

Further,

> … **Institutional plans should be designed to address the need for ongoing improvements** with regards to the provision of supervisors, the monitoring and managing of supervisory loads, the induction of supervisors, the on-going developmental

> training for experienced and emerging supervisors, and supervision models. (CHE, 2022, p.66)

Despite the importance and highly impactful nature of the role of supervisor, many doctoral supervisors at South African universities allege receiving little or no official preparation for, or purposeful socialisation into, the task of supervising doctoral candidates ((Motshoane, 2023). As noted above, this lack of supervision training may lead relevant university faculty to default to supervisory strategies informed by their own experiences of being supervised, as opposed to a sound theory of supervision as a form of teaching and learning (Halse & Malfroy, 2010).

Similar to how doctoral candidates have accumulated insufficient forms of cultural capital through master's and other prior levels of study to succeed independently, new supervisors may not have amassed enough cultural capital through their own doctoral training, and through being supervised themselves, to succeed as doctoral supervisors without support. The provision of suitable, adequate supervision training is a matter of significant importance. If the critical role of the university, over the long term, is to develop and equip the new generation of competent, independent researchers, skilled at producing knowledge and innovation on a sustainable basis (Cloete & Bunting, 2012), supervision training will require urgent and ongoing attention within higher education institutions (Motshoane & McKenna, 2021).

5.5 Conclusion

As a social field, doctoral education exerts power over the agents who seek to exist in it and who navigate it. In this chapter, this power has been framed and examined in the form of the various expectations that the field imposes on doctoral candidates, doctoral supervisors, and relevant university departments, faculties and support structures, such as postgraduate centres or doctoral schools.

The field expects doctoral candidates to have exercised due diligence in researching and thinking through the commitments associated with the programme that interests them. It expects these candidates to possess the drive and the academic acumen to be able to work independently. The field expects doctoral candidates to be able to conduct research and produce academic writing with a relatively advanced level of accuracy and proficiency, along with competence in structuring their academic argument. Candidates are also expected to be proactive in managing the supervision relationship with respect to meetings, deliverables, deadlines, and outputs.

Doctoral supervisors are expected to be accessible to their candidates and provide appropriate and timely guidance. Supervisors are expected to play a key role in managing the scope and nature of engagement with the candidate. Further, doctoral supervisors are expected to provide feedback to the candidate that is constructive as well as timely, and they are to take on a quality control role aimed at monitoring and overseeing the academic progress and competence of the candidate.

Finally, when it comes to university departments, faculties, and institutional support structures (such as centralised centres for postgraduate studies), the field expects them to monitor the doctoral candidates' progress through suitable evaluating structures and systems. The field expects these agents to fulfil a conflict-resolution role if needed, and to provide intervening support should friction arise within the supervision relationship that cannot be resolved between the candidate and supervisor(s) themselves. The field also expects universities to provide adequate supervision training that imparts relevant expertise and insight to faculty serving or yet to serve in this capacity.

These three sets of agents possess their own proportions of power within the field. One of the ways in which their power may manifest potentially lies in the degree to which they are held accountable, or not, should they fail to meet the expectations of the field. It is worth noting that as much as the field has set out its expectations as reflected in higher degrees guides, expectations of one set of agents can also be viewed as promises made to others. For instance, expectations the field has of supervisors and universities can be understood as promises made to candidates. This is what the field claims it offers to candidates by way of guidance and support. With an understanding of what the field of doctoral education expects of candidates, supervisors, university departments, faculties, etc., in the following chapter of this thesis, the research participants' unique experiences and expectations of doctoral education will be explored, in their own words and in relation to field theory, the DDNR (CHE, 2022) and relevant literature on doctoral education.

Chapter 6: Experiences of Doctoral Education

6.1 Introduction

In many ways, doctoral candidates' experiences of the field of doctoral education represents an interplay of various expectations. These include the expectations the field has of candidates and supervisors, the expectations supervisors might have of candidates, and the expectations candidates might have of supervisors and universities, based on what the field expects of them (as discussed in Chapter 5, sections 5.3 and 5.4). Furthermore, researching doctoral candidate experiences allows the opportunity to examine the consequences of mismatches in these expectations and the contradictions which arise in the field as a result. In the context of this study, these mismatches and contradictions and the impact they have are explored from the perspective of the doctoral candidate.

Section 6.2 introduces the reader to the primary characters in this study into doctoral education candidate experiences – the research participants. They are Susanne, Patience, Andiswa, Beulah, Robert and Pamela. All of these names are pseudonyms. The chapter then explores the beginning of the participants' doctoral education journey and their preparedness for it, followed by an examination of their experiences of doctoral supervision. Next, the impact of institutional culture on the participants' academic progress is discussed, which leads into an analysis of the circumstances that led to their decision to withdraw from their doctoral programme. Finally, the chapter examines the impact of their doctoral education experiences on the participants' emotional wellbeing and sense of doctoral identity, followed by the chapter's closing remarks.

6.2 Introducing the Participants

6.2.1 Susanne

Susanne was the first person in her family to have the opportunity to pursue postgraduate studies, even though she came from a family that valued education. This was because her family did not possess the financial means that made accessing higher education affordable. Her mother believed in education as a force for positive change, having earned her grade 12 school certificate via correspondence at the age of 48. Susanne's father had no higher education, and her in-laws had diplomas in nursing and technical motor engineering, which were the only opportunities available to them at the time.

Susanne first engaged with me as an English-speaking white woman, however, Afrikaans is her home language. She is completely bilingual and has a primary research interest in the subject of distance education. Before embarking on her doctoral journey, Susanne had earned a broad range of qualifications – including her master's degree – in and related to distance education. While working at a university in South Africa, she was informed by a colleague of a new doctoral programme at another university elsewhere in the country – a university exploring an innovative postgraduate research model. She expressed her interest in the programme to the institution in question and was required to submit a letter explaining her research interest.

Susanne was excited to be part of a handful of scholars accepted into the programme and was initially fascinated by her unfolding doctoral research journey. She looked forward to exploring new and interesting theories and concepts and to the opportunity to engage directly with more experienced and accomplished scholarly minds. She was also grateful to be the beneficiary of grant funding – a significant factor in enabling her to tackle this new educational opportunity.

In her early sixties at the time of my conversations with her (she opted not to disclose her exact age), she recounted her first experiences of doctoral studies at a little over 50 years of age. She spoke about how her initial journey as a doctoral candidate had left a long-lasting impression on her as a person, generally, and as a scholar, more specifically. Calling to memory and talking about the circumstances relevant to her doctoral study made her feel quite emotional at times.

It took her years to get to the point where speaking of her initial doctoral degree journey felt like something she could tackle. Susanne agreed to be a part of my study in an attempt to help her further process the impactful experiences associated with her doctoral education (the details of which are discussed in the subsequent subsections of Chapter 6). She has only ever discussed her experiences with one other person – her husband.

6.2.2 Patience

Patience was previously a schoolteacher by training and trade, having earned a degree in teacher education and worked in that profession for several years in various schools. She was the first person in her family to pursue postgraduate study. After her undergraduate education, she completed her honours and master's degrees with a research interest in her chosen discipline.

She then got a job as a lecturer at a college of education. Being employed in such a capacity at this institution, it seemed that enrolling for doctoral study was the natural thing to do – the logical progression for someone intent on forging a career in academia. The nature of the academic work environment she was in was such that the pursuit of further education was almost, if not entirely, expected. Patience was a member of the South African professional board for her discipline, which led to her attending conferences hosted by this organisation and meeting people working in her research interest area. It was in this context that she approached a few seemingly suitable individuals to determine their availability and interest in supervising her at the doctoral level, a journey which she began at 38 years of age.

As much as enrolling for PhD study seemed like the logical next step for her, as an African woman lecturer at a university with a master's degree, Patience had personal aspirations that also motivated her decision. She had hoped that success in doctoral study would result in her commanding a greater degree of respect as an authority in her chosen field of research. She also hoped that it would lead to career advancement and exciting new employment opportunities.

Patience armed herself with whatever research guides and literature she could find, including a resource handbook about soil and water conservation in South Africa, that she could refer to during the course of her doctoral degree programme. In addition, her membership with the South African Society of Geographers exposed her to current research trends and focus areas and the types of methodologies that were being used in the field of geomorphology, within which her own research was located.

In our conversations, she discussed how her initial experience of PhD study had left a long-lasting impression on her. Being the first person in her family to pursue postgraduate education, and doctoral study in particular, there was no one in her social network with whom she could share her experiences as a doctoral candidate at a South African university, and in so doing, benefit from some measure of empathy and understanding. At the time of our conversations she was 57 years old.

6.2.3 Andiswa

Andiswa was in her early fifties when she participated in this study (she preferred not revealing her exact age). She is an English-speaking African woman, although English is not her home language. She has a background as a unionist, a role in which she spent a significant part of her early career as a teacher and advocate for teachers' rights and fighting various forms of exploitation. She regards herself as a mature student whose experience has solidified her resolve about various matters and concerns in life.

Prior to doctoral study she had never 'failed' academically – she had always been one of the top five candidates in her class. In her estimation, Andiswa is respected and held in high regard by her colleagues at the South African university at which she is employed. Despite this, she noted that a doctoral degree would mean a great deal in her work context. She noted that in many people's eyes, you are nothing if you do not have the right title, and you will not be given the chance to lead anything of significance. She was one of 10 candidates who were enrolled in the same doctoral research project. Andiswa was dependent on funding to be in a position to embark on a PhD programme.

Andiswa approached the beginning of her doctoral education journey with great anticipation. She viewed the supervision relationship with caution because she had heard many stories of candidates who were struggling with supervisors who either were not experienced enough, or who for whatever reason did not provide the support their candidates needed. Despite this, Andiswa approached doctoral study in a positive light, looking forward to inspiring academic engagement, and the experience of meeting scholars who would nurture her into this 'esteemed' space in the doctoral academy.

Although she did meet experienced and accomplished scholars in various forums during her doctoral journey, as a mature, professional African woman, she at times still felt alone and unseen amid her peers and was not very confident when it came to speaking out and sharing her views, as she then saw herself as a novice in this new academic context. She envied some of her peers who seemed to be receiving the kind of attention from their supervisors that she had hoped for but did not feel that she was getting. Andiswa had never really reflected on her doctoral study experience before her participation in my study. She looked at the research invitation, and although hesitant, thought, 'It's time this story gets told'.

6.2.4 Beulah

In her early forties at the time of her conversations, Beulah received a master's degree cum laude in educational alignment studies – her research passion – and wanted to continue pursuing it at the doctoral level. She presented herself as an individual with great drive who had overcome numerous challenges to further her academic aspirations.

However, even as a mature and accomplished African woman (43 years old at the time of her conversations), she commented that she is not the kind of person for whom confrontation comes easily, and she finds it quite difficult to escalate a concern involving conflict to an appropriate arbitrator, even though it might prove necessary to do so. Her caution is exacerbated in a context within which seeking intervening assistance seems to carry with it an element of the risk of reprisal. This risk seemed to her to be present in her doctoral education context relevant to this study, which she enrolled in at the age of 42. Beulah was constantly mindful of various power dynamics in operation at individual and departmental levels (and beyond), and she was not convinced that these dynamics existed in a manner that would necessarily serve her best interests.

Beulah indicated her belief that one of the key factors contributing to success in postgraduate research, particularly doctoral education, is having a passion for the subject that you are investigating. She finds it quite challenging to make progress and engage with an academic pursuit that does not resonate with her. Beulah had a clear vision of the kind of research she wanted to pursue for her PhD, and even though she experienced external pressure to pursue alternative research interests, she was prepared to make difficult decisions which brought about challenging consequences in her efforts to remain true to her academic curiosity.

Beulah's experience of postgraduate study, master's and doctoral, was not without challenges. These challenges were rooted at least in part in the conflict within her supervision relationships, in addition to other challenges. Yet, Beulah has demonstrated determination in the pursuit of doctoral education, despite sometimes experiencing difficult and disheartening circumstances. She was, at the time of writing, engaged in her third PhD attempt at a different South African university and shared that things are going well thus far.

6.2.5 Robert

Robert, a 33-year old English-speaking man (at the time of our conversations), is the first person in his immediate family to obtain a university degree. He comes from a relatively low-income coloured[9] family and was wholly dependent on funding in order to embark on his doctoral degree. He has always regarded himself as being an independent and resourceful person, and it was these traits and his capacity for objectivity and critical evaluation that ultimately informed his decisions and choices during the course of his doctoral study experience.

Being the first in his family to go to university, Robert's achievements were met with pride and excitement by his family members. However, as the years went by with him completing his master's degree in medical sciences and then contemplating and embarking on further study, he found it increasingly challenging to convince his family of the benefit of doctoral education. It was also difficult for his family to provide him with understanding and empathetic support as he faced the various challenges that emerged during his doctoral programme. A significant portion of his family's hopes for economic upliftment rested on his shoulders – an expectation that Robert was constantly mindful of. Robert enrolled in his doctoral programme at the age of 25.

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[9] In the South African context, the term 'coloured' denotes an individual born of mixed race – typically of black and white origin.

Robert applied to be a part of a PhD project that his previous supervisor was running, continuing his research interest in pathology, although his supervisor's interest lay in a different, loosely related field. He approached his experience as a doctoral candidate with a sense of expectation and hope. He looked forward to receiving insightful support and inspiration from accomplished and more experienced academics and maturing as a more competent scholar himself. Throughout the course of his doctoral study experience, the financial side of things was always challenging for him and his family, as he faced the ongoing concern of how he was going to afford the entirety of his degree programme. He also entered doctoral study with a pre-existing mental health condition, having been diagnosed earlier in his life with clinical depression.

Dealing with the impact and aftermath of this and other challenging circumstances related to his doctoral education experience was and is still not easy for Robert. He expressed mixed feelings about having not completed his doctoral degree, which for a significant portion of his life he had tied his personal identity to. He is open to the idea of pursuing doctoral study again at some point in the future, although it has to be for the right reasons (reasons that resonate with him) and with healthy motivations.

6.2.6 Pamela

Pamela qualified as a psychologist over a decade ago and subsequently took up a position as a research officer at a previously advantaged South African university. Her employment was linked to a large three-year multinational (African and European) project focused on health and youth development. It was during this period of employment that she enrolled in a doctoral degree programme, which she embarked on in her early fifties, and her boss also served as her supervisor.

Pamela, 58 years old at the time of her participation in this study, thinks of herself as a relatively competent academic writer, seeing as it was in large part due to the strength of her work at the master's level that led to her acceptance into doctoral study. She frames her experience of doctoral education in terms of the 'North-South divide', referring to the impact and influence of cultural differences on roles, responsibilities and relationships in the context of her employment and her studies.

As a mature African woman in her fifties, she felt somewhat self-conscious when interacting in and navigating professional settings led by white colleagues, believing that her Afrikaans, working-class background – which in her view inspires a direct, bold way of communicating – was at times regarded as offensive by her white, Eurocentric supervisors. This led her to act self-consciously, which at times affected her self-esteem and confidence. Pamela described herself as a sort of 'black spectacle' that can create a lot of discomfort in a white-dominant or Eurocentric environment because she will name the 'elephant in the room'. This aligns with her view of higher education as necessary for the advancement of the public good, and of conducting research that has a tangible positive impact on the lives and spaces within which it is carried out and beyond. If postgraduate research fails to transform lives and the natural world for the better, it is of little value in her estimation.

During the course of our conversations about her doctoral education experiences she surprised herself with how emotional she felt at times in recalling and talking about those events. Prior to our conversations, she had not realised how evocative those memories could still be for her years later.

6.3 Beginning the Journey - Entering the Field of Doctoral Education

The previous chapter of this thesis explored the various expectations that the field of doctoral education has of candidates, supervisors and institutions. Focusing attention now on candidates specifically, the remainder of this chapter examines what the research participants experienced upon entering the field. This focus begins with a discussion on their status as first-generation higher education students and the implications thereof for success in doctoral study.

It is important to note that the conversation excerpts presented in the rest of this chapter are not representative of the full conversations that were held with the participants, as outlined in Chapter 4 (subsection 4.5.4). When discussing a particular subject related to the participants' experiences, certain relevant extracts from conversations with a particular individual(s) have been omitted. These decisions have been made for brevity's sake, given the parameters of this research project and the repetitive nature of these extracts, in that they echo the sentiments expressed in those excerpts which have been presented in this document, In these instances, I have chosen the presented conversation excerpts to communicate the relevant point, in the participants' own words. Furthermore, with regard to the structure of this chapter, the sections and subsections that follow generally follow each participant's doctoral education experience chronologically. The titles and consequent foci of these sections and subsections have been chosen based on their corresponding with and addressing the central issues raised by the study's research questions.

Based on university higher degrees guides, and mentioned in the DDNR (CHE, 2022), success at the master's level of education is generally considered as the requisite standard for doctoral degree preparation. This raises the question of whether or not the relevant skills and experience gap between master's and doctoral education is small enough to reasonably conclude that success in the former means preparedness for the latter. It is a question of particular relevance to first-in-family doctoral scholars who do not benefit from social capital in the form of family members who are able to share beneficial insights and guidance based on first-hand experience in a doctoral education environment.

6.3.1 First-generation doctoral scholars

In Chapter Four, subsection 4.5.2, I discussed the research survey which was employed as one of the instruments used in early data collection efforts. Primarily, the purpose of this survey was to gather some demographic information of potential research participants in the interest of gaining a general sense of the field. Beyond the demographic data, one question asked of the respondents was whether or not they were the first in their family to pursue postgraduate and/or doctoral study. The question was revisited with participants during the conversation process, although it did not involve a significant amount of discussion. However, it is a point I now wish to address briefly prior to delving into the conversation data, because of its relevance to the forms of capital that the participants entered doctoral study with, or without.

In the context of this study, candidates entering the field of doctoral education as first-generation postgraduate scholars are not uncommon. All six participants in this study were the first in their families to pursue doctoral education, and in most cases, a university degree at all. This means that the likelihood exists that they would not have benefited from an important form of social capital by way of family members and close friends who had previous experience with the culture and environment of doctoral education. These are individuals who may be in a position to share beneficial counsel, insights and social contacts with a doctoral candidate based on their first-hand experience in the field. The social capital in this context is grounded in the relationship the doctoral candidate enjoys with former doctoral candidates who represent sources of valuable institutional experience and knowledge of the field. It is these social relationships which translate into potential and existing resources that doctoral candidates have the ability to leverage to their advantage (Grenfell & James 1998). Lacking this specific form of social capital may potentially result in the perceptions, practices and overall mental and emotional preparedness of the doctoral candidate not being as aligned with the characteristics of the field as they otherwise could be.

The participants in this study lacked the potential benefits associated with this form of relational capital and would therefore have entered their doctoral education context not being as prepared or empowered for success as possible. It is the subject of the doctoral candidate's preparedness to successfully navigate the new (for them) field of doctoral education that is the focus of the next section.

6.3.2 Prior education and candidate preparedness

As discussed previously, success at the rigorous level of doctoral education requires a measure of academic preparedness. As a reminder, academic preparedness speaks to the doctoral candidate having carefully thought through the commitment associated with doctoral study, possessing the drive and the academic competency to be able to work independently, and being able to conduct research and craft their academic argument with relative accuracy and proficiency.

As was noted in Chapter 3, subsection 3.3.1, educational capital (a form of cultural capital) is gained by doctoral students in the field as they attain increased levels of education (Grenfell & James, 1998, p.21). Each of the six research participants entered the field of doctoral education having amassed significant levels of educational capital, having earned their master’s degrees and various other qualifications. However, Duke and Denicolo (2013) point out the importance of recognising that pursuing doctoral education is not simply an extension of master’s degree studies. Rather, the authors characterise the transition between previous higher education levels and doctoral study as a state change, a metamorphosis even, in terms of the development required in the doctoral candidate's scholarly identity.

The value of prior education in the context of doctoral study was mentioned by Patience when talking about her decision to enrol for her PhD as the next logical career and self-development progression. She talked about the foundation that she felt was laid by her previous degree experience when it came to grappling with certain aspects of her doctoral studies, such as the choice and understanding of a theoretical framework.

> Sometimes you feel like you are expected to know these things, so you are even too afraid to ask. You're supposed to know, but you don't know. So are you really supposed to be doing a PhD? … One of the comments my supervisor made about the theory was, where is the theory in this? And I was saying, I wonder what theory is she talking about. What am I supposed to do? Something that the supervisor might have taken for granted that I'm supposed to know it. … Why don't I know about this? … Sometimes with the master's work they don't prepare you very well for the advanced work you need to do in your doctoral studies. So, I think I felt that I was ill-prepared in terms of the theories and methodologies and I needed more support.

Here, Patience expressed that her own experience of master's level study neither gave her a strong enough academic foundation to meet the skills requirements of doctoral education nor equipped her to meet the expectations of her supervisors, the university and the field. Not knowing what it seemed she was expected to know led to feelings of inadequacy and doubting her sense of identity and belonging in the field. Whatever emotional and educational capital Patience entered the field with was undermined to some degree in a context within which she felt unsure of how and where to proceed. This is echoed in the DDNR (CHE, 2022) which points out that securing an acceptable pass mark for the master's degree is not in itself a guarantee of successful doctoral study. Not every kind of capital that is brought into a field necessarily has an exchange value in that field. The cultural and symbolic capital that Patience attained prior to and as a result of succeeding at master's level study proved to be less valuable than anticipated when trying to navigate academic territory and acquire enhanced scholarly skills that felt foreign to her. As has been discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, doctoral candidates who enter the field of doctoral education without a 'feel' for the rules of the game and without the ‘right’ kinds of capital that are conventionally valued in these settings, may find themselves at a disadvantage.

Shortly after Pamela enrolled in her doctoral programme, she began experiencing difficulties with her supervisor (and boss) that she felt ill-equipped to navigate effectively. Her supervisor was a highly respected academic and researcher who had significant research funding. Pamela felt lacking in any meaningful form of power in the context of the challenges that had begun to emerge in her supervision relationship - power which may have emboldened and empowered her to, for instance, have a necessary yet uncomfortable conversation or question a specific policy. She was unsure of how to go about this and felt unable to make significant progress as a doctoral scholar.

> I couldn’t make headway with my supervisor or my PhD. Fortunately, now I can show that there's nothing wrong in my ability to write. I knew that the problem was not with my writing. It was in part based on the strength of my master's research that I was accepted for the PhD and for my position as research officer on the project to begin with. The first thing they did was look at my master’s degree – look at my ability to write. That was confirmed. I could write. Speaking to my supervisor, it just felt like I would step into quicksand.

In the above excerpt, Pamela shared her difficulty in making academic progress, even though it was in part the strength of her work at the master’s level that secured her place in the doctoral programme. In terms of educational capital, she felt confident about her ability to write yet was unable to make the progress she desired. In her estimation, the problem stemmed from her relationship with her supervisor – a problem made more complicated by the fact that he was also her boss at her job. Pamela lacked the confidence to argue and stand her ground. She feared being fired. The nature of this difficulty with her supervisor (further discussed in the sections to follow) was such that any academic preparedness for doctoral study, which may have been imbued to her through her master’s education experience, appeared to be of limited usefulness in navigating her doctoral study context.

Similar to Pamela, Susanne experienced difficulty making academic progress, especially related to her research proposal, after completing an earlier research essay as part of her doctoral programme. Whatever the reasons were, there was little to no supervision engagement with the research essay that Susanne was meant to complete and submit, which would serve as her research proposal for the doctoral programme.

> She didn't engage with my essay. She said, 'No, you have to rewrite Chapter 1'. Only later on did I realise that what she meant was I need to do a proposal. I didn't understand the process. I didn't understand that I must change my essay to a proposal. I thought it was proposal enough.

From the above extract, it appears there was a miscommunication between Susanne and her supervisor and problems related to hidden curriculum and assumptions of prior knowledge on the part of her supervisor. Beyond the fact that, according to Susanne, she received little supervision engagement on her essay, her supervisor seemed to have assumed that Susanne would know what nature of work was required next. There was an expectation that she possessed the educational capital necessary to make progress with her research proposal – that her prior academic experience would inform her efforts. Susanne, however, was unsure of what was expected of her, and was either uncomfortable asking for clarity or at the time did not know that clarity was required. She did not understand what the requirements or characteristics of the research proposal were or how they differed from the work she had already produced. As she noted, she only realised at a later stage that her understanding in this regard was incorrect. Miscommunication of this nature represents one example of how expectations the field has of a doctoral candidate with regard to their readiness, is in reality mismatched with the candidate's experience and educational capital.

Uncertainty related to how to structure and approach a particular part of the thesis was also part of Patience's experience. After having her proposal accepted, Patience submitted her next piece of writing (aims, objectives, significance, background, etc.), which her supervisor said was well conceptualised and written, complimenting her on her strong writing. Her supervisor then recommended she do her methodology chapter. She struggled greatly for four to six months with this chapter.

> I struggled with this chapter… And I would say, 'Is this it?' … And my supervisor would say, no, you still need to do more. Also, remember, that I had not gone too deep into the

> literature review to know what other methods people were using for similar studies. For a long time, I asked myself, how am I going to approach this? Maybe I did not conceptualise the study well enough to a point where I would really know how to approach the methodology. So, I struggled and struggled and struggled.

Patience was incapable of making meaningful progress with the writing of her methodology chapter. Although she had gained some research expertise during the course of her master's education, she was unable to fully translate those skills into the successful navigation of the requirements of research and writing at the doctoral level. What this experience indicates is that while previous education may lay an important foundation, subsequent scholarly development along with the associated enhancement of educational capital appears at least in part to be dependent on suitable supervision support. However, it is important to acknowledge, as discussed in Chapter Five, that the field has very high expectations of supervisors too, and that many of them receive little to no formal training prior to becoming supervisors. Success in doctoral study requires (among a host of other factors) a specific form of research experience and skill that is not necessarily assimilated by the candidate during the course of previous study programmes. Therefore, the symbolic and cultural capital by way of educational experience which may have accrued to doctoral candidates in prior postgraduate contexts may not adequately prepare them to meet the academic expectations of doctoral education.

Beyond the influence of candidates' portfolios of symbolic and cultural capital on their academic journey, the role of economic capital should not be underestimated. It exerts a significant impact on success in doctoral education, as the next subsection discusses.

6.3.3 Economic capital and its influence

As mentioned in Chapter 5 (subsection 5.2.5), one of the aspects of education that has implications related to candidate preparedness is connected to the realm of the financial. Financial independence and stability, and the matter of economic capital, are matters which might negatively impact doctoral candidates' ability to effectively focus their creative and scholarly energy on their studies. The Doctoral Review (CHE, 2022) points out that the provision of bursaries to doctoral candidates presents a challenge across the sector, and that the availability of financial aid is vital to almost all South African doctoral candidates. The lack of necessary financial resources gives rise to considerable personal pressure – many if not most candidates are forced to find part-time jobs in order to raise sufficient funds with which to live, alongside juggling the responsibilities of doctoral study. Others may experience their physical health compromised as a result of constant anxiety and/or a lack of sleep related to financial obligations. These and other relevant pressures in turn have a consequent negative impact on candidates' ability to focus on their studies and finish their degree in good time.

Three of the six participants in this study were dependent on financial support in the form of scholarships and/or bursaries. This funding represents a significant enabling factor in their lives, given that these individuals would not have been able to access doctoral education without it. This was true in Robert's case, who expressed his struggles over the ever-present pressure that his dependence on research funding represented during his doctoral journey.

> The financial side of things was always difficult for me and my family. They were not in a position to be able to support me. My father did a trade. He didn't finish school. He left school at grade 10 or 11. My mother went to a teacher's college and worked as a teacher, but no one in my family had gotten a degree. When I entered doctoral study, both of my parents were at retirement age and were dependent on pension. So, I was reliant on bursary and scholarship funding for my doctoral studies, facing the constant concern of how I was going to afford the entirety of my degree programme.

Robert's academic journey was constantly impacted by financial-related concerns. It is useful to draw a distinction between being granted access to a field through funding – i.e., achieving formal access – and being fully empowered to succeed in that field. Funding of this nature undoubtedly plays a significant positive role in many doctoral candidates' lives in enabling them to access doctoral education, However, for many doctoral candidates, day-to-day life, over and above tuition fees and book costs, etc., requires more financial resources than they have access to. These individuals may have entered the field of doctoral education, but they are not free of the myriad stresses and burdens associated with financial lack. This is particularly true for those doctoral candidates who come from and grew up in (and whose families still struggle through) poor socio-economic circumstances. Robert and some of his black peers were excluded from various research project events purely based on not being able to afford to attend.

> Me and a female student on the project, the only other coloured person in the lab, we both came from working class upbringings, did not have the financial support of families, we were always heavily reliant on bursary or scholarship funding. The others never understood those kinds of things. There were all sorts of lab socials and things and there was an expectation that we needed to join, but we never had the disposable income.

As noted in Chapter 3, subsection 3.3.1, there is a link between economic and social capital, in that working-class candidates, compared with their middle-class counterparts, face more than one transitional stage upon entering higher education – a significant one being from one social class to another. Robert's financial circumstances, as indicated above, show how economic vulnerability can close doors to social and networking opportunities that those from more affluent backgrounds enjoy as a relative norm (see Case, Marshall, McKenna and Disaapele, 2018). These opportunities afford those benefiting from them greater scope to forge useful, strategic social connections, thereby expanding their portfolio of social capital and further cementing their sense of belonging in the field.

It is certain that unreliable funding sources (Pauley, Cunningham & Toth, 1999), and a lack of economic capital in general, undermine doctoral candidates' ability to confidently and fully navigate the field of doctoral education. In Robert's situation, for instance, financial lack meant that he was unable to fully engage socially with his peers and supervisors on the doctoral project, adding to feelings of isolation and of being an outsider in a primarily white, Afrikaans-speaking context. He also mentioned that the coloured female student in the lab was denied an opportunity to attend a research conference and present her work because of a lack of finances.

A lack of financial resources forces many students in higher education to abandon their programme of study. Andiswa had already been forced to leave a previous doctoral programme due to financial constraints. The promise of funding was instrumental in Andiswa's choice to work with a specific supervisor at a certain South African university, even if the decision came with significant drawbacks.

> The hook to my next supervisor was that he said he's got scholarships, he's got finances. So I then followed him. I could sense though that I wasn't too happy with his approach. I was uneasy with this pairing from the start because of the theories that the supervisor

> was trying to steer me towards. I thought, I don't know if I want to do what he wants me to do. However, due to the promise of funding, I decided to continue, feeling I had little choice other than to 'tow the line' as my financial situation put me in a vulnerable place.

From this excerpt, we see that Andiswa's financial situation pressured her to compromise on her desired research focus and choice of theory if it meant that she was financially able to access her doctoral education. Demonstrated here is the significant influence and power that economic capital, or the lack thereof, can exert over a doctoral candidate's scholarly interest and, therefore by extension, their scholarly identity. From the very beginning of her doctoral education journey, Andiswa felt compelled to subjugate her personal research interests in order to secure valuable economic capital, and along with it access to the field. It was a decision that had the potential to set her academic path on a significantly different trajectory from what research focus interested her most. However, she felt the choice had already been made for her, given her financial situation.

On the aforementioned subject of strategic social connections, arguably the most pivotal connection upon which the success of the doctoral candidate is dependent, is that of the candidate-supervisor relationship (Bastalich, 2017; George-Jackson & Lubienski, 2018). Given the importance of this relationship to success in doctoral education, how candidates understand and navigate difficulties encountered in their supervision relationship has the potential to facilitate or undermine their learning. Furthermore, it plays a key role in either the formation or the erosion of the doctoral candidate's academic identity (Amundsen & McAlpine, 2009). The next section discusses the participants' experiences in the field related to doctoral supervision.

6.4 Supervision Experiences - a Field of Contestation

This section explores the subject of doctoral supervision from the perspective of the participants in this study, based on each of their unique experiences. It firstly discusses and reveals how power relations played out in the participants' supervision relationship, followed by an examination of how the practice of supervision feedback impacted their relationship with their supervisor and their academic progress

6.4.1 Power dynamics and the supervision relationship

The dyadic supervision model, colloquially known as the ‘one-to-one’ model involving one doctoral candidate and a main supervisor, is associated in research with the heightened possibility of relational breakdown. This is also applicable to the joint supervision model (a main and co-supervisor) – albeit potentially to a lesser extent – and this breakdown includes instances of abuse of power and other problems linked with the privacy inherent in it (Grant, 2003; Manathunga, 2012; Frick et al., 2017). In universities in South Africa, as in those around the world, the expectations around what supervision work entails, are often imprecise (Amundsen & McAlpine, 2009). Section 5.3 in Chapter 5 examined the varied expectations that the field has of doctoral supervisors, while subsection 5.4.3 noted the fact that there is a dearth of adequate supervision training in the South African context. This lack of suitable training is of course bound to impact supervisors’ ability to sufficiently meet the expectations placed upon them.

All six participants in this study were supervised by either a sole supervisor or a main and co-supervisor pair responsible for the provision of supervision support. Every participant interviewed had experienced one or more challenges in the context of this supervision arrangement. The dyadic model and associated elements of power and hierarchy may adversely influence the supervision relationship and limit a collaborative environment which might facilitate the candidate’s development (Guerin & Green, 2015). The hierarchical nature of the relationship and the power imbalance inherent in it may make it challenging for candidates to meet the field’s expectation of managing the supervisory relationship discussed in subsection 5.2.4. This challenge could be exacerbated in instances where the doctoral candidate feels their efforts to facilitate connection are not reciprocated.

Andiswa had been in contact with several individuals in her efforts to identify a suitable supervisor. It was a decision she took quite seriously.

> At the time I started I was picky about who I’d like to supervise me. I heard many stories of people who get supervised by others, and for all sorts of reasons, they either don’t know their story or they are not supportive enough. So that kind of took me a long time

> to find someone. Eventually, I found someone at the university I was employed at, and when he got employed at another university I followed him there as a student.

She required financial aid to pursue doctoral education, and as indicated in the previous section, she eventually chose a supervisor at an institution where there was the provision of funding for her studies. Her supervisor was a renowned scholar in South Africa, yet Andiswa was, in her words, 'uneasy with this pairing from the start', primarily because her supervisor seemed unwilling to let her choose her own theoretical approach. She was determined to make progress with her research but following the submission of her proposal and one or two chapters, the 'trauma' started, as she put it.

> Everything was OK when we started. I was excited. The person really knew their stuff in the area of research I was interested in. There were lots of promises and consultations in the beginning, but at the end of the day, none of those promises actually matured into anything tangible. By the end of the year, I sat down to count – I actually had sessions with my supervisor twice. I would submit work that would go unanswered for months at a time. When I would follow up with him, he would act surprised and claim he had not received anything.

Related to the field expectation that candidates exercise due diligence in preparing themselves for the doctoral education journey (see section 5.2.1), Andiswa took time and made the effort to identify a supervisor she felt would be a good fit for her. She exercised emotional capital in finding a suitable person and in terms of submitting work and following up with her supervisor when no response to her submission was forthcoming months later. Her supervisor was offered a research fellowship that took him to the USA, but he assured her of continued support. However, she shared that this was not the case.

> It was really, really traumatic. At the time, my husband, who is originally from the UK, had gone away because his mom had passed on. I remained. While he was away for three months, I thought I'd be doing lots of work. … I would check up with him, and he would say, where is your work? Could you resend it to me? And I would think, really? And here is someone who is a so-called renowned scholar in South Africa. But he's actually a

> narcissist when it comes to treating his candidates. It was more torture, and trauma, and tears at night. Regrets.

Initially, Andiswa's supervisor seemed mindful of the expectations placed on supervisors (as discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.3), making promises to her at the beginning of their relationship with regard to the support and guidance she would receive. However, as the months passed, these promises seemed to her to be increasingly empty. She experienced a contradiction in the field between the nature and scope of support promised to her, versus what she experienced in reality. Such a contradiction in the field of postgraduate research has been identified in previous research (Cyster, 2019). Andiswa expected more support and availability from an individual who had accumulated a significant volume of symbolic and cultural capital in the field by way of qualifications, publications and other academic accomplishments.

Andiswa mentioned that she was part of a PhD group of about 10 candidates, all of whom were experiencing the same neglect – all part of a broader project. She has friends who are still struggling with the same supervisor, five years on (at the time of her conversations). She tried contacting the university's office for postgraduate support in an effort to gain some support and counsel yet felt that they were not willing to challenge her supervisor's authority in the department. Andiswa talks about how reaching out to the university's office for postgraduate support left her feeling unheard and unseen in the sense that her concerns seemed largely ignored.

> Even if you go to the offices of postgraduate support to express your concern, you just get the feeling that these people (the supervisors) are untouchable, that some supervisors are untouchable. 'Oh, you are a student for so-and-so? Agh. And the whole faculty knew that this person was frustrating candidates, but they were untouchable. I suppose it's those people who bring in a lot of money into these institutions.

As shown in Chapter 5 (section 5.4), universities have (or are meant to have) procedures and structures in place for the lodging of student complaints and appeals, and the field thus expects candidates to have the support they need from their departments, faculties and universities through these channels. However, Andiswa's experience, which is not unique among the participants in this study, nor within relevant literature (Lovitts, 2001; Golde, 2005; McAlpine, Paulson, Gonsalves & Jazvac-Martek, 2012), indicates that the expected support did not match the support she actually received and that although relevant processes exist in policy, they may not necessarily be implemented by staff. It was discussed in Chapter 2 (subsection 2.2.3) how academic culture has been described as having hierarchies and power relations which are influenced by a 'culture of silence', in which doctoral candidates are wary of expressing dissatisfaction or going against the dominant culture in their academic context. Some agents in the field who wield significant volumes of social, cultural, symbolic and economic capital at times appear shielded from structures of accountability intended to address instances where derelictions of duties occur.

It was only upon adopting a course of action that potentially put her at cross purposes with an individual in a relative position of power (her supervisor) that the doxa in Andiswa's research context started to become apparent, operating in a manner that maintained the existing power relations. Andiswa's agency in the field was undermined as a result of not possessing sufficient volumes of field-valued capital. In this instance, having economic capital – which would have allowed Andiswa to choose her supervisor and institution based on her research interests alone – could have led to a different experience. In addition, had she possessed field-valued forms of symbolic and/or cultural capital in sufficient volumes, that might have lent legitimacy and weight to her request for institutional support, without leaving her feeling ignored and disempowered. Andiswa was experiencing a field of contradictions, broken promises and unmet expectations.

The ideas of unmet expectations and conflicting cultures and capitals became key themes in Pamela's doctoral study experience. She became aware over the course of her study of the impact upon her academic progress of the different positions that she and her supervisor (and boss) occupied in the field of her doctoral education. These included respective positions of employee and employer, doctoral candidate and supervisor, subordinate and superior. This difference in positions meant that her supervisor possessed a portfolio of capital in the field that was valued significantly more and was more influential than that which Pamela possessed. He possessed dominant forms of cultural and symbolic capital based on his academic achievements, reputation and status as a globally respected scholar. As a white male in a primarily Anglocentric research and professional context, his perceptions and practices would generally have blended more seamlessly with the field, and his background, experience and history in that Anglocentric context would have enhanced his social capital. He commanded significant levels of economic capital by way of research funds, which would also have afforded him elevated levels of influence in the field. All of this meant that Pamela's supervisor would have benefited from significantly more power in a field which valued his capital above hers. As she put it,

> There were huge differences in positionality between me and my supervisor. The one thing that I can articulate now - at the time I didn't have the language for it - was the huge discourse, and worldview and values differences. It actually makes it quite hard to actually have a conversation. And if you see my work now, my work and who I am is very much located in an African worldview, and here I was with all the people who were in charge – the principal investigators on the project. All of them being white men. And powerful. They had the power and were in charge of the project. Everyone else was expected to play their assigned subordinate role. And of course, now and then I would become, what do they call it, the 'restless native'. Literally. (laughing) So, ja, it became uncomfortable a few times.

An expectation of the field is that supervisors and candidates will work together effectively, manage their relationships through compromise and negotiation, and be collegial. This implies a form of emotional capital for candidates and supervisors in managing differences (which are all but inevitable), and perhaps forms of cultural capital that enable the finding of some common ground. Pamela's experience is at odds with this expectation. Based on her experience, it appears that what was valued in her context were capitals attached to whiteness and maleness. In this specific part of the field, that is what attracted power. The values attached to the supervisors' worldview and positionality – white, male, Western – are powerful. Conversely, other values held by Pamela and 'everyone else' in the team, were devalued, and holders of those values were designated to occupy subordinate roles. An environment of this nature would have made it challenging for Pamela to meet the expectations of the field in terms of making steady academic progress and developing the required doctoral attributes, skills and knowledge.

Pamela’s experience points to a doctoral research context that is multidimensional in nature, involving a myriad of issues including race, gender, institutional standing, disciplinary authority and professional position/role. As noted in Chapter 2, some doctoral candidates’ struggles with socialisation into their particular research culture (as well as employment culture in Pamela’s case) and associated feelings of isolation can make advancing in their degree programme difficult. She spoke of how she felt disconnected from the worldview of the people who ran the office. Her feelings of isolation transcended her work and personal study programme. She also experienced them within the broader university environment. As the research has shown, feelings of isolation are commonly associated with experiences of doctoral education (Ali & Kohun, 2007), and this feeling of aloneness would have been exacerbated in Pamela’s case in light of the relative lack of field-valued capital that she had.

The experiences of the participants with regard to supervision resonate quite clearly with the findings of Woffard et al’.s (2017) study, discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4, which noted the overwhelming impact of supervision in relation to influencing candidates’ decision to withdraw from their studies. This appears to confirm, at least in part, Bastalich’s (2017) and George-Jackson’s & Lubienski’s (2018) assertion about the candidate-supervisor relationship representing the most central factor upon which the success of the doctoral candidate hinges. The disparity in capitals and positions between Pamela and her supervisor, and the different and conflicting worldview that she brought into her educational and professional context, intensified this experience for her. In addition, her sense of doctorateness – her doctoral identity – was stifled in an environment in which her scholarly and professional voice seemed dismissed or lesser than her.

> There was a very, like, what I recognise now as this very liberal way of kind of acknowledging my issues, but maintaining the power dynamic, and not wanting to give up that power. Without any concessions or compromises that would upset the existing power dynamic. I guess I was a lot less confident than I am now. I couldn’t take charge of the narrative. I was intimidated. It felt like my Afrikaans, lower working-class background that taught me to speak directly might be regarded as offensive by my supervisor and the European collaborators on the project.

As noted in Chapter 5, subsection 5.3.1, doctoral supervisors have a responsibility to offer guidance and to be accessible. The differences in worldview and personality between Pamela and her supervisor (and the other European colleagues on the joint research project) undermined this sense of accessibility, and therefore the guidance that she might have received as a result of it. In addition, in terms of the supervisor's responsibility to manage the relationship with their student, the lack of compromise or concession that Pamela experienced from her supervisor was seen to undermine any sense of mutual understanding and constructive collaboration. Pamela explicitly talked about the struggle over the maintenance and protection of power in the field, a key idea discussed in Bourdieu's articulation of the nature of social fields (Martin, 2003; Wacquant, 2007). Pamela's supervisor possessed the power. His portfolio of capital (symbolic, cultural and economic) appeared to align seamlessly with the apparently male-dominated and Eurocentric nature and values of the field. It is therefore of little surprise that when confronted with this environment while trying to respond to and overcome challenges, Pamela felt intimidated.

Pamela was always concerned about her perceived need to tone down her language so as not to offend anyone. This concern was exacerbated by her own low self-esteem. This again speaks to the aforementioned issue of imposter syndrome and how it erodes confidence in the course of navigating a social field. Pamela came to feel that she was relatively powerless in her study and work contexts, being in possession of a worldview, disposition and capitals that the field neither acknowledged nor valued as much as that of her white peers/colleagues and her supervisor.

> If I just think of all the time that I spent trying to find a way out of the quicksand. I think it was enormous. It was very stressful. I resented my supervisor. I felt that, why doesn't anyone take time to guide the student in the choice of supervisor? In monitoring, in supervising that relationship? In trying to match you with a supervisor? Nothing went into that. And also, nobody ever questions the supervisor. You take it on. I blamed myself. That's why I like to tell people that I'm a PhD drop-out from that university. You internalise that blame. The self-blame. My supervisor seemed untouchable. He commanded the millions of rands. People quoted him. They named physical landmarks after him. He is sacrosanct.

Pamela’s words here demonstrate the impact of the imbalance of power between agents in a field. She felt that her scholarly voice was rendered impotent, and as such, she felt silenced. In her estimation and experience, the prevailing doxa in the field valued affluence, academic prestige, euro-centric whiteness and culture. This experience had a stifling impact on the development of her doctoral identity and the emergence of traits relevant to her doctorateness. The rules of the field operated in such a way as to entrench, protect and advance her supervisor’s power and influence. In Chapter 3, section 3.4 on doxa it was noted that doctoral candidates may enter a field of education in which they learn that the doxa is to know their place, submit to authority, and not upset the order of things if they are to advance meaningfully. This was an aspect of the field of doctoral education that Pamela would encounter as her academic journey unfolded.

> So it was really like a clash of civilisations. The values hierarchy was inverted. So I was actually upset and kind of disorientated at a very deep level. Even now as I’m speaking with you, I can feel the charge. After all these years. I’m actually starting to feel emotional, because I’m getting in touch with the abuse of it … Often when I sat in meetings I had to count to ten. I would say to myself, don’t raise it now. You’ll raise it and there’s going to be this uncomfortable silence. You’re just going to make a mess of this. Don't come with expectations or an agenda of transformation or upsetting the balance of power. Don't express concerns or complaints – stay in your lane and know your place. Respect the hierarchy and do as you are told.

From the above excerpts, it seems clear that Pamela felt powerless to overcome or resist the power hierarchy that she perceived existed between her supervisor and European colleagues and herself. This experience had a significantly adverse impact on the development of Pamela’s doctoral identity. Rather than being in an academic environment in which she felt encouraged and empowered to exercise independent and critical thinking, she instead felt muzzled and disenfranchised. The doxa of the field, whether in explicit or implicit form, pressured her to submit to the status quo and stifled any aspirations of free thought and speech. This field context would not have resulted in the development of the kind of doctorateness that the pursuit of doctoral education is meant to instil and cultivate, as mentioned in Chapter 2 (Frick, 2011; Trafford & Leshem, 2009). One of the expectations of doctoral candidates, as noted in Chapter

5 (subsection 5.2.4) is the need to exercise emotional capital in managing their relationship with their supervisor. From her narrative account, it seems Pamela experienced this expectation as practically impossible to meet, given the aforementioned doxa operating in her specific academic and professional contexts.

In the context of her supervision relationship, specifically, Pamela and her supervisor seemed to be unable to form a collegial bond, whatever the comprehensive combination of causal factors was. Beyond the cultural alienation that she experienced, there was also a gender component. For instance, white women involved in the project were seen to be marginalised by the white men. Pamela remembers the loneliness and isolation that she felt – she recounts how she was unable to think, being consumed by worry and stress. She had all the practical tools she needed but could not summon the emotional presence of mind to make academic progress. She felt unable to direct her energies productively.

> As human beings we will always prioritise our safety first. When you feel unsafe you act the same as if a lion is stalking you. All your energies will go towards self-preservation, which means that the energies available for critical thinking, for creativity, you can't mobilise. I was immobilised. I couldn't think and be creative. So it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that as a black person, you can't perform. I felt invisible. Dismissed.

Pamela sought advice from an office on campus meant to (in part) assist with supervision-related challenges and explored getting a co-supervisor, but she felt that doing so made little difference to her situation. Similar to the context with her supervisor, Pamela felt disconnected from the worldview of the people who ran this office – her feelings of isolation transcended her work and studies and were experienced within the broader university environment. This echoed Andiswa's experience when she expressed the notion that supervisors and departments seemed 'untouchable', shielded from accountability by the institutional systems and structures which ought to be supporting struggling candidates. Pamela explored various options in an attempt to navigate the challenges she was facing.

> I went to see a therapist. I had consulted a life coach. I had gone to that office to talk about it. I tried to get a co-supervisor to try to resolve it. I think in the end, if I think of it now, all I needed to do was step into it and take charge of it. But at the time I couldn't

> do that. … Speaking and thinking critically gets one alienated from those in power and from those who are fearful of confronting those power structures. What happens then is that you end up belonging nowhere.

A supportive institutional culture represents one of the key factors influencing candidate success in doctoral education (Golde, 2005). Cultivating a culture of belonging for all doctoral candidates has the potential to significantly mitigate feelings of isolation that are often experienced during doctoral studies (Pretorius & Macaulay, 2021). Attempting to exercise traits of doctorateness, including independent thinking and being critical of systems of power, resulted in Pamela feeling like a foreigner in the field of doctoral education, devoid of significant social and emotional capital. Her sense of belonging and legitimacy was eroded, which impacted her ability and willingness to persevere in doctoral study amid various challenges. For Pamela, illusio (see Chapter 3, section 3.7) relevant to her doctoral education journey had been significantly damaged.

For Robert, the concept of illusio had not yet become relevant, as he embarked on his own doctoral journey. He applied to be a part of a PhD project that his supervisor was running, continuing his research interest in pathology. Enrolled in the project, Robert had a main and co-supervisor (both elderly Afrikaans white men) and input from an overseas research collaborator who possessed the technical expertise that would benefit Robert, but who was inconsistently available. His supervisors were not thoroughly familiar with the practical research protocols associated with his specific study.

> From early on, within the first six months … it was a constant comment that was made whenever we had progress meetings - that they couldn't really assist … I think within the biomedical sciences PhDs … it's not uncommon for the supervisors essentially to leave PhD candidates to their own devices. You can imagine how hard it might be to have to rely on someone who is on an entirely different continent, who isn't there to provide practical guidance all the way through. I was very inexperienced in a lot of these methods and I think my supervisors were relying on the collaborator abroad to provide the guidance, but there's only so much that can be done from a distance.

Drawing on the literature, doctoral reports and university guidelines, I argued in Chapter 5 (section 5.3), that the field expects doctoral supervisors to be accessible to their candidates and to serve as sources of guidance. Part of this involves providing timely, constructive feedback on the candidate's work that serves to facilitate their academic progress. As explained in the above excerpt, Robert was repeatedly told by his supervisors that this kind of support would not be forthcoming, making it apparent to him early on that his academic progress would suffer. As he struggled to make meaningful progress with his studies, he was also unexpectedly tasked with managing issues related to the logistical day-to-day management of the lab. These additional responsibilities took up a lot of his time, which he could not afford. He was also surprised to find that he was, for all intents and purposes, being relied on to supervise several postgraduate candidates:

> There were two postgraduate students that were working on the larger project, which, essentially for all intents and purposes, I had to supervise. I needed to train them in all the technical methods, and also supervise a lot of their work. The lab that we had to do the majority of the work in … that was not operational, when I started the project, so the onus was on me to get it operational. So it took months and months to convince people to get service equipment, and necessary laboratory tools, etc. So it was a lot of time wasted. … And then further down the line, in my second year, there were two more postgraduate students that joined the lab, so those were two more projects that I had to supervise. All of these things that I had to focus on were on top of having to deal with my own PhD project, which was going nowhere.

Beyond the above-mentioned challenges, Robert recalls that his doctoral research environment was quite toxic. He noted that the department was white, Afrikaans-dominated. There was, in his observation, blatant favouritism displayed towards the white candidates and postdocs who were given the scope to seemingly do whatever they wanted. Instances of racism towards the few candidates of colour, discrimination based on gender and/or sexual orientation, and inappropriate flirting by supervisors with female candidates at after-hours events (including instances of physical groping) were not unusual, according to Robert. Concerns of inequality such as these in doctoral education related to race, language and gender are not limited to Robert's research context (see, for example, Dinsmore & Roksa, 2023). Given this specific environment in Robert's case, it seems reasonable to deduce that the experience of the field of doctoral education as a Bourdieusian 'space of possibles' was more of a reality for the white candidates in the department than the others. For Robert and his fellow black peers, it may well have been more accurate to label doctoral education as a space of struggle or limitations. The field implies that every doctoral candidate can and will succeed if they meet the expectations (see Chapter 5), which are presented in higher degrees policies as fairly neutral. However, experiences like those of Robert's and Pamela's, where race, gender, language, class, and values come into play, show that there are hidden, non-neutral doxa and expectations at work that mean not every candidate has the same chance of success without significant personal compromises that not everyone may be willing and/or able to make.

Returning to Susanne's experience, with time passing by and feeling in need of more present and consistent support, she requested a new supervisor. She recalls being advised by the broader candidature group that it could be akin to 'political suicide' to do so. There existed a perception among her peers that taking such a step was fraught with risk, as she explained:

> There were concerns around appearing to 'cross' someone in a position of power and influence, and potential resultant negative ramifications on one's academic progress. The new supervisor was not given to me until May of the next year. The second year, although supervision engagement continued to be sporadic. And then I started with a proposal. I did a presentation for the proposal but the proposal was never put forward to the committee. With the point being I suppose that it was not ready. Which I grant. I was then kicked out of the programme.

Although requesting a new supervisor was a potentially risky decision, Susanne drew on her reserves of emotional capital in asking for one, indicating that the limited progress she felt she was making with her PhD raised enough concern for her so as to warrant the risk. The issue of erratic supervisory contact was a recurring theme amongst the research participants in this study. There were similar instances in which their academic progress was stunted or at least significantly delayed as a result of supervision feedback – the specific subject of the next subsection – that was sporadic in nature or that seemed unclear to the student. The apprenticeship/protégé approach to supervision, as exists in the dyadic model, involves the development of an intense relationship between the supervisor and the doctoral candidate

(Manathunga, 2012). In fact, in an attempt to highlight the intricate and contradictory mutual relations of domination and subordination inherent in this form of relationship, Grant (2008) has drawn on Hegel's (1977) master-slave dialectic to reflect on the inequality of power relations that exist within it.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, the power dynamics that potentially characterise this supervision model aptly illustrate the notion of the 'field of contestation' that Bourdieu refers to. It involves the constant pursuit of and struggle for the accumulation and/or preservation of power in the field, along with the benefits and advantages that come with it, as discussed in Chapter 3. Each agent in the field of doctoral education brings to the contest all the capital at their disposal. It is this capital that defines their position in the field and, consequently, their strategies and options (Bourdieu, 1998). It largely determines the outcome of a potential struggle between doctoral supervisors and candidates over how their relationship ought to be framed and managed. For the participants in this study, their experience in the field was largely one of powerlessness, lacking the types and volumes of capital required to make significant advancements, as the relevant excerpts and discussions above reflect. Given the research participants' experience of the dyadic supervision model as presented above, the next section continues this focus by exploring the role that feedback and writing played in their supervision relationship and the participants' academic progress.

6.4.2 Experiences of supervision feedback

One of the pivotal roles of a supervisor is that of a guide or feedback provider while developing the thesis and moulding the candidate's doctoral identity. The practice of providing feedback is embedded in the supervisory relationship (Carter & Kumar, 2017). The DDNR (CHE, 2022) reports that candidates experience delays when it comes to receiving feedback on their research proposals or concept notes. This in turn results in delays in formal registration and the initiation of research projects, particularly if these delays are prolonged, adversely impacting times for completion and graduation.

Beulah's pursuit of her research passion was smooth going at first. The relationship with her supervisor was constructive and pleasant. However, challenges emerged when a co-supervisor joined, with the proposal being halfway complete at that point. The co-supervisor was the more senior and experienced academic of the supervision team and Beulah had previously experienced challenges with her as her supervisor during her honours and master's programmes.

> After she joined us at master’s level, we were not moving. My proposal was halfway, but then when she came in, in terms of her comments, she just indicated to say that I need to divert from what I’m doing, because it looks like at the end of the day, my study is not going to provide something concrete when looking to my findings. I was not happy about the way things were moving, simply because I did not have interest in the topic that was suggested to me. All in all I tried to move forward with the topic. But I realised I don’t have the passion or interest in what I’m doing. It felt like the second supervisor would leave discouraging feedback on my work, implying that I had submitted nothing of value. This chain of events had happened almost identically during my master’s studies as well, with this same person. I even said that she came in because she wanted to drag me like she did at my honours level. … At times she would comment (feedback) as if you had done nothing, and I was so discouraged.

Beulah’s comment indicates that beyond the substance of supervision feedback being important, what is also key is the tone in which that information is relayed. Even potentially constructive feedback can undermine a candidate’s progress if shared in an unkind manner that results in discouragement, with some candidates feeling that they are being criticised harshly. It is important for supervisors to provide balanced, positive and negative feedback to the candidate, who needs to be affirmed when their work shows promise, just as they ought to be informed when their work requires improvement (Chapter 5, subsections 5.3.3 and 5.4.1). In a case such as Beulah’s, not only did supervision fail to represent a source of empowering social capital (a collaborative relationship and source of support and guidance), but it also became a liability to her and a source of anxiety. Beulah’s co-supervisor indicated that the focus of Beulah’s PhD study needed to change, saying that the current research area would not yield concrete results. Beulah consequently diverted from her original interest in education alignment to one focused on representations in mathematics. She became unhappy with the way things were progressing.

Furthermore, Beulah's relative powerlessness in the field made her vulnerable to efforts to undermine her personal research interests, and consequently, her scholarly identity, feeling unable to choose her own academic path. She lacked the symbolic capital (status, reputation) and cultural capital (accomplishments, seniority) to resist the intentions of her co-supervisor to determine her research trajectory. Her comments in this regard illustrate how passion and enthusiasm for the topic of research play an important role in nurturing the sense of illusio (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) that keeps the doctoral candidate committed to achieving their academic objectives. For Beulah, this sense of illusio had been negatively impacted by the pressure to deviate from her desired subject of research, and by feedback that she found to be unhelpful and harsh. Furthermore, it is apparent that her experience of supervision and feedback had a disruptive influence on her sense of self, contributing to the erosion of her self-confidence and sense of doctoral identity moving forward. As discussed in Chapter 5, section 5.2, academic curiosity and enthusiasm are among the key traits that the ideal doctoral candidate is expected to possess. It was challenging for Beulah to increase and maintain possession of these traits in a context in which she felt that her research passion was undermined. The consequence for her was discouragement.

Discouragement had come to play a key role in Susanne's doctoral experience. Six months into her doctoral programme she was unable to secure the necessary feedback she needed on her work. From this point on, any written feedback she did receive came across to her as vague and confusing. Her supervisor had experienced a family crisis from July to August of that first year and stated that this was the reason she was aloof. In light of ongoing erratic supervision contact, Susanne was eventually allocated a new supervisor in May of her second year of study. However, this supervisor's academic background was unrelated to her research interest, and supervision continued to be sporadic and too brief:

> I think I had a total of 30 minutes with my 2nd supervisor, maybe 45, and five minutes thereafter. She didn't look me in the eye. She didn't see me. I tried to get connections. I attended the workshops and everything, but there was no connection at all. I was quite traumatised by it, I must say. Sometime later, a colleague of mine in the same department as me, an American, who was aware of and had observed my second supervisor, said to me: "I want to say something very strange to you, and that is that I do not think this

> person likes Afrikaans women". And I was completely taken aback. She continued, saying "I know that you had difficulty. I think it was the Afrikaans nature". My colleague is an extremely nice person who gets on with everybody. Coming from her, I had to take it on advisement.

From the extract above, it is evident that Susanne's expectations relating to supervision engagement were not met. She felt almost invisible to her second supervisor, and the lack of contact made it difficult for her to make substantial academic progress, while also causing her to feel alienated. The expectations the field has of doctoral supervisors (see Chapter 5, section 5.3), did not appear to be met by Susanne's supervisor. There also appeared to be a cultural component and a clash of worldviews between Susanne and her second supervisor due to the former's Afrikaans background and culture. If indeed this was the case, no amount of emotional capital on Susanne's part would have guaranteed her managing the supervision relationship constructively. The lack of connection and exacerbated feelings of isolation had a significantly negative emotional impact on Susanne. The cultivation of her doctoral identity was undermined in the context of, what felt to her, like an apathetic academic environment.

A less-than-ideal academic environment was something that Robert was becoming familiar with. In his estimation, the supervisors and the relevant postdoctoral research fellows working on the infectious diseases doctoral project he was enrolled in were unable to provide the assistance he needed. He was told by his supervisors early on that they could not give him much guidance because they did not understand what he was doing. They were relying on his previous research experience in medical sciences to essentially run the project. They made a collaborator abroad available who had the practical lab and research experience to help Robert. However, this person was available inconsistently, and his being in a different country complicated the process. Robert's sense of the situation was that a good scientist does not necessarily make a constructive supervisor:

> You get a lot of these maverick scientists … they're charismatic speakers and they can articulate the science really well … but when it comes to doing the lab work, they wouldn't be able to do it themselves. They can't necessarily advise on the best way forward because things just advance so rapidly.

Robert's experience, as described above, points to a potential gap in skills between being an accomplished researcher and being able to supervise research. Robert's supervisors were competent researchers, but it seems that they did not possess an understanding of supervision practices, imparted (among other methods) through suitable supervision training, that could have informed their engagement with Robert. As such, they were unable to provide accessible support to Robert, nor were they able to manage the supervision relationship, despite this being an expectation the field has on supervisors (see Chapter 5, section 5.3). Owing to Robert depending on supervisory direction, support and engagement, the absence of it resulted in him feeling frustrated and confused, which caused delays in his doctoral research. His experience of supervision was that it was sporadic at best. His doctoral research in the lab involved procedures he was not versed in, and the only individual he could rely on who had the necessary expertise was thousands of kilometres away and not reliably available.

The source of doctoral supervision may not have been thousands of kilometres removed from Patience, but for her, it felt absent nonetheless. Having already encountered difficulty working on her methodology chapter, she also experienced tremendous stress and confusion in her attempt to write her literature review chapter. She struggled for over a year, not getting the guidance from her supervisor that she felt she needed. She was unclear on how to structure the chapter and what content to focus on. There was no specific feedback from the supervisor, and she simultaneously began sensing pressure to submit:

> I must have done that literature review for years and years (she laughs) … I think it all comes back to not having well conceptualised whatever needed to be done. I don't know if I'm exaggerating, but it was more than one year. I would not know what is important here. I just did not know. And then I clumped together a lot of things. And she (the supervisor) was putting pressure and saying, "No, you need to submit something". And then at that point I submitted whatever I had. And then she came back to me and said, "You know, that literature review, you still need to redo the chapter. And I don't know how you should go about it. You really need to think about how you should redo the chapter". And I thought, what must I include? It was a whole lot of struggle. And as I struggled and struggled - I don't even want to think about the words 'literature review' right now.

In the absence of specific feedback that felt substantive, Patience was left feeling confused and frustrated. She did not know if her research and writing were at least adequate, and did not know what was needed to make improvements and where those improvements were necessary. As Wang and Li (2011) have argued, feedback from the supervisor plays a pivotal role in facilitating the doctoral candidate's academic progress during their programme of study. Constructive and timely feedback helps the doctoral candidate's scholarly voice mature, helping them grow in confidence.. It is in part for these reasons that the field of doctoral education expects supervisors to provide candidates with suitable guidance and support (Chapter 5, section 5.3).

Revisiting Robert's doctoral education journey, between supervisors who had repeatedly mentioned that they were unable to assist him and a collaborator abroad who was rarely available, his academic progress suffered. He felt stuck, finding it impossible to progress without the instruction he needed. For him and the other participants in this study who did not receive either the amount or nature of feedback they hoped for the negative impact was substantial. It included academic stagnation, emotional frustration, and feelings of despondency and being lost. Ultimately, it contributed to the termination of his studies, as will be explored in section 6.5.

The participants in this study found themselves in a position of relative powerlessness. Although they had been granted access to the academy of doctoral study, they lacked significantly valued capital in the field to overcome the hurdles they faced. This included the educational capital to be able to make meaningful academic progress in the absence of supervisory guidance, and symbolic capital (status and esteem in the field) that might have emboldened them to insist on the provision of guidance or to seek out intervening support. Furthermore, any symbolic and cultural capital currency they had earned through previous academic accomplishments proved to be of limited value in the field of doctoral study. In this new context, they had little to bargain with that might have advanced their scholarly aspirations. All these dynamics played out in the context of a wider institutional culture which either exacerbated or mitigated the participants' experiences. This culture is the focus of the next subsection.

6.5. Institutional Culture and Its Impact

In the review of the literature on doctoral education in Chapter 2, an unsupportive institutional culture was identified as a key driver in doctoral study attrition, based on surveys and interviews with non-completers, staff and directors of graduate degree programmes (Lovitts, 2001). The DDNR (CHE, 2022) argues that the support provided to doctoral candidates by the relevant university needs to begin at the initial enquiry (even prior to admissions), by ensuring that the applicant sufficiently appreciates the scope of the decision to enrol for doctoral studies. Beyond this early provision of support to the prospective doctoral candidate, this same commitment of support from the university needs to continue throughout the research project, up until graduation (CHE, 2022). Chapter 5, section 5.4 discusses what the field of doctoral education expects of institutional structures, and consequently, stated another way, what it promises to doctoral candidates (and supervisors for that matter) by way of support that they might legitimately expect. Support of this nature is particularly important for students who do not have regular physical interaction with the university and for whom experiences of isolation are therefore more likely.

As previously mentioned (see subsection 6.3.1 above), Susanne requested a new supervisor amid concerns of appearing to 'cross' someone in a position of power and influence and the possible negative repercussions this might result in. What appeared as a potentially risky request was exacerbated, she felt, by race and language; she is an Afrikaans-speaking white woman who was enrolled at a university that to her felt Anglocentric in nature.

> The institution in question came across to me as quite Anglocentric in general, in a manner that made me as an Afrikaans speaking person feel less than welcome. This experience was completely unexpected … I felt excluded, both academically and socially/culturally, including on a personal level within my supervision relationship.

Even as a white woman enrolled as a doctoral candidate at a historically white university, Susanne felt alienated and out of place. The portfolio of capital that she entered doctoral education with did not appear to translate into a smooth transition inside this new social space. In her estimation, as an Afrikaans woman, she did not possess the right kind of whiteness in an institution which appeared to be primarily Anglocentric. It felt to her that her culture and dispositions failed to blend harmoniously with that of her supervisor and the broader university. Ali and Kohun (2006, 2007), referring to the socialisation challenges faced by doctoral candidates at each phase of their doctoral programme (e.g., pre-admission to enrolment, first-year, second-year through candidacy, thesis), argue that candidates are often not properly supported by departmental structures. There is often a lack of systematic procedures for acclimatising candidates into the departmental culture, with the task left largely to the student. When supportive engagement is lacking in this way, experiences of confusion, isolation, and hopelessness in candidates can be the consequent outcome (Ali & Kohun, 2006, 2007).

Challenges related to doctoral candidates' socialisation can be intensified by matters of race and gender. Consider, for instance, Pamela's experience (discussed earlier) of feeling disenfranchised as an African woman in an academic and professional environment dominated by male, Anglocentric whiteness. Beyond a lack of systematic procedures for acclimatising candidates into the departmental culture, there are situations in which candidates such as Pamela are intentionally bullied and ignored and made to feel unwelcome (see Chapter 2, subsection 2.4.1). The impact of these kinds of experiences on candidates' sense of belonging and doctoral identity in the field can be damaging and long lasting (as will be explored in Chapter 7).

Redirecting the focus to Patience's experience, after struggling 'terribly' with the literature review for some time with little success, her supervisor said that she should begin collecting data, with that chapter's problems unresolved. She began working on data collection – a long process of identifying and travelling to the sites some 900 km away from where she was based. This involved at least four different villages, with multiple interviews and observations. Simultaneously, there was constant pressure to submit further pieces of writing, which Patience could not focus on due to the time-consuming data collection process. By this stage, a new head of the department had been pressuring her supervisor, who was in turn pressuring Patience. In the middle of data collection, she was required to return to the university to present the progress of her work.

> I delivered a presentation that I felt positive about, but the new head of department did not engage with the content at all. I faced criticisms about the progress I had made, and I was not invited or allowed to ask any questions. But the head of department asked,

> “When did you begin your programme?” He did not ask anything related to my presentation. I indicated it was a long time back. The HoD said let’s not take any questions from here. You have to go and talk to your supervisor.

Patience felt cut off from any institutional support which may have been available to her beyond the level of the HoD. She continued working on data collection, faced with the continued pressure to submit writing. As noted in Chapter 3, if those already in power in a particular social field win the struggle over controlling how the field is set up and whom it values or privileges, they get to maintain the structure and characteristics of the field such that they remain advantaged. Patience felt that she lacked any form of agency that might embolden her to express her concerns beyond her supervision relationship. There was no accountability framework in place to guide and govern their relationship, and no system for submitting progress reports. Similarly, the relevant department appeared to exercise no system of inquiry into ascertaining and facilitating student well-being. This stands in contrast to the field’s expectation of universities to implement processes and systems for monitoring candidates’ academic progress (see discussion in Chapter 5, section 5.4.1).

Returning to Andiswa’s academic journey, despite the frustrations she was facing, ‘success’ was the buzzword that was often spoken by her supervisor and in her research context as well as the collaboration that candidates would enjoy in the future once their studies were complete. Despite the explicit expression of value given to themes like success and collaboration, Andiswa’s experience of and feelings regarding the unwritten rules for success in her research context pointed to a different reality. She expressed significant frustration and disillusionment as she shared this part of her academic journey.

> That was just a smoke screen, a lie, a dream and a broken promise. The unspoken rules were that you needed to worship the carpet this supervisor walked on, clap your hands in awe of their success, etc. Never complain if your chapter is not returned 4-5 months after you submit it – or when you are told to send it again because ‘it's lost’ somehow.

The excerpt above points to the concept of contradiction in the field – mentioned at the beginning of this chapter – in this case, a contradiction that exists between what the field promises doctoral candidates by way of guidance and support and what they experience in reality. In Andiswa’s view and experience, these promises were of little to no value. Rather, her specific field context was one that appeared to call for submission to authority. Furthermore, Andiswa’s supervisor was the head of the department, so she was therefore unsure how to escalate the matter or who to contact in order to do so:

> Where would you take it to? It was torture. It gives you a sense of, where is the value of this whole project? This is supposed to be a good project, developing ourselves and our understanding, but when the professors do these things, what is this all about?

Andiswa expected the field of doctoral education to enhance her sense of doctoral identity and her expertise as an independent, competent scholar. Instead, it left her questioning the fundamental value and meaning of academic pursuit as represented by doctoral education. She felt that there was no appropriate avenue available to her through which she could seek guidance and support. The experience had a significantly discouraging impact on the sense of illusio pertaining to her doctoral degree aspirations. The emotional turmoil she experienced is evidenced by the excerpt above, illuminated by the word ‘torture’.

As it relates to Beulah’s academic pursuit, she had no passion for the new research focus she felt forced to adopt. She spoke with her main supervisor who tried to reassure her that what they were pursuing was still an alignment study. Her main supervisor seemed unwilling to admit that the course of the research focus had changed. Beulah had meetings with both supervisors indicating her unhappiness and expressing concern with the lack of progress she was making. She had to prepare to present to defend her proposal, but she had no passion for or interest in the alternate subject that she felt was pressured into studying.

> As I was preparing I could see that I’m not happy about what is happening. I was not making progress with my studies. I talked with my main supervisor again and said that I had to halt the alternate research direction. The two of us then met with the co-supervisor again. In this meeting, the co-supervisor criticised my efforts and progress. Following this meeting, I once again emailed the main supervisor, indicating my dissatisfaction with my progress and the discouraging involvement of the co-supervisor. My main supervisor forwarded this email to the co-supervisor, who said she'll recuse herself so that the two

> of us can work alone together again, or so that another co-supervisor could be identified and allocated.

Beulah was greatly despondent during this time. She felt uncomfortable escalating matters and felt cut off from any institutional support. As she and her main supervisor resumed working alone, Beulah noticed the main supervisor was now also steering her away from her original research interest, further frustrating her academic progress and undermining her development as an independent, confident and competent researcher. The cultivation of her doctoral identity and her growth as a capable scholar were in jeopardy.

> Then my main supervisor tried to persuade me, saying, "No, don't worry. Let's continue. It's still an alignment study". But then I realised that as we were proceeding I could see that he's also dragging me to the other end where I don't want to go – where I have to divert from the main alignment study that I wanted to be doing.

Demonstrated in Beulah's comments are the influences and impacts of power imbalances and struggles for power in the social field of doctoral education – struggles between Beulah and her main and co-supervisor, and between her main supervisor and co-supervisor. Regarding the latter struggle and the state of the general departmental academic environment, the DDNR (CHE, 2022) states that the institutional context is significant when reviewing doctoral education insofar as it should cultivate an environment which facilitates sound doctoral study. Situations may arise within university departments where relatively junior or novice co-supervisors encounter a culture that is not always open. As a result, it is not uncommon for them to opt to conform – to remain silent and adapt in the face of pressure from the senior supervisor or the department to adopt certain supervisory approaches. These co-supervisors' silence may potentially, at least in part, be explained by a fear of social exclusion (Grubbström & Powell, 2020).

As for Robert's unfolding doctoral journey, in the second year of his programme, he found himself de facto supervising the work of four postgraduate students in the lab. All this support work with these four candidates was done unofficially, with no credit to him. With a significant portion of his time taken up in this area, it meant that his own PhD project was largely going nowhere. As he put it:

> I knew I'd have to provide some technical guidance to the junior candidates … but I didn't expect to have to supervise a whole bunch of postgraduate candidates, guiding them every step of the way. The honours candidates took up a ton of my time. This one in particular. I mean, shame, she was quite sensitive. She was very new to laboratory-based projects, so I essentially had to hold her hand a lot of the way. There were times that I would sit up until 2 or 3 'o'clock in the morning helping her to run experiments, because if I didn't do it, nobody else would have been able to assist her.

While Robert's own academic progress suffered, he helped other candidates in the lab to achieve their scholarly goals. In his view, if candidates like him fail to supply this practical expertise themselves to assist junior candidates in the lab they may be labelled as lazy, not pulling their weight, or not living up to their capabilities and/or expectations. Lacking power and capital (cultural rapport; status and seniority) in his study context relative to his white, affluent peers and supervisors, the rules of the field dictated that he did what was expected of him, whether those expectations were valid or not, or face adverse consequences if he refused. These expectations about providing supervision to junior researchers would not have been laid out officially in any higher degree guide, but to Robert, they felt binding nonetheless. He also felt unsupported when it came to navigating unforeseen expenses which arose during the course of his research. On one occasion, Robert did muster the courage to ask his supervisors for financial help:

> Putting my pride in my pocket I approached my supervisor to find out if there was hope for a top-up bursary or something. He basically told me or asked me, "Can't you adjust your lifestyle?" It was a situation where I was getting by on the bare minimum. I wasn't living extravagantly.

From the above extract, another manifestation of the impact of a lack of economic capital is evident, which is the undermining impact it has on the self-esteem of those who experience it. Robert did not think that his supervisors would understand or support any request for financial assistance to cover unexpected costs associated with his studies. His financial situation represented an ever-present source of concern, stress and embarrassment for him that impacted his doctoral education experience. He felt uncomfortable sharing his personal financial struggles with his supervisors, both of whom appeared to be beneficiaries of 'immense privilege’. Having to swallow his pride and have his requests for financial assistance fall on unsympathetic ears compromised Robert’s confidence and sense of belonging in the field, including his view of himself as an aspiring scholar with equal rights and privileges as his white peers in the lab.

As has been mentioned earlier, Robert regarded his academic context and environment to be quite toxic in nature, with instances of racism and sexism occurring in the lab. He served on the department’s postgraduate committee which encouraged victims of inappropriate behaviour to report their experiences anonymously. He explained, though, that

> … everything got shut down. Nothing got escalated through the correct channels. The one issue that did get escalated was a racism issue, but when it got to the independent ombud of the university … the people who were going to speak up against the particular academic being accused of these things, they were approached by this academic and he threatened them, saying that he’ll make their lives hell. Nothing ever happened about that.

Represented in the excerpt above is a stark example of the impact of power imbalances in a social field. The superior levels of symbolic and cultural capital possessed by a supervisor served to protect their position of privilege within the field and shield them from accountability. Many candidates opted not to speak out against these types of issues for fear that it would jeopardise their degree and that they would walk away with nothing, even when they had physical evidence like voice recordings. The situation was further complicated by the fact that Robert’s main supervisor – who had either engaged in or condoned some of this abusive behaviour towards candidates – was the head of the department, which further elevated the risk associated with reporting or escalating these matters. It also appeared to Robert and some of his peers that the Dean was hesitant to escalate issues for fear of the faculty being seen in a negative light. In this and similar instances in the field of doctoral education, power protects power, victims often go without justice, and the reputations and status of perpetrators are seldom tarnished. It is a manifestation of field-specific doxa where different sets of expectations and regulations apply to different agents, depending on the portfolio of capital the agent in question benefits from, or not.

The response to abuses of power that Robert shared is illustrative of how power often operates in a given field, following Bourdieu's field theory. As was noted in Chapter 3, symbolic capital such as positions, titles and qualifications held by people like the HoD and the Dean of the Faculty affords these agents in the field the power to dominate in it (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). This may take the form of shielding themselves and/or their allies from the consequences of questionable behaviour, and/or manipulating structures of accountability to operate to their benefit or rendering these structures dysfunctional if desired. What is also illustrated is how those who lack power in the field lack any position in it that would allow them to unsettle the prevailing, dominant culture, or to question the rules of the game that those in power benefit from in maintaining their advantage.

Complaints such as matters related to student–supervisor relationships require individually-focused responses and possibly intervention by HoDs and faculty structures, postgraduate offices or student counselling services (CHE, 2022). If these avenues and mechanisms prove to offer little supportive intervention to the doctoral candidate or even appear to safeguard the systems and relations of power that can be key to the development of the challenges they experience in the first place, the doctoral candidate may well be left feeling isolated and frustrated. Self-evaluation reports submitted by universities for use in the DDNR (CHE, 2022) reveal that structures intended for assisting with student complaints are not sufficiently visible, and doctoral candidates in some universities feel unsupported, as was the case with some of the participants in this study.

One of the common threads running through the research participants' experiences of challenges in their specific contexts of doctoral supervision and education is the private nature of the prevailing supervision model which is at times problematic (see Pearson & Kayrooz, 2004; Manathunga, 2005, 2007), and adds to the difficulty in researching these pedagogic relationships (Manathunga, 2005). Private pedagogical spaces of this nature are fraught with underlying concerns of identity and power (Grant, 2003). It is the sense of secrecy and the lack of accountability and transparency inherent in this model of supervision that can potentially foster an environment in which abuses of power may occur or various responsibilities go unfulfilled due to a variety of factors, including supervisors' overwhelming workloads and/or problems associated with candidates who are ill-prepared for doctoral study.

A concern noted in the DDNR (CHE, 2022) is that, in many cases, records of candidate progress seem to be kept at a supervisor level and are not recorded centrally or formally. Therefore, while a supervisor may have knowledge of a candidate's progress and the circumstances associated with it, these records may not be available for evaluation at higher levels within the university, and for this reason, may not be available and useful in any cautionary or disciplinary proceedings which may be required. The role of the department in doctoral studies ought to be analysed and strengthened, given that the wider institutional and academic environment is critical in the doctoral candidate's quest to become a competent researcher (Lee, 2008; Lovitts, 2005).

6.6 A Space of (Im)possibles - Deciding to Terminate Studies

This section delves into the research participants' decision to terminate their studies and their key reason(s) behind their decision. A point was eventually reached when persevering no longer seemed worthwhile to them and when their sense of illusio ceased to be sufficiently robust. As a reminder, Bourdieu defines illusio as the belief that an endeavour that an individual is engaged in is worth pursuing (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Once they have embraced and internalised the notion of illusio, agents in the field do not search for a way out of that field, even though there may be alternative fields with a better yield that they could enter and navigate.

Despite the existence of extensive literature connecting dissatisfaction with supervision to doctoral candidate attrition, research from Gardner (2009) suggests that relevant faculty are often unaware of their potential role in attrition. Susanne was given six weeks after proposal submission to rectify problem areas identified based on her presentation, with this representing the first substantive feedback she had received up until that point. Susanne found this task to be impossible – she had benefited from a total of 30–45 minutes of direct consultation with her second supervisor prior to her proposal presentation.

> I don't think it is wrong to hold back on a proposal for a student. It's obviously not good enough. They (review panels) know their work. But to get through the process of getting a student ready, that takes time and engagement. And I did not have that. I was given six weeks to fix the proposal. I said, there's no way I can do it. I cannot, for the first major

> feedback, I can’t do this. I tried. I worked day and night. I couldn’t do it. So I fell out. I didn’t send it back, So I think that that engagement, on a sustained, at least monthly basis, is much easier to track. There was no monitoring of how much engagement a student received.

Susanne felt ignored and unacknowledged. She ultimately found herself out of time based on the period she was given to revise her research proposal. Funding also became a problem as subsequently, she could not secure more research funding to continue with the project. Her experience of the continued lack of supervision engagement and clarity brought about a sense of significant frustration. She fully accepted that her work would need to go through rounds of revision and corrections in order to sufficiently elevate its standard for submission. However, the absence of academic guidance that she received raised challenges which proved beyond what she was able to cope with, eventually signalling the end of her doctoral studies. In Susanne’s situation, insufficient volumes of economic, educational (clarity around moving her research forward), and she would say, social capital (given her Afrikaans background), contributed to circumstances that made the field seem inhospitable and unsupportive. Her hopes and expectations with regard to the nature and scope of academic guidance she would receive were not realised or met.

Patience’s supervisor's response following her discouraging research presentation experience was for her to refocus on the literature review, complete it and demonstrate progress to the HoD, but again, no constructive guidance was provided and Patience continued struggling. She submitted the literature review as best she could, then booked a month off work to focus on her data collection without distraction. Just into her second week in the field, she received an email from her supervisor.

> The supervisor said, “You know, I don’t know how we can remedy this situation. I’ve looked at your literature review and I just don’t know how we can remedy it. I’ve come to a painful decision that I will not be able to work with you anymore.” She said, “You know, I think the mistake that I made was that I gave you too much credit, that you’d be able to do things on your own.” And that was that. And I never spoke to her again.

Patience received this news 900 km away from home, collecting data, five years or more into her doctoral programme since her initial registration. She had made arrangements with chiefs of villages to access their land to do observations and had secured their permission – all of which now had to be left unpursued. The words of her supervisor ring vividly in her mind to this day: *'I think the mistake I made is that I gave you too much credit to be able to handle PhD study'.* These words would prove to be almost entirely devastating to the development of Patience's doctoral identity. She was made to feel that the door at the current university was firmly closed – no other opportunities existed. The following week she went to the university to talk to the HoD, who said: *'Talk to your supervisor. If you can't make any progress, I see no reason why you should keep on registering'.* After speaking with the HoD, she went to the admissions department to de-register from her studies.

Patience had encountered a contradiction in the field of doctoral education between what the field assures her of and what she experienced in reality. These assurances are based on the expectations the field has of supervisors and broader university structures (see Chapter 5, sections 5.3 and 5.4). These expectations, if met, are meant to provide the doctoral candidate with support and guidance, not only in navigating the academic challenges normally associated with doctoral research but also in the stressful, testing circumstances which may emerge when the supervision relationship breaks down. For Patience, this field of contradictions had become a space of impossibles within which her academic hopes and aspirations were terminated.

Struggling to make academic progress and being disappointed with her experience at the university's postgraduate office, the concern of illusio became a key consideration for Andiswa. She had reached the point where whatever benefit she may have associated with a doctoral degree was outweighed by the difficulty she was experiencing in trying to attain it. Eventually, Andiswa thought*, 'I know so much about my subject. I'm such a wonderful educator. I'll just quit this nonsense'.* Andiswa mentioned that participating in this study provided an interesting opportunity to reflect on the whole experience. She had never done so before in such a focused way:

> I looked at this research invitation, and although hesitant, I thought, it's time this story gets told. There's a lot South Africa needs to do to hold these kinds of supervisors accountable for the damage they are doing. It's atrocious. It's ridiculous. I mean, I don't

> know how many people I’ve had to do a bit of counselling with because of this supervisor. They say to me, “Oh Andiswa, you did a good thing to leave this guy”.

The lack of supervision and departmental accountability in her doctoral education experience affected Andiswa greatly. It speaks to a concern expressed in the DDNR (CHE, 2022) that when time-to-completion, student retention, attrition and throughput rate data are considered by universities, in many cases the candidate’s progress is assessed with the sole purpose of excluding candidates. Oftentimes, progress reports are required for administrative purposes primarily (or only) as opposed to driving development and learning. As discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4, doctoral attrition is commonly considered by academics of the department as a personal choice made by candidates in light of their own personal inadequacies (Wollast et al., 2018; Wood & Harris, 2021; Vital et al., 2023), especially when it comes to students from minority backgrounds.

A week before presenting on her academic progress, Beulah told her supervisor that she wanted to drop what she was doing because she was unhappy with the direction her research had taken. She felt that the main supervisor had little power to safeguard her research direction/passion. Being a novice supervisor, it seemed that he was being pressured by the co-supervisor and lacked the courage to stand up to her, a challenging supervisor–co-supervisor dynamic noted by Grubbström and Powell (2020). At one point she resorted to phoning her main supervisor about her concerns:

> I decided to phone my main supervisor rather than emailing. I feared that the records would surface and be used against me, either at that university or at others I might apply to. My co-supervisor had begun responding aggressively to emails of this nature. I was very down, I must say. I was actually not happy about the whole setup. Even when I look at the comments I received from the co-supervisor, you could see that it’s actually dragging someone backwards. Hence I decided it’s best for me to leave the university, because the challenges are not starting now. They started right at my honours level.

Beulah experienced what felt like a real, tangible imbalance of power in the field. She feared reprisal should she speak out and make her struggles known to the department. By this time, the field of doctoral education had come to represent to her a space of threat and risk. She pointed out during our conversations that every student she was aware of who had been supervised by this individual (her PhD co-supervisor) had experienced challenges of some kind that impeded their progress. Eventually, out of continued frustration and disappointment, Beulah stopped communicating with her supervisor:

> I started ignoring his emails until he also stopped making contact altogether. I decided to just leave quietly and I did not deregister officially. I never experienced any support from the university, except from the main supervisor. Even after I've left I don't remember anyone calling or trying to enquire. It was only the main supervisor.

It appears that Beulah's main supervisor genuinely cared about her academic progress, to some degree at least. However, his relative power in the field was nullified by that of the co-supervisor who possessed superior volumes of symbolic and cultural capital by way of scholarly reputation, status and accomplishment. Instead of experiencing the cultivation and nurturing of her doctoral identity, Beulah came to feel intimidated and disempowered. She feared not only that her current academic goals had been rendered obsolete but that any future doctoral aspirations she might have could also be stifled. In her situation, as with Patience and others, we see a contradiction played out in the field between what its stated rules and expectations are and what a doctoral candidate actually experiences in practical terms.

Robert eventually officially left his doctoral programme, after he had fulfilled a sense of obligation towards some of the postgraduate students who he was unofficially supervising by helping them progress to the best of his ability. The sense of illusio fuelling his dedication to his studies had eroded significantly. In addition to the lack of supervision support in completing his own PhD, the toxic atmosphere in the lab and the lack of constructive intervention were key factors for leaving. Robert delayed dropping out until the last possible moment, hoping to reap the benefits of all the effort, sacrifice and time he dedicated to get his degree:

> I reached the decision to end my study through careful consideration, in light of a doctoral project that felt like it was going nowhere. I suppose I was confident enough in myself, in my reasoning and my abilities to take a stance and stick with it. I just couldn't carry on working on a project that I knew was flawed from the outset. I looked into alternative ways of salvaging the project. None of them were suitable. What it boils down to is that

> to make the project work would require probably another three or four years' worth of work. and I didn't have the time or the will to do that on my own.

Ironically, it was Robert's emotional capital (his independent and resourceful nature), in addition to his capacity for objectivity and critical evaluation, that helped clarify for him what was nevertheless a difficult decision. By this point, he no longer had the will to continue. This represents the manifestation of a collapse of illusio. The field of doctoral education specific to Robert's experience, with its unique dynamics and doxa benefitting and protecting those who possessed power, had for him become a hostile territory. He hoped for and wanted more, and although he persevered as much as he could, the field would ultimately offer him nothing more.

Towards the end of the research project she was involved in, and amid ongoing struggles to make progress with her degree, Pamela met her husband, grew weary of the academic struggle and her numerous failed attempts to resolve things with her supervisor and decided to get married. She completed her employment on the three-year research project, but Pamela formally de-registered from the PhD programme. When the project came to an end, it felt to her like a relief and a release. However, not completing her doctoral journey impacted her significantly:

> I remember I was consumed with this. There were several layers at which I tried to analyse and make sense of the situation. I didn't just drop out. It was after quite a period of trying to resolve this thing and make headway. And I never did, and so I dropped out. So I think that's my story. About how it is very important, just the context, the relationships, the structure, the framing around your PhD. Now I can tell other PhD candidates, don't get into a dual relationship (supervisor and boss). And spend time to attend to the relationship. It's going to make or break your PhD.

The previously discussed subject of capital in the Bourdieusian sense, in the various forms and levels at which it is possessed or not, influenced the evolution of the research participants' behaviour and perceptions in the field. This, in turn, influenced their process of decision-making and way of 'being' in the field of doctoral education. This was no less true in Pamela's case. At various periods of her journey, she struggled with feeling stuck, overwhelmed, silenced and ignored. The capitals she possessed largely went unacknowledged in the field, and if they were acknowledged, it was most often to her detriment. In Pamela's view, she was the wrong gender, the wrong race, the wrong class and culture, and held the wrong worldview. Her ways of being in the field put her at odds with her supervisor and boss, and her European colleagues on the research project.

Individuals who have experienced decades of a lack of capital in relation to others may enter specific fields with a significantly undermined sense of self-confidence. This lack of self-confidence may very likely result in or exacerbate their experience of imposter syndrome, undermining the healthy development of their doctoral identity. Alternatively, they may feel undermined in these new fields, which could impede their ability to both recognise and fight for the resources that are rightfully owed to them as legitimate agents in the field of doctoral education. This appears to be true of Pamela's experience. A smoother journey in her specific academic context required that she generally keep her opinions to herself and submit to her male-, affluent- and Eurocentric-dominated research environment. To submit in this way, or not to, would have extracted a cost from Pamela either way; ultimately, she felt compelled to endure the cost associated with the latter.

6.7 Impact on Emotional Wellbeing and Doctoral Identity

This section takes account of what impact the candidates' perceptions and experiences of doctoral education, and ultimately their decision to terminate their studies, had on their emotional and psychological wellbeing and their sense of identity in the academic world. It notes the ways in which they describe the impact of their doctoral experience on their doctoral identity and how they viewed themselves in relation to the field.

Research proposes the types of emotions that are valued and ostensibly nurtured in doctoral education – confidence, assertiveness, self-confidence, self-regulation, and proactivity (Gurr 2001; Stracke & Kumar 2010). The literature suggests that candidates draw on meaningful personal, emotional and intellectual resources – within themselves and their environment – to engage with the hard work of cultivating a doctoral identity in addition to researching and writing a doctoral thesis (Amundsen & McAlpine, 2009; McAlpine & Lucas 2011). In discussing the impact of the participants' doctoral education experiences on their emotional state and sense of identity, it is useful to draw on the Bourdieusian concept of symbolic violence (see Chapter 3). Bourdieu (2001) defines symbolic violence as 'a type of submission... a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition, recognition or even feeling...'. (pp.1–2). It is imperceptible, insidious and invisible. Invisibility represents an efficient tool of silent domination and silencing the dominated. Notably, in order for the silenced to be heard, more is required than affording them a platform to speak; instead, change needs to occur on a systemic and structural level so that their voices are actually afforded value, and their agency affirmed and recognised (Bhambra & Shilliam, 2009).

It is important to bear in mind that while symbolic violence may in some ways be more subtle and 'gentler' than physical violence, it is no less real – it too, results in suffering. Symbolic violence can often be a 'more effective, and (in some instances) more brutal, means of oppression' (Bourdieu, in Bourdieu & Eagleton, 1992e, p.115), and the fact that its origins tend to be misrecognised and internalised by society allows the dominant cultures that result in it to continue unquestioned and unchallenged.

It is expected that as doctoral candidates progress through their academic journey they will increasingly act, think and behave, at each stage of their study, in a manner that reflects maturation as a researcher. Some supervisors at South African universities take the doctoral attributes (refer to Chapter 2, subsection 2.2.2) for granted as being part of the process of doctoral education, even though they play a central role in enhancing the quality of a doctorate (CHE, 2022). Doctoral supervisors in these particular cases are therefore either unfamiliar with the concept or unaware of their responsibility to incorporate the doctoral attributes in their areas of supervision.

In Chapter 3 it was noted that doctoral candidates enter the field of doctoral education with ways of working – with forms of doxa and habitus – which may blend seamlessly with the established rules of the game, or which may clash significantly, potentially resulting in internal dissonance and emotional stress and crises of identity. The shared experiences of the participants in this study primarily speak of the latter. A mismatch between their expectations and ways of being and working with the dominant doxa in their study context rendered any forms of capital they entered the field with largely irrelevant and ineffectual. It was the dominant players/agents and structures in the field that determined which capitals have value or not, and these determinations largely kept existing power imbalances intact.

Susanne left her PhD experience feeling ‘totally incapable of writing’. She stopped believing in herself and expressed that she was quite ‘traumatised’ by those events, which made her feel she was not good enough for doctoral study and that she did not belong:

> I felt ignored, unacknowledged – made to feel not good enough for doctoral study, not belonging as part of the scholarly community. It has taken me years to verbalise and process the experience. I expected to be close to the people. I didn’t get the caring. Not at all. Which was reflected in time spent with me as a PhD student. I expected and hoped to progress with my studies over the three years.

She agreed to participate as an interviewee in this study in an attempt to help her further process the trauma (her words) and loss she experienced. Susanne has only ever discussed her experience with one other person – her husband.

The words of Patience’s supervisor ring vividly in her mind to this day: ‘*I think the mistake I made is that I gave you too much credit to be able to handle PhD study’.* She was deeply impacted by this statement. Patience never communicated with her supervisor again. She carries the resultant self-doubt around to this day:

> This is the kind of thing that stays with you for a long time. I don't think it will ever go away. I was made to feel that I didn't have the capacity to do a PhD in my chosen discipline. My inability to make acceptable progress made me feel defeated and helpless. What can I do?

Patience recalls all of this as ‘a very traumatic experience’. Her internalised self-doubt and lack of self-confidence (as is the case for most of the other participants in this study) is a manifestation of the impact of symbolic violence. Recalling the words of Bourdieu, it is ‘the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992 p.167). This erosion of candidates’ confidence represents how experiences in the field of doctoral education influence and change the agents in the field over time, for better or worse. Bourdieu (2001) explains this complicit behaviour – this internalised sense of inadequacy and/or self-doubt in Patience's case – as an example of beliefs or dispositions generally understood as a set of behavioural mechanisms developed in people because of social conditioning. In this case, symbolic violence originated from the critical, judgmental words of Patience's supervisor (and consequently from a position of relative power and more greatly valued capital). Her supervisor's criticisms impacted her self-belief and sense of scholarly identity to the point where she began to internalise the criticism levelled against her. Again, her experience is not unique among the participants in this study:

> I couldn't go back to work and I was battling depression, sitting aimlessly at home. It took years before I could even think of registering for a PhD again. Only after subsequently completing a postgraduate diploma did I begin having the courage to take on a PhD again.

She noted that many students may be 'falling by the wayside' because of the lack of support structures and inquiries into their progress and well-being. Patience had hoped that success in doctoral study would result in her commanding a greater degree of respect as an authority in her chosen field of research and lead to career advancement and new opportunities.

With respect to supervision support, Patience explained:

> I was hoping there could be somebody guiding me. Somebody who would say to me, 'OK, these are the particular methodologies that are being used. This is how they apply to your study'. And so on. So at least you have some guidance when you are reading, regarding what is expected of you … I felt that I was left on my own too much. And if you are overwhelmed, you don't know who to tell. You are even afraid to ask, because you are expected to know these things. But you don't. So, are you really supposed to be doing a PhD?

In addition, in talking with her it was apparent that she seemed more inclined to personally shoulder the responsibility for being ill-prepared to fulfil the duties and responsibilities associated with doctoral study, rather than blaming her supervisor or the institution. This is another manifestation of the impact and consequence of symbolic violence perpetrated by a dominant culture/system on an agent lacking the power and capital to question or resist it. As Patience put it: *'What I realised is that there was something lacking for me to get there. What*

I might not know is whose responsibility it is to fill that gap. For me, for the institution, or for whoever'. Ultimately, however, Patience's doctoral experience has given rise to deep feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy within her, feelings that, years later, she still finds herself battling and trying to come to terms with.

In the department where she works at the university currently employing her, Andiswa felt that people hold her in high regard. However, she is of the mind that doctoral titles carry a lot of value in South Africa:

> It's quite interesting, because you are nothing if you don't have a title. You can't lead anything. Your voice is kind of like, heard but not heard. So that was a bit traumatic for me, because it meant I suddenly became like a second-class citizen, even though in my area I am very knowledgeable and could be considered first class…
>
> As years go by, you walk down the corridors of your department and you see the door of somebody who was Mr so-and-so, and there's a 'Dr' next to them. In two months' time there's somebody else. And it's like, come on – what about me?

She expressed the feeling of being stagnant and of losing confidence in herself – another example of symbolic violence that leaves the sufferer criticising themselves as opposed to questioning the dominant and systemic power structures they attempt to navigate. Andiswa spoke of times when she would break down. She would have loved to go and work somewhere exciting, to explore opportunities elsewhere:

> But you need this title in order to be accepted in other places. At one I sensed that my husband had begun to despair. He too, was excited for my PhD opportunity and the doors it might open for both of us, but those hopes were disappointed. I felt like my entire academic identity was dismantled, instead of nurtured and cultivated. You feel diluted. You don't know who you are.

Beulah opted not to respond when invited to share how her experience of doctoral education impacted her emotionally. Her emotional experience of her doctoral education experience, as it relates to what she shared through her participation in this study, is limited to the time of her enrolment in the programme, during which feelings of frustration, disappointment and despondency were significant elements of her journey. She did mention feeling that she did not think there was anything she could have done differently to create a more positive outcome at the university in question.

Processing the emotions around discontinuing his doctoral studies has not been without difficulty for Robert:

> I did not expect that the guidance and support would be lacking. From a psychological point of view, not finishing did have quite a negative impact on me … I tied a lot of my self-worth to getting a PhD. As a student, it's all I thought about. … And then that's going to be the beginning of what I would've thought would be a great scientific research career moving forward. As a first-generation scholar, not completing my doctoral degree felt like quite a lonely experience.

On occasion when he tried sharing his struggles with his family, they did not understand: 'Are you telling me you failed?' It was a lack of understanding and empathy likely brought about, at least in part, by the lack of social capital resulting from Roberts' family not having experienced postgraduate education themselves. It was very difficult for them to grasp the value of doctoral studies:

> It has been a struggle for me to deal with the situation. Working in a university environment, when it's graduation season, you see everyone in their red gowns, and there's this constant thought of, I could have been there. That could have been me. I felt a range of emotions. I felt like a personal failure. I felt that I had been let down. I felt that I wasn't good enough and it took a toll on my self-confidence.

Robert has a pre-existing mental health condition, having been diagnosed with clinical depression. This experience made things worse for a while:

> I had to be on multiple types of medication. Lots of psychotherapy. I did find myself becoming a bit more withdrawn. Not being sure of myself. … Feelings of disappointing myself, disappointing my family. I was obviously disappointed in the supervisors that I had, but I don't think they really cared about that … I've taken quite a knock, I think.

Roberts' emotional response to his doctoral experience was a simultaneous combination of suffering the effects of symbolic violence (represented in his self-doubt and self-judgement), and his criticism of the structures of power in the field of doctoral education that were responsible for facilitating his successful navigation of the field towards the completion of his degree. Ultimately, Robert felt that not completing his PhD was more representative of the dysfunction that existed in his research environment, rather than any lack of desire or competence on his part as a doctoral candidate. He expressed not really needing a PhD for his career, but he still sometimes felt that he needed it personally. A bit of a void remains that he would like to fill at some point.

For Pamela, when the project came to an end, it felt to her like a relief and a release. However, not completing her doctoral journey impacted her significantly. She felt upset and disoriented at a very deep level. Speaking of it during the conversation, years after the experience, she could still feel the emotion. She mentioned that in speaking about it, she was getting in touch with the abuse of it all:

> I wasn't assimilated enough. I was too much of a black spectacle. I wasn't supposed to have values. … You have this collusion. Not just in terms of the North-South divide and how the South are victims. It's how we actively collude in our own subjugation. I often shut myself up and refrained from expressing concerns for fear of the uncomfortable impact and fall-out … I can't believe it still brings up such strong feelings. I felt that my academic identity was suffocated. I didn't have an advocate in the project.

Pamela left the project feeling deeply disappointed because she wanted to see real change on the ground. However, the overall focus of the project seemed to be on publishing and citations for self-advancement's sake. Tangible, transformational research and the public good were not priorities as far as she could tell.

Doctoral education involves a sense of 'being and becoming' that is linked with the emergence of a doctoral candidate's academic identity during the period of their studies (Green, 2005; Barnett & Di Napoli, 2007). In an earlier section of this thesis discussing the nature of the doctoral student, the point was made that identity construction in doctoral education is of relevance to this study as it has been noted that knowledge and practices, suggested yet not plainly stated, can create ‘an environment of invisible exclusiveness where those who “know” become privileged and those who do not are forever held at the margins’ (Badenhorst & Xu, 2016, p.2). These ‘knowledges and practices’ can be taken as referring to the doxa that operated in each research participant’s specific doctoral study context. Therefore, stated another way, the doxa that doctoral candidates encounter in the field can significantly impact the degree to which these individuals increasingly take on a doctoral identity and an associated sense of belonging, or not.

This chapter has argued that the subject of institutional-based challenges in doctoral education and the experiences of the candidates who seek to navigate them involves a complex interaction of expectations, capitals, doxa and power in the field. The stories of the six participants highlight pertinent and important concerns that are applicable at the relational and larger institutional levels within doctoral education.

6.8 Conclusion

This chapter opened with the observation that the experiences of doctoral candidates are the result of the interplay of various expectations held by candidates, supervisors and universities alike. Some of these expectations are based on explicitly and officially stated guidelines and regulations, such as those outlined in various university higher degrees guides (Chapter 5, sections 5.2–5.4). Other expectations, however, are not articulated in any document, but they nonetheless exert an inescapable influence on interactions in the field. These expectations include ideas such as the doctoral candidate’s requirement to simply obey those in authority and not question what appear to be neglectful or harmful attitudes and conduct. These unwritten doxa in the field include not calling attention to abusive or inappropriate conduct on the part of those who have seniority.

Drawing on the personal narratives of six participants, this chapter explored what the impact on a doctoral candidate’s scholarly journey might look like when the expectations they have of the field are at odds with the expectations the field has of them. It examined the kinds of contradictions and friction that can occur in doctoral study when, who candidates are and where they come from, not only do not blend harmoniously with the culture of the field they enter but may even evoke apathy and social injustice from the field.

Attrition in doctoral education may occur for a myriad of reasons (see Chapter 2, section 2.4), and in many cases may represent the voluntary, thoughtful decision of the candidates themselves based on what they feel is ultimately best for them. However, it is also true that for numerous doctoral candidates, the decision to exit doctoral study is made under duress, influenced or even compelled by discouraging challenges and disempowering circumstances that are often beyond their control. In these instances, when the doctoral candidate's internalised sense of illusio is no longer intact and the decision to terminate studies is eventually made, the impact on the individual can be profound and long-lasting. For the doctoral candidate, as was the case for the participants in this study, gaining access to the field of doctoral study – an accomplishment in its own right – is no indicator or guarantee of success in the field. These candidate experiences demonstrate that not all doctoral candidates are treated or valued equally across all academic contexts – a disparity which results in a variety of significant and long-term consequences that the study participants have had to face and make sense of.

In the end, these six individuals made the carefully considered decision to leave their doctoral programme having not succeeded in it. It was a decision born at least in part out of a sense of frustration and disillusionment with the field of doctoral education relating to their pursuit of doctorateness. The consequences of participants' experiences and the complex forces at work in the field are the focus of Chapter 7, which synthesises the key findings and implications of this study.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This study focused on the storied experiences of six former South African doctoral candidates who withdrew from their doctoral study at a South African university before completion. It also examined the processes and guidelines outlined in a number of South African university higher degrees guides. The study was driven by the desire to humanise experiences relevant to attrition in doctoral study and to elevate the voices and perspectives of individuals who had lived these experiences. These experiences of doctoral study, and of doctoral supervision more specifically, played a key role in the decision of the research participants to prematurely exit their doctoral programme. Shining the research spotlight on the stories of these individuals and on the various relational and institutional factors that impacted them is an important and valuable academic endeavour. A better understanding of the social and academic forces and phenomena related to doctoral attrition through listening to the voices and perspectives of the doctoral candidates themselves, was the research gap that this study identified and sought to contribute to.

This chapter begins by revisiting why and how this study was conducted, along with the research method and theoretical framework that were used. It continues by laying out the main findings of the study in response to the research questions and then discusses the various implications of these findings for academia and beyond. Finally, the chapter discusses the limitations associated with the study along with possibilities for future research.

One point worth noting as this chapter unfolds is the potential for overlap that exists between research implications for policy as opposed to those for practice. There is often as much common ground between the two as there are distinctions. For the purposes of this study, I am largely conceptualising policy implications as those relevant at a higher level to institutions, faculties, and governing bodies. Alternatively, with practice implications, I am referring largely to methods and strategies applicable at the relational (individual) level. Policy, then, has to do with high-level governing ideas, philosophies and concepts, whereas practice deals with how those policies are practically implemented.

7.2 Revisiting the Why and How of This Study

This study explored six participants' engagement with the field of doctoral education and the various circumstances which led to their decision to terminate their doctoral studies. The elicitation and co-construction of the participants' narratives in relation to their lived and imagined doctoral study experiences enabled the study to draw on stories as a meaning-making tool. I also depended on the evaluative power of stories to analyse the research data through narrative analysis, creating the findings discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, based on individual storied accounts which were readable and accessible, and which preserved the authenticity of the participants' unique experiences.

However, to acknowledge that this study examined social phenomena that went beyond the scope of the individual, I chose field theory as the theoretical lens through which to analyse and interpret the data. Field theory allowed the analysis to explore interactions relevant to power dynamics and structures, social capitals, and the interplay between dominant and minority cultures at varying layers of complexity in the field, from the individual to the systemic. Through the analysis of stories using the lens of field theory, the following research question was addressed in the study:

- What are the expectations of, and assurances made to, doctoral candidates by the field of doctoral education, and how do these play out in and impact on the reality of their doctoral education experience?

The following sub-questions guided the analysis of the data:

- What do the narratives of de-registered South African doctoral candidates reveal about the ways in which supervision practices and broader institutional structures support or constrain their doctoral identity development?
- How are attempts to resolve challenges contributing to their decision to leave their programme managed?
- Who determines what is valued within the field of doctoral education, and who is included and/or excluded as a consequence?

The following sections of this chapter bring the different analyses presented in Chapters 5 and 6 together to discuss the main findings in relation to these research questions. Furthermore, they propose what the implications of these findings are for policy, pedagogy, and future research in the field of doctoral education. In doing so, the chapter discusses the contribution that the study makes to the ongoing research conversations around the issues of doctoral education, supervision and attrition.

7.3 Research Findings

The four research questions that drove this study are addressed and answered by the main findings of the study, presented in the subsections below and revealed through the analysis process conducted in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

7.3.1 Expectations and promises in the field of doctoral education

The primary, overall research question of this study focused on the expectations of, and assurances made to, doctoral candidates by the field of doctoral education, and asked how these played out in the reality of the participating former doctoral candidates' experiences. This study found that while the field may deem its expectations of doctoral candidates to be quite clearly communicated, these expectations may in fact be opaque to numerous candidates and may not be articulated explicitly enough. The diversity of the school, undergraduate and even master's level experiences, learning and training means that not all incoming doctoral candidates have all of the required foundational knowledge in place to the same extent, and some may need additional time, additional training, and additional support in making the transition to doctoral study successfully. Furthermore, through the analyses of the data it became evident that a contradiction existed in the field between the assurances made to doctoral candidates, and what the participants in this study experienced during their own doctoral journey.

Through the analysis carried out in Chapters 5 and 6, it was determined that the field *expects doctoral candidates* to: do **preparatory groundwork** prior to enrolment; **work independently**; **possess the required academic skills**; **manage the supervision relationship**; and, **secure necessary funding**. Furthermore, by way of expectations the field places on supervisors and institutions, it *assures doctoral candidates* of supervision that is **accessible and provides suitable guidance**; of supervisors who **manage and guide the supervision**

relationship; and, who **provide regular and supportive feedback** and **quality control counsel**. From an institutional point of view, the field assures candidates of **supportive structures that monitor their academic progress**; **guidance around conflict resolution**; and, **supervisors who are sufficiently and appropriately trained**.

In terms of the **expectations the field has of doctoral candidates**, a master's degree qualification is considered the requisite standard for entry into doctoral study. However, the analysis of the data reveals that the skills and experience gained at the master's level do not necessarily prepare a doctoral candidate for success in the absence of appropriate supervision and institutional support, or for the full scope of what doctoral study requires.

This could refer to preparation for success with respect to a variety of tasks associated with the doctorate. Every former doctoral candidate who participated in this study experienced challenges that their prior education experience had not or could not prepare them for. These challenges included practical academic writing struggles related to specific parts of the thesis, or issues concerning laboratory protocols or methodological approaches. Challenges such as these are not unexpected, given the complexity of doctoral study. As noted in Chapter 5 (subsection 5.2.3), the transition from prior higher education levels to the doctoral degree has been characterised as 'metamorphic' in nature - an educational process and experience that is transformative in light of the manner in which it shapes the doctoral candidates' scholarly identity (Denicolo & Reeves, 2013). It has been observed that doctoral candidates must be made to understand that attaining success in a doctoral programme is very different from having already completed a master's degree (CHE, 2022).

Other challenges common to each participant concerned power relations in the context of the supervision relationship and associated strategies for conflict resolution. Each of these former doctoral candidates experienced difficulty with regard to the field's expectation of them to manage the supervision relationship when confronted with the supervisor in question being absent, indifferent or hostile in response to their academic needs. Closely associated with the subject of supervisor availability is the matter of neoliberalism (Chapter 1, subsection 1.2.3) and its impact on doctoral supervision, both as it relates to the training of and the daily pressures facing these academics. This impact often manifests, as we have seen from the literature, in the relatively new language of and focus on economic value (Grant, 2018; Boughey & McKenna,

2021) that has exerted increasingly significant pressure on universities. This growing trend in higher education places ever more managerial and administrative pressure on academics who are often already working under significant strain (Grant, 2018; Quinn & Vorster, 2019). This can leave the most well-intentioned supervisors lacking the suitable professional space and time to devote to embracing more supportive supervision practices.

Furthermore, as it relates to supervision training, it was noted in Chapter 2 (subsection 2.4.3) that in the South African context there are too few academics qualified to supervise at doctoral level, and that many novice supervisors receive no induction and/or ongoing training and assistance (Motshoane, 2023). There is very little by way of structured and consistent institutional training and development for supervisors in South African universities (CHE, 2022), and there are fewer workloaded hours allocated to supervision, significantly impacting how much time they do give or feel they can give to candidates. All of this means that the intentions and efforts of even the most sincere supervisors may be undermined and compromised, resulting in candidates going without the support they require.

The subject of the field's expectations of candidates also raises the issue of the existence (or lack thereof), content and thoroughness of pre-doctoral enrolment policies and practices aimed at preparing doctoral candidates for study at doctoral level. Institutional structures and systems tasked with this agenda would ideally result in a more informed doctoral candidature, and more awareness of the demands of doctoral education and of the nature of the role and responsibilities of doctoral scholars. This may lead to greater alignment between the field's expectation of candidates and the latter's expectations and understanding of their own doctoral education journey (Burford et al. 2024).

The challenges experienced by the research participants, as revealed through the analysis, relates to a **contradiction in the field**. It is the contradiction between what the field assured doctoral candidates of, and what it actually provided for them in their real, lived experiences. Contributing to this contradiction was the fact that, as noted earlier in this subsection, while the field assured candidates of supervisors who were accessible and competent in their provision of support, there was a dearth of adequate supervision training in the South African context (Chapter 5, subsection 5.4.3).

Every participant interviewed had experienced one or more supervision-related challenges. The analysis of the narratives also showed a shared experience of supervision that included supervisors who appeared to be unable or unwilling to meet candidates' needs. Beyond supervision shortcomings of this nature, the overall lack of supervision training in South Africa means that many supervisors' efforts may be hindered by a lack of relevant experience and competency.

This study found that there was a gap between the explicit rules of the game and the implicit and dominant doxa that undermined them. While none of the research participants were overtly told that their academic needs or requests were unrealistic, or that the capitals they possessed were a mismatch with those expected or desired, the doxa they encountered seemed to give them this impression. For Robert, Susanne, and Pamela the doxa revolved (in part) around a dominant culture, which was in contrast to their own. The doxa are shaped or informed by expectations —of the field or of the dominant agents within it who possess superior levels of authority and power —which are (at least in part) shaped by prior experiences, project outcomes, and unconscious biases. These often manifest as forms of racism, sexism, ableism and classism that include and embrace some (usually those who 'fit' the expectations and the norms implied by them) and exclude others. For the participants in my study, the result of the prevailing doxa was such that they were left feeling disempowered, alienated and silenced.

For the majority of the participants, the doxa operated to support those in power, as seemingly did broader forms of departmental oversight, thereby shielding those in power from uncomfortable scrutiny and accountability. Whether it was, for instance, a supervisor who was also the employer (Pamela), a supervisor who was also the HoD (Andiswa and Robert), or a system of accountability that seemed largely non-existent (Patience), these former doctoral candidates did not receive the support or validation they required. Instead, they encountered a field of broken promises and side-lined assurances. The doxa revealed in these narratives suggested that who doctoral candidates were in terms of background and culture had at least as much to do with their chances of success as did what they brought into the field by way of capital earned through prior education, work and life experiences.

It is also worth noting that at least three of the participants in this study (Beulah, Robert and Andiswa) indicated that to their knowledge and/or based on personal observation, it was common for the challenges that they faced with their supervisor also to be experienced by other candidates under that individual's supervision. This point is significant because, even if reported as part of their own recollections, it speaks to issues in doctoral education that cannot simply be reduced as being relevant to just one or two unfortunate or problematic and disgruntled candidates.

7.3.2 Constraining and enabling supervision practices and support structures

This subsection discusses findings related to the study's first two research sub-questions. The first research sub-question considered how supervision practices and support structures enabled or constrained doctoral candidates' identity development and chances for success. In contrast to negative experiences related to doctoral education and supervision, as laid out in Chapter 6, the doctoral journey did not begin with difficulty for most of the former doctoral candidates. For Susanne, Andiswa and Robert, apart from academic merit, it was the provision of funding that facilitated their access to doctoral study in the first place, an enablement they were all grateful for. Robert, Beulah, Susanne and Patience expressed enthusiasm about the opportunity to continue immersing themselves in their personal research interests at the doctoral level, engaging with peers and benefiting from the insights of more experienced scholars. Also, the fact that all of the participants were the first in their families to pursue higher education meant that their access to doctoral study represented an exciting and inspiring milestone in their lives.

The analysis of the data presented in this study revealed that both the supervision relationship and associated departmental or institutional support structures (or lack thereof), played a crucial role in the participants' inability to complete, or unwillingness to continue with, their doctoral programme. These factors are not incidental to success in doctoral study; they are critically important components that have the potential to make or break the candidate's doctoral journey (Lovitts, 2001; Ali & Kohun, 2006, 2007; Ruud et al., 2018, CHE, 2022). Furthermore, the analyses highlight the often unseen and unheard human impact, at the individual level, of supervision- and institutional-related practices, going beyond broad statistical and macro-level foci and data to reveal the doctoral candidates' unique, personal experiences.

Every participant in this study experienced significant obstacles to their success as a doctoral candidate as a result of a supervision relationship which, through varying disruptive practices including neglect, apathy and harshness, undermined their academic progress. The variety of negative supervision experiences the participants had to navigate left them feeling as if they – their ways of being and doing – did not belong in the field of doctoral education, and/or that they did not possess the academic competency to succeed in it. These experiences took various forms, including supervisory feedback that was either harsh or not forthcoming for many months at a time and a lack of broader scholarly or technical guidance and clarity in relation to candidates' supervisor-identified research or writing shortcomings.

Furthermore, broader institutional support systems which were either seemingly dismissive, complicit or non-existent further contributed to stifling the development of candidates' doctoral identities. For instance, either the supervisor themself was the relevant HoD the candidate might have otherwise approached for intervening support, or relevant institutional structures such as postgraduate offices seemed unable or unwilling to intervene in situations involving academics who commanded significant levels of institutional authority and research funds. These experiences led to long-term harm done to participants' ability to view themselves as legitimate doctoral scholars. Rather than feeling at home in an academic context that facilitated their ongoing assimilation of the traits of 'doctorateness' (Chapter 2, section 2.2.2), the field of doctoral education instead proved to be, in their estimation, an indifferent and, in some cases, hostile space that undermined their becoming skilled, mature and independent researchers.

Related to the point discussed above, it is important to note that a lack of supportive intervention and/or support on the supervisor's or even department's part is not necessarily indicative of indifference or complicity. A postgraduate officer or HoD is not empowered to implement relevant policies without the will and support of Senate and university leadership, who, in an ideal scenario, would recognise supervision as pedagogy, and doctoral study as a significant stage of an individual's educational journey requiring structured support and development, including from university and faculty structures and systems. It was pointed out in Chapter 5 (subsection 5.4.2) that the DDNR (CHE, 2022) advises South African universities to implement policies that address appeals and complaints of varying kinds. These include matters related to supervision.

The second research sub-question of this study deals with the participants’ attempts at navigating supervision-related challenges experienced during their doctoral degree journey. In attempting to reach out beyond the supervision relationship for guidance and support, Pamela, Robert, Patience and Andiswa experienced institutional structures that were unsupportive, rendering their voices impotent (Chapter 6, section 6.4). Their requests to departmental or institutional structures for intervening support were not met with an empathetic response that validated their concerns and requests for assistance. This left them feeling powerless and alienated in their university context, which compromised their scholarly development. Additionally, as argued in Chapter 6 (section 6.6), these supervision and institutional experiences contributed to each participant’s struggle with consequent emotional and psychological impacts. These impacts have had a direct influence on these former doctoral candidates' openness to re-attempting the pursuit and the cultivation of a doctoral identity through doctoral study. In fact, each participant was still processing these impacts at the time of their participation in this study. Their narratives show how their enthusiasm for scholarly pursuits was significantly undermined, and their confidence and identity as existing and/or future doctoral scholars were damaged considerably. The majority of my participants were dealing with lingering feelings of imposter syndrome as a result of their experiences, and it has taken time for them to regain enough confidence to consider re-engaging with the field of doctoral study.

It is important to note that many of the difficulties experienced by the former doctoral candidates, both within the supervision relationship and in seeking support beyond it, were allowed and exacerbated by the privacy inherent in the one-to-one supervision model (Manathunga, 2012; Frick et al., 2017). This component of privacy, along with the greater and more valued (by the field) levels of symbolic and cultural capital possessed by a supervisor in relation to their candidate, served to shield them from appropriate and legitimate accountability. Furthermore, the absence of a memorandum of understanding made it that much more challenging for problematic issues of concern to be brought to light, and for expectations, roles and responsibilities for students and supervisors to be discussed openly and set out at the start of the process.

Even though the risks associated with secrecy are mitigated when collaborative and/or peer learning opportunities are available (see Chapter 2, subsection 2.2.4), these opportunities are no antidote for poor supervision. Although at least two participants in this study had access to broader peer networks, any benefit derived from them was not significant enough to counteract the supervision- and institutional-related challenges they were facing, and they exited their programme. This points to the implication that peer learning and collaboration engagements in doctoral education, however useful, are no substitutes for constructive and effective supervision which remain critical to candidates' success.

7.3.3 Those who set the rules, enjoy the rules

This study's final research sub-question focused on who gets to determine what is of value within the field of doctoral education, and who gets included or excluded as a result of this determination. There exists no universally applicable set of criteria that accounts for who benefits from dominant doxa in a particular social field, and what the constitution of that doxa is informed by. Instead, these criteria vary across different fields within which various combinations of capitals, cultures and practices represent the status quo. Having said that, the analysis for this study revealed certain commonalities evident in the candidates' experiences in the field of doctoral education, specifically. The field of doctoral education has ways of doing, perceiving and valuing things that are unique to itself (Grenfell & James, 1998). Who sets the rules in the field is significantly based on the kinds of cultures and capitals that the field of doctoral education deems valuable, and what is deemed valuable is based on many factors, such as disciplinary norms and conventions, disciplinary and scholarly axiologies or sets of values, prestige and status related to winning funding or achieving high rankings, and so on. This means that fields of doctoral education, while they have things in common (like disciplinary and scholarly axiologies and norms), will also differ in response to the contextual factors that surround the field (like government funding and policies on education, students and supervisors' backgrounds and training, and so on).

In the majority of the participants' experiences, the field valued English-speaking Eurocentric whiteness and maleness. Furthermore, in the field of doctoral study, those who possessed elevated levels of field-specific social, symbolic, educational and economic capital wielded power and authority over those who possessed less. These capitals were represented in varying ways (Moore, 2014; see Chapter 3, subsection 3.3.1), including educational and research experience, academic titles and credentials, status and authority associated with professional positions and roles, the procurement and management of significant research funds, and so forth. In the context of this study, this means that supervisors benefited from the doxa of the field in relation to candidates, similarly to the manner in which more experienced and accomplished academics and supervisors in the field had more authority than junior or less experienced colleagues and supervisors. As has been shown in subsection 7.3.1, the doxa at work in the doctoral education contexts pertinent to this study operated to support those in power, shielding them from scrutiny and accountability relevant to any negative prejudices and practices on their part. In essence, supervisors and their institutions dominated the field of doctoral education (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). The doxa worked to subvert the stated expectations and rules of the field relating to supervisors and institutional structures (discussed in Chapter 5, sections 5.3 and 5.4) such that a distinction and power imbalance was created and perpetuated between the 'haves' and 'have nots' of field-valued culture and capitals.

From a broader perspective, the doxa at work in the doctoral contexts researched in this study, along with the inherent imbalance of power in the field between candidates and their respective institution, meant that the participants essentially could not hold academics, departments and faculties to account. They found it practically impossible to challenge the prevailing doxa (Bourdieu, 1977). In this manner, these institutions, from the level of the individual faculty member to the relevant departments and faculties, escaped any scrutiny related to seemingly dysfunctional policies and practices or the apparent dereliction of their duties. Ultimately, the analysis and consequent findings of this study resonate with the central view of Bourdieu that a social field is an arena of contestation, characterised by contest or tension (Martin, 2003; Wacquant, 2007). The doctoral study contexts experienced by the research participants were no exception.

The analysis conducted in Chapter 6 revealed that supervisors and institutions were enabled to renege, to the extent they did, with impunity on the expectations the field set for them. Rather, it was the doctoral candidates who paid the price associated with supervisory and institutional neglect, indifference or hostility, and feeling silenced (Nardone, 2018; Grubbström & Powell, 2020). They eventually exited their doctoral programmes with little to show for their time, efforts and aspirations. These former doctoral candidates experienced significant internal dissonance and emotional stress, crises of identity, and a sense of disenfranchisement (Leijen et al., 2016; Castelló et al., 2017).

7.4 Implications

The following subsections discuss the implications of the findings, both for the field of doctoral education and for universities and society more broadly.

7.4.1 Implications of contradiction in doctoral study – expectations versus reality

From the literature it is known that supervision that is understanding and caring in nature can facilitate trust and openness (Gunasekera et al,. 2021; Buirski, 2021) in the heart and mind of the doctoral candidate. However, when the field's expectations of supervisors and institutions are not met by these parties, a contradiction in the field becomes manifest, as previously discussed, between what candidates are led to expect versus what their lived reality is during their doctoral journey. When doctoral candidates experience this contradiction in the field, their trust in their supervisors and broader institutional structures can be irrevocably broken, causing some candidates to become disillusioned with academic pursuits.

The existence of this contradiction in the field potentially results in a variety of impacts at various levels. **Doctoral candidates** may not receive the guidance and support they require to thrive as emerging scholars and to develop a robust doctoral identity. **Supervisors** (particularly new and novice supervisors) may find their best intentions and efforts hindered as a result of inadequate or non-existent training (Motshoane & McKenna, 2021) which leaves them ill-prepared for the responsibilities of their role. Meanwhile, **universities** may gradually and increasingly lose credibility as candidates and supervisors lose trust in their ability and willingness to cultivate supportive academic environments that support and empower students and faculty alike. With all this in mind, the findings of this study and the associated aforementioned contradiction in the field highlight important implications relevant both for policy and practice. Regarding the former, it appears both reasonable and logical to deduce that the **university** that takes seriously (or at least claims to) the success of its doctoral candidates as well as associated faculty would purposefully prioritise and invest significant resources into the professional training of their doctoral supervisors. In addition, for **doctoral supervisors** who take seriously (or at least claim to) the success of their candidates, it seems reasonable to expect that they would prioritise and embrace available training opportunities, to whatever extent their workload allows. Furthermore, there are also implications for **supervision practice**, in that supervisors who seek to intentionally recognise, acknowledge and value each doctoral candidate's varied and unique portfolio of capitals, help cultivate an academic relationship and environment within which that candidate's doctoral identity can develop and thrive.

Findings related to the field's expectation of doctoral candidates have implications for the manner in which these candidates prepared for and were introduced into the field of doctoral study. New research by Wendy Bastalich and Alistair McCulloch (2024) has relevance here. They observe that little is known about how doctoral candidates understand doctoral study and the relationships that underpin it prior to entry into their programme, or about the way in which this understanding is likely to influence their response to it. According to the authors, this lack of research interest may be attributed to the assumption that given their success at prior levels of education, doctoral candidates are already well adapted to higher education and therefore do not need significant induction-related opportunities and resources (Bastalich & McCulloch, 2024). Where universities are providing support and training for candidates at entry level via various pre-enrolment learning opportunities, it suggests that they are improving the readiness and preparedness of the candidates who use pre-registration programmes. Consequently, the result is that many of these universities' doctoral candidates successfully complete their doctorate in the expected time (CHE, 2022, p.15; Burford et al. 2024). These pre-enrolment efforts and programmes on the part of universities represent a key policy implication for these academic institutions, informed by the findings of this study.

Previous qualitative research into the experiences of postgraduate students, also employing the theoretical lens of field theory, revealed the potential for contradictions between the promises the field of postgraduate supervision makes to students and what they encounter in reality (Cyster, 2019). In Chapter 6 (subsection 6.3.1) of this study, it was noted that being a doctoral supervisor is a great responsibility. Candidates are requested by universities or choose themselves to entrust a crucial stage of their scholarly development to these individuals (Bacwayo, Nampala & Oteyo, 2017). The supervision relationship can have a profound impact on the candidates' lives and future, and by implication, therefore, the provision of appropriate supervision training is a matter of key importance. If the central role of the university is to develop and equip the new generation of researchers, supervision training in South Africa will require urgent attention within higher education institutions (Motshoane & McKenna, 2021). The importance and necessity of supervision training receiving urgent attention in South Africa represents a key implication of this study for doctoral education practice.

7.4.2 Consequences of observed supervision practices and support structures

Given the difficulties experienced by the participants in this study in the context of the supervision relationship, and beyond, if the one-on-one supervision model and the candidate experience are not more thoroughly monitored, consequent **implications for universities** are to be expected. This is not to mean 'monitored' in a superficial, tick box kind of way as part of some neoliberal managerial process, but rather as a system or structure that facilitates and motivates qualitative feedback from doctoral candidates about their academic experience – feedback that may identify and address issues of concern. Similarly, this same result will come about **for universities** if adequate support, reporting and accountability systems that serve candidates are not put in place or strengthened. The importance of meaningful monitoring systems is in keeping with the field's expectation of universities (see Chapter 5, Section 5.4) to implement structures for monitoring candidates' academic progress. Where universities do not consistently and ethically implement the relevant structures they have in place, or under-implement them, they leave room for continued negative manifestations of power imbalances in the field of doctoral education. Doctoral candidates who enter doctoral education with capitals, dispositions and cultures not deemed valuable enough by the field will continue to suffer marginalisation, neglect and abuse. These candidates represent the vulnerable and relatively powerless minorities attempting to navigate dominant, indifferent, antagonistic and/or foreign doxa and culture in the field.

The findings of this study suggest that, in certain instances in certain **universities** at least, a doctoral candidate's chances of success are as much determined (or to some lesser or greater degree) by their socio-economic-racial-cultural background as the scholarly competence and potential they possess upon entering the field of doctoral education. This highlights important policy implications for universities, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, and for the

faculties and departments that should ideally be tasked with implementing these policies in practical, meaningful and impactful ways. When universities fail to acknowledge and address these implications, risks associated with attrition in doctoral study are exacerbated. The findings discussed in section 7.3.1 resonate with literature pointing to a poor supervisory relationship (Barnes & Austin, 2009; Ruud et al., 2018) and an unsupportive institutional culture (Lovitts, 2001) as being among the key factors contributing to attrition in doctoral study.

This attrition will continue to result in significant loss (Golde, 2000; Hawley, 2010) that is impossible to fully quantify – loss to countries, communities, the academy, and the individual. This loss associated with attrition in doctoral study has multi-faceted **implications**. As discussed in Chapter 2, section 2.4, it is a loss on **national and regional levels** represented in terms of unpublished or unrealised advancements in knowledge, innovation in creativity and the arts, in scientific and medical breakthroughs, and in terms of economic upliftment and social justice. These consequences inevitably exert a negative concomitant impact on **communities, families** and of course on the **former doctoral candidates** themselves. Individual hopes of academic achievement and career and economic advancement are thwarted. Struggling families reliant on additional financial and social resources and support are denied and disappointed, and the realisation of social and economic justice potential for communities is delayed and undermined.

For the former doctoral candidates who participated in this study, their negative experiences of supervision and their related attempts to seek out support beyond this relationship, lead to the deterioration of their sense of illusion. It seems that this would be a reasonable and logical consequence of their exposure to an academic context that did not appear to value their capitals, nor their potential and evolving identity as doctoral scholars. Postgraduate educational environments of this nature will continuously produce and perpetuate a sense disempowerment and disillusionment amongst their doctoral candidate population, which, if left unaddressed, will undoubtedly contribute to more of the kinds of experiences shared by the participants in this study (Pyhältö et al., 2012; Pretorius & Macaulay, 2021).

7.4.3 The production, protection and perpetuation of power

The nature of doxa within a particular social field, and indeed of the field itself, is such that they favour and protect those who possess the capitals that are most valued within that field (Mohr, 2000). As discussed in Chapter 3 (section 3.6), the symbolic violence that doctoral candidates may suffer in the context of an apathetic or hostile academic environment is typically an unperceived form of violence, in addition to an efficient means of domination. The dominant classes in the field need to expend little energy in order to maintain their power, needing only to 'let the system they dominate take its own course in order to exercise their domination' (Bourdieu, 1977, p.190). As those within the field who benefit from the prevailing doxa simply go about their usual business and the doxa to which they adhere continue to expand and protect their positions of privilege. Consequently, in the absence of internally welcomed or externally mandated institutional review and change, universities' doctoral education contexts will continue to disenfranchise and disempower those whose capitals and culture are at odds with the status quo.

Addressing the challenges in doctoral education and supervision uncovered in this study will require a multi-faceted approach within universities that includes (but is not limited to): (1) the implementation or enhancement of meaningful and robust pre-enrolment, induction and training programmes for prospective or new doctoral candidates and supervisors alike (Wilmot & McKenna, 2023; Motshoane, 2023); (2) strategies for enhancing and ensuring the adherence to systems of monitoring, support and accountability (Trigwell & Dunbar-Goddet, 2005), particularly in relation to the one-on-one supervision model; and, (3) opportunities for exit interviews where desired that allow candidates who do not finish to share insights into the factors that impacted the premature end of their doctoral journey (Golde, 2000; Lovitts & Nelson, 2000). All these foci are important, particularly against the backdrop of the increasingly influential neoliberal agenda worldwide (Boughey & McKenna, 2021), in light of which there is value in universities pausing to ask broad questions about what they do and do not prioritise, and to what end.

7.5 Contrasting my Master's and Doctoral Research

As I noted in Chapter 1 (section 1.1), part of the impetus for this study was my personal experiences with postgraduate supervision. This impetus was further bolstered by my desire to deepen and expand on my master's-level research, thus prompting my research interest in the experiences of PhD candidates and issues of attrition, There are similarities between my master's and my doctoral research projects. Both studies explore the experiences of postgraduate research students who withdrew from their programme of study. Both studies seek to elevate the voices of these individuals, using narratives as a means to do so. Additionally, both studies utilise the theoretical lens of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory. Consequently, due to the similarities between my master's and doctoral research projects, I feel it is important to highlight a number of key distinctions between the two – distinctions that in my opinion demonstrate the merits of this doctoral research.

Research focus – my master's study was concerned with the nature of challenges in the supervision relationship and how students sought to navigate them. The focus of the study was largely trained at the level of the supervision relationship. In contrast, my doctoral study examines the supervision relationship in the context of broader departmental and institutional contexts. This contributes a deeper level of understanding not only with respect to the nature of challenges in supervision, but also to the kinds of unconstructive academic environments that potentially enable these challenges and undermine any meaningful measures that might promote transparency and accountability. Furthermore, this study explores the implicit rules and power relations that contribute to how the field of doctoral education is structured and who is advantaged and disadvantaged.

Application of theory – while both studies utilise field theory, my doctoral study does so in a more thorough and sophisticated manner. This is due in part to my greater experience and familiarity with it as a theoretical tool as a doctoral scholar, compared with when I first encountered it at master's level. As a result, the analysis of the data in this study has yielded a depth of meaning and understanding that significantly exceeds that of my master's research. This is particularly true of this study's examination of the nature and impact of doxa on the field and those who navigate it, of which forms of capital the field values and how, and of the resultant symbolic violence that erodes doctoral candidates' sense of illusio and ultimately undermines their doctoral identity and their sense of belonging and legitimacy in the field of doctoral education.

Key findings – The key funding from my master's research is that a potential gap or contradiction exists in the field of postgraduate study between what students are assured of in terms of scholarly support, and what they experience in reality. My master's study findings also relate to the nature of the challenges experienced by master's students and how they sought to navigate them. My doctoral research echoes the potential reality of this finding – of contradiction in the field – at the level of doctoral education specifically, but goes beyond this. It achieves this by explicitly and thoroughly examining the impact of this contradiction in doctoral education (at least in the experience of this study's research participants) on issues such as academic progress, the cultivation of doctoral identity, and candidates' emotional wellbeing, Another distinguishing feature of this doctoral research compared to my master's study is the thoroughness with which it examines the expectations and consequent responsibilities in the field of doctoral education relevant to the agents in the field, at the level of the individual, the departmental and the institutional. Additionally, the findings of this study speak to the nature of power in the field, and the means by which it is protected and perpetuated, to the detriment of some and the advancement of others.

7.6 Study Limitations, Future Research and Concluding Remarks

This study sought to elevate the voices and experiences of former doctoral candidates who did not successfully complete a doctoral study programme. Its objective was to humanise candidate experiences associated with attrition in doctoral study, and through stories, shed light on the factors and forces contributing to this important issue. In tackling this task, narrative research and the theoretical lens of field theory were employed. It is important to acknowledge the limitations related to this doctoral research project.

My sample size was intentionally small in order to yield rich qualitative data, and it focused only on candidate experiences and perspectives, one agential element of the social field of doctoral education. Given this approach, this study does not seek, nor is able to, draw conclusions that are universally applicable to the entirety of South African doctoral education or beyond. It does not offer a holistic statistical or empirical representation or analysis of attrition in doctoral study in the country. In addition, this study employs particular methodological and theoretical tools and therefore inherently does not benefit from the value that might be obtained through the use of other research approaches.

The objective and findings of this study may therefore be enhanced through a variety of future research projects. This could include related studies focused on doctoral study attrition and the doctoral candidate experience that either involves larger or different samples or that are carried out in different geographical and cultural contexts, so that the results of this research might potentially be expanded upon, corroborated or challenged. Valuable future research might also focus on using alternative research methods and theories in the interest of examining different aspects of attrition in doctoral education. The purpose and value of future associated research into the issues of doctoral supervision, candidate experience and power relations in doctoral education would be to derive a greater understanding of the factors that either threaten or facilitate candidate success in doctoral education in South Africa and beyond.

Unquestioningly, there exist thousands of doctoral supervisors and associated institutional systems and structures around the world (many of them in South Africa) that strive tirelessly and in good faith towards the cultivation and realisation of doctoral attributes in candidates. These hardworking individuals and academic institutions are doing whatever is in their power to nurture the doctoral identity of the students under their supervision. Clearly, however, as this study and other related ones have indicated, there exists also the flip side to that coin. Institution-related challenges contributing to attrition in doctoral study are complex and long-standing in nature, and will not be overcome overnight.

Regarding my participants' decision to participate in this study, the hope that their story might somehow inspire positive change or represent a meaningful contribution to the field of doctoral education was a motivating factor common to all the participants. There is however no doubt that any process of positive transformation that results in the enrichment of candidates' scholarly experience, where necessary and applicable, will require sustained focus and commitment over many years and across all levels of the field of doctoral education.

While the task at hand may often appear daunting and overwhelming, the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. This study represents the intention to contribute one such step, in acknowledgement and support of the many other steps – past, present and future – taken by doctoral researchers and practitioners around the world, on the path towards more just, inclusive and conscientious doctoral education.

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Appendices

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Appendix A: Rhodes University Doctoral Study Information Sheet

Principal Researcher – Grant Alexander Cyster

Research Title: Taking on or leaving behind a doctoral identity: Analysing narratives of doctoral attrition in South African higher education

Dear prospective research participant

This research is being carried out as part of my doctoral studies. I wish to invite you to participate in this research project, which has been approved by the Ethical Clearance Committee of the Education Department at Rhodes University. Kindly review the information below. In the event that you agree to participate in this project, please complete the informed consent form and return to me via email as soon as possible at: grant.cyster@gmail.com

Study Context and Description

High attrition rates have been associated with doctoral studies for decades, fuelled by several factors. Doctoral attrition rates represent a loss of time, talent, and sacrifice for departing candidates, in addition to a consequent loss to discipline-specific and national knowledge economies. There exists a lack of qualitative research into doctoral candidates' experiences as they relate to the complex process of undertaking a doctorate – a gap in the literature which this study will seek to address, aiming to demonstrate that the issue of attrition in doctoral study is a multi-faceted phenomenon. Of the myriad factors that impact on doctoral attrition, this research will focus on doctoral supervision.

Potential research participants – former doctoral candidates who have deregistered from their doctoral programme at a South African university – will be invited to complete a Google Form survey. Survey responses will be recorded anonymously, but there will be an option for participants to volunteer for a follow-on interview (more on this below). The researcher will seek to understand the data resulting from this study by paying attention to what defines the characteristics of the field of research (doctoral education in this case) and unpacking the systems of power operating within it. This study will hopefully result in useful information regarding what doctoral candidates, supervisors and academic institutions can be mindful of in the interests of enhancing the doctoral study experience for all concerned.

By giving your consent to take part in the study you are telling us that you:

- Understand what you have read;
- Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below; and,
- Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

What will the study require of you?

Your participation in the study is totally voluntary, and it will involve the completion of a brief Google Forms survey, and should you choose to participate further, one or possibly two interviews. The interviews will be scheduled at your convenience. The estimated duration of an interview is one hour and it will be audio recorded. If you participate in the study your identity will not be revealed. You will be free to choose a pseudonym (different name) for yourself. The interviews will take place either in person where possible (at a time and location that is comfortable for you) or via an online platform such as Zoom, allowing you to change your screen name to your selected pseudonym.

Can you withdraw from the study once you've started?

Absolutely, and at any time of your choosing. Participation in the study is completely voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study and later change your mind, you can indicate this by sending me an email and indicating your chosen pseudonym (different name) so I can withdraw your data – if any data has already been collected at that stage.

Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Apart from some of your time, no risks or costs are expected to be associated with your participation in this study. However, in the event that your participation results in any data costs, these costs, once validated, will be reimbursed to you.

Are there any benefits associated with participating in the study?

I don't foresee any direct benefit to you from participating in the study, aside, perhaps, from any personal benefit you may derive from having the opportunity to share your story. However, as mentioned earlier, your participation in this study will hopefully result in useful information that may lead to the enhancement of the doctoral study experience for all concerned.

What will happen to information about you that is collected during the study?

All information will be stored securely in a password protected Google Drive folder for the duration of the study. The data will be kept for five years after completion of the study, after which it will be deleted completely. No hard copies will be stored. Your identity and personal information will be kept strictly confidential at all times.

Will you receive feedback about the findings of the study?

Yes, should you wish to. It is your right to receive feedback about the overall results of the study. Please provide your preferred email address in the consent form if you would like to receive feedback.

What if you would like further information about the study?

Should you read this information and require more information, or if you have any questions, please contact:

Principal Researcher:

Grant Alexander Cyster / (C) 071 081 1304 / grant.cyster@gmail.com

Supervisors:

Dr Kirstin Wilmot / k.wilmot@ru.ac.za

Dr Sherran Clarence / s.clarence@ru.ac.za

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Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Research Title:	Taking on or leaving behind a doctoral identity: Analysing narratives of doctoral attrition in South African higher education
Principal Investigator:	**Grant Alexander Cyster**

Participation Information

- I understand the purpose of the research study and my involvement in it.
- I understand the risks and benefits of participating in this research study.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research study at any stage without any penalty.
- I understand that participation in this research study is done on a voluntary basis.

- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will remain anonymous and no reference will be made to me by name.
- I understand that relevant email communications, digital audio recording devices or online meeting platforms may be used.
- I understand and agree that the interviews will be recorded electronically.
- I understand that I will be given the opportunity to read and comment on the transcribed interview notes.
- I confirm that I am not participating in this study for financial gain.

Information Explanation

- I confirm that the above information was explained to me by Grant Alexander Cyster and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study: Taking on or leaving behind a doctoral identity: Analysing narratives of doctoral attrition in South African higher education
- The above information was explained to me in English and I am in command of this language:

Voluntary Consent

I,
……………………………………………………………………………………………………,
voluntarily give my consent to participate in the above-mentioned research.

Signature:

Date:

Researcher Declaration

I, Grant Alexander Cyster, declare that I have explained all the participation information to the participant and have truthfully answered all questions asked by the participant.

Signature:

Date:

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Appendix C: Draft Rhodes University Doctoral Research Survey

Grant Alexander Cyster (Principal Researcher)

Research topic

Taking on or leaving behind a doctoral identity: Analysing narratives of doctoral attrition in South African higher education

Research Aim:

A doctorate represents a pinnacle of academic achievement, and for many candidates, especially those who contemplate a career involving high level research within or outside of academia, it may be a necessity. But, undertaking research at this level is also very difficult and fraught with challenges, personal and professional. Not all candidates who begin doctoral study finish, but there is very little research focused on these ‘ex-candidates’ experiences that tells us why they chose to leave and what might have prompted them to stay the course.

Knowing more about this can, firstly, give these candidates a space to share their experiences, perhaps for the first time. Secondly, it can give universities vital information they can use to provide different forms of or better support for doctoral candidates that can hopefully increase successful completion rates.

This survey is designed to begin the process of eliciting experiences from ex-doctoral candidates, or those who have made the choice to leave their doctoral degree programme. Please read the questions carefully and share as much as you feel able to or would like to. At the end of the survey, you will have an opportunity to self-select for a follow up interview, and there will be more information provided in this part of the survey.

I have estimated that it will take a maximum of 20 minutes to complete this survey, depending on how detailed your responses to the questions are.

Please note that:

1. Your responses are anonymous and will be saved as such on a secure server;
2. You may close the survey at any time should you decide not to complete it. Your partial answers may be used in the study, with full anonymity; and,
3. Your data will be treated with due care and you are under no obligation at all to volunteer for a follow-up interview.

Thank you very much for your time and contribution to this research project. If you have any questions, please contact me, Grant Cyster, at grantcyster@gmail.com.

Survey Questions

- What is your current age?
- Can you describe your prior education background (school, university and any other training you have undertaken)?
- In which years did you register and deregister from your doctoral degree programme?
  - Registration year
  - Deregistration year
- In which discipline/subject was your study located?
- What initially motivated you to enroll in your doctoral programme?
- What were the key issues that contributed to your decision to leave your studies?
- What have you been doing since leaving your doctoral programme?
- If you could go back and do things over, would you change anything, and if so, what would you change?

Further participation

Would you like to participate in a longer conversation-based interview about your doctoral candidacy experience?

Yes, please.

No, thank you.

If yes, kindly provide your:

Name (How you wish to be addressed):

____

Email address:

____

Appendix D: Revised Data Analysis Extract (Field Theory Exercise)

Pamela had also become aware of the impact upon her academic progress of the different positions that she and her supervisor (and boss) occupied in the field of her doctoral education. These included respective positions of employee and employer, doctoral candidate and supervisor, subordinate and superior. This difference in positions meant that her supervisor possessed a portfolio of capital in the field that was valued significantly more and was more influential than that which Pamela brought into the field. He possessed dominant forms of cultural and symbolic capital based on his academic achievements, reputation and status as a globally respected scholar. As a white male in a primarily Anglo-centric research and professional context, his perceptions and practices would have blended more seamlessly with the field, and his background, and his experience and history in that Anglo-centric context would have enhanced his social capital in it. He commanded significant levels of economic capital by way of research funds, which would also have afforded him elevated levels of influence in the field. All of this meant that Pamela's supervisor would have commanded significantly more power in a field which valued his capitals above hers. It felt to her as if the chess board had been set and she was obligated to play an ordained role.

> *Pamela: There were huge differences in positionality between me and my supervisor. There was a huge difference in worldview and values which makes it quite hard to actually have a conversation. My work and who I am is very much located in an African worldview, and here I was with all the principal investigators on the project being white men. They had the power and were in charge of the project. Everyone else was expected to play their assigned subordinate role.*

This points to a doctoral research context that is multidimensional in nature, involving a myriad of issues including race, gender, institutional standing, disciplinary authority and professional position/role. As noted in chapter 2, some doctoral candidates' struggles with socialisation into their particular research culture (as well as employment culture in Pamela's case) and associated feelings of isolation can make advancing in their degree programme difficult. As the research has shown, feelings of isolation are commonly associated with experiences of doctoral education (Ali & Kohun, 2007), and this feeling of aloneness would have been exacerbated in Pamela's case in light of the relative lack of field-valued capital that she was in possession of. Another common experience among doctoral candidates, and one that would have been heightened in Pamela's case, is that of imposter syndrome (Richards & Fletcher, 2019; Nori, Peura & Jauhiainen, 2020). Doctoral candidates often feel that they lack the necessary expertise and acumen that would otherwise make them feel a greater sense of belonging in the field. They subsequently feel like frauds, carrying lingering feelings and concerns of being 'found out' as being unfit for doctoral education. The disparity in capitals and positions between Pamela and her supervisor, and the different and conflicting worldview that she brought into her educational and professional context, would have intensified this experience for her. A situation in which a doctoral candidate experiences insufficient acclimatisation and immersion into the prevailing culture of research and/or the university itself (or place of employment) ushers in the potential risk of significantly delaying degree completion times (Hovdhaugen, Frølich & Aamodt, 2013).

> *Pamela: He acknowledged my issues, but without any concessions or compromises that would upset the existing power dynamic. It felt like my Afrikaans, lower-working class background that taught me to speak directly might be regarded as offensive by my supervisor and the European collaborators on the project.*

She was always concerned about her perceived need to tone down her language so as not to offend anyone - this, coupled with her own low self-esteem that she was up against. This again speaks to the aforementioned issue of imposter syndrome, and the manner in which it erodes confidence in the course of navigating a social field. Pamela came to feel that she was relatively powerless in her study and work context, being in possession of a worldview, disposition and capitals that the field neither acknowledged nor valued as much as that of her white peers/colleagues and her supervisor.

> *'Nobody ever questions the supervisor. You take it on. I blamed myself. You internalise that blame. My supervisor seemed untouchable. He commanded the millions of*

> *rands. People quoted him. They named physical landmarks after him. He is sacrosanct'.*

Pamela's words here demonstrate an impact of the imbalance of power between agents in a field. She felt that her voice was rendered impotent, She felt silenced, In her estimation and experience, the prevailing doxa in the field valued affluence, academic prestige, euro-centric whiteness and culture. The rules of the field operated in such a way as to entrench, protect and advance her supervisor's power and influence. In chapter 3's sub-section on doxa it was noted that doctoral candidates may enter a field of education in which they learn that the doxa is to know their place, submit to authority, and to not upset the order of things if they are to advance in a meaningful way. This was an aspect of the field of doctoral education that Pamela would encounter as her academic journey unfolded.

> *Pamela: Don't come with expectations or an agenda of transformation or upsetting the balance of power. Don't express concerns or complaints - stay in your lane and know your place. Respect the hierarchy and do as you are told.*

From the above excerpts it seems clear that Pamela felt powerless to overcome or resist the power hierarchy that she perceived existing between her supervisor as well as her European colleagues. This experience would have had a significantly adverse impact on the development of Pamela's doctoral identify. Rather than being in an academic environment in which she felt encouraged and empowered to exercise independent and critical thinking, she instead felt muzzled and disenfranchised. The doxa of the field, whether in explicit or implicit form, pressured her to submit to the status quo and quench any aspirations of free thought and speech. This field context would not have resulted in the development of the kind of doctorateness that the pursuit of doctoral education is meant to instil and cultivate, as mentioned in chapter 2 (Frick 2011; Trafford & Leshem 2009).

In the context of her supervision relationship, specifically, she and her supervisor seemed to be worlds apart. To be a supervisor is a great responsibility, involving doctoral candidates who entrust their supervisor with a crucial stage of their scholarly development (Bacwayo, Nampala & Oteyo, 2017). It is an experience that can have a profound impact on the student's life and future. Some candidates have become disillusioned with academic pursuits due to their experience with supervisors, whereas others have blossomed into accomplished researchers because of their experience. Bacwayo, Nampala and Oteyo (2017) go as far as to say that addressing students' needs, interests and expectations matters a great deal, and academics who are not prepared to take this responsibility seriously should not become supervisors.

Appendix E: Email Facilitating Participants' Revision of Their Contribution

(Example) Subject line: Sharing Your Previous PhD Experiences

Hello (real name),

I hope that you're well and that your 2024 is going great so far.

I'm currently in the analysis phase of my research and will be working on the findings in the next month or two. Below I'm providing you with a summary of your story based on our online conversations. Please note that your representation in the thesis will not take this same form - it will be spread out over several sub-sections. The various pieces of your story will be told based on the information below. I want to give you this opportunity to see if you are comfortable with all the information presented, and to revise any details you may wish to.

Your pseudonym in the study is Pamela.

Regards,

Grant

Pamela's response

Hey Grant

Lovely to see you are making progress. Much work huh. I am happy with what you have captured, thank you.

I had a thought though, with reference to a "coloured" woman below, I identify as black, without denying my coloured identity. It's no train smash, but if you can I'd like that to be made clear. All the best with completing the PhD,

Regards

Pamela

My follow-up response:

Hello (real name). Thank you for confirming that everything is in order.

Of course, I'd be happy to make that distinction clear for you in my study. Consider it done

Grant