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### **Holistic Wellness in the life of Angela Merkel: A call to revise the Wheel of Wellness in the light of new Positive Psychology movements and socio-cultural changes**

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#### **Abstract**

Holistic wellness theories conceptualize wellness as a multidimensional and synergistic construct. The term wellness refers to a way of life oriented toward optimal health and wellbeing in which body, mind, and spirit are integrated by the individual to live life fully within the human and natural community. The proposed *Wheel of Wellness Model* incorporate five life tasks that are influenced by seven life forces that are, in turn, influenced by global events. In this study, the model is employed to explore the life of Angela Merkel from a psychobiographical and holistic wellness perspective. Merkel was purposively selected as an extraordinary leader who demonstrated exceptional coping abilities and wellness. Findings show that Merkel's wellness is particularly strong in terms of spirituality and self-direction. Suggestions are proposed how to expand the WoW in the context of latest positive psychology developments and with regard to socio-cultural changes within contemporary societies.

**Keywords:** Psychobiography, life-span development, Positive Psychology, Wheel of Wellness, Angela Merkel, politician, chancellor

## **1. Introduction and Orientation**

Merkel became the first female Chancellor of re-unified Germany and is viewed as one of the most influential leaders in the European Union and in international politics (Mayer & Van Niekerk, in press; Moore, 2017). This psychobiography focuses on the holistic wellness of Merkel through the Wheel of Wellness model (WOW) (Myers, Sweeney & Witmer, 2000). This model is grounded within the meta-theoretical positive psychology paradigm (Nel, 2013). Positive psychology represents an eugraphic approach that emphasise psychological strengths, optimal functioning and adaptive coping. It has, over the past two decades, received considerable attention as a psychological movement (Wong, 2019).

Wellness is a central concept in the positive psychology movement (Burnell, 2013; Nel, 2013) and is defined not merely as the absence of illness, but as the movement on a continuum towards optimal functioning, dependent upon individual self-responsibility and motivation (Roscoe, 2009). Myers et al. (2000, p. 252) view wellness as “a way of life oriented toward optimal health and well-being, in which body, mind and spirit are integrated by the individual to live life more fully within the human and natural community”. The holistic wellness theory conceptualizes wellness as a multidimensional and a synergistic construct (Myers et al., 2000), focusing primarily on the concept’s positive aspects. The model has been applied with much success in psychobiographical research of, for example, Burnell (2013), Mayer (2017), and Nel (2013).

Contemporary psychobiography has only recently moved from using mainly psychoanalytic theories to expand its breadth by drawing on positive psychology theories (Mayer & Kovary, 2019). However, the WoW-model has hardly been employed in research and positive psychology 2.0 (PP2.0) (Wong, 2019) These movements developed during the past years and represents a change from a purely positive view on human behavior towards a view that balances negative and positive aspects, working through the shadow side of experiences to finally develop a sustainable positive view and transform negative emotions into sustainable positive experienced ones (Mayer & Vanderheiden, 2019). This study primarily stays within the realm of PP1.0, but also expands the WoW towards PP2.0, taking contemporary socio-cultural and societal paradigm shifts into account (Mathekga & Sekudu, 2019).

## **2. The Wheel of Wellness Model (WoW-Model)**

The WoW model (Myers et al., 2000) has been proposed to exemplify the characteristics of healthy individuals as well as the interconnectedness of life tasks, life forces and global events (Sweeney, 2009). The life tasks interact with seven life forces while certain global events (both natural, e.g., famine and natural disasters, and human, e.g., warfare) in turn impact upon both of them. The life tasks include spirituality, self-regulation, work and leisure, love and friendship, while the life forces include family, community, religion, education, government, media and business or industry. Changes that occur in one of the life-tasks, life forces or global events will bring about changes in any of the other dimensions of wellness.

## **2.1 Life Tasks**

### **2.1.1 Spirituality**

The WOW model views spirituality as a central life task (Nel, 2013), distinguishable from the institutionalised concept of religiosity. Myers et al. (2000) defined spirituality as the individual's "awareness of a being or force that transcends the material aspects of life and gives a deep sense of wholeness or connectedness to the universe" (Myers et al., 2000, p. 9) and added that spirituality focuses on life enhancing beliefs about human dignity, human rights, and reverence for life.

### **2.1.2 Self-direction**

Self-direction refers to the ability of individuals to coordinate and direct their behaviour in a goal-directed manner (Burnell, 2013; Nel, 2013). It involves 12 characteristics.

*Sense of Worth:* This characteristic is also referred to as *self-esteem* (Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). Research confirmed that a positive sense of worth correlates with effective coping (Witmer, Rich, Barcikowski, & Mague, 1983).

*Sense of Control:* This characteristic involves feelings of mastery and confidence, along with an attitude of persistence and pro-active effort (Witmer and Sweeney, 1992). Myers et al. (2000) reported that those who have a well-developed sense of control are more likely to experience positive outcomes than those who lack control.

*Realistic Beliefs:* This characteristic refers to accurate appraisals of the self and the environment, as well as distinguishing between rational and distorted appraisals. It enables individuals to limit unhealthy reactions and strive towards mental health (Myers et al., 2000; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992).

*Emotional Awareness and Coping:* This refers to the ability to experience, manage and express emotions and is an indicator of healthy interpersonal functioning, mental health, and a subjective sense of well-being (Myers et al., 2000; Sweeney & Witmer, 1991).

*Problem Solving and Creativity:* These characteristics are linked to self-actualisation, improved quality of life and increased longevity (Myers et al., 2000; Sweeney & Witmer, 1991, Witmer & Sweeney, 1992).

*Sense of Humour:* The holistic wellness model endorsed Maslow's (1970) proposition that humour that is spontaneous, philosophical and free of prejudice is characteristic of self-actualising persons (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991).

*Nutrition:* The positive effect of good nutrition on health and longevity, mood, and cognitive functioning has been recognized by researchers (Myers et al., 2000).

*Exercise:* On a biological level, exercise is viewed as essential in disease prevention, healthy ageing, and has been found to positively impact upon chronic illness (Myers et al., 2000).

*Self-Care:* This characteristic essentially refers to "personal habits of preventative behaviour as well as remedial treatment" (Myers et al., 2000, p. 255).

*Stress Management:* The individual's ability to identify stressors and implement strategies to reduce stress has been linked to positive mental and physical health (Myers et al., 2000).

*Gender Identity:* This characteristic represents a culturally constructed identification with being male or female, and includes the satisfaction with, and confidence in, a personal view of gender identity (Myers et al., 2000).

*Cultural Identity:* This characteristic facilitates personal growth and has been positively linked with well-being (Myers et al., 2000). Its inclusion in the WoW-model was motivated by the different perceptions of concepts related to health and well-being.

### **2.1.3 Work and Leisure**

The demonstrated positive relationship between work satisfaction and other indicators of psychological wellness (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992; Myers et al., 2000) as well as the effects of unemployment (e.g., increased risk for mental illness, suicide, physical illness and social problems), highlight the importance of work as a life task. Sweeney and Witmer (1991) expanded the concept of work to also include play and leisure activities.

### **2.1.4 Friendship**

Friendships refer to relationships that do not involve marital, sexual or familial commitment

(Myers et al., 2000) and requires that individuals assume responsibilities and disclose aspects of the self within relationships based on positive regard. Friendship requires individuals to acquire social skills to be comfortable in social settings, make use of social support when needed, as well as provide others with such support (Myers et al., 2000).

### **2.1.5 Love**

This task refers to the ability to maintain long-term commitments (Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). The qualities of love relationships include trust, intimacy, cooperation, compassion, companionship, fulfilment of the need for physical or sexual closeness, and the facilitation of self-disclosure (Witmer & Sweeney, 1992; Myers et al., 2000).

## **2.2 Life Forces**

The mastery of the five life tasks described above is influenced by life forces (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). Life forces are defined as societal institutions that influence the well-being of individuals (Witmer & Sweeney, 1992) and include family, religion, education, community, media, government, and business or industry (Burnell, 2013; Nel, 2013).

Healthy *families* have certain characteristics (such as commitment to the wellbeing of others, expression of mutual appreciation and good communication skills) and these influence well-being. *Religion* can function as a source for peace, hope, values, and meaning. *Education*, has the potential for creating communities in which health characteristics are nurtured. The influence of *community* as a life force becomes clear when one considers the effect of industrialisation and urbanisation on communities. The *media* also influence wellbeing because it brings events from around the globe to the immediate attention of individuals. The role of *government* as a life force is evident when considering discriminatory practices that undermine the optimal development of citizens. Lastly, *business or industry* can promote aspects of wellness by creating working environments that foster health, and where employees are productive, competent and committed (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992).

## **2.3 Global Events**

In the WOW model, global events such as war, disease, poverty, pollution, overpopulation, and economic exploitation, exert an influence on the lives of all individuals, affecting their

quality of life (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991). Global events and occurrences should therefore be taken into consideration when the wellness of communities is under discussion (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). As noted by Sweeney (2009), the global context and events “become increasingly personal to us through the media” (p. 40). Furthermore, the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution has made the global village even more interconnected and increased the potential impact of the media on health and wellness (MetLife, 2019).

#### **2.4 Wellness in contemporary changing societies**

Recently, employers and employees have been criticized because they do not implement best practices to address wellness and mental health during the rapid changes of the 4IR (MetLife, 2019). However, MetLife has also shown that awareness creating interventions and tools, financial education programmes, and flexible working hours support individuals. In this article, it is assumed, that traditional wellness models will not become obsolete during the rapid changes of the 4IR, but could rather anchor individuals in values and concepts that might contribute to wellness despite rapid change.

### **3. Psychobiographical research**

As a research approach psychobiography is firmly established and growing in popularity (Ponterotto, 2014, 2015). Psychobiographical research focuses on the lives of extraordinary, renowned, enigmatic, or even contentious individuals within the socio-historical contexts in which they lived (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). Ponterotto (2015, p.379) offered a comprehensive definition: “Psychobiography is the intensive life-span study of an individual of historic significance in socio-cultural context using psychological and historiographic research methods and interpreted from established theories of psychology.” Psychobiographical research employs case study methodology and has traditionally been anchored within the constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm (Kóváry, 2011). The aim is the discovery or illumination of a life story through a psychological lens (McAdams, 1994). Ponterotto (2014) viewed psychobiographical research as a sub-division or component of psychohistorical research that involves the psychological study and interpretation of lives contextualised within particular historical periods.

### **4. Research Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to contribute to psychobiographical research conducted within the positive psychology movement. More specifically, the study aims to explore, describe, and interpret the life of Merkel within a holistic wellness perspective, using the WOW model.

#### **4.1 Research paradigm**

The study is based on a longitudinal case study design. The researchers purposively selected Merkel as a psychobiographical subject due to her extraordinary political contribution and her remarkable coping ability, despite coming from a marginalized societal background.

#### **4.2 Data collection and analysis**

The data collection included both primary (i.e., autobiographical data) and secondary (i.e., biographical data) data sources. A five-step process of content analysis (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Kelly, 2006) was used to analyse the data. The steps included: familiarisation and immersion, inducing themes, coding, elaboration, as well as interpretation and checking.

#### **4.3 Ethical considerations, quality criteria and limitations**

The investigation was informed by the ethical considerations of psychobiographical research (Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Taewon Choi, 2017). The considerations included the exclusive use of data available in the public domain as well as the responsible, transparent, and empathic treatment of life history data. The researchers also sought to safeguard trustworthiness and rigor via the corroboration of data-sources and the utilization of systematic steps in data collection, analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the findings. The study is limited by the focus on one elite individual within a political context. It is further limited in terms of the collection of data, drawing on mainly English, German and French literature.

### **5. Research Findings and Discussion**

Merkel was born on 17 July 1954 in Hamburg. She attracted international attention by becoming Germany's first female chancellor and one of the world's most influential leaders (Moore, 2017). The life of Merkel reflects many aspects of holistic wellness throughout the life-span. Merkel is known for her robust health and evoked concerns for the first time in her career when she presented with tremors during official ceremonies in June and July 2019, shortly before her 65<sup>th</sup> birthday (AFP, 2019).

#### **5.1 Life tasks**

### 5.1.1 Spirituality

Religion was one of the primary values in Merkel's family of origin. She grew up as the daughter of a Lutheran pastor and a teacher who moved from West to East Germany to spread the Christian gospel (Stock, 2000). In her public role, Merkel does not refer to religion much. Instead, she emphasizes religious freedom and tolerance (Spencer, 2016). However, she holds strong Protestant traditional values (Clemens, 2006) and is open about her membership of the evangelical church. In her private capacity, she discloses her religious beliefs and values and the importance attached to them (Carrel, 2017). During the refugee crises in 2015, Merkel stressed that Germany should be less concerned about the growing influence of the Muslim faith, and more about the declining influence of the Christian faith (Spencer, 2016). The Christian worldview with which Merkel grew up still determines her beliefs and values.

### 5.1.2 Self-direction

Self-direction refers to the ability of individuals to act in a goal-directed manner (Burnell, 2013; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992) and involves a range of characteristics. Merkel demonstrated a strong sense of self-direction since childhood. From the beginning of her political career, she established a reputation of a woman leader with considerable agency and self-direction (Tsioulcas, 2013). Klenke (2017) emphasizes that although woman leadership is generally associated with warmth, gentleness and concern for others Merkel can claim confidence and self-direction for herself in her leadership.

The life history data indicates that nine of the 12 specific characteristics of self-direction are relevant in Merkel's life. The biographical data did not support the influence of the other three characteristics, namely nutrition, exercise and self-care on Merkel's wellness. The authors speculate that this is due to Merkel being a private person and the limited personal information in the public domain. The next section discusses the data relating to the nine self-direction characteristics that contributed to Merkel's wellness.

Not only is Merkel's *sense of worth* strong, but she adds an interesting dimension to it. She believes that self-worth is connected to human dignity and human rights and that these aspects should never be compromised (Dempsey, 2011). For example, one of her often-quoted statements is: "Always be more than you appear and never appear to be more than you are" (McCarthy, 2019, n.p.). Furthermore, Merkel's self-worth is not only a personal characteristic



that contributes to her wellness and leadership. She is credited with a significant impact on the collective feelings of self-worth of the German society (Visser, 2011).

Merkel's *sense of control* is equally well-developed. As a child, she was known as intelligent and adaptable. Despite the family's outsider status in East Germany, she participated in peer group activities and was elected into leadership positions, for example in the youth movements Junge Pioniere (Young Pioneers) and Freie Deutsche Jugend (Free German Youth). Packer (2014) has ascribed Merkel's "self-discipline, her strengths of will and her silence" as advantages of having grown up in East Germany. Merkel has been voted the world's most powerful female politician (Forbes, 2015) and is reputed to have strengthened the German economy to become the fifth-largest in the world (Meena, Rusimbi, & Israel, 2018). At the same time, the 4IR is said to be a product of Germany and thereby a product which occurred during the time of Merkel's governance. Aspects of the 4IR developed strongly during Merkel's governance. However, she points out that Germans have to take control of the 4IR, embracing digitalization, resolving problems of protectionism and isolationism (Ellyatt, 2018).

Merkel is known for her *realistic belief system*. Here, her training as a natural scientist plays an important role. As a politician, Merkel tends to make decisions on the basis of scientifically based, complex analyses (Macias, 2017). She obtained a doctorate in chemistry at the age of 32 years. Merkel remarked: "People usually think...that I let things go on too long. For me, it's important I deliberate all options...running through scenarios, and not simply theoretical experiments in my head" (cited in Macias, 2017).

With regards to *emotional awareness and coping* competences, Kornelius (2018, p. 4) points out that Merkel hardly ever relates personal stories focusing on her experiences and struggles, since she "dislikes any excess of emotions". She is said to be known as an unemotional, distant, rather than a feminine, compassionate and warm leader (Steckenrider, 2013). Once, when on the verge of tears, her personal assistant Beate Baumann told her "to pull herself together" (Marton, 2018). This indicates her emotional side and underlines the aspect that Merkel is driven passionately by values, such as the "pursuit of happiness", "liberty and freedom" (Marton) which foster her emotions. When asked about her feelings when the German wall fell, she said: "Words cannot describe what I felt back then" (Merkel, n.d.a). In her campaign for welcoming refugees in 2015, Merkel has shown a rather uncharacteristic emotionality and passion for welcoming refugees to Germany (Mück, 2017). It might be

assumed that she portrays an “unemotional public persona” – a trait which she learned early in her life (Howell & Wanasika, 2018) – whilst being lively, emotional and witty in her private life. Although she has been criticized strongly for her pro-refugee statements, she remains committed to her belief in *Wir schaffen das!* or *We can make it!* (Mück, 2017; Mushaben, 2017) to drive the pro-refugee campaign further in Germany, associating it with positive emotions. Based on Merkel’s leadership during the refugee crisis, Helms, Van Esch and Crawford (2018) have stated that Merkel’s leadership can genuinely be described as conviction leadership since she acted on a base of humanitarian values, ethical commitment and passionate emotions.

What is widely known about Merkel’s emotions is her exaggerated fear of dogs, due to an attack she was exposed to during childhood. In a meeting in 2007, Putin used this fear in talks about the German-Russian energy crises. He led his dog into the room where he met Merkel (Della Sala & Skchurina, 2019). Merkel, whose fearful expression was broadcasted via the world media, commented on the *politics of fear* from a rational point of view: “I understand why he has to do this—to prove he’s a man. He’s afraid of his own weakness. Russia has nothing, no successful politics or economy. All they have is this.” (Packer, 2014). This reaction of Merkel to the dog debacle exemplifies her ability to use emotion-filled language to retaliate when she is treated unfairly. And, it shows that a conative or forceful use of emotional language is at times needed to react to unfair aggression. This notion of positive conation may not fit with the WoW model that is associated with a rather positive, loving attitude and where mutual appreciation are expected as model of shared goals and understanding. It may be necessary to extend the WoW model (a positive model of mental health) to also take conative or negative emotions more into account. This is in line with Wong (2019) and others who have extended PP1.0 towards PP2.0 which also takes suffering and the working through the negative aspects and emotions into account.

Mayer and van Niekerk (2020) have pointed out that Merkel has impressive *problem-solving skills* (Armitstead & Govan, 2012) that enables her to employ astute diplomacy to reach agreement (Udelhoven, 2008). Packer (2014) pointed out that Merkel resolved a lot of her problems in politics and with alpha male politicians in her own party through *aikido politics* – waiting for the right moment, using their own energy against them, while always leaving her opponents with the feeling that she cares for them. One of the biggest challenges in her political career was the refugee crises in 2015. Her strong solution-orientation enabled her to

redefine the refugee problem and offer an unexpected solution supported by the idea that *Wir schaffen das!* (Mushaben, 2017). Merkel's retirement strategy also illustrates her problem-solving skills. Merkel decided to step back as the chairperson of her party in 2018. She redefined her stepping-back as a solution for a party in need of revitalization (Schick, 2018). Although she stepped down, she stayed on in the position of chancellor for a fourth parliamentary term (The Economist, 2018). She has been credited for stepping down as chair to facilitate gradual succession (Schick, 2018).

Merkel's *sense of humour* in public is not one of her outstanding characteristics. However, she has also been described as a lively and funny person in her private life (Packer, 2014). According to Kurbjuweit (cited in Packer, 2014) Merkel's sense of humour is more related to the concept of *Schadenfreude*, that is, the malicious joy gained through the error, failure or mistake of others. For example, she once joked about her experience of working in a predominantly male work environment: "The men in the laboratory always had their hands on all the buttons at the same time. I couldn't keep up with this, because I was thinking. And then things suddenly went 'poof,' and the equipment was destroyed" (The Bild, in Packer, 2014).

Merkel demonstrates exceptional *stress management* competence. She had to cope with several unusual stressors in her life. As a child she had to contend with the stress associated with outsider-status. Yet, she managed to establish considerable political leadership by the time she was in her early 30s. Ironically, this coincided with the reunification process, and Merkel lost the position she was elected in. She overcame this setback, but soon after had to adapt to the corruption scandal that rocked the party. This scandal once again challenged her to assert her leadership in the male-dominated context. Earlier in her career she faced similar challenges in an academic context. Now, in a political context, Merkel rose to the occasion to the extent that she had not only been elected as chancellor, but also soon established leadership status in the world. The above examples illustrate Merkel's ability to manage stress. She believed that her resilience was due to her habit to relax over weekends, to function on only four hours of sleep during the week, and *camel-like* abilities (Cain, 2017).

Throughout her career, Merkel has managed to assert her leadership in primarily male dominated spaces, like physics, chemistry, and the German political arena (Schlieben, 2009). In the process she challenged *gender identities* and stereotypes (Langguht, 2005) and attracted attention for promoting the visibility, equal status, and rights of women (Merkel, 2018). In

addition, Merkel also created legitimacy for women acting politically (Feree, 2006; Moore, 2017). As chancellor, Merkel declared: “I am not here for women only, but also for men” (Merkel, n.d.b). Ironically, Merkel has been criticized for “pretending to be a man” (Jacobs, 2018). In an interview Mary Beard emphasized that Merkel dresses, behaves and speaks in a masculine way because women in leadership positions have few female role models and therefore rely on male leadership qualities to survive (Jacobs, 2018).

Lastly, Merkel’s *cultural identity* is strongly influenced by her experiences of having grown up as a daughter of a pastor and West-German growing up in East-Germany. In her political career, she advocated a strong and united German national and cultural identity. However, due to the time she spent in East Germany, Merkel felt that she was not sufficiently familiar with the West-German culture. According to Packer (2014), Merkel’s closest political advisor, Beate Baumann, translated political events and Western German culture to Merkel in a discreet way. Merkel endeavored to unify the two cultures within herself and used her experiences to establish herself as chancellor: “*I am a chancellor for all Germans*” (Spiegel, 2005). During her inauguration she used her identity and experiences as metaphor to strengthen the reunification process (Stock, 2000). Merkel’s honesty – a strong German value – also contributed to her election as CDU leader in 2000. As a credible and honest leader, she received much support from the German nation and led them through various political challenges and crises (Schwennick, 2006; Spiegel, 2005).

### **5.1.3 Work and Leisure**

Merkel held leadership positions at school and was described as an intelligent, adaptable, but private person. At the age of 32, she earned a doctorate in chemistry and worked as a researcher. Her political career started three years later in the wake of the 1989 revolutions (Udelhoven, 2008) when she joined the Demokratischer Aufbruch party (DA). Soon thereafter the DA appointed her as press agent and then as spokesperson (Stock, 2000). She lost this position as a result of the unification process. However, she managed to maneuver herself into the political context again and became a member of parliament in 1990. Later Helmut Kohl – the then chancellor of the reunified Germany – appointed Merkel as Minister of Women and Youth. Merkel supported Kohl in his attempts to unify Germany (Schley, 2005) and was soon appointed as Minister of Protection of Nature and Reactor Security (Udelhoven, 2008). In 1998, Merkel was elected as General Secretary of the CDU. In 2005 she became chancellor (Qvortrup, 2017; Schwennick, 2006). Eagly (2018) pointed out that Merkel is a political leader

who has achieved extraordinary success against all odds. She has become a symbol of social change and, according to Qvortrup (2017), the *queen* of Europe.

Kornelius (2018, p.19) highlights that Merkel's life does not only exist of work, but also of holidays and leisure time. During her childhood, her parents often took the family on holiday. During adulthood, Merkel enjoyed travelling and meeting people during her leisure time. Leisure time she uses to "switch off" and get into a "carefree attitude" (Kornelius, 2018, p. 50). It has been stated that Merkel is childless because she wanted to promote her career. However, she is viewed as a German childless model of success (Ferree, 2006) who might be seen as more work and career focused than leisure time and family driven.

#### **5.1.4 Friendship**

During her political career Merkel did not spend much time on the establishment and maintenance of friendships (Merkur, 2018). Not much is known about her current friendships (Dunz, 2015), but Merkel indicated that she would like to make more time for this when she steps down. Currently, her friendships seem to serve primarily as formal networks connected to her political activity and career. Here, her friendships with Emmanuel Macron (Hasselbach, 2018) and Barack Obama (Märkische Allgemeine, 2019) serve as examples.

#### **5.1.5 Love**

Life history data on love and relationships in the life of Merkel is very difficult to come by since Merkel prefers not to share information about her private life. The available information suggests that Merkel did not pay much attention to clothes or her appearance during her teenage years. Packer (2014) stated that her haircut attracted considerable attention and comments. Her peers labelled her as a member of the *Club of the Unkissed*, since she was not associated with love relationships, but rather with intelligence and will (Packer, 2014).

Currently, she is in her second marriage. She was married to a student friend, Ulrich Merkel, between 1977-1982. Following their divorce Merkel married Joachim Sauer in 1998. Sauer is a chemistry professor. He hardly appears in public with his wife and is described as independent, bright, profound, and down to earth with a dry sense of humour (Kirschbaum, 2012). It might be assumed that this marriage was born out of love and that her marriages, her love relationships and her childlessness have had a major impact on her life and her career – for herself as well as for others. Merkel, however, is rather associated with will and power,

referred to as tough-love politics (Zeller, 2015). She relates to the term love in the context of politics, as in a statement from 2017 on the EU: “We must make an effort for the EU we love”. Here, love is achieved through effort and hard work, will and power. Although talking about love, she is described as impassionate and unemotional (BBC, 2017). However, at the same time she is viewed as “the mother of the nation” or “Mutti” by her party and voters or “Mama Merkel” by refugees (Zeller, 2015). These ascribed motherly concepts probably include a loving attitude for the nation and her politics.

## 5.2 Life Forces

The WoW model (Myers et al., 2000) refers to the following life forces: family, religion, education, community, media, government and business or industry. We now turn to the influence of these forces in Merkel’s wellness.

In East-Germany Merkel experienced herself and her *family* as being outsiders (Stock, 2000). The family’s outsider status did not seem to influence Merkel’s wellbeing (Müller-Vogg, 2004). In contrast, Merkel adapted well, performed academically, and established her leadership in her peer group.

*Religion*, particularly with connection to her family bonds, played an important role in Merkel’s life. She has repeatedly highlighted the importance of freedom of speech, religion and belief as basis of a democratic society (Merkel, 2010). Although she does not talk much about her religion in public, it significantly influences her value system (Carrel, 2017; Spencer, 2016).

From the beginning of her *educational career*, Merkel was outstanding. She excelled at school and won the Russian-German Olympics several times (Packer, 2014). Followers of Merkel’s education and career emphasise that her scientific approach, observation and listening skills, as well as analytical ability are key to her political success (Packer, 2014).

Merkel’s experience of *community* as a life force has been ambivalent throughout her life and career. During her childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, she and her family members had outsider status. Ironically, after the reunification Merkel was viewed as an *Ossi* and this maintained her outsider identity. Rather than allowing this to undermine her wellbeing Merkel managed this ambivalence by using her bi-cultural identity to promote her career and by

relying on a political advisor to sensitise her to group-specific dynamics. She has been criticized for her *political education* and her ways of learning about the West, about democracy and the heartland of the CDU politics (Packer, 2014). However, it must be taken into consideration that she has grown up and practiced politics in very different societal systems.

Langguth (2005, 2012) has indicated that Merkel promoted her career and leadership since she knows how to use the mass media and the internet to promote her own influence. However, Rosumek (2007) argued that Merkel does not use the media in its breadth to publicise her politics, as have previous chancellors, such as Gerhard Schröder. She rather maintains her pragmatic approach to practicing politics. Schomburg, Mykhalchyshyn, and Herber (2016) pointed out that Merkel economized and digitalized politics. In 2019 she has put a new focus on the media in the context of defeating cybercrime and managing the media (The Federal Chancellor, 2019c).

Packer (2014) denoted that Merkel's political career is built on a triple anomaly: a woman (divorced, remarried, no children), a scientist (chemistry) and an *Ossi* (a product of East Germany). She was therefore seen as an outsider in politics, in the *government*, as well as *business and industry*. During her youth, she was part of the *Freie Deutsche Jugend* which helped her to register for her post-graduate studies. She has been criticized harshly for not opposing the East German regime, but rather using it for her purposes (Packer, 2014). Merkel's political context was shattered twice strongly during her political career, namely when the reunification took place in 1989/1990 and when the CDU party experienced the corruption scandal in 1999/2000. During both times, she used these setbacks for her own advantage. She maintains that in politics one must take one step at a time and that it is not the time or place for great visions, grand ideologies or higher principles. Particularly not since Germany is still traumatized by the "grand ideologies of its past" (Packer, 2014). She remains committed to her personal philosophy for being successful in the industry, namely to under-promise and over deliver (Packer, 2014).

### **5.3 Global Events**

Merkel's life has furthermore been influenced by global events, especially the aftermath of the WWII and the German political split. Merkel's life as a child was influenced by East Germany and its fall in 1989 (Packer, 2014). This event influenced global politics.

Throughout her career Merkel remain committed to global cooperation and multi-lateralism to overcome nationalism and tackle global issues, such as climate change, international regulations, the management of revolutions and change in societies, trade, digitalization, and sustainability (Bendarzsevszkij, Gere, & Maraczi, 2019; The Federal Chancellor, 2019a). She has emphasized that climate change and digitalization, are top challenges of the German society which need to be tackled proactively (Business Standard, 2019). Merkel's politics, with herself being a true representative of German's postwar generation, are influenced by global events, such as the burning of the Amazonian rainforest, the global impact of cybercrime, terrorism and the global refugee crises. However, global events in times of 4IR are also changing and Merkel takes global virtual events into account, as well as their balancing with regard to digitalization, state power, individual rights, privacy with regard to data and the dynamism of capitalism (Heinemann, 2019). However, she has been strongly criticized for not managing issues of ecology, 4IR, migration, the EU, foreign affairs, and globalization properly and it has been said that particularly the German *Angst* is projected onto digitalization (Opperman, 2019; Scholz & Grotefend, 2019).

## **6. Conclusions and recommendations**

The study aimed to explore and interpret the life of Merkel within a holistic wellness perspective. Her life reflects many aspects of holistic wellness throughout the life-span. This motivated the investigation of her life from a wellness perspective.

The findings indicate that Merkel's wellness relies to a large extent on the life tasks spirituality and self-direction. Nine out of 12 self-direction characteristics are relevant in her life and five stand out as contributing significantly to her wellness. These include sense of control, realistic beliefs, problem-solving, stress management, and cultural identity. Merkel's wellness benefits from the self-discipline she acquired while growing up in East Germany. Her training as natural scientist and researcher played an important role in the development of her sense of control. She gained a reputation for being a discerning problem-solver, but has also been criticized for her slow reaction time, which ironically contributes to her mindfulness and wellness. During her life and career, she demonstrated resilience and faced immense challenges. In fact, her career seemed to have benefitted from the challenges that crossed her path. Although she had to contend with complex cultural identity issues throughout her life, she transformed the challenges and led Germany through a demanding unification process, became a strong voice for the EU, and promoted a humanitarian solution for the refugee crisis



The WoW model refers further to seven life forces, namely family, religion, education, community, media, government and business or industry. In Merkel's life, religion and education are closely related to her wellness. Although she views religion as a personal matter, life history data indicate that her religious beliefs and values sustain her. Similarly, she acquired a scientific approach to problems, politics, and life. This combined religion and (scientific) education were key to her success.

Additionally, global events influenced Merkel's wellness, of which the significant ones include World War II, the postwar era, the tension between East and West Germany, the reunification of Germany, the dynamics surrounding the establishment of the EU, as well as the global refugee crisis. Since 2019 she has further pushed the topics of climate change and digitalization as part of the 4IR into her political framework while being guided by global events.

The WoW model enabled the researchers to analyze the factors that play a role in her wellness. The WoW-model does take a connection of work and leisure time and its impact on wellness into account, but it does not refer in-depth to the tensions regarding work and leisure time, in terms of lifestyle, gender and gender roles, or the positive or negative impacts on wellness with regard to personality, career, marital and family status. The WoW-model might need to be extended in this regard to explore wellness on a deeper level and its implications and created tensions.

It needs to be highlighted that the WoW-model primarily focuses on the positive wellness aspects and thereby falls into the PP1.0 movement which has been criticized in the past years as being one-sided. This critique is supported in this article, highlighting that holistic wellness in Merkel does not only include the positive aspects, but also takes the disappointments into account. These include the conative aspects of will and power in love, or the shortcomings of love when dealing with challenging political situations which might require a "push back" or clear boundary instead of love and appreciation to sustain intra-personal wellness. These aspects might be viewed as negative or shadow sides which, when consciously approached, can be transformed to contribute even more to holistic wellness.

It might be useful for the new PP2.0 approach and the transforming societal context towards the 4IR to revise positive psychology theories, such as the WoW model. The WoW model need to become more balanced by incorporating the negative or shadow aspects of wellness. Further, the model might need to take 4IR aspects and their impact on wellness into account, such as digitalization, human machine interaction, and artificial intelligence.

The WoW-model can also expand on a different level: information on love in Merkel, for example, is hardly disclosed in terms of inter-personal relationships. However, being described as member of the Club of the Unkissed requires a strong self-love to overcome this challenging ascription. The concept of love in the WoW might be extended towards a broader concept of love, including self-love, love for the environment, or even a political organisation. This shift needs to include negative or impersonal experiences of love. This would underline, once more, the call for the integration of shadow aspects and their transformative positive impacts, thereby supporting PP2.0 approaches.

In conclusion, this study makes three valuable contributions. Firstly, it contributes to the literature on Merkel, wellness among female leaders, as well as psychobiographical research. Secondly, it presents findings which call for an expansion of the WoW model in terms of a positive psychology theory. It proposes a shift in definition of life forces and life tasks from a PP1.0 perspective towards a PP2.0 perspective that will result in a more holistic and integrative framework.

Thirdly, the study challenges traditional positive psychology theorists to adjust the models in the light of new socio-political and economic changes within contemporary societies. The WoW-model, for example, needs to include phenomena related to 4IR, namely technologization, digitalization, and human-machine interaction. Future research should investigate these trends and their influence on the wellness of leaders.

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