Self-construals and earliest childhood memories

*a new perspective from Slovakia and Denmark*

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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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Slovak</th>
<th>Danish</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (in months)</td>
<td>M: 51.89, SD: 23.25</td>
<td>M: 51.00, SD: 23.60</td>
<td>U = 3054.00</td>
<td>p = .818</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volume (in words)</td>
<td>M: 54.26, SD: 29.21</td>
<td>M: 63.27, SD: 32.07</td>
<td>U = 2657.00</td>
<td>p = .064</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other-self ratio</td>
<td>M: 0.65, SD: 0.51</td>
<td>M: 0.94, SD: 1.81</td>
<td>U = 2852.50</td>
<td>p = .352</td>
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<tr>
<td>Autonomy ratio</td>
<td>M: 2.91, SD: 2.75</td>
<td>M: 2.38, SD: 2.48</td>
<td>U = 2842.00</td>
<td>p = .215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specificity</td>
<td>70% specific</td>
<td>80% specific</td>
<td>X^2(1, N = 160) = 2.133, p = .144</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Slovak</th>
<th></th>
<th>Danish</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>81.27</td>
<td>21.06</td>
<td>88.03</td>
<td>13.90</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>12.29</td>
<td>20.07</td>
<td>4.64</td>
<td>9.30</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>6.42</td>
<td>10.87</td>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>11.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*all tests are two-tailed*
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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