

Self-Enhancement and the Myth of its Functional Relationship with Independence<sup>Ψ</sup>

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## Abstract

In this study, we examined independence and self-enhancement. Independence/interdependence theory (Markus and Kitayama 1991) argues that there is a functional link between self-enhancement and independence, such that the more individuals promote the self and stand out from the crowd the higher level of independence the person achieves. In contrast, our results, comparing the two independent cultures of Denmark and the United States, did not support this positive association within either nation. Rather, independence and self-enhancement were found to be two separate psychological processes. Due to egalitarian norms practiced in Denmark, we hypothesized that Danes would self-enhance less than North Americans did. Our prediction was not supported, which contrast previous findings (Thomsen, Sidanius, and Fiske in press). We argue that this phenomenon is the result of a generational variation in social norms because in comparison to Thomsen et al's adult Danish sample, our participants were teenagers. Notwithstanding that, our findings challenge the fundamental assumptions underlying individualistic, independent societies as adhering to self-enhancing behavioral patterns; and emphasize the significance of looking within cultures when studying social relations.

## Self-Enhancement and the Myth of its Functional Relationship with Independence

Individualistic cultures are categorized within cultural psychology as adhering to concepts such as self-enhancement, which is having high and unrealistically positive feelings about oneself. The people within these cultures often tend to rate themselves as above average, which has been referred to as the false uniqueness bias (Taylor and Brown 1988, Myers 1989). In contrast, this bias is not common to collectivistic and interdependent cultures such as Japan (Markus and Kitayama 1991; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, and Norasakkundit 1997; Heine, Lehman, Markus, and Kitayama 1999). In this paper, we challenge the idea that individualistic and independent cultures have a positive correlation with self-enhancement.

### *Individualism, Independence, and Self-Enhancement*

Triandis (1995) argued that collectivists are highly concerned with the needs of their ingroup, whereas, the concern of individualists is on personal desires. Additionally, Triandis contended that collectivists are particular about similarity among their members, and do not encourage personal achievement of individual members. This is in direct contrast to individualism, which values a motivation to enhance the self above the group. Moreover, when making attributions about the self, individualists are more likely to list personal traits, whereas, collectivists base their attributions on group or environmental context (Morris and Peng, 1994). Researchers believe that individualistic behavior is commonly expressed in the Western side of the world and collectivistic in the Eastern parts of the world (Markus and Kitayama, 1991).

Additionally, when considering interdependence versus independence, empirical findings by Markus and Kitayama (1991) significantly support the idea of an East-West split in regards to behavioral norms, when using the United States as a representative of the West and Japan as a representative of the East. Their findings emphasized Cousins' (1989) argument that North Americans view themselves as distinct from their group, and thereby do not have difficulty using internal attributes when describing personality traits. Conversely, the Japanese are more accustomed to seeing themselves within the larger context of society and their environment than their North American

counterparts. These findings support the cognitive differences that researchers believe exist between independent and interdependent cultures, and reflect the differing central values of individualism and collectivism, as well as the influence they have on self-identity.

Cultural psychologists further believe that the Western hemisphere, with its individualistic, independent cultures, are more likely to employ self-enhancement as a behavioral means of achieving independence, whereas the Eastern hemisphere, with its collectivistic, interdependent societies, are more apt to engage in self-criticism as a behavioral motivator (Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, and Norasakkunkit 1997). Thus, by generalizing above-mentioned individualistic values of North America to the entire Western world, one may mistakenly assume that the citizens of Denmark would also conform to self-enhancing, independent, and individualistic behaviors.

#### *Does the Pattern Hold?*

Recent studies have questioned the validity of this pattern because much of this East/West difference in collectivism versus individualism appears to be based purely on assumptions (Oyserman, Kimmelmeiner, & Coon, 2002). Instead of finding differences in social norms, researchers have focused on differing, between-nation behaviors, and have attributed them to collectivism and individualism, respectively (Matsumoto 1999). Many works examining the Markus and Kitayama (1991) study have failed to support their hypothesis that individualistic cultures self-enhance and collectivistic cultures do not (Matsumoto 1999; Thomsen, Sidanius, & Fiske, in press). For instance, Thomsen et al. (in press) did not find a functional link between independence and self-enhancement in Denmark. Furthermore, there exists several examples of Eastern temporal cultures, such as !Kung Bushmen of Botswana and Namibia, or the Inuit of Greenland, in which the individual does not follow the proposed criteria of collectivism, but adheres to a more individual, autonomous lifestyle (Lee 1979, Mirsky, 1961). This challenges the existing idea of a dichotomous worldwide East/West split in regards to collectivism and individualism, and it may therefore be erroneous to relate a culture's societal system and norms to its temporal location.

## *Methodology*

Recent studies assert that the findings from Markus and Kitayama (1991) are merely the result of poor methodology (Takana & Osaka, 1999, Matsumoto 1999, and Oyserman, Kimmelmeiner, & Coon, 2002). Many of these studies were conducted using subjective Likert scales, which based on previous research, have three main deficits: reference group bias (Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002), differential rates of response between subjects (Clark-Carter, 1998), and an inability to accurately verbalize one's own feelings (Milgram, 1965, 1974). Specifically, in response to the methodology used by Markus and Kitayama (1991), and the implication that they failed to find Eastern cultures to be independent, it could be argued that these findings are due to biased material only suited for a Western mindset, and not based on cultural differences. This is not a new dispute, but is relevant within the studies of individualism versus collectivism because of its cultural basis, and that most of the testing materials were created by Western researchers (Berry, 1969).

### *An individualistic/independent culture that does not self-enhance – Denmark*

In contrast to interdependent/independent categorization, which would posit no differences in self-enhancement between Denmark and the US, other perspectives argue for a distinction. For example, Aksel Sandemose, an interpreter of the Law of Jante or *Janteloven*, which is a description of leveling practices in small-town Denmark, (1962) states:

You shall not believe that you are somebody.

You shall not believe that you are as worthy as us.

You shall not believe that you are any wiser than us.

You shall not imagine that you are any better than us.

You shall not believe that you know anything more than us.

You shall not believe that you are good at anything.

You shall not laugh at us.

You shall not believe that anyone cares about you.

You shall not believe that you can teach us anything.

Henceforth, one should not self-enhance, and if a person chooses to do so despite known cultural norms, a Dane would cease from associating with that person. Clearly, these concepts do not compare with the Western individualistic, independent, and self-enhancing behavior and social relations empirically found by Markus and Kitayama (1991) in cultures such as the United States. It may, from an outside perspective, seem difficult to comprehend the influence these rules have within the Danish mindset, but for the habitants of Denmark they are an important component of normal social interaction.

Denmark is also a Western individualistic culture, but in comparison to the United States, there are some fundamental differences in social norms. For example, in the comparison between the Danish and the North American educational system, it is evident that Denmark is a less competitive culture than the United States. For instance, in Denmark, there are no spelling bee competitions, valedictorians, grading scales based on the bell curve, honors, or scholarship competitions.

In addition, differences in financial norms are clear. The "reducing of financial differences" by increasing the percentile of taxable income based on salary, and providing support for those who need it is something the Danes engage in without much complaint.

Lastly, a final but important discrepancy between Denmark and the United States is rooted within linguistics. The word *self-enhancement* is extremely difficult to translate into Danish. The most similar word is the Danish word *selvforhøjelse*, which literally means an "elevation of the self." Additional Danish words with high similarity to the concept of self-enhancement also have strong negative connotations attached. An example of such is *selvglad*, which literally translates to *self-happy*. By use of a dictionary, the English match to *selvglad* is *self-satisfied* (Axelsen, 1992), which does not carry the same negative undertone as the Danish term and thereby re-emphasizes linguistic differences that lie between the English and Danish languages, particularly in regard to positive self descriptors.

These concrete variations imply that there is a dissimilar standard endorsed between Denmark and the United States on topics such as competition, achievement, and the idea of promoting

oneself above the mean. Denmark is indeed part of the Western, individualistic world - yet it remains within the mindset of Aksel Sandemose's *Jantelov*. Therefore, the apparent functional link between individualism, independence, and self-enhancement, which can be implied from the literature present on these topics, seems not to capture the Danish social norms.

It is with this background we hypothesize that:

- 1) Denmark, as well as the United States, is an individualistic, independent culture.
- 2) There is no association between self-enhancement and independence within Denmark or the United States.
- 3) Within a culture, there is a negative correlation between the degree of self-enhancement and adherence to *Janteloven*.
- 4) Self-enhancement level is significantly less in Denmark as compared to the United States.
- 5) Danes dislike associating with self-enhancers more so than do North Americans.

## Methods

### *Participants*

The Danish sample consisted of 25, second-year students from Risskov Amtsgymnasium (RG), and 18 students from Grenaa Gymnasium (GG). The students from Risskov ranged in age from 17 to 19 years old ( $M=17.75$ ,  $SD=0.61$ ). Participants were 18 females, 6 males, and 1 whose gender was not reported. Ethnic background was homogeneous, with 24 categorizing themselves as "White," and one who did not respond. Additionally, 23 students confirmed that both their parents were born in Denmark with one participant from an immigrant home, and one questionnaire left incomplete. The students from Grenaa ranged in age from 16 to 18 years old ( $M=17.00$ ,  $SD=0.59$ ). There were 16 females and 2 males participants. Within the sample, 16 categorized themselves as "White," one "Asian," and one "Other." Additionally, 15 students confirmed that both their parents were born in Denmark with only one participant from an immigrant home and two questionnaires were left incomplete. Combined to an overall Danish sample, the age ranged from 16 to 19 years old ( $M=17.43$ ,  $SD=0.70$ ).

The North American sample consisted of 43 students from University of California, Los Angeles. The age range of the participants was 16 to 19 ( $M=17.72$ ,  $SD=0.98$ ). Furthermore, the sample contained 37 females and 6 males. Thirty-five students were born within the US, five were from immigrant homes, and three questionnaires were left incomplete. However, the ethnic background was more diverse than the Danish students, with 20 participants categorizing themselves as “White,” 17 as “Asian,” three as “Other,” two as “Latino,” and one as “African-American.”

### *Procedure*

In the Danish sample, students completed the questionnaire privately in a large classroom. The North American participants completed the measures privately in small groups. In the Danish samples, participation was voluntary and no subsidy was given to any of the students for their effort; however, in the North American sample, subjects participated for course credit.

### *Materials*

The questionnaire packet consisted of several measures. These included independence, levels of self-enhancement, social norms, and demographics. Furthermore, the students were randomly assigned to either an anonymous or non-anonymous condition. In the non-anonymous scenario, the participants were asked to provide their phone number and email. This section was not included in the anonymous questionnaire. Every item was translated, and back translated by three bilingual Danish graduate students studying within the United States. If any discrepancy arose, all three translators discussed the item. The manipulation of anonymous versus non-anonymous was included to ensure that the Danish sample did not self-enhance anonymously. Hence, we wanted to make sure that the societal difference was not merely that Danes self-enhance privately, whereas, Americans do so publicly.

Twenty Statement Test. We used the Twenty Statement Test (Kuhn & McPartland, 1954) to measure independence versus interdependence. Participants were asked to complete the sentence “I am.” In contrast to Likert scale ratings, where it can be difficult to draw cross-

cultural conclusions upon these results due to reference group effects (Heine, Lehman, Peng, & Greenholtz, 2002), this measure allowed participants to compare a given attitude to their surroundings.

The words were subjectively coded as independent or interdependent. Interdependent words included physical states of being (“I am thirsty”), contextualized answers (“I am social around my friends”, or “I am smart sometimes”), age, gender, ethnicity, occupation and social roles (“I am a mother”). Characteristics such as specific psychological traits (“I am friendly”) were coded as independent. Answers that could possibly fall in either category were coded conservatively as interdependent.

Two individuals, fluent in both English and Danish, independently coded the responses. There was a high percentage of inter-rater agreement: 96.7% for the Danish sample and 92.8% for the North American sample.

Autonomy. In order to determine the level at which the participants explicitly valued autonomy and independence, three different situations were developed in which the students imagined themselves having a difference of opinion with a parental figure. The scenarios included instances such as: “Would you move in with your partner although your parents oppose the decision?” The answers were measured on a six-point Likert-scale ranging from “very important” to “not very important.” The three autonomy scenarios were all strongly positively associated in the RG sample ( $.359 < r < .663$ ), the GG sample ( $.480 < r < .734$ ), and when the samples were combined into an overall Danish sample ( $.403 < r < .615$ ). Cronbach’s reliability level for RG was  $\alpha=0.74$ , for GG  $\alpha=0.83$ , and for the overall Danish  $\alpha=0.78$ . In the North American sample the association was strong ( $.540 < r < .548$ ) except for between scenario one and two ( $r = .153$ ). Cronbach here was  $\alpha = 0.67$ .

Attribution Task. Adapted from the Hong, Morris, Chiu, and Benet-Martinez (2000) attribution task, we included “the fish story.” The illustration portrays six identical fish. Five of the fish are swimming in a group with the sixth fish swimming ahead. Participants were here asked first to

describe the scenario, and then to explain in detail why one of the fish was swimming in front of the group.

The stories were coded for the total number of attributes ascribed to why one fish is in front, the number of attributes to the individual agent in comparison to context, and the positive versus negative construction of the individual compared to the group. Again, two independent coders read the scenarios. The generalizability coefficient was high with  $\rho = .850$  for the Danish sample and fair for the North American sample with  $\rho = .560$ .

Self-Enhancement. To test self-enhancement within the individual participants, we followed Markus and Kitayama's report of Myers' (1989) results. He found that North American college students in general have a tendency to believe they are above average on traits such as intelligence. Building on this notion, we included a percentile scale measuring intelligence, attractiveness, ability to get along with others, leadership ability, and leadership motivation. Within the RG sample the items were positively associated ( $.223 < r < .765$ ) except for rating on attractiveness and ability to get along with others and attractiveness and motivation/desire to lead, which was not associated. In the GG sample the association looked somewhat different ( $-.140 < r < .530$ ) with the only significant positive association being between leadership abilities and intelligence. Finally, within the North American sample answers were ( $.285 < r < .836$ ). All answers here were positively associated except for motivation/desire to lead and attractiveness, which were not correlated. The RG and GG were again combined to an overall Danish sample. Here, the items were positively associated ( $.239 < r < .641$ ) except for the percentile rating on attractiveness, which had no significant correlation with any other item. When we combined all the answers into a sub-composite of percentile ratings Cronbach's  $\alpha=0.84$  in the North American sample,  $\alpha=0.80$  in RG and  $\alpha=0.60$  in GG. The overall Danish sample was  $\alpha=0.73$ .

We furthermore included Taylor and Gollwitzer's (1995) positive illusions measure. The reliability levels were RG  $\alpha =0.71$ , GG  $\alpha =0.86$ , American  $\alpha=0.82$ . The overall Danish reliability was  $\alpha=0.80$ . The percentile and the positive illusion scores had an association within RG of ( $r = .624$ ,  $p =$

.001) and within GG ( $r = .807, p < .000$ ). The overall Danish was ( $r = .687, p < .000$ ) and the US ( $r = .386, p = .011$ ). In order to control for differential variance of the two scales, we standardized and combined them to a composite self-enhancement measure.

Associating with Self-Enhancers. As a measure of how likely participants are to associate with self-enhancers on an everyday basis, such as choosing someone as a roommate or a person to work with as part of a group assignment, a “liking” scale was developed. This part of the questionnaire consisted of 12 personality descriptions. The narratives were randomly chosen from an original 150 stories with six of them being written by Danes and six by Americans. The task involved rating the person described, on a first impression basis, on a scale of one to seven – one being “I don’t like the person at all” and seven “I like the person very much.” Additionally, the students were asked at the end to rank their first through sixth choice of personalities in a roommate condition and in a situation where the participant would be working with the hypothetical person on a group project. Because people throughout their lives have to make endless “liking a person or not” decisions based on first hand impressions, it was assumed that participants knew their own preference when it came to social relations even when they are not able to explain the rationale behind their choice. From these ratings, it was then possible to compute an overall score for the participants’ willingness to choose a particular personality description as a potential roommate or study partner.

Liking of Self-Enhancers. Since this task was mainly included to identify the presence of *Janteloven*, the focus was directed on identifying descriptions containing prototypical examples of such nature. Five of the stories were judged by three independent Danes fluent in both languages as being considerably higher in words breaching the *Janteloven* than the others, such as “I am very intelligent,” or “I am part of the group that everyone wants to be around.” These scenarios were therefore selected as an indicator of the participants’ liking of self-enhancers. Within the questionnaire these five stories were identified by the letters c, e, i, j, and g. In our analysis of the data, we reverse coded the Jante breaching stories, which consequently meant that the higher the positive correlation between these

items the more participants disliked these particular scenarios. In the RG sample two items were found to be positively associated: scenario e and c ( $r = .593, p = .002$ ) and scenario j and i ( $r = .488, p = .025$ ). Cronbach's reliability level between all five items were  $\alpha = 0.72$ . In the GG sample there were no significant correlations and the reliability level between the five items was  $\alpha = 0.37$ . In the overall Danish sample the same patterns as in the RG were found with a positive association between scenario e and c ( $r = .531, p = .002$ ) and also between scenario j and i ( $r = .374, p = .021$ ). The reliability level between the five items here was  $\alpha = 0.67$ . However, within the American sample the pattern was a bit different ( $-.296 < r < .436$ ) with only one significant positive correlation between description j and g. The reliability was  $\alpha = 0.30$ . As suspected, the reliability levels were not very high in the American sample because we specifically tested for a construct, which we hypothesized to play a major role in Danish, but not American culture. Consequently, there is no prior reason to believe that we would find such a construct in the United States – and indeed the non-existing reliability suggests that we do not.

## Results

### *Hypothesis 1*

Danes, as well as the Americans, live in individualistic, independent cultures.

To test this hypothesis, three different measures of independence were used: the TST, the attribution task, and the autonomy of personal life-decisions scenarios. Using one-way ANOVAS, the TST showed no significant difference between the Danish and American use of independent statements ( $M_{\text{Denmark}} = 65.936, M_{\text{US}} = 59.730, F = 1.236, p = .270$ ). The attribution task, also showed no significant difference between Danes and Americans (see figure 1) ( $M_{\text{Denmark}} = 67.917, M_{\text{US}} = 75.784, F = 1.054, p = .308$ ).

In the *autonomous life-decision scenarios*, where participants were asked to oppose their parents' will in making choices regarding the participants' own lives, Danes proved to be significantly more autonomous in their answers than the North Americans students (see figure 2;  $M_{\text{Denmark}} = 4.768, M_{\text{US}} = 3.124, F = 55.630, p < .000$ ). This supported our prediction, that Danes are at least as independent as Americans.

## *Hypothesis 2*

Within the two cultures, we wanted to see if self-enhancement and independence are two independent psychological processes. The results of the American sample supported the notion that there is no association between independence and self-enhancement. Using Pearson's correlation coefficient the association between self-enhancement and the number of psychological answers given on the TST was ( $r = 0.065, p = .695$ ). Between self-enhancement and the proportion of individual psychological attributions made as to why one fish is in front, the correlation was ( $r = 0.058, p = .745$ ), and between self-enhancement and the autonomy scenarios ( $r = -0.107, p = .494$ ).

Within the Danish sample, the correlation was also not significant between self-enhancement and the proportion of individual psychological attributions made as to why one fish is in front ( $r = 0.121, p = .456$ ), and between self-enhancement and the autonomy scenarios ( $r = 0.222, p = .153$ ). Within the Danish sample, there was nevertheless a significant correlation between self-enhancement and the proportion of psychological answers given on the TST ( $r = 0.459, p = .002$ ). However, since a high positive correlation between the number of psychological attributions given and the number of positive statements ( $r = 0.835, p < .000$ ) on the TST was found, it shows that these variables are not independent of one another. This can be explained in how the answers were coded. All neutral statements were additionally coded as non-psychological attributions, and vice versa, for instance "I am tall" was coded as neutral and thereby non-psychological. This in turn means that the more psychological attributions participants make, the greater their chances are of saying something positive about themselves. It is therefore important to look at the relationship between self-enhancement and the TST with a partial correlation controlling for the number of positive statement given. By taking out the variance on the TST, which can be accounted for by positive statements, the association between the number of psychological attributions given on the TST and independence disappears. The shared variance left between self-enhancement and psychological attributions when controlling for positive statements is, with a correlation of ( $r = 0.218, p = .165$ ), not significant.

As predicted by our hypothesis, there seems to be no evidence of a positive association between self-enhancement and independence within Denmark or the United States.

### *Hypothesis 3*

We did not find support for our hypothesis that there is a negative correlation between *Janteloven* and self-enhancement within Denmark ( $r = .045$ ,  $p = .778$ ), or within the United States ( $r = -.050$ ,  $p = .749$ ). This indicates that there is not a within-culture correlation, such that the more a person self-enhances the less the person adheres to *Janteloven*.

### *Hypothesis 4*

Levels of self-enhancement found did not significantly support the prediction that overall Americans self-enhance more than Danes. This was the case for the positive illusions *How I See Myself Questionnaire* ( $M_{\text{Denmark}} = 4.846$ ,  $M_{\text{US}} = 4.864$ ,  $F = .017$ ,  $p = .897$ ), the percentile rating ( $M_{\text{Denmark}} = 61.957$ ,  $M_{\text{US}} = 64.709$ ,  $F = 1.177$ ,  $p = .281$ ), and the combined self-enhancement composite ( $M_{\text{Denmark}} = -.0654$ ,  $M_{\text{US}} = .0654$ ,  $F = .486$ ,  $p = .488$ ). However, it is worth noting that Americans rated themselves higher than the Danish students on all three measures, though not enough for it to be of significant difference.

Manipulation of Anonymity Variable. In order to eliminate the argument that Danes actually do self-enhance – they just do so privately, a condition of anonymity was added to the questionnaire. This condition was randomly assigned in both the Danish and the North American samples, with an equal number of either questionnaires being distributed. To validate the argument that Danes self-enhance privately, it should then be that participants self-enhance more in the anonymous condition as opposed to the non-anonymous. Indeed, this was the case for the North American sample, but not for the Danish students ( $M_{\text{Denmark non-anonymous}} = .0222$ ,  $M_{\text{Denmark anonymous}} = -.1348$ ,  $M_{\text{US non-anonymous}} = -.0916$ ,  $M_{\text{US anonymous}} = .1898$ ,  $F = 1.336$ ,  $p = .251$ ) on the standardized self-enhancement composite. Thus, the results do not support the hypothesis that Danes self-enhance privately. This agrees with our hypothesis regarding *Janteloven* as a social norm, which is not openly practiced but is still adhered to within social relations among the Danes.

### *Hypothesis 5*

As a procedural measure of self-enhancement, and as an assessment of whether Danes dislike self-enhancers more so than North Americans, a measure of *how much do you dislike being a*

*roommate with self-enhancers* and *how much do you dislike working in a study group with self-enhancers* were measured. Here, the difference in how aversive Danes, as compared to North Americans, found the idea of having self-enhancers as possible roommates ( $M_{\text{Danes}} = 29.000$ ,  $M_{\text{Americans}} = 27.914$ ,  $F = 1.776$ ,  $p = .188$ ) and study partners ( $M_{\text{Danes}} = 28.792$ ,  $M_{\text{Americans}} = 27.105$ ,  $F = 3.488$ ,  $p = .067$ ) was slightly higher within the Danish sample though not significantly different from the North American (see figure 3 and 4).

However, *the relative disliking of positive self-descriptions versus all other self-descriptions* was significantly greater within the Danish sample, as compared with the North American, ( $M_{\text{Denmark}} = 17.171$ ,  $M_{\text{US}} = 14.977$ ,  $F = 6.052$ ,  $p = .016$ ). This supports the prediction that Danes dislike people who explicitly self-enhance, whereas, this is not the case for the North American students (see figure 5).

## Discussion

In this study, we examined independence and self-enhancement on a within as well as on a between culture level. In both Denmark and the United States participants were found to be highly independent individuals. Hence, independent, de-contextualized terms were well above the mean on the TST, and statements that are more psychological were directed toward the individual agent in the attribution task. Furthermore, both cultures valued autonomy more so than complying with an authority figure, such as a parent, as measured by the self-report autonomy scenarios.

Contradictory to Markus and Kitayama's (1991) study, we found no support within either culture for a positive association between self-enhancement and independence. At first glance there appeared to be quite a strong positive relationship between self-enhancement and the proportion of independent statements answered on the TST within the Danish sample; however, when controlling for the proportion of positive attributions the association vanished. It cannot, therefore, be the case that individuals need to promote the self and "stand out from the crowd" in order to be independent agents as was previously believed.

Looking at self-enhancement on a between-culture level, we found a significant difference in how willing Danes, as compared to North Americans, are to associate with self-enhancers, such that

Danes disliked the positive self-descriptions much more than did North Americans. This supports our hypothesis that Denmark, as a very egalitarian culture, finds it aversive when people explicitly portray themselves as better than average.

However, we did not find support for our hypothesis that North Americans self-enhance significantly more than they did not find support for our hypothesis Danes self-enhance significantly. Nonetheless, this is very interesting because it goes against previous findings (Thomsen, Sidanius, and Fiske, in press). Thomsen et al (in press) reported a much lower level of self-enhancement within their Danish sample as compared to North Americans - contrasting to what our data show. What is noteworthy is that their Danish participants had a mean age of 27, where we, with a mean age of 17, had a much younger Danish sample. This could indicate that there have been some fundamental psychological changes within the younger Danish population in the area of self-perception. Based on ethnographic data, this "Americanization" shines through on issues such as television. For instance, my family, as one of the first on the block, did not get cable television until I was 14 years old – I am now 24, which means that I grew up with two television channels. This is very different from Denmark today where the average family has 30+ channels showing North American movies, sitcoms, reality shows, and talk shows at any point of the day. Additionally, a very self-enhancing concept such as "employee of the month," which celebrates an individual's accomplishments in an extremely public manner, was recently introduced to the Danes by the North American icon McDonald's. The first McDonald's opened in 1981, and in 1992 when Thomsen et al's (in press) participants were 17 years old there were 21 restaurants throughout the country. Today, in 2003, this number has risen to 99 locations. The external environment in Denmark is changing, which may explain why the Danish student population today is more comparable to the North American than it was 10 years ago. It may be these societal changes, which lead to higher similarity on concepts such as perception of the self between the North American and Danish samples. However, additional research to further establish this hypothesis is needed to make any conclusive remarks.

Based on the findings of this study, we draw the following conclusions: There is no functional relationship between self-enhancement and independence, and furthermore that although Danes may

find explicit articulations of self-enhancement aversive, the individual 17-year-old Dane is not much different from the 17-year-old North American when it comes to self-report measures of personal abilities.

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## Figure Caption

Figure 1. Proportion of individual attributions made as to why one fish is swimming in front as a function of nationality.

Figure 2. Proportion of autonomous answers as a function of nationality.

Figure 3. Level of dislike experienced from the idea of having a self-enhancer as roommate as a function of nationality.

Figure 4. Level of dislike experienced from the idea of having a self-enhancer as study partner as a function of nationality.

Figure 5. Level of dislike experienced from people who explicitly self-enhance as a function of nationality.

# Figures

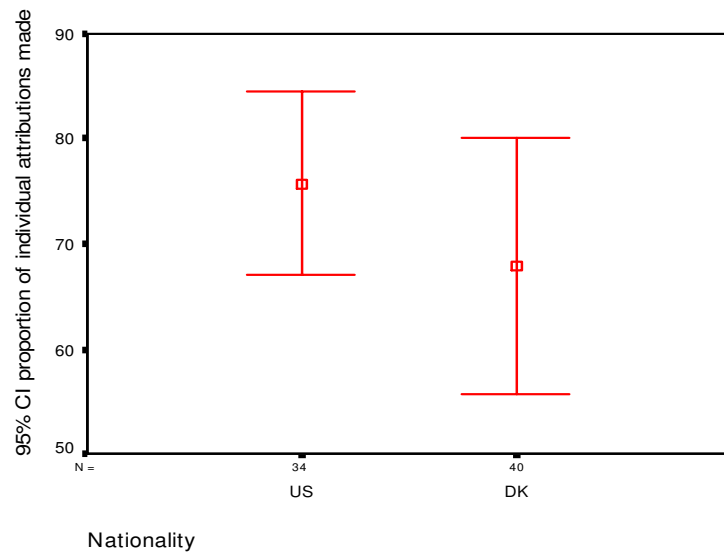


Figure 1

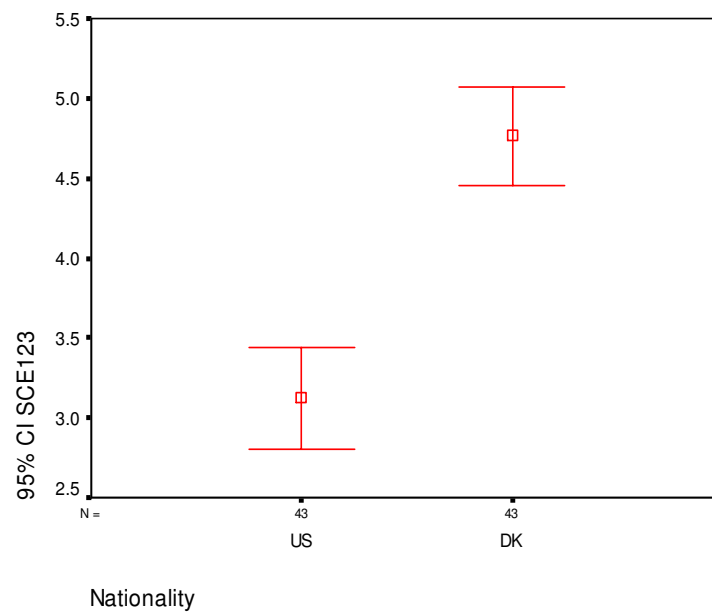


Figure 2

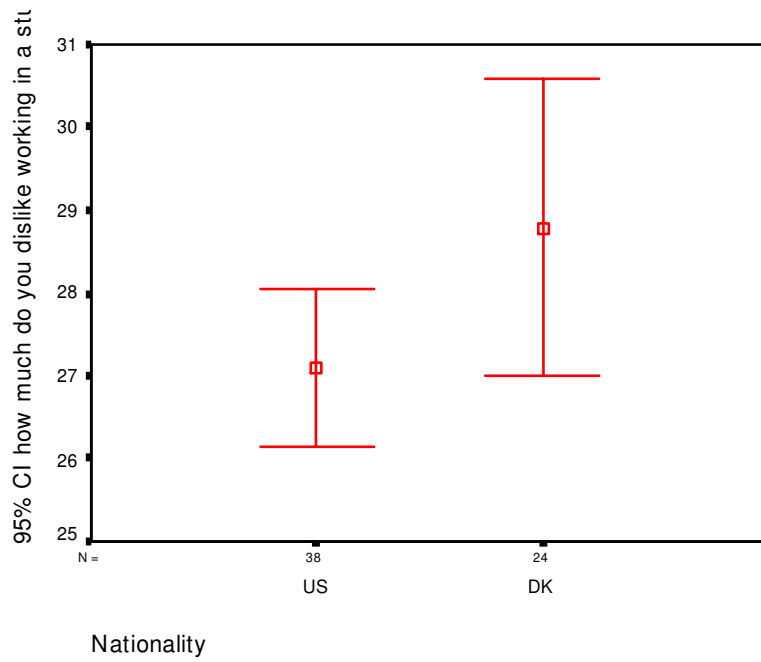


Figure 3

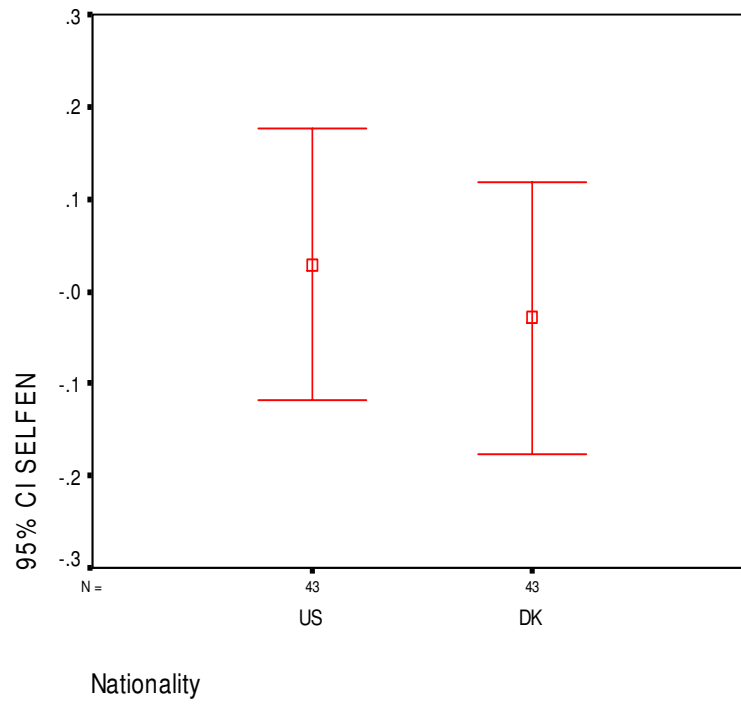


Figure 4

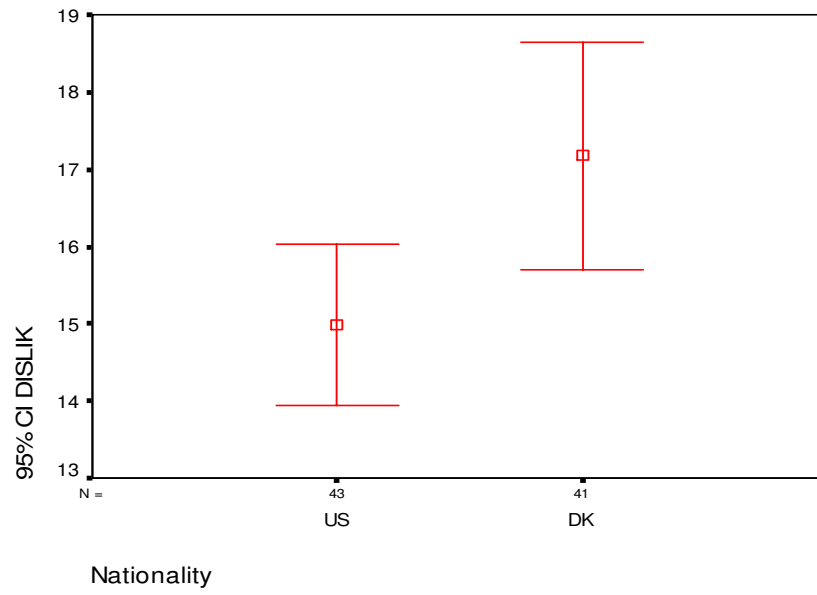


Figure 5