

Our Dominant Culture



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What Is a Dominant Culture?

The dominant culture in a society decides how people should act. In other words, people in a dominant culture do things the way society expects them to. They follow the rules for behaving in public institutions. On a Reservation, the dominant culture is Native American. Outside of the Reservation, there is another dominant culture.

In the United States, people describe the dominant culture as "Anglo", "White", or "middle class." Those are generalizations. A generalization is something that people say about a whole group of people. However, we know that everyone is different. Generalizations only help us talk about things in general terms.

For example, many Afro-Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans act like people in our dominant culture. They may or may not be white or middle class. In the same way, many White, middle-class people in the United States do not behave like people from the dominant culture.





Our public schools are mostly guided by our dominant culture. It is the culture that people also face in most workplaces. When you walk into a courtroom, you are dealing with our dominant culture. Our laws are part of our dominant culture.



If you want to work in the United States, you do not have to be part of the dominant culture. You can still live the way you want at home. However, you are wise to know how to function in the dominant culture.

Imagine that a person goes to work on another planet. Let's say that Jane goes to Planet XYZ. If she wants to be happy, she may need to learn the XYZ language. She will need to work during XYZ times, like Moon to Sun and Sun 2 to Moon 3. Jane will still be an earthling. However, she will need to adapt if she wants to be happy on Planet XYZ.



Here's a great thing to know: the more you can change, the better you will be as a learner!



Vocabulary

dominant – powerful, influential

society – a community; a group of people living together

behave – act in a certain way to others

middle class – a social group between the poor and the rich

workplace – a job; a place where you work

adapt – change to fit a situation

A. Write each term above on a 5x7 card. On the other side, write the definition. Test yourself on one side of the card. Then switch to the other. When you know the words well, write sentences with them.

B. Read each situation below. Give advice to each person. You can write down your advice or talk about it.

1. **Frank** works for Ace Construction Company. He works from 8AM to 4 PM every week day. This week, his people are celebrating the Bear Dance. Frank will have to miss a day of work. What should he do? He doesn't want to lose his job, but this celebration is important.

2. **Anna** works in at General Hospital. Her supervisor scheduled a staff meeting. The memo said the following:

A meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 7:30 AM, for all nursing staff, Room 32-B. We will discuss improvements in patient care. Bring specific examples of good comments you have heard from your patients. Bring examples of negative comments you have received.

Anna is a good nurse. Patients always tell her that she is great. She does not want to bring attention to herself. What should she do?

C. Listen to the dictation. Click on the sound clip. Write what you hear. (Check your dictation on your answer sheet.)





General Characteristics of Our Dominant US Culture

Learning is change. If you learn to change, you will become a great learner. For example, maybe a child didn't like vegetables. If that child learns to like vegetables as an adult, he will be able to enjoy many more meals! The more you can change, the more you will enjoy things around you.



Examine the way you might be different from people in our dominant culture. How could you change to function in different cultures?

Time



People in public institutions and businesses really value time. (To value something is to believe it is important.) People say, "Time is money." In other words, time can be stolen. Time can be wasted. Time can be earned and spent.



If you go to school in the US, you must take time seriously. Be in class on time or a little early. If you have an appointment with a doctor, be on time! If you have a job, show up on time or a little early. Do not leave early, however! You are paid for your time and effort!



If you have a school assignment, turn it in on time. Assignments have deadlines. So do many work tasks. Always meet deadlines. Some people may forgive you, but you never know. It is easier to always turn in work on time!

The person with less authority must be on time. The person with more authority, like a teacher, a doctor, or a boss, can be late. Those are the rules.

Personal and Professional Self



People in our dominant culture have two sides: a personal side and a professional, or public, side. Those two do not mix well.

If you work, you are expected to be a professional. That means that your job comes first. Your personal life is separate from your working life. You may have a death in your family, or your child may be sick. Those are personal problems. Some bosses will understand if you have to miss work. Some will not. It is important to ask. How does your boss feel about taking care of personal things during working hours? Remember to always, always communicate with your bosses. Don't just *not* show up! You may lose your job!

If you are a student, you are expected to act "professionally." You might tell your teacher, "My grandma was sick, and I couldn't finish my assignment." Some teachers may let you make up the work. Some may not.

At school, you are expected to put school ahead of everything personal. At work, you are expected to keep your personal life to yourself during working hours. Those are the rules.

Communication



Our dominant culture communicates through words. Written words are more important than spoken words. That is why you will find instructions printed. You will find many signs that tell you what not to do. If you don't understand something, you are expected to ask. Things are then explained in words.

If you buy or sell something, you will need a bill of sale. Shaking hands on a deal is not considered a legal agreement. If you want to protect yourself, get it in writing. A lot of paper is used in our dominant culture. Written documents are considered proof for many things.



At school, people are usually asked to turn in things in writing. The teacher then grades the writing and records it. At work, people are given memos. Memos are short notices with information. Workers are expected to follow written instructions.

If you get permission to do something, it is always good to write it down. Have someone sign the permission. You can say, "Wait a minute! He told me I could come late!" That may not be enough. He might have forgotten, and you are in trouble. Get things in writing. Follow written instructions.

Our dominant culture uses language a lot! Who are the "A" students? They are the ones who can write and read well. Learn to use language, and you will probably be very successful!

Good writing is one of the best workplace skills you can develop. In school, you are expected to write well! Those are the dominant culture rules.



Check each statement that matches the dominant culture.

People know how you feel by your body language.	
If you are going to be late, call immediately to let someone know.	
Instructions and announcements are in writing.	
If you can't show up for work, just make up the time later, maybe on the weekend. People will understand.	
Discuss your problems or personal plans during work hours.	
Turn in assignment on or before the deadline.	
It's OK to be a few minutes late to an interview.	
If you need to be absent, just tell someone at work and ask them to let the boss know.	

Pieces of The Whole Picture

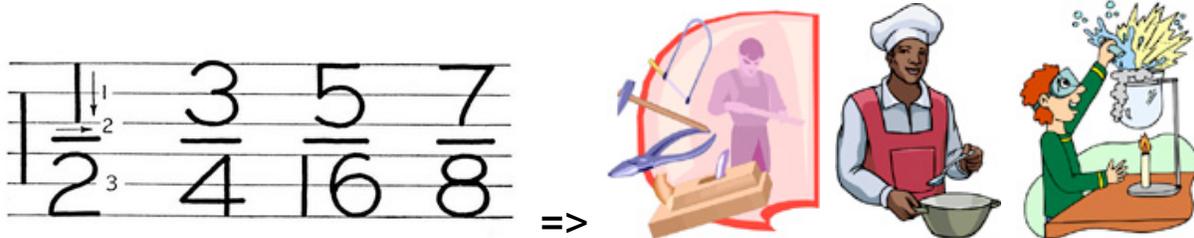


Some people love puzzles. They love to see all of those pieces and figure out how to put them together. That is the way of our dominant culture.

If you are in school, your teacher will often show you the pieces. You are expected to put them together.

For example, some teachers will show you how to add and subtract fractions. It is up to you to figure out how to use your skill to cook, or build, or figure out medical doses. Some teachers will show you

how to name parts of speech, like noun, pronoun, and verb. It is up to you to write your opinions using those parts of speech.



At work, you may be given your specific tasks. You may not know what they are for. People might say, “Stack those things here and the others there.” That’s it. Why? You may not be told. Ask if you want to know why.

There is an expression that says, “He cannot see the forest for the trees.” That means that some people see the details, but they cannot see the big picture. That is how the dominant culture operates.

Independence and Cooperation



Our dominant culture values independence. Young children are taught to do things without help. They are taught to compete and to be better than others. Asking for help is often considered a weakness.

Children in our dominant culture are taught to make decisions on their own. They are taught to challenge or question everything.

They are taught to face difficulties on their own. They are told to look people in the eye and to defend their opinions. The United States became a nation because it challenged English rule!



In the dominant culture, people who depend on others are considered to be weak: young children, old people, the sick or the homeless. That is why people try to be strong and independent.

In school, many teachers ask students to compete with each other for grades. Students are told to try new things even if they fail. Trying and failing shows that you are brave. There is a saying, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, try again.” People who compete and succeed are heroes. If they do it without help, they are bigger heroes.



At work, it is good to try harder. It is good to be better than the next worker at something.

Those are the rules.

Do the rules have exceptions? Yes. At work, bosses also like people who cooperate with each other. That is called teamwork. It is good to excel. It is also good to work with others to solve problems. Bosses like workers who work together to make things better.



In a sports team, players must collaborate. They must work together. That way, their team can win!

In our dominant culture, it is good for people to collaborate to make a company or a team successful. That way, teams and businesses can compete against each other better!

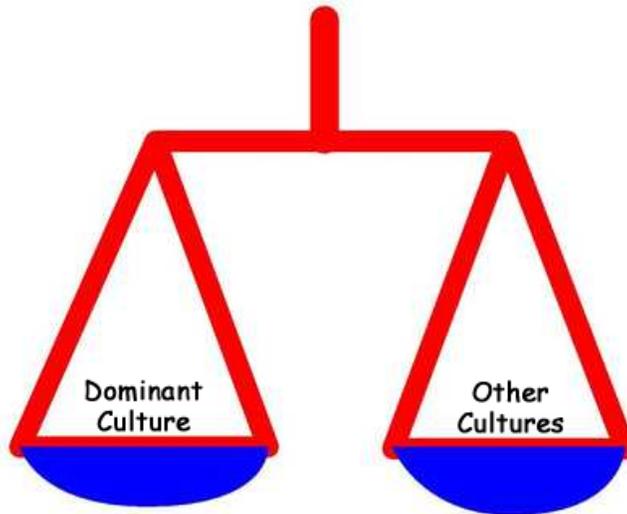
Write responses to the following questions: (No audio.)

1. What is a dominant culture?
2. Write down a few things you learned about the dominant culture in the United States. (Example: It is good to get to work on time.)
3. List three things that you value. (Example: I value being with my family.)
4. How do you act like people in the dominant culture?
5. How do you not act like people in the dominant culture?
6. Check each statement that applies to you.

I like to answer questions in class.	
I am always on time.	
I like it when someone praises me in public.	
I have to see the parts before I see the whole picture.	
My personal life is separate from my work or school life.	
It is good not to depend on others.	
I like to read and write.	



Which Culture Is Right?



No culture is right or wrong.

In some cultures, it is impolite to be on time. It is impolite to talk back or look someone in the eye.

In some cultures, it is better to observe before trying to do something. In some cultures, family always comes first.

In some cultures, tradition and body language communicate better than words.

In some cultures, time is eternal; it can't be used up.

A culture is just an agreement between people. Agreements change. No one is right or wrong. We simply do what we think is right in each culture.



Which flower is more beautiful, the rose or the carnation? Which tree is better, the pine or the oak? Which animal is better, the dog or the horse? Which color in a rug is better, the black or the red? Which culture is better, the dominant culture or a non-dominant culture? Only your opinion can answer those questions.



If you want to become a learner, you will look at all angles. You will see how differences are good. Differences make beautiful patterns, just like the colors in a rug or in a sunset. People are different. That is good. You are different. That is good.



You have your own culture. It gave you security. It helped you grow. Now, as an adult, you can choose how you want to see others. You are free to see things in different ways. You can value your own culture. You can also value how others do things. That is called learning.

Conduct a Survey (No audio)

Print copies of this survey. Complete it for yourself. Then complete it with ten other people. When you have all surveys completed, write down the totals for each question.

Things about Me		
Name of Person		
1. I like to get up	late	early
2. I go to bed	late	early
3. I talk	a lot	only a little.
4. I read	a lot	only a little.
5. I write	a lot	only a little.
6. I laugh	a lot	only a little.
7. I like to be on time.	yes	no
8. I like vegetables.	yes	no
9. I like red meat.	yes	no
10. I like seafood.	yes	no
11. I like chicken and turkey.	yes	no
12. I like desserts.	yes	no
13. I like math.	yes	no
14. I am a good athlete.	yes	no
15. I am a good artist.	yes	no
16. I am a good cook.	yes	no
17. I can build things.	yes	no
18. I am a good listener.	yes	no
19. I like to work.	yes	no
20. I like to watch TV.	yes	no
21. I like to play video games.	yes	no
22. I like to play sports.	yes	no
23. I like children.	yes	no
24. I like music.	yes	no

ANSWER SHEET (No audio)

Listen to the dictation. Click on the sound clip. Write what you hear.

The dominant culture dictates how people act in a society.

A generalization is something that people say about a whole group of people.

Our laws are part of our dominant culture.

The more you can change, the more you will enjoy things around you.

Check each statement that matches the dominant culture.

People know how you feel by your body language	
If you are going to be late, call immediately to let someone know.	√
Instructions and announcements are in writing.	√
If you can't show up for work, just make up the time later, maybe on the weekend. People will understand.	
Discuss your problems or personal plans during work hours.	
Turn in assignment on or before the deadline.	√
It's OK to be a few minutes late to an interview.	
If you need to be absent, just tell someone at work and ask them to let the boss know.	