INCLUSIVE EMPLOYABILITY APPROACHES:

FEMALE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON DIVERSITY MENTORING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

By

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ABSTRACT

Women from diverse ethnic backgrounds are under-represented in professional and managerial positions and this requires a more inclusive workforce, challenging the presence of unconscious bias. Mentoring is often signposted as a strategy to tackle these inequalities and to facilitate learning and employability transformations. This thesis interrogates how mentoring develops professional social capital for Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) female students to participate with confidence in an evolving and competitive labour market.

The study critically engages with Pierre Bourdieu's concepts for determining individual agency possibilities for employability against structural dynamics. Applying an interpretive approach, this small-scale study uses semi-structured interviews to explore the mentoring experiences of BME female students from different Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). These findings outline career planning strategies where participants gained detailed professional knowledge that developed confidence, resilience and self-efficacy. Collaborative mentoring dialogues integrated personal beliefs and enhanced self-awareness to enable alternative and creative employability practices. The students' learning resulted from varied and engaging positions influencing agency, for example: actual experiences, observed behaviours, reviewed situations and intuitive perceptions. This study adds insights to mentoring perspectives on ethnic inclusive employability preparation by proposing guidance as a 'culturally sensitive mentoring approach', to foster ethical and successful student outcomes.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACCRONYMS

BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
BME	Black and Minority Ethnic Groups
BSA	British Sociological Association
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CSJ	Centre for Social Justice
CUREE	Centre for the use of Research and Evidence in Education
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DLHE	The Destination of Leavers from Longitudinal Survey
ECU	Equality Challenge Unit
EMESG	The Ethnic Minority Employment Stakeholder Group
ESECT	Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Academy
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PG	Postgraduate
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematical
UG	Undergraduate
UK	United Kingdom
WP	Widening Participation

ZPD Zone of Proximal Development

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Sharing information and advice to someone who is less knowledgeable in that area has been a longstanding function of mentoring. Employability encompasses more than key skills and includes a variety of personal assets and views. From an employability perspective, mentoring promotes individual learning which allows individuals to be ready for the opportunities and challenges of the labour market. Widening participation schemes in higher education (HE) consistently acknowledge the need for clear information to guide informed career choices. Whether a mentor can effectively give this guidance is investigated to see how mentoring works for the enablement of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) women into employment.

The aim of this study is to investigate how mentoring develops meaningful employability attributes for women from diverse ethnic groups, considering individual agency, culture and communities. The relations between structural features and the possibilities of agency is explored in the context of learning and development possibilities of mentoring. The ability of individuals to independently make their own decisions and choices is known as agency (Archer, 2003). However, structural factors, such as political and economic elements affect the ability to make those decisions as determined by social class, ethnicity, and gender groupings.

Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) theoretical model considers the dynamics of education, family and social class that lead to social and cultural reproductions and diverse social groups' practices. The reasons why this is a theoretical framework for exploring the experiences of BME females will be discussed. This introductory chapter will outline the background and rationale for this

thesis, provide definitions for mentoring and employability, and will explain the reflexive approach. The research aim and questions are presented to set the scene for the mentoring study.

1.2 Background to Study

Over the last three decades, mentoring has been utilised as a tool for enabling personal development in a wide variety of educational, professional, personal and business settings. The use of mentoring has been cross-generational, cross-gendered and cross-ethnographic, to signpost a few areas of application, with varying degrees of success. The role of mentoring is generally diverse based on individual need, consequently leading to a wide variety of definitions and explanations given to the meaning of mentoring (Parsloe and Wray, 2000; Crisp and Cruz, 2009). An equally relevant point is the intensification of the employability agenda, coinciding with the rise in tuition fees, and competitive labour market (Tomlinson, 2008; Pegg *et al.*, 2012). The significant point here is the intersection of mentoring and employability for females from diverse ethnic backgrounds. For not only do they face a labour market that is exclusionary, but they also face traditional barriers ascribed to gender, race and class (Escott, 2012; Brynin and Longhi, 2015).

The 'Time for Change' report raised some crucial questions of the true extent of social mobility over the last few decades (Social Mobility Commission, 2017). Regardless of many efforts, the Government has not met its targets of enriching the lives of disadvantaged people by improving social mobility through access into employment. Progression opportunities and the quality of lower paid jobs are questioned, whilst an 'elitist' system still exists for the prominent positions. These inequalities are further compounded by regional variances, between increasing employment in London/South East regions against northern cities where the divide has become

even wider since the 2008 recession. Correspondingly, there is lack of progress in defeating the cycle of disadvantage between socio-economic status and employment, along with securing access into the labour market and subsequent career progression.

The term Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (BME) is adopted by public bodies and is used in this thesis to categorise the experiences of the sample group. During the development of this study, there has been a gradual change in policy language for use of the term Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Groups (BAME). There are, however, considerations with the application of both terms because, they suggest a standardised group instead of acknowledging different identities (Equality Challenge Unit, 2018). Accordingly, it is recommended that these terms are used based on context and to be clear on how and why the decision was taken to adopt these expressions. I have used BME in this report to compare against the existing data and to recruit suitable participants. The term has also been used to abbreviate the experiences of the sample for ease of reference in the analysis of data. At the same time, I am mindful not to consistently use the term as I feel that that the participants may not wish to be placed in the spotlight nor to be defined singularly by this expression. The experiences relayed were based on the mentoring elements, in the context of shared cultural references, rather than primarily gender and race dynamics. This enables development of culturally sensitive mentoring explanations with an awareness of subconscious factors influencing employability.

1.2.1 Rationale

Within the increasingly diverse working population of England and Wales, there are marked variations in economic activity for different ethnic minority groups (Catney and Sabater, 2015; Department for Work and Pensions, 2016a; Race.Bitc, 2017; CIPD, 2017). Evidence shows

disparities within certain BME groups with inactivity rates, employment levels and activity patterns for men and women (ONS, 2014). There are also geographical differences in employment activity due to labour market ethnic penalties, indirect discrimination and inequalities affecting recruitment to employment and higher-skilled job positions (Catney and Sabater, 2015).

A further possibility is the absence of social networks that provide access to professional contacts and experience with potential employers. In employment, an increasing number of ethnic minorities possess degree level qualifications yet are more likely to be overqualified and working in non-graduate positions compared to their counterparts (Brynin and Longhi, 2015). Furthermore, BME employees believe they are facing discrimination when accessing employment and particularly, Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi employees expressed a barrier was limited role models from similar backgrounds (CIPD, 2017).

Following the economic downturn in 2008, all ethnic groups experienced a higher level of unemployment (Parliament UK, 2018), and unemployment for BME groups increased by 14.7% compared to 7.8% for other groups. In 2018, the unemployment rate was higher for BME women compared to men. In view of these ongoing concerns, the Government established a review to examine the progression of BME groups into employment (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). The aims were to investigate the barriers that prevent individuals from accessing positions aligned to their academic qualifications and progression into management roles. This review aimed to identify obstacles and determine if they vary between different groups and according to various points in an individual's life span by exploring "cultural, conscious and unconscious factors impacting on BME progression" (Department for

Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016, para.2). Correspondingly, The Ethnic Minority Employment Stakeholder Group (EMESG) produced guidance for employers to assist BME groups in overcoming barriers to achievement in the labour market. These include provision of volunteering opportunities, English language classes and clear advice and information on work and training opportunities (Department for Work and Pensions, 2016b).

1.2.2 Research Strategy

The mentoring phenomenon has evolved significantly in the UK and is applied in a wide variety of learning contexts, with a common similarity being a focus on 'change' and 'transition' (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2018, p. xv). Mentoring has also been signposted to support job searches as well as a means of giving emotional support (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016). This viewpoint agrees with Kram (1985) that mentoring encompasses both career and psychosocial elements to facilitate learning and development. The thesis will therefore extend understanding of mentoring by investigating the presence of both career and psychosocial elements in creating meaningful employability impact for BME female students.

BME groups face challenges in transforming their individual aspirations into actuality, often known as the 'aspirations-attainment gap' (Bartlett, 2012, p.13). The reasons for this gap are due to deficiencies in the following areas: occupational role models, professional contacts which bring social capital and access to relevant information and guidance. In these circumstances, mentoring is considered to bridge this gap for BME female students to allow access to vital resources and knowledge. Bourdieu's (1977) social reproduction theory is a helpful tool in understanding the engagement of mentoring for BME females in HEIs,

embracing the themes associated with social capital to build towards more equitable participation, progression and transition of employability outcomes.

In today's workforce, individuals should be responsible for developing and maintaining their careers, however, this neglects the position of individual agency within socio-economic contexts and the various inequalities and challenges that exist (Kovalenko and Mortelmans, 2016). Bourdieu's (1984) ideas of 'social and cultural capital' is applied to the various dynamics within social class, gender and ethnicity. Although agency and structural mechanisms influences employability, students can shape their career paths to respond with the uncertainties of the labour market. Individual success is the result of having confidence and self-worth and needs to be strengthened and nurtured for students, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds (Yorke, 2004). A question is how individuals view their internal cultural resources and assemble their economic, cultural and social capital for labour market outcomes (Colley, 2003). Especially, when considering factors such as the growth of the middle classes, mass higher education and views of graduate's skills and competences, encompassing more than academic credentials (Yorke, 2006; Tomlinson, 2008).

Employability is not simply a characteristic of a recent graduate; instead, they should continually learn and develop from their experiences for the duration of their working life. In fact, this life-long notion of employability concurs with the life-long practice of mentoring whereby an individual takes on learning and development as an on-going project (Mullen, Whatley and Kealy, 2000). This thesis adds value to mentoring perspectives by interrogating how mentoring allows BME female students to modify their agency against structural contexts, such as, home, community and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).The role of employability

mentoring will be considered, and it is argued that this can support students to take responsibility for investing in their own social capital.

1.2.3 Purpose of Mentoring

In this study, the 'mentees' are female students from diverse ethnic backgrounds who have participated in HEI employability mentoring. Six mentees from three of the HEIs were participating in formal mentoring employability programmes. Two mentees from one HEI, participated in mentoring that can be classed as 'informal'. Formal includes a pre-set programme of mentoring with formal matching of mentor and mentees, whereas informal occurs naturally, where two individuals meet through circumstances and shared interests (Lucas, 2001; Colley, 2003).

The mentors were professionally employed, and the objectives of the relationship were to support mentees with understanding their employability trajectories, including the essence of mentoring in professional contexts. To answer this question, eight in-depth interviews were held with female students that were participating in or have recently experienced mentoring. These insights were complimented by views from two of the practitioners from the participating HEIs.

1.2.4 Researcher's Positioning

As a practitioner of mentoring for 15 years, I am personally interested in the impacts of mentoring and the difference it makes to educational growth and progression. The significance of acquiring knowledge, otherwise implied, that effectively secures professional development is an area I wished to investigate further. Specifically, the function of employability mentoring

and the transformation it makes to those individuals who do not have professional connections within their communities. It is important to hear these experiences first-hand from participants, which I hope will contribute towards a deeper understanding of mentoring as an enabling support mechanism. I have encountered many examples of positive and not so positive mentoring relationships, and therefore aim to explore the requirements for ethical and successful relationships.

I investigated in-depth views about mentoring realities, by questioning my past experiences and interpretations through a reflexive approach. Reflexivity is concerned with gathering objective and authentic viewpoints on the 'otherness', thus, information that is not implicit (Cunliffe, 2003, p.986). Stronach *et al.* (2007) considered how the sense of 'self' is portrayed in authentic and meticulous research. For example, the way the author "pictured themselves in their accounts, bringing theory, method, biography, introspection, retrospection" (Stronach *et al.*, 2007, p.186) is a moderating driver for this study. My positioning is of a Pakistani female and the first generation in my family to achieve higher education qualifications, which is attributed to strong family belief in the significance of education. My lived experience of mentoring was acknowledged by a reflexive process throughout the study. This demonstrates historical knowledge of mentoring; however, I have not personally been involved in a formal mentoring programme, nor do I have any prior experience in employability based mentoring programmes.

My knowledge of mentoring consists of various experiences. I designed and implemented mentoring programmes for school-based pupils at risk of social exclusion. I recruited and deployed Undergraduate (UG) mentors to provide one-to-one support for young learners to raise achievement. I designed and developed a mentoring training programme for a HEFCE

widening participation mentoring scheme. In this role, I was also the lead trainer for child protection, ethics and delivering good practice in mentoring. I was part of a working party to develop national training standards and a core competencies framework for mentoring. I am an accredited Coach and have been mentored informally myself. As an Academic Skills Lecturer, I applied aspects of mentoring with young and mature adults to facilitate their development. All these past experiences count towards a data source as lived experience and together with the participants' contributions aims to give a comprehensive insight into mentoring relationships.

1.2.5 Theoretical Positioning

Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural reproduction encompasses concepts such as 'capital', 'habitus' and the 'field' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977), and these elements are often used for the role of language in the reproduction of class structures (Calhoun *et al.*, 1993). Theoretically, capital is more than economic factors and include cultural, social, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1977). Habitus is the outcome of historical events which produce individual and group activities and are further reinforced by social structures. Fields are the diverse social and institutional structures, such as educational and cultural networks, where individuals produce their dispositions and gain various forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1990). All these features are interrelated as demonstrated in the following equation:

[(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 101).

For social and cultural reproduction, educational settings are crucial spaces for learning and development. In this thesis, Bourdieu's thinking tools of habitus, capital and field are evaluated in the context of contemporary HE experiences to determine its suitability, limitations and possibilities for personal development in BME women.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

To contextualise the research effectively, the study will explore several significant themes that informs this research topic, such as, mentoring, employability, Bourdieu's theoretical model, complimentary learning theories and the research methodology. Based on these points and my interest in analysing the impact of employability mentoring on BME female students, the primary research aim is:

How does mentoring support employability from the perceptions of female students from diverse ethnic backgrounds?

Research questions (**RQ**) identified are as follows:

- **RQ 1:** How does mentoring navigate through individual agency, culture and communities?
- **RQ 2:** What should mentoring involve to support access, participation and progression to the labour market?
- **RQ 3:** Are there any goals or activities undertaken during mentoring?
- **RQ 4:** To what extent can employability attributes be developed through mentoring by breaking down barriers and enabling greater access, participation and progression to the labour market?

1.4 Mentoring Historical Timeline

I felt it was useful to start the study with exploring the roots of mentoring as an established educational practice explicitly referred to in the literature. In recent times, the labour market has changed significantly, hence, the question is whether mentoring should change too or is the fundamental concept timeless. Mentoring was originally imported from the USA and has been popular over the last two decades in a wide range of spheres, such as education, health, business, vocational training and management (Clutterbuck, 2004; Garvey, Stokes and Megginson,

2018). Even though mentoring has been used formally in these sectors to support learning and development, its use for personal agendas is also widespread. Many individuals can recall someone that was influential in helping them at some point in their lives without realising or labelling as mentoring, in the case of, a sibling, teacher, work colleague or a close friend. As a result, it is challenging to arrive at a clear-cut definition on what mentoring means since it changes based on individual needs and contexts (Parsloe and Wray, 2000; Clutterbuck, 2004; Crisp and Cruz, 2009).

It is helpful to look at the origins of mentoring and how the term first surfaced. Historically, the depicted view of 'Mentor' arose from the ancient Greek myth as a character in Homer's poem 'Odyssey'. Odysseus sets off to fight in the Trojan War and entrusts the care of his household and son 'Telemachus', to a dear, old trusted friend 'Mentor' (Monaghan and Hunt, 1992). Generally, this myth is commonly embraced for many introductions to mentoring where 'Mentor' is portrayed as a bearded, wise old man. Having said this, the general view of mentoring within a mythical context is too simplistic.

Further reading of the poem indicates 'Mentor' takes the form of 'Athene' through her role of advocacy, advising and support. Interestingly, this questions the gender equations of who 'Mentor' was and simply portrays 'Mentor' as a 'trusted adviser' (Monaghan and Hunt, 1992). In the poem, when Odysseus is finally reunited with his son, Athene retracts from a hands-on role but continues to provide advice as and when needed (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 1995). This interpretation of mentoring connects with the British concept of mentoring, not doing things for the mentee but doing things alongside them. Essentially, the poem shows that 'Mentor' did not fulfil his task, the Kingdom manifested into a state of disorder leading to

Athene stepping in to support Telemachus. Although, modern versions state Athene was a role model and helped increase confidence, there is no evidence of nurturing or emotional attributes, frequently ascribed to mentoring functions (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 1995).

Challenging the 'Odyssey' mentor myth, Roberts (2000) argues alternative modern versions resonates with Fenelon's 1699 story, 'Les Adventures de Telemaque', rather than 'The Odyssey'. A continuation of the original poem, 'Fenelon' takes 'Telemaque' on a learning journey about royal duties. This depiction of ongoing support and nurturing demonstrate fundamental facets of mentoring which are missing from the original version. Roberts (2000) states the real 'Mentor' was initiated by Fenelon and not Homer, where the former supported the educational development of Telemachus. Analysis of the story provides detailed educational examples of Telemachus' holistic learning journey which include reflective practice, social skills, leadership qualities and self-contemplation (Garvey, 2010).

1.4.1 Definitions of Mentoring

The contrasting views of mentoring complicates, how to explain mentoring, justify its existence and signify its usefulness when a clear agreement cannot be reached on its origins. Colley (2003) questions why modern mentoring continues to mention ancient myths of 'Mentor' when they are in fact conveyed inaccurately, suggesting the ideological purposes of myths may be deemed immoral to challenge. This raises an important question at this point of, what really is mentoring and can it be standardised as a unique agenda, like teaching and tutoring. To answer this question, greater analysis is required, starting with mentoring definitions and explanations.

CUREE (2005) believe mentoring and coaching are interconnected and there is often misunderstanding between the two terms. To help alleviate the confusion, The National Framework for Coaching and Mentoring, developed by CUREE (2005, p.3) attempts to clarify differences and offer the following definitions:

> Mentoring is a structured and sustained process for supporting professional learners though significant career transitions.
>
> Specialist coaching is a structured process for enabling the development of a specific aspect of a professional learner's practice.

The Oxford English Dictionary (2012) defines a mentor as "an adviser or guide" (p.367). Although this definition signified a clear-cut perspective, the literature related to mentoring, presents a dynamic that is more opaque. While this definition is related to historical events from the 'Odyssey', mentoring is complex and problematic to define. Throughout the last twenty years, there have been numerous definitions. An early version by Professor David Clutterbuck (1979, cited in Parsloe and Wray, 2000, p.77) stated:

> Mentoring is an essential aid to staff development…, which calls for a perspective that looks for future possibilities.

Clutterbuck's (1979, cited in Parsloe and Wray, 2000) view is further reflective of a later standpoint that mentoring was:

> off-line help by one person to another in making significant transitions in knowledge, work or thinking (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 1995 p.13).

A mentor can be described as an adviser, facilitating support and guidance to a less experienced individual, usually referred to as a 'mentee', 'protégée' or 'learner' based on professional, geographical or educational contexts (Garvey *et al.*, 2009). According to Parsloe and Leedham

(2009) there are three forms of mentor, ‘corporate’, ‘qualification’ and ‘community mentor’ (p.135). I believe that aspects of all three initially apply in the context of this mentoring study.

- The ‘corporate’ mentor advises through all the stages of career transitions.
- The ‘qualification’ mentor guides the mentee through their professional or NVQ (national vocational qualifications) qualifications.
- The ‘community mentor’ supports someone who is potentially in disadvantaged or challenging situations.

There are several different mentoring definitions and explanations, all of which are fitting to the set of activities referred to, therefore it is impossible to agree on a clear-cut definition. As this thesis considers mentoring within a cultural context, mentors need to have an awareness of their own communication skills as well as an appreciation of both their own culture and that of the mentees (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2005). Mentoring is described as an interactive process in the following statement:

> Mentoring relates primarily to the identification and nurturing of potential for the whole person. It can be a long-term relationship, where the goals may change but are always set by the learner (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2005, p.4).

1.4.2 Applications of Mentoring

There are many interpretations for mentoring, despite an influx of activity in teacher training, business and community policies adding to the complexity and amorphous nature of what constitutes mentoring (Parsloe and Wray, 2000). According to Kram (1985), mentoring is regularly perceived as constituting one of two categories: ‘career’ and ‘psychosocial’. Career functions include coaching, exposure, visibility and sponsorship, whereas psychosocial support includes advice, guidance, nurturing, and role modelling.

A ‘classical mentoring’ relationship is long-term and exclusive that embodies both career-orientated and psychosocial mentoring (Kram, 1985). Conversely, a mentoring relationship that solely provides ‘career-orientated’ mentoring is less intense and shorter, where the individual potentially seeks out the support of several different mentors. Kram (1985) stipulates the career-orientated functions are available through the mentor’s position within an organisation where they provide critical support in understanding professional realities. Alternatively, the psychosocial functions support development of the mentees’ identity through building self-confidence leading to greater professional competence. Levinson *et al*. (1978) explains the psychosocial development of an individual occurs through the mentor who gives honest and emotional support. The mentoring relationship supports young people in the move towards adulthood through enabling professional identities.

In HE, mentoring aims to contribute towards the student’s social and personal development leading to enhanced professional awareness through access to a role model (Lindgren, 2006; Goddard and Hughes, 2006). The goal for the mentee is to become independent and to make informed choices. Mentoring should have a clearly defined objective that aligns with the mentees’ assumptions of what to expect in terms of their professional development (Lindgren, 2006). Bourdieu’s (1992) notion of ‘symbolic capital’ can be acquired through mentoring where the individual gains an understanding of the beliefs, language and behaviour of an institution (Aryee *et al.,* 1996). This type of learning through symbolic capital is required for social, professional and personal development, and this thesis will consider the relationship between mentoring and successful employability outcomes for the participating students.

1.5 Employability, Higher Education and Beyond

The landscape of Higher Education, since 2008, has gone through considerable changes in their financial and philosophical positions, arising from a marked increase in tuition fees together with a competitive labour market (Tomlinson, 2008). Correspondingly, student's expectations are somewhat greater on the respective worth and investment of HE experiences (Pegg *et al.*, 2012). As a result, Universities are tasked with greater economic, political and environmental challenges to incorporate 'employability' into their strategies and to give students meaningful returns for their time (Tomlinson, 2008).

Historically and more recently, graduates from certain ethnic backgrounds and lower socio-economic groups find it challenging to access employment opportunities comparable to other ethnic groups (Blasko *et al.,* 2002; Catney and Sabater, 2015). Graduates from higher social backgrounds will earn considerably more than graduates from lower socio-economic backgrounds, even when they have attended the same Universities and undertaken similar degrees (Britton *et al.,* 2016). This reinforces that graduates' family backgrounds continue to determine the job prospects for students a considerable time post-graduation. Thomas and Jones (2007) believe to tackle these challenges; there is a need to increase confidence and skills. It is important that higher education builds cultural and social capital, especially for those individuals with limited or non-exposure through family, communities and previous experiences.

HE has been depicted as being essential at both a national economic level and for personal, social and professional transformations (Archer *et al.*, 2007). Tomlinson's (2008) study indicated that for students, HE contributed to perceived human capital and that eventually degree attainment would lead to meaningful employment. Despite this, the interviewed students

felt there was greater competition due to the "congested labour market" (Tomlinson, 2008, p.54). Having a degree itself was not considered enough as there were underling expectations to stand out amongst numerous candidates. In the UK, employers are gradually looking for skills and attributes over and beyond academic qualifications (Stevenson and Clegg, 2011). Although a graduate's subject discipline is considered a part of an employment recruitment process, it forms a wider package of disciplines to include a range of soft skills (Yorke, 2006).

A later study by the Higher Education Academy (2012) 'Pedagogy for employability' expressed HE should support students with articulating their learning with confidence. Students from low socio-economic backgrounds are less reluctant to access careers support and there are consistent challenges in encouraging them to participate in employability and extra-curricular activities at University (Tibby, 2012). The Destination of Leavers from Longitudinal Survey highlighted that after five years from graduation, one in five employed graduates were still not employed in professional or graduate level positions (HESA, 2016).

In 2016, the Government published its HE White Paper titled 'Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice', to ensure Universities continue to provide a high-quality service to students, employers and the economy (Department for Business, Education and Skills, 2016). This reinforced that for many students the preferred outcome of HE was securing future employment. The teaching experience includes supporting students in career readiness through the development of 'soft skills', signifying the importance of having access to clear guidance to allow informed decision-making.

There are also marked differences in attainment, retention and employability participation for BME students compared to their counterparts. In addressing these concerns, the Government pledged to double the number of BME students going to University by 20% in 2020 (Department for Business, Education and Skills, 2016). To enhance the HE experiences, students should be encouraged to participate in a wide variety of stimulating work experiences developing 'soft skills' needed to succeed in employment. For this reason, a 'whole lifecycle' approach in mentoring is suggested and the extent to which this is a meaningful approach for BME women is the focus of this study.

1.5.1 Definitions of Employability

Similarly with mentoring, a definition of what employability means is challenging to agree upon since there are no clear-cut definitions in the context of HE (Yorke, 2006; Bridgstock, 2009; Green *et al.*, 2009). Lowden *et al.* (2011) highlight the reasons why it is so problematic to agree at a specific consensus on its meaning. Broadly speaking, employability tends to follow two paths, firstly by a clear focus on developing skills and attributes and secondly encompassing a holistic view on individual development, including beliefs, values, and attitudes. The following definition by the Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination Team (ESECT) has been extensively accepted throughout the UK, albeit adapted and redefined according to institutional context:

> A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Pegg *et al.*, 2012, p.4).

CBI (2011) further develops the ESECT definition to include employer perspectives and skills such as problem-solving, business awareness and communication combined with literacy,

numeracy and IT competencies. There is lack of agreement of what employability means, despite increasing pressures on Universities to develop key employability attributes for their students. Green *et al.* (2009, p.19) reiterate that there is conceptual confusion as to what the terms, graduates' skills, attributes and capabilities mean, compounded by a variation in terms used by policy makers to explain graduate outcomes. Bridgstock (2009) argues that employability goes beyond the 'generic skills' required by employers and "graduates must be able to proactively navigate the world of work and self-manage the career building process" (p.31).

1.5.2 Employability Attributes and Development

There are wide interpretations of employability which vary according to context and circumstances. Barrie (2009) devised the following set of key elements when defining employability attributes which provides a clear understanding of their purpose. Firstly, they are the result of the University experience formulated outside the realms of knowledge for the subject studied. Secondly, they include much more than a narrow focus on skills and abilities to encompass fresh and unconventional notions on knowledge and wisdom. Thirdly, they appear because of the usual process of Higher Education instead of a separate curriculum or learning experience. This suggests a whole University approach and a mentor's role is to work collaboratively adopting the ethos and principles. The Higher Education Academy (2015) supports with unpacking these elements by providing a conceptual framework in employability attributes. 'The framework for embedding employability in HE' gives HEI's a structure for the development and embedding of successful employability initiatives.

This thesis will enhance existing knowledge by analysing whether mentoring incorporates these elements, the areas that require greater attention and if there are any other ways that mentoring supports BME women. It will show how career strategies are developed for the participants in this study, by an assessment of strengths and weaknesses and establishment of appropriate long-term objectives. In the culture of HE, employability should be rooted within learning and teaching and the following areas are recommended for attention.

Figure 1: The Framework for Embedding Employability in Higher Education

(HEA, 2015)

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into the following seven chapters.

- **Chapter 1** provides the introduction, rationale and theoretical positioning for the study. The research aim and questions are presented, and definitions of mentoring and employability are included.
- **Chapter 2** continues from the policy context and explanations for mentoring and employability. This chapter extends understanding of mentoring by critically reviewing related literature and identifying limitations.
- **Chapter 3** outlines the theoretical framework arising from Bourdieu and associated social capital literature to understand the various arguments and complexities with mentoring and employability for BME women.
- **Chapter 4** discusses the methodological and philosophical standpoints. The research process is explained, including a justification and ethical considerations. The sampling and data analysis process is also outlined.
- **Chapter 5** presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews which are organised against the outcomes established in the data analysis. Four overarching themes are created and structured against the related research question.
- **Chapter 6** presents a discussion of the implications of these findings against the four key research questions. These explanations are critically analysed against mentoring literature and related learning theories.
- **Chapter 7** presents a summary of the main findings according to the research questions. This chapter also includes recommendations, limitations, contributions to knowledge and personal reflections on practice.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on historical and contemporary applications of mentoring and employability and was undertaken through engagement with academic literature, underpinned by policy implications and theoretical constructs. The aim is to present an assessment of relevant research, indicate limitations and identify how my research will meet gaps in our knowledge of the experience and impact of mentoring for BME female students. The analysis from a broad range of research suggests that mentoring remains a contested term and can be experienced differently by different groups. Although there is a lack of independent critical research evaluating UK based University mentoring programmes, investigating studies from other countries and related mentoring settings provides an insight into how these principles can be applied within University environments. This chapter will outline the process for the literature review and provide an analysis of key texts in relation to contemporary mentoring, implications for practice, ethnicity, gender and mentees' agency.

2.2 Process for Review

The review was initially undertaken before the interview process and updated as the thesis progressed. In order to produce the literature review, I began with a methodical search. However, the challenge for this study was the research aim broadly covers three topics, mentoring, employability, and social capital underpinned by ethnicity and gender perspectives. By taking each topic independently, I conducted a general search using key words such as 'employability in higher education', 'mentoring in higher education', 'BME women and access into employment' and 'social capital'. These searches were particularly useful as it allowed me

to keep abreast of the policy implications of mentoring and employability, through publications and research papers. I also read policy documents to help place the study into context and to aid my understanding of the subject. Coinciding with this approach, I also searched for academic based sources through the University of Birmingham's online library and google scholar. The initial search for the policy context helped to focus my thinking about the sources of information needed. Subsequently, I reviewed literature in the field of education, and used the following phrases, 'HE mentoring', 'Bourdieu and social reproduction theory', 'personal transformations', 'BME women and personal identity'. I also used this approach to search for relevant textbooks and journals at the University of Birmingham library.

Following on from this search, I reviewed the academic literature to determine the sources that were most of relevance. Here, I identified the key themes that I wished to interrogate further, and I organised my research under the relevant headings. This presented a coherent approach to the literature in understanding how mentoring can support BME female students with employability. It was important to ascertain a range of mentoring literature to provide background knowledge and identify where and how my study will contribute within this field. I considered literature after 1995, as this was the timescale when mentoring was gaining prominence as a strategy for the enhancement of disadvantaged groups in education and employment.

I included studies that investigated mentoring as means for supporting change mechanisms for students within HEI settings. As my research question considers how mentoring develops employability attributes, I included research that explored mentoring as an intervention to support change and progression from the students' perspective. Research from outside

educational settings was considered only in professional contexts, where mentoring was discussed in relation to employability and career-based outcomes pertaining to BME experiences. As the study involves developing a culturally sensitive mentoring approach for BME women, I also included research exploring theoretical models for mentoring.

The literature that was excluded discussed mentoring on a practical, operational level, studies considering the mentors' perspectives and mentoring undertaken in non-professional related contexts, such as schools and community settings. In terms of mentoring, I aimed to identify sources that were UK based to link in with the policy implications of employability and access to professions for BME women. I reviewed research outside of the UK that discussed the concept and functions of mentoring to support employability for BME experiences.

2.3 Applications of Diversity Mentoring

2.3.1 Mentoring and Gender Perspectives

Mentoring for women in the UK aims to tackle factors such as the lack of representation in leadership and management roles (Abalkhail and Allan, 2015; Equality Challenge Unit, 2017) and responding to male-dominated environments, such as Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016) and the Police (Jones, 2017). From an employability perspective, mentoring has been utilised for growth and pursuing advancement (Clutterbuck and Ragins, 2002; Media FHE, 2019).

Academic studies have also found job satisfaction, reaching specific career goals and perceived career success are often attributed as an outcome of mentoring for women (Noe *et al*., 2002; Allen *et al.*, 2004; Tharenou, 2005; Blake-Beard *et al*., 2007). Historically, women tend to

pursue formal mentoring relationships as they encounter greater challenges in engaging with informal mentoring relationships compared to men (Ragins and Cotton, 1999; Clutterbuck, 2004). However, research has suggested that the specific value of engaging with formal mentoring is not necessarily clear and therefore, how people experience mentoring and understand its value constitutes a gap in knowledge (Ragins and Kram, 2007; Chun, Sosik and Yun, 2012).

To understand the experiences of formal and informal mentoring partnerships, Ragins and Cotton's (1999) study based in the USA was one of the first to interrogate the functions of these two types of partnerships. They conducted a survey utilising a sample of 614 participants, including male and female mentees drawn from three organisational sectors (Social work, Engineering and Journalism). The first objective was to determine the differences in career progress between formal and informal mentoring; covering three areas of a mentoring relationship, 'initiation', 'structure' and 'process' (Ragins and Cotton, 1999, p.530-531). It was reported that informal mentoring relationships led to more benefits than formal relationships for both career development and psychosocial aspects. These benefits included better fulfilment, earning potential and promotional opportunities. Secondly, the study investigated whether the gender composition of mentors affected the progress of the protégés in career development. Female mentees allocated with female mentors were considerably more engaged with after work and social activities compared to having a male mentor. Additionally, the findings identified that being historically mentored by a male mentor led to favourable outcomes such as greater compensation and earning potential. Their study provides useful insights in to how career-based attributes and readiness are differentially experienced for male and female participants across both formal and informal mentoring relationships.

Although Ragins and Cotton's (1999) study highlighted positive career-related outcomes for women as a result of mentoring, their study did not interrogate the process element to establish how mentoring led to these outcomes. Detailed accounts of mentoring experiences and the aspects of mentoring deemed beneficial for career-related outcomes by those involved were not outlined. With reference to student based mentoring programmes, Crisp *et.al.* (2017) recommend further analysis of what occurs during successful mentoring relationships by identifying distinctive mentoring tasks. This thesis identifies the various tasks and activities undertaken by mentees that allows them to actively plan, contribute and participate towards their futures. In doing so, this thesis seeks to add value to mentoring research, by clarifying the specific mentoring functions undertaken that lead to effective employability support.

Traditionally, mentoring research has neglected to consider the context of mentoring and the roles of institutions in determining experiences (Crisp *et al.*, 2017). Applying this structural perspective to female mentoring experiences, four main themes, of relevance, arose from Humble *et al's.* (2006) research, as they argued that mentoring tends to "socialise individuals into a pre-existing environment" (p.10). Using reflexive narratives, four feminist academic stories were used to understand the following issues: 'self-disclosure', 'power', 'resistance' and 'social change'.

Humble *et al's.* (2006) study analysed mentoring functions through recognising that mentees will need to navigate through structural dynamics for meaningful change to happen. A mentor should make a commitment towards real social change and guide mentees effectively, by supporting them in choosing a variety of alternate routes, rather than relaying pre-determined views that reproduce system inequalities. With this in mind, this thesis draws on the experiences

of BME women who are first-generation University students with limited professional exposures within their home environments to extend knowledge of structural perspectives. **RQ 1** provides the context for this study and considers the role of mentoring in navigating through individual agency and communities. The structural themes will be explored in the next chapter with a consideration of Bourdieu and other related ideas.

In terms of gender specific mentoring, Casto, Caldwell and Salazar (2005) explored female to female mentoring in HE, whereby mentors helped mentees to navigate through the unknown customs of a professional and academic counselling environment. They reviewed mentoring literature and used their own mentoring experiences to develop guidelines for successful mentoring to support female graduate students professionally. They suggest women who mentor other women in HE provides support in dealing with emotions, such as lack of confidence, marginalisation and loneliness, especially in a male-orientated area. Female mentors provide tailored support to other female students to deal with barriers in HE, for completion of studies and transition into professions.

Mentoring provides female students the tools and knowledge required to participate in their career domain by enlightening them on organisational politics and structural issues (Casto, Caldwell and Salazar, 2005). These include the socially embedded practices, unwritten norms, departmental history and the professional culture for their profession. There is a need to extend research by investigating organisational politics and structural dynamics and studying these from the perspectives of BME female students. This will enable a clearer understanding of why mentoring activities are so effective in understanding and navigating through structural forces at work.

Gender specific mentoring is often implemented in the academic and professional enhancement of women in STEM (Blake-Beard, *et al.,* 2011; Syed and Chemers, 2011; Prime *et al*., 2014). Dawson, Bernstein and Bekki's (2015) empirical study analysed the effectiveness of the 'CareerWISE' programme, an online version of mentoring, through a Randomized Control Trial (RCT) of female doctoral STEM students. Participants demonstrated enhanced problem solving, coping and communication skills. In particular, the psychosocial aspect of mentoring (emotional support, encouragement and mutual understanding) was crucial by having access to positive role models, counselling and friendship.

Mentoring supported these women in two key areas, 'self-efficacy' and 'coping-efficacy', thus supporting them to become more confident to cope better with the challenges of STEM (Dawson, Bernstein and Bekki, 2015, p.56). Mentees received support in dealing with any negative working environments, managing work-life balances and developing effective working strategies. Their study concludes that students exposed to the online resource benefitted from greater professional knowledge and awareness of STEM than those students on the 'wait-list' group. The results should be treated with some caution as longitudinal research is needed to determine the long-term effects of mentoring, by tracking graduates at various points in their careers. As often the case with evaluating formal mentoring programmes, there are questions on how mentoring is determined as the key source of positive outcomes.

The two previous studies suggest that mentors can support female mentees in responding to the challenges with an unfamiliar professional setting. Their reflections are particularly related to **RQ 2** and **RQ 4** and offer examples for the role of mentoring in professional environments, through the mentees self-reporting mentoring as a significant driver for progressive outcomes.

2.3.2 Mentoring and Ethnicity Perspectives

Focussed research into race and the mentoring experiences of BME groups is limited (Blake-beard, Murrell and Thomas, 2007; Prescott and Bogg, 2013). There is a lack of BME role-models in senior positions (CIPD, 2017), which means individuals require access to multiple mentors to address their needs (Ragins, 1997). There is a need for further research, particularly in the UK, that investigates how different ethnic groups experience mentoring. Specifically, given the lack of available positive role models (CIPD, 2017; AdvanceHE, 2018; Stevenson, 2019), difficulties in accessing mentoring (Arday, 2017) and limited social connections (Ragins and Kram, 2007; Universities.UK, 2019). For BME groups, political skills and awareness can be developed, notably since mentoring is a driver for passing down information and sharing knowledge on organisational cultures (Wanberg, Welsh and Hezlett, 2003; Gibson, 2004; Blass *et al.*, 2007; Montgomery, Dodson and Johnson, 2014).

In Blass *et al.'s*, (2007, p.93) study based in the USA, business graduates participated in surveys using a cross-sectional approach, testing the following three topics to measure mentoring: 'politics', 'understanding' and 'networking ability'. The results demonstrated that individuals participating in mentoring gained deeper knowledge about navigating organisational politics that enhanced their networking capacity. Mentoring was instrumental in getting familiarised with the unwritten rules of the game for the organisation.

Blass *et al*. (2007) reported that women and ethnic minorities are generally at a hindrance in knowing these rules of the game, thereby affecting their ability to play the political game effectively. Access to networks and the social capital it correspondingly brings is an instrumental source of knowledge about an organisation. However, this study does not identify

the mentoring processes that enabled the mentees to obtain deep insights into organisational politics. It is also unclear whether the outcomes are a result of mentoring, or whether the mentees' personality or characteristics allowed them to engage positively with mentoring. The interview process in this study attempts to attribute cause and effect of mentoring to employability through the mentees' self-reporting on their experiences. The way mentoring can unlock the ability to access networks and develop professional awareness is interrogated through **RQ 2**.

Across existing research, participation in mentoring is often promoted as having positive outcomes for the mentees. Castellanos *et al.*'s (2016, p.84) study examined the 'cultural congruity' needs of ethnic minority students within two Universities in the USA, including two groups, participating in, or without mentoring. 238 students participated in a written survey considering non-cognitive developmental factors on mentoring. Mentored students reported greater levels of cultural congruence to their respective institution as mentoring provided psychosocial support that contributed towards life satisfaction and comfort within the establishment. Their findings emphasised the importance of establishing personal connections and acknowledgement of cultural beliefs. Even though the gains are highlighted, this study does not clarify how learning was facilitated within the mentoring relationship. To obtain richer details of students' perspectives requires personal accounts and descriptions of mentoring experiences, which this thesis intends to provide.

An exploratory approach to understanding successful mentoring relationships was undertaken by Chan, Yeh and Krumboltz (2015) in their study of doctoral Counselling and Psychology ethnic minority students in the USA. Grounded theory was used to create a multicultural theory

based on race and cultural interpretations. They interviewed a small sample of mentees from different ethnic backgrounds, matched with a practice mentor, to understand cultural aspects of mentoring. Their findings highlighted that detailed and tailored professional support led to satisfaction and perseverance in the mentoring relationship. However, mentors needed an understanding of cultural perspectives that led to certain attitudes and behaviours. Mentors should also have an awareness of professional inequalities and barriers experienced by ethnic minority groups. Although, this study is non-representative and not generalizable to a larger group of BME students, it does clarify the process elements of mentoring that lead to successful relationships. This type of empirical research is lacking in UK literature. This thesis addresses this gap through investigating the experiences of UK BME female students and the need for support strategies to nurture meaningful HE experiences.

Access to professional knowledge and understanding the various inexplicit norms of the workplace can be facilitated through mentoring to those individuals with little insights in this area. Turner and Gonzalez (2015) conducted a detailed literature review of mentoring publications between 1981 and 2013 looking at the successes and challenges for mentoring across gender, race and ethnicity, specifically on cross-ethnicity and cross-gender pairings. They examined the intersectionality of race, gender and ethnicity through phenomenology, thus, directly through the experiences of those involved in mentoring.

Turner and Gonzalez's (2015) review in the USA found that mentoring was helpful in navigating through different schools and departments to understand the various norms, beliefs and unwritten rules of the institutional culture. Mentees gain greater presence and visibility whilst gaining an awareness of the political context. Mutual respect and openness were also

considered important along with validating the experiences of diverse identities. Importantly, they felt mentees need to find the right balance between appropriate professional socialisation into their field against not compromising their own cultural beliefs, in favour of institutional norms. My study aims to identify how mentoring advice is received and whether the mentees were given the opportunity to tailor employability advice that fits with their cultural beliefs. In Chapter 4, the Methodology, I will discuss the methods adopted to interpret the mentees experiences. This position is also helpful for answering **RQ 2**; what should mentoring involve to support access, participation and progression to the labour market?

2.4 Implications for Practice

2.4.1 Mentoring Theoretical Explanations

The use of mentoring programmes within Universities have grown steadily over the last few years, ranging from peer mentoring (Andrews and Clark, 2011; Collings, Swanson and Watkins, 2014) to outreach programmes and academic and career-based mentoring (Goddard and Hughes, 2006; Cameron and Grant, 2017). In spite of the rapid growth and application of mentoring in a variety of settings, there continues to be a lack of detailed, quality studies that show a clear theoretical framework of what mentoring means (Crisp and Cruz, 2009; Turner and Gonzalez, 2015; Crisp *et al.*, 2017).

There is a need to develop mentoring research to meet this gap in high quality, evaluative research based on theory. Collings, Swanson and Watkins' (2014) study found over four times, as many non-mentored students considered withdrawing from University at the end of the first year and these were likely to be students from lower-income backgrounds. Peer mentoring schemes with two UK Universities were evaluated using questionaries' completed by first year

students in the first week of the University term followed again after a 10-week period. The results analysed the mediating effects of mentoring on "well-being, retention and integration" (Collings, Swanson and Watkins, 2014, p. 927). Mentored students demonstrated success with fitting into a new environment, easing stress involved with transitions and supporting social systems. While this study indicates the value of peer mentoring, consideration should also be given to any contributing factors, such as whether the students were involved in any other forms of support at University that may have led to enhanced retention and well-being. Lunsford *et al*. (2017) highlighted that mentoring was not an isolated activity for undergraduate researchers, since they also participated in other activities such as summer school programmes, internships on and off campus and other part-time research tasks. They indicated that contexts should also be considered when interpreting the influences of mentoring.

Meanwhile, the use of two different research sites for Collings, Swanson and Watkins' (2014) study provides a group comparison on how peer mentors develop self-esteem for students, by providing first-hand information on curriculum and academic writing. Their findings provide insights into how mentoring supports psychosocial outcomes for students within HE in the UK. There are gaps in empirical research for mentoring within a focussed area of employability for BME students. It is useful to consider whether for BME women, career support should be prioritised over psychosocial elements or do they require both elements to ensure the likelihood of success. This study explores whether mentoring provides participants with the internal fortitude and skills to engage with confidence in a competitive graduate labour market.

As my study involves developing a theory for culturally sensitive mentoring, a clear understanding of mentoring as a process is required. It is difficult to identify one defining theory

that clearly categorises mentoring as a professional practice process. Along with the many different definitions, each explanation is fitting to the particular set of activities it purports to.

Crisp and Cruz (2009) scrutinised mentoring literature over a period of 16 years and found little evidence to clarify clear-cut mentoring definitions and conceptual frameworks, in fact 50 definitions for mentoring were identified. The lack of agreement in how mentoring is defined may be attributed to the wider lack of agreement on a theory guiding mentoring studies. This reiterates Turner and Gonzalez's (2015) view that it is important for researchers to interrogate how mentoring is individually experienced by mentees to develop authentic theories on relationships. For example, how and if BME women experience mentoring differently compared to men and other ethnic and socio-economic groups. They may have different needs and experiences and extending their contacts to professional mentors provides new perceptions. Consideration should also be given on how the mentee benefits by determining the mentoring behaviours that have the most impact on employability experiences and how these are enabled.

Crisp *et al.* (2017) expanded their original study in 2009 and reported that HE mentoring research had evolved considerably between 2008 and 2015. Although, there was a greater focus on developing theories, they were only applicable to that study or institution. There is a need to engage further with mentoring practice, to enable HEIs to implement and evaluate mentoring programmes which successfully consider emerging issues. In responding to this limitation, my thesis aims to develop mentoring theory in diversity employability for BME female students. These findings can be shared widely across different HEIs to inform professional practice and design specific mentoring interventions to meet student needs.

Similarly, Jones's (2015) study responded to scarce mentoring research on how research outcomes influences mentoring practice through both effective learner support and implications for the professional. They demonstrated that mentoring and coaching research can benefit professional practice by critically analysing the process in producing an impact case study as part of the UK Research Excellence Framework 2014. The focus was on three areas: 'identifying a suitable case', 'meeting the criteria of high-quality research' and 'evidencing impact' (Jones, 2015, p.293). Their research highlighted the strengths of mentoring and coaching on educational policy and practice and continuing professional development locally and globally. The impacts of mentoring in HE was considered, and concluded research based on conceptual definitions of mentoring and practical uses could be evidenced succinctly by lived experiences.

These recommendations from Jones's (2015) study demonstrates limitations in mentoring research and signifies research possibilities for interrogating the role of mentoring in working with females from diverse cultures. Applicable to **RQ 2** and **RQ 4**, my research will identify the components of mentoring needed for professional development for BME women within a cultural context.

Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2018) scrutinised 18 mentoring research articles to gain a deeper understanding of the various categories and nature of mentoring studies.12 of these articles adopted a positivist approach and the remaining six were from a practitioner-based background. Positivist research used questionnaires in large samples generally used in mentoring research, however, they neglected to consider the essence of mentoring relationships and prioritised statistical significance over subjective meanings. In contrast, they found that

practitioners' studies usually interrogated mentoring meanings and their implications for practice.

Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2018) reported that mentoring research is lacking in vigorous empirical studies considering issues for practitioners in-depth, and stipulated the traditional positivist tradition for mentoring can be enhanced by looking inside the "black box and exploring the nature of mentoring action" (p.45). In responding to this gap in our knowledge of mentoring, this thesis explores effective mentoring components by creating appropriate theory. Obtaining the practitioners' perspectives, also provides an understanding on institutional experiences, and whether the employability mentoring programmes effectively cater to the needs and expectations of BME women.

2.4.2 Lifelong Mentoring

Section 2.3 highlighted the traditional role of mentoring as an enabling process at an emotional and professional level. These versions of mentoring should be enhanced to include concepts such as 'lifelong mentoring' due to employability also being considered a lifelong learning activity for students. Mullen, Whatley and Kealy (2000, p.189) explore the notion of 'lifelong mentoring', where, mentoring is not a one-off activity but is ongoing throughout the course of an individual's life, as opposed to simply having one long-term mentoring relationship. Inspired by the concept of lifelong learning, mentoring can occur at any place and at any time during an individual's life span.

Mullen, Whatley and Kealy (2000, p.191) consider defining mentoring as a process rather than an activity experienced by an individual. The individual's development is attributed to many

influences each having a different purpose such as 'friend, career guide, subject specialist and adviser' with each meeting different needs for the mentee. Still, applying Bourdieu, previous knowledge and experiences can influence the outcome of the mentoring relationship; therefore, this raises a question on the value of mentoring as a lifelong activity. Mullen, Whatley and Kealy (2000, p.199) make the following pertinent point, this will be explored in the theoretical framework chapter:

> Promising and effective mentoring begins with how we think about our past, current and future lives in order to generate intentional thinking and feeling that steer how social relationships and context are created.

2.4.3 Contemporary Mentoring

It is useful to be aware of contemporary needs when developing mentoring since millennials will form 50% of the total global workforce by 2020 (PWC, 2011). Ray (2015) indicates mentoring should aim to meet the needs of 'millennials' (born between 1977 and 1997). Bearing in mind, that their needs will be different to those of past generations due to evolving HE and labour market contexts. Five participants in this study belong to this group and three to Generation Z. The key characteristics of millennials identified by Ray (2015), relevant to my study include, the desire to have a flexible work-life balance, personal development and to receive feedback and recognition. 'Millennials' would not necessarily work with one mentor with many viewing formal compulsory programmes as inauthentic and therefore would prefer quicker and informal mentoring relationships. This view agrees with the previous life-long mentoring concept and shows the multifaceted and evolving application of mentoring.

There are further factors to be considered when mentoring millennials (Mochari, 2014). These include, firstly, supporting them to connect and undertake a mentoring relationship successfully, applying social media and technology. Secondly, to ensure it is a mutually

beneficial relationship allowing the mentors to benefit too. Thirdly, a business with a longer-term strategy should invest and nurture young talent to ensure successful leaders and managers of the future. In terms of the logistical side of mentoring, millennials prefer instant access to information and may not necessarily wait for the next scheduled session (Leedham and the OCM, 2017, p.108). They view mentoring and coaching as learning and development opportunities rather than ways to increase their own achievements, also expressed in their interest for mentoring or coaching others.

Based on the Deloitte (2016) millennial study, individuals may also consider alternative methods of mentoring to include technology such as email, WhatsApp and twitter. Therefore, mentoring programmes require a flexible approach to not only meet the evolving needs of millennials and Generation Z, but also cultural considerations for BME women such as timing, location and caring responsibilities. Applying these ideas to diverse cultural groups, **RQ 4** considers the essence of mentoring and what it should involve to effectively meet the needs of BME female students.

2.5 Employability and Personality

In employability mentoring schemes, a mentor is a professionally employed role model who takes on the experienced and trusted adviser role (Goddard and Hughes, 2006). A mentor supports their mentee in developing career attributes and coming to an understanding on the relationship between employability and careers. Whilst they will help the mentee to make choices and understand their employability, this will be done in mentoring terms, therefore empowering them to guide their own paths by becoming independent learners.

A question is whether Higher Education is the right place to develop employability skills and attributes (Tymon, 2013). Particularly, since employability creeps into the area of learning theory as a student's interest, motivation and commitment will determine their engagement with employability. This point is also applicable in mentoring, where a student's predetermined attitudes and beliefs may lead to more favourable outcomes of mentoring. Tymon (2013) agrees with many researchers that there is confusion for the term 'employability', nonetheless, most explanations acknowledge this requires ownership of both skills and attributes that apply to personality theory. The development of personality attributes aligns with various psychology literature on individual personality traits and differences and these personalised characteristics are deeply entrenched and developed at an early stage. Woods and West (2010) believe development of performance and career decisions takes time and that personality as well as skills is desired by employers.

Social capital provides students with the academic knowledge and professional skills needed to thrive in academic achievements and careers (Bourdieu, 1984). It is suggested that students develop and sustain social relationships that proactively build towards their social networks. To do this, involves students recognising the function of social capital when preparing and developing their career paths. Villar and Albertin (2010) propose that Universities should assist students to enhance their personality characteristics by encouraging them to take ownership of their learning through proactive engagement in educational experiences and activities. Their empirical research with HE students in Spain analysed students' moral views on social networking practices within University and professional environments. They interrogated how students validate or query these views, such as self-interest and the ethical dilemmas of instigating such social relationships.

Viller and Albertin (2010, p.151) believe the phrase “it is not what you know, it is who you know” should be challenged due to not only moral concerns but also how it presents delimiting views on social capital. They proclaim that networking is not solely about meeting new people but should be a two-way relationship that mutually benefits and is of value to both parties. In this way, the individual is known for the things they have done and how they have contributed towards shared social capital. This perspective will be considered, to identify whether mentoring allowed the BME mentees to realistically consider viable social connections and to make decisions for participation on their own terms.

2.6 Mentoring and Individual Agency

The previous section outlined the value of capturing mentoring information first-hand by the participants to enable independent choices. Agency gives mentees the power to make decisions based on their individual circumstances and context (Colley, 2003). O’Meara (2013) defines agency as “assuming strategic perspectives and/or taking strategic actions towards goals that matter” (p.2). This concept also relates with Margaret Archer’s (2003) notion of agency that lies in an agents’ reflexive actions. It is important to ascertain how mentoring is experienced and how the mentees interpret and respond to the information given utilising their agency. This is particularly relevant to determine the overall emotional, social and psychological benefits to mentees, and whether mentoring develops a sense of self that is confident in projecting readiness for work and that they can succeed.

2.6.1 Striving for Social Justice

Social justice principles are reinforced by consideration of the students’ agency and recognition of their identities and dispositions (Yendol-Hoppey *et al.*, 2011; Sieler, 2010; Chan, Yeh and

Krumboltz, 2015). Student agency can be enhanced by focussing on the quality and specific interactions between mentor and the mentee (Griffin, Eury and Gaffney, 2015). Fundamentally, BME women hold valuable capitals that should also be acknowledged and utilised in their career planning (Montgomery, Dodson and Johnson, 2014).

Mentoring studies are required to interrogate social justice principles for under-represented groups considering their contexts and structures (Crisp *et al.*, 2017). Detailed theoretical research is still needed on how a person's identity can determine how they interpret mentoring experiences and interactions. Duckworth and Maxwell (2015) stress that care should be taken not to attribute students as mere passive receivers of information and guidance given by mentors. Considering independent learners and agency, social justice goes beyond diversity and involves acknowledging and challenging power dynamics leading to inequalities at institutional and individual level.

Duckworth and Maxwell's (2015) study found both mentors and mentees were tied up with unwarranted operational functions rather than working together to challenge social injustices. Their study responded to a gap in UK mentoring research on possibilities for mentors in fostering social justice and consisted of two elements. Firstly, a thematic literature review on the UK Lifelong Learning Sector (LLS) and Initial Teacher Training (ITT) to determine the extent to which social justice issues were acknowledged. Secondly, a review of international literature promoting the significance of social justice within ITE and the first year of teaching practice. The aim of their study was to propose a mentoring model that implements social justice using Bourdieu (1984) as a framework for understanding transformative practice.

According to Duckworth and Maxwell (2015) the desired components in mentoring to foster transformative change includes the following elements that are of relevance to **RQ 2**. They include providing mentees with space for honest and transparent reflection and an opportunity for trainees to "experience different cultures from the perspectives of members from those cultures" (Duckworth and Maxwell, 2015, p.22). Their study gives a relevant example for implementation of mentoring within a social justice framework through critical analysis of the literature. My thesis responds to this gap in research, by incorporating these principles for 'understanding transformative justice', through interviewing the mentees, thus going beyond the obligations of operational functions to hear the mentoring experiences first-hand. **RQ 3** considers whether there are any goals or activities undertaken by the mentees that support flexibility in habitus, following participation in employability mentoring. It is envisioned that these tasks would open opportunities for dialogue and reflections.

Similarly, Brockbank and McGill (2006, p.14) believe understanding the mentees' habitus is necessary for 'evolutionary mentoring', where subjective beliefs within agency are acknowledged. The unfixed habitus reacts to certain events and has potential for change beyond subconsciousness, this concept is explored in chapter three. Transforming dispositions is challenging, as unconscious thoughts are difficult to adjust through education alone; therefore, for 'evolutionary' mentoring an awareness of habitus in the mentees' surroundings will allow mentors opportunities to support the required dispositions. My thesis indicates the mentor should gain awareness of the mentees' internal circumstances by appreciating habitus and the field relating to social and economic conditions. The extent agency for the participants have been reflected upon because of a positive mentoring experience is explored in chapters five and six.

2.6.2 Identity and Agency Considerations

A key principle of mentoring is to maintain an open and honest dialogue and implement guidance that aligns with the individual's career expectations. This is important for the development of agency to allow the BME mentees ownership throughout the process. Montgomery, Dodson and Johnson's (2014*)* integrative literature review in the USA considered the mentoring experiences of ethnic minority female doctoral students. The uniqueness of their mentoring partnership ensured mutual sharing of knowledge where both parties plan and instigate strategies for the mentee's future career, such as, social and political insights. For those BME women who have been historically excluded from the socialisation of HE, as well as their preliminary experiences, this means social capital is vital.

Equally important for BME communities, individuals hold previous knowledge from their social and cultural backgrounds, but this is not necessarily used or appreciated in HE. My thesis responds to this gap in the UK literature, by identifying whether mentees were given opportunities to draw upon their own agency, and together with the mentor identify meaningful employability strategies. This means being given the opportunity to develop professional careers, without compromising their own cultural beliefs.

A further question is how the mentoring relationship determines valid ways to build upon the BME students' cultural resources for agency, whilst tackling any power dynamics. Carnell *et al.* (2012) believed the most rewarding mentoring conversations demonstrate an openness about learning and development processes, through a 'shared language'. Socio-cultural theories point towards 'construction' and 'co-construction' approaches to learning that enhances social participation. Rather than the mentor relaying knowledge to the mentee as a passive receiver of

information, ‘co-constructed’ knowledge occurs through valuable and creative collaboration where both mentor and mentee feel respected. Consequently, learning is a creation of participative action (Fletcher and Mullen, 2012, p.233). In contrast, the ‘constructive’ model is facilitative and supports the mentee to make sense of their experiences through careful, thought-provoking questions (Carnel, *et al.,* 2012). This emphasises that BME women should be encouraged to revisit and manage their own agency, based on personal, cultural and employment constructs, rather than being passive receivers of information.

Identity and agency can be viewed as two reciprocal perspectives since agency is needed to make decisions according to an individuals’ beliefs and cultural viewpoints. A socio-cultural perspective is advocated by Palmer *et al.* (2015) due to limited research in personal and professional identity development. Their integrative review of literature analysed the intersectionality between mentoring, undergraduate research and student identities to inform practice. Findings indicate that research is needed on how knowledge is constructed on self, by considering mentees’ accounts of how their identities are negotiated against personal, professional and academic environments.

This approach also agrees with the findings of Murdock, Stipanovic and Lucas (2013, p.490) where ‘co-mentoring’ can facilitate self-awareness and development for counselling students by addressing power dimensions and promoting collaboration. In this way, students’ personal and professional selves are created through personal, academic, social and sociocultural functions. Extending this approach, my thesis analyses how mentoring is a sociocultural activity that ignites how personal and cultural identities are constructed for the participants. Mentoring

becomes an additional community for the mentee to seek support, knowledge and resources to support agency.

2.7 Research Contribution

Previous research has sought to understand the functions of mentoring in positively transforming the experiences of university students. Mentoring in HE has been utilised for peer support, psychosocial (resilience, persistence, well-being) aspects and for acquiring professional course related knowledge, such as in STEM. There is also a growing level of interest in acknowledging professional and personal identities and mentoring for social change. This study will complement the existing research, and respond to limitations in UK mentoring research, in the following three areas:

1: Ontological Mentoring - Mentoring will be looked at from an ontological perspective which is currently under-researched. As mentoring involves holistic development and can happen at different stages of life as needs emerge, Bourdieu is applicable to recognise the BME mentees' positioning and attitudes. Structural contexts, such as an evolving technological and competitive labour market are also considered.

2: Social Networks/Capital - For BME women with limited exposure to professional connections, the study interrogates the role of social networks to meet career outcomes. The research will consider how students can take responsibility for promoting and nurturing their own social capital with guidance from a mentor. It will clarify the underling mechanisms of mentoring, by highlighting the specific tasks and activities that lead to successful outcomes.

3: Mentoring for Social Justice - The study will adopt an empirical approach to understanding mentoring for BME female students through development of a culturally sensitive theory, which is currently lacking in UK literature. It will contribute towards studies on social justice professional practices through an appreciation of historical and cultural experiences for BME women. The study will explore how mentees utilised their cultural beliefs to reflect upon their agency.

2.8 Summary

The literature review identified that mentoring is not clearly understood and continues to be widely interpreted. However, a common view is that mentoring is used to foster change and is adapted accordingly to the needs of the programme and context. Given the foregoing review, critical to BME females' employability is how structure and agency affects these women acting as agents within their overarching structures (e.g. socio-economic, HE, workplace, family, religion, community) within society. Building on the literature review, BME female students' goals towards employability development will be explored through Bourdieu's theoretical model and complementary concepts in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

The aim of exploring theoretical perspectives is to investigate the significance of Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual tools when addressing enablement through mentoring for BME women. Bourdieu's notions of 'capital', 'habitus' and 'field' can be perceived to manifest a structural entity. Instead of being a merely descriptive theoretical model, Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) concepts provide 'thinking tools' that are all linked and lead to social practices. As this study investigates mentoring for BME women who are the first generation in HE within their families, Bourdieu (1977) helps to understand and appreciate the mentees' positioning and 'being'. Since personal agency is dependent on structural influences, the relationship between the mentees and their HEI environment is considered. This chapter will outline the themes related to issues that may affect BME females' accessibility into the labour market and its significance for social mobility. Bourdieu's thinking will be critically analysed bringing in relevant complimentary ideas that either reinforce or challenge the model.

3.2 The Role of 'Habitus'

Bourdieu's (1992) notion of 'habitus' includes a set of dispositions that form a person's beliefs, values and opinions. These dispositions are instilled from an early age by gradual accumulation of learning and development activities that go on to influence later life experiences (Thompson, 1991). Bourdieu refers to 'dispositions' as unconscious ways to think and feel in certain ways during social practice (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).Through habitus, the individual embodies a set of dispositions that become a part of life and are acted upon but can be subject to change for mentees as explored in this study. The dispositions between persons from shared

groups, such as in BME women, are also embodied within habitus. They are known as ‘structured’ dispositions that are ‘durable’ as they are embedded in the individual, however, they are more challenging to change (Bourdieu, 1977, p.72). These ‘structured structures’ form distinct behaviours in a wide range of areas, as they objectively respond to their social settings, explaining why there are connections between habitus from individuals within a similar social class, also known as the ‘distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1993a, p.5).

Conversely, the ‘structuring structures’ are dispositions contained within habitus as behaviours that can be adapted to suit certain circumstances (Bourdieu, 1977, p.72); however, these are influenced by an objective social relationship, known as the ‘field’. The individual’s subjective dispositions determine opportunities and challenges within their objective environment. Habitus is thus the outcome of history displayed in a set of dispositions that encounter ongoing life experiences that either underpins or adjusts its structures. As in the case of cultural experiences shared by BME communities, Bourdieu believes, in the main, individuals are more likely to face situations that tie more neatly with habitus (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Habitus is sometimes described as a ‘feel for the game’, where people unconsciously behave and respond to particular ways in a given situation (Bourdieu, 1990b, p.66).Through dispositions, such as identity and personality traits, practices are triggered by early childhood experiences (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1990a).Those individuals who have prolonged exposure to the conditions like habitus gain a ‘practical sense’ of the’ feel for the game’ based on historical and childhood experiences (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.54). Hence, individuals will naturally fall into practice and activities that habitus is comfortable with. Early life experiences influence the way habitus reacts towards change, considering whether to accept or reject this

information based on accrued experiences. For many, including BME communities, it can be done unintentionally, through participating in informal mentoring or purposely through formal mentoring.

Bourdieu (1990a) argues habitus tends to lead participants to choose activities that align with their present state as a defence mechanism. This manifest itself in consistent social behaviours that reproduce the dispositions by making the choices deemed acceptable to them. Habitus is the most extensively applied of Bourdieu's ideas; however, it is often misconstrued and questioned (Grenfell, 2008). The practices of individuals are not determined solely by habitus but include the relationships between habitus and situations in which the individual finds themselves, known as the 'field' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The BME females' practice, in this study, is the University context. Since habitus is relational, the mentoring relationship should be considered within the University field. This viewpoint supports understanding of **RQ 4**; whether mentoring allows for exposure to alternative viewpoints.

A person's habitus forms the foundation for any future tasks and activities, where individuals reproduce similar activities to which they are accustomed. As an alternative, Colley (2003) believes this can also apply to instances where individuals pursue their own goals, whereby their needs and activities are shaped around habitus. Therefore, if habitus has embodied the role of HE and employability through family interactions, then the students can access mentoring to respond to these needs. The following statement can be applied to the purpose of mentoring in relation to habitus:

> We must think of it as a spring that needs a trigger and depending upon the stimuli and structure of the field, the very same habitus will generate different, even opposite outcomes (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p.135).

As Grenfell (2008) believes habitus is not a static concept, this means an individual can be faced with making decisions at any given time. The type of decisions deemed feasible depends on histories, the present situation and position in the social field (Bourdieu, 1984). But for many, including BME women, this decision-making may benefit from intervention to support their ability to make well-informed decisions. The purpose of mentoring is to explore the diverse range of options that would not otherwise be pursued due to habitus choosing the most viable and visible options that influence a subject's decisions. **RQ 3** considers how mentoring creates employability practices and characteristics, through a reflection and re-working on decisions, actions and behaviours.

3.3 The Role of 'Capital'

From the BME student's perspective, to achieve in HE, they also utilise the 'capital' gained through past schooling, families and communities. Bourdieu's (1977) explanation of capital goes beyond economic terms to include other resources such as cultural, social, symbolic and linguistic capital (Painter, 2000). What they all have in common is they are a result of a particular investment and an expectation for a return on that investment (Moore, 2004). 'Economic capital' can be inherited or generated and is the traditional meaning of material wealth (Painter, 2000). 'Social capital' is acquired though access to social networks and exposure to such resources are generally through family and wider societal networks (Bourdieu, 1989). 'Cultural capital' applies during socialisation through formal educational processes and educational qualifications (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu, 1984).

There are three forms of 'capital' that resonate within the field of cultural reproduction. Firstly, 'symbolic capital' projected through personal qualities such as accent, language and traits

(Grenfell and James, 2008). Secondly, 'cultural capital' mainly transmitted through the family whereby children acquire their distinct dispositions for ideas and behaviours (Bourdieu, 1984). Thirdly, capital acquired through learning institutions such as Universities. In turn, these are then designated a distinct social prominence based on values determined by the dominant class (Reay, 2004).

Through habitus, people will either individually or as a group modify or internalise their social behaviours based on their social situations (Fowler, 1997). Cultural capital is obtained initially within the family and developed within the educational environment. Hence, the lack of such capital for BME communities means this is as much a barrier to achievement as low economic capital. Acquiring meaningful capital is related to **RQ 2**; whether adopting mentoring as a resource develops social and cultural capital for BME women and meets any gaps not acquired through previous circumstances.

The 'dominant' group in society are those individuals or groups who have the economic, social and political power to determine resources. Within educational systems, the culture of these dominant groups is systematically embedded through historical structures that produce and reproduce these beliefs (Harker *et al.*,1990).The educational environment benefits those individuals who already hold the required forms of cultural capital arising from habitus that is assumed by the dominant group. Each of the different kinds of capital can however be transformed into other forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1984). The cultural capital acquired from a degree can be transferred into economic capital in a graduate-level position. The premise for mentoring programmes would argue that mentoring gives access to social networks and therefore enhances this investment (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016).

However, the relationship an individual share with the institutional culture will determine their future in the system and thus differences in the dispositions of middle class and working-class students should be considered (Moore, 2004). In BME communities, initial social structures, such as family and education are not the only factors influencing practices and beliefs since an individual's biography can change over time according to context and cultures. The BME mentees' social capital can increase or decrease and thus their thinking tools and decision-making capability, as social capital affected likewise. This reflection is applicable to **RQ 4**; does mentoring create the necessary desired progressions or are structural mechanisms too dominant to overcome?

3.3.1 Alternative Forms of 'Capital'

Many ethnic minority families appear to have strong aspirations for higher education and for young ethnic women there are increasing numbers aspiring to succeed in education and beyond. Modood (2004, p,101) conceptualizes a further form of capital applicable to BME women as 'ethnic capital' which signifies the educational and career aspirations of ethnic minority parents for their children. Modood (2004) attributes this with family and community support, whereby parents express strong desires for their children to achieve upward social mobility and education is prioritised to achieve this goal. As a result, the young people will embody theses hopes and ambitions and will generally select life aspirations like their parents. At the same time, parental authority helps to follow through on these aspirations, where the young people find the means for its gradual fulfilment. Modood (2004, p.94) refers to this process as the 'motor' for perceived social transformations for British South Asian families, instigated by the families and communities.

Differentiating ‘ethnic capital’ from social and cultural capital provides a useful extension to understanding the BME capital toolkit. ‘Social capital’ is gained through social networks and ‘cultural capital’ is the portrayal of language, behaviours and certain traits (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Collective customs and beliefs create forms of ‘ethnic capital’, although this can vary considerably between families (Shah, Dwer and Modood, 2010). Structural barriers, educational environments and access to the labour market influences the application of ‘ethnic capital’. Modood and Khattab (2016) examined different ways ethnic groups can reduce the likelihood of ‘ethnic penalties’, that is the barriers informed by ethnicity. They include adopting new strategies for accessing and participating in the labour market, such as self-employment and mentoring.

Although to some extent ethnicity is developed and re-enforced by external structures, it is by no means limited to them. Even though labour market discrimination may exist, the extent and form vary. The effects can therefore be limited by using alternative strategies and behaviours, such as mentoring, work shadowing and volunteering, especially since different ethnic groups have different access to these (Modood and Khattab, 2016). Adopting alternative strategies is applicable to **RQ 4**. Where there is lack of accrual for different types of capital, mentoring can fill those gaps and attempt to transform the BME mentees’ situation within habitus.

Gender and ethnicity factors can be applied to Bourdieu’s (1977, 1984) notions for habitus and cultural capital. For example, the mother’s role in developing the child’s education and how this contributes towards cultural reproduction (Grenfell and James, 1998). Basit (2012a, p.140) categorises ‘aspirational capital’ as being a significant motivator for young people to achieve in education and employment. This family support and encouragement contribute towards

'aspirational' capital where parents display high aspirations for their children's future akin to those expressed by middle class families. Basit (2012b) acknowledges BME women are increasingly seeking qualifications and a career alongside family life and such goals arise at various points in their lifespans.

According to Bourdieu (1991) an individual's everyday practices are determined by the individuals and groups they engage with; thus, habitus should not simply be taken at face-value as even if in similar groups, everyone has their own distinct habitus. Individuals from ethnic minority groups who have succeeded in gaining educational qualifications have attributed this to family support and thus the educational system alone is insufficient in facilitating smooth transitions into employment. This 'personalised moderating process' produces many identities which are 'dynamic, helical and contextualised' (Basit, 2012b, p.420). A relevant point with mentoring is that ethnic minority young people are open to adapting and including new elements to their socialisation and are not restricted by habitus, instead they adopt new preferences and reject unsuitable aspects. Basit's (2012b) arguments are relevant to **RQ 3**. It is tentatively argued that the BME student, as a life-project could work towards development of economic and cultural capital as a result of a positive mentoring experience.

3.4 The Nature of 'Fields'

The 'field' is described as a structured system of social relationships where individuals, groups and institutions all exist with some aspect of structural relationship between each other (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 1993b; Grenfell and James, 1998). Bourdieu's (1993b) concept of the field is interpersonal, and for many communities, including BME, positions are determined by the disproportionate allocation of the different kinds of capital

(Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The field is known metaphorically as the 'pitch' or 'board' on which the game is played (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.67). Within a field are certain guidelines or uniform behaviours that are not necessarily obvious or implicit (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Another metaphor for Bourdieu's (1990a, p.66) field is 'the game' or 'football game' where the field is bound by certain rules and expectations, and individuals are the players seeking to boost or maintain their existing capital (Bathmaker, 2014). The field is structured in a way whereby participants in the game possess either dominant or subordinate roles, according to capital, the distinct resources held by the agents (Naidoo, 2004).

The extent to which social positions are held in fields is reliant on holding the required forms of capital, furthermore, each field will have its own 'logic of practice' (Bourdieu, 1990a, p, 80). Bourdieu's application of the field is often used in a fixed and deterministic manner (Painter, 2000). However, the relative weight of each capital differs according to the type of field (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). For instance, when responding to a field, BME communities also possesses a stock of embedded dispositions from their habitus together with a collection of capitals.

An example of the relationship between a capital and field is 'linguistic capital'. Bernstein's (1975) notion of the 'hidden curriculum' stipulates that schools usually adopt an 'elaborated code' aligned with the language associated with middle-class groups. This elaborated code differs from the 'restricted code' of belonging within the individual's immediate environment and community. Both working class and middle-class groups use the restricted code, however the middle-class also have access to the elaborated code, through their wider cultural and geographical socialisation (Bernstein, 1973). This access correlates with the complex, detailed

and articulate language used in schools, consequently giving an advantage through familiarity and confidence.

Correspondingly, with Bourdieu (1990a), ideologies are developed within an individual's subconscious without being actively questioned. It is envisioned that the mentee will question such ideologies before deciding to agree or decline them. Consequently, this free thinking will empower BME women to develop their own social and linguistic capitals to inform their employability decisions and behaviours. As part of the game, the relationships the mentee has with the field, such as the University context can lead to social transformations.

It is worth noting such fields can only exist so long as there are agents willing to pursue their investments. Bourdieu (1990a, p.67) refers to this as the 'illusio', that is an admission and dedication to the game. This describes the particular investment an individual will play in the game where 'players' can participate to develop or maintain their capital in line with the unspoken rules of the game, however they can also adapt partially or fully to the unspoken rules of the game (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu *et al.*, 1999). Therefore, responding to the 'hidden curriculum' within education settings referred to by Bernstein (1975).

The game is competitive, since different agents hold various positions and will adopt behaviours or strategies to enhance their position (Bathmaker, 2014). Individuals who begin University with the required forms of capital are at a distinct advantage as they will acquire more forms of capital as time progresses (Grenfell, 2008). In this way, the responsibility lies with the student to fit into and respond to established practices (Watson, 2012). The previous statement on 'congested labour market' is applicable (Tomlinson, 2008, p.54). It appears the competition

begins prior to University and thus early interventions, such as mentoring are additional support systems for BME students to respond with such practices. Tomlinson's (2008) position supports with understanding **RQ 2**; to what extent, the mentoring intervention makes a difference when interacting with the field is explored.

3.5 Criticisms of Bourdieu

Class seems to be less an element for the explanation of social action than when Bourdieu's (1984) 'Distinction' was first published and therefore, its findings need to be re-considered in today's context. The changing notion of self-identity whereby structural perspectives, such as gender, age and ethnic groups are increasingly considered (Boyne, 2002). Some aspects of working-class identity, such as beliefs, behaviours and aspirations are being amalgamated into traditional middle-class identity (Bourdieu, Chamboredon and Passeron, 1991). Evidence for such changes in BME communities are through the development of 'ethnic capital' (Modood, 2004) and 'aspirational capital' (Basit, 2012b).

There is an assumption that habitus will respond to the field without questioning dispositions and practices, therefore, Bourdieu (1977) fails to take account of any ambivalence in explanations of practice (Adkins, 2003). The application of certain values in daily lives are missing from Bourdieu's (1977) structural perspectives (Skeggs, 2004). Individuals possess in habitus certain unconscious beliefs and practices that align with their own interests and values. For example, in BME communities, there needs to be an awareness of cultural values for those individuals who do not wish to or who are unable to convert their capital into certain relations. Skeggs (2004) believes it is in inadequate to portray this negatively and unequal with dominant symbolic capital. Instead they should be given opportunities to acquire the knowledge and

resources needed for their own development. Skegg's (2004) reflection is particularly relevant to **RQ 2** and understanding how mentoring allows BME female students to navigate through 'the rules of the game' to make clear career choices.

Further criticisms of Bourdieu (1977) are based on the lack of consideration of three features in social life which contributes towards the creation of habitus and development of strategies (Atkinson, 2016, p.17-20). The first is 'multiplicity' consisting of the wide range of social situations that make up daily lives. Secondly, 'time-space' involving the physical positioning and movement of the individual against other objects or entities in their lives, such as policy and media influences. Thirdly, the role of social networks as Bourdieu (1992) viewed such networks as the outcomes of certain connections as opposed to developers of habitus. Atkinson (2016) believes this along with 'time-space' is a restricted view. An individual's dispositions, social practice and acquisition of capitals from social exchanges may also determine perceptions, needs and knowledge, these themes will be explored in the analysis chapter.

In Butler's (1998, 2010) notion of 'performativity', the subject is reconstructed through repeated acts or behaviour that differs from Bourdieu's (1992) view where social exchanges are personified through interactions with the field. Butler agrees with Bourdieu on the significance of institutional standards in creating social experiences, however, she emphasises the function of repetitive behaviour when responding to those standards. Here, agency is developed through a 'speech act' in response to a given environment which imitates established practices and thus, not limited to those individuals traditionally aligned with the field. This offers a different perspective to Bourdieu and considers ways in which individuals transform habitus from either resistance to established practices or enablement of different behaviours. Bourdieu neglects to

consider these circumstances where BME students may depart from engrained practices, consequently reviewing their agency.

This concept of deconstructing agency was explored in Margaret Archer's (2003, 2007, 2012) reflexivity model which was developed as critique to Bourdieu (1990). She believed that conscious 'internal conversations' or 'dialogues' are essential to human subjectivity. Archer's (2003, p.5) explanation of reflexivity is the 'internal conversation' with the self. This is where personalised goals, commitments and priorities are determined, otherwise known as 'life-projects' (Farrugia and Woodman, 2015, p.627). The social environment in BME communities, can then be supportive or restrictive and either replicate existing structures or create new practices. Archer (2003, cited in Farrugia and Woodman, 2015) believes habitus is too restrictive as it neglects to acknowledge the way individuals may pursue certain life paths according to their "ultimate concerns" (p.627). This limited view of habitus does not meet the demands of modern societies due to an emphasis on structural forces that ignores how the BME mentees can pursue social changes.

In Bourdieu's (1990) model, individual identities respond to social expectations through habitus and embodied dispositions and social practices are not readily susceptible to reflective analysis (Farrugia and Woodman, 2015). Archer's (2003) criticism of habitus is that it neglects to consider any meaningful investment that arise from an individual's concerns achieved through 'internal dialogues' with self. Emerging questions applicable for BME mentees, are how a choice is made to select a particular activity instead of others for 'life projects' and where an individual's 'ultimate concerns' derive from (Farrugia and Woodman, 2015, p.633).

Widening participation policies have promoted greater diversity for disadvantaged groups in society as its philosophical basis (Archer *et al*., 2010), whereas Bourdieu's (1993) field theory considers competitive factors where inequalities are produced and reproduced. Still, for BME women, there are other aspects of HE experiences that can also create new meanings, such as, choosing activities that depart from engrained practices. Naidoo (2004) explores Bourdieu's (1993) field theory to understand HE intellectual and structural systems, specifically, the role of HE in enhancing self-confidence, motivation and persistence. Universities are directed by their own fields underpinned by inherent values and beliefs, operating almost exclusively from economic and political fields. The structure of the field shows that agents and HEI institutions hold 'dominant' and 'subordinate' roles, based on the capital held by the agent or the 'academic' capital (Naidoo, 2004, p.458).

A criticism of the field is that it focuses on structural processes of institutions and fails to acknowledge the individual circumstances that challenge social inequalities. The field theory has limitations as it neglects social forces that are "strong enough to challenge dominant forces but too weak too entirely displace such forces" (Naidoo, 2004, p.468). Bourdieu (1993) also neglects to consider the everyday practical aspects of HE experiences that challenge assumptions, and in these conditions, mentoring for BME women is considered an alternative activity. For this reason, Naidoo (2004) believes that too much emphasis is placed on structural ideologies and not enough on how knowledge is produced. As a result, individuals are seen as mere objects positioned in their fields and these fixed locations/positions sustain the superior and inferior features attributed to social capital.

3.6 Mentoring and Social Capital Development

I have created the following conceptual framework outlining the structural and agency factors, arising from my analysis on habitus, capital and the field. This table presents a summary of my critical evaluation of Bourdieu and highlights themes that are of relevance to BME experiences in this study. The next section will review the alternative and complimentary perspectives to Bourdieu and will be considered in relation their significance on mentoring.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework - Structural and Agency Themes

Individual Agency	**Structure**
Inherited cultural capital	Interclass competition
Academic capital – inherited values	Power and power relations
Educational investment	Economic, cultural and political capital
Social change – aspirations and vision	Agents and dominant class
Social engagement (social life)	Social mobility and power groups
Meanings and attitudes for social capital	Individual structural mechanisms
Understanding 'the rules of the game'	Structural frameworks
Social construction of knowledge	Structural ideologies and social inequality

The mentees' personality traits as well as class, gender and cultural backgrounds are ingrained in habitus and these determine how a person will react towards mentoring. Hence, Bourdieu's

theoretical model is useful when investigating mentoring relationships as it allows consideration of the 'being' of a person (Colley, 2003). Bourdieu's (1984) notion of 'cultural capital' is also regularly adopted when describing the various advantageous knowledge and understandings an individual possesses which support them in navigating through educational systems (Montgomery, Dodson and Johnson, 2014). To support with access to employment, BME women can invest in their cultural capital by internalising and instigating the knowledge and socialisation needed in the workforce.

The model of 'interactive universality' can be applied to BME mentoring experiences, where 'universality' is a moral understanding gained by a shared respect for each other's viewpoints (Benhabib, 1992, p.32). This moral respect is achieved by social exchanges understanding the perspectives of others, thus, being able to reverse places with the other person. If we apply this reasoning to mentoring conversations, the mentor should aim to gain an understanding of the BME mentees' needs by listening to their opinions. Benhabib's (1994) views are consistent with Bourdieu, where identity is created though social interactions and cultural contexts; subsequently an individual internalises a version of themselves, leading to self-conception. However, this is 'situational' and subject to change for the BME mentees dependent on the 'situational knowledge' encountered.

In contrast, Young (1994) suggests creative conversations should be developed by acknowledging any social differences rather than considering views and values as symmetrical. This approach uses a moral dialogue that is open to hearing the mentees explicit articulations for their backgrounds and employability aspirations by not making assumptions of understanding their perspectives. In turn, the mentor should refrain from making any political

or moral conclusions for the mentees' futures. **RQ 4** considers the components needed for employability mentoring. Understanding cultural heritage is worth exploring to see what aspects of the BME mentee's existing repertoire can assist them in their employability.

In these situations, consideration should be given to how mentees pursue their own employability agendas irrespective of structural contexts. Foucalt (1988, p.17) posits four types of technologies that individuals use to make sense of their social encounters, the two applicable in this mentoring study are 'technologies of power' and 'technologies of self'. The former relates to HE structural conditions and the latter, the BME female mentees' agency that determines activities within the HE environment.With respect to 'technologies of self', individual agency is not submissive to power relations and can make decisions within that environment. Foucault (1988) believes agency can be transformed when individuals either respond according to their own beliefs, or through assistance from others, such as mentoring. These are the "specific techniques that human beings use to understand themselves" (Foucault 1988, p.18). In this study, 'specific techniques' is the mentoring process and the effects on the BME mentees' decision-making capabilities.

Colley (2003) questions how quickly habitus can be transformed in a relatively short period of time and attributes caution when addressing the rise of social and cultural capital through mentoring, due to differing individual circumstances and context. Despite this concern, it is worth exploring the field context for the mentee and the extent internal resources are classed as worthy capital instead of not acknowledging their worth. For mentoring to support employability goals for BME women, it has a responsibility to aid development of the social capital agenda, generally absent within this domain, where job progression is implied rather

than specific. Colley (2003, p.175-176) posed several questions when critically evaluating mentoring programmes against the social and political contexts of mentoring practices. The two questions that will be explored in the discussion chapter for BME mentoring experiences are:

> 'Does mentoring encourage individual passivity and acquiescence or promote active citizenship that might challenge inequalities in the status quo?' (in relation to the field).
>
> 'Does mentoring seek to work on or through the persons involved?' (in relation to habitus).

3.7 Summary

This thesis aims to extend knowledge by adapting Bourdieu's work based on the mentoring experiences of BME women for a sociological explanation of individual agency and employability in the UK. This is not defending or advocating Bourdieu's work but to provide support with making sense of the key issues influencing employability. Accordingly, these ideas support the research process rather than being used as a benchmark to measure against the mentees' experiences.

The study will enhance understanding of whether mentoring can challenge traditional social/racial/gender inequalities to support BME female students' progression into employment. A conceptual framework (**Table 1**) was developed from the ideas of Bourdieu and was explored in relation to social capital, family, environmental, cultural and historical contexts. The themes highlighted in the literature review and the mentoring research topics identified throughout this chapter, contributed to understanding the research aim: **How does mentoring support employability from the perceptions of females from diverse ethnic backgrounds?** The next chapter will outline the research paradigms, methodology, sample and ethical considerations used in exploring these issues.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This study considers a collaborative view of employability mentoring through the mentees, practitioners and my lived mentoring experience. Reflexivity is applied since I am interpreting the experiences shared by the participants and is especially crucial given my historical experiences of mentoring, both at an operational and personal level. This means that because the data will unavoidably be influenced by my own mentoring experiences, a reflexive and open approach is needed. The methodology chapter will discuss the research paradigms, approach and methods that are best suited for obtaining the real-life mentoring experiences of BME female students. This chapter will also outline the sampling process, discuss the ethical implications and explain the data analysis process.

4.2 Research Paradigms

For qualitative researchers, the relationship between individuals and their social world is different to positivism of the natural sciences, in that objects ascribe meanings to their surroundings (Bryman, 2012). The key three paradigms for qualitative research are positivist, interpretivist, and critical paradigms (Punch, 1998). Epistemological links of how knowledge is created are through phenomenology and symbolic interactionism and is thus attributed to 'interpretivism'. This premise utilises a sympathetic approach allowing deeper feelings to be uncovered (Denscombe, 2002). As opposed to positivism, the social world does not exist independently but is constantly created and reinterpreted by individuals during their day-to-day lives (Matthews and Ross, 2010).

According to the interpretivist view, social reality exists subjectively within mentees and is socially constructed and interpreted from their meanings. An interpretive approach allows these meanings to be captured to understand how mentoring assists employability for BME women. This connects to the ontological perspective of constructivism, where social phenomena exist due to the meanings and interpretations of those individuals engaged within it (Matthews and Ross, 2010; Kings and Horrocks, 2010; Robson and McCartan, 2016). The interpretivist perspective explores the mentees own understandings of employability mentoring, hence, allowing many different perspectives. The premise of interpretivism is how the social world is viewed and interpreted by individuals 'from the inside' (Blaikie, 2000, p.115). My role as researcher is to capture this 'inside' view rather than capturing an 'outsider' view of mentoring experiences.

I adopted the interpretive paradigm for this study in line with general research education, indicating the differences between quantitative and qualitative research. The simplicities of this distinction is questioned by Rowbottom and Aiston (2006) and instead methodological flexibility is suggested, seeking to address the concern, irrespective of assigning a scientific or interpretive path. In this study, I considered the purpose of my research and the most suitable method in obtaining the data. Rowbottom and Aiston (2006, p.154) propose a "genuine fitness for purpose" in methodological processes where research should be carefully designed to obtain reliable data for the specific context in mind. Broadly, the following perspectives, ontology, epistemology and methodology influence paradigms (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). Each of these perspectives will be considered in turn with a 'genuine fitness for purpose' to the objectives of this study.

4.2.1 Ontology - The Constructivism Position

"Ontology is a branch of philosophy that is concerned with the nature of what exists" (Blaikie, 2007, p.13). The ontological position known as constructionism or constructivism is when people attribute meanings to their life; consequently, this social phenomenon is an ongoing process of interaction with others (Matthews and Ross 2010; Bryman, 2012). This suggests that social interactions such as mentoring for BME communities can be analysed in this way.

Constructivism stipulates that social exchanges are continuously moulded through reflection (Matthews and Ross, 2010). The social reality for the BME students is the employability effects and mentoring is referred to as a social phenomenon, that is, a social entity that exists alongside other aspects of their daily social lives. I am also part of a social word and carry my own historical understandings and interpretations of mentoring; this forms a social constructionist view. Social constructionism is relativist and believes meanings arise through our interactions within the social world (King and Horrocks, 2010). Since this depends on historical and cultural contexts, there may be conflicting versions of mentoring according to different institutions, locations and timings. As the participants were drawn from four different HEIs, there may be differences or similarities in how mentoring is experienced. Although the mentees are from BME groups, they conceptualise their own employability attitudes and behaviours through their social interactions with mentors.

4.2.2 Epistemological Perspective

Epistemology refers to the way we gather knowledge about the social world (Blaikie, 2007). In social constructionism, social realities are formed by the mentees' social exchanges with their mentors. Meanings are developed in many ways; hence, mentoring can mean different things

to each of the BME female mentees. Yet, each perspective is considered valid as it is essentially derived from that individual experience of the phenomenon. I also considered how my own values, knowledge and interest in mentoring would affect the outcomes of the study. My lived experience as a BME woman and previous experiences of mentoring emphasised a greater need for reflexivity and to look critically inwards during all parts of the process.

The social interactions undertaken through mentoring, takes place through language and this allows the mentees to be social beings. The language used within certain cultures and communities enables groups to interact with each other leading to group behaviours and decisions (Matthews and Ross, 2010). It should be acknowledged that, each mentee is a unique individual despite being part of a similar social and BME group; this allows them to relay their own unique experiences of mentoring. Within the realms of confidentiality, they can describe in detail the mentoring process and how it developed their employability strategies.

4.2.3 Phenomenological Approach

The two strands of interpretivism initially considered were symbolic interactionism and phenomenology. John Dewey (1933) notion of symbolic interactionism suggests that individuals will interpret the meaning of actions and objects in social events and act accordingly (Gray, 2014). Consequently, the 'self' can also be revised based on these experiences. Although symbolic interaction has merit for this study, phenomenology is considered, as this approach believes that social reality can only be understood by capturing individuals' experiences of their reality (Gray, 2014). Phenomenology aims to capture the subjective mentoring experiences of the students through an inductive approach developed through the interview process. Here, I strived to set aside any pre-understandings about mentoring to allow fresh meanings to emerge.

Phenomenology is a methodological viewpoint that investigates *how* knowledge is known as opposed to *what* knowledge is known (Macquarrie and Robinson, 1990). The subject matter in this case being mentoring. "Phenomenon the 'showing-in-itself' signifies a distinctive way in which something is encountered" (Macquarrie and Robinson, 1990, p.54). It means how people clearly interpret their life and experiences through every day social encounters (Butler-Kisbler, 2010; Denscombe, 2014). Phenomenology arises from the philosophical viewpoints of Heidegger (1962) and is based on the ontology of 'being in the world'. For this study, the focus is on understanding the *essence* of mentoring experience, through phenomenology, deep and renewed mentoring insights were captured, as it appeared first-hand to the mentees.

4.3 Research Design

4.3.1 Inductive and Deductive Paradigms

I created the theoretical framework to understand social capital issues through Bourdieu (1977) and related concepts. This framework is an interrelated structure of statements on social class, family, communities and employment which created ideas for the research structure. This study analyses employability using the theoretical framework together with the BME female students' mentoring experiences to test the validity of this theory, known as deduction, where the theory is recognised before research is undertaken (Gilbert, 2001).

The 'social capital' literature was used to make sense of the issues, focus research and develop suitable interview questions. Although, the resulting social theory will help to understand the nature of mentoring across cultural experiences, care was taken not to analyse these experiences solely based on the theoretical framework. The research objectives were to generate data and determine the significance of mentoring to BME women. Some critics argue that theories

should be rejected, and facts should simply be judged on face value alone (May, 2001). Nevertheless, the concern here is that our assumptions may still be present underneath the surface and will influence our interpretations of behaviour. For this reason, I was reasonably satisfied with commencing the study with the theoretical framework, initially with a deductive stance since there were risks of certain views being reproduced by simply observing the social events.

The inductive research process begins by collating data, undertaking analysis and producing generalisations known as 'inductive' logic. (Blaikie, 2007). Dewey (1993) describes the inductive paradigm as starting from disjointed views and moving towards a more united coverage of the event, where theories are generated after this process (Gray, 2014). This study also uses the inductive strategy where the data is analysed to determine uniting trends for mentoring across the BME sample group.

I grappled with deciding on the most appropriate research approach. Inductive logic explores the individual circumstances from a case to draw out inferences, conclusions or theories, thereby, allowing facts to relay the personal details of mentoring. This allows mentoring theories to be developed after undertaking careful reflection and data analysis (O'Leary, 2017). Conversely, deductive logic incorporates a predominant notion of social capital to capture inferences about connections with employability. David and Sutton (2011) believe that it is possible to conduct qualitative research with the construction of a hypothesis; thereby, the lines are blurred with both perspectives presenting challenges on implementing a single approach for this study.

When considering the purpose of deductive and inductive research, in practice both concepts are interweaved (Gilbert, 2001). Therefore, using a mixed approach, the theoretical framework was considered by analysing the features of social reproduction theory, thus deducting the social capital theory informing the study. The interview process then tested out aspects of this theory. Where it was found that the theory was inapplicable, the inductive method was applied to construct a tailored theory in response to the mentoring experiences of females from diverse ethnic backgrounds. This means that instead of creating a theory from the data, the theory is created from an on-going verification basis.

As a result, the process involved alternating between different sequences of deductive and inductive approaches (O'Leary, 2017). This approach analyses findings that allow theories to appear through inductive, 'ground-up' processes. In this instance, it was possible that these emerging theories would result in a deductive validation of Bourdieu's 'social reproduction theory' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). It was also important when undertaking deductive verification, I was willing to accept unforeseen ideas emerging from the data and create alternative theories inductively. In this way, interpretations of employability mentoring for BME mentees relied on the continuous corroboration of various social capital ideas.

4.3.2 Validity in Research

In qualitative research, researchers should ensure their approach is construed as consistent if adopted by different research studies and researchers (Gibbs, 2007). Creswell (2014) suggests the researcher includes 'validity' strategies including a variety of approaches that assures readers of accuracy. The following methods were subsequently used as validity measures. Triangulating from other sources of information to validate themes by inviting the University

practitioners of the participating institutions to give their views. All participants were sent their interview transcripts and asked to verify the accuracy of these accounts. It was particularly important for participants to be collaborative producers of mentoring knowledge. The analysis section used specific and detailed descriptions to express mentoring accounts. I remained open to the fact that I would have some potential for bias, based on my own mentoring experiences. Accordingly, I kept abreast about recent developments in the mentoring field, especially in the context of contemporary mentoring. I also liaised with peers and colleagues to strengthen the accuracy of the thesis by asking them to critically challenge and ask questions about my approach.

4.4 Interview Methods

4.4.1 Sampling Process

Purposive sampling is related to small, detailed studies interrogating individual experiences and outlooks (Davies, 2007; Black, 2012). An aspect of this is 'homogenous' sampling where the cases derive from similar groups with similar features (Matthews and Ross, 2010). The aim was not to produce a sample statistically representative of the wider population; instead, the participants were selected intentionally to allow analysis of BME female students' mentoring experiences. This is also known as 'theoretical sampling' where the researcher used their own reasoning in choosing a group that can provide specifically useful insights (Jensen and Laurie, 2016, p.100).

The selection criteria were driven by Bourdieu's theory (1977, 1984) and related ideas discussed in the literature review. The sample consisted of BME female students with no parental experience of HE and thus would benefit from gaining professional insights. Refer to

participant information sheet for details (Appendix A). Gerson and Horowitz (2002) suggest selecting a sample that focuses on one significant element of social reality such as age or generation but differs on other aspects, such as class, race and gender. Whilst, due to the nature of this research question it was not possible to do this, researching at four different Higher Education Institutions (HEI) offered the opportunity to obtain different perspectives and thus a differentiation category.

Although this sampling approach does not produce a precise representative group, it is deemed useful as it explored the potential of mentoring across different HEIs. It also allowed an understanding of mentoring, to determine a common view of the impacts of mentoring for BME females on employability. Eagon *et al.* (2013) reported that many mentoring studies investigated mentoring from a single site, programme or institution. I decided to recruit mentees from four different HEIs for a representative view on employability mentoring through consideration of how different institutions and departments shape students' experiences.

A core sample of eight BME females was drawn from four HEIs to consider a range of perspectives for mentoring. The four HEIs were based in the West Midlands, two were pre-1992 institutions and two post-1992. A common theme across all institutions was their ongoing commitment to widening participation and implementation of responsive activities. I contacted the University Employability and Mentoring Coordinators with details of the project to determine interest.

Once consent was received, the University Coordinators emailed the participant information sheet to mentees participating in their mentoring programme, asking for volunteers. Two of the

participants were from my place of employment; however, they were unknown to me and thus considered acceptable for interview. In the case of the student being known, I would not have selected them due to potential bias. This thesis aims to determine subjective meanings of individual or group experiences of mentoring, to understand mentoring in a situational context. I am reasonably satisfied that the eight interviews reached a point of saturation when demonstrating specific impacts of employability mentoring. Any differences in data would then be from those BME female students that did not experience a meaningful mentoring experience.

4.4.2 Formal and Informal Mentoring

The eight participants were drawn from four Higher Education Institutions who were participating in or have recently participated in employability mentoring (see **Table 2** for mentees' details). All mentors were professionally employed and six were in senior positions within their respective industries. One mentor was in business and had a background in entrepreneurialism. The mentoring took place during the academic year and mentoring started once the training and matching process was complete.

Table 2: Outline of Participants for Qualitative Research

Participant	**Ethnicity**	**Course**	**Institution**	**Formal/Informal Mentoring**
Nakida	Black-African Caribbean	BA Accountancy and Finance	Pre-1992	Formal
Tahira	Pakistani	LLB Law	Post-1992	Formal
Shona	Black-African Caribbean	BSc Biomedical Science	Pre-1992	Formal
Fawzia	Somalian	BA Accountancy and Finance	Pre-1992	Formal
Ishana	Indian	BA Business Management	Pre-1992	Formal
Alyssa	Black-African Caribbean	BA Specialist Hair and Make-Up	Post -1992	Informal
Varsha	Indian	BA Accountancy and Finance	Pre-1992	Formal
Kareen	Black-African Caribbean	BA Specialist Hair and Make-Up	Post -1992	Informal

Six mentees were engaged in formal mentoring and two mentees from one HEI, participated in 'informal' mentoring. Due to the nature of their vocational qualifications and clear specialism, they considered mentoring through conversations with staff. There were no significant differences identified between the mentees from the formal mentoring against the 'informal' mentoring. However, there were two main distinctions in the way that 'informal' mentoring was delivered. Firstly, the friendship element was more evident due to greater flexibility in the mentoring relationship. Secondly, as the relationship was not being monitored or evaluated at institutional level there were no time restrictions. Colley (2003) identified several factors that

influence the styles of formal and informal mentoring. The factors applicable in this study for informal mentoring are highlighted in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Mentoring Styles: Informal and Formal

Informal	**Formal**
Unplanned	Planned
Voluntary participation	Degree of compulsion
Individual goals	Policy and institutional goals
High level of negotiation	Low levels of negotiation
Shared background and experiences	Social distance
High social intensity	Low to medium social intensity
Self-sought friendship	Relationship mediated by matching process
Indefinite timespan	Limited timespan
Less directive	More directive
Difficult to track	Intensively monitored on specific criteria
Located in familiar surroundings	Located in institutional settings
Relates to wider social ties and peer group	Focuses on individual
Rooted in the local community	Separate from local community

(Colley, 2003, p.165)

4.4.3 Mentoring from the Practitioners' Perspective

As the study progressed, I felt it would be useful to obtain the practitioners' perspective of mentoring to understand BME experiences and to determine any differences between the mentees' viewpoints. This triangulation approach supports the quality of the research process by considering data from alternative perspectives (Denscombe, 2014). Additionally, it provides

an opportunity for the findings to be substantiated or queried from relevant sources. All four Coordinators from the participating Institutions were contacted and two HEI practitioners out of the four institutions agreed to participate (refer to Appendix B- participant information). Face-to-face interviews were conducted with broad questions regarding the relationship between mentoring and employability for female students from diverse ethnic groups.

4.4.4 The Interview Process

In-depth semi-structured interviews was selected for this thesis. Qualitative interviews are akin to usual everyday conversations, as they are flexible and allow other elements to be considered to meet the research objectives (Gomm, 2009). This means I was dependent on the students' descriptions of their mentoring experiences as representing their realities outside of the interview. May (2001) highlights several points for deliberation when using interviews. The descriptions may not be completely accurate for unaccountable reasons. Although they may give an authentic depiction of mentoring, there may be other forces at play affecting employability that the mentee is unaware off.

May (2001) argues a deeper understanding can only be achieved if the researcher witnesses first-hand some of the situations which the mentee refers to, such as observation. Due to the confidentiality elements that underpin the very nature of mentoring relationships, it was not possible for me to pursue this method. My aim was to gather in-depth information on how mentoring leads to certain employability attitudes and behaviours. The advantages for interviews are the ability to collate and meticulously interrogate narrative descriptions explaining social behaviours (Silverman, 2013). Interviews give possibilities for social change transitions, such as mentoring, to be interpreted first-hand by those experiencing it. Hence, the

explanations from qualitative interviews allow detail interrogation of mentoring, including context, circumstances and cultural understandings. Although, it was not possible to observe the mentoring process in 'situatedness', I was able to derive information about context through the data.

The survey method was also considered inappropriate, even though it may have had a higher response rate, because it would not be possible to deeply understand the mentees' feelings. The survey method is generally used for evaluation of mentoring programmes to measure changes in mentees' confidence and organisational effectiveness. Mentoring research often involves 'cross sectional designs' with a large portion using surveys; there are limited studies analysing the mentoring process (Gray, Garvey and Lane, 2016). I aim to meet this gap through a detailed account of mentoring as an enabling process that meets the specific employability needs of the mentees. I feel it is important to give participants the opportunity to express their stories on their terms, by exploring mentoring from a subjectivist perspective giving descriptive accounts. Focused interviews allow the mentees' cultural views and beliefs to be captured within an overarching framework. The initial step was to undertake a situational analysis of mentoring and employability documentary analysis on the experiences of BME women to date. The interview guide was prepared to analyse the research questions and to enable the interviews to capture the subjective experiences of the mentees.

4.4.5 Purpose of Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews give opportunities to probe further if clarification is needed, known as the phenomenological approach; this identifies the meanings individuals attach to events (Gray, 2014; Robson and McCartan, 2016). Interviewing forms a collaborative approach where

both the mentees and I generate understandings of lived mentoring experiences. This interview type provides an overall structure whilst allowing flexibility for the participant to respond according to her own terms (Flick, 2011). I created a semi-structured interview schedule to provide an overarching structure. There was a risk that this approach could potentially lead to bias, as I may consciously or subconsciously identify data that agrees with my mentoring experiences.

The theoretical orientations of this study required a structure to determine how Bourdieu's (1977) model can be adapted according to BME female experiences. Semi-structured interviews were used since I had a defined aim to tackle specific issues on mentoring, social class and employability. This step is required for phenomenological research to extract subjective meanings arising from mentoring experiences. The interview schedule was designed in three sections. Firstly, questions on background and context. Secondly, progress of mentoring and the type of activities undertaken through mentoring. Thirdly, the review questions on benefits and recommendations. Refer to Appendix C for questions assigned to mentees and Appendix D for questions aimed at practitioners.

I strived to develop professional interviewing skills by reflecting after each interview and considering ways my practice could be improved. An agreement was reached with the respondents to record the interviews to enable a complete transcript to support with data analysis. I also took notes of any relevant non-verbal information that provided context on how information is understood (Henn, Weinstein and Foard, 2009). These non-verbal factors are broadly categorised into the following five areas: emotions, interpersonal attitudes, 'support speech', self-presentation and rituals (Argyle, 1998). Using this as supporting guidance, I

looked out for signs of positive body language through the participants' gestures, posture, facial expressions, tone of voice and silence. I interpreted positive body language as having an open and relaxed posture, nodding and amiable facial expressions. The tone of voice is also relevant when interpreting conversations and displays feelings and emotions (Argyle, 1998).

I was also able to interpret non-verbal information through a cultural perspective, as a BME woman. Non-verbal language varies across different cultures and a gesture may have completely opposite meanings and thus interpreted in different ways. To interpret non-verbal communication effectively and minimise misconstructions requires some awareness of context. Knapp and Hall (2006) emphasise the position of culture and individuals who are more accustomed to a particular culture are able to pick up appropriate signs and meanings. For instance, personally, I am aware that culturally lack of consistent eye contact may not necessarily mean the person is uncomfortable or misleading with their responses. The familiarity of being a 'cultural insider' allows access to such awareness and nonverbal behaviour is interpreted accordingly (Knapp and Hall, 2006, p.464).

4.4.6 Establishing Rapport

Establishing rapport is an essential requirement during interviews for an effective professional relationship between the researcher and participants (Bryman, 2012; Jensen and Laurie, 2016). The interviewing was an interactive dialogue between me and the participants to establish how mentoring supports employability outlooks and behaviours. I feel the anonymous element of the interview process along with my neutral role helped to uncover mentoring feelings. The mentees discussed mentoring with someone who was not part of their University experience, thereby giving them an opportunity to reflect on their experiences.

The complexities of the researcher and researched relationship was explored by Oakley (2016), building on her previous study based on the political and social exchanges occurring within interviews. She suggests implementing the notion of 'friendship' and 'gift' since they form the familiarities of the relationship; due to the researcher being reliant on the participant's contributions from their memories. This approach is compatible with my study, by having an ethical obligation to relay the mentoring experiences as accurately as possible. Since the aims of in-depth interviewing were to gain detailed mentoring understandings, it was important that I established a good rapport. I attempted to view mentoring from the participants' points of view instead of enforcing any preconceived notions of mentoring. Rapport needed to be attained quickly to maintain the participants' interest in the interview. I achieved this by introducing myself and stating the purpose of the research clearly, followed by a 'warm-up' through initially asking approachable questions (Robson and McCarton, 2016, p.290). I also refrained from offering any agreements or disagreements to the statements made, by being mindful of my body language. It is difficult to say whether myself as a BME woman supported in developing rapport but, nonetheless I feel a professional connection was established with all the participants.

4.4.7 Criticisms of the Interview Process

This thesis has the potential to explain various viewpoints and explanations; the BME perspectives should be considered as the conditions for veracity of the mentoring experiences. However, critiques of interviews state there may be lapses in memory, dishonesty and choosiness in the responses given (Mason, 2002). There are also issues in the type of language used and power relations, leading to caution with attributing description arising from interviews as clear-cut accounts of mentoring experiences.

When interpreting the responses, researchers should also be aware that the interviewee's statement may not be as clear-cut as it appears, therefore it is imperative not to jump to any conclusions as to what the researcher wishes to hear according to their theoretical orientations. I aimed to avoid this through a reflexive approach. The interviewer effects should also be considered in the analysis and presentation of findings, including similarities in gender, age and race of the researcher and the researched. (Gomm, 2009). The challenge here was to analyse the findings without bringing to the forefront my own assumptions arising from gender, social class, and mentoring experiences, this was dealt with by using an ethical approach which I explain further below.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethics places the research participants at the heart of the research process, by, acknowledging and addressing the issues and consequences that the research may bring to the participants (Henn, Weinstein and Foard, 2009; Punch, 2014). These issues are even more pertinent when dealing with qualitative research due to the interactive and personal nature of the interview experience. Broadly, ethical principles encompass the following four areas when liaising with participants: preventing harm, obtaining informed consent, respecting privacy and preventing deception (Gray, 2014).

The researcher is bound by certain ethical legal requirements during all stages of the research process. (Denscombe, 2014). The requirements suggested from the British Sociological Association (BSA, 2003) includes three key areas. Firstly, the researcher should uphold full professional integrity by explaining their study as fully and accurately as possible to all involved in clear and relatable language. Secondly, the interests of the participants should always be

protected, and informed consent received. Thirdly, by maintaining professional and ethical relationships with other colleagues, employers and members of the mentoring profession (Henn, Weinstein and Foard, 2009). During the inception stage, ethical approval was authorised by the University of Birmingham Ethics Committee. See Appendix E for clarification of approval. As this research involved, a small group of BME female students in a specific environment, confidentiality and anonymity was particularly important.

The student's names, institution or any other insinuations to the person are not recognisable in the final thesis. Confidentiality means a conscious attempt to leave out details from the research notes of any names or details that will clearly identify the participating individuals (Flick, 2011). The data was stored confidentially to ensure neither the names of the students nor their Universities were recognised. All data, including notes, transcripts and recording was stored safely and data saved electronically by password protection (Flick, 2011). Anonymity refers to leaving nameless and unidentifiable all participants in the published report (Henn, Weinstein and Foard, 2009). This was done by using pseudonyms when referring to participants to ensure that they were not personally recognisable. The name of the institutions are not mentioned or explicit in the final thesis.

Before the interviews commenced, permission was sought from the students and the University Coordinator to determine if they were willing to take part. Adhering to ethical obligations means to safeguard all persons who are involved or contributed towards the research. This is to protect all participants from unanticipated personal, political or economic consequences. Participants should willingly consent without any undue duress, by being provided with an accurate picture of the research, known as the 'doctrine of informed consent' (Burns, 2000).

The participants should not feel any pressure in participating nor be misled into contributing in any way (Henn, Weinstein and Foard, 2009). The students were forwarded the informed consent form that clearly stipulated the aims of research, rationale and rights to depart at any stage (Appendix A). Interviews were then undertaken once a signed consent form had been received.

4.5.1 Respecting Participants

Ethical considerations ensures that safe conduct is undertaken, free from deception and does not discredit the researcher, the HEI nor the quality of research. The welfare of the students was acknowledged throughout the whole process as an essential tenet of research ethics is no harm should arise to others (Jensen and Laurie, 2016). I needed to take care that the reputation and welfare was not affected for the participants, other students involved in mentoring, as well as the reputations of University mentoring programmes.

As qualitative research is interpretive research, the process entails intensive interaction with the participants which raises ethical, strategic and moral questions (Creswell, 2014). I was reflexive and transparent about my social and cultural background and especially mindful not to gravitate towards certain themes based on my mentoring experiences. I was also careful not to search for meanings based on theoretical constructs but to keep an open mind for new interpretations. Even though my personal background allowed for some empathy to the experiences of BME women, I aimed to set aside personal beliefs. Caution was also taken not to invest in my own emotions and to be respectful to the feelings of participants (Davies and Sutton, 2004). Researchers are under a moral ethical duty to place the subjects at the heart of the research process before the researcher's interests and purpose of the study. This includes not only

practical and procedural compliance but to personally remain committed to ethical principles at all stages of the process (Punch, 2014).

4.6 Data Analysis

The analysis of qualitative data is an ongoing process that begins from inception of the research question (Matthews and Ross, 2010). I began the data analysis as soon as possible after the interviews as the quality of the report is based on intricate analysis of data as opposed to the volume collected (Layder, 2013). I kept a research log as a record of my observations, reflections and notes of any issues. The intention for the data analysis was to obtain the mentoring perspectives as the students directly experience them. Thematic analysis allowed me to systemically scrutinise rich sources of data and gain a deep understanding of the language, explanations and experiences (Robson and McCarton, 2016).

4.6.1 Process Undertaken

The first step was to carefully transcribe the interview data, and these transcripts were forwarded to the participants for approval. This process was particularly important as I wanted the participants to be active co-producers of mentoring knowledge. I ensured I was fully informed about the data, which is a continuous process (Robson and McCartan, 2016). This entailed ongoing reading of the data to seek out potential meanings and themes. During the analysis of transcripts, a sense of interesting ideas emerged concerning common trends and significant points relating to BME female students mentoring experiences.

Once I felt I was fully familiar with the meanings of the data, the next step was coding of themes. I started the analysis process by interrogating the text of an individual student to

determine what mentoring means to them. This was then compared with the text of the other BME female students to explore meanings, common issues and differences (Matthews and Ross, 2010). I used open coding, that involved reading the data carefully and breaking down the significant statements into emerging themes (Layder, 2013). As I read through the transcripts, I underlined statements and phrases that I felt resonated with my research questions. My reading of the existing literature and theoretical framework influenced the process and my research questions, thus, provided the structure for analysis. I was mindful to be reflexive and not to allow my position and knowledge of existing material influence the allocation of themes.

Relevant codes were then assigned to categorise the topics and themes pertinent to mentoring and employability for BME experiences, this created an initial set of themes (Appendix F). As I found there were many overlaps between the meanings of coding, this process was then developed further by grouping together similar ideas into central themes. The purpose was to reduce the data again to highlight the key mentoring trends based on common patterns within the data. See **Table 4** - Collective themes in Chapter 5. This phase was the interpretive analysis of the data where the themes were developed further.

Coding can be 'theory-driven' and/or 'data-driven' (Robson and McCarton, 2016). The former interrogates the data with Bourdieu and the latter means the themes derive from consideration of the data to create self-generated theory on cultural mentoring experiences. Although pre-determined codes can be used from related literature and research interests, this approach is criticised as pre-conceptions can guide the researcher into certain areas at the risk of missing new ideas (Robson and McCarton, 2016). I adopted the view that an awareness of related

literature supported understanding of employability mentoring for BME women, with the expectation that new ideas may emerge.

4.7 Summary

For this study, the epistemological stance is interpretivist since an understanding of mentoring social experiences is required. The ontological perspective is constructionist where the mentees social understandings occur through exchanges with the mentors. As research interviews give prospects for elaboration, validation and encourage mutual collaboration, they can also produce unanticipated responses to explore what the mentoring really feels like for the BME female students. This type of empirical work is suggested for development in UK mentoring literature (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2018). The thesis is therefore based on mentoring experiences, strategies, perspectives and ideas generated from BME female students in relation to BME women, on mentoring and employability dynamics. The next chapter outlines the data gathering and analysis process that supports with unpacking the four research questions.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings from the data analysis giving examples of commonalities between the participants' mentoring experiences. The chapter is structured by the four central themes that support with understanding the corresponding research question. These overarching themes and various subthemes arose as the shared interview responses were interpreted. Each theme is supported by narratives from the mentees explaining their employability perceptions resulting from their mentoring experiences (refer to **Table 2** for participants' profiles). The mentees' interpretations are complimented by inclusion of the practitioners' perspective, indicating the practical issues from an institutional point of view. The chapter is concluded by an overview of the shared cultural mentoring experiences across the sample group.

5.2 Collective Themes Emerging

The ideas within the original coding exercise were considered and mentoring behaviours, feelings and actions grouped together based on similar employability meanings. The four main themes established are **'structural systems', 'collaborative mentoring exchanges'**, '**professional insights'** and **'enabling agency'**. **Table 4** presents the collective themes and subthemes emerging from the analysis.

Table 4: Collective Themes

Structural Systems	• Past educational experiences • Aspirations • Awareness of differences
Collaborative Mentoring Exchanges	• Friendship • Promoting individuality • Personalised attention • Mentoring qualities
Professional Insights	• Collaborative career planning • Coaching on specific tasks • Industry knowledge • Engagement with professionals • Professional conduct
Enabling Agency	• Increased confidence • Self-efficacy • Individual mindsets • Broadening horizons

5.3 Theme 1: Structural Systems

RQ 1: How does mentoring navigate through individual agency, culture and communities?

The theoretical framework and Bourdieu's (1977, 1991) concepts demonstrate how diverse environments can influence social experiences for BME women, refer to **Table 1**. The first theme, 'structural systems' is based on the surrounding environment, such as family, peers, school and community that influenced the mentees' feelings and reactions. The subthemes include examples of future ambitions which are underpinned by the mentee's subconscious awareness of structural factors influencing employability.

5.3.1 Past Educational Experiences

Historical experiences influence habitus and whether individuals wish to respond to or reject any new information and experiences (Bourdieu, 1990). The mentees were asked initial questions to understand how current HE educational experiences were framed within a cultural context. In education, many mentees felt it was generally a positive experience and their aspirations were nurtured, through supportive, widening participation activities, such as presentations from inspiring people to speak in assemblies and celebration events. For example, Shona asserted that:

> I went to a good state school, it did push us and gave work experience and prepared us for medicine interviews with the resources they had. I feel the experience I had was generally positive, but even so, there are differences between the ones a private school can give (Shona).

However, two mentees expressed a negative view of previous education that was internalised as a challenging experience:

> I think that in education, you are constantly battling against the odds about what they believe you are, and black kids are going to fail anyway so you might as well

> not help them. I felt like that, statistics say that you are more likely to fail as black kids, that is what I always heard (Kareen).

> My mum was supportive, she convinced me, as I did not know what to expect as I was so traumatised by my college experience. I got here, looked around, and started talking to people, ended up here for my degree (Nakida).

Nearly all the mentees expressed the role family played when navigating through life choices, such as deciding on educational and vocational courses and giving them a supportive home environment to study. For example, "I did well at school as my mum pushed me to work hard" (Tahira). A lack of aspirations is not necessarily a factor for BME women (Basit, 2012a). Shona illustrating this perspective, stated that:

> My family have been very supportive, but I also think it was hard for them because we don't have any doctors in the family, or we don't have any connections for getting work placements. There was time when I needed work experience leaving school and even now getting work experience is hard…you don't know anyone who can open those doors for you. My family are supportive of what I do but they find it hard to help me set things up (Shona).

In some cases, mentees stressed that their parents expressed hopes of them doing well professionally and carving a different future than themselves. This type of parental support for BME communities is linked with a desire to achieve upwardly social mobility, where high expectations are set for the child. Kareen, for example, stated:

> I had a mum who pushed me, so very positive at home versus a negative school. I had that nice balance at home but if you don't have that at home, this is why people don't get to University or don't get that job because they have no one at home battling the odds of that teacher at school (Kareen).

Community and peers also influenced the way mentees felt about their futures and identification of educational and employability goals. Ishana felt her community also included teachers and friends, along with work experiences. In the following example, a sense of community spirit, through the neighbourhood provided support to meet career objectives in self-employment:

> I guess in the community, I want to be a makeup artist. I mean, I get help, people that promote me to say I am a makeup artist, that is supportive, people helping me and that (Alyssa).

5.3.2 Aspirations

Future career aspirations acknowledged the competitive nature of the labour market together with concerns about maximising value for HE investment. Most of the sample indicated the principal reason for participating in employability mentoring was to achieve graduate-level positions. Nakida, for example**,** stated:

> I think it is going to be tough. These days a degree is not enough…we need to do so much extra things to compete besides having a 2:1. It is quite scary, as you don't know if you will be able to get a graduate job. You will compete with students from a top University with relevant work experience and who have done extra courses relevant to that job (Nakida).

Three of the mentees felt the association of being a BME woman was a contributing factor to be considered in a competitive labour market. Modood (2004) described the barriers informed by ethnicity as 'ethnic penalties'. In illustrating this perspective, Shona stated:

> When we are going into professional settings, from my experience, I am the only BME woman there. It shouldn't be intimidating but it is and so it is about recognising the challenges we face (Shona).

Kareen and Alyssa expressed that postcode disadvantage was another factor in the perceived competitive market and whether this would act as a hindrance to obtaining meaningful job roles. Kareen expressed the view that:

> It's not even just school, it is socially, the work-place, you apply for jobs you don't put your postcode down because, they look it and think oh no, you are afraid to apply for jobs, because you think what's the point because of where I live (Kareen).

In these instances, the mentees were subconsciously aware of the potential negative viewpoints associated with certain postcode areas. Alyssa, for example, stated:

> When people might find out where I live, this might put them off about hiring me. Sometimes my race and culture, but you don't know, it could be my age too, because I look quite young (Alyssa).

5.3.3 Awareness of Differences

Social class and ethnicity differences were acknowledged by the mentees and again this influenced their views of employment. Nakida aptly illustrated this, stating:

> We live in a competitive world and need to bring in extra skills and experience. It puts us in an uncomfortable position, even though you get involved in extra-curricular activities, will it help us to get a job. You know of people who do not have these things and still secure a graduate job and then you think is it even worth it (Nakida).

Ishana noted:

> I think that because of the way society is set up and cultural backgrounds, without being stereotypical sometimes you find that BME women are quieter or shy. They may have lots of ideas they can use in business, but they do not feel like they can speak up (Ishana).

For example, Fawzia was aware that her background did not allow professional insights to be gained organically and that other students might have access to such experiences due to their family background:

> I feel like coming from a normal family that does not have much; we have had to struggle. We all had to focus on school, and it was sort of expected of us. In the community I come from, the jobs I wanted to go for, I did not see anyone else doing it. There was no-one where I thought that this person is doing it and I can go and speak to them (Fawzia).

Access to visible BME role models was suggested, for more confidence of what is attainable for that group. Seeing other people from similar groups could act as reassurance that HE investment is worthwhile. Fawzia stated:

> Having that sense of belonging is really important, I feel it can give the confidence to do that, to see someone doing the role can be a very empowering thing. Even if people are from different sectors (Fawzia).

Shona expressed:

> Although, I can relate to my mentor, she does not have the experience of being BME. This will help in terms of the outside aspect of mentoring and not only careers but the self-belief and confidence side (Shona).

Feelings of marginalisation and isolation within HE is being expressed here. This is beyond the scope of this study, which looks at how mentoring as a process supports employability. There is potential for future research addressing the question of whether BME female students would feel better supported by a mentor from the same ethnic background.

5.4 Theme 2: Collaborative Mentoring Exchanges

RQ 2: What should mentoring involve to support access, participation and progress to the labour market?

'Collaborative mentoring exchanges' is based on the nature of mentoring exchanges between the mentor and the mentee and are presented, not as a 'one-way' process, but a mutual interaction of ideas and deliberations. The subthemes outline the process for developing and sustaining the momentum of the mentoring relationship within a cultural context. These include identifying the mentoring components needed to ensure the mentee benefits and feels valued. An assessment is made of the mentors' qualities and characteristics that are integral to this process.

5.4.1 Friendship

Almost all the participants discussed the friendship element of the mentoring relationship within the context of sharing personal interests and experiences. Varsha aptly illustrates this, stating:

> It was interesting; I was getting to know someone I probably would not have normally, if it was not for the scheme. At University, you stick with your group of

> friends and that is it…It's good to know how she got to where she is now and her interests outside work (Varsha).

Mentoring depended on both parties committing to the relationship and for the mentor to display certain qualities that developed the 'core' of mentoring, as established in mentoring literature. All the mentees expressed they felt comfortable enough in the relationship to openly share feelings, worries and ideas. It was agreed that, although friendships were being developed, this was underpinned by mentoring aspects, thus indicating a formal nature to the relationships. Fawzia stated that:

> I have grown to know my mentor personally too and then you realise that there are other things about them other than the professional way they present themselves. It is important to see both sides as this makes them more relatable to you (Fawzia).

The friendship element allowed rapport to be developed and sustained. Mentoring sessions were viewed as a sounding board which provided a safe and confidential space to discuss career ideas. Tahira felt she was able to communicate well with her mentor, "it helped me to achieve more from the mentoring because I was comfortable with her". Their relationship resulted in the mentor sharing her past work experiences and anecdotes. Alyssa also expressed, that:

> Mentoring is how to go about the daily lives, problems and issues. Things like help with the layout of the CV, having another ear to talk to who is not a counsellor…If you have the opportunity to bond with someone then do it (Alyssa).

Mutual understanding of each other's personal perspectives and cultural backgrounds were expressed. External or personal factors were discussed only when they had a bearing to the employability discussions. Varsha reflecting this perspective, stated that:

> The mentor should show both the good and bad sides to their role. They may also talk about personal experiences such as holidays or activities they take part in if they feel open to share this as this may help the mentee build on their own skills (Varsha).

Even though the friendship element was highlighted, this was stressed within the confines of a professional relationship. It was felt that the mentor should suggest ideas for exploration, rather than specifying areas that the students should be considering. Kareen, for example, concurs and stated:

> In moments when I don't think I am good enough and I don't want to apply for the job. Or, it sounds like I could do it, but I feel I don't have two or three things, my mentor will say, you do have it. If you don't have that friendship with your mentor, then you won't tell them about those insecurities (Kareen).

5.4.2 Promoting Individuality

The mentees felt they were being understood as an individual person that may have had different backgrounds, beliefs and perspectives to the mentor. They were then able to express their individuality openly and developed the components needed for effective mentoring relationships with BME female students. Varsha noted:

> I wanted to get into a graduate scheme and to get there by a certain date. I think having a mentor there constantly reminded me that I needed to apply, because that person has put time into being a mentor and supporting me (Varsha).

As the mentees felt respected and comfortable, this allowed development of the relationship, through the mentors understanding the mentees' needs and addressing these through relevant employability activities. Shona, for example, subscribes to this perspective and argues:

> It is something that is needed because it is having someone in that position and understands what you have gone through and how you are feeling about a particular struggle and is committed just to you. University tutors are available to students, but they must cater for a lot of students, but by having a mentor you get one to one help (Shona).

All the mentees appreciated the professional nature of the mentor's position and acknowledged the time dedicated towards mentoring. This recognition of support was apparent during conversations through the tone, and body language expressed by the mentee. Many felt this was

the reason why they participated in the interviews, as it gave them an opportunity to relay their views. Varsha, for example, stated:

> Although you might not have that at home or in University, you have that support through your mentor. It's nice to have someone reminding you that you can achieve your goals, rather than other people's perceptions of you, or the way society perceives you should be (Varsha).

Varsha did not elaborate on the types of 'perceptions', this could be interpreted as the stereotypes of being a BME woman and the types of careers or life paths pursued. The following statement is an example of where having a mentor from a similar background was supportive to the mentee's needs:

> I find it hard to relate with other people compared to the other students. I am from a different background and I will have different experiences. My mentor is a BME female and is under 30 and I am 23, so we can relate to each other. She can give advice as well as she might be aware of issues that have happened around me (Alyssa).

The mentoring sessions were inspirational and led to mentees recognising the value of mentoring. The shared feelings of compatibility across the group included, feeling valued, respected and worthy. Ishana aptly expressed this, stating:

> I think the self-doubt that the mentor does not really care. In the first session, in my head, I was thinking this person is really senior and talented, why are they wasting their time on me. And, that's the thing, my mentor was great at. I remember my mentor said all I have to offer you is my time and that really made me feel at ease (Ishana).

5.4.3 Personalised Attention

The University Coordinators used specific career mentor and mentee matching, when deciding on the best possible match for the student. This process allowed the mentees to gain deep insights within their desired employment fields. Tahira, for example, stated:

> She told me that lots of people get jobs differently. She gave me examples of a few of her friends that got the same job and became solicitors in different ways. She

> explained to me people can achieve the same goals in different ways and she shared her experiences with me (Tahira).

Mentees received honest and open advice from an experienced professional. The mentor provided individualised support, based on the mentee's needs and expectations. Nakida stated:

> A mentor to me is a person who is on the same level, in experience and mindset…someone who guides you to the direction you want to go and to give support when you need it. And, someone who might help you to discover skills you didn't know that you had (Nakida).

Alyssa commented:

> A mentor basically put you on the right path with careers and helps a little with personal life but does not get too involved…They are to help you to be secure and give encouragement, but also, to give you back up options too (Alyssa).

For all participants, mentors offered professional expertise and specific advice was given in their desired careers. Mentees appreciated being supported by someone already in the role they would like to get into, especially when they did not have friends and family "who are on the same track" (Varsha). Similarly, Kareen, stated:

> Just knowing that my mentor has experience, in where I want to be. When I was looking for a mentor, I needed someone to inspire me and have everything that I want. So, understanding the profession and how to get investors and how to talk that jargon (Kareen).

The University employability mentoring schemes were not set up to match mentees with mentors from similar gender/ethnicity backgrounds. Instead, the prospective mentees were asked to indicate whether they preferred a gender/ethnicity in the recruitment stage and were matched accordingly. Practitioner B, for example, stated:

> The main thing that we look at is, always employability, and what the student can get out of it. If they do not have a lot of confidence, then we will match them with someone who has been with us a long time and who we know can build up their confidence and push them and challenge them (Practitioner B).

The following comment is from a mentee that expressed the role of gender and ethnicity within a mentoring context:

> My mentor is a woman, she has given up her time, and she is in a senior role already. If she has the time in such a high position to do that, it shows me that I can do that as well. But more than anything it shows she is in senior role and that you can push for Black women in Leadership (Varsha).

The mentor's role was to challenge any obstacles, perceived or otherwise, that may affect consideration of a job role. This involved understanding the mentees' doubts and identifying suitable ways to address these concerns. Shona, for example, underscored this by stating:

> A lot of it is giving their advice and guidance, so like even with character traits. I asked my mentor how she deals with criticism or when things go wrong. It is not just how to get into medicine you need to do XYZ, it is more how to be a better person. Through having that support you can be a better employee or a student because you know how to deal with the skills from someone who has been there and done it (Shona).

5.4.4 Mentoring Qualities

There were different definitions for the meanings of mentoring. Tahira felt that many people can be her mentor informally, in her case, a teacher and a line-manager. A common agreement was that an integral part of the mentor's role was to share professional knowledge and to offer careers guidance. As Fawzia stated:

> Before, I didn't have a mentor officially, just someone who gives advice whether that be family or friends or teachers. Mentoring is different and at that time in my life it meant something different to what it means now, it is always changing depending on who it is. My mum is my mentor as well (Fawzia).

The importance of having empathy was highlighted by the mentees and this is traditionally considered a key component of a mentor's role. Nakida, for example, stated:

> Communication is very important, body language, how you talk, be clear in your message, have empathy and understand where you are coming from (Nakida).

Many of the participants discussed their feelings on accessing the competitive job market and hoped that mentoring would help in addressing any challenges. Here, the mentor should appreciate the mentees' feelings about their futures and understand various social and economic issues, particularly for self-employment opportunities. Alyssa, for example, stated:

> A mentor should have a lot of patience and understanding of different cultures and races. They should know other things like what's on the news, Brexit and how that will change things. They need to understand the institution or industry; they definitely have to be current with everything (Alyssa).

The mentor should also be up to date with current labour market issues and the needs and positioning of millennials and Generation Z. This perspective is aptly expressed by Fawzia, who stated:

> My mentor needs to be empathetic and realise when I was that age what sort of position I was in and needs to understand things are different…as the job market is different and more competitive now. We look for motivation from their work experiences and advice on any mistakes they made and then learn from them (Fawzia).

A common view from all the mentees was that they were being listened to. Mentors should try to get to the 'root of the issue' mentees need support on by listening and responding appropriately. This understanding allows trust to be built and led to the mentees feeling comfortable in sharing their views and concerns. Kareen in illustrating the consequences of discomfort, stated:

> Like if you are from a private school background and the other person is from a state school who has had difficulties, it will be difficult. Not as a bad thing, it just won't work as they are not relatable. And, I feel that straight away that person will feel inferior to them, like straight away I didn't feel inferior to my mentor (Kareen).

Mentoring qualities such as acceptance, relatability and reassurance were indicated as components needed to develop and sustain relationships. As the mentees felt comfortable in the sessions, this meant they were able to talk openly. Benhabib's (1992) model of 'interactive'

universality is particularly applicable to the dialogue within mentoring relationships for BME women. Her view of universality encompasses a mutual respect for each other's perceptions underpinned by a 'moral' understanding. Varsha concurs and states:

> I have had the support of someone really believing in me and they have been able to take me to the right path I want to take and to give some motivation. When I have been rejected in applications, they have been able to get that boost out of me again (Varsha).

5.5 Theme 3: Professional Insights

RQ 3: Are there any goals or activities undertaken during mentoring?

RQ 4: To what extent can employability attributes be developed through mentoring by breaking down barriers and enabling greater access, participation and progression to the labour market?

The 'professional insights' theme is characterised into the following two areas. Firstly, participation in *employability-based activities* which familiarised the mentee to specific career requirements (**RQ 3**). This section identifies the specific task and activities undertaken to support the mentees in reaching their aims. The mentees also engaged with career planning discussions and received 'coaching' on identified areas. Secondly, the subthemes present narratives of mentees articulating their *professional knowledge and insights* (**RQ 4**). They include examples of connecting with professionals to gain familiarity of professional environments.

5.5.1 Collaborative Career Planning

A recurring activity for participants involved with formal mentoring was support with career planning. For example, three of the mentees participated in mock job interviews. Varsha expressed:

> They are useful for interview preparation, because they know hands-on what employers are looking for as they would probably have interviewed someone themselves (Varsha).

A few mentees practiced their own interview styles through an assessment of their strengths and abilities according to their chosen careers. Shona, for example, stated:

> We had feedback on the mock interview in pointers of what I can do for the interview, what I need to look into more and less of. She also picked up on my body language and things like that. She also picked up on aspects that I did well at interview, and it gave me encouragement that if I tweaked a few things I would be ok (Shona).

The collaborative mentoring process helped mentees to plan their career ideas and identify relevant skills development opportunities. Mentoring involved mapping of career objectives, including exploring alternative pathways to achieve a desired career goal. In Shona's case, long-term goals were set, together with shorter tasks needed to meet these aims:

> She helped me to make a five-year plan and to get it going. She has also been supportive at the beginning before I got into medicine, to find a backup plan and gave me the resources of how to approach things, which is useful as this is something I had not considered (Shona).

As a basis to build an ongoing mentoring relationship, a strategy for achieving career plans was established. Fawzia, for example, stated:

> I definitely want to go into something financial related. I want to be able to progress; I want to start at entry level, but I want to learn everything and be well rounded and move to a more senior level. This makes you understand and work hard and appreciate the job more when you do get it (Fawzia).

Nakida noted:

> The first thing was to get my CV up to date and a good standard. Then it was to add in experience. I applied for my placement, we worked to set the goals early and it gave me something to work towards. The plan was to have a placement in advance, so that I could focus on my exams (Nakida).

These strategies placed the mentoring relationship into context and provided the mentee with structure for mentoring with a clear career aim. Varsha, for example, underscored this by stating:

> I am more likely to build a professional network…before I would not even have thought of using LinkedIn. It is not anything my mentor has said, but more encouraged me to use it and find out what people are doing at other companies and how they are expressing that on LinkedIn. Before mentoring, I would log onto LinkedIn, but I wouldn't go through my feed and upload it (Varsha).

Nakida stated:

> I update my mentor on how I am getting on with looking for placements, the companies I am looking for and ask opinions on the companies to apply for. He might suggest certain cities to work in as it might be cheaper to live there (Nakida).

5.5.2 Coaching on Specific Tasks

Even though the mentee/mentor relationship is underpinned by mentoring principles, certain activities took place that are tentatively classified as 'coaching' style activities. This process differs from mentoring and here, I have defined coaching as 'participation in one-off activities preparing the mentees for the careers they had in mind'. Shona, for example, underscored this, stating:

> The mock interview really helped me as I will probably have many interviews in the future and now, I know how I can improve. Even if the interviews are quite different, I still have the pointers about body language, how fast I speak to take away from me that can last a lifetime (Shona).

All the mentees received tailored careers advice related to their needs. Personalised support was given in preparation for job applications, including CV design, advice in psychometric tests and interview preparation:

> I remember for an interview, I had to do a presentation and I did not know what topic to pick. My mentor mentioned something that I had not realised that I already knew a lot about and then I did my presentation on this…So, even by having a

> conversation, with the mentor may spark up an idea that you did not think of before (Fawzia).
>
> My goal was to improve on psychometric tests as this was the reason why I was not getting any offers, especially the verbal ones. I wanted to be more confident in interviews and come across the best way I can (Nakida).

Kareen and Alyssa participated in informal mentoring and due to the vocational nature of their courses, this form of mentoring was deemed useful. Mentors offered real-life business insights, including sharing a glossary of key terminology for potential self-employment industries. Kareen, for example, stated:

> Literally, anything you will learn on a business course, but I get to physically see my mentor doing it that way and learn it. I like to see how to put things into practice. I did not have that as my mum does not own her own business. Now, I can confidently go into a room and know what I am talking about…because of my mentor, it makes a difference (Kareen).

Shona and Alyssa were both offered work experience opportunities as part of the employability support. This was not consistent across the BME sample group, thus, demonstrating that mentoring was a subjective experience for each of the students consisting of a range of activities. Shona, for example, concurs and stated:

> Getting the interview for medicine was really helpful and to see if there was any way my mentor could offer me work experience over the summer. I have had work experience before, but it was like anything I could get, rather than something I can benefit from and enjoy (Shona).

The mentees had access to new and insightful professional information that was unavailable within their home or communities, through relevant work experience placements. This position agrees with Bourdieu's (1977) views regarding the influence of social and cultural capitals and demonstrates its significance within BME communities. Alyssa noted:

> Through my mentor, I have got some work experience. My course is a specialism, so I feel I need to talk to people from that specialism. There is no one in the institution except my placement officer (Alyssa).

According to the two practitioner's experience, BME groups tend to choose courses and careers that are suggested to them through family members and communities. Through the employability programme, mentees subsequently engaged in practical activities which encouraged them to explore alternative possibilities.

> I find for higher education, because their parents do not know much about it, they do not believe in themselves and do not look into that area. I find their choices tend to be, what their siblings and cousins are doing, it is as if they want to take the plunge, but they do not know much about it (Practitioner A).

Bourdieu's (1977; 1990) notion of habitus suggests that individuals tend to make life decisions on the options that are readily feasible to them. Practitioner A, for example, concurs and stated:

> It is about finding out their hobbies and interests, by asking about the modules, they enjoy and are doing well in. It might be the case that a student finishes at University and wants to undertake a Masters or a PHD. Some students have this ingrained in them; they know what they want to do but a large cohort do not (Practitioner A).

The mentees were able to broaden their horizons to consider alternative options that they may not have considered, the significance of this point on BME experiences will be explored in the discussion chapter. However, it is worth noting Practitioner B's perspective here:

> Sometimes what they think they want and what they actually need are two very different things. Especially with BME students, sometimes it is a career that they think they should go into but by having a mentor, we can open their eyes into different opportunities (Practitioner B).

5.5.3 Industry Knowledge

The mentors offered specific industry insights for the mentees desired professional fields, including job information not readily available on recruitment material. Thus, being exposed to insider knowledge and learning the 'rules of the game' (Bourdieu, 1990). Rather than a generic overview, mentors offered specific insights to the organisational culture and practices. Nakida, for example, concurs and stated:

> Life is about not only skills and knowledge but also 'who you know'. I am well aware of that and it makes the mentees' life easier if the mentor is from the same industry and aware of the career options. Mentoring is about getting new skills, but it also directly related to employment and looking for a job…the more relevant a mentor is to what a mentee is doing the better (Nakida).

These specific insights provided mentees with an awareness of work-life realities, allowing them to build a picture for that job environment based on the real experiences of a professional. Tahira, for example, stated that:

> My mentor showed me that if I want to go into that profession, that's what I need to prepare myself for. It made me more aware. I always knew that solicitors would work long unsociable hours, but she has shown me that it is manageable, and it is not as bad or as good as it looks. It could be either way (Tahira).

Mentoring provided relevant opportunities to acquire professional capitals and resources for the BME students to be active and functioning participants in society. Shona in illustrating this, stated:

> None of my family know how to get into medicine, they appreciate it, but they have not been through that process themselves. It is that first-hand experience, which I think makes the mentoring support different from that which I receive through friends and family (Shona).

Mentoring exposed the mentee to the professional world through experiencing events first-hand, such as visits to the work premises and work experience opportunities. These activities gave an insight into company politics, as well as building commercial awareness of employer expectations (Blass *et.al.*, 2007). Nakida underscored this by stating:

> You usually get mentoring after you have secured the job. I wanted to get something before, so I knew what to expect…how I am going to prepare myself for a job, prepare for an interview and build CV. I wanted the support before as after you have a job you get the support from a Senior Manager (Nakida).

5.5.4 Engagement with Professionals

The mentees engaged with social networking and building professional connections in their chosen fields. Shona acknowledged there can be initial barriers when "getting the foot in the door" and trying to establish professional networks:

> Things like mentoring has given me that step in…to have that relationship with someone that can lead to other opportunities (Shona).

Fawzia remarked**:**

> It is important as you build connections with so many people. You may have one or two people that you can draw upon, but even one conversation can strike a chord and change your mindset. Networking is good but can also show you things you might want to avoid (Fawzia).

In these circumstances, mentoring helped to break down barriers, related to accessing professional contacts, experienced by many BME groups. Kareen, for example, stated:

> On paper, you will not really stand out being a BME female and probably the neighbourhood you are from. But, if you have that network where they know who you are and how good you work, they are more likely to take you on. Without that, you are not really going to know anybody and will struggle to get a job, or at the level you want to be (Kareen).

Mentoring facilitated access to professions, where the professional relationship with a mentor could then lead on to other career opportunities. Tahira, for example, noted:

> It helped me to talk to different people, because normally you speak to your friends or people that you have in common with, but this has given me confidence to speak to people in professions, not just personal life. Normally when you are University, you only meet people from friends and family (Tahira).

Participation in mentoring provided the mentees with exposure to new social groups. The mentor can share relevant professional contacts as well as signposting where to look for employment. These interactions on a senior level provided opportunities for mentees to have pre-graduation professional exchanges. Kareen, for example, stated:

> It gives you access to people that you would not normally have, so who they know, becomes available to you. That really helps through my experiences of having a really good mentor. I have my mentor in the middle and I have all these people around that helps (Kareen).

Ishana expressed:

> It is through networking that I have found a group of mentors that I can learn from. In your day job, you are just there to meet objectives. Your relationship with your manager is different from with your mentor (Ishana).

Nakida stated:

> I come from a background who did not care about networking with people. I started to do that when I got here, it is who you know that gets you to places. I have met so many people that I would not normally get to meet if I did not get involved in these activities. It has really helped me with finding a placement, what I need to do and how I should be carrying myself in assessment centres (Nakida).

Since these professional connections were developed alongside studies, mentees were prepared by planning ahead. For example, mentees and practitioners agreed and stated:

> Without having people to talk to that I network with, I have not been able to find my next job, whether it is a quick chat with someone I used to work with or someone who can help with interview skills, you need to have a pool of people who you can get advice from (Varsha).

> A lot of our graduates come back and say I didn't realise I had to be or act this way. So, doing it as a student really teaches things like professionalism that you would probably have to find out the hard way (Practitioner B).

For many of the mentees, the mentor was their first sustained contact with the professional world and this source of information was invaluable in building pre-graduation connections. This viewpoint is consistent with Bourdieu's (1977; 1989) notions of cultural and social capital and demonstrates examples of 'demystifying the academy' (Turner and Gonzalez, 2015). Practitioner B, for example, concurs and stated:

> Some of the students are the first in their family to have gone to University and if that is the case, then they are not likely to have met anyone in a graduate level role

> at home or within the community. Sometimes, they feel like they are navigating a new world in starting up those contacts and getting that knowledge by themselves (Practitioner B).

5.5.5 Professional Conduct

All the participants talked about aspects of professionalism, including the following points: self-presentation, language, gestures and displaying professional etiquette. Varsha, for example, stated:

> To come across professionally to all people that you meet and work alongside. If I walk into a face to face meeting, it is how I come across. Whether it's with confidence or whether I am mumbling or not talking in full English (Varsha).

Nearly all the mentees highlighted the role of a professional image that may be different to the persona carried out in their personal lives. For example, Alyssa, stated:

> She has made me see how to have set etiquette and how to act in a professional environment. With interview preparation, it's how are you going to dress, what are you going to say and how will you say it, little things like that (Alyssa).

Kareen agreed and stated:

> Before, I was the same person as everyone in my neighbourhood and walked and talked like them. When you are pushed into a new environment that makes you uncomfortable, that leads to a change…so I definitely got more confidence (Kareen).

Mentoring facilitated the development of 'soft-skills' to complement the academic skills acquired during studies. Ishana aptly illustrates this, and stated:

> My mentor helped me get my internship. Not help with any kind of recommendation but helped in how to present myself and how to talk to people, how to run a meeting. It helped with those types of skills needed in business, little things of how to sit around a table in a meeting and get your voice heard (Ishana).

The mentees realised they were subconsciously emulating professional behaviours and language; this expansion into professional language is linked to elaborated codes, traditionally used in education (Bernstein, 1975). Kareen, for example, stated:

> If you have been in the same environment for years, like my local neighbourhood, you tend to act like them, and talk like them. When you are exposed to new environments, you learn to adapt to their behaviour. It's almost like projection, you imitate their behaviour because it fits with them (Kareen).

Fawzia noted:

> You are gaining things from them, like the way they speak. Even, if you are in the presence of a mentor, how they act helps you to know how to act, the jargon they use, and how they talk about work-related things. Networking is important and you have to find some common ground. When you first meet someone, it can help with the first conversation. I was not good at this before, but at events seeing how my mentor does this, I was able to pick this up (Fawzia).

The first-hand industry exposure within the mentoring exchanges equipped mentees with professional language pre-graduation. For example, Practitioner B outlined:

> Many of our students will come back and have rethought the job they would like to do, as they did not realise that all these different roles existed, and it gives them an opportunity to interact with the real word. The mentor can take them into their place of work, and they can see what the world of work looks like. Many of our students have not been into a place like that, they may have worked part-time but that is probably in retail or something similar. They are not a student anymore but a young professional (Practitioner B).

Mentoring provided an awareness of adaptability in language and behaviours needed when navigating through professional and personal lives. For example, Alyssa, stated:

> It can show us how to go about being in the industry, how to look, where to look, what we need to prove we can work correctly and how it is. It has given me understanding of how I should treat people…we can't be the same all of the time and you have to switch it up (Alyssa).

In these cases, the mentees were developing professional personas, suggesting they were remodelling their cultural selves to fit normative social constructs associated within professional worlds. Varsha, for example, noted:

> It's the insight really…I don't say she has specifically said this is the way it should be, just advice on how to come across in a professional way to all people. I should adapt that, and I should be able to change based on who I am talking to (Varsha).

Tahira stated:

> I learned that networking is important, and you should be able to talk to people and socialise…not be very talkative but to be able to start a conversation professionally (Tahira).

An explanation of self-development and self-awareness for the mentees from a cultural perspective will be given in the following section.

5.6 Theme 4: Enabling Agency

RQ 4: To what extent can employability attributes be developed through mentoring by breaking down barriers and enabling greater access, participation and progression to the labour market?

The previous theme outlined how employability attributes were developed. This section expands on these points to include a more rounded development of mentees which covers other life-skills and encompasses holistic understandings of mentoring as a change process. The 'enabling agency' theme presents examples of progressive changes in the development of agency for the BME female students. The subthemes indicate the aspects of agency that move beyond employability realms for the mentees. They include examples where the mentees have benefitted from mentoring to support them with life decisions and well-being. The mentees' narratives articulate their reflective and independent thinking arising from the mentoring process.

5.6.1 Increased Confidence

A recurring theme for the positive effects of mentoring were changes in self-confidence. This confidence translated into keeping an open mind and remaining positive when applying for new jobs. In relation to BME female experiences, it can also lead to confidence in applying for positions in different locations and industries:

> The job I was offered is within the construction industry and I know that my family would say to me are you sure that's the direction you want to be taking. And, although it is not them saying directly, you're female, you shouldn't be in the construction industry, you know it's what they are thinking. Mentoring really pushes you to say to people, just because I am female, I can be in the construction industry (Varsha).

There were a variety of examples given suggesting that mentees had increased in confidence. Mentees talked about fresh career opportunities by having the conviction to move outside of their comfort zones. Shona, for example, stated:

> I have not had the chance to meet someone who is high up in their field and it has made me feel a lot more comfortable in those situations and how I can come across. Even through having the relationship with my mentor, it has helped me with that side, now I am not intimidated by meeting a CEO of a charity or a director. Before, I would have felt, not this is not the space for me…I would have felt intimidated about what I have done to be there (Shona).

Nakida expressed the personal impacts of mentoring on self-belief:

> Having someone that believes in you makes you even more confident. In my case to be more professional. It helps to keep my mind open and to have a positive mind when applying for new jobs (Nakida).

In many instances, mentoring built an awareness of 'self', there were indications of a new 'self' emerging as well as preservation of the existing 'self'. Varsha, for example, stated:

> Before the mentoring scheme, I didn't even think I could consider applying for this and it has helped me to get outside of the box and put myself forward for other things. Even though this is for mentoring, I get involved with other activities like travelling. It has given me the confidence to be able to do that (Varsha).

Both practitioners expressed BME women, in general are lacking in confidence to ask for help and support. They felt that staff had to be more proactive about relaying the different types of support available at University and encouraging BME female students to participate:

> Having a positive role-model, whether that's in a group or one-to-one, but it is having someone who is influential and has been through the same experience, perhaps Alumni. For them to say, this is where I started, this is where I am, and this is what I am doing. I think that some BME students do lack in confidence. Sometimes, they don't know much about the system and they don't wish to delve into it so much. If they had someone there, telling them these things it helps them to consider their options (Practitioner A).

This lack of confidence extends to sourcing advice from academic and careers staff unless there is a close and trusting relationship with that member of staff. Practitioner B, for example, stated:

> A lot of them have not interacted with any professionals at all and even coming to a member of staff, I can see that they are nervous, and they are lacking in confidence. Even though, this is the programme for them, I can still see there are nerves and a lack of awareness of how to deal with a situation where there are professionals (Practitioner B).

From a confidence perspective, mentees were showing a sense of self-awareness and optimism. Through their body language and expressions, their feelings were clearly articulated. In cases where they discussed any insecurities, these were reframed to consider alternative ways to overcome such feelings. Tahira, for example, stated:

> I learned how to research the company that I am applying for and it has given me confidence that I can apply for jobs and go to interviews. And, I was able to relate to another Solicitor who is from a big firm, so that's improved my confidence that I can talk to people (Tahira).

5.6.2 Self-efficacy

Several mentees anticipated challenges in terms of the competitive labour market and whether the investment in HE will be meaningfully met. However, mentoring helped build a resilience that felt ready to consider alternative perspectives. Bandura's (1986) concept of self-efficacy

on BME experiences is explored in the following chapter. Instead of focussing on any barriers for entering that field, mentees reassessed views to realistically consider employability options. Fawzia, for example, supported this, and stated:

> It is definitely worth doing to discover things that can maybe change your life. Even if it doesn't, it will help you in the future even if you don't realise it. You know what the process is, the advice you have been given will stay with you. Even if you don't pick it up now, you will remember it in a years' time and it will help you at some point in your life, you just don't know when (Fawzia).

Tahira noted:

> It can give a different perspective of life because some people might not have the confidence to do things, or they might have a special talent, the mentor might be able to see that and build their confidence (Tahira).

The mentoring dialogues offered opportunities for reconsideration of any challenges or concerns through mentee-led agendas. Mentoring developed a resourceful mindset where the mentee felt ready to accept any setbacks and move on with their goals. Shona, for example, stated:

> I think the mock interview was helpful. I was so nervous, and it was helpful as not only am I going to continue doing interviews in the medical profession, but I am also going to have revalidation procedures. Basically, it is about talking about yourself in a positive way and that is something that will always be valuable to me, she has really helped me to develop that (Shona).

Three of the mentees expressed feelings of persistence, even if faced with a rejection from a job application. For example, "I will try to look past it and try harder in the next assessment centre" (Varsha). This notion of developing resilience was a recurring theme throughout the mentoring sessions, despite any perceived barriers accessing the labour market. Nakida stated:

> I think mentoring is an extra opportunity to really build on our skills and confidence and decrease our apprehensions on the job market based on stereotypes, usually negative, that are associated with a person coming from a minority group (Nakida).

Tahira acknowledged the significance of mentoring on career goals:

> Not that the mentor offers you a job but through help can build your confidence and help you feel you can achieve your goals regardless of being an ethnic minority person (Tahira).

In addition, Fawzia stated:

> I have learned how to deal with rejections and just to be able to take it on the chin and think that something better will come out of it. Having the confidence that I will get something out of it at the end is what has kept me going (Fawzia).

Mentees were showing evidence of enthusiasm and persistence despite any previous negative experiences. For example, Varsha, stated:

> I am more motivated now compared to when I was doing my A 'Levels. I don't think I was motivated because of the school that I went to; I didn't think I was capable of going to a good University or getting accepted to a high tier firm (Varsha).

5.6.3 Individual Mindsets

The mentees displayed the following mindsets: flexibility, self-drive, determination and initiative. Fawzia, for example, stated:

> Work-life, honestly, it can go either way, it can be very good, or it can be very horrible…I think a big part of it is down to me and how I make it seem. If I allow it to be a positive experience, then it can be. I feel like the attitude you come to work and the tasks you do is down to the person and how you deal with these things (Fawzia).

Ongoing personal development was a positive outcome of the mentoring relationships, covering a range of personal attributes such as resilience, personal habits, time-management, creating tolerance and being open to different perspectives:

> I know it will be hard to find work as it is very competitive as others may have more skills. Or, they may have less skills; however, they might have a network. But you need perseverance and do your best and be your best. Have personality but also have the skills and perfect them…there are other options as well, which I have now thought about (Alyssa).

> It has helped me to realise my weaknesses. I had to find out the things I was struggling with in order to ask my mentor how to cope. And, also what she finds hard and how to deal with those aspects (Shona).

Almost all the mentees expressed feelings of gratitude in recognition of the support, they personally had been given. This encouraged them to consider helping similar people from non-professional backgrounds. For example, Ishana and Fawzia stated:

> I would probably say that I will be a lifelong mentor and mentee. I do not have 30 years' careers experience, but I can definitely help those who are in their final year at Universities (Ishana).

> In the future, I want to help people, I want to guide people in five years' time who are like me. Because I am grateful, I feel it makes me want to help other people (Fawzia).

During the interviews, a sense of the mentees' cultural values and personal beliefs were given. Many mentees expressed how they felt towards a suggestion and did not participate in any activities they did not feel comfortable in. Two mentees rejected advice in favour of a positive projection of their own personality. These views acknowledge the moral stance of students in relation to social networking practices (Villar and Albertin, 2010). For example, Nakida, stated:

> It is also important to maintain contact with these people. If I need something from them, or if they need something from me so it does not feel like I am trying to get something out of them. I try to stay in contact with them as much as I can. Most of the people I network with go the same work events and I try to keep in touch with them to see how they are doing (Nakida).

Mentoring for the BME female mentees was a subjective experience where individual personalities, beliefs and mindsets influenced outcomes; this will be explored further in the next chapter. However, is worth noting Tahira's perspective, which stated:

> It could change someone's life…but I think it depends on the people and what they want to achieve. Some people I know who took part, did not change anything or did not learn anything from. I learned a lot of things and some of my friends learned

> even more, but it depends on who you are and how much you want to put into it (Tahira).

5.6.4 Broadening Horizons

A recurring aspect of mentoring for all participants included broadening horizons. This involved thinking of ways to set themselves apart from other candidates and to pursue alternative activities, whether that be personal pursuits or career orientated. Fawzia indicated that she was reading more books, to see things from another perspective. Practitioner B stated:

> It is about confidence, that you are important enough for someone in that position to give up his or her time for you. I think that makes a huge difference in their confidence and motivates them to look at different things that they can do. It does broaden their horizons as to what careers are open to them (Practitioner B).

Although, mentoring had a clearly defined timespan, the impacts of mentoring were viewed as being far-reaching into the future. For example, Kareen stated:

> I have been to business meetings and seminars with confidence, I go on my own and I think that is because it has been reinforced that you do have it in you. I need someone to reinforce that idea, that yes you can and that you will be great at it too. In my mind, I thought I can do it, but I'm afraid. My mentor has said you can do it, off course you can. I then go for it and that's where I am now…I go for all kinds of things (Kareen).

Fawzia noted:

> The thing is not everyone has that, not everyone has someone that they can go to. Having a mentor allows you to speak to people that you may not be able to before. Sometimes you have to go and find that person yourself…If the person is not there you can't wait for them to come to you (Fawzia).

Varsha stated:

> Mentoring can help mentees who come from ethnic minority groups by giving them confidence to apply for roles in locations other than their home location. It can also help them confide in a professional figure who may be from the same or similar background (Varsha).

The mentees indicated a willingness to learn new skills and encounter different experiences. This translated into being pro-active about their employability futures through a clearly identified route. For example, Fawzia, stated:

> Support will be needed on what it is actually like in this next step of how to get a work-life balance. I feel that is how my mentoring will grow into the next phase. The first phase is getting into employment and the next phase is what happens when you get there (Fawzia).

All the mentees accounts demonstrated transformative effects of mentoring in confidence, motivation and persistence. Foucault (1988, p.18) suggests individuals gain a greater understanding of self through "specific techniques", that is mentoring for this study. For example, Fawzia aptly noted:

> Mentoring is different for everyone; it is how you define mentoring. I went in with whatever you can help me with, that is fine rather than a list. I went in sort of blinded, the help that I got I didn't expect it…probably because I came out feeling confident that I can use it in the future (Fawzia).

More research on the long-term benefits of mentoring is often suggested in literature and policy. Sometimes, a participant is engaged with several different supportive activities, thus, it is not possible to pinpoint impacts directly to mentoring. A specific example of an employability impact for mentoring in this study is expressed here:

> I would leave each session feeling energised, excited and grateful and I learned something new each time…we prepared a lot for the interview and the day I walked in to say I got the job, my mentor said 'I knew it all along' and that was a nice feeling as we had both worked towards that's goal and achieved it (Ishana).

Mentoring contributes towards life-long learning and the willingness to try out new and unfamiliar activities. Shona, for example, acknowledged:

> Most of the things will last with me for a very long time. My mentor helped me with maybe more than career hurdles. With employability, you are always going to look for the next thing that you need to work for, having the confidence that makes you think you can do that, will stay with me (Shona).

Kareen appreciated the value of mentoring on career planning and personal development:

> It can give you a bit confidence that you can do it, because one voice thinks you can, but then other voices say no…I will speak to my mentor and say I have an application form and I am battling against it, I don't think I am good enough and my mentor will coach me on the application form and say if you don't get it at least you have tried. That's the next thing, they make sure you are always trying and eventually something will happen (Kareen).

5.7 Overview of Analysis

The findings have contributed towards knowledge by, firstly, demonstrating how aspirations can be turned into reality for BME female students through personalised guidance and participation in professional activities. Secondly, by highlighting the role of mentors as social networks that bridge the gap between employability aspirations and reality. The implications of these points will be discussed in the next chapter.

The ethnic/gender background for the mentors was not collected due to the focus of this study on identifying the components for employability mentoring, in supporting students who are first in their family to enter HE. During the interviews, it was reported that four participants had a male mentor and four had a female mentor. Two of the mentees were supported by a mentor from the same ethnic background and experienced positive feelings of growth, similar with the other students. There was no preference indicated for the desired gender of the mentor, as the main requirements for participation were to gain relevant industry insights and professional information. This agrees with the viewpoint by Practitioner B on the process used for matching mentors and mentees according to employability factors. In all instances, although this question was asked during the interviews, there were no negative mentoring experiences highlighted. Instead, operational issues were mentioned, such as, time-management and fitting in study with

part-time work and family commitments. More time with the mentor was suggested, as location could be an issue when organising mentoring sessions, if the mentor works in a different city.

5.8 Summary

This chapter presented narratives from the mentees giving specific details of their mentoring experience and how it shaped their employability thoughts. This gives an opportunity to find out more about the mentoring process and *how* it leads to different outcomes such as improved confidence and persistence. The following chapter will analyse the four themes and significance of the participants' statements in relation to the literature review, theoretical framework and related learning theories. I will offer explanations on how this data extends insights of employability mentoring for the empowerment and development of agency in BME female students.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the four themes; 'structural systems', 'collaborative mentoring exchanges', 'professional insights' and 'enabling agency' and will critically apply their significance to applicable literature, the theoretical framework and learning theory. Both practically and theoretically, there are connections across all four themes and therefore they have overlapping meanings. This adds to the view that mentoring is a holistic process of learning and development, suggesting individual agency and structure are not separate entities. I will analysis the implications of the key themes and propose the various elements needed for supporting BME female students effectively. The aim of this chapter is to extend knowledge by developing the components of a culturally sensitive mentoring approach in addressing employability needs.

6.2 Theme 1: Structural Systems

RQ 1: How does mentoring navigate through individual agency, culture and communities?

The initial interview questions to the participants enquired about their previous educational, family and social experiences. These questions provided context to the study and established the backgrounds of the mentees, in relation to the literature on social capital and the practitioners' perspective.

6.2.1 Building on Social Capital

A motivator given for pursuing higher education is the expected return on future earnings and that education is a route to obtaining that financial capital (Tholen, 2015). In view of this,

students believe that pursuing higher education is sufficiently worthy of investing their time and resources. With the expansion of HE, this 'personal capital' includes a wider range of personal qualities to include both 'hard and 'soft' currencies. The 'soft currencies' go beyond 'hard currencies' of obtaining degrees and work experiences and include interpersonal skills, self-presentation and dispositions (Tholen, 2015, p.771). This means that personal and cultural characteristics are increasingly visible and could affect young people historically from low-income backgrounds accessing professional positions.

The intention of this thesis is not to interrogate the structural factors in-depth but nonetheless, it is important to have an awareness of the participants' cultural backgrounds. In terms of not belonging in University, three of the participants mentioned this. There is no scope in this study to analyse this further since the focus is how the students interpreted the influences of mentoring on employability. Certainly, Higher Education systems and the way in which they support ethnic minority students is a recommendation for future studies and will be suggested in the concluding chapter.

6.2.2 Emotional and Ethnic Capital

All the participants commented on the support available to them within their home environments. Two of the participants did not mention parental support, nor were they negative about this aspect; instead, they attributed support from their community and peers. This demonstrates that the emotional bond is there, whether that is with family or with close friends and encouragement within the BME person's environment act as motivators (Modood, 2004; Basit, 2012a). The nature of this support can be providing space and time to study as well as emotional encouragement.

Shona recognised that other middle-class counterparts were advantageous as they already had a network of opportunities available within their own environments. Similarly, *Kareen* was aware of the structural disadvantages of low-income backgrounds, peer pressures and lack of opportunities for her community. Her significant motivating factor was her mum but *Kareen* recognised this should be balanced against other structures, such as, education, school and employment. For the participants, a crucial point is that family can give emotional support to pursue higher education but not the industry specific insights. Still, as demonstrated in section, 5.3.1 providing the student with time and space to study cannot be underestimated as well as the impact of emotional care and support.

'Bonding capital' consists of emotional support and encouragement whilst 'bridging social capital' is access to wider networks, information and identities (Putnam, 2000). Although bonding within groups creates close, nurturing communities, developing relationships with outside groups creates social capital associated with professional positions (Putnam, 2000). Section 5.3.1 of this study has shown the need for both bonding and bridging capital as each has its own unique purpose. In the case of BME female students, the bridging capital is not as effective if the emotional bonding is not available by family, friends or community.

The central focus on family involvement regarding ethnic capital has been criticised because it ignores the possibilities of individuals obtaining other forms of social capital via alternative means (Shah, Dwer and Modood, 2010). Wider social networks are useful to obtain knowledge about educational processes and the requirements of evolving work environments. Although this criticism seems to have merit, I feel failing to acknowledge the significance of the BME family groups neglects a key capital resource from a BME's internal and historical toolkit. The

intrinsic values instilled from early age experiences, resonates powerfully throughout the BME's life and situations. The family, overall, is a strong moderating voice in many BME's choices, actions and activities. However, the combined lack of ethnic, cultural and social capital can hinder progress and sustain social disadvantage. The value of family involvement cannot be under-estimated and despite these inherent disadvantages, individuals from supportive home environments are provided with tools to help them succeed. Parents being actively involved in their child's education through discussions and keeping abreast of homework produce favourable outcomes (Basit, 2012a). Hence, achieving educational qualifications and the associated capital is considered a driving force for transforming young people's lives (Basit, 2013).

The family is generally considered an influential foundation for developing economic, cultural and symbolic capital, as it institutionalises each member's feelings to ensure the survival and perseverance of the unit (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Herein, the question does not lie necessarily with aspirations for BME women but having appropriate support to ensure employability attributes are developed at HE. Students understanding the internal processes and moving beyond aspirations to accessing professional networks and professions is important. Almost all the mentees received support from home and acquired aspects of 'ethnic capital' (Modood, 2004). As a result of participating in employability mentoring, they received first-hand industry advice from mentors and obtained professional and business connections. I have depicted this in **Figure 2**, where enhanced social capital for BME females is the outcome of family/community/peer support, motivation, professional/managerial mentors and social networks.

Figure 2: Components of BME Social Capital

Enhanced Social Capital	Family / Community / Peer Support + Motivation + Professional/Managerial Mentor + Social Networks

6.2.3 Implications of Wider Structures

This study confirms that mentoring cannot be separated out from the wider structure and the associated power elements (Colley, 2003). Examples of power dynamics are indicated in **Table 1**, where I provided my independent evaluation of Bourdieu's ideas. Garvey, Stokes and Megginson (2018, p.305) offers a 'heuristic' view of mentoring and coaching where mentoring and coaching activities are considered a discourse containing mutually dependent factors. Core origins of mentoring and coaching are rooted in sociological, psychological and philosophical traditions and these are also influenced by political, economic, sociological, technological and legal factors. I have presented an understanding of sociological factors that underpin mentoring relationships investigated through an evaluation of Bourdieu (1977, 1990). Philosophical factors will be interrogated in the 'collaborative mentoring exchanges' section by an understanding of 'being'. The psychological factors of individual motivations and behaviours will be identified in the 'enabling agency' section.

6.3 Theme 2: Collaborative Mentoring Exchanges

RQ 2: What should mentoring involve to support access, participation and progression to the labour market?

The aim of this section is to interrogate the principle components needed to establish and maintain ethical mentoring relationships for BME female students. In this study, the main difference between mentoring and coaching is that the mentee owns and drives the learning process. The mentee has an idea of her goals, and the mentor offers the information so that the mentee is better informed. Care should be taken that the mentor listens to the mentee and responds appropriately according to cultural needs. To some degree, trust is needed in the mentees' judgement together with having respect of what they consider is right for them. The various elements needed to build trust and develop successful mentoring relationships will be explored further.

6.3.1 Understanding and Appreciation

The mentors and mentees had an understanding and appreciation of each other's roles that facilitated ongoing conversations about employability. Mentoring provided the space to explore the participants' feelings to establish new meanings and relationships with employability. Even though there are constraints to what mentoring can facilitate, there is the opportunity for both parties to practically experience beliefs, such as "respect, tolerance and acceptance" (Garvey, Stokes and Megginson, 2018, p.235). The notion of empathy is a common component for defining mentoring qualities and aptitudes (Clutterbuck and Ragins, 2002; Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2005). The ability of both parties to recognise and share feelings with each other cannot be underestimated, particularly, in relation to appreciating each other's cultural outlooks. Goleman (2004) explanation of empathy involves deeply understanding the other

person's feelings and reacting accordingly. This purports to being tuned to and actively interested in any emotional concerns and responses that may trigger certain behaviours. At an extended cultural level, the mentor can support their mentee by understanding their needs and feelings by using a sensitive approach.

For effective mentoring relationships, it is helpful for the mentor to be aware of cultural influences and acknowledge the mentees' circumstances and background. This study has identified that for employability based specific mentoring the same gender and ethnicity is not as significant. However, it is important for the mentor to have empathy and an understanding of the circumstances that may lead to the mentee to act or feel in a particular way. Clutterbuck (2002) addresses this from a diversity perspective where both the mentor and mentee should acknowledge and respect each other's differences and understand the mindset behind an alternative attitude or behaviour. In doing so, the values underpinning those alternative behaviour should be appreciated.

6.3.2 Building Rapport

Varsha acknowledged the importance of being recognised as an individual. She mentioned the merits of knowing some personal details about the mentor as it helps to establish rapport and build a trusting relationship. In a 'diversity mentoring relationship', both mentor and mentee form a 'professional friendship' with a shared willingness and commitment to learn from each other (Clutterbuck and Ragins, 2002, p.88). Once this shared respect forms the foundation of the mentoring relationship, this is followed by exploring other career options. Subsequently, the mentor is suitably placed to suggest alternative ideas that have not previously been contemplated by the mentee. Developing rapport is also important as it allows the mentee to be

open about their concerns about employability. When the mentor plays the role of a 'critical friend' and offers constructive feedback, the mentee is more likely to accept such opinions (Clutterbuck and Ragins, 2002). This process was evidenced by the feedback given in the mock job interviews regarding language, tone and pace of responses.

6.3.3 Distinctions between Mentoring and Coaching

Although, coaching is a more recent practice than mentoring, there are common elements and practices in both interventions. Both practices require honesty and genuine approaches to allow the individual to flourish to the best of their abilities (Garvey, 2010). In general terms, mentoring is a longer-term process whereas coaching looks at immediate learning and development needs (Clutterbuck, 2004; Garvey, 2010). Even though, certain elements could be construed as 'coaching', in this study, this is done under the *umbrella of mentoring*, here, I have defined coaching as a:

> One-off activity that is initiated and owned by the mentee, with the mentor using their skills and expertise to support the mentee in reaching an understanding of that activity (Mukhtar, 2019).

Roberts (2000, p.150) presents a clear explanation for the differences between mentoring and coaching by highlighting four essential components needed to develop and sustain mentoring relationships. These factors were also evident in this study to address employability development needs for BME female students:

- Process relationships.
- Helping process.
- Teaching-learning process, reflective practice.
- Career and personal development, formalised process.

Certain aspects of the employability activities are like ‘coaching’, which is considered a by-product of the mentoring. Hazen and Steckler’s (2010) explanation of ‘career coaching’, is where the coach shares knowledge and insights on different work environments, systems and beliefs. Similar with the role of a coach, the mentor supports the mentee to be ready for the workplace in a well-informed and perceptive manner, leading to professional approaches meeting the organisational culture. The mentees develop a convincing understanding of their own capabilities applicable to their chosen field and supports them to make realistic, appealing career choices.

6.3.4 Application of Mentoring Models

This thesis is consistent with the findings of Garvey’s (2010) key features for mentoring. Effective mentoring depends on open, trusting and committed relationships with an emotional bond that may lead to friendships (section 5.4.1). The core skills used by the mentor are questioning, listening, challenging and supporting (section 5.4.3 and 5.4.4). The mentee and their aspirations are integral to the whole process. The mentee is also at the centre and aspires to access their chosen occupational field by gaining appropriate skills and professional experiences (section 5.5.5). As evidenced in theme 2, mentoring is a collaborative learning and developmental relationship between two people.

In terms of understanding the differences between mentoring and coaching, Garvey (2010) emphasises the emotional aspect of the mentoring relationship. Learning is heightened because of this close relationship, through the mentor giving insights and sharing wisdom which lead to the mentee considering different options or activities. See sections 5.4.1 to 5.4.4 for examples of rapport, empathy and a genuine interest in the mentees’ abilities that encouraged

development. Brockbank and McGill (2006, p.63) concept of 'developmental coaching' also relates with this study, where the mentor should have trust in the mentees' development goals through a person-centred approach. This humanistic approach of learning and developing relies on genuine and authentic mentoring relationships for understanding BME experiences.

Carl Rogers (1981) believed that a person-centred approach was essential for successful learning and development. The mentees discussed the types of mentoring characteristics that allowed trust to be built and sustained. To understand how this relationship was developed also requires analysis of the mentors' experience. This was beyond the scope for this study, but it is still worthwhile to consider for future research. The person-centred approach is vital for understanding the experiences of BME female students and the following three features are needed for effective relationships:

- 'Congruence' - to be authentic, genuine and expressive.
- 'Unconditional positive' - mutual acceptance of each other's circumstances.
- 'Empathy' - expressing an awareness of that person's feelings, thoughts and opinions.

This person-centred approach facilitated the development of career strategies for the mentees. Hazen and Steckler (2010) propose two ways in which career plans, based on different facets of human personality, can manifest as part of the coaching process. I have applied these principles to mentoring processes within this study. The first strategy '*plan and implement'* begins with examining the individual's circumstances, to enable a direct route in achieving an identified goal through planned action (Ibarra, 2004, p.30). Although this philosophy is underpinned by a person having a principle self, this does not mean that personality is binding

since career support evaluates inwards to discover the best possible career path. Planning activities include (Ibarra, 2004):

- Researching career domains.
- Mapping out ideas.
- Becoming accustomed with the desired career through access to networks.
- Developing a clear strategy to reach that aspiration.

This study demonstrates that mentees participated in the first three elements to a greater or lesser extent; *Kareen* and *Shona* were also developing longer-term strategies. As each participant experienced mentoring in her own way, a representative view cannot be given for the BME sample group. A common factor, however, was all the mentees had specific goals and this was communicated to the mentors at the start of the relationship. The second career strategy is, *'test and learn'* which begins with action, followed by analysis, thus creating alternative actions reinforced by 'testing and learning' (Ibarra, 2004, p.32). This approach also applies since it views the mentees as 'possible selves' and considers a variety of career development activities. Ibarra (2004, p.33) refers to this as 'crafting' experiments' where the mentees are testing out new ideas and forging professional acquaintances in a gradual and less risky way with reflective opportunities.

I believe both aspects of Ibarra's (2004) model are applicable to BME female mentoring experiences. The mentors needed to have an idea of how the mentees visualised their employability futures through 'plan and implement' and how they felt their skillset were applicable. In contrast, the 'test and learn' approach was applicable to alternative opportunities that were previously not considered by the mentee, for example, setting up a business and

having career options. Even so, it is challenging to allocate a specific model representative of the BME sample, as the individual mentoring relationships are appropriate to either one of these groups. *Tahira* and *Varsha's* experiences are applicable with the former as they were quite specific in what they wanted to achieve out of mentoring. Whereas *Ishana* and *Kareen's* relationship were exploratory as they were trying out probabilities of doing different things. In the UK, there is lack of research in developing mentoring models (Gray, Garvey and Lane, 2016). As explained, it is challenging to do so; instead, the following section explores the components needed for successful mentoring relationships in 'culturally sensitive employability' approaches.

6.3.5 Ontological Mentoring

This section addresses Colley's (2003) question of "whether mentoring seek to work on or through the persons involved" (p.176). The mentees' perspectives are developed through acknowledging the role of habitus in an authentic and inclusive manner. Ontological based interventions, whether through mentoring or coaching, aim to create organic changes in deep-rooted attitudes and actions by altering the way of being. The mentees developed different understandings of their personal skills and aptitudes to apply in their potential futures.

Sieler (2010) explored the function of ontological coaching, I believe the fundamental principles also relate with mentoring and specifically for BME women for the following reasons. To make changes and alter behaviours, individuals should be equipped with not only skills and aspirations but need to be resourceful in the rapidly changing climate. Therefore, to be resilient enough to cope with present challenging situations (competitiveness of the graduate labour market) and personal effectiveness in dealing with future situations (greater automation,

political and technological changes). Thus, meaning job seekers should be prepared to respond and adapt with these changes (CSJ, 2018). The mentee is not a passive receiver of the processes established within HE structures but can make decisions and participate in activities according to their own terms (Foucault, 1988). The mentors need to be aware of the 'way of being' for their mentees as this influences their behaviours and beliefs.

According to Sieler, (2010), a person's way of being is shown through three connected dimensions, language, emotions and physiology. Firstly, language leads to certain outcomes and generates certain behaviours (Bernstein, 1975). Secondly, a person's emotions will lead them to view certain situations and respond in a particular way. The mentor's role is to acknowledge and be responsive to these moods in order to shift ways of thinking. For instance, when *Kareen* did not feel she had the skills to apply for a job position, her mentor encouraged her to alter this view, by focussing on her skills and reinforcing these qualities. Thirdly, the dimension of 'physiology' shows the way of being is personified in body language and posture and includes refined nuances developed throughout life, usually subconsciously. If not reflected upon, these postures continue and keep people in similar moods and emotions.

Modifications in all three elements lead to changes in ontological positions through the mentee viewing alternative perspectives and seeking new opportunities (Leedham and the OCM, 2017). My study extends on this viewpoint, where the mentors were able, through a trusting relationship with their mentee, to comment on these professional postures, such as self-presentation in meetings, speaking too fast or unclearly. The mentors were relaying to the mentees that even minor shifts in body language could lead to different outcomes. Vitally, the core mentoring relationship needs to be established first before the mentee is willing to accept

such comments and approval must be gained first. Practicing these shifts in language and posture is internalised and lead to prepared ways of adapting future behaviours by change in the way of being (Sieler, 2010).

6.3.6 Ethical Mentoring

I believe the ethics of ontological mentoring should always be considered for successful mentoring relationships for BME female students. The mentors should operate in an ethical manner, and must place the needs of their mentees first, by always ensuring that the mentee is comfortable and has consented to the course of conversations and suggestions. Flaherty (1999) provides a thought-provoking perspective on coaching, where we need to have an understanding and familiarity of the other persons being, as the underlying structure for effective relationships. Heidegger's (1962) 'Being and Time' presented the philosophical notions for coaching, in that past interpretations would inform a person's reality. Applying this perspective, mentors should aim to understand the mentees' cultural backgrounds and that historical, social and educational experiences influenced feelings.

In this study, mentors provided insights to professional terminology. The language used in coaching allows subsequent actions and activities to be harmonised with others (Flaherty, 1999). In the case of the mentees, the language needed within a professional environment that is not readily available within their home and communities. Flaherty (1999) discusses two aspects of language that are applicable to BME experiences. Firstly, the possibility of creating a new language to build upon historical and cultural backgrounds, to incorporate different activities and actions through the mentor offering insights to professional language. This applies to job interviews, job applications, introductory meetings and making connections. The

outcome of this language creates a professional identity that may be different to the one in the mentees' personal lives. The mentor's role was to create changes in behaviour by developing professional language through specific insights and examples of real-life work experiences. The mentee is then able to pick up this language, without the support of the mentor, when they are aware of its existence and importance. See sections 5.5.3 and 5.5.4 for examples of how these professional skills were mastered.

Secondly, it is through interpretation that these changes take place once the mentee becomes aware of them consciously. The mentee participates in new actions, as she is aware of something that was not considered previously, hence, leading to the mentee's independence. Mentoring should also manage expectations and give mentees the tools to make informed decisions. Applying this reasoning, the 'structure for interpretation' in the study is the awareness of professional behaviours (Flaherty, 1999).

Ontology is based on people living in their past, present and futures. The purpose for mentoring in this study, supports employability for BME female students, with the mentor having an awareness and empathy for the mentees' historical, cultural and social circumstances. An ontological perspective is that individuals are continuously projecting themselves into the future with a particular mindset. Through unconscious thoughts, a suggestion or opinion by a mentor can be viewed as either helpful support or as a challenge. As demonstrated by two of the mentees, *Kareen* and *Ishana*, rejecting a piece of advice offered by their mentors. Flaherty (1999) attributes this to individuals subconsciously making decisions based on how they feel about their experiences and not future implications. This also occurred in the case of *Kareen* not asking others for help as her past experiences discouraged her to access this type of support.

This is indicative of Colley's (2003) stance that mentees can moderately utilise their personal agency to determine support needed. The mentees might reject advice to imitate and instead will stand by the value of their own beliefs, instead of meeting regularised expectations. Bearing all these points in mind, ontological mentoring for BME women is about ethical mentoring. It is about the mentor having an awareness of the mentees' cultural circumstances, whilst having their own self-awareness that they are using appropriate practices:

> Indeed, the core skills of a mentor can be described as having sufficient sensitivity to the mentees' needs to respond with appropriate behaviours (Clutterbuck, 2004, p.18).

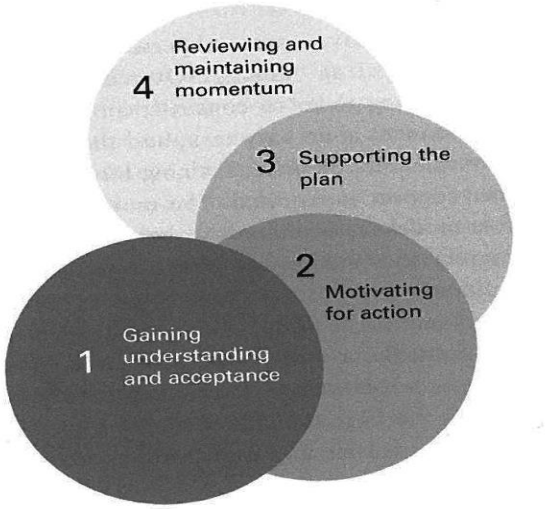
6.3.7 Cultural Approach for Mentoring

When considering a model for mentoring, there is much confusion surrounding this area, since effective mentoring responds to individuals needs and therefore a one size that fits all is inappropriate (Crisp and Cruz, 2009). However, it is essential that mentoring is delivered ethically for the mentees to benefit. This connects with Turner and Gonzalez's (2015) suggestion that research should investigate how mentoring is internally experienced to create appropriate models. Mentors should value and acknowledge the inherent beliefs of personal and shared agency to allow consequential transformations (Gray, Garvey and Lane, 2016). The professional insights gained are then expressed in the ways of being in working life.

Theories for mentoring are generally limited, despite the phenomenal growth of mentoring in learning and developmental contexts. Leedham and the OCM (2017, p.20) reject the need to have 'ideal models' and instead believe that a mentor/coach should respond appropriately to individuals needs and circumstances. Their description of an 'ideal model 'provides a template to be adapted to the specific mentees' needs. They suggest a framework to guide practice is helpful; however, a mentor should principally be guided by the mentees' requirements. There

are three forms of mentors, 'corporate', 'qualification' and 'community' (Leedham and the OCM, 2017). While aspects of all three mentors apply to this study, the focus is on community mentoring which emphasises language and behavioural aspects, as presented in the following model (**Figure 3**):

Figure 3: 'The four stages of the community coach-mentoring process'



(Leedham and the OCM, 2017, p.61)

This process was also evidenced within my study. After analysing the data, it was determined that both mentors and mentees required certain qualities and characteristics for successful mentoring. As the mentoring relationships were deemed effective, this confirms their potential suitability for culturally sensitive mentoring approaches. I have also identified additional elements to 'the four stages of the community' mentoring process. Based on the shared cultural references across the participants, I have suggested desired components for employability-based mentoring.

There are, however, challenges in presenting a clear-cut model of mentoring for BME female students, even within a cultural framework. This is because, development does not occur through mentoring as an intervention but because of the parties involved. Good practice in mentoring happens through focussed dialogues and interpersonal exchanges grounded on the principles of trust, acceptance and tolerance (Gray, Garvey and Lane, 2016). Although, each mentoring relationship is distinctive, there are parallels to other BME participants in this study. For this reason, I propose a cultural concept of mentoring as depicted in **Table 5**.

Table 5: Cultural Mentoring Components for Employability

Participant	Cultural Mentoring Components
Professional Mentor	Adopts an ethical approach Awareness of mentees' social and educational experiences Offers wisdom and expertise Shares industry insights and professional experiences Listens and responds to the mentees' needs Appreciates cultural values and outlooks Genuine and empathetic approach Provides constructive feedback Facilitates opportunities for discussion and reflection
Student Mentee	Motivation to invest in the mentoring relationship Drives individual employability agenda Identifies specific career goals Ownership of strategies for career development Acknowledges cultural perspectives Communicates openly about concerns and feelings Proactive and committed to process Reflects on progress and personal potential

This model suggests that changes in a person's habitus is possible if these mentoring components are in place. Refer to section 2.6.1 and the concept of 'evolutionary mentoring' where the importance of subjective beliefs are acknowledged (Brockbank and McGill, 2006). Nonetheless, it is not enough to say that mentoring can create benefits, but mentoring has the potential to do these things if these ideas are in place. The mentor should recognise the cultural values and beliefs held by the mentees, be responsive to their individual circumstances, and crucially, to any barriers that may affect achievement of a goal.

6.3.8 Mentoring Discourse

Discourse is the way certain ideas are communicated, whether as written or spoken language. The mentoring discourse themes identified by Gray, Garvey and Lane (2016, p.13) that are also applicable for BME communities include:

- Educational origins.
- Assists psychosocial growth.
- The mentor's skills consist of 'listening, questioning, challenging and support'.
- Learning is boosted by 'critical reflecting and 'experience'.

As an extension of mentoring discourse, I feel the language of mentoring should be reconsidered when discussing mentoring, and use 'successful or effective mentoring relationships' can lead to increased confidence, academic achievement etc. This is due to many factors that influence the mentoring relationship, as is the case with other human relationships; it is simplistic to say that mentoring per se, can lead to improved outcomes and possibilities.

There also needs to be clear and specific mentor and mentee matching from the onset and clear agreement of expectations and boundaries. For effective mentoring to happen, the mentee should be satisfied that the mentor's position provides opportunities for meaningful knowledge, feedback and reflection. The mentor's qualities and characteristics are important to facilitate wholesome and genuine relationships which places the mentee in control of learning and development. This indicates implications for practice and the need for careful recruitment and matching by developers of HEI mentoring programmes.

6.4 Theme 3: Professional Insights

RQ 3: Are there any goals or activities undertaken during mentoring?

RQ 4: To what extent can employability attributes be developed through mentoring by breaking down barriers and enabling greater access, participation and progression to the labour market?

This theme includes two key aspects of professionalism. Firstly, this section outlines the various employability activities and strategies undertaken by the mentees (**RQ 3**). Secondly, a recurring outcome for this study was the professional insights that the mentees were exposed to, and for most of the participants, it was their first interactions with professionals at a senior level (**RQ 4**). To understand the implications of these points on employability, a comparison is given against the employability strategies for HEIs recommended by the Higher Education Academy (2015).

6.4.1 Employability Activities

The stipulated aim of employability is not only about securing a job post-graduation, but also developing attributes for a variety of job positions, setting up a business or developing self-

effectiveness for a chosen life activity (Norton, 2016). The mentor should develop an awareness of what the mentee wishes to achieve from the sessions and guide openly and without judgement. There are certain aspects of these activities that could be described as coaching, but only if they meet the definition provided previously. These apply in instances where the mentee expressed that they require support with achieving a specific task and the mentor helped to reach an understanding of that aim. The mentees engaged with a wide range of job-related activities, including the following examples outlined in **Table 6**.

Table 6: Employability Development Activities

Activity	Tasks
Job search	Finding suitable organisations Understanding job roles Awareness of company culture Researching alternative locations
Writing job applications	Advice on writing personal statements Familiarity with terminology Understanding job specifications Setting yourself apart from others
Mock interviews	Engagement with professionals Developing professional communication Self-presentation and impression Articulating skills and abilities clearly
Visits to workplace	Meeting other professionals Viewing the working facilities Experiencing a professional environment
Psychometric tests	Support with preparation Feedback on progress Suggestions on improving capabilities Practice and reflection
Personal Presentations	Advice with structure of presentations Providing suggestions for inclusion Feedback on pace and tone of delivery
CV and LinkedIn design	Providing ‘extra mile’ advice Reviewing and recommendations Tailoring to different job positions Developing professional contacts Understanding the purpose

6.4.2 Differentiation between Mentoring and University Careers Advice

When considering these employability activities there appears to be an overlap between mentoring and the guidance from HEI careers services, however, there are two key distinctions. A key factor that differentiates employability mentoring from general HEI careers advice is the *personalised nature* of this support. University careers services support many different students and do not necessarily have time for tailored advice, although this may happen with students that they have built a relationship with. The mentor provides individualised attention; where specific goals can be broken down to meet objectives.

Even though 'employability 'activities could potentially be carried out by the careers service, in mentoring they are underpinned by having supportive attention. For example, the mentor suggested to *Tahira* an alternative look for the design of her CV by giving ideas on how to go the extra mile with CV development This may seem like a minor point but developing the aesthetic look of her CV so that it stands out amongst other candidates was not previously considered by this mentee. As the mentoring relationship had already been built by trust at this point, *Tahira* was willing to consider this option. My study therefore clarifies how mentoring develops career-readiness aptitudes, expanding on Ragins and Cotton's (1999) earlier ideas but applied within a modern context to BME female students.

Another distinction is mentoring provides *specific industry knowledge and insights*. As the mentor is from the profession or organisation that they aspire to, mentees are given a real-life insight into the organisational culture and recruitment. It gives the mentee a vast source of knowledge and information, particularly, when these insights are not readily available at home, or, if not for the mentoring, would not have been accessible. Where the HEI careers services

can share details of work sectors, the mentor is from a company or institution and gives specific details. For *Varsha*, it was important to gain a real understanding of the profession that extends on the information relayed in recruitment. She also felt that her mentor needed to be open about working environments and culture so that she could make informed decisions.

In the case of *Kareen*, the mentor's contacts became accessible to her, especially in the private sector where word of mouth is significant, also giving an example of the '*test and learn'* approach. The mentor advised on planning strategies and obtaining relevant business contacts to build on *Kareen's* ideas. In her case, step-by-step plans were recommended as well as practical advice on operating a business and attracting suitable investors. As a result, *Kareen* developed a greater awareness of developing a business by building a professional network of like-minded individuals. She was also involved in a range of employability development activities, such as, attending workshops, seminars and meetings. The impact of this support is that she is developing her own business and is willing to engage with new activities.

All the mentees engaged with some form of career planning activities (sections, 5.5.1- 5.5.4). The content of activities was based on their needs, where employability mentoring provided a structure as expectations were communicated from the beginning. The mentors were clear on their role in supporting the mentees to become knowledgeable about their chosen professions.

6.4.3 Engaging with Professionals

The opportunity to engage and communicate with professionals was a common factor for all participants. *Varsha* had a goal to obtain a work placement by a certain date and undertook mentoring to help her reach this aim. She mentioned the use of professional etiquette, the

language to use and how to come across in a professional way. *Varsha* also noted the way mentoring differs from general University career advice in that it is specific and responsive to the student's career interests. This connects with the many explanations of mentoring, as being non-judgmental, facilitating, support and nurturing. The longer-term relationship of mentoring gives space to discuss ideas, gather information, apply knowledge and to obtain feedback.

Nakida highlighted the benefits of mentoring, to include CV checks and interview preparation. She experienced a real-life awareness of the company she would like to work for and knowledge of organisational culture and training opportunities. This was through having meetings for some of the mentoring sessions at the work premises. *Nakida* understood the complexities of the graduate employment market and the dynamics of 'who you know' may lead to favourable employability outcomes. These professional contexts have been built upon, initially through the mentor, and followed by exposure with other team members. Although longitudinal studies would need to be carried out to determine the level of success for BME female students, mentoring has given initial professional engagement. Even if these contacts are not practically used, the participants have experiences of communicating professionally that is internalised for future encounters.

6.4.4 Professional Attitudes and Behaviours

The participants learned to adapt their behaviours when in a professional environment through language and self-presentation. It is unclear whether they have changed who they are; rather they adapt and modify to fit into the working cultures. Practitioner B gave an insight into how to apply these behaviours:

> Some of our students think you should be quite schmoozing to be able to network, when actually it is using who you are as a person to the best of your ability, going out, and talking to them (Practitioner B).

This study builds on the work of Casto, Caldwell and Salazar (2015) in clarifying circumstances where mentees are given the tools to navigate through organisational culture and politics. Through interacting with a professional mentor, the mentees gained an awareness of the following aspects of professional and business behaviour, such as:

- Communication in meetings (Varsha, Ishana, Kareen)
- Creativity in CV designs (Tahira, Varsha)
- How to be a team-player (Ishana, Kareen, Alyssa)
- Introductory meetings (Fawzia, Shona, Tahira,)
- Business terminology (Kareen, Alyssa)
- Professional language (All mentees)
- Networking in their field (Varsha, Shona, Ishana, Nakida, Fawzia)
- Adopting a professional image (All mentees)

6.4.5 Views on Social Networks

In this study, almost all the mentors are in senior positions and this allows the mentee to develop their social networks whilst at University. Practitioner B confirmed that many students participating in employability mentoring are the first in their family to have gone to University. As a result, engaging with a professional mentor will extend the BME students social circles to facilitate access to employment. Clutterbuck (2004, p.139) outlines two ways in which a person may benefit from being mentored by someone from a different group. Firstly, they offer ‘alternative perspectives’ and give insights into how a professional structure operates and how to adapt to those needs. Secondly, through ‘networking’ the mentor will open social contacts

that previously would have been unavailable to them, as opposed to being mentored by someone from the same group with similar contacts. The decision to be mentored by the same or different social group depends on the mentees' needs and, in this case, mentors from a different group is appropriate in this sample.

The focal point here is that the participants do not wish to take advice about social networks without giving something back to the community. This means by being a future mentor, they can pass on these professional tools knowing that they have gained benefits themselves. The way an individual feels about accessing social contacts is important and is consistent with the findings of Villar and Albertin (2010). It is important for mentors to be aware of how mentees might feel about social networks, especially since they may have historically not giving this any prominence. In my view, in BME communities, the focus is on obtaining good qualifications with the view that suitable employment will follow; social networks are a secondary or missing consideration. It appears that the mentees are willing to access social networks so long as they can give something back to the community (section 5.5.4). Hence, for the relationship to be reciprocal and mentees simultaneously offering something in return for the social exchange.

6.4.6 Professional Presentation

Mentoring raised *Shona's* awareness about networking and career possibilities by giving specific insights into her field. She acknowledged the existence of soft skills and how professionalism is displayed through body language, such as, how to 'project yourself' as a business image. For *Shona*, mentoring built stronger resilience and an entrepreneurial spirit by a desire to set up her own mentoring organisation because of an interest in social change. *Fawzia*

witnessed how the mentor acted in a professional environment and ways to make a connection. She thought about the kind of topics to discuss when meeting professionals for the first time and emphasised the significance of tailoring language around different circumstances. She also developed confidence in how to address and communicate specific religious needs within a working environment.

Alyssa recognised the role of professional networks and that through meeting people, especially as freelance, would lead to being remembered and being considered for future opportunities. She referenced the need for 'etiquette' in the workplace and mentoring heightened awareness. The components of 'etiquette' in this regard include, adapting language and behaviours to different situations and for different people. The industry experience opened doors for *Alyssa* and subsequently, broadened her inner social circle to include access to information, advice and guidance (IAG). Here, the mentee is not passive but instead actively questions presumed everyday practices; gradually creating alternative approaches. Bourdieu (1990) neglects to consider such circumstances where the mentees develop meaningful agency to meet their cultural interests.

All the participants gained an awareness of the professional behaviours for their work sectors and contributes to Bourdieu's (1990) thinking of 'rules of the game' (p.66). The mentees were exposed to the behaviours and nuances that exist within professional working environments. This gives the mentees a preview of language that exist for their profession or industry. Students arrive in HE fields with various quantities of economic, social and cultural capital. As a result, the field allocates the capital it considers valid and dismisses those deemed insignificant (Colley, 2003). The capital that is deemed valid can only then be acknowledged and enhanced

further. For this study, the professional insights bring the capital that is widely recognised in HE and employability fields. These explanations of professional insights include aspects such as, small talk, appearance, conversations and body language. They may seem minor or taken-for granted but they are in fact considerable in certain BME communities where there have been limited historical exposure to these experiences.

6.4.7 Language and Social Capital

The professional language acquired by the mentees relates to Bourdieu's (1991) concept of 'linguistic capital'. Academic capital is prevalent in HE and consists of previous educational achievements, behaviours and dispositions shown through language and writing skills (Bourdieu, Passeron and Martin, 1996). However, the application of language is not evenly spread across society and this is known as 'linguistic capital'. How an individual uses language is based on the 'logic of practice' to their social field (Grenfell and James, 2008), and Bernstein's (1975) notion of the 'hidden curriculum'.

This linguistic capital is a further sub-set of dispositions within habitus created by learning experiences from peers, family and community. It entails the language that is used for particular circumstances and go on to determine the person's linguistic practices in other areas such as education and employment (Bourdieu, 1991). Individuals will differ in their levels of linguistic capital; and thus, their ability to generate vocabularies tailored to different contexts. As with other forms of capital, this variation determines a location in a social setting. Those with greater linguistic capital can "exploit the system of difference to their advantage and thereby secure a profit of distinction" (Bourdieu, 1991, p.18).

To be proficient in 'linguistic capital' individuals need to draw on their educational status and social background. This study provides an alternative perspective to Bernstein's (1975) concept of 'hidden curriculum', through mentees developing linguistic competence by interactions with a professional mentor. The professional readiness contributes towards the students' 'linguistic capital' as participants developed ways of professionally expressing themselves that can be adapted accordingly. The mentees are left with the decision on how and if they wish to capitalise on this form of capital. Mentoring should not be about changing a person's personality but instead should give the tools needed to respond in a particular environment and the 'hidden curriculum'.

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) model, 'zone of proximal development'(ZPD) has relevance as this can be applied to any type of learning activity (Kozulin *et al.*, 2003). This model assumes that a more 'competent' person is guiding the other in a learning area that requires development or is difficult to achieve. Since mentoring provides opportunities for advice and guidance through a shared dialogue, knowledge and understandings are boosted (Gray, Garvey and Lane, 2016). ZPD is associated with learning and development and is particularly applicable for BME female students through the social context of the relationship. The ongoing relationship for mentoring gives space for the ZPD to develop and for mentees to gain understandings of their career plans. Phenomenological aspects of how people learn is also relevant to enable them to make sense of their experiences. Gray, Garvey and Lane (2016, p.107) believe it is the mentoring process that has a bearing on progress, 'how' people learn rather than 'what' people learn influences practice. I have identified 'how' the participants have learned professional behaviours in this study through:

- Reflective discussion.

- Asking questions.
- Researching areas of interest.
- Gaining feedback.
- Job interview practice.
- Visualising the profession.

An important question emerging is whether this identity and self-knowledge is different to the previous one held by BME female students in this study. The mentor supports the mentee in making steady changes to their professional identity that gradually leads them to take an independent role in understanding that learning. This is enabled only through having a supportive and trusting mentoring relationship, which allows the mentees to feel comfortable in considering these behaviours. The mentors helped the mentees to develop new professional practices, language and behaviours by:

- Raising awareness of professional activities.
- Offering safe opportunities to practice.
- Providing feedback and suggestions.
- Reflecting on their effectiveness and significance.

6.4.8 The Framework for Embedding Employability in Higher Education

The Higher Education Academy (2015) emphasises that successful employability should be embedded within all HE cultures. The following attributes are signposted by the HEA as necessary for students to develop within the teaching and learning process. For this study, I have mapped the HEA (2015) attributes against the skills, attitudes and behaviours emerging from the data analysis of participants' experiences. I allocated these behaviours under two of

the four core themes, ‘professional insights’ and ‘enabling agency’, refer to **Table 7** and **Table 8**.

When undertaking this task, I initially mapped these against the employability activities, but then I identified personal agency elements are also applicable for BME mentoring experiences. The ‘professional insights’ element answers **RQ 3** and **RQ 4** and is the most significant theme in the analysis; this also confirms Kram’s (1985) model of mentoring that addresses both career and psychosocial needs for mentees.

Table 7: Employability Attributes - Professional Insights

HEA	**MENTEES**
Specialist, technical and transferable skills	Coaching on specific tasks Practical business advice Glossary of terminology Specific industry insights First-hand industry knowledge Exposure to professional events
Knowledge and application	Developing ideas to fruition Job application support Advice on psychometric tests Awareness of real-life work examples Job search activities Recognition of social networks
Behaviours, qualities and values	Presentation of soft skills Professional awareness Adaptability to different environments Awareness of job capabilities
Enterprise and entrepreneurship	Specific business advice and terminology Business connections
Career guidance and management	Signposting for additional support Mapping career positions Exploration of different pathways Collaborative career planning CV design and development Development of LinkedIn
Self, social and cultural awareness	Advice on setting yourself apart Adopting a professional persona Awareness of strengths and capabilities Acknowledging personal beliefs

Reflection and articulation	Preparation for a job interview Strategies to enhance employability Navigating home and work-life balance Acknowledgement of personal potential
Confidence, resilience and adaptability	Professional portrayal of image Commercial awareness Persistence to achieve Consideration of alternative options
Experience and networks	Practical work experiences Professional connections Initial professional engagement Insight into company politics Wide exposure of contacts
Attributes and capabilities.	Discussion of employability ideas Professional behaviours and presentation Professional language and etiquette Commercial awareness

Table 8: Employability Attributes - Enabling Agency

HEA	**MENTEES**
Specialist, technical and transferable skills	Encouragement to try for job positions Confidence to explore alternative options Presentation and communication skills
Knowledge and application	Time management skills Flexibility and resourcefulness
Behaviours, qualities and values	Participation in extra-curricular activities Attending meetings and seminars
Enterprise and entrepreneurship	Establishing business connections
Career guidance and management	Seeking out new opportunities Meeting career goals
Self, social and cultural awareness	Openness to different perspectives Contributing towards society Feeling worthy of support Participating in lifelong learning Feeling comfortable in self Individual mindsets for motivation
Reflection and articulation	Awareness of different options Willingness to learn new activities Appreciating the value of mentoring Exceeding expectations for mentoring Feelings of belonging in professions Re-framing challenges
Confidence, resilience and adaptability	Greater confidence Self-belief Moving outside comfort zone

	Dealing with insecurities Developing resilience Preservation of self-values Incentive to persist despite challenges Taking initiative Hopes and aspirations
Experience and networks	Exposure to new social groups Developing professional connections Familiarity with organisational customs
Attributes and capabilities	Self-efficacy Tolerance and acceptance Self-drive and determination Optimistic outlook Personal habits and interests Motivation to persist

This thesis expands from Collings, Swanson and Watkins' (2014) study on HE mentoring to include a specific application of HE mentoring within a BME employability context. Mentoring elements can be applied to many of the employability attributes suggested by the HEA (2015). This means that the mentors are not only supporting the mentees but are also supporting the HEIs in meeting their employability objectives too. It shows that the element least facilitated by the mentoring is 'Enterprise and Entrepreneurship. This is because all the mentors (except one who did own his own business) were professionally employed in an organisation. Nonetheless, it is worth investigating further and relates with the changing nature of the labour market as evidenced by Centre for Social Justice (2018).

6.5 Theme 4: Enabling Agency

RQ 4: To what extent can employability attributes be developed through mentoring by breaking down barriers and enabling greater access, participation and progression to the labour market?

This section explores how mentees reflected on their agency to consider specific employability objectives. The mapping of themes to the HEA template demonstrate that 'enabling personal agency' for BME female students is an integral theme, including several sub-factors such as self-confidence, resilience and self-efficacy. In terms of their personal lives, the mentees are also considering life-long learning and giving back to the community. As they are using their experience in other areas, this relates with holistic explanations of mentoring in that benefits are far-reaching. In sections, 6.4.3-6.4.5, I identified specific areas of professional development, these explanations are extended to understand the role of developing agency for BME women.

6.5.1 Building Self-confidence

The practitioners indicated that lack of confidence continues to be a factor for BME female students, thus, an example of enhanced agency is through all the participants experiencing greater self-confidence. Heightened self-confidence is often attributed as a benefit of mentoring (Clutterbuck, 2004; Brockbank and McGill, 2006; Leedham and the OCM, 2017; Mosaic, 2018). Having greater self-confidence also transfers to other aspects of lives, and leads to confidence in making decisions (Clutterbuck, 2004). In my professional experience, policymakers usually look for 'hard' factors to evaluate the success of mentoring programmes, i.e., improved academic achievement, progression into employment and transitions. However, the effects of greater self-confidence should not be undervalued for BME women as they influence agency on other critical life decisions as well as facilitating learning and development. I have identified greater confidence by the ability of mentees to make free choices through the following factors:

- Applying for jobs (Tahira, Nakida, Shona, Fawzia)
- Belonging in a professional environment (Varsha, Tahira, Kareen, Nakida)

- Communicating with professionals (Shona, Kareen, Practitioner B)
- Trying out new activities (Varsha, Alyssa, Fawzia, Practitioner B)
- Keeping an open mind (Varsha, Shona, Tahira, Fawzia)
- Creating tolerance (Fawzia, Tahira, Kareen)
- Participating in extra-curricular activities (Tahira, Varsha)
- Reframing challenges (Fawzia, Varsha, Shona, Ishana)
- Having a positive attitude (Shona, Fawzia, Varsha, Nakida)

Feedback is communicating with the mentee how others may perceive their actions and this process leads to enhanced self-confidence and self-awareness of actions (Parsloe and Wray, 2005). Constructive feedback supports the learning and developmental process for BME students by offering advice about the options available and areas that can be stretched. For example, feedback from mock interviews provided participants with an awareness of how others perceive them and how they can modify their agency in certain situations.

Another way to develop confidence is by reviewing progress on a regular basis (Parsloe and Wray, 2005); this reassures the mentee that they are meeting the requirements of their goals, such as having a work placement in place by a certain date. In 'development' mentoring, the mentees gain confidence in career making decisions through the mentor acting as a 'sounding board' and guiding them through this process (Clutterbuck, 2004, p.40). The mentor also supports mentees by finding out where their cultural values fit within different career structures. This enables mentees to utilise their agency independently to make the right choices, for example, location and choice of organisation.

In order to produce transformative critical agency, BME female students require support to acknowledge and modify their dispositions. Duckworth and Maxwell's (2015) review acknowledged ways in which critical dialogues were developed and this provides another example of supporting cultural values. They concluded that Bourdieu's (1986) model appreciates how mentoring is implemented and experienced and suggested development of theoretical mentoring models based on social justice. This means acknowledging and respecting histories to alter habitus and reframing diversity as learning possibilities. One positive outcome would be the empowerment of mentees that could motivate them to act as social justice role models for their own communities (Duckworth and Maxwell, 2015). In my study, the professional insights enabled the mentees to reflect on their agency in practical ways providing meaningful opportunities for creativity and innovation. The longer-term effects would be interesting and is a recommendation for future studies in the concluding chapter.

6.5.2 Mindsets and Personal Investment

The labour market is competitive where students need to portray 'soft skills' to compete as well as the degree classification. Mentoring has built this mindset for the participants and they are willing to persist, having had the industry knowledge beforehand. This potentially gives the mentees a head-start pre-graduation and builds their agency organically, which gives them the confidence to apply for positions. I feel the mindsets of the participants should also be considered as this will partly, or in some cases fully, determine the focus, interest and energy placed into mentoring relationships. *Ishana* was aware of the potential benefits of mentoring but emphasised the onus must be on the mentee. She felt an intrinsic drive is needed as, "you can't put everything in the hands of your mentor" *(Ishana).*

Psychological influences and mindsets, such as, motivation effect academic achievement and persistence in life activities (Ferguson, 2000). A person's belief will play an important role in their motivation, decisions and balancing intrinsic against extrinsic motivations (Dweck, 1999). These personal beliefs are however subject to change either overtly or indirectly. In terms of developing agency for BME female students, they can be done immediately or in the longer-term through lifelong learning. Despite people bringing relatively steady mindsets to an event, these can be altered either provisionally or permanently. Dwek (1999) suggests that a person can change their perspective if faced with a new event and thereby, will not necessarily use the same personality characteristic. In effective mentoring relationships, motivation for personal development can be developed as a 'new event 'experienced by the participants.

There are various aspects of motivation including 'academic' and 'competence' based motivation (Sternberg, 2007, p.19). The former relates to those who aim high academically but are not necessarily high-risk takers. The latter refers to 'self-efficacy' and a person's belief in their abilities to respond to any challenges. In the context of employability mentoring, there should be motivation to invest personal energy into the mentoring relationship. For example, *Fawiza* and *Tahira* acknowledged that mentoring involved organising their time and allocating funds for travelling expenses, however, they were happy to do this as they viewed it as future investment. Acknowledging the fact that something new is learned from every conversation and will be useful at some point in their professional lives is linked to 'symbolic capital' and suggests 'competence' based motivation. These shifts in the mindset may only be there so long as you are in the situation giving the message but can be more long-term for stronger messages (Dweck, 1999). These stronger messages can empower BME women to employ agency in employability-based options beyond graduation.

Crucially, the mentor should acknowledge the BME mentees' values and acknowledge whether they feel comfortable about accessing professional social contacts. *Nakida* was thinking about what she could offer the company during her work placement in return. She further mentioned the need to stay connected with her groups of contacts, so it does not seem she only would like to receive something from them. Social contacts are significant influences; however, caution should be given to how people feel about accessing 'help' as they may have a certain mindset. Through a trusting relationship, a mentor will get a sense of what feels comfortable for that mentee.

I also agree with Ray (2015) that consideration should also be given to the needs of millennials due to changing employment conditions and mindsets. The fact that the mentees are considering life-long learning is timely, especially given the changing nature of the UK labour force over the next 10 years, to include greater automation, political and economic implications (CSJ, 2018). An implication for the future of mentoring initiatives is for mentors to have awareness of both public and private sector traditions to allow the mentees to make better-informed decisions according to their cultural beliefs and circumstances.

Lifelong learning in this case relates to most participants expressing an interest in becoming a mentor, due to valuing the support received, they would like to advise young people from similar backgrounds. This clarifies Mullen, Whatley and Kealy's (2000) perspective where mentoring is defined as a 'process' throughout a person's life rather than an 'activity'. My findings also support Leedham and the OCMs (2017) view that millennials may wish to become a mentor or a coach himself or herself and are less focused on pursuing their own success. Interestingly, this also ties in with the practitioner perspective of Alumni Mentors being a

potential source of support, where lifelong learning extends from personal and professional development to giving back to the community.

6.5.3 Reflexivity and Moving Beyond Bourdieu

The thesis reveals ways mentoring has challenged aspects of Bourdieu's (1977) notions by giving examples of participants reconstructing habitus. These cases are investigated through various reflexive practices that enhanced agency for the mentees. This study incorporates both reflective and reflexive approaches as it was challenging to consider one aspect, due to the various dynamics of ethnicity, gender and employability. Reflection draws upon conventional assumptions that it is probable to be objective and study realities using theory, drawing upon various subjective realities of challenges and possibilities (Cunliffe, 2004). Reflective analysis involves a logical search for patterns and trends, whilst reflexivity, embodies critical and ethical action to determine wider prospects.

Akram and Hogan (2015) questioned Margaret Archer's (2003) reflexivity model as being too readily dismissive of habitus where wider social relations are dismissed. Her depiction of reflexivity neglects the critical, routine aspects of day-to-day life that determine an individual's actions. Instead, Akram and Hogan (2015) support Bourdieu's theory (1990) of habitus, in that agency does not operate independently to social contexts and it is challenging to alter our behaviours, although it can be possible. The outcomes of this study propose that social interactions influencing agency can be achieved by mentoring for BME female students. This supports Archers' (2003) position that 'ultimate concerns' can be pursued through meaningful social interactions, such as mentoring, however, this is facilitated within the constraints of structural features. Suggested research to test these outcomes include following up with

mentees to capture details of the longer-term impacts of mentoring. I will expand on this point in the concluding chapter.

6.5.4 Reflexivity and Broadening Horizons

In this study, the supportive mentoring relationships created modified dispositions for the mentees and thus, Bourdieu's (1992) view of habitus is questioned. This suggests that reflexivity exists in common practices, such as mentoring, habitus and in the lasting set of dispositions. Adkins (2003) adopts Bourdieu's (1990) thinking for a critically reflective view on presumed social situations, occurring in cases where the fit is low between habitus 'feel for the game' and field, 'the game'. The manifestation of this low fit, is when the arrangement between subjective and objective structures is fragmented, leading the mentees to reflect on their social circumstances and adapt behaviours accordingly.

In these circumstances, there is potential for habitus to be altered from the usual subjective and objective structures, if fragmented, social transformations emerge and thus, scope for reflection known as 'symbolic mastering' mastered (Adkins, 2003, p.27). A relevant example on the mentees' agency is when they investigated career options that had not been previously considered. Practitioner B agreed with this idea, based on her own institutional experience that some BME students opt for courses or careers suggested for them by families and communities due to a lack of awareness for other possibilities.

Bourdieu (1977, p.83) believed that the true emerging of consciousness would appear once any routine adjustments between subjective and objective structures were fragmented. Although this is an important point, this presumption that social changes happen through reflexivity is

limited. Considering Bourdieu (1977) links the field to exchanges with an objective phenomenon, habitus, as a result responds to this field but cannot adapt accordingly due to the objective status (Adkins, 2003). Hence, critics believe more persuasive explanations for social transformations are needed (Maton, 2003; Cunliffe, 2004). Particularly, according to Bourdieu (1977), when responding to the field, habitus resists any chances for inconsistency from typical daily practices and therefore reducing the likelihood of social changes.

However, in this study, there are temporal changes in the mentees' habitus that increase possibilities of social change. Foucault (1982, cited in May, 2000) suggests that individuals possess multi-layered relationships where behaviours are adapted to suit various situations; consequently, a conditional profile for the students will develop. The characteristics of this profile include ambivalence or inconsistency from usual thinking, actions and behaviours. The narratives presented the mentees' cultural values and beliefs in relation to their career ideals.

Examples were given of circumstances where mentees utilised agency to think and behave differently, due to mentoring. For example, by researching alternative career paths and engaging confidently with professionals. They also wish to support young people from similar backgrounds resulting from an appreciation of their mentoring experiences. In the case of mentees that go on and become mentors themselves, they are relaying their experiences and passing them on to young people from similar BME communities, thereby challenging Bourdieu's (1977) ideas that structural inequalities are reproduced. This is also consistent with Nadoo's (2004) findings which demonstrates when a cycle is broken and how individuals can move themselves into different paths.

According to Bourdieu (1990) human subjectivity is invested in meanings ascribed to social experiences; this explains the differences in investment according to social class. Since habitus depends on embodied dispositions formed in social practices, occupational choices and other life projects are formed in socially created patterns (Farrugia and Woodman, 2015). Consequently, the 'illusio' is when the participants participate in and believe in the worth of the game (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), that is, HE will bring the desired changes in economic and symbolic capital. Habitus will then embody the purpose of the field during that time and adapt social practices accordingly. Findings from my study suggests that mentoring is a mechanism for identifying potential 'life projects' (Farrugia and Woodman, 2015, p.633), for BME women. Unlike Archer (2003), Bourdieu (1990) does address this perspective within the 'illusio'. See section 5.5.5 'professional conduct', for examples of adopted social behaviours that have disrupted the normal way of practice for the mentees.

Adkins (2003) suggests that people should reflect on their surroundings, activities and outlooks for social changes to occur. This involves disjointing agency away from structure to allow for critical reflexivity on presumed beliefs ascribed to gender, class and religion. An example being when *Varsha* (5.6.1) considered a role within the construction industry, even though she knew her family would question whether she was sure of that decision. She confirmed that mentoring had given her confidence to consider alternative options. To achieve this confidence, reflexivity should involve reflection of the 'unthought' and 'unconsciousness' types of routine that exemplify self-conscious behaviours or actions (Adkins, 2003, p.25).

Bourdieu's (1977) theory discusses deeply instilled dispositions and traits forming an individual's identity that reinforces cultural reproduction. This ignores creativity and

innovation for critical social transformations as habitus according to Bourdieu (1991) reacts to external social structures beyond the person's influence (Bohman, 1999). In contrast, reflexive agency for the BME mentees means to critically reflect on their social experiences and to challenge and develop new understandings of their employability projects. Rather than embodying Bourdieu's (1990) 'illusio' per se, they are developing their own employability understandings through dialogue with their mentors.

Expanding from Bourdieu's (1991) view of habitus, mentees have been able to alter their dispositions accordingly through greater confidence, self-belief and resilience. My understanding is they have felt confident to be honest with their mentor about how they were feeling. There are no direct or explicit power connections with the mentor and the mentee, and it may be different if, for example, they were from the same workplace. In this instance, power dynamics may lead the mentee to feel uncomfortable with sharing openly with the mentor because of line-management relationships (Gray, Garvey and Lane, 2016). In this study, the mentor does not have any prior knowledge or experience of the students and therefore is not making any assumptions about how they think they should be aiming for. On the other hand, they may have pre-assumptions according to gender and ethnicity, however none of the participants indicated this concern.

6.5.5 The Relationship between Self-efficacy and Mentoring

Given the critique of Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) theories, the work of Albert Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) is relevant since the mentees have developed their dispositions through cognitive thinking and interactions with the mentor as an occupational role model. Here, habitus can be creatively modified for BME women when faced with different social interactions, such as

mentoring. Self-efficacy is based on 'Social Cognitive Theory'(SCT), whereby individuals, through their own emotions and motivations are shaping their actions (Bandura, 1994). Evolving identities are enabled not only through self-reflective practices but also through interactions within wider cultural, social and political factors (Elliott, 2008).

The person's self and identity also depend on how they feel about who they are (Maddux and Gosselin, 2005). Self-efficacy is the way the participants' employability feelings influences their future and how they respond to achievements and challenges. Quenani, MacDougall and Sexton (2014, p. 201) believe 'graduate identity' concerns the holistic development of a student and is different from accessing employment. In relation to BME experiences, employability development is exhibited through enhanced agency by the renewed ability to make informed choices. Again, this applies to not only securing a graduate job position but how a person feels about other aspects of their life, such as health and well-being. This goes beyond skills and competences to include other 'softer' skills, like, self-awareness, self-efficacy and self-belief. See sections 5.6.1-5.6.4 for examples of the mentees focus on self-knowledge as an outcome of the mentoring relationships.

Bandura's (1994) concept of self-efficacy to employability, is related to a person's belief about the job opportunities open to them post-graduation (Berntson, Sverke and Marklund, 2006). Feeling employable will have a positive effect on job search activities, though creating resilience and informing confident decision-making. The mentees were feeling suitably motivated to pursue careers through industry insights and confidence to make applications. For BME women, this is professional self-confidence, where enhanced knowledge happens through short-term exchanges with several different contacts as opposed to having sustained contact

within the same social group (Bandura, 1997). Thus, changes in the way of being through habitus can happen with interaction from the mentor, even though, it lasts for an academic year, the effects can be longer lasting. Bandura (1997, p.85-101) advocates a person's self-efficacy is developed through the following five elements; these are evident in the mentees' agency through varied and engaging learning experiences.

1: Performance or mastery experience. A person's efforts will usually be determined by their previous successful or ineffective activities, therefore, a perception of not being able to secure employability will reduce self-efficacy. Examples of the mentees planning their career paths include research into companies, location, training and culture. Pre-planning helped to focus the mentees and the career planning strategies confirmed self-efficacy as attempts were made to access chosen career paths. Another factor is 'motivational' efficacy where the mentees' motivation combines a long-term goal of securing meaningful employment with shorter smaller goals, such as, work placements, interview preparation, practice with psychometric tests and CV design. The culmination of these activities sustains interest and perseverance throughout the mentoring process.

2: Vicarious experience. When considering their capabilities, people will look for 'social comparative influences' (Bandura, 1997, p.86), and observe the actions of similar others, to form probabilities for their own actions. Witnessing other people perform successfully increases self-efficacy of what is also obtainable for BME women. As in the case of *Tahira*, where she felt that, her mentor had a similar upbringing and if she was able to reach her position in a large Legal firm, there is the possibility for the mentee too. Observation of actions was

discussed in the professional insights section, where the mentees internalised professional behaviours and language.

3: Imaginal experience. Imagining yourself being successful at a certain position or situation can build self-efficacy and is reinforced by experiences within hypothetical situations. The mock interview was a hypothetical situation that strengthened self-efficacy through constructive feedback and suggestions. This process supported the mentees to assess their existing skills and attributes and look for ways in which they can build on their repertoire. Feedback reinforces learning as *Shona* stated that interviews are an ongoing process and it helps to have an awareness of strengths and weaknesses.

4: Verbal persuasion. Other people's comments about an individual's capabilities and aptitudes for success influences efficacy, especially in the context of employability mentoring where the mentor's expertise and occupational position is considered valuable. Similarly, a person's self-efficacy is enhanced when a 'significant other' (Bandura, 1997, p.101) expresses confidence in that person's ability to achieve, so long as this is realistically possible within the mentees' context. Since the mentor is looked up to and considered successful in their field, their opinion on the mentees' capabilities will matter to them (see *Ishana,* section 5.4.2 and *Fawzia,* section 5.5.2).

5: Psychological and emotional states. These states effect self-efficacy with a low par performance or a perceived view of not doing well being attributed to negative emotions whereas doing well results in satisfying moods. A person's mood will affect their experience and cognitive interpretation of the mentoring relationship. As learning is enhanced if the process

is harmonised to moods during that time (Bandura, 1997), it is important that the mentee and mentor are enjoying their sessions to enable commitment and motivation. A close rapport also will lead to both parties investing long-term in the relationship (Clutterbuck and Ragins, 2002). Theme 2 provides examples on how the mentoring relationships flourished indicating the mentees and mentors continued faith in the employability programme.

In contrast to aspects of Bourdieu's (1977, 1991) theory, Bandura's (1986) social structure is not embodied in the person's historical consciousness and personal efficacy supports development. Bandura (1994) suggests people can reframe their lives if they have relevant information and the self-belief that they can act on this information. For BME communities, they can also choose and respond to different social arrangements if they feel it will meet their aspirations. This differs to Bourdieu's (1990) thinking where embodied dispositions and structural issues, such as economic and political factors influence social practice. Although this assessment has merit, the structural factors for BME groups should also be considered by an analysis of Bourdieu.

6.5.6 Mentoring within HE Structures

If we accept the fact that BME female mentees can make progressive changes to agency through cognitive reasoning, then this needs to be analysed against structural factors. Bourdieu's (1990b) responded to his criticisms by specifying that although it is challenging, in certain events, habitus reacts accordingly to its relationship with a field and produces alternative practices and positioning. This occurs by inconsistency, challenge and instability to its expected patterns and by unexpected outcomes through interactions with other social arrangements. In response, my study provides examples of 'transformation' through 'certain events' where

mentoring is a social arrangement in BME women. Specifically, it occurs through an ‘emerging of consciousness’ and it is in these circumstances where I suggest employability mentoring applies. Mentees have developed professional knowledge and attributes arising from career planning strategies. Refer to sections 5.6.1 - 5.6.3 for examples on mentees altering their positioning through a reflection of practices.

The ‘thinking tools’ (habitus, capital and field) are all interrelated and produce social practices within the environment, therefore, BME female experiences are not understood by habitus alone but should also consider the field of higher education. This is because habitus considers the individuals feelings at that time and includes how history is interpreted within situations that guide choices. Those individuals who have habitus that fits neatly towards the dominant culture of that social space have an advantage with greater capital (Watson, 2012). As the students are differentially located, this affects their ability to appropriately accumulate meaningful resources.

For a University field to be effective there needs to be students who are willing to play the game for the rewards of obtaining a degree and securing future employability. For that game to be played effectively requires habitus that embodies the knowledge and beliefs for that field. In terms of mentoring, the knowledge gained enabled mentees to adapt to the HE environment, by renewed thinking before they graduate. Moore (2004) argues that the cultural field is relatively independent in two ways. Firstly, it is exclusive from the political and economic fields with its own social settings, beliefs and traditions. Secondly, the agents are not seemingly members of the ‘dominant’ group and have their own practices "way of doing their own things for their own purposes" (Moore, 2004, p.449). In this study, the BME female students accessed mentoring as

additional support that works alongside HE practices, thus changing their original relationship with the field. Mentees responded to the game by participating in mentoring to meet their own employability needs. Here, the field does not have absolute determinism and allows moderate use of personal agency (Colley, 2003).

The relationships with fields can also change over time and there can be facets that pass swiftly and others with more conventional roles (Grenfell and James, 2004). As fields evolve, changes can exist within the field itself or by external influences, lending itself to the view that mentoring can be the outside influence enabling agency for BME women. Mentoring becomes a 'technology of the self' and includes probabilities of overlooking the broader social spheres where a relationship exists (Foucault, 1998, cited in Colley, 2003). This demonstrates the potential for progressive and autonomous learning for BME students through mentoring and thus, departs from Bourdieu's (1993) field theory. To some extent, this addresses Colley's (2003, p.175) question; *does mentoring encourage individual passivity and acquiescence or promote active citizenship that might challenge inequalities in the status quo?*

Outcomes from this thesis indicate that 'active citizenship' for BME women occurs in two ways. Firstly, through changes in social environments by exchanges with a mentor and secondly, reflexivity on agency for presumed practices. BME female students can successfully work towards their goals through self-efficacy by applying Bandura's SCT. This implies that personal agency and self-efficacy operate independently from the social structures and is at odds with Bourdieu's (1990a) view of social structures as a 'structuring structure' (p.53). The following four features underpin Bandura's (1986) SCT and demonstrate the mentees' experiences of changes in the relationship with Bourdieu's (1993) notion of the field.

1: Cognitive capabilities. The participants reflected upon the mentoring to acknowledge the knowledge, skills and aptitudes resulting from detailed exchanges with their mentor (Garvey, 2010). They developed their own targets and were able to articulate their employability feelings confidently during the research interview. Previous and present experiences were consolidated by reflection to meet employability aims.

2: Environmental factors. Through the participants own reasoning, they regulate their actions to reciprocate to not only their environment but also their cognitive and emotional thinking. The mentees reciprocating their newly acquired knowledge into professional environments was evidenced in the mock interviews and visits to the mentor's workplace. Refer to section 5.5.5 for details on how mentees internalised the professional language to be applied as appropriate in different environments.

3: Socially embedded practices. The mentoring relationship is considered a social exchange where the mentees' sense of self and capabilities gradually evolved. Examples of how the relationships developed are presented in the following components of culturally sensitive mentoring, 'friendship' (section 5.4.1) and 'promoting individuality' (section 5.4.2). This also contributes to theoretical explanations of mentoring as a two-way social process between the mentee and the mentor which are guided by the mentees' needs. These are evidenced in the following subthemes, 'engagement with professionals' (section. 5.5.4) and 'professional conduct' (section 5.5.5).

4: Self-regulation. Mentees initially used their historical experiences to determine their feelings, activities and behaviours. They were then involved in self-reflection, by deciding on goals and subsequently altering their behaviours in perusal of those goals. For example,

securing a work placement and practice for psychometric tests. See ‘coaching on specific tasks’ (section 5.5.2) and ‘industry knowledge’ (section 5.5.3) where mentees have expressed and worked through their employability aspirations with their mentor.

In summary, this thesis has identified examples for ‘emerging of consciousness’ that have modified the usual way of employability practice for BME female students. The mentees’ experience includes a journey of assurance, self-exploration, confidence and transformation. This phased experience suggests a rehearsed approach by the mentees to meet alternative social and cultural standards of employability. Emerging questions arise whether this version of ‘self’ remains during employment and later life experiences, and thus queries the authenticity of this renewed self. Further consideration should therefore be given to understanding BME identities and whether they can hold on to their cultural beliefs and utilise their agency confidently within various social environments.

6.5.7 Variations in Capital

The personal narratives have clearly demonstrated that the BME female mentees adapted to meet the demands of existing systems through acquiring professional language and associated cultural capital. I agree with Colley (2003) that this neglects the role of structure, and what should be done to recognise the existing needs and repertoire across different groups. In terms of this study, I have identified the participants’ existing attributes and ‘cultural capital’ as:

- Giving back to society (Kareen, Ishana, Fawzia, Nakida)
- Community spirit (Fawzia, Ishana, Nakida)
- Resilience (Tahira, Fawzia)
- Being a team player (Ishana, Alyssa)

- Strong work ethics (Kareen, Tahira, Ishana, Fawzia)
- Motivation (Varhsa, Fawzia, Kareen)
- Effort and persistence (Nakida, Tahira, Varsha, Kareen, Shona)
- Tolerance (Fawiza, Tahira, Ishana, Shona, Nakida)
- Resourcefulness (Fawzia, Shona, Varsha)
- Organisational skills (Tahira Varsha, Shona)
- Openness to learn and reflect (Fawzia, Varsha, Shona, Alyssa, Ishana)

It is apparent that a range of components are needed to ensure mentoring allows opportunities for BME women to reflect upon their career choices. This chapter has analysed these factors to determine the perceived effectiveness of mentoring relationships. Although there are limits due to the confidential nature of mentoring, the analysis explored the process elements of mentoring and how the mentees go on to interpret these experiences underpinned by shared cultural understandings.

6.6 Summary

The analysis of findings against the literature and theoretical framework have raised several viewpoints. Whilst a mentor can support and develop the mentees' agency, the structural influences for BME women cannot be underestimated. These structural mechanisms include the HE environment, community, family and wider labour market conditions. Mentoring works through some of these dynamics to create different ways of approaching challenges and alternative ways of developing employability.

Although there is much work to do to acknowledge the varying forms of capital, for women from diverse ethnic backgrounds, I am still assured about the nature of the mentoring exchanges experienced in this study. As the participants' needs were met for employability, the HEIs mentoring programmes are considered effective. It is therefore concluded that the mentor supports the mentee personally, practically and professionally. This is through the process of identifying credible goals that will aid success in the longer-term for BME students in terms of employability and general well-being. The following mentee statement underscores a valid point emerging from this study:

> Mentoring needs to stay the way it is, in my experience it has helped me to become more confident. I think mentoring does what it is supposed to. It is the step beforehand in finding a mentor and I think that not enough people know of its value and how important it is to have these people in your life to help you work on things. People are afraid of highlighting their weaknesses or gaps; they are also intimidated by people that they need to overcome. It is the step before, BME women need to seek out these opportunities and be dedicated and committed to growing themselves and in turn, the way mentoring is they will learn a lot from it (Ishana).

Table 9 summarises the key research outcomes and original contribution towards mentoring knowledge. I have grouped these under four areas signifying areas where mentees have demonstrated evidence of self-transformation and self-awareness. Ethical and successful mentoring for BME women, involves changes to the nature and conditions of the field so that mentees are not obliged to adhere to established norms of behaviour (Colley, 2003). For this reason, the table includes the mentees' 'cultural capital' as essential for enablement of employability mentoring behaviours. This capital refers to internal cultural resources that can be validated as valuable tools in professional domains. I have identified these factors from the attributes displayed by the mentees which enhanced agency. This extends knowledge of the impact of employability-based mentoring evidenced by the participants' creative and alternative activities.

Table 9: Overview of Empirical Findings

Career Planning • Job search • Writing job applications • Mock interviews • Visits to work premises • Psychometric tests • Presentations • CV design • LinkedIn design	**Professional Behaviours** • Communication in meetings • Creativity in CV design • How to be a team-player • Introductory meetings • Business terminology • Professional language • Networking capabilities • Professional image
Greater Confidence • Applying for jobs • Communication skills • Feelings of belonging • Keeping an open mind • Creating tolerance • New activities • Reframing challenges • Having a positive attitude	**Cultural Capital** • Community spirit • Resilience • Being a team player • Strong work ethics • Motivation • Effort and persistence • Tolerance • Resourcefulness • Organisational skills • Openness to learn and reflect

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

7.1 Introduction

In this concluding chapter, I summarise the key findings from this study according to the research questions they were driven by. The limitations of this study are outlined and personal reflections on practice provided. Within mentoring and employability fields, this chapter identifies the contribution to knowledge and implications for professional practice. Recommendations are given for future research to develop further approaches in culturally sensitive mentoring.

7.2 Summary of Study

7.2.1 Theme 1: Structural Systems

RQ 1: How does mentoring navigate through individual agency, culture and communities?

Obtaining the perspectives of the HEI practitioners was useful for understanding structural implications as well as the need for mentors as positive role models. Practitioners had a practical knowledge of mentoring and specifically the various issues faced by students who were the first generation in their family to enter Higher Education. In terms of BME women, there is a lack of awareness of the different course and career choices, due to insufficient information within the home environment. An interesting viewpoint from the practitioners was they felt that BME female students lacked in confidence when asking for help, whether that be with Lecturers or Careers Service staff. As this study has shown, mentoring supports with building confidence through having a supportive and nurturing relationship where the mentee feels comfortable to ask questions. Mentoring, if done well, can help to break down these barriers and ensure

students get the necessary support needed to allow them to flourish personally and professionally.

I also believe that it can be beneficial for BME women to be supported by mentors from different ethnicities for employability, except, if a student has specifically indicated otherwise. This helps to broaden horizons and can lead to paths that were not previously considered. So long, as the mentor is culturally sensitive to the needs and feelings of the mentees and the mentoring has a specific focus, this can work satisfactorily. However, there is a distinction between this approach and having access to visible role models. It is useful to observe successful BME women to encourage confidence in others of what is possible in professional and personal realms. For example, witnessing BME women successfully manage work and family life commitments could encourage women from similar cultural backgrounds to also explore their options by gaining the necessary information.

7.2.2 Theme 2: Collaborative Mentoring Exchanges

RQ 2: What should mentoring involve to support access, participation and progression to the labour market?

Mentoring seems to be successful when the mentee has expressed a need, and this is communicated with the mentor who is able to share knowledge and insights to meet those needs. In this study, the mentees' needs were explicit in that they were looking to develop their employability trajectories. In all cases, the mentors were suitably matched and were able to provide the guidance and professional insights needed by the mentees. Although this study did not interrogate from the mentors' perspective, suitable characteristics were identified. Fundamentally, the mentor needs to understand and appreciate the mentees' circumstances,

historical positioning and reasons why they feel and respond a certain way. Since the mentor needs to consider the 'being' of the mentee, is where Bourdieu's views have been particularly helpful. Mentoring has created social and cultural capital that were not acquired through previous socialisation and educational experiences. The BME students' predetermined attitudes and feelings within habitus are modified but flexible; they can then be drawn upon in future life pursuits.

Empathy also relies on the mentor utilising emotional intelligence skills to interact with the student to foster a professional relationship. Historically, educational and workplace systems prioritised certain professional dispositions in language, posture and mannerisms; the BME mentees have acquired written and oral language that are tailored to meet these entrenched requirements. However, mentees need to have trust in the process and their mentor in order to accept development of such attributes. To do this, the mentor draws on emotional intelligence and empathy to be able to relate to the mentee's personal circumstances and their feelings that might result in thinking in a particular way about employability.

Both parties can share and learn from each other's cultural experiences, thus the mentor benefits too by adding diversity awareness to their existing repertoire of aptitudes. The cultural context is significant for BME students as not only does it inform dispositions but also includes family and caring responsibilities, ability to relocate and existing social connections.

7.2.3 Theme 3: Professional Insights

RQ 3: Are there any goals or activities undertaken during mentoring?

Mentees experienced a variety of employability related activities based on their individual requirements and expectations. These ranged from initial job search and planning to writing job applications, developing CVs and professional networking activities. In some cases, practical support was given by participation in mock interviews with professionals and visits to the mentors' workplace. Although, these activities can be carried out to some extent by the HEI careers service, mentoring involves personalised attention. There is more time for the mentee to express their needs openly due to the trusting relationship. Opportunities are also available for reflection and discussion; and this process allows the mentee to consider careers not previously contemplated.

The introductory chapter identified limited participation in general HEI careers advice for BME students. This study has demonstrated that mentoring opens access and engagement to careers advice in a personable and relaxed way. The trusting and confidential mentoring relationship allows the mentee to brainstorm ideas that differentiates this support from general careers advice. Professional development activities provide opportunities to articulate employability attributes confidently in a supportive environment. This first-hand employability knowledge provides insightful information that otherwise may not be the case within the mentees' home and communities.

7.2.4 Theme 4: Enabling Agency

RQ 4: To what extent can employability attributes be developed through mentoring by breaking down barriers and enabling greater access, participation and progression to the labour market?

Mentoring has led to increased self-belief and self-awareness as well as supporting future employability planning. Mentees have demonstrated greater confidence in their ability to

interact in a range of unfamiliar circumstances through building resilience and persistence in challenging situations. In such situations, people will have little motivation to persist in certain actions unless they believe there is a chance that they will become fruitful (Bandura, 1997). The impact of these beliefs determines how positive or negative a student feels towards employability influencing their motivation to investigate viable routes. BME women do not necessarily lack in their aspirations but instead require support in making those goals a reality. Developing self-efficacy through mentoring, creates a mindset for practical ways for these goals to happen through the process of self-regulation.

In this study, mentees acknowledged the competitive nature of the employment market but were willing to do their best to try to tackle this challenge. The mentees had the opportunity to generate new employability ideas and explore feasible opportunities to make these a reality. Despite this, I am careful not to overemphasise the role of agency for BME women as structural contexts do affect the extent to which these goals can be achieved. Instead, I am emphasising that mindsets can be developed to at least be able to think about practical ways to deal with these challenges. This renewed self-awareness extends to life experiences beyond employability realms, such as, family, health, individual pursuits and interests. Although the overall goals were to secure graduate level positions, the impacts of mentoring resonate with traditional elements of mentoring practice.

7.3 Original Contribution to Knowledge

Although, this is a small-scale study, it has investigated the process of mentoring and 'how' the mentees learn from their interactions It is not proposed that the findings created from this study are applicable to a larger group of BME female students, since these findings derive from a

specific group. Instead, they contribute towards the body of mentoring research and provide a conceptual framework on how mentoring develops core employability attributes. It does this by focussing on the personal lives and circumstances of the sample group to deliver the following authentic approach to cultural mentoring.

Firstly, the impacts of mentoring on professional dispositions, language and behaviours was acknowledged. Limited career objectives are not necessarily a factor for BME women, instead they need clear, accessible and visible paths for reaching their goals successfully. Specifically, the role of social networks in bridging the gap between employability aspirations and reality was recognised. Here, cultural capital not only represents formal qualifications but also access to other factors such as increased confidence, communication and presentation. Using my findings, I have created a flow chart which demonstrate the process leading to enhanced social capital (**Figure 2**). My study is also consistent with Blass *et al.* (2007) and Dawson, Bernstein and Bekki's (2015) research on the significance of acquiring political skill development. The mentees gained the ability to adapt language to different circumstances due to having knowledge of the operational features for that organisation.

Secondly, the study highlights the key importance of responding to individual needs, through ontological and ethical mentoring, considering the mentees' cultural feelings and perspectives. This focus on self-knowledge is a key emerging issue where the mentees may reject advice in favour of a positive projection of their own personality, instead of responding to normative beliefs. My findings, therefore, adds empirical data to existing UK literature on the nature of BME female students' mentoring experiences. Applying my findings, I have identified the cultural components needed for ethical mentoring relationships, as demonstrated in **Table 5**.

Thirdly, the study identifies the independent agency needed for BME women to develop soft skills in an increasingly competitive labour market. This study has identified the specific tasks and activities which develop successful mentoring outcomes (**Table 6**) and thus, extends knowledge on understanding the process elements of mentoring. The narratives have clearly shown that dispositions and capitals can transform creatively following effective mentoring interactions. These softer skills in confidence, self-efficacy and resilience enhance personal agency and include valuable psychosocial elements. Using my findings, I have mapped these against the HEA (2015) recommendations of employability.

7.3.1. Implications for Professional Practice

The thesis will be shared with the four participating HEIs and across other HEIs' participating in or considering implementing employability mentoring programmes. The findings demonstrate how BME female students can be given a meaningful undergraduate experience by embedding diversity mentoring principles within HEI systems and mentoring training programmes. As the findings highlight employability activities, this supports HEIs to meet their employability objectives and extends on careers advice by preparing students for work. I have created an assessment of employability attributes in **Tables 7** and **8**, indicating a range of competences which prepared the mentees for changing economic and labour market conditions.

The findings also raises awareness of the need to consider alternative ways of delivering mentoring as technology evolves. Consequently, mentoring programmes require greater flexibility in the design and structure of supportive activities to meet these evolving needs as well as cultural considerations. This study suggests that BME women face dilemmas and challenges in engaging in mentoring and in employment at professional and managerial levels. Equally

evident is that BME female students require effective support processes, including access to professional and managerial level mentors. When recruiting suitable mentors, Programme Coordinators should be aware of the skills and characteristics required for effective mentoring to design and implement responsive activities. Refer to **Table 5** for the key mentoring attributes identified in this study.

Significantly, the evidence points to the need for mentoring, HEIs and personal dimensions to work in synergy to address personal, professional and structural barriers to BME females' employability. The study therefore addresses an ethnic inclusive mentoring philosophy which integrates a 'culturally sensitive mentoring approach'. This is recommended as guidance only and mentors should remain committed to meeting the individual needs of their mentees. In summary, the following points suggests the implications for employability mentoring practice:

- HEI practitioners' to be more proactive about promoting the mentoring scheme to BME female students and encouraging them to participate with confidence.
- HEIs to recruit and undertake briefings with professional and managerial mentors, to ensure quality and ethical mentoring, by acknowledging the individual backgrounds of the mentees.
- There should be careful consideration of the students' needs and an understanding of the best route for their well-being, such as, professional employment, PG study, self-employment, part-time or flexible working opportunities.
- Implementation of flexible and responsive approaches to mentoring, for example by online means, through acknowledgement of personal circumstances.
- Evaluate and review the mentoring programme to identify core employability outcomes.

- Consult with mentees, mentors and Programme Coordinators to identify longer-term impacts of mentoring and to make recommendations for improvements.

7.4 Personal Reflections on Practice

As a mentoring practitioner for many years, I felt it was important to investigate mentoring from the experiences of the mentees to determine whether mentoring does something different or indeed reinforces its aims. This study has allowed me to critically scrutinise this phenomenon in detail by engaging with learning theory. The findings have confirmed my belief that mentoring can have a lasting and meaningful influence on people's lives through the on-going relationship with an experienced and trusted adviser. So long as both parties are clear and transparent about their expectations, in successful relationships, mentoring can help with key decision-making.

I also reiterate the view, that the effectiveness of mentoring depends on both participants and people may have varying and perhaps not so fruitful relationships. The language to promote mentoring schemes should be re-considered so that they manage expectations and do not promote mentoring as a solution but as a potential source of support. The effectiveness of this can be applied against the core components for cultural mentoring as highlighted in this study.

This research process has informed my mentoring practice by trying to be more aware of individual needs and to be careful not to subconsciously guide in a path that may not be appropriate. I am conscious of ethics and the importance of allowing mentees to consider the routes that are most suited to them. Since mentoring is viewed as holistic development, this goes beyond supporting with employability. With regard to BME women, mentoring can

develop self-confidence in other aspects of meaningful life decisions such as, family, well-being and lifelong learning.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

This study did not collect longitudinal studies of the participants to determine actual employment destinations and whether the mentoring had supported this or not. The sample size for the mentoring interviews is small with eight student participants and two practitioners, which is less than was originally anticipated. The reasons could be the timing for the requests, as this was in the second part of the academic year and students may have been busy with exams and assignment submissions. In addition, they were given a choice on whether to participate or not in the study.

Another factor is connected to literature on the limited engagement with careers advice and extra-curricular activities for BME groups and participating in this research is to such a degree viewed as an 'activity'. Furthermore, I had no contact or involvement in the recruitment process, instead was reliant on the four HEI Coordinators to disseminate and collect this information, acting as gatekeepers for the study. Nonetheless, this factor meant that I was neutral within the process and mentoring was studied through an independent perspective.

7.6 Recommendations for Future Research

7.6.1 Structural Influences and 'nature of the field'

This small-scale study has given an insight into the role of mentoring for BME women, to be investigated further in the context of structural issues, such as, the changing labour market, entrepreneurial and flexible working opportunities. There are other issues, such as belonging in

HE that is worth exploring and the extent to which HE supports this feeling or consideration of ways to improve practices. Critical research should also be undertaken about how employment and HE structures can be adapted to meet the needs of BME groups, rather than them trying to fit into established practices. This should include investigating potential changes in the system by working with policy makers.

Colley (2003) suggested ways to address these inequalities, in todays' context, these suggestions are even more pertinent and further effort is needed to tackle these concerns. The concern here is Colley (2003) recommended that mentoring initiatives should appreciate the various cultural perspectives of different groups instead of a one size fits all system for values. Analysis of this thesis indicates the mentees are still being mentored on the professional languages and behaviours expected in professional workplaces. Colley (2003) believes mentoring has the possibility to investigate how properties of the field may be altered to allow for variances in social and cultural capital.

Equally, there needs be more research on what and how these changes can be implemented to allow these cultural experiences to be accepted as meaningful capital. Considering this study outcomes, it would be useful to consider how BME females' self-awareness and self-transformation may support them regarding ethnic and gendered limitations. Critical Race Theory (CRT) is suggested as a methodological tool for understanding the intersectionality experiences of race, gender and ethnicity.

The categorisation of 'extra-curricular' activities should also be reviewed to acknowledge a variety of cultural experiences. For example, part-time home-based students tend to participate

in local based ‘non-University’ type activities and female students are more likely to be engaged in non-paid caring type roles (Stevenson and Clegg, 2011). Certainly, dispositions formed through home, community or schooling should be also be recognised as embodied social capital. Thus, more research is needed on understanding dispositions and adapted behaviours. As a way forward, mentoring should work towards interpreting an individual’s knowledge, abilities and experience in a constructive manner. To achieve successful and ethical mentoring, changes should be made to the nature and conditions of the field so BME students’ internal cultural resources can be categorised as valuable capital. Reflective practices and clear open dialogues with all participants of HEI mentoring programmes is needed, to include, the students, mentors, mentoring coordinators and relevant stakeholders.

7.6.2 Unsuccessful Mentoring Relationships

The interview findings presented positive explanations regarding employability perspectives of mentoring. Apart from logistical and time-management issues, there were no negative experiences reported. In order to obtain a comprehensive view of mentoring, a recommendation is to interview BME female students who did not have a meaningful mentoring experience and this research aim should be explicitly emphasised in the recruitment material. If the mentoring relationship was not effective, it is useful to investigate why and consideration given for alternative support mechanisms at HE. Further research is suggested to consider the family context for BME experiences, as discussed in the first recommendation, to determine the level of emotional support that may have affected the outcome of these mentoring relationships.

7.6.3 Longitudinal Research

It is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to consider the long-term effects of the mentoring process. Revisiting the BME mentees' experiences at various points would be helpful to determine whether the skills and performances they have learned from mentoring are still enabling and empowering them in employment. Longitudinal studies should be undertaken of the BME participants to determine actual employability and life destinations.

Two of the mentees are already in employment and it will be useful to undertake destination studies with participants of other HE employability mentoring. This evaluative research will address policy implications of measuring the success of mentoring programmes by highlighting the longer-term impacts of mentoring. This thesis acknowledges the benefits of mentoring are not limited to employability alone for BME women but can be applied to other life decisions and well-being. There are emerging research questions on how these life experiences are still being affected progressively or adversely because of the mentoring process.

7.6.4 Meanings of HE Employability

The stipulated goals of University employability initiatives are not necessarily to secure a fulltime position straight after graduation but to develop employability awareness in order to make informed and beneficial decisions (Norton, 2016). The mentees, in this study, however, expressed that obtaining a graduate level job is a goal for undertaking the employability mentoring. As we have seen, the aims of employability initiatives at HE presents this in much wider terms and is not solely focussed on the final job position. A recommendation is to make these aims clearer so that students are aware of the different ways for developing employability. A suggestion is for HEI's to clarify their explanations of employability and support students to articulate clearly the 'soft skills' associated with participation in employability initiatives.

7.6.5 Alumni Mentors

The practitioners suggested the use of alumni who have recently graduated and are in employment as employability mentors. Research in this area would be useful to see whether they are any additional benefits to BME students from engaging with alumni. This is an alternative approach from the traditional mentoring literature on the wiser, older and more experienced person mentoring those individuals with less experience. It would be interesting to note if there are any differences or similarities of being mentored by someone who is closer the student's age and has recently been through the system. Particularly, this type of mentoring would be useful to investigate the beliefs of millennials as highlighted in the literature review and of their emerging needs.

7.7 Final Remarks

This thesis has highlighted the crucial significance and value of including ethics within the mentoring process. Mentors should operate ethically, with a reflective view on their own practices and encourage mentees to take ownership of their learning and employability objectives. Suitable and safe practice for mentoring has been identified and the various factors to be considered when supporting women from diverse ethnic backgrounds. These include the mentor appreciating the cultural backgrounds and circumstances for BME women and supporting them to articulate their ideas for the future they visualise for themselves.

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APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET

Research Title: Mentoring and Employability Development for BME female undergraduates/postgraduates

Dear Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) Female Undergraduate/Postgraduate

Your support is highly needed in aid of research on the impact and significance of Mentoring and Employability Development for BME female undergraduates/postgraduates.

The Research Scope and Context Relevance

Research will be undertaken to gather the views of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) female undergraduates/postgraduates participating in University mentoring programmes. As you are aware, mentoring has been adopted in various educational, personal and professional contexts over the last twenty-five years. Equally significant is the rise in employability attributes demands for undergraduates/postgraduates from employers, within the last 10 years, where students are vying for meaningful labour market returns on their Higher Education investment.

The Research Aim

This research aims to explore and assess the significance of mentoring for BME female undergraduates/postgraduates who are first in their family to enter Higher Education. The purpose of the research is to gather opinions on the role of mentoring, and, whether it helps mentees with employability development. Thus, this research is interested in finding out how mentoring supports and develops employability skills and attributes and your views on the difference it makes**.**

Why Your Contribution is Essential to the Research

Your feedback would be valuable in developing a model of mentoring that effectively meets the needs of BME females and employability, to identify what works well and possible improvements for the future of mentoring. Your contribution will identify support in empowering BME women to access and compete with confidence for sustainable and meaningful employment after graduation by enhancing employment opportunities.

Possible Value of the Research to You

- Provide an opportunity to reflect on your mentoring experience through talking to an independent party.
- It should help you to identify your preparedness for employment by recognising skills, successes and any challenges.
- It can serve as a personal 'self-reflective-audit' of strengths and gaps for your employability journey.

- Can help you map out and capture your employability attributes to aid your employment seeking plans.

The Nature and Timing of Research Interviews

One-to-one interviews will be held to gather your views and will last no longer than one hour. The interviews are scheduled to take place between 19 February 2018 and 23 March 2018.

Confidentiality of the Research

Please note the conversations between you and the mentor are completely confidential and will not be discussed at this interview. All information will be held in the strictest of confidence in line with data protection protocols. There will be no names or personal details disclosed in the final report or at any other stages of the research process. Although the participants will be known to members of the research team, the data is confidential.

Participation and Consent to the Research

Participation is voluntary. Please be aware you are under no obligation to participate and you can withdraw during the process or up to 8 weeks after interview participation.

Research Expressions of Interest to Participate

Please can you confirm expressions of interest to participate by….

Thank you in advance for your support.

Informed Consent Form

Research Title: Mentoring and Employability Development for BME female undergraduates/postgraduates

The findings of this study will be stored at the University of Birmingham Library. All responses you provide in this study will be kept fully confidential. Audio recordings will be produced from the interview for capturing data and to support text transcription. Your name will not appear on the interview survey and an anonymised number will link the responses you provide to the research. Only the student researcher and the Careers Consultant/team will know your real identity and it will not be disclosed or made public information. In addition, your identifying information will be kept in a secure location in a locked cabinet/office at the University and a password-protected computer.

Please note, your participation in the research is voluntary and you are not required to participate in this research at all. If you do decide to withdraw, you can do so without stating a reason. Please be aware you can withdraw your data up to 8 weeks after participation in the interview.

Please can you kindly confirm below if you are willing to take part in this study. The research will be conducted by Rahila Mukhtar in a one-to-one interview and should last no longer than one hour.

If you have queries or questions regarding any aspects of the study, please contact…

Thank you for your support.

Research Title: Mentoring and Employability Development for BME female undergraduates/postgraduates

I agree to participate in the mentoring and employability research for the purposes of the EdD Doctorate at the University of Birmingham. I understand this will involve participating in an interview where full confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. I have read the information provided in this document and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I can withdraw from the study during the process and up to 8 weeks after interview participation.

Name [Print] …….....……

University…….....

Contact Details: Mobile and Email .....…….

Signed……...

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANTS INFORMATION SHEET

Research Title: Mentoring and Employability Development for BME female undergraduates/postgraduates

Dear University Coordinator

Your support is highly needed in aid of research on the impact and significance of Mentoring and Employability Development for BME female undergraduates/postgraduates.

The Research Scope and Context Relevance

Research will be undertaken to gather the views of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) female undergraduates/postgraduates participating in University mentoring programmes. As you are aware, mentoring has been adopted in various educational, personal and professional contexts over the last twenty-five years. Equally significant is the rise in employability attributes demands for undergraduates/postgraduates from employers, within the last 10 years, where students are vying for meaningful labour market returns on their Higher Education investment.

The Research Aim

This research aims to explore and assess the significance of mentoring for BME female undergraduates/postgraduates who are first in their family to enter Higher Education. The purpose of the research is to gather opinions on the role of mentoring, and, whether it helps mentees with employability development. Thus, this research is interested in finding out how mentoring supports and develops employability skills and attributes and your views on the difference it makes**.**

Why Your Contribution is Essential to the Research

Your feedback would be valuable in developing a model of mentoring that effectively meets the needs of BME females and employability, to identify what works well and possible improvements for the future of mentoring. Your contribution will identify support in empowering BME women to access and compete with confidence for sustainable and meaningful employment after graduation by enhancing employment opportunities.

The Nature and Timing of Research Interviews

One-to-one interviews will be held to gather your views and will last no longer than one hour. The interviews are scheduled to take place during July 2018.

Confidentiality of the Research

All information will be held in the strictest of confidence in line with data protection protocols. There will be no names or personal/institutional details disclosed in the final report or at any other stages of the research process. Although members of the research team will know the participants, the data is confidential.

Participation and Consent to the Research

Participation is voluntary. Please be aware you are under no obligation to participate and you can withdraw during the process or up to 4 weeks after interview participation.

Thank you in advance for your support.

Informed Consent Form

Research Title: Mentoring and Employability Development for BME female undergraduates/postgraduates

The findings of this study will be stored at the University of Birmingham Library. All responses you provide in this study will be kept fully confidential. Audio recordings will be produced from the interview to capture data and support text transcription. Your name will not appear on the interview survey and an anonymised number will link the responses you provide to the research. Only the student researcher will know your real identity and it will not be disclosed or made public information. In addition, your identifying information will be kept in a secure location in a locked cabinet/office at the University and a password-protected computer.

Please note, your participation in the research is voluntary and you are not required to participate in this research at all. If you do decide to withdraw, you can do so without stating a reason. Please be aware you can withdraw your data up to 4 weeks after participation in the interview.

Please can you kindly confirm below if you are willing to take part in this study. The research will be conducted by Rahila Mukhtar in a one-to-one interview and should last no longer than one hour.

Research Title: Mentoring and Employability Development for BME female undergraduates/postgraduates – University Coordinator Perspective

I agree to participate in the mentoring and employability research for the purposes of the EdD Doctorate at the University of Birmingham. I understand this will involve participating in an interview where full confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained. I have read the information provided in this document and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I can withdraw from the study during the process and up to 8 weeks after interview participation.

Name [Print] …….....……

University…….....

Contact Details: Mobile and Email .....…….

Signed……...

APPENDIX C: Interview Schedule – Student Perspective

Mentoring for employability: Professional development approaches

Research question: How does mentoring support employability from the perceptions of female students from diverse ethnic backgrounds?

Issue / topic	Possible question	Possible follow-up questions	Probes
Mentees background and Context	Ethnicity, Age, Qualifications What is your current year of study? What is your mode of study? FT/PT Is the mentoring relationship current? What is/was your mentor's profession or employment? How long have you been participating/or participated in the mentoring programme? Do you take part in any careers advice or support whilst at University? What employment position do you think is likely for you 3 years after graduation? Are there any aspects at home (positive and negative) or in the community that influence your employability aspirations?	If yes in what way? If no, please clarify?	

Mentoring Progress	How would you describe the mentoring role?	How significant were these?	
	Have you set any goals since you have started mentoring?	If yes please clarify the stage you are at?	Are they realistically achievable?
	Can you please explain if you have benefited from the mentoring with your employability development?	If no, please explain if there are any reasons why?	Are there any barriers that impact your ability to pursue these activities?
		Are there any positive/negative aspects?	
	Have you faced any challenges or issues during mentoring?	If yes, please clarify the types of issues tacked during the mentoring?	Anything else?
	Can you talk about the types of activities or tasks that were experienced during mentoring		Any other

Mentoring Evaluation	What were the stand-out or particularly memorable part of mentoring?	Please clarify?	Anything else?
	How do you feel about work life after graduation?	Has the mentoring changed your views in any way?	Anything else?
	Did you get the support you needed from the mentoring sessions?	If yes, how	Any other ways?
	What recommendations would you make to improve the mentoring relationship?	If no, is there anything else the mentor could have included that would have helped you?	Anything else?
	Ideally, what skills, qualities and characteristics should a mentor have when supporting with employability?	If no, is there anything else mentoring can do to improve your employability skills?	
	What are your views on social networks?		
	What did mentoring do that was most significant to you?		
	How would you best describe the mentoring experience to those women who have not participated or experienced mentoring before?		
	Are there any comments you would like to make on the interview process and the effect it has had on you?		

Interview Guide adapted from:

Thomas, G. (2013, p.199). *How to do your research project* (Second Edition). London: Sage.

APPENDIX D: Interview Schedule – University Practitioner Perspective

Mentoring for Employability: Professional development approaches

Research question: How does mentoring support employability from the perceptions of female students from diverse ethnic backgrounds?

Issue / topic	Possible question	Possible follow-up questions [Prompt]	Probes
Employability **Mentoring Programme** **Practitioner** **Background and Context**	How long has the mentoring programme been running for? How is the programme promoted to the students? Can you explain the recruitment and selection process?		
Mentoring Progress	In what way does mentoring support with the employability of students?	Is there any support offered to the students?	

	What are the main issues and challenges during the mentoring programme	Mentor and mentee matching?	
Mentoring Evaluation	Can you outline the main benefits for the students?	Employability skills and attributes?	
	Are there any significant issues or barriers when supporting students with employability?	Access into employment?	
	Are there any recommendations you would make to improve the programme?		

APPENDIX E: ETHICAL APPROVAL CONFIRMATION

Dear Dr Nick Peim

Re: "How does mentoring support employability from the perceptions of BME female students?"

Application for Ethical Review ERN_16-1064

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly bought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards,

Ms Sam Waldron

Deputy Research Ethics Officer
Research Support Group
C Block Dome (room 132)
Aston Webb Building
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston B15 2TT
Tel: [redacted]

APPENDIX F: Overall Table of Themes

1: Structural Systems

Past educational experiences	Parental support and encouragement, family beliefs and values, peer and community spirit, support and encouragement
Aspirations	Competitive job market, future career apprehensions, ethnic penalties, postcode disadvantage, access to role models
Awareness of differences	Cultural, social class, race

2: Collaborative Mentoring Exchanges

Friendship	Sharing personal interests, sounding board, mutual understanding, professional relationship
Promoting individuality	Appreciation, feeling respected, feeling valued, feeling worthy, feeling comfortable, exceeding expectations, recognising the value of mentoring, inspirational
Personalised attention	Honest and open advice, advice from an experienced professional, individualised support, exploration of options, challenge obstacles, sharing real-life work experiences, specific career mentor and mentee pairing
Mentoring Qualities	Acceptance, relatable, reassurance, understanding of background, understanding of social issues, different definitions for mentoring

3: Professional Insights

Employment Development activities	Job interview preparation, setting yourself apart, access to new information, mock interviews
Collaborative career planning	Mapping of ideas, signposting for additional support, exploration of different pathways, strategy for career plans, job search activities, work experience opportunities
Coaching on specific tasks	Specific careers advice, practical business advice, glossary of terminology, job application writing support, CV design and development, advice on psychometric tests
Industry knowledge	Exposure to professional events, specific industry insights, awareness of work-life realities, insight to company politics, commercial awareness
Initial professional step-in	Interaction on a senior level, pre-graduation professional exchanges, professional connections, exposure to new social groups, awareness of work-life realities
Presentation of skills	Soft-skills, self-presentation, professional etiquette, professional portrayal of image
Professional conduct	Imitation, adaptability, emulate professional behaviours and language

4: Enabling Agency

Increased confidence	Seek out opportunities, self-belief, move outside comfort zone, re-enforcement of strengths, realisation of experiences, feelings of belonging, self-awareness, empowerment, dealing with insecurities
Self-efficacy	Reframing challenges, awareness of different options, mentee-led agendas, encouragement to try for positions, incentive to persist, resourceful
Personal development	Resilience, personal habits, setting yourself apart, motivation to persist, overcoming hurdles, time-management, extra-curricular activities, broadening horizons, be open to different perspectives, creates tolerance
Lifelong learning	Pro-active, clear focus, feelings of growth, willingness to learn, give something back to society, optimistic outlook, identify potential
Individual mindsets	Taking initiative, hopes and aspirations, preservation of self-values, conflict with personal values, flexibility, self-drive and determination)