Patterns of Dominant & Non-Dominant Cultures

"Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress in every society, in every family…Information and freedom are indivisible."

~ Kofi Annan

"Let the truth be told so we can create more justice in this country."

~ Equal Justice Initiative

This document was created with a prayer — that those who are alive on the Earth at this time could rise up together to disrupt the inequality, injustice, and mass suffering that is rampant in our world. It was created with reverence and respect for the compassionate, loving, courageous, and powerful capacities of human beings of all types to be the change we want to see and create together a world we want to live in.

This is an invitation to:
- Explore the influence of culture on human behaviors
- Self-reflect and reflect on the ways of society
- Recognize alternatives to the dominant ways of acting
- Deepen our collective capacities to work together to free us all

About this Document

This document is meant to be a conversation starter. It is incomplete. It is laid out in a linear and seemingly objective way, which in and of itself is not accurate since the content being explored is extremely complex. The intent of this document is not to say that all characteristics of white people are damaging. Nor is the intent to say that all non-dominant culture norms are positive. Both lists are incomplete and the aim is that these lists will help people discern when they may be acting from a dominating cultural behavior and shift to more non-dominating cultural behaviors. People from different races and cultural backgrounds contributed to the content included.

What is Culture?

Context matters… the education we've received formally and culturally has socialized us to be the individuals that we are. Our culture is influenced by our formal and informal education in schools, the neighborhoods we live in, our families, our community, our religion, and by the media that we consume. Our beliefs and behaviors are formed by the stories told to us and that we tell, our knowledge, experiences, customs and traditions. Our environments and what we learn, shape our way of living. We develop our own "cultural package," a body of knowledge, relationships, and expressions that are unique to each person.

The stories we tell and the beliefs we have shape how we see the world. This becomes our mindset. Our mindset influences how we act, and what we are capable of imagining and bringing to life.

The Influence of those with Power

Those in positions of power have the opportunity to influence the functioning of society. Power is the ability to define what is healthy, normal, or not, for other individuals. There are powerful social systems, that we often can't see, that uphold injustice. The culture of the people, the mindset of the individuals, and the narratives that are told are responsible for maintaining life-threatening inequalities. Seeing the ways that we act which contribute to injustice, is necessary for change. To see this, we must recognize the patterns at play in order to shake ourselves out of the complacency that perpetuates racial injustice and inequality. Awareness is an essential step in the journey to equality.

"People are not conscious unless they are made uncomfortable."

~ Dante Bryant

Dominant Cultures

Capitalism   *White Supremacy*   *"Christianity"*
Heteropatriarchy   *Anti-Blackness*   *Paternalism*

The oppressive legacy of colonizers and conquerers.
Behavior patterns that maintain power for select people.

Dominant Cultures

Modern societies are often a conglomeration of different, often competing, cultures and subcultures. In such a situation of diversity, a *dominant culture* is one that is able, through economic or political power, to impose its values, language, and ways of behaving on a subordinate culture or cultures. **The dominant culture in a society is the group whose members are in the majority or who wield more power than other groups. In the United States, the dominant culture is that of white, male, middle-class, Protestant, heterosexual, cisgendered people of northern European descent.***

The dominant culture characteristics mentioned below are ones that can be damaging to group spaces, organizations, relationships, and society at large. That said, some of these qualities can also be helpful at times. The highlighted characteristics of non-dominant culture are ones that are often missing from group spaces, organizations, and relationships that are governed by dominant culture norms.

The dominant culture's function is to maintain the status quo and maintain the power that certain people do or don't have. The goal of this document is to bring awareness to these human dynamics so that people can consciously choose how to act.

People with Power have Shaped Social Structures of this Country

Social systems are the groups and institutions that work together to make up society — public education, government, religion, families, etc. In social systems, the relationships that maintain the system become more complex over time. The operations and interconnectedness of the parts becomes more complicated. As the systems get more complicated, many people cannot differentiate what is connected to what and so they comply with what is considered to be "the norm." The TRUTH of how things are operating and the actual impacts become anonymous. People cannot see the connections and they are complicit with the behaviors and patterns of the social system. This allows social systems to gain and maintain power.

Social systems survive in 3 ways:
- **Brute force to maintain power:** people are punished if they don't participate in the system and its culture
- **Coercion:** Some people benefit from the system and so continue to participate in it (i.e. rewards that come from classism, sexism, white favoritism, etc.)
- **Anonymity:** People don't recognize that the system exists. They don't have the knowledge or awareness. Being invisible allows something to survive. (i.e. people don't realize that they have privileges or advantages that other people don't have access to.)

> *"If you have come to help me, you are wasting your time. If you have come because*
> *your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together."*
> ~ *Lilla Watson*

* *Sources:* encyclopedia.com & http://www.sparknotes.com/sociology/society-and-culture/section6.rhtml

Other Sources: Dante Bryant, Professor at UNC Charlotte, Equal Justice Initiative Museum and Summit
Contributors to this whole document: Claudia Montesinos, Desiree Adaway, Mattice Haynes, Ashley Cooper

Patterns of Dominant Cultures
(White Supremacy, Patriarchy, Capitalism, etc.)

Dominating the Talk Time in a Group - Taking Up Space

- When someone has something to say, they feel it is their right to speak it to the group
- Don't pause before speaking
- Tend to seek to stand out as special
- Will say things to prove to a room, group or another individual their knowledge about the topic at hand or to prove that they are aware of what is going on

- Continuously share their own thoughts, experiences, and knowledge without pausing to see the impact on others, particularly the other people who are not part of the dominant culture
- Believe that their voice needs to be heard in order to be considered part of the conversation

Antidotes: Let others talk. Allow pauses and silence. Share power. Contribute in subtle and supportive ways. Discuss what good leadership looks like and identify when people are leading in oppressive ways.

Defensiveness

- People respond to new or challenging ideas or feedback with defensiveness and resistance, thus making it difficult to raise these ideas
- Criticism of those with power is viewed as threatening, inappropriate, or rude (influenced by of either/or thinking)
- Lots of energy spent making sure people's feelings don't get hurt and trying to work around people's defensiveness

- Organizational structures are set up in ways that protect those with power, rather than facilitating people to contribute their gifts
- How those with power are expected to use their power is not stated, nor are there systems for accountability
- Defensiveness often stems from fear of losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege, losing power.

Antidotes: Understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege). Work on your own defensiveness, learn to recognize it and course correct. Name defensiveness as a problem when it is one. Discuss the ways defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission or positive change. Understand that abuse can exist even if you cannot see or understand it.

Patterns of Dominant Cultures
(White Supremacy, Patriarchy, Capitalism, etc.)

Right to Comfort/Fear of Open Conflict

- Belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort at all times
- Inability to sit with emotional or cognitive discomfort. Don't perceive that feeling discomfort is a part of growth and change — Feel a need to make the discomfort go away
- When experiencing discomfort, perceive that they are being attacked or treated inappropriately

- Fear of losing control or public embarrassment
- Unable to distinguish the difference between civil disagreement and disrespect
- When an issue is raised that causes discomfort, blaming or invalidating the person for raising the issue rather than looking at the issue raised
- People in power are afraid of conflict and try to ignore it, run away from it, or deny its presence

Antidotes: Understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning. Welcome discomfort as much as you can. Deepen your political analysis of racism and oppression so you understand how your personal feelings and experiences fit into a larger picture. Don't take everything personally. Distinguish between being polite and raising hard issues. Don't require those who raise hard issues to do it in "nice" ways. Role play ways to handle conflict before it happens. After conflict is resolved, reflect on how it was handled.

Objectivity & Valuing Logic Over Emotion

- The belief that there is such a thing as being purely objective. Includes a belief that there is one right way to do or see things.
- The belief that emotions are irrational and often irrelevant in regards to decision-making and group process.

- Invalidating people who show emotions.
- Favoring and often requiring people to think in a linear fashion and ignoring or invalidating those that think or express differently.
- Impatience with approaches that do not appear logical to those with power.

Antidotes: Realize that everyone has a worldview and that everybody's worldview affects the way they understand things. Push yourself to sit with discomfort when people are expressing things that are not familiar to you. Assume that everyone has a valid point and your job is to understand what that point is. When people emotions are heightened, listen deeply to what it is they are trying to communicate.

Adapted from Dismantling Racism: *A Workbook for Social Change Groups*, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, ChangeWork, 2001

Patterns of Dominant Cultures
(i.e. White Supremacy, Patriarchy, Capitalism)

Individualism

- The belief that the needs of each person are more important than the needs of the whole society or group.
- Individual's wishes, ideas, or contributions are prioritized over mutual well-being or collectively generated ideas.
- People have little experience or comfort working as a team.
- If cooperation is valued, little time or resources are devoted to developing those skills.

- Accountability or reporting to, if any, is done up to those with more traditional power rather than sideways to peers or to those who an organization/mission is set up to serve.
- High value is placed on people who get things done on their own without needing guidance or supervision.
- The belief that for it to be done well, I need to do it and little or no delegation to others.

Antidotes: Evaluate people based on their ability to work as part of a team, accomplish shared goals, and delegate others. Set up mechanisms for feedback. Create spaces for and develop the skills to co-create and collaborate. Provide guidance and support when people need it.

Either/Or Thinking & Perfectionism

- Things are seen as good/bad, right/wrong, with us/against us. It's difficult to see both/and.
- Attempts are made to simplify complex things, such as believing poverty is a result of lack of education.
- Mistakes are taken personally as a reflection of the person. Rather than making a mistake, it is perceived that the person is a mistake. Rather than doing something wrong, it is perceived that the person is wrong.

- Energy is not invested in reflecting on lessons learned that can lead to improvement.
- Tendency to focus on what's not working and to highlight the lack. Less frequently identify and appreciate what's working.
- Credit rarely given to the people that are not in positions of power for the contributions that they make.
- More common to talk about others inadequacies that to tap to them directly.

Antidotes: Notice when people use either/or language and push to come up with more than 2 alternatives. Notice when people are simplifying complex issues. Slow it down, encourage deeper analysis. Develop a culture of appreciation. Develop a culture of learning, where it is expected that everyone will make mistakes and those are opportunities for learning. Separate the person fro the mistake. When offering feedback, speak to the things that went well before offering criticism. Offer specific suggestions for how to do things differently.

Patterns of Dominant Cultures
(i.e. White Supremacy, Patriarchy, Capitalism)

Sense of Urgency/ Prioritizing Action

- A sense that there "is not time", making it difficult to take time to be inclusive, encourage democratic and/or thoughtful decision-making, to think longterm, or to consider consequences.

- Frequently results in sacrificing potential allies due to rushing towards highly visible results or outcomes.
- Actions prioritized over process and relational needs.

Antidotes: Leadership that understand that things take longer than anyone expects. Realistic workplans. Set goals and create plans with timelines for achieving more inclusivity, diversity, and longterm planning. Be clear about how you will make good decisions in an atmosphere of urgency.

Paternalism/ Power Over/ Power Hoarding

- Decision-making is clear to those with power and unclear to those without power.
- Those with power think that they are able to make decisions in the best interests of those without power and the whole organization.
- Those with power don't see themselves as hoarding power nor do they perceive themselves as being threatened by changes.

- Those without power understand they do not have it, understand who does, and can clearly see the impact of decisions made by those with power.
- Those with power feel threatened when anyone suggests changes to how things should be done.
- Little, if any, value around sharing power.

Antidotes: Make sure that everyone knows and understands who makes what decisions and who has what level of responsibility and authority in the organization. Include people who are affected by decisions in the decision-making. Discuss how and develop the skills to share power.

Focus on Measurable Results Over Quality

- Little or no value attached to process or relationship development or goals.
- Things that can be measured are more highly valued than things like quality of relationships or ability to deal with conflict.

- People and things become disposable in favor of outcomes and profit.
- Not understanding that when there is conflict between content (i.e. agenda items) and process (people needing to be heard or engaged), usually process will prevail.

Antidotes: Create process, quality, and relationship development goals. Look for ways to measure those goals. Learn to recognize when to let go of the agenda and address people's underlying concerns.

Non-Dominant Cultures
(from Latinx, Black, and Native Cultures)

Deep Listening —
It Takes As Long As It Takes

✦ Slowing down. Allowing silence.

✦ Everyone's opinions and perspectives are respected.

✦ Prioritize everyone having a chance to contribute.

✦ Making space for reflection, analysis, learning, tending to relationships, talking things through.

✦ Deep listening to understand others and to listen between the words to underlying meanings and what is not being said.

✦ Often means folks will listen to understand before talking and sharing their perspectives.

✦ Makes space for prayer and reflection.

La Familia & Cariño

✦ Acknowledging that *people are related* and responsible for each other. Intentionally weaving and nurturing connections.

✦ Regardless of position, social class, or ranking, people are treated as family.

✦ Taking in strangers and treating as family.

✦ Creating opportunities for people to connect with each other, show affection, care for each other.

✦ Allowing a social window before and after gathering.

✦ Cultivate and environment that feels nurturing.

Relationships Carry Responsibility

✦ Contributing to the welfare of other people and the natural world is seen as an honor and high priority. To be in relationship with someone means to be accountable to their well-being.

✦ Allowing for passionate, emotional expressions of urgency to act now that come from experiencing that people are suffering.

Non-Dominant Cultures
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Sankofa
Learning from the Past

- ✦ Remember your roots. Know where you come from.
- ✦ Ensure that actions in the present are influenced by lessons learned in the past.
- ✦ Encourage feedback to aid in reflection and integration of lessons learned.

- ✦ Be aware of the history and struggles of people.
- ✦ Cultivate a culture of learning and reflection.
- ✦ Remember that our roots ground and nourish us, hold us down during change.

A Leader Among Equals

- ✦ Nurturing people's potential and ability to work both autonomously and in teams.
- ✦ Many people contribute. Many have ownership. Responsibility is shared.

- ✦ Giving recognition to people who make contributions. Sharing credit.

Gracias & Spiritual Responsibility

- ✦ Leaders attend to people's material and social needs as well as providing inspiration and hope.
- ✦ Guided by a moral and ethical code that integrates social responsibility with the spiritual responsibility to do good for others.

- ✦ Value gratitude, faith, hope, forgiveness.
- ✦ *Gracias* in Spanish means "thank you" and it means "grace".
- ✦ A deeply-rooted sense of optimism.
- ✦ Focus on thankfulness rather than lack.

Rituals & Celebrations

- ✦ Provide opportunities to dream, connect with the supernatural, to combine the tangible world with the metaphysical world.
- ✦ Celebrations to honor changes and significant moments.
- ✦ A spirit of generosity, giving things away.

Adapted from *Salsa, Soul and Spirit: Leadership for a Multicultural Age. New Approaches to Leadership from Latino, Black, and American Indian Communities* by Juana Boras, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2007
Additional contributions from people who identify as being from Latinx, Black and Native cultures.

Non-Dominant Cultures
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Practicing Spirituality Publicly

- ✦ Praying in public
- ✦ All actions are built around spirituality, and spiritual practices
- ✦ Spirituality deeply rooted in who folks are as a people
- ✦ Spiritual practice integrated into everyday life

See Beyond Duality of Masculine & Feminine

- ✦ Common belief that we carry elements of both masculine and feminine in us
- ✦ Third gender terms that encompass both masculine and feminine
- ✦ Two Spirit

Humor, Music, Poetry, Arts

- ✦ Expressions of humor, music, poetry and art as necessary for survival
- ✦ Creating something from nothing (i.e. spare parts of the pig)
- ✦ Remembering the times in life when love overcame fear
- ✦ Sense of humor about own situation and public hypocrisy
- ✦ Taking what could be miserable life experiences and finding laughter and joy in them or turning them into works of art
- ✦ Celebrating the collective experience in public through music, song, and dance (including the suffering)

Contributions from people who identify as being from Latinx, Black and Native cultures.

This document is still being created. Please contact ashley@easilyamazed.com with suggestions.