

Comparative analysis of dominant russian and american values

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Comparative analysis of dominant Russian and American Values The question of values becomes important when we cannot understand and explain the behavior of foreigners. Probably you know this from your own experience of communication with people from other countries: sometimes we think that foreigners behave strangely or rudely or just differently from what we expect. In most cases this is what is usually called " cultural misunderstanding". OK, now let's dwell on the concept " value". There is a considerable confusion surrounding the definition of values.

In spite of the fact that there are many definitions and innumerable studies, no definition has attracted widespread consensus. Kurt Baier notes that to define values sociologists employ a bewildering profusion of terms, ranging from what a person wants, desires, needs, enjoys, prefers to what the community enjoys, sanctions or enforces. The concept of value refers to two contrasting ideas. At one extreme we speak of economic values based on products, wealth, prices - on highly material things. In another context, however, the word " value" acquires an abstract, intangible and non-measurable meaning.

Among such spiritual values are freedom, peace, justice, equity. In many societies we find a growing antagonism between some of the new values propagated by the mass-media, and the traditional values inherited from the past. For example, we can single out such pairs as: traditional sex roles/blurring of sex roles or traditional family life/alternative families. But let's analyse all this stuff by looking at two countries, America and Russia. First of

all, we'll give some descriptive information, then we'll compare them. America.

Before we can fully understand the dominant American worldview we need to analyze the historical and cultural roots of mainstream American society. The earliest settlers who came to the North American continent were motivated by the desire to escape the control and the social order of monarchy, aristocracy, and established churches. They were seeking relief from oppression and poverty and were ready to make a fresh start. Freedom is at the center of all that Americans value and hold dear. The U. S. Bill of Rights, ratified in 1791, assures individual rights such as freedom of speech, press and religion.

The concept of individual freedom began to be associated with the United States. By "freedom" Americans understand the desire and the ability of an individual to control his own life without interference from any organized authority. As we can see, Americans' notion of freedom focused on the individual and individualism. The early settlers were mostly farmers whose success depended on their ability to survive and confront hardships on their own. This idealized self-reliant individual is easily recognizable in the industrial age as a small businessman who became a financial success on his own.

This strong belief in self-reliance and self-sufficiency is the basic aspect of the American character. Though people are not equal in their abilities, equality of opportunity is understood by Americans as an equal chance for success, an equal start to enter the race for success. However, this myth

proclaiming equal opportunities has become one of the most battered ideals of today. Only a relatively small number of people under corporate capitalism can reach pinnacle of success, no matter how many people are talented or motivated to succeed.

Only a few can reach the top because they could discipline themselves and work hardest. There is also support from Protestant theology, which tends to associate hard work and personal achievement with being in favor with God. In any context working hard is highly honored by Americans. The self-esteem of many Americans is closely connected with performing productive and rewarding work. Students and children are encouraged to work part-time to gain valuable experience and become contributing members of the family instead of being a dependant.

Being a productive member of the society is very important and praised and it is not surprising that elderly people and the disabled strive to be useful and productive in any way they can. The phrase "to go from rags to riches" reflects the great American dream in which material wealth and possessions are one of the top priorities. Russia. Russia, more than any other country, has always been a challenge for philosophers and historians who tried to provide a logical description of Russia's national identity and national character. There are, however, reasons behind this uniqueness and complexity.

Russia is a very old country with the history of more than 11 centuries. It often happened that the new stage of development denied all the values of the previous one: from Tsarist Russia to Socialism, from Socialist Russia to

the Free Market Economy. However, despite these sweeping changes Russia has always demonstrated its uniquely Russian character and style which have survived through centuries and resist all attempts to transform or westernize Russia. It is impossible to approach the culture of Russian people without trying to look at the geopolitical context within which Russia has lived for centuries.

Russia is a vast country, situated on the crossroads of Europe and Asia. With such a vast territory to govern, Russia evolved into a state ruled from its center. Distance and isolation prevented easy communication with other centers of civilization which contributed to isolation from excessive foreign influence and to the uniqueness of the Russian national worldview. Russia is also a northern country with a long cold winter and short summer. The harsh climate made Russians strong and healthy, capable of enduring extreme hardship, patient and cautious, dependant on the test of time.

The vast territories and cold climate, together with the need to survive and resist the attacks of neighboring countries cultivated the spirit of communalism, which is often considered to be a predominant Russian value. From prehistoric times when Russians banded together to cultivate the land, to fell the trees, to harvest the crops and to protect themselves from invaders, sobornost (communal spirit, togetherness) became a distinctive feature of Russians in contrast to the individualism and competitiveness of the West. Communalism at the same time brought about such ideals as dependence on each other's help, mutual support and trust.

Russians rely on a close network of family and friends and coworkers as protection against the risks and unpredictability of daily life. On the other hand, communal mentality is alien to the spirit of self-reliance and responsibility. Russians got used to being told what to do and what to think. Even in the modern rapidly changing world decision making is often difficult for Russians who prefer to refer decisions to higher-ups, thus ridding themselves of the responsibility in case things go wrong. Another important feature of the Russian national value system — preference of spiritual over material.

N. Berdyaev considered Russians to be the most spiritual people in the world and claimed that the economy can be viewed only as an instrument but not the goal or the highest value. With the advent of the market economy nowadays it may seem that many traditional values will change dramatically. Traditional values are still strong — self-sacrifice, sense of duty, compassion, the importance of family, and love of nature, courage and moral strength. We may only hope that provided with new practical dimensions, these values will remain the mainstream Russian values.

The List of Russian-American Values. 1. Going to extremes (Russians) vs. moderation in everything (Americans) A Russian can spend all his money in a restaurant during one night, Americans would probably never do this and would consider the Russian behavior strange or just foolish. 2. Open-heartedness (Russians) vs. being reserved (Americans) A Russian can talk to a complete stranger on the train about his or her problems, an American

would probably prefer to talk about football, rather than to share his or her problems with anybody. 3. Generosity, hospitality (Russians) vs.

BEING PRACTICAL, saving money(Americans) While Russian dinner is a real feast, Americans make as many hamburgers as there are guests expected; if Americans invite you for coffee, they mean coffee and not anything else. 4. Complaining about problems (Russians) vs. Being always OK (Americans) Russians and Americans solve their problems in different ways: if Russians have problems they go to their relatives or friends, if Americans have problems, they go to their psychiatrist. Russians and Americans also differ in borrowing money: Russians borrow money from their relatives or friends, Americans borrow money from the bank. . Critical/ironical attitude to one's country (Russians) vs. patriotism(Americans) Russian love of their country is geographical (they love their nature, their birch-trees); American love is political (they love their freedom and democracy and they believe that it's their sacred duty to protect freedom and democracy all over the world). 6. " Being" orientation (Russians) vs. " Action" orientation (Americans) Americans are more active physically and mentally. Russians prefer to sit at home doing little and earning little money for little work rather than to stand the physical strains of hard work.

Russians prefer intellectual entertainment to going in for sports (Americans prefer sports). 7. Leisure orientation (Russians) vs. Work orientation (Americans) You have worked hard before the exam. When you come to your exam and get " 5" you tell your colleagues that you knew everything and you deserved it (American); you tell your colleagues that you knew nothing and

got " 5" because of cheating (Russian). 8. Problem making (Russians) vs. problem solving (Americans) Russians have a serious attitude to life, they tend to complicate everything, Americans have a childish attitude to life, they tend to simplify everything.

Situation: Your friend doesn't get on with his colleagues and because of this won't get a promotion. You think that a) He has a complicated personality (Russians), or b) He is a fool (Americans) 9. " Creative attitude to law" (Russians) vs. law obedience (Americans) It's normal to break traffic laws in Russia, then it's normal to bribe the police (Americans can't even think of bribing the police!). Explanation: When Russians break traffic laws and are stopped by the policeman, they first try to talk with him, appealing to his feelings, since Russians see in him a human being and not the embodiment of the law. 0. Collectivism (Russians) vs. individualism (Americans) Examples from Russian life: cheating on tests, which is considered normal among Russian students (When Russian students are told that American students do not normally cheat, Russian students can't understand why.). A line in the library (Several people from your group will join you in the line and nobody would object, American students would consider this not only strange but totally unacceptable).