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## Cultural constraints on the emergence of women as leaders

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### ABSTRACT

Women, who have historically been less represented than men in leadership positions, emerge as leaders in some societies more than others. Unlike previous cultural explanations for this effect (rooted in differences in values, practices, or gender roles), we argue that a culture's tightness – its strength of norms and social sanctions – can provoke a resistance to change practices that historically placed men in leadership positions. Tighter cultures will yield fewer women represented among top leadership positions. Moreover, cultural tightness moderates the degree to which egalitarian practices – where individuals from both genders are treated equally – lead women to emerge as leaders. Specifically, differences in egalitarian practices are more likely to predict the emergence of women as leaders among tight rather than loose cultures because such practices are more strongly implemented in tight than weak cultures. Analysis of publicly available data reveals some preliminary support for predictions. This research concludes that loose cultures will be more receptive to changing existing cultural practices, but that tight cultures are more successful in implementing and sustaining such changes.

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There are times when people want to be led: They seek leaders who can provide direction, make big decisions, and inspire them to achieve what previously might not have been possible. It thus necessitates an understanding of what type of person is likely to emerge as leader. On this front, a robust finding that has sought explanation is that men more often than women have emerged in leadership positions (Carli & Eagly, 1999). Although somewhat consistent across cultures – where, regardless of culture, men more than women emerge as leaders – there is stunning variability in emergence rates. That is, the emergence of women as leaders is stronger in some nations instead of others (World Bank, 2011). Although cultural explanations for these phenomena tend to originate in explanations of cultural values or practices (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Emrich, Denmark, & Den Hartog, 2004; Paris, Howell, Dorfman, & Hanges, 2009; Wrangham, 2009), we instead investigate how the strength of those norms and practices – what could be called cultural tightness (Gelfand, Nishii, & Raver, 2006; Gelfand et al., 2011; Triandis, 1989) – has implications for women to emerge as leaders.

*Cultural tightness* originates with early calls by cross-cultural psychologists to go beyond the tradition of attributing cultural

differences to differences in cultural values (Earley & Mosakowski, 2002; Triandis, 1989); after all, the influence of cultural values on behavior has oftentimes yielded weak and/or mixed results (Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010). Not only should cultural differences manifest as a function of society's values and the translation of those values into practices, but it should also manifest as a function of society's commitment to implementing such norms and constraints that will help to yield greater insight to cultural phenomena (Gelfand et al., 2006; Triandis, 1989). Building on existing evidence (Gelfand et al., 2006), we propose that cultural tightness leads to a resistance to change existing cultural practices, and thus impedes (but at times may also sustain) the emergence of women as leaders in that culture. By doing so, we hope to provoke a research agenda for greater discoveries, and provide recommendations that researchers, legislators, and nations can draw from in their respective efforts to understand the state of women leadership in different countries.

### 1. A cross-cultural perspective on leader emergence among women

We propose that the emergence of women as leaders arises from two processes. First, according to *emergent leadership theory*, individuals emerge as group leaders by fitting the shared conceptions of followers (Hollander & Julian, 1969; c.f. Smith & Foti, 1998). Leader emergence is an outcome of individual differences, behaviors, and outcomes produced by the leader,

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and then perceived by followers as leader-like (Lord & Maher, 1991). According to follower-centric leadership theories, “good leadership is in the eye of the beholder” (c.f. Van Quaquebeke, Van Knippenberg, & Eckloff, 2011). An individual is more likely to be viewed as a leader and be able to influence his/her followers when he/she fits the followers’ cognitive representation of an ideal leader or ideal leader prototype (e.g., Lord, Foti, & de Vader, 1984; Lord & Maher, 1991). It has been argued that such leader prototypes can include demographic characteristics, such as race (Rosette, Leonardelli, & Phillips, 2008), gender (e.g., Paris et al., 2009), or age. This cognitive process of matching one’s prototype of a leader with a target person suggests that the more followers perceive women as leader-like, the more open followers may be towards their influence (Van Quaquebeke et al., 2011). To the extent that followers’ implicit leadership prototype omits masculinity or maleness as an ideal leadership feature, or includes femininity as an important trait, women may be more likely to emerge as leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The second aspect of leader emergence involves the target individuals’ intention to lead or be recognized as a formal leader. Some evidence shows that even when possessing and demonstrating leadership behavior that is superior to others in the group, women leaders may sometimes prefer to cede the formal leadership role to men in the group because they, too, believe that being male or masculine is more leader-like (Gershenoff & Foti, 2003; Ritter & Yoder, 2004). For leaders to emerge, others have to be receptive to the target’s leadership, and the target must actually intend to take on the leadership role. Accordingly, for women leaders to emerge, the people in the situation should view women as leader-like, and women need to be willing to be recognized as a leader and take on the leadership role.

### 1.1. Cultural tightness

To understand how cultural tightness is related to resistance to change, an understanding of the construct of cultural tightness is necessary. According to Gelfand and her colleagues, cultural tightness comprises of two key components. The first aspect deals with the extent to which norms within societies are clear and pervasive and the second concerns the strength of sanctioning (i.e., how much tolerance societies have for deviance from commonly held norms; Gelfand et al., 2006). Tight cultures are “rigid in requiring that ingroup members behave according to ingroup norms” (Triandis, 1989, p. 511). Norms are clear and reliably imposed with severe sanctions administered to those who deviate. Loose cultures, on the other hand, have unclear norms, and are more tolerant of deviance from the norms (Triandis, 1989). Out of the 33 countries studied by Gelfand and her colleagues, Pakistan, Malaysia, Norway, and Japan score high on tightness, whereas Ukraine, Israel, Netherlands, and Australia score low (Gelfand et al., 2011, Table 1). The U.S. is below the mean in terms of tightness and thus may be considered as a society that is considered slightly loose.

A broad array of ecological and human-made societal threats that nations have historically encountered creates the need for strong norms and conformity to those norms (Gelfand et al., 2011). Such threats include territorial challenges, natural disasters, and resource scarcity. Strong norms and punishment for deviance are viewed necessary to enhance order and social coordination, and ensure survival (Gelfand et al., 2011). Others suggest that a tight culture is the result of homogeneity in the population. On the other hand, a loose culture is so because with greater heterogeneity (i.e., groups with dissimilar norms and values), greater tolerance and flexibility in dealing with deviance are applied as sanctioning or rejecting ingroup members can become quite costly (Triandis, 1989). In addition, the tightness of a culture is dynamic and

ever-changing – a culture may become tight as a result from too much looseness, and loose as a result of too much tightness (Triandis, 1989); or when the threats that necessitated a tight culture are no longer threatening (Gelfand et al., 2011).

Gelfand et al. (2011) demonstrated that there was a high degree of within nation agreement, between-nation variability in terms of tightness. Cultural tightness was distinctive from some cultural values. It was uncorrelated with Hofstede’s (2001) uncertainty avoidance and masculinity index values, with Schwartz’s (1994) values of harmony, mastery, and intellectual and affective autonomy, and with measures collected in the GLOBE study (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman, & Gupta, 2004) regarding power distance, assertiveness, and uncertainty avoidance. Tightness has conceptual similarities with collectivism in that both cultural dimensions act on individuals through the institution of ingroup norms, clear role definitions, and the use of sanctions. However, the two constructs have different antecedents, and can relate independently on groups’ application of norms and sanctions. For instance, groups can give priority to ingroup goals (collectivist), yet allow considerable deviation from group norms before imposing sanctions (c.f. Triandis, 1989).

Cultural tightness directly addresses the external influences and the situation on differences in behavior across cultures. It has important implications for organizational behavior. Because of its lower tolerance for deviance and greater use of sanctions on deviation, tightness in a culture creates an isomorphic influence on organizations and the behavior of their members. Tight cultures also tend to be more predictable, orderly, and efficient as strong norms prescribe expected behavior (Gelfand et al., 2006). Loose cultures, on the other hand, allow for greater variability in the responses to problems faced by the culture, and mete lighter and fewer sanctions. Their more flexible views on conformity allow loose cultures to be more open to change and experience higher rates of change in the societies’ norms than in tight cultures. Accordingly, organizations and organizational behavior will exhibit greater variance in attributes and idiosyncrasies (Gelfand et al., 2006). What might be seen as acceptable or unacceptable behavior, attributes, and attitudes may vary more within such cultures.

Evident from this review is that this cultural dimension can more strongly implement the norms and practices that characterize a nation. We argue, however, that the very strength of cultural tightness is also its liability. For norms that might otherwise be challenged by more recent international efforts to encourage equal rights or fair treatment for women, tightness can create a resistance towards change of existing cultural practices. Some preliminary evidence supports this contention. Cultural tightness is modestly correlated with societal measures of hierarchy and conservatism (Gelfand et al., 2011). In the context of this research, we argue that cultural tightness provokes a resistance to changing the traditional and widespread view that leadership is masculine. We now turn our discussion to a brief examination of some perspectives on the historical origins of the masculinity of leadership, and why tightness impedes change in the tradition of the masculine leaders, and thus prevents the emergence of women as leaders.

### 1.2. Possible origins of the predominance of men as leaders

An exploration of recent theories on social evolution offers some perspectives on the origins of masculine views of leadership. A classical explanation for the gender division of labor relates to the hunter–gatherer tradition of early man. Men hunted for meat, a much-prized form of food, while women gathered staples such as roots, seeds, and shellfish (Wrangham, 2009). Society based on such division of labor would have been relatively egalitarian and

leaders were not a necessity (Boehm, 1993; c.f. Van Vugt, 2006). According to what could be considered Wrangham's (2009) "cooked food hypothesis," hunter-gatherers discovered the benefits of cooking their food, but cooking also necessitated the protection of cooked food from others. As a result, gendered division was cemented with men more suited to hunt for and protect the food, whereas women prepared the meals and depended on men for protection of the food (Wrangham, 2009). These circumstances caused women to become more susceptible to, and eventually caught in "a newly subservient role enforced by male-dominated culture" (Wrangham, 2009, p. 177).

Others suggest that because the need for leadership in ancestral societies involved protecting followers from a myriad of threats from other humans over scarce resources, including food, status, territory, and mates, men were particularly suited for the part (Van Vugt, 2006; Van Vugt & Ahuja, 2011). Leaders were needed to keep the peace within groups, and organize group defense and lead attacks against threats from rival groups. Oftentimes, an informal leader emerges and the leader is a "physically strong, warrior-like figure who exercises a disproportionate influence on group action," also known as a "Big Man" (Van Vugt, 2006, p. 356). According to the "male warrior hypothesis" (Van Vugt, De Cremer, & Janssen, 2007), tribal warfare is largely the domain of men. Men respond more strongly than women to intergroup threats by cooperating and contributing more to their group, whereas cooperation among women was unaffected by intergroup threats. Further, men tend to make more competitive choices in social dilemmas between groups than women do (group-discontinuity effect), and are higher in their social-dominance orientation. Women, on the other hand, are more likely to "tend and befriend" in response to threats (Taylor et al., 2000), having been shaped by different kinds of needs, such as defending offspring and creating supportive social networks (Van Vugt et al., 2007). Based on these evolutionary explanations, it is not surprising that researchers have found that the sex-typing of leadership, especially when in a society that is under threat, men are viewed more as leaders and women as less so, and the divergent emphasis on leadership behaviors between genders appear to be universal (Gibson, 1995; House et al., 2004; Schein, 2001; Van Emmerik, Euwema, & Wendt, 2008). Such divergence could also be maintained by current social phenomena such as favoritism (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), social dominance (e.g., Berdahl & Raver, 2011; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), contemporary interpretations of gender role (e.g., Eagly & Karau, 2002), gender stereotyping (e.g., Rudman & Glick, 2001).

Even though the phenomenon of sex-typing is pervasive, and women are, in general, less likely than men to emerge as leaders, we think that the variations in cultural tightness create variation in the extent to which women emerge as leaders, and it does so in two ways. First, as cultural tightness increases, women will be less likely to emerge as leaders because cultural tightness is associated with a greater resistance to change historically held expectations connecting masculinity to leadership. Second, tight cultures rigorously implement and sustain cultural practices, and as such, cultural differences in gender egalitarianism will be more likely to predict the emergence of women as leaders in tight than in loose cultures. We turn to these specific arguments and our hypotheses next.

### 1.3. The effect of cultural tightness on the emergence of women as leaders

In tight cultures, men and women continue to view masculinity more than femininity as leader-like. Culturally tighter countries, like China and Japan, display the greatest degree of sex-typing, compared to looser cultures, like the U.S. (Schein, 2001). In a tight

culture like Japan, women have no place in the boardroom (Renshaw, 1999). In a comparative study of Malaysian and Australian male managers, where the two countries represent opposite ends of the tightness-looseness continuum, results show that Malaysian men rated women managers more negatively in terms of their leadership effectiveness, compared to Australian men (Jogulu & Wood, 2008).

Cultural tightness also affects how women perceive the leadership role and if they are suited for it. In culturally tight countries, women are more likely to perceive a need to conform to gender roles (Idris, 2008). If they hold leadership positions, they feel compelled to adopt feminine leadership styles. For example, in Malaysia, a country high in cultural tightness, women leaders report that they have to lead as if they were mothers or teachers to their subordinates so that society and their followers will be more accepting and tolerant of their leadership (Idris, 2008). Examining two studies that sampled management students in Germany, U.K., China, and Japan, all relatively tight societies, findings show that women were unlikely to moderately likely to see similarity between women and managers, with Japan seeing a near zero resemblance between women and managers (Schein & Mueller, 1992; Schein, Mueller, Lituchy, & Liu, 1996). On the other hand, women management students in the U.S. did not sex-type the managerial position (c.f. Schein, 2001).

Consequently, there is reason to believe that, compared to loose cultures, tight cultures have not changed traditional views on the masculinity of leadership and the acceptability of women as leaders. Change in such cultures is less likely to have occurred and variation to the status quo is more strongly sanctioned. External factors impose largely similar constraints on people, creating a consistency in leadership perceptions and prototypes of leaders (Lord, Brown, Harvey, & Hall, 2001). This creates consistency within that culture on the acceptability of women leaders. In tight cultures, men and women are likely to share the view that effective leaders are men, causing men to less likely elect women as leaders and women less willing to take on leadership positions in organizations (e.g., Japan, China, Malaysia). Consequently, women are less likely to emerge as leaders in tight cultures.

On the other hand, in loose cultures, societal members tend to be more open to change, and this openness may become manifest in changing expectations and attitudes about the masculinity of leadership. A longitudinal study on U.S. managers showed that there has been a significant change in the period of 1976–1999 in men and women managers' perception that a good manager is predominantly masculine (Powell, Butterfield, & Parent, 2002). In other loose cultures, such as the Netherlands, leadership styles among managers did not differ between men and women in terms of the extent to which they were people-oriented, task-oriented and transformational (Van Engen, Van der Leeden, & Willemsen, 2001). In loose cultures, women are also more comfortable with displaying feminine leadership styles and confident that feminine leadership can be effective (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Furthermore, international organizations specifically focused on advancing the rights of women (e.g., Association for Women's Rights in Development; Global Fund for Women) have been active for a number of years and have engaged in efforts to increase equal treatment across the globe; from our theoretical perspective, loose more than tight cultures should be more receptive to such outreach. Altogether, this evidence indicates that in looser cultures, a woman is more likely to be seen as a leader in a group, and may be more willing to lead or be recognized as a formal leader of a group. Hence, the looser the culture, the greater the emergence of women as leaders.

**Hypothesis 1.** Cultural tightness will be negatively related to the emergence of women as leaders.

We have argued that tightness is negatively related to the emergence of women as leaders because tight cultures are more resistant to change, including the changing of the cultures' stereotypical male model of leadership. Strong social norms with heavy sanctions on deviance prevent change, which implies some deviation from the rule. Hence, tight cultures are less likely to change existing traditional views and practice of leadership as the domain of men, whereas loose cultures may be more receptive to changes to existing cultural practices. However, some tight countries, like Norway, show among the highest level of women board representation (Catalyst, 2011). This suggests the presence of moderating influences. We think that cultural tightness could constrain or facilitate the application of gender egalitarian values in organizations. Specifically, we propose that another way tightness influences the emergence of women is by moderating the degree to which practices of gender egalitarianism are implemented. That is, we argue that when cultural tightness is high, gender egalitarianism should be more strongly and positively related to emergence of women as leaders, than when cultural tightness is low. We now turn our discussion to the role of gender egalitarianism in women leader emergence.

#### 1.4. Cultural tightness moderates the effect of gender egalitarian practices and emergence of women as leaders

Gender egalitarianism refers to the "beliefs about whether members' biological sex should determine the roles that they play in their homes, business organizations, and communities." (House et al., 2004, p. 347). Based on the authors of the GLOBE studies, this cultural dimension was derived from Hofstede's masculinity cultural dimension. It focuses specifically on the extent to which biological sex is relied upon to determine the allocation of roles between the sexes. Accordingly, gender egalitarianism should be most pertinent to the emergence of women as leaders. Using the GLOBE data and data from the International Labor Organization (ILO), Paris and her colleagues (Paris et al., 2009) indeed found a strong correlation ( $r = .69$ ) between gender egalitarian values and the number of women in management/professional positions. We are focused in our study on gender egalitarian practices, and not gender egalitarian values. This is because egalitarian practices are the (albeit imperfect) behavioral and structural manifestations of egalitarian values or ideals. We are thus interested in how tightness affects the implementation of egalitarian practices to affect emergence of women as leaders.

We posit that gender egalitarianism practices should interact with cultural tightness to affect women leader emergence. Specifically, when cultures are tight, greater egalitarian practices are associated with greater women leader emergence, but this is not so when cultures are loose. As noted earlier, tight cultures are more committed to existing cultural practices. As such, we think that they are more likely to facilitate the implementation of practices than loose cultures do (for a similar rationale, see Taras et al., 2010). People in tight cultures are more likely to rigorously follow cultural practices, and adherence to practices is also more likely to be enforced by authorities. Loose cultures, on the other hand, have a greater tolerance for deviation and thus are more flexible in the dealing with deviance; members are also less compelled to strictly conform to existing and new arrangements. As a result, cultural differences in egalitarianism beliefs about gender are more likely to predict women leader emergence if they are also culturally tight, compared to cultures with gender egalitarian beliefs, yet are culturally loose.

Some evidence supports the notion that cultural tightness moderates the practice of cultural values. In their meta-analysis of cross-cultural data, Taras et al. (2010) found that cultural tightness moderated the degree to which Hofstede (2001) cultural values

(which could be interpreted as more closely associated with cultural practices) more strongly predicted cultural outcomes for tight rather than weak nations. Admittedly, their analysis involved more general categories of behaviors (such as emotional outcomes, attitudes, job performance) and did not investigate the emergence of leaders or the role that gender and gender.

Although this test has not been previously investigated, there is good reason to believe the hypothesized interaction will manifest. Consider Norway and Germany, both tight cultures. In Norway, it was found that substantial change in the perception of the male and female stereotypes has occurred. Stereotypes of women in Norway became more favorable with stereotypes of women viewed as more active and strong, whereas the stereotypes of men became less active and strong (Williams & Best, 1990; c.f. Paris, 2004). Although a culturally tight country (Gelfand et al., 2011), Norway ranks high in terms of gender egalitarianism. Norway has among the most ambitious equal opportunity legislation in the world that legally requires firms to reach a 40% women board representation by 2017; and recent evidence shows that Norway has an almost 40% women board representation (Catalyst, 2011). In addition to these legislative and normative initiatives, Norwegians hold implicit leadership prototypes that are androgynous or unisex, with no clear sex-typing of managerial positions (Williams & Best, 1990). In fact, it has been suggested that a new implicit contract has been formed between Norwegian men and women in the workplace that institutes equality between the sexes (Paris, 2003). In Germany, however, a country that is culturally tight but low in gender egalitarianism (House et al., 2004), the emergence of women as leaders has not been as favorable. Duetsch Telekom, for example, is not unlike many of Germany's largest companies that struggle with bringing women into the top leadership positions as men managers continue to hold on to stereotypical masculine leadership prototypes (Clark, 2011). In one study, German men and women managers were evaluated as equally competent, however, respondents displayed greater negative affect towards women managers than to the men (Koch, 2005).

**Hypothesis 2.** Cultural tightness will moderate the relationship between gender egalitarian practices and the emergence of women as leaders, such that egalitarian practices will lead to greater emergence of women as leaders when cultures are tight rather than loose.

## 2. Method

Nation-level data were taken from publicly available sources on tightness, leadership emergence, and gender egalitarianism to explore what role if any it played in explaining the linkage between tightness and leadership emergence. Such sources were either academic (tightness, gender egalitarianism) or from the World Bank, an international banking group dedicated to reducing poverty.

Of note, data for tightness and gender egalitarianism differentiates between East and West Germany, but the measure of leader emergence comprises a statistic for unified Germany only. Consequently, for tightness and gender egalitarianism, scores for East and West Germany were averaged together to form a single score for unified Germany.

### 2.1. Cultural tightness

Gelfand et al. (2011) accumulated data for cultural tightness for (in our study) 32 nations. Gelfand and her co-authors collected data on a six-item measure, with items such as "There are many social norms that people are supposed to abide by in this country" and "People in this country have a great deal of freedom in deciding how they want to behave in most situations" (reverse-scored).

**Table 1**  
 Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	1	2
1. Tightness	32	6.48	2.83	1.60–12.30	1.0	
2. Leadership positions held by women (%)	32	29.38	9.27	3–42%	–.59*	
3. Gender egalitarianism: practices	25	3.37	.36	2.50–4.08	–.33 <sup>m,†</sup>	.57*

\*  $p \leq .05$ .

<sup>m</sup>  $p \leq .10$ .

<sup>†</sup> Correlation between tightness and gender egalitarianism has been previously reported in Gelfand et al. (2011).

Participants rated the degree to which they agreed with such items on a six-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 6 = *Strongly Agree*). After undergoing transformation to reduce response sets (Gelfand et al., 2011), scores indexed cultural tightness, with higher numbers indicated greater cultural tightness.

### 2.2. Emergence of women as leaders

Nation-level statistics on the emergence of women leaders were collected from an online resource available via the World Bank, on the percentage of leadership positions filled by women, notably “female legislators, senior officials and managers” (World Bank, 2011), last collected in 2005. This statistic was retrieved for all 32 nations for which we had an index of tightness, where greater numbers indicated a greater percentage of leadership positions filled by women. This data was part of a comprehensive and continually updated dataset compiled from national statistics agencies, United Nations databases, and World Bank-conducted or funded surveys (World Bank, 2011).

### 2.3. Gender egalitarianism

Data for gender egalitarianism was collected as part of the international effort on cultural forces on leadership and management, informally known as the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004). Nation-level data on 66 societies were collected on differences in gender egalitarianism (Emrich et al., 2004), with data differentiating the nations on egalitarian practices (using self-report items such as “In this society, boys are encouraged more than girls to attain a higher education”) and gender egalitarianism values (e.g., “In this society, boys should be encouraged more than girls to attain a higher education”). Individuals responded to these measures using 7-point scales that were appropriate for the item (e.g., 1 = *Strongly Agree* to 4 = *Neither Agree nor Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Disagree*). Of note, for this item and for others in the measure, the conceptual midpoint of the scale (4) is the point of gender egalitarianism. Scores higher or lower than this reflect deviations from egalitarianism, whereas those close to the midpoint reflect egalitarian values or practices. Differences in nations reflected differences in the lower half of the scale (i.e., below and approaching 4), and thus, we treated this construct as an index of differences in gender egalitarianism.

There were societies for which data on gender egalitarianism did not completely overlap with those indexing tightness. These societies were eliminated. This reduced the available data set to  $N = 25$  for analyses involving tightness (or leader emergence) and gender egalitarianism. Finally, the measure of egalitarian values was included for exploratory purposes; however, analyses involving this index yield no effects, and consequently, results involving this index are not reported below.

## 3. Results

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations among these measures are reported in Table 1. Analysis indicated that tightness

was negatively associated with leader emergence; as a culture’s tightness increased, women filled fewer leadership positions. As the scatterplot in Fig. 1 reveals, this negative relation persists across all levels of tightness. By contrast, egalitarian practice positively predicted percentages of leadership positions filled by women.

### 3.1. Differentiating tightness from gender egalitarianism

The measure of leader emergence was submitted to a regression analysis with tightness and egalitarian practices as simultaneous predictors. Analysis revealed that tightness and practices were independent predictors of leadership positions; as tightness increased, there were fewer women in leadership positions ( $b = -1.20, p = .04, sr = -.34$ ). As egalitarian practices increased, there were more women in leadership positions ( $b = 10.67, p = .02, sr = .42$ ).

### 3.2. Tightness and egalitarian practices interaction

The index of leader emergence was then separately submitted to a regression analysis, with tightness scores and practice scores as predictors and the product of the two entered to test for the predicted interaction. Prior to analysis, tightness and practice scores were centered first (i.e., mean score was set to zero) to reduce concerns with multicollinearity (Aiken & West, 1991). Analysis of leadership positions revealed a marginally significant interaction ( $b = 2.33, p = .10, sr = .26$ ). Following standard procedures for plotting interactions (Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aiken, 2003), we used the regression equation to calculate mean scores for information sharing at 1 standard deviation below and 1 standard deviation above the means for tightness and gender egalitarianism practices (see Fig. 2).

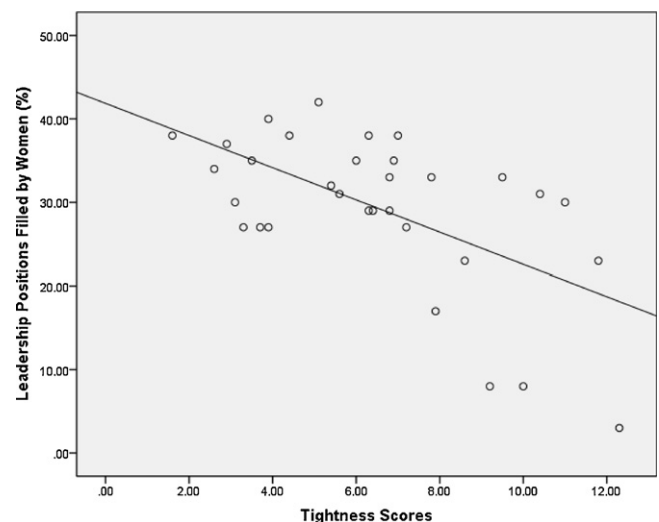


Fig. 1. Scatterplot of tightness scores by leadership positions filled by women.

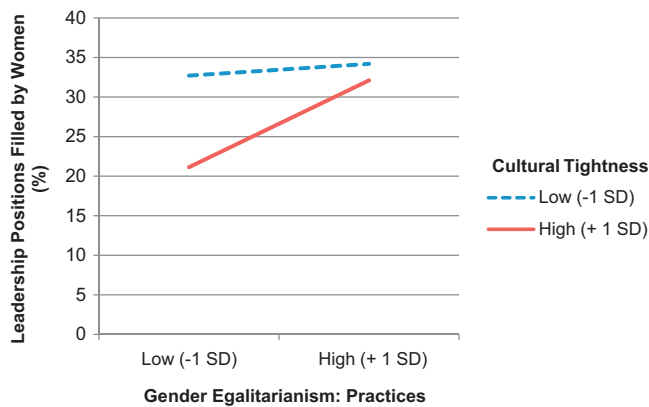


Fig. 2. Leadership positions filled by women predicted by cultural tightness and gender egalitarian practices.

Simple-slopes tests (Cohen et al., 2003) indicated a positive relation between egalitarian practices and leadership emergence when cultural tightness was high ( $b = 15.24$ ,  $p = .004$ ,  $sr = .49$ ), but not when it was low ( $b = 2.06$ ,  $p = .75$ ,  $sr = .05$ ). Greater egalitarianism practices were associated with a greater percentage of women leaders only when cultural tightness was relatively high. Additional analysis revealed that the negative relation between cultural tightness and leadership positions when egalitarian practices were low ( $b = -2.04$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $sr = -.43$ ), but not when it was high ( $b = -.37$ ,  $p = .62$ ,  $sr = -.08$ ). Greater cultural tightness was associated with a fewer percentage of women leaders only when gender egalitarianism was relatively low.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. Discussion

We offer a new perspective integrating research on culture and the role it plays in the emergence of women as leaders. Instead of differentiating cultures on their cultural practices, we argue that the degree to which cultures maintain a strong commitment to their cultural practices – they exhibit a tight culture – is negatively related to the emergence of women as leaders because it creates a resistance to changing the existing predominance of leaders who are men. We argue that once those egalitarian cultural practices are in place, however, cultural tightness can sustain such egalitarian practices, allowing them to persist. In a preliminary test of these predictions, our analysis revealed that tight cultures were less likely than loose cultures to have women emerge as leaders. Moreover, tightness moderated the association between egalitarian practices and women leader emergence. Egalitarian practices were associated with greater emergence of women as leaders when a culture was tight not loose. In sum, cultural tightness is negatively related to women leadership emergence, particularly when such a culture's practices favor men over women leaders.

<sup>2</sup> It is possible that the effects reported here may be due to differences in the wealth of nations, where people in wealthier countries are more willing to allow the emergence of women leaders. We conducted additional analyses with one index of national wealth – gross national income per person (GNI per capita; World Bank, 2012). However, a simultaneous regression analysis revealed that, even though GNI per capita independently predicted the emergence of women leaders ( $b = 1.71 \times 10^{-4}$ ,  $p = .01$ ,  $sr = .35$ ), tightness remained a significant predictor ( $b = -1.89$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $sr = -.58$ ). Furthermore, it did not offer a successful substitute for tightness or egalitarian practices when testing interaction effects. These analyses, first with egalitarianism and GNI per capita and second with tightness and GNI per capita, revealed that neither interaction term approached significance ( $ps > .36$ ) and effect size estimates were much smaller than the test yielded by the tightness and egalitarian practices interaction ( $srs < .13$  compared to  $sr = .26$ ). Differences in national wealth cannot explain these effects.

Admittedly, the data used to test the interaction are based on a sample of 25 nations, a relatively small sample and a likely contributor as to why the analysis yielded a marginally significant rather than a statistically significant interaction. More confidence could be had were the interaction replicated in a larger sample of nations differentiated on cultural tightness, egalitarian practices, and leader emergence. Of note, there was also a lack of data on extremely impoverished nations where women have virtually no status both in the domestic or economic domains. To truly understand cultural differences, we need to examine the full spectrum of nations on tightness and gender egalitarianism.

#### 4.1. Implications and future research

Tightness affects women leader emergence in two ways. First, as we had argued earlier, tightness creates a resistance to change of existing beliefs. When people have committed to change through the institution of new practices, change can be more easily implemented and sustained in tight cultures. An analogy can be drawn from the organizational design literature. Theory and evidence show that more mechanistic organizations (high in formalization, standardization, and hierarchy; Burns & Stalker, 1966) are more effective in implementing new practices than organic organizations because they have clear channels of authority and formalized procedures to ensure that adopted practices are properly carried out (Adler & Borys, 1996). These characteristics allow new practices and innovations to be quickly implemented and sustained in the organization (Adler & Borys, 1996; Johns, 1993; Toh, Morgeson, & Campion, 2008). Similarly, once a culture becomes committed to the change, change may be implemented more quickly and be sustained in tight rather loose cultures. Relative to Norway, other European countries with similarly ambitious equal opportunity laws, such as Spain and France, have not seen as significant improvements in the emergence of women as leaders. The looseness of these cultures may be preventing the swift and effective implementation of egalitarian practices, thus inhibiting women leaders from emerging.

That cultural tightness leads to a resistance to change is not necessarily a negative feature of cultural tightness. After all, tighter cultures should also be more resistant to changing cultural practices that have served individuals in that culture well (such as respecting marriage contracts, ownership rights; Tomasello, 2011). In fact, it could be concluded that with egalitarian practices in place, women leaders should be more likely to emerge in tight than loose cultures as individuals more strongly commit to such norms. Additional analysis of the interaction reported in Fig. 2 reveal that once egalitarianism was high, cultural tightness did not improve the emergence of women as leaders.

We think this could be a function of the type of practices implemented. Nations with relatively high scores on egalitarian practices approached the midpoint of the scale (4), suggesting equal treatment of men and women. Were the practices to advantage women over men (and on the measure, deviate from 4 in an upwards direction), it is possible that cultural tightness might positively predict the emergence of women as leaders. That is, were cultural norms and practices to favor women leaders over men leaders, cultural tightness could increase the prevalence of women leaders. However, in the GLOBE data, no nation surveyed was found to have practices that favored women over men (House et al., 2004). Investigating the effects of women's desire to lead, and followers desire to accept women leaders when practices that clearly favor women are adopted would be a potentially important avenue for future investigations.

Additional analyses also suggest that in cultures that do not practice gender egalitarianism, tightness has a negative effect on

women leader emergence. We think that tightness may cause both women and followers to be less willing to go against convention and accept women as leaders. Traditionally or naturally held preferences for men to lead are more likely to persist in tight societies. However, even if gender egalitarian practices are not implemented, people of loose cultures are more open to change and are less likely to adhere strictly to existing norms. They may be more susceptible to the influence of external forces. International efforts – by Western governments and by specific organizations dedicated to women's rights – may be more predictive of a nation's receptiveness to women leaders when that nation is loose rather than tight (assuming such international efforts have been received by the nation's populace) because loose nations may be more receptive to the new messages delivered by such organizations. In addition, women in loose cultures may feel less inhibited from exploring and breaking existing cultural convention by taking on leadership positions. Loosely held norms afford women greater latitude to pursue their natural desire for high social status and better outcomes for themselves. Followers in loose cultures, too, are not as bound to prevailing views and arrangements such as those pertaining to traditional gender roles and leadership, and thus may be more receptive than tight cultures of women's leadership.

The conclusions that we have arrived upon pertain to a society's receptiveness to change, and its ability to implement and sustain change as a function of cultural tightness. The precise psychological processes pertaining to women's intentions to emerge as leaders, and followers' willingness to include women in their implicit theories of leadership as a result of perceived cultural tightness and gender egalitarianism still require elaboration and testing. Researchers have agreed that the context in which women leaders are evaluated needs to be specified to determine when women leaders will be perceived as being more effective than men leaders (Rosette & Tost, 2010). It remains to be seen if differences in women's leadership styles and the perceived effectiveness of women leaders (e.g., Deaux, 1984; Eagly & Karau, 2002), are moderated by tightness and gender egalitarianism.

#### 4.2. Managerial relevance

No country surveyed by the World Bank and the GLOBE studies were women and men equally represented in leadership positions in various arenas, or were egalitarian to the extent that women were favored over men. Even in the most egalitarian of societies, societal values and practices did not reach the point of equality or yield ratings favoring women over men. Countries in the Middle East, Confucian Asia, and Germanic Europe reported the lowest levels of gender egalitarian practices (House et al., 2004). The society's values and practices in turn have a strong influence on organizational values and practices that can override the values and practices when they conflict (e.g., Disney Corporation in France, see House et al., 2004). Our findings suggest that organizations wishing to promote women organizational leaders should find loose, rather than tight, cultures a more favorable environment for doing. In tight cultures, attempts to change cultural norms may be more difficult, as greater effort might be needed to overcome existing resistance to women leaders. For example, German corporation Duetsch Telekom finds its German unit less successful than its foreign offices in achieving targets for women management representation due to closely held beliefs about the gender of leaders (Clark, 2011). Organizations entering tight cultures should be aware that women may self-select out of leadership positions and that decision makers may have implicit biases in their leadership prototypes, both of which would need to be overcome. The greatest challenge will be found in extreme conditions where women have virtually no status and the cultures

are tight and resistant to external influence to improve the status of women.

Yet at the same time, when gender egalitarian practices are accepted, egalitarian practices should also yield the greatest improvement in women leader representation in tight cultures. Societies that are tight can see significant improvement if there is strong commitment to more egalitarian practices. As noted earlier, mechanistic organizations that have rules of conduct formally laid out and enforced are more effective in implementing new practices when they are committed to them. Thus, organizations that adopt egalitarian practices and enforce them may yield substantial change. Like most change initiatives, founders of the organization and top management play a critical role. Awareness is the first step. Managers should take a proactive approach, gauge the process by which leaders are evaluated in the organization, and rectify procedures if they systematically give advantage to men and link successful leadership performance with leaders who are men.

Finally, it is important to note, however, that even in tight cultures, norms may not apply to all situations or all persons. For example, in Japan, foreigners are afforded a different set of expectations and norms (Triandis, 1989), and thus women expatriate leaders may be more acceptable to members of the host society than would local women leaders (Adler, 1987).

#### 4.3. Conclusion

Our approach to gender and leadership emergence deviates from other approaches. Our goal has been to offer an understanding of how cultural forces prevent or facilitate the emergence of women as leaders. Whereas previous research has tackled the origin question (why are men more likely to be in leadership positions?) or considered cultural values to be the determinant, our approach is rooted in trying to understand the process of change and how culture contributes to this process. Moreover, our work points to the importance of cultural tightness to these phenomena; for change to be implemented, perhaps it is not so much about first changing cultural values, but rather, about changing a culture's tightness first. To the degree that a nation's culture can be made loose initially, new values and practices may manifest, and once they have done so, tightening a culture around those new practices may allow them to be implemented to a greater degree. Implicit in this conclusion is that cultures are not simply features of societies, but rather, can be shaped to serve a social purpose.

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