

**An Exploration of African and Caribbean Women's Journeys**

**Towards Senior Positions in Further Education**

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## **Abstract**

Within further education (FE) institutions in the United Kingdom (UK), there is a lack of African and Caribbean women in senior positions; the FE sector has seen a significant decline in the number of leaders who are members of Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) groups. This means that there are inadequate levels of diversity in leadership, and the existing body of scholarly work on diversity in leadership has not considered the unique experiences of African and Caribbean women professionals in FE.

This research was focused on exploring African and Caribbean women's journeys towards senior positions in FE. It explored the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women as they aim to progress in a sector in which they are significantly underrepresented.

The study contains a review of the literature on theories regarding African and Caribbean women in senior positions. This was used to formulate the research questions and a framework based on Black feminist thought and critical race theory, which was applied to investigate and assess the lived experiences of the participants in this research, who were chosen to be relevant to this line of inquiry.

The qualitative findings were developed using the biographic-narrative interpretive method and semi-structured interviews. It was found that African and Caribbean women's experiences were not the same as those of their White counterparts, from the early stages of their school experiences onward. The themes that emerged from the study emphasised the importance of management and the desire of these women to take advantage of opportunities and to invest in achieving their objectives; however, they experienced marginalisation and a lack of complete and lasting power in their senior positions once they had gained them. Underrepresentation and unfair treatment of African and Caribbean women at senior levels in FE is widespread and impacts their career progression.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my son, Jöhann Lincoln Evans.

What I hope you learn from my journey is to never give up. Never stop striving to improve yourself until you have achieved your full potential. Nothing's impossible.

*"I have learned that success is to be measured not so much by the position that one has reached in life as by the obstacles which he has had to overcome while trying to succeed."*

(Booker T. Washington, Outlook Company, 1900, Vol. 66.p.654)

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## List of Abbreviations

AFHEA	Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy
A-level	Advanced level
AS-level	Advanced subsidiary level (a qualification that students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland can pursue after the completion of their General Certificate of Secondary Education examinations at the age of 16)
ATLAS-ti	A qualitative research tool that facilitates the coding and analysis of transcripts and field notes, development of literature reviews, production of network diagrams, and visualisation of data
BAME	Black, Asian and minority ethnic
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BFT	Black feminist thought
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
BLI	Black leadership initiative
BME	Black and minority ethnic

BNIM	Biographic-narrative interpretative method
BWIL	Black women in leadership
C-suite	C-suite, or C-level: derived from titles of top senior executives, whose titles begin with the letter C for 'chief,' such as chief executive officer (CEO), chief financial officer (CFO), chief information officer (CIO)
Cert.Ed.	Certificate in Education (A-level-5 qualification for teachers, trainers and tutors in the further education and skills sector); for example, further education, adult, and community settings
CEO	Chief executive officer
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSE	Certificate of Secondary Education
CRT	Critical race theory
ESOL	English for speakers of other languages
FE	Further education
IFL	Institute for Learning)
FHEA	Fellow of Higher Education Academy
ETF	Education and Training Foundation
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
HE	Higher Education
HND	Higher National Diploma
LSIS	Learning and Skills Improvement Service
NATFHE	National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education
O-level	General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary level
PGCE (FE)	Postgraduate Certificate of Education (Further Education)

PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
SQUIN	Single question aimed at inducing narrative.
TES	Times Educational Supplement
UCU	University and Colleges Union
US	United States
UK	United Kingdom

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A dissertation is a considerable endeavour that could never be successfully completed individually or alone. I have been humbled and inspired by this experience. I owe my deepest gratitude to many individuals who took part in the study, willingly sharing their experiences and time, who all have made this research possible.

First and foremost, I give honour to God, the centre of my life and the source of my strength. Additionally, Professor Vanita Sundaram. I had the privilege of being mentored by Dr. Daisy Agathine-Louise during a leadership and management course. Our interactions were intellectually rewarding, as we engaged in thought-provoking conversations. I appreciated her insightful critiques and valuable suggestions.

To my late psychology lecturer and mentor for over 25 years, Claire J Lea, who began this journey with me from an Access to Higher Education Programme where we first met and who attended all my graduations and social events. Thank you for the memories and the support throughout the years; you are truly missed and loved.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my two examiners, Professor Farzana Shain and Dr Eleanor Brown, for taking the time to read and comment on this thesis.

## **Declaration**

I declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. No part of it has been submitted for previous examination at the University of York, or any other institution, nor has any part of it been previously published. I understand that this thesis will be made available to the public. All sources are acknowledged as references.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **1.0 Background regarding women of African and Caribbean heritage who work in senior positions in further education**

Research in the UK is rarely focused on staff of African and Caribbean heritage who work in senior positions in FE. Studies published since the 1980s have examined only the leadership characteristics of African and Caribbean women and the barriers they face, which include their gender and assumptions that people make regarding their race (Collins, 2000). Senior positions have traditionally been associated only with White middle- and upper-class women (Collins, 2000; Delany & Rogers, 2004; White, 1999). Even when African and Caribbean women are represented in senior positions, many experience problems with “gendered racism” (Essed, 1991) and are subjected to sexism and racism because of their gender and their heritage, even though they exist simultaneously in both identities. Women of African or Caribbean heritage have achieved a great deal of success in a variety of fields. This success has been accomplished despite the inequality that exists throughout society, including the workplace.

The findings of the research contained in the 2020 report by the Lean In organisation on the situation for African and Caribbean women point to the same overarching pattern, namely that, in many ways, African and Caribbean women experience more challenges and stress than almost anyone else regarding their employment status. They are overrepresented in jobs that pay the lowest wages, they are hired and promoted at a slower pace than others and, if they are promoted, in many cases, they are the only women of African or Caribbean heritage in the room and, as a result, they are subjected to a wider range of microaggressions than women of other racial or ethnic backgrounds. In addition, their pay is significantly lower than that of men and of many groups of other women. Morgan (2020) contends that, despite efforts to develop a diverse leadership pipeline, the number of African and Caribbean women working at senior levels within UK organisations remains very low. This imbalance persists although African and Caribbean women comprise a significant proportion of the workforce. Concerning the poor prospects for advancement of African and

Caribbean women into positions of leadership, there exists a straightforward explanation for this phenomenon, in my view, which is that African and Caribbean women are members of two marginalised groups, specifically African and/or Caribbean and female and, therefore, they face a situation of 'double jeopardy' regarding discrimination. This means they face greater levels of discrimination than do those individuals who hold only one marginalised identity (i.e., White women or African and Caribbean men). In most discussions about women in leadership roles, the intricate and intertwined nature of the inequalities that are associated with the intersection of gender and race is ignored, even though such inequalities are widespread in our society (Morgan, 2020).

As a researcher, my positionality is deeply rooted in my personal experiences and worldview. I identify as being of Caribbean British heritage, I work as a senior lecturer, course coordinator, and module leader of undergraduate students which has shaped my understanding and perspective of the world. Researching African and Caribbean women in leadership positions in my first year helped me find my feet while exploring my area of interest, spending the first year outlining research questions, the context of the study, research focus, formulating researchable questions, and considering suitable methods. My experiences have led me to develop a keen interest in the experiences of African and Caribbean women in FE. This demographic has historically been underrepresented and marginalised in academic discourse.

My motivation for this study stems from my desire to contribute to the body of knowledge that seeks to address this gap. I believe that by focusing on the experiences of African and Caribbean women in FE, we can gain valuable insights into the unique challenges they face, and how they can be addressed to promote equity in education. It is important to note that my positionality not only influences my motivations but also how I interpret and present my research findings. I strive to approach my research with an open mind, acknowledging my biases, and constantly reflecting on how my own experiences and identity might influence my interpretation of the data. This reflexivity is crucial in ensuring the validity and reliability of my research.

The interview procedure for my PhD degree began in 2017. This entailed a sequence

of discussions and collaborations with diverse academics and professionals in my area of expertise. The interviews played a pivotal role in influencing the trajectory of my research and offered significant perspectives that, ultimately, guided my work. After four years of intensive study and research, I completed my interviews in 2021 – the turning point in a substantial phase in my scholarly journey, propelling me closer to completing my PhD.

## **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Over the years, African and Caribbean women have been generally underrepresented at senior levels in UK FE colleges. This is especially significant when you consider that women make up most of the teaching force at both national and international levels. Research on gender and management has uncovered several challenges that African and Caribbean women face as they attempt to advance their careers into management and leadership roles in educational institutions. While the underrepresentation of African and Caribbean women in leadership roles in academic institutions is a global concern, it is especially evident in developing countries. According to Combs (2003), research conducted over the course of the past few decades into racial inequality and discrimination in the education sector has included concern about the lack of inclusion or progression of African and Caribbean staff. They are more likely than White staff to report that they consider their career progression and promotion to be blocked (Commission for Black Staff in Further Education, 2002, p.81). Only 7% of college presidents are members of Black, Asian or minority ethnic (BAME) groups (Fino, 2019).

Several programmes to develop and promote BAME leaders have been created but have ended in recent years. This is probably attributable to the merging of colleges, as noted by Hadawi (2019). Such closed programmes include the Black leadership initiative (BLI), which was established in 2002; the Network for Black and Asian Professionals, which disbanded in 2015; and the Association of College BAME Principals' Group, which disbanded in 2017. Within England's 185 general FE colleges, 52% of college leaders are female, and 9.8% of college principals or chief executive officers (CEOs) are from a BAME background, according to data from the Education



and Training Foundation (ETF) in 2017 (Hadawi, 2018). The percentage of non-White college administrators does not correspond to the nation's demographics. According to census data, 13% of the population in 2011 was BAME.

*"There are not enough BAME leaders in further education, it's as simple as that"* (Kirsti Lord, Association of Colleges' Deputy Chief Executive, 2019, p.1)

The most recent findings from research carried out by The Times Educational Supplement (TES) found that FE institutions continued to have an inadequate level of diverse leadership.

*"8.7 per cent of senior college leaders identify as from a BAME background. 84 per cent of senior leaders in English colleges identify as White British"* (Kate Parker, 2020, p.1, *TES Magazine*)

Dr Lynne Sedgemore, who led the Centre for Excellence in Leadership, said that the numbers of BAME leaders between 2004 and 2008 were unsatisfactory. The number of BAME college leaders has decreased from 13% in 2017 to around 5-6%. Weale (2020) believes that allegations of widespread racism in the industry are responsible for this declining trend. At the same time, the number of students who identify as belonging to BAME groups has increased, and this group accounted for 30% of the overall student body in institutions of FE in 2018 (Weale, 2020). A group named the Black FE leadership group, which comprises principals of FE colleges with BAME backgrounds, is demanding immediate action to address racism in FE, which the group claims is undermining "the sector's ability to fully engage with all of its constituents" (Weale, 2020, p.1). The Association of Colleges estimates that between 12 and 14 of England's 239 FE colleges are currently led by principals from BAME backgrounds, although it states that it does not have access to official data (Weale, 2020).

Following the argument that the journey made by African and Caribbean women towards senior positions in FE should be given research consideration, I attempted two fundamental tasks to contribute to the literature. The first was to explore the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women as they sought such senior positions as they are significantly underrepresented in this sector. This was with a view to gaining

a better understanding of the personal and professional perceptions of these women during their journeys. The second was to gain insight into the unique experiences of African and Caribbean women through the use of the concepts of Black feminist thought (BFT) and critical race theory (CRT) to answer questions posed during this study (Collins, 2002; Davis, 1983; Giddens, 1984; Johnson-Bailey, 2001). BFT is a significant theoretical framework that discusses how intersecting systems of oppression, encompassing race, gender, class, and sexuality, influence the lived realities of African and Caribbean women. The argument posits that there exists an inherent and inseparable connection between sexism, class inequality, and racism. CRT is a theoretical framework used to analyse the complex links between society, and culture, and how race, law, and power are conceptualised and operationalised. The examination of the connections among race, law, and social concerns is a frequently used approach within the field of social sciences. It enabled me to build on a critical social theory of African and Caribbean women's experiences as collective 'agents of knowledge' (Collins, 1990, p.7) at the centre of discourse and 'analysis' (Collins, 1990, p.1). BFT argues that race, class, and gender have an impact on African and Caribbean women's experiences in education (Abdi et al., 2015). Various theories have been explored to examine the experiences of African and Caribbean women. One frequently used concept is intersectionality, a theoretical framework introduced by Crenshaw (1989). It is often used to examine the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women while understanding how various elements of an individual's social and political identities link to distinct forms of discrimination or privilege. This led to the term 'womanism', which was introduced by Walker (1983). Walker (1983) defined 'a womanist' as a Black feminist or a woman of colour and used both terms interchangeably. According to Walker (1983), most African and Caribbean women see no distinction between the two, as they both argue for the common cause of self-definition and self-determination among African and Caribbean women. According to Omolade (1994), the term Black feminism is occasionally referred to as womanism due to its shared focus on tackling both sexism and racism. The Black feminist movement specifically addresses the experiences of African and Caribbean women who are actively involved in their own communities' attempts to achieve equality and freedom (Omolade, 1994).

Womanism involves the formation of a social transformational framework that is rooted in the lived experiences and problem-solving approaches of African and Caribbean women within their day-to-day lives and environments. The primary focus is the interconnections between various forms of oppression and the strategies aimed at achieving liberation. These theories contribute to a better understanding of the distinct experiences of African and Caribbean women as they consider the influence that race, gender, social class, and other aspects of society have on their experiences.

This project aimed to apply BFT to examine the experiences of African and Caribbean women in the UK. This theoretical framework acted as a lens through which to analyse the epistemological perspectives of those who experienced racism, discrimination, and marginalisation. Researchers such as Bernal (2002) and Ladson-Billings (2002) support this approach. I explored the complex lived experiences of African and Caribbean women, how they narrated their journeys towards senior positions and the factors that influenced their chosen career paths and their achievement of senior positions. I was also interested in the impact this had, not only on the restrictions but also on the challenges and barriers they faced as they worked towards senior positions. This was in recognition of the fact that educationalists, researchers working in the field of education, policymakers, and practitioners were trying to increase the numbers of women in senior positions, particularly African and Caribbean women. The following research questions were developed to fulfil these aims:

RQ1. How do African and Caribbean women narrate their journeys towards senior positions in FE?

RQ2. What factors influenced African and Caribbean women to embark on their chosen career paths?

RQ3. What do they perceive to be the factors that enabled them to achieve senior positions?

RQ4. What do they perceive to be the factors that restricted or challenged them in their journeys towards senior positions?

## 1.2 The scope of the research enquiry

The research questions are the product of my journey towards a senior position in FE and the lived experiences I gained along the way. As a mature student with a non-traditional educational background, I was inspired to conduct this investigation. Therefore, it is important to outline this personal narrative to demonstrate how it has shaped the research. To do this, I have charted my journey towards a senior position (Figure 1) like the women who took part in this study. I narrated~~d~~ and charted the events and experiences that have been important in directing my journey towards a senior position in FE and that inspired this research. Most of my education and professional history, as well as the setting in which I acquired invaluable experience, was gained through study and work in FE colleges. As a mature student, and later, when my career began in FE, I faced many challenges and obstacles, which influenced my aspirations. For instance, there were instances in which I was subjected to challenging working conditions, such as working during nights and occasionally on weekends, while still having to handle an increased workload. I remember when I assumed the role of a course leader several years ago. It became apparent that there was a lack of enthusiasm about the position, as I discovered upon being offered the role and realising that I had been the sole applicant.

I would argue that it was because of this that I decided to study on an Access to Higher Education programme and to go to university, something that came as a surprise to my family. This has helped me to develop a deep understanding of where I stand personally in education and society; my thoughts, and experiences, and how I believe education has the potential to act as a means of achieving social mobility. I consider that it is crucial to recognise the context in which I situate this research and I believe that the research is enhanced by the fact that I have worked in various FE colleges for many years. My roles have included lecturer, coordinator, course leader, tutor, and head of studies, and recently I have been promoted to senior lecturer, course coordinator, and module leader. In these roles, I have access to the 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci, 1971) who dominate the field of study. My journey and extensive experience that have led me to a senior position in FE were both challenging and rewarding. It took ten years of job applications before I was offered a position as

a lecturer in FE; the first job I was able to get in the field was in London and I was offered two hours of work per week.

I now hold a senior position as a senior lecturer on an undergraduate degree programme and which includes being a module leader in partnership with three universities. However, the journey to get there was long and arduous (Figure 1).

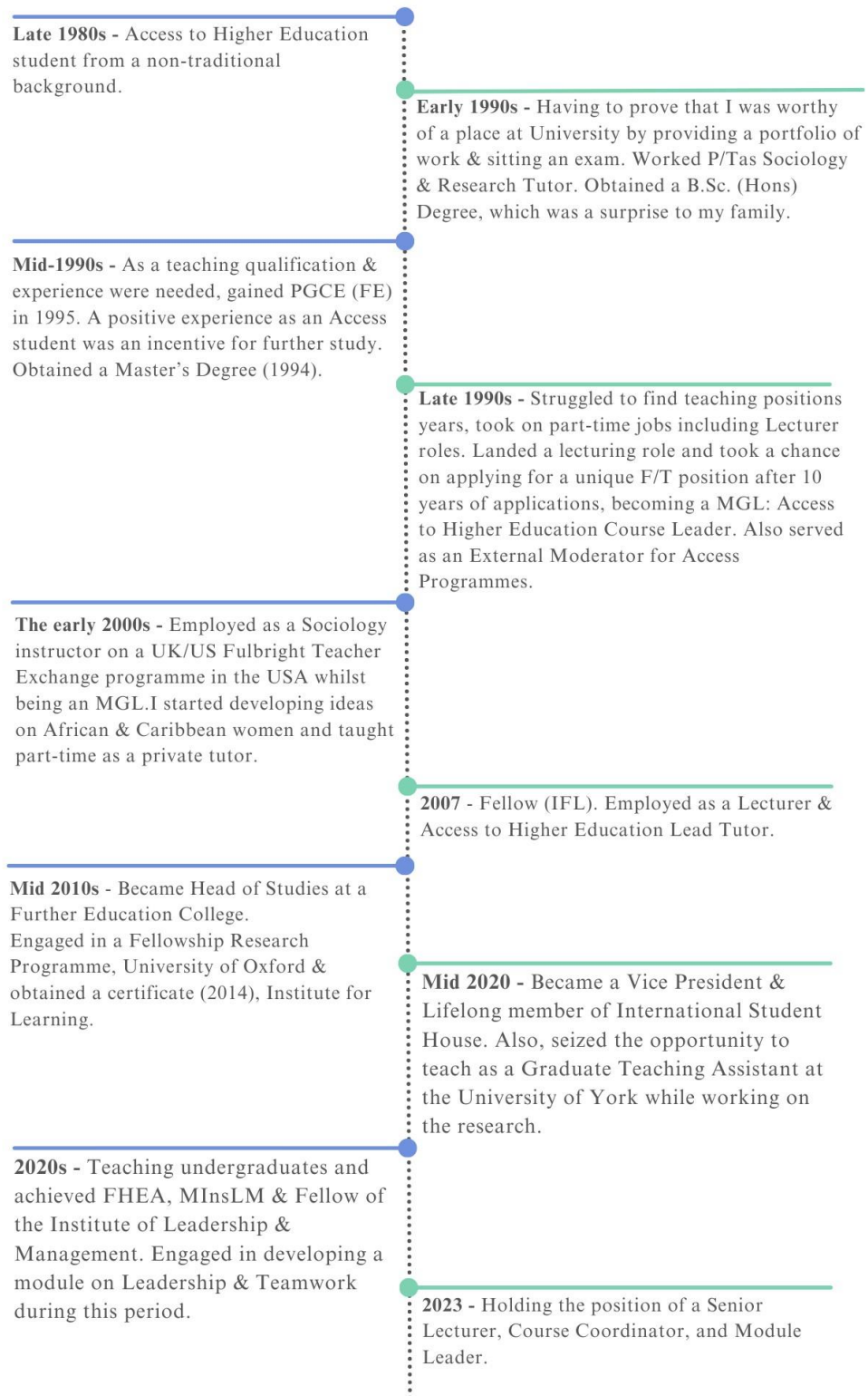


Figure 1: A Researcher's Journey

### **1.3 The anticipated contributions of the study**

This study contributes valuable insights to our understanding of African and Caribbean women's experiences of navigating their way into senior leadership positions and the barriers they face. The study may interest educationalists, researchers in the field of education, policymakers and practitioners who seek to promote women of African and Caribbean heritage. Firstly, insight into this journey contributes knowledge of the phenomenon. It explains African and Caribbean women's relationships with other women at work, their perceptions and the impact of achieving senior positions in FE colleges. Secondly, generating knowledge of African and Caribbean women's journeys towards senior positions may create a framework that improves the everyday experiences of African and Caribbean women in FE. The insights gained from this in-depth qualitative study should assist in the development of strategies and policies for local FE institutions in relation to African and Caribbean women. My research makes a significant contribution to the evidence base in a field in which studies and research literature are either lacking or outdated.

### **1.4 The structure of the thesis**

The thesis consists of eight chapters, including this chapter.

Chapter 2 explores existing literature on the theories surrounding the underrepresentation of African and Caribbean women in senior positions within the field of education, with a specific emphasis on FE. It explores the challenges posed by microaggressions as a pervasive form of everyday bias, as well as the leadership concerns that are associated with transitioning into management roles. Furthermore, the experiences of African and Caribbean women within the workplace are explored and discussed. The theoretical framework through which to understand African and Caribbean women's trajectories is summarised and examined.

Chapter 3 examines the methodology used in this study. An inductive approach, also known as inductive reasoning, was employed. It involved making observations and subsequent formulation of theories based on the research findings.

Inductive research encompasses the examination of patterns resulting from empirical observation and the formulation of explanatory theories through a sequential progression of hypotheses (Bernard, 2011). This methodology aims to derive meaning from the collected data to find patterns and correlations to establish a theoretical framework. The rationale for employing an inductive technique is supported by epistemological and ontological principles, which include a justification for the research selection and design. The strengths and flaws that are inherent in the research design are explored to ensure the study's credibility and reliability. The chapter holds a detailed explanation of the actions conducted at each stage of the study, analyses the research methodology chosen, and discusses the decision-making process, including ethical considerations and ideas related to qualitative research. This study involved the use of two methods of study: the biographic-narrative interpretive method (BNIM) and semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 4 introduces the study participants. The chapter provides an overview of their characteristics and demographics. It presents thorough accounts that are based on their profiles. The pseudonyms were chosen to use African and Caribbean names that effectively represented each individual's identity. The names reflected each participant's self-identification as a member of a particular ethnic group. All participants demonstrated genuine eagerness to participate in this research work, expressing appreciation for the chance to contribute their personal experiences. The research study incorporated 13 participant profiles. The study participants ranged in age from 30 to 62 years. The study sample comprised nine participants of Caribbean ethnicity and four of African background. The variables that were examined in this study encompassed age, race/ethnicity, and initial qualifications, and investigated the paths they took to pursue FE and to acquire academic qualifications, as well as their latest occupational role or position.

The chapters after Chapter 4 discuss and analyse the research findings. The analysis was conducted in accordance with the objectives of the study, the research questions that were formulated, and the main themes and concerns that developed from the collected data.



Chapter 5 discusses the elements that affected African and Caribbean women's decisions regarding their career pathways in the UK. It covers various important aspects, such as emerging themes derived from the data, career aspirations, the experiences of women in school, the influence of parents, and women's academic achievements. This chapter focuses on the factors that have influenced women's career choices in the UK. It provides a response to research question two: what factors influenced the participants to embark on their chosen career paths? The aim was to examine how the women mapped their career pathways in relation to the forces that drove them in certain directions and the motivations behind their career choices. Factors that influenced the women's career aspirations are examined. Specifically, it explores the perspectives and support provided by parents, with a particular emphasis on the role of mothers. Additionally, the chapter considers the impact of academic achievements on career aspirations, and the patterns observed in participants' self-identification and their connection to their cultural background. Black feminist philosophy (Collins, 2000) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989) are applied to conceptualise the process by which gendered racial identity is formed among African and Caribbean women. This approach serves to address the gaps that have been identified within the current body of research relating to racial identification and gender identity. CRT is used to analyse the educational experiences of African and Caribbean girls in schools with a mostly White student population.

Chapter 6 examines the way in which individuals of African and Caribbean heritage articulate their journeys and achievements in reaching senior positions within FE. It addresses different factors that have contributed to their achievement of those positions, including their career trajectories, opportunities and investments, and personal reflections. This chapter examines the experiences of African and Caribbean women as they navigate their journeys through FE institutions, focusing on their narratives as members of minority groups. The analysis in this chapter addresses research questions one and three: how do African and Caribbean women narrate their journeys towards senior positions in FE? and what do they perceive to be the factors that enabled them to achieve senior positions? This chapter focuses on the reasons that the women consider have contributed to their achievement of senior FE positions

in the UK. African and Caribbean women offer valuable insights into their experiences. Chapter 7 addresses research question 4. It investigates the issues that have limited women in their pursuit of senior FE positions and the obstacles they have faced. The focus is on the work environment and the level of visibility that participants have experienced. The absence of experienced mentors is reported as a particularly significant challenge. The lack of diversity inside mostly White educational institutions reflects the unequal experiences that African and Caribbean professionals face (Hurtado et al., 1998). The women express their concerns regarding the lack of diversity and representation within their workplaces, particularly concerning the underrepresentation of African and Caribbean women. The participants share their experiences of working in settings in which African and Caribbean women are absent in leadership roles. This situation makes it difficult for the women to collaborate. The findings of the study unveil several challenges that span race, age, socioeconomic position and restricted access to opportunities. The challenges they face in their pursuit of senior management roles are analysed. These challenges encompass aspects such as the work environment, visibility, limited experience, and difficulties specific to the FE sector.

Chapter 8, the final chapter, summarises the research inquiry and its findings and offers reflective insights. The original contributions that have been made to both theory and practice are examined. The chapter presents a comprehensive summary of the principal discoveries and notable arguments put forth during the investigation. The scope of coverage encompasses an analysis and contemplation of the research work. The study presents a reflective examination of the data, with a specific focus on the implications regarding senior roles within FE colleges. The contributions made to knowledge and practice in the FE sector are significant. These contributions play a crucial role in our understanding and application of educational practices within the FE context.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.0 Introduction**

In this chapter, the literature that is relevant to the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women who hold senior positions in the FE sector is discussed. In the literature, aspects of FE, the journeys of African and Caribbean women in education, and their lived experiences in leadership positions have been investigated. This chapter explores the interrelated and significant concerns that are fundamental to my research on the systematic determinants that influence the career paths of African and Caribbean women in FE. The term 'senior positions' is used throughout the research to refer to managerial level roles in top and middle management teams or groups and includes vice-principals and principals. This term is used interchangeably with management positions. People in a variety of positions within their institutions who are referred to in a variety of ways within those institutions as programme sector or teaching staff, curriculum/programme leaders, managers and developers, and cross-college co-ordinators are referred to as middle managers. Middle managers have jobs that frequently involve both management and teaching responsibilities (Shain, 2000)

### **2.0.1. Identification as 'Black'**

The term 'Black' appears throughout this research project. It refers specifically to women who are of African and/or Caribbean descent and who presently reside in the UK. The idea of what it means to be Black has developed over the course of history to become complex and fraught with debate. The term covers a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds and is in some cases offensive and unreliable (Shain and Bhopal, 1994). Mirza (1997) had a difficult time understanding the concepts of 'Black' and 'Black women' before she began to research and explore the lives of African and Caribbean women. She challenges who should be considered 'Black'; she contends that Americans use the term about people of African descent and their descendants who have a history of slavery, even though the term has different meanings depending on the academic and cultural context in which it is used. According to Mirza (1997), there are two main contexts in which the phrase is used: academic and cultural. Both contexts can be broken down further into subcategories. In the context of academia, the term 'Black' is widely used to describe a racial category of humans. This racialised categorisation is employed typically as a political and skin colour-oriented classification for communities that are defined by a medium- to dark-brown complexion.

The issue of skin tone has been a topic that has often been overlooked or avoided in discussion. Discomfort arises from the recognition that some employers and colleagues associate dark black skin with inferiority, which may lead to a perception of subpar performance in professional settings (Showunmi, 2023). These ideologies have re-emerged and been increased by recent far-right discourse (Murray and Herrnstein, 1994). In a book entitled *The Bell Curve*, Murray and Herrnstein (1994) asserted that there is a correlation between darker skin and lower intelligence. The claim lacked empirical evidence. In 2011, Kanazawa, an academic affiliated with the London School of Economics, asserted that empirical evidence indicated that African and Caribbean women were perceived as the least attractive globally. Subsequently, he acknowledged the flawed basis of this analysis associated with 'race', but other

proponents have employed incorrect information to posit the inferiority of Black people in comparison with their White counterparts.

The term 'Black' has a variety of connotations in the cultural setting that depend on the culture and historical context in which it is used. In recent years, there have been several discussions and issues regarding the usage of the term 'Black' as well as its capitalisation. The term may be used in some cultural settings to refer to people of African descent; but, in other situations, the term may be used to refer to people who have dark complexions, regardless of their ethnic or racial origins. Therefore, for this research, the phrase 'African and Caribbean women' is used instead of the term 'Black'.

## **2.1 African and Caribbean Women: Progression in Further Education**

There has been little research in the UK on African and Caribbean staff working in senior positions in FE. Studies published since the 1980s have examined only the leadership characteristics of African and Caribbean women, the barriers they face, and gender and racial assumptions (Collins, 2000). Senior positions have been associated with White middle- and upper-class women and no studies have been performed on the experiences of African and Caribbean women in senior positions (Collins, 2000; Delany and Rogers, 2004; White, 1999). Even when African and Caribbean women are represented in senior positions, many experience problems with 'gendered racism' (Essed, 1991). They are subjected to sexism and racism because of their African and Caribbean heritage as well as their gender, even though they exist simultaneously in both identities. Women of African and Caribbean heritage have achieved a great deal of success in a variety of fields, despite the inequality that exists throughout society, including in the workplace.

Once African and Caribbean women take up senior professional positions in education, they are faced with issues of being African, Caribbean and female. As they deal with internal and external pressures and lead successfully, their situation is then scrutinised (Boris-Schacter and Lager, 2006; Jean-Marie and Martinez, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1993; Young and Skria, 2003). Young (1999) asserts that if African and Caribbean women are

placed in leadership roles, “it must be tokenism. It can’t be because she’s any good. It’s got to be a sop to political correctness” (Young, cited in Purcell, 1999, p.12 *NATFHE [National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education] Journal*). The assertion is that her ability is unlikely to be the reason for her placement in the role. The action can be perceived as a concession made in response to societal expectations of political correctness. Young was the first Caribbean woman awarded with a university professorship. She argued that progress through the system was difficult and competition in terms of publications, administration, and curriculum “requires a certain ruthlessness and single-mindedness” (p.12).

The problems associated with African and Caribbean women’s journeys towards senior positions contribute to the ongoing debate regarding their experiences and positions in the UK. This debate is focused on women’s experiences and positions in the workplace. For instance, many women are marginalised because of their perceived capabilities; they face bureaucracy and organisational impediments (Sangha, 2011); they are disempowered; they are excluded from the social network or are the only woman (Byrd, 2009); they are underrepresented in academic professional roles and overrepresented in manual jobs such as secretary, security guard or non-academic management roles (Shillian, 2014).

Research conducted by Bhopal (2014) was focused on the educational successes and challenges faced by underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Bhopal focused on HE in her studies, but the same may be stated about African and Caribbean women in FE institutions. She argued that inequalities in academia were caused by economic and social decline, which had a substantial impact on the element of risk in the personal and professional lives of persons both inside and outside the university. It is possible that the competitive mechanisms of the research excellence framework exacerbate this problem for BAME academics in the UK, yet comparable pressures affect United States (US) academics who are confronted with severe funding cuts and fears of job insecurity.

Santamaría (2012) documented her journey from first-generation immigrant to academic, in which position she studied the situation from a Black feminist

perspective. She was the first member of her family to graduate from college. She agreed that there was a shortage of African and Caribbean women in education and senior positions. She considered that they did not benefit from mentoring or have direct access to opportunities. The Commission for Black Staff in FE (2002) reported that African and Caribbean women faced difficulties as a result of their status as members of two minority groups (p.2003), and that this had led to their significant lack of representation in leadership positions within educational institutions.

According to the Women's Leadership Network (2012), despite the incorporation of women's colleges and universities, African and Caribbean women continue to be underrepresented as college principals. The established male leadership orthodoxy in FE has been challenged but FE college leadership continues to be perceived as an exclusive 'boys' club' by African and Caribbean women (Kerfoot & Whitehead, 1998; Shain, 2000). Some women have made significant efforts to overcome these barriers and have progressed into senior positions. However, the number remains low, which may be the result of exclusionary challenges such as racism and sexism. The industrial and occupational distribution of African and Caribbean women is such that they are concentrated in a few occupations in academia, and few occupy senior positions such as head of department, senior lecturer or senior researcher. If men and women received the same level of training, there would be equal employment and promotion opportunities for both genders. Yet there is a lack of visibility and an underrepresentation of African and Caribbean women in senior positions in education, which justifies this current research.

### **2.1.1 African and Caribbean women's opportunities in FE colleges**

FE colleges are a component of the learning and skills sector of the educational system in the UK. The government considers that the sector is of 'strategic importance' in terms of the development of skills that will both benefit the economy and promote social inclusion, because these advantages will be mutually beneficial (Jameson, 2008, p.6). Each year more than 4.5 million individuals sign up for programmes offered by FE institutions (Lifelong Learning UK, 2008a). Of those, 3.16 million are adults who wish

to learn new skills (Skills Funding Agency, 2012a). More than 260,000 people are employed in FE (Lifelong Learning UK 2008a, 2011a).

FE colleges accept full-time and part-time students aged between 14 and 90 years, but their focus is on students who are between the ages of 16 and 25. These institutions offer a diverse range of vocational educational training, including courses that lead to qualifications such as the Higher National Diploma (HND) and those run by the Business Technology Education Council (BTEC), in addition to more traditional professional education opportunities. In the past, students who had finished their secondary school education would participate in these activities as part of their post-school tertiary education, also referred to as third-level education. These days, the terms 'post-secondary' or 'post-16' education are used, and FE colleges offer teaching for qualifications that would formerly have been offered only at secondary level, such as the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE), as well as advanced levels (A-levels), advanced subsidiary levels (AS-levels), Scottish Highers, degree programmes for students enrolled in HE, and Access programmes. Access is a term that has traditionally been associated with adult and continuing education. Educators view this as an alternative route for students who have been unable to complete their education through the normal channels (GCSEs and A-levels).

FE colleges offer different educational paths for mature and economically disadvantaged students to boost HE access. They provide HNDs, BTECs, GCSEs, A-levels, and Access programmes for students who missed regular educational trajectories. Senior and leadership roles at FE colleges are underrepresented by African and Caribbean staff and women. They struggle to progress professionally due to systematic racism, gender inequality, and conventional standards. FE offers professional development, but institutional prejudices and lack of support make senior roles difficult to achieve. Main Differences FE enables African and Caribbean students to access HE and careers through inclusive education. African and Caribbean women staff suffer greater professional challenges in FE colleges than students, despite formal support. As with other FE institutions, in FE colleges African and Caribbean women have historically been underrepresented in senior positions and among the cohort of principals, and this situation has persisted (Walker, 2013). African and Caribbean



women are expected to conform to the dominant White societal norms regarding appropriate behaviour (Kramer, 2020).

### **2.1.2 Alternative Route: The Shaping of African and Caribbean Women's Careers through Further Education**

The traditional route into HE is to complete GCSEs and A-levels before progressing to university. The Access route to HE is an alternative for students who do not meet these requirements, such as mature students. A few examples of Access programmes are Fresh Start, Return to Study, Threshold, Fresh Horizons, and General Education for Mature Students. Students may also obtain a Certificate of Completion of Studies in Preparation for Admission to a Higher Educational Institution (Evans and McCulloch, 1987). The goal of these programmes is to broaden the student body that is represented in HE. Examples of such students are those who originate from economically challenged households; women; and members of racial or ethnic minorities (particularly Africans and Caribbeans) who live in communities that encounter barriers to accessing FE or HE. At least half of the women who took part in my study chose to proceed in this manner (Woodrow, 1988). According to the findings of Goodrham and Hodkinson (2004), FE also meets the educational and professional development needs of employees.

### **2.1.3 Empowerment through Education: African and Caribbean Women in Leadership**

Colleges that offer FE provide a second chance to people who were not successful in their school education or who have paused employment to obtain a degree or to learn new skills. Many students leave secondary education either dissatisfied or disheartened, and they view FE as a way back into learning. Others may have the opportunity to remain in secondary school, but instead, they choose to attend FE colleges where they can study a wide range of subjects at different levels. The staff of FE colleges are "those who occupy a broad range of positions within their situations

and whose work often involves a combination of management and teaching” (Shain, 2000, p.218). Such positions vary in name: principal, vice-principal, FE director or head of FE, divisional manager, course coordinator, course leader, curriculum manager, and senior lecturer.

Despite their wide appeal, these colleges are the “Cinderella service” in comparison with schools and HE institutions (Gleeson, 1999; Gleeson et al., 2005), so-called because they are under-resourced, undervalued and under-researched in comparison with compulsory schooling and HE (Randle and Brady, 1997). Johnson (2006) argued that FE was “no Cinderella” service but rather an “engine for prosperity” and suggested that this “perception should be buried” (Johnson, 2006, p.1).

The sector’s appeal to women is clearly demonstrated by their majority representation among all learners. The presence of a diverse array of courses, such as English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), basic English and mathematics, vocational training, GCSEs, Access to HE offerings, and HE programmes, within the field of FE is to be expected, given its historical trajectory. FE encompasses any form of academic pursuit undertaken after secondary education, except HE programmes that are pursued within the framework of undergraduate or graduate degrees. FE covers three categories of technical and applied qualifications that are designed for students aged 16 to 19 years. These include Level 3 technical qualifications, which enable students to specialise in a particular technical occupation. Level 2 technical certificates are aimed to facilitate employment opportunities or to enable progression to a higher tech level. Lastly, applied general qualifications are intended to facilitate the continuation of general education at an advanced level through applied learning.

The CEO of the Association of Colleges, David Hughes, delivered a speech to a large audience of executives in the FE sector, in which he questioned the common practice of labelling the sector as a ‘second chance’ (cited in *TES Magazine* by Otty, 2017, p.1). According to Hughes, who had personally experienced the transition from secondary education to FE, he believed that education served as a crucial opportunity for a significant number of young people in general. Hughes asserted that schools played a vital role in offering less privileged individuals their initial and best possible

opportunities for success (cited in *TES Magazine* by Otty, 2017, p.1).

## **2.2 Breaking Barriers: Journeys of African and Caribbean Women in Senior Leadership**

The journey taken by African and Caribbean women towards leadership roles is one of persistence and unwavering commitment. According to Amber (2012), the trajectory of a leader's development is influenced by the various events that the person encounters in their daily life, as these encounters include a range of challenges and diversities that move individuals from one point to another. This phenomenon, which is referred to as 'passage', affects the decisions made by a leader (Dotlich, 2005, p.1). A leader's journey can be seen in hindsight as pivotal because it affects and nurtures learning through trial and error (Maxwell, 2013), prior experience, and character. Furthermore, it is significant because it shapes the leader's character. The journey itself is important since during it, the future leader learns about the influences, mentors, diverse experiences and decisions that define career plans. This knowledge can be significant as a person shapes their future. African and Caribbean women who experience barriers to their career progression are more likely to report a problematic journey towards senior positions, according to the findings of an online survey conducted as part of a research project commissioned by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS, 2009-2010). The survey indicated that the barriers concerned issues related to a lack of flexibility in the workplace, such as the provision of childcare and assistance from their college, as well as discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. Issues were perceived and treated differently in the cases of African and Caribbean women and therefore 'minority ethnic' people in senior positions who had progressed. This was because of the redistribution of management positions and power that was achieved through equal representation (Lumby and Coleman, 2007).

In 2015, only 14 college principals identified as being from a BAME background, according to the statistics. A report published by *The Guardian* in 2017 indicated that college staff in the FE sector had observed a decline in the representation of BAME individuals in leadership positions. Specifically, the proportion of college leaders from

these backgrounds had decreased from approximately 13% in 2017 to an estimated 5-6% at present. However, it is worth noting that the Association of Colleges does not keep official data on this matter. According to the National Biodiversity Action Plan, it is difficult to get a complete picture because the workforce data on ethnic minority employment in colleges, which are compiled by the Education and Training Foundation (ETF), the expert organisation for professional development and standards in England's FE and training sector, are not reliable. This is because the return of figures is voluntary. Only one college in three currently provides data; the others argue they do not have the capacity to do so due to a lack of staff or funding resources. The ETF established a target for the year 2020 that college leadership and management should reflect the ethnic composition of the student population. This was not achieved.

The failure to meet this target may have hampered the advancement of African and Caribbean women in the field of education. African and Caribbean communities are substantially underrepresented among managerial and senior-level positions, with a tendency to be concentrated in lower levels (Edson, 1987; Grant, 2012; McGee Banks, 2007). The underrepresentation of African and Caribbean women may have constrained their job promotion, presenting obstacles in terms of career growth and professional decision-making (Kramer, 2022).

The phenomenon of institutional racism persists as a significant factor influencing the experiences of African and Caribbean women inside organisations, resulting in their frequent exclusion from possibilities for personal and professional growth (Earley et al., 2012; Scheurich and Young, 1997, p.5). Racial discrimination in the workplace is a significant obstacle for African and Caribbean and minority ethnic employees who seek higher positions inside organisations (McNamara et al., 2009). The absence of African and Caribbean women serving as role models in leadership positions might impact the drive and ambition of African and Caribbean women in lower positions to progress professionally (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2003).

The application of an intersectional framework offers a valuable perspective for comprehending the ways in which gender and race dynamics interact with and influence the experiences of African and Caribbean and minority ethnic women, who

encounter various manifestations of oppression. Intersectionality is a theoretical framework that facilitates comprehension of the various ways in which race, gender, age, sexuality, ability and class intersect and hence influence individuals' day-to-day encounters. In other words, intersectional approaches facilitate the exploration of the interconnected factors that influence the experiences of African and Caribbean, and minority ethnic workers within their professional environments.

A damning report revealed in 2019 that thousands of African and Caribbean people had faced discrimination in the previous five years (Fino, 2019). Consequently, the Commission for African and Caribbean Staff in FE (cited in *The Guardian*, 2002) and specifically its members from African and Caribbean countries shared their concerns regarding FE colleges. Even though 20 institutions had policies regarding race equality, only 16% of those colleges had African, Caribbean, or Asian managers. The chair of the commission stated a belief that the absence of successful role models for African and Caribbean and Asian students had a knock-on effect of low aspirations and underachievement among those students. As a result of this report, the government decided to support BAME employees through the BLI, which aimed to increase awareness and improve the training of African and Caribbean leaders; this proved beneficial as the number of African and Caribbean principals rose from four in 2002 to 17 in 2012.

In 2015, the University and Colleges Union investigated the challenges faced by African and Caribbean staff members who were employed in FE. One year later, the union reflected on the challenges it had encountered during the investigation. For instance, 52% of African and Caribbean staff members were not aware of the procedures to apply for promotions (p.1). They asserted that work colleagues who held senior positions did not assist them with the processes that they had to navigate to advance their careers. As a direct consequence, they did not believe that their employer offered any opportunities for professional development or advancement. More than two-thirds (68%) of people who took the survey said that they had experienced bullying and harassment at the hands of their managers either "often" or "sometimes" (p.1). According to Atkinson and Flint (2001), many members of marginalised groups that are excluded conceal their existence from social researchers and policymakers who

are searching for evidence of the experiences of these groups; I found this to be the case when I sought African and Caribbean women who were in senior positions in FE colleges.

Consequently, the ETF established the objective that by 2020, the ethnic composition of the student body should be reflected in that of the leadership and management of colleges and universities. However, college leaders and managers stated that the absence of a well-defined strategy made it difficult to achieve these objectives. Bravo (2015) argued that there were insufficient financial resources to recruit or employ African and Caribbean principals and that to increase their recruitment, it would be necessary to make equality and diversity a factor in the grading of colleges by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). "That would at least frighten people into action" (Bravo, 2015, p.194). For equality and diversity to be taken seriously, those in senior roles, from the minister for education through FE college principals to senior managers and staff members, must acknowledge and place value on all facets of diversity.

### **2.2.1 Gender and Leadership Challenges in African and Caribbean Contexts**

Shain (2000) offered a comprehensive analysis of the main perspectives on the evolving gender dynamics within FE management. The author confronted the question of whether FE, at the senior level, remained a boys' club. This concept refers to the purported advantage that male employees possess in their interactions with influential males, in comparison with their female counterparts. For instance, Cullen and Perez-Truglia (2020) argued that male employees might engage in informal socialising with their male bosses in a manner that was not accessible to female employees. Shain (2000) examined the extent to which women appointed to senior and middle management roles in FE were tasked with the responsibility of implementing organisational change. The author examined the complex connection between gender and management within the context of FE. She investigated recent research that had been conducted within the FE sector to explore the strategies employed by female FE managers in their pursuit of a harmonious equilibrium

between their aspirations for engagement in stimulating professional roles, and the pressures that stemmed from working within a gendered organisational culture that necessitated significant exertion of effort.

There have been requests for more accountability within the FE system due to low staff morale and widespread claims of bullying, corruption and major financial mismanagement (Hodge, 1998). According to the Further Education Funding Council for England (1998), there was a 32% turnover in principals between the years 1993 and 1996, resulting in lecturers and managers being affected. Stott and Lawson (1997) suggested that more female representation was required in management. This led to considerations of matters of gender, employment, and organisational dynamics within the field of FE. For instance, Newman (1994) questioned whether there was an emergence of new organisational environments that aimed to support and legitimise women's distinctive managerial approaches. It appears that FE is experiencing a process of demasculinisation, characterised by a concentration of women in middle management roles and the 'burden of transformation' as described by Shain (2000) in the sector (Prichard et al., 1998). Alternatively, one could argue that identities may be being transformed, as some female managers embrace traditionally masculine strategies in their professional endeavours (Whitehead, 1998; Yeatman, 1990).

Concerning middle managers, masculine roles include not only the management of budgets and people in the quest for increased efficiency but also the mediation of conflicts and difficulties associated with rapid and unpredictable change (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Gleeson and Shain, 1999). This is because unexpected and unpredictable change can bring about many challenges and opportunities. Middle management emerges as a key area in which tensions, stresses, and examples of bullying behaviour multiply. While inclusiveness and cooperation may be the discursive reality of senior management (although not challenged), senior management emerges as a key sector in which bullying activity is more prevalent. This shows that "crisis and stress are gradually being pushed further down the line" (Watkins, 1993) to the sector in which most women appointed to managerial roles since 1993 are located (Further Education Development Agency, 1997; Prichard et al., 1998). This trend is expected to continue.

The constantly developing statistical image of women in FE management is complicated and reveals as many inconsistencies as it does solutions to the concerns that were posed at the outset of this thesis. There is a movement towards management approaches that are more feminine. However, a more in-depth investigation finds that the masculine competitive ideals that support policy and practice in the FE sector have not been replaced by this method of management, even though it has been adopted by many women and some men. Ozgan and Walker (1999) claim that the thrusting competitive cost-cutting entrepreneurialism of the early 1990s and the team-building and empowering approach of the late 1990s are two sides of the same managerial text. These two approaches were prevalent in the public sector during the first and second waves of managerial thought, respectively. What this may imply is that as tensions and contradictions are encountered in the FE workplace, female managers are expected to perform and manage a range of masculine and feminine identities in (gender-appropriate) circumstances. An investigation was conducted into the gender dynamics of management. In the next section, the dynamics of management are examined in connection with the representation of women in leadership positions.

### **2.3 Empowering African and Caribbean Women: Leadership and Work Challenges**

According to Sangha (2011), the beliefs, ideas, and values of Asian, African, and Caribbean minorities have motivated them to fight against and overcome their personal experiences of being disadvantaged, inequity, and racial discrimination. Their upbringing and their heritage have served as motivation and encouragement for them to pursue education and to work their way up into positions of authority. According to the findings of comparative studies of the experiences of African and Caribbean female managers and White female managers, there are significant discrepancies in the changes that are made available to each group in terms of professional development (Hite, 2004). When African and Caribbean women strive or aspire to senior positions that are traditionally dominated by White men, their dual identities, as women and as



African and Caribbean people, are barriers to their career progression in these positions (Basit, 2012; Crenshaw, 1991).

Mackay and Etienne (2006) investigated the experiences and viewpoints of African and Caribbean managers working in FE colleges, as well as the challenges and barriers they encountered while attempting to advance their professional careers. The main conclusions of the investigation by the Commission for Black Staff in FE emphasised a lack of participation by African and Caribbean employees in positions of management and senior management. Specifically, it pointed out that the proportion of African and Caribbean employees in managerial positions was 4.9%. A significant proportion of FE colleges had workforces that comprised less than 5% minority ethnic staff members. The data indicated an increased likelihood that managerial roles were occupied by White members of staff. African and Caribbean workers were disproportionately represented in part-time lecturing positions, accounting for 8.5% of the workforce, while they were underrepresented in more secure roles, comprising only 4.5% of the total. In general, African and Caribbean employees had greater levels of education than White employees (Commission for Black Staff in FE, 2002, pp.31, 33, 35, 39). These findings indicate that it is necessary to understand the obstacles encountered and achievements made by African and Caribbean managers to provide advice for the advancement of their careers in FE colleges. The failure to find published narratives in the UK that relate to the experiences of African and Caribbean women managers in the field of education presents a compelling case for more inquiry.

Walker's (2013) research explored why there were so few women in positions of authority in the FE sector. She argued that even though women were in the majority in the field of FE in overall staff numbers, this made no difference in terms of the representation of these women in leadership positions. She investigated the experiences of Black and minority ethnic (BME) and White women who were in senior leadership positions and concluded that these women had encountered barriers and no support throughout their period of transition. Curtis (2017) looked at the intersectional complexities of African and Caribbean women and their impact on leadership from the standpoint of management in education. She argued that gender played a complex role that shaped the relationship between perceived ideals of

womanhood and leadership, the differences between leadership and management in the early years, and the skills required in areas of socioeconomic deprivation. According to Curtis (2017), there were concerns regarding manners of speech, modes of dress, and customary hairstyles such as braids, afros and dreadlocks. The findings of a 2023 survey into workplace hair acceptance, which was conducted by the organisers of World Afro Day, indicated that there was a prevalent bias against afro hair within professional settings. This bias has been found to have detrimental effects on employment opportunities and can lead to job losses. The results of the survey also highlighted the existence of a hierarchy of hairstyles in office environments, in which hairstyles that aligned more closely with European standards were preferred over African and Caribbean designs (Nadine White, 2023, *The Independent*). Curtis (2017) considered that earlier research that had investigated African and Caribbean women leaders had not considered the experiences, narratives, or voices of the women being researched. She described this as a lapse in judgement that had created a void in the academic environment. She considered that her 2014 study had been an important opportunity to correct this imbalance.

Women are being employed in various professions, and some eventually gained senior-level positions. However, the number of BAME women in management and leadership roles continues to be low. BAME women are traditionally underrepresented in positions of power. An extensive analysis conducted by the company McKinsey (2015) showed that individuals who belonged to BME communities were concerned about issues of fairness and equity, while the same study indicated that diverse organisations were more likely to attain increased levels of success. The research revealed that organisations that were well placed to racial and ethnic diversity showed a 35% greater likelihood of an increase in financial outcomes that exceeded the norm for their national industries, in comparison to companies that lacked diversity (McKinsey, 2015).

The market experiences significant impacts due to inadequate use and diminished productivity resulting from the unemployment or overqualification of some people from minority backgrounds. If the employment rate for ethnic minorities was equal to that of their White counterparts, and individuals from BME backgrounds were

able to secure positions that aligned with their skills, the potential advantages would be substantial. The participation and development of BME people in the job market may be annually earnings increase of £24 billion for the UK, based on the McGregor-Smith assessment (2016). This figure corresponds to around 1.3% of the country's gross domestic product.

The structure of the labour market in the United Kingdom has seen substantial changes throughout the past forty years. The workforce is experiencing a rise in the percentage of individuals from a BME background. According to the 2016 annual population survey conducted by the Office for National Statistics, 14% of people fall into this category, and projections indicate that the figure is anticipated to reach 21% by 2051, as shown by Wohland et al. (2010). Nevertheless, this proportion is not reflected in the numbers of BME people who work in professional environments, as a significant number of individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds are disproportionately represented in lower-wage occupations. Based on the research carried out in 2015 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, it was found that individuals belonging to Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) origins indicated a greater possibility of being employed in sectors such as catering, hairdressing, and textiles (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2015).

Many academics consider that as overt forms of racism have become unacceptable in the UK, covert forms have emerged to fill the void (Eddo-Lodge, 2017). The term 'racial macroaggressions' is used to refer to hostile practices that may be overt, covert, unconscious, or subtle. These insidious forms of racism have largely overtaken more overt and conscious manifestations of racism. Research carried out by Lifelong Learning UK (2011) shed light on the detrimental effects that racial macroaggressions have, not only on the career decisions made by BAME women, but also on their mental health and overall well-being. The researchers investigated the factors that prevented people of African, Asian, or Middle Eastern ancestry from advancing their careers in the FE sector. The participants reported being subjected to unequal treatment that was influenced by unfavourable preconceptions and attitudes regarding BAME individuals. BAME women have disclosed that they see challenges in communication between themselves and their White male counterparts, and have described instances

where male senior managers, irrespective of their racial background, held viewpoints that were discriminatory based on race and/or gender. Furthermore, it was found that women from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds expressed difficulties in establishing professional networks within their workplaces, mostly due to the underrepresentation of BME women in the labour force.

One participant said:

*“There is a ceiling for BME [staff], as BME staff are not told about jobs because they don’t have the same level of informal contact and so don’t hear about opportunities”* (Lifelong Learning UK, 2011).

Davidson (1997) defined the phrase ‘concrete ceiling’ to describe the systemic discrimination that prevents African and Caribbean women from being promoted and to contrast it with the ‘glass ceiling’ that is experienced by White women, which appears to be a less significant barrier. Feminists coined the phrase ‘glass ceiling’ to describe the challenges or barriers that high-achieving female professionals faced. The glass ceiling is a barrier that prevents progression by some groups, usually women, to the next level of work but its presence may be unacknowledged or denied; people in the affected groups who have excellent qualifications and experience continuously struggle to ‘break through’ it.

The concrete ceiling is a comparable phenomenon to the glass ceiling, yet it distinguishes itself by virtue of its higher density and greater resistance to being shattered. The statement highlights the heightened and exceedingly challenging obstacles that minority individuals encounter in their pursuit of senior positions (Moore and Jones, 2001). It represents a barrier to people who belong to two marginalised groups: those of women and minorities, particularly African and Caribbean people. Opportunities for such marginalised groups are being lost as a direct result of the current government's policy of cutting spending and implementing widespread deregulatory policies, which have removed the career ladder of success as well as the monitoring, and the supervision that underpinned progression. African and Caribbean women who took part in the survey described how, in addition to experiencing a strong sense of invisibility, they were subjected routinely to assaults,

humiliation and patronising remarks (Lifelong Learning UK, 2011).

According to Pierre (2019), the idea of a concrete barrier symbolises the obstacles that African and Caribbean women face. They are inherently more formidable to overcome compared with the challenges represented by glass; the structural integrity of the concrete means that African and Caribbean women face a near-impossible task to overcome it (Pierre, 2019). A goal of this research was to discover characteristics that exist within the corporate hierarchy that have contributed to the building of the glass ceiling and to compare these factors with those that contribute to the concrete wall. The issues that were analysed by Pierre (2019) support my research regarding the barriers that face African and Caribbean women who aspire towards senior positions in FE.

The glass ceiling represents a significant obstacle that White women must confront. African and Caribbean women must demonstrate further resilience in surpassing the concrete ceiling or dismantling the glass wall (Moore and Jones, 2001; Pierre, 2019). African and Caribbean women face the dual challenge of overcoming both gender and racial bias, which creates a more formidable obstacle to their advancement than the glass ceiling (Women Business Collaborative, 2022).

Extensive studies on the lack of role models, access to education and opportunities to mentor African and Caribbean women has led to knowledge and strategies to break the cycle of marginalisation, disengagement and the absence of hope, to penetrate the glass ceiling in society (Davidson & Foster-Johnson, 2001, 2002, 2003). Collins (1990) and Jean-Marie and Lloyd-Jones (2011) examined the phenomenon of the glass ceiling; the prejudice and bias that has created it has also led to a gender pay gap, in which men are paid more than women who do the same job. Women of African and Caribbean heritage may face 'double bias' or 'double jeopardy' in the workplace, which reduces the number of options available to them for professional development and growth. This leads to a lack of representation in leadership roles, which continues the cycle of bias and discrimination.

Moreover, the glass ceiling imposes restrictions on the capacity of African and Caribbean women and other minority workers to interact effectively with their peers

(Beckwith et al., 2016). Consequently, these individuals experience feelings of isolation and exclusion from promotion procedures. According to a Lean In report, *The State of Black Women in Corporate America* (2020), African and Caribbean women pursue leadership roles and demonstrate greater interest in attaining such positions than their White counterparts, yet they continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions; Lean In (2020) reported that African and Caribbean women held only 4.4% of senior executive and supervisor roles in 2020. Such individuals are referred to as 'C-suite' because the job titles contain the word 'chief', as in CEO or CFO; they hold the most senior positions within an organisation and are typically characterised by their extensive experience and seniority. Evelyn Forde, an African and Caribbean headteacher, said in 2019:

*"We have not smashed that glass ceiling just yet. There's still inequality in all top jobs. I work on the premise that if I don't if we don't, who will?"* (Evelyn Forde, Headteacher, 2019, cited in Race in Education, *The Guardian*, p.1.)

The provision of leadership development is of utmost significance in facilitating the advancement of African and Caribbean women to break down the glass ceiling (Green & King, 2001). However, Morgan (2020) contended that despite increasing efforts to develop diverse leaders, the number of African and Caribbean women working at senior levels in UK organisations remained very low. In my view, the explanation for this is their membership of two marginalised groups, which increases the level of discrimination they face and places them in a position of double jeopardy. According to Morgan (2020), in most discussions about women in leadership roles, the complex and intertwined nature of the inequality that is associated with the intersection of gender and race is ignored, even though such inequality is widespread in our society. Miller's (2021) review of the literature concluded that no study had considered the viewpoints of African and Caribbean women working in the educational sector in this way.

The findings of the research conducted by McKinsey and Lean In (2020) on the work situations of African and Caribbean women point to the same overarching pattern: in

so many ways, African and Caribbean women have a more challenging and stressful experience than almost everyone else. They are overrepresented in jobs that pay the lowest possible wages. They are hired and promoted at a slower pace than others. Often, they are the only women of African or Caribbean heritage in a room or discussion. Their pay in the same job is significantly lower than that of men and other groups of women.

## **2.4 Ethnic Leadership Initiative: Shaping African and Caribbean Women's Career Progression**

In 2000, the Network for ~~Black~~ African and Caribbean and Asian Professionals and others publicised the dissatisfaction of BAME people who had tried and failed to become managers. The extent of the problem in FE was brought to light by the findings of a Commission of African and Caribbean Staff in FE. There were race equality policies in 20 colleges; only 16% of these colleges had ~~Black~~ African and Caribbean or Asian managers. This problem led the chair of the commission to argue that racial discrimination claims in these colleges were not severe enough to warrant an investigation but that there was a knock-on effect of low aspirations and underachievement among students because they lacked successful role models. It led the UK Government to support BAME staff through the formation of the BLI to raise awareness and to improve the training of African and Caribbean principals; this proved productive as the number of principals increased from four in 2002 to 17 in 2012.

A detailed research study by Walker and Fletcher, published by the LSIS in 2013, warned about the threat that funding cuts posed to these gains. The study evaluated the impact that had been made by the BLI over the period 2002-2012. The report said that progress in recruiting more BAME college principals "may have stalled" and recommended a stronger focus on underrepresentation in college management, government bodies, and the inspectorate and national funding agencies to sustain the initiative. However, the ETF, which replaced the LSIS as the improvement body, had its funding cut from £147m to around £18m. This caused the ETF to state that it lacked the money to sustain BLI programmes. BLI funding was reduced to a £35,000 training

bursary compared with an initial three-year, £600,000 pilot initiative. All equality and diversity initiatives – whether for ethnic minorities, women, or lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender groups – were rolled into one. Critics suggested that this move increased the competition for limited resources.

## **2.5 Educational Path to Leadership: Enabling African and Caribbean Women's Progression**

The descriptions in the literature of the educational journeys that people have undertaken that have led to leadership positions are covered in this section. Pennant (2019) and Shuaibe-Peters (2020) discussed how their upbringing, educational experiences, socialisation and heritage had inspired and encouraged them into education and how they had progressed into leadership positions. The views of African and Caribbean and White female managers have been compared regarding access to senior career opportunities (Hite, 2004). According to Bell and Nkomo (2001), African and Caribbean women are invisible in the workplace because their White colleagues suppress their identities and due to the notion of colour-blindness (Higginbotham and Weber, 1999); accusations of colour-blindness are seen as insulting to White women in organisations that are dominated by White women since it relates to race, gender, and social class.

Many White people are uncomfortable discussing race, especially with African and Caribbean people. Marshburn and Knowles (2017) argued that White people tried to avoid anxiety by distracting themselves from thoughts of their White identities before encounters of this kind. They argued that White people adopted a strategy of distancing themselves from racially charged interactions to cope with them. Identification as a White person may be a threat in these situations because White people fear being thought of as racist (Goff et al., 2008), so White people might protect themselves from anxiety by trying not to think about their whiteness. The presence of whiteness is inhibited through self-regulatory effort in this strategy, which can be conceptualised as an act of suppression (Monteith et al., 1998). In the same way that members of minority groups may alleviate a threat by actively suppressing specific negative stereotypes of the group (Logel et al., 2009; Steele & Aronson, 1995), White



people may alleviate anxiety when confronted with racially charged situations by actively suppressing their identity as White. White people can prevent themselves from 'experiencing' their whiteness before and during racial conversations with a colleague from an oppressed group by engaging in an activity known as 'mental control' (Wegner, 1994).

According to Marshburn and Knowles (2017), it is possible for White people to feel uncomfortable approaching conversations about race, particularly when they are with persons of African and Caribbean heritage. To manage this fear, they tend to employ a strategy of creating emotional and physical distance from situations that involve racial tension. This distancing approach involves consciously refraining from contemplating their White identity before such encounters. White people engage in this behaviour as a means of protecting themselves from possible allegations of racism, and the concern of being viewed as racist (Goff et al., 2008). As a self-defence tactic, they learn to suppress their awareness of being White.

According to Monteith et al. (1998), this suppression is seen as a form of regulating themselves. White people consciously suppress recognition of their own racial identity when participating in conversations with fellow employees from marginalised groups. They engage in mental control to avoid experiencing their racial identity. The discomfort they feel when discussing race may lead them to avoid engaging in racially sensitive situations and to reject their own racial identity; they avoid fully identifying as White and interacting with it to reduce anxiety and maintain a sense of emotional protection. According to Logel et al., 2009 and Steele & Aronson, 1995, this is comparable to how members of minority groups conceal adverse stereotypes about their race. Therefore, an understanding of these fluid techniques could contribute to inclusive and productive discourse.

## **2.6 Critical Race Theory: A Lens on Minority Education**

In this study, African and Caribbean women who attended schools in which White students made up most of the student body are examined through the lens of CRT. CRT can be used in the field of education to challenge widespread misconceptions

about racial minority students and their families through investigation of past and current policies, practices, and social dynamics that influence those students and their families' decision-making processes. In the study, the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality and counter-stories were used to illuminate how the educational experiences of female members of racial minorities are stratified along racial lines, and how this impedes their full participation in educational settings. Researchers in the field of education have performed CRT studies to investigate data derived from educational institutions that are characterised by a mainly White student demographic. The results of their studies indicate that students' negative interpersonal connections with both fellow students and teachers, alongside institutional factors such as strict surveillance, might impede the development of trust and undermine the formation of supportive networks that are crucial to fostering conducive and effective learning environments.

Furthermore, CRT has been utilised to elucidate the process of marginalisation that racial minorities in England encounter (Gillborn, 2006; Warmington, 2012; Youdell, 2006). The impact on the academic performance of pupils of institutional regulations and contacts with school authorities has been examined by researchers through the utilisation of Caribbean students' and parents' perspectives. The methodology employed in this study resembled that used in investigations carried out on African American children attending schools where the majority of the student body was White (Gillborn et al., 2012; Thomas, 2012). Thomas (2012) documented a phenomenon in which acceptance of racial stereotypes pertaining to Black Caribbean students, specifically their perceived aggression and tendency to challenge authority figures, could lead to ineffective interactions between teachers and students, heightened surveillance, and disproportionate disciplinary actions. In their study, Gillborn et al. (2012) examined a group of 62 middle-class parents of Black Caribbean heritage. Through the analysis of interview data, the researchers illustrated the tenuous relationships between students and school authorities, the marginalisation of institutional policies and practices, and the recollection of parents' previous negative encounters with educational institutions. In England, CRT has been employed as a framework to draw attention to matters that pertain to race, particularly racial

realism. It has been used to underscore discrepancies in education and to shed light on the contrasting academic accomplishments of racially marginalised pupils and their White counterparts. In this context, the utilisation of CRT was deemed appropriate for the interpretation and elucidation of my research findings, rather than engagement in a comprehensive evaluation of pre-existing scholarly literature.

## **2. 7 Leadership under the Lens: African and Caribbean Women Confronting Challenges**

There has been much discussion about the intersection of identities, the experiences of those with colour-blindness, and the unique challenges faced by African and Caribbean women within the context of the work environment. Many African and Caribbean women who are recruited into leadership positions argue that their identities affect their practice (Jean-Marie & Lloyd-Jones, 2011; Santamaría & Santamaría, 2012). According to Banks (2007), there has been little drive to develop or recruit African and Caribbean women leaders. It has been reported that 50% of African and Caribbean women working in senior management positions have resigned due to racism in the workplace (Morris, 2022). This survey by Morris (2022) showed the extent to which African and Caribbean women who held senior roles were subjected to discrimination and racism at work. Similarly, a study that was carried out by the non-profit organisation Black Women in Leadership (BWIL) found that nearly half (45%) of African and Caribbean women who were employed in white-collar jobs in the UK believed that they would be passed over for promotion despite having the same level of competence as a female White colleague.

Research on the experiences of African and Caribbean women describes the challenges they face in achieving educational administration positions; for example, studies indicate that they consider themselves overlooked for such positions (Edson, 1987; Grant, 2012; McGee Banks, 2007).

In 2015, the University and College Union (UCU) conducted a survey targeting its African and Caribbean members to document their personal encounters and

experiences within the context of the post-16 education sector. The key findings regarding the obstacles that these members faced in advancing their careers aligned with previous UCU research, which indicated that most African and Caribbean staff occupied grades below management level within the profession. The results of the study showed that 90% of African and Caribbean women who worked in both post-secondary education and HE had frequently or occasionally encountered obstacles. 50% of the participants in both sectors lacked knowledge of the processes that they had to complete to apply for promotion.

According to Kramer (2022), women face significant challenges in career progression due to the presence of gender bias against women. While gender bias is not the sole discriminatory barrier that women encounter in their profession, it continues to be a substantial obstacle to the progress of women in their careers. The phenomenon can manifest itself in many ways, such as preconceived notions of the abilities of women, societal assumptions about their designated roles, and subconscious prejudices that influence recruitment and promotion processes, as stated in a 2019 government report entitled *The Global Institute for Women's Leadership: Improving Women's Progression in the Workplace*. Women who have social identities that differ from the existing workplace standards, particularly those who are not White, heterosexual, have non-normative sexuality, have a disability, follow a different faith, are older, or do not have children, encounter additional difficulties (Erskine, Brassel, & Robotham, 2023). African and Caribbean women encounter specific difficulties; there is a relationship between their social identities and the advancement of their careers. The examination of workplace experiences among African and Caribbean women in comparison with White women highlights three distinct types of obstacles – the need to navigate uncertain circumstances that offer no beneficial outcome, the compulsion to adhere to cultural norms that may contradict their own social identities and the experience of biases that extend beyond those related solely to gender.

Kramer (2022) found that some White women were commonly perceived to embody communal characteristics, such as being agreeable, nurturing, and submissive, and displaying a genuine interest in the well-being of others. The leadership challenge they face is to strike a balance between being perceived as excessively communal, which

may undermine their effectiveness as a leader, and being perceived as excessively agentic, which may make them less likeable. Kramer (2022) examines disparities in how White women and African and Caribbean women are perceived in terms of leadership. The main goal of those in leadership positions is to effectively manage the difficult balance of avoiding the impression of excessive rage or forcefulness, which could result in being unpopular, and that of excessive submissiveness and compliance, which could be seen as a lack of power or autonomy.

According to a study conducted by Almeida et al. (2021), African and Caribbean women, irrespective of their origin in the UK or elsewhere, are the least likely demographic group to attain high-income levels. UK-born African and Caribbean women have the highest level of underrepresentation in the highest income bracket compared with women of other ethnic backgrounds and with men. Almeida et al. (2021) also compared African and Caribbean women and White women across various career stages. They focused their analysis on three groups: women under the age of 30, who are commonly embarking on their professional journeys; women between the ages of 30 and 45, who are in the middle stage of their careers; and women over the age of 45, who are most likely to occupy senior positions.

The findings of the study indicated that African and Caribbean women, although commencing their respective careers with comparable opportunities to those of their White counterparts, encountered notable discrepancies in their incomes as they advanced in their professional trajectories.

During the initial stages of their careers, African and Caribbean women and White women showed a comparable likelihood of being in the top 1% income bracket. Nevertheless, there were significant disparities in the probability that they would be in the highest 10%, 20%- and 30%-income brackets, and these disparities persisted even after accounting for various potential compounding factors. In the mid-career phase, approximately 10 to 15 years later, disparities in earnings became more pronounced, with African and Caribbean women facing a significantly lower probability of attaining top-earning positions compared with their White counterparts, irrespective of the specific criteria used to define 'top earners' (Almeida et al., 2021).

An illustration of the disparity in income distribution revealed that there was a 6.1 per cent lower likelihood that African and Caribbean women would occupy the top decile of income earners compared with White women. There appeared to be a correlation between the age at which income was growing most rapidly and the corresponding increase in income penalties, and this correlation mirrored the observed trend in the broader gender wage gap. The dominant rationale for the disparity in wages between genders is attributed to career interruptions due to childbearing, but this explanation cannot be used when considering comparisons between groups of women.

In the later stages of women's professional careers, according to the study, when they were aged 45 and above, the disparity between these two cohorts in the probability of attaining high-earning positions diminished and became statistically insignificant when taking into account a range of factors, suggesting that penalties tend to stabilise over time. On the other hand, the narrowing disparity could be attributable to the decision of African and Caribbean women to withdraw from the workforce at this stage, due to their increasing disillusionment in the face of the barriers and obstacles that hinder their upward mobility.

Further research exploring the convergence of race, gender, and leadership has been consulted. Rosette, Koval, Ma and Livingston (2016) conducted a study on 'intersectional invisibility' to examine how the combination of race and gender can result in African and Caribbean women being less noticeable in leadership positions and their contributions disregarded. This lack of visibility can lead to disappointment and disengagement from the workforce. According to Wingfield (2019), African and Caribbean women frequently encounter a form of sexism known as 'racialised' sexism, in which their race and gender combine to produce distinct obstacles in their professional experience. These women may face pressure to comply with workplace norms that fail to recognise their cultural heritage, resulting in feelings of loneliness and frustration. In this body of research, the complex interplay of race and gender in moulding the work environments and leadership perspectives of women is brought to light. Furthermore, the importance is emphasised of resolving these systemic challenges to cultivate a workplace atmosphere that is more inclusive and supportive.

## **2. 8 Theories of Black Feminist Thought and intersectionality**

According to the theories of BFT (Collins, 2000) and intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), the gendered racial identity development of African and Caribbean women should be conceptualised to fill in some of the gaps in existing research on racial identification and gender identity. These gaps formed because previous research did not consider the intersection of race and gender. Collins (2000) stated that the epistemology of BFT was focused on the standpoint of African and Caribbean women and sought to contest conventional White, Eurocentric social constructions of knowledge. BFT emphasises the historical suppression and marginalisation of the voices and experiences of African and Caribbean women in the US (Alinia, 2015; Collins, 2000). Intersectionality describes the interconnectedness of various systems of power and oppression that African and Caribbean women encounter due to their race, gender, and social class (Crenshaw, 1989). The notion of intersectionality is concerned with the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression and the resulting structural inequities that emerge and occur as a consequence of the social development of marginalised identities. It has been discussed by various researchers, such as Cole (2009), Cooper (2016), Crenshaw (1989, 1991), Else-Quest and Hyde (2016), and Lewis and Grzanka (2016). In order to understand the complex character of African and Caribbean women's lived experiences, the present research uses intersectionality as a theoretical framework. This includes the interdependent systems of racism and sexism that influence their intersecting identities as marginalised individuals belonging to the African and Caribbean communities. The concepts of BFT and intersectionality recognise that the distinct lived experiences of African and Caribbean women at the intersection of their racial and gender identities are shaped by sociocultural and historical factors. However, much of the published social identity literature lacks intersectional explanations of racial and gender identity. This gap in knowledge hinders the acquisition of a comprehensive understanding of gendered racial identity among African and Caribbean women.

The gender identity of women who are from the African diaspora coincides with their

racial identities (Martin & Hall, 1992; Parks et al., 1996; Watt, 2006). However, some studies have shown that some African and Caribbean women are inclined toward embracing gender role attitudes that are adaptable (Kane, 2000; White, 2006) and become aware early in life of gender prejudice (Brown et al., 2011; Thomas et al., 2011, 2013). According to Thomas and King (2007), these results may be related to the inconsistent messages about gender roles to which African and Caribbean girls are exposed through portrayals of them by their families and the media.

Awareness of racial and gender identity is required to understand the experiences and identities of African and Caribbean girls and women. Cole (2009) and Settles (2006) observed that the employment of an intersectionality viewpoint provided an extensive framework through which to explain the processes related to social identity. The examination of the social identity of African and Caribbean women involved an investigation of the fundamental question: what is the importance of being an African and Caribbean woman? Personal beliefs, lifestyle preferences, socialisation experiences, and messages that people are exposed to are likely to have an impact on the prevalence of gendered racial issues in social identity. The impact of oppression and stereotypical portrayals, as well as the significance of self-determination or resilience, are highlighted in the academic literature that is focused on the development of identity, self-concept, and self-esteem among African and Caribbean girls and young women (Shorter-Gooden & Washington, 1996).

Identity suppression is an example of what Knowles et al. (2014) referred to as identity distancing, which refers to the efforts made by White people to avoid the detrimental effects on their own minds of belonging to the dominant racial group. Conscious efforts to control or replace unwanted thoughts can regulate the automatic activation of those thoughts, which suggests that the thought suppression efforts made by White people may be detectable at the implicit level (Blair & Banaji, 1996; Gollwitzer & Schaal, 1998).

According to Goldstein (2019), colour-blindness can be defined as the belief or attitude that denying the existence of race will miraculously cure racism and achieve racial equality. Goldstein (2019) argued that colour-blindness could be described as a broad



ideology. The discourse of colour-blind ideology is characterised by the claims of White people such as "I don't see colour" to exonerate themselves from allegations that they are racist. This idea places its trust in organisations that are working toward the achievement of racial equality, but it does so while ignoring the historical and systemic discrimination that exists within organisations and which helps to maintain racist norms and practices. The concept of colour-blindness, also known as colour-blind racism, is based on the belief that the absence of explicitly bigoted language in laws and policies, in conjunction with the creation of language that is race-neutral, reinforces the idea that race is no longer an issue.

Colour-blindness has led in the US to the employment of race-neutral policies to maintain racist practices. Both the US and the UK have passed laws that make it illegal to discriminate against others. In the US, it is against the law to discriminate against someone because of their race, colour, religion, sex, national origin, age, or disability, according to laws such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. In the UK, the Equality Act of 2010 makes it illegal to discriminate against anyone based on certain protected characteristics. These characteristics include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership status, pregnancy and motherhood, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation. This is because being White is a marker for being higher up in the cultural chain; White people typically do not have to be colour conscious or think of themselves in terms of race. Engaging in colour-blind ideology promotes the wilful ignorance of racial inequalities by refusing to attribute the cause of social problems to racism. This is done to avoid having to acknowledge that racism exists. The existence of colour-blindness is caused by the fact that White people are blind to their own whiteness and the ways in which it gives them advantages over non-White people (Wingfield, 2015).

In the context of leadership experiences among African and Caribbean women, the phenomenon of colour-blindness can have adverse consequences. For example, if an organisation embraces a colour-blind strategy in its recruitment and promotion practices, it may fail to recognise the challenges and barriers that African and Caribbean women encounter in their pursuit of career progression. This pattern can lead to the underrepresentation of African and Caribbean women in leadership roles,

despite their significant qualifications. Moreover, individuals with colour-blindness may encounter challenges when they attempt to address matters of racism and discrimination inside their organisations, as concerns linked to colour may be disregarded or overlooked. These problems might pose additional obstacles for African and Caribbean women in their career progression and pursuit of leadership roles. Companies that recognise and confront these obstacles can establish work environments that are more inclusive and equal, thereby fostering the advancement and achievements of African and Caribbean women in leadership positions.

The percentage of African and Caribbean women working in senior management positions increased to 84%. Half of the African and Caribbean women surveyed who held senior management positions had left their jobs because of unfair or uncivil treatment related to their race. More than a third - 38% - of African-Caribbean women surveyed believed that they did not earn the same as their White female colleagues who performed the same job. The BWIL network commissioned a report to investigate the lack of information and data on the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women who were employed in organisations in the UK. The report, titled 'Black Women in the UK Workplace', examined challenges that African and Caribbean women identified. Barriers that were identified included the glass ceiling, colour-blindness, sponsorship, racial discrimination, and equal pay. They were reported to have adverse effects on the career journeys of African and Caribbean women and to prevent their advancement to leadership positions. These challenges might be attributable to sexism and racism and form a complex framework of discriminatory practices that reinforce inequities and hinder career progression. The biases and preconceptions associated with African and Caribbean women resulted in a sense of voicelessness and suppression of their ethnic identity.

## **2.9 Post-16 Education: African and Caribbean Women's Barriers**

Many respondents to the UCU survey reported that senior managers and leaders did not offer them any support to advance their careers. Another significant finding was that 71% of African and Caribbean staff members in post-16 education reported

experiencing frequent or occasional instances of bullying and harassment from their managers and colleagues. Across FE it was 68%, whereas for members of all backgrounds, it was 66%. This finding indicates that bullying and harassment are prevalent in these types of workplaces. Around 78% of African and Caribbean respondents said that they had been excluded from decision-making processes in some capacity throughout their time in FE; across the board, this figure was 75% (UCU Report, 2015).

The survey indicated that racism was experienced by members within FE institutions, including colleges and universities. The consequence was the existence of a continuous barrier to progress for African and Caribbean employees within post-16 education, in conjunction with a significant prevalence of workplace bullying. Furthermore, they had encountered instances in which they had been prevented from participating in decision-making processes and had been subjected to cultural insensitivity. A significant number of African and Caribbean staff in universities expressed feelings of isolation and that they felt unsupported when they confronted instances of bullying and harassment (UCU Report, 2015).

Therefore, the findings of this survey showed that the obstacles to promotion affected those who worked in FE and that African and Caribbean staff were bullied by senior managers and colleagues. Yet initiatives to increase awareness of racial equality within colleges have been predominantly focused on students rather than staff.

## **2.10 Sponsorship Gap: Education Careers of African and Caribbean Women**

The practice of making use of one's social capital to aid in the professional development of another person, who is often referred to as a protégé, is known as sponsorship. Lack of sponsorship is one of the obstacles that African and Caribbean women experience while trying to advance their careers into senior positions in education (McKinsey, 2018, 2019). It is significantly less likely that African and Caribbean women will interact with senior management on the job than that their

non-African and Caribbean colleagues will do so. This lack of access is paralleled by a lack of sponsorship; less than a quarter of African and Caribbean women believe they have the sponsorship they need to move their careers to the next level (McKinsey, 2018, 2019). This finding implies that African and Caribbean women have fewer opportunities to be seen by people in leadership positions, and they are less likely to be involved in crucial debates about the priorities and strategy of the organisation compared with other colleagues (McKinsey, 2018, 2019; Lean In, 2020).

### **2.11 African and Caribbean Women Confront Racism**

In educational institutions, institutional racism is manifested on both the micro and macro levels, as highlighted by Scheurich and Young (1997, p.5). Institutional racism refers to the use of systematic practices within institutions or organisations that result in adverse consequences for individuals who belong to one or more racial groups in comparison with those who belong to the dominant racial group. These practices may be either deliberate or unintentional in nature. Institutional racism is also shown when the cultures, rules, habits, or symbols within institutions or organisations have a similar biasing impact. Racism has the potential to perpetuate prejudiced attitudes and actions that negatively impact the educational and professional experiences of individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds within an institution, thereby affecting the broader system. It should be noted that educational leaders and their institutions are influenced by racialised national, social, and community contexts. Despite this, these leaders hold significant power and have a distinct position from which they may impact staff, students, and other stakeholders.

Earley et al. (2002) conducted a study that revealed the presence of racial and ethnic stereotyping as a contributing factor to the limited advancement of BAME educational professionals to senior positions. A decade later, Earley et al. (2012) maintained their previous finding. A study conducted by Bush et al. (2006) revealed similarly that racial and ethnic discrimination was a significant obstacle in the advancement of educational professionals from BAME backgrounds.

The Fawcett Society (2022) conducted a comprehensive survey titled 'Broken ladders:

the myth of meritocracy for women of colour in the workplace'. This survey stands as the most extensive representative report on the position at work of African and Caribbean women to date. The researchers conducted an analysis of the general existence of institutional racism that has been experienced by African and Caribbean women, including the distinct encounters of women from diverse ethnic minority backgrounds. The report emphasised the presence of institutional racism, discrimination, and deeply ingrained undesirable workplace cultures that limited the progress of women of colour, hindering their ability to achieve their full potential. Consequently, it stated, several organisations in the UK were deprived of the valuable talents and skills possessed by these individuals. According to the findings presented in the report, a higher proportion of women of colour (39%) reported that their overall well-being had been negatively affected by a lack of career advancement, in comparison with White women (28%). Additionally, the report highlighted that 43% of women of colour saw their motivation decline as a result of being denied promotion opportunities.

*“Women of colour across the UK already know that experiencing completely unacceptable racism at work is, sadly, the norm. It’s sickening that three-quarters of women of colour have experienced racism at work”* (Jemima Olchawski, CEO of the Fawcett Society, 2022).

The available research suggests that there is a widespread presence of institutional racism in different industries and organisations, leading to a significant and negative impact on African and Caribbean women within the work environment. In addition, working environments involve constant negotiation of identities and perpetual stagnation. These findings were supported by Lumby and Coleman in studies they performed in 2007 and 2017 (Lumby & Coleman, 2007, 2017). Coleman and Campbell-Stephens (2010) and Miller and Callender (2018) supported these findings. The progression among educators of BAME heritage is hindered by institutional practices such as marginalisation and indirect racism (Powney et al., 2003), as well as workplace discrimination (McNamara et al., 2009). These factors have been identified as significant barriers to the advancement of BAME academics. Moreover, research

studies that have considered the viewpoints of marginalised African and Caribbean women in the field of educational leadership identify the challenges these women encounter when they aspire to secure these positions (Edson, 1987; Grant, 2012; McGee Banks, 2007).

The educational experiences of most participants in my research, who teach at predominantly White schools, are influenced by their African and Caribbean status, resulting in distinct challenges (Chapman & Bhopal, 2018). For more than 40 years, scholars have recorded and analysed the encounters and experiences of ethnic minority students in racially diverse schools in the UK; (Gillborn, 2003; Mac an Ghaill, 1989; Ogbu, 2003). The present study has employed critical race analysis to explain the common experiences of African and Caribbean women in predominantly White urban and rural schools. The academic advantages of predominantly White urban schools have been extensively studied and documented (Tefera et al., 2011). However, researchers are still exploring the complex range of outcomes experienced by students with racial minority backgrounds who attend these schools. These students are often exposed to challenging college-preparatory coursework and a wealth of academic and social opportunities. At the same time, they may also encounter discriminatory practices based on their race, leading to feelings of low self-esteem and conflict related to their racial identity (Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

Applying CRT to the experiences of African and Caribbean women is necessary to better understand the difficulties that racial minorities face in environments of mixed-race education. Through teacher-student relationships, student-student interactions, and school policies and practices, race and racism continue to have an impact on the educational experiences of racial minority students in state-run schools where students and staff are predominantly White. According to Lewis-McCoy (2014), there has been a change in education policy and discourse towards emphasising resource provision while neglecting the significance of classrooms, schools, and individual students in promoting school equality. In rural educational settings, challenges to academic involvement are attributed to the way in which African and Caribbean females have been marginalised and excessively monitored, particularly by teachers, within secondary educational institutions. Educators must understand fully the

structural and societal obstacles that racial minority children and families experience in different learning environments, including predominantly White schools, to improve and adapt support systems for them (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Lewis-McCoy, 2014).

A report from the Department for Education and Skills (now known as the Department for Education) states that research on the education of minority ethnic pupils should be expanded beyond inner city areas, as ethnic minority families are moving away from these areas, according to Cline et al. (2002, p.8). Scholars have noted an ongoing trend of racial minority families seeking education in various regions of England. Specifically, researchers have documented the utilisation of social and economic capital by parents from diverse racial minority backgrounds in selecting high-performing schools. This often involves relocation to areas with more desirable educational institutions (Gillborn et al., 2012; Weeks-Bernard, 2007). According to Weeks-Bernard (2007), a significant number of BME children receive their education in ethnically segregated schools. These schools are characterised by a clear majority or a distinct minority of pupils being of one ethnic background. Regarding my research, the significant number of participants in my research study were in schools in England where the student population predominantly consisted of individuals from White ethnic backgrounds.

According to the study conducted by Cline et al. (2002), it was determined that African and Caribbean pupils in the United Kingdom exhibited higher academic performance in the GCSE exams when they attended mostly White schools, as compared to their urban counterparts who attended racially diverse schools. The academic analysis indicated that African and Caribbean students originating from schools with low minority ethnic populations achieved a greater percentage of five or more high-grade passes in their GCSEs compared to their counterparts from London boroughs, who were comparable in terms of racial, social, and economic factors. The preceding group attained a success rate of 40%, whilst the subsequent group earned a successful rate of 26%. The study encompassed a sample size of more than 34,000 children, including those attending schools located in suburban and rural areas with predominantly non-minority ethnic populations, as well as schools in London characterised by significant racial and ethnic variety. Based on the findings of the survey, it was determined by the

researchers that African and Caribbean students enrolled in schools with a low proportion of minority ethnic individuals did not exhibit superior academic performance compared to their peers in London schools. However, it was observed that these students derived greater advantages from the available educational resources in comparison to students in urban areas characterised by racial diversity (Cline et al., 2002).

Thus it appears that students from ethnic backgrounds have gained advantages from their educational experiences in mainly White academic institutions. Nevertheless, there are still significant drawbacks that remain. There have been considerable research studies that have been conducted on the poor education environments that African and Caribbean students confront inside educational institutions throughout England. These surroundings have been found to have a very negative influence on the self-esteem and academic motivation of these students. This phenomenon has been extensively examined and documented in a range of research investigations, such as the research undertaken by Askins (2009), Ball et al. (2013), Bhopal and Myers (2011), Gillborn (2003), and Modica (2015). Numerous studies have provided evidence that children belonging to racial minority groups often experience racism in educational settings where the majority of individuals identify as White. This racism itself in several forms, including continuous verbal harassment.

## **2.12 Overcoming Barriers: African and Caribbean Women's Leadership Progression**

Research conducted by Weiner et al. (2022) on the appointments of African and Caribbean women principals investigated the nature of their recruitment and promotion processes towards educational leadership. They concluded that sexism and racism were present in all aspects of the main hiring and selection processes. First, it seemed that having personal and political connections with individuals who were already in power (predominantly White men) was an important consideration in being able to enter the applicant pool and become candidates for leadership. Opportunities were frequently and overtly racialised. since the participants were African and



Caribbean. Second, many participants regarded the interview process as being informal and insubstantial, and this method reinforced harmful stereotypes about African and Caribbean women. This gives rise to the question of whether interview panels are representative of the community and/or whether the questions are standardised to promote fairness and transparency.

Many studies have shown that racial and other forms of bias influence decisions regarding “who is worthy of being hired” and, as a result, “guide hiring routines” (Liera, 2020, p. 1955). Collins (2000) emphasised that “commonsense” or otherwise normalised social practices (such as job interviews) were hegemonic and served to uphold White supremacy, heteronormativity, and other forms of discrimination. Grogan (1999) stated that there was a need to apply critical feminist intersectional lenses to highlight these systems and practices. Despite this, little research has been performed that has focused specifically on prejudice in hiring and promotion procedures (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lee & Mao, 2020; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015; Shakeshaft et al., 2007).

### **2.13 Mentoring: A Barrier in Further Education**

A history of oppression and marginalisation, as stated by Black feminists and supported in studies (Grant, 2012; Jean-Marie and Brooks, 2011), places obstacles in the way of African and Caribbean women in their pursuit of senior positions. These obstacles are rooted in the fact that these women have historically been subjected to less favourable conditions compared with White women. Even though mentoring offers several important advantages (Larke et al., 1999), several studies point to the importance of the mentors having prominent identities, such as racial or ethnic (Holmes, 2000; Holmes et al., 2007; Lee, 1999; Tillman, 2001; Welch, 1996). According to Holmes et al. (2007), African and Caribbean women can benefit from having White mentors; yet White mentors are restricted in their capacity to comprehend and advise African and Caribbean women when issues such as racism come up. According to Bova (2000), White mentors can offer career support, but they are unable to satisfy the social and psychological needs of a particularly vulnerable population. When it comes

to addressing certain requirements of African and Caribbean women, it has been demonstrated that White mentors can be helpful and supportive.

Mentors play important roles in the accomplishments of their mentees, regardless of the identification of the protégé (Grant, 2012; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Jean-Marie & Brooks, 2011). Despite this, there remains a dearth of role models available to assist African and Caribbean women who are pursuing senior positions at FE institutions.

According to Parker and Funk (2017), African and Caribbean women are less likely to be mentored and are passed over for promotion more frequently than their White counterparts, are discouraged from applying for positions such as department chairs or assistant deans and are infrequently put on track to become tenured professors or deans of schools or colleges. According to Shepherd (2017), a recent study that was presented by the leadership foundation found that women in its management programme who applied for executive-level jobs were not only denied but also unsuccessful, whereas their comparable male counterparts were successful and hired in the same or higher-level leadership jobs.

## **2.14 African and Caribbean Women in Senior Management**

Several research studies (Edson, 1987; Jean-Marie, 2006; Ortiz, 1982; Santamaría and Santamaría, 2012) investigated the difficulties encountered by African and Caribbean women who were already in educational leadership and their experiences with continuous professional development when they aspired to senior positions. These women face several obstacles when they attempt to advance in FE through promotional opportunities and professional development (Albelda and Tilly, 1997). These obstacles include a lack of access to professional development and mentoring opportunities, as well as the experience of being trapped in jobs that do not involve management responsibilities. African and Caribbean women who work in non-managerial roles are not given the chance to progress professionally, and as a result, they are likely to remain stuck in jobs that are not classified as appropriate for career advancement. Women of African and Caribbean heritage who pursue additional education frequently face obstacles connected to marginalisation. These obstacles are

the result of the conjunction of their race, gender, and socioeconomic circumstances or job classification. According to West (2015), marginalisation is the ongoing experience of being covertly or explicitly demoted to an unrelated position within the context of one's professional environment. This can take the form of subtle or overt discrimination.

There is a lack of data on the number of African and Caribbean women occupying managerial or senior positions in the FE sector in England . However, the Association of Colleges estimates that approximately 12 to 14 of England's 239 FE educational institutions are under the leadership of principals from African, Caribbean, Asian and other ethnic minority backgrounds (Haughton, 2021). Nevertheless, the available data fails to provide a comprehensive analysis based on gender or racial or ethnic backgrounds. The issue of African and Caribbean women's underrepresentation in senior positions in FE educational institutions in England is a subject of significant concern. Although students are from diverse backgrounds, with 30% of all FE students being from an African, Caribbean, or Asian background, these demographics are notably underrepresented in leadership positions (Haughton, 2021). To offer a more nuanced understanding of the presence of African and Caribbean women in managerial or senior positions in FE institutions in England, further investigation and a deeper exploration of the barriers to participation are important. This would facilitate the formulation of focused policies and efforts aiming to mitigate such marginalisation.

### **2.15 Barriers to inclusiveness for African and Caribbean women**

According to Niemann (2016), tokenism is a function of what is required of an organisation, as well as the expectations and perceptions of the dominant group regarding whether academic staff from diverse backgrounds can fulfil these needs and related roles, together with the ability of that group to impose its will regarding these expectations (p. 456). Token minorities do not enjoy the same employment advantages, opportunities for training and professional progression, or even the same level of representation in the workplace as other minorities. Furthermore, tokenism occurs when an organisation 'keeps up appearances' by making a solely symbolic

effort to demonstrate support for diversity to avoid criticism. This type of effort is often made to show that the organisation cares about diversity. Tokenism in the workplace, when allowed to continue unchecked, can lead to managers making the wrong recruitment decisions or to reaching diversity targets without having to involve an organisation's diverse personnel. Both outcomes are problematic for the organisation as they are each undesirable in their ways.

According to Siocom (2022), in the workplace, diversity refers to the practice of recognising and appreciating the unique qualities of each individual while working to create an inclusive atmosphere. It addresses the wide range of similarities and differences that everyone brings to the organisation, including language, race, colour, ability or disability, gender, age, religion and socioeconomic status. Even if an organisation hires candidates from a variety of backgrounds, it is guilty of tokenism if it fails to create an inclusive work environment. Tokenism is a form of discrimination that can arise when businesses mismanage their efforts to promote diversity and inclusion. Siocom (2022) considered that tokenism could manifest in the workplace in different ways, such as: hiring a small number of applicants from diverse backgrounds to show that the organisation was inclusive; using pictures on the organisation website of a diverse workforce, but these pictures did not represent the employee population of the company accurately; and recruiting people from different backgrounds for important or managerial positions, but not giving those people the authority, influence or team members that were commensurate with those positions.

In a tokenistic organisation, there are disproportionately low numbers of people of Asian or African and Caribbean ancestry. Niemann (2016) added that tokenism resulted in identity disruptions that impacted the token staffer's institutional role, job description, career success, and career path, as well as their psycho-social realities. FE leaders could diffuse the negative impacts of tokenism by facilitating a context that placed meaningful value on faculty of colour by doing things such as rewarding them for their diversity-related service with merit increases, tenure, and promotion, and celebrating their presence (Niemann, 2016). Smith (2009) warned of the practice of tokenism, in which individuals might be visible representatives of an organisational leadership structure but functionally invisible.

## **2.16 Invisibility of Intersectionality: The Impact of African and Caribbean Educators**

According to Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008), intersectional invisibility means "the general failure to fully recognise people with intersecting identities as members of their constituent groups". The model of intersectional invisibility these researchers propose sheds light on the experiences of African and Caribbean women educators within oppressive power structures, which result in their simultaneous invisibility and hyper-visibility. According to Harris and Leonardo (2018), to enhance social conditions within school environments, it is necessary to make a concerted effort to elucidate and address the difficulties faced by African and Caribbean women, as well as other marginalised groups (p.18). Ramdeo (2023) addressed the lack of UK-based research on this theme that has specifically investigated African and Caribbean women educators, with a particular emphasis on their experiences beyond the realm of leadership discourse. The primary objective of this study was to shed light on the concept of intersectional invisibility and its manifestation in school environments, while also exploring the various ways in which African and Caribbean women educators encountered oppression. Excerpts from personal narratives provided by four African and Caribbean women educators at various points in their professional journeys, selected from a broader investigation involving ten African and Caribbean women educators (Ramdeo, 2022), were chosen to illustrate instances of obstruction and detriment that resulted from workplace oppression, as well as its consequential effects.

Research conducted by Stanley (2022) offered an England-based viewpoint that aimed to deepen our understanding of the daily experiences of these women. Ramdeo's article (2023) further illustrates this point by arguing for a 'nuanced understanding of these women's daily existence' (Sealey-Ruiz, 2013, p.22) in the school environment. The objective was to challenge prevailing oppressive frameworks and institutions, and to stimulate leaders to contemplate strategies for effecting authentic structural transformations that would foster inclusive spaces and support African and Caribbean women educators, rather than relegating them to the margins.

African and Caribbean women encounter distinct challenges in the professional environment, whereby they encounter adversity and trauma due to intersectional invisibility (Johnson et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019). Such adversity does not impact their White female counterparts. African and Caribbean women do not conform to the societal expectation that associates femininity primarily with White women. The non-prototypicality of African and Caribbean women results in their invisibility, which in turn affects their career paths and overall well-being.

The achievements and potential of African and Caribbean women are easily overlooked by the members of the majority group, but their very limited representation within the workplace places them under more scrutiny than is directed at those around them (Smith et al., 2019). Given their intersectional invisibility, African and Caribbean women are considered not just invisible but also hyper-visible. Nonetheless, the idea of intersectional invisibility makes it possible to gain insight into how African and Caribbean women are affected when the uniqueness of their experiences is not recognised. It also makes it possible to criticise how social institutions fail to deal with the specific issues that African and Caribbean women face (Coles & Pasek, 2020). According to Green (2005), the most significant factor contributing to the success of African and Caribbean women in the US in overcoming these barriers is education. Education has been successful in reforming the culture of the US, but these women must work harder and for a longer period than others to achieve justice and equality.

The concept of intersectional invisibility provides insight into the detrimental effects experienced by African and Caribbean women when their specific lived experiences are not acknowledged, and its consideration enables critical examination of how societal institutions neglect to address their specific needs and issues (Coles & Pasek, 2020). Hence, it is possible to utilise this body of research to elucidate the reasons behind the increased number of obstacles and limited prospects for career advancement to middle and senior leadership roles that are experienced by African and Caribbean women in the workplace, as compared with their White female peers (Johnson et al., 2020).

### **2.16.1 Intersectionality: The Challenge for African and Caribbean women in White Institutions**

The intersectional experiences of African and Caribbean women are situated where race and gender intersect, resulting in the emergence of social and professional obstacles that are not shared by African and Caribbean men or White women. As an individual of Caribbean heritage who has previously been employed in predominantly White institutions, I can provide personal insight regarding being overlooked and distrusted and experiencing a sense of alienation. These themes are extensively examined in contemporary literature that delves into the employment encounters of African and Caribbean women within White-dominated environments (Johnson & Thomas, 2012).

According to Johnson and Thomas (2012), intersectionality, while attempting to expand the range of experiences for individuals with consideration of their racial or gender identity, particularly within the context of being ~~Black~~ an African or Caribbean woman, fails to validate or recognise adequately the unique and individual presence of African and Caribbean women (p. 157). The examination of the experiences of African and Caribbean women holds significant importance due to the distinctiveness of the intersections among their identities. Through the prism of legal debate and discrimination lawsuits, Crenshaw (1989) investigated the intersectionality of African and Caribbean women's lives. Crenshaw (1989) stated that

*because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated. Thus, for feminist theory and antiracist policy discourse to embrace the experiences and concerns of Black women, the entire framework that has been used as a basis for translating 'women's experience' or 'the Black experience' into concrete policy demands must be rethought and recast (p.140)*

According to Collins (1991), the consciousness of African and Caribbean women refers

to the internalised ideas that enable them to navigate and, in some instances, surpass the limitations imposed by intersecting forms of oppression based on race, class, gender, and sexuality. This distinctive perspective contributes to the alternative narratives of African and Caribbean women and their societal roles. According to Johnson and Thomas (2012), there is a lack of comprehensive investigation into the extent of leadership development as it pertains to African and Caribbean women both within the US and on a global scale. The existing body of scholarly work on diversity leadership lacks a specific focus on the unique experiences of African and Caribbean women professionals in FE. Instead, it tends to merge their narratives with those of African and Caribbean men.

Theoretically, intersectionality provides a perspective that enables us to understand and examine the complex nature of our surrounding environment. It recognises that individuals' identities are not unique, but rather comprise a complex interplay of various elements that shape their societal experiences. The present study employs the theoretical framework of intersectionality to explore the distinctive encounters of African and Caribbean women within the framework of gendered racism. This strategy considers the fact that these women's experiences are affected by several facets of their identities, including race, in addition to their gender.

Mirza's (1997) research offers a detailed and subtle understanding of the educational experiences of African and Caribbean women. According to her research, African and Caribbean women in education are contributing to a global movement bringing about social change; their educational achievements have not only individual significance but also wider societal consequences. Mirza (1997) states that these women use techniques such as conforming to and embracing the notion of the meritocratic system, advancing within the conventional hierarchy and aspiring to achieve success by disregarding their obligations to the educational system. This demonstrates a practical and logical strategy for navigating the educational system. She contends that it is revolutionary for African and Caribbean women to aspire to success within the context of education; it undermines the traditional accounts of the ambitions of minority women in the field of education. Contrary to popular belief, women of African



and Caribbean heritage often take advantage of educational chances to venture out of traditional career progression patterns and make a contribution to their communities beyond the classroom. Their proactive involvement runs counter to the popular educational literature, which frequently depicts them as 'the most oppressed', 'less visible' and 'less powerful'. Mirza & Gunaratnam (2014) observe that these women are part of a cohort of postcolonial women who have faced difficulties in education since the 1970s. Understanding their current encounters and problems relies heavily on understanding the historical background.

Through a comprehensive analysis of these intersecting elements, a more profound understanding of the prejudice experienced by African and Caribbean women have been realised. For example, their encounters with sexism are influenced by race, which distinguishes them from White women's experiences. This underscores the importance of considering all aspects of identity when analysing instances of prejudice. The results of my research have emphasised the significance of intersectionality in discussing the complex dynamics of gender-based racism. Studies by Crenshaw (1991) & Collins (2000) recounted the experiences of African and Caribbean women and emphasised the disparities between them and their White counterparts. This highlights the necessity of developing an understanding of prejudice that considers the interconnected elements of race, gender, and identity. A more complex conceptualisation of African and Caribbean women's experiences is made possible by the theoretical framework of intersectionality for leadership and career development. This assertion recognises that the experiences of these women are affected by a multitude of intersecting factors, including race and gender.

African and Caribbean women in senior positions in the FE sector use diverse techniques for managing the challenges they face (Mirza, 2009). They actively confront and question detrimental gender and racial stereotypes, exhibiting resilience in the face of resistance within mostly White, male-dominated institutions, and strive to address and overcome unconscious or implicit biases. These techniques demonstrate their ability to bounce back and their unwavering resolve in the face of gender-based

and race-based prejudice. My study offers unique perspectives into the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women in leadership positions within the FE sector by emphasising the interactions of gender and race. It emphasises the need to recognise and deal with the distinct challenges that these women encounter and for more comprehensive and fair policies within the sector.

In summary, intersectionality offers a beneficial theoretical framework for understanding the complex dynamics of gender-based racism and prejudice, and for examining and understanding the distinct experiences of African and Caribbean women within the field of FE, underscoring the need to develop a comprehensive and sophisticated understanding of the complex mechanisms of marginalisation and gender-based oppression expressed by these women. It enables us to see the interplay among several facets of an individual's identity, which affects their encounters, and so provides a more comprehensive understanding of the prejudice they encounter. By employing the use of this paradigm in my research, I have exposed the distinct experiences of African and Caribbean women and the need for a more subtle understanding of prejudice.

### **2.17 African and Caribbean women managers' self-reflections**

Bravette (1985) is a well-known, documented and cited author, who has the credentials of management, which are substantial. Her literature supports my research in that she reflects on her self-awareness, that of other African and Caribbean women managers, and the realities of their status and positions in organisations. In 1991 Bravette tried to develop a better awareness of herself, of other African and Caribbean women managers and the realities of their status and roles in organisations, and UK society in general. As she did so, she became involved in a process that she referred to as 'conscientisation' (awakened critical consciousness). This enabled her to learn more about all these issues.

Bravette is an African and Caribbean British woman who is a manager and educator.

In her book, she provides her observations on her personal management learning process, which she describes as a journey towards self-knowledge and 'liberation' because it removes potential barriers that have been suppressed. She attempts, in her words, to "theorise our experience," with the intention through the reflections to provide African and Caribbean managers and professionals, those who have held positions in the past and those who may hold positions in the future, with experience of significant obstacles. These reflective thoughts are also meant for White managers who seek to improve their understanding of culture and their connections with employees of other cultures in the workplace. Choosing an appropriate research methodology was one of the most significant problems she faced in the process of investigating and gaining an understanding of the African and Caribbean experience.

### **2.18 African and Caribbean Women & Further Education Policy**

The policy environment of the representation of African and Caribbean women in senior positions within FE institutions in England is complex. It has seen the implementation of broad social policies, and of policies specific to the education context. The UK has comprehensive equality legislation, such as the Equality Act 2010 that effectively prohibits any kind of prejudice or bias against individuals or groups based on protected attributes, such as race and gender. It applies to various sectors, including education, and establishes a legal structure aimed at fostering equality.

Various policies have had an impact on the portrayal and encounters of African and Caribbean women within FE institutions in England. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that although these policies strive to foster diversity and equality, their efficacy can fluctuate, and they may not always have favourable results. The Public Sector Equality Duty, implemented under the Equality Act 2010, mandates that public entities, such as FE institutions, must prioritise the eradication of prejudice, the promotion of equal opportunities and the cultivation of positive interpersonal relationships in the execution of their operations. Equality, diversity and inclusion policies delineate responsibilities in several domains such as recruiting, training, and compensation, signifying an appreciation for each person, a readiness and willingness to meet their requirements, and a commitment to support them and to combat

prejudice. These policies are designed to eradicate bias and unfair treatment, with the fundamental factor in resolving conflicts being the focus on protected traits. The safeguards encompass not only the protected qualities, but also other characteristics that could lead to an individual being underrepresented, marginalised, or minoritised. According to Lewis (2022), the principle of equal opportunity should be upheld, irrespective of an individual's history or personal characteristics.

The objectives are intended to be good, which can be perplexing. There ought to be an awareness of the perils associated with a divide-and-rule strategy and of instances where organisations only make superficial statements since people continue to experience prejudice despite the corporate façade. This underscores the effects of collaboration and a transformative endeavour, including an institution's recognition of Black History Month, Black Lives Matter, or its showcasing of its equality and diversity credentials alongside the college and/or African and Caribbean employees. It includes enhancing the working environment for employees, especially those of African and Caribbean descent, pressuring employers to rectify shortcomings and demonstrate progress, and strengthening ties with community organisations and groups.

Social movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM) have had a substantial influence on policy and representation across all sectors, including FE. BLM has raised awareness and advocated structural reform to deal with racial disparities. It is possible to draw some important conclusions about the influence of BLM on educational policies and practices, particularly concerning the representation of African and Caribbean women in FE, based on Roijs' (2015) review of Ahmed's (2012) book *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. This assessment does not only concentrate on BLM; it also offers significant perspectives on the wider scope of diversity and inclusion initiatives that have been affected by BLM. The BLM movement has notably reinforced awareness of institutional racism in educational institutions and exerted pressure on them to enhance their level of responsibility for their diversity and inclusion procedures by conducting frequent audits, providing comprehensive reports, and making public pledges to diversity objectives, as outlined in Ahmed's (2012) research. As a result of the influence of the BLM movement, institutions may have enhanced their affirmative action policies by implementing specific recruitment and retention

tactics aimed at African and Caribbean women. Ahmed's (2012) examination of institutional diversity initiatives provides evidence to support the notion that social movements can instigate these changes. The exertion of influence has resulted in the establishment of scholarships and support programmes that are specifically tailored to benefit African and Caribbean women and are part of a wider endeavour to enhance their presence and achievement in FE.

Academic establishments are increasingly embracing more comprehensive programmes that accurately represent historical events and the significant contributions made by African and Caribbean people. Ahmed (2012) examines the concept of institutional diversity and how it creates a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere for students from diverse backgrounds. Consistent with Ahmed's research, the BLM movement has prompted the adoption of cultural competence and anti-racism training for teachers and staff. This ensures that the educational setting becomes more inclusive and attuned to the requirements of all student populations. BLM has also called on institutions to enhance their connections with organisations that serve the African and Caribbean communities to help them to gain a deeper understanding of and meet the requirements of those communities, thereby establishing a network of support for students. Institutions are forming more partnerships with community groups to provide mentorship programmes and fight for legislative reforms that specifically benefit African and Caribbean women in the field of further education. As a result of the influence of the BLM movement, institutions are now more dedicated to showcasing progress in their efforts to promote diversity, providing regular updates on diversity measures, highlighting achievement, and maintaining transparency in areas that require development. Shining a spotlight on the accomplishments of African and Caribbean women in educational environments serves as a source of motivation for existing and potential students, in line with Ahmed's (2012) emphasis on the significance of representation. Roij's (2015) analysis of Ahmed's (2012) research indicates that the BLM movement has significantly influenced educational policies and practices, especially the representation of African and Caribbean women in FE; it has compelled institutions to heighten awareness, enact policy reforms, create inclusive curricula, enhance community connections and

reflect progress in diversity and inclusion. These enhance the development of a fair and supportive educational atmosphere for African and Caribbean women.

In Williams, Mezey, and Singh's (2021) article *BlackLivesMatter: From the Protest to Policy*, they investigate how the BLM movement has impacted several societal issues, including educational practices and policies. Among the important themes that they discuss are the effects of the BLM movement on the portrayal of African and Caribbean women in FE and how BLM has increased awareness of systemic racism in educational institutions. This raised consciousness has resulted in stronger support for the incorporation and portrayal of underprivileged groups, such as African and Caribbean women. The BLM movement has received widespread public backing and applied pressure on educational institutions to acknowledge and correct racial inequalities. Consequently, a more focused endeavour has been to establish policies that contribute to diversity and equity. Williams, Mezey and Singh (2021) emphasise the impact of the BLM movement on the formulation of policies that seek to enhance the presence of African and Caribbean women in many spheres. This includes the implementation of affirmative action rules, the use of targeted recruitment and the creation of diversity organisations or committees within an institution. The movement forced organisations to demonstrate greater accountability and transparency regarding their diversity programmes. This encompasses the dissemination of diversity statistics, progress reports, and the conduct of periodic evaluations of their policies and procedures.

The influence of the BLM movement has resulted in the establishment of scholarships and funding programmes designed to support African and Caribbean women; financial assistance plays an important role in enhancing the accessibility of FE for certain demographics. Williams, Mezey, and Singh (2021) examine the mentorship programmes and support networks that offer guidance and assistance to African and Caribbean women in FE, confronting the distinct obstacles encountered by these students. The BLM movement has also prompted initiatives to broaden the curriculum by integrating African and Caribbean populations' histories, contributions and viewpoints. Williams, Mezey and Singh (2021) highlight how such changes enhance inclusivity and support in the educational setting. Additionally, the movement has

encouraged the implementation of cultural competence and anti-racism training programmes for teachers and staff. This ensures that educators are prepared to assist a varied student population and address problems related to prejudice and discrimination.

Williams, Mezey and Singh (2021) emphasise the impact of the BLM movement on the development of connections between educational institutions and African and Caribbean community organisations, which enables assistance and resources for students and enhances educational institutions' awareness and their ability to address the requirements of these communities. Collaborative activities between educational institutions and community groups include workshops, seminars and outreach programmes, which contribute to the establishment of a cohesive and inclusive educational atmosphere. Williams, Mezey and Singh (2021) also analyse the wider cultural changes occurring in institutions as a result of the BLM movement. This includes cultivating a setting that appreciates diversity, fairness, and inclusivity and actively endeavours to remove structural racism. Enhancing the prominent position of African and Caribbean women in academic and administrative positions not only inspires students but also disrupts and transforms dominant power structures in educational institutions. According to Williams, Mezey and Singh (2021), the BLM movement has had a considerable impact on educational policies and practices; it has led to more awareness, regulatory changes, the establishment of assistance programmes, modifications to curricula, enhanced community connections, and more cultural transformations within educational institutions, enabling the establishment of a more comprehensive and fairer educational atmosphere for African and Caribbean women. Thus, social movements such as BLM have impacted educational practices relating to the participation of women of African and Caribbean heritage in FE.

Encouraging diversity and inclusivity is the primary objective of many education-related policies. To encourage equity and diversity within FE, for instance, the Department of Education has implemented programmes to increase the proportion of underrepresented demographics in leadership roles. The policies of individual FE institutions may also target the promotion of diversity and inclusion. Potential strategies that can be implemented include unconscious bias training, mentoring

initiatives, and inclusive recruitment procedures. It is especially important to have policies that offer women enhanced prospects for professional growth and assistance in their jobs. These can include specialised financial support, educational guidance and connections. Nevertheless, notwithstanding these initiatives, the level of African and Caribbean women's presence in high-ranking roles within FE establishments in England continues to be inadequate. These findings underscore the need for enhanced application of policies and strategies to address underrepresentation. Warmington et al. (2018) do not argue that Stephen Lawrence's murder created England's institutionalised racism from 1993 to 2013, but they did not increase awareness of it.

The ensuing movement for justice led by the Lawrence family resulted in the establishment of a public inquiry (Macpherson, 1999), which had a direct impact on the development of race equality legislation and provided specific suggestions to tackle racial inequality in the public sector, particularly in the field of education. Nevertheless, Stephen's death did not have an immediate influence on government policies and particularly did not affect the field of education. The significance of the Macpherson Report, which examined the police's response to Stephen's death, followed by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, ought not to be considered definitive milestones. Furthermore, on further consideration, it becomes evident that there has been a deficiency in addressing race equality in education policies.

Although the Labour Party's 'high performance/high equity' plan (2010) gave racial equality a significant push, there were contradictions almost immediately after the approach was implemented. Ball (2008) claimed that improving performance and reducing racial disparities are not distinguishable from one another but did not necessarily occur while the Labour government was in power; there was a shift in emphasis away from resolving imbalances and towards emphasising the achievement of efficiency (Tomlinson, 2005). After the influence of the work of Macpherson was reduced, the issues relating to racial equality continued to be addressed through the prism of dealing with underachievement. An inclusive approach to educational expectations that takes into consideration every person irrespective of their race or ethnicity replaced the primary focus on dealing with institutionalised marginalisation, which had been proposed by the Macpherson Report (1999) and Race Relations



(Amendment) Act (2000). This approach was implemented to tackle the issue of workplace discrimination. In terms of educational policy, it brought a shift away from an emphasis on performance towards focusing on equity, as proposed in the Macpherson Report and by the Labour government (2010).

In summary, despite the implementation of governmental initiatives aimed at fostering equality and diversity, substantial obstacles persist in the representation of African and Caribbean women in FE institutions in England. Additional investigation and formulation of policies are required to tackle these concerns. Nevertheless, equality, diversity, and inclusion do not mean treating all individuals uniformly; rather it entails the promotion and acceptance of the unique qualities that set us apart from others, while also ensuring that all feel secure and embraced. It is imperative to be open and responsive to the requirements of those with distinct attributes, while also showing them support, a demonstration of equality, diversity, and inclusivity.

## **2.19 Black Lives Matter & Social Protests: its Significance**

The global BLM protests that took place in 2020 after the death of George Floyd had a substantial influence on various industries, including the field of FE in England. Although it is difficult to measure its influence on the presence of Black women in high-ranking positions in FE, the movement has unquestionably led to significant conversations and initiatives concerning representation and racial justice.

According to Mohbin, Swann and Bannock (2021), the BLM protests have effectively raised the issue of racial inequity and inclusion to public awareness. The amplified consciousness and exchange of ideas on these matters are expected to have had an impact on FE sectors in England, leading institutions to scrutinise their procedures and leadership. There has been a growing need for educational programmes to incorporate the cultural, literary, and historical aspects of African and Caribbean groups more accurately (Parveen & Thomas, 2021). Numerous educational institutions throughout England have undertaken curriculum reform aimed at acknowledging the accomplishments of African and Caribbean people, as well as other minority ethnic communities, while also addressing the detrimental consequences of racism (Parveen & Thomas, 2021). Several establishments have pledged to tackle racial disparities and

enhance inclusivity. Nevertheless, the pace of these transformations is frequently insufficient, needing a considerable amount of time to see substantial progress in the presence of African and Caribbean women in positions of leadership. The BLM rallies have resulted in a stronger examination of institutions, especially those in the banking and financial education industry, and have the potential to exert further pressure on them, compelling them to confront matters of diversity and fairness.

FE colleges in England have implemented several measures in response to the BLM movement (Riaz, 2020). Many have prioritised the integration of concepts derived from the BLM movement and racial justice into their pedagogical approaches to the cultural, literary and historical aspects of African and Caribbean populations (Riaz, 2020). FE colleges have been challenged to analyse their reaction to the BLM movement and examine the need for more effort in their anti-racial endeavours (Advance, 2021). Universities have established training initiatives to instruct students as well as educators on racial diversity and the significance of inclusivity (Advance, 2021; Mirza, 2018; Rollock, 2012). Several educational institutions have implemented financial assistance and grants with the specific objective of providing support to African and Caribbean students and lecturers (Advance, 2021). Attempts have been undertaken to mitigate disparity in educational attainment among various cohorts of students (Advance, 2021). Universities have been urged to collect and examine data on race as well as diversity to have a deeper understanding of and tackle racial inequalities (Advance, 2021; Mirza, 2018; Rollock, 2012). These initiatives demonstrate dedication to tackling racial disparities and fostering inclusivity in the field of financial education. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that implementing change usually requires a significant amount of time and ongoing effort to guarantee enduring effects.

In conclusion, although the BLM demonstrations have probably had an impact on the FE sector in England and raised awareness of the problem of representation, it is an opportunity for reform. Sustained endeavours are required to guarantee that the progress achieved by these demonstrations results in an enduring change in the presence of African and Caribbean women in recognised senior positions in FE colleges in England.

## **2. 20 Summary of literature review**

The literature explores the educational achievements and obstacles faced by African and Caribbean women, who are often marginalised and underrepresented as a social group (Bhopal, 2014). These issues persist due to the presence of both explicit and implicit forms of racism. The interplay between class and gender inequalities has significant implications for the professional advancement of African and Caribbean women, particularly at higher levels within organisations (Bhopal, 2014). This can be attributed to the adverse effects of economic and social disadvantage. The literature exposes the lack of awareness of the underrepresentation of African and Caribbean women in senior positions; women who have been subjected to societal expectations that align with the norms of a White-dominant culture within the context of FE (Kramer, 2020).

The underrepresentation of these women poses a challenge to the prevailing male-dominated environment, commonly referred to as the 'boys' club' (Kerfoot & Whitehead, 1998; Shain, 2000). According to Shain (2000), women who occupy positions of senior and middle management in FE bear the responsibility of managing and implementing organisational transformation. FE sector organisations try to find a balance between working and challenging responsibilities and the demands of making tremendous effort within a gendered organisational environment. According to Shain's (2000) research on managers within the sector, it is evident that women are often assigned the roles of middle managers.

The process through which African and Caribbean women achieve senior leadership positions is characterised by their unwavering determination and dedication. The progress of their journey is influenced by challenges and various encounters (Amber, 2012). Learning is influenced and promoted through experience (Maxwell, 2013). The significance of the journey lies in its role as a platform for African and Caribbean women to acquire knowledge about many influences, mentors, unique experiences, and decisions that shape their career aspirations. However, the experiences of African and Caribbean women in their pursuit of senior leadership roles indicate the obstacles they face (Collins, 2000) as well as their inadequate professional background (Collins,

2000; Delany & Rogers, 2004; White, 1999), which contributes to their underrepresentation in senior positions (Santamaría, 2012). Those who subsequently assume senior positions in FE experience further challenges when they identify as African or Caribbean females and face both internal and external pressures associated with leadership and successful leadership.

A significant number of African and Caribbean staff have encountered instances of discrimination (Fino, 2019). Many institutions have implemented rules about racial equality, but only a limited number of colleges have people with African, Caribbean, or Asian heritage in positions of management. Government initiatives were implemented to support BAME employees. One such initiative was the BLI, which aimed to enhance the training and development opportunities for African and Caribbean leaders. According to Fino (2019), some positive outcomes have resulted from these efforts. One notable difficulty encountered by African and Caribbean personnel working in FE colleges is their lack of familiarity with the procedures involved in applying for promotions. Additionally, these individuals often experience a dearth of support in terms of career advancement and progression (UCU, 2015). The field of education continues to be predominantly male dominated at the senior level (Shain, 2000).

Disparities exist in the opportunities for professional growth among African and Caribbean women and White women managers, as highlighted by Hite (2004). African and Caribbean women who possess excellent qualifications and many years of experience often encounter problems in their efforts to break through the glass ceiling, an invisible barrier that restricts their progression to senior-level positions (Lifelong Learning UK, 2011). Recruitment and promotion procedures have incorporated discrimination in the routes to educational leadership for African and Caribbean women (Weiner et al., 2022). Pervasive sexism and racism are evident in all facets of the hiring and selection processes (Weiner et al., 2022). Yet there has not been much research on bias in the recruitment and promotion processes (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Lee & Mao, 2020; Palmer & Mullooly, 2015; Shakeshaft et al., 2007).

The UCU Report of 2015 highlights the persistent presence of racism in FE institutions, colleges, and universities. This is evidenced by the ongoing obstacles faced by African and Caribbean employees in their professional advancement, as well as instances of workplace bullying, which are documented in the same report. The presence of racism within the FE system in England is manifested in different ways that have noticeable impacts on African and Caribbean women (Bell, 2004). Racial discrimination or microaggressions (Thomas, 2021) persist as ongoing challenges, regardless of efforts that are made toward the achievement of racial equality. According to Thomas (2021), the struggle for equal opportunities in the workplace continues, forcing women of all races and nationalities to confront these challenges and develop coping mechanisms. In male-dominated industries, women are required to exert additional effort to progress their careers and achieve success. Furthermore, Thomas suggests that women are expected to adopt a grateful attitude towards their employment and avoid expressing discontent regarding microaggressions. The influence of race and ethnicity has significant effects on their employment choices, emotional well-being, and overall state of health (Eddo-Lodge, 2017).

In the context of educational institutions, the presence of institutional racism can be observed at various levels, including in micro and macro forms (Scheurich & Young, 1997). The expectation that people will conform to racial and ethnic stereotypes has been identified as a significant factor that influences the ability of individuals from BAME backgrounds to achieve senior positions within organisations (Earley et al., 2002). Racial prejudice forms a substantial barrier to the progress of individuals from BAME backgrounds (Bush et al., 2006; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Lumby & Coleman, 2007, 2017; Miller and Callender, 2018). According to Parker and Funk (2017), there is a notable disparity in the provision of mentorship opportunities to African and Caribbean women, resulting in their frequent exclusion from such programmes. According to Albel and Tilly (1997), individuals who are unable to access professional growth and mentoring opportunities, including those who find themselves confined to positions without managerial responsibilities, face challenges. This experience can manifest as either subtle or overt forms of discrimination (West, 2015). The implementation of BAME staff initiatives, such as the BLI, has demonstrated

efficacy in enhancing awareness and training for African and Caribbean principals. This effectiveness is evidenced by a notable increase in the number of principals within this demographic. The government's intervention intended to address the difficulties that members of BAME groups, particularly those with African and Caribbean heritage, encountered while applying for managerial posts.

In the next section, there is a discussion regarding the theoretical framework that can be used to explore the experiences of African and Caribbean women in achieving senior positions within FE.

## **2. 21 Trajectories of Success: A Theoretical framework for African and Caribbean Women in Further Education**

A theoretical framework was required to investigate the journeys taken by African and Caribbean women to reach senior positions in FE colleges. The framework chosen for this study comprised four parts: a synopsis of the process of developing a theoretical framework; the design of the framework: critical theory and CRT (Gunter, 2000); and BFT (Collins, 2000). These parts taken together present a wide variety of perspectives of African and Caribbean women in the context of their lived experiences of working their way up to top positions in FE. The ideas are significant in the context of FE institutions because they offer crucial viewpoints on issues of racial inequality, gender bias, and what is needed for representation. In addition, they provide opportunities to investigate the complexities that exist between racially charged and gender-specific experiences.

### **2. 21.1 Summary of the development of a theoretical framework**

It is appropriate to summarise the key concerns that influenced the formulation of the research inquiry's purpose and, eventually, the research questions to establish a theoretical framework that would be used to investigate the experiences of African and Caribbean women.

Inequalities in society, including the workplace, pose challenges for BWIL roles within FE institutions. These challenges stem from both internal and external pressures, as well as the scrutiny the women face. Previous research by Johnson et al. (2020), Boris-Schacter (2006), Jean-Marie and Martinez (2007), Shakeshaft (1993) and Young and Skria (2003) has highlighted the complexities associated with these inequalities. Bhopal (2014) highlights the persistent underrepresentation of racial and ethnic groups in senior positions, as well as discrepancies in their progression to senior positions within the field of education. Consequently, there is a noticeable scarcity of African and Caribbean women in top positions, as noted by Santamaría (2012).

As delineated in the literature review, the present study acknowledges two primary

theoretical frameworks: BFT (Collins, 2002) and CRT (Gunter, 2005). In 2000, Gunter wrote that social processes were shaped by social positions and power dynamics. In 2006, Gunter suggested that this required recognition of the influence of dominant elite groups and the disregarding of racial considerations.

To address the research questions in-depth, it was necessary to have a framework that provided an overarching perspective, which could be used to examine or understand the criticisms made by participants who took part in the interviews. The framework made it feasible to draw parallels between the lived experiences of a variety of African and Caribbean women and the situations in which they found themselves. In addition, it assured participants that they understood the internal and external facets, as well as the challenges, that were involved in holding senior or managerial positions in FE colleges.

Black feminist thought (BFT) and critical race theory (CRT) were the two theoretical frameworks that were employed in this study since they both addressed and explored the lived experiences of the participants, and they were relevant to this study. BFT explores race, gender, and class through the lens of African and Caribbean women. It fills imbalances in feminist and civil rights movements. This theory emphasises African and Caribbean women's experiences to make feminism and social justice more accessible and equitable to all. CRT addresses how race and racism affect other social disparities. It challenges equality initiatives for failing to address systemic racism and originated in the 1970s and 1980s in the U.S. CRT promotes social justice and equity by revealing and changing how race and racism impact society, law, and culture. Intersectionality theory by Crenshaw (1989) is essential for understanding how race and gender affect African and Caribbean women's identities and experiences. My intersectional framework provides a contextualised understanding of gendered racism by examining race and gender, addressing literature gaps, and incorporating social, cultural, and historical issues.



## **2. 21.2 Black Feminist Thought**

BFT (Collins, 2002) provided the theoretical foundation for this research study. According to this school of thought, African and Caribbean women have unique shared experiences that only other African and Caribbean women can understand. BFT challenges White feminism because the latter ignores the various forms of oppression to which African and Caribbean women are subjected. Collins (2002) urged African and Caribbean women to speak their truths without making any accommodations to fit within the ideals of the dominant culture. She encouraged African and Caribbean women to 'self-define' and 'self-validate'. The goal of BFT is to provide African and Caribbean women with the resources necessary to fight the subordination of African and Caribbean women. Additionally, BFT seeks to empower and elevate the narratives and lived experiences of African and Caribbean women as a way to build upon the knowledge that is required to understand marginalised groups of people (Collins, 2002).

A BFT approach was used as a theoretical framework for the data collection part of this research and to answer questions that the study posed (Collins, 2002; Davis, 1983; Giddens, 1984; Johnson-Bailey, 2001). Its use enabled me to expand on a critical social theory of African and Caribbean women's experiences as collective 'agents of knowledge' (Collins, 1990, p.7) at the centre of discourse and analysis (Collins, 1990, p.1).

BFT is a school of thought that was established in 1989 by Patricia Hill-Collins. It is a perspective that is grounded in the lived experiences of the everyday struggles of African and Caribbean women (Alinia, 2015). According to Alinia (2015), BFT discloses how dominance is organised and functions in a variety of different institutions of power. As a result of the multi-personality of social agents, on the one hand, and the multiple and intersecting sites of oppression, on the other hand, the relationship between domination and resistance is complicated. Furthermore, it demonstrates the journey of struggle and the way to empowerment, while at the same time highlighting the challenges and difficulties in combating intersecting oppression (Alinia, 2015, pp. 2334–2335).

African and Caribbean women are subjected to a variety of forms of discrimination, including racism (Weale, 2020), barriers (Mackay & Etienne, 2006) and harassment and bullying. These issues have been investigated in the context of FE (UCU, 2015). Therefore, the application of BFT is pertinent to the investigation of African and Caribbean women leaders in FE and their advancement to senior positions because it aligns with the purpose of enabling African and Caribbean women to share their lived experiences and to disclose their truths in senior positions. Women with African and Caribbean heritage who work in education are continuously proving their significance and value as highly educated and experienced professionals, but they must decide what kind of voice and stance they will adopt once their arguments have been heard and accepted (Grant & Ghee, 2015).

According to Collins (2000), investigation of six distinguishing features that characterise BFT may provide the common ground that is so desperately needed both among African and Caribbean women and between African and Caribbean women as a group and other groups whose collective knowledge or thought has a similar purpose (Collins, 2000, p.22). These six principles are discussed in the next section.

## **2. 21.3 Six Principles of Black Feminist Thought**

1. Regardless of where within the African diaspora or the Caribbean a woman lives, she will be subjected to a variety of different types of oppression, each of which will produce the same kinds of consequences.

In my research, the findings pointed to several forms of oppression, including but not limited to ethnicity, age, economic status, discrimination, and restricted access to opportunities for career advancement through senior positions within the FE sector. The many forms of oppression, notwithstanding their detrimental nature, persisted throughout the participants' educational trajectories.

2. Black Feminist Thought emerges as a thread that interconnects experiences and beliefs; but not all African and Caribbean women have the same interpretations of their lived experiences, nor do they all have the same experiences.

All 13 participants in my research shared their stories and provided unique interpretations of their personal experiences. Employees experienced several challenges in the workplace, including unfair treatment, limited promotion prospects, and racial discrimination. Each participant narrated their own story. The factors contributing to the challenges faced by the individual included insufficient support from management, limited prospects for advancement, and the additional complexity of being a female manager of African and Caribbean descent. In the study, the impact of competition and intra-group dynamics on female managers was examined. Participants said that they often suffered discrimination and prejudice based on different aspects of their identity, which consequently presented obstacles to their career development.

3. Black Feminist Thought is the connections between the experiences of African and Caribbean women as a heterogeneous collective and any guaranteeing group knowledge or viewpoint.

The participants in this study collectively discussed and connected their opinions on their diverse experiences. The participants encountered many challenges and barriers while striving to progress in their careers and attain senior level positions. These hindered their advancement. Additional challenges included attending educational institutions predominantly populated by White students, residing in localities dominated by White students, and being the only people of African and Caribbean heritage in regions of London. The workplaces and workforces considered in this study reflected a deficiency in terms of diversity and representation. Prevailing issues were the absence of role models with African and Caribbean backgrounds; experiences of belonging to a marginalised or underrepresented group; and the lack of diversity and inclusion, particularly in positions of leadership. One major barrier to their job advancement was the absence of sufficient experience and opportunities to take up managerial positions. The interview procedure also posed a problem.

4. Black Feminist Thought acknowledges and promotes the significant contributions made by women thinkers from Africa and the Caribbean.

Through my research, African and Caribbean women have made important

contributions by sharing their narratives of striving for senior roles in FE.

5. “Black women intellectuals are neither all academics nor found primarily in the Black middle-class but are those who contribute to BFT as a critical social theory” (Collins, 2000, p.14). BFT can be used to construct and make available a forum through which the experiences of African and Caribbean women may be discussed.

The participants in my study made significant contributions to the field of BFT, a critical social theory, by using it as an opportunity to articulate their experiences and perspectives regarding their progression towards senior positions. This facilitated the initiation of more discussion on the subject matter. The participants expressed their feelings regarding the frustration, isolation, exclusion, and discrimination they experienced within the work environment, as well as regarding the difficulties they encountered in the management of the challenges they faced in their professional settings.

6. The importance of progressing one's position is a fundamental concept in BFT:

*“As social conditions change, so must the knowledge and practices designed to resist them”* (Collins, 2000, p. 39).

The research findings indicated that individuals faced significant challenges in their pursuit of senior positions, as they frequently failed in their applications for management and senior roles. They also faced challenges as they shifted into new managerial jobs. When assuming a new position, individuals may encounter challenges in effectively navigating their roles, especially when unanticipated concerns and tensions occur in their interactions with colleagues.

## **2. 21.4 Black Feminist Theory in this study**

The primary focus of BFT is the examination of relationships between BFT and other initiatives that aim to promote the principles of fairness and equal treatment. The outcomes of my research show that African and Caribbean women desire a professional environment within FE colleges that is characterised by inclusivity and fairness. The individuals expressed their viewpoints regarding the personal significance they attached to being invested in by someone.

My study was based on the premise that FE colleges should play a more active role in embracing diversity and should, as a result, fully realise the potential of African and Caribbean women to contribute their experience, skills, and training to the benefit of all. This was the central thesis of my study, and it is the foundation upon which the rest of my research is built. My conclusions include a staff profile and an inclusiveness policy, both of which improve diversity and equality of opportunity, with the goal of assisting and supporting a new generation of African and Caribbean women in senior managerial roles and senior positions.

Black Feminist Thought is a critical social theory that raises awareness of intersectionality and investigates the experiences and contributions that have been made to the empowerment of African and Caribbean women, in this case, women who occupy leadership roles in FE. BFT also is focused on the experiences and contributions that have been made to the empowerment of African and Caribbean women. The perspectives of African and Caribbean women who hold positions of leadership in FE are also emphasised within the framework of BFT. In 1989, Crenshaw introduced the concept of intersectionality as a metaphor (demarginalising); in 1991, she extended it as a 'provisional concept' to demonstrate the inadequacy of approaches that divided systems of oppression, isolating and focusing on one while partially obscuring the others. She did this to show that ways through which to understand oppression that separate these systems of oppression are insufficient. Previous research on racial and ethnic diversity in senior positions in FE did not address the significant challenges that African and Caribbean women encountered on their way to top management jobs, nor has it focused on the paths that lead to senior positions. Neither of these topics has been given sufficient attention in previous research.

According to Collins (1986), Black feminist literature has been developing since the latter part of the 1930s. She argues that Black intellectuals use their positions to critique race, class, and gender. The historian known as E. Frances White (1984) suggests that African and Caribbean women's notions have developed between movements for racial and sexual equality, in addition to beliefs that African Americans have been pushed to create Black feminism due to "marginalisation in both arenas" (White, 1984). Collins (1990) argues that in the hegemonic realm of power, dominant

groups strive to legitimise their acts through the utilisation of organisational procedures and social interactions. The participants in the current study had experienced situations in which the practice and social network systems within their organisations controlled whether they were disempowered, whether or not they were the only one of their kind, whether or not they were excluded, and whether or not they needed validation. The concept of Black feminism considers the uniqueness of each African and Caribbean woman's experience while recognising the similarities among those experiences. That is in line with the findings of this study, according to which the women shared many experiences that were similar to one another, despite the fact that each woman presented her story differently or had some experience that was unique (Collins, 1990), whether or not those experiences were judged according to stereotypical images of African and Caribbean women.

The development of BFT exemplifies the growing power of African and Caribbean women as agents of knowledge. African and Caribbean women are portrayed as self-defined and self-sufficient individuals who confront race, gender, and class oppression. One of the most notable characteristics of BFT is its concentration on transforming the consciousness of individuals in addition to transforming political and economic structures to bring about social change. Knowledge is an important component of the social dynamics that underpin both dominance and opposition. Nevertheless, putting the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women at the centre of the study provided a unique understanding of the concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies behind feminist and Afrocentric critiques (Collins, 1990). First, BFT assists individuals in contemplating many forms of oppression. According to Collins, BFT acknowledges that knowledge is an integral component of the social relations of dominance and resistance; a paradigm in which gender, class, and race are interrelated systems of oppression (Collins, 1990). Second, BFT tackles epistemological disputes in feminist theory and the sociology of knowledge that involve different ways of understanding 'truth' (Collins, 1990). This new knowledge assisted me in understanding new methods of learning about the individual experiences of empowerment that my participants had undergone, particularly in situations where there were options.

I applied BFT to my research as a component of this theoretical lens that helped assist me in comprehending and explaining the specific concerns that this research tackled. Collins (2000) argues that African and Caribbean women intellectuals frequently encounter two different epistemologies, one of which represents the interests of elitist White males and the other of which expresses the concerns of Black feminists. Although there are many different versions of these epistemologies, it is feasible to eliminate some of the transcendental differences that exist between the paradigms that they include. The fundamental question of which versions of the truth will stand is concerned with epistemological choices regarding whom to trust, whom to believe, and why something is right. Collins' book *Toward Truth* takes the position that Black feminist philosophy is found within a dominant cultural environment.

Collins (2000) contends that Black feminism is a form of knowledge that has been oppressed, and this is because, historically, African, and Caribbean women have had a difficult time locating alternative locations and epistemologies that can validate their self-definitions. In general, she has explored the positioned and oppressed stance of African and Caribbean women to understand Black feminist ideology as a partial perspective on dominance. This is instead of focusing on how the perspective of an African-Caribbean woman and the epistemology that goes along with it are distinct from those of White women, African and Caribbean men, and other groups of people. The lived experiences of African and Caribbean women provide one particular social location from which multiple epistemologies can be examined as potential points of connection with each other. She argues that African and Caribbean women, along with other groups that have distinct viewpoints, have validated these notions as being true. Furthermore, she argues that these notions have become the most 'objective' truths because each group has used the epistemological approaches that grow from its unique standpoint. Each group conveys its perspective and imparts the knowledge that it possesses, however limited and contextualised it may be. Each group's knowledge is incomplete because it views its truth as being only partially complete. To be heard, one must be particular; individuals and groups that make knowledge claims without having owned their position are less credible than those who do own their position. The existence of a self-defined African and Caribbean women's standpoint that makes

use of a Black feminist epistemology raises questions about the content of what is currently considered truth while also calling into question the truth itself. The conceptual framework that underpins Black feminist knowledge as a school of specialised thought reflects the lived realities of African and Caribbean women. By employing non-conventional methods of knowledge production and verification, the women of Africa and the Caribbean have developed a distinct Black female perspective on a variety of issues.

## **2. 21.5 Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory**

The purpose of this inquiry is to examine and evaluate ideology and political viewpoints to ensure that they are thoroughly analysed and assessed so that 'field members ask questions about power relationships within and external to activity and actions' is one of the fundamental principles of critical theory. The links between me as the researcher and the participants are based on analytical critique and historical analysis (Gunter, 2005 p.166). The social processes, according to Gunter (2000), are organised in accordance with social roles and dynamics of power, and as a result, "understanding the production of knowledge involves an awareness of dominating elite groups, not least how history may 'other' women, and bleach out issues of colour" (Gunter, 2006, p.207). It is a central component of feminism that social reality is inextricably bound up in power dynamics. Feminists often highlight the significance of disseminating a diversity of regional narratives (McLean, 2004). Hence, the act of actively interacting with leaders who are responsible to direct discussions and influence future actions in the context of cultural diversity (Lumby & Coleman, 2007).

Issues surrounding how to use of language in the context of racial differences are just as contentious as the notion of race. The statement, which relates to the examination of the relationship between 'race' and racism, as well as their intersection with gender and class, in relation to their impact on social interactions, originates from Critical Race Theory (Maylor, 2009, p.54). Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers a critical analysis of Bourdieu's (2001) theory of cultural capital, as it has been argued that certain groups own more cultural wealth than others, often leading to the evaluation of cultures that



position themselves with the dominant White middle-class culture. According to Popkewitz (1999), a study undertaken in the United States revealed the existence of a cohesive framework of concepts and beliefs concerning infancy, teaching, and school administration. This framework, sometimes referred to as a "scaffold of ideas," was found to have the effect of constraining the educational chances available to African and Caribbean children (p. 33).

These children were "divided and positioned as different from the normal in a way that was not overt, but which embodied the universal norms of sameness nonetheless" (p.33). In light of this, the ability to "normalise whiteness" (Warmington, 2009, p.292) Poses a significant challenge to maintaining of social fairness.

Hughes and Giles (2010) argue that CRT posits the necessity of formulating and implementing educational strategies and procedures that aim to make an impact to bring about change by prioritising the experiences and interests for ethnic groups. This perspective underscores the imperative of centring the needs and perspectives of people of colour in educational contexts. It is important to note that "applying critical race theory to African and Caribbean women's experiences is crucial" for the development of shared knowledge and understanding about the experiences of African and Caribbean women, the meanings they give to these experiences, and the discriminations they struggle with (Maylor, 2009, p.54). Thus, CRT challenges the dominant perspective, which within educational research is usually a White perspective (Hughes and Giles, 2010), by insisting that discourse should embrace race in addition to gender. According to Kohli (2009), this is sometimes referred to as the dominating perspective. The critical theory of race rejects "the assumption of a colour-blind society - and recognises that racism, both structural and personal, is alive and well" (Hughes & Giles, 2010, p.47). In CRT, the telling of stories is encouraged (Maylor, 2009) about the "lives, experiences, and daily environments of people of colour who suffer from and offer resistance to oppressive systematic pressures that manifest in various ways on their personal and collective lives" (Hughes & Giles, 2010, p.46).

The theoretical framework that was used for this study enabled analysis of the

obstacles faced by African and Caribbean women who want to advance to senior positions in FE. I have presented a concise overview that served as a foundation for the construction of a theoretical framework based on BFT. These sections included a comprehensive overview of six concepts that pertain to BFT, which were subsequently connected to the research findings. The relationship between BFT and other initiatives was discussed, specifically in terms of their role in promoting fairness and equal treatment. The discussion revolved around how to make use of CRT and its application. The next chapter contains a comprehensive account of the research methodology that was used in the study.

## **Chapter 3: Methods**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter examines the research methodology that was used for the study, with a specific focus on the decision to use the Biographical-narrative interpretative and semi-structured interviews to capture the experiences of African and Caribbean women in their pursuit of senior positions in the FE sector.

### **3.1 Inductive research approach (inductive reasoning)**

The inductive approach, also referred to as inductive reasoning, begins with observations and concludes with the formulation of theories that are formed as a consequence of those observations. Inductive research involves the exploration of patterns derived from observation and the development of explanatory theories through a series of hypotheses (Bernard, 2011). The objective of this approach is to construct significance from the gathered data to identify patterns and relationships, eventually leading to the development of a theoretical framework.

This research employed an inductive approach, which is usually associated with qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. This choice meant that I was able to concentrate my attention on a select group of problems. To acquire a well-rounded understanding of the findings, I gathered a large amount of rich data. No deductive technique was used in this research. Deductive techniques are normally connected with quantitative approaches. The use of a deductive technique would have required the translation of qualitative data into quantifiable measurements. This process does little to acknowledge the importance and significance of in-depth qualitative data and how they can be used to make meaningful contributions, and such an approach was not acceptable for this research.

The collection of qualitative data makes it possible to gain a thorough understanding of the why and the how of any problem. With quantitative data, the outcomes are

based on numerical responses, and if I had used this method, I would have obtained less insight into the ideas, motives, and drivers of my participants. Quantitative research approaches are generally linked with a scientifically evidenced approach; this was not considered the most effective strategy by which to research the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women. According to Patterson et al. (2016), the use of qualitative research approaches, such as story and narrative analysis, can provide thorough knowledge of the collective experiences that are shared by African and Caribbean women.

### **3.1.1 Justification for the use of an inductive approach**

The justification for applying an inductive approach lies in its ability to uncover empirical patterns that can subsequently be utilised to test hypotheses. Consequently, the inductive technique is widely employed in qualitative research (Bernard, 2011). When it comes to conceptualisation and evaluation of the experiences of African and Caribbean women, this approach could effectively take into consideration the broad spectrum of possibilities offered by Black feminism.

The use of inductive research is common in qualitative research, whereas the application of deductive research is more common in quantitative research. The difference between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies is discussed in the next section.

## **3.2 Qualitative research epistemological and ontological assumptions**

The use of qualitative approaches made it possible to understand and describe African and Caribbean women's unique experiences with issues. These phenomena could be described comprehensively as they were located and integrated within specific local settings.

The paradigm known as interpretivism acknowledges that the 'truth' of a situation is contingent on how other people interpret that phenomenon. Interpretive approaches recognise the significance of meanings for individuals and encourage them to behave

(or refrain from behaving) in a specific manner. This comprehension is important for both the participants in a study and the researchers, since both groups 'interpret' their own realities and create meanings based on those interpretations. Researchers need to have a comprehension of meaning if they are to interpret how participants account for themselves in interview settings, which typically present a context in which participants such as African and Caribbean women can become "too emotional" (Khosroshahi, 2021). Interpretative researchers can use interpretive analysis to acquire credibility, authenticity, or plausibility, which are more useful than absolute truth (Denzin, 1989a, 1989b; Hoffman, 2007; Scott, 1998). In a similar vein, the 'truth' of the reader's interpretation of these data is invariably contextually located and impacted by the predominant social discourses (Kohler Riessman, 2008b; Plummer, 2001; Stanley, 1992).

By recognising the subjectivity of both participants and researchers, BNIM acknowledges the widespread nature of interpretivism as a theoretical framework. The recognition of interpretivism is not limited to those who have been 'researched'; rather, it acknowledges the fact that both the researcher and those who have been 'researched' are affected by what Fisher (1978) referred to as a 'rather paradoxical situation'. According to him, "the human who engages in self-contact with self as an object and an active interpreter, both at the same time, is a dynamic entity whose fundamental trait is action – on the environment and on the self" (Fisher, 1978). In essence, individuals engage actively in the process of constructing and shaping their meanings as they narrate and recount the stories that reflect their life experiences. This is not done purposefully or explicitly; rather, it is typically triggered by habit, qualities, or inclination. The intricacy of interpretivist research is shown by these assumptions because many different elements have the potential to impact the telling (or not telling) of a narrative, as well as its interpretation and the subsequent relaying of that interpretation to other people (Fisher, 1978; Plummer, 2001; Sandelowski, 2002).

The inductive approach can be used to gain insights into the trajectories of African and Caribbean women in their pursuit of senior positions in FE through the collection of data from diverse sources such as interviews and surveys. I aimed to understand the

subjective experiences of the women in my sample through the identification of patterns within the data that might yield overarching insights that pertained to the issues of career progression, attainment, and obstacles that block the way to senior positions.

### **3.3 Research choice – qualitative method**

The qualitative research paradigm was best suited to this study, which was designed to value the individual and authentic voices of African and Caribbean women marginalised or eliminated from traditional hegemonic epistemology. In order to capture people's lived experiences from their viewpoints and to create themes that questioned basic or general assumptions, a qualitative research method was best suitable for this study. This choice of research method was prompted by factors involved in a study in which perspectives were needed to understand the overarching research questions in a college context.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003, pp.4-5), the qualitative researcher observes the world through field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and personal notes. Qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach in which researchers work in their natural settings to make sense of and interpret the meanings that people bring to them; various empirical tools are used in qualitative research, for example, case studies, personal experiences, introspection, life stories, interviews, artefacts, cultural texts and productions, and observational, historical, interactional and visual texts that describe routine and complicated meanings in the lives of individuals (Schurink, 2008).

#### **3.3.1 Exploration of the 'case study'**

Various strategies were considered for this investigation. Case studies were useful in the early phases of researching African and Caribbean women's journeys to senior positions in FE as they could be used to establish a hypothesis. This procedure was intensive, as it required detailed observation of African and Caribbean women.

According to Flyvbjerg (2001), a case study should only be used to analyse an individual at a certain time and place. A case study could help the researcher to understand how African and Caribbean women were invisible, isolated, marginalised, or discriminated against in FE, and what had happened to them. New hypotheses and questions could result. However, the disadvantage, in this case, could bring about selection bias that understates or overstates the relationships of African and Caribbean women which would make the importance of the study weak (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

### **3.3.2 Exploration of the 'oral history' approach**

Oral history was another option since I thought people might narrate their 'journeys' and discuss unnoticed topics. This method may reveal subconscious issues that individuals may not be aware of. Oral history data gathering is thorough, as a variety of interviews are required with participants to give them ample opportunity to tell their stories (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). It supports case study, interviews, and conversational approaches. However, oral history critics argue that participants may not remember exactly and may exaggerate past events, so they are unreliable (Hobsbawn, 1997). Hobsbawn believed that lived experience had eroded cultural and societal effects, leaving memory hazy and hard to grasp. I also considered collecting and analysing empirical materials on African and Caribbean women's journeys through a focus group. This would involve focusing on a particular department over a period, or by participant numbers and regions (as shown in Deane, 2013), to examine the progression of minority staff in FE and sixth form colleges.

Narrative interviews often show a significant amount of guidance, structure, and sometimes micromanagement from the interviewer. This phenomenon is observed both at the beginning of the interviews and, more commonly, at different stages throughout the interviews, as is typical of semi-structured interviews. Concern for the diversity of past and present, dominant, and less dominant viewpoints that people currently hold on those events as well as those that they held before and throughout those experiences is an essential component of biographical inquiry into

people's lived experience of their lives and the circumstances in which they find themselves.

My choice was to use a qualitative method that employed semi-structured interviews that followed the Biographical-narrative interpretative method framework. This method was suitable because it would capture the subjective experiences of these marginalised women and would reveal themes that challenged preconceptions. In the next section, the chosen data collection methods are explained.

### **3.4 Methods of data collection**

Two methodologies were employed to gather data for this research project: the BNIM and semi-structured interviews.

#### **3.4.1 Biographical-narrative interpretative method (BNIM)**

The fundamental assumptions and analytical technique of the Biographical-narrative interpretative method are focused on three interconnected aspects: the individual's entire life experience or story (biography), how the individual tells it (narrative), and the social interpretation of the story (interpretation). Usually, the BNIM uses a one-of-a-kind interviewing method to coax participants into telling their whole narrative without interruption (Wengraf, 2001).

The Biographical-narrative method actively promotes and facilitates studies that delve into the subjective experiences of people and groups. The development of this phenomenon is conducive to the use of psycho-dynamic and socio-dynamic approaches, and support professionals in psychology and sociology, without demanding a commitment to any specific theoretical framework. This resource is specifically designed to cater to the needs of researchers seeking tools that facilitate an in-depth knowledge of the interaction between psychological and sociological factors. It emphasises the importance of not disregarding or choosing either sociological or psychological dynamics and structures, and instead recommends a holistic understanding that considers their historical context and situational nature (Wengraf, 2001).



The Biographical-narrative interpretative methodology integrates biography, narrative, and interpretation. In recent years, several qualitative and in-depth interview methods have been developed to elicit narrative accounts. These include the free association narrative interview method (Holloway & Jefferson, 2008), the Biographical-narrative interpretative method (Wengraf, 2006) and narrative-oriented inquiry. Work produced using the Biographical-narrative interpretative method can be analysed in many ways. The use of this method is aimed at “reconstructing the experiencing interpreting subjectivity” of biological agents (Wengraf, 2004, p.12). Those who use analytical methods seek to understand life-world-interpreting and life-world-activity experiences. Since the participants’ biographical narratives described ‘objective life events’, I examined the participants’ choice patterns; how their story's decisions flowed; what events and themes they discussed; how they talked about them; and how they wanted me, the researcher, to evaluate them and their phrases. How did they appear? What ‘moral’ of the (biographical) story should I not use? Why?

The Biographical-narrative interpretative method is used to support research on people's actual lived experiences, both individually and collectively. The comprehension of the reciprocal relationship between internal and external dynamics is enhanced by the collection of experiential narratives, as opposed to relying solely on explicit expressions of individuals' perspectives within historically shifting contexts. Biographical research emphasises the variety of past and present, dominant, and less prominent perspectives that people have on their lives and situations. Instead of ‘attitude’ surveys and interviews that elucidate mostly dominant, explicit and ‘official press release’ present-time perspectives, the use of the Biographical-narrative interpretative method helps us to understand the contradictory and emotional by expressing and detecting implicit and often suppressed present-time and earlier perspectives (and counter-narratives).

I expected the use of Biographical-narrative interpretative method and semi-structured interviews to be simple. I planned to introduce myself to each participant,

go through the questions, and hope that they would answer them fully. However, sometimes this procedure degenerated into a debate before and after the interviews, which consumed time. I only wanted to examine a specific group of African and Caribbean women. I targeted African and Caribbean women who agreed to be interviewed and were considered representative of the population. The Biographical-narrative interpretative method is suitable for the first part of my research since its use exposed participants' experiences and interpretations of their senior position journeys. They could speak their stories freely. Additionally, the interview schedule gave me immediate participant experiences. Semi-structured interviews followed BNIM interviews well. This was a cost-effective technique to collect data on big, dispersed populations.

Standardised interviews with questionnaires are the most widely used study method, according to Ackroyd and Hughes (1981), and their use has been analysed extensively. They contrast with unstructured interviews, in which the interviewer can ask any questions in any order that fits the situation. This form of interview gives the interviewer and respondent more freedom to ask and answer questions than does a structured interview. The unstructured interview is a conversation that is a useful method in exploratory studies where little is known about the subject (the person.) It is mostly used in ethnographic studies because it involves understanding people in their settings, does not control or manipulate what is being studied, and is concerned with participant-based description, meaning and language. An ethnographic method is financially economical, but it takes a lot of time and requires a lot of knowledge about the interviewee to enable the researcher to phrase sensible surveys. In this case, not enough was known about the interviewees or the subject to use this method.

The same period up until the first Biographical-narrative interpretative method interview as well as the period that followed can be the subject of successive Biographical-narrative interpretative method interviews to elicit later reviews from possibly new perspectives. Therefore, the Biographical-narrative interpretative method can be utilised as a component of studies that consider events before and after certain interventions. Their use involves a unique interviewing strategy to capture in practice an unbroken tale from participants. A major component of the

method is listening carefully to the stories of participants (Corbally, 2014).

The Biographical-narrative interpretative method can be used to study life histories, including whole-life trajectories, as well as life stories, such as descriptions of overcoming challenges to reach senior positions in FE. Through the production of a thorough biography, useful insights can be gained. This study was aimed at deepening understanding of life-stage decision-making. Social scientists can analyse individuals as agents shaped by historical circumstances by studying their biographies. Their actions can only be fully understood within their specific historical contexts. O'Neill (2011) used the Biographical-narrative interpretative method to study African and Caribbean women who wanted high-level positions in FE. This study used narratives to protect participants' identities and to reveal family members' job decisions. These stories illuminated how people made the best decisions in difficult situations.

In this study, I highlighted the stories of the women's interpretations of their journeys towards senior positions in FE. When the interviews had been completed, I decided to analyse the participants' responses using the Biographical-narrative interpretative method and the semi-structured questions. The questions were presented to 13 participants.

### **3.4.2 Biographical-narrative Interpretative Method in Black Feminist Work**

In their studies in Black feminist theory, a few scholars have applied the Biographical-narrative interpretative method technique. To learn more about the experiences of African and Caribbean women aspiring to top leadership positions in Californian unions, Askew (2021) employed the Biographical-narrative interpretative method. This approach consisted of carrying out individual Zoom interviews with eight women, providing them with the opportunity to recount their experience and their progress towards positions of leadership. The use of the Biographical-narrative interpretative methodology allowed the researcher to collect comprehensive and complex accounts that provided a profound understanding of the obstacles encountered by these women, such as the phenomenon known as the 'glass ceiling'. The acquired data were subsequently analysed both manually and using NVivo software to discern patterns

and themes. Nevertheless, the study acknowledges its limitations, such as a small sample size and the possibility of misinterpreting the participants' statements. The purpose of the research was to provide information to union officials and encourage the presence of diverse individuals in leadership roles.

In their Black feminism work, Stoll, Yalipende, Arday et al. (2022) using the Biographical-narrative interpretative method to investigate the encounters of African and Caribbean university students in the UK with mental health problems. The application of a qualitative methodology enabled the researcher to gather data from interviews, contributing to a methodical investigation into how people perceive their own identities and navigate their complex life encounters. In this Black feminist work, the application of Biographical-narrative interpretative method offered a thorough understanding of the experience of African and Caribbean university students. This enhanced the existing body of research on issues of race, mental health, and FE.

The Biographical-narrative interpretative method played a crucial role in documenting the mental well-being of students while identifying significant milestones in their academic journey. The discussion provided an opportunity for students to articulate their views and the use of language, ultimately mitigating prejudice and assuring a diverse range of ideas. The study used Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a theoretical framework to analyse and confront racial disparities. CRT contributed to the examination of racist attitudes and practices in education as well as to the investigation of racial disparity from several perspectives. It also provided direction for the study of how colonialism and slavery have affected people's lives and families throughout generations.

Jordan (2023) employed the Biographical-narrative interpretative method to investigate the encounters of prominent female BAME leaders in the field of social work within the context of Black feminism. The use of the Biographical-narrative interpretative method approach enabled the researcher to collect comprehensive and intricate narratives from the participants without exerting any influence on their reports. It enabled the accumulation of individual accounts and first-

hand experiences, which were subsequently examined using Constructivist Grounded Theory and Charmaz's methodology. Several readings of the transcripts were required for the analysis, after which they were coded and categorised into sub-sections, such as childhood memories, family history, and the effects of migration. By employing an iterative method, involving both in-case and across-case analysis, themes were identified, precisely defined, and subsequently refined to accurately capture the experiences. The study used a psychoanalytic framework to analyse race and racism as complex phenomena that are shaped by social, cultural, and historical factors. The statement emphasised the contradiction between society's strong opposition to racism and its continued support for racial categories. The study also examined the dynamic changes in racial hierarchies within the framework of social class. The researcher's investigation uncovered instances of unconscious aspects of interpersonal interaction through their personal experience of the transfer of information.

In this Black feminist study, the application of the Biographical-narrative interpretative method provided a thorough understanding of the realities for BAME women in managerial positions in social work. This contribution adds to the existing body of information on aspects of ethnicity, mental health, and FE.

The Biographical-narrative interpretative method framework was highly efficient for collecting the subjective experiences of African and Caribbean women in FE. Through the collection of personal accounts, this method enables a comprehensive understanding of how the BLM movement has increased awareness of systemic racism and compelled institutions to be more accountable. This consciousness is frequently mirrored in the individual narratives and encounters disclosed by the participants. When planning my research, the increased recognition and need for responsibility described in the literature, as demonstrated by Williams, Mezey and Singh's study (2021), inspired my decision to capitalise on the Biographical-narrative method. The method's emphasis on individual narratives offers a forum for participants to articulate how these wider societal shifts have affected their personal and educational experiences. The biographical-narrative method enables the examination of how policy reforms and inclusive behaviour, influenced by the BLM movement, are

perceived by African and Caribbean women. Through an analysis of individuals' life experiences and narratives, this study can uncover the efficacy of and obstacles to affirmative action policies, focused recruitment techniques and diversity initiatives. The method's focus on narratives offers a comprehensive and intricate description of how these policies manifest in the real lives of marginalised women.

The subjective narratives collected by the Biographical-narrative interpretative method can reveal the effect of assistance programmes and resources created in response to BLM advocacy. These anecdotes serve to challenge preconceived notions of the sufficiency and availability of such initiatives, offering a more profound understanding of their tangible effect in everyday life. The study conducted by Williams, Mezey and Singh (2021) emphasised the need for support initiatives. This affected my choice of methodology, as Biographical-narrative interpretative method enables a comprehensive examination of participants' interactions with these programmes, uncovering both achievements and areas for enhancement. The Biographical-narrative interpretative method framework is also a useful tool for analysing the effect of broader cultural and institutional changes on African and Caribbean women in FE; through an emphasis on biographical and narrative elements, the study can reveal the personal impact of these changes. Biographical-narrative interpretative method's capacity to record intricate, individual narratives offers a complete understanding of how these overarching changes impact human encounters and perspectives within educational establishments

My research on the influence of the BLM movement on educational policies and practices, with a particular emphasis on the representation of African and Caribbean women in FE, is appropriate to the Biographical-narrative interpretative method. A biographical-narrative interpretative method is shaped by and draws from existing literature through its emphasis on personal life experiences, narratives, and societal interpretations. This approach facilitates a detailed examination of how the BLM movement has influenced policies, practices and individual experiences, ultimately leading to a thorough and all-encompassing understanding of its effects. This reflection provides a connection between my research design and the pertinent

findings and topics in the literature. It provides a rationale for using the Biographical-narrative interpretative method and demonstrates its suitability for the study.

### **3.4. 3 General principles of biographical-narrative Interpretative method interviewing practice**

The Biographical-interpretative method interviewing practice involves a main interview, which may last for one to two hours, and in some cases a second interview. In the first interview, the Biographical-interpretative method was used to gain answers to the first and second research questions:

RQ1: How do African and Caribbean women narrate their journeys towards senior positions in FE?

RQ2: What factors influence African and Caribbean women to embark on their chosen career paths?

The main interview consisted of two sections. The first section involved consideration of the first question, which was designed to elicit narratives and to establish a framework for subsequent questioning. The background, education, and experiences of the interviewee were emphasised. The question asked at the beginning of this section – “Briefly, can you please tell me the story of your journey?” – was an open narrative question designed to elicit the journey of the participant as they chose to tell it. In principle, after that initial question, I asked no more questions in that section but supported the study participants as they attempted to answer it.

Cooper (1995) and Benham and Cooper (1998) posited that narratives indicated the significant influence on the speaker of what they had gone through, as seen by their ability to convey powerful messages. “Stories can be retold, reframed, reinterpreted and because they are fluid, open for retelling and ultimately relieving, they are the repositories of hope” (Benham & Cooper, 1998, p.121). Benham and Cooper (1998) argue that narrative approaches have the potential to capture the researcher's intention of revealing experiences that surpass superficial masks and preconceptions

(p.7).

According to Wengraf (2001), the initial open question may lead to highly variable lengths of response that last between “five and 55 minutes or more” (Wengraf, 2001, p.134). The main objective is to provide help and assistance to the participant to enable the continuation of their storytelling, with the overall objective of achieving a minimum duration of 30 minutes. During my research, I compiled concise notes relating to the subjects discussed by the interview participants, employing the specific terminology and phrases they used. I aimed to help the participants continue to tell their stories for as long as they wished without interrupting the flow of their storytelling. I used Wengraf’s guide to BNIM to help me with the analysis of the interview data (2001, p.134). My notes were written immediately after each interview. Casy, in her 1993 study, invited female teachers including African American women to “tell me the story of your life” (p.240). This work had an impact on my research because I used a similar phrase to invite senior African and Caribbean women who had agreed to participate to tell me about their journeys. After the interviewee had concluded the initial account, I then moved on to the second subsection, in which I asked the second question: “What factors influenced you to embark on your chosen career path?”.

The second subsection was a narrative follow-up to the initial account. Questions were posed to the participants; however, the style of these meant that numerous limitations were placed on their responses. For instance, I asked only questions that were narratively targeted toward the themes that were brought up. Second, I limited my questions to themes that were brought up by the interviewee, despite points that might have aroused my curiosity. Third, I inquired about the subjects that were brought up only in the language that the interviewee used and in the sequence in which they were mentioned. In the second session, more notes were taken to prepare for additional narrative-directed questions. These notes were used in the second session.

Immediately after the interview, before I did anything else, I jotted down a few short notes on the experiences I had undergone while conducting this first narrative



interview. As crucial to my education as the interview tapes were, I found these experiential instant-debriefing notes to be invaluable. I continued to write about whatever came into my head, regardless of whether it was pertinent to the topic at hand until I could think of nothing else to write about. In the same manner that I gave the person I was interviewing the time they required during the interview to say whatever they needed to say in the way that they wanted to express it, I gave myself an hour after the interview for an instant debrief in which I could say all I needed to say in the way that it came to me as I wrote it down. This made it possible for both my interviewee and me to express ourselves, freely in the same way, using the free-associative method.

All interview participants consented to a follow-up interview. These participants developed an interest in their experiences of education and how it had made an impact on their journeys. However, the most important part of the main interview was never to interrupt the respondent and only ask for narrative information.

A great deal of guidance, structure, and even micromanagement on the part of the interviewer can be found in many (narrative) interviews, either at the beginning of the interviews or, more frequently, at various points throughout. All semi-structured interviews follow this pattern. Concern for the diversity of past and present, dominant, and less dominant viewpoints that people currently hold on those events as well as those that they held before and throughout those experiences is an essential component of biographical inquiry into people's lived experiences of their lives and the circumstances in which they find themselves. Therefore, an open, less structured approach was favourable for this study.

### **3.5 Gaining access to participants and recruitment**

Potential participants were sent invitations by email, in which I introduced myself and the reasons for my conducting a research study on African and Caribbean women. The purpose of the study was discussed with all participants. I told them that the study

would help to develop an understanding of the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women to assist in the development of strategies and policies for local FE institutions, to improve their recruitment and enrolment of African and Caribbean women to senior positions. Participants were told that to obtain the data needed for this study, an initial interview would be scheduled at a mutually convenient time. They were told that there would be two interviews in person, each lasting approximately one hour. To reassure participants, they were told that interviews would be tape-recorded and transcribed, and they would be allowed to review the transcript for accuracy, as well as to make changes. They were told that participation was voluntary and if they decided to participate, I would share the interview questions with them before the interview, that the results would be reported in the dissertation, and that all information they provided would be treated with the same level of confidentiality and anonymity as other research participants' data (British Educational Research Association (BERA), Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 2011, p.7).

All participants received a letter, an invitation, and a consent form to provide further information about the research (Appendix, Consent and Information Forms, p. 330). I introduced myself as a research student, explained why I was researching African and Caribbean women, and asked the women if they would be willing to participate and be interviewed for the study. I made it clear that the information they provided, such as the voice recordings of the interview, would be saved and guarded with a password. I explained that the data collected (voice recordings/transcript) might be used in an anonymous format in a variety of ways and that they should indicate on the consent form whether they were happy for this anonymised data to be used in each of the ways that were listed. They would be able to leave the study at any time during the data collection process and up to two weeks after the completion of the data collection.

The invitation and consent form included a list of questions that participants were expected to ask, such as 'What am I researching? what will it mean to take part? An explanation was given as to how the participant's right to privacy would be maintained, as well as what would become of the interview recordings and how the project would be concluded. All participants were asked to sign a participant consent

form. Those who agreed were sent a letter of thanks, in the spirit of reciprocity. Interviews were conducted in locations agreed with participants, for example, their home, a restaurant, café, classroom, or virtually through Microsoft Teams or Skype.

The combination of my senior position and my relationship with the community I was studying significantly influenced my narrative research approach. Being indigenous to the community placed me in a unique position that bridged theory and practice, and this contributed to my understanding and analysis. The recruitment process resulted in the active involvement of 13 women from diverse African and Caribbean heritages.

The following methods were used to locate and recruit participants.

- a. Emails were sent to key African and Caribbean female academics and colleagues in senior positions in FE colleges whom I identified from the professional networking platform, LinkedIn.
- b. Searches were conducted through social media to identify African and Caribbean women in senior positions in FE colleges (senior roles were defined as those of principal, FE director, head of FE, divisional manager, course coordinator, course leader, curriculum manager or senior lecturer).
- c. I used word-of-mouth and/or a snowballing technique among colleagues/people I knew who worked or used to work in FE colleges. My insider knowledge and contacts with former colleagues were useful in gaining initial access.
- d. LinkedIn proved to be a useful tool eventually as recruitment became difficult. Establishing contacts through a purposive sampling strategy proved helpful for recruiting participants and snowballing (networking, LinkedIn).
- e. I designed and produced a leaflet to be distributed among colleagues or those whom I felt might be willing to participate.

This section has described the methodology used to conduct the research. It scrutinised the choice of research technique employed in the study, particularly emphasising the rationale behind the use of the Biographical-narrative interpretative method and semi-structured interviews. These methods were chosen to capture the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women as they navigate their way towards

senior positions within the FE sector. The choice of the inductive approach was rationalised, and its use was reflected in relation to qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The discussion included an examination of the distinctions among several qualitative research methods and an explanation of my chosen method, the qualitative inductive method. The structure of the interviews was explained.

### **3.5.1 Finding and recruiting participants**

It was difficult to find women of African and Caribbean heritage in senior positions in FE colleges as they are few and far between. It was time-consuming to search for these women through search engines, which involved compiling a list of all FE colleges, looking through their prospectuses and searching for African and Caribbean staff profiles, and to seek participants through word-of-mouth, designing a leaflet and distributing it among colleagues and through two social media sites and platforms.

First, I searched social media platforms for online college prospectuses and relevant college websites that were accessible to me. I sought images and photographs that I could use to identify visually African and Caribbean women in leadership roles within FE colleges. This was hard due to the absence of visual content or the listing of staff names unaccompanied by corresponding images or pictures. Due to these difficulties, I used other procedures or techniques to identify and recruit people. For instance, I created a leaflet that contained brief information about my research and my contact details, and I distributed it among individuals within my social network who possessed potential connections to others who might be interested in participating in my study. A duplicate of my information pamphlet was sent to acquaintances through the messaging application WhatsApp. The quality of the responses was not satisfactory. Subsequently, I created an account on the professional networking platform, LinkedIn, where I explained my research interests and expressed my intention to identify possible volunteers for my study. Following a brief overview of the study, the question was posed to the audience as to whether anyone would be interested in taking part in the research. Once readers expressed interest, communication was conducted

through email and telephone conversations.

LinkedIn has become a forum through which companies build leadership in their respective industries and recruit the best and brightest individuals in their professions. LinkedIn also provides chances for advertising, including the capacity to send personalised advertisements directly to the inboxes of its users. After I had shared an invitation to take part in my research on LinkedIn, I received the highest response rate among all the recruitment methods I had tried in terms of participant interest in taking part.

### **3.5.2 Pilot interviews**

Two pilot interviews were conducted to assess the feasibility of the research method. There were several reasons to conduct pilot interviews. Their use provided an opportunity for me to engage in the collaborative process with the participants and to involve them actively in the unfolding inquiry (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002, p.332). In addition, I decided specifically to involve two African and Caribbean women in the pilot study to examine critically my interviewing technique and to consider the epistemological challenges that were associated with doing research as an outsider. For instance, this study involved the viewpoints of me as a researcher, who assumed the role of an external observer, and as a study participant, who assumed the role of an internal insider. The limitations of my personal lived experience necessitated an introspective inquiry into the epistemological privilege inherent in the ongoing research. Specifically, Browning (2013) prompted me to consider who had the epistemological privilege in the research being conducted: me as the researcher (an outsider) or as the participant (the insider).

The pilot interviews were carried out with two African and Caribbean women who had ambitions of attaining senior positions, and who had contacted me through word-of-mouth. These interviews were performed as part of the process of Biographical-narrative interpretative method and to create the semi-structured interview instrument that I would use. The pilot study comprised two main components: the establishment of specific criteria for the selection of possible participants; and the enhancement of the interview guide, with a special focus on enhancing the interview

questions.

The main research questions that I selected for the pilot study and considered to be of significance were research questions one and four as outlined in section 1.1:

RQ1: How do African and Caribbean women narrate their journeys towards senior positions in FE?

RQ4: What do they perceive to be the factors that restricted or challenged them in their journeys towards senior positions?

The inclusion of pilot interview questions in the narrative inquiry study enhanced the reliability, validity, and practicability of my research (McLeany, 1994, p.47; Morrison, 1993; Openheim, 1992). After I had conducted these interviews, I reviewed the exercise and revised the questions as necessary. The necessary modifications involved making minor changes to the phrasing to improve comprehension. This involved examining the questions asked during the interviews and identifying any modifications that were required in the semi-structured format. The rationale for these changes was to facilitate a more comprehensive interview process, as semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility in adapting the initial questions based on the issues raised by the interviewees. Furthermore, it gave the interviewees the chance to elaborate on topics and to offer open responses (Robson, 2002). Erben (1996) and Walker (2013) noted that the use of semi-structured interviews had been beneficial in facilitating the exploration of additional topics and addressing unresolved matters following the first interviews. The pilot interviews were conducted in person; the locations were mutually agreed with the participants. Each interview lasted for one hour. The questions were categorised into subheadings, and it was decided that other interviews could be conducted, if necessary, to distribute the interview questions. The interviews varied in the extent to which the participants elaborated on their experiences, offered examples, or supplied more information in response to the questions or prompts.

### **3.5.3 Description of the sample and sampling criteria**

Initially, I intended to recruit 20 African and Caribbean women who were in senior positions at FE colleges in the UK. However, 13 such women agreed to take part in the project after the recruitment stage. The sample consisted of nine African and four Caribbean women. They were aged between 30 and 62 years old, with a mean age of 50, and all except one participant held either a degree or a higher qualification. The sample population of African and Caribbean women in this study were domiciled in the UK. Qualitative research emphasises the concept of reaching saturation based on the findings (Morse, 1995), instead of suggesting a particular sample size. Ethical approval was sought and obtained from the Department of Education ethics committee at the University of York. All participants were given pseudonyms to ensure their anonymity. The sampling criteria that were used for recruitment was that each had to be an African or a Caribbean woman who worked in a senior position in an FE institution. The steps in the pilot interviews were adapted from an article by Majid et al., 'Piloting for Interviews in Qualitative Research: Operationalization and Lessons Learnt', published in 2017.

#### **3.5.4 Sample size**

According to Mason (2010), making certain that the sample achieves data saturation as a matter of course guarantees that enough high-quality data are gathered to back up the research. Mason (2010) analysed the sample size and degree of saturation present in PhD research that involved the use of qualitative interviews. The most common sample size was 20, followed by 30, then 40, and finally 25, for the 560 studies that were examined. However, samples used in qualitative studies are generally much smaller than those used in quantitative studies. Ritchie et al. (2003) considered that studies reached a point at which the collection of more data did not add information (saturation). Other PhD studies that used qualitative data collection methods were analysed to find sample sizes consistent with Mason's analysis of sample size and saturation. Byrd (2009) used a sample size of 10 African and American women in executive or senior-level management positions in predominantly White organisations; Bhopal and Jackson (2013) studied 35 BME academics regarding

multiple identities and career progression; and Tedrow and Rhoads (1999) performed 30 in-depth interviews in a qualitative study of women's experiences in community college leadership positions.

### **3.5.5 Narrative**

Individuals can account for themselves by providing a narrative about their lives. This may occur using written or oral forms of communication. Interaction between humans is necessary for the production and interpretation of stories, and it is individuals, acting as protagonists in these stories, who are responsible for the development of meaning and expertise in a society (Montgomery Hunter, 1997; Polkinghorne, 1988, 2005). Polkinghorne (1988) stated that the "vicissitudes of human intentions" are what constitutes the subject matter of narrative; this refers to changes in the direction and objectives of storytelling.

According to Wengraft (2001), there are three primary principles of narrative interviewing: first, conceptual openness - there are no prior hypotheses to be 'tested'; second, the principle of communication - some of the rules of everyday communication are followed, but they are moderated by a concept of 'active listening' which consists of providing non-verbal support. This was accomplished in part by maintaining an attentive listening posture, making some degree of eye contact, and making non-verbal sounds such as "hmm", which let my participants know that I was paying attention to what they were saying. Before the interviewee could share their narrative with me about how they got to where they are today, I needed to give them some time to go through their thoughts and prepare them. I inserted this step after the pilot interviews, in which I had been a poor listener and had been guilty of interrupting the participants on several occasions while they were speaking to ask for clarification of points that I had not understood. Third, the principle of 'Gestalt' - by using narrative interviewing, I made it easier for the interviewee to build and complete freely a Gestalt on their own. The concept of the 'Gestalt principle' in the context of narrative interviews suggests that an individual's life is a cohesive entity that is more significant than the individual components that make it up (Hollway & Jefferson,



2008). This notion stems from Gestalt psychology, which emphasises how things are arranged and patterned within a perceptual field. Narrative interviewing applies the principle of 'Gestalt' to how individuals recount their life events. The objective is to enable the interviewee to independently develop and articulate a comprehensive narrative, or 'Gestalt', of their lived encounters without any kind of interference or guidance from the interviewer (Hollway, & Jefferson, 2008). This approach acknowledges and upholds the authenticity of an individual's life narrative and acknowledges that the significance of a particular event can only be understood properly when considered within the broader framework of the entire life narrative. Furthermore, it recognises the importance and instructive nature of the choices that individuals make when sharing their personal experiences, including what they decide to include or exclude.

Within my research, I used this idea by allowing the interviewees sufficient time to process their ideas and construct their narratives. My objective was to actively listen without interruption or seeking clarifications that might impede the participants' storytelling process. This method enabled the respondents to autonomously construct and finalise their own 'Gestalt', thus yielding a comprehensive and all-encompassing perspective of their experiences.

During the interview, there were times when I did not understand why the interviewee was reacting in the way that she did; nonetheless, I did not interrupt to find out why or to clarify for myself. If I had interrupted the flow of the original story, I would have been taking a chance that the interview would be ruined or significantly weakened. It is reasonable to divide narratives into two distinct categories, such as the sociocultural and the personal (Ricoeur, 1981). At the sociocultural level, the community, family, religion, and other societal institutions construct meta-narratives that impact both the meaning of individual events and personal accounts of those experiences. For instance, a patient's ability to articulate their level of discomfort to a nurse could be influenced by how their culture views the feeling of pain. There is a chance that the patient's description of the pain exaggerates or minimises its level of severity (Ricoeur,

1981).

Narratives are constructed by people, who build in them a story of who they were in the past, who they are at this moment, and where they envision themselves going in the future. A narrative method of reasoning, sometimes known as 'narrative logic' (Polkinghorne, 1988), draws on principles that are informed by personal and meta-narratives in this way. The Biographical-narrative interpretative method contributes to the exploration of the factors that motivate individuals to share their experiences in the way they do. Of course, Interpretation is inevitable in the case of narratives.

Overall, narratives can manifest through various modes of communication, including written and oral media. Wengraft (2001) posited that the primary objective of narrative interviewing was to stay true to the principles of conceptual openness and effective communication. These principles are further enhanced by the application of 'active listening', which involves non-verbal forms of support. The Biographical-narrative interpretative method research initiative contributes to the investigation of the underlying processes that drive individuals to communicate their personal experiences in the manner they choose. The occurrence of interpretation is unavoidable when it comes to narratives, and this point is discussed in the next section.

### **3.6 The principles of Biographical-narrative Interpretative Method practice**

The Biographical-narrative interpretative method incorporates a combination of interview techniques and analytical procedures. All parts of the methodology hold equal importance. The application of the BNIM of interviewing is a necessary component of the analytical approach, despite the existence of alternative methods for collecting information (Wengraf, 2001).

#### **3.6.1 The Biographical-narrative Interpretative Method Interview**

In the context of the Biographical-narrative interpretative method, it is customary to conduct open-ended narrative interviews. This methodology can include a series of two or three sub-sections and consistently opens with the formulation of a framed

question. This 'single question aimed at inducing narrative' (SQUIN) (Wengraf, 2001, 2014) is intentionally made general and its use leads to the collection of data that helps participants to start, build, and finish their narrative on their own. Participants must have the freedom to do so (Jones, 2003; Meares, 2007; Nicholson, 2009). My experience during the study was that the use of the SQUIN produced a lot of data, and the research participants were satisfied with this method (Corbally, 2011).

Interpretivism acknowledges that people's interpretations determine the 'truth' in each situation. According to interpretivist research, a variety of factors may influence how a tale is constructed or left out, how it is interpreted, and how other people interpret it (Fisher, 1978; Plummer, 2001; Sandelowski, 2002). This study followed Wengraf's (2001) Biographical-narrative interpretative method principles. Wengraf's (2001, 2014) Biographical-narrative interpretative method interview approach, notably involving the use of the SQUIN method, was also used. It was found that asking follow-up questions in the second subsection after the initial enquiry led to the collection of a lot of data (Corbally, 2011).

Understanding narratives is strongly related to how education is carried out around the world in different cultures. Participants' perceptions affected the choices they made (or did not make) concerning their educational experiences and journeys toward senior positions. Research in education emphasises defining, understanding, and projecting the variety of factors that affect how people gain education daily. To better understand how knowledge is socially created in the constantly changing field of education, it is useful to investigate and analyse the discourses and narratives that are used in the field.

It is vital for those who provide support and training for those seeking senior positions to have an awareness of discourses and how the narratives that are used to articulate individual representations of experiences are formed by structural and agency restrictions as well as the historical context in which these are constructed. This knowledge is essential because it allows these trainers to improve the assistance, they offer those they are training to become senior leaders. It is crucial to have this information since it enables FE providers to assist in the promotion of their workers,

particularly African and Caribbean women. It is more important than ever before to keep the perspective of the participant in mind today (Apitzsch and Inowlocki, 2000).

Researchers in the field of education now have access to the Biographical-interpretative method, with which they can analyse people's accounts of their experiences. Researchers agree with Sandelowski's notion (Sandelowski, 2002, 2011) that the 'empirical intimacy' that relates to the study of a case, or even a small number of examples that utilise the Biographical-interpretative method approach, is a helpful means of overcoming divisions. This can be done by analysing a single case or a limited number of samples. It is considered that individual case histories and stories that emerge using the Biographical-narrative interpretative method have a special significance since they can offer a method for creating connections between policy, professional practices, and the individual. According to Chamberlayne (2002), even though the empirical weight of randomised controlled trials is given appropriate credibility, researchers feel that individual case histories and narratives that emerge using the Biographical-interpretative method have unique importance.

### **3.6.2 Conceptual Framework: Applying Biographical-Interpretative Method**

Black Feminist Theory (BFT) explores race, gender, and class through the lens of African and Caribbean women. It fills imbalances in feminist and civil rights movements. This theory emphasises African and Caribbean women's experiences to make feminism and social justice more accessible and equitable to all. Critical Race Theory (CRT) addresses how race and racism affect other social disparities. It challenges equality initiatives for failing to address systemic racism and originated in the 1970s and 1980s in the U.S. CRT promotes social justice and equity by revealing and changing how race and racism impact society, law, and culture. The underpinning of my theoretical and conceptual framework is based on the fundamental theories and concepts of BFT and CRT. The choice of these frameworks was based on their pertinence to my research and their emphasis on investigating the personal encounters of the participants, particularly African and Caribbean women aspiring to senior roles in FE.

The BFT approach, which considers African and Caribbean women as a collective group with the ability to generate knowledge, was employed as a theoretical framework for collecting data and addressing the research questions. By adopting this method, I was able to elaborate on a crucial social theory on the lived experiences of these women and position them as the focal point of discussion and examination.

I incorporated CRT into my research as a fundamental aspect of the theoretical framework. It helped me understand and elucidate the specific issues addressed by my research, including the challenges encountered by African and Caribbean women who aspire to progress into leadership positions in FE.

Thus, the theoretical and conceptual framework, based on BFT and CRT, directed my investigation, along with my understanding of the challenges faced by and the life experiences of African and Caribbean women in leadership positions in the FE sector.

The theoretical underpinnings of BFT and CRT have greatly influenced the formulation of my study questions and aims. The main aim of my research was to investigate the everyday experiences of African and Caribbean women who are pursuing leadership roles in FE, which is known for its lack of diversity. The overlapping oppressive structures that these women may face are highlighted by BFT and CRT. The BFT framework offers a conceptual structure for understanding how the intersection of racial, sexual, class and gender identities can shape the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women. As a result, research questions were developed to develop a better understanding of the distinct experiences of these women. Moreover, CRT has influenced my research by offering a perspective that allows for the examination and comprehension of the racial dynamics involved in the experiences of these women. This directed my inquiry into the subjective and objective perspectives of these women as they progressed toward senior roles. Thus, the theories and concepts of BFT and CRT have played a crucial role in influencing my research topics and objectives.

The use of the Biographical-narrative interpretative method played an important role in the research by enabling me to efficiently capture the personal narratives of the marginalised women I explored. This method concentrates on three interrelated areas: the person's biography, which is their complete life experience or tale; their

narrative, which is their account of it; and the interpretation, which is how society interprets their story. The Biographical-narrative interpretative method employs a distinctive interviewing technique that encourages participants to share their complete tale without any interruptions. This method facilitates the investigation of individuals' and communities' real-life experiences. Gathering experiential narratives improves understanding of the interdependence of internal and external processes. Biographical research focuses on the diverse range of historical and contemporary viewpoints, both influential and less well-known, that individuals have regarding their lives and circumstances. The Biographical-narrative interpretative method employs methods that go beyond traditional attitude surveys and interviews. Instead, it seeks to uncover the conflicting and emotional aspects by conveying and identifying implicit frequently suppressed perspectives from both the present and the past, including opposing narratives.

During the initial phase of my research, the Biographical-narrative interpretative method proved to be appropriate as it allowed participants to share their experiences and interpretations of their journeys toward senior positions. It enabled them to openly recount their memories, granting quick entry to their first-hand perspectives. Therefore, the Biographical-narrative interpretative method proved to be a potent instrument in my Black feminist research, uncovering themes that challenged preconceived notions.

I present specific examples that demonstrate how I applied the Biographical-narrative interpretative method proved in my research, applying excerpts from my transcripts. The first section addressed the first question, eliciting narratives to establish a framework for subsequent questioning.

RQ1: How do African and Caribbean women narrate their journeys toward senior positions in FE?

The purpose of the research was to collect narratives from women of African and Caribbean heritage concerning how they progressed to leadership positions within FE colleges. Participants were allowed to share their stories uninterrupted, following

Wengraf's instructions for the Biographical-narrative interpretative method. The purpose of the data collection was to provide information that would guide the development of strategies and policies to enhance the recruitment and inclusion of these women in senior-level positions. Participants received assurance regarding the privacy and anonymity of their data. My prominent role and connection with the community had a substantial impact on the research methodology, effectively connecting theoretical concepts with practical applications, and enhancing the understanding and examination of the real-life encounters of these women.

The Biographical-narrative interpretative method was selected for its ability to accurately represent the complex and diverse experiences of African and Caribbean women as they progress in their careers. This method is perfectly in line with the study's objectives to understand the aspects that impact individuals' career paths. It emphasises the significance of role models, educational experiences, self-confidence, and resilience.

Through my research, I have found that the Biographical-narrative interpretative method successfully captures the complex and diverse experiences of African and Caribbean women as they navigate their professional journeys. Using this approach, the narratives offer significant insights into how these women successfully navigate their career paths, shaped by a multitude of personal and environmental influences. BNIM has successfully answered the research questions by presenting comprehensive and subtle narratives, emphasising the importance of role models, positive educational experiences, self-assurance, perseverance and ongoing learning in professional progression. The method's capacity to extensively explore individual narratives renders it a perfect choice for this study.

The Biographical-narrative interpretative method proved framework excels at unravelling the complexities of individual career trajectories. Through using the technique of biographical narratives, this approach facilitates a thorough examination of individuals' lives, offering a full perspective on their experiences and the influences that have shaped their professional trajectories. Amari's educational journey and the influential role of supportive women in shaping her career aspirations were effectively

shown in Biographical-narrative interpretative method, emphasising the importance of mentorship and good responses in creating professional aspirations. This example demonstrates the strong alignment between the method and the study's emphasis on the impact of positive educational experiences and role models, and personal qualities such as confidence, diligence, and perseverance; it illustrates the aspects, both internal and external, that contribute to professional growth through rich narrative descriptions. The approach emphasised the participants' self-assurance and ability to bounce back from challenges, which are crucial attributes for progressing in one's profession. Sanaa's narrative of her professional advancement showcased her tenacity and persistent determination, underscoring how these attributes foster career development and the achievement of senior employment opportunities. The narratives highlighted the significance of ongoing education and a proactive approach to the advancement of one's profession. The participants' detailed narratives emphasised their commitment to gaining knowledge and improving their skills, underscoring the importance of lifelong learning and proactively managing their careers.

In conclusion, the Biographical-narrative interpretative method has demonstrated its efficacy as a potent instrument for capturing the complex and multifaceted experiences of African and Caribbean women in their professional trajectories. It has effectively addressed the research questions by presenting comprehensive and subtle narratives that emphasise the importance of role models, positive educational experiences, self-confidence, resilience, and continual learning in professional advancement, making it a good choice for this study.

My semi-structured interview questions fell into three sections. The first section was focused on the journey and education history, and it comprised 10 questions; the second section was focused on educational senior positions and contained nine questions; and the third section was focused on career opportunities and progression and comprised three questions. All the questions were created while eliciting the participant's educational position and were open-ended. The length of the interviews



was one hour for each interview. Initially, NVivo software and the analytical method used were distinctive. For example, descriptive coding was used to analyse the interviews, “extracting general and unique themes from all of the interviews and making a composite summary” (Groenewald, 2004, p.50). Then I used another piece of software, ATLAS.ti, to analyse the interviews. Creswell (2015) considered that descriptive codes were the “best” code labels because “you start to build codes and later themes that resonate with your participants” (p.160). The incorporation of direct quotations gave weight to participants’ experiences. The interviews that used the Biographical-narrative interpretative method and the semi-structured interviews were run concurrently.

The research I conducted two different kinds of interviews with each participant: the Biographical-narrative interpretative method interviews and semi-structured interviews; these interviews ran concurrently. I conducted a study involving 13 participants. Each participant's initial interview, which took place applying the Biographical-narrative interpretative method, lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Participants were able to tell their personal stories using a narrative structure. After the Biographical-narrative interpretative method provided interviews, I proceeded with the second round of interviews utilising a semi-structured method. Each interview lasted around 30 minutes for each participant. Semi-structured interviews afforded me greater flexibility, enabling me to pose more precise questions in response to the participants' answers. The initial Biographical-narrative interpretative method interview was concluded before commencing the semi-structured interview. This meant that the stories gathered in the initial phase could provide insights for the inquiries made in the next phase. Nine interviews were recorded, and detailed notes were taken of the four interviews that were not recorded, ensuring that crucial data from these interviews could be used in the study.

In summary, my research consisted of a thorough and systematic approach to conducting interviews, enabling a thorough examination of the participants' experiences and viewpoints. By employing both the Biographical-narrative interpretative method and semi-structured interviews, a harmonious approach was achieved that enabled participants to express themselves freely in their narratives

while also enabling the opportunity to ask specific questions derived from these narratives. This methodology enhanced the data gathered and generated a more sophisticated understanding of the research subject.

The interviews were performed face-to-face in person, on Teams or Skype because of the COVID-19 pandemic. I communicated with participants through WhatsApp, LinkedIn, and email. Table 1 shows a summary of the participant profiles and demographics. More detail concerning the participants was gathered during the interviews and is captured in their narratives.

After the narrative interviews, the subsequent phase of the study was the performance of the semi-structured interviews.

### **3.7 Semi-structured interviews**

The plan for the semi-structured interviews required the completion of the following five stages:

1. selection of the type of interview
2. establishment of ethical guidelines
3. crafting of the interview protocol
4. conducting and recording of the interview
5. reporting the findings.

#### **3.7.1 Designing the semi-structured interviews**

##### **3.7.1.1 Stage 1: selection of the type of interview**

I decided to perform semi-structured interviews because I was able to narrow down some topics for questions that I wanted to ask the participants. Use of unstructured interviews such as those that use the Biographical-narrative interpretative method involves the risk that the topics or themes that are related to the research question

under consideration will not be elicited from the participant. There were some specific topics that I wanted to cover, but at the same time, I wanted to gain more detail from their stories, which had been collected during the Biographical-narrative interpretative method interviews. Consequently, I used the format: emphasise openness, statement regarding the interview and reasons why I was using semi-structured questions and the Biographical-narrative interpretative method, and a few questions to elicit conversation. I planned questions that were designed to probe for information that had not been forthcoming during the initial narrative interview.

### **3.7.1.2 Stage 2: Establishment of the ethical guidelines**

Entering the lives of others, especially the lives of study participants, must take into consideration ethical and moral issues. The chapter entitled 'Ethical issues of interviewing' in Kvale's book, *Doing Interviews* (2007), provides a guideline and a useful list of aspects to consider throughout the different stages of the interview. I realised that approaching the more advanced stages of research design from a moral and ethical stance would facilitate my interaction with the interviewees. Issues of purpose, consequences, consent, identity, relationships, confidentiality, and protection became central early in the process. I felt confident that I could approach my participants fairly and ethically.

### **3.7.1.3 Stage 3: Crafting the interview**

Protocol: this stage was the most time-consuming of all the stages. According to Rabionet (2011), there are two important components: (a) how do I (as the interviewer) introduce myself to the person being interviewed? and (b) what are the questions to be asked?

Once I had completed the BNIM interview, I thought about the questions to be asked in the semi-structured interviews in the context of the interpretation process. The standard guidelines for conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews would need to be followed in the event that the research questions being asked required non-narrative information. I had asked the interviewees to familiarise themselves with the concepts and questions that were important to me, and this allowed me to translate the research questions (also known as 'theory questions') into interview

questions that would be useful for my participants (Wengraft, 2001). The semi-structured interviews lasted one hour, and they were focused on gaining answers to the remaining research questions. Therefore, the interviews explored questions related to what the participants perceived to be the factors that had restricted or challenged them in their journey towards senior positions; their education histories; educational positions; and career opportunities and progression.

The research questions that remained to be answered were:

RQ3: What do African and Caribbean women perceive to be the factors that enabled them to achieve senior positions?

RQ4: What do they perceive to be the factors that restricted or challenged them in their journey towards senior positions?

These second interviews were focused on gaining information on African and Caribbean women's lived experiences, their journeys and education. There were seven questions. The third interview (one hour) was semi-structured and based on information about their educational position. There were nine questions. There were also three questions on career opportunities and progression.

In conclusion, the research questions provided an additional way to analyse and review the structural elements through the coding process of thematic analysis for this study to ensure that I was on the right track with my themes and ultimately, providing answers to the 'what' and 'how' issues posed by the Biographical-narrative interpretative method study. In this approach, the 'lived experience' stories of research participants were interpreted; however, for those stories to make sense interpretively, the interpreter (the researcher) of the stories needed to have a genuine and in-depth understanding of the experiences that the participants had gone through. In this study, I have highlighted the stories of the women's interpretations of their journey towards senior positions in FE. When the interviews had been completed, I decided to analyse the participants' responses to the BNIM and semi-structured questions.

### **3.7.2 Data collection**

Voice recordings were made of the interviews (which were performed one-to-one), and I used the field notes that I had taken as cues to formulate narrative-focused questions for later in the interviewing process. Immediately following the completion of the interview, I wrote field notes on the participants and themes to which they had referred. The duration of each interview was one hour. Participants received a token of appreciation that was not monetary in nature.

After the first round of interviews, the questions that would have been repeated in the second round were removed if participants had already fully or partially answered the questions during the Biographical-narrative interpretative method interview. After that, only the second set of interview questions were discussed in the interview. As a result of the restrictions imposed by COVID, the final interviews were carried out virtually rather than in person. The audio recording and personal notes were transcribed while the details remained fresh in my mind. This helped me to become familiar with the narratives. I deleted my personal audio recordings to maintain confidentiality. Discussions after the interviews confirmed the African and Caribbean women's interest in exploring African and Caribbean women's journeys towards senior positions in FE.

Next, the analytical framework was developed. This is detailed in the next section.

### **3.8 Analytical framework: thematic analysis**

When the interviews had been completed, I decided to analyse the participants' responses to the questions asked in the Biographical-narrative interpretative method and semi-structured interviews. Through its emphasis on eliciting narratives of previous experience rather than (only) explicit affirmations of present or remembered 'positions', the Biographical-narrative interpretative method narrative enables the expression and detection of implicit and frequently repressed viewpoints in the present. Additionally, it facilitates the expression and detection of prior perspectives (and counter-narratives) that are no less conflicting or emotionally charged. A

researcher who uses the Biographical-narrative interpretative method is interested in describing and trying to understand the development of something called 'situated subjectivity'. Upon collecting the data, I conducted an analysis to identify any discernible trends or patterns pertaining to the factors that had influenced the career trajectories towards and attainment of senior positions among African and Caribbean women in FE colleges. Additionally, it was crucial to examine the restrictions or obstacles that were encountered by these women in their pursuit of FE senior roles.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data collected for this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The application of thematic analysis enables individuals effectively to perceive and understand recurring patterns or themes within the data. This facilitates the identification of crucial insights that are pertinent to the research objectives. Thematic analysis is a technique that is used to analyse qualitative data systematically. Its use is common in the compilation of written materials, such as interviews or transcripts.

The technique of coding the most significant patterns and themes, as well as carefully analysing the data, allowing for the identification of recurrent patterns or themes, subjects, concepts, and meaning patterns in the data. Table 2 illustrates the primary matrix, which demonstrates how the research drew together the patterns or themes that arose from this research following the coding technique used to locate the primary themes.

During my research, I searched for a software application that was user-friendly and could effectively support my data analysis. I came across ATLAS.ti. I used this software to assign codes systematically to a substantial volume of quotations. The number of codes produced using ATLAS.ti qualitative data analysis was 126. ATLAS.ti is a software tool that enables the integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis, making it unique in its capability. As a researcher, it was challenging to imagine conducting data analysis without its assistance. The use of ATLAS.ti provided an opportunity to observe the efficacy of its organisation of qualitative data.

Prior to initiating the use of ATLAS.ti, the codes were created manually using qualitative coding and thematic analysis in Microsoft Word, which proved to be time-

consuming. Furthermore, I encountered the challenge of transferring the coded information onto diagrams and gathering it into themes, which required the creation and composition of these diagrams and themes from the ground up. The use of ATLAS.ti significantly enhanced the efficiency of this undertaking. I was able to select the pertinent sentences/quotes, which led to the creation of a questionnaire, application of the codes, and saving by file, export project bundle.

The data gathered for this study were analysed using a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through the method of coding the most significant patterns and themes and carefully analysing the data, it was possible to identify recurring patterns or themes, subjects, concepts, and meaning patterns in the core themes. The use of ATLAS.ti increased the effectiveness of this project considerably. In the subsequent section, ethical criteria and concerns regarding the study are examined.

### **3.9 Ethical considerations**

I am aware of my responsibility to be sensitive and respectful of research participants and their fundamental human rights. I support fully the ethical code of the University of York. In particular, throughout my study, I explained the aims and objectives of the study and the procedures to be followed at the beginning of each interview to all participants in the research; secondly, I made it clear to them that participation in the study was voluntary, and should they wish to withdraw from the study, they had the right to do so at any time during data collection and up to two weeks after the end of the data collection period. Thirdly, I ensured that everyone who participated in the study completed an informed consent form and finally, that their privacy was respected throughout the study and that everything they shared would be confidential.

When analysing the data, one of the most important considerations is to avoid taking sides with the participants, to respect their right to privacy, and to avoid offering or discussing information about the institutions, as doing so could lead to researcher bias. During the interviews, it was essential that I avoided disclosing information that could be harmful to the participants; that I communicated in unambiguous language; and

that I shared the data with others, including my participants, when recording the data and publishing the research.

At the beginning of the study, I informed the participants of the objectives of my research and disclosed my identity to them as a Caribbean female researcher. I began each interview by restating the objectives of my research, having a conversation about ethical concerns, and requesting that participants sign a consent form in accordance with the recommendations of the department's ethical committee. It is unlikely that the involvement of African and Caribbean women at this stage would be detrimental to the respondents. The involvement of African and Caribbean women at this stage may have been beneficial as they were drawn to reflect on and understand the experiences that led them to senior positions in FE colleges (Cohen et al., 2000).

Barron (1999) argued that the role of a researcher was to earn the respondent's trust and that the research should be kept confidential. It is of paramount importance to be sensitive to the feelings of the respondents to determine how they might react to particular questions; to listen attentively without passing judgement; and to take the opportunity to reflect. Before beginning the research, voluntary consent was sought to determine whether participants were willing to give their consent voluntarily, a process known as openness disclosure (BERA, Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, 2011). As part of my fieldwork to recruit respondents, I created an information sheet and a consent form using the guidelines provided by BERA. I also piloted interview questions with two participants before using these questions with the remaining respondents. All participants who were employed in FE colleges received a one-page summary that contained the research aims and objectives, and this was sent to them to retain their anonymity and confidentiality.

### **3.10 The empirical part of the research investigation**

In conducting the empirical part of the study, I continued my interest in developing and conceptualising ways of researching gender, race, and class. I reviewed Black feminist epistemology and epistemological theories on Black research, in my attempt to understand how my research might proceed. Once the transcripts were completed,



I began to look systematically for patterns, themes, and trends that emerged from the data. I wanted to use participants' interpretations to produce findings related to the factors that had influenced, restricted, or challenged them in their journeys towards senior positions. I tried different ways of recording, including audio recording, and taking notes. Completion of the pilot phase enabled me to review my research questions and research instruments (Denscombe, 2003); confirm participants' understanding of the questions; and procure the study's truthfulness. The ages, geographical backgrounds, and religious affiliations and practices of the recruits were not part of the selection criteria. As the data collection method for this study was time-consuming, I collected the data from a smaller sample than would be the case if I were to use a quantitative approach. However, the benefit of the qualitative approach was the rich information that was gained from the participants, as it offered a deeper insight into the phenomenon of African and Caribbean women's journeys to senior FE roles than quantitative data would have done. The method of interviewing and the questions that were used for the narrative inquiry, including the pilot interview questions, increased the reliability, validity, and practicability (McLeany, 1994, p.47; Morrison, 1993; Openheim, 1992) of the research.

Upon the completion of each interview, I checked modifications for the final version and if necessary, reworked the question(s) with changes (what questions did I ask/what semi-structured questions did I change and why?), to proceed with a more detailed semi-structured interview. One reason to use semi-structured interviews is that initial questions can change in response to the issues that are raised by interviewees. The use of these second interviews also allowed them to expand on topics and provide open responses (Robson, 2002). According to Erben (1996) and Walker (2013), semi-structured interviews help researchers to follow-up issues after initial interviews. I categorised the questions under subheadings and arranged several interviews, if it was necessary, to spread the interview questions. Interviews varied; some individuals expanded their experiences or gave examples or provided additional information to questions or prompts.

The steps involved in this study's analysis procedure are as follows: The codes were developed through ATLAS.ti, a software application employed for qualitative data

analysis. These codes function as indicators to assist in the classification and categorisation of specific components of the data. The codes developed were used on components of the data that were pertinent to the study's findings. This encompasses information about the participants' career trajectories, aspirations, challenges, and encounters within FE institutions. The data was divided into distinct sections according to the codes. Each code refers to a distinct theme or issue, such as the progression of one's career, notable professional experiences, challenges faced, achievements and other significant factors that have had an impact.

The data underwent frequency analysis, where the frequency of each code was determined and expressed as numerical values in the columns (Appendix, pages 288–293, contains representative codes together with the entire set of initial codes). This offers a quantitative evaluation of the frequency with which each theme or issue was addressed in the data. The encoded data was subsequently examined to determine the elements that affect the career pathways and progress of African and Caribbean women in FE colleges. This entails understanding their motives and objectives and the obstacles they encounter. Through a methodical and organised analysis of the qualitative data made possible by this technique, I found themes, patterns and insights that helped to shape the study's conclusions. The goals of the study and its research questions were taken into consideration when interpreting the coded data.

The following tables present an identification and analysis of themes derived from the data obtained in my study.

**Table 1: The themes and codes matrix**

THEMES	CODES
THEME 1	Careers aspirations
THEME 2	School experience
THEME 3	Parental influence
THEME 4	Academic achievement
THEME 5	Management
THEME 6	Opportunities & investment
THEME 7	African and Caribbean women in

	management
THEME 8	African and Caribbean women's work environment & visibility

**Table 2: An analysis of themes and an initial codes matrix**

Career path in FE	Personal Characteristics Career aspirations & academic achievement African and Caribbean women's experiences in FE
Senior position in FE	Motivation Management Opportunities & Investment
Challenges faced by African and Caribbean women	African and Caribbean women managers Invisibility of African & Caribbean women Lack of diversity and inclusivity Racism Inexperience and lack of mentor

*Theme: Career path in FE*

The theme of career path in FE relates to personal characteristics that influence these career paths. In this study, an aim was to investigate the individual traits that had an impact on the professional trajectories of African and Caribbean women in FE.

The following section is a brief explanation of sub-themes.

- Personal characteristics
- Career aspirations and academic achievement
- African and Caribbean women's experiences in FE

One sub-theme was the intersection between career aspirations and academic achievement: a critical examination. This sub-theme related to the examination of the interaction between job aspirations and academic achievements, and how these factors were either influenced by or influenced the personal characteristics of African and Caribbean women. The sub-theme under consideration was focused on the experiences of African and Caribbean women in FE, with a particular emphasis on how their individual qualities influenced their career trajectories.

*Theme: Senior position in FE*

Motivation was found to be related to senior positions in FE. In the study, the motivational factors that drove African and Caribbean women to pursue leadership roles actively within the FE sector were investigated.

This theme could be broken down into sub-themes:

- Motivation
- Management
- Opportunities and investment

The sub-themes examined the relationship between managerial jobs and the motivation of African and Caribbean women to pursue senior positions. The sub-theme of opportunities and investment was focused on the examination of the impact of opportunities and investment in FE on the motivation of African and Caribbean women to pursue senior posts.

The primary focus of this study was the analysis of the particular obstacles that were encountered by women of African and Caribbean heritage in managerial positions.

This theme could be broken down into sub-themes:

- African and Caribbean women managers
- Invisibility of African and Caribbean women
- Lack of diversity and inclusivity
- Racism
- Inexperience and lack of mentors

The sub-theme of invisibility represented a significant challenge that African and Caribbean women encountered. It was characterised by a lack of notice or acknowledgement in their respective roles. The sub-theme of lack of diversity and inclusivity highlighted the potential obstacles that women faced in their professional environments as a result of limited representation and inclusiveness. The sub-theme of racism highlighted the substantial obstacles that were faced by these women in senior positions due to their experiences of racism.

### **3. 11 Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study**

Each of the four concepts credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are relevant to a specific facet of the overall validity of qualitative research (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, 1989; Stahl & King, 2020). The framework for evaluating the rigour of the research consisted of these four elements. Nevertheless, there exists a degree of disagreement within academic discourse regarding the methods by which credibility might be assessed in the context of qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stahl & King, 2020). According to the guidelines provided by the University of York for MPhil and PhD programmes, a researcher should be able to justify the contents of their thesis and demonstrate a comprehensive understanding of the consequences and contextual significance of the primary results or argument. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Stahl and King (2020) discuss many methodologies that can be used in qualitative research to attain credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The definition of each term is provided in the relevant section and afterwards applied to the research inquiry within the study's specific setting.

#### **3.11.1 Credibility**

To enhance the reliability of my study's conclusions, I applied various strategies to establish the credibility of the research. These encompassed extended involvement, continuous examination, and the use of triangulation techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stahl & King, 2020). For instance, a substantial portion of time was allocated to conducting interviews with a cohort of African and Caribbean women to gain an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences and their progression into senior positions in FE colleges, as participants in the research project. By engaging in this process, I successfully established a sense of trust with the participants involved. This proved to be significant in enabling me to overcome my preconceived notions regarding their personal encounters and progression towards leadership roles, specifically as a senior lecturer and module leader. I regularly found recognisable patterns using a variety of field-based information or method sources, and I identified

consistent patterns across multiple data sources. Additionally, I engaged the participants in the process of validating my interpretations after the conclusion of the interviews. The practice of member checking, as referred to by Stahl and King (2020), involves engaging participants in various roles and levels of participation within a study, and is widely recognised as a valuable research approach.

I believe that my knowledge of the lived experiences and path to senior positions was a strength because it gave me some hands-on experience with the research issue and thus increased my confidence as a researcher to ask pertinent questions when interviewing the participants. To enhance the reliability and validity of my study results, I used a triangulation approach, including many data sources and frameworks. By employing this method, I was able to cross-reference and authenticate the data gathered from the interviews. The triangulation was accomplished through the examination of multiple reports, including Lifelong Learning UK (2011), UCU (2015), LSIS (2013), BLI (2002-2012), Lean In (2020) and BWIL (2022). To identify important details, I carried out a systematic review of these documents, distinguishing important themes and patterns, contrasting findings from several reports, and incorporating additional information to enhance the interview data. The reports offered supplementary viewpoints and comprehensive details that enriched the data obtained from the interviews. The triangulation process proved to be a valuable tool in my exploratory, narrative and comparative research approach; the reports allowed me to analyse and characterise the career paths and experiences of African and Caribbean women in senior roles. This detailed method not only confirmed the accuracy of my findings but also enhanced the overall study and conclusions. Having direct experience and first-hand knowledge of the actual experiences of African and Caribbean women and their journey to higher positions was advantageous, as it provided me with a more profound understanding of the subject matter. This enhanced my confidence as a researcher and empowered me to ask relevant questions throughout the interviews. Therefore, using documentary analysis as a kind of triangulation with my personal experience enhanced the thoroughness and dependability of my research.

This approach enabled the application of diverse data sources, thereby reinforcing the

reliability of a developed account of the findings. The justification for including these reports was an integral aspect of my research investigation. The study's methodology, characterised by its descriptive, comparative, and exploratory nature, required the use of sources that facilitated my interpretation, analysis, and formulation of conclusions based on the data (Briggs et al., 2012).

### **3. 11.2 Transferability**

The study's quality could be assessed by consideration of how well its conclusions applied and could be extrapolated from the experiences of other African and Caribbean women pursuing senior posts at FE colleges in England. The use of thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stahl & King, 2020) offered a sufficiently detailed depiction of the context, enabling its application to different contexts. Transfer applications, including the ones mentioned, depended on the researcher's comprehensive descriptions that encompassed contextual information regarding the study locations (Stahl & King, 2020). The objective was to provide a comprehensive depiction of the contextual factors influencing the lived experiences and career progression of African and Caribbean women in senior positions within FE. This study aimed to enhance the applicability of the findings to other African and Caribbean women in FE who found themselves in comparable settings and circumstances. As previously mentioned, by conducting interviews with African and Caribbean women who held senior positions in FE colleges, I collected different perspectives regarding their workplace experiences. This enabled me to obtain knowledge and understanding of the significant encounters within FE colleges.

I am aware of the constraints associated with Biographical-narrative interpretative method interviews, including the challenge of generalisability (Bornat, 2008; Passerini, 2009). For example, they involved the use of a SQUIN, which served as the initial stage of each Biographical-narrative interpretative method interview. Subsequently, the participant was offered the opportunity to answer questions without any interruptions. However, this approach may have resulted in the loss of 'dialogic possibilities' (Bornat, 2008). One of the outcomes that resulted from the use

of the Biographical-narrative interpretative method was its reliance on a limited number of interviews, which hindered the ability to generalise findings (Passerini, 2009). One could argue that the inclusion of only 13 African and Caribbean women in the research study limits the generalisability of the findings, as this sample size represents a small proportion of the overall population of African and Caribbean women in FE colleges in England. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the use of the BNIM methodology, specifically through narrative interviews, presents a valuable opportunity to research the lived experiences and circumstances of African and Caribbean women. This approach enables an exploration of the diverse range of perspectives, both dominant and less dominant, that these women hold regarding their past and present experiences. In contrast, alternative methodologies, such as attitude surveys and interviews, primarily uncover prevailing and overt attitudes, often reflecting government press releases (Wengraft, 2002).

#### *Sample size*

It is appropriate to discuss the problem of sample size. The concept of saturation, as previously mentioned (Mason, 2010), refers to the notion that an increase in the amount of data gathered does not necessarily increase information, as previously noted by Richie et al. (2003). There are examples of qualitative research in which sample sizes were used that aligned with Mason's analysis of sample size and saturation; these include a study by Byrd (2009), who used a sample size of 10 African and American women in executive or senior-level management positions in primarily White organisations; one by Bhopal and Jackson (2013), who used a sample size of 35 BME academics for their study on multiple identities and career advancement; and another by Tedrow and Rhoads (1999), who used a sample size of 30 for their qualitative investigation of women's experiences in community college leadership roles. These sample sizes were in the range of my research sample size of 13 African and Caribbean women.

I conducted interviews with this cohort of 13 African and Caribbean women who held comparable positions throughout several FE colleges. Their roles encompass both the organisational and individual levels. I contend that the number of participants in the



study was adequate and provided pertinent information as well as data. The inclusion of additional participants would have contributed minimal extra data to those collected.

### **3. 11.3 Dependability**

The notion of dependability, also known as trustworthiness, relates to the stability of data and the consistency of inquiry methods throughout a specific duration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participants perceive trustworthiness when these processes are effectively implemented (Stahl & King, 2020). The authors emphasise the interconnectedness of credibility and dependability, highlighting that in practical terms, credibility plays a significant role in promoting dependability.

### **3. 11.4 Confirmability**

Confirmability can be defined as coming as close to actuality as possible using only qualitative methods (Stahl & King, 2020). The term 'researcher neutrality' pertains to the degree to which the outcomes of a study are influenced by the participants rather than being biased, motivated, or influenced by the researcher's interests. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), if credibility, transferability, and dependability are attained, the criteria to reach confirmability are met.

The underlying premise is that the researcher contributes a viewpoint to the investigation, and the attainment of confirmability can be accomplished using various methods, such as having the findings corroborated by other sources. To ensure confirmability in this study, 13 African and Caribbean women were actively involved in the research process. The perspectives of others, and the need to ensure that my interpretations were not solely products of my imagination (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), also aided in mitigating researcher bias.

The following chapters are divided into four sections: they begin with a preface chapter that gives general background details of the participants, preliminary data and a profile for each African and Caribbean woman who took part in the study. The idea

is that the reader may become familiar with the participants' lived experiences in their quest towards senior positions. The first section discusses how African and Caribbean women narrate their journeys towards senior positions in FE. The second discusses the participants' career paths, including career aspirations, academic achievement, and their experience in FE. In the third section, senior positions in FE are considered, with a focus on management, motivation, opportunities, and investment. The final chapter addresses the challenges that African and Caribbean women face in senior positions, their inexperience, the problems of being mentorless, their invisibility, the lack of diversity and inclusivity, and the prevalence of racism.

## **Chapter 4: Participants' Profiles**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the 13 participants involved in the study. This chapter primarily examines the background features of African and Caribbean women, their academic accomplishments and detailed account of their educational history.

### **4.1 Background characteristics**

A total of 13 African and Caribbean women took part in the research. Nine were of African background, and four were of Caribbean heritage. Seven were born in England, four in Africa, and two in the Caribbean. Those born in Africa and the Caribbean received their primary schooling there.

The participants ranged in age from 30 to 62 years. Two of the sample were married, while the remaining 11 were single.

Most of the participants (12) were in full-time employment and one was in part-time employment. Their job titles varied from coach/trainer to CEO. Nine participants were already in senior positions: one principal/CEO, one director, five managers (two with other roles – coordinator and lead tutor), one team leader, one programme leader and one coordinator. Other roles were coach/trainer (one), adviser (one), and trainee lecturer (one). Eleven of the 13 participants had a history of difficulties on their paths towards senior positions in FE. These women were recruited through LinkedIn, by word-of-mouth and snowballing (networking, LinkedIn).

There are three main routes into HE: firstly, with traditional sixth form qualifications, for example, A-levels, AS-levels, and Scottish Highers; secondly, with vocational qualifications, such as BTEC and HND; and thirdly, through Access programmes, which are designed to ease entry to positions that usually require higher requirements for non-traditional students. Examples of these are students from working-class

backgrounds, women, and ethnic minorities (mainly Black), who have difficulty entering FE and HE. There are three main characteristics of Access programmes: some are for women only or ethnic groups; applications to join a programme are processed by a collaboration between FE and HE institutions; and they offer clear progression, preparation for, and a route into HE that is sometimes linked to a modular course in HE (Woodrow, 1988). Although most of the participants had come via the traditional route into HE, two participants came via a non-traditional route into HE. The study found that many of the participants, despite having achieved academic success, had not had positive experiences in school. They had attended schools in the UK that were in predominantly White communities. Living and going to school in predominantly White communities had impacted their negative experiences.

The interviews were conducted in various places across England.

The pseudonyms that were chosen for the participants were selected based on the intention to employ African and Caribbean names that accurately reflected the identity of each participant. The self-identification of individuals with a specific ethnic group holds significance for me.

## **4.2 Participants' Profiles**

The following are brief introductions to the women who participated in the research study. Their pseudonyms are Jasmine, Duchess, Ashanti, Ade, Raven, Destiny, Amari, Jvonte, Sanaa, Olufemi, Aliyah, Kyla, and Ebony. They all showed a sincere willingness to take part in this study, and they expressed gratitude for the opportunity to share their experiences and for being given a platform through which to do so. Most of the women identified as African or Caribbean. The study provides a comprehensive description of the participants involved, including their demographic characteristics. The variables under consideration in this study were age, race/ethnicity, and initial qualifications. The profiles include their routes to HE, academic qualifications, and their job role or position.

#### **4.2.1 Participant 1: Jasmine**

Jasmine, a person of Caribbean heritage, is 50 years old. She holds a position as director. Jasmine self-identifies as an individual of African-Caribbean heritage, belonging to the Black British community, and coming from a socioeconomically disadvantaged background. She attended an all-White primary, state school in England, where the overall educational environment was not conducive to a positive experience. The one positive educational experience was when she decided to return to education as a mature student in an FE college, where she decided to pursue studies through an Access programme. Her route to pursuing HE differed from the conventional approach, as she engaged in an Access to HE programme. As a mature student and a single mother, she encountered difficulties in fulfilling her parental responsibilities. Jasmine subsequently pursued advanced academic studies and ultimately obtained a bachelor's degree and a master's degree. Jasmine characterises her progression towards a senior position as unpleasant. Over several years, she diligently pursued various managerial roles, although she was consistently not selected for interviews. She decided to cease her application process. Due to her dissatisfaction with being overlooked, she opted to stop submitting more job applications for senior positions. Throughout her life, Jasmine has struggled with feelings of self-doubt and a lack of confidence. This struggle has been driven by the immense pressure she has had to validate her worthiness, considering factors such as race, age, socioeconomic status, and various societal boundaries.

#### **4.2.2 Participant 2: Raven**

Raven is 51 years old and is of African heritage. She is in the process of becoming a manager. Raven identifies as an African woman who was raised in a working-class environment. She received both her primary and secondary education in Africa, although she completed secondary education in England. She considers herself to be from a working-class background, although she attended one of the most elite schools for girls in Africa during her formative years. Raven regards herself as an advocate, but she said that she had a fear of being herself because she was assertive and outspoken,

and she feared being undermined at her place of employment because she believed that she was exploited for these traits. As a consequence of this, she developed a phobia of being able to express who she was fully. At school in the UK, she gained O- and A-levels and continued into FE because she did not know what she wanted to do with the rest of her life. After that, she continued her education and eventually earned a diploma, as well as a bachelor's degree and a master's degree.

#### **4.2.3 Participant 3: Duchess**

Duchess is 55 years old and is of Caribbean heritage. She is a leader in a programmed area. She affirmed that her self-perception was as a member of the working class. She received her primary and secondary education in London. Duchess was a lecturer for some time during her career in the FE sector. Her experiences have not always been pleasant because her choices have been questioned frequently. She began her professional life as a grade-one lecturer, and she did not believe that she had accomplished very much up to that point in her career. After landing a job, she rapidly realised how unprepared she was for the responsibilities that came with the position. After completing her O- and A-levels, Duchess decided to extend her education and ended up earning a bachelor's degree, a master's degree, and a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (FE).

#### **4.2.4 Participant 4: Ashanti**

Ashanti is 46 years old and is of African heritage. She works as a coordinator and manager. She was raised in a family that was considered middle-class. She was born in England, and she identifies as being of Black British heritage. She received both her primary and secondary education in London. Her lack of confidence at the beginning of her journey made it difficult for her to fulfil the obligations she had been given in her role as an interim manager. This made the first part of her journey difficult. Nonetheless, she has been provided with some support and encouraged to achieve her goals. She was presented with a number of other possibilities to consider. To gain

admission to an HE institution, Ashanti followed the traditional route of studying for her O- and A-levels. Ashanti decided to complete her education and as a result, she is now in possession of a diploma, as well as a PGCE and a qualification in ESOL. It is helpful for people whose first language is not English to have these qualifications, as they enable the student to develop the necessary communication skills for advancement in a variety of professional, educational, and personal contexts. The qualification ranges from Beginner 1 to Advanced 2.

#### **4.2.5 Participant 5: Jvonte**

Jvonte is 56 years old. She is of Caribbean heritage and considers herself to be working-class. She is a team leader. She attended primary and comprehensive secondary schools in London. After that, she spent most of her professional life (20 years) working at an FE sixth-form institution. Jvonte understood there was no reasonable chance that she would be offered a senior post, thus she saw any attempt to participate in an extra interview for the job as a senseless waste of her time. Consequently, she did not pursue any further interviews for the role. She concluded after in-depth consideration of her previous experience that she was not qualified for senior roles. The obstacles that she had encountered in her life led her to reflect on the meaning of her life and to analyse critically its value. Jvonte showed a strong sense of self-assurance and conviction in her opinion that she possessed the required skills to assume leadership roles. After landing a job as a team leader at a sixth-form college, Jvonte immediately began taking on responsibilities at an FE college. She achieved O- and A-levels and attended an institution that offered FE and finally earned a bachelor's degree after pursuing her education there.

#### **4.2.6 Participant 6: Ade**

Ade is 33 years old and of African heritage. She is currently a trainee lecturer but intends to work her way up to a more senior position with the intention of one day becoming a professor. She went to a primary and comprehensive secondary school in

Africa. She comes from a working-class background. She said that she maintained a positive outlook and made the most of chances whenever they presented themselves, despite the challenges she faced. Her first job was in an FE institution, where she worked as an academic adviser for students. Ade quickly became aware of her desire to take on more challenging duties, which prompted her to pursue promotions aggressively. Her path to FE followed the traditional O- and A-level route, after which she was awarded a scholarship that allowed her to continue her education in the UK. Ade went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees.

#### **4.2.7 Participant 7: Amari**

Amari is 54. She was born in the Caribbean, and she places herself somewhere in the middle-class. She holds the positions of principal and CEO. She attended primary and secondary grammar schools in London. At the beginning of her professional career, she was confronted with a few challenges. In several workplaces, she has been the only Caribbean member of staff, but she has still managed to exceed expectations and achieve success. She credits fortunate circumstances for this outcome. Amari has a strong interest in learning and finds that participating in educational activities brings her a sense of satisfaction. Amari went about obtaining her HE in the traditional manner by first obtaining her O-levels and then her A-levels. She wound up earning bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees, in addition to a PGCE (FE).

#### **4.2.8 Participant 8: Sanaa**

Sanaa is 54 years old and a manager. She comes from a working-class background and is of African heritage. She went to a primary and comprehensive secondary school in London. Having accumulated a significant number of years in education and motivated by her wish to see the world, she chose to embark on a period of travel before she planned to become a teacher. Following her return to England, she embarked on a professional career in an occupation that was not directly associated with the area of education. Subsequently, she returned to her educational institution. Sanaa pursued



a conventional path to HE by studying for her O- and A-levels, an undergraduate degree, a master's degree, a doctorate and a PGCE (FE).

#### **4.2.9 Participant 9: Olufemi**

Olufemi is 47 years old. She is a coordinator and adviser. She is of Caribbean heritage and considers herself to be working-class. She went to a primary school in the Caribbean and a comprehensive secondary school in London. She held several jobs in the retail industry. Eager to make a career change, she returned to studying after quitting school at the age of 16. She went to an FE college to study business administration in addition to taking other classes that would be the equivalent of five GCSEs now. She continued her schooling and eventually earned a bachelor's degree and a PGCE (FE).

#### **4.2.10 Participant 10: Destiny**

Destiny is 52 years old. She is a curriculum manager and lead tutor. She is of Caribbean heritage and from a working-class background. She went to primary and comprehensive secondary schools in London. She held a part-time job for a significant number of years and had a lifelong interest in education. While she was working as a temporary curriculum manager in a college that provided FE, she was given additional secretarial and administrative responsibilities. By joining an Access to HE programmes as a mature student, Destiny was finally able to pursue her goal of receiving HE. Now she holds two bachelor's degrees and has earned a verifier award in addition to her PGCE (FE).

#### **4.2.11 Participant 11: Aliyah**

Aliyah is 52 years old and of Caribbean heritage. She is a manager. She went to primary and comprehensive secondary schools in London. An avid learner, she was able to work her way up to a senior position although she did not have any qualifications

because she was offered training classes. She said she would be the first to confess that, in terms of her intellectual abilities, she was not very strong at school. Aliyah is considering advancing her education and is currently deciding whether or not to pursue a degree. She had found it very hard to obtain work, so she had felt compelled to put a lot of extra effort into the training classes that she took. She has no qualifications, but she participates in many of the staff training classes that are offered at her workplace.

#### **4.2.12 Participant 12: Kyla**

Kyla is 55 years old and is of Caribbean heritage. She is a manager. She went to primary and comprehensive secondary schools in London. She has spent a significant amount of her professional life working in FE institutions, first as a manager, and then in a variety of administrative posts that she held at once. She said that because she was responsible for so many different things, she was required to put in a lot of work and solve a lot of problems during her working days. Kyla said she had been dismissed from her job but was able to find other employment after she had attended to her responsibilities toward the people who depended on her. She followed the traditional route through Certificates in Secondary Education (CSEs), O- and A-levels to be admitted to an HE institution. Then she acquired undergraduate and master's degrees, and a PGCE (FE).

#### **4.2.13 Participant 13: Ebony**

Ebony is 62 years old and of Caribbean heritage. She is a coach and educator. She spent most of her early educational years in the Caribbean, after which she went to a comprehensive secondary school in London. She had spent a substantial portion of her career in the FE sector as a lecturer; nevertheless, even though she had submitted many job applications, she had failed to secure a senior position. She entered HE by way of the O- and A-levels. Ultimately Ebony achieved bachelor's and master's degrees and a PGCE (FE). She no longer has any aspiration to advance her position in the FE

system through promotions.

The study cohort comprised 13 women of African and Caribbean heritage, ranging from coach to CEO. The majority of these women were employed on a full-time basis and encountered difficulties in attaining more senior positions. They gained admission to HE through conventional, vocational, or Access to Higher Education pathways. Although some achieved academic success, a significant number of these women had unfavourable experiences in schools where most students were White. The study emphasised the significance of these women identifying themselves with a particular group.

Throughout the transcription and analytic stages of this investigation, pseudonyms were employed to preserve participant privacy. The literature (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kaiser, 2009; Saunders, Kitzinger & Kitzinger, 2015) strongly supports this strategy for protecting identity and guaranteeing ethical compliance in qualitative studies.

Protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of my participants was crucial. A widely used technique to guarantee anonymity, applied during the transcription and analysis stages of this study, was to use pseudonyms. Each person who participated in this study was given a pseudonym to protect their privacy, following ethical guidelines. This approach is essential when handling privileged data. Although they added an extra degree of security for the participants, pseudonyms did not affect the context or interpretation of the data.

### **4.3 Academic achievement of participants**

The inclusion of a comprehensive description of the participants' credentials is highly relevant to Chapter 5 of the thesis, which directly pertains to one of the themes identified in my findings. This theme is their academic achievement, as they aspired to pursue careers in FE. All participants stated that their parents believed that education was of utmost importance and a top priority. The results of my study indicated that the participants attributed significant importance to their educational pursuits and accomplishments.

The various qualifications attained by the participants are summarised below.

One participant gained a CSE. CSEs were standardised tests that were available in academic and vocational subjects. They were assessed through both coursework and examinations.

Nine participants completed O- and A-levels, which were undertaken typically at 16 and 18 years and were regarded as the traditional route to university. If individuals did not acquire these qualifications during their time at school, they could pursue them at an FE college. O-levels have since been replaced by GCSEs.

Two participants gained Access to Higher Education certificates, which have since been renamed Access to Higher Education Diplomas. The Access route is a non-traditional way to enter HE. Students without A-levels but with the Access to HE diplomas can pursue degree-level studies. The Access course is structured to provide students with relevant academic knowledge and the opportunity to learn strategies that will help them to succeed at the university level.

Two participants had diplomas Ten (plus one with two degrees) hold bachelor's degrees. Eight participants had PGCEs in FE. Seven had master's degrees and two had PhDs. As stated earlier, 12 participants were in full-time employment, and one was in part-time employment. Their job titles varied from coach/trainer to CEO. All participants except two said they had found it difficult to reach senior positions in FE.

This section provides a description of the participant's background in a table and a visualisation of the journeys taken by participants.

### Description of Participant's Educational Background

Participant	Age	Type of School	Route into Education	Degrees/Certificates	Current Occupation
Jasmine	50	Comprehensive Secondary School	Access to HE	Degree Masters	Director
Raven	51	Primary Elite School (Africa) Comprehensive Secondary School (UK)	'O' & 'A' Levels	Diploma, Degree Masters	Trainee Manager
	46	Comprehensive	'O' & 'A'	Diploma	Coordinator

Ashanti		Secondary School	Levels	PGCE (FE)	Manager
Duchess	55	Comprehensive Secondary School	'O' & 'A' Levels	Degree Masters PGCE (FE)	Programme Leader
Jvonte	56	Comprehensive Secondary School	'O' & 'A' Levels	Degree	Team Lead
Ade	33	Comprehensive Secondary School (Africa)	'O' & 'A' Levels	Degree	Trainee Lecturer
Amari	54	Grammar School	'O' & 'A' Levels	PhD Masters Degree PGCE (FE)	Principal CEO
Sanaa	54	Comprehensive Secondary School	'O' & 'A' Levels	PhD, Masters Degree, PGCE (FE)	Manager
Olufemi	47	Comprehensive Secondary School	GCSE, YTS, Celta RSA Business Administration	Degree PGCE (FE)	Coordinator Adviser
Destiny	52	Comprehensive Secondary School	Access to HE	2 Degrees Masters PGCE (FE)	Curriculum Manager Lead Tutor
Aliyah	52	Comprehensive Secondary School	No qualifications Staff training	No Degree	Manager
Kyla	55	Comprehensive Secondary School	CSEs 'O' & 'A' Level	Degree Masters PGCE (FE)	Manager
Ebony	62	Comprehensive Secondary School	'O' & 'A' Level	Degree Masters PGCE (FE)	Coach/Trainer

The appendix contains a visualisation that depicts the journeys taken by the participants.

This chapter provides a comprehensive summary of the 13 African or Caribbean women who participated in the study. The participants, including those who were born and attended primary school in Africa and the Caribbean, are from varied origins and have attained academic accomplishments through both traditional and non-traditional routes to HE. Nevertheless, despite their accomplishments, numerous participants related negative encounters in UK schools situated in mostly White communities. The study emphasises the importance of Access programmes for offering the opportunity for non-traditional students, such as those from working-class families, women and ethnic minorities, to access FE and HE.

The participants' affiliation with ethnic groups is evident in the pseudonyms that were selected for them. The study focuses on the major theme of their educational ambitions and successes, which they consider of paramount significance. Chapter 5 of the thesis specifically addresses the topic of their ambitions to pursue jobs in FE, making this subject matter highly pertinent. The study revealed that every participant saw education as extremely important, an attitude that their parents ingrained in them.

In conclusion, this chapter offers a thorough understanding of the participants' demographic attributes, educational background and the obstacles they encountered. This lays the foundation for additional analysis in the subsequent chapters.

In the next section, the factors that played significant roles in these women's career choices are examined.

## **Chapter 5: Factors that influence African and Caribbean women's career choices**

### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter examines what influenced African and Caribbean women in their decision to pursue their selected professional pathways. It especially addresses the second research question: 'What factors influenced these women in their career paths?' The study analysed the participants' professional objectives, family influence, school experiences and academic performance, demonstrating the impact of these factors on their career decisions. With CRT as the theoretical framework, the analysis underlines the participants' ambition and resolve to succeed despite institutional and social racism.

The research data was collected through in-depth interviews with participants, specifically targeting their life narratives and professional paths. The data was coded by identification of common themes and patterns that are associated with career motivations and the barriers encountered. Upon doing a systematic analysis of the interviews, several themes were identified. These themes include the significance of role models, the effect of attending schools comprised entirely of White students, and the distinct yet interconnected experiences of African and Caribbean women in their professional paths. This chapter investigates the experiences of Jasmine, Raven, Duchess, Ashanti, Ade, Jvonte, Amari, Sanaa, Olufemi, Aliyah, Destiny, Kyla, and Ebony by analysing their narratives. It aims to uncover both the shared aspects and nuanced variations in their experiences. The analysis also examines the influence of role models, specifically focusing on the experiences of Ebony, Kyla, Amari, and Sanaa, which demonstrate how significant individuals led their development and ambitions. The chapter applies CRT to offer a comprehensive understanding of how the intersection of race, gender, and class affects the professional trajectories of African and Caribbean women.

## 5.1 Identity

This section examines the relationship between African and Caribbean women's identities and their unique backgrounds, including their self-identity as Caribbean, Black Caribbean, Black British or Black. It encapsulates associations with Mirza's (1997) research. The testimonials of several participants indicate a clear manifestation of pride in their unique identities, particularly while engaging in conversations about the ancestral background of their parents. This sense of pride is especially linked to a robust identification with the geographical origins of their paternal ancestors. Some participants saw themselves as working-class and powerful women.

*"I would describe myself to be of African-Caribbean descent, Black British" (Jasmine)*

*"I'm a woman of colour. And I'm a strong, strong woman." (Aliyah)*

*"Black African" (Ade)*

It is possible to attribute my participants' personalities and behaviours to a wide variety of circumstances, including connections they had with their parents and how they were raised. These women's upbringings have influenced their self-perception and contributed to developing the sense of self-assurance that they currently possess. Mirza (1997) explores the significance of self-identification and the resilience needed for African and Caribbean women to successfully navigate predominately White institutions. The validation of their individuality underscores their determination and introspection. Mirza (1997) examined the strategies employed by African and Caribbean women to negotiate their identities, facing challenges related to identity conflicts and stereotypes. Kyla's narrative revolves around her identity as a Black woman with African ancestry. She relates the ongoing battle against stereotypes and the necessity to show her abilities and value in the presence of bias. Kyla's resilience and self-perception are a sense of pride in her African and Caribbean heritage, and the



impact of noteworthy individuals such as Angela Davis, an American political activist, philosopher, scholar, and author.

*“Angela Davis influenced me enormously” (Kyla)*

Mirza's 1997 publication, *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, delves into the concept of intersectionality, examining how race, gender, and class intersect in the lives of African and Caribbean women in Britain, focusing on their experiences in the school system. The paradigm she presents emphasises the impact of institutional racism, sexism, and classism on the lives and identities of African and Caribbean women. It underlines their ability to overcome adversity and control their lives, and the strategies they use to negotiate these obstacles. The focus of my research on African and Caribbean women in managerial positions aligns with Mirza's ideas since it explores the distinct experiences of these women in professional settings, analysing how their identities shape and are shaped by their professions.

Similar themes are investigated in my research, with a particular emphasis on African and Caribbean women who are employed in managerial positions. I am studying the impact of their African and Caribbean identities on their experiences in these professions and their strategies for overcoming problems. Both Mirza's (1997) study and my research examines the intersections of race, gender, and class, and how these overlapping identities affect the experiences of African and Caribbean women; both emphasise the structural obstacles that African and Caribbean women encounter, as well as their ability to adapt and overcome these difficulties. The individuals I studied demonstrate patterns that align with the concepts outlined in Mirza's (1997) framework, including the development of personal identity, the process of negotiating one's identity, overcoming barriers posed by institutions, displaying resilience and experiencing the effect of race and gender. Regarding their professional lives, the participants in my research reflect on where their personal and professional identities overlap. The participants emphasise their ethnic origins and how these identities shape their career goals and motives.

*"I am of Caribbean descent and consider myself to be of working-class"*

(Duchess)

*"I describe myself as a Black British. Born in England."* (Ashanti)

*"I wanted to work with people who were underprivileged."* (Ashanti)

The process used by Duchess and Ashanti in developing their identity is deeply influenced by their ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Duchess passionately identifies with her Caribbean heritage and working-class background, which shapes her motives and beliefs. Ashanti's status as a Black British woman and her commitment to supporting disadvantaged communities underscore the interaction between her personal background and career goals. Mirza's concept highlights the significance of recognising and accepting one's identity in choosing a career; it suggests that the backgrounds of these women have a substantial impact on their professional trajectories and objectives.

The following quotations illustrate Sanaa's ability to constantly bounce back from challenges and the intricate process of navigating her sense of self in her professional path, aligning with Mirza's (1997) focus on the power and flexibility of African and Caribbean women despite structural obstacles, exemplifying the notion of resilience and ultimate acknowledgement of competence, a crucial element of her framework.

*"When I was there, I never thought I was going to end there. Actually, I always thought I'll get this academic thing and I'll become a lecturer some way."* (Sanaa)

*"Having said that, in this place, I have made a positive name for myself for the first time in my life, after many years of wanting opportunities, not given them."* (Sanaa)

Kyla's progression through many positions in the field of education, ranging from teaching to administration, displays her ability to bounce back and her unwavering commitment to achieving success despite structural obstacles. Her willingness to learn new things and grow professionally—she went on to gain many degrees and enter the counselling field—shows how flexible and determined she is.

"He said, that's your vision, and he said if you've got visions like that, you will always make it to the top if you progress in that sort of way."  
(Aliyah)

Mirza (1997) examines the strategies employed by African and Caribbean women in balancing their career ambitions with the challenges placed upon them by society. This is demonstrated by the woman's audacious goal and the reaction it receives. Sanaa, Kyla and Aliyah's stories shed light on these issues and offer valuable qualitative perspectives on the real-life experiences of African and Caribbean women in management, further supporting Mirza's (1997) views on the complex relationship between race, gender, and professional identity. The participants and women in her study demonstrate an unwavering belief in self and resilience; Aliyah's self-identification as a resilient African and Caribbean woman corresponds with Mirza's (1997) claim that defining oneself is essential for navigating and opposing marginalisation.

A person's identity goes through a process of development as they progress through the early phases of their educational journey and as they begin to engage in professional endeavours. This process involves the individual's self-perception becoming more defined and structured as they progress. The fact that most of these women spent a substantial portion of their formative years in environments that were predominantly White and in which they were the sole person of African and Caribbean heritage had a significant impact on them. People who have been raised in nurturing family contexts may have a more challenging time making the transition to the interpersonal relationships that are common in educational environments because of the phenomenon of self-awareness and the development of self-esteem.

*"Being the only Black in a school outside London. The schools I went to were White-dominated"* (Jasmine)

*"School was predominantly White"* (Jvonte)

As women of African and Caribbean heritage become aware of their capacity for independence and appreciate their African and Caribbean cultural heritage, they might experience difficulties in assimilating with society as a result of their excluded

position. This understanding underscores the challenges individuals encounter in attaining their objectives and cultivating a feeling of inclusion.

*"I was taught by strong women who encouraged me. I stayed on into the sixth form because I wanted to teach" (Amari)*

*"A long time ago, I learned to be independent because I was the only Black girl in all the schools I went to. My independence stemmed from there" (Jasmine)*

Mirza (1997) highlights the significance of African and Caribbean women's recognition of their cultural background and their ability to be self-reliant in shaping their sense of identity. This awareness enables them to recognise their individuality in environments where they are excluded or disadvantaged. In her work, Mirza (1997) explores the notion of 'dual consciousness', which refers to the experience of African and Caribbean women who manage their identities by embracing their African and Caribbean heritage and addressing the discriminatory aspects of society. She emphasises that African and Caribbean women encounter considerable challenges in fully integrating into society due to systematic exclusion and marginalisation. These obstacles appear in several ways, including bias and unfair treatment in professional environments, educational institutions, and wider social contexts. Mirza's (1997) explores the challenge of achieving inclusivity; she argues that African and Caribbean women frequently face more challenges in attaining their goals and establishing a sense of inclusion due to the widespread presence of institutional racism and sexism.

African and Caribbean women's identities and lived experiences are shaped by the complex interactions between race, gender and class, as explored by Collins (2015), which cites 'intersectionality' (2015). Collins's (2015) research enhances Mirza's work by offering a more comprehensive theoretical framework with which to understand these processes. Collins' (2015) notion of intersectionality underscores the unique way in which the identities of African and Caribbean women are affected by the interaction of many forms of oppression, such as race, gender and class. 'Intersectionality' refers to the obstacles encountered by women of African and Caribbean heritage in society. She contends that recognition of one's cultural history can have a transformative

effect, providing individuals with a sense of empowerment. Acknowledging and appreciating their African and Caribbean heritage can empower African and Caribbean women, enabling them to remain strong and resilient amid discriminatory practices. According to Collins (2015), racism and sexism are systemic and result in structural obstacles that impede the complete integration of African and Caribbean women into society. These obstacles are reinforced by legislation, institutional practices, and cultural norms that give advantages to certain groups while disadvantaging others. Collins (2015) emphasises the ability of African and Caribbean women to confront repressive structures, despite the difficulties they face. She argues that by engaging in collective action, fostering community development, and advocating for their rights, African and Caribbean women can confront and change the circumstances that lead to their marginalisation.

The significance of heritage cultures in African and Caribbean women's development of their identities is emphasised by both Collins (2015) and Mirza (1997). Building a strong feeling of self-worth and autonomy requires understanding and recognising their African and Caribbean heritage. However, awareness of this situation highlights the difficulty of navigating one's identity in a culture that marginalises and discriminates against people based on their race and gender. Both scholars emphasise the challenges of integrating into wider society; African and Caribbean women encounter significant barriers in reaching their goals and inclusion due to a systemic history of exclusion and marginalisation. These issues are not only individual but rather originate from structural inequalities that necessitate collaborative endeavours to be resolved. Mirza (1997) and Collins (2015) offer extensive conceptual frameworks for understanding the identities and cultural legacy of African and Caribbean women. Their works emphasise a dual process of empowering. To adequately address these problems, a comprehensive strategy is needed that encompasses both personal resilience and structural reforms that promote fairness and inclusivity.

The complex difficulties that African and Caribbean women encounter in predominantly White institutions are also discussed by Johnson and Thomas (2012). They stress that because of the intersection of the gender and racial biases that these women face, their identities and experiences are frequently not acknowledged or

validated. Intersectionality refers to the concept that the difficulties experienced by individuals in this group are different from those faced by African and Caribbean men or White women. As a result, they bear the weight of prejudice from two different sources. Johnson and Thomas (2012) argue that African and Caribbean women frequently experience a sense of seclusion and exclusion in environments that are predominantly controlled by White individuals, both in social and professional contexts. This marginalisation can impede their career advancement and affect their psychological well-being; they often face prejudices that influence how they are perceived and treated. These preconceptions may encompass both race and gender, contributing to the challenges they encounter.

Numerous studies have delved into the identities and realities of racial minorities in contexts where White people predominate. In *How to Raise an Anti-racist* (2022), Kendi emphasises the significance of acknowledging and reinforcing the racial identities of minority groups in all aspects of society, such as education and the professional environment. He underscores the importance of implementing systemic changes to establish environments that truly recognise and honour minority identities. Many reports such as McKinsey, Company & Lean In (2020) and McKensey (2015) emphasise the significance of diversity and inclusion in the work environment. These reports frequently emphasise the unique difficulties that African and Caribbean women encounter and provide approaches for promoting more comprehensive settings. The current conversations highlight the enduring significance of Johnson and Thomas's (2022) findings; they still strongly connect with the realities of racial minorities in institutions that White individuals predominantly control. To address the issues that African and Caribbean women and other racial minorities experience, there is still a need for increased acknowledgement, affirmation and institutional change.

African and Caribbean women in mostly White educational institutions are significantly shaped by their overlapping identities of race and gender. The idea of intersectionality offers an important framework for understanding the interplay between these multiple identities. Crenshaw (1991) highlights the simultaneous navigation of several forms of discrimination by these women, which affects their distinct encounters with exclusion and resilience. Studies conducted by Martin & Hall

(1992), Parks et al. (1996) and Watt (2006) indicate that the formation the gender identity of women from the African diaspora often aligns with their racial identity. The intersectionality of their identity development processes is highlighted, as racial and gender elements are closely interconnected.

According to Collins (2000), cultural heritage and community assistance are significant in forming identity among African and Caribbean women. The research emphasises that the socialisation processes within African American communities play a crucial role in promoting a positive self-perception, especially in situations that marginalise them. This viewpoint corresponds to the accounts of Jasmine and Amari, who contemplate their identities in mostly White institutions, highlighting the significance of community and cultural validation in their feeling of belonging. The contemplation of identity and sense of belonging among African and Caribbean women in mostly White educational environments is complex and profoundly shaped by their overlapping identities. By integrating literature on intersectionality, cultural identity, views on gender roles, early awareness of discrimination, educational experiences, media representation and resistance techniques, we enhance our understanding of these experiences. It highlights the need for structural modifications to establish settings that recognise and value the complex identities of marginalised students.

## **5.2 Career aspirations**

The findings of this study shed light on the factors that contribute to the decision of African and Caribbean women to pursue professions in FE. The data show that some of the participants had no experience working in FE colleges, while others had previous experience, possessed the requisite credentials, and desired to advance their careers to more senior positions in a college. All the participants were interested in pursuing professions in FE.

The findings of this study shed light on the factors that contribute to the decision of African and Caribbean women to pursue professions in FE. The data show that some

of the participants had no experience working in FE colleges, while others had previous experience, possessed the requisite credentials, and wanted to advance their careers to more senior positions in a college. All participants were interested in pursuing professions in FE. Mirza's work from 1997, particularly her book *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, is a crucial piece in our understanding of the realities and aspirations of African and Caribbean women living in the UK. This analysis explores the interconnectedness of race, gender and social class, emphasising the unique ways in which these variables affect the lives and possibilities of African and Caribbean women. The accounts of several of the people I interviewed in my research align with many issues explored in Mirza's (1997) work. The following are some significant links:

***Identity and Professional Aspirations:***

A reflection on Sanaa's identity as a Black British woman, as well as how her upbringing and educational background influenced her desire for a profession, was complete. In addition, she explored the impact of her academic pursuits and personal encounters with racial identity on the trajectory of her career. African and Caribbean women's career aspirations and sense of belonging in professional situations are influenced by their identity and self-perception, as examined by Mirza (1997). Sanaa and Olufemi address the distinctive obstacles they encounter as African and Caribbean women in their careers as professionals. Sanaa discusses the additional pressures she faces as a Black female manager and the impact of stereotypes on how she communicates with peers at work. Olufemi discusses her identity as a Black British woman and her will to achieve success despite the presence of institutional obstacles.

*“When there are issues, I am taken aback by how quickly issues of, I think stereotypes about the way people communicate based on race ethnicity, or culture come to the forefront.” (Sanaa)*

*“Personal sense of drive. A member of the family can do well. Education, a sense of wanting to achieve.” (Olufemi)*

***Educational and Career Pathways:***



The non-linearity of Sanaa and Olufemi's professional paths is reflected in their careers. Sanaa transitioned between positions in education and administration, motivated by the ability to adapt and necessity rather than a linear advancement in her career. Olufemi's transition across multiple businesses before pursuing college and ultimately earning a degree later in life illustrates endurance and adaptation in overcoming institutional challenges. Mirza (1997) examines the challenges that African and Caribbean women encounter in education and entering the labour market, which frequently leads to non-linear career trajectories. Although Ebony had hoped to achieve leadership roles to have a significant influence and act as a positive example for African and Caribbean students, she has lost interest. She has ceased seeking more senior positions because she believes that racial prejudice in the recruitment process deems it pointless. This discontent reflects notions presented in Hall's 1997 essay *The Spectacle of the 'Other'*, which can be found in the book *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. In this essay, Hall explores the psychological consequences of racism, including how individuals may internalise feelings of inferiority or experience a loss of motivation as a result of systemic obstacles. It offers an extensive examination of how cultural depictions and preconceived notions sustain racism and affect the mental health of marginalised communities.

*"I'm no longer getting those positions, so I am looking at it from a different angle in terms of empowering students from the fact that I'm a Black educator and I need to empower them through my skills"*  
(Ebony)

*"I've applied for senior positions three or four times, I'm tired of that, I'm tired of the racism"* (Ebony)

### ***Resilience and Aspirations:***

Sanaa and Olufemi demonstrate this perseverance. Sanaa's persistence in overcoming institutional obstacles and achieving management success, and Olufemi's resolve to pursue a degree and a professional pathway, exemplify the resilience and ambitions emphasised by Mirza (1997). Mirza's (1997) work reflects on the determination and ambitions of African and Caribbean women who persevere in their efforts to surmount

institutional obstacles. Sanaa's transition from the field of education to management, characterised by episodes of feeling underappreciated and encountering opposition, exemplifies the non-linear professional trajectories that numerous African and Caribbean women endure. Her exceptional achievements and recognition in her present position reflect her ability to bounce back from challenges. Sanaa's unwavering commitment to study, demonstrated by her pursuit of a PhD despite initial challenges, and the subsequent financial backing from a prominent individual in the institution she attended, underscores the importance of support and recognition in overcoming obstacles. Olufemi's varied professional trajectory, encompassing business administration, security and education, along with her decision to pursue further education at a later stage in life, demonstrates her ability to adapt and persevere in the face of systemic obstacles. Her subsequent success in HE, despite the delay, serves as a reminder of the value of easily accessible education and the effect of encouraging educators in their professional aspirations.

### ***Resilience and Self-Determination***

Despite enduring persistent neglect in promotions and facing prejudiced internal dynamics in general, Jvonte persevered in her pursuit of positions of leadership and actively explored opportunities to move her career forward. Her determination is shown in her choice to leave adverse situations and pursue her career in several institutions. She astutely managed her professional trajectory by identifying instances of manipulation and opting out of participation in certain political strategies, such as avoiding pursuing a position that demanded the managerial expertise she lacked.

The correlation between Mirza's (1997) study and my research on African and Caribbean women and their career ambitions is in the investigation of the obstacles and institutional impediments encountered by African and Caribbean women in their professional trajectories. Mirza's (1997) research, namely her investigation of the educational and employment experiences of African and Caribbean British women, offers a valuable perspective for analysing the narratives of individuals such as Jvonte and Sanaa. Mirza (1997) highlights the drive and autonomy of African and Caribbean women who persist in their pursuit of professional aspirations while facing many

challenges. This requires sophisticated manoeuvring within their work contexts and ongoing promotion of their interests.

My research on African and Caribbean women and their professional aspirations aligns with the areas that were investigated by Mirza (1997). The accounts of Sanaa, Olufemi and Jvonte highlight the interconnectedness of race, gender and class, the effect of early educational encounters, the obstacles within institutions, and the determination needed to negotiate and thrive in such settings. These links enable a more profound understanding of the institutional and individual achievements that characterise the professional ambitions and experiences of African and Caribbean women in the UK. For most participants, the aspiration to pursue a career in FE was a rational progression in their lives; their motivations for pursuing jobs in FE were diverse, but their career choices had a profound influence on their futures.

### **5.3 Academic achievement**

The results of this research reveal that participants attributed significant importance to their educational institution in relation to their achievements. The majority of those who took part said that they had been very keen to work in the field of education. Despite not having the appropriate qualifications, some participants expressed enthusiasm for teaching.

*“I stayed on into the 6<sup>th</sup> Form because I wanted to teach” (Amari)*

*“I think I always wanted to teach” (Destiny)*

*“For me, I want to be good at teaching and want to learn as much as I could. I think, it gave me a lot of skills, um, a lot of confidence” (Destiny)*

Personal testimonies were offered by participants as they reflected on their educational and professional experiences. It is evident from my findings that the majority of my participants have actively pursued advanced education and have attained diverse levels of academic accomplishment. A few have chosen to engage in occupational training programmes, while others have successfully obtained advanced academic qualifications, such as master's degrees and doctorates. Additionally, some participants have sought teaching qualifications, such as a PGCE.

*"I wanted to gain a teaching qualification and a diploma. My placement and teaching practice were at a college of further education" (Ashanti).*

*"Before I did my PGCE (FE), I did a Certificate in Education and one of the women, who was my mentor, a Caribbean woman, was very instrumental in me becoming a teacher" (Ebony)*

*"So, I basically went and started studying again. I started getting more regular teaching at the same time I was doing my PGCE (FE)" (Destiny).*

The participants engaged in a discourse regarding the types and geographical distribution of the educational institutions they had attended, predominantly in various areas of London. Some shared their sentiments as the sole individuals of African and Caribbean heritage in their schools. Three participants had attended primary schools abroad, while one had been educated at a grammar school in another country. Two participants had received education at independent schools outside London. In contrast, six participants attended comprehensive schools within the London area. The school experiences of the three participants were not specified. One participant had been granted a scholarship to attend a school in London, while the remaining participant attended a school near London.

During the discourse, the participants offered a narrative about their experiences in various areas of education and their professional careers. It includes the overarching concepts, principles and reasons that are collectively communicated. For instance, a dedication to education, the ability to empower as a result of education, guidance from mentors and the impact on the community, as well as a variety of educational

routes. The discourse highlights a shared dedication to education, encompassing both individual academic success and professional credentials. Participants' narratives indicate that educational achievement is not entirely a vocational trajectory but is valued.

The participants' empowerment, confidence and abilities have been revealed by their education and training, according to the testimonies. Destiny's educational path has resulted in motivation and confidence, which have a positive impact on her personal and professional life. Mentorship plays a crucial role in professional development, emphasising the significance of community and support networks. Ebony's experience exemplifies a wider societal narrative in which community members provide mutual support and motivation. The discourse also reflects the varied educational trajectories that individuals have pursued, including advanced degrees, vocational training, and professional certifications. This diversity illustrates the various paths to attaining career goals and emphasises the adaptability and perseverance of the participants. Mirza's (1992) study investigates the educational encounters of young African and Caribbean women in the UK, examining topics such as racial and gender identity, educational ambitions, and the effect of systems on their educational paths, underscoring the determination and resolve of African and Caribbean women in their pursuit of education; this aligns with the participants' shared dedication to education as a highly valued profession. Mirza (1992) highlights the significant impact of education on marginalised communities, reflecting the participants' accounts of how their educational experiences have empowered them and enhanced their abilities.

The significance that Mirza (1992) placed on mentoring and community support is reflected in the participants' accounts of the important role mentors and networks played in their professional development. Mirza's (1992) investigation of the many educational trajectories of African and Caribbean women validates the participants' numerous individual avenues to attaining professional objectives and the tenacity needed to negotiate these routes. The testimonials of the participants indicate that personal goals have a significant impact on the decisions made regarding education and professional paths. The persistent desire for education, as expressed by numerous individuals, signifies an overwhelming internal drive that motivates their educational

and vocational pursuits. Obtaining additional degrees and professional qualifications is depicted as a crucial means for advancing one's career and personal growth. This is consistent with wider social ideals that encourage HE alongside specific training for achieving professional success. Mentorship is recognised as an effective motivator for obtaining career goals, implying that having support systems and role models is crucial in the educational process. This underscores the need to cultivate mentorship programmes in educational institutions and professional organisations.

The participants' reflections suggest continuous progress in their experiences. A constantly evolving approach to personal and professional progress is characterised by a narrative of constant learning and gaining of skills. Mirza's work (1992) is strongly reflected in the analysis of the educational and career experiences of the participants since it offers a theoretical framework as well as empirical evidence that supports the concepts that were found. Mirza's (1992) research, described in *Young, Female, and Black*, explores the ambitions of individual African and Caribbean women and their desire to overcome structural obstacles in education and professional work. Her research demonstrates that despite encountering discrimination and marginalisation, these women are motivated by resilient personal aspirations and a determination to achieve success; this inherent drive demonstrates a profound dedication to individual and vocational objectives, sometimes in the face of substantial obstacles.

Professional credentials and HE are crucial for job growth and empowerment, as noted by Mirza (1992). She emphasises how disadvantaged populations embrace education to attain social advancement and overcome economic obstacles. The participants' endeavour to obtain advanced degrees and professional certifications is regarded as essential for their career progression and personal growth. This statement reflects Mirza's (1992) claim that education plays a crucial role in attaining professional success and personal empowerment. The participants strategically capitalise on education to circumvent and overcome systemic challenges, aligning themselves with cultural ideals that prioritise HE.

Mirza (1992) places great importance on the functions of mentorship and support from communities in her work. She explores the significance of mentors, specifically

those who share comparable cultural backgrounds, in offering crucial guidance, support and role modelling for African and Caribbean women. The experiences of the participants emphasise mentorship as an effective driving force for attaining their professional goals. This underscores the importance of effective support structures and mentoring, strengthening Mirza's (1992) plea for more organised mentorship initiatives to assist marginalised students. Mirza (1992) argues that constant learning and skills improvement are essential for both personal and professional development. Her research demonstrates that marginalised communities frequently participate in continuous education to adjust, develop and thrive in ever-changing and frequently demanding circumstances.

The participants' varying levels of attending school and their ambitions for HE is influenced by mentors, a lifelong dedication to learning, and a longing to teach. The conversation around these events emphasises the value of learning, mentoring, and pursuing several routes to career success, adding to a comprehensive and empowering narrative for educational and career advancement. Mirza's (1992) research offers a strong and comprehensive structure for understanding the key ideas that arise from the participants' testimony. Her study shows that personal ambition, HE, mentorship and ongoing learning play a crucial role in the educational and career paths of marginalised individuals. African and Caribbean women in education, according to Mirza (1997), are part of an international movement for social change. The strategies they employ for achieving academic success and gaining admission into FE and HE include complying and aligning with the philosophy of the meritocratic system, progressing up the traditional structure and seeking to be successful by ignoring responsibility to the educational system. She argues that is radical for African and Caribbean women to want or need to achieve in the educational system; they tend to capitalise on learning opportunities to navigate traditional patterns in terms of educational mobility and strive beyond their education in their communities. This proactive participation contradicts what we expected; African and Caribbean women have been portrayed in the existing educational literature as 'the most oppressed', less 'visible' and disempowered (Mirza, 1997). They belong to a group of postcolonial women who have endured challenges in school since the 1970s (Mirza & Gunaratnam,

2014).

In conclusion, the experiences serve to emphasise the complex and diverse array of obstacles encountered by women of African and Caribbean descent. These obstacles include interpersonal dynamics, racial bias and cultural incongruities. This emphasises the necessity of implementing structural modifications at both the societal and institutional tiers to tackle these difficulties and cultivate a milieu in which African and Caribbean women can flourish. Such initiatives encompass the promotion of diversity and inclusion, the questioning of preconceptions and biases, and the guarantee of equitable and transparent procedures in education and employment.

#### **5.4 School experience**

The extracts provided reflect a profound picture of the lived reality of African and Caribbean people in the educational system, particularly in areas that are located outside of London. These personal narratives highlight the concepts of racism, loneliness and a wish for community and a feeling of belonging. To have a deeper understanding of the impact of these experiences, each quotation is examined and discussed below.

*"I remember my mother and I leaving a school or primary school after being told that the parents wouldn't like their children playing with a Black child. So, you know, I could go three years in primary school and not go to anyone's birthday party." (Kyla)*

Kyla's experience exemplifies the overt racial discrimination encountered in educational environments. The outright rejection by other parents is indicative of a kind of racism that is accepted in society and harms young children's social growth and sense of identity. This exclusion is highly likely to have had a significant influence on



Kyla's social interactions and self-esteem. The lack of invitations to any birthday parties in three years serves as a poignant indication of the extent of her seclusion and alienation. This incident highlights the need to develop more inclusive environments and implement regulations in schools to prevent marginalisation.

*"You know that making it through school, um, moving to another area where there were a few more Black families and um finding friendship groups, that was very nurturing and encouraging and I hadn't had that until I was about 10. So, between 4 and 10 it was quite a lonely life."*

(Kyla)

This quotation emphasises the disparity between Kyla's early educational years and her subsequent encounters. The transition from feeling isolated to a supporting atmosphere highlights the importance of communities for cultivating a positive educational experience. Kyla's experience of being alone from ages 4 to 10 is likely to have had enduring emotional and psychological consequences. Nevertheless, discovering a community at a later stage proved to be a valuable source of support, indicating that implementing structural reforms to promote diversity and inclusion can greatly enhance the welfare of marginalised students.

*"My experience of schooling in this country was racist, bullying, the whole lot. When I came to this country, I was subjected to a barrage of racism from teachers as well as the students who used to throw, um, bananas at me, telling me that's what we eat."* (Ebony)

Ebony's story vividly portrays explicit racism and bullying in educational institutions. The act of hurling bananas and the racially derogatory remarks made by both peers and teachers indicate a hostile and inhospitable atmosphere. The discriminatory treatment can have profound consequences for a student's psychological well-being, educational achievement, and general perspective on life. Ebony's testimony underscores the necessity of thorough anti-racism instruction for both students and staff, as well as the need to enforce strict anti-bullying regulations.

*"I had a poor experience of schooling. I went to a primary school outside London. There were issues of class, being the only Black in a school*

*outside London. The schools I went to were White-dominated."*

(Jasmine)

Jasmine's account centres around the convergence of race and class, highlighting her isolation as the sole African and Caribbean student in a largely White school. This setting likely intensified feelings of exclusion from society. Educational institutions should address several levels of inequality due to the intersection of racial and class issues. Initiatives focused on fostering diversity and inclusiveness may assist in alleviating the negative experiences that Jasmine had.

*"Schooling was quite alienating. I grew up in all-White areas, outside London. Extremely alienating, but we came back to London, and I was able to salvage something because I came back when I was 11."* (Sanaa)

A feeling of estrangement is something that Sanaa identifies as a result of her upbringing in predominantly White communities. The use of the term "salvage" suggests that returning to London, a city known for its greater diversity, enabled her to recover some of her sense of self and discover a more encouraging social network. The experience of estrangement that Sanaa encountered underscores the significance of creating a varied and inclusive atmosphere for minority students. Her anecdotal evidence indicates that moving to a more heterogeneous region may lead to favourable outcomes in terms of individual growth and inclusion in society.

The participants' experiences highlight a widespread problem of racial discrimination and social isolation in schools, specifically in areas outside of London. The quotations emphasise the following crucial points: The overt racism depicted, such as parents preventing their children from interacting with African and Caribbean fellow students and engaging in outright racial harassment, points to an adverse atmosphere that significantly undermines the victims' confidence and sense of inclusion. Particularly in places with a high concentration of White people, several individuals expressed feeling alone and alienated. This implies that the absence of an adequate sense of belonging in a community can intensify the experience of isolation among students belonging to minority groups. The favourable change in experiences after relocating to more varied regions highlights the significance of establishing inclusive environments where all

students feel acknowledged and encouraged. The quotations presented are consistent with the research and theories of Mirza (1992; 2009), Tomlinson (1983; 2008) and Collins (1990; 2000; 2009), who have conducted studies on the topics of race, education, and social dynamics.

Mirza's (1992, 2009) research frequently examines the interaction of race and gender and the difficulties encountered by African and Caribbean women in educational environments. Kyla's encounters with ostracism and exclusion from social gatherings, such as birthday parties, provide examples of the systematic racism that Mirza (1992, 2009) addresses. Kyla's initial isolation and later sense of comfort in discovering a caring group corresponds with Mirza's (1992, 2009) research on the significance of supportive networks for minority students. Tomlinson's (1983, 2008) research focuses on the systemic disparities in the educational system that impact pupils from minority backgrounds, emphasising how systemic racism in schools can result from both policy and human behaviours. Ebony's encounters with explicit racism from both educators and peers exemplify Tomlinson's (1983, 2008) findings regarding the widespread occurrence of racial prejudice in British educational institutions. The antagonistic atmosphere Ebony portrays emphasises the need for the structural transformation that Tomlinson promotes in her research.

Collin's (1990, 2000 & 2009) research on intersectionality examines the interplay of race, class and gender in shaping the lived realities of African and Caribbean women. The 'matrix of domination' notion she proposes is highly pertinent for understanding the varied forms of oppression that they experience. Collins's (1990, 2000 & 2009) theory of intersectionality illustrates Jasmine's encounter with the simultaneous challenges of race and socioeconomic status at a largely White educational institution. This combination of two layers of marginalisation corresponds to Collins's (1990, 2000 & 2009) theory on how intersecting social identities may increase oppression. Sanaa's sense of isolation in predominantly White communities also aligns with Collins's research. The framework of the matrix of domination suggests how various aspects of identity align to generate distinct encounters of marginalisation.

The participants' experiences are a merging of the theories and discoveries of Mirza

(1992, 2009), Tomlinson (1983, 2008) and Collins (1990, 2000 & 2009). The accounts of Jasmine and Sanaa illustrate how the intersection of race, gender and, in Jasmine's case, class gives rise to marginalisation and estrangement. Collins's (1990, 2000 & 2009) theory offers a perspective through which one can understand the interconnectedness of these various forms of oppression. Ebony's description of explicit racism from both educators and peers serves as a clear illustration of the structural problems present in educational establishments, as cited by Tomlinson (1983, 2008). Kyla's progression from aloneness to discovering a nurturing community corresponds with Mirza's emphasis on the importance of favourable social networks for marginalised pupils. Thus, these researchers offer conceptual frameworks that help us understand the complex experiences of African and Caribbean women in the education system. They emphasise the significance of confronting institutional racism, cultivating inclusive communities and recognising the interconnectedness of aspects of identity. The real-life experiences of Kyla, Ebony, Jasmine and Sanaa exemplify these themes, underscoring the continuous need for educational reform and social justice.

#### **5.4.1 All-White schools**

Some of my participants went to all-White schools. There are commonalities and differences in their experiences. A significant number of interviewees related states of emotional isolation and challenges as the only African or Caribbean student in their educational institution; this was the case for Jasmine and Amari. Jasmine also highlighted the presence of class disparities, in addition to ethnic inequities, in this context of isolation. The uncomfortable feeling of being an outsider is intensified by both ethnic and social characteristics, resulting in a complex experience of exclusion.

*"I was the only Black girl in all the schools I went to",*

*"I went to a primary school outside London".*

*"There were issues of class, being the only Black in the school outside London". (Jasmine)*

*"The schools I went to were White-dominated".*

*"I went to an all-girls school. I was the only Black child in the school and my area (Amari)".*

The traumatic experience that Sanaa went through while she was in primary school highlights the profound emotional impact that such isolation may have. As the sole African or Caribbean family in the county, she experienced both social isolation at school and her family faced isolation within the larger community. This underscores the widespread extent of her seclusion, impacting every aspect of her existence and adding to her distressing encounters.

*“I grew up outside London in an all-White area”.*

*“I found primary school to be traumatic because you were the only Black family, in the whole county”.*

*“I think I wanted not to be there; I didn’t know what aspects of my identity were there”? (Sanaa)*

Kyla's experiences capture the real-life impact of discrimination based on race on the process of social integration. Her narrative of enduring three years in primary school without receiving an invitation to a single birthday celebration highlights the social ostracism she experienced. The absence of social integration might result in enduring consequences for one's self-esteem and capacity to establish significant connections. Kyla's remark describing her relocation to an area of greater diversity, with African and Caribbean families with whom to establish social circles, highlights the extent to which she had to exert effort to discover a feeling of community and place.

*“In that area around the colour of my skin and sort of racism and enforced isolation. I could go three years in a primary school and not go to any one birthday party. You know making it through school, um moving to another area where there are a few more Black families and finding friendship groups. It was quite a lonely life.” (Kyla)*

Several participants, including Kyla, exhibited proactive coping methods in response to the loneliness they experienced. She relocated to a community with a higher concentration of African and Caribbean families to establish a social network and friendships. The decision to move to a more varied location emphasises the significance of community and its function in reducing feelings of loneliness.

Amari and Sanaa contemplated the inherent conflicts that arise from their identities in these mostly White environments. Amari's attendance at an all-girls school, where she was the sole African or Caribbean student, highlights the gender-based aspect of her racially isolated setting. Sanaa's contemplation of her inability to understand certain aspects of her identity serves as a clear example of the perplexity and absence of self-awareness that can arise from being in an environment that fails to acknowledge or affirm one's identity.

Kyla's reference to the enforcement of isolation and racism in her community provides more insight into the external forces that affect the experiences of minority students. This imposed seclusion not only affects interpersonal connections but also leads to a feeling of being different and excluded that can come to be internalised.

These reflections collectively underline the substantial emotional and social difficulties experienced by minority students in predominately White educational settings. They emphasise the significance of diversity and inclusion in schools to cultivate conditions that ensure that all children feel acknowledged, assisted and appreciated. The anecdotes recounted by these women serve as a potent reminder of the need for structural reforms to address racial and socioeconomic segregation in schools.

The lived experiences of African and Caribbean students in educational institutions, where they are frequently the only members of their ethnic group, are extensively explored in the works of Mirza (1992, 2009) & Tomlinson (1983, 2008). Specifically, they also highlight the emotional and social issues that these adolescents endure, with a special emphasis on feelings of isolation and exclusion. Mirza (1992, 2009) and Tomlinson (1983, 2008) emphasise the significant feeling of seclusion that can occur when a student is the only African or Caribbean individual in an educational setting, as exemplified by the experiences of Jasmine and Amari. Jasmine's story highlights that the sense of isolation is intensified by class inequalities, which adds complexity to the perception of being an outsider due to both ethnic and social issues. Mirza (1992, 2009) and Tomlinson (1983, 2008) employ these unique accounts to underscore the necessity of implementing structural changes to tackle racial and socioeconomic division in education. The thoughts of these students exemplify the profound

emotional and social challenges they encounter, underscoring the crucial significance of diversity and inclusion in educational institutions.

### ***Variations***

Sanaa displayed uncertainty over her identity, indicating a challenge in understanding her position within the mostly White environments. The uncertainty may stem from internal tensions surrounding her racial identity and the expectation to conform to a dominant culture that does not align with her own.

The narratives presented here are representative of broader patterns that have been observed within the existing body of literature concerning the experiences of African and Caribbean students who attend schools that are mostly White. Studies argue that African and Caribbean students frequently experience a feeling of 'otherness' and confront distinct obstacles that are not encountered by their White counterparts. The issues addressed in this context are social isolation, identity negotiation and racial prejudice.

Being the only African or Caribbean student in a school might give rise to emotions of isolation and marginalisation, as stated by Tatum (2017). The lack of representation and support structures further accentuates this isolation, making it more difficult for individuals to find validation for their identity and experiences. African and Caribbean students typically face the challenge of navigating a mostly White setting, which requires them to engage in identity negotiation. This involves finding a balance between their racial identity and the expectation to adapt to the dominant culture. Sanaa's example exemplifies the potential for misunderstanding and ambiguity to arise. Tatum (2017) examines the progression of racial identity in educational environments, specifically focusing on the feelings of isolation and conflicts of identity experienced by African and Caribbean students in institutions where most students are White. He employs a theory of racial identity formation to explain the process by which African and Caribbean students understand their racial identity, exploring the phenomenon of their experiencing feelings of isolation and alienation at mostly White educational institutions. She contends that this state of isolation arises from being

among a small number of African and Caribbean students in their educational institutions, resulting in emotions of isolation and a sense of not fitting in. The state of being socially isolated can have a detrimental effect on their academic performance and general experience in school. Tatum (2017) asserts that African and Caribbean students in predominately White environments frequently encounter identity problems. They may have challenges in reconciling their racial identity with the expectation to conform to the prevailing culture. As a result, they may experience internal tensions and stress as they attempt to navigate the differences between their home culture and the atmosphere of the school system.

Students of African and Caribbean heritage can encounter racism, both explicit and subtle, which can have negative effects on their academic achievements, emotional well-being, and overall state of health. Discriminatory actions can span from subtle microaggressions to overt acts of racism. Mickelson (2003) investigated the impact of racial inequalities and instances of discrimination in school, on the academic achievements and social interactions of African and Caribbean students. Mickelson (2003) examines how racial inequalities in school become apparent and the effect of racial prejudice in causing these inequalities. She argues that racial differences in education stem from a confluence of social, economic and institutional variables, rather than being attributed to one reason. These factors encompass disparities in resource allocation, disparities in the quality of education provided by schools, and more generally, in the social and economic environment in which schools function. Mickelson (2003) asserts that racial discrimination, both explicit and implicit, has a substantial impact on the formation and continuation of these inequalities. This form of prejudice is evident in many aspects of the educational system, encompassing monitoring, expectations of educators, disciplinary measures and the distribution of resources for education. Mickelson (2003) emphasises that academic inequalities are not exclusively caused by socioeconomic conditions but are particularly impacted by racial prejudice and discriminatory policies within educational institutions. African and Caribbean students' interactions with society and their psychological stability can be affected by experiencing prejudice and racial inequalities. These factors can result in a sense of isolation, decreased self-confidence, and a diminished feeling of inclusion in



the school setting. These social and psychological impacts additionally exacerbate the academic difficulties experienced by African and Caribbean students.

The extracts from the interviews offer a moving representation of the lived experiences of students of African and Caribbean heritage who attend schools that are mostly White. By recognising both the similarities and differences in their experiences, we can gain a deeper understanding of the subtle difficulties that individuals encounter and strive to establish educational settings that are more comprehensive and encouraging. These accounts not only show how resilient the students are, but also make the case for structural adjustments to deal with the underlying issues that lead to discrimination and isolation.

### ***Differences and Managing Circumstances***

To cope with the challenges, they faced while attending mostly White institutions, the participants who took part in my research used a variety of coping mechanisms. Kyla moved to a region with more African and Caribbean families to establish better relationships and feel more comfortable in a more familiar cultural situation. This strategic move emphasises proactive isolation management and supportive communities.

The individuals' subjective interpretations of their experiences exhibited substantial variation. According to Sanaa, her primary school experience was upsetting and an example of the difficulties and psychological toll that minority students may face in these kinds of settings. Conversely, Amari refrained from openly expressing unpleasant feelings about her own experiences, indicating a more impartial or resilient viewpoint. The variety of answers highlights the unique ways in which individuals cope and perceive their surroundings, even in comparable circumstances.

### ***Diversity and Inclusion***

The consequences of these occurrences highlight the more widespread challenges that minority students confront when attending schools that are mostly White. They

reinforce the significance of promoting diversity and inclusion in educational institutions to establish more supportive and empathetic environments. The objective of my research is to understand the distinct difficulties faced by these students and the techniques they apply to cope with them.

Mirza's (2008) study aligns with my findings, namely highlighting the prevalence of racism and the resulting isolation experienced by African and Caribbean women in predominately White settings (Mirza, 2008). Mirza's results correspond with the identity problems articulated by Sanaa in my research. She examines the barriers that African and Caribbean women encounter in understanding their role in contexts dominated by White people, emphasising the emotional and psychological difficulties involved. Mirza (2008) contended that the academic accomplishments of African and Caribbean women were mostly motivated by their aspirations and commitment, rather than by substantial support from their teachers. This highlights a more extensive systemic problem whereby minority students may not be provided with equal levels of assistance and motivation compared to their counterparts. This result is consistent with the coping mechanisms I identified during my research, including Kyla's move to an area where African and Caribbean families predominate, which suggests a need for outside validation and support. Mirza's (2008) study also emphasises the interconnectedness of race, gender and social status in affecting the lives of African and Caribbean women. The experiences of the individuals I studied align with the themes cited by Mirza, indicating that these difficulties are part of a larger pattern driven by racial and socioeconomic factors in educational institutions.

## **5.5 Perspectives and support of parents**

The individuals participating were conscious of the impact their parents' opinions had had on their experiences in school. One example was the importance that parents placed on education and their active support of their children's efforts to achieve their career aspirations. The selected quotations present perceptive viewpoints on how

parents significantly impact their children's educational journeys and ambitions.

*“My mother believed in education and said I should work hard. She believed I could do anything and achieve whatever I wanted to in life.”*

(Amari)

Since education is seen as a means of realising one's potential, Amari's mother values education highly. Amari was likely imbued with a feeling of purpose and motivation due to her mother's belief in the importance of education. Her unwavering faith in Amari's capabilities ('She had complete confidence in my potential') indicates a solid base of emotional and psychological backing. This undoubtedly motivated Amari to strive for big objectives and exert unwavering effort. Amari's mother's support serves as a mechanism for reinforcing positive behaviour, which is essential for developing resilience and self-confidence in children. Consistent and persistent encouragement can have a long-lasting effect, cultivating an attitude of growth and the conviction that hard work leads to success, which is crucial for academic and professional accomplishment.

*“When I told the careers woman that I wanted to do research, she looked at me and said I would amount to nothing. My mother said, ‘Go back and tell them that you can do anything you want to,’ and she wasn't happy with that. She repeated that I would amount to nothing, and I should become a nursing assistant, I went home and told my mother that, and my mother said, ‘No you'll not be a nursing assistant.’”*

(Ebony)

Ebony's mother challenges the pessimistic predictions made by the career adviser, strengthening Ebony's confidence in her abilities. The mother's emphasis on Ebony not compromising on her objectives displays a proactive and assertive attitude to providing support. This example underlines the crucial significance of parental support in assisting children in overcoming external doubt and disillusionment. By encouraging Ebony to question the adviser's narrow perspective, her mother cultivates a feeling of empowerment and resolve, which are essential for pursuing aspirations.

*“My mother took me out of school a year before I should have left and put me into the college where she was doing evening classes” (smiles), “and she begged the head of the department to let me start even though I was only 15, and he did.” (Kyla)*

Kyla's mother takes decisive action to guarantee that her daughter has access to possibilities for advanced learning. Personally, lobbying for Kyla's admittance to college demonstrates a profound dedication to her educational progress. The proactive actions of a parent may fundamentally alter a child's educational path, offering opportunities that may otherwise be unavailable. Kyla's smile when narrating this anecdote signifies an optimistic emotional reaction, implying that her mother's efforts not only supported her education but also had a positive effect on her self-worth and assurance.

The quotations collectively illustrate that parental views and assistance are crucial in influencing the educational trajectories of children. The parents in these examples demonstrate a strong appreciation for education, proactive encouragement and a readiness to take substantial measures to support their children's ambitions. Parents' focus on education inspires their children with its significance from a young age. Parental advocacy is vital, as evidenced by the extent to which parents will go, whether to dispel negative preconceptions, advocate directly with educational institutions or support their child's self-belief. Parental support cultivates a feeling of empowerment and self-confidence in the children, equipping them with the assurance to pursue ambitious objectives despite potential challenges. These examples demonstrate the significant influence of parental support on educational achievement. They show that when parents actively participate in their children's education, they may help overcome obstacles and contribute to their success.

Mirza's (1992 & 2009) research highlights the significance of support from their families in the academic achievement of African and Caribbean women. She examines the strategies employed by African and Caribbean parents and communities to challenge the detrimental stereotypes and minimised expectations that educational institutions frequently impose on their children. This is demonstrated in Ebony's

encounter, in which her mother dismisses the job adviser's cautious projections and advocates for her daughter's entitlement to pursue her aspirations. The notion of intersectionality, as defined by Collins (2000 & 2009), is relevant for understanding the diverse experiences of the individuals mentioned in the quotations. Parental support includes not only the appreciation of education but also the adept handling of the interconnections of race, gender and class that impact their children's prospects. Collins explores how African and Caribbean women assert their power and improve their communities by engaging in different forms of resistance against structural oppression. The mothers' efforts, as depicted in the quotations, to motivate their children to follow their aspirations and speak for them in educational environments, can be seen as acts of resistance and empowerment that coincide with Collins' (2000 & 2009) analysis. Collins (2000 & 2009) emphasises the significance of community and family connections in helping and promoting resilience. The quotations demonstrate the active involvement of mothers in their children's education as supporters and sources of inspiration.

Mirza (1992 & 2009) and Collins (2000 & 2009) together offer a structure for understanding the profound ramifications of the quotations. Both emphasise the importance of parents as champions for their children's education, actively fighting systemic prejudices, and encouraging ambitious targets. The behaviour of the mothers mentioned in the quotations are acts of defiance against efforts by society and institutions to exclude their children. These actions align with the ideas of empowerment and resilience explored by Mirza (1992 & 2009) and Collins (2000 & 2009). The excerpts show significant concepts from the works of Mirza (1992 & 2009) and Collins (2000 & 2009), such as the vital role that parental support plays in overcoming systemic hurdles, the active resistance against low expectations, and the empowerment of children through family advocacy. Understanding how marginalised groups function and thrive in educational systems depends on these components.

### 5.5.1 Parental support and encouragement

The participants mentioned their mothers but did not provide detailed descriptions of their mothers' careers. Instead, they focused more on their own educational and career journeys. We only know about Ashanti's, Sanaa's and Kyla's mother's careers.

Ashanti's mother worked as a career adviser. Ashanti's career path was greatly helped by her mother's occupation, which gave her valuable guidance and motivation. Sanaa's mother held a managerial role, although further information about her career is not provided. Nevertheless, Sanaa embarked on a diverse and tenacious professional journey in the field of education, eventually transitioning into management positions. The text does not explicitly acknowledge the impact of Sanaa's mother's job, allowing Sanaa's professional drive and accomplishments to be evaluated solely based on their worth. However, during her early years, this background likely enabled Sanaa to cultivate leadership abilities while gaining insight into the dynamics of a professional environment. She developed an intense interest in languages partly because of her father's work as a linguist.

Kyla's mother, along with her father, were ardent unionists and expressed their views strongly. This suggests their likely involvement in advocating for workers' rights through lobbying. Kyla's outspoken demeanour may have contributed to the development of a strong belief in justice and the importance of pushing for one's rights. Kyla's mother exerted a substantial influence on her schooling and professional trajectory, notwithstanding the obstacles she encountered. Kyla was able to begin college at the age of 15 due to her mother's influence and skills in establishing a link with the director of the humanities department, who taught evening sessions at the college. Kyla found this school setting to be a nurturing and encouraging place, where she coincidentally had several of the same teachers as her mother. Kyla's mother created a supportive educational atmosphere that enabled her to excel academically, ultimately inspiring her to choose a profession in education.

Amari was brought up by her mother in a single-parent household located in a deprived community in London. While the profession of Amari's mother is not specified, it is evident that she placed great importance on education and passed on this conviction to her daughter. She motivated Amari to exert effort and have faith in her ability to accomplish any goal she determined to pursue. Amari's unwavering conviction and confidence in the transformative potential of education propelled her to academic and professional success. Jvonte's account lacks precise information regarding her mother's occupation, instead emphasising her professional trajectory and the difficulties she faced. Nonetheless, Jvonte's mother's impact is suggested by the values of perseverance and tenacity that Jvonte consistently displays in her professional journey. The accounts of Ade, Aliyah, Duchess, Destiny, Ebony, Jasmine, Raven and Olufemi do not explicitly state whether their mothers had a profession or discuss their mothers' professional lives. Their emphasis lies on their voyage and encounters rather than on the vocational endeavours of their parents.

The portrayal of the mothers in these narratives is subtle and complex. It encompasses not only their occupations or accomplishments but also their convictions, principles, tenacity and their ability to handle difficulties. This subtle influence is the real parental effect, which is sometimes disregarded in work that largely concentrates on fathers.

When compared to the literature that focuses on fathers, the narratives of the participants differ in several ways, particularly concerning the emphasis placed on maternal influence and the career trajectories that the participants pursued. Mothers are highlighted in this collection of stories more for their personal influence and supportive roles than for their accomplishments in the workplace. The participants contemplated how their mothers offered emotional assistance and motivation and created favourable circumstances, rather than providing precise details about their mothers' careers. Conversely, literature that centres on fathers frequently emphasises their occupations and their direct impact on their children's professional ambitions and accomplishments. Fathers are often shown as exemplary figures whose work decisions and accomplishments serve as models for their children's aspirations. The participants rather prioritise their individual educational and career paths. They provide a comprehensive account of their difficulties, accomplishments, and the

obstacles they encountered in their careers. Their self-focus emphasises their independence and the individual work they dedicated to advancing in their career.

Literature focusing on fathers may include stories in which the children's professional paths are significantly impacted or moulded by their fathers' occupations, networks, or aspirations. Occasionally, this can obscure the individual experience of children. Ashanti's, Sanaa's and Kyla's mothers played a crucial role in laying the foundation for their educational and professional endeavours; the emphasis on the professional legacy and effect of fathers may overshadow the supportive duties of mothers.

The stories told by Amari and Kyla both discuss the difficulties that they faced in terms of their socioeconomic situation, as well as how their mothers' perspectives on education were crucial in overcoming these obstacles. This emphasises the concept of perseverance and self-empowerment that arises from maternal influence. In the literature that centres on fathers, it is common to explore the socioeconomic circumstances; the father's occupation is typically portrayed as a stabilising or inspirational influence within the family, serving as a role model for financial prosperity and career accomplishments. For several participants, including Aliyah, Duchess, Destiny, Ebony, Jasmine, Raven and Olufemi, the jobs of their mothers are not explicitly described. This effectively directs attention solely toward their own work stories and accomplishments. However, father-focused literature typically provides more information on the fathers' careers; occasionally, this might give rise to a narrative in which the child's professional trajectory is perceived as an extension or reaction to the father's heritage. However, these stories highlight the importance of personal strength, motherly assistance, and individual professional paths, frequently in the face of socioeconomic obstacles, rather than focusing on fathers or emphasising the father's employment as a significant factor in shaping the child's professional life.

When examining the impact of fathers on the educational and career trajectories of children, especially in minority populations, researchers have investigated many aspects such as parental engagement, positive examples, and the passing down of beliefs throughout generations. In her book *From Black Power to Hip Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism* (2006), Collins explores the influence of African and



Caribbean fathers within the framework of wider societal and cultural factors that shape family dynamics, contending that it is important to consider their roles within larger societal and cultural contexts, rather than in isolation.

Family dynamics are strongly impacted, either positively or negatively, by the presence or absence of fathers in African and Caribbean homes. Collins (2006) examines the impact of fathers' engagement on children's growth, the stability of the family and their general welfare. Collins (2006) questions commonly held preconceptions about African and Caribbean fathers, namely the belief that they are mostly absent or not actively involved. She explores the many experiences and responsibilities of African and Caribbean fathers, featuring those who are actively involved in their children's lives and those who encounter structural obstacles; their experiences are significantly influenced by economic pressures and systemic racism. Collins (2006) examines how these issues can restrict fathers' capacity to fulfil conventional responsibilities, resulting in the emergence of alternative methods of engagement and assistance. According to Collins (2006), African and Caribbean dads are frequently cultural pillars, transmitting customs, languages and values to assist their offspring in navigating a society that is divided by race. Collins (2006) also highlights the significance of community and extended family networks in cementing fatherhood. Within many African and Caribbean cultures, the role of parenting extends beyond individual responsibility and becomes a community endeavour, involving the active participation of uncles, grandfathers and other male characters who assume key responsibilities. Collins (2006) employs the notion of intersectionality to examine the impact of race, class and gender on the experiences and duties of African and Caribbean fathers. This perspective facilitates understanding of the complexities of their existence and the diverse character of their contributions to the well-being of their family and community. Collins (2006) argues that it is important to recognise and address the structural obstacles that African and Caribbean fathers encounter. This necessitates the implementation of policies and practices that promote and facilitate their active participation in family life, including the resolution of economic inequalities to ensure opportunities for education and work and counter racial prejudice.

Fatherhood is being redefined by cultural developments, as shown by Marsiglio and Roy's (2012); they emphasise the ways in which social activities and cultural changes are reshaping the concept of fatherhood, and analyse the transformation of the fatherhood paradigm, which has shifted from the conventional provider role to a greater emphasis on nurturing and active involvement in the lives of children. They highlight the growing demand for fathers to actively engage in childcare and home duties. They cite many initiatives that advocate and bolster engaged fatherhood, encompassing parenting programmes, workplace regulations promoting paternity leave, and community-based organisations offering tools and support for fathers.

Marsiglio and Roy (2012) examine the impact of cultural changes on fatherhood, specifically gender equality and evolving family structures. They highlight how societal views on gender roles and parenting are shifting, resulting in increased support and recognition for fathers' participation in caregiving. Marsiglio and Roy (2012) recognise the obstacles and difficulties that many fathers continue to encounter; these include financial difficulties, limitations in employment and societal norms, and may impede fathers from fully participating in their parental responsibilities. Through the adoption of nurturing and caregiving responsibilities, fathers are defying conventional concepts of masculinity and actively promoting more adaptable and all-encompassing perceptions of gender, according to Marsiglio and Roy (2012). Involved fatherhood has a positive impact on family dynamics, child development, and community cohesion.

A thorough analysis of the several roles fathers play in their children's development is provided by Lamb (2010). He explores the fundamental elements of fatherhood, such as providing emotional assistance, serving as a positive example, and actively participating in education. Fathers who are emotionally present and sensitive to their children's needs make a substantial contribution to the emotional development and security of their children. Lamb (2010) explores the impact of fathers' actions and interactions on their children's behaviour, attitudes, and values. Role modelling plays a crucial function in fostering the development of social skills and facilitating children's understanding of gender roles. He highlights the favourable influence that fathers' engagement in activities such as reading, assisting with homework and attending school events has on children's academic achievement and attitudes to learning. Lamb

(2010) asserts that fathers fulfil multiple roles in their children's lives, serving as playmates, disciplinarians, carers and teachers. Each of these roles contributes distinct advantages to their children's development.

Lamb (2010) asserts that children who have fathers who are actively engaged in their lives generally experience improved educational performance, heightened self-esteem and fewer behavioural issues. He examines the contextual elements that impact fatherhood, including cultural norms, economic circumstances, and family arrangements. He elucidates that these characteristics influence how fathers interact with their children and the level of their participation. Lamb's study also explores the significant issue of the intergenerational transfer of parenting methods. The author explores the impact of fathers' upbringing on their parenting style and the subsequent transmission of these behaviours to future offspring. Lamb (2010) advocates for the implementation of policies that promote fathers' engagement, such as granting paternity leave, offering flexible work schedules and providing parenting programmes; he contends that these are crucial for facilitating dads' active involvement in their children's lives. Lamb's (2010) research enhances our understanding of fatherhood by emphasising the diverse and complex functions that fathers fulfil in the process of child development. He questions conventional ideas about men being only responsible for financial support and emphasises their importance as carers and nurturers. Establishing conducive circumstances for fathers is essential; Lamb (2010) promotes cultural and institutional modifications that foster and enable fathers' proactive involvement in raising their children.

To summarise the key findings of Collins (2006), Marsiglio and Roy (2012) and Lamb (2010), firstly, according to Collins (2006), it is important to consider the socioeconomic and cultural context to understand African and Caribbean fathers. Their presence or absence has a substantial impact on family dynamics, children's growth, family stability and general well-being. Collins (2010) disputes the prevailing perceptions that African and Caribbean fathers are mostly absent or uninvolved, instead highlighting those who are actively and passionately involved despite facing institutional obstacles. Financial constraints and institutional discrimination curtail fathers' capacity to fulfil conventional societal expectations, resulting in the adoption

of alternate methods of engagement and assistance. Fathers play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage, by imparting traditions, languages and values to their offspring, enabling them to navigate a society that is divided along racial lines. Parenting is frequently a shared obligation, and extended family networks assume important roles. The experiences and roles of African and Caribbean fathers are influenced by the intersections of race, class and gender.

According to Marsiglio and Roy (2012), the concept of fatherhood has transitioned from the conventional role of being the primary earner to a more caring and engaged presence. Parenting courses, corporate regulations for paternity leave and community-based support initiatives encourage and support the active involvement of fathers. The shift in societal norms about gender roles and parenthood promotes increased paternal participation in caregiving. However, fathers' involvement can be impeded by economic demands, workplace limitations and societal expectations. According to Lamb (2010), fathers who are emotionally accessible and responsive play a crucial role in promoting their children's emotional well-being and growth, having a significant impact on their children's behaviour, attitudes and beliefs by serving as role models through their actions and interactions. This influence aids in the development of social skills and understanding of gender roles. Fathers' interactions with their children are affected by cultural conventions, economic realities and family arrangements. Despite significant disparities in parental involvement in children's education, even parents with limited educational backgrounds try to promote academic rigour and diligence, thereby motivating and inspiring their children to achieve excellence.

## **6. Role Models and their influence on African and Caribbean Women**

Competence and career advancement are frequently affected by influential role models (Bandura, 1997; Kram, 1985; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001; Yancey, Siegel & McDaniel, 2002; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Gibson, 2004). They serve as a source of inspiration, provide guidance and cultivate within us the assurance and drive to pursue our objectives. Their perseverance in the presence of obstacles offers us a nuanced understanding of the course that lies ahead. Within this framework, I examine the

impact of role models on four individuals – Ebony, Kyla, Amari, and Sanaa. Their individual growth was greatly impacted by role models who had distinct effects on each of them.

Oluchi, a woman from the Caribbean, served as a role model and had a profound impact on Ebony's path to becoming a teacher. Oluchi not only encouraged but also took proactive steps to generate possibilities for Ebony, such as strongly recommending that she pursue a part-time post as a lecturer. Oluchi's unwavering belief in Ebony's abilities was demonstrated when she staunchly supported Ebony's efforts despite unjust criticism. Oluchi's courage and determination were exceptional, despite being the sole African or Caribbean woman among her White fellow staff members and continually encountering obstacles from them. Her experience brought to light the structural problems encountered by African and Caribbean women in positions of influence, equipping Ebony with an insight into the obstacles that lie ahead.

*“One of the persons who was my mentor was a Caribbean woman, um Oluchi was very instrumental in me becoming a teacher. She was extremely supportive because even when I qualified in doing my Cert. Ed and there was a position for a lecturer and she insisted that I should apply for it, and I got it on a part-time basis. She’s someone I will never, ever forget because she supported me throughout the time, even though I did a Cert.Ed., one of my teachers wanted to fail me. After all, he said one of the essays I answered, wasn’t, um, comprehensive enough but the problem was she was in charge of the course and when she looked at my essay, she said to him there was nothing wrong with it. You know, so, she was instrumental” (Ebony).*

The teachers who taught Kyla had a significant influence on her academic career; they were all of African or Caribbean heritage. Kyla was deeply influenced by their exceptional intelligence and friendliness in the educational setting. They acted as exemplary figures, challenging preconceptions and motivating Kyla to pursue her passions regardless of any obstacles.

*“At school, we had a chemistry teacher, brilliant and um a Black woman, Caribbean descent who was the nice one who was Ugandan and phenomenal in the classroom, phenomenal and um a physics teacher who was very handsome but also very kind to those who found physics a little bit difficult”.*  
(Kyla)

The principal role model for Amari was her mother, a single parent. In their challenging situation, Amari's mother's conviction of the value of education and diligent effort inspired Amari with a profound self-assurance. The conviction that she could do anything she determined to pursue served as a motivating factor in Amari's life.

*“I was brought up in a single-parent home by my mother. My mother believed in education and said I should work hard. She believed I could do anything and achieve whatever I wanted to in life.”* (Amari)

Sanaa's fascination with languages was greatly influenced by her linguist father. Her confidence was not only strengthened by his proficiency and enthusiasm for languages but also inspired by them. Sanaa's own proficiency in languages was driven by her father's influential impact, instilling her with a sense of confidence.

*“My father always spoke languages; he was a linguist. So, I felt I was always going to be good at languages because my dad was a linguist and that was a confidence thing rather than I was any good. It motivated me.”* (Sanaa)

Examining manifestations of role modelling helps enhance understanding of the diverse mechanisms via which role models have an impact. There are several forms of

role modelling: direct and indirect modelling, professional role modelling, peer role modelling, community role modelling, and parental/family role modelling.

### ***Direct and Indirect Modelling***

In direct role modelling, the individual and the role model engage in a relationship that is close and personal. This can be achieved through mentorship, coaching or regular contact. Characteristics include providing customised guidance and evaluation, exerting a direct influence on the individual's choices and behaviours and engaging in consistent and continuous contact and assistance (Bandura, 1977). A few examples of individuals who actively engage with African and Caribbean women include educators, community leaders and professionals. Immediate feedback, encouragement, and one-on-one mentoring are provided by direct role models, and this resource can be extremely valuable for both professional and personal development. As described by Bandura (1977), indirect role modelling refers to the phenomenon where individuals admire and aspire to emulate someone they are not personally acquainted with, but whose accomplishments and conduct they respect. Examples are individuals who hold leadership positions, notable figures from the past or influential figures in specific fields. An indirect role model motivates people by actions and accomplishments in public, having an impact on a large audience via books, speeches and media, and functioning as role models for perseverance, success and other great traits.

### ***Professional Role Modelling***

This type of role modelling is commonly observed in professional or academic environments when professionals with experience guide less experienced colleagues or students, offering direction and inspiration in a professional setting. Competent female entrepreneurs, researchers and creative professionals of African and Caribbean heritage are examples (Kramer, 1985). Women are assisted in navigating work situations and overcoming obstacles as professional role models provide examples of career choices and success techniques. Kramer (1985) suggests that this includes offering specialised guidance and counsel related to professional or academic progress, helping individuals to cultivate the unique competencies required in their fields and promoting networking and prospects within the professional community.

### ***Peer Role Modelling***

Another source of role models is peers who demonstrate desired accomplishments. Such role modelling typically entails a reciprocal impact between individuals of comparable age, experience or socioeconomic status (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Some examples include peers, fellow employees, or acquaintances who have achieved big milestones in their lives. Peer role models offer realistic instances of achievement and perseverance, generating a feeling of solidarity and reciprocal assistance. Characteristics of a supportive peer relationship include being at a comparable level, making accomplishments appear achievable, providing mutual encouragement and guidance and jointly understanding and overcoming similar problems.

### ***Community Role Modelling***

There is a tremendous amount of influence that may be exerted by members of a community or social group acting as role models. This may involve community leaders, advocates or prominent figures in the cultural sphere (Yancey, Siegel & McDaniel, 2002). In the context of community development and social transformation, community role modelling emphasises the effect of community leaders and activists, such as cultural leaders, community organisers and local activists. Community role models promote a sense of communal responsibility, cultural self-esteem, and community solidarity, thereby motivating women to engage in the progress of society. Characteristics include the ability to effectively handle the distinct requirements and difficulties faced by the community, create a sense of shared action and unity and accurately represent the values and experiences of the community (Yancey, Siegel, & McDaniel, 2002).

### ***Parental and Family Role Modelling***

When it comes to developing attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, parental and family role modelling focuses on the effect that family members, and notably parents, have on their children. Mothers, grandmothers and other family elders who embody fortitude, tenacity and cultural legacy play a vital role in shaping the personal growth and cultural identity of African and Caribbean women, modelling fundamental values



and providing support networks. Eccles & Harold (1993) argue that parents and other family members are the first role models, and their impact is usually significant and enduring. Characteristics include the process of moulding fundamental values, beliefs and behaviours in the early stages of life, developing a basis of emotional and moral assistance, exerting a long-lasting influence on individual growth and identity.

Generally, Gibson (2004) asserts that role models offer explicit direction on how to accomplish objectives, handle obstacles and make well-informed choices. They motivate individuals to pursue excellence and persist through challenges. Role models provide a captivating representation of what may be achieved, fostering self-assurance and promoting behaviour focused on achieving goals. They empower individuals by imparting their knowledge and experience, equipping them with the necessary abilities to surmount challenges and achieve success. They assist African and Caribbean women in understanding and negotiating obstacles, augmenting their capacity to successfully pursue their objectives.

By understanding these various manifestations of role modelling, we can enhance our appreciation of the numerous ways in which exceptional people contribute to the development of both personal and professional aspects of other peoples' lives.

## **7. African and Caribbean women's similarities and Subtle Differences**

By analysing the narratives of Jasmine, Raven, Duchess, Ashanti, Ade, Jvonte, Amari, Sanaa, Olufemi, Aliyah, Destiny, Kyla, and Ebony, it is possible to identify some recurring and subtly distinct themes:

### **Similarities:**

Firstly, the absence of Role Models: Each of the thirteen women encountered a dearth of African and Caribbean role models across their educational and professional trajectories.

Secondly, obstacles to career advancement: A typical experience among many participants; all 13 encountered obstacles in moving into positions of leadership.

Thirdly, the collective experiences of the 13 women, who have been marginalised for promotion and felt compromised because of their race and gender.

### **Subtle Differences:**

#### **The Overarching Themes in Pursuing Success**

##### ***Independence and Self-Reliance***

Since Jasmine was often the only Black female student at her educational institutions, she learned the ability to rely on herself from an early age. Ade had to quickly adapt to a strange environment and gain knowledge of the habits and practices of the dominant culture.

*“I was the only Black girl in all the schools went to” (Jasmine)*

*“I had to adjust quickly and try to understand diversity and took the initiative to learn ways of White people” (Ade)*

##### ***Demonstrating Determination and Tenacity***

Raven showed remarkable persistence in the face of adversity, resolutely maintaining her position while being targeted and undermined. Jvonte showed remarkable perseverance in the face of adversity and unfair treatment, as she tenaciously pursued employment opportunities while being consistently overlooked. Kyla has shown unwavering determination and resilience throughout her career, overcoming challenges and relentlessly striving for advancement.

##### ***Opportunities and Driven Aspirations***

Ashanti embraced the opportunities that were presented to her and was motivated by her desire to work with underprivileged people. Aliyah had a distinct and concentrated vision for the progress of her career and was unwavering in her drive to achieve it.

##### ***Adaptability and Resilience***

Sanaa exhibited adaptability by modifying her academic and professional path in response to her circumstances, and ultimately found satisfaction in a management role. Olufemi worked in a succession of professional roles and organisations, in retail, security and administration, before ultimately finding her vocation in teaching.

### ***Pursuing Education and Knowledge***

The pursuit of information, as well as the promotion of honesty and clarity, is something that Amari is very enthusiastic about. Destiny was motivated by a powerful desire to constantly acquire knowledge and an intense desire to achieve in education.

### ***Inspiring Others and Creating Impact***

Duchess had a great ambition to achieve success and aggressively pursued both personal and professional fulfilment in the industry in which she had chosen to work. Ebony's drive sprang from her desire to inspire students and have a substantial impact as an educator representing African and Caribbean cultures.

These overarching themes illustrate the various approaches taken by each person to overcome obstacles and realise their goals. This method emphasises shared characteristics while simultaneously acknowledging the distinct elements of each person's experience.

### ***Academic Background:***

Jasmine returned to school later in life and approached her studies as an adult learner, whereas Raven dedicated more than a decade to studying a range of subjects, searching for her identity, and developing her self-assurance. Duchess had held positions at four quite different organisations and had assumed leadership responsibilities in managing the curriculum at another college. Ashanti pursued her undergraduate studies at a university and subsequently enrolled in a postgraduate training programme at the same institution. Ade followed a customary and standard path in Africa and subsequently obtained a scholarship for her Bachelor of Science degree on arriving in the UK. Jvonte has accumulated 20 years of experience in education, during which she has held several positions such as curriculum and team leader. Amari attended an all-female school in London, where she was the sole African

and Caribbean student both in her school and at her level of education. She pursued teacher training and dedicated three years to acquiring knowledge in several disciplines. Sanaa initially worked as an English as a foreign language teacher in Africa and subsequently participated in a Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) programme. Ultimately, she successfully obtained her PhD and held many positions in education. Olufemi pursued a career in education to explore other places. She initially worked as an English as a foreign language teacher in Africa and subsequently completed a Youth Training Scheme course. Aliyah initially enrolled as a student at a college, subsequently transitioned into an administrative role, and eventually progressed to the positions of team leader and manager. Destiny initially began her educational journey as a student, subsequently pursuing a City and Guilds course, and ultimately completing a PGCE. Kyla initially enrolled as a student, subsequently participated in a Youth Training Scheme, and later pursued a PGCE. Ebony initially began her journey as a student, subsequently engaging in a Youth Training Scheme, and ultimately pursuing a PGCE.

***Motivation:***

Jasmine believed that being a woman, being Black, a lack of opportunities and being from a working-class background were all barriers. Raven blamed society and what she calls 'unspoken discrimination' for her experiences. Duchess was motivated by the desire for money and a sense of fulfilment and achievement. Ashanti was motivated by the desire to work with underprivileged people and seized opportunities that came her way. Ade was motivated to enhance her career, create differences in people's lives, and understand diversity in education. Jvonte was motivated by the desire to help students and bring ideas to the table as a team leader. Amari was passionate about learning openness and transparency. Sanaa was motivated by the desire to travel and the flexibility that teaching English as a foreign language provided. Olufemi was motivated by the desire to travel and the flexibility that teaching English as a foreign language provided. Aliyah was

motivated by her enjoyment of her courses and the opportunity to progress further. Destiny was motivated by her love for teaching and the desire to learn as much as she could. Kyla was motivated by her desire to improve and advance in her career. Ebony was motivated by the desire to empower students and make an impact as an African and Caribbean educator.

A more comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by individuals as they navigate their academic and professional trajectories, especially those belonging to communities that are marginalised, is achieved through the examination of these correlations and distinctions. They emphasise the structural difficulties encountered, the persistence needed, and the significance of inclusivity and assistance. Each person's journey is distinct and influenced by their circumstances and experiences, even though they all have certain commonalities.

This chapter has explored the complex experiences of African and Caribbean women and students in educational environments where most individuals are White. It has analysed how the intersection of race, gender and class affects their professional trajectories and academic experiences. This study uses participant interviews and establishes theoretical frameworks to emphasise the significant effect that systemic racism, social isolation and identity negotiation has on these individuals. The accounts of Sanaa, Olufemi and others exemplify the impact of racial identity and self-perception on career aspirations and the ability to persevere in one's career. Notwithstanding the presence of preconceptions and institutional obstacles, these women demonstrate uncompromising determination and flexibility, aligning with Mirza's (1997) emphasis on resilience and self-determination. The participants' encounters with racial isolation and prejudice in schools where most students are White emphasise the emotional and psychological impact of being excluded. The study emphasises the importance of creating supportive educational environments and providing mentorship to promote professional development and career ambitions.

Mirza's framework (1997, 1992) examines the interaction among race, gender and class, offering a holistic perspective to understand the perspectives of the participants.

Hall's (1997) examination of the psychological consequences of racism aligns with the sentiments of disillusionment and resilience articulated by participants such as Ebony. Mickelson (2003) and Tatum (2017) provide valuable perspectives on the systemic nature of racial disparity in education, and the consequent challenges faced in forming one's identity. The chapter posits that African and Caribbean women and students encounter distinct obstacles in mostly White educational and professional settings, due to the interplay of race, gender and class. The obstacles that these individuals face are evident in the form of social isolation, racial discrimination and the need to navigate their identity. These challenges have a substantial impact on their educational accomplishments and their aspirations for their careers. Nevertheless, the accounts of the participants also emphasise their ability to bounce back, adjust and demonstrate a strong will to conquer these challenges.

The results emphasise the immediate need for fundamental alterations in educational establishments to tackle discrimination and promote inclusiveness. This entails establishing supportive networks and mentorship programmes to facilitate the success of African and Caribbean students and professionals, gaining understanding and taking action to confront the various levels of subjugation experienced by these persons, and creating and implementing policies that address and prevent both covert and overt manifestations of racial bias. This chapter enhances our understanding of the complex realities that African and Caribbean women and students encounter by observing their lived experiences. Their narratives of tenacity and resolve not only emphasise the need for greater inclusivity in educational settings but also function as an inspiration for fundamental structural transformation. It is essential to confront these problems to allow African and Caribbean individuals to reach their maximum potential and excel in their professional lives, thereby promoting a fairer society.

## **Chapter 6: Factors that contribute to the achievement of senior positions in FE**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter explores the experiences of African and Caribbean women as they negotiate their paths as minorities in FE institutions, addressing research questions one and three: RQ1: How do African and Caribbean women narrate their journeys towards senior positions? RQ3 What do they perceive to be the factors that enabled them to achieve a senior position? The chapter focuses on the reasons that they believe have contributed to their attainment of senior positions in FE in the UK.

The research data was gathered in comprehensive interviews that specifically explored the life narratives and professional trajectories of the participants. The data was methodically coded to find prominent themes and patterns related to career motivation and the obstacles experienced. During the coding process, several important themes were identified, including the importance of role models, the impact of attending schools with a largely White student population, and the unique yet interconnected experiences of African and Caribbean women in their professional journeys. The analysis uses CRT and BFT as theoretical frameworks to understand the complex interaction of race, gender and class in influencing the professional lives of these women. By analysing the journeys and perceptive observations of these women, who are minorities in predominately White contexts, the chapter provides a detailed overview of how they have achieved senior positions.

The chapter also emphasises how opportunity, management and both personal and professional investment foster career progression. Along with exploring professional training that aided their progress, it also explores the support system of friends and family. The participants' thoughts offer profound insights into their emotional reactions to their career paths, demonstrating their resilience and unwavering commitment to achieving success.

## 6.1 Career trajectories

My research has shown that the African and Caribbean women who took part in this study had faith in their capabilities to advance their careers and obtain top jobs in FE. These women were recruited from a variety of institutions across the UK. They were holders of academic degrees in addition to other relevant qualifications in education, and they had previous experience working in senior roles in the management of curriculum at a variety of FE institutes. They were resolute in their pursuit of employment and persisted in doing so with complete self-assurance, despite meeting challenges such as being rejected for senior positions while applying for jobs, which were among the barriers they faced. As a result of their previous successes and experiences, they were self-assured enough to pursue their goals, and they were determined to further their experiences to be able to assume managerial duties. This gave them the confidence to go for what they wanted. The overarching image is that these women were able to develop at a senior level within a relatively short length of time and that as they succeeded in their occupations, they built confidence in themselves. Additionally, the impression is that they were able to do so within a relatively short period.

*“I had already been carrying out some senior roles of curriculum management at a different college and felt confident making applications for senior positions elsewhere. I felt that I was prepared for a senior role and had already been working for at least four different establishments” (Duchess)*

This quotation highlights the significance of acquiring knowledge and the effect of believing in one's abilities. Mirza (1992) would probably emphasise how Duchess's varied professional experience and previous duties enhanced her self-assurance and preparedness for senior positions. This demonstrates her ability to adapt and excel in many organisational settings, highlighting her resilience and competence.

*“This gave me the confidence to explore the curriculum manager’s role further and apply when a position became vacant at another further*



*education college” (Duchess)*

*“I was able to develop at a senior level within three years in a relatively short space of time. After nine months in a coordinator’s role, I applied for a manager role. I developed confidence” (Ashanti)*

Mirza (1997) may contend that Duchess's confidence arises from a blend of individual determination and the deliberate exploitation of opportunities in the educational system. This quotation highlights the importance of professional accomplishments for enhancing one's self-perception and one's motivation to strive for better objectives, aligning with Mirza's (1997) emphasis on personal agency. Mirza (1997) would likely view Ashanti's rapid progress as proof of her capacity to overcome setbacks and skilfully negotiate institutional difficulties. Rapid progress and increasing confidence illustrate how African and Caribbean women may leverage their skills and previous successes to achieve significant professional milestones, despite the constraints imposed by systemic racism. Within the scope of this study, the experiences of African and Caribbean women who were working toward attaining managerial positions within the setting of FE colleges were analysed. Although their initial applications for managerial positions were not successful, the participants continued to send in their resumes and cover letters for other managing openings. Despite this, their efforts were not always fruitful, as they encountered roadblocks when attempting to secure positions of authority. Despite the difficulties they faced, these women persisted in their search for gainful employment to advance their careers into positions of senior leadership, and many of them eventually found success by securing jobs such as college principal, curriculum head, and coordinator. Despite the difficulties they faced, these women persisted in their search for gainful employment to advance their careers into positions of senior leadership. They were encouraged to continue their pursuit of managerial positions with the support of their family and friends.

*“I applied for a middle management job in a further education college. I did not get it. I later applied to another further education college for a leadership in management position for Black and Asian managers. I became a principal of a college” (Amari)*

*“Our curriculum leader left and um, I then applied, I think I applied twice for the curriculum head, and I did not get it. I did not on the first round, didn’t get it on the second round” (Jvonte)*

*“I eventually left there and moved environment, a position came up and I did apply for it. I didn’t get it and didn’t lose any sleep over it. Pastoral head. I went to sixth-form college as a team leader. This was a very interesting job role I just applied for and got it” (Jvonte)*

According to Mirza (1992; 1997), Amari's experience is probably a tribute to African and Caribbean women's tenacity and calculated agency to overcome institutional hurdles. Her emphasis on targeted efforts and support networks in strengthening marginalised groups is shown in her eventual achievement in gaining a leadership post designated for African, Caribbean and Asian managers. Jvonte's tenacity in the face of numerous rejections illustrates the durability that Mirza (1992; 1997) examines. The ability to adapt strategically to a changing environment and the constant pursuit of professional progress is demonstrated by the individual's shift in surroundings and eventual success in obtaining a leadership position (Mirza, 1992; 1997). These achievements are emphasised in Mirza's (1992, 1997) research on African and Caribbean women in the field of education. The recurrent refusals and the need to submit additional applications for leadership roles exemplify the structural obstacles and racial prejudice that these women encounter. Tomlinson's (1997) research delves into the complex relationship between intersectionality and structural inequality, specifically examining how the convergence of race, gender and class gives rise to distinct obstacles faced by African and Caribbean women in educational environments. Amari and Jvonte's professional trajectories can be understood using the concept of intersectionality, which acknowledges that their experiences are affected by various forms of discrimination and institutional injustice.

A small number of participants were strongly encouraged to submit applications for leadership roles by line managers, families and colleagues. In some cases, there were internal candidates. However, there was no indication that there were strategies in

place to promote career advancement for their existing employees and to give them opportunities to apply for senior jobs.

*“Eventually, I applied and was offered a coordinator role. It was a step down in the level of responsibilities. Initially, I was unsure of applying for the post due to the lack of experience but felt it was worth applying as there was the structure of the institution. However, I was encouraged to apply by my friends and family” (Ashanti)*

*“They looked for an interim head of department. Friends at the time said to me, why don’t you apply, you know (how) to do the interim head of department job (chuckles). The role was only meant for internal people so, I applied and this other lady. They gave me the interim, a part-time interim manager post” (Destiny)*

*“It wasn’t a proper interview if you know what I mean. It was a casual talk like. And the gentleman said to me, oh, when can you start? I became a team leader” (Aliyah)*

As demonstrated by participants, perseverance and determination do not always lead to career progress to a senior position.

*“ not being offered managerial positions when applied for previously. This became a common experience and problem over the years for me and I was sick and tired of it. I’ve got to think about my own health and well-being, and I can’t take it on” (Jvonte)*

*“There was nobody who looked like me. The fact that you have qualifications, the questioning, you’ve got three degrees and it’s just frustrating and I shouldn’t have to justify myself” (Ebony)*

These quotes indicate reasons why some of the people who participated in my research had left their jobs, given up looking for higher positions, and left the field. The problems shed light on the challenges that individuals of African and Caribbean heritage face to be accepted or recruited. In addition, these issues lend weight to some of the concerns that emerged from the findings of my research.

*“I had a bad experience in striving towards a senior position. I remember applying for a managerial position. For example, not being offered managerial positions when applied for previously. This became a common experience and problem over the years for me and I was sick and tired of it” (Jasmine)*

*“I have been for several positions. All of which I have not got. One lacked experience. Didn’t fully agree with it because I had sufficient experience and on two occasions the person who actually got it had less experience than I (did). So, it was nothing to do with my experience or qualification” (Ebony)*

The African and Caribbean women who took part in my research tended to persevere in their quest for leadership posts despite the challenges they faced along the way. One of the participants showed a great deal of excitement for their job and said that they would be happy to work for a lower wage if it meant that they would get the opportunity to do the job. Another participant was encouraged by the possibility of receiving a greater salary in a more senior capacity. For several of the participants, the problem was that they lacked the necessary experience and applications. In general, it appears that their desire and motivation played a vital part in the quest of career advancement, which was one of their primary goals. The Network for Black and Asian Professionals and other sources (2000) brought attention to the career progression of African and Caribbean women, highlighting the problems made by individuals from BAME backgrounds who expressed frustration with their unsuccessful attempts to attain managerial positions. The Commission of African and Caribbean Staff in FE shed light on the magnitude of the issue within the FE sector.

In their respective works, Pennant (2019) and Shuaibe-Peters (2020) explored the influence of their childhood, educational experiences, socialisation, and heritage on their motivation and pursuit of education. They also examined their subsequent advancement into leadership roles. A comparative analysis was conducted by Hite (2004) to examine the perspectives of female managers from African and Caribbean backgrounds as well as those from White backgrounds in relation to their access to

senior career prospects. According to the scholarly work of Bell and Nkomo (2001), African and Caribbean women face a lack of visibility within the workplace. This is primarily attributed to the suppression of their identities by their White colleagues, as well as the prevailing concept of colour-blindness (Higginbotham and Weber, 1999). It is worth noting that accusations of colour-blindness are perceived as offensive to White women in organisations where they hold the majority, as it pertains to issues of race, gender, and social class.

## 6.2 Opportunities and Investment

The participants shared their perspectives on what it meant to them to have someone in their organisation invest in them. Being assigned to training courses subsequently led to promotion, which in turn led to further promotions that opened doors to various senior positions. They also discussed the support they received from their families and friends and the professional training they received.

*“Someone invested in me, and it just so happens the person who invested in me was high up in the establishment” (Sanaa)*

*“I have been very fortunate to be supported by my family, friends and husband including a lot of professional training courses” (Ashanti)*

The notion that FE might serve as a supplementary avenue for educational attainment was well-received by the participants. They reported having successful career growth and professional development experiences. They had been provided with learning and development possibilities, including participation in training programmes and guidance from educators or mentors. Additionally, they valued their colleagues' guidance and the supportive atmosphere at their places of employment. These factors probably played a role in their impetus to persist in pursuing professional progression.

*“For me it gave me a wonderful opportunity. I was taught very well in that college. The teachers were caring, very supportive. And I headed to the FE sector. Um, in those days the pay was good, better than schoolteachers, the holidays were great. I had a young child. Um, also,*

*you know, people talk about FE, second opportunity and education and I just wanted to be there” (Kyla)*

*“I was sent on a course a couple of years ago. Excellent course called ‘Leading in the Middle’, that we were given a coach and the experience of that was excellent. That was a couple of years ago, but I was already in management, and I think it is good to have a coach or mentor. I tried finding another person, er, she’s quite good, given some tips, um and I think it’s a good idea, but I just don’t have” (Sanaa)*

The participants who took part in my research came from a wide range of different backgrounds and brought with them a variety of different experiences as well as points of view towards the topic of career advancement. It appeared that improving their careers was a challenging process for these participants, which could be affected by a wide range of conditions, such as their levels of motivation, the opportunities that were available for growth and development, and the support that was offered by the organisation. Overall, this was the impression that was given.

*“I seek opportunities. I also offered to cover classes, support staff. Develop workshops” (Ade)*

*“The thing is about being a team leader, the only way you can go is up, not sideways. So, in terms of it will always be a progression but what they didn’t do was invest” (Jvonte)*

Despite the difficulties, they are confronted with, it seemed that their self-assurance shone through in the manner that they interacted with one another, the decisions that they had taken, and the way that they performed. Even though they are often given less room to make mistakes than their White counterparts, African and Caribbean women who hold managerial positions have a high level of confidence in their talents.

The sector’s appeal to women is demonstrated by its majority representation among all learners. The presence of a diverse array of courses, such as ESOL, basic English and mathematics, vocational training, GCSEs, Access to HE offerings, and HE programmes, within the field of FE is to be expected, given its historical trajectory. FE encompasses

any form of academic pursuit undertaken after secondary education, except HE programmes that are pursued within the framework of undergraduate or graduate degrees. FE covers three categories of technical and applied qualifications that are designed for students aged 16 to 19 years. These include Level 3 technical qualifications, which enable students to specialise in a particular technical occupation. Level 2 technical certificates are aimed to facilitate employment opportunities or to enable progression to a higher tech level. Lastly, applied general qualifications are intended to facilitate the continuation of general education at an advanced level through applied learning.

According to Hughes, who had personally experienced the transition from secondary education to FE, he believed that education served as a crucial opportunity for a significant number of young people in general. African and Caribbean women who hold senior posts may face increased scrutiny and criticism, which makes it more difficult for them to achieve their goals. This is discussed more in Chapter 7.

### **6.3 Personal reflection**

Throughout the interviews, the participants engaged in introspection regarding their respective professional trajectories and their corresponding emotional responses.

*"I kind of reflected on my life and thought maybe this is not for me. It helped me rethink, what is it I'm supposed to do?" (Jvonte)*

*"You know, the way I see my future - my professional future isn't the way I thought it would be, I've progressed and maybe I just don't want to go to the top, just a little bit more, you know" (Sanaa)*

These women's journeys of self-discovery and personal growth have been reflected in the decisions that they have taken throughout their lives. Many people may, without a doubt, identify with this. There has been a shift in perspective on their ambitions as well as their professional objectives. According to the findings, these women believe that being successful does not necessarily mean reaching the peak of performance but rather finding satisfaction and fulfilment in their progress to reach leadership

positions. This belief is supported by the fact that success may be measured in more than one way.

These are quite insightful views that show a great deal of self-awareness on their part. In addition to this, they place a higher priority on conforming to their internal standards of performance and contentment rather than external norms of success. These are thought-provoking viewpoints that a diverse range of people, regardless of their backgrounds or identities, could connect with on a personal basis. Despite this, the experiences that each individual has are one-of-a-kind and are shaped in part by the unique aspects of their personality, such as their racial or gender identity. As a consequence of this, the points of view that are presented may resonate differently with distinct persons.

As a result of participating in their introspection, I have concluded that the course that their lives are currently on may not be congruent with the objectives and aims that they have set for themselves. They have been inspired to reevaluate their goals and duties as a result of the experience of taking part in the study. More particularly, their vision of the future course of their careers has changed, and it differs from what they had anticipated. They have achieved progress in their professional journeys, which has prompted them to question whether they have reached the peak of success. Instead, they discover that they have a strong desire to make slow but steady progress towards reaching their goals.

Bravette (1985), who is well-known, well-established, and much respected, has a track record of conducting studies in the area, as well as having a strong background in management. The corpus of her work provides support for my investigation as she scrutinises not just her own. Bravette (1985) is an esteemed author with a notable reputation, whose credentials in the field of management are well-regarded. The literature provided by the author contributes to my research by examining her self-awareness, as well as that of other African and Caribbean women managers, and the actualities surrounding their status and roles within organisational contexts. In 1991, Bravette endeavoured to enhance her self-awareness, as well as get a deeper understanding of African and Caribbean women managers and their positions and



functions inside organisations, as well as their broader societal context in the UK. Upon engaging in said action, she found herself immersed in a phenomenon she labelled as "conscientisation," which can be understood as the awakening of critical consciousness. This facilitated her acquisition of further knowledge regarding these matters.

Bravette is a woman of African and Caribbean heritage hailing from the UK, who holds positions as both a manager and an instructor. The author presents her views regarding her personal management learning process in her book. She characterises this process as a transformative journey towards self-awareness and emancipation since it entails the identification and removal of latent obstacles. The author endeavours to engage in theoretical analysis of our collective experiences, aiming to offer insights into the challenges faced by African and Caribbean managers and professionals, both present and future, to enhance their understanding of these hurdles. These introspective musings are also intended for White managers who aspire to enhance their comprehension of culture and strengthen their relationships with employees from diverse cultural backgrounds within the professional setting.

#### **6.4 Black Feminist Thought and Intersectionality**

BFT creates space within the lives of African and Caribbean women for them to evaluate their experiences (Morgan, 2020). BFT can be used to analyse and explain the intersectional relationship between these issues. Despite increasing efforts to develop diverse leadership roles and an increased number of African and Caribbean women working at senior levels in UK organisations, that number is extremely small.

Despite the extensive literature on leaders and leadership, our understanding of African and Caribbean women's progress towards senior roles in FE and their representation in such positions remains in a development phase. The composition of governing bodies, in terms of factors such as ethnicity, gender and disability representation, is characterised by preconceptions that must be dismantled. Governing boards must have balanced profiles, and educational institutions should

offer mentoring, coaching support, training and staff development opportunities to achieve this objective. One participant provided a statement and presented an argument of the challenges faced by African and Caribbean professional women in attaining leadership positions within the field of education.

When comparing African and Caribbean female managers with other African and Caribbean female managers, Sanaa analyses the challenges of rivalry and group dynamics that can arise. She contends that these dynamics can create a challenging experience in the journey to leadership positions. Sanaa explored the topic of stereotypes and their impact on views and behaviour in the workplace. However, she acknowledges the surprising fact that some African and Caribbean people also have a role in sustaining these stereotypes, highlighting the complex struggle that African and Caribbean female managers must face.

*“I think that when you are a manager, a Black female amongst other female managers, I think sometimes there is competition. I think sometimes you can be allied by maybe not too much. I think there are in-group issues as well which means that the journey is also a little bit tense, a little less comfortable” (Sanaa)*

*“I would like to think I don’t and I like to think other Black managers would say Sanaa, no she’s not on that. Actually, there are things that go around that mean that we all actually, um, to some degree, or many people to some degree conform to these stereotypes, when I hear the way people talk about another Black female manager I am surprised that some of the people talking about them in that way are Black. I find that we all fit into some kind of thing that we’re all against but when we actually look at our behaviour sometimes, we’re not.” (Sanaa)*

The assertions made by Sanaa highlight the complex relationships between gender and race in the workplace, especially for African and Caribbean women who hold leadership roles. These experiences can be examined using the frameworks of BFT and of intersectionality, which provide valuable perspectives on the distinct obstacles encountered by African and Caribbean women in these situations. According to Collins

(1990, 2000), BFT highlights the importance of understanding the unique experiences of African and Caribbean women, which are affected by intersecting oppressive systems such as sexism and racism. This approach emphasises the complex and diverse nature of African and Caribbean women's identities, which have a clear impact on their social experiences.

Sanna's statement indicates that rivalry and in-group issues among African and Caribbean female managers are produced by an atmosphere where systemic pressures compel individuals to assume competitive positions. BFT recognises that African and Caribbean women frequently find themselves in situations where they must consistently demonstrate their ability in the face of both racial and gender stereotypes. This might result in inadequate levels of unity, since systematic oppression nurtures an atmosphere of insufficiency and rivalry. Sanaa's contemplation on how African and Caribbean people, including herself, occasionally hold prejudices about other African and Caribbean people, emphasises the internalised racism and sexism that BFT aims to deconstruct. The statement acknowledges that African and Caribbean women experience oppression not only from external forces but also from internalised norms that uphold these repressive systems. This internalisation might be observed in the form of severe criticism or diminished assistance from African and Caribbean colleagues, so strengthening the very preconceptions they aim to remove.

Crenshaw's (1991) theory of intersectionality offers a framework for understanding the way different types of discrimination intersect and coincide, resulting in distinct experiences for individuals who are part of various marginalised groups. Sanaa explores the intersectional effects of race and gender, rather than focusing primarily on individually. Intersectionality exposes a distinct and specific type of prejudice faced by African and Caribbean women, which differs from the discrimination faced by African and Caribbean men or by White women. For instance, Sanaa's feeling of unease and stress in her work setting is a result of the overlapping effects of race and gender, which cannot be fully grasped by considering race or gender separately. The discourse on intra-group rivalry and stereotyping also highlights the complex difficulties faced by African and Caribbean communities at the intersectional level. Through the lens of intersectionality, we can better understand how systematic racism

and sexism may divide marginalised groups and give rise to phenomena such as internalised oppression and lateral abusive behaviour. Sanaa's disbelief upon hearing African and Caribbean colleagues perpetuate preconceptions about other African and Caribbean women highlights the widespread impact of these overlapping networks, irrespective of sharing the same racial group.

These statements underscore the intersectionality of race and gender in professional environments, as well as the specific obstacles encountered by African and Caribbean women as they strive for leadership positions in the education sector.

*“I had been trying to get into management. It was, I had been in one place, a senior teacher but they wouldn’t give me any management work.” (Sanaa)*

Sanaa recounts her endeavour to move into a managerial position in this statement. Although she had a senior position and made significant efforts, she states that she was never given managerial responsibilities. This implies the existence of an obstacle or prejudice that hindered her progress in gaining leadership roles, a difficulty commonly encountered by professional African and Caribbean women in various sectors, including the field of education. This emphasises the structural problems that can impede the progress of African and Caribbean women in their careers.

*“You can’t really be in management if you’re not in education, FE or HE if you’re not an expert in practice. So, you do need, um or at least in my college, you do need a teacher training certificate. So, if you’ve got that, then you can consolidate. It’s no use having been to many places and knowing your thing of you haven’t got the piece of paper as a foundation that, that’s how I feel. I think and that would have been good to know that early.” (Sanaa)*

Sanaa examines the importance of having a teacher training certificate to have a managerial position in education. She accentuates the significance of this ‘document’ as fundamental, implying that without it, professional expertise and understanding may go unnoticed. This demonstrates the structural obstacles that might impede the progress of African and Caribbean women in professional roles, hindering their ability

to progress to positions of leadership, despite having the necessary competencies and experience. Sanna's remarks eloquently highlight the necessity of an intersectional perspective to properly understand the difficulties encountered by African and Caribbean women who hold leadership positions in the field of education. BFT and intersectionality offer crucial frameworks for examining these experiences, emphasising the interconnected nature of their challenges and the structural influences at work. These viewpoints emphasise the significance of simultaneously dealing with both racial and gender-based discrimination to cultivate a more inclusive and supportive work atmosphere for African and Caribbean women.

The absence of diversity has posed challenges for African and Caribbean women as they belong to underrepresented groups. They have felt excluded and unrecognised within the professional environment. There is an ongoing debate on the necessity for organisations to participate actively in endeavours that are aimed at cultivating a workplace atmosphere that is distinguished by diversity and inclusivity. This objective can be accomplished by implementing strategies that prioritise diversity and inclusion, that can guarantee fair chances for professional advancement, and that successfully tackle any instances of bias or discrimination that may arise. I argue that this kind of initiative could cultivate a professional setting that was distinguished by improved assistance and inclusiveness for all professionals.

In the context of the UK, persons belonging to BME communities demonstrate comparatively lower levels of engagement and advancement within the workforce than their White counterparts. African and Caribbean women encounter numerous barriers that hinder their advancement and achievement of their full potential, from the early stages of recruitment to reaching senior-level positions. It is argued that this circumstance is marked by an inherent injustice towards these people, and it represents a lost opportunity for FE institutions. The comprehensive integration and progression of African and Caribbean women in the workforce can yield substantial economic benefits for the UK.

The experiences of the respondents contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding the experiences and social status of these selected women. This study has thus far

underscored the significance of establishing a support mechanism from the onset of individuals' training and maintaining it throughout their education trajectory. Education is frequently employed as a means of upward social mobility, as individuals reject their current social standing and expend considerable effort to enhance their circumstances, even sometimes at great personal expense. One potential confounding variable that warrants consideration is the presence of gatekeepers within educational institutions. Who are the individuals in question and what are their respective backgrounds? What factors impact the selection of individuals eligible for senior-level positions? Does the determination of suitability primarily rely on the individual's specification, or is it influenced by a combination of other variables? Is the cause being fought by these women considered to be lost? Nevertheless, while several women may choose to relinquish their pursuits, some persistent endeavour until they have successfully attained their utmost aspiration or objective. When individuals do not receive adequate assistance, they frequently draw upon their personal experiences, such as familial or occupational challenges, as a consistent wellspring of motivation. This implies their steadfast determination to persist and refrain from surrender. Young (2011) asserts that African and Caribbean women possess a keen awareness of their ability to exhibit confidence and empowerment, a trait that can be traced back to the influence of their parents and role models during their formative years. The testimonies provided by the women in my research have shed light on a multifaceted and challenging trajectory involving race, gender, and class. Consequently, the organisational culture inside FE institutions raise additional inquiries that warrant exploration. Furthermore, the concerns highlighted by the participants appear to be just the surface manifestation of the challenges they encounter in their progression towards senior-level positions. This raises the question of what further significant issues should be taken into consideration.

The proportion of women in leadership roles in the UK is still deficient. Carli and Eagly (2016) and Hoyt and Murphy (2016) contend that despite the observed rise in the representation of White women in leadership positions, women remain underrepresented in such jobs. A significant portion of the existing leadership

literature that examines women's experiences and aspirations in the realm of leadership (Fritz & Knippenberg, 2017) mostly focuses on the viewpoint of White women. The inclusion of African and Caribbean women's experiences in the leadership canon is sometimes lacking (Parker, 2005). This is because leadership in Western countries is typically linked with White men (Coleman, 2012; Lumby, 2007). Additionally, research on leadership, leadership theories and concepts, or research, rarely considers the experiences of African and Caribbean women leaders. One of the main factors contributing to this phenomenon is the evolution of the term 'women leaders' in contemporary discourse. Several agencies in the UK have conducted studies on the topic of diversity. However, it is important to note that these studies have primarily focused on gender-related aspects and have not thoroughly explored the intersectionality of race and gender. The increase in the representation of White women in positions of authority has resulted in a distorted picture of the overall progress made by women in attaining leadership positions. As a result of this phenomenon, individuals who aspire to or attain positions of power, yet deviate in any way from the perceived societal norm of White males and females, are commonly seen as 'outsiders'. Miller and Callender (2019) argue that the prevailing conventional perception of leadership positions has significant implications for those who are considered outsiders, specifically African and Caribbean women in this context.

African and Caribbean women who work at FE institutions in the UK have had their career paths examined in this chapter. Particular attention has been paid to how these women describe their rise to senior positions and the things that they believe have made their path possible. The study examines the role of ambition, family influences, school experiences and academic performance on career development.

The chapter offers a thorough analysis of how race, gender and class intersect to influence the career paths of African and Caribbean women, using CRT and BFT as theoretical frameworks. The participants' accounts demonstrate a significant dependence on role models and the significance of supportive leadership, availability of opportunities and personal and professional commitment as crucial elements in their career achievements. Although they are in the minority in predominately White educational settings, these women have shown exceptional perseverance and

determination. Their experience of isolation and exclusion, especially in institutions where the student body is predominantly White, emphasise the emotional and psychological difficulties they encountered. However, with the assistance of their families, mentors and specialised education, they have successfully surmounted these obstacles and attained senior jobs.

The chapter emphasises the importance of establishing supportive educational environments and offering mentorship to foster professional growth and career ambitions. The observations derived from the participants' experiences underscore the necessity of implementing structural modifications to address the obstacles encountered by African and Caribbean women in their professional trajectories. The experiences of these women illustrate how the pervasive effects of racism, social isolation and the process of defining one's identity have shaped their professional and academic journeys. They highlight the importance of perseverance, self-motivation, and strong support systems in overcoming these obstacles. To summarise, this chapter emphasises the need for ongoing endeavours to cultivate a wide range of leadership positions and enhance the representation of African and Caribbean women in senior posts. Institutions may improve the success and meaningful participation of these women in FE by creating inclusive environments and offering strong support systems.



## **Chapter 7: Factors that challenge African and Caribbean women in senior management**

### **7.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the challenges for African and Caribbean women to become senior managers in FE institutions. It offers a comprehensive examination and discourse on the fourth research question: What do African and Caribbean women perceive to be the factors that have restricted or challenged them in their journeys towards senior positions? The chapter delves into the specific difficulties of the dearth of expertise, the existence of obstacles and the lack of mentors in the FE sector. The information for this chapter was obtained through qualitative interviews conducted with African and Caribbean women who had either made attempts or achieved success in reaching positions of leadership within FE institutions. The interviews were conducted to document their individual experiences, perspectives and the obstacles they faced. The fourth research question seeks to ascertain and understand the elements that African and Caribbean women perceive as restrictions or challenges in their endeavour to attain higher-ranking positions in FE institutions. This involves a wide array of factors, such as institutional obstacles, personal and professional difficulties and the effect of mentorship or its absence.

Thematic analysis was employed to code the research. After the interviews were recorded, the data were systematically coded and categorised to identify the major themes. Several themes came to light, such as the lack of ethnic diversity and representation in the workforce, the underrepresentation of African and Caribbean women in leadership positions, the challenges faced by these women in making the move from non-managerial to managerial positions due to their lack of formal training and experience, the difficulties they faced in successfully dealing with unforeseen circumstances, the perceived importance of mentoring in both professional and personal growth, the lack of mentors who could offer support, guidance and advice, and the effect that insufficient experience has on career advancement.

The analysis was conducted by using both CRT and BFT. These frameworks facilitated the analysis of how race and racism intersect with various types of oppression in the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women. They also aided in understanding the structural and institutional obstacles that reinforce inequality in FE institutions. BFT emphasises the gendered aspects of the difficulties encountered by the individuals involved and examines the points where race and gender intersect in the professional lives of African and Caribbean women. The research findings suggest that African and Caribbean women frequently encounter workplaces that are deficient in diversity and representation, particularly in their leadership. Participants saw an urgent need for, or perhaps the absence of, African and Caribbean women in positions other than administration. It is more difficult for FE employees to foresee and achieve professional progress when there are insufficient visible role models and mentors in the field, which contributes to feelings of loneliness and self-doubt. The participants encountered substantial difficulties while transitioning into managerial positions. Those without previous experience or formal leadership training encountered difficulties in effectively handling unexpected situations and the complexities of their unexpected duties. Their limited experience frequently resulted in challenges when it came to carrying out their responsibilities proficiently, thereby impeding their professional development and achievements.

The absence of mentors emerged as a critical barrier for the participants. Many expressed a strong desire for mentors who could provide guidance and support in navigating their careers. They believed that having a mentor could significantly enhance their professional development and help them achieve their career goals. The lack of mentorship opportunities left them feeling unsupported and directionless, contributing to the perpetuation of self-doubt and career stagnation. Their inexperience often resulted in missed opportunities for progress and success. Additionally, other systemic barriers, such as discrimination and prejudice, further complicate their professional journeys, making it difficult for them to break through the proverbial 'glass ceiling' and attain senior positions.

## 7.1 African and Caribbean women's work environment and visibility

The outcomes of the research underscore how African and Caribbean women have started to articulate their concerns about their workplaces, which lack diversity and representation, especially in terms of African and Caribbean women. They mentioned in the interviews that during their time in FE, they had only seen African and Caribbean or other minority ethnic women in administrative roles, but never in positions of leadership. They also stated that it was not clear whether any women of African or Caribbean heritage or other minority ethnic backgrounds held leadership positions.

*"I don't remember seeing any African and Caribbean women during my time in FE" (Jasmine)*

*"I can't say I saw anyone in a position of leadership. I saw them as lecturers, only as lecturers" (Jvonte)*

*"No one" (Amari)*

Only two participants mentioned seeing African and Caribbean women in leadership roles.

*"Just one, she became my mentor" (Ebony)*

The participants suggested that difficulties in working together and cooperating in professional environments that were characterised by a deficiency of representation of African and Caribbean women in positions of leadership were the cause of these issues. The participants' places of employment were predominantly occupied by people of White origin; hence, they felt that they needed to instantly adjust and make attempts to understand and accept the concept of diversity. As a result of this, the participants discussed the challenges that they face in their respective work environments as a direct result of a lack of diversity and representation.

*"Over time, a new Deputy Director took over who was less visible and proved to be difficult, the dynamic changed" (Ashanti)*

African and Caribbean women frequently experience uncertainty and unpredictability in their employment situations; this has been addressed in Mirza (1992). Leadership transitions can have a significant and far-reaching effect, especially when new leaders fail to give importance to diversity or provide support for minority employees. The challenges faced by the newly appointed Deputy Director may be indicative of the wider institutional obstacles that African and Caribbean women face, where having supportive leadership is essential for fostering a positive and inclusive workplace.

*“When I did my Access course, they were visible, um, in further education, I can’t say really; at university, they were there but the hardest thing, in terms of numbers they were a minority, but they were there” (Jvonte)*

Mirza (1992) highlights the varying levels of recognition that African and Caribbean women experience in different educational settings. Although there may be certain instances or environments in which African and Caribbean women are more noticeable, they often continue to constitute a minority and their presence tends to be segregated rather than assimilated. This demonstrates that discriminatory practices continue to exist, even though there are occasional instances of increased visibility. The difficulty with numbers emphasises the persistent obstacle of attaining significant representation and the assistance that accompanies a substantial number of individuals.

*“White-dominated, White people. It was challenging. I had to adjust quickly and try to understand diversity and took the initiative to learn ways of White people” (Ade)*

Mirza (1992) examines the concept of cultural assimilation and the pressure on African and Caribbean women to conform to predominately White settings. This phrase succinctly captures the burden of adhering to prevailing cultural standards, frequently at the cost of one's own individuality and personal experience. Mirza (1992) highlights

that African and Caribbean women often face the need to adapt and acquire knowledge of the cultural norms and practices of White people. This is because they are required to navigate and thrive in settings that do not prioritise or accommodate their diverse backgrounds.

The unique experiences and points of view held by these women are reflected in the concepts that they have presented here, which come from a variety of settings. There has been a shift in leadership, there is racial imbalance, and there is increased publicity; the findings suggest that there has been a change in the dynamics of leadership. This can be seen by the decreased visibility and increased difficulty that is associated with newly appointed senior members of staff, suggesting the possibility of a deficiency in openness or approachability among the leadership, which has the potential to impact the entire dynamic of the workplace. This could be seen as seeking increased inclusion and a greater variety of points of view.

Within the context of FE, African and Caribbean women are regarded as a minority. This has given rise to worries about the lack of inclusive points of view in educational institutions, and an atmosphere that is predominantly composed of people of White heritage, in addition to the inherent challenges connected with adjusting to and recognising variation in society. The data demonstrate that the women are capable of endurance and dedication in their quest for knowledge about various cultures. In general, they have emphasised how important it is to have visibility, representation, and a greater knowledge of diversity within the contexts that they have been discussing, such as professional workplaces and academic institutions. The perspectives expressed by these women highlight the significance of maintaining an ongoing conversation on topics of this nature to promote inclusion and fairness.

African and Caribbean women face unique obstacles in the workplace, where they are more likely to experience adversity and trauma as a result of intersectional invisibility (Johnson et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2019). Women of African and Caribbean heritage do not adhere to the conventional standard of femininity, which largely places such an obligation on women of White ethnicity.

Mirza's analysis reveals that African and Caribbean women frequently encounter systemic invisibility, resulting in their contributions and presence being disregarded or unnoticed. This marginalisation is further exacerbated by the absence of adequate representation in positions of leadership. African and Caribbean women often face the expectation of assimilating into mostly White settings, necessitating learning and adhering to prevailing cultural conventions. The demand to conform can be tiring and result in a feeling of alienation. The success and well-being of African and Caribbean women in professional contexts are contingent upon the existence of supportive leadership. Leadership changes can have a substantial impact on the work environment, occasionally resulting in negative consequences. The presence and recognition of African and Caribbean women might vary greatly among educational and professional settings. Even if they are there, their numbers are frequently insufficient to have a significant effect or offer adequate support. Mentorship and supportive networks are essential for African and Caribbean women's career advancement; these partnerships can offer the essential direction and support needed to manage difficult settings. The difficulties of visibility, representation and cultural adjustment continue to be major issues for African and Caribbean women in different educational and professional environments, as seen by the link between the participants' experiences and Mirza's (1992) analysis.

This section has explained the various hurdles encountered by women of African and Caribbean heritage in management positions. The picture is of individuals who are marginalised and lack representation, who find it difficult to deal effectively with work-related issues and to adjust to a new professional role. Some participants had gained access to training possibilities and received support. Additional concerns included the experience of stress among individuals transitioning into leadership roles, as well as involvement in demanding work environments that hindered their progress towards senior positions. In the next section, a lack of experience and other obstacles that are faced by African and Caribbean women in senior-level positions are examined.

The experiences of African and Caribbean professionals continue to mirror the environments of unequal diversity that exist in predominantly White educational institutions (Hurtado et al., 1998). This is the case despite the commitment of primarily White FE institutions to increase their recruitment and retention of African and Caribbean professionals. The findings of my research show that the multifaceted nature of the marginalisation faced by African and Caribbean professionals reveals the possible effect that their identities can have on how they perceive their position in the FE institution. This is especially true of African and Caribbean women in senior positions.

## **7.2 Challenges of being in senior management**

When making a transition into managerial roles in their careers, the people who participated in this study came against a number of obstacles. For instance, the individuals who had any prior experience or formal training in their senior roles encountered difficulties in efficiently managing unforeseen circumstances. This was a difficulty for them because they lacked both the experience and the training.

Considering three of the participants had no previous experience in the roles to which they were promoted, it was challenging for them to deal with circumstances that had not been anticipated. Because of this, it was very challenging for them to respond in a proper manner. According to the findings of the research, they discovered that it was challenging to manage the new duties, particularly when there were unforeseen challenges and tensions among fellow employees.

*“I didn’t have recent management experience. From what I’ve seen they take on your ideas, because it’s like, it a bit suffers from the old boys’ network, it’s all about leadership positions and class” (Jvonte)*

*“I felt that I needed some of the necessary experience” (Duchess)*

*“He came and spoke to me, said where you’ve got the qualification, you haven’t got the experience” (Aliyah)*

The study revealed that some participants encountered challenges in adapting to their situation.

*“As a new line manager, I had to deal with the problem. I had no experience. The lack of coherent information from senior management was a huge stumbling block”* (Duchess)

*“I needed a lot of experience”* (Ashanti)

These quotations exemplify the challenges that individuals encounter when adjusting to senior roles, especially if they lack recent managerial experience, clear direction from senior management or adequate relevant experience and qualifications. For example, Jvonte states that despite having ideas, the organisation is hindered by an established ‘old boys’ network’, suggesting that the filling of leadership roles is frequently influenced by social class and personal connections rather than by merit or influential ideas. Duchess describes the sense of requiring essential expertise. Aliyah emphasises the disparity between having qualifications and lacking experience. Ashanti explicitly emphasises the requirement for a substantial amount of experience, and challenges related to adjustment and support. Duchess explores the challenges she faces as a newly appointed line manager, attributing them to her limited experience and the inadequate and inconsistent information provided by the leadership team. These comments collectively suggest that the process of moving into more senior roles might be impeded by systemic challenges, insufficient practical experience and inadequate assistance from upper management.

The intersections of race, gender and class and how they exacerbate barriers for people in professional settings—especially African and Caribbean women—are discussed in Mirza's (1997, 2009) and Collins' (1990, 2000) works on the difficulties in senior positions. Mirza (1997, 2009) highlights the presence of structural obstacles that women and minorities encounter while trying to obtain leadership roles, mostly as a result of institutionalised racism and sexism. They have to exert extra effort in terms of emotions and psychology to navigate and overcome these systemic challenges. The absence of mentorship and support for minorities in positions of leadership can intensify feelings of inadequacy and seclusion. Collins (1990, 2000)



frequently examines the influence of social hierarchies and power structures on the professional encounters of marginalised groups. The main focus of her argument is the combined prejudice experienced by individuals as a result of their intersecting identities (such as race, gender and class), which has an impact on their career progression. The presence of power relations in the workplace frequently results in the exclusion of voices from minority backgrounds. The quotations emphasise issues that can be understood through the critical lenses of Collins (1990, 2000) and Mirza (1997, 2009). They propose that these hurdles are not solely due to individual inexperience but are fundamentally connected to larger systemic problems that must be resolved to provide fair professional environments.

According to the findings of my research, participants commonly ran into barriers as they transitioned from being individual contributors to taking on leadership roles. The job of a manager is likely to result in high levels of stress, and taking on a managerial role as an African or Caribbean woman entails a unique set of challenges.

*“I think that being a manager has some stresses” (Sanaa).*

*“As a temporary curriculum manager, I was juggling this role while continuing other aspects of the job. Also, members of the academic team did not recognise me in the new position, including not responding to emails relating to my management role” (Destiny).*

These women were forced to contend with a difficult working environment as well as a lack of support from management. One person reported that because of this lack of support, it was difficult to keep their attention on the task at hand and stick to their professional standards. They had a difficult time finding any available support.

*“The management was not supportive and said that I had to realise that people responded to change in different ways. The working environment proved to be extremely difficult for me and so I kept focused on my teaching and maintaining standards I had set for myself, but this had a knock-on effect on my performance” (Destiny).*

The participants in the study spoke of many ways in which they had experienced

discrimination, and the many factors that had prevented them from achieving senior positions. This included lack of opportunity, being from a working-class background, being African or Caribbean and being an African or Caribbean woman.

*"I think the issues specific to being Black and er, those issues don't just come to the forefront with people who are not Black. They actually come to the forefront with people who are Black" (Sanaa).*

*"The manager came up to me because I'm a Black lady. 'Oh, you should go for it. I'm backing you'. I'm not going for that job because I'm not prepared to play that dirty game of working against someone that I'm going to be working with either way" (Jvonte).*

*"I believe it was because of being a Black woman, being Black, lack of opportunities and being from a working-class background were all barriers" (Jasmine).*

*"Being a Black woman, being Black; issues of race; lack of opportunities; class and being from a working-class background" (Jasmine).*

*"Being Black in a multicultural community, racism has been very prevalent in my life" (Kyla).*

Some of the women discussed the difficulties they faced as a result of being in the minority in managerial positions, including feelings of isolation and hostility from their peers.

*"I think that when you're Black in management, it's a lonely place" (Sanaa).*

*"I tried to maintain my role professionally although I experienced other problems. For example, people would not respond to my emails; there was hostility toward me in general from some members of the team" (Destiny).*

One individual, working within a system of policies that her employer had established,

encountered a recurring pattern in which the plans and decisions she made were continuously overturned by managers and colleagues who were under her leadership.

*“Policies were already in place and had to be adhered to once I had taken on the role. Planning and some decisions I made were more flexible but were overruled by the faculty director on many occasions”*

(Duchess).

The presence of a range of roadblocks in management was a defining element of the career trajectories of several of these women, and it was a factor that affected the progress of their careers. They found it difficult to navigate a new role, and it was very difficult for them to adapt and transition into a senior management position because they had not been allowed to develop their knowledge and skills. The majority of these women were unable to cope with unforeseen events because they had not been allowed to develop their experience. They were not provided with information by management, and they were not recognised as managers or in senior positions within their teams. Some of the participants found that being in these roles caused considerable stress since they had to deal with additional challenges, such as the responsibilities of the workplace, without having access to support from management. Some of the participants brought out the points of intersection that exist between having African or Caribbean heritage, being a woman, and belonging to a certain social class; high expectations and lack of feedback were all factors in their career development in their discussions.

The challenges they encountered often took the shape of implicit biases, or overt barriers imposed by the system, both of which tended to impede their progress in terms of job opportunities and promotions. They were unable to cultivate ambitions for leadership roles or to capitalise on other opportunities that FE institutions offer because these options were not made available to them, and they were unable to take advantage of these opportunities.

*“Members of the academic team did not recognise me in the new position, including not responding to emails relating to my management role”* (Destiny).

*“Planning and some decisions I made were more flexible but were overruled by the faculty director on many occasions” (Duchess).*

*“You’re constantly being undermined because you know your stuff. The very thing that is your strength, is your weakness. I had to think of another way of dealing with it” (Raven).*

The glass ceiling, the unfair expectations placed upon African and Caribbean women, and the limited choices that are available to them were all topics that were investigated in this study. A significant number of African and Caribbean women who participated in my research were already holding senior positions in their respective fields, and a considerable number of them admitted that they were no longer prepared to conceptualise the glass ceiling or comparable barriers as obstacles to progress in their careers. In addition, the glass ceiling is a structural barrier that creates constraints on the ability of African and Caribbean women, as well as other minority employees, to engage in connections with colleagues that are more productive and meaningful (Beckwith et al., 2016). As a direct consequence of this, the African and Caribbean women in question face the challenges of social exclusion and marginalisation when it comes to the progress of their careers. According to Green and King (2001), there should be provisions made for leadership development to enable African and Caribbean women to succeed and break through the glass ceiling.

I found that most of the participants displayed a desire for promotion within FE that had developed as a result of their perception of their self-worth and of the value they brought to the organisation, a drive for development that could be traced back to their desire to advance to senior positions during their careers.

*“Especially people of colour, you’re not going to get through just because you’re good at your job and you’ve been told you’ve been doing well for years. Breaking through that ceiling is very difficult” (Kyla shows a very sad and subdued face).*

*“I was encouraged and put forward by the director at the time. This led to other opportunities” (Ashanti).*

The research findings appear to focus on the experiences and views of African and Caribbean women of their professional growth. Kyla's statement highlights the structural obstacles that individuals belonging to racial and ethnic minorities frequently encounter in their professional trajectories. Although they possess adequate abilities and consistently excel in their work, they frequently face a barrier that impinges on their progress in their professional journey. This phenomenon may be attributed to systemic racism, inherent bias or limited access to opportunity. Nevertheless, Kyla's willingness to share this experience implies that she has successfully overcome these difficulties, potentially by demonstrating perseverance, and tenacity and by accepting help from supporters. Ashanti emphasises the importance of help and guidance in surmounting obstacles. Receiving recognition and encouragement from a leader can provide new opportunities while encouraging professional growth. It seems that Ashanti was able to take advantage of this assistance to effectively manage the obstacles she encountered and advance in her professional journey.

These experiences indicate that African and Caribbean women encounter substantial obstacles in their professional lives. However, they can triumph over these difficulties by demonstrating resilience and determination, receiving assistance from collaborators and taking advantage of opportunities as they arise. Consequently, they are capable of overcoming adversity and achieving success in their chosen professions. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that these individual endeavours are frequently undertaken within the framework of structural obstacles, underscoring the crucial importance of more extensive reforms for promoting fairness and inclusivity in the workplace. Conquering that obstacle presents a difficult challenge for these women; they are having a conversation about the challenges they face in their career advancement because they are members of a racial or ethnic minority group. Despite their proficiency and the great comments, they have received, they could still run into problems, commonly known as the 'glass ceiling'. There is a possibility that this recurrent event can be explained by institutionalised prejudices or a lack of diversity in positions of leadership.

In essence, a sense of self-assurance that comes from specific encounters or

occurrences is what is driving these women to strive for leadership positions. This sense of self-assurance is what motivates them; their ideas are supported by their sense of self-confidence and their ability to capitalise on opportunities for professional growth. They have emphasised the relevance of the impact that individuals can have on their progress in their professional trajectories. This is concerning the fact that they have emphasised the significance of mentoring and promotion in the process of progressing in their professions. Nevertheless, the perspectives expressed by these women have brought to light the complexity of professional progress.

The challenges in the way in which African and Caribbean women progress to senior management continue to be an issue. Shain (2000) questions whether FE, at the senior level, remains a boys' club. This concept refers to the purported advantage that male employees have in their interactions with influential males, in comparison to their female counterparts. For instance, Cullen and Perez-Truglia (2020) argued that male employees might engage in informal socialising with their male bosses in a manner that was not accessible to female employees. Shain (2000) examined the extent to which women appointed to senior and middle management roles in FE was tasked with the responsibility of implementing organisational change. The author examined the complex connection between gender and management within the context of FE. She investigated research that had been conducted within the FE sector to explore the strategies employed by female FE managers in their pursuit of a harmonious equilibrium between their aspirations for engagement in stimulating professional roles, and the pressures that stemmed from working within a gendered organisational culture that necessitated significant exertion of effort.

The unique challenges that African and Caribbean women have been facing over the years are arduous. African and Caribbean women are commonly perceived as exhibiting assertiveness, anger and an 'attitude', rather than conforming to communal stereotypes. Hence, their primary objective lies in navigating the balance between avoiding the perception of excessive anger or assertiveness, which may lead to being disliked and avoiding the perception of excessive subservience and compliance, which may be interpreted as a lack of strength or independence. Hence, while both White women and African and Caribbean women are susceptible to experiencing a dual

dilemma, the predicament faced by African and Caribbean women is more challenging compared with that encountered by White women. If White women are perceived as being too social to lead, they will still be liked, but if African and Caribbean women are perceived as being subordinate, they are not respected; if African and Caribbean women are perceived as being angry, they are not liked; and if African and Caribbean women are perceived as being subservient, they are not respected. To put it another way, African and Caribbean women must find a way to negotiate the perception problem so that they get it just right, or else they will not be perceived as leaders or likeable.

### **7.3 Lack of Mentors in Further Education**

The participants in my study were interested in finding mentors who could assist them in both their professional and personal growth. They believed that having a mentor who could provide them with direction, advice and support in their efforts to attain their professional goals might be extremely beneficial to them.

*“You have to search for it – um, you go online” (Jvonte).*

*“I really wish I’d had one. I think I’m going to get one now. I think I need a mentor” (Sanaa).*

*“Because I don’t have a mentor. I think a mentor would help me not to waste my blessing time, to be very focused to what it is you want to do and go for it” (Ebony).*

*“No African and Caribbean role models throughout my education” (Jasmine).*

The conversations revealed that the participants believed that African and Caribbean role models were absent in their organisations, and that this was the reason why they expressed a desire for mentors to guide them. In addition, they claimed that this absence was preventing them from achieving their full potential. They were aware of the fact that they had not been exposed to any African or Caribbean role models over the course of their education, and they felt the need for such guidance as they moved

forward in their professional lives.

The findings demonstrate the desire of these African and Caribbean women for representation in the community as well as mentoring by other individuals. The idea that one should always be looking for new representation or resources persists, partly because getting direct access to these things might be difficult. In addition to this, it stresses the value of having access to the internet as a means of discovering resources that are pertinent to the topic at hand. There is great demand for advice and direction from mentors due to the significance of having someone help them on their path to a senior position. It would be extremely useful for these women to have a mentor who could help them be more focused on the goals they have set for themselves and more efficiently pursue those goals. The lack of involvement in educational opportunities has presented difficulties, mostly difficulties in locating adequate direction and maintaining motivation owing to the absence of role models who share their cultural experiences. The findings have shed light on the major significance that inclusion and mentoring play in the process of both professional and personal development, particularly for women from African and Caribbean countries and other marginalised minority groups.

Lack of mentoring is seen as a barrier to progression to senior positions for African and Caribbean women in FE. Mentoring is rooted in the fact that these women have historically been subjected to less favourable conditions than White women. Even though mentoring offers several important advantages (Larke et al., 1999), several studies point to the importance of the mentors having specific identities, such as racial or ethnic (Holmes, 2000; Holmes et al., 2007; Lee, 1999; Tillman, 2001; Welch, 1996). According to Holmes et al. (2007), African and Caribbean women can benefit from having White mentors; yet White mentors are restricted in their capacity to understand and advise African and Caribbean women when issues such as racism come up. According to Bova (2000), White mentors can offer career support, but they are unable to satisfy the social and psychological needs of a particularly vulnerable population. However, when it comes to addressing the needs of African and Caribbean



women, it has been demonstrated that White mentors can be helpful and supportive. Mentors play important roles in the accomplishments of their mentees, regardless of the identity of the protégé (Grant, 2012; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Jean-Marie & Brooks, 2011). Despite this, there remains a dearth of role models available to assist African and Caribbean women who are pursuing senior positions at FE institutions. According to Parker and Funk (2017), African and Caribbean women are less likely to be mentored and are passed over for promotion more frequently than their White counterparts, are discouraged from applying for positions such as department chairs or assistant deans and are infrequently put on track to become tenured professors or deans of schools or colleges. There is no correlation between the identity of the mentee and the significance of the role that a mentor plays in their success (Grant, 2012; Grant & Simmons, 2008; Jean-Marie & Brooks, 2011), but mentors do play an essential part in the success of their mentees. Despite this, there is a shortage of female role models from Africa and the Caribbean who are available to support women working in high positions in FE institutions.

#### **7.4 Lack of experience and other barriers**

The lack of experience in managerial roles presented a key obstacle to the career progression of the participants in the study. For example, a lack of experience can lead to a lack of success.

*“At that stage, I did not have the necessary experience to pursue it.”*

(Duchess)

*“Not being offered managerial positions when applied for previously.”*

(Jasmine)

*“I have been in several positions. All of which I have not got. One was (due to) lack of experience.”* (Ebony)

The research findings indicate that two African and Caribbean women in the study had

encountered difficulties during their job applications and interviews as a result of their limited exposure to recent management roles.

*"I remember applying for a managerial position. This became a common experience and problem over the years for me and I was sick and tired of it." (Jasmine)*

*"They excluded people from the interview process. They knew that I knew that, and I wasn't going to play that game." (Jvonte)*

*"I know why I didn't get the job because their reasoning for not giving me the job was nonsense." (Ebony)*

Ebony said that in the interviews that she went to, she was given many excuses to explain her non-appointment to senior roles.

*"I have been for several interviews and have not got them." (Ebony)*

*"I have been going for interviews; in a lot of cases, I'm the only Black person and I also feel that I was just there to make up the numbers (rather than) going there for my ability and skills." (Ebony)*

The participants' descriptions indicated the importance of structural issues. For instance, women who belonged to such groups had a lower probability of having access to the kind of experience or skills that would make it possible for them to obtain specific kinds of work possibilities.

*"I didn't have recent management experience because they excluded people from the interview process so, they knew that, and I knew that. I wasn't going to play that game" (Jvonte)*

*"My lack of experience had been a barrier as some advertisements stated that they wanted an experienced person to fulfil the criteria. I felt that I needed some of the necessary experience and needed to liaise with colleagues and to ensure regular contact with past colleagues who had moved on to new positions elsewhere" (Duchess)*

*"I heard there were a lot of jobs being advertised, at the time, in Aim*

*Higher and Widening Participation and wanted to apply. I applied to many but no joy because I needed a lot of experience” (Ashanti)*

The study's results reveal numerous obstacles that individuals encountered in both their personal and professional spheres, encompassing factors such as race, age, status, and limited access to opportunities. The interviewees placed strong emphasis on their identity as African and Caribbean women, highlighting their experiences of struggling with self-doubt, encountering discrimination, unfair treatment and ignorance from others, and facing unwarranted assumptions. The complexities and contradictions of discrimination and prejudice are exemplified by the inclusion of African and Caribbean women and negative discourse.

### ***Struggling with Self-Doubt***

The study demonstrates that African and Caribbean women encounter a substantial hindrance in the form of self-doubt, which impacts their personal and professional spheres. This self-doubt originates in institutional discrimination and the limited availability of possibilities, which are further accentuated by their identification as minority women. The data presented in the interviews vividly demonstrate the manifestation and impact of self-doubt on the lives of the individuals.

*“All my life I struggled with self-doubt; how much you have to do to be recognised. People are threatened by the level of my knowledge, and commitment, by what you do so, you become a threat.” (Jasmine).*

Jasmine's experience exemplifies the intricate connection between self-doubt, the persistent need for acknowledgement and the idea of being a potential threat. This highlights a more extensive societal problem in which minority women are frequently underestimated, and their ability is seen as threatening rather than worthy of praise.

*“It has taken me 51 years to recognise that I cannot keep fighting my battles in the same way. I had to think of another way of dealing with it.” (Raven)*

Raven's statement suggests a persistent battle with uncertainty about herself, making

it necessary for her to adjust her approaches to dealing with structural obstacles. Her experience highlights the long-lasting effect of self-doubt and the importance of resilience and adaptability when confronted with persistent obstacles.

*“Because I don’t have a mentor. I think a mentor would help me not to waste my blessing time and to be very focused on what it is I want to do and go for it.” (Jvonte).*

To overcome self-doubt, mentoring is crucial, as Jvonte's remarks confirm. Lacking guidance and support, she perceives ambiguity in her job and personal choices, underscoring the need for mentorship to offer guidance and enhance self-assurance.

*“I just worked hard and sometimes I went above and beyond to prove that I’m not that stereotype.” (Aliyah)*

Aliyah's endeavour to challenge stereotypes underscores the internal conflict of self-doubt and the burden of needing to surpass expectations. This highlights the psychological and emotional impact of cultural biases and the ongoing need to consistently affirm one's uniqueness and ability.

The data suggest that self-doubt among African and Caribbean women is deeply rooted in systemic barriers and societal prejudices. The psychological consequences of these obstacles manifest as a persistent internal struggle, affecting their self-assurance and career progression. Key factors contributing to self-doubt include African and Caribbean women often feeling that their efforts are not recognised, and that their competence is perceived as a threat, leading to a continuous battle with self-doubt. The need for long-term adaptation, as seen in Raven's experience, shows the prolonged nature of these challenges and the evolution of coping mechanisms over time. The absence of mentors exacerbates self-doubt, as mentorship provides crucial support and guidance; the lack of mentorship can leave individuals feeling directionless and uncertain about their decisions and potential. The internal battle to overcome stereotypes, as highlighted by Aliyah, shows how societal prejudices can

lead to an internalised sense of inadequacy, requiring individuals to go above and beyond to prove themselves.

The study's findings emphasise the need for targeted interventions to address self-doubt among African and Caribbean women. This includes implementing mentorship programmes that can provide the necessary support and guidance, helping women navigate their professional trajectories with greater confidence; creating nurturing environments that validate the identities and abilities of African and Caribbean women can help mitigate the impact of self-doubt and foster a sense of belonging and recognition. Addressing the broader systemic barriers that contribute to self-doubt is crucial; this involves promoting diversity in positions of authority and ensuring equitable access to opportunities. By tackling these issues, it is possible to cultivate self-assurance and perseverance among African and Caribbean women, enabling them to overcome the systemic obstacles that contribute to self-doubt.

***Encountering Discrimination:***

*“I blame society, not the individual I call it the unspoken discrimination. My line manager changed my contract and another member of staff, and an HR meeting was arranged/organised/planned without informing me. I was given a verbal warning without the college following proper procedures. I was told that I did not have the skills for the job. Others who were targeted had left. I refused to leave and deal with it.” (Raven)*

*“University, White-dominated, White people. It was challenging. I had to adjust quickly try to understand diversity and take the initiative to learn the ways of White people.” (Ade)*

As a result of institutionalised discrimination, Ade was compelled to adapt and learn rapidly to succeed at a predominately White university.

*“Being Black in a multicultural. Um, community and there was a little council estate where we lived, where the people of colour, brown experience aggression when offered that small estate, um, racism has been very prevalent in my life.” (Kyla)*

Kyla's encounter with hostility and racial prejudice in her community is a clear manifestation of discrimination.

*“I’m tired of, you know, I’ve applied for senior positions or three or four times, I’m tired of that, I’m tired of the racism, I’m tired of the excuses.” (Ebony)*

Ebony has been subjected to discrimination on numerous occasions, as evidenced by the instances in which she was rejected for senior positions and faced prejudice.

Raven's encounter with discrimination in the work environment serves to emphasise the systemic character of the obstacles she confronts. The absence of appropriate protocols and the alteration of her contract without her awareness are evident examples of institutional discrimination. This underscores the imperative for organisations to provide equal opportunity and openness in their procedures to avert such bias. Ade's encounter at a largely White university highlights the inherent and systemic character of racial inequality in educational establishments. This reinforces the necessity of implementing diversity and inclusion efforts to guarantee an accommodating and inclusive learning environment for every student.

Kyla's encounter with aggressiveness and prejudice in her community, and Ebony's experiences of being consistently marginalised for more senior positions, despite her skills, are unequivocal examples of discrimination. These instances highlight the systemic nature of racial discrimination and its effect on the progress of African and Caribbean women in their careers. They underscore the necessity for policies and practices that proactively oppose discrimination and enforce principles of fairness.

### ***Unfair Treatment and Ignorance from Others:***

*“I think you could be isolating and as I’ve said, sometimes your isolation isn’t just because you’re in a White environment; it’s some Black people*

*around you or in the same institutions who may be in lower positions.”*

(Sanaa)

*“People assumed I was learning to speak English. People’s ignorance. And there were personal struggles – not being treated fairly, no promotion, my colour. One of my supervisors said to me, if you know so much, you have to hold back.”* (Raven)

*“I think that when you’re Black in management, it’s a lonely place.”*

(Sanaa)

Sanaa's statement implies that she experiences a sense of isolation in her managerial position, possibly as a result of harsh treatment or lack of understanding from others in her organisation.

*“I’m tired of having to go into some classes where students and educators are all also asking me if I am qualified.”* (Ebony)

This remark suggests that Ebony is subjected to inquisitiveness and unjust treatment from individuals who doubt her credentials despite her seniority.

As an illustration of the prejudices that African and Caribbean women frequently encounter in their places of employment, the experiences of Sanaa and Raven accentuate the indifference and unfair treatment of others. These encounters potentially develop an unfriendly work atmosphere and exacerbate feelings of being excluded and marginalised. This highlights the importance of cultivating an inclusive work environment that appreciates diversity.

Sanaa's sense of alienation in her managerial position indicates inadequate support and understanding from her fellow employees. This highlights the necessity of providing educational opportunities for cultural competency in businesses to cultivate understanding and admiration in heterogeneous teams.

Aliyah's encounter with racial expectations and Ebony's experience of having her credentials doubted demonstrate the unjust treatment and lack of knowledge that African and Caribbean women frequently encounter. These encounters potentially establish an unpleasant work atmosphere and exacerbate feelings of being excluded

and marginalised. These findings emphasise the need to implement education programmes and awareness-raising campaigns to promote mutual respect and understanding in teams of mixed backgrounds.

***Facing Unwarranted Assumptions:***

*“People are threatened by the level of my knowledge, and commitment, by what you do so, you become a threat.” (Jasmine)*

*“You’re constantly being undermined because you know your stuff. The very thing that is your strength, is your weakness.” (Raven)*

*“If they gave me the job, because I was the strongest contender for the position in our team; if they gave me the job, they would leave.” (Jvonte)*

According to Jvonte, unfounded assumptions exist regarding her abilities and likely influence on the team dynamic. This sentiment is reflected in her statement.

*“So, somebody said to me, and they’re gonna expect you to because you know people have this perception of Black people that we’re all aggressive. I am a Black woman, but it doesn’t mean that I’m aggressive.” (Aliyah)*

Considering her gender and race, Aliyah's experience demonstrates that she encounters unjustified preconceptions about her behaviour.

The experiences of Jasmine and Raven serve to underscore the preconceived notions and prejudices that frequently confront women of African and Caribbean heritage. These baseless misconceptions could jeopardise their abilities and contributions and impede their career advancement. This emphasises the importance of challenging and combating these preconceived notions and promoting an environment that values and acknowledges each person. Jvonte's experience of being perceived as a potential threat because of her skills and dedication draws attention to the prevalent misconceptions and prejudices that African and Caribbean women frequently encounter. It is important to challenge these unjustified preconceptions and



acknowledge the worth and achievements of African and Caribbean women. Aliyah's experience of being viewed as violent due to her colour and gender is a blatant illustration of unjustified beliefs. These prejudices can diminish the abilities and accomplishments of African and Caribbean women and prevent their development in their careers. They emphasise the importance of rethinking these assumptions and promoting a culture that values and acknowledges individual abilities.

Ultimately, these experiences highlight the inherent and widespread character of the challenges that African and Caribbean women have in advancing their careers. They emphasise the importance of implementing structural modifications, both organisational and societal, to tackle these challenges and cultivate a setting in which African and Caribbean women can succeed. This includes the promotion of diversity and inclusion, a critical examination of preconceptions and biases, and the continuation of fair and transparent procedures in the working environment.

The results of the study indicate that assuming the role of a manager is accompanied by inherent stresses and further stresses are experienced by individuals of African and Caribbean heritage who hold managerial positions. The experience of being a female manager of African and Caribbean heritage presents additional challenges, including heightened competition and intra-group dynamics among other female managers.

This finding underscores the recurring trend of increased difficulties and pressures encountered by individuals who identify simultaneously with multiple marginalised groups, such as those who identify as African and Caribbean, and female, and who hold managerial positions. Some may encounter instances of discrimination and prejudice that stem from various facets of their identity, thereby rendering their professional trajectory more challenging.

*“I think that being a manager has some stresses, think that being a Black manager has additional stresses, being Black and female and, I don't know I think maybe, I don't know, probably would have been*

worse" (Sanaa)

*"I was given extra work to do, this led to increased expectations, I was told that people did not understand me because of my accent, and people complained. I call it unspoken discrimination. I was given a verbal warning without the College following proper procedures. I was told that I did not have the skills for the job" (Raven)*

Based on my observations, these participants have encountered numerous challenges. In addition to these, being a manager can be stressful, particularly for individuals belonging to minority groups, which may result in the manager feeling isolated and marginalised or having increased pressure to be successful. They stated that they received additional tasks, resulting in more demands on them. This situation can be daunting and may be perceived as unfair if other members of staff in comparable positions do not have an equivalent workload. Their accents caused a lack of understanding, which was frustrating and made them feel discriminated against, particularly if it impacted their job performance. Addressing the 'unspoken discrimination' can be challenging as it is sometimes subtle and not openly noticed by others. Being given a verbal warning without the College adhering to correct processes may constitute a breach of the employee's rights; receiving criticism that one lacks the necessary skills for a job is demoralising and unjust, particularly if the individual believes they are competent and suitable. These experiences can be difficult to manage in a professional environment. The inequality that continues throughout society, particularly within the workplace, has not prevented African and Caribbean women from achieving success in various professions. This has been achieved despite there being persistent disparity, at least in the US of America.

### **7.4.1 Enablers**

When analysing my participants' experiences, it is essential to consider the interconnectedness of race, gender and class. It is critical to investigate these variables as possible enablers even though they are frequently regarded as obstacles. None of the individuals specifically acknowledged race, gender or class as obstacles to their achievement. Upon closer scrutiny, it becomes evident that these variables certainly exerted a substantial influence on their lived experiences and outcomes. Particularly, for the middle-class individuals who had attained significant levels of achievement, their social class may have developed as an enabler.

Being middle-class frequently gives one access to opportunities and advantages that can help one succeed. These variables can include excellent educational opportunities, well-functioning social systems and individual characteristics, among other things. These resources potentially assisted our middle-class participants in overcoming obstacles and capitalising on favourable circumstances, thereby playing a role as enablers in their achievements.

#### ***Quality of education***

Ashanti's educational path has played a crucial role in advancing her career. Academically, she was well-established due to her choice to attend university. Her school choices may have been guided by her mother's position as a career adviser.

Ashanti's experience of studying abroad enabled her to expand her worldview and collaborate with marginalised demographics. This experience probably deepened her understanding of global concerns and improved her relationships with others. Ashanti's teaching experience enabled her to apply her knowledge practically while obtaining excellent professional experience. She found great significance in her involvement in an African and Caribbean association. Although initially faced with obstacles in securing employment, Ashanti showed determination and ultimately secured a position as a coordinator. Despite the reduced level of responsibility, this position offered her a well-organised setting to acquire knowledge and develop.

Amari's story is a powerful testament to the transformative power of education. Despite facing challenges as a mixed-race child in a predominantly White school, she excelled academically and professionally due to her determination, hard work, and the support of strong women who encouraged her.

Her journey highlights several key points about the quality of education as an enabler. Amari was fortunate to have a strong support system, both at home and at school. Her mother instilled in her the belief that she could achieve anything she set her mind to. At school, she was taught by strong women who encouraged her to pursue her dreams.

Amari had access to a good education, which equipped her with the necessary skills and qualifications to pursue her career goals. She achieved 'O' levels and two 'A' levels, and later earned a Certificate in Education with merit and a degree. Her story underscores the importance of continual learning and upgrading one's skills. She pursued further studies and later earned a master's degree and a certificate in management. She also retrained, demonstrating her commitment to lifelong learning. Education enabled her to take on leadership roles in FE colleges, where she was able to make a significant impact. She became the principal of an FE college and used her position to advocate for diversity, equality and widening participation in education.

Despite facing setbacks and discrimination, Amari remained resilient and determined. She continued to apply for leadership positions and did not let rejections deter her from her path. In conclusion, Amari's story illustrates how good quality education can serve as a powerful enabler, providing people with the skills, qualifications, and opportunities they need to succeed and make a difference in their communities. It also highlights the importance of resilience, a strong support system and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Sanaa's narrative is an interesting demonstration of how education can act as an enabler, regardless of being confronted with challenges. The trajectory of her progress through education and employment underscores certain important aspects. Sanaa's professional trajectory was unconventional; she began her career as a teacher in Africa and later transitioned into a managerial role after gaining extensive experience in

education. In pursuit of her master's and doctoral degrees, she returned to the teaching profession due to its flexibility. Her adaptability enabled her to effectively deal with a range of problems and opportunities throughout her career.

Her narrative highlights the significance of continuous education throughout one's life. Although she had challenges in obtaining a position as a lecturer, she persevered in her academic pursuits and ultimately achieved a PhD. Despite the challenges and complexities of the job, she persevered as a manager, continually improving her knowledge and skills. Throughout her work, she encountered a multitude of problems, such as prejudice and stress in her job-sharing position. Nevertheless, she maintained her resilience and determination, exploiting these situations as opportunities for personal development.

Sanaa's professional experience was significantly affected by her background as a bilingual woman of African heritage. As an African manager, she encountered additional pressures and had to carefully deal with complicated relationships with students and tutors from diverse countries. Nevertheless, she successfully cultivated amicable relationships and used her experiences to shape her managerial style. Notwithstanding the obstacles she encountered, Sanaa persevered in her dedication to her work in education. She derived contentment from her role as an educator and was regarded as an exemplary teacher. As a manager, she assumed the duty of instructing other instructors, so showcasing her dedication to education.

Ultimately, Sanaa's narrative demonstrates how receiving a high standard of education, along with the ability to bounce back from adversity, adjust to new circumstances and maintain a dedication to continuous learning, may act as a potent catalyst, enabling individuals to successfully overcome obstacles, take advantage of circumstances and have a positive impact on their communities. Furthermore, it emphasises the additional complexities of the educational and professional endeavours of people of different cultures.

### ***Support Systems***

This inquiry delves into the significance of supportive networks, including mentors, family members and peers in supporting the accomplishments of the participants.

Ashanti's experience serves as evidence of the effect of nurturing connections and individual commitment. Several crucial factors have contributed to her success; Ashanti's job choices were likely influenced significantly by her mother, who works as a career adviser. Despite her perceived lack of expertise, her family motivated her to pursue job opportunities.

Ashanti was encouraged by the Deputy Director, who had a BME background, to seek jobs and enhance her skills. The mentoring, in conjunction with backing from the senior management team, presented her with prospects for continued career development. Ashanti's acquaintances also encouraged her to seek employment, instilling in her the self-assurance to actively pursue various possibilities. Ashanti's employer offered training opportunities and actively recommended her for various positions. This assistance enabled her rapid progress to a senior position within a relatively short period. Ashanti has shown unwavering perseverance and dedication despite obstacles. She actively pursued possibilities, submitted employment applications, and assumed responsibilities, which ultimately resulted in her recognition and achievement. She was provided with opportunities for personal and professional development, such as speaking at public events and assuming managerial roles. These events promoted the development of her self-assurance and abilities. Ashanti's professional growth was likely positively influenced by working in an organisation run by individuals from African and Caribbean backgrounds and by observing women from the BME groups in managerial roles. Ultimately, Ashanti's achievements can be ascribed to a blend of individual dedication, nurturing connections and conducive surroundings. Her narrative serves as a source of motivation for individuals who are negotiating their own professional trajectories.

Amari's journey to success is a powerful story of resilience, determination and the importance of supportive relationships. Amari's mother played a crucial role in her life;

she instilled in Amari the belief that she could achieve anything she set her mind to. This belief likely served as a strong foundation for Amari's career.

Throughout her career, Amari had the support of various mentors. These included the strong women who taught her at school, the leaders in the FE colleges where she worked, and the members of the Network for Black Professionals and the BLI. Amari's colleagues and friends provided her with a network of support, helping her navigate challenges and seize opportunities.

The FE colleges where Amari worked provided her with opportunities for growth and development. They recognised her potential and gave her the opportunity to take on leadership roles. Despite facing obstacles and setbacks, Amari remained resilient. She pursued her interests, sought out opportunities for learning and growth, and continually pushed herself to achieve more. She had opportunities to teach in a sixth form, to lead in various colleges and to work on diversity, equality, and widening participation in education. Amari's hard work and dedication were recognised with a CBE for her services to further education, race and gender equality, and she was awarded a Doctor of Law. In conclusion, Amari's success can be attributed to a combination of personal resilience, supportive relationships and an enabling environment. Her story serves as an inspiration for others navigating their career paths.

Sanaa embarked on an arguably eventful journey. Starting with her early experience as a teacher in Africa, she has encountered various problems and opportunities during her career, also linked to support systems leading to her subsequent transfer into management upon returning to England.

Her ability to speak two languages fluently has proven to be a valuable advantage in her teaching profession, and it is evident that she has had a considerable influence at the private educational institutions where she has worked. Despite the inherent tensions and complications, her transition into a managerial position seems to have provided her with an opportunity for personal development and the acquisition of new skills. The supportive ties, including with mentors, family and friends, appear to have

played an important part in her journey. The individual who made an investment in her and facilitated her participation in a course appears to have exerted a substantial career influence. Nevertheless, she has encountered obstacles on both race and gender in her position as a manager. Successfully moving through these challenges, particularly in a diverse and multilingual setting, necessitates fortitude and adaptability. Her ability to maintain positive relationships with others despite these hurdles is impressive. Her narrative serves as a demonstration of the power of persistence, flexibility and of nurturing connections in attaining achievement. Undoubtedly, she has a promising future in her present college, striving for excellence.

### ***Personal Attributes***

Enabling factors can include personal qualities such as resilience, determination and adaptability. Ashanti's journey exemplifies how these personal qualities can contribute to success in one's career. Her resilience is apparent in her adept navigation of diverse jobs and challenges. Having initially worked as a teacher and later transferring into a managerial role, she encountered several challenges along the way, but remained determined and persevered. Despite facing rejection, she persevered in applying for opportunities, demonstrating her unwavering ambition to succeed. Her strong commitment is evident as she actively seeks possibilities that closely correspond with her optimism and principles.

She took advantage of the opportunity for education, exerted considerable effort in volunteering despite the demanding workload and persistently pursued job applications until she secured a position as a coordinator. Her flexibility is evidenced by her capacity to succeed in diverse roles and circumstances. She demonstrated exceptional performance in a coordinator capacity, assumed responsibility to speak in public and temporarily assumed a managerial function to fill in for another's absence. Furthermore, she successfully adjusted to shifts in management and the evolving dynamics within her professional environment. Her journey was significantly influenced by the support she received from her family, peers and colleagues, which encouraged her growth and skills development.



Amari's story is a compelling illustration of how character traits like resiliency, tenacity and flexibility may support one's professional goals. Overcoming a variety of obstacles demonstrates her resilience. Despite being the sole African or Caribbean pupil in her school, she demonstrated exceptional academic performance and subsequently pursued her passion for teaching. Despite experiencing setbacks, such as being denied the middle management position, she remained determined and persevered in her pursuit of achievement.

Her persistence is seen in her pursuit of advanced education and positions of leadership. She obtained a master's degree, a certificate in management and a doctorate. She sought leadership roles in FE colleges and eventually became the principal of an FE college. She ensured that she was equipped with certifications, demonstrating her strong commitment to achieving success. Her versatility is evidenced by her capacity to perform well in diverse roles and circumstances, transitioning from teaching in a sixth form to assuming the role of a principal, and from working in human resources to establishing an academy. Furthermore, she successfully adjusted to modifications in her personal life, such as relocating to another country. In addition, the assistance provided by her mother, mentors and networking played a vital role in her path. Their support and the opportunities they offered encouraged her development on a professional and personal level, enabling her to enhance and refine her abilities.

Sanaa's qualities have had a substantial impact on the progress of her career. Resilience, determination and adaptability are potent catalysts that can assist individuals in overcoming obstacles and achieving their objectives. Sanaa's resilience in the face of the pressure of a job share and in overseeing a heterogeneous workforce enabled her to thrive in her position and establish a reputation. Her pursuit of a doctorate and choice to solidify her abilities are both indicative of her determination. Throughout her professional trajectory, she has successfully adjusted to several positions and settings, ranging from teaching in Africa to overseeing a department in FE. Her capacity to learn and develop in these diverse environments is evidence of her

flexibility. These qualities not only allow her to overcome difficulties but also to create new possibilities for personal development and achievement.

Ashanti, Amari and Sanaa's narratives are empowering. They demonstrate that by exhibiting resilience, determination and adaptability, individuals may effectively manage obstacles and capitalise on advantageous circumstances to achieve in their professional endeavours. Nevertheless, it is crucial to acknowledge that the experiences of individuals are complex and diverse. The interrelationships of race, gender, and class can emerge in various ways, shaping individuals' experiences in distinct and subtle patterns. Hence, although my research indicates that social status can facilitate certain opportunities, it is important to proceed with caution in extrapolating these findings to the entire population. To summarise, my research emphasises the significance of the interconnectedness of race, gender and class when understanding the experiences and achievements of individuals. Although these variables may present difficulties, they can also operate as enablers, emphasising the complexity and variety of interactions between individuals.

#### **7.4.2 Barriers**

##### ***Societal expectations and stereotypes***

The career choices of African and Caribbean women can be greatly impacted by societal norms and preconceptions. An example of this is the perception that women are less competent in leadership positions, which can result in a prejudicial work atmosphere, impeding the progress of African and Caribbean women to managerial roles. Moreover, racial preconceptions can exacerbate these difficulties. Societal norms and preconceived notions of race, gender and social status may present difficulties. An example that could potentially be applied in this context is Jasmine's account of her experience as an African and Caribbean woman and the obstacles she encountered. Raven's experience of being marginalised due to her professional background can also be included. The existence of preconceptions may result in a

difficult and demanding work environment for BWIL positions. For example, individuals may face societal pressures to conform to specific behavioural norms or encounter prejudices that challenge their aptitude or capacity for leadership. My research focuses on the societal norms and preconceived notions that African and Caribbean women encounter, specifically in their involvement in education and leadership positions. The combination of personal experiences and the available research emphasise the difficulties faced by these women as a result of intersectional invisibility and gendered racism. The experiences of my participants, including Jasmine and Raven, exemplify the pragmatic consequences of these societal norms and preconceived notions. Their narratives highlight the significance of recognising and resolving these difficulties to establish workplaces that are more inclusive and equal.

The literature review focuses on significant studies on the subject matter, including the contributions of Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008), Harris and Leonardo (2018) and Ramdeo (2023). These studies offer valuable perspectives on the experiences of African and Caribbean women educators and the structural obstacles they encounter. My research also highlights the significance of intersectionality as a theoretical framework for understanding these experiences. According to Crenshaw (1989) and Collins (1991), intersectionality offers a perspective that helps us understand how racism, class, gender and sexuality interact and influence the experiences of these women in a complex manner. Mirza's (1997) research highlights the ability of African and Caribbean women to effectively deal with these problems, demonstrating their strength and independence. Notwithstanding the obstacles they encounter, these women persist in making valuable contributions to societal transformation and challenging conventional paradigms. In summary, my study offers a comprehensive and detailed examination of the societal norms and preconceived notions that African and Caribbean women encounter in the realms of education and leadership positions. It emphasises the importance of recognising and resolving these matters to foster more fairness and inclusivity.

### ***Systematic inequalities***

Prominent obstacles manifest as systemic inequities in domains such as education and employment. For instance, African and Caribbean women may encounter disparities in their ability to obtain high-quality education or secure employment prospects as a result of systemic racism. This can prevent their career growth and limit their opportunities for success in FE. Destiny's experience of non-recognition in her managerial position and the absence of managerial assistance can serve as an example of systemic disparities in the working environment. Systemic inequalities are present in several domains, such as work and education. These inequities can be substantial obstacles for African and Caribbean women, limiting their ability to get good educational opportunities, job prospects and professional advancement. Structural inequities may arise from unfair practices or policies. By examining institutional inequalities, an insight may be gained into the inherent inequities that African and Caribbean women encounter in education and employment.

The research that I have examined, which includes publications by Pennant (2019), Shuaibe-Peters (2020), Hite (2004), Bell and Nkomo (2001) and other authors, offers valuable perspectives on the experiences of African and Caribbean women in leadership roles. These studies emphasise the structural obstacles that these women encounter, such as institutional racism, lack of racial awareness and workplace bias. The discomfort experienced by White individuals while engaging in discussions on race, as explored by Marshburn and Knowles (2017), Goff et al. (2008) and other researchers, offers a thought-provoking insight into the dynamics of race-related conversations in professional settings. Additionally, it demonstrates the impact of these structural inequities on the professional paths of African and Caribbean women, connecting to wider concepts of institutional discrimination, inequity and discrepancies in education and economy, and allowing for the understanding of my participants' experiences within a broader societal and structural context.

### ***Lack of opportunities***

The absence of opportunities may undermine the achievement of African and Caribbean women in FE. This may be attributed to an insufficient presence of African and Caribbean women in positions of leadership, leading to a shortage of inspirational mentors and guides for women from these backgrounds in the sector. Furthermore, institutional policies or practices may unintentionally restrict opportunities for women from African and Caribbean backgrounds. This obstacle can be illustrated by Jasmine's experience of being overlooked and Ebony's experience of failing to secure employment due to illogical reasoning, by being excluded from the interview process.

The term 'lack of opportunities' refers to the limited opportunities for professional development and progress that African and Caribbean women may encounter in their professional lives. This may be attributed to an insufficient presence of African and Caribbean women in positions of leadership, leading to a rareness of representative figures and mentors for women from these backgrounds in the profession. Further, it could be attributed to social norms or practices that unintentionally restrict opportunities for women of African and Caribbean descent. The experiences of Jasmine and Ebony exemplify this dearth of opportunities.

The research that I have examined, which includes studies by Edson (1987), Jean-Marie (2006), Ortiz (1982), Santamaría and Santamaría (2012) and other authors, offers valuable perspectives on the experiences of African and Caribbean women in leadership roles. The research studies emphasise the fundamental barriers that these women encounter, such as the limited availability of opportunities for professional growth and guidance, and the predicament of being confined to positions that are not associated with managerial duties. The concept of tokenism, as explored by Niemann (2016) and Siocom (2022), offers a thought-provoking view of the dynamics of diversity and inclusion in the work environment. The relatively few opportunities on the professional journeys of African and Caribbean women led to wider concepts of representation and inclusivity in positions of leadership. This places my participants' experiences within a broader societal and structural context.

In its entirety, my research offers a comprehensive and intricate examination of the dearth of prospects available to women of African and Caribbean heritage in the realms of education and management. It emphasises the importance of recognising and resolving these matters to foster increased fairness and inclusivity. It also offers a comprehensive and detailed examination of the structural disparities that African and Caribbean women encounter in the realms of education and leadership positions. Enablers and barriers provide a more thorough explanation of the intricate relationship that exists between race, gender and socioeconomic status in affecting participants' experiences and results, emphasising the diversity and complexity of individual experiences.

To summarise, this chapter explains the complex and varied difficulties encountered by African and Caribbean women in FE institutions. It offers a thorough understanding of the obstacles to their professional progress by examining their unique narratives through the lenses of CRT and feminist theory frameworks. The results highlight how important are diversity, mentorship, and structural change for African and Caribbean women in leadership positions to promote their professional development.

## **7.5 Discussion of findings**

The findings that were uncovered by African and Caribbean women have brought to light the challenging journey that is required to be taken to attain senior management positions in FE. These revelations shed light on the occurrences that take place along this path. According to the research, the trajectory that African and Caribbean women follow to advance their careers in the FE sector is motivated by excitement in addition to a great number of other factors.

Many of the participants had the impression that the decision to embark on a professional journey in FE was the result of an inevitable progression in their lives that led them to feel compelled to do so. These women were driven to pursue careers in FE by a broad variety of different motivations; nonetheless, these factors were all intricately tied to the work histories of their mothers, who played a vital part in the choices that these women made regarding their professional futures. The women's

mothers had a significant impact on the decisions that these women made regarding their professional futures. Although the opinions of fathers were more variable and were addressed less often, nearly all mothers expressed their support for their daughter's education. The research showed that mothers had a considerable influence on their daughters' decisions about their careers, and participants frequently brought up the subject of their mothers.

To conclude, the findings of my study have provided insight into the obstacles faced by African and Caribbean women in achieving senior management positions, including issues related to their work environment, visibility, lack of experience, and impediments encountered in FE. Furthermore, the absence of mentors in the realm of FE has been identified as a significant factor that impacts these women's professional advancement.

This study showed that CRT and Black Feminist Theory can be applied to the discourse related to African and Caribbean women occupying managerial positions to shed light on and define the systemic barriers and challenges they face within the professional sphere. The issues discussed in this context are a result of the complex interplay between racial and gender-based discrimination, as highlighted by Cheeks (2018). Cheeks (2018) argues that African and Caribbean women who attain senior positions require specialist assistance that recognises their distinct experiences as persons originating from these backgrounds. To cultivate a sense of camaraderie and belonging, it is imperative to ensure that individuals, even while functioning as the lone member of their team, are cognisant of the fact that they are not genuinely solitary. BFT is an important resource to help people to increase their understanding of how societal norms and expectations surrounding race and gender, together with institutional practices and regulations that perpetuate discriminatory behaviours, contribute to these difficulties. To foster greater inclusivity and fairness within their workplaces, FE institutions should enhance their understanding of the challenges encountered by African and Caribbean women in leadership positions. This can be achieved through a comprehensive analysis of frameworks that accurately capture the experiences and realities of these women.

The examination of the experiences of African and Caribbean women in their pursuit of senior positions within FE institutions provides compelling evidence that supports the idea that more opportunities for managerial advancement are required within this demographic. The discourse pertains to the dissemination of practical knowledge regarding the cultural practices and customs of individuals among the general populace. The focus of this study was on the advancement of women in senior positions, particularly within the context of FE colleges. Nawrockyi et al. (2014) emphasise the importance of creating a diverse and inclusive workforce in these institutions. Additionally, this study has explored the specific contributions that African and Caribbean women in senior positions bring to FE institutions. The advantage of inclusivity is evident in the context of HE, as it has a significant influence on factors such as motivation, loyalty, performance, and the well-being of urban populations. The participants have expressed the need for increased openness and fairness within the realm of FE.

*“There should be more openness, honesty, and planning at a senior level. Most colleges are not realistic in their goals and end up incompetent, which leads to staff suffering from a lack of realism. The colleges are not autonomous and as such are answerable to a variety of agencies many of which are under government control” (Duchess)*

*“I believe that networking both internally and externally is important and that there are benefits once you are in a position of influence and making change happen and sharing” (Jvonte)*

My research indicates that women in leadership positions in FE experience marginalisation and a lack of complete and lasting power. This trend persists notwithstanding their occupation of senior jobs. The trend can be attributed to various factors, a few of which have been previously highlighted, including the convergence of race and gender, as well as the presence of gender-based racism. These women often encounter challenges from their White colleagues that are aimed at undermining their positions of power. To endure their state of isolation and to maintain their positions, African and Caribbean women in senior positions must cultivate strategies of



resistance. Further data would be required from participants to pursue this line and to represent this trend accurately. A notable proportion of African and Caribbean women occupying senior positions have demonstrated resilience, adaptability, and unwavering determination. These women depend on their social networks and personal agency to thrive and succeed in their respective positions.

However, the research has highlighted some variables that have provided support for BME communities in the absence of role models. For instance, McKenley and Gordon (2002) argue that mentoring and family and friends have been instrumental in fostering motivation within BME communities. Additionally, Ogunbawo (2012) suggests that leaders of BME leadership development programmes serve as role models. Furthermore, Wild (1994, p.92) highlights the significance of partners and reliable childcare in supporting BME individuals. Lastly, Ogunbawo (2012) states that professional networks such as the Network for Black Managers (now known as the Network for Black Professionals, 1991) are another valuable resource for BME individuals. However, although these communities provide support and encouragement within their respective racial groups (Davidson, 1997; Johnson-Bailey and Cervero, 2004), the Commission for Black Staff in FE (2002) presents evidence suggesting that support from White senior managers has a greater impact on empowerment when it is built on trust and responsibility. According to Davidson (1997), instances in which African and Caribbean women have achieved success in their professional roles as leaders, while consciously avoiding assimilation and maintaining their visibility, have often resulted in the development of distinct leadership abilities that set them apart from their peers (p.87).

Research (Rhodes, 2012; Rhodes and Brundrett, 2012) has emphasised the significance of self-belief as a determinant in management and progression towards leadership. I believe that individuals possess the freedom to pursue any desired course of action and assume any desired identity. The only barrier preventing African and Caribbean women from taking action is their lack of confidence in their abilities. The emphasis here is on their passion and commitment to pursue their career progression. To tackle the issue of underrepresentation of African and Caribbean women, it appears that the presence of 'gatekeepers' (a term introduced and elaborated upon by Lewin in 1943,

within the framework of gatekeeping theory) may impede the advancement and professional growth of this marginalised group. These gatekeepers are perceived to be a means of social control, operating as a mechanism through which information is filtered and selectively disseminated. However, published literature has highlighted certain variables that have provided support to the BME communities in the absence of role models. For instance, BME communities have found that mentoring can effectively foster motivation (McKenley & Gordon, 2002). Additionally, leaders of BME leadership development programmes serve as role models (Ogunbawo, 2012). Individuals within these communities rely on various sources of support, including partners and dependable childcare (Wild, 1994, p.92), as well as family and friends (McKenley & Gordon, 2002). Moreover, groups such as the Network for Black Professionals (Ogunbawo, 2012) provide support and encouragement, although specifically to individuals of their respective racial backgrounds (Davidson, 1997; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2004).

A significant proportion of African and Caribbean women have attained positions of leadership and exerted influence. They have overcome the challenges they have encountered that are caused by the intersectionality of race and gender. For this study, interviews were conducted with 13 women of African and Caribbean heritage to gain a deeper understanding of the common barriers they encounter in their chosen fields of employment. These interviews shed light on the various coping mechanisms employed by these women to navigate these challenges, as well as the potential impact of these strategies on their future career prospects. If this assumption is accurate, it implies that the labour market in the UK is witnessing a decline in the numbers of African and Caribbean women who possess advanced skills and qualifications and can use them to their full potential. This phenomenon was observed among some participants in my study, who had experienced setbacks that had deterred them from pursuing senior positions. The participants in my research did not indicate the relative significance of having a mentor who shared their race and gender compared with having a mentor who could guide their professional trajectory. The issues have been illuminated, and the outcomes of my research lend support to the claims of the participants, who reported encountering challenges and a dearth of

available mentors to guide them. A limited number of participants had enjoyed the opportunity of engaging with a mentor or knew of a suitable mentor's existence.

## **7.6 Limitations**

The findings of this study are not transferable to all women or organisations, nor were they intended to target those populations. The design of the study did not take into consideration any cultural or geographical constraints; initiatives such as this one give a view of the world at a particular time and location, within the context of a particular culture.

The qualitative research methodology is distinguished from other methods by the presence of several constraints that are intrinsic to the method. Instead of acquiring a superficial knowledge of activities by using a single method, qualitative research designs strive to study events thoroughly by utilising a variety of research approaches. This contrasts with quantitative research designs, which aim to obtain a shallow understanding of activities by using just one method. In contrast to most quantitative studies, qualitative research typically employs smaller sample sizes, which are clustered in a smaller number of geographical locations and is carried out over longer periods. This reasoning is since qualitative studies are more likely to be exploratory. However, due to the broad breadth of the data acquired and the number of approaches chosen, it may be necessary to implement a targeted strategy to guarantee that a project will not go over its allotted budget or that it will not exceed the time constraints that have been established. To successfully collect qualitative data at the desired level of depth, a qualitative researcher needs to have an in-depth grasp of the limitations connected with the framework, structure, and organisation that they have decided to use. This comprehension is essential because it enables the researcher to make certain that the procedure of collecting qualitative data stays within the boundaries of what is appropriate and what is attainable. This is a critical aspect of the research process.

As a result of my studies, I had to think about the ethical repercussions of my decisions. Considering the relationships between the researcher and the participants, I was required to take into consideration a variety of critical ethical problems, including confidentiality, participant consent, data representation, the voices of the participants, and the dissemination of the findings. According to Neuenschwander (2009), the release of agreements concerning ownership of the interviews and copyright, the Freedom of Information Act, privacy and defamation, and the ramifications of copyright and defamation were crucial.

When narrative researchers publish or extrapolate from participants' narratives over an extended period, they expose themselves to the possibility of certain risks. Narrators can have feelings of vulnerability or exposure due to the nature of narrative work. When it comes time for researchers to discuss or publish their findings, Lieblich (quoted in Clandinin and Murphy, 2007) recommends that narrators be contacted once again and asked for permission to utilise their narratives. According to Josselson (2007a), narrative research enables the investigation of "people's lives as lived, people whose life experience has been lost in the search for central tendencies" (p.8). Josselson makes this argument in his article.

### ***Reflections on my PhD journey***

Engaging in this activity is somewhat gratifying now that I am at the end of my journey.

Reflecting on successes –

**Maintaining a record:** To track the development of the project as it was being worked on during the journey, a log of my progress was kept. This was done to make the decision-making processes more transparent and to bring attention to crucial factors that went beyond the bounds of the research's scope. This made it possible for me to reflect on both my intellectual and personal growth, which ultimately helped me to have more understanding of the magnitude of my advancement.

**Periods of Reflection:** It had become essential for me to set aside some time during my packed agenda to think about formulating and creating ideas, as well as to reflect so that I could find connections between events that had occurred over a period. Throughout my PhD studies, I made it a practice to on a weekly basis, and I never deviated from that schedule, unless there were other commitments. It helped gain an understanding of how to arrange the chapters. Considering this, it was essential for me to maintain records of the reading materials and to make pertinent judgments or observations in support of the subject matter of my research. A significant part of this approach consisted of engaging in ongoing introspection about my place in the context of my research activities. At each stage of my PhD studies, it was critical to recognise that I had a significant role in the research process through my active participation.

**Keeping and maintaining a Journal:** It was beneficial but tough since it enabled me to examine my work in a systematic manner, which included having regular interactions with my colleagues, gaining knowledge relating to research procedures, and being able to reflect.

**Academic reflective writing:** It was vital to have a consistent viewpoint or method of generating thinking and making justifications. I was required to learn how to make connections between my personal experiences or apply them to real life and material that was already available, whether it be in theory or practice.

**Process of reflection:** The process of reflection was significant since it required extracting useful information from these experiences and, ultimately, applying it to guide the next step in the process. When I think about my doctoral journey, there are a few things that come to mind. If I had to start this PhD research over again, I would address how to manage my time effectively while having a full-time career. Working full-time while also pursuing my education presented me with a few challenges, including the need to hone my organisational abilities and locate the time and space necessary to conduct research, read, collect data, evaluate, and compose.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

### **8.0 Introduction**

This final chapter is a summary of the main points of the research. Four areas are covered: a reflection on the research questions, the implications and significance of the findings for African and Caribbean women in senior positions, their choice of career path, achieving senior positions in FE, and challenges that African and Caribbean women face in senior management. It also addresses the limitations of the research and its contributions to knowledge.

### **8.1 Reflection: the investigation**

#### **8.1.1 What I wanted to achieve**

The investigation originated from a need to gain a better understanding of the personal and professional perceptions that African and Caribbean women had regarding their journey towards senior positions in FE. African and Caribbean women have faced challenges and barriers throughout their journey to senior positions and they are revealed in the women's descriptions of their complex lived experiences, their narrations of their professional journeys, the factors that influenced their chosen career paths, and their achievements of senior positions. My interest in African and Caribbean women in FE led to my choice of research topic.

After a preliminary investigation of the subject of research, I formulated four research questions to examine the full scope of the study. These questions enabled an in-depth understanding of the journeys of these women towards senior positions in FE: the factors that influenced their choice of career path, the factors that enabled them to gain senior positions, and those that stood in the way.

Before commencing the research, I reviewed the existing literature. The published

literature was limited, outdated, or had not paid attention to this area; thus, the topic of my research was an opportunity to make a valuable contribution to knowledge and to change the practice within FE institutions.

I drew from the work of academics such as Shain (2000), Collins (2002), Gunter (2006), Mackay and Etienne (2006) and Curtis (2017). Mackay and Etienne (2006) had investigated the experiences, challenges, and barriers that African and Caribbean women encountered while progressing their professional careers in FE. I developed a clear understanding of the theories and the complex lives of African and Caribbean women. I was presented with an opportunity to develop their stance on their journey to senior management in FE. I aimed to apply theories to the under-researched topic of African and Caribbean women in senior positions.

Equipped with a better understanding of decision-making models, curriculum and related leadership and management influences, I created an analytical framework based on BFT (Collins, 2000) and CRT (Gunter, 2006). The use of the framework enabled the analysis of the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women in senior positions in FE.

Informed by the literature review and the design of an appropriate theoretical framework, I decided on the research questions. I determined that African and Caribbean women in senior positions in FE would be the most suitable group from whom to collect the data, and I decided to do this through interviews.

The BNIM and semi-structured interviews were used to gather the information. The participants willingly shared their experiences and knowledge, so I could use the participants' responses and data to answer the research questions. To validate the information, I carried out a thematic analysis of patterns that were observed in the participants' narratives regarding the factors that influenced their career trajectories and attainment of senior positions. I coded the most significant patterns and themes and analysed the data carefully, to identify recurring patterns or themes, subjects, concepts, and meaning patterns in the core themes.

## 8.2 Summary of the findings regarding the research questions

Clear interconnected themes emerged that indicated factors that were common to all African and Caribbean women as they strove to enter senior management in FE.

The empirical part of the research investigation discussed the emergent themes and sub-themes. Here, I present a summary in relation to the research questions (RQs).

As a reminder, RQ2 was: what factors influence African and Caribbean women to embark on their chosen career paths? The factors are highlighted in italics.

Gender, socioeconomic status, parental occupation and education, and parental expectations of African and Caribbean women were found to influence *career aspirations*. In relation to the participants' challenges, they argued that their experiences were not the same as those of their White counterparts. This was evident in the early stages of their *school experiences*. Irrespective of the prevailing circumstances, parents prioritised the *academic achievements* of their children to guarantee their future educational success.

The individuals contended that their less-than-favourable experiences throughout their school years led them to ascribe a significant portion of their present *identity* to the educational system in the UK.

The third research question (RQ3) was designed to analyse the enabling factors for African and Caribbean women in their push to achieve senior positions in FE in the UK. The interconnecting themes and sub-themes shaped how and why African and Caribbean women in senior roles used their abilities to develop their careers. I argue that the evidence gained from the findings and analysis of the themes that emerged from the study emphasise the importance of management and women's desire to take advantage of opportunities and invest to achieve their objectives. These features characterise African and Caribbean women in FE.

The fourth research question (RQ4) analysed various challenges that African and Caribbean women face in senior management positions within the context of FE. The evidence from these interviews is that many African and Caribbean in leadership positions in FE experience marginalisation and a lack of complete and lasting power.



These women often encounter challenges from their White colleagues and are undermined in their positions.

### **8.3 Reflection on the findings**

In this section, I reflect on the new knowledge that was gained from the findings, as discussed through each theme. It contains an evaluation of the complexity of the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women in senior positions in FE.

#### **8.3.1 Implications of the findings for African and Caribbean women in senior positions**

The African and Caribbean women in this study who occupied senior positions in FE provided insights into their backgrounds through their narratives to improve their understanding of their career trajectories. The discourse regarding the collective experiences of these women shows disparities from other challenges that are manifested within the FE sector. The absence of diversity, inclusivity and representation, exclusion, and a lack of recognition poses challenges that are associated with African and Caribbean women belonging to groups that are underrepresented within the professional environment.

These issues are connected, and therefore they must inform the practices of CEOs, principals, and directors of institutions. Leaders must constantly review these issues to improve diversity and inclusivity across the senior FE workforce. The analysis in this research has revealed injustices that occur at the senior level within FE institutions.

The study indicates that unfair treatment throughout FE institutions impacts African and Caribbean women and affects their progression towards senior positions. The absence of role models in FE has led leaders of BME leadership development programmes to serve as such models because they can provide support and encouragement from the point of view of someone with the same racial background. Also, at senior and managerial levels, a lack of support and promotion opportunities, along with discrimination and underrepresentation, has hindered progression and contributed to the choice made by many African and Caribbean women to leave FE.

The consequence of the unfair treatment of African and Caribbean women is impairment of society and the economy; their lack of progression leads to a lack of diversity in leadership roles and loss of economic productivity, which reinforces stereotypes, racism and invisibility of African and Caribbean women. These issues could impact their aspirations and self-image.

### **8.3.2. The complex challenges that African and Caribbean women face in positions of leadership in Further Education**

FE in the UK is an economic driving force as it offers a second chance back into education and learning for those who have left mainstream education with few qualifications. Also, it offers different levels of management and teaching to those in senior positions within it. Yet while it offers routes into FE or HE particularly to those in marginalised groups, African and Caribbean women who are employed in it face discrimination (Fino, 2019) and huge challenges (UCU Report, 2015). The consequences of failure to deal with these challenges are concerning for those occupying senior leadership and managerial roles, most particularly African and Caribbean women in senior positions. A review by McGregor-Smith (2016) found worryingly low numbers of African and Caribbean women holding managerial positions (one in 16 of all such positions were held by members of this group). Data produced by the Black FE leadership group for the Association of Colleges (Weale, 2020) indicated that between 12 and 14 FE colleges were led by principals with BAME backgrounds, which is an alarmingly low figure.

A report by *The Guardian* (2017) found that the number of African and Caribbean, Asian, and other minority ethnic women taking up leadership positions had declined. This affected their job promotion prospects, career progression and professional decision-making. I also found in my research the influence that their identities had on how they perceived their positions within FE institutions.

African and Caribbean women in senior positions need to collaborate with others who understand their needs in senior roles. Many are not offered training opportunities or support to transition from roles as individual contributors to the assumption of

leadership roles. This leads to a lack of promotion opportunities, which compounds unfair treatment and discrimination based on the racial background that they face in FE institutions. These findings contributed to participants' perspectives on their lived experiences of being in senior positions in FE. The rationale for collaboration in leadership is important, especially for African and Caribbean people; for example, it increases inclusivity and collaboration among senior leadership roles in the workplace. It encourages and supports staff to move towards career progression and success.

Irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, staff should have equal access to roles and equal outcomes throughout their career journey. FE institutions that ensure equality of opportunities for career progression and participation of African and Caribbean women, and of other minority groups, will benefit as they address the decline in the numbers of skilled staff and improve performance both for these marginalised groups and all FE institutions in the long run.

African and Caribbean women can help to develop better relationships and can strengthen the connection of hierarchy between employees and managers. Having a diverse team from different backgrounds to solve problems empowers colleagues to use their expertise, skills, and the experiences they bring to the organisation through teamwork. Collaboration helps to build relationships, and the sense of being part of a team and sharing ideas reduces the loneliness that can occur in a senior role. For African and Caribbean women, the inclusivity of diverse teams within the work environment develops positive and effective relationships.

The UK educational climate emphasises achievements and career opportunities. Senior leaders and managers are expected to demonstrate their commitment to reward such achievements in terms of provisions within this demographic. To achieve this, FE institutions must address some important systems.

Firstly, institutions need fair and transparent processes and systems of recruitment and promotion. FE institutions provide continuous professional development, staff development training, and other training to improve attendees' employability skills and career prospects as set by the LSIS and explained in a report named the London Local Skills Improvement Plan (2023). The report was funded by the Department for

Education to develop a plan among employers, educators, and other stakeholders to address the skills system to meet local needs. Secondly, in developing senior leaders' training skills, FE institutions have a responsibility to train potential senior leaders for career development. The current challenge for the FE sector is to encourage training throughout people's career journeys.

For African and Caribbean women in senior positions, the development of senior leadership training skills alone is not enough. FE leaders must recognise the importance of other factors that require consideration within the diverse and complex FE sector. Evidence from this study shows that the complexities of people's lives, discrimination, prejudice, and negative discourse must be grappled with. However, training techniques will be beneficial from funding initiative.

Numerous challenges that are presented to African and Caribbean women in their leadership roles are signs of how their careers have unfolded; they lack professional experience at this level and many challenges impact their lives and career progression. If they are not allowed to train or to gain experience, they are unable to nurture aspirations for leadership roles and to capitalise on opportunities that may be open at other FE institutions. The desire for promotion among African and Caribbean women within FE is driven by their awareness of their self-worth and of the value they bring to the organisation.

My investigation uncovers the complex and diverse aspects of the marginalisation experienced by these women. The perception of their position in the FE institution is affected by their identity, which is influenced and shaped by the interactions of race and gender. African and Caribbean women in senior positions encounter complex patterns of marginalisation and gendered discrimination in a sector that is primarily composed of White individuals. The application of intersectionality in the analysis of my data has contributed to the recognition of how these intersections affect the lived experiences of my study participants. These intersections result from cultural structures and beliefs rather than existing in isolation. This has presented an occasion to examine the complex manners in which different identities merge to affect the experiences of women of African and Caribbean heritage. Intersectionality enables a

more comprehensive understanding of social phenomena by transcending unique categories of identification. This observation discusses how several facets of an individual's personality converge and promotes a more holistic understanding of lived experience.

#### **8.4 The research: contribution to knowledge**

The journeys that African and Caribbean women take towards senior positions in FE form an important issue. The review of the literature and examination of FE institutions that has been performed as part of this research means that this project is an important contributor to knowledge regarding the FE sector.

The findings, with supporting evidence, regarding African and Caribbean women's journeys towards senior positions in FE offer valuable insights to improve our understanding of their experiences and the barriers they face. African and Caribbean women frequently experience feelings of isolation and marginalisation in educational environments that are largely composed of White individuals. Jasmine and Kyla, among other participants, emphasised the experience of being a minority at their institutions, which resulted in social isolation and a feeling of not belonging. These women's work experiences and opportunities are frequently impacted by instances of overt and covert racial prejudice. Instances of racism, such as those reported by Kyla, highlight the enduring presence of racial prejudice in the workplace.

African and Caribbean women encounter substantial obstacles when it comes to finding jobs, receiving training and progressing in their careers, which leads to their limited presence in managerial roles. The challenges encountered in recruiting African and Caribbean women for the study can be attributed to their limited representation in senior management positions. Moreover, individual testimonies expose challenges in obtaining access to opportunities for professional growth. The career journeys of these women are further complicated by the intersection of socioeconomic and cultural issues with race and gender. Jasmine's experiences demonstrate how one's socioeconomic status and cultural disparities intensify feelings of being marginalised and impede professional advancement.

Engaging in the process of negotiating one's identity in mostly White environments may result in considerable psychological distress. Sanaa's confusion regarding her identity exemplifies the internal struggles experienced by several African and Caribbean women in similar contexts. African and Caribbean women demonstrate resilience and use diverse coping strategies to handle the obstacles they encounter in their professional lives. Kyla's choice to move to a culturally familiar location demonstrates proactive tactics for coping with loneliness and establishing support networks.

The reasons for exploring African and Caribbean women's journeys toward senior positions are well-known (Alinia, 2015; Morgan, 2020). However, the research findings show that collaboration to address issues that face African and Caribbean women in senior positions and their lack of representation should reduce the number of complex challenges. The underrepresentation of African and Caribbean women at senior levels in FE institutions is a problem to be solved. The findings of this research were gathered in interviews with African and Caribbean women holding senior positions in FE in the UK.

The framework that was used to understand their lived experiences requires further exploration concerning FE. Future research could analyse the framework and develop a theoretical approach to the study of African and Caribbean women in senior leadership. The study shows that the more senior leaders in FE are better placed to bring about effective change.

My contributions are enhanced by a comprehensive awareness of African and Caribbean women's experiences in predominately White educational settings:

The themes of social isolation and racism that African and Caribbean women experience are seen in Jasmine and Kyla's experiences. This shows how widespread these concerns are. Recognising individual differences like Sanaa's identity uncertainty provides insight into how unique backgrounds and environments shape experiences.

Combining theoretical insights from Tatum (2017) and Mickelson (2003) with empirical data from my study gives a solid framework for understanding racial identity formation and prejudice. This theoretical foundation increases my contributions' legitimacy and

depth. By comparing my findings to Mirza's (1992, 1997) work, I can highlight the intersectionality of race, gender, and social status and strengthen the wider implications of my research. Systemic reforms are needed to address structural issues including African and Caribbean women's underrepresentation and support. This work promotes the creation of more inclusive learning environments and the reform of existing policies. Effectively addressing support and representation gaps requires evidence-based solutions such as training and support systems.

Being able to highlight participants' proactive coping mechanisms, like Kyla's move to a more culturally familiar area, shows how they handle their situations. This knowledge can help create support systems for African and Caribbean women. Understanding subjective perceptions of experiences such as the psychological impact on Sanaa and Amari's resilience emphasises the necessity for individualised psychological and social support in educational settings. Focusing on African and Caribbean women's rise to prominent positions in FE institutions enhances the leadership diversity debate. My study helps minority women in leadership by identifying hurdles and suggesting solutions to disparities in employment, training and promotion. Senior leaders in FE should actively provide focused training and support, underlining the importance of leadership in change. Future studies can build on the research framework to examine African and Caribbean women in senior leadership. This could result in the creation of more thorough theoretical frameworks and useful measures to improve inclusion and diversity in education.

My research illustrates African and Caribbean women's struggles and coping methods by recognising their similarities and differences. This comprehensive view emphasises these women's resilience and autonomy and advocates for institutional changes to alleviate discrimination and isolation. My contributions strive to create more inclusive and supportive educational environments, improving African and Caribbean women's representation and well-being.

## **8.5 Limitations and delimitations**

There were some limitations and delimitations in my research study.

### **Limitations**

Conducting remote interviews using technological platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Zoom and Skype has become necessary during the COVID-19 epidemic. However, this approach has presented challenges in scheduling because of participants' job obligations. Scheduling and rescheduling interviews entailed understanding their professional responsibilities and identifying mutually agreeable schedules. The interviewer's and participants' familiarity with the technology was ensured by offering explicit instructions and technological assistance as required. This required dedicating additional effort to establishing a strong connection virtually, which can be more difficult than in-person contact; this included preliminary discussions before the interview to establish a relaxed and conducive atmosphere.

The first coding and theme analysis were conducted manually using Microsoft Word, which proved to be a laborious process and hindered the proper visualisation of data. I successfully resolved this strategy by changing to ATLAS.ti, which greatly simplified the coding process and improved the capacity for visualising data. I dedicated effort to acquiring proficiency in ATLAS.ti, enabling me to effectively employ its functionalities and improve the analysis process. I used an iterative methodology, where preliminary manual coding influenced the subsequent comprehensive and organised coding procedure within ATLAS.ti, guaranteeing uniformity and thoroughness in the data analysis.

Due to their underrepresentation in senior FE positions, finding and recruiting African and Caribbean women was difficult. LinkedIn was the most effective resource for recruitment. I posted detailed and engaging project descriptions to attract potential participants, emphasising the importance of the research and its impact.

### **Delimitations**

The study focused on African and Caribbean women in senior positions in FE, thus its conclusions may not apply to other women or organisations. The focus was planned



and motivated by personal experience-shaped RQs to address this group's underrepresentation and unique issues. The findings are not generalisable, but they provide deep insights and context-specific knowledge which may drive future studies and policy in similar demographic or institutional settings. I ensured that the conclusions reached were understood within the parameters of the research by clearly communicating to participants the scope and limitations of the study.

The research findings are reliable and robust because I carefully addressed these limitations. Flexible and technical preparedness were needed to overcome technology limits and scheduling issues, and ATLAS.ti improved data analysis efficiency and depth. Effective use of professional networks alleviated recruitment issues while narrowing the scope of the research and producing focused and contextually rich insights. Together, these tactics improved the overall quality and significance of the research, providing insightful information about FE and the perspectives of African and Caribbean women in leadership roles.

## **8.6 Recommendations**

**RQ2:** What factors influenced African and Caribbean women to embark on their chosen career path?

**Conclusion:** Career aspirations, parental influence and school experience/academic achievements were identified as important patterns that significantly influenced participants' career paths. They believed that they needed to work twice as hard as their White counterparts to reach the same place. The support of mothers who understood their children's aspirations and provided guidance throughout their African and Caribbean daughters' professional journeys was significant and mainly responsible for the career routes taken by these women.

**Recommendation:** Future research should examine how African and Caribbean parents support their children with their career aspirations. The involvement of White, African and Caribbean parents in their children's career choices could be compared.

**RQs1 and 3:** How do African and Caribbean women narrate their journeys towards

senior positions in FE? What do they perceive to be the factors that enabled them to achieve senior positions?

**Conclusion:** African and Caribbean women narrate their journeys in terms of their career trajectories, opportunities, and self-investment, and their descriptions reflect their career paths. The factors that enabled African and Caribbean women to gain senior positions included management opportunities and their investment in senior positions.

**Recommendation:** The findings show the various variables that led to the success of African and Caribbean women in obtaining senior positions in FE. Nevertheless, some participants had to overcome multifaceted and challenging obstacles involving race, gender, and class. Based on this, future research should investigate career trajectories that involve these demographic features within FE institutions. An in-depth examination of the organisational culture of FE and the challenges that African and Caribbean women encounter in their progression towards senior-level positions should be performed. The insights gained will assist in the development of strategies and policies for local FE institutions concerning African and Caribbean women.

**RQ4:** What do African and Caribbean women perceive to be the factors that restricted or challenged them in their journeys toward senior positions?

**Conclusion:** There are various challenges that African and Caribbean women face in senior management positions in FE. These women often encounter challenges from their White colleagues that are aimed at undermining their position of power. Issues include transitioning into managerial positions, lack of diversity and representation in the work environment, visibility, lack of experience, barriers, and an absence of mentors in FE institutions.

**Recommendation:** The investigation has revealed that African and Caribbean women in leadership positions in FE frequently experience marginalisation, challenges, and a lack of complete and lasting power. On this basis, future research should examine

what kind of support is available. How does the FE sector deal with the challenges that these women experience? The recruitment and retention methods that are used to draw in and support these women should be investigated.

In this final chapter, the research topics, consequences, significance, career pathways and issues experienced by African and Caribbean women in senior FE positions were highlighted. The research sought to understand their personal and professional views on their path to these jobs. African and Caribbean women in FE encounter several obstacles, as their multifaceted lives and careers demonstrate. Common themes showed how their professional paths and senior achievements were shaped. These women face additional difficulties due to the absence of diversity, inclusivity, representation and recognition, which highlights inequalities in the FE sector.

The narratives revealed their histories and professional paths, emphasising the need for restructuring of FE institutions. Diversity, inclusivity, anti-racist legislation, and individualised support are essential for helpful educational environments. The study emphasises how critical it is to address structural injustices to enhance the experiences and visibility of African and Caribbean women in senior positions in FE.

With its insightful analysis of the experiences of African and Caribbean women in leadership roles, this research makes an important contribution to our understanding of the FE sector. It emphasises the economic importance of the UK's FE sector and the necessity for inclusive approaches to empower marginalised populations. By confronting the recognised obstacles and executing the suggested measures, FE establishments can more effectively assist African and Caribbean women, increasing their presence and experience in senior-level positions and cultivating a more versatile and impartial learning environment.

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## Appendices

Pilot interviews

Finding: Data Collection Sample of Pilot

First interviewee: Jasmine

The initial narrative question (BNIM)

DE (Interviewer) - Can you please tell me your story about your journey; All the experiences and events which were important to you, up until now, start wherever you like.

Please take the time you need. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt. I'll take some notes in case I have any further questions for you after you finished telling me about it all.

**Jasmine:** During my journey, there were no African and Caribbean role models. I had no support from parents or school.

A long time ago, I learned to be independent because I was the only Black girl in all the schools I went to; my independence stemmed from there. I had a bad experience in striving towards a senior position.

I remember applying for a managerial position, I was applying for my line manager's job as he was leaving, that did not go down well when I was not offered the position.

I had bad experiences towards senior positions in the past. For example, not being offered managerial positions when applied for previously. This became a common experience and problem over the years for.

I believe it was because of being a Black woman, being Black, lack of opportunities and being from a working-class background were all barriers. All my life I struggled with self-doubt (self-esteem); how much you have to do to be recognised.

There were so many barriers. Being a Black woman, being Black; issues of race, age; lack of opportunities; class and being from a working-class background. I struggled with self-doubt and self-esteem. I began to question myself of how much you have to do to be recognised. People are threatened by the level of my knowledge,

commitment and what I do. They saw me as a threat.

The initial narrative question (BNIM)

Second interviewee: Raven

DE (Interviewer) - Can you please tell me your story about your journey; All the experiences and events which were important to you, up until now, start wherever you like.

Please take the time you need. I'll listen first, I won't interrupt. I'll take some notes in case I have any further questions for you after you finished telling me about it all.

**Raven:** Well Dawn, I am glad to be given the opportunity to tell you about my experience. It's not often we get the opportunity to tell our story.

I had the fear of being myself. the fear of being undermined in my current job. I believe that I was taken advantage of. For example, the amount of work that had been bestowed upon her, being assertive and outspoken, willing to speak for others. This led me to be targeted.

I was given extra work to do, this led to increased expectations, I was told that people did not understand me because of my accent, people complained; I was not allowed to see the feedback of my work compared to

I became a target; had supervisions, was told that I was not right for this job; he told me that my advance skills were most suited to another role and that they would help me work towards it.



I'll listen first, I won't interrupt, //I'll tell you if we are running out of time

I'll just take some notes for after you've finished telling me about your story of your experiences."

to be said in full, as designed!

Full SQUIN your story of your journey

Conceptual Focus

a phase of your journey e.g. youth; ...

a particular biographical strand e.g. education, professional work,  
family

biographical relevant phases e.g. your family during ...

Special issues or themes

**Second Interview (1 hour** used as prompts to help with discussion in the first interview)

Interview: Single Question aimed at inducing Narrative (s)

"Can you please tell me your story about your journey,

All the experiences and events which were important for you, up until now,

Start wherever you like

Please take the time you need

I'll listen first, I won't interrupt

I'll just take some notes in case I have any further questions

For after you finished telling me about it all" (Wengraf, 2004)

Design sheet

Can you please tell me about your journey  
the story of your journey towards a senior position in further education  
your experience of .....  
all those events and experiences which were important for you,  
how it all developed up to now. Till it stopped being personally  
important

Begin wherever you like.

Please take the time you need... // We've got about ..... minutes/  
..... hours

I'll listen first, I won't interrupt, //I'll tell you if we are running out of time

I'll just take some notes for after you've finished telling me about your story of your  
experiences."

to be said in full, as designed!

Full SQUIN your story of your journey

Conceptual Focus

a phase of your journey e.g. youth; ...

a particular biographical strand e.g. education, professional work,

family

biographical relevant phases e.g. your family during ...

Special issues or themes

#### APPENDIX 4: Semi-structured schedule Questions

(Used as prompts to help with discussion in the second interview)

African and Caribbean women lived experiences were explored. I am interested in how

they narrate their journeys; define their interactions and relationships; factors that influenced them on this journey; and the factors that restricted or challenged them on their journey. The impact of African and Caribbean women's educational experiences has all the hallmarks and foundations of their journey towards senior positions. I am interested in how their experience of education has made an impact on their journey.

#### THE JOURNEY & EDUCATION HISTORY

1. How would you identify yourself?
2. Tell me about all those events and experiences that were important for you on your journey towards the senior position.
3. Begin where you like. Describe the journey towards the position you now hold.
4. What has influenced you on your journey towards a senior position?
5. What challenged you on your journey towards a senior position?
6. I came from a non-traditional route into Higher Education. What route did you take and what type of education did you have?
7. What is your experience of schooling/ College/ University?
8. What aspects of your identity were most prominent at School/College/University?
9. I am of Caribbean heritage. Were there any African and Caribbean women in senior positions throughout your education? If so, can you say something about your experience?
10. How visible were African and Caribbean women in the further education sector?

#### EDUCATIONAL SENIOR POSITION

Now that African and Caribbean women are in senior positions, I am interested in what



attracted them to further education, motivations, issues, expectations, restrictions, challenges, their relationships, their influences, and professional development.

1. What is the title of your current senior position?
2. How long did it take you to reach a senior position?
3. How did you prepare yourself for a senior-level position?
4. What was your motivation for the further education sector?
5. Did you develop a relationship with mentors at any point in your career?
6. What are the benefits of being in a senior position in practice in relation to being in a non-senior position?
7. Are there any special considerations in your professional field?
8. What personal characteristics would you say contributed most to your career?
9. What advice would you give an African and Caribbean woman aspiring towards senior positions in further education?

#### CAREER OPPORTUNITIES & PROGRESSION

I am interested career opportunities and progression of African and Caribbean women; and the chances of them reaching a senior position.

1. Are there specific career opportunities and progression for African and Caribbean staff pursuing senior positions?
2. Do you have access to specific career development opportunities? If so, what are they?
3. What is your experience of progression?

\*Are there other issues that you expected me to talk about which I had not covered in my interview questions?

Information and Consent Form

*Exploring African and Caribbean Women's Journey towards  
Senior Positions in Further Education*

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**FIELDWORK MANUAL**

**(2020)**

**University of York, Heslington,  
York YO10 5DD**



**Department of Education**

Heslington, York, YO10 5DD

**Direct Line:** (01904) 320000

**Web:** [www.york.ac.uk/education](http://www.york.ac.uk/education)

Dear Madam,

I am currently exploring African and Caribbean Women's Journey towards Senior Positions in Further Education. I am writing to ask if you will be able to take part in the study. Taking part in this study will be an opportunity to explore African and Caribbean women's journey towards senior positions in further education. This study will help develop an understanding of the lived experiences of African and Caribbean women in an effort to assist in developing strategies and policy for further education institutions, particularly preparing themselves better in recruitment and enrolment of African and Caribbean women in senior positions.

The data that you provide (e.g. voice recordings of the interview) will be saved and protected by a password. The data may be used for future analysis and shared for research or training purposes, but participants will not be identified individually. All information gathered in this study will be kept confidential. If you do not want your data to be included in any information shared as a result of this research, please do not sign this consent form.

The data that I collect (voice recordings/transcript) may be used in an *anonymous* format in different ways. Please indicate on the consent form enclosed with an  if you are happy for this anonymised data to be used in the ways listed. There will be two interviews of approximately 1 hour for each interview. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time during data collection and up to 2 weeks after the date of collection.

If you have any questions about the study that you would like to ask before giving consent or after the data collection, please feel free to contact me (Dawn Evans, the researcher) by email [dme505@york.ac.uk](mailto:dme505@york.ac.uk), or Professor Vanita Sundaram (academic supervisor) by email [vanita.sundaram@york.ac.uk](mailto:vanita.sundaram@york.ac.uk) or Professor Paul Wakeling (Chair of Education Ethics Committee) via email [education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk](mailto:education-research-administrator@york.ac.uk).

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

Yours faithfully,

Dawn Evans



Department of Education

Heslington, York, YO10 5DD

*Direct Line:* (01904) 320000

*Web:* [www.york.ac.uk/education](http://www.york.ac.uk/education)

## **INFORMED CONSENT**

**Department of Education**

---

**TITLE OF STUDY:** Research on Exploring African and Caribbean Women's Journey towards Senior Positions in Further Education

**RESEARCHER:** Dawn Evans

**SUPERVISOR:** Professor Vani ta Sundaram

**CHAIR:** Professor Paul Wakeling

---

### **Purpose of the Study**

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to explore African and Caribbean Women's Journey towards Senior Positions in Further Education.

### **Participants**

You are being asked to participant in the study because you are an African and Caribbean woman in a senior level position working in Further Education.

### **Procedures**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in a two one hour face-to-face interview place negotiated with you or on Skype/teams in time negotiated with you due to the pandemic

select a time and date for the interview. The consent form will be fully explained to you and you will be asked to initial and sign it prior to the interview. If you decide to participate in person, you will receive a signed copy of this form at the interview. A copy of the signed form will be mailed to you.

The interviews will be voice-recorded and transcribed and you will be given an opportunity to review the transcripts for accuracy, as well as make additional changes. You will be given two weeks to add, change, and check for accuracy in the transcripts. Participation in the study is voluntary.

## Participant Initials

If you decide to participate, I will share the interview questions with you prior to the interview. Please note that the results will be reported in the dissertation and all information you provide will remain confidential

**Please indicate on the consent form enclosed with a ☐**

**If you are happy for this anonymised data to be used in the ways listed.**

<input type="checkbox"/> I understand that there is a possibility that some of the data may be used publicly (e.g. in presentations or online), and I will be informed how anonymous the data will be used. I will be given an opportunity to decline the use of the data.
<input type="checkbox"/> I understand that data (voice recordings/transcript) will be used in an <i>anonymous</i> format in different ways.
<input type="checkbox"/> I understand that I will be given an opportunity to comment on the written record of my interview.
<input type="checkbox"/> I understand that the data that I provide (e.g. voice recordings of the interview) will be protected and I will be given an opportunity to withdraw from the study up to two weeks after the date of collection.
<input type="checkbox"/> I understand there will not be a financial cost to me to participate in this study. The study will take approximately 2 hours of my time (two separate interviews of one hour each).
<input type="checkbox"/> I understand that the data could be used for future analysis and/or other purposes.
<input type="checkbox"/> I understand that if there are concerns or complaints, they can be directed to Professor Vanita Sundaram (academic supervisor) by email <a href="mailto:vanita.sundaram@ork.ac.uk">vanita.sundaram@ork.ac.uk</a> or Professor Paul Wakeling (Chair of Education Ethics Committee) via email <a href="mailto:education-research-administrator@ork.ac.uk">education-research-administrator@ork.ac.uk</a> .
<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Confidentiality</b> I understand that all information gathered in this study will be confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could be linked to me in this study.

## Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. A copy of the form has been given to me.

**Signature of Participant**

**Date:**

-----  
**Participant Name (Please Print)**

*By signing below, you agree to be audio-taped.*

**Signature of Participant**

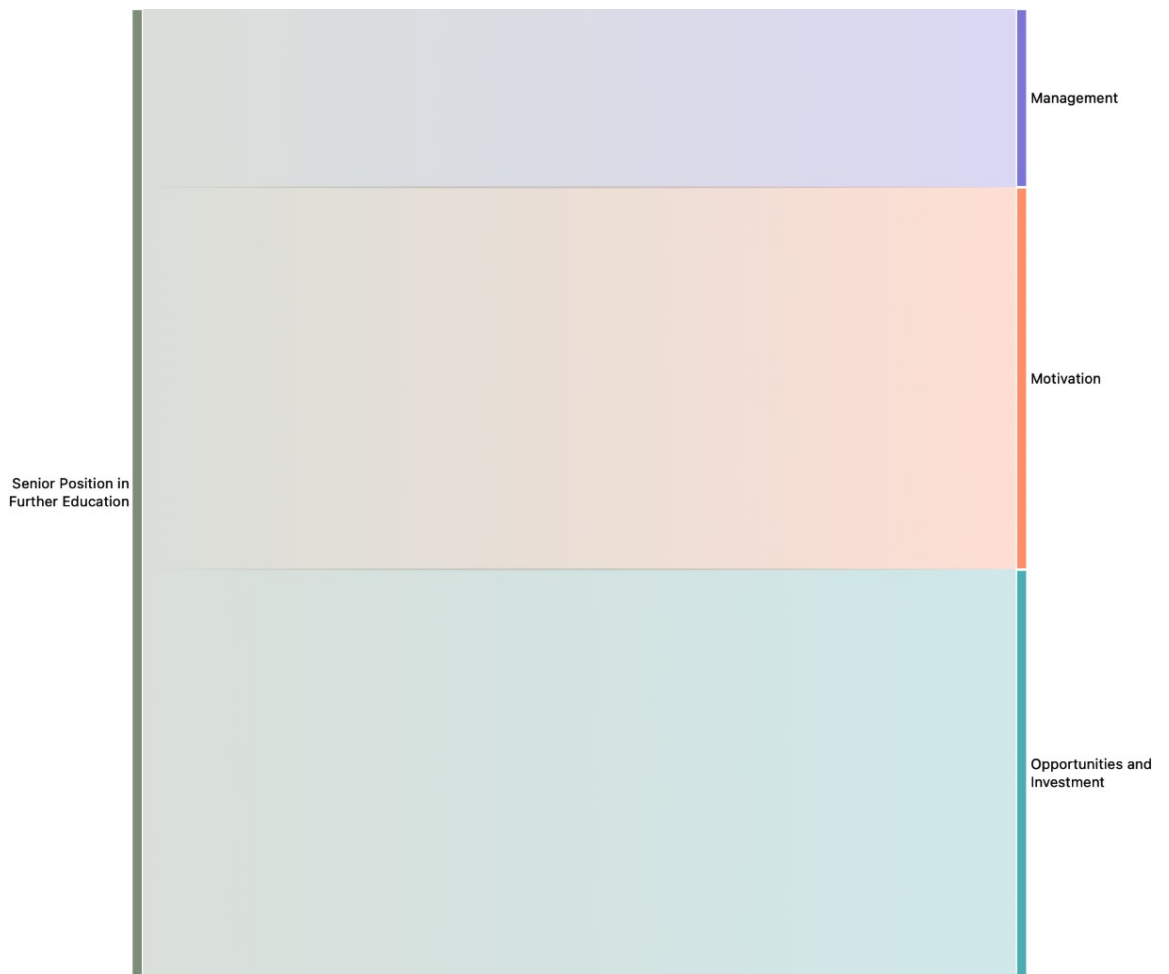
**Date:**

**Participant Name (Please Print)**

Dawn Evans



This shows codes/themes linked to the research question 1. How do African and Caribbean women narrate their journeys towards senior positions in Further Education?



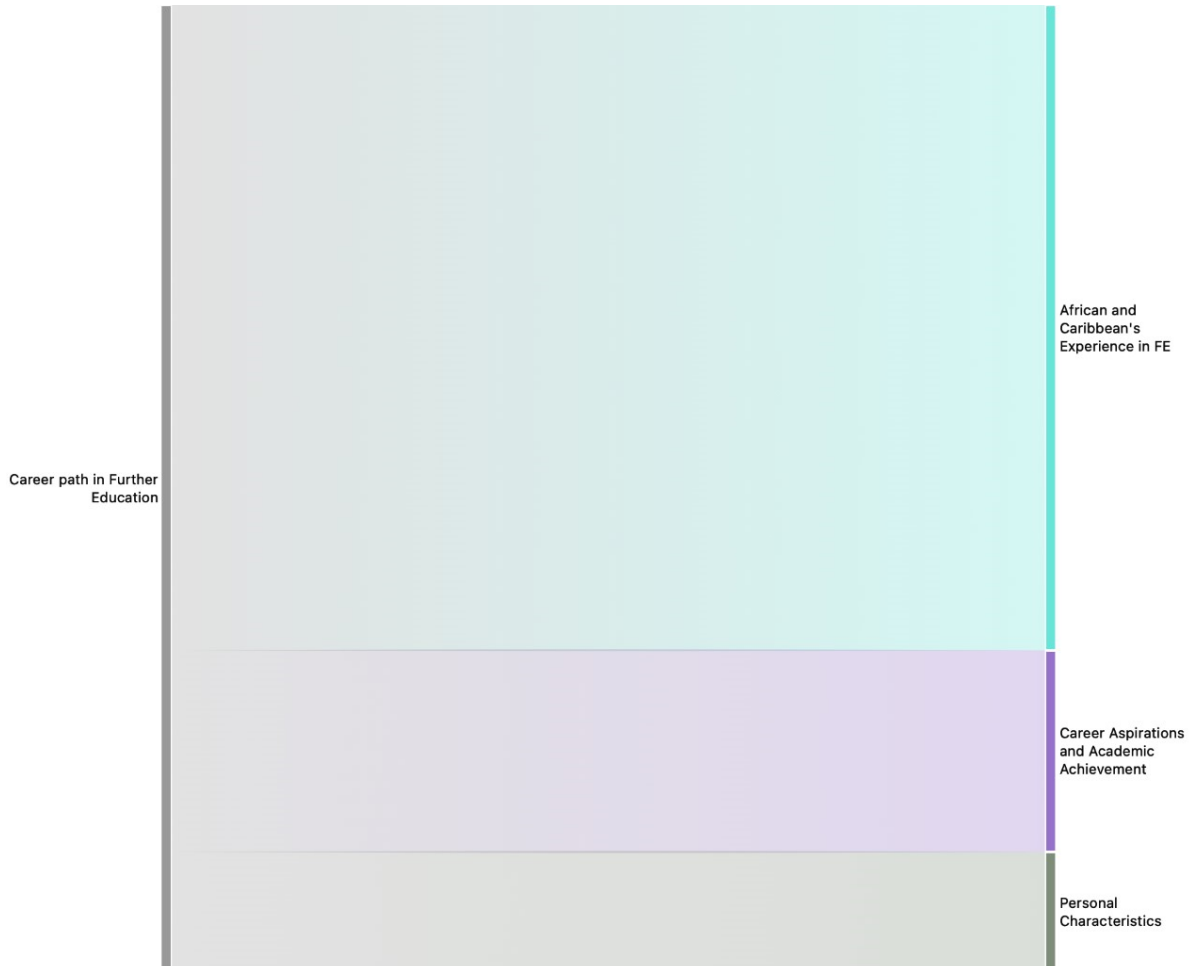
		● Senior Position in Further Education 127
● Management	7	7
● Motivation	17	15
● Opportunities and Investment	17	16

		● Senior Position in Further Education 127
● Management	7	7 (0.06) 🟡
● Motivation	17	15 (0.12) 🟡
● Opportunities and Investment	17	16 (0.12) 🟡



This shows final codes/themes linked to the research question 2.

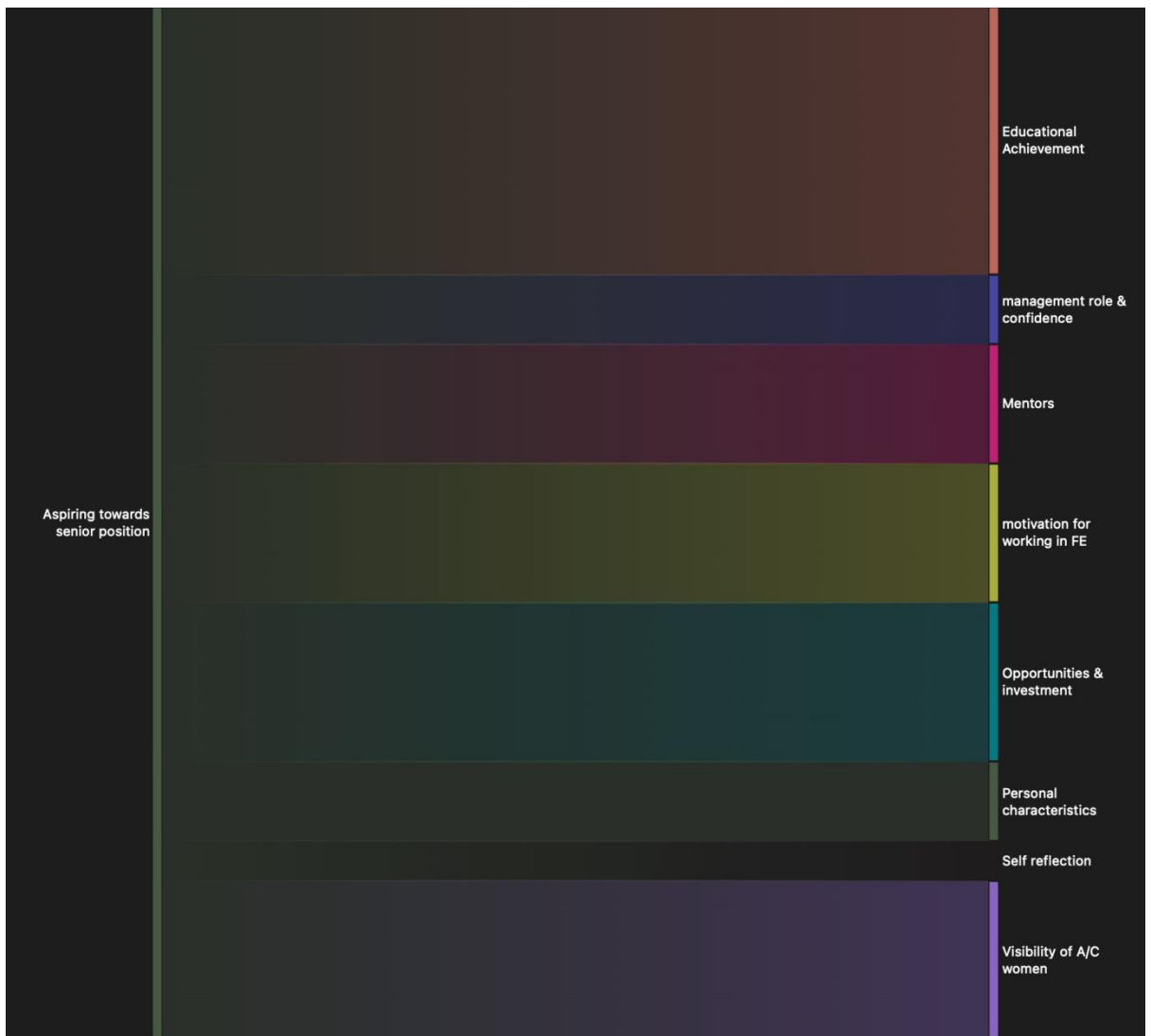
What factors influenced them to embark on their chosen career path?



		● Career Path in Further Education
		47
● African and Caribbean's Experience in FE	16	16
● Career Aspirations and Academic Achievement	5	5
● Personal Characteristics	8	3

		<span style="color: orange;">●</span> <span style="color: green;">◇</span> Career Path in Further Education <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">47</span>
●	◇ African and Caribbean's Experience in FE <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">16</span>	16 (0.34)
●	◇ Career Aspirations and Academic Achievement <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">5</span>	5 (0.11) <span style="color: orange;">●</span>
●	◇ Personal Characteristics <span style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 50%; padding: 2px;">8</span>	3 (0.06) <span style="color: orange;">●</span>

This shows final codes/themes linked to research question 3. What do they perceive to be the factors that enabled them to achieve senior position



	Senior Position in Further Education 127
Management	7
Motivation	15
Opportunities and Investment	16

	Senior Position in Further Education 127
Management	7 (0.06)
Motivation	15 (0.12)
Opportunities and Investment	16 (0.12)

This shows codes/themes linked to the research question 4. What do they perceive to be the factors that restricted or challenged them in their journey toward a senior position?



		○ ◇ Challenges of African and Caribbean Women ④④④ 48
● ◇ African and Caribbean Women Managers	④④④ 17	17
● ◇ Inexperience and Mentor less	④④④ 19	15
● ◇ Invisibility of African and Caribbean Women in Senior Positions	④④④ 2	2
● ◇ Lack of Diversity and Inclusivity	④④④ 14	14
● ◇ Racism	④④④ 11	7

		○ ◇ Challenges of African and Caribbean Women ④④④ 48
● ◇ African and Caribbean Women Managers	④④④ 17	17 (0.35)
● ◇ Inexperience and Mentor less	④④④ 19	15 (0.29)
● ◇ Invisibility of African and Caribbean Women in Senior Positions	④④④ 2	2 (0.04) ●
● ◇ Lack of Diversity and Inclusivity	④④④ 14	14 (0.29)
● ◇ Racism	④④④ 11	7 (0.13)

## A Visualisation Depicting the Journeys Taken by 13 Participants

Jasmine

**School** - attended all-white primary and state comprehensive school in the UK. The educational environment was not conducive to a positive experience. She was the only African and Caribbean girl in these schools

**Identity** - self-identifies as of African and Caribbean heritage, belonging to the Black British Community, and coming from a socioeconomically disadvantage and working-class background.

**Educational experience** - one positive experience was when she decided to return to education as a mature student and a single mother in an FE college. She encountered difficulties in fulfilling her parental responsibilities. Her route into education was pursuing her studies through an Access to Higher Education Programme as a mature student.

**Advanced academic studies** - went to university and ultimately obtained a bachelor's degree and a master's degree.

**Employment** - she characterises her progression towards a senior position as unpleasant. She diligently pursued various roles, although consistently not selected for interviews. She decided to cease her application process. Due to her dissatisfaction with being overlooked, she opted to stop submitting more job applications for senior positions.

**Struggles in life** - throughout her life, she struggled with feelings of self-doubt and a lack of confidence. Driven by pressure validated by her worthiness, factors such as race, age, and societal boundaries.

**Current occupation** - holding the position of director.

## Duchess

**School** - attended a mixed primary and secondary comprehensive school in London.

**Identity** - self-identifies as of African and Caribbean heritage. She affirmed that her self-perception was as a member of the working class.

**Educational experience** - After completing her O-and A-levels, Duchess decided to extend her education by going to university.

**Advanced academic studies** - went to university and ultimately obtained a bachelor's degree, a master's degree and PGCE (FE).

**Employment** - Her experiences have not always been pleasant because her choices have been questioned frequently. She began her professional life as a grade one lecturer. After landing a job, she realised how unprepared she was for the responsibilities that came with the position.

**Struggles in life** - She did not believe that she had accomplished very much up to that point in her career..

**Current occupation** - holding the position of Programme Area Leader.

## Raven

**School** - Attended a primary and secondary elite schools for girls in Africa during her formative years. Then, completed her secondary comprehensive education in the UK.

**Identity** - self-identifies as of African and Caribbean heritage, and as an African woman who was raised in a working-class environment. Considers herself to be working class.

**Educational experience** - She gained O-and A-levels and continued into FE college. Continued her education and eventually earned a diploma.

**Advanced academic studies** - went to university and ultimately obtained a bachelor's degree and a master's degree.

**Employment** - She regards herself as an advocate, but feared of being herself because she was outspoken. Raven feared being undermined at her place of employment believing she was exploited for these traits.

**Struggles in life** - As a consequence of these traits, throughout her life, Raven developed a phobia of being able to express who she is fully. Personal struggles - not being treated fairly and spent years building her confidence.

**Current occupation** - holding the position of manager.

## Jvonte

**School** - attended a mixed primary and state comprehensive school in the London. Predominately White.

**Identity** - self-identifies as Caribbean heritage and considers herself to be working class.

**Educational experience** - She studied for O-and A-levels and decided to complete education university.

**Advanced academic studies** - She finally earned a bachelor's degree.

**Employment** - She spent most of her professional life (20 years) working at an FE sixth-form institution. She understood there was no chance of being offered a senior post. Thus, she saw any attempt to participate in interviews was senseless waste of time. Consequently, saw her previous experience not qualified for senior roles. No further interviews pursued.

**Struggles in life** - The obstacles she experienced in her life, led her to reflect on the meaning of her life and analysed critically its value..

**Current occupation** - holding the position of team lead.



## Ashanti

**School** - Attended a mixed primary and secondary school in London.

**Identity** - Self-identifies as of African heritage, and being of Black British heritage. She was raised in a family that was considered middle class.

**Educational experience** - Always dreamed of teaching. To gain admission to an HE institution. Ashanti studied for her O-and A-levels and decided to complete her education.

**Advanced academic studies** - She is now in possession of diploma, PGCE (FE) and a qualification in ESOL.

**Employment** - Her lack of confidence at the beginning of her journey made it difficult for her to fulfil the obligations she had been given in her role as interim manager.

**Struggles in life** - Her lack of confidence made the first part of her first journey difficult. Nevertheless, she has been provided with support and encouraged to achieve her goals. Also, presented with many other possibilities to consider.

**Current occupation** - holding the position of coordinator and manager.

## Ade

**School** - Attended a primary and secondary comprehensive schools in Africa.

**Identity** - She is of African heritage and comes from a working-class background, identifies as Black African..

**Educational experience** - Ade studied for her O- and A-levels. Then awarded a scholarship after her degree that allowed her to continue her education at a university in the UK.

**Advanced academic studies** - ultimately obtained a bachelor's degree and a master's degree.

**Employment** - She intends to work her way up to a more senior position with the intention of one day becoming a professor. Ade's first job was in FE, where she worked as an academic adviser for students. Desired more challenging duties, which prompted her to pursue promotions aggressively.

**Struggles in life** - Ade said she maintained a positive outlook and made the most of chances whenever they presented themselves, despite the challenges she faced.

**Current occupation** - holding the position of trainee lecturer.

## Amari

**School** - Attended primary and secondary grammar school in London. A single-sex school. Had a positive experience at school.

**Identity** - Self-identifies as of Caribbean heritage, and places herself somewhere in the middle class background.

**Educational experience** - Amari has a strong interest in learning and finds that participating in educational activities brings her a sense of satisfaction. She obtained her O- and A-levels.

**Advanced academic studies** - went to university and ultimately earning a bachelor's, a master's and doctorate degrees, in addition to a PGCE (FE).

**Employment** - In several workplaces, Amari has been the only Caribbean member of staff, but she has still managed to exceed expectations and achieve success. She credits her fortunate circumstances for this outcome.

**Struggles in life** - At the beginning of her professional career, Amari was confronted with a few challenges.

**Current occupation** - holding the position of principal and CEO.

## Sanaa

**School** - Attended primary and secondary comprehensive schools in the UK. Schools were all White and isolated and traumatic.

**Identity** - Self-identifies as of African heritage and Black British, it depends on what the context is and comes from a working class background.

**Educational experience** - Having accumulated a significant number of years in education and motivated by her wish to see the world, Sanaa chose to embark on a period of travel before she planned to become a teacher. She obtained her O- and A-levels.

**Advanced academic studies** - She pursued her studies and eventually earned a bachelor's degree, in addition to PQCE (FE).

**Employment** - Following her return to England, she embarked on a professional career in an occupation not directly associated with education. She opted to stop submitting more job applications for senior positions.

**Struggles in life** - Feeling isolated, lonely in the roles, and lacking confidence.

**Current occupation** - holding the position of manager.

## Olufemi

**School** - Attended a primary school in the Caribbean and a comprehensive secondary school in London. A single-sex school.

**Identity** - Olufemi is of Caribbean heritage and considers herself to be working class. Identifies as a Black British woman.

**Educational experience** - Having accumulated a significant number of years in education and motivated by her wish to see the world. Olufemi went to an FE college to study in addition to taking other classes relevant to five GCSEs.

**Advanced academic studies** - Pursued her studies at university and ultimately obtained a bachelor's degree, and a PGCE (FE).

**Employment** - She held several jobs in the retail industry. Eager for a career change, she returned to studying after leaving school at the age of 16.

**Struggles in life** - throughout her life, she struggled with a personal sense of drive to do well.

**Current occupation** - holding the position of coordinator and advisor.

## Kyla

**School** - Attended a primary and secondary comprehensive mixed school in London. They were single-sex school and no positive experience.

**Identity** - Kyla is of Caribbean heritage. She identifies as a Blackwoman of African heritage.

**Educational experience** - She obtained certificates in secondary education (CSEs), O- and A-level to be admitted to an HE institution.

**Advanced academic studies** - went to university and ultimately obtained a bachelor's degree, a master's degree and PGCE (FE).

**Employment** - She has spent a significant amount of her professional life working in FE institutions (35 years), first as a manager, and then in a variety of administrative posts she held once. Dismissed from her job but found other employment.

**Struggles in life** - Responsible for so many things, she was required to put in a lot of work and solve problems at work. Stereotypes and sabotage by others, and the various comments by other people make it difficult. Colour of her skin and isolation.

**Current occupation** - holding the position of manager.

## Destiny

**School** - Attended a primary and secondary comprehensive school in London.

**Identity** - Destiny ifof Caribbean heritage and from a working class background.

**Educational experience** - She worked in various roles including voluntarying. Destiny has always had a lifelong interest in education. By joining an Access to HE programme as a mature student, Destiny was finally able to pursue her goal of HE .

**Advanced academic studies** - went to university. She holds two bachelor's degrees, a verifier award in addition to a PGCE (FE).

**Employment** - She held a part-time job for a significant number of years. Worked in a managerial role in FE, given additional roles and responsibilities.

**Struggles in life** - The boy's network, unfairness and not being recognised in her role or accommodating her, and being in a hostile environment. These issues impacted her health.

**Current occupation** - holding the position of curriculum manager.

## Ebony

**School** - Ebony spent most of her early educational years in the Caribbean, after which she attended a comprehensive secondary school in London.

**Identity** - Self-identifies as a Black Caribbean heritage.

**Educational experience** - Her experience has not been positive, as she was ignored and bright when she came to this country. She entered HE by way of obtaining O- and A-levels. She no longer has any aspiration to advance her position in FE through promotions.

**Advanced academic studies** - went to university and ultimately achieved a bachelor's and a master's degrees, and a PGCE (FE).

**Employment** - She spent many years working in the FE sector as a lecturer. Her experiences have not always been pleasant, although she had sufficient experience. Ebony no longer has any aspiration to advance her position in FE through promotions.

**Struggles in life** - Ebony was subjected to racism, excuses, and having to justify herself and her experience of the education system was not positive. Found herself crying everyday and no longer believing in her. She feels her ethnicity is preventing her from progressing.

**Current occupation** - holding the position of coach and educator.



## Aliyah

**School** - Attended a primary and secondary comprehensive school in London. She confessed that, in terms of her intellectual abilities, she was not very strong at school.

**Identity** - She is of Caribbean heritage and self-identifies as a woman of colour, Black Caribbean and Black British. From a working class background.

**Educational experience** - An avid learner, she was able to work her way up to senior position despite not having qualifications, was offered training. She participates in many staff training offered in the workplace.

**Advanced academic studies** - Aliyah is considering advancing her education and currently deciding whether to pursue a degree.

**Employment** - She felt compelled to put a lot of extra work into training classes because of struggling to find work.

**Struggles in life** - Found it very difficult to obtain work. The perception of African and Caribbean people is aggressive, and that race plays a role in the way people talk about you.

**Current occupation** - holding the position of manager.