

9-2016

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Cultural effects on wellness as it applies to society and the individual: an international comparison of Germany and the United States of America

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HNR 499 Senior Project
(Winter 2016)

Introduction

At its most basic and objective meaning, the word “wellness” essentially refers to the state of being well. The inescapable longing to be in a state of wellness is an inherent and fundamental influence on the actions any person takes. Though this yearning is universal across all peoples and cultures, the actual concept of wellness is not. The concept of wellness is a universal phenomenon but also manifests itself in vastly different ways across that globe. It is both a dynamic notion—ever-changing with the evolution of a society and its technology—, as well as one deeply anchored in the unalterable, aggregate history and dependent on persisting standards. This complex derivation of wellness is what makes it a confusing yet authentic representation of cultures and therefore allows it to serve as a tool to examine and define those cultures. Defining one’s own culture is often a headache-inducing activity that frequently involves arguments such as “because that’s just the way it is” or “because that’s what makes sense to me.” These are arguments without concrete support, and they are therefore irrelevant.

Often the most successful way to gain a complete understanding of a culturally unique idea is to analyze an analogous phenomenon in a foreign environment. The frequently cited line from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe exemplifies this idea perfectly: “Those who know nothing of foreign languages know nothing of their own.” (von Goethe, 1998) After deconstructing the intricacies of a foreign language, one begins to notice equivalent patterns in one’s native language, allowing an individual to more competently put this mother language to use. Similar to deconstructing nuances of an unfamiliar language, dissecting and examining the components of wellness in a foreign setting will catalyze the unfolding and untangling of this enigmatic, parallel idea closer to home. This investigation will exploit the enlightening properties of intercultural study to

investigate wellness as a cultural phenomenon in Germany in order to gain insight on cultural patterns and tendencies that form the identity of the United States of America and Germany.

The study begins with a foundational definition of wellness in Germany and the United States by considering the word itself: how and in what contexts it is used in each respective country. Once these differences are defined, the report will introduce a number of cultural dimensions, this includes power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint. Breaking down a culture into these distinct dimensions helps to analyze the complex identity of that culture. A series of factors that arise from a nation's concept of wellness follows the introduction to the cultural dimensions. This will include health care schematics, employers' policies on motherhood/parenthood leave and hours worked, productivity, nutrition, and leisure time activities. How does a society's approach to each of these subjects represent underlying patterns in their culture? A detailed examination of each factor as it manifests itself in Germany and in the United States results in a consequently clearer image of each cultural dimension. Piecing together these images for each country will then produce a finally full vision of national identity. The concluding section of the report consists of a reflection and interpretation of the results presented.

The most foundational definition of wellness as seen in the two countries begins with the word. Although the words in the two languages are virtually identical—"Wellness" in German, with a capital W—their definitions and the trends seen with their usage vary considerably. The roots of the American, modern-day term "wellness" lie in the 1950s, during a time of good-health promotion in order to address the nation's needs in long-term health care ("Building America's Health," 1952). New developments in the concept of wellness were made in the 1970s, when individual responsibility for one's own health became more important than the efforts of physicians (Miller, 2005). At this time, institutions—including businesses, schools, and governments—began to offer wellness programs to lower the increasing costs of health care (Ardell, 1985). Some employers even introduced the still-observed practice of providing monetary rewards for healthier lifestyles (Ardell, 1985). At its conception, the idea of wellness in the United

States was meant to reduce costs for governments and businesses. “Corporate wellness” is a buzzword that exemplifies this concept. *Forbes* magazine has a vast number of articles devoted to the importance of wellness programs in the workplace. Articles emphasize that corporate wellness is important not only because it is an effective way to combat rising health care costs, but also because an active workplace is a more productive workplace (Love, 2013). Countless health and fitness companies—FitBit, Garmin, WeightWatchers, and YMCA franchises—have pages of their websites dedicated to corporate wellness programs that they sponsor. In addition to outlining the benefits of an active workplace, these sites include fitness products they offer that may be incorporated into a corporate wellness program to encourage a healthy, active lifestyle. Other examples are discounted memberships to fitness centers, as well as access to educational videos and keynote speakers that promote wellness in meetings or conferences. Close association between wellness and the workplace displays the importance of financial and job security in the United States. A person that is “well” is one that works hard and earns money. This is doubly expressed in the origin of wellness programs as policies to save on health care costs.

In addition to the development of wellness in health care and corporate wellness, wellness in the United States maintains close ties to physical activity and weight loss. The wellness center at Grand Valley State University is no exception, offering services that promote strictly physical fitness: numerous training programs, massage and nutrition services, and resources to help quit smoking (“GVSU”). Additionally, wellness centers employ phrases such as “lower body blast,” “power cycle,” “spin express,” and “high-intensity training” (“South Haven,” “UND,” “Antioch”). The deliberate use of aggressive and energetic language for describing their wellness programs conveys a rushed feeling and the idea that these programs are designed to get the client physically fit in a short amount of time. A “well” person is therefore one who fills his or her schedule—one who is able to work hard, maintain responsibilities, but also manage to take care of himself or herself physically. Time management is a characteristic of a “well” individual.

Though spelling and pronunciation of the word are the same in Europe (capitalized “*Wellness*” in Germany), the patterns of its use vary fundamentally from the concept of wellness in the United States. In Germany in the late 1980s and early 1990s,

the spa industry began heavily employing the word in their marketing campaigns (Miller, 2005). Entering “Wellness in Deutschland” (translated: “wellness in Germany”) into the search bar results in a host of websites advertising hotels, spas, and resorts to escape the hustle and bustle of ordinary life. Using vocabulary such as “restorative wellness-vacation”, “bringing body, spirit, and soul into harmony,” and “guaranteed recovery and relaxation” (“Top-Wellness”; “TUI”), German tourism websites cater to a different set of emotions when considering *Wellness*. In Germany, a key association made with *Wellness* is pleasure and beauty, rather than objective health (Hox, 2002). Even reading a book constitutes an activity contributing to *Wellness*. This purposeful, exclusive use of *Wellness* in situations regarding peace and serenity implies that the German idea of being well and balanced is less dependent on fitness and physical conditioning. More important is learning to relax when circumstances allow it, as well as reflecting on what one has. The effort of clearly separating wellness from the workplace—making it the *absence* of responsibility—indicates that in order to be well, it is also essential to have separation of work and pleasure. To Germans, compartmentalization and organization of different areas of one’s life are key factors in determining the well-being of a person.

The simplest illustration of the difference between wellness and *Wellness* appears clearly when “Wellness in Deutschland” (translated: “Wellness in Germany”) and “wellness in the United States” are entered in a search engine and the results compared. The German search results in links to only hotels, spas, and vacation-planning websites. This symbolizes the importance the German culture places on balancing relaxation and workplace. Organizing and making a strict distinction between these two ideas is just as significant as balance. The English search yields a variety of links, mostly leading to websites for insurance companies, national institutions aimed at educating the public on good health, and fitness centers. This indicates two important patterns in the culture of the United States. First, it represents the strong influence career, job, and consequently financial securities have in the state of well-being. The results also show the perception in the United States that appreciation of hard work leads to gratification and well-being.

Though the social definitions and applications of the words “wellness” and “*Wellness*” are a solid start to understanding the national cultures of the United States and Germany, areas of life impacted by the idea of wellness/*Wellness* also reveal

characteristics of culture. As a whole, national culture is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to define if analyzing all possible influences. This task is easier if culture can be broken down into discrete categories that together represent the overall tendencies of members of that culture. Dutch social psychologist and pioneer in characterizing national culture, Geert Hofstede, defines his six cultural dimensions as power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity vs. femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term vs. short-term orientation, and indulgence vs. restraint (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Hofstede's extensive work in international business settings led him to score each dimension and quantitatively represent cultures with these scores. Though this study values the convenience of dividing the massive concept of culture into six, manageable dimensions, using a numerical score to quantify culture runs the risk of reducing an infinitely changing and sophisticated society to a finite number. Unlike Hofstede, this report will not attempt to quantify each dimension of culture in the United States and Germany but will instead use these dimensions to qualitatively extract tendencies of these cultures by observing trends in wellness.

Power distance deals with the fact that there are bound to be inequalities in a society. Some individuals have power over others, and the response to these disparities dictates whether a nation exhibit a larger or smaller power distance. An example of a situation where power distance plays a role is in interactions between a professor and his students. In a culture in which power distance does not play a large role, the professor would encourage students to seek him out in office hours. He would present himself as approachable: a resource available to his students if they ever need extra help. This creates an opportunity for a more personal relationship between the professor and his students, shrinking the power distance between them. In contrast, a professor from a culture that places more importance on power distance would lead lecture in a stricter fashion, perhaps not even mentioning that he is available outside of class for questions. He would present the material, and the students would study it and take his tests. Preventing casual relationships between him and his students forms a larger power distance between them. In this example, the United States exhibits a smaller power distance than Germany.

Individualism values the thought that individuals are responsible in caring only for themselves and immediate family. Societies displaying this emphasize the “I” rather than the “we” in situations of self-image-definition. Its opposite is collectivism, which is characterized by a tight-knit society that expects family members and peers to maintain a high degree of loyalty within a group, causing that group to play a large role in defining them as persons. Members of a collectivistic society visualize an entire group—instead of the individual—when making decisions. Individualism emphasizes differences rather than similarities. This can lead to a difficulty in understanding another’s perspective in individualistic societies.

Similar but distinct from individualism is masculinity. This characteristic gives priority to competition and success. The key difference between masculinity and individualism is that the latter concerns interdependence, while the former does not address this. The polar opposite to this idea is femininity, which respects cooperation and modesty. An example of masculinity in the workplace is the dedication to a deadline, even if the project is not yet perfect. This is because successful completion on time is more important than whether each member thinks the group finished the project to the best of their ability. A feminine culture would prefer to push back the deadline in order to ensure that all team members are content with the finished product.

Uncertainty-avoidance quantifies how a culture copes with the fact that the events of the future cannot be known. Attempts to control the future through carefully thought out actions indicate a society with high uncertainty-avoidance. Conversely, cultures that value risk-taking have lower uncertainty-avoidance. The immediate situation and reaction is more frequently the determinant of behavior than thorough weighing of the options. Patterns in rules can be indicators in uncertainty-avoidance. Cultures with more rules—both formal and informal—often have a greater uncertainty-avoidance. These rules may include what time of day it is acceptable to place trash in a public dumpster, how to properly pour different styles of beer, or whether it is acceptable to do loud activities on certain days of the week.

Long-term and short-term orientations serve as methods in considering the past, present, and future of a society. Long-term orientation refers to a society that encourages innovation to prepare for challenges faced in the future, while short-term orientation

describes one that holds a greater respect for past traditions and focuses on the present rather than the future. Believing that context and situation dictate what is “true”, rather than the existence of an absolute “truth” for any circumstance. “Pragmatic” is often the word used to describe a culture oriented for long-term. For example, a business that is oriented for short-term will concentrate on quarterly earnings, while the long-term-oriented business will look past short-term deficits to see profits in the future.

An indulgent society emphasizes the need to have fun and therefore encourages individuals to be rewarded for even small achievements. As can be expected, restraint places importance on repressing desires, frequently drawing a strict line between work and leisure activities. An example comparing indulgent and restrained cultures involves the amount members will express themselves. An indulgent society will show expression of opinions more readily than a culture than restrains itself. In this sense, the United States and Germany show similarities, with Germans perhaps sharing a forward opinion more readily than an American. However, the United States is seen as more indulgent when regarding rewards given for simple tasks.

Using Hofstede’s cultural dimensions, the remainder of the report will concentrate on analyzing the nature of wellness and *Wellness* and how societies view them in the workplace, health care system, and free time. This exploration of wellness and *Wellness* will illuminate reoccurring trends in German and American cultures to help us understand them more fully.

Because the very origin of wellness in the United States was with the intention of reducing health care costs, this section begins with an analysis of the insurance and health care systems in the United States and Germany. Unlike most developed countries, the United States displays a complex mixture of publicly and privately funded health insurance, with little regulation from the state (Schoen, Osborn, Squires, & Doty, 2013). Relying on employers to provide health coverage is the most common strategy in the United States (Elliot, Bernstein, & Bowman, 2014). This has led employers to develop wellness programs to lessen the burden of their employee’s health costs. In contrast to this system, non-profit insurance institutions that are socially funded by the state and federal governments in Germany compete for providing coverage of citizens (Schoen, Osborn, Squires, & Doty, 2013). This creates a health care system more heavily

influenced and regulated by the German government than that in the United States. Though Germany also has programs analogous to American wellness programs that are designed to lessen health care costs of citizens, they are not designated as “*Wellness*” schemes, rather “health-incentive systems.” This serves as a reminder that the word *Wellness* in Germany plays a different roll than that of wellness in the United States.

The significant difference between the health care systems in Germany and the United States is who is funding the coverage. Each employer has the decision to choose which insurance agency they want to use for their employees since they provide the coverage in the United States. Placing this decision in the hands of the employers—rather than the employees, who will be affected by the choice of insurance provider—creates a power distance between the two groups. The power held by the employers allows them to choose an insurer that best benefits them personally. The employee must accept the health care provided or go out of his or her way to find another insurer that suits him or her better. The complex mixture of public and private providers assists in maintaining this power distance because employees will avoid branching out to find their own insurance provider, which may involve further complications and paperwork to fill out. Studies have found that the United States spends USD \$606 per person annually for administrative costs (compared to Germany’s USD \$237) due to the complexity of the system (Schoen, Osborn, Squires, & Doty, 2013). Over-complicating health care and leaving the decision to employers forms a power distance between those providing the insurance and those receiving it, which prevents Americans from making their own, informed decisions on what insurance provider might be best for their needs.

In Germany, the social funding of the health care system, as well as allowing individuals to decide which insurer fits them best—no matter who their employer is—shows a more collectivistic approach to health care. Socially funding healthcare causes younger, healthier, better-off members to support older, less healthy members in poorer situations. This is representative of a collectivist society because it creates a form of interdependence between members of the society.

The health insurance differences in German and the United States show that solidarity and alliance is most important to protect members in the collectivist German system. This is because it is the state and federal governments that fund the programs.

Giving authority to the employers to decide on a provider forms a power distance between employees and employers regarding the fate of their health care plan. This is accentuated by the complexity of the system, often hiding costs and requiring time and additional resources. This power distance serves to make specific, personal health care less accessible to members of the American society that do not want to invest the time and effort into fully comprehending the system. This collectivistic characteristic of German culture is used to support its members, while the power distance exhibited as a result of the American health care system serves to benefit employers and weaken less-educated employees.

Since *Wellness* in Germany is not associated with benefitting employers but is instead the ultimate *non-workplace* activity, observing the boundary between work and non-work in each country effectively explores this difference in definitions. Differences in hours worked per week and the productivity during those hours reveal characteristics about Germany and the United States with regards to *Wellness* as abstinence from work and the proper balance of work and leisure. In 2014, Americans worked an average of 1,789 hours, while Germans averaged 1,371 hours (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2014). This results in German employees spending 23.4% less time at work than their American counterparts. Productivity is a result of both the hours worked and the quality of those hours. The gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in the United States in 2014 was USD \$53,353.2, and this number in Germany was USD \$46,393.6 (OECD, 2014). This means that although Germans are devoting only 76.6% as much time to work as Americans, they earn 85.4% as much GDP per capita. The 8.8% discrepancy results from a difference in the slightly higher productivity of Germans while at work. Both the number of hours worked and productivity during that time present insight to the balance of time spent working versus at home and the boundary between the two. Additional support for the strong separation between work and free time in Germany surfaced in late 2014 when the Labor Ministry considered a ban on after-hours emails to employees, discouraging working while not on the clock (Nelson, 2014).

The higher number of hours-worked in the United States displays the short-term orientation of the American culture. Even with knowing that over-working employees for

a long amount of time will lead to lower productivity due to burnout, the short-term benefits of working longer hours are worth it to companies in the United States.

The fewer hours Germans spend at work, higher productivity during that time, and strict line they draw between work and pleasure together form an image of a culture valuing restraint in regards to working culture. This is because an employee working fewer hours per day will work harder during those hours and avoid distractions if he or she knows that workplace tasks are to be completed at the workplace and should not encroach into leisure time.

Longer working hours highlight the orientation in the short term in the United States. In Germany, shorter working hours coupled to higher productivity and separation between work and play demonstrate a sense of restraint that the Germans hold to allow them to more fully concentrate on work while at work and on leisure while during their free time.

Also key in understanding the importance of spending time away from the workplace in both countries are their corresponding policies on pregnancy and parenthood leave. In 1993, the Family and Medical Leave Act was the first nationally protected leave policy in the United States that required an employer with 50+ employees to grant 12 weeks of unpaid leave to employees who have worked at least 1,250 hours in the last 12 months. This policy managed to exclude 55% of working women from eligibility (Aisenbrey, Evertsson, & Grunow, 2009). When comparing this system to a total allotment of three years leave in Germany, with a minimum wage compensation of USD \$387 per month for 14 months (or 67% of average earnings), the differences are startling. This German system also has roots that reach back over four decades prior to the program in the United States (Aisenbrey, Evertsson, & Grunow, 2009). These differences result in new mothers taking off much less time due to pregnancy and instead returning to the workforce (Gangl & Ziefle, 2009). Prioritizing time differently between work and staying at home in the period surrounding pregnancy and childbirth indicates differences in cultural priorities between Germany and the United States.

Similar to the number of hours employees in the United States work, the policy on parental leave reflects the short-term orientation of the United States. By providing no wage compensation for mothers who have just given birth, American employers

disregard the need of a parent to remain with the newborn child and cause that responsibility to be shifted to a third party, such as a daycare facility. Rather than considering the future relationship between the child and its parents, employers are concerned about regaining their employees, reducing costs to them.

A lengthy parental leave with generous wage compensation indicates the German culture oriented in the long term. Understanding that some new mothers will need more time off than others is a pragmatic way of considering maternity leave. Every mother is in a different situation, and it is impossible to tell whether the new family will need a long time to adjust to this big change. Extending the parental leave and providing pay accounts for circumstances that may require more time off work.

Short-term orientation plays a large role in the United States as employers strive to maximize profits in minimal time. This is further reflected in the parental leave policies used by employers to quickly bring new mothers back into the workforce. The opposite is seen with the German parental leave. Allowing for three years and 14 months of stipend present the pragmatic quality of German employers. Their consideration of the issue of childbirth is oriented for the long term.

Since *Wellness* is the complete absence of work responsibilities in Germany, the differences in how free time is spent in each country represent relevant cultural characteristics. A study completed by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) asked subjects which activities were common in their leisure time: watching television, visiting/entertaining friends, participating/attending events, sports, “other” (OECD, 2014). According to the study, the activity that consumes the majority of free time in the United States (44%) was watching the television, while this number was only 28% in Germany (OECD, 2014). The most common activity in Germany (46%) was labeled as “other” (OECD, 2014). Judging by the list of options, these “other” activities include reading, traveling, and relaxing. A larger number of Americans (16%) than Germans (4%) reported spending time visiting/entertaining friends, but more Germans (15%) than indicated that participating/attending events were common leisure activities Americans (2%) (OECD, 2014). The close relationship of *Wellness* with leisure and non-work activities makes an evaluation of the distribution of these activities relevant in an analysis of wellness/*Wellness* as cultural concepts in the United States and Germany.

Of all of the potential answers for how leisure time is spent, the most isolated and individual activity is watching television. Unlike any other activity, one can complete it in total solitude. This therefore embodies the importance of individualism in the United States. The vast number of available channels and programs ensure that at least one caters to the entertainment of a particular individual. Watching a show that speaks personally to a viewer while simultaneously excluding other shows allows an individual to customize his or her experience, regardless of anyone else who is also watching television. This individual customization of television speaks to the value Americans place on individualism. This is further encouraged by websites that offer streaming of television shows, eliminating the need to tune in to the correct channel at the correct time. A viewer can instead watch the show on his/her own schedule. Additionally, the slightly higher proportion of Americans that indicated that visiting/entertaining friends was a common leisure time activity illustrates the competitive, masculine characteristic of hosting a dinner party in the United States to demonstrate one's social status.

While it is difficult to extract meaning from the majority of German leisure time being spent doing "other" activities, something can be said about the slightly more common practice of participating/attending events in Germany than in the United States. Forming a community in support of a beloved sports team brings together masculinity and collectivism to show that the competitive nature of sporting events can also bind together individuals and create a support network.

The varying proportion of time spent on different leisure activities displays multiple characteristics about the United States. The first tendency of American culture is the importance of individualism as it relates to television and entertainment. Masculinity also manifests itself in visiting/entertaining friends. This is shown in the competitive display of one's home to one's friends. Germany displays both masculine and collectivistic traits by participating/attending events, illustrating that competitiveness does not necessarily equate to a lack of community.

The final topics relating to wellness and *Wellness* are nutritional tendencies and attitudes of laypersons and medical professionals in each country. A 2011 study surprisingly found that beliefs held by German medical doctors on diet and health are more similar to those of the common German, rather than those of doctors in the United

States (Leeman, Fischler, & Rozin, 2011). As concept expected to be fairly universal across cultures, opinions on good nutrition and health show variance, depending on whether the doctor is American or German. For example, both doctors and nonprofessional Americans have a significantly stronger view of vitamins as a key part of good health than Germans (Leeman, Fischler, & Rozin, 2011). Similarly, utilizing medicines as a practice for maintaining good health is concept supported in the United States, while Germans are much more skeptical (Leeman, Fischler, & Rozin, 2011). Not only is there a difference in opinions on medications and vitamins and their connection to health, but the beliefs of the importance of aesthetic quality of food also differ in Germany and the United States. In Germany, the researchers found that there was a strong, positive connection between how food tastes and how it affects health. Germans are more likely to see good tasting food as something that is better for health and positively affects how one feels. Different attitudes toward nutrition and its connection to overall health expose cultural patterns in wellness and *Wellness* in Germany and the United States.

Considering the positive view on vitamins and the opinion of their importance for a healthy diet, the United States displays a high regard for the power distance between laypersons and scientific professionals. In addition to regarding a novel development in nutritional science as something that must be healthy, Americans are also more likely to accept the use of biotechnology in their food than Germans (Peters, Lang, Sawicka, & Hallman, 2007). This power distances creates institutional trust in scientific communities: “With their background, they would never produce or sell anything that would hurt the public, would they?”

This power distance is not seen in Germany, but the value they place on the flavor of food and how that relates to health instead indicates an indulgent quality in the German culture. The desire of associating something pleasurable with good health represents indulgence in the pleasurable activity.

A power distance results from blind trust in scientific developers in the United States. This makes Americans more likely to accept changes in subjects on which they themselves are not informed. Associating taste with healthiness of foods shows an indulgent side to Germany’s culture. Interestingly, Germans were found to value restraint

early, yet they are now seen as indulgent. This is one example of opposing traits being present within the same culture. While Germans may restrain themselves at work, enjoying a flavorful meal is deemed as a time to indulge.

While this report observes a variety of aspects of society impacted by the American and German views of wellness, some consistent patterns appear in the two cultures. In both the health care setting and acceptance of new technology, the United States displays a large power distance between the knowledgeable and uninformed members of society. This power distance is exploited to cut costs. In health care, employers are able to reduce costs by providing the insurer of their choice and count on the majority of employees accepting whatever insurance provider they are offered. Many scientific developments (such as gene manipulation in agriculture) serve to benefit producers by optimizing their manufacturing process.

In addition to this conclusion, longer working hours and shorter, unpaid maternal leave both display the short-term orientation of the United States. Rather than considering the myriad of outcomes and making accommodations for those possibilities, American employers use view working hours and parental leave as influences on their possible profit, rather than determining factors in one's personal life and well-being. Just as wellness was a concept originally created to assist employers and reduce costs in the United States, many policies and constructs are also created with the benefit of the employers in mind.

Other traits—such as individualism and masculinity—appeared to also play roles in creating a cultural identity in the United States, but their connection to more aspects of society must be analyzed to find a more definite pattern in how these traits influence decisions in the United States.

As a country more socialist than the United States, it comes to no surprise that a pattern following collectivism appears in the German culture. The health care system uses this sense of community and support to spread wealth throughout society and fund health-related costs for Germany's citizens. When considering leisure time spent at events, the collectivism and support for the group hosting the event is used to encourage community between members with similar interests. In either case, the use of collectivism facilitates stronger relationships and support for all members of the group.

The paradox of indulgence and restraint with food and productivity at work, respectively, serves as a reminder that the workplace is strictly separated from the rest of German life. Even if the German culture demands restraint while in the workplace, indulgence is perfectly allowable during free time. This is also reminiscent of the meaning of *Wellness* as an antithesis to work, rather than an aspect of it. Discretely separating various areas of life into an organization of mutually exclusive entities is clearly a necessary component to German culture.

Understanding the above patterns and how each country uses certain cultural dimensions to influence society brings about awareness for the intentions behind policies and other social phenomena. Though this report summarizes only a miniscule number of infinite tendencies present in German and American cultures, it shows that analyzing the definitions and uses of a widely understood concept (such as wellness) will lead to an illustration of cultural patterns relating to each country in question.

The initial idea for this project emerged as a mixture between my experiences I gained while studying and living abroad and my interest in the health sciences as a student of the biomedical sciences. After taking a class centered on intercultural communication, I thought that I already had a strong, concrete definition of the German and American cultures. I believed that two semesters of discussing cultural dimensions and how they related to patterns seen in the behaviors of members of each society. I was not under the impression that this project would require me to seriously contemplate my view of the identity of Germany and the United States.

I originally wanted to work in the direction opposite to that of the current project. I was tempted to use broad, sweeping stereotypes that are typically used to define a culture to justify why Germany and the United States hold such different views on wellness. It took until the first large draft of the project to realize that these generalized statements were not an effective way to form a unique, in-depth analysis of the different cultural phenomena I witnessed in both the United States and in Germany. Instead of using seemingly all-inclusive cultural trends to define the meaning of wellness in the two

countries, I needed to analyze their vastly different definitions and uses for wellness and *Wellness* to understand what these differences reveal about the identity of their culture. As I continued to work on this report and this realization became clear to me, I realized that a 10-month period studying at a foreign university was not sufficient to elucidate all aspects of culture and that I would need to continue my yet-unfinished image of each country.

This project is therefore not simply a conglomeration of knowledge I acquired while abroad—as I had expected it to be—but rather a step in becoming a more aware member of my society. It also means that this project is not the conclusion of my study of cultural phenomena. The ongoing process of chasing the meanings of ever-changing social constructs will never cease, but as my understanding grows, I can better contemplate this world of intertwined cultures that surrounds me and make more informed decisions to benefit both myself and others.

Wellness is an over-arching concept that manifests itself in various ways, depending on the culture in question. Using an idea such as this—one that is both universal and widely diverse—to realize cultural tendencies opens exciting new doors. A successful project does not only answer current questions but more importantly poses new questions to explore. What does wellness look like in a less westernized country? How is it perceived in a first-world country? Are there patterns in wellness that certain countries share? Are there patterns that economically successful/lacking countries show in their views on wellness? Are there other concepts similar to wellness that can similarly serve as lenses to illuminate other perspectives of the cultures of the United States and Germany (e.g. attitudes toward nature, food, identity, life, or death)? As members of an ever-increasingly global society, these valuable questions may lead to answers that can create understanding between the unique members of a diversity of cultures.

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