

## Comparing Life in Cultures with Strict Rules and Ones with Easy-Going Rules

<sup>1</sup> Imagine that you are on city sidewalk in your country just watching people. Then you see someone covered in tattoos or with purple hair politely stop people to ask them for directions. Do you think the average person in your country would be willing to help?

<sup>2</sup> Researchers conducted some interesting studies to compare social rules in different countries. In one study, they hired assistants to put on temporary tattoos, purple hair wigs, fake nose and lip rings and fake facial warts. Then these assistants approached strangers on city streets to ask for directions or went into stores and asked clerks for help with a purchase. They did this in 14 countries. In some countries, people were more willing to help the research assistants than in others.

<sup>3</sup> The countries in which people are more willing to help someone who looks different from the average citizen can be classified as **loose cultures**. On the other hand, psychologists categorize as **tight cultures** the ones in which people were less likely to help those “unusual-looking” strangers. (The chart at the end of this article shows a list of countries according to how tight or loose they are.) In her book, *Rule Makers, Rule Breakers: How Tight and Loose Cultures Wire Our World*, Michele Gelfand discusses some of the differences between the two different types of cultures.

### Safety

<sup>4</sup> One of the attractions of tight cultures is that crime rates are significantly lower than in loose cultures. There are some reasons for this. One is that citizens can be seriously punished for breaking laws. For example, in some tight cultures like Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, people who possess drugs can receive the death penalty. Also, in Singapore, a tight culture, if you spit on the street, or if you forget to flush the toilet in a public rest room, you can get fined \$1,000. If you try to bring chewing gum into the country, you may go to jail. Making too much noise in public is not allowed. Interestingly, although these sound like strict rules, over 80% of the citizens of Singapore approve of them.

<sup>5</sup> As a way to keep crime rates low, tight cultures tend to have more police and more surveillance cameras on streets, buildings, store entrances, taxis and train stations. On highways, cameras can catch drivers who are

talking on the phone, texting, not wearing seat belts and speeding.

### Orderliness

<sup>6</sup> City streets and public places in tight cultures tend to be cleaner perhaps because they have more cleaning workers. In Vienna, Austria, a tight country, they have “waste watchers” who can give fines to people who litter, for example, throw food wrappers or soda cans on the streets. Moreover, tight cultures tend to also have less noise pollution. Germany has required quiet hours on Sundays and holidays. During those hours, people are not allowed to play loud music, mow their lawns or run their wash machines. Recently, a resident complained about a dog constantly barking, so a judge allowed the dog to only bark 30 minutes a day.

### Creativity

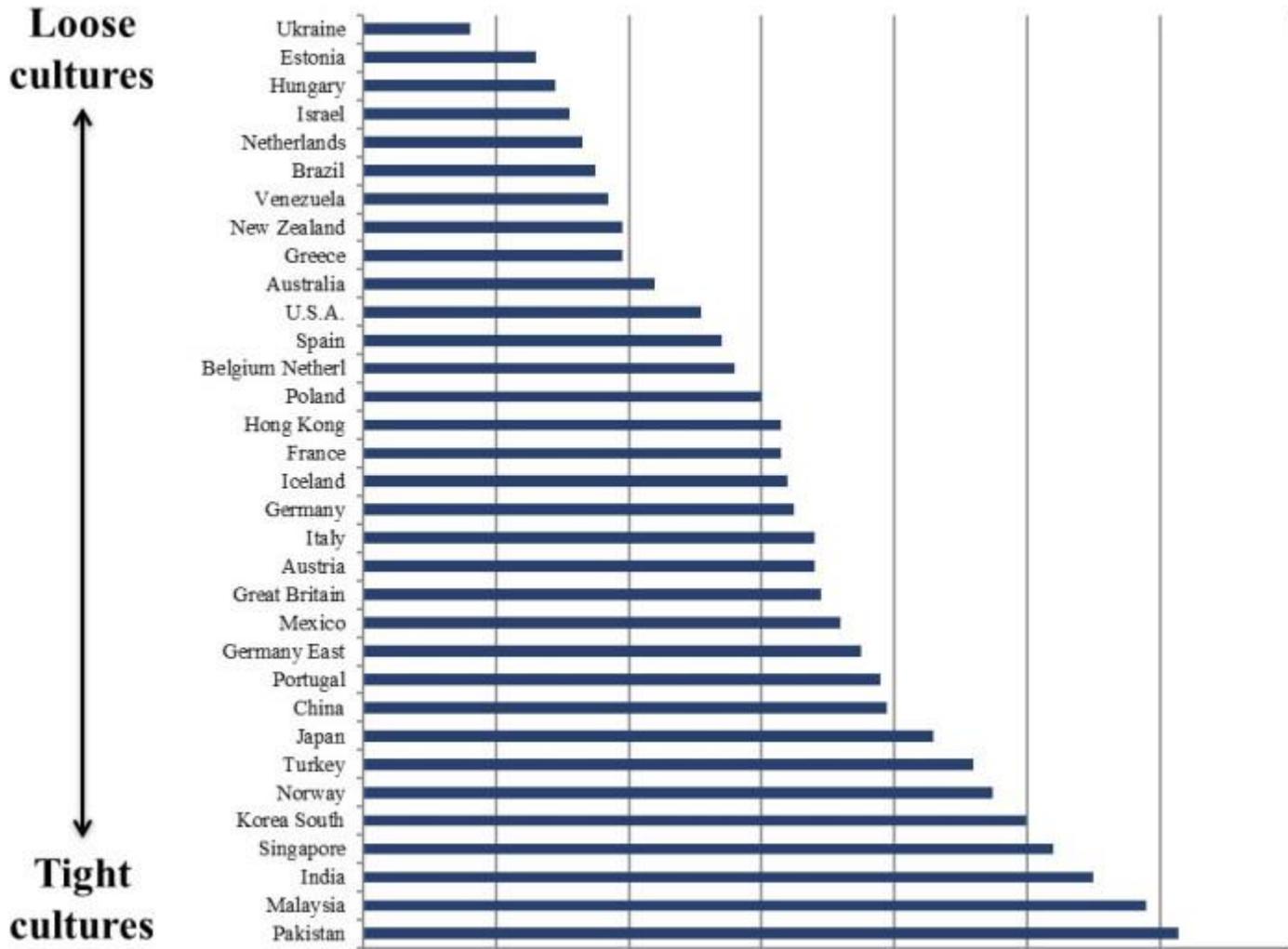
<sup>7</sup> Loose cultures may be more disorderly, but they also tend to be more open to new ideas, different people and change. As a result, these cultures have innovative advantages. Researchers analyzed 99 creative contests in which large money prizes were given to the best ideas. Examples of the challenges were to design a new shopping mall in Spain, create a TV commercial for an Egyptian audience, change the image on a brand of coffee in Australia and design a water bottle that looked typically French. People from tight cultures were less likely to win these competitions, and they were even less likely to enter them.

### Acceptance of differences

<sup>8</sup> People in loose cultures are not only more open to different ideas, but they are also open to different people. Studies found that people in loose cultures, such as Australia and the Netherlands, were most welcoming, compared to tight cultures, such as Malaysia and Turkey, who were not. Moreover, loose cultures have a higher percentage of immigrants.

<sup>9</sup> Loose cultures are more open to living next to a wide range of people. A study of 33,000 people in 19 countries found that people from loose cultures were much more willing to live next to gays, foreign workers and unmarried couples and people from a different religion or race,.

<sup>10</sup> Marital status (in other words, being single, married or divorced) is considered less important in loose cultures than tight ones. In fact, about half of children in the Netherlands, New Zealand and Spain are born to unmarried parents. By contrast, unmarried women and single mothers in tight cultures often face shame and exclusion for their unconventional lifestyles.



**Exercise 1:** Read the article**Pre-discussion Exercise 1**

Answer True (T) or False (F) according to information in the article.

- 1) Researchers interviewed people with tattoos and purple hair in 14 countries.
- 2) About helping “unusual-looking strangers,” people in tight cultures were more helpful than in loose ones.
- 3) One reason why tight cultures are safer is because they will punish people who break the rules.
- 4) Tight cultures have more surveillance cameras than loose cultures.
- 5) If you play loud music on Sundays in Germany, you might get into trouble with the police.
- 6) People in tight cultures are more open to new ideas than those in loose cultures.
- 7) You will find more immigrants in loose cultures than tight ones.
- 8) If you are a divorced woman, you will probably have more difficulties getting a job in a tight culture than a loose one.

**Pre-discussion Exercise 2**

Think about these discussion questions. You don't have to write anything.

1. If we were in your hometown and a stranger with a lot of tattoos or purple hair or a lip ring asked someone for directions, what do you think would happen?
2. Do any of your friends in your hometown have tattoos? Unusual hair color?
3. Have you ever wanted to look different from other people in your hometown, for example, get a tattoo, wear unusual hair color, wear unusual clothes, etc.?
4. Look at the chart at the end of the article. Is your country on this chart? If it is, are you surprised where it is?
5. Would like to live in a country that is safe and clean but has strict laws like Singapore?
6. Do you think having surveillance cameras are a good idea?
7. Have you or someone you know ever been punished or fined in your country?
8. If I visit your hometown, can I feel safe walking around at midnight?
9. Would you like a quiet-hours law like the one in Germany?
10. In your country, is it common to hear someone playing loud music from their car or their home?
11. Are there some laws in your country that you think are too strict?
12. Are there some laws that your country doesn't have but you think your country should have?
13. About a contest for designing a mall or making a TV commercial, if some people in your country were in the contest, do you think they would do well?
14. In the neighborhood where you lived with your family, were there any gays, foreign workers or unmarried couples or people from a different religion or race,?
15. Do you think people in your hometown would be comfortable living next to these people: gays, someone from a different race, or someone with a different religion?

**Small-group Discussion: Which is More Effective: I'm Calm or I'm Excited?****Student A**

**Directions:** Read these questions to your partners and respond to theirs.

1. The article told about some research about the tattoos and purple hair. What happened in this study?
4. **This is a discussion question.** Have you ever wanted to look different from other people in your hometown, for example, get a tattoo, wear unusual hair color, wear unusual clothes, etc.?
7. **Don't look at the article when you answer this question.** According to the article, why are tight cultures safer than loose ones?
10. The article mentions surveillance cameras. What are they?
13. **This is a discussion question.** Have you or someone you know ever been punished or fined in your country?
16. **This is a discussion question.** Would you like a quiet-hours law like the one in Germany?
19. **This is a discussion question.** Are there some laws that your country doesn't have but you think your country should have?
22. **This is a discussion question.** About a contest for designing a mall or making a TV commercial, if some people in your country were in the contest, do you think they would do well?
25. **This is a discussion question.** Do you think people in your hometown would be comfortable living next to these people: gays, someone from a different race, or someone with a different religion?
28. **This is a discussion question.** Do you have any friends whose mother is single?

**Post-Discussion Discussion**

**While you wait for other groups to finish, you talk about one of these:**

- a) Was there anything in this article that surprised you or that you don't agree with or that you found very interesting?
- b) Talk about rules.
  - When you were in high school, did your school have strict rules? Explain.
  - When you were in high school, what would happen to students who broke rules?
  - When you were in high school, did your parents have strict rules? For example, did you have to come home by 10 pm at night?
  - In your country, can I own a gun?
- c) Think of a different topic and discuss it.

**Small-group Discussion: Which is More Effective: I'm Calm or I'm Excited?****Student B**

**Directions:** Read these questions to your partners and respond to theirs.

2. **This is a discussion question. We should all answer this and ask follow-up questions.** If we were in your hometown and a stranger with a lot of tattoos or purple hair or a lip ring asked someone for directions, what do you think would happen?
5. **Don't look at the article when you answer this question.** According to the article, which is stricter: tight or loose cultures?
8. What percent of people in Singapore approve of their strict laws? Choose one: a) 90% b) 80% c) 70% d) 50%
11. According to the article, where do tight cultures tend to have surveillance cameras?
14. **This is a discussion question.** If I visit your hometown, can I feel safe walking around at midnight?
17. **This is a discussion question.** In your country, is it common to hear someone playing loud music from their car or their home?
20. **Don't look at the article when you answer this question.** In paragraph 7, the article told about a creative contest. What were some of the challenges in the contest?
23. **Don't look at the article when you answer this question.** The article discusses living next to a wide range of people. Who is more willing to live next to people who are different from them: tight or loose cultures?
26. According to the article, what percent of children in the Netherlands, New Zealand and Spain are born to unmarried parents? Choose one: a) 60% b) 50% c) 40% d) 30%
29. Let's check our True False answers in Pre-Discussion Exercise 1.

**Post-Discussion Discussion**

**While you wait for other groups to finish, you talk about one of these:**

- a) Was there anything in this article that surprised you or that you don't agree with or that you found very interesting?
- b) b) Talk about rules.
- When you were in high school, did your school have strict rules? Explain.
  - When you were in high school, what would happen to students who broke rules?
  - When you were in high school, did your parents have strict rules? For example, did you have to come home by 10 pm at night?
  - In your country, can I own a gun?
- c) Think of a different topic and discuss it.

**Small-group Discussion: Very, Very, Very Smart Children or Creative Ones**  
**Student C**

**Directions:** Read these questions to your partners and respond to theirs.

3. **This is a discussion question. We should all answer this.** Do any of your friends in your hometown have tattoos? Unusual hair color?
6. **This is a discussion question.** Look at the chart at the end of the article. Is your country on this chart? If it is, are you surprised where it is?
9. **This is a discussion question.** Would like to live in a country that is safe and clean but has strict laws like Singapore?
12. **This is a discussion question.** Do you think having surveillance cameras are a good idea?
15. **Don't look at the article when you answer this question.** The article talked about a barking dog in Germany. Tell me what the article said about that.
18. **This is a discussion question.** Are there some laws in your country that you think are too strict?
21. What did the results from the creative contest tell us about tight and loose cultures?
24. **This is a discussion question.** In the neighborhood where you lived with your family, were there any gays, people from a different religion or race, foreign workers and unmarried couples?
27. **This is a discussion question.** In your country, do people have an unfavorable opinion about unmarried women and single mothers?

**Post-Discussion Discussion**

**While you wait for other groups to finish, you talk about one of these:**

- a) Was there anything in this article that surprised you or that you don't agree with or that you found very interesting?
- b) b) Talk about rules.
  - When you were in high school, did your school have strict rules? Explain.
  - When you were in high school, what would happen to students who broke rules?
  - When you were in high school, did your parents have strict rules? For example, did you have to come home by 10 pm at night?
  - In your country, can I own a gun?
- c) Think of a different topic and discuss it.

## Writing Activities

**Writing Activity 1.** Write a reflection about the article. Try to write a paragraph with several sentences. In your reaction, your first sentence can be one of these:

- *I found some interesting/important information in this article.*
- *After reading this, I now would like to (learn more about /read more research about /...)*
- *There is some information in this article that I could apply to my life.*
- *I agree / disagree with the author about something.*
- *This article reminded me of (me/ my family/my friend).*
- *I was surprised by something in this article.*