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### **Culture Shock in the Land of Supersizing**

New homes in the United States are more than two times bigger than they are in Spain, Ireland, Finland and Austria according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the research institute Policy Exchange. Homes are not the only part of American life that is supersized. McDonald's, known for its trademark supersizing, offers bigger portions in America, despite phasing out the term in 2004. A "small" 16 fl. oz. soda is 1.5 times the size of small soda in a McDonald's in Brazil and Chile.

<http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/unaffordable%20housing%20-%20jun%2005.pdf> - <http://www.census.gov/const/C25Ann/sfttotalmedavgsqft.pdf>, Nutritional Information on McDonald's official websites. <http://nutrition.mcdonalds.com/getnutrition/nutritionfacts.pdf> - [www.mcdonalds.com.br](http://www.mcdonalds.com.br) - [www.mcdonalds.com.cl](http://www.mcdonalds.com.cl)), Supersize being phased out <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A26082-2004Mar3.html> Supersize™ US Trademark #74451719

McDonald's is not alone with its big beverages. The average size in the United States has increased 52 percent in two decades according to a University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill study about changes in beverage intake between 1977 and 2001. (Study Beverage intake between 1977 and 2001 - <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749379704001229>)

Brazilian exchange student Isadora Louvain finds it hard to adjust to these sizes. She has been living in North Carolina for one semester. "Two people can – easily – share a drink," she says. (Louvain's interview)

Louvain also has been surprised by the size of packages of toilet paper. “I was at a supermarket and I saw this lady buying three 72-roll packages of toilet paper. Even for my entire family, I wouldn’t buy more than one pack for my house, and it would be enough for at least four months.” (Comparisons from the first paragraph’s sources and Isadora’s interview)

For German graphic design student Mareike Assfahl, who used to live in Germany and Austria, buying shampoo in America became a big decision. “I’m staying here for only one semester,” Assfahl says. “When I got in a supermarket here I just thought I had to pick really well which shampoo or conditioner I wanted to buy, because they are so big that I know I will use the same bottle for the next five months.” (Assfahl’s interview)

Even the stores that sell the large products have increased in size. The Food Marketing Institute points out that the median size of an American supermarket increased from 35,100 square feet in 1994 to 46,000 square feet in 2010. (Food Marketing Institute - supermarket facts <https://www.fmi.org/research-resources/supermarket-facts>)

The American population’s preference for big sizes can be connected to the idea of getting one’s money’s worth or making a very quick judgment, explains Psychology Professor Denise Martz. “We call this heuristics,” Martz says. “We make decisions very fast, but often we make errors. It is like buying the most expensive wine for thinking it would taste better than a cheaper wine. However, bigger also seems to be better in a lot of situations.” (Martz’s interview)

Sociology Professor Martha McCaughey sees a link between American excess and the concept of American exceptionalism. “There’s clearly a link because companies push their supersized products market in a way that links notions of freedom, mobility and wealth to consuming products. We may think we’re free to consume what we want, but critics of this

consumer culture ask us if purchasing more products really makes us free or happy,”

McCaughey says. (McCaughey's interview)

Some people come to the United States and fall in love with this culture, and others have problems adapting. Instead of fully embracing America's "big" culture, Japanese Professor Takayuki Suemitsu learned to adapt. Since he moved from Japan to the United States one and a half years ago, he has noticed a big difference in the sizes of products, but he uses this to his advantage. Suemitsu has managed to not change his habit of consuming less, and instead stores excess product to use later. Whenever he goes to a restaurant, for example, if the portion is too big, he is happy to have left-overs for lunch on the following day. (Suemitsu's interview)

Marketing Professor Neel Das didn't take long to enjoy the culture of big portions. In his home country, India, he is used to smaller sizes — especially when eating. “I love food and anything that makes this love more positive is of course viewed positively by me. Subsequently, I developed health issues due to overeating and lack of self-control,” Das says. “Now, I am trying to control portion size, but here it is not easy.” (Das' interview)

“I do not think the reaction to portion size can be simplified to either a positive or negative,” Das says. “It is about personal responsibility. Just because it is available does not mean that I have to have it!” (Das' interview)

**This article could be accompanied with:**

- infographic comparing size of products in the United States and other countries.
- Pictures of Neel Das and Isadora Louvain in a way that represents where they are from.

-Curiosity box: this is bigger in America and an example of what's bigger here.

**Sources:**

Graphic Designer Student - Mareike Aßfahl

English Student – Kim Yeonghyeon

Sustainable Environmental Student – Isadora Louvain

Psychology professor - Dr. Denise Martz

Sociology professor – Dr. Martha McCaughey

Marketing professor - Dr. Neel Das

Japanese language professor - Dr. Takayuki Suemitsu

NIELSEN, Samara J. and POPKIN, Barry M. **“Changes in beverage intake between 1977 and 2001”** - American Journal of Preventive Medicine, Volume 28, Issue 4, 2005.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749379704001229>

CRAIG, James. **Australian homes are biggest in the world.** Economics Insights, november 30, 2009

<http://images.comsec.com.au/ipo/UploadedImages/craigjames3f6189175551497fada1a4769f74d09c.pdf>

Nutritional Information on McDonald's official website.

<http://nutrition.mcdonalds.com/getnutrition/nutritionfacts.pdf>