Cross-Cultural Attitudes toward Vacation Time in the U.S. and Abroad

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Abstract

The current research examined attitudes towards vacation time in the United States and other countries. Specifically, this project examined not just the differences in leave policy but how people actually use their leave time. This includes both the amount of vacation time that workers actually take as well as whether they engage in work-related activities while officially away from the job. A web survey and interview questions were developed to assess whether a difference in attitudes towards vacation time exists between American, European, and Asian workers. Results indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between the groups of participants on most measures. Participants did differ statistically in the amount of leave time granted, engaging in meaningful conversations with others, and self-judgment of ability to handle situations. Given the methodological limitations of the study, however, more research would need to be done to determine if these findings can be substantiated.
### Contents

Acknowledgments............................................................................................................... 2  
Abstract .................................................................................................................................. 3  
Introduction............................................................................................................................... 5  
The Current Project........................................................................................................... 12  
Methods............................................................................................................................... 13  
  Participants.................................................................................................................... 13  
  Materials ..................................................................................................................... 14  
  Procedure .................................................................................................................... 16  
Results............................................................................................................................... 16  
  Quantitative Results...................................................................................................... 17  
  Qualitative Results ..................................................................................................... 18  
Discussion.......................................................................................................................... 22  
References.......................................................................................................................... 27
Introduction

Many workers today struggle to balance the demands of their job with a myriad of other life tasks, including family, friends, and other activities. Alfred Adler (1929, 1937) suggested that the key to a psychologically healthy life is to maintain a balance among different aspects of our lives. Adler suggested that our ability to balance demands from work, love (family), and community is essential in establishing and maintaining an integrated balanced life. Furthermore, Adler contends that “It is in his response to these three problems that every individual human being unfailingly reveals his own deep sense of the meaning of life” (Adler, 1937, p. 7). Thus, from the early twentieth century onward, psychology has concerned itself with the way that a person’s work life interacts with the rest of his or her existence. Adlerian psychologists recognize that a person’s role is not simply as a worker, a community member, or a partner in a relationship, but a combination of the three. Therefore, given the limited time people have in their lives, care should be given to allocate enough time to master each area of their lives. In particular, much emphasis has been placed on understanding the ways in which individuals balance the time they spend at work with the time they spend on other activities, such as family, social relationships, and diversions. Industrial/organizational psychologists have become increasingly concerned with work-life issues during the past few decades.

Industrial/organizational psychologists examine issues related to work-life integration, or how individuals manage to integrate their work with the rest of their life in a meaningful way. Included in this perspective is how individuals manage to organize the rest of their life around achieving their specific career goals. The topic of work-life
integration implies that we have a need to integrate work responsibilities, personal duties, and aspirations. Although these dimensions are integrated, there are times when separation (distance) can be helpful and productive. For example, workers may wish to take time away from their jobs to work on developing other areas of their lives. A comparison of academics who took sabbatical leave versus those who did not found that those who took sabbatical leave reported greater positive wellbeing, less burnout, and feeling as if their resources had been renewed (Davidson, Eden, Westman, Cohen-Charash, Hammer, Kluger, & Spector, 2010). The fields of medicine, higher education, and ministry are known for offering sabbaticals to their workers, in which these professionals take an extended period away from their jobs so that they can conduct research or develop the professional or spiritual aspects of their lives. Alternatively, these sabbaticals provide a means for those in these highly demanding fields to relax and recharge, giving them a chance to return later with increased energy. Sabbaticals can also be used to further aspects of a worker’s life that do not directly relate to their occupational role, but that provide the person with a sense of meaning in society. An example of this is a French law that permits workers to take an unpaid sabbatical from their employers in order to work on projects contributing to international solidarity (Ray & Schmitt, 2007). While sabbaticals have been popular in some industries, the option has not been widely adopted. In contrast, the United States and European Union countries have introduced family and medical leave policies that mandate that workers are able to take an extended period of time off from work to attend to their own or a family member’s health issues or to care for a newborn child. The United States’ Family and Medical Leave Act, for instance, guarantees employees, “[t]welve workweeks of leave in
a 12-month period” for reasons including a child’s birth and newborn care, care of a recently adopted child, care “for the employee’s spouse, child, or parent who has a serious health condition” or “a serious health condition that makes the employee unable to perform the essential functions of his or her job” (United States Department of Labor, n.d.). This gives workers an option for unpaid leave from work while retaining their company’s insurance benefits, thus giving support to the worker during a significant event in his or her personal life. Not all reasons for leave from work require the extended period that sabbaticals or family and medical leave require. Employers have recognized that their workers desire short amounts of paid time off work for illnesses, family matters, or relaxation. As a response to this demand, many companies have instituted benefit packages for their workers that include sick days, personal days, and vacation time. While the former two categories are often not scheduled in advance, vacation time is a form of employee leave that is typically planned ahead of time and offers the worker more options as to how to relate to his work during his leave time. Since vacation time provides employees with options as to how they engage with their workplace during their lives, it is the focus of this study.

Companies have recognized that taking time off work for vacation can have positive psychological and morale benefits for employees. Kühnel and Sonnentag (2010) found that workers’ emotional exhaustion decreased and work engagement increased after taking vacation leave. This refreshed return to work makes for better functioning in job tasks after the employees have returned from their vacation, since they are no longer fatigued as they approach their work. This can ultimately lead to greater performance at work and higher quality output. Moreover, Kühnel and Sonnentag noted that taking
vacation leave reduced the self-reported burnout of teachers in Germany. Lowering burnout levels could ultimately improve company morale, and in some cases, could reduce employee turnover. Perhaps most importantly, while the effects of vacation on employees’ stress levels seem to fade out after three weeks, the reduced burnout levels associated with taking a vacation are still significant three weeks after taking the vacation (Etzion, 2003). Therefore, many industrial psychologists today view vacation leave as beneficial not only for the employees, but also for the larger organization as a whole.

Table 1 summarizes the costs and benefits of vacation time as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Vacation Matrix</th>
<th>Costs</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of “face time” while at work.</td>
<td>Decreased number of workers for company tasks.</td>
<td>Increased work engagement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time diverted from work tasks.</td>
<td>Continue to pay workers who are not currently productive.</td>
<td>Decreased emotional exhaustion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential buildup of work responsibilities to be completed after vacation.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased engagement of workers on the job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fewer burnouts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recognizing many of the benefits of vacation leave, most American companies offer some form of vacation time to employees. The specific details of these vacation policies vary from company to company; however, these trends can also be observed at the international level. In European Union nations, for instance, employers are required to provide workers with at least four weeks of paid vacation leave each year, and many EU members, such as France, Finland, and Sweden, require more paid vacation leave than
the European Union minimum (Ray & Schmitt, 2007). In the United States, however, there is no requirement that companies allow employees to take any paid vacation leave. This could indicate that Americans do not view vacation time as a necessity in the same way that Europeans do.

Studying work-life integration in the context of individual vacation time is useful because it can examine individual differences within a limited time frame, and provides insight into how these differences reflect differing perceptions about how a person relates to his or her job. Unlike sick days or personal days, vacation time is more likely to be scheduled well in advance, which means that employees can spend more time pondering the implications that their vacation time will have on their work life. Some workers may opt to maintain a certain degree of workforce participation even while on vacation leave, responding to company correspondence or completing some work tasks while officially taking time off. In some cases, the employee may find that their supervisor expects this to occur when workers take vacation leave from the company. This is evidenced by the fact that 20% of employees who are often contacted by their employers outside of their normal work hours also report working “often or very often” while on vacation (Galinsky, Bond, Kim, Backon, Brownfield, & Sakai, 2005). The degree to which an employee can disconnect from his work concerns while away from the job is known as the employee’s level of detachment. Numerous studies have examined how detachment from work during vacation and other non-work periods relates to the employee’s productivity and morale. Fitz and Yankelevich (2010) noted that there is a curved relationship between detachment level and job performance, with moderate detachment levels providing the optimal job performance. Similarly, Moreno-Jiménez and Mayo
(2009) found that detachment from the workplace tempers the relationship between work-family conflict and psychological strain. These studies indicate that there is likely a psychological benefit to occasionally disconnecting from work duties. While these studies have been conducted in a variety of countries, none of them have compared detachment patterns across cultures. It is possible that workers in different countries would vary in their expectations for detachment levels from the workplace while on vacation. An internet survey conducted by Expedia (2011) found that there was considerable difference in the number of employees who checked their company email and voicemail while on vacation. In that survey, 58% of Americans reported that they checked these means of communication while on vacation in some fashion, compared with 49% of Danish and 89% of Indian participants (Expedia, 2011). It is hypothesized that American workers would exhibit lower levels of detachment, and thus remain more in contact with the workplace while on vacation, than European workers would. This is because there is a perception that European societies place a greater emphasis on work-life integration than the United States does. In contrast, in emerging economies, there may be less emphasis on work-life integration due to the less established nature of leisure time in those countries.

One interesting finding that researchers have noted is that employees typically do not take all of the vacation time that they are allotted. In 2005, a Family and Work Institute study found that 36% of American workers did not plan to take all of their vacation time (Galinsky et al, 2005). This is especially interesting when one considers that taking vacation time does not require that the employee embark on an expensive trip. In fact, workers are able to use paid vacation time to simply relax at home. One of the
theories of why Americans do not take advantage of the full amount of vacation time is that they fear that they will be seen as a less productive worker if they do so. In this era of corporate downsizing, workers may fear that taking a lot of vacation time could be mistaken for laziness, offering the management a reason to lay them off. David J. Maume (2006) found that men’s self-reports of job insecurity were correlated with taking fewer vacation days than their employer granted them. Likewise, workers may feel that spending less time in the office may make them appear as less of a “serious player” or dedicated worker, making it more difficult for them to be promoted (Hochschild, 1997). Thus, while a company may appear to offer considerable vacation time to its workers on paper, in actual practice it may be daunting for employees to actually take that amount of time off. Those who do take vacation time may compromise by working in some capacity while officially on vacation leave. This study attempts to address this aspect of vacation policies in American and international workplaces by focusing on the ways in which employees make themselves available to their employers while on vacation leave, and whether the decisions they make about their vacation time are due to fears about using vacation time interfering with their career goals or respect while at work. Since there are differing cultural expectations about work and leisure in the United States and Europe, as well as differing policies towards hiring and termination, it is possible that Americans and Europeans do not have similar concerns about the impact of taking vacation time on career goals. Moreover, some European countries, such as the United Kingdom, require workers to take all of their paid vacation time each year (Ray & Schmitt, 2007). This indicates that workers in some countries are expected to take all of their vacation leave, while in the United States that may not be the case. Thus, it is hypothesized that
American workers will report greater concern that their careers will be more adversely affected by taking the full amount of vacation time that they are offered by their employers than Europeans workers will.

The Current Project

This project examines cultural differences in the use and perceived consequences of using vacation leave in the United States and abroad. The objective is to go beyond the discussion of vacation leave policies and focus on how vacation leave is actually implemented in practice. This project measures both the amount of vacation time actually taken (as opposed to the amount allocated to the workers) and the amount of work undertaken while officially on vacation. Additionally, this project attempts to address whether any discrepancies between vacation leave policies and vacation leave behavior are due to workers’ concerns that taking vacation time will jeopardize their careers.

Specific hypotheses:
1) **Expectations: Time.** US workers and workers in emerging economies will expect to take less vacation time than provided by their employers. European workers will expect to take the full amount of allowed time.
   
o **Basis:** US workers will perceive that taking all the vacation time they are allotted indicates less dedication to the organization. A possible reason is that US worker identity is more strongly connected to work issues (Hochschild, 1997). Emerging economies will also take less vacation time than they are allotted because those societies will have had less of a history of a leisure culture.
2) **Expectations: Task** US workers will feel that they are expected to check in at work while on vacation.

   - **Basis:** US workers and workers in emerging economies will fear that if they do not check into work while in vacation, they will be perceived as being less dedicated, and thus more likely to be laid off. It is believed that perceptions of job security will play a role in whether these workers will engage in work activities while on vacation, with those who are most concerned about their jobs being more likely to work while on vacation. Dedication is not as strong a concern with European workers due to the nature of European labor laws, which promote greater job security for permanent employees. The greater job security will translate into less fear of being laid off.

**Methods**

**Participants**

A total of 54 participants agreed to take part in this study’s web survey, and of these, 44 participants completed the survey. When asked the number of hours they worked each week, 4.2% of participants indicated that they worked less than 20 hours per week, 2.0% indicated that they worked between 20 and 30 hours per week, 36.7% indicated that they worked between 30 and 40 hours per week, and 57.1% indicated that they worked more than 40 hours per week. When asked where they worked, 56.6% of the participants indicated that they currently worked in the United States, while 43.5% indicated that they worked in another country. Notably, 22.6% of participants reported working in the United Kingdom. Other countries in which survey participants are employed include Canada, Germany, Greece, India, Malaysia, and Switzerland. In total,
32.1% of participants were working in a European country and 9.5% of participants described themselves as working in an Asian country. In addition, participants were asked to report their nationality. The two largest nationalities reported were American (49.1%) and British (22.6%). In total, 32.1% of participants described themselves as being from a European country, and 14.4% of participants described themselves as being from an Asian country. Participants were also asked to indicate the length of time that they had worked at their current organization. The average length of time was 9.96 years. When asked about paid leave time, 93.9% of the participants responded that they had access to paid leave time, while 6.1% said that they did not.

Since the web survey was designed to be as brief as possible in order to facilitate generating a sufficient response rate, some typical demographic questions were removed from the survey. These include questions about gender, age, marital status, ethnicity, and current occupation/industry. Furthermore, the omission of questions regarding these potentially personally identifying items may have helped participants to feel more confident that their responses were anonymous. While these benefits may have been valuable in convincing some participants to take the survey, it also meant that the data included fewer variables to examine. This means that there are potential trends in survey responses that were not captured in this study.

Materials

This study was comprised of both quantitative and qualitative components. The quantitative part of the study consisted of an 18-question web survey. Most questions were formatted as either multiple-choice or five-point Likert scales, but there were five numerical response questions in which participants were asked to input answers (such as
how many vacation days they received as part of their job and how many vacation days they planned to use). Questions addressed the amount of vacation time taken, whether participants engaged in work activities while on vacation, participants’ assessments of their job security, and personal wellness. The questions on job security were modified from those originally developed by Kraimer, Wayne, Liden, and Sparrowe (2005), and the questions on work activities while on vacation were expanded from those originally asked by Etzion (1998). The web survey approach was chosen because it provided a flexible way to reach participants across multiple countries and time zones.

In addition to the survey, a set of five interview questions was developed. The interview questions consisted of three personal responses (“How is your vacation time scheduled and when do you feel you can take it? Is there any subtle pressure placed on you to either take or not take your vacation?,” “What is the greatest vacation benefit for you? What do you see as the greatest cost or problem for taking a vacation?,” and “Do you work or check into the office while on vacation? Why? How do you feel about doing that?”), and two situational questions, (“Imagine that you are working on a major group project at your job. Someone you work with insists on taking all of his/her vacation time, and is planning to take it near the project deadline. How do you feel about this person?” and “Imagine that you are working on a major group project at your job. Someone you work with had scheduled his/her vacation near the project deadline, but decided not to take it in order to work more on the project. How do you feel about this person?”). Additionally, the following two demographic questions were asked: “Of what country are you a citizen?” and “In what country do you currently work?”
Procedure

The study was conducted via a SurveyMonkey web survey. A snowball sampling procedure was used to obtain participants in this study; participants were contacted via email or social networking sites and asked to forward the survey to others. The initial participant contacts were made through asking professors (particularly in foreign languages who had international contacts), family members, and friends who had either lived or had family abroad. These participants were then asked to pass the survey on to others who might be willing to participate in the study, especially any contacts who were working abroad. The goal of using the snowball sample method was to expand the researcher’s limited international contacts abroad by identifying friends and acquaintances that had more contacts outside of the United States, and who would be likely to contribute to a project by someone that they personally knew. The web survey was created and administered on the SurveyMonkey hosting site. At the beginning of the survey, the participants had the option to check a box indicating that they gave consent to have their responses used in the research. At the conclusion of the survey, participants were asked whether they would also like to take part in the interview component of the research. If they agreed, they were asked to provide their email or phone number to be contacted for the interview. These participants were then contacted with interview questions.

Results

Both quantitative and qualitative results were collected for this study. While some significant findings were found, there are serious concerns with the sampling issues that were encountered in the study. Specifically, the sample size and snowball sampling
method may have limited the representativeness of the sample. Nevertheless, the findings may be of interest and are described further below.

**Quantitative Results**

The quantitative results were collected from the participants’ answers to the web survey items. In total, 54 people participated in the study. These participants were grouped into three nationality categories: American, European, or Asian. In general, any differences found among groups’ responses were not statistically significant, as indicated by a one-way ANOVA. That being said, there were three questions to which the differences in responses were statistically significant. These responses were to the item asking about the amount of leave time, as well as how often participants engaged in deep conversations with others and whether they felt that they could handle any situation.

The first item that found to be statistically significant was the amount of leave time that the participants received. The results of a Tukey HSD test showed that American participants reported significantly more leave days than Asian participants, $F(2,25)=6.851, p<.01$. European participants also reported significantly more leave days than Asian participants did; however, there was no significant difference in leave time between American and European participants. This finding is surprising given the previous literature on the subject by Ray & Schmitt (2007), which suggested that European participants would have more leave time than American participants due to European Union labor laws. Possible reasons for the divergence in these findings could be a small or unrepresentative sample size. In particular, relying on a snowball sampling method for participants could have resulted in participants being more similar to each other rather than being fully representative of the countries in which they live.
Of the wellness survey questions, two items turned out to be statistically significant. The first was the extent to which participants agreed with the statement, “I have deep meaningful conversations with another person at least once per week.” The results of a Tukey HSD test indicated that European participants were significantly more likely to agree with that statement than American and Asian participants, $F(2,40)=5.817$, $p<.01$. There was no significant difference in response between American and Asian participants. This suggests that Europeans were more likely to report meaningful conversations than participants in either of the other locations were. Once again, the small size of the groups involved could have led to potentially skewed results here.

The final wellness question that was statistically significant was agreement to the statement “I can handle almost any situation.” According to the Tukey HSD test, Asian participants were significantly less likely to agree with the statement than either American or European participants, $F(2,40)=4.306$, $p<.05$. It is important to bear in mind, however, that the small sample size of the Asian participants makes the accuracy of these findings suspect.

**Qualitative Results**

The qualitative results are of interest because they provide insight into how participants see the issue of work-vacation balance when asked open-ended questions. There were five interview questions; three of the questions were about personal vacation habits, while the remaining two addressed hypothetical situations related to vacation time. Five participants from the web survey also agreed to complete the qualitative email interview. All of the participants in the qualitative portion of the study were Americans working in the United States.
When asked what the greatest benefit of vacation time was for them, most participants mentioned that it was relaxing to have the time away from work. One participant spoke for most when he said, “vacation recharges me.” However, four of the participants mentioned that the additional work to complete upon returning to the office was the biggest cost of vacation. One participant noted that, “the greatest problem is the volume of emails that come in while I’m away—I try to block a few hours my first day back to dig out of email and triage my activities for the first week.” Another participant noted that, “By the time I begin relaxing, it’s time to go back [to the office].”

Participants were also asked whether there was any pressure on them to take or not to take their vacation. Responses ranged from “I have never felt pressure not to take vacation” to “there is subtle pressure to ensure that the vacation does not affect my company’s work.” Another participant explained that “…I can generally take it whenever I want with the exception of times of launch of new products.” Three respondents said that they tried to time their vacations to avoid conflicts with important projects. Another respondent scheduled her five weeks of vacation in one-week blocks “so not to put too much pressure on my team.”

Another question asked participants whether they work or check into the office while they are on vacation. All of the participants reported that they did check in with work while on vacation, but they gave a variety of reasons for doing so. One participant said that she checked in at work “…mainly because I am a control freak. I don’t like not knowing what is going on.” In contrast, another person said that “I do not want to do it; however, it is expected that I check in every couple of days. I am also responsible for reading and responding to email in a reasonable manner.” Many participants explained
that they did some types of work while on vacation, but not others. One participant described her approach as follows: “I do check email—scanning for very easy or important emails to respond to. I am very strategic in what I will do—I do not try to take care of everything—that would take all day, every day.” Another participant put it simply: “I check in only to see if they need anything. I’m okay with that.”

The last two questions of the interview dealt with situational judgments. The first situation was “Imagine that you are working on a major group project at your job. Someone you work with insists on taking all of his/her vacation time, and is planning to take it near the project deadline.” The first question about this situation was “How do you feel about this person?” There was a wide divergence in how participants responded to this question. One participant responded with simply, “they should postpone their vacation,” while another participant answered, “I don't have a problem with this person as long as they plan accordingly and get all of their portion of the project complete before they depart.” Two other respondents explained that their response to the scenario would vary depending on whether the person had already made travel arrangements as part of their vacation. One of them said, “I'm pissed they are taking it, but it is earned and if you travel you must plan ahead. If they are staying home and don't offer to change it then it is more of an issue.”

The next question asked was “What do you think this person’s coworkers think of him/her?” Two of the respondents indicated that they thought coworkers would see taking vacation during an important project as self-centered or that the person does “not take their job seriously.” Two other respondents said that they thought coworkers’ attitudes would depend on how the person was willing to contribute to the project. One explained
that, “If the person has worked hard on the project all along I wouldn’t have a problem with it. I know how difficult it is to arrange family time off.” The other person said that the response “Depends on when the vacation was planned and what they [the person taking vacation] are willing to do to make sure their role/deliverables are covered while they are out. This happens, that is life sometimes.”

The final question about the first situation was “What do you think this person’s boss thinks of him/her?” Most respondents stated that they thought the boss would have the same perspective as the coworkers. Another participant described her perspective as follows, reflecting on the different scenarios that could influence her attitudes: “I have found that your boss just expects you to do what you need to cover your work and manage your life. If the vacation puts the project at risk, then we have to plan for that well in advance. A short notice declaration of “I’m going to be out” is just bad team behavior and will get you some serious peer and manager coaching sessions. That is career limiting!”

The second situation was “Imagine that you are working on a major group project at your job. Someone you work with had scheduled his/her vacation near the project deadline, but decided not to take it in order to work more on the project.” The first question about this situation was “How do you feel about this person?” One respondent stated the he felt that this person was more committed to his job. Two other participants started their responses with “I feel bad for the person,” but then diverged into different perspectives. One respondent qualified their sympathy with, “however, they should have planned their vacation or taken on the assignment at a different time.” The other respondent’s view was very different. She said, “I would make sure I work with him/her to figure out
other ways to get the work covered or the deliverables created.” Thus, one participant was more willing for the person to change their behavior, while the other was more willing to temporarily change the organization’s workflow to accommodate a vacation. The answers to the question, “How do you think this person’s boss thinks of him/her?” also reflected the view that rearranging vacation plans to accommodate work concerns would make the boss see the person as “dedicated,” or as a “hard worker and devoted to the job.” One respondent even reflected on her own experience, adding, “I think we all have skipped or adjusted vacation plans, it depends on where you are going, how much you have sunk into the trip, what’s going on, etc.”

The interview questions that provoked the most divergent answers was how the person’s coworkers perceived the worker who canceled his vacation to work more on a project. One respondent seemed to think that others would be impressed, and think that that person is a “team player.” Another seemed to suggest that the coworkers might not necessarily be grateful for the change, saying that they would think that, “perhaps it was easy for them to reschedule and work was the priority at that time.” In both of these cases, the participants focused on the individual whose choice it was to postpone their vacation. The third respondent, however, indicated that she thought that the work group might bear some responsibility for the person’s actions. She wrote that, “Self-sacrifice is a slippery slope, as a team we need to plan and figure out how to support everyone having a life.”

**Discussion**

The results of this study suggested that there are no statistically significant relationships between nationality and most of the dimensions of vacation time that were test-
ed. The only statistically significant difference was in reporting the amount of leave time, a finding that has been noted in numerous other studies. Likewise, there were no correlations found between nationality and most wellness items; the exceptions were in the items, “I have deep meaningful conversations with another person at least once per week” and “I can handle almost any situation.” Despite the statistically significant relationships found in these two items, the small sample sizes, particularly of the Asian group, provides reason to doubt the reliability of the findings. Given the wide variety of countries presented within each group (for instance, the Asian group included participants from cultures as diverse as China, India, and Malaysia), it would be difficult to generalize the findings of this study to a larger population.

It is possible that the sampling method employed played a role in the results of this study. This project used a snowball sampling method, in which an initial group of participants were encouraged to recruit other people to become participants in the web survey. This method was chosen because it met the researcher’s budget and time constraints. While snowball sampling met those practical considerations, it did not succeed in generating a large number of respondents from a wide variety of countries. Future studies of this topic should explore other sampling methods to see whether a larger, wider-reaching sample could be obtained. Ideally, it would be nice to be able to compare specific countries to each other instead of relying on regional (American, European, and Asian) categories. One possibility would be to identify a multinational company or professional association with members in multiple countries and obtain permission for a researcher to interview or administer the survey to them. If the organization promotes the survey, this could lead to greater participation of similar respondents.
Future studies may also consider revising the wording of some items, particularly the wellness part of the web survey and the situational interview questions. While the questions were evaluated for clarity before being incorporated into the project, all of the reviewers were familiar with the research aims, and were thus more likely to interpret the meaning of ambiguous items in a similar manner. On further reflection, some of the data may be the result of different interpretations of a question rather than actual differences in behavior. For instance, participants may have had different ideas about what constitutes a meaningful conversation. These differences in understanding could be culturally based, which would also give statistically significant results without necessarily meaning that the participants in the distinct cultures were actually acting differently. Similarly, the responses to the situational judgment questions in the email interview might have exhibited a large variation due to omission of information that would change responses to the situation. Some of the participants indicated this in their responses by explaining how their answers would differ according to the situation. This problem could be minimized in future studies by using more behavioral, rather than subjective, terms in the web survey items, and providing more details in the hypothetical situation questions. This will help minimize differences due to variability in interpretations.

A notable limitation of this study was that it was not possible to isolate differences due solely to those of culture. Those who took the web survey could have differed in other ways besides culture, such as social class, age, the type of position in which they worked, and the organizational culture of their place of employment. These differences were not accounted for in the survey. An additional limitation is that the snowball sampling method and the use of an English-language survey could have restricted participa-
tion to those employed in higher-level positions or members of higher social classes. In some cases, the fact that the person even has business contacts in another country could be related to working in a certain type of occupation or organization. Future studies could attempt to control for this by surveying employees with equivalent positions at different branches of a multinational company. These workers would then presumably be more similar in aspects of their work besides culture. Furthermore, a study of a large organization could include job titles as a variable to see whether differences in attitudes towards vacation time could be related to position within the company was well as to culture. While no correlational study could prove causality, having more factors accounted for in the study design will give researchers a clearer picture of what is being measured.

Another direction that future research could take is to examine the long-term effects of vacation time. The present study did not attempt to find participants who had all taken their vacation time recently. As a result, respondents answered questions such as, “What is the greatest vacation benefit for you? What do you see as the greatest cost or problem for taking a vacation?” from their memory of the experience. This means that some participants may have remembered the experience well, particularly those who had recently returned from vacation, while others who may have gone years without taking an extended vacation may not remember the experience as completely. Several previous studies in this area have made use of a two-part method in which wellness or job satisfaction measures were assessed prior to vacation and at a specified interval after vacation. An example of such a study is Kühnel & Sonnentag (2010). In the case of Kühnel & Sonnentag’s study, the researchers used a sample of teachers who had set vacation times.
This helped them to avoid the issue of varying lengths of time since vacation in their research. Future studies might consider using a sample such as this.

While the findings of this study fail to support the hypothesis, this project does provide a direction to future studies. Future researchers should focus on developing a sampling method that will draw a larger number of participants across countries. Additionally, if the researcher could find enough similar employees across cultures (having the same or similar job titles, tenures, and industries), then the study could account for more demographic variables that could have affected the responses. Lastly, researchers could try different ways to conduct the experiment, such as face-to-face or telephone interviews, which may offer more opportunities to capture rich data.
References


This well-known book provides the theoretical basis for my paper. It provides a comprehensive definition of personality from the Individual Psychology perspective, and demonstrates how work and other aspects of life (love and social interest) must coexist in a healthy individual.


This study discusses the ways in which Adlerian psychology was used to create a model of wellness. The sample questions provided in the wellness inventory profiled in this study provided an inspiration for developing my own wellness questions.


This study describes some of the benefits that sabbaticals have provided for academics, including less burnout in their careers. Similarly, the research found that academics that traveled abroad during their sabbatical reported greater wellbeing. This provides support for both the detachment and vacation aspects of my thesis.

This article analyzed the effects of vacation time on employee’s reported stress levels and burnout. The article noted the potential long-term effects of vacation time on reducing burnout, which demonstrates the significance of vacation time for employee’s wellbeing.


This survey, conducted by Harris Interactive for Expedia.com, compares perceptions of vacation time across 20 countries. This survey addresses many of the aspects of vacation time that are relevant to this project, including whether or not employees check their company email while on vacation and whether they feel that their boss supports employee’s decisions to use vacation time.


This article examined the relationship between detachment and job performance, as measured by reviews from the subject’s peers. The study found that a moderate level of detachment was optimal for job performance, with extremes of either high or low detachment levels being detrimental to job performance. This is useful information because it demonstrates that a relationship exists between detachment from the workplace and job performance.

*This study surveyed American workers about the amount of vacation time that they are granted and the amount of vacation time that they use. Another useful feature of this study is that it also interviewed people about how likely they were to work while on vacation, which is something that I also hope to address in my study.*


*This study evaluated the dimensions of the Wheel of Wellness model, which is based on an Adlerian understanding of wellness. I used knowledge of this model as described in this study to develop the wellness portion of my survey.*


*This book provides useful information on the variety of reasons that employees do not take full advantage of the work-life balance policies that the company makes available to them. This book helped me to formulate my idea of understanding the role that fear of adverse career consequences prevents people from taking more vacation time.*

This study did not directly address vacation time, but it did address how employees’ perceptions of their job security could affect their attitudes at work. The researchers developed a survey to assess how workers perceived their job security, which I was able to use as a component of my survey.


This study found that teachers in Germany reported lower levels of emotional exhaustion and higher levels of work engagement after returning from vacation. The study found that taking vacation leave provides temporary psychological benefits to workers, thus demonstrating the importance of vacation time to worker’s well-being.


One of the most interesting findings of this study was that men are more likely than women to take less vacation time when they had concerns about their job security. The study found that a male employee’s fear over job insecurity was significantly correlated with taking fewer vacation days than he was granted.

This article demonstrates that detachment from work duties moderates how work-family conflict affects employee’s wellbeing. Work-family conflict has less of a negative impact on the person’s wellbeing if they are able to separate themselves psychologically from their work responsibilities at the end of the day. This article is useful for my research because it demonstrates the importance of detachment, which can occur while on vacation.


This article compares national policies towards paid vacation leave in many developed countries, including France, the Netherlands, the United States and the United Kingdom. This article is helpful in that it provides information not just on the amount of leave offered to employees in each country, but also the policies that in place regarding vacation time. For instance, in some countries workers must use all of their vacation time, or may not exchange additional compensation for vacation time.


This government website explains the conditions of the Family and Medical Leave Act, including the situations in which workers are eligible for unpaid leave according to the
act. This was helpful in understanding the background information about types of situations in which employees are allowed to take leave from work.