



The Cultural Parent

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The Cultural Parent

Pearl Dreger

Abstract

Berne's concept of culture is supported by combined anthropological views on culture. Etiquette, Technicality and Character form the basis of TA Cultural Analysis, and correspond to the Parent, Adult and Child components of the individual person. The internalization of the "personality of a culture" is described in structural terms: it forms the Cultural Parent of the individual person, and is diagrammed as three ellipses within the Parent ego state. The Cultural Parent provides a strategy for individual change within a socially unjust environment and a tool for social transformation of groups.

Berne developed a concept of group culture which is based on his model of individual personality. When a group of people form a social network or community, they share Parental values, Adult procedures and Child emotions which Berne (1963) names Etiquette, Technicalities and Character respectively. This threefold division is in tune with many anthropological views of culture. Ruth Benedict sees a similarity between culture and an individual where she describes culture as a more or less consistent pattern of thought and emotion (Benedict, 1934). Clifford Geertz speaks of culture as an historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols through which people communicate, and perpetuate and develop their knowledge of and attitudes towards life (Geertz, 1968). Klukhohn and Murray define culture as the historically created designs for living; these may be explicit and implicit, they may be rational, irrational and non-rational, they are potential guides for human behavior (Klukhohn & Murray, 1956). Kroeber's (1948) definition includes the conglomeration of learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, techniques, ideas and values, and the behavior they induce.

The Personality of a Culture

Just as in the individual person there is a part which perceives and a part which responds, so also there is a part of social consciousness which governs ways of perceiving and ways of responding. The TA method of seeing personality through Parent, Adult and Child can be applied to the study of a culture as we look at the Parent, Adult and Child of the culture (Berne, 1963, p. 110). The study of a culture's 'personality' can be used as an effective tool for cultural and social transformation. Following Summerton (1979), I use three ellipses rather than three circles to diagram the structure of a group's culture:

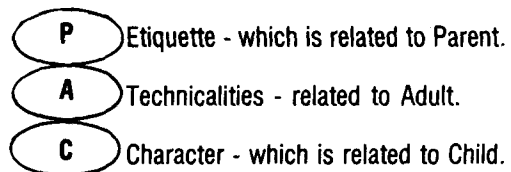


Figure 1
'Personality' of a Culture (Dreger, 1981)

Berne summarizes etiquette as "what one is supposed to do," technicality as "what one has to do," and character as "what one might like to do" (1963, p. 112).

The following scheme of contents is a start in the investigation of ego states of a culture:

Etiquette: Culturally inherited beliefs, ideologies, values, rules, moral codes, beliefs about life and death, about good and evil, about being male and female, about wealth and poverty, about fertility and entropy, superstitions, customs, rituals, social hierarchies, prejudices, expectations of the ideal man, the ideal woman, methods of reward and punishment, etc.

Technicalities: Culturally inherited knowledge, skills, techniques, methods of production and distribution, economic processes, science

and research, planning and organizations, distributions of political power, etc.

Character: Culturally inherited ways of experiencing and of acting out love, hatred, pleasure, pain, acceptance, rejection, obedience, resistance, hungers, needs, drives, friendship, jealousy, birth, death, freedom, identity, fear, hope, fulfillment, and the culturally inherited ways of sabotaging or deviating from the cultural etiquette (Drego, 1981).

In summary: the etiquette, Parent-type contents of a culture are the transmitted designs for thinking, behaving and valuing in a particular society; the technicality, or, Adult-type contents consist of the actual organization of the material and social life of a particular human group; the character, Child-type contents include socially programmed ways of feeling, handling biological needs, emotional expressions, especially compliance and rebellion.

Any object, event or pattern in a culture can be seen in the context of the above three-fold system. For example, the Dowry system in India can be seen as follows:

Etiquette of the Dowry System consists of beliefs about women and their status in the original family, about their duties to her husband and his family, about the passing of ownership from one family to another ...

Technicalities of the Dowry System consist of the procedures for accomplishing the inter-family bargain, the sequence of events related to the handing over of the money or assets, their preservation and supply: e.g., the bridegroom's family acquires wealth, or the newly-weds acquire wealth, or the bridegroom's sister acquires a dowry, ...

Character of the Dowry System indicates the feelings of obligation, deprivation or satisfaction, feelings of worth or worthlessness on the part of the brides, their feelings of frustration or compliance, feelings of power on the part of the husband's family ...

The Cultural Parent

All processes of social transformation, for example, in the dowry system will require changes, adaptations and compromises in the whole system of beliefs-options-feelings that constitute the cultural personality. This cultural personality is located as a configuration within the individual person, the person's Cultural

Parent, which is diagrammed as three ellipses in the Parent. The Cultural Parent consists of etiquette, technicalities and character of a culture as introjected into and lived out by an individual living within that culture.

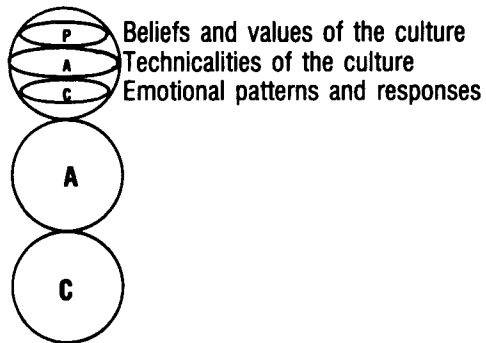


Figure 2
The Cultural Parent (Drego, 1981)

The process of individual transformation or cure requires a re-distribution of the contents and cathexis of Parent, Adult and Child. For the process of social transformation the contents and energy distributions within the Cultural Parent are to be identified and changed.

This concept of a Cultural Parent also gives a model for the identification of the Parent, Adult and Child of a community. The members of the community can become conscious of how these ways of behaving affect the psycho-social dynamics of oppression within the community and in relation to oppressor groups. An integrated program of social transformation will emphasize all three parts of the Cultural Parent.

The transformation of beliefs, opinions and traditions of the Cultural Parent of a given community is important because it is this part which justifies and imprisons a given social order by providing legends, rules, punishments and rewards for specific types of behavior in the community.

The Cultural Parent Influence in Daily Decisions

The Cultural Parent is located both in a social group and in the individual. A young economist who hears her mother-in-law say that if she does not go to the temple, her husband will have financial set-backs, is hearing the voice of the Cultural Parent (etiquette). When the gay

mood of a spring festival surges in the market place, or when one group feels disgust towards another group, the Cultural Parent (character) is again in evidence. When a sick person uses prayers or creative imagery for healing, the Cultural Parent (technicality) is at work.

When a young woman decides to marry the man of her own choice, it is the Cultural Parent that is uncomfortable and wants to stop her. When a child is prevented from going to school, and is asked to look after the younger children, the Cultural Parent smiles with satisfaction. When a wife is beaten by her husband, the punitive part of the Cultural Parent grimly approves, and both parties are caught in its grip. The Cultural Parent contains the conscious and unconscious boundaries of acceptable behavior, whether or not what is acceptable is harmful or helpful to the individual. When tradition dictates that a little baby be massaged, this is helpful to the child, but when it dictates that it was mother's wet hair which caused damages to the baby's lungs (mother had breast-fed the baby after having washed her hair), and nothing can change it, this is harmful to the baby. When a harijan thinks it is shameful to be a harijan, and believes that harijans are inferior by birth, it is the Cultural Parent which fosters such assumptions. When a landlord thinks that he has rights over the bodies of his workers, when a man believes that raping women is his prerogative, when teenagers believe that burning buses is a valid form of protest, it is the Cultural Parent in which these beliefs and their corresponding behaviors are encrusted. While the Cultural Parent is one way of looking at the individual's Parent, it also needs to be seen in its social context, and to be cleaned within the social network in which the individuals relate to one another as a group.

The Cultural Parent is formed in the family and early socio-cultural environment. It is the process by which children of the landowners are programmed to become like the landowner and to imitate his behavior and attitudes, while the children of the landless laborer are programmed to be like their forefathers. The more closed the Parenting process, the fewer options will the child look for while growing up and the more the child will re-live the Cultural Parent program of being oppressed or oppressing. This is the process that is shaken up by consciousness-raising and by those movements

that work for a reversal of old structures. In China today, the children of university graduates are denied a university education while the children of farmers encouraged to get one.

An unhealthy Cultural Parent is one which wants to (1) repeat old history over and over again without change; (2) keep things the way they are, because this is safe and familiar; (3) assume responsibility for others that these others can well assume for themselves; (4) provide punishments for new and untried behavior even where such behavior is life-giving and healthy (6) keep power over others and enjoy controlling them for the sake of controlling; (7) destroy anything, however good, that threatens the maintenance of control.

Here in India I have seen my development programs that focus on the Child when they "take care of" the needs of the deprived or they focus on the Adult when they train people in new methods of agriculture, nutrition, and self-employment. Many activist programs focus on the Child, stirring up resistance and rebellion in the people.

When a community examines its Cultural Parent, it can decide to keep what is needed so as to protect a just social order and create new forms of social interaction beyond the cultural circumference. By modifying unjust values in the Controlling parent such as unlimited accumulation of wealth, unlimited profit margins, autocratic power, destroying others in order to meet one's own wants, the foundations of a new social order are prepared.

Changing the Cultural Parent

Kanta and Sheila offer two examples of individuals who have changed their Cultural parents and in so doing, have improved the quality of life. Kanta found that her ethnic group prescribed that she fast regularly so as to preserve her husband's health. In her society, wives lived with feelings of guilt and fear, reinforced by their acceptance of the cultural belief system, that if they did not fast faithfully, and if their husbands fell ill, then they would be responsible. At the same time they felt a secret sense of power over their husband's bodies, a feeling of triumph that went against the cultural etiquette of male dominance. The cultural character therefore contained both compliance and rebellion, while the cultural etiquette con-

tained messages of control for the woman and nurturance for the men.

Kanta's	Before Therapy Old Cult.P.	After Therapy New Cult.P.
Etiquette	Wives must suffer to preserve husband's life.	Each spouse is responsible for own life.
Technicality	Fasting	Exchange strokes
Character	Fearful, powerful.	Free, Confident

Sheila was furious when she heard that (the Cultural Parent of) her husband's family forbade her to sleep with him on their wedding night. She had to sleep with her mother-in-law. Her husband took three months to change his Cultural Parent. By using the ETC framework, the two of them located their conflict in their Cultural Parents, and they resolved this in time to prevent a break-up.

	Husband	Sheila
Etiquette	Wife belongs to husband's family.	Spouses belong to each other.
Technicality	Wife sleeps with mother-in-law for first three nights.	Joint decision-making.
Character	Inferior/Superior	Co-operative

The transformation of the Cultural Parent at a group level is a longer process. At times a change in technicality will bring about a change in etiquette and character, at times the process starts from a change in character or etiquette. For example, a TA group of village women are gradually changing their Cultural Parent on the subject of childbirth as follows, by learning technicalities of relaxation and breathing.

	Old Cult.P.	New Cult.P.
Etiquette	The more the labor pain the more mother loves baby.	Experience of childbirth contractions can be controlled by mother.
Technicality	Isolation of mother at childbirth.	Mother surrounded by caring hands (and relaxation techniques).
Character	Helplessness during birth process.	Powerfulness in giving life.

It may be many years before the village women see that their husbands also have a part in the childbirth process.

Another example of change in the Cultural Parent of a group of village young women came when they decided to go on a picnic. Usually, girls do not leave the village boundaries. After using their individual Adult ego states to plan

and carry out a trip to another part of the city, they found the Character in their Cultural Parent challenged with a new sense of self-worth. They later accepted a new Cultural Etiquette of "Girls are capable of independent action and can travel outside the village." To avoid family confrontation they gave extra strokes to their mothers: another new technicality.

The model of Cultural Parent was also useful for analyzing health practices in the village:

Etiquette: Concept of ideal health, superstition about causes of disease, etc.

Technicalities: Methods of diagnosis, instruments of treatment such as pills, herbs, chantings, etc.

Character: Fantasies of decay or rupture, divine punishment, faith in healer, etc.

A common Cultural Parent system in Indian villages says "Don't give water to a patient suffering from diarrhea." By using the image of a broken cooking pot on the village coals which needs extra water to be added several times in order to cook the food, some families have accepted a change in their etiquette and technicalities concerning this disease.

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