

SECTION FOUR

SO WHAT?

So What?

Closing Remarks

Chapter 10

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Introduction

As I commence this concluding section of the thesis, I am conscious of the journey that I have undertaken in the course of this research. At the start of the journey, exploring my hopes, aspiration and goals for the study, I wrote in a working paper (1989)

"I have done quite a lot of work on understanding the prime economic and structural factors that maintain the status quo of racism and sexism. I am now exploring and seeking to understand the ways in which we as Black women unconsciously collude with and in this way play a part in maintaining this state of being. It is from this base that I am entering this inquiry. It is to this place I want to re – emerge - having explored and further understood. These are not separate issues, therefore it is important that the outcomes of this inquiry are placed firmly back in the frame of Institutional Discrimination."

In Autumn 1997, while writing this thesis, I delivered a keynote address at a Black Workers Conference, and heard myself saying, "*in my exploration of the barriers to Black women's progression and development I kept returning to Institutional Discrimination*". With a flash of insight I realised that, though using an old familiar term, my appreciation of Institutional Discrimination - how it is perpetuated, maintained and changed - was radically different. I was looking at the same phenomena from a different position and with a radically different set of lenses. In the intervening years *I* had significantly changed.

This insight was extremely surprising to me. Firstly, because I had not set out to develop my thinking about Institutional Discrimination. It had always been part of the

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taken-for-granted frame of this research rather than a focus of my work. Secondly, although I was aware that the personal development work undertaken as a part of this study had made a huge impact on me in my personal life, at that time I was not consciously aware that it had also radically changed my way of perceiving and being in my professional life as well. My tendency to split the personal and professional was a coping strategy identified in the study that presented itself in many aspects of my work and was probably influencing the seemingly bizarre assumption that radical change could be partial!

Reflecting on myself *in action* at the conference and then later reflecting *on my actions* I realised that in my presentation and subsequent discussion I was in effect 'writing' the closing chapter to this study. After years of feeling that despite all the work I had nothing to say, I had now reached a stage where I was beginning to know what I had learnt from the research and indeed I said a lot of it at that conference. This was a truly exciting and liberatory moment! At the Conference as I spoke to both Black workers, and the powerbrokers of their organisation, I had experienced myself as standing differently in relation to both groups. The verbal and non-verbal feedback from my Black colleagues echoed the perceived difference in location that I felt.

In those moments, some very important insights had been *felt* more than conceptually grasped.

Following the conference I filled many pages of a journal as I struggled with the insight that my understanding of Institutional Discrimination had been changed and tried to identify the precise nature of the learning I had been gained. I asked questions such as:

- *What was the difference that I perceived in myself?*
- *How did this change come about?*
- *What do I now know what I did not know then?*

These were very puzzling questions to which I could find no easy answers. I realised that over the period I had been involved in differing types of learning. The conference had triggered an awareness of the transformational aspect of my learning. I knew that along the way there had been many 'Aha!' moments when new insights had been gained. Yet as I 'stood' at the 'closing chapter' of the study I had great difficulty in specifically isolating the discrete units of 'new' learning. In my struggle to make sense of what I had learnt I became aware that this was in itself an important insight about the nature, and order, of learning that must be undertaken in attempting to liberate oneself from the effects of oppression, and to move from a mode of surviving to thriving. Vaill (1996), Kegan (1994) and Bateson (1972) all observe that learning in which the individual becomes an active participant in directing and facilitating her/his development is of a different order to 'other-directed' learning. Learning which empowers the individual to become subject rather than object is not simply about the acquisition of new knowledge and skills. It demands new ways of being in the world and a different level of consciousness. It is not possible to move from surviving to thriving simply by adding new competencies. It is a shift that demands new ways of perceiving and relating to oneself, others and the world.

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So, as I try to summarise the key 'Learnings' gained from this study, and attempt to identify the main contributions of this study to work on issues of Equal Opportunities, in general, and Black women's development in particular, I include insights produced as I reflected on this shift in 'location'. Returning to the metaphor of the study as a tapestry, it seems as if over the period I have added large areas of colour to the 'work in progress'. In the same way that colours differentiate, and depict the significant features of the tapestry, so the themes of learning gained distinguish differing aspects of this 'problem'. As I added strand upon strand, and layer upon layer, features of the picture that were previously unseen or only faintly etched, came into sight and my understanding of the nature of the 'problem' and of the issues involved was extended, increased and sometimes transformed. Yet the themes are not separate – in the midst of one we uncover another. This too was part of my learning.

My reflections following the conference mentioned previously did not identify any *specific* pieces of knowledge about Institutional Discrimination that was not known at the start of the study, produced some important insights.

- Firstly, in the course of this work my conceptual frame for recognising racism in everyday life had been greatly elaborated.
- Secondly, a surprising realisation was that in the process *I* had been transformed. *Was my transformation linked to the elaboration of my conceptual framework? Would it have been possible for me to attain this level of understanding of Institutional Discrimination without the radical change of perspective I perceived in myself? Which came first – was it the change in myself that produced the new insights to the issue or was it vice versa?* Links between the elaboration of my understanding of discrimination and oppression and the change in myself is an inquiry with which I am still occupied.
- Thirdly, in and through the research, I became engaged in experiential learning about learning. Having reached the end of the study I realised that in the research process I had gained practical understanding of the espoused theory that effective learning was about both product **and** process. Therefore, as I try to make visible to the reader my learning from this work, an important aspect of challenge in writing this closing chapter is how to find positions of poise between these two very different outcomes of the work

In this closing chapter I do not attempt to engage with all of the various new insights, questions and areas of inquiry that have emerged from this study, but rather to honour the work done. In doing this I select for focus a few 'splashes of colour' added to the big picture by this study, and identify some of the significant themes of learning gained. In choosing one - first, second or last - or in spending more time with one than the other, I do not infer that any of these issues is of greater importance than the other. I currently understand them to be simply different areas of an intricate web. In striving for balance I also draw attention to important aspects of the story of the research journey - that incremental process by which those unintended outcomes, of elaborated conceptual frameworks and personal transformation, emerged. The significant themes of learning dealt with in this chapter are about:

1. *The experiences of Black women managers;*
2. *Our exploration of the questions "Are we surviving?" and "Are our survival strategies working in our interest?"*

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3. *Thriving as a radically different way of being;*
4. *Gaining an elaborated understanding of the problem of Institutional Discrimination;*
5. *Considerations in designing strategies for changing the system so that we might thrive.*

1. Experiences of Black women managers

In a study, in which learning has been accumulative and incremental - a gradual layering of insights - it is very easy to overlook the importance of some of the early, now taken-for-granted information gained. The writing of this chapter has indeed offered me an opportunity to return to those early periods and to recall a time when objective knowledge about Black women managers' experience was not known and to remember my sense of amazement when I first began to realise that there were repeated echoes across the stories being told. Of course having worked as a manager for many years I had a wealth of practical and experiential knowledge, but I had not taken the time to 'sense-make' and theorise it. In re-framing my key research question to be "*What changes would need to take place for Black women to experience themselves as having equality of opportunities?*" the need to do just that emerged. Also as I asked a further question "*Are we as Black women surviving or thriving?*" it became apparent that I needed to know objectively what were the experiences of other Black women managers. At the time of starting this work there was no 'body of knowledge' about this topic, and I realised an early task would have to be to establish that baseline knowledge myself. In later years, as first the Dickens and Dickens (1991) American study, and then the Davidson (1997) British study on Black managers appeared, I have thought how much easier it would have been to have done this work with the support of even just **two** such studies. The lack of recorded and published information about the lives of Black professionals has research implications.

An important learning emerging from the work was that despite the differences in the organisations, types of work, levels of experiences, racial and cultural difference in the women participating in the study, the same themes appeared in the stories the women told. They talked about being:

- ***On the margin - tentative, vulnerable outsiders*** - always feeling 'at the edge' of the organisation and continuously struggling for acceptance.
- ***Tokens*** - this was the experience of being used as a 'representative Black person' and having our professional expertise and knowledge overlooked.
- ***Highly visible and yet invisible*** - this paradoxical experience is part of the double binding nature of the context, produced through the sending of conflicting messages. As Black women managers our 'difference' caused us to be highly visible and 'known' and yet at the same time our particular competencies, circumstances, and needs were overlooked. It was as if our skin colour was the only aspect of ourselves that could be perceived by others.
- ***Under scrutiny and treated as suspicious*** - There were stories of being watched for signs of incompetence. It was perceived that this flowed from the expectation that "they" were not "up to it".

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- ***Threatened by invisible power*** - In some accounts the "aggressor" or perpetrator of harassing and threatening behaviour was not easily identified, but the impact of their actions was felt no less keenly.
- ***Made different and treated differently*** - We talked about struggling to 'fit in', and of not receiving the same treatment as our colleagues.
- ***'Black manager' – a contradiction in terms*** - There was the experience of having our status and role as 'manager' questioned by both Black and White people, and in many instances we felt the need to choose between the identities of 'Black woman' and 'manager'. It appears that the ways in which both of these concepts are generally construed make them incommensurable.
- ***Reduced opportunities*** - For many of the reasons given earlier Black women were consciously and unconsciously excluded from the pool of people perceived to be suitable for many positions. We also recognised that we also protected ourselves by excluding ourselves from certain positions.
- ***Difficulty in getting experience of discrimination recognised*** - In many organisations experiences of discrimination are suppressed and denied, so to talk about such encounters is to break a taboo and to risk being problemized.
- ***Carrying heavier workloads – overload*** - Many of us struggled with overload, and had demands made on us from many fronts. At work we were often asked to take on additional work as organisations struggled with their lack of knowledge about the experiences, and needs of Black service users, and low expertise in responding to those needs. In addition to this, many were carers - of children, and/or grandchildren, and /or parents; **and** actively involved in formal and informal roles in the community.
- ***Always in situations of conflict*** - We observed that dominant notions of 'The Black woman' caused us to be continuously construed as different to and 'other' and therefore conflictual situations were constantly created.

These themes were mirrored in my own life experience and many of them appear in Davidson's work on Black women in Britain. A theme that is remarkable in its low appearance is that of the challenges experienced in establishing and managing boundaries around sexuality in the workplace. The dominant constructions of the 'Black woman' causes me to think that this is an issue with which the Black woman manager must frequently engage, yet it intrigues me that it did not arise in most cycles of this inquiry. It is therefore an area that needs further exploration.

2. Are we surviving and are our survival strategies working in our interest?

Some of this work's key questions arose from a statement made by Maya Angelou at a concert in Lewisham, some months prior to the start of this study. She said:

" The issues that face us are not just how to survive – obviously we are doing that somehow, but how to thrive – thrive with some passion, some compassion, some humour and some style."

This caused me to wonder:

"*How do we survive?*"

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"What strategies do we use in doing this?"

These questions were explored in many cycles of the study. From these I learned:

- a) *That we **all** identified ourselves as surviving not thriving;*
- b) *About our experience of surviving;*
- c) *About the strategies commonly used in dealing with the familiar challenges encountered in organisations.*

a. We are surviving

It was surprising to find that regardless of the group and the setting there was an instantaneous 'yes' response to the question "Are *we surviving?*". One woman claimed that she could not envisage being able to thrive in Britain. Most groups found that the exploration of surviving triggered sadness and despair and so to varying degrees resisted engaging in that work. In some instances my request triggered anger. Participants were much more ready to explore the notion of thriving, yet having explored it many said that they had little actual experience of that state.

b. Our experience of surviving

As mentioned, it was not easy to generate this information, and when it was accessed it gave insights into the pain of our life position. All images produced were ones in which death was faced, and the difficulty of negotiating our own escape was expressed. When asked to produce phrases and words that described the experience the following themes emerged:

- *Alienation from others*
- *Alienation from self*
- *Protective of position*
- *Reduced opportunities*
- *Alive but not living*
- *Blaming self*
- *Grateful for what given*
- *Rage and resentment*
- *Struggle*
- *Exhausting*
- *Produces creativity*

Initially, I was intrigued by this information. Subjectively I 'knew' the experience described, yet intellectually I struggled to understand it, and to identify where it came from. Then I observed the overlap between the experience of surviving, and the *feelings* produced by incidents described in the stories of Black women's experiences told by the women in the Action Learning cycles. I also noticed that information about surviving expressed the *impact* of those incidents on us. Suddenly I realised that

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the experience of surviving was produced from the *feelings* of being a *recipient of those incidents*. I began to understand that each incident/transaction was for us a transmitter of information about:

- White people's perception of our relationship
- Their perception of our worth
- The nature of our context.
- **Transactions as expressions of a pattern of experience**

As I looked **across** the information from all cycles of the research I began to realise that the seemingly discrete incidents of discrimination encountered in organisations were 'felt' – not as 'one-off' occurrences but as sequences in a familiar pattern of experience. This pattern of experience flows from a relationship established many centuries previously, and is repeated daily, weekly and monthly in, and out, of organisations. Therefore, as Black people perceive an incident we do not simply see the specific action(s) but also our historical experiences. Goleman (1996) states that this is an automatic human process. He says:

"For better or for worse, our appraisal of every personal encounter and our responses to it are shaped not just by our rational judgements or our personal history, but also by our distant ancestral past."

So from one perspective the incident or personal encounter is an expression of the old established pattern of Black people's experience at the hands of White people. As such it often triggers very old personal and collective memories that are deeply evocative and emotion laden. Throughout this work I was reminded of this constantly. In working with the research material, each time I 'listened' to accounts of the same types of oppressive incidents being told by different voices, I could not escape the pain, anger and sometimes rage that seems to be an inextricable part of the experience.

- **Transactions as communicators of messages of inferiority**

Reflecting further on this information I realised that each transaction carried a message and contributed to the telling of the story of the relationship between Black people and White Britain. The motto "*Actions speak louder than words*" indicates that as human beings we have an understanding of actions as carriers of messages. Experiences in the research indicated that at each encounter Black women gather information about its meaning intuitively, and also consciously search for the import of the transaction. I often heard women saying, "*Why did she say that?*" or "*Why was it necessary for him to do that?*". In reflecting on my own past experiences (chapters 1-3) I observed a similar process. I noticed that at a time when my conceptual understanding of racism was limited, incidents where the message intuited from the actions experienced did not fit my rational perception of the situation, were held like a frozen frame in my memory, and labelled 'confusing'. Essed (1991) asserts that racism is often analysed by considering whether the action is 'normal' - eg "*Would she have said or done that to a White manager?*"

This process is well illustrated in Cassandra's sketch, recounted in Chapter 8. From that I learnt that as we receive an action we work - sometimes very hard - to construe

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the messages being sent about the other's perception of our relationship. We use both our emotional and rational minds (Goleman, 1996) in making sense of the situations we encounter. At a pre-conscious level, from verbal and non-verbal expressions, we '*feel*' attributions of inferiority or negation to worth, power and agency, and then *sometimes* undertake a rational processing of the information gathered. In many instances we are confused by the dissonance between the implicit information gathered, by our 'emotional minds' through our senses from the actions of the other, and that gathered by our rational mind from explicit statements. These conflicting messages are 'crazy-making'. We are aware of holding information that undermines the stated message, but often we cannot be sure of *how* we gained that information. Because it is at odds with the overt communication we may even wonder if we imagined it. I would argue that these are some of the reasons why we so often remain silent about experiences of discrimination and harassment. In situations where we are isolated, as was the case with many women in the study, we sense our perceptions to be at odds with those around. In the various cycles of the research an extremely valuable aspect of the work was the opportunity to test our perceptions through the stories of others with a similar experience of the world. It was common to hear "Oh you have experienced that too, I thought that it was just me." In the process of this work I realised that the telling of our stories and the breaking of our silence is an important step towards our liberation.

Sometimes the information gathered by the emotional mind by-passes our rational process and triggers instantaneous reactions. Goleman (1996) explains that this is a part of the same survival mechanism that triggers fight or flight. However in this process, when there is no gap between action and reaction, opportunities to check the accuracy of our perceptions and the consequences of our actions are lost. In situations where our experiences are likely to trigger personal and collective anger and rage, as puppets on strings, we remain vulnerable to being controlled by our external circumstances. To attain our liberation and create possibilities for our thriving we must learn to create spaces between action and reactions and develop our ability to **choose** our response. Personal experience in this study gave me first-hand knowledge of the tremendous anxiety that must be managed in order to resist the urge to move into instantaneous action. This is extremely challenging work.

- **Transactions as signifiers of the nature of the context**

As we engage in interactions with White people, and pay attention to innuendo and inferences we seek to determine not just the covert implicit messages about our relationship status, worth and power, we seek to know if they interrupt or reinforce both our personal and collective experience **and** our established knowledge about the nature of the context. At first glance this may appear pathological, however when placed in the context of a historically oppressive and abusive relationship, such behaviour becomes understandable. It is a response developed to help us survive in a setting in which we perceive ourselves to be continuously 'at risk'.

As descendants of peoples whose relationships with 'The White Man' includes capture, enslavement, colonisation, enforced dependency, and the removal of many or all basic human rights, we have learnt to be fearful or at least cautious in his presence. We hold within us, at preconscious levels, memories which warn of the dangers of acting contrary to his edict. As I retrospectively made sense of my more recent past

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(Chapter 1) I realised that we carried within us, though perhaps often unprocessed, information about the various double-binding situations, encountered by our parents' generation, which made economic, physical and psychological survival challenging. Of course these 'lessons' have not been 'taught' to us explicitly but passed on through the implicit messages conveyed by verbal and non-verbal encounters in our early life.

We have been taught that in order to stay alive, it is necessary to swallow our tears, bite our lips, smile, and not to look 'The White man' in the eye or answer back. In other words we have learnt that to survive we must be good actors. We have learnt that the White man is powerful and that the use (or abuse) of that power should be feared. I believe that as we engage with White people in our everyday lives these wordless pieces of information form the back-cloth against which we make sense of their actions. The back-cloth, though very old is kept strong as it is reinforced by newer and much more recent threads.

In our present day 'lived' experience we find that injunctions to 'keep our place' are not as explicitly stated as they were in our fore-parents times, nevertheless a theme throughout all cycles of the study was the pressure to 'fit in'. We have evidence that those who have not learnt how to do this in organisations do not survive. It is observable that those of us who cannot or will not 'fit in' find it difficult to negotiate entry to organisations, or having entered either they are forced to leave, or we remain at the lowest levels of the organisation. Outside of the organisation we also experience ourselves as vulnerable. Our continued experience of attacks provoked simply by the perception that as a Black person you are in the wrong place; unfair policing; struggles to be perceived as and attributed the rights of a legitimate British citizen, and our over-representation in mental institutions all strengthen the old images. This is the context against which every day experiences are construed, and from which the experience of surviving arises.

Exploring the significance of the information that was emerging from the study I tried to gain insight into and verbalise the implicit meanings about the nature of the context, gained from these recurring incidents. As I did this it became apparent that the context is *felt* to be:

- **Deeply shaming** - experiences of discrimination send messages which undermine our sense of worth and trap us in an attributed identity that is collectively construed as worthless. Our deep shame emerges from our inability to escape the given identity and to protect ourselves from the negative experiences people carrying such labels attract. The experience of this degree of helplessness or lack of power over self, is deeply humiliating.
- **Double Binding** - this is a seemingly straightforward and simple situation that proves impossible to negotiate and to 'win'. We find that the explicit 'rules' for successfully negotiating apparently simple problems, such as gaining access to and succeeding in organisations, do not work in practice. We then experience ourselves as trapped in positions from which we are unable to 'win' through. In this study insights into the double binding nature of the organisational and societal contexts in which we work and live increased as we explored our survival strategies. From our inquiries we began to realise that our survival strategies were not facilitating our escape, but keeping us wedded to a system

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designed to objectify us, deny our humanity, and prove us to be inferior beings.

- ***Negating*** - the context is constructed in ways that make us invisible. The 'wiping out' of Black people and their contributions from the history books illustrate this point. This experience is echoed in the present in a variety of ways. One aspect of this that proved to be very painful for individuals in the study was the experience that our unique humanity was not being perceived by others. So often we are treated as categories - 'Black woman' or 'manager', and affirmation of our human complexity, and of the multiplicity of ourselves is denied us. In a lot of our stories we struggled to be seen, as 'Black', women **and** competent managers.
- ***Alienating*** - In exploring our encounters in and out of organisations and our response to those situations it became apparent that our alienation is constructed in a variety of ways. We operate in contexts that are alienating **and** invite our complicity in the construction of our alienation. As we examine the historical and present day relationships between Britain and the various Black peoples it enslaved and colonised, that alienation is evident. In the present day we continue to be alienated from the wealth and structures produced by our labour. We are construed as, and construe ourselves as, separate from the organisations and society in which we have participated, and to which we have contributed for years, so that the concept of Black British still remains a not commonly used or accepted term. In our exploration of our survival strategies we realised that in masking we create possibilities for negotiating the inclement context, but through this same strategy we also separate ourselves from others and from our inner selves.
- ***Frustrating*** - This feeling emerges from the experience of our inability to escape the oppressive system. We experience ourselves creating new strategies and still discovering ourselves to be trapped. Many Black people are cynical of, and frustrated by, Equal Opportunities policies. Often we perceive them as simply masking the unchanged patterns of experiences and relationships encountered in the 'real-life' organisation. Overtly structures shift but the less visible micro processes that undermine our ability to access and utilise our power and that communicate to us messages of inferiority, dependency and vulnerability remain the same.

a. Our coping/survival strategies

In addition to learning to make sense of **all** levels of communication in an interaction we have been 'taught' a number of strategies for dealing with some of the most commonly experienced situations. In my conversations with Roseanne and with my peers in the Collaborative Inquiry cycle, I explored our coping/ survival strategies and tested, observations from my work with the women in the Action Learning groups. In this way similarities in our responses to the common situations encountered were identified across the research cycles, and the following survival/coping strategies were identified:

- ***Continuously proving self***
- ***Cautious, fearful and anxious***
- ***Protective of the self - We wear the mask***
- ***Our fear of being controlled – so controlling***

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- *Fear of vulnerability, weakness and helplessness*
- *Fear of being strong and of standing out*
- *Learning to hold back, to withhold our experiences and to be silent*
- *Difficulty in valuing self and paying attention to our own needs*

As we explored the impact of our survival strategies it became apparent that they are often contradictory and 'reinforcers' of the very system from which we were struggling to liberate ourselves. In working together we experienced keenly the paradoxical dilemma of wanting intimacy and yet 'knowing' that it is dangerous to trust others and to reveal the intimate self. As mentioned earlier, from our explorations we realised that the strength of our defences / masks worked against us in multiple ways. However, the double bind is that in a setting in which experience has shown that vulnerability invites attack, masking is an extremely wise precaution.

Fanon (1967) and Freire (1972) and Memmi (1967) draw attention to the contradictory relationship, and love-hate attachment, between the oppressed and the oppressor. As long as our reactions are constructed on the basis of the given assumptions of the conceptual framing of the world from which the initial actions arose, we remain attached to the system and therefore trapped. In situations in which our competence is continuously challenged, and we experience ourselves as perpetually scrutinised in a context in which we are expected to fail, the desire to prove ourselves is an understandable reaction. However, in trying to prove ourselves, in line with the given 'rules' we continually fail and contribute to a process which reinforces messages of inferiority and our worth is perpetually undermined. We seem not to fully realise, or to forget, that in a double-binding context it is never possible to prove another truth.

- **Coping Strategies as culture**

We came to identify our survival strategies as habitual responses that arise from a preconscious level. It seemed that at very early ages, we had learnt, as part of learning our culture, that as Black women we are perpetually vulnerable and need strategies to try to ensure our safety. In objectively assessing the continued usefulness of these strategies and in trying to adjust those that seemed most double-edged and not quite so relevant to current day situations we became acutely aware of the challenges of changing these patterns, and discovered that these habits were not easily interrupted. We noticed that even when we were aware that a strategy was not working for us we remained protective of, and wedded to it. For instance, we realised that the familiar survival strategy of 'holding back', withholding our experiences, not speaking our truths and choosing to remain silent, ensured that only the voices of the oppressor groups were heard and that in this way we unwittingly collude with the perpetuation of the myth of **one** story and **one** truth. Yet while working with an incident from the life of a group member we identified our continued attachment to that way of being and recognised that we were instrumental in passing on to the next generation, the very strategy that we problemised!

This learning was further reinforced as I worked with women managers who were over-laden, stressed, tired and longing for support. We continually complained about lack of parity in the distribution of responsibilities for caring for the family and home, yet I also observed that our behaviours worked towards perpetuating the problem. I

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noticed that we were often protective of our learned definitions of familial roles. Yet at the same time, the tensions, stresses and overload that occurred as we determinedly claimed our right to realise our potential fully and to make contributions outside of the home made it apparent that there was a need for re-visioning of roles in the family. We explored ways in which in our roles as mothers of sons we perpetuated the system. We noticed that experiments in changing our behaviours were not only resisted by our sons but by their fathers, sisters, uncles, aunts and grandparents; by our sons' peers and their parents; and of course by the models presented in the wider social system. From these observations I was recognising that to problemize our survival strategies is also to problemize our culture. Yet, in a eurocentric, racist context where 'Black culture' is pathologised the questioning of our cultural patterns is experienced as betrayal. Also it is evident that despite the costly consequences the old ways of working have kept us going. When survival is at stake it is hard to experiment with alternative responses. This is a predicament at the heart of the struggle to liberate ourselves from our old survival strategies and also from the system.

3. Thriving as a radically different way of being

As I looked at the information generated about our notion of thriving I realised that we were:

- a) describing a radically different way of being in the world;
- b) not yearning to attain 'success' as commonly construed in Western society, even though some of the indicators of success were also included;
- c) talking about wanting to realise our human potential. Our descriptions of the experience of surviving hold within them insight into the dehumanising nature of our everyday, and moment by moment, encounters. In our notions of thriving we were expressing our longed-for desire to reclaim our humanity.

Surviving and thriving on different continuums

It was very painful to realise that some of the strategies previously perceived to be our most powerful attempts to attain our liberation were inhibitors to our ability to thrive. As we played close attention to ourselves in action, and in relation to each other, and as we became more skilled at noticing our thoughts we began to realise that in enhancing our ability to survive we were not necessarily increasing our ability to thrive. As we identified our common patterns of responding as cultural habits that ensure our complicity with the system, it became apparent that thriving required personal and collective change of a transformational order. This was extremely disturbing.

Moving from Surviving to Thriving

As I paid attention to my personal experience in undertaking this work and as I tried to apply insights gained to my life and experimented with new ways of being, I learnt about both the possibilities and constraints of moving from surviving to thriving. Both the content and the process of this work affected me. It elaborated my conceptual understanding of Institutional Discrimination, raised my level of consciousness,

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challenged my way of being in the world and produced learning of a transformational order. In this section there is only space for a very brief review of some of the most critical lessons learnt about that process.

- **Saying 'yes' to life**

Reflecting on the impact of this research on my life it seems that in the early days of the study when I was engaged in redefining my topic, issues of commitment to personal development and change were also being negotiated. Journals written around that time vividly describe the intense challenge and disturbance I experienced at this stage of the study. Reflecting on that process many years later, it occurs to me that all along that particular part of the journey there were many important moments of choice, when small, yet hugely influential, decisions were made. I now perceive these decisions to be points at which I had to respond to Life's question about my willingness to participate in the discovery of what it means to consciously live as part of this vast social system, and to learn more about myself and my human potential. At any of those points I could have chosen to say 'no', and in doing so closed off opportunities to know myself more fully and so expand my ability to live more fully. These were not conscious decisions, though some pieces of writing indicate that I had 'felt' them be momentous at the time that they occurred (see chapter 5).

The re-definition of my topic influenced my choice of research methodology. In choosing Collaborative Inquiry, with its principles of participation and wholeness, I could not remain separate from, and so unaffected by, the study so by seemingly objective research choices I opened up possibilities for my transformation. From this experience I now perceive that the definition of the research topic is itself an early cycle of inquiry, deserving the same time and quality of attention that is given to later research cycles. Yet paradoxically awareness of the value of this early stage has only become visible as I have been impacted upon by the cycles of learning that had their very early beginnings in the redefinition of my topic. Reflecting retrospectively I am aware of the intensity of the challenges involved in undertaking the personal inquiry and development that may be needed in order to locate the deeper concerns and questions that hold the passion and energy necessary for driving and sustaining a long-term research project. I have no doubt that, as a mature student undertaking this work alongside the other demands of my life, I would not have completed this work, had I stayed with the early superficial questions and not uncovered the deeper meanings that this work holds for me. This reflection raises questions about the quality of support needed when individuals choose to say 'yes' to Life and engage in emancipatory endeavours. As a consequence it challenges me to reconsider my role and responsibilities as a facilitator of inquiries into life, and of learning and change.

- **Shift of focus**

The definition of my topic produced an important shift of focus. I moved from my preoccupation with the problem of Institutional Discrimination to considering its impact on the people (including myself) affected by it. It seems that as my gaze

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shifted new areas of insights became available to me, and new possibilities for change occurred. This enabled me to give attention to identifying, and healing, the traumas suffered, by myself (and others), in the course of living and working in contexts hostile to our well-being. It was while working with the women of the Action Learning cycles that I began to identify this as being an important step on the journey towards liberation. I began to observe that the system invites a preoccupation that threatens to be all- absorbing, sapping our energy and creativity. I realised that it keeps us outwardly focussed and detached from ourselves and from each other, and that as our gaze becomes fixed on the system with its multifarious manifestations, our sense of helplessness and powerlessness increases. I noticed that it is in detaching our gaze and focussing inwards that we 'awake' to our potential to change our selves and our world. I realised that the shifting of gaze is an act of resistance. Yet the conundrum is that the awakening and the shifting of gaze is a product of a process of personal development and change **and** that in the *process* of shifting our gaze and awakening we are changed. So where does this process of awakening, from which flows empowerment, start? Learning from work on addiction it seems that as we 'hit bottom' and encounter our despair at our inadequacy for liberating our selves and as we surrender the problem to our Higher Power important steps are made in this process

- **The importance of dialogue in inquiring into survival strategies**

We learnt that catching sight of our habitual, automatic behaviours was like trying to understand how we breathed. We realised that it would have been impossible for us to know the questions we needed to ask in order to reveal to our conscious mind the strategies used as we attempt to secure our survival. Like Marion Milner we found that we needed to heighten our awareness of ourselves in action and then to 'catch our selves out'. It was in the context of a well-established relationship and in dialogue with ourselves (sometimes questioning ourselves aloud) and with each other that the patterns of reaction appeared. Scott (1991) in her exploration of Black women's "Habits of Surviving" says:

" The habits of survival and denial are serious. Each of these women had openly shared her intimate life with me. But when I got them all together to talk to one another, they were not able to let down their guard and talk to each other as they talked with me. They could not detach themselves enough from their defenses and ploys to see and talk ... as women."

- **Engaging with paradox**

In seeking to liberate ourselves and to thrive we were constantly confronted by paradox. Socialised to view the world from an either/or perspective, I found the emergence of paradox initially paralysing. Metaphorically, and sometimes physically, my arms became heavy, my shoulders sagged and I was overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness and powerlessness. There was a point in this process when suddenly I became aware that I was not only victim, but that I had the ability to impact on individuals and also on the system. An important point in the emergence of this insight occurred while participating in some group-work. I became aware that by physically shifting my position in the group, I triggered changes of positions in other group members, and without intending to I changed the formation of the group itself. From this seemingly small manoeuvre experiential insights into the nature of a

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interconnected system emerged. In this action I understood something of my ability to impact on others and on the system. As part of a system any other's action was likely to impact on me and similarly mine on them.

I continued to learn about being both vulnerable to a destructive system and to abuses of power by others **and** capable of changing myself and influencing shifts in others and in the system. As I tried to repair the damage to my identity, self-image and self-respect and let go of the self-defeating patterns I discovered further the seamless connection between the internal inhibitors to my development and growth and the construction of the external system. I realised that while accepting the need for fundamental changes in the system and in others who had powerful impacts on my life there was also the need for me to let go of stored emotions and habitual responses that inhibited my ability to live life fully. I discovered the need to heal the psychological damage accrued from living in an abusive system. I learnt that I needed to unearth the shame, anger and rage buried not very far below the surface that could be triggered so very easily, and that blocked my ability to blossom and bloom and to make connection with others.

Through repeated experiences of conquering personal 'mountains' that had previously seemed impossible to scale I began to catch glimpses of having many more choices and opportunities than I previously perceived, and of tremendous potential for self-development and change. Then in another moment, sometimes not very far from the 'mountain top' experience, the clouds would close in again and I would be intensely aware of my dependence on the system; of the extreme difficulties of escaping its self-defeating and limiting patterns; and of its tremendous capacity for reformulating itself. As time and time again I moved from 'mountain top' - where thriving was a realised experience - to the cloud-filled valley, where visibility is extremely limited and the mountain disappears from view, so I began to glimpse the possibility that **both** encounters were important to my growth. Perhaps it is not the attainment of the peak that is important but rather what is learned in the process of going from one to the other?

- **Bring the background into focus**

As a child painting by numbers facilitates the emergence of a picture, so my work with the issue of internalised oppression revealed, not only my role in the maintenance of my own oppression, but also the interactive relationship between the seemingly small interactions of my everyday life and the system.

The discovery of duality in both the oppressor and oppressed proved to be some of the most difficult and resisted lessons to learn. I have often struggled (and still struggle) to see the oppressor as victimized by, as well as co-creator of, the system. Appreciation of the responsibility of members of the oppressor group in the creation and maintenance of oppression had been visible to me for many years but I was less open to seeing their oppression by the very system by which they also gained many benefits. Equally difficult to confront was my complicity in the maintenance of this system. A critical, and I believe very important, stage of my learning about this issue was when I moved beyond the actors and confronted the evilness of this system. I began to see the system as a process fundamentally antagonistic to the development of human potential, growth and well-being, and designed to ensure our spiritual,

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emotional and physical annihilation. It was at this point that I began to better understand that thriving demands a radical shift in the ways in which we construct our world. It became apparent that I must confront my addiction to the 'benefits' offered by the system, and recognise that without an intense attraction there would be no addiction. In claiming life I must problematize ideologies and practices of injustice and oppression wherever I encounter it - whether in myself or others – and be ready to find new ways of relating with others. I realised that the seemingly complex analysis of Institutional Discrimination with which I had started this work, was inadequate for understanding the complexity of the problem emerging to view.

- **Surviving and thriving are states of being not life positions**

At the start of this work I had assumed that surviving and thriving were discrete life positions, and that as I moved towards one I would let go of the other. In the process of this work I realised that that these were modes of being in the world. Over the period I found that in any day I might experience myself as having been in both states at different times of the day. I continue to find the existence of the state of thriving mysterious, as when I am fully caught in the state of surviving its existence is rarely visible. Now, when caught in a mode of surviving I am able to remind myself that, as in the 'Hall of mirrors', there are alternative ways of perceiving and being in the situation. This ability has emerged from my increasing experience of the state of thriving and of 'knowing' the transformation of perception and consequent changes in emotions and behaviours that takes place when situations are engaged with from that perspective. Describing the state of thriving in this way may cause it to seem ephemeral, unreal and easy to attain. Yet it is an extremely challenging transition to make and from the state of thriving it is possible to recognise that the state of surviving is no more real or less illusionary. They are both attainable ways of being in the world at any one time. While the survival mode is the invited response to a threatening situation, the 'thriving' mode remains an alternative, though not complementary, response to us in the same situation.

- **Thriving as 'self-making': a disturbing and painful process**

Not given much space in this thesis, but nevertheless very important, is the impact of the study on my perception of human development. I now see development not simply as a type of expansive growth in which the self stays basically the same, but as a metamorphic process with critical stages of transformation at which the self is structurally changed. For some time I had noticed that pain is often associated with periods of great learning. Understanding that this autopoietic process involves the living system in a process of engagement with aspects of its environment that disturbs, and that creates flux and disorder in the living system, allows me to better appreciate that developmental change is likely to involve great emotional pain. My experience in the research affirms this.

4. An elaborated understanding of Institutional Discrimination

A rather surprising and unplanned outcome of the layers of learning that took place in this study was the elaboration of the conceptual framework by which I recognise racism and sexism as they evidence themselves in everyday life. At the start of this study I perceived racism and sexism to be complex ever-changing phenomena

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presenting themselves in multifarious forms. From the works of Hamilton and Carmichael (1967) Sivanandan (1983), Katz (1978), I understood Institutional Racism to be the perpetuation of ideologies of "internal colonialism" to support the system by which Black people are perpetually disadvantaged. When I encountered that term in the early 80's it gave me entry into a world in which observable and 'felt' behaviours were maintained through invisible systems of thought. It illuminated the commonly stated definition of Racism as "Prejudice plus power". Over the period of this research I returned to this definition many times, and on each return new questions and insights, that expanded my understanding, emerged.

Re-framing my concept of prejudice and power

In the course of this study I found that the common definition of institutional discrimination as prejudice plus power was substantively revised. Exploring understandings of prejudice both in the study and in my professional practice it appeared that many of us understand it to be a pre-formed negative opinion about a group. The description of prejudice as an opinion (pre-formed or otherwise) seems to infer to assume detachment from, and conscious awareness of our prejudices. However as I used Milner's practice of "catching my thoughts" to explore my own prejudices I came to realise that it is part of my perceptual process that takes place largely outside of my range of consciousness. I began to see it as type of 'lens' acquired early on in life which influences the way in which I perceive the world and also as the sets of unconscious coded and programmed messages, which allow me to act quickly in a complex world. Hofstede 1991 describes it as "soft-ware of my mind" and Bateson as transforms. Re-framing my understanding of this term changed my perceptions of the challenges involved in changing behaviours based on prejudices. It also alerted me to the fact that in challenging prejudice we raise it to the conscious mind, and question, a part of an individual's organising frame for engaging with the world. Therefore it is not surprising that it produces high anxiety, defences and resistance. Unlearning prejudices involves higher order learning that Bateson says changes:

"the way we tend to think about ways and means and about the dangers inherent in our habit of thought."

Work which involves us in consciously examining our prejudices and in identifying that they are only one way of perceiving the world is critical if we are to create a system in which individuals and groups are attributed equal worth and given equal access to developing and using their potential. However higher order learning needs to be approached with caution and care. It is learning that has the potential to take us "in over our heads" Kegan (1996).

In the course of this study I found myself unconsciously engaged in the revising of my understanding of power. Again through this process of conscious awareness and reflection I explored my relationship to power and my unconsciously held assumptions about its nature. From this I learnt that I had made negative associations with power and at a deep level (contrary to intellectual assessment) believed that it was negative to be powerful. This insight drew my attention to the fact that I had internalised the contradictory messages sent to me by the system. At an explicit level I had been taught that power was neutral and that it was a process by which things were

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made to happen. From my life experiences I had learnt to fear power as the source by which I am controlled exploited and abused. As I explored the assumptions that influenced the urges that prompted my behaviours I identified that 'power' like 'love' and many other verbs had been objectified and turned into something that one possesses. In doing that, and in keeping with a dualistic perspective on the world, I assumed that if others had power I would not. This was not a perspective with which I would have ever agreed, yet as I examined my own (and others) behaviours I saw that I/we acted as if that assumption was true. I noticed that the idea of *having* power produces a competitive determination to control before you are controlled, while the concept of empowerment and *being* powerful produced much more relaxed behaviours and opened up the possibility of collaboration with similarly powerful others. From these observations I concluded that explorations which start from raising our consciousness of our *behaviours* in relation to power rather than of our thoughts/theories about power are necessary if we are to be able to mutually share power for the common good.

Systemic thinking and Institutional Discrimination

Instrumental to my learning was a continuous process of action and reflection. I took my newly gained theoretical ideas, and tested them in my own consultancy and research work, and in my personal inquiry into how I might become more human, and live life more fully. In doing this I pushed the boundaries of, and continuously re-framed my understanding of Institutional Discrimination. I believe that it is this process of action and reflection that produced the shift experienced at that conference.

As I took theories of institutional racism into my practice and used them to illuminate the experiences encountered and observed, I became aware that other systems of supremacist thought, beside racism, were institutionalised in society. Yet we did not have similar terms with which to name those other processes. For instance, I perceived that acts of sex discrimination were the expression of patriarchal ideology embedded in all aspects our society. As I explored sexism I realised that although the forms that sexism take, in and out of organisations, are very different to those taken by racism, yet both phenomena express very fundamental ideologies of the inherent superiority of a very small, select group of people. I began to perceive racism, sexism and all other discriminations as simply different processes by which people outside of the select privileged group are disadvantaged and so less able to demonstrate excellence in the knowledge, skills and ways of working identified by the privileged group as important. The oppressed groups, to whom inferiority has been attributed, then affirm beliefs in their inherent inferiority by their inability to achieve the standards set by, and for, the privileged groups.

From a perspective of Institutional Discrimination as a process by which a few are privileged and many disadvantaged, I caught sight of the interrelationship between the various discriminations. From this location I began to understand that there was both a need to recognise the common base from which the various forms of discrimination arise *and* to understand the unique construction of each. In beginning to perceive the various discriminations as connected and realising that actions taken on any one discrimination had the potential for either challenging or reinforcing other I was gaining early learning of the systemic nature of the problem.

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- As I reach the end of this inquiry I realise how important systemic thinking has been for my understanding of Institutional Discrimination. At the start of the study I perceived Institutional Discrimination, at an organisational level, to be perpetuated and maintained by powerful and privileged individuals; by seemingly objective and neutral structures; *and* by the taken-for-granted culture. I recognised organisations as both artefacts of the societies from which they are produced and also co-creators of those societies. In my work with organisations I often spoke about the dynamic relationships between these various aspects of the system however it is only in retrospect that I am able to perceive the partial nature of my knowledge at that time. I now realise that I had been preoccupied with the 'things' / entities of the system, and overlooking the impact of the background or context that support the 'things'. Internalising systemic thinking my focus shifted from oppressor, oppressed, structures, and culture - the 'things' of the system - to the spaces in between them in which relationships are negotiated. From this exploration new insights emerged:
- **New forms and experiences where the discriminations intersection**

I noticed that at the places where the discriminations overlapped new forms of oppression emerged, which produced unique experience for those located in these intersections. This insight enabled me to understand the differences, as well as similarities, between Black men and Black women's and White and Black women's experiences. It drew my attention the need to inquire into the specificity of the experience that emerges as different discriminations meet and interact.

- **'Oppressor' and 'oppressed' part of all our experience**

Exploring the overlaps further I gained insight into their permeable boundaries. I noticed that individuals did not remain located in any one, but passed fluidly between. So that in one moment a Black man may experience racial oppression, and in another he enjoys the privileges of maleness that patriarchy attributes. From this I began to realise that while labels such as 'oppressed' and 'oppressor' described the positions of groups in relation to each other, they could not be permanently attached to individuals. As human beings we are constantly moving between these positions, and it is rare for a person to experience only one state. Even those who most frequently occupy positions of power will also have experiences of relationships and interactions in which they are the recipients of abused power. Similarly, even those most regularly in disenfranchised positions, where opportunities for agency have been most severely denied, will also have experiences of being powerful in relation to another. In understanding this I realised that terms such as 'oppressed' and 'oppressor' had to be understood in the context of a world in which individuals constantly move in between shifting roles and relationships. Therefore White women, for example, though often in situations where they experience oppression might in other situations be the 'oppressor'. This is true for people of every other oppressed group.

- **Power of the system lies in personal re-enactments**

It was in my exploration of the 'space in between' that I uncovered the taken-for-granted non-verbal, unarticulated assumptions that underpin our explicit communications and transactions. Closely observing the transactions between Black

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and White people, and men and women, and reflecting on the nature of the relationships they inferred I began to see that the patterns, forms and processes of discrimination and oppression at the macro system are perfectly reproduced in the everyday interactions between individuals. From this I understood that the power of the system lies in the fact that its ideologies and values are perpetually given life in our interactions with each other. This produced new insights into the meaning of the old axiom "The personal is political.

- **Past, present and future intricately inter-linked**

I also noticed that present day transactions are re-enactments of notions and relationships established in the past, at periods well beyond our personal memories. As I began to grasp more fully the relatedness of the past to our current actions, I saw ourselves as powerful influences on the actions of future generations. At all levels of the system - in individuals, groups and structures - past, present and future perpetually interact and interrelate. In and through this dynamic interaction the social relationships between groups are constructed; the 'lens' by which we determine what is worthy of attention and what should be disregarded are created; and the codes for transforming the images we perceived are produced. As I applied systemic thinking to concepts of discrimination and oppression I realised that all aspects of the system were important and necessary to its perpetuation.

- **Institutional discrimination: a seamless weave**

Recognising the wholeness of the system further challenged my conceptual frame. If, institutional discrimination, which produces the inequality of opportunities, disadvantage and oppression that Black women experience, is a seamless weave of many interconnecting strands, then transformational change in any part has the potential to impact on the whole. Yet as I caught sight of the context with its intricate network of organisational and societal values, and norms I noticed that the overt, therefore more easily problematized, discriminatory structures and behaviours are representations of the contextual frame in which they sit. Notions of White supremacy, and patriarchy interweave with other societal and cultural values and with organisational norms. Therefore to interrupt racism and sexism we find ourselves needing to challenge values such as unilateral control, individualism, either/or thinking, valuing of things over people, organisational norms such as construing of mistakes as weaknesses to be hidden and the denying of differences. So, while appreciating the potential of any aspect of the system to powerfully influence the whole, we must at the same time recognise that the of breaking the problem into its constituent parts though useful in understanding its nature and construction, is an inadequate basis for the design of a change strategy. Our strategies for change need to express our full appreciation of the fact that the whole is considerably more than the

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sum of the constituent parts, and that we are inextricably a part of that whole. Capra (1996) writing about living systems states that the whole system has properties that none of the parts has. He says:

"They arise from the interactions and relationships between the parts. These properties are destroyed when the system is dissected either physically or theoretically, into isolated elements. Although we can discern individual parts in any system, these parts are not isolated, and the nature of the whole is always different from the mere sum of its parts."

The importance of paradox

Engaging with this level of complexity, though necessary to my appreciation of the problem was emotionally disturbing to me. I was overwhelmed by the puniness of my resources in relation to the problem, and profoundly challenged as multiple aspects of my schema were questioned. There was a great urge to protect my self by either letting go of my commitment to working towards radical change of this inhumane and oppressive system, or by trying to return to a former state of ignorance when I could more easily believe in the efficacy of partial solutions. In my determination to maintain my 'yes' to life and to growth, I discovered the power of standing in the middle of paradoxes. I realised that when I found a position from which I could maintain sight of my potential for powerfully impacting on the system **and** of the need for total change in the system I was empowered to act. I could search avidly for complex solutions with the potential to impact at many levels of the system while accepting that they would nevertheless be partial and that on interaction with the system unexpected outcomes may emerge.

5. So What? Practical considerations in designing change strategies

In the early days of this study, I was thrown into confused silence when having outlined my research project to a close colleague/friend, she baldly asked "So What?" As if to respond to my confusion she developed her inquiry by saying "Of what benefit will that be to organisations?" Reflecting on her response, over the years, I realised that she had expressed some of my own concerns. Would the outcomes from this study have relevance to others outside of those who participated in it? Would it offer anything of value to Black women who had not participated in it and to organisations to whose effectiveness I am also strongly committed? Now at the end the study I am convinced of the pertinence of the issues raised and insights gained to a wider audience. Approaching the issue of institutional discrimination and oppression through the experiences of an oppressed group, this research allows us to view the problem from a less familiar location, and to gain alternative perspectives on it. It reminds us that in constructing strategies for changing the experiences of the oppressed we must:

Search for positions of poise between paradoxes

Throughout the work many contradictions were encountered which illustrated that the discriminatory processes of the macro system are reproduced at the micro level of interpersonal and cross group relationships and that oppressor and oppressed all participate in the perpetuation of the system. However, in acknowledging our personal responsibilities for the system we must not overlook the fact that our abilities to

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choose, act, grow and develop are severely constrained at the macro levels of the system by discriminatory legislation, organisational policies, procedure and norms. So in contemplating change there is a need to continuously keep sight of, and address both ends of the paradoxes of individual and collective responsibility and personal development and systemic change. They are indeed alternative sides of the same coin and must be attended to simultaneously, though with very different types of strategies.

Layder (1997) identifies the need to "weld both the subjective and objective sides of social life into a comprehensive theory that accounts for the production of social life through human activity." From this study, insights emerge into some of the ways in which we may impact on the subjective aspects of human activity. It identifies that we must act both individually and collectively and that we must work at changing the established relationships between Black and White people and men and women.

Individual Action

An important leaning in this study was that though victimised we are not victims. We have essential roles to play in the design and construction of a system in which we would be able to realise our potential and make our unique contributions to our world. We perceived the need for change to start with ourselves by:

- ***Acknowledging our responsibility in the perpetuation of the system and start by changing ourselves.*** In an interconnected system while no one part is unilaterally powerful each is influential.
- ***Moving beyond denial and seek to both experientially and conceptually understand oppression.*** Freire (1972) asserts that the oppressed must "find out the oppressor" and "unveil the world of oppression". Discrimination and oppression severely abuses us all. It detaches us from each other and from fully encountering our own humanity (Katz 1978, Du Bois 1903, Myrdal 1944, among others). As with other forms of abuse, both perpetrators and those victimized often protect themselves from the very painful feelings triggered by such experiences by pushing the shaming incidents out of consciousness. In the research we identified that as children we had been explicitly counselled to ignore and forget such incidents. I believe that, as with other abuse, the raising to consciousness of these experiences is vitally important for our healing and recovery. In becoming conscious of the process by which oppression is constructed in our everyday realities we are able to:
 - debunk myths of fairness and social justice, and to appreciate that ideologies of patriarchy and White supremacy, among others, produce a system designed to privilege a few and disadvantage many;
 - acknowledge the wrongfulness of racial, sexual abuse etc.;
 - 'mark' the events at which parts of ourselves were brutally treated or 'killed' and in this way enable ourselves to forgive but not forget. It demands a great deal of energy to contain and suppress the rightful anger and rage felt at these "crimes" against our humanity. Also anger, when out of sight turns inward and, as an unobserved cancer, gradually eats us up. As we revisit incidents of abuse, and forgive others and ourselves we are able to 'let go' of our anger. Estes (1992) in her story "*Marking territory: the boundaries of rage and forgiveness* "

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gives a very useful outline of how this process of forgiveness might be undertaken.

- ***Motivating ourselves to change the abusive system.***
- ***Identifying our participation in the perpetuation of the system, and discovering that the 'enemy' is also inside of us.*** Our store of experiences of dominance provide opportunities for us to learn experientially about the processes by which 'power over' others is constructed, and how exclusion, negation, isolation, are created in everyday practice. In the course of this learning we are likely to encounter many of our prejudices, have the opportunity to review and appraise their validity and generate alternative ways of construing the world. Martin Luther King (1964) suggests that we need to transform our minds and be "tough-minded", "non-conformists" who are willing and able to think and act counter culture. This is extremely challenging work. However for those of us who most regularly experience oppression in many areas of our lives, it can be excruciatingly painful for us to associate ourselves with the abuse of power and the oppression of others, and perhaps the tendency to deny our participation is greater. Yet it is as we own and explore our experience of dominance that we encounter our agency and our ability to powerfully impact on our world.
- ***Developing ourselves in ways that shift the locus of our control.*** Liberation is about being internally, rather than externally, controlled. It is about discovering our responsibility and choice. In our exploration of moving from surviving to thriving we identified the need to:
 - *Uncover the programmes by which our actions are controlled.* In exploring our survival strategies we observed that much of our behaviour is automatic and habitual. Therefore our engagement in processes that raise our consciousness of ourselves in action, and allow us to 'catch sight' of the thoughts and assumptions about the world that underpin our behaviours, are acts of resistance. In such processes opportunities to identify our prejudices, and change our behaviours arise. We may also discover the attractions/addictions that seduce us to comply with the system, and experientially understand our need to surrender the problem of self-change to a higher power.
 - *Create spaces, between the actions perceived and received and our reactions, in which choice may be exercised.* In doing this we take responsibility for determining our actions - rather than being controlled by others and by the circumstances we experience. In this study we identified that the situations in which we live our lives are designed for our destruction, therefore to live constructive and productive lives we must discover ways for reducing the influence of the context on ourselves.
 - *Redefine the self in ways that generate healthy self-images and self-love.* Racism, sexism and other discriminations are alienating processes. By splitting the psyche, and separating individuals from each other, opportunities for us to experience our humanity are reduced. Therefore there is a need for us to create 'wholeness' in our ourselves and to create possibilities for participation and community.

Learning from this study indicates that this type of individual, self-directed learning is necessary if we are to create change at the subjective aspects of the system. However

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it is learning of a high order and as such extremely challenging to undertake. It demands loving environments in which the emotional security of the individual is assured, so that excursions into areas previously identified as taboo, and too dangerous to enter, can be tentatively undertaken. Experiences with *Through One Hundred Pairs of Eyes* (see chapter 4), and in my professional practice, indicate that individuals can be adequately supported to undertake this learning. The *Through One Hundred Pairs of Eyes* manual and Gash and Kenny (1991) provide useful analytical frames for constructing such learning environments. It is important to note that in the absence of such settings, individuals may feel compelled to protect themselves by resisting attempts to raise their awareness of their prejudices, and of their participation in the oppressive system. This study therefore raises challenges for facilitators of liberatory endeavours, and for those wishing to support transformational change in themselves and others.

Collective Action

In addition to the individual work we need to identify and participate in the work that is appropriate for our group - of course we may have membership of multiple groups. Together we must uncover the ways in which we may collectively impact on the system.

- **As Black women**

Learning from the study indicated the need for us to:

- ***Collaborate in the reconstruction of the dominant images of "the Black woman"***. Largely speaking, these are externally constructed images that have been internalised and then enacted by us. In the absence of alternative models this is perhaps inevitable. This study affirms Scott's claim that even when as individuals we, in our private lives, negotiate changes in the dominant images, we go to great pains to maintain the public images of the 'strong Black woman', the 'mammy' and the 'mule of the world'. We also teach our daughters to comply with those images. Although there is clearly a need for 'others' to join us in challenging these dominant images of the 'Black woman' it seems that the construction of alternative images is primarily our work. Our challenge is to create images that allow us access to the whole range of possible ways of being as human being.
- ***Find our voices, claim our right to speak and be seen.*** The oppressive system has effectively negated our presence in the world and silenced our voices in the public arena, but to attain health in the system there is a need for the contributions of all our perspectives. Experiences in the study indicate that it is anxiety-raising for us to speak our truths and become visible. In doing so we must act counter to our learnt survival strategies and break age-old taboos. Therefore, I would argue that this is work that must be negotiated and undertaken collectively with the support and encouragement of our sisters.
- ***Tell the stories that have been obliterated by a racist system.*** An understanding of the past relationships between Black and White people provides insights into the patterns for relating that have been passed down to us, and information about the dances we skilfully execute together. Therefore

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it creates possibilities for the changing of those scripts and for choreographing new dances. Clearly, this very difficult task, must be done in relationships with White people but I would argue that the early stages of this process is our (Black women's) work. In the first stages we must extend and elaborate our understanding of the past relationships between Black and White peoples. It is important that our voices and perspectives are added to those of the White group and that our stories are told. Initiatives such as the uncovering of Mary Seacole (Alexander and Dewjee, 1982), the re-discovery of Zora Neale Hurston (Walker, 1983) and a few others are important steps in creating fuller, more rounded and more positive self- images and therefore of enhancing our capacity for self-love.

- **Healing and transforming the relationships between Black and White people, men and women**

From this work it became clear that thriving demands "both/and" rather than either/or responses. While identifying the need for individuals to take responsibility for their part in maintaining the system and to become subject - seeing and taking opportunities and making choices, it is also true that forces external to us actively reduce our choices and prescribe our ability, potential and roles. In seeking to be subject rather than object we implicitly reject the scripted roles attributed to us and therefore disturb the scenes into which we has been scripted. In my Living Inquiry I discovered that decisions to change the parts I would normally play in a relationship, or to change my behaviour in relation to others, created anxiety in those around me, and generated pressure designed to force me to return to old positions and behaviours.

Therefore there is the need for joint action in designing mutually empowering roles. We need to develop skills as both leaders and followers. For instance, as Black women learn to claim their human rights to agency and take the lead in negotiating their liberation, Black men and White people must also simultaneously learn about giving support, being of service to others and about the gentle art of "followership". **Together** we must negotiate generative relationships, problemize the context, and collaboratively create and experiment with strategies for changing that taken-for-granted aspect of our world.

- **As Leaders and direction-setters**

In this study we caught sight of the destructiveness of the contexts, in which we live and work, and understood that any emancipatory endeavour must seek to attain change at the macro institutional level. So, there is a lot of work to be done by those of us who exercise power and influence in organisations. From this study I identified early steps towards this goal to be our recognition of:

- The added levels of responsibilities that as leaders and managers, we carry for the maintenance of the discriminatory and oppressive system, and the additional opportunities we have for designing and creating humanising, empowering and constructive systems.
- The need for an elaboration of our understanding of institutional discrimination, and the generation of more complex strategic models that acknowledge the interrelationship between the practices of everyday life at the

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personal and intra-personal level and the objective structural level of organisational policies and procedures.

- The need to develop in leaders the capacity to model alternative ways of using power constructively to the mutual good of all.

Closing Remarks

From the knowledge generated, aspects of the system of which I was previously less aware came into focus. I saw that Institutional Discrimination, as well as being an interconnected set of ideologies and interactive structures, is also about:

- values and principles that influence social relationships, in and out of the organisation;
- constantly recurring patterns of unequal relationships;
- everyday individual interactions through which messages of superiority and inferiority are enacted and communicated;
- The taken-for-granted and rarely observed context in which norms, expectations, attributed scripts for people of different groups are held and continuously communicated. It is from this space that injunctions and invitations to collude are emitted and the experience of being constantly 'wrong-footed' and put at risk is constructed.

In this inquiry as I engaged with the challenges, dilemmas and paradoxes of identifying and changing the internal and external factors that inhibit Black women's ability to thrive, knowledge of varying natures – practical, prepositional, experiential and presentational, was produced, and worked with. Yet drawing this thesis to a close, I am conscious that the real benefit of this research lies not in the insights and theoretical knowledge gained – though very important – but in my experience of shifting my way of being in the world. The experience was transformational! This insight reminds me of the concept of autopoiesis or self-making in systems thinking, described by Capra (1996). The idea that living systems select aspects of their environment to which they will pay attention and respond to their environment, and then in the process of responding to and interacting with it, they are structurally changed. Experiences in the course of this study profoundly disturbed and disorientated me and as a result changed my perceptual and conceptual frameworks. As it shifted my position from that of object/victim to one of being actor / co- creator of my world, it facilitated my emergence, like the butterfly, to a new stage of my becoming.

At the start of this study my intention was to learn about the inhibitors to our growth *while* impacting on the system. I wanted to engage in research *as* social change. (Romm, 1997) In the course of the work I have learnt that I am not a detached observer of the system, but an integral part. Therefore it is not surprising that such a large part of my learning has been about self-change. In trying to change the system I discovered the need to change myself and gained new insights into the meaning of the commonly used slogan of the '80's – *The personal is political*.

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