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Self-construals and earliest childhood memories: a new perspective from Slovakia and Denmark

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Example 1

“Probably when I was around 4-5 years old, maybe even less, my mum was busy, she was in the garden, and I was bored. I don’t even know for what reason, I went into the boiler-room and took a straw broom and stuck it into the burning boiler. Afterwards, I got scared, but I didn’t let the broom loose, instead I was running around the courtyard with it, holding it like a torch and screaming that it’s on fire.”

Slovak female, 19 years old
Theoretical model

Culture

- can emphasize independence
- can emphasize connectedness
- can emphasize group membership

Autobiographical memory

- can be from an earlier or later age
- can be more or less detailed
- can focus more on own roles or roles of other people
- can express more or less one’s autonomy
- can be more or less specific

Self-construal

- can define a person by own internal attributes
- can define a person by relationships to others
- can define a person by membership in groups
Empirical model

- Nationality
- Recall of an autobiographical memory
- Self-description questionnaire
Example of an empirical study (Wang, 2001)

**American**

I have a memory of being at my great aunt and uncle's house. It was some kind of party; I remember I was wearing my purple-flowered party dress. There was a sort of crib on the floor…

**Jewish, cheerful and optimistic, worldly, curious, creative, charismatic, a performer.**

**Chinese**

I was 5 years old. Dad taught me ancient poems. It was always when he was washing vegetables that he would explain a poem to me. It was very moving. I will never forget the poems such as…

**a college student, a girl, fun-loving, a freshman, in the Math. Department, rational, lazy to think.**
East-West perspective
A NEW East-West perspective
Our questions

1. Will the form and content of the earliest childhood memories and the type of self-descriptions in young Danes and Slovaks display a similar profile as in members of strongly individualist cultures, such as USA?

2. Will any characteristics of the earliest childhood memories and self-descriptions reveal the specific background of participants as having been raised in post-communism or welfare state, respectively?
Participants and method

- 80 Slovak ($M = 17.75$ years) and 80 Danish ($M = 18.92$ years) secondary grammar school students
- 43 females and 37 males in each sample
- Written questionnaire in the respective mother tongue consisting of:

Recall of earliest childhood memory

- Coding for:
  - Age at the time of event
  - Volume
  - Other-self ratio
  - Autonomy ratio
  - Specificity

Shortened Twenty-Statements Test

- Coding for:
  - Private descriptions
  - Collective descriptions
  - Public descriptions
# Results – earliest childhood memories

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<th>Danish</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age (in months)</td>
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<td>23.25</td>
<td>51.00</td>
<td>23.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volume (in words)</td>
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<td>29.21</td>
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<td>Other-self ratio</td>
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<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.94</td>
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<td>Autonomy ratio</td>
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<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.38</td>
<td>2.48</td>
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<tr>
<td>Specificity</td>
<td>70% specific</td>
<td>80% specific</td>
<td>$X^2(1, N = 160) = 2.133, p = .144$</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*all tests are two-tailed*
## Results – self-descriptions

<table>
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<th>Danish</th>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Private</td>
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<td>21.06</td>
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<td>9.30</td>
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<td>10.87</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>11.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*all tests are two-tailed

$U = 2692.50, p = .067$

$U = 2632.00, p = .019$

$U = 3090.50, p = .656$
Conclusions

1. Young Slovaks and young Danes seem to display a similar independent profile

2. Hardly any factors revealing the specific background of the participants

- Could the coding attend to other interesting features when dealing with post-communist and long-term welfare state samples?
  - References to extended family
  - Numbers of others / groups
  - Markers of the situation – Christmas, birth of a sibling, etc.
  - References to particular relationships (“glad to be around my family”) or relationships in general (“friendly”) in TST

- Age
- Gender
Example 2

“What I remember is that I am outside walking with my grandmother, I am wearing green sandals, we are on our way down to the beach, I am holding her hand, the sun is shining and a light cool wind is blowing around us, cloud-free sky, the weather is warm.”

Danish male, 19 years
Thank you for your attention!

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