

## Living Equalities: Cultural Parent



Pearl Drego is an Indian transactional analyst and she originated the idea of the **Cultural Parent**. Drawing on Berne's earlier concept of the **Group Culture**, she defined the concept as consisting:

**'of the etiquette, technicalities and character of a culture as introjected into and lived out by an individual living within that culture.'**

Whilst Parental messages might be attributed to specific parent figures these are highly influenced by the wider group culture, hence Drego's reference to the Cultural Parent. She also claimed that:

**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.**

In the UK context, we might see the Cultural Parent at work when we hear white, professional individuals talk of how they love their quiet neighbourhood, whilst secretly hoping that the street is not 'taken over' by immigrants (character). Or when we are navigating the NHS systems access free health care (technical). And, of course, when we hear that the monarchy is unquestionably 'a Good Thing' (etiquette).

Drego describes a shadow side of the Cultural Parent. In ego state terms this is what is activated in the Child ego state in response to the cultural messaging held in the Parent ego state. To do the individual has to navigate what can be the 'push and pull' of contradictory cultural messages. As an example of how this is done, Drego introduced the 'Reverse Injunction' and refers to what might appear like an autonomous action is more accurately understood as 'pseudofree' because it is more an act of rebellion.

Drego explains further:

**The protest against the injunction is connected to the reverse injunction, which can appear to be autonomy but which is actually an ardent resistance against the injunction. In the reverse injunction, the original prohibition is denied and suppressed or rebelled against...**

Drego draws upon her research amongst Gujar women by means of illustration:

*Indian Gujar women are said to be aggressive and dominating. However, in actuality they feel insecure and fearful, carrying the Don't Belong injunction. They defend against this by aggressive social behavior and declarations of loyalty to the*

*tribe and family. This aggression is their anti-script, which is reinforced by a cultural etiquette filled with proverbs of courage and sacrifice. When individual women have a reverse Don't Be a Child or Don't Exist injunction, they refer to their traditional zest for living, vibrant energy, and audacity. These traits are fed by the loneliness, suffering, and frustration arising from the constant social put-downs of girls and women.*

If we return to the UK context we might see an example of something similar in the term 'inverse snobbery' with regard to the class system. This is where working class individuals who have 'made good' advocate the ideal of 'having to make your own way in life' (etiquette). They insisting on having only the very best material goods, buying into private education and healthcare in order to demonstrate how far they have come, expressing disdain for those others who have not got the pluck, ambition or talent to have been as successful. Much of this dialogue reflects one dimension of the etiquette of UK culture where there is a consensus that success comes if you work hard and have ambition; that higher economic achievement is the key performance indicator.

The situation however, is problematic when combined with group etiquette in relation to class. To 'know your place' in the British class system is the fundamental premise for group etiquette, ie. it is the belief on which the group requires a high level of consensus in order to function. The enthusiasm of the working class individual for celebrating their social mobility is akin to the pseudo-freedom Berne referred to. A 'Don't be Important' injunction embedded in the Child ego state of the working class psyche can be 'reversed' through an overactive embracing of the work ethic. Consequently, the feeling of success experienced by the working class social climber silences the shame of being working class.

**'Where freedom is really defiance, it is only an illusion' (Berne 1972).**

### **Exercise 1:**

Drego writes the following of the Gujar womens' Cultural Parent:

*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...*

What might be an equivalent statement in relation to the Cultural Parent of your group culture?

### **Exercise 2:**

What connections do you make with your own experience of the Cultural Parent?

Consider where you are in a 'have-not' position. What do you experience as the permissions, attributes and injunctions associated with that part of you?

Are there ways in which you rebel, or act out in defiance of the Cultural Parent messages?

Then...

Consider where you are in a 'have' position. Again, what do you experience as the permissions, attributes and injunctions associated with that part of you? How does the Cultural Parent material support you in maintaining that 'have' position?

Do you see how the shadow of the Cultural Parent plays out in relation to this part of you?

Finally...

How can these reflections inform your understanding and practice regarding DEI issues in your school?