

I'm a fiercely independent person. When I was young, my parents had to take extra precautions to ensure I wasn't running off in the store to charm some stranger. Because of this, my parents' aid became an enemy at a much earlier age than they do for most kids. I was capable of doing everything on my own. I always dressed myself. I never wanted to hold hands as I crossed the road. If I wasn't doing well in a subject it wasn't because I needed help, it was because I just wasn't trying hard enough. I didn't want to dress like the other kids. If I wanted to wear olive green bell bottoms and a groovy light pink polo, I was going to do it and there was nobody who could stop me and unfortunately, nobody ever did.

This independence led to my inability to trust others. If I leave it for somebody else to do, that means I'm forced to depend on somebody else and that makes me vulnerable.

Now, to most people, this doesn't seem like a problem. Most people want to be more independent. They want to be the rock, the fearless leader that people can rely on. And truly, I'm far from a rock or a fearless leader, but that's how I've always wanted to be perceived.

The reason I decided to write about independence is because of its relevance to my experiences studying abroad in the Netherlands. I can't tell you how many students I've talked to upon reentry who have told me the most valuable life skill they earned while they were abroad is independence. And honestly, that's not a bad quality to have. Even on the plane over, I believed that this experience was going to be a testament of my independence.

But I couldn't have been more wrong. I already knew I'm an independent person. Going abroad actually proved that I need people in my life. Alone, I couldn't have adequately navigated the S-Bahn in Hamburg, Germany. Alone, I probably wouldn't have found the Portcullis House in London. Alone, I would have sat in my room the night before my Dutch final thinking I was dying from the giant red blotches, when my friends knew they were only hives and that I wasn't, in fact, dying.

After coming back from abroad, I'm okay with admitting that I need my parents, my fiancé, my little brother. Weakness is okay. Admitting that maybe my map skills weren't so strong helped us to get across Berlin a lot faster than if I didn't. Needing help is only human. I

feel that as a society we take too much time focusing on personal successes: *I* earned the A, *I* earned this scholarship, *I* earned that job. We forget to acknowledge the people who helped us along the way: the professors, the advisors, moral support from parents and friends.

I know this isn't a unique personal attribute. I'm going to geek out on you for a second to put this into perspective. There's a cultural inventory that was produced by Geert Hofstede in the 1980's. I won't go into much detail but one of the cultural phenomena it measured was overall attitudes of individualism versus collectivism. Low numbers reflect more collectivist while higher mean the opposite. Brazil scored a 38, Saudi Arabia 25, Canada an 80. And the US score? A whopping 91. Not even the hard working Germans beat us. To me, this says we've become too focused on individual achievement.

Something can be learned about interdependence in a choral environment. Mr. Babcock always mentions that alone, no single person can produce a choral sound. Which seems obvious, right? But that's really the beauty of choir. We take all these people from different backgrounds, different voices, different attitudes and we throw them together in this group and hope they can rely and build off of each other to create a truly brilliant work of art. For a few hours a couple of times a week, we have to be a little less selfish, a little more vulnerable and a lot of times uncomfortable. But the end result is always worth it, isn't it?

I'm Chloe Gearhart and I believe in the value of interdependency.