

Deep Culture Experience – Transcript

The Deep Culture Experience Podcast explores the psychological impact of intercultural experiences, informed by the sciences of brain, culture and mind. Join **Joseph Shaules** and **Ishita Ray** as we explore the psychology of intercultural understanding. We hear stories from contributors from around the world, and geek out on insights from brain and mind sciences.

Episode 62 – Tightness and Looseness

Is it okay to kiss on a bus? Some societies are more strict about social norms—they are more *tight*—whereas others are more *loose*. In this episode, Joseph Shaules, Torhild Liane Haars Skårnes and Sanne Bosma discuss research into tightness and looseness. We compare the rankings of different countries, including some we find surprising. We argue that the key to navigating foreign norms is learning the values behind them, and we hear stories from Emre Seven, Yuto Aki, Vanessa Eisenberg, Hashini Madarasinge, Albert Mhangami and Ishita Ray.

Time	Speaker	
00:00:00	Sanne	Local governments gave booklets to newly wedded couples specifying social norms for things like when to do laundry, which was Monday, by the way, how to organize kitchen cabinets, positioning of furniture. A daily and weekly cleaning schedule was provided as well.
00:00:29	Joseph	Hello, this is Joseph Shaules, and welcome to the Deep Culture Experience, the podcast that dives deep into the psychology of intercultural understanding. And I'm here with Lia – Torhild Liane Haars Skårnes - and Sanne Bosma. It's so exciting to be co-hosting with both of you.
00:00:46	Lia	Hi, Sanne and Joseph. I'm so excited about this episode.
00:00:50	Sanne	Hi, Lia and Joseph. It is really great to be here with you.
00:00:54	Joseph	So the title of this episode is Tightness and Looseness. And this relates to norms, or what we sometimes call customs, the social expectations of everyday life, what's normal, so to speak. And Lia, this was a topic that you suggested.
00:01:12	Lia	Yes. I've recently become fascinated by research that tries to measure tightness, intolerance of deviant behavior. For example, in one country, it might really be frowned upon to, say, kiss someone in a public place.

00:01:25	Joseph	So tightness means that norms are strictly enforced, whereas looseness refers to more flexibility about norms.
00:01:33	Sanne	And the whole team got interested in this because cultural bridge people have to think about norms whenever we are in a foreign place. What are the customs here and is it okay to do this? Why do people act this way?
00:01:50	Lia	And I have a special interest in this because Norway, where I'm from, is ranked as a pretty tight country. And I think I agree. Research says that tight countries are harder to adapt to, and I used to work with immigrants and I see the challenges that they face. So I really wanted to learn more.
00:02:09	Sanne	Well, I am interested in the fact that the Netherlands ranks as a much looser country than Norway, which I found surprising.
00:02:17	Joseph	Well, and tightness and looseness has been kind of a trendy topic in the last 10 or 15 years, even in popular media.
00:02:24	Sanne	So in this episode, we will dig into the theory behind tightness and looseness, those country rankings and how they were created.
00:02:32	Joseph	But fair warning, this topic is more complicated than it may sound. At first, the podcast team wasn't always sure about the country rankings. There are critiques about the methodology, and it's not clear how useful tightness and looseness is for cultural bridge people.
00:02:51	Lia	But the team agreed that when you are navigating a foreign culture, you can't just call norms tight or loose. We have to make sense of the values behind them, which isn't always easy.
00:03:03	Joseph	And that brings us to part one - What's Normal?
Part one – What's normal?		
00:03:15	Joseph	So what's a norm? The Cambridge Online Dictionary defines norms as, quote: "An accepted standard or a way of behaving or doing things that most people agree with."
00:03:33	Lia	That's very broad. An accepted standard, a way of behaving. And that could be anything. From "Don't throw your trash in the

		street”, to “Wait at your turn”, to “Don't ask someone's salary”, or “Don't chew with your mouth open.”
00:03:50	Joseph	And most of the time, we don't even think about norms. We just take them for granted. It's just normal.
00:03:56	Sanne	But when people break norms, we notice. Norms are enforced. People will look at you funny or call you out or maybe even call the police.
00:04:05	Lia	So we want to know how learning about tightness and looseness can help cultural bridge people.
00:04:11	Joseph	So let's start by giving some background. Back in 2011, Michelle Gelfand, a cultural psychologist at Stanford, published an article in the journal <i>Science</i> about tightness and looseness that got a lot of attention in the media. A few years later, she also wrote a book that made a splash called: <i>Rule Makers, Rule Breakers How Tight and Loose Cultures Wire Our World</i> .
00:04:37	Sanne	She says, quote: “Across the millennia, human groups have evolved specific cultural and psychological adaptations to cope with collective threats, from terrorism to natural disasters to pathogens. In particular, research has identified cultural tightness, characterized by strict social norms and punishments, as one key adaptation that helps groups coordinate to survive collective threats.”
00:05:07	Lia	Her core idea is that strict social norms are kind of glue that hold societies together and a way to deal with collective threats. So the higher the threats, the tighter the norms.
00:05:19	Joseph	She also says that tightness and looseness is really important for understanding cultural difference. In her 2018 book, she calls it, quote: “An underlying primal template of culture” or “A deep underlying factor”. And she says that reading her book will make many people see the world in a completely different way. Like entering the matrix.
00:05:42	Lia	Wow. So did reading her book make you enter the matrix?

00:05:46	Joseph	Well, no, it did not, but it did make me think. And her basic premise that tighter social norms are a threat response, that does make sense to me.
00:05:58	Lia	And there's a lot of research looking for a relationship between tightness and other factors. For example, in the United States, some states rank as more tight than others. And tight states have more executions, more harsh criminal punishment, more restrictions on alcohol, more restrictions on same sex couples. Another study that interested me found a connection between tighter societies and fewer deaths from COVID. And I remember that Norway, a tight country, was very strict about COVID restrictions compared to Sweden, a more loose country.
00:06:35	Sanne	And there was a really cool study that found that feeling threatened made two people's brains synchronize more closely. That was measured by brain scans on different individuals at the same time.
00:06:46	Joseph	And that was amazing. Experiencing a collective threat triggers this biological mechanism that increases coordination between individual's neural systems. Basically, your brains network with each other.
00:07:00	Lia	There was even a study that tracked quotations of Bible passages in books published over a 200 year period. Researchers found that writers quoted Bible verses that described a punishing God at a higher rate during times of societal threat. They argued that quotes about a punishing God are psychologically more attractive in chaotic times.
00:07:32	Joseph	Overall, this is a pretty broad claim. These patterns are presented as a human universal. That threat encourages tightness in all societies and throughout history.
00:07:43	Sanne	And that's what I find intriguing. So when I first read about tightness and looseness, I really liked how it links culture to evolutionary psychology.
00:07:52	Joseph	And you shared an example that hits close to home for you. A reason that tightness and looseness make sense to you. And you recorded a segment for us. Let's take a listen.

00:08:07	Sanne	The Netherlands ranks as a pretty loose country, but for my grandparents it was a very different place. They were born around 1930 and lived through the war. The country was occupied by Nazi forces, which led to years of repression and forced labor. It was a terrible time that led to a lot of suffering for people, including the bombing and near total destruction of Rotterdam. Fortunately, my grandparents survived and they were directly involved in reconstruction afterwards. After the war, there was a powerful sense of threat and insecurity related to the trauma of war and occupation, but also to the struggle for the basics of daily living: housing, food, jobs, health care. This led to a strong emphasis on frugal living. For example, a great burden was placed on housewives as managers of household budgets. You heard rules to save energy, like: <i>“Wanneer u naar de keuken gaat om theewater op te zetten, zorg er dan voor dat u het licht in de woonkamer uitdoet.”</i> Literally: “When you go to the kitchen to heat water for tea, be sure to turn off the light in the living room.” Local governments gave booklets to newly wedded couples specifying social norms for things like when to do laundry, which was Monday by the way, how to organize kitchen cabinets, positioning of furniture. A daily and weekly cleaning schedule was provided as well. There were strict rules about what children, men and women were supposed to wear. And deviance had consequences. People held each other accountable because obedience was deemed necessary to be a good citizen. To help rebuild the nation. All this changed drastically for my parents’ generation. The Netherlands enjoyed economic prosperity, higher wages, in the 1960s and 70s youth cultures emerged, the emancipation of women and the contraceptive pill and the sexual revolution took place. The Vietnam War led to questions about what it meant to be a good citizen, calling people to stand up against those in power. When I was growing up in the 1990s and aughts, deviance from the old rules was more tolerated and even celebrated. So even in my family, in the space of a couple of generations, I can feel the fluctuations of tightness and looseness, just as theory predicts.
00:11:34	Joseph	Well, the idea that tightness relates to threat is not so different from things we have talked about on the podcast before. For example, the World Value Survey calculates a score for what they call survival values. And here's the definition: “Survival values place

		emphasis on economic and physical security. It is linked with a relatively ethnocentric outlook and low levels of trust and tolerance.” And that all sounds quite similar to me. Also, we did an episode on scarcity and culture, that was episode 56. And we talked about how scarcity has powerful psychological and cultural impacts. And that also seems in line with these ideas of tightness and looseness.
00:12:19	Lia	In the brainstorming, I think we all had a similar reaction. In general terms, tightness and looseness make a lot of sense, but it was when we got into the details that we started to have questions.
00:12:31	Joseph	But before we get to that, I think there's a more basic issue. We are interested in whether learning about tightness and looseness can help with the everyday challenges that cultural bridge people face.
00:12:44	Lia	And that brings us to part two - Navigating norms.
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00:12:59	Joseph	So let's talk about what all this means for someone navigating expectations about different norms, whether that's in your own country or in a foreign country. So, Lia, when you moved to the Philippines, what were some of the expectations that you had to adjust to?
00:13:17	Lia	Well, as a Norwegian, the norms related to hierarchy sometimes felt way over the top. We had a company driver. No one has a driver in Norway, but it's normal in the Philippines. And when we arrived at the office, he would rush to the door to unlock it for me. There was a lot of little things like that. It was embarrassing.
00:13:39	Joseph	So how did you make sense of that? What was the cultural logic behind it?
00:13:44	Lia	I learned this from our housekeeper. She had a lot of experience with Norwegians. One day when I cleaned my own dishes, she sat me down for a talk. She said: “I am very proud of my job. I am supporting my children. Please don't make it look like I'm not doing a good job.” It was very helpful. I realized that's probably how the driver felt too.
00:14:06	Joseph	So that sounds like norms around authority are tight. So showing respect is good. And I would imagine that a subordinate that doesn't show proper respect would get pushback.

00:14:18	Lia	I think that's exactly right. And it's that tightness around how to treat authority that got to me. It just didn't feel right. In Norway, there's no tolerance for anyone that acts superior in any way.
00:14:31	Sanne	Same in the Netherlands. In general, you don't get special treatment even if you're a boss. And there's a saying in Dutch: " <i>Doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg.</i> " Literally: "Just act normal. That's crazy enough."
00:14:45	Joseph	But here's the thing. We can say that the Philippines is tight as it relates to hierarchy, but we could equally say that Norway and the Netherlands are tight as it relates to equality. The United States too. If your boss says: "You don't have a right to an opinion because I'm the boss. ", I mean, people will be really offended.
00:15:04	Lia	That's a great insight. It means that tightness relates to specific values. Tight norms around equality in the Netherlands, tight norms around hierarchy in the Philippines.
00:15:16	Sanne	And that makes it hard to compare countries with a single tightness score. And that's something that podcast team member Vanessa Eisenberg has been thinking about. Let's take a listen.
00:15:30	Vanessa	When I first looked at the list of countries and saw the tightness scores, I was surprised to see that Singapore was ranked one of the highest at 10.4, especially as Japan was ranked 8.6. Having lived in both Singapore and Tokyo, I felt that there were so many more unspoken societal norms in Tokyo. Singapore, on the other hand, has very tight institutional restrictions, with severe repercussions for disobeying them. For example, in Singapore and Tokyo, people don't eat on the train. In Tokyo this is not an enforced law, but etiquette. In Singapore, you can be fined up to 500 Singapore dollars for it, which is around US\$400, so you can't afford to eat on the train. Norms reflect the cultural patterns of each society. In Singapore, following rules are seen as part of social responsibility. It's important to understand the cultural logic of the norms we encounter, even if they might seem bizarre to us at first. Learning about the difficult history of the country and its emphasis on social solidarity could help one better understand the value that Singaporeans find in their stricter norms. Ultimately, you don't

		have to agree with norms to understand them, regardless of whether they are tight or loose.
00:17:01	Joseph	Well, I really relate to what Vanessa is saying: "Norms reflect the cultural patterns of a country." Like Japan's tight norms are different from Singapore's tight norms.
00:17:12	Lia	Norms have values behind them. And so for Norwegians, Japanese and Singaporeans, following them is just about getting along, being a good person.
00:17:22	Joseph	But of course, growing up in a society doesn't guarantee that you will be comfortable with its norms. And this is something that team member Yuto Aki has been reflecting on.
00:17:38	Yuto	Having grown up in Japan, I can see why it's ranked as a tight country. For example, relationships are clearly hierarchical. You are expected to use certain linguistic forms, and there are expectations about how to interact and not just when addressing a high status or elderly person. You can see this even in middle school and high school. When you join a club or sports teams, you have to follow strict protocols for anyone who is your <i>sempai</i> , your senior, even though they're just one year, or in some cases, a few months older than you. And if you don't conform to it, you can be criticized or virtually excluded from the <i>nakama</i> , the ingroup. I have never felt comfortable showing deference in this way. It feels arbitrary to me. I sometimes feel that I cannot freely express myself, which is a source of frustration for me. Fortunately, I have a way of getting around this issue, and that is using the English language. Speaking English feels loose and I find it liberating.
00:19:10	Joseph	I love how Yuto says: "Speaking English feels loose." And I had the opposite experience with Japanese. I had to learn not to speak up. There's even a word, <i>enryo</i> , which is hard to translate, but it's like holding yourself back, but in a positive way, like not taking the last French fries.
00:19:31	Lia	People are pretty reserved in Norway too, but it feels like the roots of tightness are different. Historically, there's a strong Lutheran influence, an emphasis on modesty, temperance. You can only get liquor in a government controlled store.

00:19:47	Joseph	But that's something that confuses me about the whole tightness thing. Norway, Singapore and Japan have close tightness scores. But the kind of norms that are tight are very different.
00:19:59	Sanne	And this is something that Ishita Ray has been thinking about.
00:20:06	Ishita	India ranks as a country with tight norms. The question is, what kind of norms? Yes, there are implicit social expectations. You do not drink alcohol in public places. You do not display affection to your partner, even in front of your parents. You take off your shoes before entering temples. Once inside, you talk in hushed voices, if at all. Most of these things hinge around religious and moral codes, especially authority, loyalty and sanctity. And the expectations change based on the context. You touch the feet of elders, except when they are from a lower caste or class. Temples are cleaned several times a day, but there's trash on the streets. Talking in places of worship is frowned upon, but you can get pushback if you ask someone to turn down their phone volume in a train coach. On the other hand, Indians can be extremely accepting of violating systemic rules and laws that are meant for everyone. Trains running late - happens all the time. Cars flouting traffic rules - You know, they must be in a hurry. Trash everywhere - Too many people. What can we do? So is India a tight country? In many ways, yes. But this does not begin to do justice to the complex social dynamics and traditional morality that lie behind the norms.
00:22:05	Sanne	This is fascinating. So Ishita is saying that India is tight about sanctity and respect norms, but loose around fairness and equality norms.
00:22:16	Joseph	Well, podcast team member Emre Seven is also from a country that is ranked as tight, Turkey, but he feels that it's flexible. And he lived in a country that is ranked as more loose, the United States, but he found it inflexible. So let's take a listen.
00:22:38	Emre	The United States is listed as a looser, more flexible country than my home country, Turkey. But that's not my experience. For example, when I was working in a factory in the US one day, I was late to work, literally a few minutes. I expected to start my workday

		with a tiny apology, but I was shocked to hear my supervisor warning me quite sternly, telling me that I would be fired if this is repeated. I was furious all day. Why break someone's heart for being only a few minutes late? Another time I was on a highway and I noticed a police car following me with his lights on. I had done nothing wrong, so I kept on driving. It kept following me. So finally I stopped and the police car came in behind me. The officer approached and asked me if I knew why he stopped me. I said no. He asked if I knew the speed limit. I said yes, 55 miles an hour. He asked how fast I was going. I said 55. He said that he was going 55 in the right lane and that I passed him, which makes my speed over 55. Then he checked all my documents and finally said: "Well, just this once, I'm not going to fine you.", and he let me go. It was incredible. All of that for being a bit faster than the speed limit. In Turkey, things are usually more flexible and it bothers me when they are not. Once I lost my ID card and wanted to renew it. I went to the town office and I applied for it; I submitted a photo of mine. However, the official denied me the ID card, saying that my photo was too old, it must be taken in the last six months. I calmly replied, yes, but it is clearly me. The official was firm. "Sir, I cannot give you the card with this photo." I asked her to be flexible. The photo is clearly not someone else and honestly, I didn't want to pay for another photo, but she simply repeated the six month rule. I was furious. I know that the United States is an open society in many ways and that Turkey can be quite conservative, but still, it feels like these rankings just don't match my experience.
00:25:37	Sanne	I love Emre's stories, and there's a parallel with Ishita's story. He's talking about formal norms being flexible in Turkey but inflexible in the United States.
00:25:48	Joseph	And his experience echoes some things that podcast team member Hashini Madarasinge has experienced as she navigates tightness and looseness. Let's take a listen.
00:26:06	Hashini	On paper, Sri Lanka, much like India, is considered a tight culture, although it wasn't included in the country rankings. But Sri Lanka can be surprisingly loose at the same time. People know the rules, yes, and there's a clear sense of what you should do. But people break the rules constantly. When I had to get an amendment on my

		birth certificate at the registrar office in Sri Lanka, I made the mistake of trying to follow the process literally. I waited in the queue, filled out the forms and did things, quote unquote, the proper way. Meanwhile, people were just walking up to the counter, skipping ahead, chatting, and somehow getting things done in 10 minutes. Since then, I always take my cousin with me. He knows the system. After living in Sri Lanka and Italy, I moved to New Zealand, which continues to surprise me. On paper, it's a loose culture where people are friendly, casual and relaxed. But in practice, it feels like the tightest country I've ever lived in. People follow the rules religiously, not because anyone is watching, but because it's part of being a good person. No one, and I mean no one, skips a queue. Even honking feels strange because no one honks here. There are so many unspoken rules about how you talk to people, how you line up, when to say thank you, and even how loudly you can laugh in a cafe. It's not oppressive, but it is, shall we say, quietly structured.
00:28:19	Sanne	I love how Hashini says that New Zealand feels tight because you never skip a queue, whereas I imagine New Zealanders would simply find that to be common courtesy and fairness.
00:28:31	Joseph	And there is a deeper issue. Norms are not simply clear rules. The norms that Hashini had to get used to were unspoken, and I'm sure it took time to even figure them out. Navigating in real life requires a lot of background knowledge, and that's something that podcast team member Albert Mhangami has experience with. Let's listen.
00:28:59	Albert	I come from Shona and Ndebele cultures in Zimbabwe, which have pretty clear rules for how genders interact. A while ago, I participated in a program that was majority Iraqi, Kurdish, Arab and Assyrian participants. I guess that the norms I grew up with were not as, quote, tight as theirs, particularly because many of the participants were hijab wearing Muslim women. I knew that Islam places particular care on respect between genders and that based on their respective cultures and traditions, for some of these women it would be disrespectful to try and shake their hand. For example, I was concerned that my very Zimbabwean way of communicating and humor might be seen as inappropriate and too familiar. And so, with all these thoughts in my head, I ended up

		consistently avoiding interacting with the Muslim women in the program. One of my hijabi colleagues must have noticed because during a coffee break she cleverly sat between me and the exit. She kindly asked why I was friendly with everyone but the Muslim women. I apologized and explained, which made her laugh. She then said something that felt so simple yet hadn't occurred to me in my desperation to comply with unfamiliar norms, she said: "If you don't know, ask. It is human to be ignorant and even more human to ask." After the conversation, she asked me, would you like a hug? I nodded because that would have been a typical greeting among the few international colleagues. She immediately shook her head and said, I would be uncomfortable with a hug. And now you know. If you'd like to know anything else, just ask me. This lesson has really stuck with me. Unfamiliar norms may seem simple, but they're not. Context is important, and learning to navigate requires not only respect, but also trial and error and a large helping of humility.
00:31:17	Joseph	Well, thanks to Albert for this very honest account of trial and error. I really liked how he said: "Unfamiliar norms may seem simple, but they're not."
00:31:28	Sanne	And this is something the whole team related to. We've all been in a situation where we just don't know what to do, how to act, and what was expected.
00:31:38	Lia	And that brings us to part three - Can you kiss at a funeral?
Part three - Can you kiss at a funeral?		
00:31:53	Joseph	So Lia, you were really into the research around tightness and looseness and you found some cool studies, but there are critiques as well.
00:32:03	Lia	Let's start with what came up in the brainstorm. We often had trouble making sense of the country rankings.
00:32:10	Joseph	Right, for example, out of the 33 countries studied, the loosest countries were in order: Ukraine, Estonia, Hungary, Israel, Brazil. And it's a bit hard for me to figure out what those countries have in common other than similar rankings on a looseness survey.
00:32:28	Sanne	In countries we might have expected to be loose, like the Netherlands, Australia, the US, were loose, but not the loosest.

00:32:40	Lia	And then the tightest countries were: Pakistan, Malaysia, India, Singapore, South Korea. Again, very different societies.
00:32:50	Joseph	And then there were all these correlations. For example, that tightness is related to dearth of natural resources, higher food deprivation, prevalence of infant and child mortality rates, less democratic and civic liberties, less access to and use of new communication technologies, high religiosity, lower murder and burglary rates, and on and on. But of course, not all of these apply to all tight countries. So for me, finding correlations doesn't explain much. And I find myself wondering what tightness can predict. So that brings us to the question of methodology and how the rankings were created. So let's look at the 2011 article in Science.
00:33:42	Lia	They gathered data from people in 33 countries, and it wasn't a super large sample, around 200 people each. And then used survey responses to calculate scores and create country rankings. Basically, they relied on self-reporting. Researchers asked people their impression of the tightness of their own country; whether they agreed with items like: "People in this country almost always comply with social norms."
00:34:10	Sanne	I do wonder though, can people judge the norms in their own country? Norms are often invisible to people that follow them.
00:34:20	Lia	Well, they also asked participants to rank the appropriateness of different behaviors in different situations. For example: "Is it appropriate to eat in a public park or flirt at a party?"
00:34:32	Joseph	So they listed 12 behaviors and 15 situations. The 12 behaviors were: argue, eat, laugh, curse, kiss, cry, sing, talk, flirt, listen to music, read newspaper, and bargain. And the 15 situations were: in a bank, doctor's office, job interview, library, funeral, classroom, restaurant, public park, bus, bedroom, city, sidewalk, party, elevator, workplace, movie. And so they asked about each behavior in each situation. That's 180 items.
00:35:15	Sanne	Can I state the obvious? Combining these two lists creates some pretty bizarre combinations, like: "Is it okay to bargain in a funeral?", or: "Is it okay to read a newspaper in a bedroom?"

00:35:28	Lia	I like: "Is it okay to sing in a job interview?" I'd love seeing someone do that.
00:35:44	Joseph	But we can see what the researchers are going for. How strict are expectations about behavior? And for sure some are going to get very different answers. Like kissing in a public park, perfectly okay in some societies, but not in others. But I have to say, the things being asked about feel quite narrow to me.
00:36:05	Lia	It feels like this list deals only with certain kinds of norms about public behavior that might be considered indecent or disruptive in some places, but more simply a freedom of expression in others.
00:36:19	Joseph	And that reminds me of something Ishita said. She talked about certain norms in India being tight. Those related to sanctity, loyalty and authority. But norms relating to fairness being loose. And those categories relate directly to research into moral intuitions.
00:36:39	Sanne	And we talked about moral intuitions in episode 42. These evolved because they helped our primate ancestors survive by enforcing certain behaviors.
00:36:50	Joseph	So this can help us make sense of the types of norms that may be tight or loose. Ishita talked about, for example, touching the feet of one's elders. That relates to the moral intuition of authority. But then she says norms related to rules and regulations which, relate to fairness, are broken all the time in India.
00:37:13	Lia	We see moral intuitions in the other stories from team members as well. Albert's story about not shaking hands with Muslim women related to sanctity, honoring women. And Emre's story about the factory and the police officer in the US relate to fairness. An emphasis on everyone being treated according to the rules.
00:37:35	Sanne	This is really great. It explains why two countries can rank as tight, like Singapore and Japan or Turkey and Norway, and yet be such different societies. The norms are grounded in different moral logics. Germany may have very tight fairness norms, "Don't cross on red.", while India has tight sanctity norms, "No public displays of affection."

00:38:11	Lia	We should also mention the critique of tightness and looseness that come from other researchers. There is a number of issues. Here's a quote from one article: "The main tightness looseness measure has generated a number of theoretical and empirical concerns. It likely reflects unfounded national auto stereotypes. The conceptual boundary between tightness and looseness and individualism-collectivism is blurred. Respondents in different societies have different tight-tightness looseness related concepts. Tightness-looseness yields mostly low and often insignificant correlations with its presumed correlates."
00:38:52	Joseph	Okay, so that was pretty heavy. Let's unpack this. One concern they're mentioning is national auto stereotypes. That is, when you ask people about the norms in their country, their answer may reflect the stereotypical image they have of their country, not necessarily the way things actually are.
00:39:12	Sanne	Another critique is that tightness and looseness is actually an aspect of individualism and collectivism because collectivism relates to stronger social expectations towards the group.
00:39:25	Joseph	And this is really a disagreement about how tightness and looseness is conceptualized and measured. And Gelfand says that tightness is not simply an aspect of collectivism. She says you can have loose collectivist societies and tight individualist societies, but not everyone agrees. And also the critique about "insignificant correlations with presumed correlates". That's basically saying that tightness and looseness scores do not have much predictive power. Saying a country is tight, doesn't really tell you much.
00:39:59	Lia	But let's get back to our main question: Is tightness and looseness useful for cultural bridge people? What are your takeaways, Sanne?
00:40:08	Sanne	I think knowing about tightness and looseness can be useful for cultural bridge people. It can help you to see and understand more about norms. For example, strict gender roles may be related to the threats a particular cultural group has faced. I am not, however, a fan of country scores.
00:40:28	Joseph	How about you, Lia?
00:40:30	Lia	I really enjoyed getting into the research, the rankings, all the other studies, and it's really interesting that tightness can change when

		there is a threat. But I think how norms differ is important, especially because some domains may be tighter and others looser. How about you, Joseph?
00:40:48	Joseph	Well, I find the psychology of tightness and looseness convincing. I love the idea that people's brains sink more when they're under threat, but I just don't find the country rankings useful. And I thought the point Ishita made is spot on. The norms in a society will be tight around the things that that society values. And I think that's true whether a country is ranked as tight or loose.
00:41:14	Sanne	And we agree that navigating different kinds of tightness and looseness is a challenge. And let's give the final word on this to Hashini, who has been navigating norms in Sri Lanka, Italy and New Zealand.
00:41:32	Hashini	When I move between my different worlds of tightness and looseness, I become aware of boundaries within myself. It used to be so normal for me to jaywalk in Sri Lanka or Italy. Now, in New Zealand, I catch myself hesitating to cross the street before the light turns green, even when there's no car in sight. I've learned to stand patiently in lines and to say sorry, even when something isn't my fault. If I were to give advice to someone dealing with foreign tightness and looseness, I would say to observe first and learn what the invisible rules are. The tension of not quite fitting in is very normal, and it usually comes from hidden expectations. So, be kind to yourself as you navigate new cultural worlds. The patterns will become clear and so will your inner compass.
00:42:53	Joseph	Well, that's a beautiful thought: "Be kind to yourself, the patterns will become clear and so will your inner compass." And I think that's a good place to bring this episode to a close. So let's share some of our sources. The quote defining tightness was from <i>Cultural evolutionary mismatches in response to collective threat</i>, and that's in Current Directions in Psychological Science. You can also check out <i>On the Nature and Importance of Cultural Tightness Looseness</i> in the Journal of Applied Psychology, that's in 2006. Also <i>Differences between tight and loose cultures, a 33 nation study</i> in Science, and that was in 2011. And also Gelfand's book

		<i>Rule Makers Rule Breakers How Tight and Loose Cultures Wire Our World.</i>
00:43:45	Lia	The research about brains synchronizing more while under threat was <i>The Role of Gamma Interbrain Synchrony and Social Coordination when Humans Face Territorial Threats</i> in the Journal of Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience. The research that tracked Bible passages is <i>Conflict Changes how people View God</i> in Psychological Science. And for a critical look at tightness and looseness, check out <i>The Nature and Utility of Cultural Tightness Looseness Evidence for Reconsideration</i> , Journal of International Business Studies, and that was published just this year.
00:44:26	Joseph	The Deep Culture Experience is a podcast sponsored by the Japan Intercultural Institute, an NPO dedicated to intercultural education and research. I'm the director of JII. This podcast is completely non-commercial, so help us out by leaving a comment on Apple Podcasts, spreading the word on social media and you can get in touch with us at dcpodcast@japanintercultural.org A special thanks.
00:44:52	Sanne	A special thanks to Ishita Ray, Emre Seven, Yuto Aki, Vanessa Eisenberg, Hashini Madarasinge, and Albert Mhangami for sharing their experiences. Thanks also to Skirmantė Cairns, sound engineer Robinson Fritz, JII's administrator, Ikumi Fritz and everyone at JII.
00:45:14	Joseph	And thanks to you, Lia and Sanne for your hard work producing this episode. I learned a lot.
00:45:19	Lia	Thank you so much Joseph and Sanne. This was a very interesting experience.
00:45:24	Sanne	Thank you, Joseph and Lia. This has been an interesting and fun learning experience for me.