

SHORT NOTE

**Which studies test whether self-enhancement is pancultural?
Reply to Sedikides, Gaertner, and Vevea, 2007**Steven J. Heine,¹ Shinobu Kitayama² and Takeshi Hamamura¹¹University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; and ²University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA

What types of studies test the question of pancultural self-enhancement? Sedikides, Gaertner, and Vevea (2007) have identified inclusion criteria that largely limit the question to studies of the better-than-average effect (i.e. 27 out of 29 effects that they include as 'validated' and 'relevant'). In contrast, other effects which they labelled as 'unvalidated' or 'irrelevant' used methods other than the better-than-average effect (i.e. 24 out of 24 effects). Because Sedikides *et al.* are drawing conclusions about pancultural self-enhancement and not the pancultural better-than-average effect, these excluded studies are relevant to the hypothesis under question. Ignoring the findings from other methods is highly problematic, in particular because these other methods yield results that conflict with those from the better-than-average effect. An analysis of effects from all studies reveals no support for pancultural self-enhancement.

Key words: culture, meta-analysis, self-enhancement.

We appreciate this opportunity to respond to Sedikides, Gaertner, and Vevea's (2007) reply to our comment (Heine, Kitayama, & Hamamura, 2007) on their response (Sedikides, Gaertner, & Vevea, 2005) to Heine's rejoinder (Heine, 2005) to Sedikides, Gaertner, and Toguchi's (2003) challenge to our original paper (Heine, Lehman, Markus, & Kitayama, 1999) that questioned the universality of the self-enhancement motive.

We are pleased to see that the analyses from the six key papers of contention (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Heine & Lehman, 1995, 1999; Kitayama, Markus, Matsumoto, & Norasakkunkit, 1997; Heine *et al.*, 2001; Heine & Renshaw, 2002) that two of us have worked on to address the question of pancultural self-enhancement are now included in the Sedikides *et al.* (2007) meta-analyses on this topic. However, we dispute the criteria that they use to determine which studies are appropriate to test the question of pancultural self-enhancement.

A perusal of the effects from tables 1 and 3 of Sedikides *et al.*'s (2007) meta-analyses yields two sets of findings. One set is largely consistent with their hypotheses regarding pancultural self-enhancement, and finds Westerners self-enhancing more on individualistic than collectivistic dimensions, and East Asians self-enhancing more for traits

that they view to be especially important. The other set largely reveals the precise opposite pattern: Westerners self-enhancing less on individualistic than collectivistic dimensions and East Asians self-enhancing less for traits that they view to be especially important. Sedikides *et al.* (2007) deem the vast majority of the studies in this latter set to be 'unvalidated' or 'irrelevant' to the question of pancultural self-enhancement and these studies are ignored in the conclusions that they draw.

What studies are relevant to the question of pancultural self-enhancement? We submit that Sedikides *et al.*'s (2007) criteria for what entails self-enhancement are unique to the field, and are dubious in validity. According to their inclusion criteria, the only acceptable measures of self-enhancement are those studies that 'provide a measure of self versus other perception'. What this means is that 27 of the 29 effects that Sedikides *et al.* (2007) considered to be 'validated' and 'relevant' are measures of the better-than-average effect (Heine & Hamamura, 2007; Hamamura, Heine, & Takemoto, in press), whereas 24 of the 24 effects that they considered to be 'unvalidated' or 'irrelevant' used measures other than the better-than-average effect. Furthermore, Sedikides *et al.* (2007) only included four of the eight effects from Hamamura *et al.* (in press) in table 3. The other four effects are, for some reason, excluded and it is worth noting that these effects both would seem to meet their criteria of relevance and do not support pancultural self-enhancement. It is problematic to limit a meta-analysis to survey the results from largely one method, when there are dozens of different operationalizations of self-enhancement (we identified 30

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in a recent meta-analysis of cross-cultural studies; Heine & Hamamura, 2007). Their criteria are even more questionable as there is a growing chorus of voices that there is something problematic with using the better-than-average effect as a measure of self-enhancement as the measure implicates various non-motivational mechanisms that are not included in other measures of self-enhancement (Klar & Giladi, 1997; Kruger, 1999; Chambers & Windschitl, 2004; Kwan, John, Kenny, Bond, & Robins, 2004). But their criteria strike us as most insupportable because the studies that use other designs yield the opposite pattern of findings with respect to the question of pancultural self-enhancement as that found with the better-than-average effect (BAE; Heine *et al.*, 2007). Rather than discuss this contrary set of findings, or offer explanations why they might yield a different pattern, Sedikides *et al.* (2007) offer the conclusion that these studies can be labelled irrelevant to the question of pancultural self-enhancement, and can be ignored, as they have done in their previous papers. Elsewhere, we offer an explanation and empirical evidence (Heine, 2005; Hamamura *et al.*, in press), to account for the findings from all the studies in the meta-analyses.

In summary, we conclude that self-enhancement is a far broader phenomenon than that encapsulated by the very narrow inclusion criteria used by Sedikides *et al.* (2007). This is problematic if they wish to conclude, as they do, that their meta-analyses demonstrate support for pancultural self-enhancement, and not the pancultural better-than-average effect. In their appendix I, Sedikides *et al.* (2007) offer arguments as to why the six papers in contention do not meet their inclusion criteria; however, in none of their papers do they ever discuss why pancultural self-enhancement can only be tested with such criteria. Inclusion criteria for meta-analyses must be consistent with the conclusions that are drawn, and Sedikides *et al.*'s (2007) inclusion criteria are at odds with their conclusions regarding pancultural self-enhancement. We invite readers to read the various studies that were excluded for being unvalidated or irrelevant and decide for themselves whether these address the question of pancultural self-enhancement. We contend that when you look at all the studies that have investigated this question, as we did in Heine *et al.* (2007), there is no support for the notion that East Asians tactically self-enhance on dimensions that are important to them.

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