The Relationship between Black Managers and Black Workers

Introduction

In this chapter I shall present the material generated, with my reflective comments, from the Managers' meetings and some Practitioners' Group meetings in the Co-operative Inquiry. I have also included material from final-year social work students who were in practice placements and had experience of being managed. Some of these students had black managers as their practice teachers in work placements; others had previous experiences of working in teams which had black managers. This student group was an all black group whom I taught; they were undertaking a module called Black Workers in White Welfare Organisations. (Further details of the nature of this teaching module will be given in Chapter 10 when I discuss my practice as a teacher). In a few of the teaching sessions the group explored their ideas, expectations and experiences of black managers, which I found interesting and insightful.

In including some of the material from student groups I had a boundary issue. I questioned whether I should open the boundaries of the Co-operative Inquiry so wide to include material from students who were not part of the inquiry. I resolved my dilemma by referring back to the overall aim of the research project and considered the material in relation to that aim. I concluded that this group provided a valuable source of information and feedback which could not be ignored in respect of the research inquiry, so I have chosen to include their views in this analysis about the relationship between black managers and black workers. However, the managers' voices predominate in the text and they appear more in the 'first' person and the workers' voices in the 'third' person.

I have chosen to focus more on the material from the Managers'' Inquiries for two reasons. One is that I worked without Cathy with the Black Managers Group as part of the research inquiry so I held stories about some black managers' experiences that were exclusive to that group and myself and which need to be told. I undertook to work with this group as I had a particular interest having been a manager in similar settings. I therefore felt that I had a lot to share and would be able to empathise with a their experiences on the basis of a genuine and lived understanding. The second reason for the primary focus on the managers' material is that the theme of the relationship between black managers and black workers was more pertinent to this group than to the other

inquiry groups. So what is presented in this chapter are thoughts ideas and inquiry questions in an attempt to tell the stories of our experiences as black managers relating to black workers in white welfare organisations. I shall attempt to present some of the meanings we generated from our stories and my own sense making of what I have heard by way of theorising. I have selected more field text for this chapter to give the reader a sense of the flavour of the discussions and stories which emerged.

The Manager's group met five times in all following the contracting and original meeting. Ten managers, eight women and two men, began to meet as a group. We were of Afro-Caribbean and Asian descent. We were not a homogeneous group. We had differences in terms of gender culture, region, status, class and in terms of our experiences in statutory and voluntary organisations. Three people worked as Service Managers in large London Social Services Departments, one as a Centre Manager with NSPCC, one as an Assistant Regional Director with NCH and one as a Family Centre Manager with Barnados. Only six people, five women and one man including myself continued to the end and met on a regular basis.

At the outset one primary inquiry question was "How do I interact with black social workers?" "Do I treat white social workers differently?" The second part to this question still remains to be developed but the first part has formed the basis for other inquiry questions such as:- "What are managers expecting and wanting from black workers and what do black workers expect from black managers" How are our expectations met if at all?" "What happens when they are not met?" "How do we react and respond and how do organisations react and respond?" The question of what black workers expect from black managers was explored in greater depth by the Practitioners' Group of the research and also by black social work students; however the black managers also discussed it.

Some of these questions will form the basis of future inquiries but, in the analysis that follows, I shall present some themes that emanated from the Managers' and Practitioners' Inquiry Groups and from student group explorations. By taking an intergroup theoretical approach, a systems approach and using a bicultural model I hope to offer some explanations of what happens to black managers and workers when we interact in the context of our expectations in white organisations.

THEMES

As we explored further and deeper three major themes emanated from our perceptions and expectations. Firstly, **Cultural loyalties**; subsumed under this theme is a sub-theme:- familial relationship between managers and workers. There are also some minor themes under this sub-theme which are *the implicit parent-child relationship of nurturing/ dependence/independence, respect from workers, developing workers potential, lack of gratitude betrayal/rejection, workers operating as victims, workers having high expectations and making too many demands on managers, workers pushing boundaries and asking for allowances and exceptions*; secondly, **the myth of the super black manager** and thirdly, the **need for support** for and from black workers as a way of dealing with managers' isolation.

Cultural Loyalties

A bicultural perspective that is looking at what it means to live in two cultures simultaneously is essential to understanding and explaining such issues as cultural loyalties and behaviours between black managers and black workers. In assuming a bicultural perspective I am examining the ecological context and impact on our behaviour, which may be adaptive or dysfunctional depending on the contextual variables at different points in time. A bicultural perspective can be used to explain the pressures and stresses on black workers, in general, as we participate in minority and majority group cultures.

As black workers we live in a bicultural world which requires us to pursue and develop our careers in the white world and maintain our personal life within the black community. We are sometimes forced by the black community and by white organisations to make choices about how we organise our lives culturally. We are expected to split our allegiances between the organisation, the black community and ourselves as black workers. For example, organisations may want us to be integrated into the dominant white, male culture where we are sometimes forced to suppress our racial and ethnic identity and where our positions are very often on the margins. On the margins we experience isolation, feelings of invisibility and in some cases feel we have to deny or abandon our racial identity.

The black community, on the other hand, asks us to stay rooted to its norms, traditions and values and remain committed to our culture. So, for some black workers, there is a sense of having our own cultural identity, taking on the work identity of the organisation and striving for a sense of integration of the two. Striving for that sense of integration however leads to our having to behave in certain ways that cause conflict and lead to stress since each context has its own expectations and role demands. Bell (1990), who has specifically investigated the experiences and problems faced by black women managers and professionals in America, reveals that as black women we perceive ourselves as living in a bicultural world (one culture black, the other white). Consequently, we feel a constant 'push and pull' between the different cultural contexts in our lives, which results in high stress levels particularly linked to role conflict stressors. Denton's (1990) review also emphasises the importance of these bicultural role stressors and the combined effects of racism and sexism which enhance the "stresses endemic to today's cadre of black professional women" (p447).

As black managers, some of us feel an obligation to contribute to the alleviation of racism for other black workers on behalf of the black community. We are therefore, faced with having to manage tensions between these two worlds and with possible identity conflicts as a result of having to remain emotionally committed to different components of our lives which are sometimes incompatible (Baumeister, 1986). Having the proper balance between our own cultural identity and assimilation into the organisational culture is essential for healthy psychological functioning. However, uncritical assimilation into the organisation cultural values can cause a great deal of stress and strain on relationships between black managers and black workers (Wimberly, 1997).

The extent to which one group of workers may have achieved a higher level of assimilation and acculturation into the organisation compared to other workers is another important consideration. Very disparate levels of acculturation and assimilation can be especially problematic for black managers and black workers alike and can have a significant impact on the power dynamics and create conflict over issues of loyalty, identification, role model and support, for example.

Our research inquiry revealed that for some black workers emotional cut off from black managers may result as workers begin to feel "too different" from black managers and distance themselves from these managers. They distanced themselves and did not offer support when they felt that managers were not displaying loyalty to the black community,

loyalty to them as black workers, or to the fight against racism. One group expressed their reasons for distancing based on disloyalty by stating strongly:

"They should be united with us in terms of purpose and sharing in the plight of black people. They should have an understanding of our shared experience, of the experience of racism; an understanding of the race issues, factors affecting black professionals and workers in general".

Other workers had clear expectations of managers in regard to race and cultural loyalty. There was an expectation that black managers should have a high level of awareness of racism and they should be proactive in challenging racist practices and promoting equal opportunities. They should be proactive in seeking strategies for change. The following statements from black workers reveal some of these expectations of black managers:

"To have knowledge of racism and be proactive regarding race issues".
"To be self-aware and clear about their identity".
 "To be black conscious and have a black perspective".
 "**To work with an anti-discriminatory practice model".**

There was an implicit assumption that somehow, by virtue of managers' position in the organisation, their knowledge, awareness and experience of racism would automatically be more developed. It was assumed that a high level of race awareness should be a pre-requisite for black seniority. Black workers attributed to senior staff a wealth of knowledge, a high level of race awareness and magical powers to make changes. This was expressed in statements like, "**I expect black managers to be knowledgeable, they need to know more than me about racism and how to challenge it at work".** One group went as far as to say that they expected black managers to be the ones to ensure, if not initiate, black workers support groups. They went on to say that it was black managers' obligation to create changes that could promote communication between black workers. They looked to black managers to be role models and positive ones at that. They also expected them to "**play the part and be the part".** This meant that black managers should be "**More direct and assertive about creating change".**

Some black workers identified with black managers at the level of being black in an all white setting and they expected black managers to identify with them at that level. In that regard, they saw themselves as being in partnership with the managers by virtue of the fact that they were in the minority in white organisations. Collectively as black workers

they had similar experiences with regard to unfair treatment and lack of opportunities. Identification contributed to black workers expecting to feel comfortable and safe with black managers and expecting honesty and openness from them. One group of students noted that they expected managers "**To be supportive, offer unlimited support and fair treatment, to be open, honest and understanding.** Another group noted that they expected black managers "**To empathise with black workers".**

They expected that black managers should be able to understand them because they would be aware of their likely experiences as black workers. There was also an implicit expectation that managers should understand their life experiences and should, therefore, be able to make allowances for their behavior or requests. Without a doubt there was an expectation that managers should make exceptions for black workers, exceptions in respect of child care needs, the need to have to leave work early at times, the need to arrive late at work sometimes so that expectations over time keeping and punctuality were cited as a particular 'bug bear'.

Discussions about time are sometimes fraught with tension as managers take a position that punctuality is a minimum requirement of a professional. However some workers have a different view. They take the view that black managers should understand their position in a racist society and should be familiar with their domestic circumstances. Allowances and exceptions should, therefore, be made even when, the request and basis for it is deemed unreasonable in the eyes of the manager.

Some black managers, however, feel that black workers are being unreasonable in this regard seeing them as sometimes pushing the boundaries too far, and as making demands and having expectations of them which they did not have of white managers. A male manager stated his belief:
"I believe that black staff push our relationship to its limits to see if there are boundaries imposed, they feel comfortable to ask for things that they would not ask of a white manager".

On this matter this manager related a story of one of his black members of staff asking for an exception to be made for her that she wold not have asked of a white manager and how he confronted her:

"Speaking as somebody who in the last two jobs has worked with a majority black staff, one of the things that has always interested me is how black staff feel about testing out the

limits of the interaction between yourself and them. By that I mean that they often push the relationship to its limits to see whether there are going to be any boundaries. For example, one of my female centre workers asked me to allow her to leave work early to get her car fixed. So I said to her, "well, you have not got any time off in lieu because you have not worked any extra time and you have a group room full of children downstairs. You and your colleague are supposed to be working with them, why are you asking me a question like that". You only work part-time. You should be able to do it on Monday or Tuesday. Why are you asking me that and she said, *"well I would not be telling you these things, I would not be asking you these things if you were white".* She actually said that.   I said stop, stop right there. Listen to yourself. Listen to what you are saying. You are saying that it is all right to take liberties, to ask for things that you would not ask for because, I am black. Is that what you are saying to me? And she said " Oh yeah because I feel comfortable with you, that's why I feel able to do that."   I said no that's not what it's about. It's about you feeling that if you give me that sob story, as a black man, I must understand and I must let you go because I am a black man and we all got to struggle in this world. But what are you doing? What is that doing for you? What does that mean for you?   Does that mean then that you are going to take that experience into other organisations and use it with other black managers? Does that mean then that you are only going to work in all black establishments, so therefore you will be asking these questions of all black managers"?

One manager picked up on the fact that the worker said she was feeling comfortable because he was a black manager and reflected on the meaning of that for some black workers. She reflected:

"But I am now thinking, well, one thing she also said is because I feel comfortable and that is the bit that I picked up on. In the past, if workers came to me with such request I thought, "Oh you are taking liberties, you are taking advantage, you would not do this to a white manager, why are you asking me more than you would ask a white manager". And may be not pay enough attention to the fact that there might be something that this person is experiencing from me as a black person, that I also have to respond to.   It was the word "comfortable" that triggered that for me…….. I am hearing that word "comfortable" again slightly differently. That word has really struck me because that comfort might be also about, 'here is somebody who I can share that responsibility or unburden that responsibility on, whatever they choose to do'. So I imagine that they won't feel the same way with a white manager, you know.   They might be thinking, "You will understand so I can share or burden that responsibility on you"."

"Their demands should not necessarily be viewed in the negative or seen as taking liberties" as one manager put it. It could possibly be constructed as workers being more comfortable and confident when relating to black managers than to white managers, that

there is a bond, based on shared experience as black people, which results in testing limits and pushing boundaries.

Another manager concurred with the story and added that some black workers have a sense of having a right to special consideration. She reported how one member of her staff expressed such a right, based on her expectation that the manager should know and understand her situation as a black person. She said, **"I can remember one of my female staff saying to me "you know the runnings". Because you know 'the runnings', why are you not making allowances for me".**

There was an expectation that the managers should know and understand and should be able to negotiate with the organisation for these needs to be met because of their power positions. Workers should not be forced to be in a position to negotiate around such need. The message and assumptions were that the organisation should be expected to make changes to accommodate the needs of black workers since the organisation was part of the system which made their lives difficult and the managers were now part of that system or represented that system.   Therefore, they should be the ones to make allowances as they were "in the know" about black life.   Aligned with this was the expectation that black managers should be actively seeking to promote the interests of black workers, in the organisation.

Those workers who did not experience empathy or support, in the form of making exceptions or allowances, for their plight from black managers viewed these managers as not having a high level of race awareness or black consciousness or loyalty to their culture.   The sense of having a right to special consideration never left some black workers. Some of these workers thought of their history and their condition as a wound, which made them different, and special, so that they should be exempted from certain responsibilities. When black managers complained about their behavior and attitudes towards work performance and time keeping, for example, or their apparently lack of a sense of responsibility they were baffled and hurt.

Black managers said that they were cognizant of black workers' organisational position – on the bottom rung of the socio-economic ladder- and hence realised that some of the workers were victims of white, male, institutional oppression and questioned whether workers did experience their support. **"They come to us as victims, how supportive are we? How much am I helping? Do we perpetuate the victim position in black workers? How do we**

help them to own their responsibility and not put it on black managers? There is an expectation that black managers should make allowances".

Another manager added:

"I believe that black workers are not feeling listened to by us and white workers feel black workers are listened to more. Each have their fantasies that the other is getting support".

Victim role

On another level this expectation, of making exceptions, could be construed as workers using their race and gender to manipulate managers and of attributing a great deal of responsibility to managers to make things better for them. Some workers may even go so far as to present themselves as victims who have no choice in order to have this expectation met.

One manager stated that he thought that some workers often took the victim role, and he found this difficult to cope with at times. He related his struggles to support them and questioned whether he was really being helpful, particularly when they:

"have a way of operating which includes crying, presenting themselves as victims in all situations and allowing you to…. Pulling you over to that side, in order to get their own way and not looking at what is actually going on for them and face up to some quite complex problems that they've got.

So often I would take them on face value and if they ask me for something, more often than not I would say yes. But I have got to the stage where I am beginning to think that I am not actually helping them. I am actually allowing them to manipulate me and they would just carry that behavior on to other black people, other managers, to the point where I am worried they would then become abusive if they were not getting their own way. So I said to myself "you know, this has got to stop. I am not actually doing them any favours".

I am trying to build up a certain kind of relationship here particularly as it is mainly all black staff, and I try to look after staff as much as possible. But then you have to come to the point where you say to yourself, "well how much am I actually helping this person really and truly. Am I just skimming over the surface with them and allowing them to do things, which are comfortable for them at the moment, so they can get through the next day or week, what about the future? What happens to them after I have gone or after they have gone from here?"

He wanted to find a way to help workers to feel empowered rather than to be victims. He questioned:

"How de we help workers to make some sense of their behavior, to get out of that victim role? Interpretations does not always help, ownership of their behavior and responsibility for their behavior is what would help".

Stories were told during the research inquiries of experiences between black managers and black workers where managers created a nurturing or even emotionally dependent and co-dependent relationship with some black workers which may have contributed to some workers not taking responsibility.

Nurturing - dependent/co-dependent relationship

Some black managers said explicitly that they experienced their relationship with black workers as being that of parent and child. Some women managers experienced being in a maternal role so that at times they felt they had to nurture, protect and contain workers. This was captured in one managers attempt to brainstorm words and phrases associated with her experiences. She said:

" I have some words and phrases associated with my experiences of being a black manager, they are maternal, too much high expectations, boundaries blurred, protection, can't contain them because they are too unruly, delinquent behavior, issue of punishment".

One manager summed up that experience in relation to herself in this statement:

"I believe there is an expectation by black workers of us taking on a mothering role, and this might be cultural because I don't see them displaying such an expectation in the same way with white female managers. For me there is a relationship between being a black woman manager and mothering. The type of nurturing we give as black mothers are entangled with the way we are, as managers. It is difficult to separate our culture from the way we manage. The way we relate to mothering in our culture is the same way we relate to being a black woman manager. We expect to be treated with the kind of respect that our own parents taught us to give to older people and people in senior positions. I treat black workers with the kind of respect I was taught to give to my brothers and sisters".

This is a complex dynamic, which sometimes creates role confusion for managers and workers alike. This dynamic is related to the role of caregiver that many women are socialised into accepting and which sometimes brings with it problems with letting go and separation. Some mothers continue to treat their children as dependants. By the same

token black women managers run the risk of not letting the workers grow and continue to treat them as dependants.

One manager explored the notion of mothering and the possible confusion and projections to do with expectations of role:

"I feel that I've got boundaries but the boundaries get mixed up trying to be 'me' and being a manager. There is also the feeling of wanting to protect, you know, and that links with having a maternal role towards black staff... I am confused too because I do not think I have the blueprint about how I should be as a black manager. So I think the confusion is for all of us and maybe we can't contain that confusion.   If all of us are in the confusion and yet workers expectation of managers is that we should get it all clear, for me its another burden. I deal with that burden by putting it back on them saying 'it is not just my problem' but I'm thinking isn't it. Somehow it just doesn't become 'not' my problem any more. It is about redefining for me what then becomes my problem and what is not my problem".

Some often experienced workers as adolescents for whom they were challenged to provide boundaries and containment. One manager said:

"**Sometimes I find some of the black staff that I work with presenting like adolescents with delinquent behaviour. Sometimes I can't contain them.   They are all over the place... Trying to contain them is so difficult for me".**

Some black workers may unconsciously fall into the role of adolescent in their demands to be treated differently in terms of allowances being made for their attitudes, behavior, and requests for privileges for their situation. One manager related an example of how one of her workers had expectations that she should be looked after, as one would look after a family member, and was surprised at the way she chose to present herself:

"**She was expressing herself like an adolescent saying 'I want my bit of it and you're supposed to sort it out for me because you are the manager, so I am telling you what I want and you are supposed to do something about it'".**

Respect

Some managers had expectations of respect from workers that bore a resemblance to familial relationships. They also spoke of implicitly treating workers as they would treat their bothers and sisters or their children. This is reflected in the following dialogue with

one manager speaking about his expectations of respect from black staff in his organisation:

"Well, I think, here I expect people to have a certain amount of respect for each other as black people and when that does not happen, a centre worker or any worker is disrespectful to another colleague or especially to a family, it makes my blood boil. It really does. That is one thing that is guaranteed to make me really angry".

"What do we mean by disrespect"? Asked another manager.

He replied:
"Treating them as if they were nobody instead of treating them as if they were your brother and sister. Treating them as another black person. Its kind of crazy I know because brothers and sisters have arguments. Brothers and sisters don't always like each other. Brothers and sisters have different points of view".

Another manager challenged and tried to make sense by saying:
"But does that not come from the kind of stereotype, if you like, that all black people are alike and we are the same. We do not recognise our differences. But we are different. We have different needs and we have different wants and show them differently and I think that it is that bit that gets missed out. Because we expect the other person, the other black brother to behave like we behave and when they don't, then we become angry".

This statement triggered further reflections and sensemaking and this manager continued:
"I get angry when I experience disrespect. Respect for our elders and people in authority are very important to us in any black family. So that is the value we carry in there, in organisations. Well it may be that the other generation of black workers doesn't hold that value as highly as we do".

This manager also thought that maybe as managers we were having unrealistic expectations with regard to respect, by expecting 'unconditional respect'. She reflected:
"... Once upon a time as soon as I saw a black visitor or black staff coming into my centre, I expected a certain type of respect and I did not have that similar expectation of a white visitor or white staff. So when I didn't get it from black staff, then what went on for me? How did I perceive this? How did I respond then? I expected them to respect me unconditionally. So look at the load black staff has to carry or the load we are putting on them. The white staff can walk more freely because they are not carrying it. We are not putting it on them".

Reflecting on this complex dynamic psychotherapeutically, projections, issues of dependence and independence, separation and loss would be present in the relationship and would need to be managed as the familial dynamics are played out. Some of our encounters are the professional parallels of common human experiences, as is the case with projections, which refer to the unconscious processes whereby vulnerable, hostile or otherwise difficult feelings, may be disowned by an individual and attributed to another. The other person may then, as a result of the interaction, actually experience the feelings as his or her own. What are likely to be projected are core fears and self-protective defenses against relating and intimacy.

The notion of care taking, being a positive role model and assuming responsibility for ensuring that there are successes in the black community motivated some managers to seek out potential in workers for coaching and to ascertain workers views of wanting to be helped to grow and develop. Generally, some managers felt responsible for ensuring that more black workers went up the hierarchy in an attempt to close the black managers' isolation gap. There was also a sense of responsibility for creating more black professionals. Some felt responsible at an unconscious level, for providing opportunities in education and employment that had been previously denied to black people. Some of us felt that we were more conscientious about equal opportunities issues than our white counterparts. This created tremendous pressures on managers for preparing workers to become the next generation of managers. It also created pressure on the workers to succeed, to be grateful and to become good role models. The opposite position sometimes arose in which some workers felt that they did not want so much responsibility and rejected managers' offers. Some accepted the offers and developed a close relationship with the manager and then found it difficult to separate so that a co-dependent relationship emerged. Some workers, however, felt that black managers did not help them to climb the career ladder. They experienced some managers as doing the opposite; as actively seeking ways to prevent workers from achieving similar positions to managers. Both managers and workers operate with contradictions in regard to this issue.

Potential

Some managers felt that they had a responsibility to coach workers into being better at their jobs. They took responsibility for identifying workers potential and helping them to develop in appropriate ways. Some workers also wanted managers to take an interest in them as workers, in their development, growth and progress. They specifically said that

they did not want their progress to be hindered and instead wanted encouragement. Managers, however, expected that workers would be aware of their own potential, would want to nurture that potential and take an interest in their own development. Some of us spoke of the frustration we felt when we saw what we considered to be good talent going to waste. Some managers were sometimes impatient with workers for not moving as fast as they wanted them to. At one level they knew that the workers lacked the self-confidence to push themselves and that generally people did not move until they were fully ready to, but nevertheless the impatience remained. Part of the impatience with black workers was also because some black managers felt over-responsible for the development of black staff. A manager questioned the implications of her responsibility as she saw it:

"Black managers need to do extra coaching with black workers, do we raise workers expectations and are we being unrealistic when we help them too much? Am I being honest with the worker"?

Another responded:

"Why do black workers need more coaching? We never find it easy to recruit black staff so when I find ones with potential I coach and nurture them. Sometimes there is a cost to us, I feel".

One manager said:

"When we spot potential we invest a lot to enable them to grow then we feel let down if they don't meet our expectations. There is a cost to us around being perceived as making exceptions. What is the outside world going to think about our standards? Are they going to see us as having lower standards".

Other managers spoke of emotional cost to 'self'. Some said that they expected workers to feel grateful for their offers of help and support and felt hurt and pain when they thought they were bending over backwards to help workers and workers were seemingly ungrateful.

Lack of gratitude betrayal and rejection

Some managers shared stories of bitter disappointment. One manager spoke of the help she gave to a secretary who, she felt, had potential for taking on a senior position and professional training. She actively sought help for her by taking an interest in the work

she was doing, giving her more challenging work, speaking on her behalf and praising her work in relevant senior managers meetings so that her skills and abilities could be recognised. She sought and secured money from the organisation for her to undertake further training. The worker accepted all the help gratefully and during her period of training, growth and development and her relationship with the manager was a good one. However on completion of the training their relationship deteriorated. They came into conflict when both parties had to renegotiate their relationship. With the worker's new found self esteem and skills she began to relate differently to the organisation and to the white staff in the organisation in a way that displeased the black manager, who said:

" I had an expectation that she would use the talents and the skills that she had within the team and develop but clearly, she thought she was right, it's work that she thought she had done and she did not want to do it again.   So she had a different view of it from me.

The manager felt that this worker's work standard had dropped and she took to coaching her again. The worker resented what she now perceived as interference and the manager's jealousy. The manager felt that their relationship became distant and estranged as the worker demonstrated that she was no longer in need of her help. They eventually got into conflict as the manager began to challenge her on the standard of her work and the worker took out a grievance against the manager for harassment and unfair treatment. It was a long, protracted and painful process with both parties in hurt and pain, but with the worker feeling the brunt of the outcome.

The manager continued with her story:

"**Through all of that, all that has been thrown at you as a manager, you begin to feel totally isolated. And then on another level you understand and feel glad you were there to be able to help.   I'm glad I was there and it is good to see a black person there but then I get confused with all the other bits. I'm talking about the trust, the boundaries. Last month I got accused by one black worker of actually 'playing' with her career, messing up her career. I gave her opportunities to make choices. But still she could not see that she had choices and she's still not talking to me...... She thinks I've blighted her future and "how dare I" she said, and went on to tell me how much I'm a 'coconut' and she thinks that she has the right to do that, to call me names".**

This manager looked pained as she recounted the story and said:

"If I appoint a black member of staff and that person fails then I feel I have failed. If a white manager appoints them then it does not matter so much".

Many of the other managers identified with her and recounted similar experiences of their own. We also spoke of how sometimes black managers' good intentions are misunderstood by workers. One manager recounted:

"With two of my workers both a black worker and a white worker within the space of half an hour in one morning, they said things to me that I thought 'that was below the belt'. I was not hearing what they were telling me and I thought they were not hearing me either. So what was happening in our communication was so distorted that we all thought we were listening but we weren't hearing what each other was saying. You start off by being a caring manager with good intentions, wanting to do something to ensure that black people get represented in a fair way but yet still it is received by a black worker as not fair. So what is happening then in terms of our intentions is we set off with something that is very good... things happen and you know somebody gets the wrong message. They then get locked into that sort of argument about "you were not thinking about me, you were not really trying to protect me". "You sold me out".

These stories reveal that some workers accepted the managers' offers to develop themselves but, sometimes, later reject the managers. This is sometimes done with an attitude, which says " I have arrived, I am just as good or better than you so I no longer need your help". With this attitude goes a feeling that managers do not want them to be empowered or to be better than them. There are also those workers who reject help and guidance from managers believing that the managers do not have their interest at heart because they are jealous and do not want them to be in the same position as them. This is especially so when managers give them feedback which they perceive as negative. In this case the manager is seen as the oppressor.

Another reason why some black workers reject black managers and why managers feel betrayed, is that some black workers view the black manager as part of the organisation, as belonging more than they do. Some workers compete and become more demanding and rivalrous when they see black managers as belonging. They struggle with the managers over whether they should strive to achieve promotion and join this group or whether they should leave the organisation. Some workers interpret "belonging as managers" as being assimilated into the organisation/family group and loosing their allegiance to their identity group. Many workers, expressing concerns about losing their black identity, struggle not to integrate for fear of loss of 'self' and reject those who do integrate. In not wanting to integrate into this family (organisation/group), workers may reject help from black managers and fail to learn from them how to move towards management positions or how to become bona fide family member.

Many black workers, whether managers or non-mangers, are ambivalent about becoming integrated into the family (organisation/group). Pressures to integrate or not come from other sources other than the individual. The values of the organisation, the black community and society, also play their part in the dynamics and contribute to the levels of expectation we have and to the demands we make of one another.

High expectations- too demanding

Black workers felt that they were under more pressure than their white peers from some black managers to perform in the organisation. Some workers believed that black managers wanted them to play a subservient role or expected them to perform better. In this regard they felt that the black managers' standards were too high, that they held an expectation that as workers they should be exceptional in what they did and be "professional" at all times. They said that black managers expected "more than a hundred percent" from them. One group cited "a hundred and twenty percent" and another "a hundred and fifty percent" as the efforts required of them from black managers. They described them as hard 'taskmasters' and mistresses.

The men particularly made the point, that in their experience in welfare organisations, it was the black women managers who were the hardest and whom they believed, to have higher expectations. Nevertheless, they respected the managers for wanting the best from them. They also had a general respect for black managers' positions in the organisation and for the fact that they were there. Some said that they had a high regard for those managers, invested a great deal of confidence in them and had a strong belief in their abilities. They also had a lot invested in seeing successful black people in power. These people acted as role models, motivators and provided encouragement for them to aspire to success. However, they did not want role models who were reinforcing the dominant value system. In return, they expected respect from managers; they expected managers to respect difference, to understand individualism, to appreciate that they were black but at the same time individuals.

Black managers and workers alike may mirror what is going on in the organisation. The processes in the workplace between black managers and the organisation are often reflected in black workers'/black managers' relationships. The core idea being that the dynamic interactions which belong to and originate in one area of relationship are acted

out in an adjacent area as though they belong there, being carried from one area to the other by a 'player' common to both. For example, black managers who feel badly treated by their organisations may speak in a general way of this 'abuse' mirroring the abuse from the black workers with whom they work – though this may merely mean that there are experiences of ill-treatment in both areas.

There are additional forces which operate to compound this difficult situation. For example, experiences of racism tend to harden the emotional side of some black workers and managers alike and in order to cope, they may opt to insulate themselves emotionally. In essence some become less affectionate towards each other, thus making it more difficult to continue being largely on the giving end of the relationship. Others continue to give support as part of their loyalty to the black community.

The notion of black mangers being here to serve and nurture in the interests of development in the black community can be a burdensome one and at the same time it has helped our survival. Our extended family tradition has helped us survive so far. This has been heavily criticised by researchers and members of the black community, but we know that our willingness to extend ourselves for family and community has been one of our greatest strengths. It comes from the idea that 'if we don't look after ourselves who will?'

For some black managers and workers alike this willingness to help members of our community who are in need gets translated into a sense of responsibility to others which can be self-destructive. Such managers or workers feel that they must take care of other workers and neglect to take care of themselves. This manager offers some caution in this statement:

"Whether you are a student, a basic grade worker, a manager or a higher education professional, our expectations of each other have remained consistently high which is good in some ways. But in other ways, it signals for me, that partly racism and a white system, which constantly expects us to fail, trigger these high expectations. So we should constantly strive to challenge this because it is too stressful. Our individual 'selves' appear to be left a little way behind in this process, at a cost to many of us in terms of our physical and sometimes mental health".

Implied in this statement is that we should guard against offering time and energy to anyone who needs it, thereby giving an image of being super human.

The myth of the 'super black manager'

The notion of taking responsibility for each other can act as a hindrance or burden for all parties concerned and the more so for black managers. Some managers said that they no longer wanted the burden of responsibility for creating change for black workers in organisations as a way of improving the lot of their race. They still cared for the black race and wanted good things for the black community but did not want the pressure and the guilt the responsibility sometimes carried. Some felt that they took action to remedy the situation in the black community of needing more black professionals in senior positions, by pursuing advanced education and a higher salary, in order to become a professional. These managers are now working in a transformed world where the black person is in a position of power; at the same time they scorn that liberated position because it is nothing more than a responsibility, a responsibility for setting the tone of one's own position in the organisation and standing by it.

Black managers are placed in a difficult position, almost in a double bind. This is reflected in this manager's statement:

"As a black male manager I represent something good - skills, merits, achievements, and pride in being black and achieving. I don't want to leave the grassroots and I want to empower black people. I want black people to have direct access to me, but I wonder if by doing that we are not setting up ourselves as super managers, by making ourselves available to black staff under the guise of empowerment. Are we setting too high a standard for ourselves"?

On one hand we want to accept and take responsibility for helping other black people to grow, to assist in bringing about change that will challenge institutional norms, and to put success in the community as a way of strengthening the black community. On the other hand we do not want the pressure of the responsibility; we want to be like any other employee doing a job and want to be given the necessary gratification. Black workers contribute to us staying in this bind by having unrealistic expectations of us and making implicit demands. One manager reflected on her dilemma as she struggled to come out of this bind. She said:

"How then, can we get what we want without compromising our integrity, our ability and competence. I feel a tension between appearing vulnerable and appearing too competent. I need to find the balance. We are late in coming into the management role in this country and a lot of this is new to us. We need help too".

The organisation also contributes to holding us in the position of 'super black manager'. People at the top of hierarchies carry the burden of responsibility for large segments of the organisation because, in theory, they have more access to resources and maintain a larger network of relationships with key people outside the organisation. They also have more potential power than black workers who are lower down the hierarchy. Black workers see black managers as possessing more power than they experience themselves as being able to use effectively. They see them as occupying favourable positions in the organisation. They, therefore, have high expectations of them using that legitimate authority favourably and at times forget or do not understand that managers may hold favourable positions in organisations but are rendered mute by the relative disadvantage in the larger system. The world confronting black managers and senior workers is very complex and the untoward effect of inappropriately using their power is often much clearer to managers than to workers lower down in the system, who face less complicated environments.

This manager's statement reflects, yet again, the dilemmas and moral and ethical struggles which most black managers have in terms of the balance of responsibilities between the individual, the organisation and the community. She stated:

"We need to be clear that we are not responsible for every other black person in the organisation under the guise of building the black community or taking responsibility for the black race. We can't deliver if we carry this responsibility for community to be together at any cost. In some ways the notion of community is humbug. How much do we take on as individuals and what do we push back to the organisation".

This notion of a super black manager is fed by the belief that as long as white society is willing to blame the misdeeds of one black person on an entire race, black people feel that they cannot stand alone, as do some white people (Wallace 1979). It becomes important, therefore, that black people, as individuals, become as publicly successful as possible because this reflects on the race as a whole. If black people are to prosper as a group in the British workplace, those who are successful could help by passing on their learning to the new black members of the professions.

This does mean, however, that young black people entering the workplace and professions must be willing to learn from the experiences of seasoned veterans and pioneers (Wallace, 1979). They need to learn organisational politics from senior black members. If they do not, valuable time will be revisiting the same learning experiences

that senior blacks have already had. It is for these reasons that some black managers actively seek to empower black staff and they take on what is sometimes seen as another job, that of coaching them, in their own time. However, they are mindful that the objective is to empower their staff not to create an unhealthy dependency.   One manager cautioned, **"There is a real relationship between coaching, empowering and fostering dependency and we need to have some clarity between them".**

This job brings with it its own personal cost and some black managers face tremendous conflicts as they cope with making themselves vulnerable to other black workers. One manager said:

"Will black workers cope with our vulnerabilities? We give off mixed messages around our expectations relating to vulnerability. We need to identify our feelings and then ask for help from the appropriate people. We don't have to present ourselves as competent at any cost".

Some managers feel that they have a lot to live up to and do not then want to show their vulnerabilities to black workers and to the organisation as a whole, for fear it would lower their image. This was conveyed in this statement:

"We believe that if we show vulnerability we won't appear powerful or competent and black workers will become concerned. Whose perception is that anyway? I think that we feel we have to present as able and competent so that the black workers' perceptions of us are not lowered. We are feeding that myth of the 'super black person', the myth of the 'super black manager'".

Some believe that they cannot allow white people to see that they do not understand, or that they can make mistakes, nor can they allow other black people to see this either. They might be concerned that white people would think that black people are stupid and inefficient which will reinforce the stereotypes about black people. These managers are very concerned about self-image in their need to appear super competent. They have a great deal invested in the "all powerful and competent" image. There is a fear of bringing the personal into the work.

Black people have been late in coming into managerial and power positions in British organisations. Our own history of having to prove ourselves at all times has been embedded in our unconscious. Therefore some of us feel that we cannot afford to show what we probably perceive as weakness because we need to command respect and preserve our status in the organisation. In not showing some vulnerability, we perpetuate the belief some black workers have of us as 'all strong'. Is it any surprise to hear a black worker stating clearly that she wanted her black manager **"to be confident, I want them to**

have integrity and able to work in empowering ways so that I can feel supported, cared for and at the same time challenged"?

Some of us are also wanting to hold on to the super black manager image to demonstrate that we are competent and are not holding our positions because we came in 'through the back door', on the equal opportunity band wagon. We are holding and continuing to hold our position on merit. Some managers expressed fear that if they want to show their vulnerabilities black workers would not be able to cope with them; but by their not showing their vulnerabilities some workers might possibly continue to hold on to the image of "super black manager" and not be in a position to offer support to managers in very isolated positions. The pain and isolation that comes with the position was recognised by many managers.

One aspect of the myth of the "super black manager" that continues to inform our self concept is the assumption that we are mother earth who has built-in capacities to deal with all hardship (Wallace, 1979). Many managers accept that myth and perpetuate it. It provides them with a convenient mask to hide all vulnerabilities. This mask could attract negative projections from other workers. This need to be indispensable to others and to the organisation might be related to feelings of low self worth. Some of us find meaning in making ourselves indispensable. For black women managers, in particular, there is a relationship between the way we have been socialised and our role as managers. Black women are socialised to assume the role of omnipotent caregiver and our passive acceptance of the role is a block to our self-development and general health. Because we take pride in our ability to be strong and supportive we find it difficult to admit that we can't always bear up. As black women some of us find it hard to admit we are overworked, overwhelmed, stressed and in pain.

The "super black manager" image is dangerous because it might convey that we could take anything anyone throws our way, that we need little nurturing or support.

<u>The need for support</u>:

Black managers felt that they had worked hard, long and well yet did not get the recognition they deserved. They also felt they did not get the right kind of support from other black workers and from the organisation. They said that they expected black workers to know how difficult it was for them as managers. They expected them to know

and understand what it felt like to be isolated and to appreciate their need to talk to black people and to be part of their network in the organisation. They did not want workers to see them as part of the system but people. **"A telephone call to acknowledge our difficulties with making hard decisions would be appreciated. We want them to recognise we have feelings. We want reassurances that we are doing the right thing by them"** said one manager.

There are so few managers that the network is very small and some managers therefore have to seek support from the general network of black workers, many of whom are not their peers. Black workers support groups were identified as a forum for support, but some managers did not feel that their needs were fully met in this forum. Instead, we sometimes experienced role conflict, collusion and confusion in these groups. There would be some confusion about how some of us wanted to be supported as a black people and in the professional role. The two are difficult to disentangle and there is very little choice of places in the organisation where the black manager can get this support aside from black workers groups. Some of us have used these groups as a way of empowering ourselves; we use them (the group) as a way of staying connected to the grassroots and of feeling grounded.

Many managers spoke of the difficulties encountered in these groups. We experienced finding ourselves in compromising positions. One manager reported his contradictions:
"It's not easy to tell them about the difficulties we face as black managers. It's like getting the support from the very people we have to manage, and we have to do it because our isolation means that we have to talk to other black staff who are not on our level who are not our peers. That sometimes causes issues of blurred boundaries. This situation is unique to black managers".

This statement also describes blurring of boundaries, and highlights a complex dynamic in which we sometimes want to be seen as black people needing support and at the same time we are not trusted by some workers because of our power position. This impacts on our interactions and on how black workers view us. Sometimes there is collusion between managers and workers to keep each other informed about news. Middle managers are in touch with concrete day to day events of workers below them, with their deprivations and struggles, and with the pressures of workers above. They also have to exercise control over and mete out punishment to black workers and retain their position, especially when workers react to their alienation by passive and aggressive

means. Some black workers, also make demands of black middle managers to promote them (to make them visible) and help them feel less anonymous.

Managers often sat with confidential information in black workers' groups and some workers had an expectation that managers would divulge this information. This situation would create further difficulties where workers were sitting in the same room as managers, voicing their grievances, and managers felt placed in a position in which they were sitting with information that they could not divulge. Furthermore, the manager might, for example, be one of the actors in the grievance matter being discussed, either as one of the persons hearing the case or as the person who was the object of the grievance.

Managers were also expected to take on powerful roles, such as chairperson and secretary, and to be active in working groups or sub-committees thereby giving them more power in the group. Some workers ascribed to managers' expert power by virtue of their skills, knowledge and position in the organisation. It was therefore very difficult for managers to 'be themselves' and they spoke of their struggles to convey such difficulties and have their limitations heard.

One manager spoke of an experience in her organisation where such circumstances forced the few black managers to form their own group. The workers there were angry because they viewed this action as creating a split and depleting the strength of the black workers in the organisation. They felt resentful and saw this as elitism. As far as they were concerned racism transcended everything and any discussion pertaining to back people's positions in the organisation should be done openly in one forum. They felt that they were losing out by not getting the full benefit of the managers' experiences and expertise.

Black managers and workers strived to communicate within these webs of complexity and had many blocks to overcome. This manager left us with many questions including this important one:
"How does the communication get blocked between us and black workers? We need to recognise our differences, we expect them to know and understand comradeship, to know how difficult it is for us as black managers, but we don't tell them".

Another challenging question still facing black practitioners was that of how managers and workers could converse across positions and boundaries.

Reflective Summary

One of the ways in which I have chosen to summarise what I have presented so far has been to look for similarities and differences. I shall reflect on how expectations between black managers and black workers converge and diverge.

Similarities and Differences

Reflecting on both sets of field text I have noticed some similarities, in the sense that what the black managers have perceived black workers as wanting, has been confirmed by the workers in some of their statements about expectations. I was interested to note that there were few differences in our expectations of each other. In some cases both parties wanted the same things and some of these things reflected fixed expectations and huge and sometimes unrealistic demands. One manager expressed the view:

"There is an element of us having fixed expectations and unsaid expectations. Sometimes we verbalise it with white colleagues but we would not necessarily do it with the blacks".

Both managers and workers wanted a great deal from each other as a way of defending and protecting ourselves from the racist stereotypes of black people being perceived as inferior, with inferior abilities. Both groups made demands on the other to perform to a high standard and to support each other in doing so; both had a need to be understood in their professional role and had an expectation that each group would know what the other's needs were as black people; both groups had expectations that each would be efficient and good at their jobs, and moreover, that each would perform better than their white peers.

Black workers wanted black managers to look after their interests to encourage and to develop them. Black managers had taken on and accepted a responsibility to seek out black workers with potential and support their career development, assisting them by seeking out and offering opportunities that they would otherwise be denied black people in a white institution.

Black workers clearly had an expectation that black managers would have a high level of race awareness and considered that they, should be interested in race and equal opportunities issues, and, more importantly, should fight racism and should seek strategies for change. Black managers also believed that they had some responsibility

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for challenging racism and for challenging the myths and stereotypes about black workers.

The negative impact of racism on our community makes many black workers feel obligated to work for its eradication. Black managers and senior workers, in particular, are expected by other members of our community to retain allegiance to our own culture whilst participating in the host culture, whether this be in its organisations or in society as a whole. Our community makes it difficult for us not to be responsible and feel obligated (Bell, 1990).

This value was clearly reflected in our expectations. Workers expected support and managers expected to offer support to black workers. Black workers behaved towards black managers, in ways which implied that they expected them to be superhuman. Some of us as black managers, behaved as though we were super black managers in not showing our vulnerabilities, expecting to work twice as hard as our white peers, and in taking on the black struggle in terms of responsibility for the black community. In black workers' perceptions we were also expected to be super black workers.

Conclusion

We are caught in a conflicting web of expectations, which are more complex than simply being a black manager or a black worker. Some of the complexities are related to invisible community loyalties, invisible cultural loyalties, acculturative tensions and negative organisational introjects. They are also related to the fact that we are often the first of our kind to occupy a place in teams or organisations and certainly the first to hold a middle or upper management job. There are few role models for us to turn to. Many of us have been pioneers in unknown territories. All these factors contribute to pressure on the individual. Aside from organisational pressures, we are faced with pressures from black communities, communities with norms and values about how a black professional should behave (Bell, 1990). All these pressures heighten our anxieties and contribute to the way we interact with each other in organisations.