



**Relatability: the hidden force behind Black African  
youth employment disadvantage**

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## Abstract

South Africa has very high levels of youth unemployment by global standards. In addition, its youth labour market is characterised by high levels of racial inequalities which lead to marked disparities in employment access and outcomes based on race. Studies have revealed that Black African youth in South Africa are as much as five times more likely to be unemployed than their peers from other race groups, even after differences in observable human capital characteristics have been accounted for. This inductive qualitative study sought to engage with employers from corporates in the formal sector, employer federation representatives, youth work-readiness intermediary representatives and finally, unemployed Black African graduates and matriculants, with the aim of uncovering employer preferences, behaviours and decision-making processes that might account for the vast differences in the labour market prospects of youth to the detriment of Black Africans. Drawing from multi-disciplinary theoretical perspectives such as the race and ethnicity theory, institutional racism theory, labour market segmentation theory and a blend of perspectives focusing on social processes that underpin labour market inequalities, this study found that the Black African youth labour market disadvantage is an outcome of an interplay of macro-contextual structural factors, exclusionary economic and labour market design, intra-organisational processes and a racialised corporate power structure. From an employment decision-making perspective, the key finding of the study is that *Relatability* is the bedrock upon which Black African youth labour market exclusion rests. It is manifested through five key processes of *Self-Presentation, Confidence, Bias, Choice and Affinity*, which are underpinned by *Unconscious Incompetence, Contextual Apathy, Limited Social Imaginary, Short-termism and Homophily*. Structurally, it rests on and is enabled by *White Intra-Organisational Power Dominance, a Culture of Selective Affirmation, and Unfettered Managerial Discretion*.

Key Words: Youth Unemployment, Black African youth, Labour Market Racial Inequalities, Employer Decision-Making, Relatability

## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

South Africa has a very high level of unemployment, especially amongst its youth, i.e., people aged between 15 and 35 years old (Heintz & Naidoo, 2021). Whilst unemployment amongst the youth is a global phenomenon (Pastore, 2018), there are certain aspects about the nature of youth unemployment in South Africa that are somewhat peculiar and require a closer examination. Firstly, there are significant differences in the employment prospects of the youth of this country based on race (Mlatsheni, 2021). Secondly, these differences seem to persist even when there are no observable differences in human capital endowments between young people from different races (Kingdon & Knight, 2004). Several studies (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat & Mayet, 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004; Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002) have examined this phenomenon and concluded that indeed young White work-seekers are significantly more likely to get a job than their Black African counterparts even when they appear to be similarly qualified based on objectively measurable human capital characteristics. The current inductive qualitative study sought to explore this phenomenon from a different perspective by engaging with employers from South African corporates to get a deeper understanding of their preferences and decision making processes for youth employment, as well as the meaning (Laverty, 2003) they associate with employing young Black Africans which ultimately harms their employment prospects, thus disadvantaging them relative to their White counterparts.

### **1.1 General Background**

South Africa is faced with a massive problem of unemployment. According to the latest statistics produced by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), 32.1% of the country's population is currently unemployed (Stats SA, 2024, p.8). On a more granular level, 59.4% of the people aged 15-24 years old are unemployed whilst the figure stands at 39.0% for those aged 25-34 years old (p. 24). Youth as a segment of the labour market tend to experience the highest levels of unemployment in most countries globally (Pastore, 2018; Pennoni & Bal-Domańska, 2022). Accordingly, it is not surprising that in this respect, unemployment in South Africa mirrors this pattern. Compared to many countries, South African youth unemployment is significantly higher and tends to last much longer (Mlatsheni, 2021). The long-term unemployment rate (those who have been unemployed for twelve months or longer) for youth aged 15-35 years old stands at 70%

(Mlatsheni, 2021, p. 692). This must be concerning because people in this age category make up nearly 35% of the total population (Stats SA, 2022, p. 27).

South Africans should be worried about the effects and impact of the high levels of unemployment amongst its youth because of the psycho-social damage it causes (Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002). Research has shown that long-term unemployment is associated with an increase in substance abuse (Thern et al., 2017), reduced self-esteem (de Witte et al., 2012), mental health challenges (de Witte et al., 2012; Thern et al., 2017), increased criminal activity (Mlatsheni, 2021), aggression, and in some cases, propensity for risky sexual behaviour (Graham et al., 2019).

## **1.2 Putative causation – racial discrimination**

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, a few studies (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat & Mayet, 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004; Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002) have been conducted to explore the racialised nature of the country's labour market. Collectively, these studies examined the influence of many of the variables that are commonly cited in an attempt to explain why young White job seekers have a much higher likelihood of securing employment than their Black African counterparts. These include demographic characteristics such as race, gender, age, geographical location, level of education, parental educational level, work experience and socio-economic status (Kingdon & Knight, 2004; Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002). They also controlled for differences in educational characteristics such as the quality of education, type of institution attended, field of study, final year marks and use of social networks, amongst others (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat & Mayet, 2012).

Baldry (2016, p. 789) concluded that after controlling for all variables under observation, White, Indian, and Coloured graduates were five times more likely to be employed than Black Africans. Kingdon and Knight (2004, p. 207) found that after controlling for all variables under observation, Black Africans were 21, Coloureds 15, and Indians 11 percentage points more likely to be unemployed than Whites. Mlatsheni and Rospabé (2002, p. 17) concluded that after isolating all the variables under study, 47% of the racial gap in the employment rate between young African and White workers remained unexplained. Bhorat et al., (2012, p. 18) concluded that Africans who studied at

historically White institutions were more likely to be unemployed compared to their White peers, even after controlling for the quality of education and field of study.

Unable to account for the significant residual gap in employment prospects between Black African and White youth, the respective researchers cautiously attributed it to possible employer discrimination as follows:

“With regard to racial differences in employment, it is found that a significant proportion of the difference in African and White youth wage employment is unexplained by observable characteristics and is likely to reflect some hiring discrimination from the employers” (Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002, p. 24).

“The residual may be due to employer discrimination or to racial differences in unmeasured determinants such as the quality of education” (Kingdon & Knight, 2004, p. 219).

“There are two possible reasons for this differential in employment probabilities for Africans and Whites at HWIs. The first is that employers continue to discriminate against prospective African candidates” (Bhorat & Mayet, 2012, p. 19).

“The importance of race, even after the deracialised higher education system, is somewhat surprising and indicates that the legacies of apartheid persist in disadvantaging Black Africans and those of lower socio-economic status, even after their attainment of a higher education qualification” (Baldry, 2016, p. 807).

Whilst the inference of employer discrimination against Black African youth made by these researchers is plausible given the data at their disposal, it does nonetheless remain an assumption that is backed by little evidence due to the gaps in the datasets which were acknowledged by the researchers themselves (De Lannoy et al., 2018, p. 38). Proffering a second potential explanation for the persistent racial gap in their study, Bhorat and Mayet (2012) opined: “The second is that there are other characteristics on the basis of which employer decisions are made, that could not be controlled for, given the information in the dataset” (p. 19).

Human capital theory-centric studies, such as the four referenced above, often struggle with a key shortcoming, namely, their inability to study discrimination because of their methodological presumption of inherently meritorious labour markets (Roscigno et al., 2007). The consequence is that “discrimination is not observed, but must be inferred as a residual significant effect, once presumably meritocratic factors have been statistically accounted for” (Roscigno et al., 2007, p. 21). The current study sought to avoid this methodological trap by drawing more from contextually sensitive theoretical approaches.

### **1.3 Knowledge Gap and Study Justification**

A lot has been written about the causes and drivers of youth unemployment globally (Pastore, 2018; Pennoni & Bal-Domańska, 2022), continentally (Anyanwu, 2013; Baah-Boateng, 2016) and locally in South Africa (Bhorat et al., 2021; Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015; Mlatsheni, 2021). However, as previously stated, most of what is known and written about this topic is from the supply-side, and tends to focus on macro-level and human capital drivers of youth unemployment with scant attention paid to the demand-side factors, especially employer behaviour, preferences and decision-making (Grimshaw et al., 2017).

While the studies of racial differences in employment prospects amongst South African youth that were referred to above have collectively made a significant contribution towards improving our understanding of the drivers of racially-skewed labour market access and outcomes amongst South Africa's youth, they have all been unable to probe and interrogate important issues of meaning (Laverty, 2003), particularly in respect of employers' hiring decision-making processes and preferences in as far as they relate to the youth from different racial backgrounds. This is mainly because none of the researchers engaged with employers to seek a deeper understanding of their perspective and rationale for their apparently low preference for young Black African candidates. In their concluding remarks, Bhorat and Mayet (2012) had this to say: "In addition, and this is the surprising yet key result here, we do need to understand more about preferences of South African employers as well as their specific decision-making framework when employing individuals, who at first glance appear to be equally certified" (p. 19).

This point is further underlined by De Lannoy et al. (2018) who argue that "While there is economic research on the macro level, demand-side drivers of employment and economic growth, this is never disaggregated for youth in particular. We thus lack understanding of whether these factors affect youth differently or not. Still on the demand side but at the micro level, there is very limited information about employer behaviour with regard to decisions about whether or not to employ young people" (p. 70). It was this gap in knowledge that the current study sought to help close.

#### **1.4 Problem Statement and Significance**

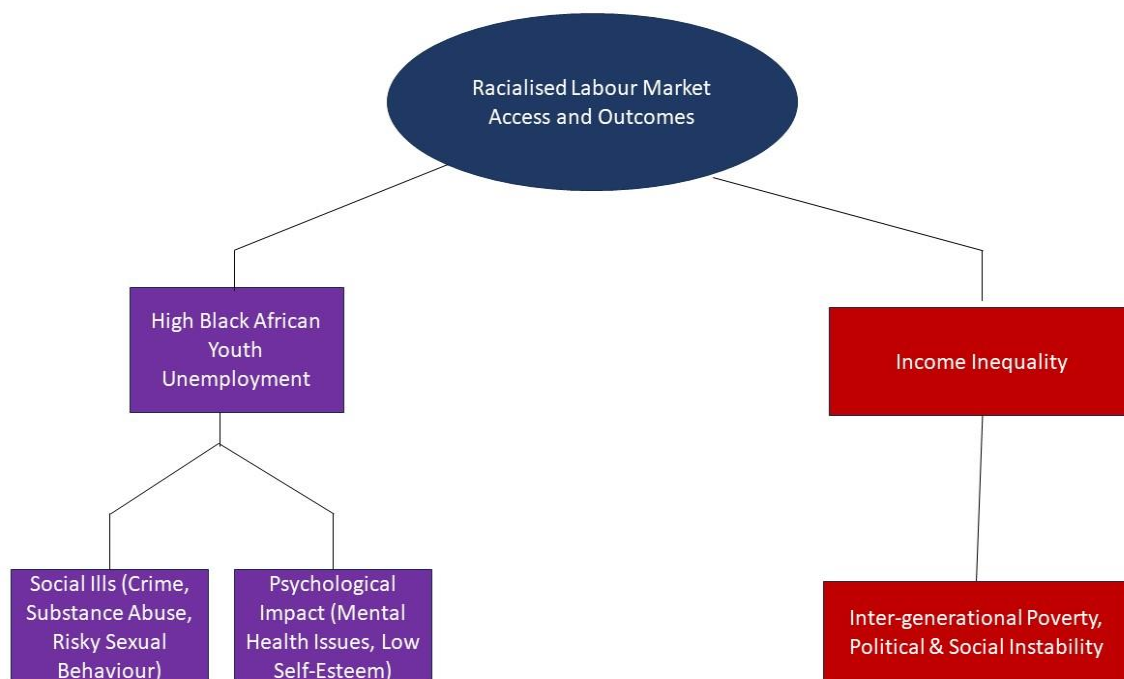
South Africa is the most unequal country in the world (The World Bank, 2022, p.1). The wealth and income inequalities in the country have a strong racial character to them because of the history of apartheid and colonialism (The World Bank, 2022). Excessive wealth and income inequalities are big contributors to intergenerational poverty as well as political and social instability (The World Bank, 2022). **See Figure. 1 below.** According to economists, one of the sources of inequality is income inequality, and labour market inequality is estimated to account for between 85 and 91% of total income inequality in South Africa (Bhorat et al., 2021; Leibbrandt et al., 2012).

The inequalities in the country's labour market do not only shape income patterns, but they are also evident in the differences in employment prospects amongst the youth of different race groups (Ismail & Kollamparambil, 2015; Mlatsheni, 2021; Ranchhod & Daniels, 2021). Studies (Bhorat & Mayet, 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004; Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002) have shown that Black African youth in South Africa are most likely to be unemployed relative to their peers from the other race groups. Chances of being unemployed amongst Black African youth can be five times as high as those of their White counterparts (Baldry, 2016; Ismail & Kollamparambil, 2015). People aged 15 to 34 years old make up 43% of South Africa's economically active population (Stats SA, 2024, p.24). Black Africans constitute about 80% of this group (Department of Labour, 2021, p. 15). Logically, addressing the dynamics that give rise to the anomalous marginalisation of such a significant part of the labour market should materially improve the overall youth employment situation in the country.

South Africa's history of racial segregation and discrimination through the policy of Apartheid is well documented (April, 2021). The country's labour market before the dawn of democracy in 1994 was legislatively and socially racialised (Clair & Denis, 2015), where high status and well-paying jobs were reserved for White people, Black people were barred from competing for certain jobs and they were legally banned from living in most areas closest to employment opportunities. Additionally, there was a systematic dilution of the quality of their education to constrain their productive capacity, thus further entrenching and justifying White people's dominance in the labour market (April, 2021; Heintz & Naidoo, 2021).

In 1996 South Africa adopted its new constitution, which is generally highly regarded for its human rights-centric nature. The constitution and the Employment Equity Act which was passed in 1998, make it illegal for employers to discriminate against job applicants on the basis of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, as well as any other grounds that are not part of the intrinsic job requirements, with the exception of affirmative measures aimed at redress (Employment Equity Act No. 55, 1998). It is against this background that it is puzzling to observe the endurance of the Apartheid-era labour market racial hierarchies thirty years after Apartheid was officially discarded and outlawed.

**Figure. 1: Problem Statement & Significance Diagram**



### 1.5 Research Aims and Objectives

This study aimed to uncover the preferences, behaviours and decision-making processes of employers in corporates within the formal sector in South Africa, in relation to their youth employment practices. The ultimate objectives of this study were: firstly, to enrich the academic understanding of the mechanisms that underpin the Black African youth employment disadvantage, and secondly, to inform practical interventions intended to address the problem.

## **1.6 Research Question**

The brief context outlined above triggered the following research question:

*How might South African corporate employer preferences, behaviours and decision-making processes be helping to create and sustain the Black African youth employment disadvantage?*

## **1.7 Limitations**

Firstly, the current study confined itself to employers from corporates in the formal employment sector. Therefore, it is conceivable that different findings could be made when engaging with employers from a different sector of the economy. Secondly, all the participants of this study were based in Johannesburg, in the Gauteng province (the leading economic hub in Africa). However, virtually all the employer participants in the study, either in their current portfolio at the time of the interview, or in one or more of the positions they previously occupied, had accountability that spanned across the country. Finally, despite its many virtues, inductive qualitative research methodology also has a few inherent pitfalls (Langley, 1999; Maxwell, 2009). Chief amongst these, is that it can be prone to researcher subjectivity (Gioia et al., 2013). This issue is addressed in greater detail in the methodology chapter.

## **1.8 Dissertation Outline**

This dissertation has six chapters, namely: the Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings, Discussion, and lastly, Conclusion and Future Research chapter. In the Introduction chapter there is an opening paragraph that broadly introduces the phenomenon of racial inequalities in the South African youth labour market, and specifically points out the issue of Black African youth employment disadvantage. This is followed by a brief outline of the general background to youth unemployment both in South Africa and across the globe. Thereafter, there is a brief account of what is already known about the issue of racial employment disparities in the country, using four research studies as key reference points. Knowledge gap, justification for the current study and problem significance follow. Research aims and objectives, succeeded by the research question and limitations of the study conclude the chapter.

In the Literature Review Chapter, contrasting theories explaining labour market inequalities have been explored. These include human capital theory, race and ethnic

theory, institutional racism theory, labour market segmentation theory as well as social capital and social closure theories that bridge macro and micro perspectives of labour market inequalities. In the Methodology Chapter, research assumptions have been explicated, and the design choices justified. A detailed account of the research strategies, data collection and analytic methods and procedures has been provided, followed by an account of the strategies employed to ensure quality of the findings and counteract any threats to the validity thereof.

A detailed report of the outcomes of the study has been given in the Findings Chapter. This was supported by an extensive use of direct quotes from the study participants as evidence. In the Discussion Chapter, the researcher has pulled everything together and contextualised the findings by integrating them into prose to develop a coherent story that explains the genesis, mechanism and structure that belies Black African youth labour market disadvantage. This chapter is concluded with a short synopsis of praxis implications of the study. Lastly, everything is wrapped up in a brief conclusion and a short suggestion for future research.

## **Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

In this chapter, a relatively short presentation of contrasting theoretical perspectives explaining labour market inequalities has been undertaken. The main theories that were focused on are human capital theory, race and ethnicity theory, labour market segmentation theory, and institutional racism theory. In addition, perspectives emphasising the role of social processes, such as social closure and social capital, in entrenching racial labour market inequalities have been presented. Finally, a conclusion pulling it all together, exposing the gaps in literature, and highlighting the angles that can be adopted in the current study follows.

### **2.1 Theoretical perspectives on racial inequality in the labour market**

Racial inequality in the labour market, including hiring discrimination against the marginalised sectors of society, is a widespread global phenomenon (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021). Despite general assumptions and expectations of gradually improving relations between different races, empirical evidence indicates that employment discrimination against minorities in the United States of America and the United Kingdom

has remained virtually unchanged over the last 25 years (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021, p. 404).

Racial discrimination as the cause of unfavourable employment outcomes and prospects for Black people and other marginalised groups is not an uncontested factual attribution. This is especially the case when racism or discrimination is inferred from observations of ‘disparate impact’ or differential effects of certain employment practices on people of different races. In making this point, Berard (2008) argues that

“a wide variety of factors and processes, other than racism or in conjunction with racism to various degrees, can lead to institutional disparate impact by race. Without better knowledge of how racial disparities are produced, including an understanding of the relevance of nonracial characteristics (such as wealth and income) which are correlated with race, we are really not in a good position, scientifically speaking, to be making inferences or claims about how institutional results, outcomes, effects, or consequences are, or are not related to racism” (p. 748).

For this reason, this chapter has reviewed different theoretical perspectives on the underpinnings and mechanisms of racial inequalities in employment.

#### **a. Human Capital Theory**

Human capital theory has its roots in neo-classical economics and is attributed to Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz (Tan, 2014). Its central tenet is that players (employers and employees) in the labour market are rational and efficient actors who seek to maximise self-interest, earnings in the case of employees, and productivity for employers (Tan, 2014). It contends that individuals are motivated to invest in their education to improve their skills, which will improve their productive capacity thus securing them a competitive advantage in the labour market (Tan, 2014). In terms of this theory, labour market inequalities are a reflection of human capital and productivity differences between participants, as well as regulatory rigidities in some instances (Leontaridi, 1998).

In explaining the high levels of youth unemployment in South Africa and globally, the human capital perspective would highlight young people’s lack of general work and job specific experience (Pastore, 2018; Pennoni & Bal-Domańska, 2022) and inflexible labour laws (Bhorat et al., 2021; Heintz & Naidoo, 2021) amongst the main causal factors. The Black African youth labour market disadvantage has been attributed to poor quality education, ineffective job-search strategies and lack of access to networks, to name just a few (Bhorat et al., 2021; De Lannoy et al., 2018; Mlatsheni, 2021).

Although human capital theory is now widely accepted, despite heavy criticism it attracted in its early days (Tan, 2014), it continues to draw strong criticism for its skewed focus on the supply side explanations of labour market inequalities to the exclusion of the demand side factors, especially the role of the employer (Grimshaw et al., 2017; Leontaridi, 1998). It has also been accused of ignoring (ideologically and methodologically) the role that discrimination, social, structural and institutional processes play in driving and preserving labour market inequalities (Darity et al., 2015; Leontaridi, 1998; Roscigno et al., 2007). The human capital model is premised on the assumption of irrationality of racial discrimination, predicting its eventual demise in the face of market demand (Darity, 2005). Many scholars argue that, on the contrary, discrimination is in fact a rational action undertaken by the dominant economic group (White men) to preserve and perpetuate its labour market dominance and privilege (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Darity, 2005; Roscigno et al., 2007).

#### **b. Race and Ethnicity Theory**

“Race refers to putative biological ancestry groupings signalled by phenotypical characteristics believed to be associated with ancestry groups. Ethnicity, by contrast, refers to putative ancestry groups associated with cultural characteristics and usually less-distinct phenotypical characteristics” (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021, p. 392). Racism is an ideology of racial and cultural supremacy (Clair & Denis, 2015). Racism often leads to racial discrimination where people receive different treatment based on race (Clair & Denis, 2015).

The primary foundation to racism is the ‘othering’ (Hamann & Bertels, 2018) of its targeted victims where the dominant group seeks to arbitrarily use any perceived differences between themselves and their would-be victims as the basis of their dehumanisation and subjugation (Freire, 2000). During colonial and apartheid days in South Africa, employers played an active role in the othering and dehumanisation of Black Africans, which laid the foundation for exploiting and discriminating against them. Hamann and Bertels (2018) note, “In fact, mining employers were not merely bystanders and passive beneficiaries of their government’s institutional work of categorising: they played an active and decisive role in it in order to suit their interests, categorising Black Africans as a distinct group of ‘Kaffir labour’” (p. 405).

In a study reviewing 140 field experimental studies on hiring discrimination across 30 countries, Quillian and Midtbøen (2021) found that discrimination against non-White employment candidates is still rife. Whilst the scientific foundations of racial superiority that anchored earlier incarnations of racial ideologies have been comprehensively discredited (April, 2021), new forms of subtle and covert racism have emerged (Clair & Denis, 2015; Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021). They assume different forms in different contexts. In his highly cited “Racism without racists: Color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in the United States” (2006), Bonilla-Silva identifies four frames or modes of operation that contemporary racism or what he refers to as ‘colour-blind’ racism assumes. These are abstract liberalism, naturalisation, cultural racism, and minimisation of racism (p. 26). According to Bonilla-Silva, these are essentially interpretive filters designed by the dominant group to subtly disguise, misrepresent and downplay the discriminatory foundations of racial inequalities (p. 26). This aligns with Freire’s (2000) articulation of the notion of false perception. He argues that

“a different type of false perception occurs when a change in objective reality would threaten the individual or class interests of the perceiver. In the first instance, there is no critical intervention in reality because that reality is fictitious; there is none in the second instance because intervention would contradict the class interests of the perceiver. In the latter case the tendency of the perceiver is to behave ‘neurotically’. The fact exists; but both the fact and what may result from it may be prejudicial to the person. Thus it becomes necessary, not precisely to deny the fact, but to ‘see it differently’. This rationalization as a defence mechanism in the end coincides with subjectivism. A fact which is not denied but whose truths are rationalized loses its objective base. It ceases to be concrete and becomes a myth created in defence of the class of the perceiver” (Freire, 2000, p. 52).

In effect, “The core of modern racist belief is no longer biological racism, instead, non-whites are viewed as inferior because they are viewed as having dysfunctional cultures or violating moral tenets” (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021, p. 396). This phenomenon was observed in an ethnographic study (Jeske, 2020) aimed at discovering the employer’s perspective of the unemployed in an area just outside Pietermaritzburg (the second largest city in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa). In one conversation amongst a group of only White people, frustrated by absenteeism amongst their Black workers and their failure to notify the employer in advance, one White female employer representative said, “They are still so traditional. It is going to take hundreds of years for these people to become sophisticated. To evolve. But it is their culture to go walkabout” (Jeske, 2020,

p. 60). A White male manager added: “Lots of things are their culture ... you can’t understand it” (Jeske, 2020, p. 60).

Defining racism as an ideology or a belief system essentially locates its foundation in the heads of individuals who are assumed to operate in racism-free structures (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). This conception of racism has a number of pitfalls that Bonilla-Silva identifies, including the following: Firstly, it falls into the trap of circular logic in that racism is inferred from discriminatory (racist) behaviour which is taken as confirmation of the existence of racism (racist ideology). Secondly, because racism is located in the individual, measures to detect its existence tend to remain unchanged over long periods of time. This effect of this is the inability of this approach to explain persisting racial inequalities even when there is a significant decline in the prevalence of individuals subscribing to racist ideologies. Finally, Bonilla-Silva argues that conceptualising racism as a belief system with no social foundation presumes irrationality on the part of those who behave in a racist manner. However, on the contrary, both original and contemporary forms of racism are rational and serve to advance and protect the individual and collective interests of its perpetrators (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 468).

Arguments that tout the primacy of human capital differences and meritocracy in explaining racial and gender inequalities in the labour market are reductionist and ahistorical (Darity, 2005). They “overlook the role of inequality in institutional processes generally, and closure enacted by the dominant group actors that reifies existing stratification hierarchies – factors beyond the control of any given individual” (Roscigno et al., 2007, p. 18). Studying racism in employment decisions is challenging and open to criticism. Social desirability bias often means that people are not likely to openly and honestly express their racist beliefs (Clair & Denis, 2015; Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021). Self-reports from potential victims of employment discrimination are open to under- and over-reporting of incidents because of interpersonal differences in sensitivity to and perceptions of racism (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021).

### **c. Institutional Racism Theory**

Recognising the shortcomings of the theoretical frameworks conceptualising racism as individual ideology, Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton coined the phrase ‘institutional racism’ to account for the role played by institutions and social structures in

creating and sustaining racial inequalities in various social and economic spheres of society (Berard, 2008; Clair & Denis, 2015). Institutional racism covers a wide array of perspectives. One thing that unites them is their common assertion that “macrostructural processes, as opposed to individual acts, provide more meaningful explanations of contemporary racial inequality” (Clair & Denis, 2015, p. 860). A key element of institutional racism is that it tends to concern itself with ‘disparate impact’, “where organizations or societies distribute more resources to one group than another without overtly racist intent” (Clair & Denis, 2015, p. 860).

Whilst he acknowledges the valuable contribution of institutionalists in advancing our understanding of the genesis of racial inequalities by locating them in the social structures that produce them, Bonilla-Silva (1997) criticises these scholars for failing to provide a conceptual framework that can be used by other scholars to analyse the mechanisms that underpin race-based outcomes differentials (p. 467). He goes on to introduce the idea of racialised social systems, which he defines as “societies in which economic, political, social and, ideological levels are partially structured by the placement of actors into racial categories” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 469). He argues that racialised systems are always hierarchical and that groups that have been placed at the top of the hierarchy enjoy power dominance, have disproportionate share of economic resources and better access to opportunities and ultimately, secure better labour market outcomes (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). He argues that “the totality of these racialized social relations constitutes the racial structure of a society” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 470). He regards racism or racial ideology as the element of the racialised structure that regulates mutual stereotypes and how different race groups relate with each other. He argues further, that “although racism or racial ideology originates in race relations, it acquires relative autonomy in the social system and performs practical functions” (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 474).

In an essay reviewing two important studies of racial inequalities, Rashawn Ray (2014) refers to a study by Kevin Stainback and Donald Tomaskovic-Devey which reviewed records documenting desegregation in employment covering over 5 million private employer workplaces in America from 1966-2005. In this study these authors found that despite the Affirmative Action policies that were implemented to deal with labour market discrimination, the desegregation progress came to a halt between the 1980s and the 2000s (Ray, 2014, p. 479). The authors impugn biased managers and supervisors for continued racial inequalities in the labour market, and their discriminatory hiring

practices. Citing Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey, Ray (2014) remarks, “because the racial and gender biases are so widespread, changes in organizational behavior rather than changes in individual-level bias are the key to restarting desegregation in the workplace” (p. 479).

Shedding some light on the persistence of racial inequalities in the labour market in the absence of formal discriminatory policies, Bobo (2014) remarks: “Scholars increasingly hold that once race is deployed as a tool of social and self-understanding – and especially once it has been used to systematically structure who occupies positions of power, money, and prestige – its effects are extremely hard to undo” (p. 189). He goes on to argue that attempts to deal with racial inequalities can only succeed if the underlying structures that produce and perpetuate these are dismantled.

Critics of institutional racism theory have accused it of neglecting the social-psychological aspects of racism, i.e., racist *intent* amongst the individuals leading institutions, by focusing too much on the structural *effects* of racial inequalities, in so doing placing “moral condemnation where it is undue” (Clair & Denis, 2015, p. 861) and also failing to recognise the possibility of other alternative causes of inter-racial inequalities apart from racism such as class and gender (Berard, 2008; Clair & Denis, 2015). Berard further argues that institutional racism is an interesting and catchy concept that is useful for social and political commentary. However, he avers that it is too theoretically sketchy to facilitate any meaningful scholarly engagement and interrogation of the processes through which racial outcome disparities unfold. Institutionalists have also been accused of being overly-structural by failing to account for the agency of the actors in these institutional arrangements (Rosigno et al., 2007).

#### **d. Labour Market Segmentation Theory**

This theory emerged out of dissatisfaction with human capital theory’s failure to shine the spotlight on the role of the employer, and other institutional drivers of labour market inequalities (Grimshaw et al., 2017; Leontaridi, 1998). It contends that labour markets have a duality about them and are segmented into primary and secondary submarkets that are structured and operate very differently (Leontaridi, 1998). A further argument is that secondary labour markets are characterised by poor working conditions, low pay, limited prospects for upward mobility, and that one’s entry into this market is not influenced by

any differences in human capital endowments but more by discrimination and structural inequalities (Leontaridi, 1998). Primary labour markets on the other hand, tend to exhibit many of the characteristics described in human capital theory; there is a greater reliance on individual skill, a stronger connection between personal human capital investment, productivity and earning ability, more open competition for opportunities and greater prospects for upward career mobility (Leontaridi, 1998). It is argued that the workings of the primary market are not controlled by free market forces, but rather by employers, who keep tight control over it. This theory further argues that there is virtually no mobility across primary and secondary markets, and that this is what accounts for labour market inequalities (Leontaridi, 1998).

Labour market segmentation theorists have been criticised for failing to achieve universal consensus on the number, features and workings of the segments, and there have been serious theoretical and methodological shortcomings in trying to support some of their key assertions, including failing to produce empirical evidence of the existence of barriers to mobility between the secondary and primary sub-markets (Leontaridi, 1998).

## **2.2 The role of Network-Outcome differences and Social Closure**

The race theory of labour market inequality is illuminating in many respects in terms of how racism infiltrates organisational practices such as hiring and promotions to distort outcomes in favour of one group at the expense of another. However, its critics rightfully point out its limitations in explaining the persistence of labour market inequalities even when there appears to be a significant decline in racism as an ideology. Institutional racism has broadened the narrow definition of racism by shifting the spotlight to foreground the primacy of institutions and social structures as originators of racial inequalities. This has been key in facilitating our understanding of the persistence of disparate impact and outcomes even when racism appears to be abating. As indicated earlier, in spite of its virtues, institutional racism has been accused of failing to adequately explicate its conceptual framework that underpins the mechanisms that produce racial inequalities.

Clair and Denis (2015) argue that research concerning social processes that produce racial inequalities can be divided into two main categories. There is one approach that “considers racism in historical context, focusing on general mechanisms that account for

macrolevel changes over time, and another that considers microsocial processes that operate in interpersonal interaction” (p. 860). Some scholars have argued that neither the focus on the individual or cultural foundations of racial inequalities, nor their institutional or structural drivers are enough on their own to provide a complete picture of how this phenomenon unfolds (Jeske, 2020). The missing link is an examination of the social processes that weave the two together (Roscigno et al., 2007).

In Rashawn Ray’s essay referred to earlier, he reviews another book by Nancy DiTomaso, titled *The American Non-Dilemma: Racial Inequality Without Racism*. Here, the author sought to understand the mechanisms behind the continuous reproduction of racial inequalities in the American labour market and the alignment of attitudes about opportunity structure, structure and work with the prevailing political landscape in the country (Ray, 2014, p. 481). After interviewing 250 Whites across three states, Tennessee, Ohio, and New Jersey, DiTomaso found that the majority of them believed the following regarding opportunity structure and race: “(1) racial discrimination no longer exists with the exception of a few individual racists; (2) Black behavior is the reason for their current position; and/or (3) Blacks actually receive more social benefits than Whites. Potentially more importantly, DiTomaso (2013) finds that most Whites say they are committed to color-blindness and believe their work effort is their reason for their socioeconomic status” (Ray, 2014, p. 481).

DiTomaso challenges the views of her interviewees and asserts that their perspectives are merely attempts to defend their racial advantage. Contrary to being a product of their efforts and merit, DiTomaso attributes Whites’ labour market advantage to their access to social resources accumulated over long periods of time in segregated neighbourhoods, families, workplaces, and other social structures. She concludes that White labour market advantage derives much less from racism than it does from White favouritism, where White people use their social capital to do favours for each other (Ray, 2014). This conclusion opens itself to criticism as critics argue that “what DiTomaso calls favoritism is actually a nice way of describing modern discrimination and racism” (Ray, 2014, p. 483).

Staying with the social capital theme, it is critical to note that whilst everyone is free to utilize their networks to gain a competitive advantage in the labour market, network access and outcomes are not race-agnostic in a racialised society (Pedulla & Pager, 2019). Research has shown that as much as fifty percent of all job vacancies are filled through

referrals, instead of traditional channels such as advertising (Pedulla & Pager, 2019). Pedulla and Pager's research into the use of networks and success rate thereof between Black and White job seekers in America found that while there was no difference in the extent of usage of networks between the races, the success rate of White job seekers in securing jobs through their networks was twice as high as those of their Black counterparts (Pedulla & Pager, 2019, p. 996).

The use of referrals as a hiring strategy has two key implications. It elevates the profile of the networked-job seeker by endorsing his or her quality, thus positively influencing the prospective employer in their favour. The inverse of this phenomenon is that competing job seekers who do not have the same level of network access to the prospective employer are disadvantaged in the process. As it has been argued, a key feature of a racialised society is the predominance of members of the dominant group in positions of socioeconomic power and influence (Bonilla-Silva, 1997), which in turn gives them better network placement (being networked to people with authority to hire) (Pedulla & Pager, 2019). It is the combination of better network placement and network mobilisation (the extent to which a job seeker's network is prepared to put in a good word for them with the employer) that accounts for the vast differences in network outcomes between Black and White job applicants (Pedulla & Pager, 2019). This simply boils down to the fact that, because of their privileged position in the socio-economic hierarchy, White people generally have better social capital which they deploy to their advantage, in the process further reproducing labour market inequities.

Reporting on the findings from the Stainback and Tomaskovic's (2012) study earlier on in this chapter, the dominance of managers' and supervisor 'bias and prejudice' in hiring discrimination that normally works against Blacks and other minorities in America was underscored. Clair and Denis (2015) define implicit bias as "an unconsciously triggered belief in the inferiority of, or negative attitude toward a group" (p. 859). Biases are a direct consequence of the racialisation of society, and they are produced by a racial "ideological structure of a social system that crystallises racial notions and stereotypes" (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 474). It is the crystallised frames of racial ideology regulating how Black and White Americans see each other that account for why, to this day, Whites in America still battle to reconcile themselves with dealing with Black doctors, bankers, lawyers or professors (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 474).

In a study exploring the role of implicit and cognitive bias in the hiring of university academic staff, O'Meara et al. (2020) found that these biases still strongly influence employment decisions in favour of White men at the expense of women and underrepresented minorities (URMs). They grounded their research on behavioural economics and social psychology, drawing strongly from Daniel Kahneman's (2011) concepts of System 1 and System 2 thinking. System 1 is the part of our thinking system that we use most of the time in our day to day thinking and it relies on patterns or cues to make quick judgements in social interactions. It is very efficient in that it operates subconsciously 80-90 percent of the time, however, it is prone to a lot of biases (O'Meara et al., 2020, p. 313), which permeate the decision making of even the most educated members of society (O'Meara et al., 2020). System 2 thinking, on the other hand, tends to be more considered and methodical, and thus takes concerted more time. When one's brain is in System 2 mode, it is receptive to 'nudges', which are defined as "a small change made in the context surrounding a decision, intended to remove or alter biases in behavior and help individuals voluntarily make better decisions and promote better choices" (p. 414).

Furthermore, the authors found that there is a range of biases that infiltrate the four stages of the academic hiring process namely, the stereotypes that emanate from lack of diversity in the hiring panel, subtle biases in how the job advertisement is crafted signalling who will be a good 'fit', exclusionary marketing and search channels and strategies and finally, biases emanating from knowledge of scarcity of diverse candidates in a particular field. Biases in these domains were found to work in combination to the detriment of women and URMs (O'Meara et al., 2020). The presence of biases in hiring processes and decision making is rife, irrespective of the context or the sophistication of the recruiters or hiring managers, as the two studies briefly touched upon here have revealed. As it has been demonstrated in the Findings and Discussion chapters of this dissertation, the current study has found the South African labour market to be no exception in this regard.

Social closure is another key social instrument of racial exclusion employed by dominant groups in the labour market. It is essentially "the process by which collectivities seek to maximize advantage by restricting access and privileges to others" (Roscigno et al., 2007, p. 21). Furthermore, Roscigno et al. (2007) argue that this type of exclusion plays out in daily social interactions, and it involves systemic marginalisation of the less powerful groups by those with socio-economic power, through language and symbols, with the sole

intention of “status-hierarchy preservation and the various advantages/disadvantages that such hierarchy affords” (p. 21).

There are many forms of racial discrimination in the labour market which, deservedly, have received much scholarly attention. These include wage discrimination, spatial discrimination and exclusionary employment practices amongst others. (Roscigno et al., 2007, p. 23). However, there are many other forms of racial and gender discrimination and harassment that take place during everyday interactions between people in the workplace, which may sometimes be perpetrated by individuals with no formal institutional authority, albeit seemingly sanctioned through institutional complicity, with the aim of reinforcing prevailing power patterns (Roscigno et al., 2007).

After poring through thousands of officially reported cases of workplace discrimination and harassment in America that were reviewed and adjudicated upon by an independent government agency, Roscigno et al. (2007) identified three key emerging forms of social closure that were used to marginalise Black employees and other minority group members. These were: 1) ‘Disparate policing of minority employees’, which essentially entailed selective application of company rules and disciplinary procedures against minority group members while overlooking similar ‘transgressions’ committed by White employees; 2) ‘Managerial use of particularistic criteria’, which involved arbitrary use of managerial discretion in hiring and promotion decision making where informal criteria such as ‘soft skills’ are used as a justification to exclude Black and other minority candidates for jobs which they qualify for based on measurable objective job requirements; 3) ‘Racial hierarchy maintenance in employment’, which often played out through overt and sometimes subtle forms of racial discrimination and harassment where Black employees are called derogatory names and treated disrespectfully by White supervisors and managers.

One example the authors cite in this regard, is that of an African American man who complained about being repeatedly called ‘boy’ by his White supervisor, despite having expressed his disapproval to being referred to in that manner. Whilst not all of these acts of harassment and discrimination are always blatant, they are quite calculated and wilful with a harmful impact which “isolates minority employees in their workplaces, undermines their capacity to perform their jobs properly, and impacts their sense of dignity in quite meaningful ways. Moreover, it reifies racial hierarchy on a daily basis,

and in ways seldom captured by standard analyses of racial inequalities at work” (Roscigno et al., 2007, p. 34).

**Table 1: Literature Review**

Emerging concepts and themes	Key references
<p>A. Social Capital and Social Closure</p>	<p>(O’Meara et al., 2020; Pedulla &amp; Pager, 2019; Ray, 2014; Roscigno et al., 2007)</p>
<p>B. Human capital theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Human capital and productivity differences as primary basis for labour market inequalities</li> <li>❖ Barriers to Black African youth employment in South Africa</li> <li>❖ Macroeconomic and supply side drivers of youth unemployment.</li> </ul>	<p>(Pastore, 2018; Pennoni &amp; Bal-Domańska, 2022; Tan, 2014)</p> <p>(De Lannoy et al., 2018; Graham et al., 2019; Mlatsheni, 2021)</p> <p>(Anyanwu, 2013; Borat et al., 2021; Heintz &amp; Naidoo, 2021; Mlatsheni, 2021; Pauw et al., 2006; Reddy et al., 2016)</p>
<p>C. Race and Ethnicity theories</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Race, ethnicity, and racism as drivers of hiring discrimination</li> <li>❖ Modern/new racism and assumed cultural dysfunction as underpinnings of employer discrimination</li> </ul>	<p>(April, 2021; Clair &amp; Denis, 2015; Quillian &amp; Midtbøen, 2021)</p> <p>(Bobo, 2014; Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Clair &amp; Denis, 2015; Jeske, 2020; Quillian &amp; Midtbøen, 2021)</p>
<p>D. Labour market segmentation theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Demand side drivers of labour market inequality and the role of the employer</li> <li>❖ Labour market duality</li> </ul>	<p>(Grimshaw et al., 2017; Leontaridi, 1998)</p> <p>(Leontaridi, 1998)</p>
<p>E. Institutional racism theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Institutional and structural racism</li> <li>❖ Racialised social systems and institutions</li> <li>❖ Economic rationality of racism</li> </ul>	<p>(Bobo, 2014; Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Clair &amp; Denis, 2015; Darity, 2005)</p>

### 2.3 Conclusion

Macroeconomic (Bhorat et al., 2021; Heintz & Naidoo, 2021; Mlatsheni, 2021) and human capital (Pauw et al., 2006; Reddy et al., 2016) theoretical reasons tend to be the dominant explanations given for Black African youth disadvantage in the labour market. However, these have been found wanting when it comes to providing meaningful and convincing justifications for the persistence of the racially-based labour market outcome differentials when there are no observable differences in human capital differences between youth from different race groups (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat & Mayet, 2012; Kingdon & Knight, 2004; Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002). There are too many factors outside of human capital differences that mediate employment prospects between the youth of different races. This literature review has shown that while there is some truth to, and relevance in, the arguments offered by the dominant classical economics and human capital centric perspectives to explain inequalities in the labour market, such explanations are at best incomplete, and at worst, possibly misleading. The more structurally and institutionally oriented perspectives arguably provide better and more contextually sensitive and meaningful explanations. The works of April (2021), Bonilla-Silva (1997), Freire (2000), and Roscigno et al. (2007) are only just a few amongst many scholars who provide instructive insights on how dominant groups enact various forms of social closure to protect their interests and hegemony over those they perceive as a threat. In the context of South Africa, with its deep-rooted history of social and racial inequity, it should not be so easy to dismiss pervasive racial and gender inequalities in employment outcomes, based on unsustainable human capital deficiency assumptions. There are important explanations for labour market racial inequalities amongst the country's youth that can only come from employers as the ultimate deciders of who is hired and why. This goes to the heart of the research question for this study, namely,

***“How might South African corporate employer preferences, behaviours and decision-making processes be helping to create and sustain the Black African youth employment disadvantage?”***

## Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

### 1) Research assumptions and methodology

At the most basic level, research methods are simply “the means to answering your research questions” (Maxwell, 2009, p. 236). However, there is a broader and deeper context that shapes and underpins one’s research approach and decisions. According to (Van de Ven, 2007), every researcher, whether explicitly or otherwise, conducts their research within a certain paradigm, which Guba & Lincoln (1994) define as “a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines for its holder, the nature of the “world”, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as, for example, cosmologies and theologies do” (p. 107).

To help clarify and crystalize his own paradigmatic position, this researcher sought guidance from three incisive questions posed by these authors. The first question is ontological as it relates to the nature of the world, asking, “what is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is it that can be known about it?” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108). Drawing on a constructivist orientation, the current researcher firmly believed that much of our world and organisational realities were social constructions (Gioia et al., 2013). Therefore, in answer to Guba & Lincoln’s second question that queried “the nature of the relationship between the knower, or would-be knower, and what can be known” (1994, p. 108), he contended that one’s knowledge of the world could only be through a process of subjective interpretation, and this made his epistemological (Maxwell, 2009) position an interpretivist one. Finally, in respect of the methodological question, which asked, “how can the inquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known?” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108), this researcher was of the view that it was only by engaging with informants who had first-hand knowledge and lived experience (Laverty, 2003) of the realities and phenomena that this study sought to understand, that he could get to fully answer the research question.

Phenomenology, specifically, hermeneutic phenomenology, was in the view of this researcher an appropriate methodological and philosophical research framework to guide this study’s inquiry process. This was because hermeneutic phenomenology’s primary object is to give primacy to the voice of the informants by “illuminating details and

seemingly trivial aspects within experience that may be taken for granted in our lives, with a goal of creating meaning and achieving a sense of understanding” (Laverly, 2003, p. 7). Inherent in this approach is an assumption, which this researcher subscribed to, that informants “are knowledgeable agents who know what they are trying to do, and can explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 7).

Whilst both the descriptive and hermeneutic approaches to phenomenology (Gill, 2014) share a common focus on the lived experience of the informants, because of their ontological differences, they diverge substantially in their beliefs on the relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon being studied, and how the researcher ought to engage with the informants (Gill, 2014). Contrary to descriptive phenomenology, which emphasises the importance of the researcher assuming a neutral posture by suspending or ‘bracketing’ their biases when engaging with informants (Laverly, 2003), hermeneutic phenomenology not only dismisses the notion of bracketing one’s biases as an impossibility (Gill, 2014; Maxwell, 2009; Van de Ven, 2007), it actually encourages scholars to bring their own experience and beliefs to bear when interpreting what they are hearing and observing from their informants, provided, they remain sensitive, through a process of reflexivity, to how their biases could be influencing their interpretation of what they are witnessing (Laverly, 2003; Van de Ven, 2007). This researcher subscribed to the assumption that researchers “are knowledgeable people too – that we can figure out patterns in the data, enabling us to surface concepts and relationships that might escape the awareness of the informants, and that we can formulate these concepts in theoretically relevant terms” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 17).

## **2) Positionality**

In the interest of reflexivity, this researcher had to reflect deeply on how his biases borne out of his personal beliefs and experience could both enrich and compromise his interactions and interpretations during the course of the study (Neibert, 2009). As a born and bred Black South African who was raised in a working-class environment, this researcher could identify with many of the challenges faced by many Black African youth who were struggling to secure employment. As the first university graduate in the family, this researcher had first-hand experience of the power that securing a good job early in a young person’s career could have in transforming their own life, and the lives of the people around them, lifting the family out of poverty in the long run.

Professionally, the researcher had about two and a half decades of human resources experience which, amongst others, involved recruiting, interviewing, and employing scores of young people, both matriculants and graduates, of all races. Having worked in a big corporate company at all levels, right from starting out as a fresh and inexperienced young graduate trainee, all the way up to occupying a seat at a group executive committee table of a large organisation, employing tens of thousands of people across a number of countries, would have equipped this researcher with significant experience that positioned him appositely to appreciate the nuances and subtleties (Lavery, 2003; McIntosh & Morse, 2015) that might emanate from his engagements with the research participants.

### **3) Research Approach**

The Quantitative approach has traditionally dominated scientific inquiry (Gioia et al., 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However, despite its many virtues in advancing knowledge, this approach to science has increasingly been criticised on a number of fronts including accusations of context stripping, which compromises the relevance and generalisability of its findings, exclusion of meaning and purpose, and “the disjunction of grand theories with local contexts, i.e., the etic/emic dilemma” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 106). On the contrary, a qualitative research approach enables the researcher to generate “a deep and nuanced understanding of a given phenomenon” (Lester et al., 2020, p. 95). The four studies referred to in section 2 in the Introduction chapter were all quantitative in nature, and they used powerful statistical tools and techniques to reveal intriguing relationships and insightful connections between the variables under study, which has shed a lot of light on the many drivers of the Black African youth labour market disadvantage. However, common to all of them, was their inability to interrogate the employer decision-making context, processes and the meaning (Starks & Trinidad, 2007) that employers attached to employing Black African youth. This created a gap in our understanding of these important phenomena. It was for this reason that the current researcher adopted a qualitative approach for this study.

### **4) Research Design**

In her seminal article titled, “Strategies for theorizing process data”, Langley (1999) asserts that there has been a wave of interest amongst scholars to understand complex and dynamic organisational phenomena. She argues that there are two main approaches that

have been adopted to try and explain these intriguing organisational processes. On the one hand, some scholars choose to develop theories in advance and test them using an array of methods. This describes a deductive research design. On the other hand, there are those scholars whom she identifies herself with, who “plunge oneself into the processes themselves, collecting fine-grained qualitative data - often, but not always, in real time - and attempting to extract theory from the ground up” (Langley, 1999, p. 691). That is inductive research design.

Whilst traditional deductive research studies are very useful in describing, explaining and even predicting theoretical phenomena, they are often found wanting in their ability to facilitate discovery of new and original theoretical insights, especially as they relate to how organisational change processes evolve over time (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 16). This is where inductive strategies are particularly strong. Gioia et al. (2013) argue that “the strong social scientific tradition of using qualitative data to inductively develop “grounded theory” provides rich and deep theoretical descriptions of the contexts within which organizational phenomena occur” (pp. 16 -17).

Amongst the kinds of research questions that lend themselves to inductive theory development, are those aimed at “understanding how a process unfolds, developing insight about a novel or unusual phenomenon, or digging into a paradox and explaining the occurrence of a surprising event” (Edmondson & McManus, 2007, pp. 1161-1162). The current study was about gaining deeper insights into the mechanisms responsible for the puzzling phenomenon where young Black African candidates’ prospects of employment were significantly lower than those of their peers from the other race groups even when, at face value, they appeared to be equally qualified. Such an exploration made an inductive design an appropriate mode of enquiry for this study.

### **5) Unit of analysis**

Van de Ven (2007) defines the unit of analysis as “the entities (individuals, collectives, or objects) being studied” (p. 164). The current study’s unit of analysis was the South African formal sector corporate employers, and the focus was at a micro level since the researcher engaged with individual employers or their representatives. The rationale for choosing employers as the unit of analysis was because of their influence and impact. Seventy five percent of employed youth in South Africa work in the formal sector

(Mlatsheni, 2021, p. 692). Employers have immense power to shape the character of the labour market (Hamann & Bertels, 2018) because they ultimately decide who gets employed (Grimshaw et al., 2017).

### **6) Participant selection and sampling**

Given that this was a hermeneutic phenomenological study, it was imperative that in the selection of participants careful attention was paid to ensuring that the researcher picked individuals “who [had] lived experience that [was] the focus of the study, who [were] willing to talk about their experience, and who [were] diverse enough from one another to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience” (Polkinghorne; van Manen, 1997) as cited in (Laverty, 2003, p. 10). Accordingly, this study employed a purposive or what Maxwell (2009) calls purposeful sampling methodology.

In this case, a group of 10 individual employers who met the following requirements was identified:

- Had to have had significant experience in dealing with South African youth, i.e., aged 15-35, seeking employment. Whilst no minimum years of experience was specified, each individual employer participant in the study had at least 15 years’ human resource management or recruitment experience. All the individual employer participants were senior practitioners in their fields, with most of them heading up their respective functions in their various organisations, although that was not a key requirement for participation in the study.
- Their experience had to have included the recruitment of both matriculants and graduate young candidates.
- The individual employer participant’s experience had to have been acquired in a formal South African corporate organisation.

### **7) Data Source Triangulation**

Van de Ven (2007) argues that when one is dealing with an ambiguous or complex problem such as the one that was under study, there is a great need to engage as many people who can provide different perspectives on the matter as possible. Often, this can

be accomplished through a process called data source triangulation (Maxwell, 2009; Van de Ven, 2007). It is for this reason that three more sets of participants were invited and agreed to give their perspectives as well as. These included a senior executive who represented a big employer federation with members from a wide range of South African industries. This was aimed at obtaining insights into employer perspectives from as many diverse industry sectors as possible. In addition, two senior members from different youth work-readiness intermediary organisations who were significant players in this space also took part. The latter were invited for their unique vantage points, as they interfaced and interacted with both employers and unemployed youth. Finally, this researcher deemed it important to also give a voice to the victims of this phenomenon, i.e., unemployed Black African youth. In this regard, two separate groups of unemployed young Black African work-seekers, aged between 18 and 35 years of age, were invited to participate. The first group comprised of university or university of technology graduates, and the second one was made up of high school graduates with matric as their highest qualification. This is because matriculants and graduates face different dynamics in the labour market (Bhorat et al., 2021) and as such, their experiences might be differently nuanced.

#### **8) Sample selection and size**

As stated by Starks and Trinidad (2007) “Typical sample sizes for phenomenological studies range from 1-10 persons” (p. 1375). With this in mind, drawing from his own network and in some cases, referrals, this researcher compiled an initial list of 17 potential interview participants who met the criteria mentioned earlier in this chapter. Of these, 13 were potential employer participants, 2 were from youth work-readiness intermediaries, and the last 2 were from employer federations. Gaining access to the identified potential participants was a bit of a ‘mixed bag’. Two of the individuals that the researcher had been referred to by a former non-executive director of his former employer, postponed or cancelled the interview through their personal assistants, sometimes as late as a couple of hours before the interview was scheduled to happen. This happened despite the enthusiasm about the topic and eagerness to be interviewed, which they had expressed during the initial introductory between them and this researcher. After many unsuccessful attempts to reschedule the appointments, the researcher eventually made a call to find replacement candidates.

The rest of them were relatively easy to secure appointments with, except two or three whose diaries did not allow them to take part even though they were quite interested. In the end, the final sample was a total of 13 participants made up of 10 employer participants, 2 youth work-readiness intermediary representatives, and 1 employer federation representative. The employer participants, collectively, had a wide spread of industry experience spanning across retail and investment banking, insurance, specialised financial services, telecommunications, fast-moving consumer goods, logistics, professional services, and engineering consulting. They worked for a diverse range of national and multinational companies, varying in the size of staff complement from as few as 350 to more than 50 000 employees each.

### **9) Data collection methods**

In the interest of ensuring rigour of this study (Forero et al., 2018), a data method triangulation strategy (Maxwell, 2009) was employed, by using a combination of semi-structured interviews (McIntosh & Morse, 2015), focus groups (Von Seggern & Young, 2003), and industry reports (Rogelberg, 2004). The researcher decided to use the one-on-one semi-structured interview technique with the employer, employer federation representative and youth work-readiness intermediary organisation representatives. This decision was made for practical logistical reasons and was also informed by a careful weighing up of the pros and cons of using this tool (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). At a practical level, it would have been extremely difficult to assemble all the individual employer participants in one room at the same time because of their busy schedules and different preferences on the mode of engagement, in person or virtual, and choice of venue.

Engaging with employers with the view to uncovering their reasons for their apparently discriminatory behaviour against young Black African work-seekers was a potentially sensitive issue (Jordan et al., 2007), which could trigger some form of social desirability bias (McIntosh & Morse, 2015), if it were to be discussed in a relatively open forum such as a focus group. A one-on-one semi-structured interview enabled anonymity and allowed the researcher to pick up non-verbal cues or any signs of discomfort on the part of the respondent and respond accordingly (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

However, with respect to the unemployed youth, the dynamics were different, and therefore the focus group method seemed a more appropriate and cost-effective choice for them. Firstly, it was much easier to get the participants to converge in the same venue and at the same time. Secondly, conducting two focus groups was a lot less time-consuming than conducting interviews with each unemployed youth would have been. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, research suggests that the focus group method is particularly effective at encouraging people to speak openly when they feel that they are in the company of people who are in the same position / ‘same boat’ as they are (Jordan et al., 2007).

### **10) Ethics**

As required by the rules of the University, prior to approaching any prospective participants with invitations to take part in the study, an application for ethical clearance was made to and granted by the University’s Commerce Faculty Ethics Committee. Written consent was obtained from every participant, and all participants were informed that they were free to withdraw their consent and participation at any stage of the process. Assurances were given to participants that their identities and those of the organisations they worked for, where applicable, would be kept anonymous. This was done by removing any personal or organisational identifiers when the interview and focus group audio files were transcribed. Pseudonyms were used in lieu of the names of participants in the interview and focus group transcripts.

### **11) Semi-Structured interview preparation**

A semi-structured interview is a research tool that “is designed to ascertain subjective responses from persons regarding a particular situation or phenomenon they have experienced” (McIntosh & Morse, 2015, p. 1). It is a tool that is particularly useful when the researcher is investigating a complex issue because it enables them to ask probing questions and follow up should any part of the respondent’s answer need further clarification (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The research question of the current study was of such a nature that a lot of probing and clarification would be required in order to fully grasp the thought process and logic that underpin employer decision-making. This made the semi-structured interview an ideal instrument for the study, and it is a method that is quite common in hermeneutic phenomenological studies (Oerther, 2021).

In preparation for the interviews, an interview protocol (Oerther, 2021) that would be used to guide the discussion was developed and submitted to the Ethics Committee for approval prior to the commencement of the study. **See Appendix 1.** Guided by what is known from the literature about the phenomenon under study, this researcher developed question domains and categories under which interview questions were then crafted (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). These included warm-up questions to break the ice and get the discussion going, core questions that dealt with the key themes this researcher sought to obtain the participants views on, whilst making an allowance for probing questions in case more detail was needed on a particular answer given by the respondent, and finally, wrap-up questions to close the interview (Oerther, 2021, p. 2147).

## 12) Study procedure

Mindful of the potential complexities and issues that could arise from the relationship between researchers and their participants (Maxwell, 2009, p. 234), this researcher opted to follow a consistent and reasonably formal process during the research invitation and engagement with all the participants, irrespective of the level of familiarity between the researcher and each individual participant. As the initial step, the researcher contacted each prospective participant either via email, telephonically or text message, requesting a quick telephonic appointment of about 5 minutes or so, in order to introduce himself, where no relationship existed between him and the prospective participant, and provide a brief overview of what the study was about. Once the telephonic appointment was secured, the researcher would call. After brief introductions, the researcher would proceed to provide some background on the study, what motivated it, and why the individual was deemed a suitable candidate to take part in the study.

The researcher would then mention that if the individual was keen on participating in the study, they would be required to sign a written consent form as the very next step. At the same time, each prospective participant was assured that they could withdraw their participation in the study at any time, without repercussions. Furthermore, the researcher explained that candidate participation would be in the form of an interview lasting about an hour, and that whilst it would be audio-recorded for record and transcription purposes in line with the University's strict ethics requirements, it was going to be completely anonymous, with all personal and organisational-identifiers removed from the written record, and that a pseudonym instead of participants' actual names would be used. Each

participant was informed that, if interested, they would be given access to their interview script to validate the accuracy of its contents.

The participants were asked to choose whether to have the interview in person or virtually, on Microsoft Teams or a similar platform. Seven (7) preferred a face-to-face meeting, whilst six opted for a virtual interview via MS Teams. Of the seven participants who wanted to meet in person, two preferred to have the interview in their offices whereas the remaining five wanted to have the discussion over a meal in an informal setting of a restaurant. The choice of the restaurant was discussed and agreed with each participant, and the cost of the meal and drinks was settled by the researcher. The practice where the researcher pays for the meals of the study participants is not unprecedented (Von Seggern & Young, 2003). Whilst restaurants can sometimes become too noisy for research recording purposes, special care was taken by the researcher to choose a table in the most distant and quiet part of the restaurant. As an additional precaution, two audio-recording devices placed at different parts of the table were used to minimise any potential sound interference and audibility issues. The thirteen interviews took place over a six-month (October 2022 – March 2023) period mainly because they overlapped the year-end holidays when most people usually take time off work.

With the consent of the participants, all the interviews were audio-recorded and each file saved in a secure online drive (Lester et al., 2020). The level of familiarity and strength of the relationship between this researcher and the interview participants varied significantly. Eight (8) participants were completely unknown to the researcher prior to the commencement of the study, and the rest were known to the researcher over several years, but only two of them could be said to have a personal relationship with him as the researcher would sometimes meet with them socially, two to three times a year. However, the researcher had never discussed the topic under study with any of the participants prior to the commencement of his research.

Given South Africa's socio-political and economic history (April, 2021), the issue of race remains quite a sensitive topic (Jordan et al., 2007) in just about every aspect of society. For this reason, one might have expected some of the participants to exhibit a level of 'social desirability bias' (McIntosh & Morse, 2015) in some of their responses, especially those who did not have a close relationship with this researcher. Indeed, whilst there were

one or two interviews where this researcher found some of the respondent's answers to be guarded and at times, a little pre-emptive, on the whole he was taken by surprise at the level of transparency, openness and eagerness shown by most of the respondents when answering even those questions which one might have thought would be somewhat challenging. This surprising discovery accords with what has been found by other scholars in their own studies: "We have been surprised in the past – to the point where we are no longer surprised – at how willing informants are to reveal what we might have considered to be proprietary information" (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 19). Surprised by her own level of openness, one of the participants in this study jokingly said to this researcher, "Oh gosh! Please don't get me fired." This concern was similar to one attributed by Gioia et al. (2013) to one of their informants who said, "I'll tell you anything you want to know, as long as you don't embarrass me" (p. 19).

Services of a highly experienced professional transcriber who is familiar with doing academic research transcription were enlisted (Lester et al., 2020). Although this step meant incurring extra costs, this researcher deemed it necessary to ensure improved accuracy and rigour (Forero et al., 2018). The transcriber was given access to the digital drive where the audio files were saved, and she was instructed to transcribe the contents verbatim so that the full meaning, context and nuance of what every respondent was trying to convey would be captured (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). In addition, the transcriber was supplied with pseudonyms that would replace each participant's name and was also instructed to remove any personal or organization-identifying information. The transcriber would submit the completed transcripts to this researcher as PDF files. The researcher would carefully check every file, line by line, against the audio recording to ensure accuracy, and where mistakes were picked up, the researcher would ask the transcriber to rectify accordingly (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

### **13) Focus group participant selection**

With South Africa having one of the highest levels of youth unemployment in the world (Hallstein Holte et al., 2018; Mlatsheni, 2021), one would expect it to be fairly easy for a researcher to gain access to a pool of unemployed Black African youth interested in taking part in a focus groups to discuss youth unemployment. However, in reality, things proved not to be that simple and straightforward as this researcher soon found out. As indicated earlier on in this chapter, this researcher sought to conduct two focus groups, one made

up of unemployed graduates and the other, unemployed matriculants. This was aimed at avoiding diluting any of the participant voices and messages given the different dynamics that are at play in these sub-segments of the labour market (Bhorat et al., 2021; Bhorat & Khan, 2018).

The recommended sample size for a focus group ranges from 4 to 12 participants (Von Seggern & Young, 2003, p. 274). However, as attainable as this sample size might seem, one of the challenges that researchers face is ‘no shows’, meaning, confirmed participants who cancel at the last minute, or sometimes simply just do not pitch without giving any notice (Jordan et al., 2007). Forewarned with this knowledge, this researcher tried to cast the net in search for suitable candidates as wide as possible.

The focus group potential participants had to meet the following criteria:

1. They had to be Black African as defined by Stats SA.
2. They had to be South African citizens.
3. They had to be aged between 18 and 35 years.
4. Participants for the matriculants focus group had to have passed the grade 12 national examinations, whereas those for the graduate focus group had to have graduated from a university or a university of technology.
5. Potential participants had to be currently actively looking for employment, or be recently employed, after having struggled to secure employment for some time. The key issue here was that every participant or potential participant had to have had a recent personal experience of being unemployed and struggling to secure a job.

In line with the purposive sampling methodology that was adopted for this study, the researcher approached various individuals in his networks, as well as referrals, who could connect him with qualifying potential participants. For the graduate focus group, an initial total of 16 potential participants were invited either via text messages or phone calls by the researcher. Of these, 8 expressed interest and confirmed attendance, but 6 ultimately attended. One cancelled the day before the session, citing unexpected work commitments, and the other just did not show up.

Things were a little trickier with landing the matriculants focus group participants. Of the initial list of 30 potential candidates that were invited, 15 accepted, and 9 attended. Of the 6 that did not arrive, one called a few days before the session and informed the researcher that he had just secured a job and would therefore not be able to attend anymore, four could no longer be located during the final confirmatory call by the researcher a couple of days before the session, and the last one could also not be located in the final confirmatory call by the researcher the afternoon before the session, despite several attempts and messages left on her phone. She eventually called the researcher an hour after the session had already started inquiring if she could still attend. Unfortunately, it was too late at that point.

Apart from securing participants, a number of other important decisions had to be made by the researcher. Firstly, he had to carefully consider what the appropriate profile of the facilitator for each focus group was (Von Seggern & Young, 2003). For the graduate focus group, the researcher opted for a young Black African female professional facilitator who is a university graduate. The rationale for this decision was that this profile was more likely to be relatable to most of the participants given their demographic similarities. The researcher paid the facilitator a fee which they had agreed upon in their negotiations during their initial briefing meeting. The researcher opted for a professional facilitator, once again, for the matriculants focus group. She was a Black African female with comprehensive work experience and was much older than the participants. The rationale for going with someone a bit more experienced in this case was that this was a much bigger group with participants hailing from diverse backgrounds. The researcher believed that a much more mature and experienced, but still relatable, facilitator would be a more appropriate choice. The facilitator in this case opted to waive her fee because she was passionate about the topic, having worked with unemployed Black youth previously. She even brought along her own sister to be a participant, since she had recently matriculated and was struggling to secure a job. However, she and the researcher agreed that he would reimburse her travel expenses. The researcher had briefing discussions with each of the facilitators prior to the sessions, where he explained the objectives of his study and what he wanted to achieve through the focus group sessions. He also shared a brief document which had high-level guidelines of the topics and questions he would like to get answers to from the participants. However, the format, structure and process of each session was left entirely to the professional discretion of the respective facilitators.

The next decision that the researcher had to make was whether or not to pay the participants a fee to compensate them for their time, especially in view of their unemployment status. Paying researchers is a contentious topic because, on the one hand, it raises issues of power, informed consent, and can potentially positively influence what the participants say, amongst other things (Hammett & Sporton, 2012). However, on the other hand, paying research participants has been found to increase participation rates (Head, 2009), and, in the case of this study, it could make a difference in easing the financial challenges, no matter how modestly, that are faced by most of the participants given their unemployment status. Having considered the pros and cons of each approach, and consulted with his supervisor, this researcher opted against paying the participants for participation. This decision was clearly explained to all prospective participants individually during the initial introductory call by the researcher. Thus, everyone who agreed to take part in the study did so knowing that they would not receive any payment for it. A small gift costing not more than R100 was given to all the participants and facilitators of both focus groups after each session as a token of appreciation. They were not told in advance about the gift to avoid influencing their responses in any way.

Distant location from centres of commercial activity and cost of transport are two of the biggest barriers faced by many Black African youth seeking employment in South Africa (Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015). For this reason, and in view of the decision not to pay the participants for taking part in the study, this researcher wanted to neutralise the effect of these two issues as a factor in the prospective participants' decision-making process as much as possible. The graduate focus group participants came from many parts of Johannesburg. For that reason, the researcher decided to book a professional conference facility in Parktown, which is centrally located and easily accessible. This venue is used by many corporates for their own events and functions, and as can be expected, it was somewhat pricey. However, the researcher was lucky to have dealt with a manager who was sympathetic to the objectives of the study and was amenable to offering him a good discount on their regular rate. Most of the matric focus group were based in the south of Johannesburg. It made sense therefore to find a venue in that part of the city. Once again, the researcher went for a professional conference venue. In this case, the venue was part of a hotel that was also popular for corporate functions and conferences. No discounts were on offer this time round. However, it was important to the researcher that the participants of both groups received an experience of similar quality. In both sessions,

refreshments and lunch were provided to the participants and facilitators at no cost to them (Von Seggern & Young, 2003).

One of the hardest hurdles to overcome was how to get around the issue of transport cost without paying the participants. After exploring various options, the researcher settled on 'e-hailing' transport as the solution. With agreement from some of the participants, this researcher requested a ride using an e-hailing application on his phone to fetch and drop off the participants from their chosen locations to the conference venue and back home. In some cases, choosing the cash payment option, the participants used the e-hailing application on their own phones to request a ride and this researcher paid the driver personally on arrival to avoid money exchanging hands with any participant. In these cases, after the session, the participants would request an e-hailing ride from their own phones, and the researcher would walk with them to the car and pay the driver in cash at the start of the trip this time around. Because there was no preexisting relationship between this researcher and any of the focus group participants, he had to go to some lengths to convince some of the female participants who were, understandably, somewhat sceptical and a little anxious that they could find themselves becoming victims of crime.

Both focus groups sessions had somewhat of a slow start, with many of the participants being a little reserved and not willing to say much. However, after a couple of 'ice-breaking' activities and warm-up questions (Oerther, 2021) led by the respective facilitators, the mood in the room gradually changed to one of vibrant and sometimes animated interaction. In the researcher's initial estimates, each session was likely to run for two and a half to three hours. However, because of increased engagement levels, they both ended up lasting about 4 hours each, with unanimous approval of all participants involved. In both sessions, participants expressed gratitude and said they found much value from being in the same space in conversation with individuals who were in the same situation as they were, giving credence to what scholars (Jordan et al., 2007) say about the power of the focus group method to encourage openness amongst participants who have a shared experience, i.e., 'are in the same boat'.

As was the case with the one-on-one semi-structured interviews, both focus group sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by professional transcribers.

Similarly, the resulting PDF transcripts were checked by this researcher against the audio-recordings for accuracy (Forero et al., 2018).

#### **14) Data analysis**

One of the advantages of qualitative inductive theorising is its power to stimulate imaginative and insightful original discoveries amongst researchers (Langley, 1999, p. 707). However, as (Gioia et al., 2013) note, “qualitative research also has a long history of suffering the (often well-deserved) criticism that it does not justify its assertions, leading to troubling skepticism about whether qualitative researchers are engaging in creative theorizing on the basis of rather thin evidence” (p. 18). Ensuring interpretive rigour (Forero et al., 2018) when conducting hermeneutic phenomenological research can be tricky because “there is not an agreed upon language used to describe it or one universal set of criteria used to assess its presence” (Lavery, 2003, p. 24). This is an important consideration for a researcher following this methodology because as Maher et al. (2018) opine, “Rigor in qualitative analysis belongs to the process and its trustworthiness” (p. 12). Hermeneutic phenomenological data analysis techniques are similar to those of grounded theory, and therefore the two are instructive of each other. It is for this reason that this researcher used constant comparison – where similar data was grouped and conceptually labelled. Then concepts were categorized. “Categories are linked and organised by relationship, conditions and dimensions are developed, and finally a theory emerges” (Scott & Howell, 2008, p. 113). As a result, the researcher employed open coding, axial coding and selective coding (reflective coding) (Neibert, 2009). Drawing on Strauss and Corbin (1998), Scott (2004) defines data analysis as “the interplay between the researcher and the data” (p. 113). The general opacity that has tended to characterise this interplay in qualitative research has sometimes led to it being labelled as ‘impression analysis’, for the sketchy or scant evidence upon which its conclusions can sometimes be based (Welsh, 2002, p. 6).

To avoid this unenviable tag, this researcher adopted a combination of software based (NVivo 14) and manual (conditional relationship guide and reflexive coding matrix) analytical tools to maximise transparency and traceability (Welsh, 2002; Wilson Scott, 2004). The use of software in qualitative research analysis provides many benefits such as, the audit trail, ease of handling large of volumes of data, memo-ing capabilities to discern emerging themes and map out data connections. However, it is no panacea, as

software technology has been found wanting when it comes to gleaning nuances in the data, to name but one issue (Welsh, 2002). Employing a hybrid of technological and manual analytical methods helps overcome the inadequacies of either approach (Maher et al., 2018).

### **15) Analysis procedure**

In preparation for the analysis, data cases for employers, youth work-readiness intermediaries, and Unemployed Black African Youth, respectively, were set up in NVivo. The transcribed files in PDF format were imported and stored in their respective cases. This was done to facilitate easier traceability, statement attribution and data comparisons, should it be necessary at a later stage.

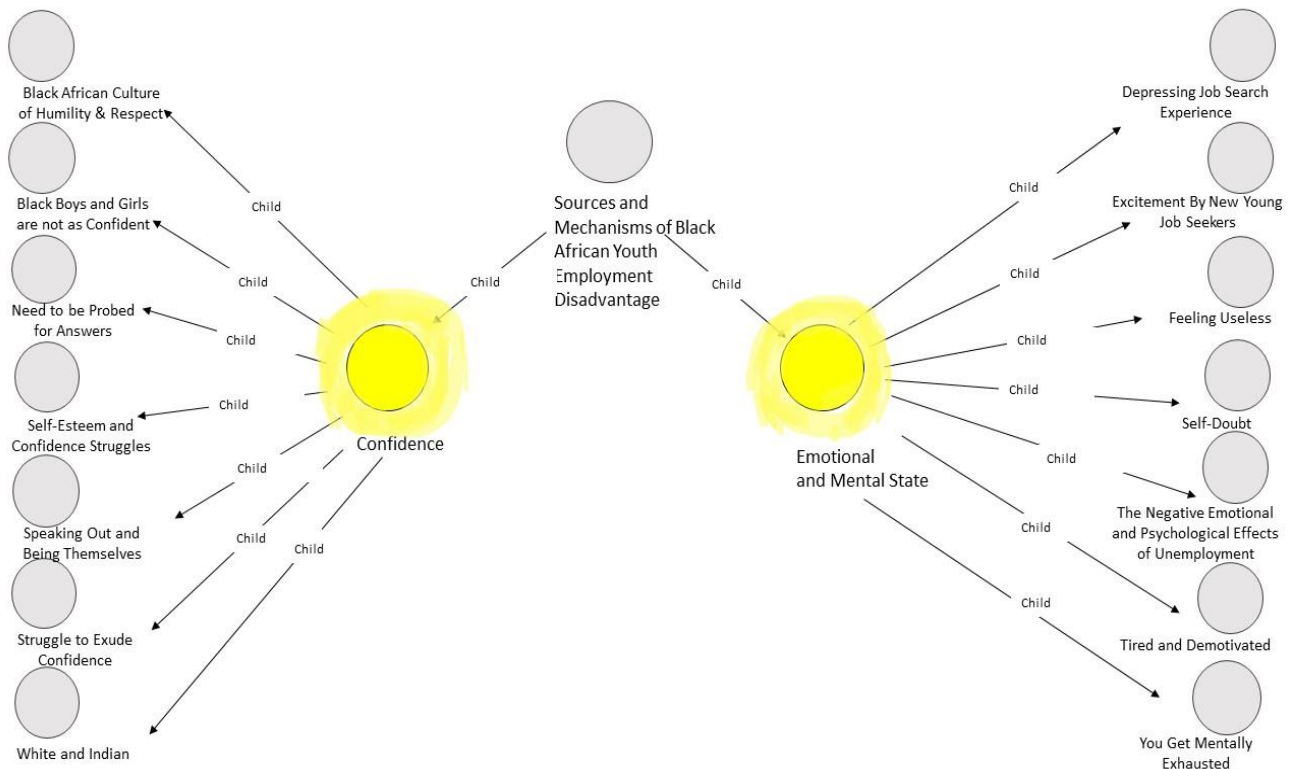
The primary analytic step conducted by this researcher was open coding, where extracts of data responding to the research question were categorized “with a short name (a code), and using these codes to sort and develop an understanding of what’s happening” (Maher et al., 2018, p. 6) relating to the phenomenon this researcher was investigating. Care was taken during this stage of the process to use the participants’ exact words to avoid imposing the researcher’s interpretation on the message the participants wanted to convey (Gioia et al., 2013). This is in line with one of this researcher’s assumptions stated earlier of recognising participants as knowledgeable actors in their world and who are capable of expressing the essence of their reality.

During open coding, a total of 196 codes were captured on NVivo. **See Code Book in Appendix 3.** Care was taken to capture the words exactly as they were used by the informants. This was done to avoid imposing the researcher’s meaning (Gioia et al., 2013). Thereafter, a careful comparison of the codes was undertaken with the aim of identifying similarities and differences between them (Wilson Scott, 2004). Similar categories were grouped together and labelled using informants’ words as much as possible, once again, to avoid researcher bias (Gioia et al., 2013). This brought the number of codes down to 33. **See an example in Figure 2 below.**

After open coding, the constant comparative analytical method requires the researcher to progress to axial and selective coding, as the intermediate and final steps of the process, respectively (Neibert, 2009). In axial coding, the researcher examines the relationships

between categories in order to distil emerging patterns and themes in the data (Gioia et al., 2013). To facilitate this important analytical step, this researcher employed the conditional relationship guide (Wilson Scott, 2004) as the primary tool. In interrogating the data, the researcher asked important questions of “what, when, where, why, how and with what result or consequence” (Scott & Howell, 2008, p. 4) during this process. See **Figure 3 below** for an extract from the conditional relationship guide. The full document will be found at the end of this chapter marked as **Appendix 2**.

**Figure 2: Example of individual open codes and categories**



**Figure 3: Conditional Relationship Guide extract**

<i>Category</i>	<i>What</i>	<i>When</i>	<i>Where</i>	<i>Why</i>	<i>How</i>	<i>Consequence</i>
<i>Affinity</i>	Commonality, Bonded by <u>something</u>	When deciding who to employ	Shared culture	Relatability and Chemistry	Cultural Affiliation	Recruiting people like us, Trust
<i>Apartheid legacy and exclusionary System</i>	Apartheid after-effects, Systems designed to <u>exclude</u>	Choice, Decision-making rights	Bias, Labour market and economy structured to <u>exclude</u>	Designed for an <u>elite</u>	Job Requirements-based barriers, Preference for ready-made, <u>Degrading</u> and discrimination	Oversupply of labour and competition, <u>Social</u> class and privilege, Preference for ready-made
<i>Assessment of ability and potential</i>	Cognitive and personality assessments	Oversupply of labour and competition,	Choice, Culture-fit	Not taking a risk	Psychometric tools, Guts recruitment, <u>No</u> science, Need for Alternative assessment tools	Panicking during interviews or assessments, Education system, English eloquence over potential

Discovering emerging themes in the data is not an easy process, especially for inexperienced researchers (Scott & Howell, 2008). Scott (2004) developed another tool called the reflective coding matrix, which this researcher found very useful in helping him identify and put into perspective what Scott calls the “central phenomenon” in the data (Scott & Howell, 2008). It achieves this by training the researcher’s focus on the consequence categories with the intent of identifying the core category and outlining its properties, processes, dimensions, contexts and consequences, thus paving the way to what scholars call theoretical saturation (Gioia et al., 2013; Scott & Howell, 2008).

To develop the reflective coding matrix (see **Table 2 below**) for the current study, following Scott’s guidance, this researcher identified 22 consequence categories from the original list of 33. These would later become major categories from which the core category and its properties was drawn (Wilson Scott, 2004). Properties, processes, consequences and contexts had to be chosen from the major categories, whereas the dimensions could be picked from the rest of the categories (Scott & Howell, 2008). Taking a step back and pondering on the study as a whole and what the participants had informed this researcher helped clarify his thinking on which dimensions of the reflective coding matrix the categories had to be assigned.

Given the relative flexibility of this step of the process (Scott & Howell, 2008), this researcher started by identifying the processes of the matrix as they helped shed some light on how the labour market disadvantage against Black African youth unfolded. *Self-presentation, Confidence, Bias, Choice, and Affinity* seemed to be the most prominent ways in which the phenomenon unfolded. This was followed by an identification of the consequence categories. *Social class and privilege, Eloquence in English over potential, Degrading and discrimination, Preference for ready-made* and finally, *Recruiting people like us* came out as the most dominant consequences. At this stage of the process this researcher had to pick a temporary core category from the remaining major categories. Once again, the researcher had to pause and think about the entire study to recall what was most mentioned by the study participants, specifically employers, as one of the main things that ultimately separated two evenly matched candidates, and that was *Relatability*.

Now that a temporary category had been selected, this researcher then identified *Social capital and mentorship, Education system, Emotional and mental state, Oversupply of labour and competition*, and lastly, *Situational empathy* as the context categories. After taking yet another moment to reflect on the newly assigned categories, this researcher was satisfied that they all somehow revolved around this idea of *Relatability* as the central theme of what the participants had to say. It appeared eight times as a consequence category plus a few additional times in relation to the other categories in the conditional relationship guide. It met the criteria set by Strauss and Corbin (1998) as cited in (Scott & Howell, 2008), that the core category has to appear many times in the data and also be a natural fit when related to the other categories in the matrix. Accordingly, this researcher was comfortable that this category became the permanent core category. *Culture-fit, Showing up, Trust, Not taking a risk and Chemistry* emerged as the strongest properties of the core category. The final step was arranging all the categories into five columns based on the relationships that were established in the conditional relationship guide, and thereafter assigning applicable dimensions selected from the remaining categories that did not make it as major categories (Scott & Howell, 2008). This exercise took multiple iterations with this researcher arranging and rearranging the categories to find sequences and interactions until he was satisfied that the final arrangement was the best representation of what his participants had told him. This also involved going back and forth between the reflective coding matrix, the conditional relationship guide, the

open codes, and source files to ensure that the full essence and context of what his participants said was not lost.

Scott and Howell (2008) guide researchers who are developing their reflective coding matrix to assign more abstract labels to the properties of the core categories because each label has to be descriptive of the nature of the processes, contexts and consequences in their respective columns (p. 11). Accordingly, this researcher abstracted *Culture-fit to Impression*, *Showing up to Impact*, *Trust to Credibility*, *Not taking a risk to Dependability*, and *Chemistry to Connection*. This abstraction process accords with one of the assumptions of this study of treating the researcher as a knowledgeable agent who was able to “figure out patterns in the data, enabling us to surface concepts and relationships that might escape the awareness of the informants, and that we can formulate these concepts in theoretically relevant terms” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 17).

The final step of the analysis process was selective coding. During this process the focus was on developing a compelling story line by demonstrating how the various elements identified in the reflective coding matrix interacted in a dynamic fashion (Scott & Howell, 2008) to converge on *Relatability*, thereby providing a theory that explained the structure and mechanism underpinning Black African youth labour market disadvantage, specifically as it pertained to their inferior employment prospects relative to their peers from the other race groups even when at face value they might seem to be similarly qualified.

## **16) Methodological rigour**

Unlike in quantitative studies where the concepts of validity, reliability and replication are widely accepted markers of rigour in a study (Maxwell, 2009), there is a plurality of views in qualitative research on how to demonstrate quality or methodological rigour in a study which can give confidence to other researchers in the integrity and accuracy of the results (Lester et al., 2020). This can pose a number of validity threats to the findings of the study (Maxwell, 2009) which may lead to its trustworthiness being called into question.

**Table 2: Reflective Coding Matrix**

Reflective Coding Matrix					
Core Category	Relatability and Chemistry				
Properties	<i>Impression</i>	<i>Impact</i>	<i>Credibility</i>	<i>Dependability</i>	<i>Connection</i>
	Culture-fit	Showing up	Trust	Not taking a risk	Chemistry
Processes	Self-presentation	Confidence	Bias	Choice	Affinity
Dimensions	Workplace norms and standards, High marks but poor articulation, Professional brand, Dress code, What to say, what not to say, Salary too low, Social and family support, No nurturing boss	Assessment of ability and potential, No science, Black culture of respect and humility, Self-esteem, Need to be probed, Panicking during the interview, White and Indian youth confidence, Cultural understanding	Preconception of a competent person, Structural barriers, Hiring people that look and sound like us, Good dresser, good speaker bias, Racial bias, Inability to identify hidden talent	Ready-baked, No handholding, Plug and Play, Difficulty in hiring and firing, Job requirements-based barriers, No people development culture, Apartheid legacy and exclusionary system	Decision-making rights, Gut recruitment, Similarity bias, Shared culture, Can relate socially and behaviourally, Chemistry, Understanding the person's context, Predominance of Whites and Indians in positions of power
Contexts	Social capital and mentorship	Education system	Emotional and mental state	Oversupply of labour and competition	Situational empathy
Consequences	Preference for ready-made	English eloquence over potential	Degrading and discrimination	Social class and privilege	Recruiting people like us

One of the most commonly used frameworks to establish trustworthiness or rigour in qualitative research is the one originally proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1989), (Forero et al., 2018; Maher et al., 2018). According to this framework, for a qualitative study to be trustworthy it needs to have *credibility* (measure what it purports to measure), *transferability* (the ability of the findings to be transferred to other settings), *dependability* (the process being described in sufficient detail to enable a different researcher to repeat the work) and finally, *confirmability* (the extent to which the researcher's bias is minimised by acknowledging one's positionality) (Maher et al., 2018, p. 3). **See Table 3 below.**

To ensure credibility of the current study, as a starting point, interview protocols (see **Appendix 1**) were developed and approved firstly by the research supervisor, who was veteran professor and seasoned researcher, and secondly, by the University's Commerce Faculty Ethics Committee. In addition, as a human research instrument, (Forero et al., 2018; Maher et al., 2018) this researcher's many years of experience in conducting semi-structured interviews enabled him to keep the discussions focused. The strategy of using experienced professional facilitators for the focus group sessions was yet another measure aimed at ensuring credibility.

The adoption of a purposive sampling methodology and the detailed account of the research context in which this study was conducted should enable other researchers to determine if the study can be repeated in other contexts (Maher et al., 2018), thereby demonstrating transferability. This researcher's choice to use professional transcribers to produce verbatim transcripts of the interviews and focus group discussions was intended to produce 'rich data' (Maxwell, 2009). This, together with a detailed account that has been given of the methodology tools that were used to analyse the study data should demonstrate dependability. Additionally, importing and analysing the raw data files on a software platform like NVivo provided transparency and an audit trail aimed at further enhancing dependability (Forero et al., 2018).

Finally, a combination of data sources (employers, youth work-readiness intermediaries and unemployed Black African youth), methods (interviews and focus group) and a triangulation strategy were utilised to counteract any threats of systematic bias, prove confirmability (Maxwell, 2009) and enhance credibility. Finally, over and above

explicating his research assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) and positionality (Pratt, 2009), this researcher kept memos (Lester et al., 2020) where he reflected on how his own views and values might have affected his interpretation of content shared by his participants. This was an additional measure aimed at ensuring confirmability through reflexivity (Van de Ven, 2007).

**Table 3: Methodological Trustworthiness**

Quality Criteria	Strategies Employed
Credibility	Approved interview protocols, Expert supervisor, Experienced interviewer, Professional facilitators, Data source triangulation
Transferability	Detailed research context, Purposive sampling methodology
Dependability	Rich data through professionally transcribed verbatim transcripts, Thick description of analytical procedure followed, Audit trail on NVivo
Confirmability	Data source and method triangulation, Reflexivity

## Appendix 1: Interview Protocol

### Interview Protocol - Employer

## Introduction

My name is Sifiso Mthembu. I am currently registered for an MPhil in Inclusive Innovation at the University of Cape Town's Graduate School of Business. I was prompted to enrol for this programme by the quest to gain a deeper understanding of the factors and dynamics behind the deepening crisis of youth unemployment in our country, particularly amongst Black Africans. My proposed study seeks to tap into the lived experiences of employers, employer association, youth employment intermediaries, and unemployed Black African youth to gain deeper insights into the factors that adversely affect the employment prospects of young Black African work seekers relative to their peers from the other race groups in South Africa.

The participants have been chosen based on their knowledge and experience of the topic. The interview will take a maximum of one hour. For the employers, employer association, and youth employment intermediaries, a semi-structured interview format will be followed, which means that the researcher will ask a set of questions prepared in advance, merely as prompts to stimulate responses from the participants on certain focus areas. However, participants will have the freedom to answer the questions as they deem fit. They will also be at liberty to choose not to answer any questions should they so wish. Whilst each participant will be asked to provide some information about themselves and their organisation, such identifiers will be removed to preserve personal and organisational anonymity when the study findings are reported. Each participant can request to see the transcript of their interview should they be interested.

The interview will be divided into four sections: some opening remarks, warm up questions, core questions, and finally, concluding question and remarks.

## Opening remarks

The researcher will thank the participant for agreeing to take part in the study and encourage them to relax and take the interview as a friendly discussion between two individuals, with no right or wrong answers. The researcher will remind the participant that they must feel free not to answer any question if they do not have an answer, or should they feel uncomfortable to respond to it.

## Warm up questions

- Tell me about your role and position in the organisation.

- Briefly describe your experience as it relates to the employment of young (below age 35) people.

#### Core questions

- Tell me about the attributes that you look for when recruiting young people into the organisation.
- How difficult are they to find among young applicants in general?
- How difficult are they to find among young Black African candidates relative to the other race groups?
- If they are harder to find amongst Black African candidates, do you have any insights why that would be the case?
- Organisations tend to have unique ways of identifying talent. In addition to the attributes you have mentioned, can you share with me other ways in which your company identifies young candidates that you believe are likely to be good hires.
- Have you observed any material differences in how young applicants of different races present and conduct themselves during the recruitment process, which tend to hinder or improve their chances of securing the job?
- Where young applicants who have applied for the same position have similar qualifications, experience, and assessment results, how is the successful candidate chosen?
- In your experience, what are some of the reasons that would explain why young Black African applicants tend to fare worse than their peers from other race groups in the job market, even in cases where they seem to be similarly qualified?
- Share with me how the employment decision making process works in your organisation as it relates to young people.
- In your view and experience, how do cultural differences between the job applicant and the final decision maker (employing manager) shape the employment decision, if at all?
- What are your organisation's strategies and preferred channels for sourcing young talent, and reasons thereof?
- Many companies have adopted Employment Equity policies to redress the injustices of the past, however, young white applicants appear to be more likely to be employed than their Black African peers, even when they have similar experience and qualifications. In your experience, what have you found to be the main reasons for this disconnect?

#### Concluding remarks

- The researcher will thank the participant(s) for their time and invite them to ask any questions they might have.
- The session will be considered closed.

## Appendix 2: Conditional Relationship Guide

Category	What	When	Where	Why	How	Consequence
<b>Affinity</b>	Commonality, Bonded by something	When deciding who to employ	Shared culture	Relatability and Chemistry	Cultural Affiliation	Recruiting people like us, Trust
<b>Apartheid legacy and exclusionary System</b>	Apartheid after-effects, Systems designed to exclude	Choice, Decision-making rights	Bias, Labour market and economy structured to exclude	Designed for an elite	Job Requirements-based barriers, Preference for ready-made, Degrading and discrimination	Oversupply of labour and competition, Social class and privilege, Preference for ready-made
<b>Assessment of ability and potential</b>	Cognitive and personality assessments	Oversupply of labour and competition	Choice, Culture-fit	Not taking a risk	Psychometric tools, Guts recruitment, no science, Need for Alternative assessment tools	Panicking during interviews or assessments, Education system, English eloquence over potential
<b>Bias</b>	Recruiter and hiring manager biases, Preconception of a competent person, Similarity bias, University bias, Qualification bias, Racial bias, Good speaker, good dresser bias	When setting Job requirements -based barriers, Not taking a risk, Decision-making rights	Choice, Eloquence in English over potential, Preference for ready-made	Untrained managers, Relatability and chemistry	Decision-making rights, Affinity, Situational empathy, Predominance of Whites and Indians in positions of power	Recruiting people like us, social class and privilege, Degrading and discrimination
<b>Choice</b>	Preference, choosing a candidate that is 100 percent for you	Deciding which candidates to recruit and employ	Job requirements-based barriers	Decision-making rights	Bias, Not taking a risk	Relatability and chemistry Affinity, Recruiting people like us, Trust
<b>Confidence</b>	Speaking out and being yourself, Ability to express and present one's views, Communication	Self-presentation	In the interview	Education system, Emotional & mental state, Black African culture of humility and respect	Panic and anxiety, Need to be probed, Showing up in an apologetic manner, White and Indian youth confidence	English eloquence over potential, Preference for ready-made, Culture-fit, Showing up
<b>Corrupt recruitment practices</b>	Bribery, and nepotism in recruitment	Oversupply of labour and competition	In Choice and Decision-making rights	Social capital and mentorship, Social Ills	Interviewing people as a formality, Bribery, unfair competition	Social Class and privilege, Emotional and mental state
<b>Culture-fit</b>	Alignment of values, How they look, how they talk, Professional brand	During the interview	In Showing Up, workplace norms and standards	Don't want to set them up to fail, No nurturing boss	Social and family support, social capital and mentorship	Self-presentation, Eloquence in English beats potential, Relatability and chemistry
<b>Decision-making rights</b>	How the final decision is made on who gets the job	When there are evenly matched candidates	Oversupply of labour and competition	Because they have a Choice	Affinity, Untrained managers Affinity, Relatability and chemistry, Bias	Not taking a risk, Recruiting people like us

<b>Degrading and discrimination</b>	Lower status and career prospects afforded to interns and learners, unconsciously disadvantaging good but inarticulate candidates	When making the Choice who to employ,	In the exercise of Decision-making rights, Culture-fit	Social class and privilege, English eloquence over potential	Untrained managers, Education system, Assessment of ability and potential	Recruiting people like us, Salary or Stipend too low, Bias
<b>Difficulty in hiring and firing</b>	Difficult to fire non-performers, Difficult to employ youth	When trying to dismiss non-performers or recruit the youth	In organisations	Because of labour laws and Protectionist trade unions	Taking employers to the CCMA, Opposing youth employment incentives	Preference for ready-made, Social capital and mentorship, Oversupply of labour and competition
<b>Education system</b>	Quality and direction of our education system, Model C, Private, Public, Different outcomes	When assessing ability and potential, During interviews	Self-presentation, Showing up	Apartheid legacy and exclusionary systems, Social class and privilege	English eloquence over potential, Confidence	Bias, Preference for ready-made, Showing up
<b>Eloquence in English language over potential</b>	Candidate's interview skills versus great calibre, eloquence in English, Choosing a more articulate candidate over one with better marks	During the interview	High marks but poor articulation, Culture-fit	Untrained managers, Bias	Assessment of ability and potential, Decision-making rights, Social class and privilege	Relatability and chemistry, Affinity, Recruiting people like us, Degrading and discrimination
<b>Emotional and mental state</b>	Depressed and mentally exhausted, Feeling useless, Self-doubt, Tired and demotivated, Excited	During their search for employment	Social class and privilege, Some unemployed Black African youth	Being unemployed, Corrupt recruitment practices	No Reasons for rejection provided, Structural employment and Job requirements-based barriers	Confidence, showing up, Panicking during interviews or assessments
<b>Job requirements-based barriers</b>	Wanting Afrikaans speakers, Minimum two years' experience for entry level jobs, Driver's licence, Requiring Honour's degree for entry level jobs	Choice	Emphasis on academics and high maths marks, Preference for ready-made	Apartheid legacy and exclusionary system, Oversupply of labour and competition	Bias, Predominance of Whites and Indians in positions of power	Affinity, Social class and privilege, Education system
<b>Not taking a risk</b>	Not taking a chance, making a choice that is 100 guaranteed for you	Oversupply of labour and competition	Job requirements-based barriers, Recruiting people like us	Trust, Choice, Bias	Decision-making rights, Relatability and Chemistry	Recruiting people like us, Preference for ready-made, Affinity
<b>Oversupply of labour and competition</b>	A lot of youth applying for too few jobs,	Assessment of ability and potential, A	Shrinking job market	Apartheid legacy and exclusionary	Education system, Job requirements-based barriers,	Social capital and mentorship Preference for

	Shrinking job market, Hypercompetitive recruitment market	lot of youth applying for too few jobs		systems, Lack of economic growth, Difficulty in hiring and firing	Protectionist trade unions, labour laws	ready-made, Not taking a risk, Choice
<b><i>Panicking during interviews or assessments</i></b>	Nervousness, Panic and anxiety	During interviews and assessments	Self-presentation	Inadequate preparation due to Structural employment barriers, Serious-faced panel, Emotional and mental state	Panic and anxiety, Emotional and mental state, Showing up	Confidence, showing up, Culture-fit, English eloquence over potential
<b><i>Predominance of Whites and Indians in positions of power</i></b>	Disproportionate representation, Executives are predominantly white, Positions of power predominantly occupied by Whites and Indians	Whenever Choice has to be made	Bias, Decision-making rights	Apartheid legacy and exclusionary system, Education system	English eloquence over potential, Social class and privilege	Recruiting people like us, Affinity, Relatability and chemistry, Situational empathy
<b><i>Preference for ready-made</i></b>	Preference for 'ready-baked' candidates Plug and play, 'Sink or swim', No Handholding	When setting Jobs requirement-based barriers	Bias, Social class and privilege	Oversupply of labour and competition, Difficulty in hiring and firing, Untrained managers	Eloquence in English over potential, Social capital and mentorship, Not taking a risk	Recruiting people like us, Relatability and chemistry, Choice
<b><i>Recruiting people like us</i></b>	We like to recruit people that look and sound like us	Choice, Decision-making rights	Bias, Relatability and chemistry	Affinity	Predominance of Whites and Indians in positions of power, Decision-making rights, Not taking a risk	Social capital and mentorship, Situational empathy, Trust
<b><i>Rejected with no reasons provided</i></b>	Generic system-generated rejection, Lack of feedback from assessments	Applying for jobs	Automated responses to applications	A lot of youth applying for too few jobs, CV format versus automated recruitment systems	Matching CV content to employer systems algorithms, Lack of Situational empathy	Not knowing what employers want, Emotional and mental state
<b><i>Relatability and chemistry</i></b>	Cultural affinity, Shared culture, relatedness, chemistry-fit	During interviews	Self-presentation, Choice	Affinity, Bias	Culture-fit, Social class and privilege, Situational empathy	Recruiting people like us, Eloquence in English over potential
<b><i>Salary or Stipend too low</i></b>	Salary on offer below applicant's expectations or needs	During and after the interview	Self-presentation, Eloquence in English over potential	Employer location and cost of transport, Family to look after	Structural employment barriers, Social class and privilege	Emotional and mental state, Culture-fit
<b><i>Self-presentation</i></b>	How to dress and conduct yourself in an interview	During the interview	Dress code, Too loose too tight, What to say and not to say in an	Social environment and family support, Social	Social class and privilege, Education system, Bias	English eloquence over potential, Preference for ready-made,

			interview, Showing up	capital and mentorship		Culture-fit, Confidence
<b>Showing up</b>	Making sure that your voice is heard, Knowing how to present your top skills	During an interview	Self-presentation	Social class and privilege, Education system, Emotional and mental state	Panic and Anxiety, Showing up in an apologetic manner, Confidence	Culture-fit, Relatability and Chemistry
<b>Situational empathy</b>	Can relate socially and behaviourally, Understanding a person's context	Self-presentation, Panicking during interview	Affinity	Relatability and chemistry	Social class and privilege, Predominance of Whites and Indians in positions of power, Bias	Recruiting people like us, Social capital and mentorship, Trust
<b>Social capital and mentorship</b>	Access to valuable social networks and mentors, Old boys networks. Relatable senior mentors	Getting a job because of connections	Oversupply of labour and competition	Affinity, Unemployment creates unfair competition	Vouching for white candidates by internals, Corrupt recruitment practices, Predominance of whites and Indians in positions of power	Relatability, Trust, Social class and privilege, Self-presentation, Confidence
<b>Social environment and family support</b>	Influence of community and family of employment prospects	Self-presentation	Showing up, Social class and privilege	Apartheid legacy and exclusionary systems, Education system	Self-presentation, Workplace norms and Standards, Social ills	Confidence, Culture-fit, Emotional and mental state
<b>Social class and privilege</b>	Candidate's social standing and privilege status, Classism, Privileged versus not privileged	Self-presentation	Confidence, Showing up	Bias, Apartheid legacy and Exclusionary System	Education system, Social capital and mentorship, Affinity Recruiting people like us	Culture-fit, Eloquence in English over potential, Relatability, Chemistry
<b>Structural employment barriers</b>	Spatial segregation, Cost of transport, Data and Printing costs, Lack of internet access	Poor preparation for interviews, Lack of money to attend interviews	Showing up, Salary or stipend too low	Apartheid legacy and Exclusionary systems, Social class and privilege	Predominance of Whites and Indians in positions of power, Lack of Situational empathy, Emotional and mental state	Panicking during interviews and assessments, Confidence
<b>Trust</b>	Having my back when the chips are down	Choice	Recruiting people like us	Affinity	Bias, Situational empathy	Relatability, Chemistry
<b>Untrained managers</b>	Line manager's inability to identify and develop hidden talent	Culture-fit and Self-presentation	Eloquence in English over potential	Lack of training and/or interest	Bias, Preference for ready-made	Recruiting people like us, Degrading and discrimination

## Chapter 4 - Findings

### 1. The context to Black African youth labour market disadvantage

There were a number of contextual factors that were highlighted by some of the participants which are important considerations when situating Black African youth employment disadvantage. Understanding the nature and impact of these factors was important because even though they might have appeared to be outside of the engagement process between a young job seeker and a prospective employer, they strongly influenced how their interaction played out.

The first issue was **low economic growth and the legacy of apartheid of structurally exclusionary and extractive economic and labour market systems.**

According to the study participants, the apartheid economic and labour market systems were deliberately designed to exclude Black people by catering for a minority elite at the expense of the majority of South African citizens. Peggie, a seasoned C-suite executive with a varied professional background, including considerable experience in the youth work-readiness arena, summed it up in this way, "*So, the first answer has nothing to do about the kid, about the youth. It's got to do about the economy. So, unfortunately, the economy has not been growing for decades. So, we know the last time there was per capita real GDP growth, I think it must have been in 2012. So, we haven't had growth a long time, which means the environment is very negative for jobs. Then the second thing we know about Apartheid is structurally, the economy was built so that it could run with 25% of the people. It didn't need the full team. So, there's a whole range of structural reasons why people are excluded*".

This view was echoed by Shamala, another c-suite executive with a rich diversity of experiences including working with hundreds of thousands of unemployed youth, majority of whom were Black African, in the youth work-readiness intermediary space. She said "*our systems have been designed to exclude, so they were designed to do three things. One is made to exclude some people, so it was designed for an elite, like I mentioned, an industrial era where people from elite universities with names and CVs, etcetera, got opportunities. So, it's an exclusive system by design. It also makes some young people in particular, in some areas in particular, particularly I would say women and working in spaces that are often seen as less remunerative, etcetera, like care work,*

*invisible by design. So, you don't see them in the economy, you don't understand what their skills are, you think that they're not qualified and competent, etcetera. And then lastly, that it's an extractive system.*

The second issue, which was a direct consequence of a stagnant economy in an exclusionary labour market, was the **oversupply of labour and intense competition**, especially, amongst the youth. Jill, probably one of the most experienced young talent sourcing specialists in the country, boasting almost two decades of experience in recruiting young people, mostly graduates, in financial services, remarked, *“But as we know, economic principle of scarcity. There's lots of jobs that are needing a very, very specific skill. There is a lot more youth than there is those jobs”*. Preggie shared this sentiment and opined further saying, *“So, you have a huge oversupply of labour relative to the jobs that you have. So, that's the problem. Okay. Then I would say the issue is then, in that environment as an employer, why would you employ anyone? So, the employers are going to be super selective about employing people. So, in a very competitive market, if you're coming from a background that doesn't give you the competitive edge, you're already going to struggle.”*

The third issue was the country's **rigid labour regulatory regime and protectionist trade union movement**. In an environment with such high levels of youth unemployment, one would be inclined to assume that it would be easy for employers to hire and fire people, thereby facilitating the creation of opportunities for new young talent to enter the workforce. However, this was far from reality according to Kumaran, a senior executive with extensive experience in engaging with authorities at the highest level of government and seniormost employers across a wide array of industries. Putting the blame at the door of protectionist trade unions who resisted programmes aimed at incentivising youth employment, Kumaran quipped, *“So, within that context, given that we have unemployment rate of 40-odd percent, youth unemployment rate of 70-odd percent, that sort of environment, we can't say that we're going to make it difficult to employ people. We've got to make it as less difficult as possible to employ people and those are the sort of discussions we are having. That, under certain circumstances, or in most circumstances, labour unions should not be conducting themselves in a way where they're patently protecting those that have jobs. That is their mandate. I accept that, but if you do that in a way that makes it very difficult for employers to bring into the labour market more people, then you're not actually dealing with the unemployment situation.*

*And so, under certain, so the youth employment incentives and so on, labour came out very strongly against that and we said, but why?"*

Similarly, he bemoaned the difficulties faced by employers, especially small and medium sized businesses, when it came to dismissing poor performers or misplaced employees without incurring the wrath of the law. The combined effect of these scenarios was that employers became a lot more careful and risk-averse about who they employed. Inexperienced young people were the ones more likely to be affected as a consequence thereof. Expressing similar sentiments, Peggie remarked, *"If I'm going to hire five people, I want the one who is going to be the least hassle for me. The least hassle, because they already know what to do and I don't have time, I don't have all the supervisors running around, I can't carry all this cost. So, the person who is, kind of, more ready and they've got a CV and they've got good references. Because I don't have time in a stressed environment to be running around to helping people or even worse, hire someone who is completely misplaced and then he takes me to the CCMA."*

The fourth issue was the country's **dual-stream education system and the disparate outcomes these two streams produced**. Whilst racial segregation of the education system (Baldry, 2016; Heintz & Naidoo, 2021) in South Africa was done away with with the advent of democracy, the system continued to be deeply divided between the private and semi-private school stream on the one hand, and the government controlled public school stream on the other. There were vast differences in the quality and outcomes produced by these two streams which shaped the employment prospects of their respective attendees in materially different ways. Remarking on this point Peggie stated, *"So, our labour market for the youth, you can split it from the schools into two, right? You've got the private school stream and you've got the public-school stream and they are two different countries. So, private schools in South Africa generate outcomes that are comparable to anywhere in the world. You come from a private school, St Stithians, St Johns, Roedean, whatever or any number of those schools, you're generally going to be equivalent to a kid from San Francisco, Tokyo, Brussels. You're coming from a government school and not what they used to call the needs or whatever they are, not the top government schools. You'll be coming from this as a bottom 65% of the schools, you are going to be in a very disadvantaged position"*.

At a more practical level, narrating a story of her observations of the performance of Black and White candidates in job interviews or psychometric assessments for job selection purposes, Nomonde, a local divisional head of human resources for a large global consumer goods company, commented, *“So, what I picked up was, there's two types of Black candidates or Black youth. There's the ones that came from what we call model C schools, your very affluent schools. Those candidates did exceptionally well. They did similar or the same as what their White counterparts would do. And this is attributed to the way they were taught in school. What are some of the things they went through, what are some of the programmes they went through? But someone who perhaps, might have gone to a, you know, and I use this word for lack of a better word, a Bantu education type of school, a public schooling system, where even though English might be a primary language, that's not really the reality. And then they get to go to university. That's actually, where they now start way behind to the other counterparts. I found they did far worse, because I read a study that said, on average, people that study in your Bantu education or your, let me say, Black schools, their language proficiency is down by 70% to your eloquent middle class or high and private schools.*

The fifth issue was **the social environment, access to mentors, networks and community role models, and the type of family support system** that different young people came from was cited as another factor with a big bearing on their chances of landing a job. Having people to look up to, and being able to interact with and learn from people with business or formal employment experience played a role in shaping a young work-seeker's level of preparedness and showing up in their engagement with employers. Unfortunately, for many historical and current reasons a lot of young people especially in the townships and rural areas did not have this benefit.

Tshego, an associate director responsible for human resources in a global consulting firm, had this to say about this point, *“So, the role models that we used to have are no longer there...I think when we're living in suburbs like this, we also don't see some of the difficulties that young people have in townships and in rural areas. So, if we use the same argument of role modelling and I live in a township. I mean, my parents still stay in a township. Sometimes I drive home during working hours, and I find lots and lots of people walking around on the streets on weekends. You know what it is. We all go to parties, we drink. You end up doing the things that you see around you. So, there's almost like that moral fibre that we used to have that is almost lost in society. And I think the difference*

*between back then in the days of Apartheid and now, is that you could look up to somebody. So, I think that whole thing of role models, we don't have it any longer and I'm not talking about role models of people that are famous. Role models have got to be in the community, people that you look up to and say, "I want to be like Mama so and so, because of one, two, three, four, five...I want to be like her, because I can relate to your journey. I can relate, because we come from the same background and for some reason you made it out of that background, and I can also do it. We lack that. And I think, some of the social ills are what is controlling us. And as a result, you do find that even the preparedness level of children that come out of the townships, of black children, is lesser than that of people that come from a different environment where there was a different type of focus, a different support".*

Making a similar point but with a stronger focus on the family support system dimension, Kumaran said, *"So, that mentoring, that family system, that values, for a whole range of reasons, pre-Apartheid what happened, post-Apartheid what's happening, in the Black African community and at the risk of generalising, amongst the majority of Black African people, that's broken down. So, that's the first point.....There's a whole lot of work to do to rebuild families, to rebuild family values. But the second issue is that one of the most critical issues about getting work is networks and examples and mentors. Right, now in many of our townships and so on, you know, where do kids get into networks? Their examples are more unemployed people, right".* As will become apparent later, the social and family context that young people came from was important in their ability to make the right impression in their engagements with recruiters and employers.

The last contextual factor to touch on is what has been referred to as **structural employment barriers** which many young Black African work-seekers encountered on a daily basis. It was not this researcher's intention to rehash what scholars (April, 2021; Graham et al., 2019; Graham & Mlatsheni, 2015) have already written about in respect of what these barriers were and how they complicated many young Black African's efforts to secure employment. However, in honour of the phenomenological foundations of this study, this researcher did want to shine the spotlight on the lived experience of some of the study participants and the nuanced manner in which these barriers shaped their labour market reality and employment prospects.

Remarking on this point Shamala said, *“And then perhaps a third set of factors, I think, which are probably a lot more nuanced and complex and arranged from a different, you know, on different levels, is that there are so many barriers for a young person in South Africa today to find work and to keep work. And they range from transport. I mean, spatial disaggregation in South Africa, because of Apartheid, meant that people had to take several taxi rides to get to work or even to find work. That's expensive. That's money young people don't have. People have to have money for printing or money for data and costs like that”*.

Shamala's point was echoed by most participants in both the matriculants, and graduates focus groups who expressed facing a lot of difficulties in raising money to buy data to apply for jobs, and for transport to attend interviews. As one transport and logistics graduate put it, *“For me, it is data or Wi-Fi. Like, not having access to the internet is one of the challenges, because for us we are staying—for me, where I'm staying, there is no internet or there's no Wi-Fi access. You have to buy data in order to send out those CV's and emails. So, this is and we're unemployed. We have to like constantly ask our parent, “Mum, dad, can you please buy me data?” Yeah. And then I feel like I'm a burden to them”*.

The data cost or lack of wi-fi access issue was raised by many participants in both focus groups. Its impact was very real and was touched on by some of the employer participants. Reshma, a strategic human resource manager in a financial services institution who had been specialising in recruiting young talent for almost two decades, had this to say, *“A simple thing like applying for a job, we have a lot of bandwidth to apply. It takes a lot for a young talent to actually be able to purchase data, which is quite expensive in South Africa, to do an application online. And obviously, if I apply and my documents aren't looking as professional, I actually don't even get through, because my documents aren't—I mean, we do have individuals that when they submit documents, we don't always see the documents, because most of the time they're doing it through their mobile phone. Not all recruiters will call and say, “I don't have your CV. Please can you send it to me?” And very likely the reasoning behind us not having this CV is due to them when they were uploading it, something or the other with bandwidth or data has occurred. So, they do face additional challenges”*.

Beyond just complicating access to the labour market, which in itself was a significant issue, spatial segregation and the other structural employment barriers that have been cited

further undermined many young Black African candidates' chances of securing employment in an array of other less visible yet equally insidious ways. Firstly, it was through the emotional and psychological impact that these struggles tended to have on affected young people. One participant in the matriculants focus group said this, "*Job hunting is depressing. Everything. Waking up in the morning, going to the internet café, you spend every cent you have to look for a job. We don't have money, but you have to spend money to get a job. That's why it's depressing*". Another one echoed this view, saying, "*Job hunting is mentally exhausting. You get this expectation that if I go look for a job everything will be fine, maybe if I use this last money I have it doesn't matter. God will provide, I'll find a job. And at the end of the day, you don't find anything, and you start doubting yourself, like, what's wrong with me?*"

Feeling depressed and on the verge of despair was a sentiment that was expressed quite strongly by the majority of candidates in both focus groups. In the matriculants focus group, the researcher asked the participants to share how they were finding the job search experience, and how they were feeling as a result thereof. Busisiwe, an 18 year-old recent matriculant who was new to the job market said she found the whole experience exciting and that even the lack of response to her applications that she often encountered was part of the excitement. Almost in unison, the rest of the group burst out in laughter, with Mimi, a 23 year-old who had been looking for a job for five years, saying, "We have all been there". As the researcher, it was saddening to witness the jadedness and cynicism shown by the participants in response to their much younger and less 'battle-scarred' fellow job seeker's excitement. Almost every other participant expressed feeling depressed and mentally fatigued due to their job search experience. "*For me, it's been stressful, discouraging. Waking up in the morning and sending out CVs, and then getting a rejection, that's very stressful. That can cause a mental exhaustion. You get mentally exhausted,*" one said. Another said, "*It's very, like they said, depressing, discouraging. When you're fresh out of high school, it's really exciting because it's a new day. But when you start having responsibilities and you actually have to maintain yourself on your salary and expenses, it gets... Because of that pressure, it gets depressing, because you constantly have the rejection letters or rejection emails*". Mimi simply said, "*Job hunting is mentally exhausting*". Puleng said "*Waking up in the morning, going to the internet café, you spend every cent you have to look for a job. We don't have money, but you have to spend money to get a job. That's why it's depressing*".

This was the general state of mind that a lot of young Black Africans found themselves in. Perhaps the story that best captured the impact of unemployment on young Black Africans was the one that was shared by a finance graduate who was part of the graduates focus group and had recently found a job. She was narrating a specific encounter she had with a recruiter: *“I remember when I was unemployed, there was this one recruiter who met me on LinkedIn. And he did advise on the job and then he said he would call me. But I remember, to be honest, when he called me, I was affected psychologically and emotionally by being unemployed. And when he called, to be honest, I was not ready. It was not on his fault. And I remember he even said, Xxxxxxxxxxxxxx, please just find out what is it that you want to do. Because right now, it seems that you are not sure. And I can't recommend you to that company, because you're not going to survive. And that was true. And that's when I started to actually start doing research and start seeing, where am I going wrong. Because I felt like I didn't know what I want as much as I had the qualification. So, I had to look deep within. What is it that is wrong with me? I started doing research. I started—I couldn't even answer a question about myself. Who are you? I couldn't answer that. Because I was literally very affected negatively by being unemployed. I, kind of, allowed that experience to consume me. But when I started just letting that go and saying, you know what, it's going to happen at the right time. Let me start asking myself, what is it that I want to do? It can't be just praying about it, applying, but me myself, what is it that I want to do? What impacts do I want to make? Which direction do I want to go? Yes, I do not know right now what is it that I want to do exactly. But at least which field do I want to be in? In what kind of company? It started opening me up to actually having that sort of light, seeing the light. And I remember, that's when I actually got other interviews and I was able to actually speak. And then I started improving and being able to say, oh, this is what they want. And then I think it did allow to land me a job. I think it did have an impact after finding out what exactly that I want”*.

A candidate's emotional and mental state was pivotal and as it will emerge later on in this chapter, affected how they presented themselves and how they were received by an employer during an interview.

The second area of impact of structural employment barriers on affected young Black African candidates was with regard to interview preparation and performance which was compromised because of struggles with internet access and connectivity. Lebo, a senior group leadership and human resource development specialist in the logistics sector - who

had recruited and developed scores of young people for almost two decades - made this observation: *“And you know, this is really my experience and I found that because the White and Indian potentially has access to the internet, they are more likely to come prepared. So, having an understanding of what the organization is about, what the organization does and what the role that they are coming for is about. And when I look at also, our own people, the Black youth, I've picked up a lot of, you know, they are coming to the interview, but there is no understanding what the job is about, what the role is about, so a lack of unpreparedness, especially in rural areas, which you could attribute to the lack of internet, the lack of facilities and possibly a grandparent or an aunt would have applied on their behalf at that point when they saw the XXXXXXXX ad. So, the lack of unpreparedness clearly comes through quite a lot”*. Anxiety and extreme nervousness induced by a lack of, or inadequate preparation was mentioned by many participants as the biggest issue they battled with during interviews and assessments. One matric participant went as far as stating that she had even fainted during an interview due to extreme nervousness.

Lorna, an experienced human resources director working for an international consumer goods company, shed light from a slightly different angle on how she had observed the impact of these structural barriers on the performance of Black African candidates. She said, *“Because you can see sometimes a child will come in with very high marks and then you wonder, why can't this child articulate themselves? And maybe you don't think, maybe they're just intimidated for that moment. Maybe they had to walk five kilometres to get to a taxi before, and they've been awake for four hours. It took them four hours to get to this interview. You don't think about it, because the other child was dropped off by their mom to the interview”*.

Thirdly, the concern about the high cost of transport in getting to and from the place of employment dominated the minds of many young Black African candidates to the point that they would start expressing minimum salary expectations at inappropriate times during the recruitment process thereby creating a negative impression in the mind of the employer, which might end up jeopardising their prospects of securing the job. This exact point was made by Nomonde when she said, *“But also, they ask the most inappropriate questions like, “So, how much is the money? Because I'm not willing to go for less”. And at a very early stage. “The distance is too far. So, I can't take a low, minimal salary”*.

*And this is at the beginning of the interview, probably when they still have maybe one or two interviews. And if you don't have mature interviewers, off the bat, they're going to think, Oh, no. "We don't want this candidate because all they focus on is money"'*". In the focus group discussions, many participants confirmed even missing out interviews they had been invited to due to a lack of transport money. Others said they turned down job offers or decided not to apply for jobs because they felt that most of it would be swallowed up by high transport fares and they could not afford accommodation that was closer to work.

It was evident that there were many pre-labour market challenges which adversely conditioned many young Black African candidates' emotional and mental state and interview preparation, and that is if they were even able to find money to attend the interview in the first place. These contextual structural constraints foreshadowed many young Black African work-seekers' labour market experience and performance in material ways, and they imposed on them an additional burden that candidates from the other races and more privileged backgrounds seldom had to contend with.

In the next section, this researcher will present his findings on how the employment decision-making process unfolded as revealed by the employer participants in the study. This process is particularly important as it will shed light on the key question of the study namely, how do employers decide who to offer the job to when there are two or more similarly qualified and experienced candidates, and more importantly, why, and how young Black African candidates find themselves at a disadvantage relative to their peers from the other races in this process?

## **2. Relatability: The hidden force behind Black African youth labour market disadvantage**

Establishing how employers separated competing young candidates who were evenly matched on objectively measurable human capital characteristics such as experience and academics, to name but two, was the crux of this study. When probing the employer participants on this question, the most dominant theme that came through from most of their answers was *relatability*, which they broadly defined as a sense of connection, chemistry or relatedness that a hiring manager felt towards a particular candidate driven by perceived similarities, often based on some shared experience, social standing, race or

culture. Speaking directly to this point, Fundiswa, a veteran human resources practitioner who headed up the human resources function for a telecommunications network company, said, *“I mean, I don't know whether it's proven, but I know that we like to recruit people that look like us. We can relate and not because we are racist or anything, but we can relate. If a person of colour joins an interview, I can relate to them, especially if they speak vernac. I'm like, “Oh, my goodness. They're, you know”, and the conversation is smooth and I think it's the same. And in our business, unfortunately, because our business is mostly white, we find that we hire more white people”*.

Puleng, a human resources director in a specialised financial services company said, *“I find a lot of what happens here, boetie, is leaders will hire people based on, I enjoyed that conversation or it was easy or there was a certain relatedness. But when you look at the scoring sheet, you find the other person who maybe was not as talkative actually responded better, right, to the competencies. Tshego added a different dimension but still pointing to relatability as the crux of the issue, “I think maybe to answer, so the hiring manager's race doesn't necessarily influence the race of the person that they need to hire. What I do think may influence who they hire is, almost like, I don't want to call it a social standing of some sort. So, it's like, I can relate to this person. Like, for example, if a person comes from a very disadvantaged background and you cannot relate to that person versus a person who went to a model C school here, people are more inclined to go with the latter. Because I can relate to you to some extent. So, I think there is almost like a social standing thing that will probably influence. So, it might not necessarily be from a racial perspective, but can I relate to you? Can our worlds relate to each other? And I don't know how to describe it, but I think there is that that I've seen”*.

Valerie, an experienced campaigner with multi-industry experience, who was in charge of a human resources function for a telecommunications company, simply put it this way: *“I think it's a human flaw, right. We like to work with people that we like. We like to work with people that we can relate to and we like to work with people who are somehow like us”*. This view was shared by Reshma and Lorna as well. Underling the role of chemistry, Reshma said, *“I think sometimes— look, we do have a structured interview questionnaire, which helps to ascertain the skill sets are met. But if you have two individuals where they both have the similar or same experience, so the non-negotiables, the mandatory requirements are both met for both of them, what would be that deciding factor*

*sometimes? It is that chemistry fit. It is the person that I would feel I would get on more with-versus the one I feel I wouldn't get on more with”.*

It was interesting that the word “relatable” and its various derivatives was used by so many employer participants without it being used as a direct prompt by the researcher. The process through which relatability manifested itself unfolded in a number of ways in the interaction between the candidate and the employer during the interview. What was important to note about this evaluative process was that it was informal, unwritten and did not feature anywhere in the job requirements or specifications. Accordingly, this meant that unless a candidate had been trained in interview skills, they were generally not likely to be aware of it and, consequently, could not prepare for it. In any case, as it will be apparent later, even if a candidate might be aware of these extra-specification considerations, there was not much they could do about some of them because it might be factors beyond their control.

### **3. The unfolding of Relatability**

Five key processes emerged as being amongst the most important considerations that influenced employer candidate choice when everything seemed to be evenly balanced. These were **self-presentation** (*how the candidate is dressed, speaks and presents him or herself in an interview*), **Confidence** (*how assuredly the candidate expresses themselves, comes across, and engages the interviewer(s)*), **Bias** (*recruiter and/or hiring manager’s preconceptions of what competence looks and sounds like in a candidate*), **Choice** (*the freedom enjoyed by the hiring managers to employ candidates based on their preferences*), and finally, **Affinity** (*a familiarity or connection due to a shared culture or common experience between the candidate and the hiring manager*). In the next section there will be a short examination of each process, its dimensions, contexts, and consequences.

#### **i. Self-presentation**

The interview was normally the first opportunity where young candidates got to meet and interact with employers, face to face, be it in person or via some virtual audio-visual platform. Shamala said that there were norms that *“the professional world has set up that cater to people who, as I mentioned earlier, you know, either speak model C English or have a certain persona and appearance”*. This was confirmed by Puleng who said, *“I*

*think there's an innate assumption that people know what they need to do to show up well for an interview. So, how they're dressed, how they show up, you know, those are some of the things that our hiring line managers are biased towards". Lorna took this point further talking specifically in the context of dealing with young and inexperienced candidates and said, "And even then, you know, you are recruiting candidates directly from university. So, you know they don't have the skills, the knowledge, or the skills of the job. So, what you're looking for is people who can actually fit into the organisation. And what this translates to is, how do they speak? How do they look? Because you're looking for a fit. Will they have that professional brand that we are selling to clients? But I also worked in a factory, you know. I worked at Xxxxxxxx, and there also, you're looking for people who are not like the people who irritate you in the organisation. For example, I was looking for other shop stewards, because the shop stewards are a pain. So now, you're looking for people actually according to what you think will make your life the easiest in the organisation. So, that fit becomes very subjective."*

Speaking on the importance of how young people presented themselves in an interview, Nomonde remarked, *"The third one is, how do you present yourself on the initial interview? And that's a big one. And the reality is, I don't know if I want to call them millennials, when sometimes they come into an interview, it's not about wearing a suit or not wearing a suit. It's also about your posture, it's about your confidence, it's about knowing that certain attires are not to be worn, obviously in an interview. It doesn't have to be a suit. You can wear just a plain black and white. You can see somebody who's prepared and who's been taught versus somebody who just comes in a crop top and a very revealing top. And now, let's say you, unfortunately you're interviewing with actuaries, who are sticklers for these things. And the first thing that comes to their minds, "Oh my God. This person is going to go see our clients"*.

Reshma and Puleng also spoke about the high value placed on candidates' physical appearance by hiring managers in organisations they had worked for. As important as a candidate's physical appearance and dress code were as part of how well they presented themselves in physical encounters with prospective employers, many young Black Africans who came from the type of social environments described earlier in this chapter were likely to 'fail' this seemingly obvious test for more than one reason. Speaking about her experience in this regard, Shamala said, *"I think, my own experience, both with*

*Xxxxxxxxxx and with Xxxxxxxxxx, is that most of the time young, excluded Black youth don't have experience of people who have had formal jobs in their families. So, it's not like those norms are easily available to them. So, it is not like it's a tacit language that's hard to understand. So, how do you show up for an interview? ... it's surprising how many young people don't have access to what is— I mean, whether or not that is professional is one question, but people end up expecting, you know, to turn up in a specific kind of outfit".* Reshma added another dimension to this, saying, *"And unfortunately, those coming from the lower LSM, so previously disadvantaged backgrounds ... They do have some of the social and economic factors that influence their personal brand. You know, dress attire, sometimes is also it. They generally, you know, from my background, previous background on the grad side, generally they would have hand-me-down corporate clothes that they would be wearing. Sometimes too big, too loose, too tight. Unfortunately, that's what they have available.* The issue of affordability was also raised by Nomonde as one of the factors influencing the choice of interview outfits for some of the candidates.

The second dimension to candidate self-presentation was as Jill put it, "knowing what to say and what not to say in an interview". Once again, a candidate's social and educational background mattered a lot here. Jill pointed out: *"So, for example, I've interviewed African candidates from UCT who know exactly what to say in an interview, and they're proactive in showcasing all of these competencies and abilities. They've been immersed in this environment of exactly how to present themselves in an interview. And then there's candidates that came from Northwest University, for example. And they're so unaware of what to say and what not to say. And they will often make blunders about, if you're in a business unit interview, you can't admit to too much. "Oh, I failed the subject, because I went out partying with my friends the night before". I've heard that sometimes".* Nomonde gave the example mentioned earlier in this chapter, where some candidates started speaking about minimum salary expectations at inappropriate times in the interview. Both Jill and Nomonde ascribed candidate performance differences on this dimension to interview training, meaning, whether or not the candidate had been trained or coached on how to do interviews.

The final dimension to self-presentation was how fluent and articulate a candidate was in the English language. Surprisingly, many employer participants indicated that a candidate's eloquence often superseded academic results in importance as an indicator of potential, in the minds of many hiring line managers, even though much emphasis was placed on academic record when dealing with inexperienced young work-seekers. A story by Tshego illustrated this point very well. She said, *"I remember there was this young chap. I think he was from Venda. He'd gotten, it must have been seven A's and I think he was doing nine subjects... Absolutely, for maths, higher grade, by the way. But that interview just completely went pear-shaped. So again, you do find people from an academic perspective, they are great, but they cannot express themselves. So, it's a mixed bag and you have to be open-minded when you look at this for you to say, "I'm not only looking at great marks. I'm looking for potential. I'm looking for somebody that we can shape." Because it's not only marks that will, yeah"*. This sentiment was shared by most employer participants. Giving her take on this point, Lorna said, *"And most interviewers, unfortunately, are not trained to look past some of these obvious physical appearances or even just the way people sound. Because you can see sometimes a child will come in with very high marks and then you wonder, why can't this child articulate themselves? And maybe you don't think, maybe they're just intimidated for that moment. Maybe they had to walk five kilometres to get to a taxi before and they've been awake for four hours. It took them four hours to get to this interview. You don't think about it, because the other child was dropped off by their mom to the interview. So, there's too many strokes against black children in our own country that we sometimes, as interviewers, we act like we don't want you here"*.

Sometimes Black African candidates could pick up the "we don't want you here" signal from recruiters. Sharing her experience on this, a transport economics Honours graduate who was in the graduates focus group said, *"And then another thing is the anxiety, you know. How recruiters respond to you. Other recruiters, honestly, they are rude. Others are not friendly at all, because others will just ask you questions and then they don't smile, they don't do anything. They will just look you into the eye and then at the end of the day, they will say that you must make an eye contact with the interviewer, but how can you make an eye contact with someone which is serious? Like, you can't even make a joke or laugh, you know"*.

Speaking on her observations, Reshma said, *"If you speak, I call it the Queen's English*

*[Laughter], irrespective of what you said, people tend to want to believe you, because you are eloquent in your vocabulary, whereas somebody could be completely brilliant, but they cannot articulate themselves. They're put at a disadvantage and unconsciously, you may discriminate against them".* Introducing the class angle but still reinforcing the same theme, Valerie said, *"Recently, you do see a slight change from a classism point of view, you know, with those ones that went to multi-racial schools and what we call model Cs now. They're a little bit more advanced in how they present themselves than your traditional Black kids. But for all intents and purposes, we are most likely to take a Black child that presents themselves better than someone else, even when they have good marks, hey!"*.

The conflation of eloquence and cognitive ability also came through in what Puleng had to say, *"A lot of our clients at the Xxxxxx is the old, dominant, corporate SA. So, you know, they want the confidence that they're going to put somebody in front of a client who can speak English very well, who is polished and somebody who's got, you know, that high cognitive ability"*. Just about all the employer participants in the study stated that most young Black African candidates, excluding those with a private school or former model C education background, often struggled to express themselves "correctly" in English, and that counted against them in the end. Making this point, Lorna said, *"You know, children from disadvantaged backgrounds, they don't speak—their English doesn't quite flow or roll off their tongues as children from advantaged backgrounds or children who went to private schools or semi-private schools or the so-called ex-model C schools. So, that becomes a hindrance for them, as well as also the interviewers. Because they just can't articulate themselves as well as the other five, we've just seen before them"*. Responding directly to this researcher's question of how, in her experience, companies decided between two similarly qualified young applicants, Nomonde put it succinctly and said, *"The reality is you choose the one that spoke better in the interview, because it's all about that"*.

Part of the problem here was that many hiring managers were not trained in what Puleng referred to as the "art and science" of recruitment, especially how to identify hidden talent in young and inexperienced candidates. Reshma said it this way, *"I think, maybe the corporates that I come from don't always, because they're fast paced, they don't always take the time to always run proper management training courses to individuals. I am*

*brilliant at quants and actuarial. You're assumed to be brilliant in recruiting. And that's not the case. I think core programmes need to be in place to upskill managers to be better managers. Particularly when it comes to recruiting, particularly when it comes to identifying hidden talent. Managers, I think sometimes they do, you know, how the person looks, how the person sounds, inherently you tend to want to find people like you, because you resonate well". This was echoed by Lorna who said, "most interviewers, unfortunately, are not trained to look past some of these obvious physical appearances or even just the way people sound". Rounding this off, Jill noted, "I think, through the interview process, I find that maybe employers don't understand what they're necessarily witnessing, but the kids that are trained how to interview, they would have had access to that kind of process. And often, what interviewers find to be a great calibre applicant, is just a student who's been taught how to answer interview questions. And I can easily tell you that interviewing graduates from UCT, you know exactly that those kids have had all the access to that process versus interviewing a really bright, high potential student from the University of Limpopo, who've had none of that privilege. You have to be able to recognise potential in both, but unfortunately many employers miss the boat, potential versus interview skills".*

Lorna noted that in many instances young job applicants tended to have limited experience, which often meant that employers had to find other ways to determine suitability and fit. In responding to the question of how they went about this process, many varied answers were given by the employer participants. Some (Lebo, Lorna, Tshego, Nomonde and Jill) said they used psychometric tools that test personality, cognitive ability and potential. However, others said they did not have any formal process outside of an interview to assess ability and/or potential when recruiting young people. Fundiswa said, *"But from your responses, we then are able to determine if yes, we want to continue the conversation with you and then kind of take it to the next step. But there is no science behind it. I mean, we're not advanced as a company. We don't do psychometrics".* Valerie said, *"With the youth it's mostly, it's guts recruitment, if that makes sense. Guts recruitment, in the sense that you can tell someone has potential based on how they've answered some of the questions".*

The reported lack of hiring and talent identification skill amongst line managers coupled with a general lack of use of scientific methods in youth recruitment within corporates

was concerning, especially in the light of numerous biases that seemed to dominate their recruitment and hiring decisions as will be seen later in this chapter. This widespread type of decision-making in youth employment was indefensible, as Jill opined. She said, *“I don't think, any decision and recruitment is defensible based on an interview. It just isn't. I don't care how structured the interview is. You know, audit-trail wise, if you do not have some kind of scientific data gathering method, you should fail. And especially when it comes to potential”*.

## **ii. Confidence**

Many employer participants in the study cited a candidate's *confidence* in an interview as a prominent factor influencing who was ultimately offered the job. “Showing up” was quite a commonly used phrase amongst employer participants when describing how they were able to pick up confidence in a candidate. When talking about confidence, they were referring to how a candidate “shows up” and their ability to communicate and express themselves freely without needing to be prompted. Jill spoke about a candidate’s ability to showcase and present their top skills and competencies. Explaining how this plays out in an interview, Lorna said this, *“Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, if your mom is a cleaner or your dad is a gardener, you are not exposed to certain life experiences or certain conversations that a child with a slightly more exposed, educated parent has with them. I don't want to say critical thinking skills, because that suggests a little bit more high capability. But just the way they understand a question or the way they answer a question, it's less detailed. Let's make it simple. Just their self-esteem and self-confidence, you kind of sometimes have to prep a child up to then say feel free, feel comfortable, you know, consider this just a conversation”*.

Carrying on along the same theme, Nomonde explained how this worked against Black candidates, *“I still found that the Black youth or African youth struggled far more than your White counterparts. And I think, with things like exuding confidence in the interview, being able to articulate, I think what they were thinking, if you were patient enough to dig deeper, you would get the response. But the reality is, you have an hour's interview to assess the person, you have three people in the panel and everybody wants to jab at the interviewee, and there's not enough time to probe”*.

Alluding to a cultural dimension that might manifest with respect to the observed lower confidence levels amongst young Black Africans, Valerie said, *“It’s in the confidence levels, it’s the communication. So, if I were to interview an Indian young kid here, I don’t need to probe for answers, for instance. Whereas with an African child, you find either they—I don’t know whether it’s a respect thing or it’s a culture thing. So, they don’t just come out and speak out and feel that they can be themselves in front of adults, as it were”*. In the Methods chapter, the researcher spoke about the slow start to the two focus groups as a result of low engagement levels from the participants initially. At the beginning of each of the two sessions most of the participants were soft-spoken and appeared to be shy. However, as the sessions progressed, and with a fair amount of encouragement from the respective facilitators, most of them found their voices and became a lot more engaging and proactive in raising their points to such an extent that both sessions concluded much later than foreseen because they suddenly had more to share. Understandably, in a job interview situation, where there would be time pressures and many more candidates to see, employers would demonstrate much less patience than this researcher could afford to in the focus groups sessions.

The cultural dimension to confidence was also touched on by Puleng who said, *“I have to tell you, man, there’s this cocky confidence that White applicants have and I can’t explain it. There’s assurance, a confidence, you know, they walk in with this, yeah, man, this set thing that I’ve got, you know, I’ve got the job and a certain humility on Black applicants that sometimes actually doesn’t work for them. Now, if you are not culturally competent, it’s easy to forget the person who is more humble and quiet out of respect, because you’ve enjoyed the conversation with the other person so much because they were at ease, you know. So, I think sometimes that can be misconstrued”*. Similar to Puleng’s point contrasting the confidence of young Black African candidates with that shown by their White counterparts, Fundiswa said *“I think there’s a certain level that you get from White boys and girls of confidence of, their ability to just be able to have a conversation. Even if it’s a mediocre conversation, they are able to hold their own. I mean, they will talk to you as if they know what they’re talking about, whereas they know nothing. And you will see, it’s about how they show up. And I think with our Black youngsters, they have not been groomed to be able to have a voice and to not care what the next person thinks about what they— it’s their opinion”*.

Apart from a candidate's cultural background, confidence levels also seemed to be influenced by their neighbourhood, educational and socio-economic backgrounds. Fundiswa said, *“As an example, so we will find that we have youngsters here at work who come originally from Soweto, but then moved to, let's say, Randburg, Bryanston and they then got exposed. So, they went to a model C school, they're much more confident, they interact and engage in a different way. So, they've elevated themselves. So, their level of showing up is much better than the youth that I'm talking about, that is mostly from lower LSM. ...so they completed their matric in a JSS school in Soweto, as an example. So, we haven't seen— there's very few, not that we haven't. I'm just thinking of another employee that we have. The majority of the ones that grow up in more affluent areas do show up. They do have a level of confidence, but in some instances, not as much as the white people”*.

It would appear that differences in observed *confidence* levels between young Black Africans and their White counterparts persisted well beyond the interview stage into the post-recruitment stage. Talking to this point, Fundiswa, said, *“I used to work for Xxxxxxxx (an investment bank), it's similar. You'd find a trader, a White boy trader and a Black boy trader and they would be just as good, but when we would do talent reviews, the feedback about the Black boy would always be like, there's something about him that's missing. And I never used to understand that something. What is something? But now that I've been in corporate for much longer and I understand, something is about showing up. It's about making sure that your voice is heard and interacting, engaging with people at different levels, and I think sometimes the Black boys and girls are not as confident and not all the time. I mean, you would find those that have the gift of the gab and don't struggle and it's only a small percentage. And I'll say, in my interaction, just here at Xxxxxxxx, we probably, that percentage is 10%. The rest struggle. They kind of feel like this is not their real home. I mean, it's like, yes, they are here, because they're working and they're showing up in an apologetic kind of manner, and I don't know if I'm making sense”*.

### **iii. Bias**

Shamala eloquently defined bias as “preconceived notions of who is competent or not”. Lebo stated that recruiters hold many biases which affect how they deal with job

applicants and candidates. Lorna said these biases were “subjective”, and almost all the employer participants said biases were hidden and unconscious. Virtually every employer and youth work-readiness intermediary participants spoke about the dominant role played by biases held by the recruiting and hiring manager in the employment decision. Biases cited by most of these participants as being particularly common in this process included university and qualification bias, good dresser-good speaker bias and similarity bias. Racial bias did come up once or twice, but always with a qualifier. Narrating a typical experience she sometimes witnessed in her organisation, Jill had this to say, *“We send through a transformed pipeline of applicants and the business units and I think this is where the biases come in. Of course, race is in there, but it’s, “Oh, but I want them to study the degree I’ve studied and I want them to go to the university I went to.” So, we’re going to dig a little deeper, but basically what we’re going to show is, here are the pipelines that were sent to these business units. That’s the selection that was made. So, I think often, people need to be made aware of all of those biases and it is a mixture of biases*

The four studies referred to in the Introduction chapter which examined Black African youth employment disadvantage all made inferences to racial discrimination as a possible underlying reason. In the current study, this researcher found that while racial bias was mentioned as one of the factors that influence the final decision on which young person gets the job, none of the employer participants specifically singled out racial discrimination or racism as *the* underlying reason for this thesis’ central focus. Many participants emphasised that biases tended to be hidden and escaped the consciousness of the people who held them. As per one participant, Lorna: *“Why are Black kids the most unemployed? Because human beings cannot remove their biases from recruitment. And unfortunately, biases are unconscious. So, sometimes we’re not even aware of the biases you are applying when you’re busy recruiting for people”*.

Reshma made this observation: *“So, again, one of the things we find is individuals like hiring people that are like them. You know, same schooling, same background, same experience. We also find that you have a job, but you have a person to replace. Managers tend to want to replace the person that’s left as opposed to replacing the job...And that is key and critical, because the person may have an MBA. The job doesn’t require an MBA. The person may speak Afrikaans. The job doesn’t require Afrikaans. So, those are aspects*

*that we do have. This practice, especially the Afrikaans requirement in job advertisements, was cited by most participants in both focus groups as an exclusionary factor that they regularly encountered when applying for jobs. One graduate focus group participant had this to say: “If you can’t speak Afrikaans, you’re not going to go through. So, for some of us, for example, in the school that I went to, we did Afrikaans up until grade seven, but in grade eight up until matric we didn’t do Afrikaans, so we forgot, to be honest. And we’re not an Afrikaans speaking school. So, then, that does pose a barrier into you getting absorbed into the job market. Narrating a story of a personal experience on this topic a matric focus group participant said, “I was in an interview for a school assistant, and they wanted someone who speaks Afrikaans. I think that’s why I wasn’t called back, because I said, I don’t know Afrikaans. At my school, we don’t learn Afrikaans, just our African languages. They don’t take into consideration that you know English, you can speak English, they just want Afrikaans, you must speak Afrikaans”.*

A strong theme that came through from many employer participants as an explanation for what appeared to be racialised employment decisions was that generally people liked recruiting other people who looked and sounded like themselves, with the phrase “we like to recruit people who look like us” coming through almost word for word, from no less than six employer participants. Illuminating this point further, Lebo and Nomonde shone the spotlight on the demographic composition of the management structures in a typical South African corporate and the power dynamics therein. They both made the point that senior and top management positions in South African organisations were occupied mostly by Whites and Indians, which gave them decision-making powers and thus had the final say on who got employed within areas under their control. They observed that managers used their power to employ candidates who looked and sounded like themselves. Quoting Lebo directly, *“In corporate South Africa, when you look at the statistics, they show you the positions of power are predominantly occupied by White and Indian. So, when we come to recruitment biases and the fact that people recruit what looks and sounds like them, in terms of my experience, I have found that line managers who are decision makers, who are White, Indian or Black are the ones that are making the business decisions to recruit people that look and sound like them. And that’s why there is this ongoing recruitment of Indian and White graduates, because the people that hold the power around the decision making in corporate still remain the White leaders”.* Similarly, Nomonde said, *“So, you look at financial services, bulk of C-suite, which is*

*executives, are predominantly White male, who have a lot of other White males, but maybe a trinket of a Black female there or black male, a trinket of a White female here. But then what will happen is that level will hire another level that's exactly like them.*

Commenting on the same phenomenon, Reshma said, *“You see in the Ops [Operations department] world, we see a very different view compared to that in IT and Actuarial and Quants. And again, the Ops view, the managers there are predominantly African and EE [Employment Equity], whereas in the Quants, the managers there are mainly White. Now, I don't think people purposely do it. I do think there's a lot of unconscious bias”*. Similar views were also expressed by Fundiswa and Puleng. These findings indeed confirmed that a candidate's race played a role when the final selection decision is made. However, as opposed to being driven by a conscious intent to discriminate against a particular race, it was more an outcome of an interplay of unconscious biases held by the recruiter or the hiring manager, influenced by their own race, and enabled by the positional power that they possessed. Given the relative underrepresentation of Black Africans in positions of power within South African corporates, a consequence was that young Black African candidates would tend to lose out when they were up against similarly qualified white or Indian candidates.

#### **iv. Choice**

At the beginning of this chapter, the researcher demonstrated how the country's stagnant economy and exclusionary labour market system combined to exacerbate youth unemployment, leading to intense competition for the few positions that did become available. The biggest winner in that scenario was the employer because they got to pick and choose who they would or would not employ. The study employer participants said that it was quite common to have well over 5000 applications from young people competing for a 100, or less, entry level positions on the graduate programme. Puleng made this point: *“You know, my team and I will go, they will source, they will bring 5,000 CVs, but at the end of the day, the person who makes the hiring decision is not HR. It's the line manager. And you can see that the line manager makes the decision based on their own biases, their own view of the world”*.

When the researcher asked every employer participant who had the final say on which candidate would be employed in the case of two more evenly matched young candidates, everyone said it was the hiring line manager concerned. The rationale given was that

ultimately, the line manager was the one that would account for that decision. Ravesh, a veteran human resources director in a consulting engineering firm, answered the question this way: *“So, when you talk about responsibility, the panel is responsible for the interviews, for the identification, for the selection, for the recommendation. So, the panel will recommend (researcher’s emphasis) to the hiring manager, who’s part of the panel, “We think Sifiso is a better candidate than Ravesh. These are the reasons why.” And by virtue of the credibility that comes with the decision making, in terms of the tests and the assessments and the role plays, the hiring manager will then be held accountable for the hiring of that individual”*. Interfering with the line manager’s discretion to make the final decision often had unpleasant ramifications for the ‘imposed’ candidate as Puleng explained: *“And so, what we’ve also experienced is where we have forced and pushed that certain individuals be hired, it ends up so bad. What do I mean? The poor grad comes in and you can see they’re not even given a chance to learn. So, that dynamic, for me, is such a big part of why we are struggling with getting this right”*.

Jill’s earlier example of how biases infiltrated hiring line manager’s decisions showed that the exercise of choice did not start in the interview when they were faced with the deadlock between two similarly qualified candidates. Rather, it started much earlier on in the recruitment process when a vacancy opened up, or when the need to employ someone new was identified. In describing their preferred candidate choice, employers would use words like, *“ready-baked”*, *“sink or swim”*, *“plug and play”*, amongst others, to justify their exclusionary decision. Jill explained it this way, *“But as we know, economic principle of scarcity. There’s lots of jobs that are needing a very, very specific skill. There is a lot more youth than there is those jobs. So, companies are going to take the route of, “Let’s take someone who’s ready baked.” It’s easy plug and play, so I think that’s absolutely happening. But those are the flagship grad programmes. And maybe this is controversial, I think, you can’t only just force companies to take the longer route”*. Puleng made a similar point, *“So, you know, for them, they want somebody who will plug and play. I hate that statement, by the way. Literally in five days. And plug and play means, Puleng can speak well, I can put her in front of a client, she can hold her own, I don’t have to spend two years, you know, coaching and helping her”*.

Earlier Shamala expressed a view that the labour market in South Africa was exclusionary and designed to cater for the elite, with CVs boasting qualifications from prestigious

universities. Nowhere was her point clearer than during the process of hiring manager choice-making. Candidates' socio-economic class patently shadowed the hiring manager's articulation of their preferences. There were varying levels of subtlety demonstrated by the employer participants when talking about this issue. Giving her take on racially divergent employment outcomes amongst youth, Jill said, *"So, the racial skew, I suppose, comes into the fact that majority of African candidates will be the ones coming from less privileged backgrounds or less high calibre universities... I would say definitely, there is, it's the privileged versus not privileged, more than race. But yes, absolutely. More of the African, Coloured candidates are kids that come through. They get bursary schemes, so even if they do end up at UCT, you will see a difference"*.

Valerie pointed out it out in a more pragmatic manner, saying, *"I think it's important also to note that there's also a certain level of almost, call it classism, that also comes with how we recruit. I explained to you I'm in the telecoms industry, where our industry is fast-paced and very complex and often we work late. And if someone lives in Alex[...ander township] and they need to take taxis and they need to be out of the office exactly by 4 o'clock, versus a young intern who can Uber around or is using mummy's car, who are you going to take? It's almost like it's a no-brainer. As much as you feel sorry for the other one, but the person who's going to come in and be able to drive around and drop the files and do what needs to be done, without complaining about the bus is leaving me or I need to go home and fix this, I don't know how to position that, but that element also does come in at some point, sadly"*.

Ownership of, or access to private resources such as smart phones and vehicles was another way candidates from higher socio-economic background gained an edge in the employment arena over their competitors from more modest backgrounds. Valerie advised, *"But right now, as a technology organisation, unfortunately we do expect that our candidates come ready to enter the technology industry. So, they must have a smart phone, they must know how to manipulate systems and so forth"*. Adding the dimension of social and behavioural challenges encountered by candidates from lower socio-economic background, Reshma said, *"You know, simple, how do you time keep? You know, some of the roles, it becomes important around ensuring that I come to work early. I have to rely a lot on public transport. So, how do I ensure that when it rains or when the Gautrain, load shedding happens that I still am able to get to work in time? That my brand is not affected. My personal brand is not affected. And unfortunately, those coming*

*from the lower LSM, so previously disadvantaged backgrounds, don't have the luxury of cars. They do rely on public transport”.*

Socio-economic background influenced the employment decision beyond just pragmatic considerations by activating recruiter and hiring manager biases of what competence “looks and sounds like”. Lorna made this point, *“When a poor child walks into a room, they have a look about them. They sound it. So already, they walk in with a few strokes against them unintentionally, which are quite obvious also for the interviewers. And depending on who the interviewer is, do you have a level of empathy, do you have a level of understanding, to then see through these things?”*. Puleng put it much more directly and said, *“I mean, it's not like we don't hire Black people. We do hire Black people, but like I said, they tend to be very polished. We only want the creme de la creme, you know, not a sense of people who are struggling, babuya eThema [they come from Thema township], you know. So, I do think that social class then probably comes into play”*.

At the end of the day, how the line manager arrived at his or her choice was probably the most illuminating part of the entire process. Explaining how this worked, Jill said, *“So, for example, actuarial managers prefer to hire actuarial students versus someone with a maths and stats. In some roles that's valid, some, but for many, it really isn't. A statistical degree is perfectly adequate for the role, but because I'm an actuary, I understand what actuaries can do. I prefer an actuary. So, it's a preference and because you have the choice, you make the choice that you know is a hundred percent for you. You're not going to take a chance to take a risk. Or I went to the University of Pretoria, I know what that degree at University of Pretoria has and that professor is brilliant, because he taught me. This is much more guaranteed”*.

According to the employer participants, many South African corporate environments were not nurturing for most young Black recruits. Speaking to this point, Puleng said, *“And (at) the xxxxxxxx, we've got a lot of technocrats, a lot of experts, people who, you know, leadership development and understanding that my role as a leader is to develop people is not our core DNA. We've got lots of experts, specialists. And so, I think some of that line manager bias is influenced by that, to be honest. Lorna made a similar point, advising that “And even sometimes when you even take that child, who you know did not do well, but this child is smart, you want to find them a boss you know is going to nurture*

*them and is going to bring out that best in them. And if you know that there isn't such a boss at the current time who is recruiting, then you know you can't set them up for failure. So, then you don't place them.*

The sentiment of rejecting young Black African candidates for 'their own good', i.e. not wanting to "set them up for failure", seemed to be quite common. In each of the examples that were shared by the employers, the underlying cause for it was the lack of interest or ability among line managers to develop young people with raw potential. Nomonde said it this way, *"So, if you know they might not be the candidate themselves, but if you know you have a culture of people who don't want to teach people from scratch, and you know this candidate has to go through a lot of learning, you might not want to take that candidate, because you know you're going to set them up for failure. They're going to come, they need a lot of training, they need a lot of development, but you know your leaders don't do that. Then they turn around and say, I've got us a candidate that's not sufficient. And again, this is a different topic, but it ties into this. Sometimes it's not the candidates, but it's the inability of leaders and people that train these students or these youth in the organization, who are unwilling to teach somebody from scratch"*. Once again, this is an illustration of employers who are spoilt for choice and who, consequently, have no interest in investing time and effort to develop certain types of talent. Providing a rationale for this Jill said, *"And maybe this is controversial, I think, you can't only just force companies to take the longer route. It might take two years to develop that youth that needs more development and completely scrap the programmes and go, okay, let's take someone who's top of their game. I think there is a place for growth and at the end of the day, it is business, so you do need to be able to also take on the skills that add value within six months as opposed to 18 months"*.

The way choice was exercised effectively meant that hiring line managers had a blank canvass where they could pretty much pick and choose any candidate of their choice without restraint. As illuminated, recruiter and hiring manager bias featured quite strongly in their determination of a suitable candidate and filtered through to the job requirements specification. In addition, as shared by many employer participants, there was a strong role played by short-term considerations such as wanting candidates who were "plug and play", "ready-baked", and could "hit the ground running", etc., together with an unwillingness to invest in young talent development, in the final choice of the successful candidate.

## v. Affinity

Affinity or what Lorna called “similarity bias” was highlighted as the last process that played out albeit, informally and unconsciously when the hiring manager was trying to separate equally balanced young candidates. Lorna shed a little light on how this happened: *“Because let’s be honest also, when you are recruiting young kids, sometimes when they’re all kind of okay, honestly, I could give either one of them a job. Then you start looking for the reasons not to give the other ones a job, instead of reasons why to give the other one a job. Because you know what? On paper, they’re quite similar, to be honest. Now, you find yourself saying, “Oh, I see you come from somewhere. Where did you study?” Or “Who was your teacher there?” You know, you’re looking for reasons to connect with this person on a more familiar level. And when you find that, then almost instantly this person has a leg up on the other children”.*

Preggie said affinity required there to be some degree of a bond between the two individuals. He cited shared culture as an example of a bond that can often tilt the scale in favour of the candidate if he or she hailed from the same race or culture as the hiring manager. In making his point, Preggie recalled a story from his previous corporate experience when he and his colleagues were listening to a former CEO (a White Afrikaans man) of an asset management company that was listed on the local stock exchange, explain how culture was the secret to his business success. In Preggie’s mind this translated to the gentleman justifying only employing White men. Reflecting further on this experience, Preggie said, *“And it’s like the culture. It’s the culture. And I’m like, yeah, so the culture means that all of the Afrikaans White dudes basically”.* He elaborated and said, *“But I do notice it is a big thing and I thought initially, I was very offended by that guy’s comments. I told people afterwards, you know, that’s the problem. And then after a while I realised, you know what? It’s not so ridiculous, because in his world he can see through the issues much more easily, that there’s kind of an affinity and I notice it’s not only White Afrikaans guys, but it’s different race. It’s not everyone who does this”.* Carrying on further: *“So, the extent to which people are bonded by something matters a lot. So, obviously the most crude thing, like you might think, oh, if I sit with an Indian person I’ll be bonded. I’ll probably have very little in common with an Indian person compared to you. In my own mind, I don’t see my identity, but for some people it’s a big deal, so they will revert to that. So, that’s why you would tend to find, let’s say, if there’s*

*three people applying for the job, but the employer's the same race of one of them, that one has an advantage, all things being equal. Because when the chips are down there's certain points you get for shared culture".*

Affinity appealed to the same biases that were at play when hiring managers gravitated towards people who looked and sounded like themselves. The cultural affiliation that conjoined the hiring manager and candidate tended to invoke situational empathy in the manager because he or she could understand and relate to the candidate socially and behaviourally. Shamala made this exact point: *"I think situational empathy is really important, and I think some of that comes from cultural affiliation and understanding the context that a young person and a young work-seeker comes from".*

Puleng also touched on the above when she said, *"And I find a lot of what happens here, boetie, is leaders will hire people based on, I enjoyed that conversation or it was easy or there was a certain relatedness. But when you look at the scoring sheet, you find the other person who maybe was not as talkative actually responded better, right, to the competencies. And so, this is the other thing about hiring decisions. It's an art and a science, right, because the chemistry has to be there as well. And you have to feel like you can work with this person. And I think that's where maybe the Black applicants lose out, to be honest, unless they are being interviewed by somebody who's Black, who can relate, who can understand, who can see, oh, okay, no, I see myself in this individual, you know. But as I mentioned, a lot of our senior leaders are what? They're White".*

Incidentally, a couple of the participants in the matriculants focus group also spoke about this very point. One of them shared about the experience he had when was still employed. His employed employer insisted that he had to be at work at 7 o'clock every morning, and he battled to do that because he lived far from the office and his salary was not enough to enable him to find a place closer to work. He ended up spending a lot of money on e-hailing vehicles that would pick him up from his house and drop him off at a central place to catch an early metro bus that would bring him to work on time. In response to this story, another participant stood up and said, *"For me, I think the focus should not be on actually teaching the young, Black youth on how to find employment, but it's actually to create employment. I think that route will work better for us. Because I feel like most employers, which is managerial, your top-level management, is not people like us, so they*

*don't understand what we go through". He went on to say, "So, they expect you to do certain things that might hinder you in some form, so I feel like if there are more African top management, they would understand. Okay, Sipho comes from the township, this is what happens, or today there's a strike. Because sometimes employers, some employers don't care if there's a strike, and the roads are blocked. They want you to be at work. So, if your employer is like you or comes from the same place as you, I feel like he or she will be more understanding. So, the focus should not be on how to get employment, but how to create employment".*

The issue of Black African youth being disadvantaged by the underrepresentation of Black Africans in senior corporate structures has far-reaching implications as Puleng explained. She said, *"From the smart, Black graduates we get, I mean, they can also hold their own. But, you know, I still think that there's a huge diversity, inclusion, belonging kind of, below the waterline dynamic that we tend to deal. Because a lot of our youth, all of our under 30 young professionals are Black. So, mostly African, but we've got mostly Black, Black African, but we've got Indian, Coloured. And a lot of them will often say they can't relate to senior leadership, because they don't see themselves up there. So, the White and Indians will quickly find coaches and mentors, if I'm making sense, informally. Not ones that are being pushed by HR, but informal leaders will say, I'll look after you. And then what we find as a void is then the Black African gradua[tes] we've brought in tend to be the ones who are floating around with no formal mentorship or support, because there's a sense of, they can't relate to anyone at the top, really".*

Affinity, often strongly influenced by race and class many participants said, undeniably influenced candidate selection. Moreover, as per Puleng's story above, it also had a bearing on who among recently employed young people would be affirmed through mentorship opportunities, among other things.

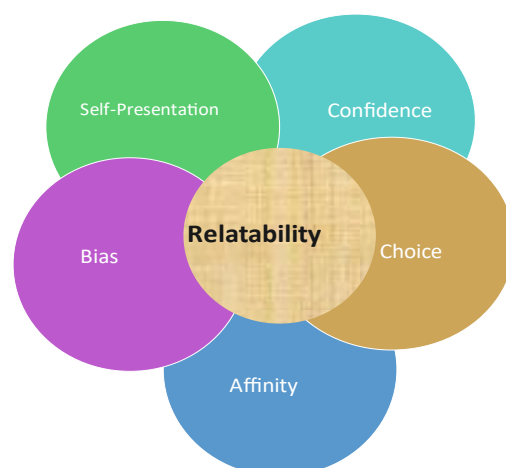
#### **4. The Interactivity of Relatability Elemental Processes**

The five processes highlighted above were not mutually exclusive, but instead, they interacted with one another in a dynamic manner, combining to ultimately converge on *relatability*, which was the central phenomenon revealed by this study. **See Figure 4 below.** It all began when a candidate presented him or herself for the interview. The way they were dressed and how they expressed themselves was evaluated against

predetermined, albeit unspoken, norms and standards which were mediated by preconceived biases held by the recruiter and hiring manager regarding what a competent person looked and sounded like. To the extent that a candidate was well-dressed and came across in an outspoken, expressive, and self-assured manner, underpinned by eloquent self-articulation in the English language, which was often influenced by their socio-economic standing, it triggered biases, affinity and chemistry that made them relatable to the hiring manager, thereby gaining an upper hand over their competitors.

This would happen against the backdrop of candidates coming from vastly different social environments with markedly divergent levels of social capital and unequal educational outcomes, compounded by facing untrained hiring managers who had neither the ability nor the inclination to identify hidden talent in candidates due to their general preference for the ‘ready-made’, facilitated by an oversupply of job seekers. The absence, or inconsistent use of scientific methods to identify potential in young candidates, coupled with racially skewed corporate demographic profiles and power patterns enabled the race dynamic to influence the final employment decisions where two or more candidates could not be separated on objective selection criteria.

**Figure 4: Relatability Elemental Process Diagram**



## Chapter 5 - Discussion

### **Bridging the Gap**

The current study owes its existence to the theoretical and methodological gaps in some of the dominant perspectives in the literature on labour market inequalities. The assumption of equity and meritocracy as the default settings of the labour market, together with the supply-side focus of human capital-centric theories, meant that they were methodologically incapable of explaining racially disparate labour market outcomes where there were no measurable differences in human capital endowments between competing job candidates (Roscigno et al., 2007). The consequence of this was that the significant residual that remained unexplained was putatively ascribed to discrimination (De Lannoy et al., 2018; Roscigno et al., 2007).

The inability of the proponents of the race theory to prove racist intent (Berard, 2008), and account for the endurance of racialised labour market inequalities even when racist ideologies in society seemed to be on a significant decline (Bonilla-Silva, 1997) limited the usefulness of this theory in helping us better understand the phenomenon under study. Lastly, the over-reliance on structural explanations by the proponents of institutional racism theories (Roscigno et al., 2007) and their failure to explicate the theoretical mechanism of how labour market discrimination practically unfolds in everyday interactions (Bonilla-Silva, 1997) has often meant that the agency of individual players within institutions in the labour market is overlooked (Berard, 2008; Roscigno et al., 2007).

Instead of juxtaposing the institutional or structural explanations of racialised labour market outcomes, on the one hand, against the more individual-centric ones, on the other, a more integrative perspective that weaves the two together is perhaps a more holistic and helpful way of analysing this phenomenon (Jeske, 2020; Roscigno et al., 2007). This is exactly the approach that has been adopted by this researcher when undertaking this study. The paucity of data in the literature on the role that employer behaviour, preferences and decision-making processes play in creating and sustaining racially disparate employment prospects amongst the country's youth has created a knowledge gap which the current study has sought to help close, albeit, in a very modest way.

It is this researcher's submission that this study can contribute to what is known about the phenomenon under study at three levels. Firstly, it has endeavoured to extend current knowledge on the impact of macro-contextual factors, such as structural employment barriers, on Black African youth unemployment by focusing less on how these impede labour market access because that perspective has been covered quite extensively in the literature (April, 2021; De Lannoy et al., 2018; Graham et al., 2019). Instead, this study has sought to illuminate how pre-labour market challenges compromise the performance of affected Black African candidates in their engagements with employers thereby scuppering or delaying their employment prospects. Secondly, through the development of "*Relatability Theory*", this study has attempted to contribute, once again in a modest way, to the theoretical understanding of the centrality of employer preferences, decision-making processes and power structures in the creation and sustenance of Black African youth labour market disadvantage. Thirdly, from a praxis point of view, the study hopes to contribute to existing scholarship on this topic by highlighting the conceptual shortcomings of many youth employment initiatives that currently dominate this space and why they are not likely to catalyse sustainable and systemic change. Hopefully, this will plant the seed for the emergence of a more demand-side focused social innovation youth employment movement aimed at agitating for employer targeted transformation.

### **1. The emasculating reality of unemployed young Black Africans**

One of the defining features of apartheid was the forced removal of Black people in general, and Black Africans in particular, from urban areas and confining them to remote townships and far-flung rural areas situated far from places of commercial activity and employment (Heintz & Naidoo, 2021). The adverse legacies of this carefully designed race-based spatial segregation policy are still evident to this day, and they continue to materially affect the lived experience of millions of Black African people who still live in these areas (De Lannoy et al., 2018). The high costs of transport, lack of affordable internet connectivity and more recently, unreliable power supply with no affordable alternatives for the majority of the citizens of the country are amongst the inarguably structural employment barriers faced by unemployed Black African youth on a daily basis in their quest to find employment (April, 2021; Graham et al., 2019). The debilitating effects of unemployment on the emotional and mental health of the youth are well-documented (de Witte et al., 2012; Thern et al., 2017). What has not been as widely covered in the literature is the combined effect of the structural employment barriers and emotional and mental state

of young Black African work-seekers on how they show up in their engagements with employers and the impact thereof on their employment prospects, which this thesis engages with in, hopefully, helpful and insightful ways.

The current study has revealed that apart from significantly restricting their access to employment opportunities, structural employment barriers undermine the efforts of affected young Black African candidates in the following ways: Firstly, some employer participants in the study cited poor job interview preparation amongst many young Black African candidates as one of the reasons for their poor showing in comparison to their peers from other race groups. This was confirmed by quite a few focus group participants who conceded that sometimes they would attend interviews with little or no preparation at all. They blamed this on factors like ‘load-shedding’ and inability to research the company and the job because of lack of access to the internet due to affordability or poor coverage in the areas where they lived. Secondly, many of these participants said that attending interviews knowing that they were not adequately prepared filled them with extreme panic and nervousness which often severely impacted their interview performance, eroding their confidence already prior to the interview. One participant even stated that she once fainted during an interview due to extreme panic. Finally, confirming existing theory and scholarship, the overwhelming majority of both focus groups’ participants reported being severely affected, emotionally and mentally, by unemployment. They used words like “mentally exhausted”, “feeling useless”, and “depressed”, amongst others, to describe their current state of being.

In the Findings chapter, many employer participants spoke at length about their observation that, compared to their White and Indian peers, most young Black African candidates often tended to exhibit much lower levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, which worked against them being employed. Nomonde, Valerie and Lorna expressed frustrations with the lack of detail in responses by many young Black Africans in interviews, often requiring to be probed for clarity, which was not ideal given the time constraints that usually characterised such interactions. On the contrary, White and Indian candidates were generally found to display more confidence, be more expressive and forthcoming in their responses, which ultimately gave them an upper hand.

Expanding on the importance of candidate *confidence*, Valerie said, “*I think to my point earlier, we look for confidence in self, we look for the ability to express and present. You cannot be shy, you cannot afford to be shy and it’s in the basic things. In a group of people, stand up and introduce yourself. Some people battle with basic things like those, you know. Who are you, where do you come from, why are you here today, what are you hoping to achieve? So, some kids are not even able to articulate that*”. The earlier point that she was referring to is when she was bemoaning African candidate’s low confidence levels, and the respectful demeanour that they tend to exhibit in their interactions with prospective employers, which she found problematic.

An important question is why do Black African youth seem to struggle to exude confidence and express themselves with ease in their dealings with employers? The answer lies in the emotional and mental state that many of them find themselves in. A difficult social environment characterised by high levels of crime, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, family instability and the absence of role models are a daily reality that weighs heavily on the wellbeing of many Black African youth. The story shared by the finance graduate in the findings chapter perfectly illustrates, almost as if it was in direct reference to Valerie’s statement above, the severe emotional and psychological impact unemployment has on many young Black Africans. It decimates their self-confidence and self-esteem and locks them into an inescapable vicious cycle where they find themselves unemployed because of having low self-confidence and self-esteem and having low self-confidence and self-esteem because of being unemployed. Feeling this way compromises the ability of many of them to show up and present themselves in the best way possible when they finally have chance to engage with employers in an interview setting (Mlatsheni, 2021). Clearly, in a highly competitive labour market where employers value candidate self-presentation and confidence way more than potential, many of these young people have a slim chance of landing a job in their current state of mind and social context.

## **2. The fallacy of meritocracy**

One of the central tenets of the human capital framework is the primacy meritocracy in the labour market where those with the best credentials have the strongest competitive advantage (Tan, 2014). This assumption seemed to ring true even in the current study in the opening stages of the interviews with employer participants. In response to this researcher’s question about what they deemed most important when recruiting young

people, at the top of the list of all employer participants was the candidate's academic performance. The rationale they gave for this was that most young candidates did not have work experience, therefore as Jill put it, "*the definition of a high calibre graduate goes down to academics, because that's really the most obvious sign*".

However, this assertion was to prove untrue as the discussion with each employer participant went deeper. As reported in the Findings chapter, many employers conceded that, in reality, there were other considerations that superseded academic achievements when they were making the final decision about which young applicant would be employed. The story shared by Tshego about the "young chap" from Venda is a good case in point. This story was not an exception by any means, as we subsequently heard from the majority of the employer participants. This admission quickly put paid to the notion that merit, based on objective measures, is always the primary deciding factor on which candidate prevails in a competitive labour market. This was an apposite segue into the conversation about how employers went about making the final decision when they were faced with two or more young candidates who were evenly matched on objectively measurable criteria. As revealed in the previous chapter, *relatability* was cited by most employer participants as the swing factor.

### **3. Decoding Relatability**

As a quick reminder, *relatability* was broadly defined as a sense of connection, chemistry or relatedness that a hiring manager feels towards a particular candidate driven by perceived similarities, often based on some shared experience, social standing, race or culture. Five processes were said to be the main vehicles that signalled candidate *relatability* to the hiring manager. These are candidate *self-presentation*, *confidence*, *recruiter or hiring manager bias*, *choice*, and *affinity*. The employer participants informed this researcher that whilst the consequence of relatability was often that the hiring manager would most likely employ someone from their own race, the motivation behind the decision was not necessarily racism. This begs the obvious question, i.e., if relatability is race-agnostic, at least in its character, then what is it about it or its processes that leads to racially disparate outcomes among young employment candidates?

Starting with *Self-Presentation*, virtually every employer participant emphasised the value and importance placed by hiring managers on the way a candidate is dressed and speaks.

Shamala stated that there are workplace norms and standards, albeit “tacit”, that dictate what tended to be preferable (although questioning its necessity) dress code and way of speaking. One can understand the importance of a candidate having to show up dressed in a suit for certain roles and in certain industries, because of what Lorna referred to as the company’s “professional brand”. However, in a country that is marked by severe wealth and income inequalities that are so deep that it has been dubbed the most unequal society in the world (The World Bank, 2022), affordability or access to “professional” attire is out of reach for many Black African young people as was alluded to in the previous chapter. Nomonde, spoke of a charity institute that she knew of that lent formal outfits to young people who needed to attend interviews. Clearly, a young person who has to go there to borrow clothing to wear to an interview has no luxury of picking and choosing the best looking or fitting outfit. Given the fact that most Black African people are located at the bottom of the country’s economic ladder (April, 2021), it follows that they are the ones most likely to be affected by this reality.

The way a candidate speaks is another, and arguably more important, dimension of *self-presentation*. In the Findings chapter, a detailed account of how a candidate’s ability to articulate themselves impressively in English during an interview trumped just about all other considerations in the minds of recruiters and hiring managers was proffered. A dominant theme was that, in this respect, the scale was tipped heavily in favour of young candidates with a private school or “Model C” background. In South Africa an employer can legally discriminate against a candidate if they can prove that such ‘discrimination’ is an inherent requirement for that specific job (Employment Equity Act No. 55, 1998). However, in the study it was evident that candidate eloquence in English took precedence just about over every other consideration, irrespective of the type of job being recruited for. It was a clear case of substance over form, where more value was placed on how articulate a candidate was than the essence of what they were saying. This is yet another area where White and Indian candidates generally had an advantage over most Black Africans because, as Lebo noted, they are able to express themselves “correctly” in English given that for many of them, it is their home language.

Candidate *confidence* is another factor that employer participants said affects how *relatable* prospective employees are perceived to be, thus shaping employability prospects between competing young candidates. It was interesting to hear various explanations proffered by employer participants as to how they were able to detect *confidence* in a

candidate during an interview. Some of the key takeaways from their observations were firstly, that many employer participants believed that they could detect a candidate's confidence from how they "showed up", and how freely they engaged and expressed themselves without having to be probed for details. Secondly, they said that White candidates (and in some cases, Indian candidates) had "innate" confidence or what Puleng referred to as "cocky confidence" about them, even when, as Fundiswa observed, they might not know what they would be talking about. Thirdly, they said that young Black African candidates, generally, struggled as Nomonde put it to "exude confidence". A few employer participants cited the "African culture" of respect and humility as a possible reason for this.

A few additional observations were made by employer participants in respect of Black African candidate confidence levels. Valerie, Nomonde and Fundiswa said that they had observed that Black Africans who attended what they called Model C or "affluent" private schools were a lot more confident than those who came from the mainstream public schooling background. Fundiswa introduced the neighbourhood angle as yet another factor that seemed to influence confidence levels, saying Black African youth who were raised in formerly White neighbourhoods were generally a lot more confident than those who grew up in townships or rural areas. However, she also pointed out that even in cases where some young Black African candidates came from a similar educational and social background as their White peers, they still tended to lag behind their White counterparts in the confidence stakes. This seemed to suggest that self-confidence was cultivated in certain environments, namely, affluent neighbourhoods and schools which were historically, and in some instances still are, White dominated. To the extent that a young Black African candidate had not had exposure to such environments, then they were likely to be perceived as not being confident.

The third process through which *relatability* appeared to be transmitted was recruiter and hiring manager *bias*. Just about all participants in the study spoke about the dominant influence of implicit bias in the employment process. As detailed in the Findings chapter, recruiters and hiring managers were said to possess many biases, most of which escaped their conscious awareness. Whilst no employer participant suggested that racial bias was the most prevalent and dominant bias of them all, the combined effect of the other biases, which individually might appear to be race-neutral, such as university bias, qualification bias, good dresser/good speaker bias etc., often led to job requirements specifications that

were so narrowly defined that they ended up producing racially skewed outcomes. For example, Jill and Reshma informed us that hiring managers often went as far as specifying that they wanted candidates with specific qualifications from specific university faculties just because of a particular professor there who might have taught them when they were students themselves, ignoring candidates who had the same or similar qualifications just because they were not exactly the same as what they themselves possessed. This, combined with other biases such as “must be Afrikaans speaker”, had an effect of excluding many Black African candidates who would otherwise qualify.

With respect to **choice**, hiring managers effectively had a ‘blank canvas’ to design a ‘made to order’ specification of a candidate or candidates that they were likely to find most *relatable*. Falling just short of specifying the race of their ideal candidate, because hiring people based on race other than for affirmative action purposes was illegal in South Africa (Employment Equity Act No. 55, 1998), when detailing their job “requirements”, hiring managers often would prescribe just about any criteria they could legally away with. Right from what the candidate must have studied, from which institution, the level of qualification they had to have, languages they had to speak etc., all in the quest of “guaranteeing” themselves a candidate that was, to quote Jill, “*100 percent for you*”. Having heard from the employer participants firstly, that most decision makers in South African corporates were White (and Indian, as some said) and secondly, that there was a common bias of “recruiting people like us”, then it was logical that, in general, Black African candidates would not be the chosen ones if your typical hiring manager had his or her way, and we now know that they generally do, because they had the final say on who got employed.

Finally, **affinity** was probably the easiest and most obvious way that *relatability* was said to express itself. Fundiswa and Peggie said there was a connection and understanding that arose from a “shared culture” or race between a candidate and the hiring manager. Shamala spoke about the importance of “cultural affiliation” in understanding the context of a young work seeker. Adding a practical dimension to that Reshma said, “*that becomes important on behavioural and social aspects, where people like me who can relate to me, can guide me. ... so they understand the challenges I may have*”. In a country with deep social divisions like South Africa as a result of its history of spatial segregation (April, 2021; Heintz & Naidoo, 2021) understanding the context of a young work-seeker is important in

order for employers to fully appreciate their actions, however, the racial imbalances in the demographic makeup of the country's corporate structures (Daya, 2021) makes it very hard for many young Black African candidates to find employers who can relate to their lived reality. Once again, because decision making authority vests with hiring line managers who are mostly White and consequently, do not appreciate or understand the context of a typical young Black African candidate, there tends to be no affinity or chemistry between them, which ultimately translates into a lack of connection, thus no relatability.

#### **4. Relatability Theory: The Mechanism and Structural Embeddedness**

In the Findings chapter the researcher tried to finely elucidate the broader social context that enveloped and hamstrung many Black African youth, even before they get to interact with prospective employers. It set the scene for how they showed up and were received in their engagements with employers. The key macro factors that defined this context were: a stagnant economy which led to an excess supply of labour thus creating hyper competition for a limited pool of available jobs, a perceived restrictive regulatory environment as well as a protectionist trade union movement which made employers want to avoid people they deemed to be risky hires, disparate outcomes from the dual-stream education system which favoured those from more affluent backgrounds, a challenging social and family environment which left many young Black Africans underprepared for what was a very normative labour market, and finally, the many structural barriers that impeded a lot of young Black Africans' access to and readiness for the labour market. These were impediments that stood in the way of many young Black African people *before* they even got to deal with employers. Those who succeeded to get around these challenges were faced with yet another invisible layer of barriers that stood between them and those high paying jobs of interest to them. These are what this researcher calls extra-organisational labour market impediments.

##### **i. Extra-Organisational Labour Market Impediments**

Extra-organisational labour market impediments refer to a set of barriers that stand between a young Black African applicant and the individual corporate employer that they are interested in joining. They are a lot closer and more integral to the labour market than the more high-level macro-contextual factors discussed previously. They define the general nature of the youth labour market in South

Africa and are not unique to specific employers. They form the outer layer of the **Relatability Model** as depicted in **Figure 6** below. These are *elitist and exclusionary labour market, youth labour oversupply, latent workplace norms, network-centricity, racialised class inequalities, and Black African candidates' emotional and mental fatigue*. As witnessed in the previous chapter, candidate *relatability* is established against the backdrop of these factors. Below is a brief account of the role played by each factor in shaping many young Black African employment prospects relative to those of their counterparts from other race groups.

Preggie and Shamala spoke about how the **South African economy and its labour market were deliberately structured to exclude**. It was an extractive system designed ensure maximum employer benefit for as little cost and effort as possible. This was illustrated very clearly in the employer participants' accounts of the mindset prevalent in their various organisations to extract value from new recruits as soon as possible, without having to invest much in their development. This meant that candidates who are deemed to require a lot of 'handholding', meaning those who did not measure up when assessed against the *relatability processes* described earlier, were likely to be rejected. Naturally, for reasons detailed in previous sections, most of these were likely to be Black African. The **oversupply of labour** in the youth labour market gave employers tremendous power to pick and choose whoever they wanted whenever there were vacant positions to be filled. The consequence of this was elitism where young people from privileged backgrounds became candidates of choice for most employers. Given the apartheid legacy of **racialised class inequalities** (April, 2021; Bonilla-Silva, 1997) that still define South Africa, Black African candidates most of whom were from disadvantaged backgrounds would tend to suffer the most once again.

In the Findings chapter it was revealed that South African **workplaces were highly normative**, and that these norms were mostly latent and inaccessible to many young Black African candidates, which made them atypical (Myeza & April, 2021) and therefore *unrelatable* to hiring line managers and recruiters. Compounding their problem of being found *unrelatable* and atypical, many young Black African candidates were **emotionally and mentally fatigued** due to the harsh reality of their social environment and the challenges of being unemployed. This state of

being materially impaired their self-confidence and self-esteem, further diminishing the employment prospects given the critical importance of these attributes to employers.

Lastly, the **network-centric nature** of the South African labour market had a significant bearing on a young person's ability to secure employment. Employer participants spoke at length about the dominance of social capital and the "unfair competition", as Lorna put it, that it created. Puleng explained how young White recruits benefited disproportionately in employment opportunities because of the networks or social capital at their disposal. She said in many cases they would have someone "internally who can vouch for them", which was not the case for most young Black African applicants. A few more employer participants spoke about the ubiquity of this phenomenon.

Young Black African candidates were aware of the importance of social capital, but they simply lacked access to productive networks. This phenomenon was confirmed in the literature. It is a well-known reality that most job vacancies are filled through referrals (Baldry, 2016; Pedulla & Pager, 2019) and that there are vast differences in the levels of success achieved by White versus Black African applicants when using this strategy. Baldry (2016) shares the results of a study which found that amongst graduates who secured jobs through referrals, 56% of them were White versus just 18% of Black Africans. The reasons for this are structural in nature and are an after-effect of a racialised labour market. As confirmed by the study participants and literature, White people still occupied most positions of power and influence in most corporates in the private sector in the country. This meant that those young work-seekers who were associated with them, either personally or through friends and family, were likely to get assistance in securing employment. Given the historical social and spatial divisions that defined race relations in this country, such connections tended to be along racial line which worked to the advantage of White youth, thereby delivering better "network returns" (Pedulla & Pager, 2019) for them compared to their Black African counterparts whose networks did not have such inherent utility value.

A fair portion of the blame for the persistence of these labour market barriers and the resultant Black African youth employment disadvantage must be placed

apportioned to the government for its complicity in creating an exploitative labour market system. The South African government has always been an ineluctable contributor and enabler, either through collusion or inaction, to labour market inequalities. The role played by the apartheid government in providing the private sector, especially mining, with cheap Black African labour is well-documented (Hamann & Bertels, 2018; Heintz & Naidoo, 2021). That set the foundation for the dehumanisation of Black Africans and commoditisation of their labour (Hamann & Bertels, 2018).

The labour market racial inequalities and continued devaluing of Black Africans still indelibly evident has deep and well-entrenched roots. The current government has continued, albeit in less aggressive and overt ways, to collude with the private sector in the exploitation of mostly Black African labour. For instance, many employers have used labour brokers to avoid directly employing people and still be able to extract the same value from them at a fraction of the cost (Jeske, 2020). This further reduces the already limited chances of young Black African people of gaining secure employment. Many of the focus group participants decried the widespread deceptive, and what they called “dishonest” and “exploitative”, labour practices that seek to prey on desperate young work-seekers. They cited the “direct marketing” industry as a prime example where such practices were rife. Government’s inaction allowed such practices to continue unabated.

Government’s failure to control illegal immigration is pitting poor young Black South African citizens against their fellow Africans from across the borders of the country in the scramble for the few ‘job scraps’ that remain after the good ones have been snapped up by the privileged elite. Sharing a story from her ethnographic study aimed at getting “The employers’ perspectives of the unemployed”, Jeske (2020) said, “Both in South Africa and globally, there are notable trends toward shorter, more casual, less work binding work arrangements. At times, employers businesses in the Howick area that had decided to stop hiring Zulu employees – one that stopped hiring altogether, and one that hired only immigrants from other African countries” (p. 72). These are not isolated occurrences. The hospitality industry and the much-publicised frequent eruptions of violence in the trucking industry between Black South African workers and their colleagues from the rest of the continent are good cases in point. Any caring and capable government would

be very interested to get to the bottom of a situation that led to the majority of its young citizens being as much as “five times more likely to be unemployed” than their peers from the other race groups even when they were similarly qualified. A situation like this prevails to a large degree because of government complicity and/or inaction.

## ii. The Foundations of Relatability

This study has revealed three cornerstones upon which Black African youth labour market disadvantage rests. The first one is *White intra-organisational power dominance*. Many study participants, with different emphasis, pointed to the racially imbalanced demographic profile of organisational structures in most corporates in the country as a big driver of the racial disparities in hiring decisions. Despite being a significant minority of the total population, decades after the end of apartheid, White people still hold about two thirds of all top, and just over half of senior, management positions, respectively, whereas Black Africans’ share of these positions is about one fifth, and a quarter, respectively (Daya, 2021). This is happening in a country where Whites make up about 8% of the population, whilst Black Africans constitute over 80% (Stats SA, 2022, p. 25). The obvious consequence of this literal structural demographic imbalance is the unequal distribution of power between race groups, which profoundly shapes the racial profile of who gets employed, mostly to the disadvantage of Black African youth. The strong and direct link between White power dominance in South African corporates and Black African youth unemployment is, in this researcher’s humble opinion, one of the most groundbreaking and revelatory findings and contributions of this study.

The second cornerstone is what this researcher calls the *culture of selective affirmation*. In section 3 of this chapter (Decoding Relatability), we saw how Whiteness and closeness thereto is affirmed whilst distance from it is shunned and rejected during the recruitment and selection process. The White “cocky confidence” that Puleng spoke about emanates from their feeling of being ‘at home’ in South African corporate surroundings. This brings to mind an incident that this researcher observed many years ago when he worked as an executive in one of the large corporates in the country. His office was located in what was known as the “executive floor” where the CEO and most his executive team were based. This

was generally a relatively quiet floor with much less foot traffic than the other parts of the building.

One early evening this researcher was working in his office when he suddenly heard fairly loud non-stop whistling coming from down the corridor. Although a bit unusual, he tried to ignore the noise hoping it would soon stop. Instead, the whistling continued, growing a bit louder here and there. Not wanting to lose focus on what he was working on, the researcher went to the direction where the noise was coming from so that he could ask the person to keep it down. To his surprise, it was coming from a White gentleman he had only ever seen two or three times before in the building, who did not have an office on that floor. In fact, as it turned out, he did not even work for this particular company. He was an external auditor who was there on a short-term assignment. On reflection, the researcher was fascinated by how comfortable the gentleman was in a space that was generally found to be a bit 'intimidating' even by employees worked in that building. That is the kind of confidence that one would show in a space that feels comfortable and familiar to them, a space in which they feel at home and accepted or at least a modicum sense of belonging.

This researcher doubts if he would ever witness similar behaviour in the same environment from a 'visiting' Black African person. In fact, on a few occasions, he observed that whenever some of the foreign Black senior executives who ran the subsidiaries of this company in other parts of the continent came to the head office in Johannesburg, and visited the same executive floor, they tended to carry themselves in a much more restrained and reserved manner, in complete contrast to the White external auditor. Despite their long tenure in the group and their level of seniority, whenever they were in the South Africans, they tended to behave more like visitors who did not work for the company.

There is quite a lot that is packed in this example. It is reminiscent of the story by Fundiswa in the Findings chapter, where she shared her observations on the differences in the levels of "showing up" displayed by young Black African traders compared to their White counterparts. She observed that the Black Africans seemed to "*kind of feel like this is not their real home*" and would "*show up in an apologetic manner*". They talk to differences in the level of comfort and sense of belonging

that Black and White people feel inside White-dominated corporates. This researcher gets fascinated when he watches the contrasting demeanor projected by many South African White people when they are in an environment that is not White-controlled or one that has a majority of Black people in charge, for example, waiting in the line at the Department of Home Affairs offices. They tend to be much more reserved and do not seem to be as free and comfortable as they are when walking down corporate corridors.

The story shared by Puleng in the previous chapter of how quickly young White and Indian recruits would be handpicked, and taken ‘under the wings’ of senior leaders of the same race, to the exclusion of young Black African recruits because of a lack of Black African representation in senior management roles in her company, is a great example of a culture of *selective affirmation* plays out in organisations. One of the consequences of it is the differences in the sense of belonging and showing up as observed by Fundiswa.

Racial representation is beyond just a number’s game. April (2021) aptly captures this issue when he says, “In South Africa, even though the majority of its citizens are people of colour, in the workplace – particularly at management and executive levels – people of colour are often a minority in number, but also ideas and approaches within the dominant Western orientation of most South African businesses. Such dominance, underlined by the hegemonic ideology that assumes cultural and biological inferiority, organises, regulates and determines the exploitation and dependence of less-dominant race groups” (p. 15).

The third cornerstone is *unfettered managerial discretion*. Many corporates in South Africa rely on the interview as the main, and often only, selection tool. This means that decisions on who gets appointed to the job are based on how impressive different candidates are found to be in the way they answer interview questions. These days, most corporates use panels of interviewers instead of just one or two people to interview candidates. This is aimed at improving transparency, fairness, and enable exploration of issues from a diversity of angles. However, as Lebo pointed out, the hiring manager often has the final say on who forms part of the panel. Additionally, as confirmed by all the employer participants, the panel can only recommend who must be pointed because it is hiring line manager who has

the final say. The rationale for this, as Ravesh explained, is because final accountability for the performance of the new employee ultimately rests with the hiring manager as their line manager. This makes sense and would not be a problem in a world where biases and subjectivity were not such a dominant feature of recruitment.

Individually, each of the three features of South African corporate environments is enough to produce racial disparities in employment and general labour outcomes. Collectively, they make this an inescapable outcome.

### iii. The Underpinnings of Relatability Processes

The study employer participants were able to quickly and easily identify the five processes that sit behind *relatability*, namely, *self-presentation*, *confidence*, *bias*, *choice*, and *affinity*. However, it took active listening and careful reflection and analysis on the part of the researcher to discover that behind these processes, sits corresponding support pillars which prop them up. The pillars are not so obvious and, therefore, their connection to the processes was not readily made by some of the participants. This type of reflection by the researcher is in line with one of the assumptions explicated in the Methodology chapter. It is aptly encapsulated in the following: “We assume, for instance, that we are pretty knowledgeable people too – that we can figure out patterns in the data, enabling us to surface concepts and relationships that might escape the awareness of the informants, and that we formulate these concepts in theoretically relevant terms” (Gioia et al., 2013, p. 17).

There are five key pillars that underpin the processes that serve as a backdrop to *relatability*. The first one is what this researcher calls the *unconscious incompetence* of many recruiters and hiring managers. This simply refers to the lack of awareness on the part of hiring line managers of their inability to identify potential, capability and/or suitability of a candidate in an interview. This pillar is what strongly supports the *self-presentation* process. There was a strong theme conveyed by many employer participants that most hiring managers were heavily swayed in their candidate choice by looks and eloquence. This meant that most of them were not able to discern the difference between a candidate who had potential but was inarticulate and not well-

presented versus one who was articulate and well-presented but might not have as much potential. Reshma and Lorna attributed this *unconscious incompetence* to a hiring manager's lack of training in what Puleng calls the "art and science" of interviewing. Compounding the problem of interviewer unconscious incompetence is the subjectivity that characterises most selection processes. As reported earlier, most employer participants stated that they did not use scientific and objective methods, except basic personality tests in some cases, to determine candidates' capabilities and potential. The result of this was what Jill labelled as "indefensible" appointment decisions, which led to the obvious discrimination against many young Black Africans.

The second pillar is *contextual apathy* which is a term the researcher uses to describe the historical and situational indifference displayed by most recruiters and hiring managers when dealing with young Black Africans. The *confidence* process of *relatability* rests on this pillar. As detailed earlier, many young Black Africans who live in rural areas, informal settlements, and townships face layer upon layer of structural barriers and hardships on a daily basis. Many of the focus group candidates complained about what they felt were "inconsiderate" actions by recruiters which demonstrated a "lack of care and understanding" of the reality they lived in.

For that "young chap from Venda", as per Tshego's story, to achieve seven distinctions, including one for higher grade mathematics, in matric final exams, coming from such an environment, was a huge achievement which indicated immense raw potential that was just waiting to be harnessed and nurtured. However, because of *contextual apathy*, the interview panel judged and rejected him because "he couldn't express himself". In Tshego's words, "*But that interview just completely went pear-shaped*". It is interesting to note that even though Tshego seemed to appreciate the importance of taking a candidate's context into account, the decision still went against the young man. Speaking on the importance of inclusivity and open-mindedness amongst recruiters and hiring managers, she said this, "*So, understanding that the world that we live in might be different from the world that that Black child might come from. So, understand that. And see the potential in that person and not necessarily what you see. There are times where you would sit in a bad interview, but you can*

*see something. And then you can see that, you know what? It might just be the nerves. It might just be, you know, make the person as comfortable as possible. But it's that potential that will probably make you make a different decision.* The fact that despite Tshego expressing these sentiments, the young candidate in question was still rejected would suggest that she was not the hiring manager, and lacked the final say on the matter, which is one of big problems identified in the study.

Many employer participants in the study expressed awareness of the multi-layered barriers and constraints faced a lot of young Black African candidates, however, these were not factored in when the final employment decision was made, hence *contextual apathy*. They exhibited a 'take it or leave it' attitude bolstered by the knowledge that for every one candidate that fell by the wayside, there were ten or twenty more who were waiting in the wings.

The third pillar is what this researcher calls a *limited social imaginary* that seems to afflict many White recruiters and hiring managers when dealing Black African candidates. This is a pillar upon which the *bias* process sits. A social imaginary refers to "the range of shared ideas, values, meaning and systems that define what is possible and real in a given social group" (Jeske, 2020, p. 76). One of the cornerstones of the apartheid system was spatial segregation where different race groups were legally forced to live apart from each other (April, 2021). This meant that people lived and socialised and even worked mostly with people from their own race. The limited social interaction between races created a fertile ground for inter-racial stereotypes to develop about members of the outgroup (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). Such stereotypes led to the formation of a social imaginary about what one could or could not conceive of or expect from member of the other races. Social imaginaries are heavily shaped and influenced by stereotypes that have "crystalised" and become widely accepted overtime (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). It is for this reason that to this day, in the United States of America, "Whites still have difficulty in dealing with Black bankers, lawyers, professors, and doctors" (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 474).

Bonilla-Silva (1997) argues that many stereotypes tend to disappear over time as people interact more and more with members of the 'outgroup' and they have

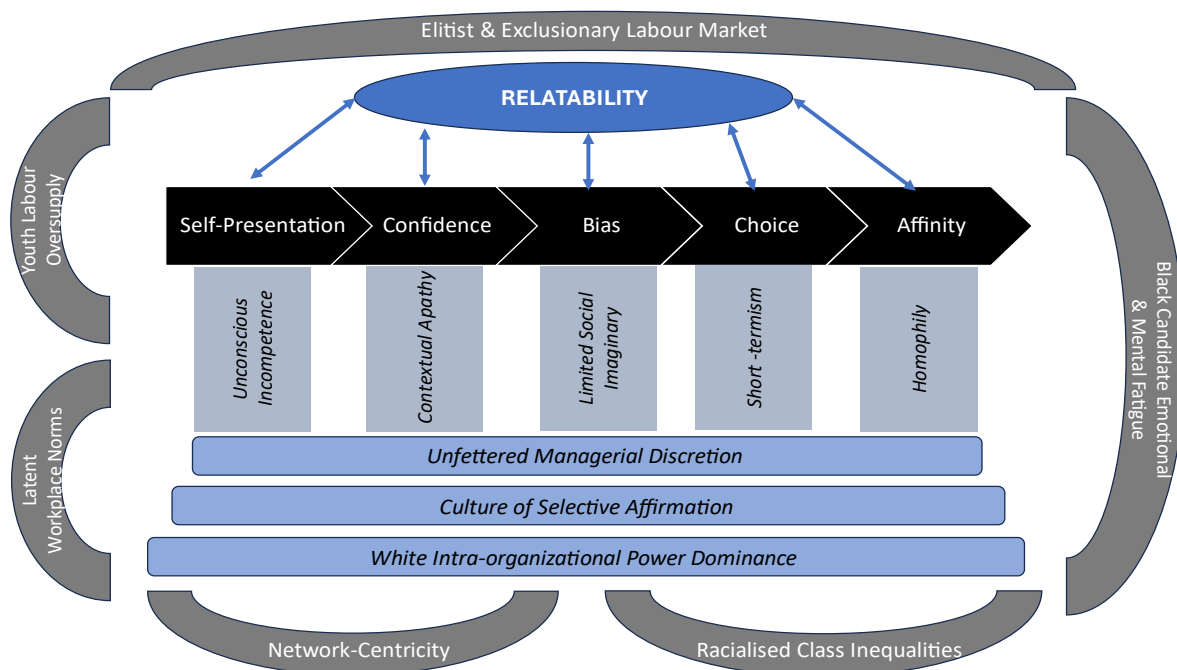
direct evidence which contradicts the particular stereotypes they hold. In South Africa, although the situation is gradually changing, as many schools, workplaces, and residential areas become more racially integrated, there are still many Black Africans and White people who do not have regular social interactions with members of the other group. This limits their ability to broaden and enrich their social imaginary. This would explain why many White recruiters and hiring managers would find Black Africans who speak Model C or private school English and live in formerly Whites only suburbs more *relatable*. Their rejection of the more typical (Myeza & April, 2021) Black African candidates whose backgrounds, looks and way of speaking is very different from their own, activates the social imaginary about Black African people that they grew up with, which prevents them from being able to picture such candidates in the roles being recruited for. This activates their “*preconceived notions and biases around who's competent and who can do a job*” as Shamala said.

The fourth pillar is the culture of *short-termism* that seems to prevail in most South African corporate organisations. In this instance, it refers to the tendency by recruiters and hiring managers to prefer candidates whom they believe will fit into their teams and deliver results in the shortest time possible. The *choice* process of *relatability* rests on this pillar. As seen earlier, hiring line managers are heard often using phrases like “ready-baked”, “plug and play”, “no handholding”, “sink or swim” in reference to and justification of their choice of candidate. These phrases have, overtime, become entrenched in the daily lexicon of most corporates in the country. The ubiquity of this type of *short-term* mindset in South African corporates coupled with the managers’ lack of interest or ability to invest in people development as we heard earlier, means that young people from privileged socio-economic backgrounds, who are mostly White, and Indian to a degree, will continue to receive preference in employment as they are normally deemed to be the most “ready”, and are a lot more relatable to recruiters and hiring line managers.

The last pillar is *homophily* which is defined as “the tendency of individuals feel more comfortable with individuals themselves” (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021, p. 395). This is what *affinity* is anchored on. The statement “like to

employ people like us” was used by so many employer participants in this study. As demonstrated previously, White people dominate positions of power and influence in the most corporates in South Africa. Naturally, in a place where homophily is rife as confirmed by most employer participants, it is inevitable that young White candidates would emerge as the ultimate winners when they are up against similarly qualified Black African candidates.

**Figure 5: The Relatability Model**



**Summary:**

When one takes a step back and synthesises everything to get to the crux of what really underpins *relatability*, one finds that unintentional as it might be, race and racial discrimination become an inescapable conclusion. Several factors make this observation difficult to avoid. These are as follows: firstly, the employer participants said that employers have a strong preference for Black African candidates who speak private school or “Model C” English. Secondly, they also said that unlike their young Black African counterparts who have a low self- confidence and project a respectful and humble

demeanor that “does not serve them”, White (and in some cases, Indian) candidates seem to have “innate” or “cocky” confidence about them. Thirdly, they said that young Black Africans who live in the formerly Whites only suburbs and went to formerly White schools are a lot more confident, even though they still fail to match the confidence levels of their White peers. Fourthly, they also mentioned that recruiters and hiring managers have preconceived implicit biases about what competence looks and sounds like, and that race features amongst these biases. Fifthly, some participants shared that, in the exercise of their wide and far-reaching discretion, hiring line managers often specify many ‘job requirements’ and criteria that are not inherent to successful performance in the job, such as the ability to speak Afrikaans, in the process excluding many Black African candidates who would otherwise qualify. Lastly, the reported widespread inclination by hiring line managers to employ candidates who are similar to themselves means that, because of the predominance of Whites and Indians in roles with authority to hire, Black African candidates generally tend to be disadvantaged when they are competing against similarly qualified White and Indian candidates.

The resounding underlying message is that young Black African candidates whose social background and experience was furthest away from that of White people, were generally found to be least *relatable* and therefore, had the lowest chance of being chosen as the preferred candidates in the highly competitive youth labour market. Conversely, those who had a lot more in common with their White counterparts (attended the same schools, speak the same way, and live in the same neighbourhoods) tended to be more relatable to White hiring managers and accordingly, had a better chance of securing the job. This is because “Cultural distance increases discrimination”, (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021, p. 405). Citing evidence from studies in Europe, the authors go on to say that “evidence from several studies suggests that there may be significantly more discrimination against minority group members who are viewed as less assimilated to the culture of the White majority in the country” (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021, p.405). In South Africa, Black Africans are a significant majority of the total population, however, Whites are a dominant majority in senior and executive positions, which are the centres of power, inside corporates (April, 2021).

Whilst young Black African candidates who had a private school or Model C background and lived in formerly Whites only areas were much more preferred to their fellow ‘brothers and sisters’ who went to predominantly Black public schools and lived in virtually

exclusively Black neighbourhoods, they were still perceived as second best when they competed with similarly qualified young White candidates. This was because of the “extra points” that a candidate garnered for hailing from the same culture or race as the hiring manager, as Peggie explained. This is a consequence of homophily (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021). “Cultural matching theory emphasizes that employers may want employees who fit in to employee teams and with whom they feel socially comfortable, which may contribute to racial discrimination in hiring” (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021, p. 395).

Not one of the employer participants singled out racism as the reason for the Black African youth labour market disadvantage. The closest insinuation to that was the mention of racial bias, along with many other biases which were attributed to recruiters and hiring managers. Even then, reference to it was fleeting. Whilst the homophily theme came out very strongly from many employer participants, there was a tendency to downplay its racist motive, even from some Black Africans amongst them, by emphasising that managers of different races, including Black Africans, had a tendency to employ people similar to themselves. This was an example of one of the key features or frames of colour-blind racism, where racist behaviour is rationalised as a natural human tendency (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). There also appeared to be a fair bit of victim blaming where young Black African candidates’ way of speaking, how they dressed, and their low confidence were said to be amongst the key reasons for their labour market misfortune. Once again, this was yet another example of colour-blind racism. There was even a bit of cultural racism (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021) where inferences that the “African culture” of respect and humility was responsible for their perceived low self-confidence.

What this is, is simply a smokescreen that seeks to do is shift attention away from the ‘elephant in the room’, i.e., employer culpability for employment discrimination against Black African youth which plays out when recruiters and hiring line managers “invoke a relatively flexible set of filters for “who fits the job best”” (Roscigno et al., 2007, p. 41). “Particularistic mobility processes and the invocation of “soft skill” criteria in job access and promotions are also important. Here we see those in powerful positions defining desirable job qualities informally or “on the spot”, and in a manner that undermines minority hiring and promotion. Whether such soft skills, such as communicative ability, confidence, ability to work with others, and so on are important for a given job is a matter of debate. What is not in question, however, is the problematic nature of using such criteria arbitrarily to exclude some at the cost of others, particularly where there is either racist

intent from the outset or subjective interpretation invoked on the spot” (Roscigno et al., 2007, p. 43).

What is interesting to note is that some of the statements that may be deemed as examples of ‘colour-blind’ racism against Black African candidates actually came from Black African employer participants. In their article titled “Being black, middle class and the object of two gazes”, Hugo Canham and Rejane Williams (2017) share some interesting insights that might explain this seemingly puzzling phenomenon. They argue that, threatened with the entry of Black people into the economic spaces which they have historically dominated, White people keep a close eye (the White gaze) on those Black people who are in ‘their’ space. As the base of their argument, they use this quote from Foucault: “He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play simultaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (Canham & Williams, 2017, pp. 28-29). They go on to say that Blacks have internalised the White gaze which “negates their blackness and inferiorises them” and this in turn, leads to them ‘self-disciplining’ and getting stuck in “internalised negative messaging” which helps maintain the status quo of White dominance (Canham & Williams, 2017, p. 29).

Being accused of racism, especially where no such intent can be shown is not a good thing by any measure and it carries a stigma that is hard to shake off (Berard, 2008), so one can understand the apparent cautiousness by the participants to easily make attributions to it. However, we must be reminded that “the point of these theories is not to blame the innocent but to improve understanding so that the policies, practices, and ideas that perpetuate racial inequality can be identified and dismantled” (Clair & Denis, 2015, p. 860). Avoiding naming and confronting racism and blaming Black African youth for their labour market struggles negates their agency by diverting attention away from the structures and institutional forces that entrench White hegemony (Canham & Williams, 2017).

Labour market discrimination and racial inequalities have continued to stubbornly persist (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021; Ray, 2014) in countries where racialisation was not as highly developed as the apartheid system was in South Africa (Bonilla-Silva, 1997), and which abandoned discriminatory policies many decades ago. One wonders therefore, what would make South Africa so exceptional that despite its highly sophisticated and institutionalised

apartheid system with deep roots in every sphere of society including the labour markets (April, 2021; Heintz & Naidoo, 2021), just a mere three decades later, racism in the labour market would be assumed to have miraculously vanished and ceased to be the powerful force that fuelled White socio-economic dominance in the apartheid era.

Bobo (2014) warns about what he calls the stickiness of race in racialised societies. Contrary to the classical economics school of thought that views labour market discrimination as an irrational aberration that will self-correct in due course (Darity et al., 2015), it is actually a powerful tool used by those at the top of the economic pyramid to hold on to their position of dominance and continue enjoying the social and economic benefits it gives them (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Roscigno et al., 2007). The official demise of apartheid should not lull South Africans into a false belief that its patterns of operation died with it too. Scholars teach us that, “Inequality can persist or be greatly re-configured in response to key reform efforts, without fundamentally erasing deep structures of race inequality” (Bobo, 2014, p. 192). This would explain the persistence of racial disparities in the labour market in the absence of discriminatory policies or overt racial discrimination.

The position of economic dominance that White people in South Africa occupy is a big reason for the racial inequalities that prevail in the labour market. Their general inclination to attribute their dominance to superior human capital characteristics (Roscigno et al., 2007) is nothing but self-deception (Canham & Williams, 2017) as this study has demonstrated. Until White people in this country are prepared to openly acknowledge that their continued economic and labour market dominance is still, to a large part, because of their race, the deeply-embedded structures that sustain their privilege are likely to remain unchallenged (Canham & Williams, 2017).

Finally, White South Africans need to understand that, individually or collectively, they do not stand accused of being racist, because as Jeske (2020), quoting George Lipsitz, reminds us, “Condemning whiteness is not the same as condemning white people. Whiteness is a structured advantage subsidized by segregation. It is not so much a color as a condition. Yet because whiteness rarely speaks its names or admits to its advantages, it requires the construction of a devalued and even demonized Blackness to be credible and legitimate” (Jeske, 2020, p. 80).

The reality is that, for their own long-term survival, South African corporates can no longer afford to turn a blind eye to the ongoing exclusion and marginalisation of millions of Black

African youth. The social uprisings that The World Bank (2022) warns about, such as the looting spree in the provinces of KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng in 2021, will become commonplace in this country unless the ticking time bomb of Black African youth labour market exclusion is urgently addressed.

## **5. Praxis implications of this study**

In social commentary, many business pundits often sing the praises of South African businesses' flair for innovation and creativity, often under very difficult and challenging conditions. Indeed, there are many South African businesses who have received local and global acclaim for the innovative feats they have achieved in their various industries. An example of this is First National Bank (FNB), which was named "the most innovative bank in the world" at the Financial Global Banking Innovation Awards held in Washington, in the United States of America in 2012. One wonders then why a country that is endowed with such high levels of human ingenuity would fail to solve what seems to be a comparatively much easier problem of labour market racial inequalities.

In fairness to the country's business community and leaders, they have come up with many interventions, mostly through their corporate social investment (CSI) foundations, aimed at tackling the problem of Black youth unemployment. The first, and arguably, most successful of these is the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator (De Lannoy et al., 2018), which was started by Yellowwoods, a non-profit arm of the Enthoven family business empire. In their website, <https://www.harambee.co.za/> Harambee claims to have "enabled" 1.2 million "opportunities" for work-seekers over the past ten years and supported 3.7 million work-seekers in various ways. Another one is the Youth Employment Service (YES), which was launched with much fanfare by President Ramaphosa back in 2018. In his address, which this researcher attended, the president said the programme was aimed at addressing the plight of millions of Black youth who were struggling to find jobs. It would do this by providing opportunities for youth to gain experience in participating companies over a period of 12 months, with the hope that some of them will be employed by the respective companies at the end of that period. They would be paid a stipend during that period. He said the programme had set itself an ambitious target of creating one million "work opportunities" a year. According to its website, <https://www.yes4youth.co.za/>, YES is the biggest youth employment assistance

programme in country that is completely funded by the private sector. Amongst its achievements, it highlights that has more than 1700 “corporate sign-ups”, has created over 140 000 “work experiences”, and that it has operated for more than 5 years “with no state funding”. Apart from the ‘feel good factor’ of being corporate citizens, participating corporates stand to gain points in terms of the country’s Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) regulations.

These are sound and supportive initiatives by the country’s business sector, and they have made much difference in the lives of the many young people and their families who have benefited from the opportunities created. Having said that, it is important to note firstly, that the programmes emphasise creating “work experiences” or “work opportunities” and not jobs. Secondly, the scale of impact seems to have been significantly smaller than what was originally anticipated. There is a big difference between 140 000 work experiences in five years and a million jobs per year over the same period. The problem is not the initiatives themselves, but rather, the mindset that seems to underpin them. These two programmes, and many similar ones found in the country, are examples of what is known as social innovation.

Social innovation broadly refers to initiatives aimed at solving social problems that have not been addressed by either the state or the market (Unger, 2015, p. 233). According to Unger (2015), there are two main schools of thought in the social innovation movement. The first one is what he refers to as the “Minimalist View”. He argues that the primary focus of players who come from this perspective is compensating for the gaps left unaddressed by both government and the private sector, and it is a space dominated by non-governmental organisations and CSI foundations. He critiques this approach for failing to agitate for self-reconstruction of society (Unger, 2015, pp. 236-237). This is exactly the reason why, in this researcher’s view, the programmes mentioned above will always struggle to catalyse systemic change in the fight against Black youth unemployment. The second approach is what Unger calls the “Maximalist View”. He argues that this approach agitates for a fundamental transformation of economic and political institutions, as well as the beliefs that inform and sustain (Unger, 2015).

Labour market racial inequalities have deep structural roots (Bonilla-Silva, 1997) as this researcher has tried to demonstrate in the chapter. Therefore, as Bobo (2014) advises, the inequalities will continue to manifest themselves, even as overt racist ideologies and

behaviours seem to have significantly declined. Well-intentioned as they are, these CSI programmes that focus almost exclusively on ‘closing’ the human capital gaps in the young people they work with, without challenging the exclusionary practices of the employer, (which they cannot because they depend, almost entirely, on their financial backing for their own existence) inadvertently help to create and sustain secondary labour markets (Leontaridi, 1998) for the marginalised Black (mostly) African youth where they are confined to jobs and careers whose prospects are much more limited and less rewarding than those in the primary labour markets (Grimshaw et al., 2017). In the current study, evidence of the unfolding of this phenomenon was shared by some of the participants. One Honour’s graduate in transport economics, who participated in the graduate focus group, shared her experience in this regard. She said she once applied for a position in the graduate programme of one company and after attending an interview with them she had this experience: *“The moment I am at home, before I even put my bag down, they called me. They were like, unfortunately, they couldn’t take me for that position. They are considering me to put me in the YES (Youth Employment Service – researcher’s comment) programme. A YES programme. And then they were like, “It’s 4.5.” And I ask myself, okay, I applied for a graduate programme. They are saying they are going to put me in a YES programme, you know, and then it’s 4,500, which means I will spend plus 2K for transport, you know. And their company is a distribution and courier company, which means you can also— you also have to work shifts, day shifts and night shifts. I felt like it was really unfair for me, honestly. It was unfair for me, because they actually are just— what do you call when someone “um’beka phansi (degrading) someone? Yeah. [Degrading someone] Yeah. I feel like they were. Because I even asked them, I was like, “So even if you have an honours degree, you’re looking for someone on a YES programme and they’re going to earn 4.5. They were like, “yes.””*

From an employer participant’s perspective, Puleng shared her own observations in this regard. She said, *“So, for internships, learnerships, we kind of pivot to the opposite end where we’re saying, we understand that, you know, these learners, perhaps, you know, their comprehension or, you know, kind of how they speak English, maybe there’s work to be done. So, what we tend to do is we are more open to saying we will help them with professional English, how to communicate effectively in the workplace. We expect that they come from previously disadvantaged environments and therefore, exposure to corporate SA is quite minimal. So, I think we have more grace, right, in saying these are diamonds*

*that still need to be polished, unlike gradua[tes], which is a problem. Because I think it's discriminatory, you know, Sifiso. And I think with gradua[tes], because we earmark those people for business roles. So, we don't have a grad programme where people rotate for three years indefinitely. We are preparing people for certain jobs. So, I think the double-standard is a result of that. So, we already want somebody we can put in front of a, gosh, a Xxx Bank, you know, or one of our stockbrokers as part of their learning experience. Unlike learners who tend to get cocooned, they still get a lot of time internally to learn the processes. So, I think it's probably an innate expectation of how quickly we want this person to be up and running versus the other, you know. And that's where the discrimination really kicks in. And that's what I've observed. So, we enhance the proposition so that they get jobs. But there's a question below that, right. What type of jobs are they getting? And so, it's really basic. So, administrative call centre, it's entry level jobs. And that's what happens to our learners. Unlike the grads who, as I'm saying, we prepare for relatively senior roles in the organization.*

What Puleng was saying here is that her company has a graduate programme where they target what she called “polished” or “crème de la crème” young Black candidates, and then they also have a “learnership and internship” programme targeting the ‘average or typical’ young Black African, who then gets the treatment she was referring to. This duality in how South African corporates deal with young employment candidates is prevalent as was confirmed by virtually all the employer participants. On the one hand, they have their flagship graduate programmes where they recruit what they say is the best youth they can find, which refers to those they find most relatable as elaborated on in this chapter. These programmes are racially diverse, but the Black Africans they would normally take are those from privileged backgrounds, who look and speak the “right” kind of English. On the other hand, they have internship and learnership programmes, such as YES. They said these are mostly done for BBBEE purposes. This is where you find them recruiting young Black Africans mostly from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is important to note that candidates recruited through the graduate programmes are permanently employed and paid market related salaries from the start, whereas, learners and interns are normally placed on the programme for 12-24 months, with no guarantee for permanent absorption at the end, and are paid a stipend, mostly subsidised by grants from the relevant Sector Employment and Training Authority, (SETA), which falls under the Department of Higher Education.

As noble as they may, many of the initiatives supported by the various corporate CSI foundations amount to no more than what Freire (2000) refers to as “false generosity” aimed at placating the marginalised youth. These corporates have no intentions of making substantial structural changes to fundamentally transform the character of the labour market because they are benefitting immensely from the status quo. For them to continue being seen in a positive light for their “generosity”, they need conditions that create the problem to remain unchanged (Freire, 2000).

It is this researcher’s submission that whilst there are many initiatives in the market, including the two mentioned earlier on in this section, which are doing a great job in helping many Black African youth close any human capital gaps they might have in order to make them more attractive to employers, for as long as the employer contribution to the problem continues to be ignored, no fundamental transformation and levelling of the playing field will take place. Millions of Black African youth will remain condemned to the ravages of unemployment, at worst, or relegated to operate on the fringes of secondary labour markets (Leontaridi, 1998), at best.

## **Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Future Research**

### **1. Conclusion**

In this study the researcher set out to get a deeper understanding of the foundations and drivers of the pronounced Black African youth employment disadvantage (Baldry, 2016; Bhorat & Mayet, 2012; Mlatsheni & Rospabé, 2002), particularly, in instances where they appear to be as qualified as their peers from other race groups, especially White youth. Literature revealed that the current gaps in knowledge on this topic stem from the asymmetrical focus on the supply-side drivers of this phenomenon (Grimshaw et al., 2017), leaving many unanswered questions and untested assumptions about the contribution of employer behaviour, preferences and decision-making processes (De Lannoy et al., 2018) to the problem. It is for this reason, that this researcher elected to focus on examining the role played by South African corporate employers in the creation and sustenance of Black African youth employment disadvantage.

The researcher hopes to have succeeded in the aims and objectives of this thesis in the following ways: firstly, the study has endeavoured to contribute to extant knowledge on the topic by adding the dimension of how the social environment many Black African young people come from and the structural barriers they face undermine their effectiveness and performance when they finally engage with employers in job interviews. Secondly, the researcher has endeavoured to add a new voice to the scholarly debate about the drivers and mechanisms of racial labour market inequalities in South Africa, specifically in the area of youth employment, by developing the *Relatability Theory*, which has been presented in this dissertation. Lastly, the researcher has offered a conceptual critique of the dominant approach(es) that informs many youth employment initiatives that currently prevail in the labour market. The objective of this critique is not to cast aspersions on the motives or minimise the contribution of these initiatives, many of whom have helped scores of previously unemployed Black African youth secure employment and, in the process, change their lives and those of their families substantially. Rather, the researcher's intention is to plant the seed for the emergence of a new wave of youth employment initiatives, but this time, centred more around uprooting exclusionary mindsets and practices inside the corporate employer domain.

## **2. Future research**

The vastness and complexity of the topic of racial inequalities in the South African youth labour market necessitated that the researcher delineate a specific segment to focus on, i.e., Black African youth, for this study. However, even within this segment, future research endeavours could unearth nuanced findings, for instance, in terms of how *relatability* shapes employment prospects and/or career mobility of young Black African women due to intersectionality (Cho et al., 2013), given the severe underrepresentation of Black African women (Daya, 2021) in positions of power in South African corporates.

## Appendix 3: Code Book

### Codes

Name	Description	Files	References
Sources and Mechanisms of Black African Youth Employment Disadvantage	Factors and dynamics that adversely impact Black African youth's employment prospects	19	566
Affinity	Familiarity between the hiring manager and the job applicant due to a shared culture or being bonded by something. (Preggie)	7	15
Bonded by something		2	2
Cultural Affiliation		1	1
Shared Culture		3	3
Apartheid Legacy and Exclusionary System	Exclusionary labour market and economic system	6	18
Apartheid After-Effects	The lingering long-term effects of apartheid. (Preggie and Shamala)	3	3
Designed for an Elite		2	3
Disadvantaged by the Exclusion		1	1
Exclusionary systems	Exclusionary design of labour market systems	2	6
Labour Market and Economy Structured to Exclude		3	3
Not being Inclusive is not Sustainable Business	Business that is not inclusive and plays no role in addressing social	1	2

Name	Description	Files	References
	ills has no long-term future. (Kumaran)		
Assessment of Ability and Potential	Tools used by employers to determine the level of ability or potential of job applicants.	10	22
Alternative Assessment Tools	Tools designed to showcase actual capabilities of young applicants, beyond generic maths and English scores. (Shamala)	1	1
Cognitive and Personality Assessments		2	2
Gut Recruitment	Being able to tell if a candidate has potential based on how they answer questions. (Valerie)	1	1
Lower Assessment Scores of Black Candidates		2	2
No Science		1	1
Potential	Ability to learn new information fast, recall, integrate and use it.(Jill)	4	4
There Should Be Many Ways of Assessing Potential	Employers shouldn't just rely on assessments when choosing the best candidate.	1	2
Use of Psychometric Tools		8	9
Bias	Subjective assumptions and preconceived notions about who and what good candidates	10	45

Name	Description	Files	References
	look like - (collective definition- Shamala, Lorna, Lebo, Puleng)		
Conception of a Competent Person Bias	A biased mental image of what a competent person looks like, the kind of English they speak, how they are dressed and the type of hairstyle they have. (Shamala)	2	6
Good Speaker and Dresser Bias	A bias towards well-dressed candidates with excellent English communication skills. Puleng	3	6
Hiring Line Manager Bias		2	3
Mindset Bias	Preconceived notions and biases, based on assumptions, about who is competent versus who can actually do the job. (Shamala)	1	1
Qualification Bias		1	2
Racial Bias		6	10
Recruiter Bias		4	5
Similarity-Familiarity Bias	Looking for reasons to connect with the candidate on a more familiar level. Lorna	1	2
Subtle Biases	Subtle cues and assumptions that are hard to quantify which prevent true inclusion in the workplace. Shamala	2	2
Unconscious Bias	An unconscious tendency by hiring managers and recruiters to choose candidates	2	3

Name	Description	Files	References
	who look, sound and share a similar background as themselves. Reshma and Lorna		
University Bias		3	5
Chemistry	A feeling of ease and relatedness a hiring manager can feel sometimes in an interview when talking to a candidate that he shares a similar experience(s) with. Puleng & Reshma	4	6
Choice	A preference you know is a 100 percent right for you (Jill)	1	1
Confidence	Ability to express and present one's views and engage with people in a self-assured manner (Valerie & Fundiswa)	6	26
Black African Culture of Humility & Respect	Black applicants' culture of humility and respect doesn't work for them during interviews. (Valerie and Puleng)	2	2
Black Boys and Girls are not as Confident		2	2
Need to be Probed for Answers	Inability by some black candidates to communicate freely without being probed.	4	6
Self-Esteem and Confidence Struggles	Displaying a lack of self-confidence and a sense of being overwhelmed. (Lorna & Fundiswa)	2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Speaking Out and Being Themselves		2	2
Struggle to Exude Confidence	Struggle with articulating oneself without being probed during an interview.	1	1
White and Indian Youth Confidence	The self-assuredness projected by the candidate during a job interview. (Puleng)	4	6
Corrupt Recruitment Practices	Corruption, bribery and nepotism experienced by some candidates when applying for jobs.	2	10
Bribery	Demand of bribes from unemployment applicants by recruiters	1	2
Corruption in Recruitment		1	4
Interviewing People as a Formality	Tendency by some employers to interview candidates when they have already decided on who will get the job	2	2
Nepotism		1	2
Culture Fit	How you carry yourself, how you communicate and whether your values align with the organisation's (Valerie).	7	15
Don't Want to Set Them up To Fail		2	2
How They Speak, How They Look		1	1
No People Development Culture	Managers and leader generally unwilling to develop talent (Puleng & Nomonde)	2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Professional Brand		1	1
Values Alignment	A candidate's personal values and how these align with those of the prospective employer. (Valerie and Fundiswa)	2	2
Workplace Norms and Standards		2	3
Decision-Making Rights	The hiring line manager has the final say on who gets employed. (Puleng)	8	10
Degrading and Discrimination	Poor status and career prospects afforded to interns and learners relative to grad programme attendees. (Puleng & FG - Grads)	4	8
Discrimination	Discrimination against candidates who are not articulate in English	2	3
Feeling Degraded		1	2
Difficulty in Hiring and Firing	A labour environment where it is hard to employ and dismiss people. (Kumaran & Peggie)	2	7
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration	2	2
High Difficulty in Dismissing Non-Performers		2	2
Opposing Youth Employment Incentives		1	1
Protectionist Labour Unions	The tendency by the labour unions to put their members' interests ahead of youth	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
	employment creation efforts. (Kumaran)		
Stressed Environment		1	1
Education System	The nature, quality, direction and outcomes of education system in South Africa.	8	21
Different Outcomes of Public and Private School Streams		2	4
Education System	The impact of the nature and quality of the education received by the majority of South African Black African youth on their employment prospects.	4	5
Model C or Private School Background	Youth who attended semi-private or private schools engage with employers in a different way than their public school counterparts.	7	11
Quality and Direction of Education System		1	1
Eloquence in the English Language Over Potential	Employers' tendency to be swayed more towards candidates who are articulate in the English language than those with raw potential. (Reshma & Jill)	10	29
Candidate's Interview Skills versus Great Calibre	Employers' inability to distinguish between candidates who are trained in interview skills from those who	4	9

Name	Description	Files	References
	have genuine potential (Jill)		
Choosing the one who spoke better	The tendency to choose the candidate who spoke better in the interview	1	1
Eloquence in the English Language		2	2
High Marks but Poor Articulation	Inability by some black candidates to articulate themselves well despite having achieved high academic results	4	9
Inability to Express themselves Correctly in English	Candidates' inability to articulate themselves in English. (Lorna & Lebo)	6	8
Emotional and Mental State	Young job seekers' emotional and mental state due to unemployment	3	18
Depressing Job Search Experience		1	3
Excitement By New Young Job Seekers		1	4
Feeling Useless	A feeling of uselessness due to being unable to meet parents' expectations to assist them financially due being unemployed.	1	1
Self-Doubt	A candidate's sense of wonder what's wrong with themselves due to failing to find a job.	1	1
The Negative Emotional and Psychological	A state of self-doubt and negative emotional state due to unemployment	2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Effects of Unemployment.			
Tired and Demotivated	Application fatigue experienced by some Black youth from years of unsuccessful employment applications	1	5
You Get Mentally Exhausted	Some candidates mental state after unsuccessfully searching for a job	1	2
Job Requirements-Based Barriers	Employers making work experience and drivers licence part of the requirements for entry-level jobs.	8	27
Emphasis on Academics and High Maths Marks	Job advertisements that require high marks, especially in maths, even though that may not be what it actually takes to do the job. (Shamala)	7	12
Fascination with High Maths and English Marks	Companies tend to set high minimum marks for these subjects for candidates to be eligible for vacant positions.	3	3
High Maths Marks Aren't a Good Measure		1	2
High-Calibre Graduates Always Down to Academics	Employers' general inclination to select candidates based on academic performance.	1	1
Preference of High Performing Students Over	Employers' inclination towards top academic achievers ahead of average performers.	2	6

Name	Description	Files	References
Average Ones			
Lack of Work Experience is a Barrier to Employment	What Matriculants cite as the biggest reason for their struggle to secure employment.	2	7
Requiring Honours Degree for Entry-Level Jobs		1	1
Requiring Two Years Experience For Entry Level Positions		1	1
The Driver's Licence Requirement is a Barrier for Many Applicants		1	2
They want Afrikaans Speakers		2	3
Not Taking a Risk	Not taking a chance, but instead making a choice that is 100 percent guaranteed for you (Jill)	1	1
Oversupply of Labour and Competition	Too many people competing for too few jobs.	10	26
A Lot of Youth Applying for Too Few Jobs		2	2
Being unemployed		1	1
Employers are Super-selective		2	2
Exploitation Due to Unemployment	Unemployed youth feeling exploited and ill-treated by employers taking advantage of	1	2

Name	Description	Files	References
	high unemployment in the country		
Hypercompetitive Recruitment Market		1	1
Lack of Economic Growth		2	2
Over-supply of Labour	Too many people competing for a few jobs.	3	4
Shrinking job market		2	2
Unemployment Creates Unfair Competition	Practices that give some youth an unfair competitive advantage in a high unemployment environment. (Lorna)	2	6
Panicking During Interviews or Assessments	Struggle during interviews or assessments due to extreme panic or nervousness	3	12
Nervousness during the Interview	Extreme nervousness during the interview that unemployed matriculants cited as a big personal challenge	1	4
Panic and Anxiety During Interview		2	3
Panic Because of Facing a Serious-Faced Panel		1	1
Panic During Assessments		1	1
Panic in Interview Due to Inadequate Preparation		2	3

Name	Description	Files	References
Predominance of Whites and Indians in Positions of Power	Dominance of Whites and Indians in powerful senior positions in organisations.	6	24
Disproportionate Representation		2	2
Executive Decision-Making Powers		2	4
Our Business is Mostly White	Hiring a lot of white people because the business is mostly white. (Fundiswa)	2	2
Top Management is Not People Like Us		2	4
Whites and Indians Occupying Positions of Power	The connection between the race of senior managers in organisation and the demographic choice of their recruits.	3	6
Preference for Ready-Made	Employer's tendency to prefer youth or candidates that are "ready-baked" over those than need more development. (Jill)	8	16
Don't Want to Start from Scratch	Employers' unwillingness to train new recruits who come with no basics.	2	2
Least Hassle	Picking a candidate who already knows what to do.	1	1
Plug and Play	Choosing candidate who is "ready baked".	2	2
Sink or Swim	The expectation by employers for new recruits to hit the ground running with minimum handholding	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
There is no Handholding	The expectation that new recruits "hit the ground running", in the shortest time possible.	1	1
Recruiting People Like Us	Hiring managers like employing people who look and sound like them (Fundiswa, Lebo & Reshma)	6	8
Rejected with No Reasons Provided	Generic system-generated feedback or none at all, to applications, thus making it harder for applicants to know where they went wrong.	2	14
CV Formats versus Automated Recruitment Systems		1	3
Matching CV Content Employer Algorithms	Not knowing how to optimise the contents of CV for a best possible match with algorithms of the systems used by employers.	1	1
Lack of Feedback from Selection Assessments		1	4
No Reasons Provided for Application Rejection		2	6
Not Knowing What Recruiters Want		1	1
Relatability	A connection or relataness that a hiring manager feels towards a candidate due to a shared experience, social standing or race	5	12

Name	Description	Files	References
	(Fundiswa, Tshego & Preggie)		
Relatability	The tendency by hiring managers to favour candidates that they find easier to relate with.	5	11
Relatedness		1	1
Salary or Stipend Too Low	Salary on offer below the young work seeker's needs and expectations.	4	13
Rejection	Candidate rejecting a job offer or the employer rejecting a candidate due to salary disagreement	2	2
Unfairness	Candidate feeling unfairly treated	1	1
Self-Presentation	How to dress and show up, what to say and not to say in an interview.	9	29
Dress code for interviews		3	3
How the Graduate Expresses themselves in an Interview	Importance being placed by hiring managers and recruitment panels on how articulate the candidate is when answering questions during an interview.	2	2
How to show up for an interview		4	7
Presenting oneself in an interview	Knowing how to conduct yourself, and what to say and what not say during an interview	4	6
Too Loose or Too Tight Dress Attire	Candidates from poor socio-economic backgrounds showing up in ill-fitting attire	2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
	because that's all they have access to.		
What to Say and what Not to Say	Candidate's ability to know what they should and should not say in an interview (Jill)	2	3
Showing Up	Making sure that your voice is heard, interacting and engaging with people at different levels.	5	10
Awareness of How to Present your Top Skills		1	1
Making your voice heard		1	1
Showing Up in an Apologetic Manner	"They kind of feel like this is not their real home".	1	1
Situational Empathy	Cultural affiliation and understanding the context where a young person or work-seeker comes from. (Shamala)	7	27
Can Relate Socially and Behaviourally		1	1
Inconvenient and Inconsiderate Requests by Recruiters.	Recruiters asking candidates to attend interviews at short notice, leaving them with little time to prepare and raise money for transport.	2	6
Lack of Care Why People are Late for an Interview or Work	Managers not caring about the reasons for late-coming	3	3
Lack of Consideration and	Employer's failure to appreciate job applicants'	2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Understanding by Employers	circumstances and challenges.		
Lack of Higher Human Consciousness	Managers' lack of understanding why candidates may be late for interviews.	1	1
Need for Open-Minded Hiring Managers	Willingness by hiring managers and panels to see potential in candidates and demonstrate contextual sensitivity.	1	2
Understanding a Person's Context		5	7
Employers or Senior Management Do Not Understand People Like Us	Unemployed Black African youth feel that senior white management does not appreciate the socio-economic challenges they face.	2	4
Social Capital and Mentorship	Access to valuable social networks and mentors.	9	16
Black People Do Not Have Networks	Most black youth do not have access to networks of people who can connect them to employment opportunities.	1	1
Getting a Job Because of Connections	Candidates being employed because of people they know within a company. Lorna	2	2
Lack of Networks	Lack of social networks that can facilitate one's access to employment opportunities and career progression	6	6

Name	Description	Files	References
Lack of Relatable Senior Mentors and Coaches	The struggle of black youth to find senior black mentors and coaches in organisations they work in.	2	2
Old Boys Networks	Securing jobs through personal connections	1	3
Vouching for White Candidates	White candidates often have someone internal who can vouch for them. (Puleng)	1	1
Social Class and Privilege	General employer preference for candidates from a higher social standing or privileged backgrounds (Valerie, Jill, Tshego & Puleng)	7	25
Classism	The role of one's socio-economic class status in shaping their employment prospects.	4	9
Exposure to and Ownership of Technology		2	2
Lower LSM Candidates' Social and Behavioural Challenges	Additional family and financial responsibilities faced by job candidates and employees from disadvantaged backgrounds. (Reshma)	1	6
Emotional Stress		1	1
Family to Look After		1	1
Personal Brand	How an employee or candidate is perceived by employers. (Reshma paraphrased)	1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Time Keeping When Relying on Public Transport	Struggle to show up to work on time when depending on public transport.	1	1
Privileged versus not privileged	Differences in young people's employment prospects based on economic status	3	5
We Only Want Creme de La Creme	Applicant's Social Class plays a role - (Puleng)	1	1
Social Environment and Family Support	The influence of the social environment and family support on employment prospects.	10	25
Family Support System	The influence of family system and values on education and career success. (Kumaran)	8	11
Family Structure	The influence of family structure and support on young black people's career choices and success.	1	2
Impact of Family System on Education and Career Prospects	The effect of the family support system on the employment prospects of young work seekers. (Reshma, Kumaran and Ravesh)	3	4
No family members with formal employment experience		4	5
Instant Gratification	The tendency by the youth of today to seek the easier route in the quest for achieving quick success. (Tshego)	2	4

Name	Description	Files	References
Loss of Community Role Models		1	3
Loss of Moral Fibre		1	1
Social Ills are Controlling Us		2	2
Unaddressed Effects of Historical Violence	Unresolved psychological effects of a violent past in Black communities.	2	2
Structural Employment Barriers	Economic and logistical barriers to access of employment. Shamala	6	21
Data and Printing costs	Cost of accessing the internet and printing documents for employment application purposes	6	10
Lack of Internet Access Impacting Interview Preparation		3	3
Poor Preparation for Interviews due to Cost of Data or Wifi	Disadvantaged Black candidates tend to show up for interviews unprepared, relative to their White and Indian counterparts, due to lack of access to data or wifi.	2	2
Spatial Segregation and Cost of Transport	Extra costs faced by candidates who live far from where employment opportunities are.	4	8
Distant Location from Employers	The difficulty experienced by young black work seekers to attend interviews due to	1	4

Name	Description	Files	References
	distance and cost of transport.		
Employer Location and Cost of Transport	Financial difficulties experienced by some candidates in paying for transport to attend employment interviews in locations distant from where they live.	1	1
Lack of Money to Attend Interviews		1	1
Trust	Being able to count on the person's backing when "the chips" are down. (Preggie)	1	2
Untrained Managers	Hiring managers often untrained at looking beyond how a candidate looks and sounds, and how to develop talent.	4	6
No Nurturing Boss	Absence of manager who is prepared to develop raw talent.	1	1
Untrained at Identifying Hidden Talent	Hiring managers' inability to find hidden talent, beyond how a candidate looks and sounds, due to lack of training. (Reshma)	4	5

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