

*Taiwanese Parents' Reactions to the Achievement of their Children: Vertical
Distinctiveness Versus Horizontal Distinctiveness*

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Abstract

Study 1 adopted parents of 1st and 2nd graders as well as 8th and 9th graders as participants to recall their children's good performance or achievements. The results showed that parents of 8th and 9th graders recalled higher ratio of vertical distinctiveness (VD) than any other type of achievement while parents of 1st and 2nd graders recalled more good performance in the field of horizontal distinctiveness (HD). The three most mentioned categories of achievements for parents of 8th and 9th graders to mention were: VD, HD, and good behavior. However, it became HD, good behavior, and then VD respectively for parents of 1st and 2nd graders. Study 2 used scenario experimental method to examine parents' reactions to the achievement of their high school children. The results found that parents would be more likely to encourage their children to pursue career in VD field, and felt more matched their expectation if their children pursue their career in VD field. On the contrary, parents would feel more regretful if their children pursue their future career in HD goals instead of VD. Interestingly, although parents experienced the same intensive feelings of having face when their children had a success in the field of VD versus HD, they did feel having more face on their daughter's success in VD goals and less having face in HD goals comparing to the same success of their son.

Keywords: big self, having face, horizontal distinctiveness, social orientation, vertical distinctiveness

Introduction

Tafarodi, Marshall, and Katsura (2001) divided Asian's highly pursued life goals into: Vertical Distinctiveness (VD) and Horizontal Distinctiveness (HD). VD goals are those approved by the general public; therefore, one may obtain praise from the whole society when achieving these goals. On the contrary, HD goals are those pursued by the actor out of personal interest; therefore, when one achieving these goals, s/he may not obtain equal praise from the whole society (Hwang, Chen, Wang, & Fu, in press). Although parents value good performance and talents of all aspects of their children, due to the social orientation in Confucian societies (Yang, 1992) and the prevalent effects of academic elitism, it is very possible that parents may adjust their expectation to their children from appreciate both VD and HD to focus mainly on VD when their children are gradually growing up and facing the stress of getting into "top-ranked". In consideration of these two types of distinctiveness and parents' feelings of their children's achievements might differ when their children are in different developing stage (whether facing the stress of Entrance Exam of High School and University or not). The first part of this study would like to compare whether there is any difference in contents of recalled achievements or good performance between parents of 1st and 2nd graders and parents of 8th and 9th graders. The different contents of good performance could reflect that Confucian societies did value VD goals more than HD. The second part of this study would examine parents' feelings of having face and other related reactions when their children were achieved in VD versus HD goals.

Literature Review

Hwang, Chen, Wang, and Fu (in press) emphasized that there are two types of achievement goals pursued by students in Confucian society. 'Vertical distinctiveness' (VD) goals are those approved by the general public. Having achieved the goal, the actor may obtain praise from the whole society. 'Horizontal distinctiveness' (HD) goals are those pursued by the actor out of personal interest. Though the peer group may share similar interests with the actor and approve of these personal goals, significant others and the general public in the society may not do so. When a child is in his/her childhood, there is no doubt that parents appreciate good performance of their child. Especially for the low birth rate in Taiwan and for the thoughts that do not let children losing in the beginning of their life, most parents are willing to spend money to develop all aspects of their children's potential talents when they are young (Huang & Huang, 2009). However, since people in Confucian societies are very social-oriented, people enjoy praise and compliments from others (Yang, 1992). Due to the characteristic of VD goals and HD goals differs in

acceptance and appreciation from others, it is apparent that Chinese people value VD goals more than HD goals.

As aforementioned, parents value all the talents and good performance of their children. However, because of the prevalent influence of academic elitism and getting into top ranked, it is very possible that parents may adjust their expectation to their children from appreciate both VD and HD to focus mainly on VD when their children are getting older and facing the stress of the Entrance Exam of High School and/or University. Parents may switch their emphasis and attention to children's performance from all aspects of talent to mainly focus on academic performance, which implies transferring attention from HD to VD. Chiu's (2005) study found that there were differences in ratio between the fifth and the sixth graders attending in the "dance-music" type of after-school classes. The ratio of fifth graders was higher than that of the sixth graders, and the results of this study implied that children had encountered more social demands on academic achievements and parents might switch their support of their children's performance from general aspects to academic performance.

On the other hand, one of the basic features of Confucian societies is the concept of 'Big Self'. Under this concept, an individual's family members, especially parents and children, are more likely to be included in the territory of one's self (Hwang, 1999; Hwang & Han, 2011). The relationship between parents and children is usually perceived as a single body in the eyes of Chinese people. As a result, family members are especially liable to the feelings of having glory or shame together. In other words, an individual's achievement or good performance is not only his/her own success, but is also counted to his/her parents' glory (Hwang, 2005; Li, 1993; Lu, 2003).

As Yu and Yang (1987) pointed out that the goals for people in Confucian societies to pursue is determined by social demands, especially from the request or expectation of one's parents. Studies have found that parents have direct, extreme effects on their children's decision of future career, especially for the gifted students (Chen, 1991; Lin, 1993). Then, it will be very possible that although parents appreciate their children's talents and performance in both fields of VD and HD, as their children are getting older, they will encourage their children to pursue socially approved goals in VD field, hoping their children to receive more social achievements. Comparable with this idea, study had found that children in Confucian societies were more willing to work hard on a task for their parents comparing to their Western counterparts (Iyengar & Lepper, 1999). Su and Hwang (2003) also found that retired people in Taiwan experienced

more intensive feelings of having face for their children's achievements in VD goals. The results of aforementioned studies imply that children in Confucian societies may change their pursuit of distinctiveness from horizontal goals to vertical goals to meet their parents' expectation. As a result, children's good performance might increase in VD field, and on the other hand, decrease in HD because they learn from their socialization and switch their attention to value VD goals more than HD.

Thinking that because Confucian societies value VD goals more than HD and parents' focus on VD or HD goals might have an effect on their children's performance. Study 1 would like to investigate whether the dimensions of children's good performance or achievements do differ when they are in different developing stage, especially whether they are facing the stress of Entrance Exam of High School or not.

Study 1: Parents' Recall of Children's Good Performance

Considering that when children are in their early childhood, parents would appreciate their good performance in all aspects; therefore, from parents' perspective, they will notice both their children's VD and HD performance. Moreover, since there is little academic competition for young children, it is very possible that children can develop and perform freely in the field of HD, and thus, impress others. However, when children are gradually growing up and facing the stress of the Entrance Exam of High School, parents may encourage their children to focus mainly on academic performance by valuing their VD performance more to meet the requirements of elitism in a social oriented society. Therefore, endeavoring to perform well in VD goals becomes the central issue of children's daily life. As a result, elder children's achievements in VD goals might override their HD goals. The purpose of Study 1 is to examine whether younger children do exhibit more good performance in the field of HD than VD; whereas, elder children who are facing the stress of academic achievements will have more good performance in the field of VD than HD. However, since it is difficult to have young children to report their good performance, this study adopt parents as participants to report their children's good performance and/or achievements.

Method

Participants

The participants were divided into two groups: One group consisted of 121 parents of 1st and 2nd graders, among them, 21 (17.4%) were male and 100 (82.6%) were female (ages from 25 to 67, $M = 40.11$, $SD = 4.75$). The other group consisted of 170 parents of 8th and 9th graders, 38 (22.4%) of them were male and 132 (77.6%) were female

(ages from 32 to 67, $M = 44.72$, $SD = 4.58$).

Research design and instruments

The purpose of study 1 is to collect young versus elder children's good performance or achievements of all aspects. However, because it would not be plausible to ask young children to report their good performance, this study adopted parents as participants and asked them to report their children's good performance and/or achievements in any aspects of talent and academy which may represent horizontal or vertical distinctiveness respectively. To maximize the effects that children's good performance would switch from HD to VD goals when they are getting older and facing more social demands on academic elitism, study 1 collected data from participants of two groups: one group of parents of 1st and 2nd graders, and the other of parents of 8th and 9th graders. The recalled achievement data of these two groups were collected and analyzed separately.

Participants in this study were instructed to recall either an episode in which they thought their child had a good performance or an episode in which their child was praised by others. Then, participants were instructed to write down this good performance or achievement in detail.

Procedures

Noting that Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) meeting will be held on 'School Day' at elementary and middle schools in the beginning period of semester and it would be a good chance for us to access our potential participants. We contacted both elementary and middle schools in Taipei area to ask whether it was possible for us to collect questionnaires on their School Day. 10 schools (5 elementary schools and 5 middle schools) in large Taipei area gave us positive answer. We then visited these schools on their School Day before the PTA meeting began and asked those parents who arrived school earlier waiting for the meeting to fill out our questionnaire.

Results

The data of good performance and achievements were categorized mainly according to its relatedness to VD or HD. The similar and repeatedly-mentioned events were categorized together. The results showed that mainly 5 categories of good performance and/or achievements were generated. Contents of each category and its frequency distribution were presented in Table 1-1.

Table 1-1 Contents and frequency distribution of participants' recall good performance of their child

Contents of different category	Frequency for 1st and 2nd Graders (N = 121)	Frequency for 8th and 9th Graders (N = 170)
<p>1. Achievements Related to VD Goals, including academic performance... good performance in school tests, i.e. 100% correct in a test or top ranking in class...; won a prize in a contest of intelligence, mathematics Olympiad, nationwide science contest, nationwide or whole school spelling bee, language contest...; passed the test of gifted students, early admission, honors classes...; elected to be an exemplary student; excellent academic performance, progress in academic performance...</p>	<p>21 (17.4%)</p>	<p>73 (42.9%)</p>
<p>2. Achievements Related to HD Goals, including talented performance... performed well on stage for piano, violin, flute-playing, or in a play...; won a prize in a contest of paintings, game of go, swimming, calculation using abacus, roller blades, ping-pong, badminton, sprint, race, Taekwando, piano, paintings, flute, singing...; good motor development, good at singing, dance, Logo...</p>	<p>38 (31.4%)</p>	<p>44 (25.9%)</p>
<p>3. Appearance pretty, good looking, gorgeous, cool, good figure, handsome, cute, big eyes, tall...</p>	<p>12 (9.9%)</p>	<p>6 (3.5%)</p>
<p>4. General Cleverness or Ability very smart, very clever, creative, talented, gifted...</p>	<p>13 (10.7%)</p>	<p>8 (4.7%)</p>
<p>5. Good Behavior and Personality very polite, sweet, well-educated, understanding, self-discipline, patient, autonomous, focus...; willing to help,</p>	<p>37 (30.6%)</p>	<p>39 (22.9%)</p>

rules-obeying, willing to share...		
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The results of χ^2 analyses found that the ratio of achievements in different categories parents reported was significantly different when their child was in different stage of the development ($\chi^2_{(4, N=291)} = 25.22, p < .001$). Parents with child in middle school mentioned more achievements in VD goals (73; 42.9%) than parents with child in elementary school (21; 17.4%). On the contrary, Parents with child in elementary school mentioned higher ratio of HD goals (38; 31.4%) than parents with child in middle school (44; 25.9%) though the frequency of the latter was a little higher. In addition, parents with younger child also mentioned higher ratio of achievements in Appearance, General Cleverness, and Good Behavior and Personality. The three most mentioned categories of good performance for parents of 8th and 9th graders to mention were: Vertical Distinctiveness, Horizontal Distinctiveness, and Good Behavior and Personality. However, it became Horizontal Distinctiveness, Good Behavior and Personality, and then Vertical Distinctiveness respectively for parents of 1st and 2nd graders.

Discussion

The purpose of study 1 was to examine that whether when children were in different stage of the development, they would perform well in the field of VD and HD differently, especially from horizontal distinctiveness and general goodness to mainly stressing on vertical distinctiveness. The results of study 1 supported this proposition that parents of 8th and 9th graders mentioned steep higher ratio of vertical distinctiveness than any other type of achievement.

Study 2: Parents' Reactions to Their Child's Achievement

Different from independent construal of self in which the person is viewed as bounded and unique in relation to others in Western cultures, the self in Confucian societies is more connected to others (Hwang, 2000; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Sampson, 1988). Because the concept of self is always relational, one's social behaviors, no matter it is an achievement or a failure, also represent glory or shame to his/her "Big Self", the family members (Li, 1993). In other words, a person's achievement is not only his/her own success, but also his/her parents' glory. Studies have found that the achievement motive of people in Confucian societies is social oriented. The goals one will be motivated to be excellent are highly depending on what the whole society expects to him/her, especially from his/her parents' expectation (Yu & Yang, 1987). Iyengar and Lepper' study (1999) did found that,

comparing to their counterparts in Western, Chinese children were more willing to work hard on a task for their parents.

Although people in all societies might experience the feelings of gaining or losing face because of positive or negative social evaluation, face is more an indigenous concept deeply rooted in Confucian culture (Zhang, Tian, & Grigoriou, 2011). Because Confucian societies emphasize the feelings of having face, social comparison is a common phenomenon where people can win face by feeling that they perform better than others. In addition, due to the concept of 'Big Self', one who has any achievement always basking his/her family members, especially his/her parents. Zhai (2004) suggested that the phenomenon of sharing face with important others can be viewed as an extension of one's own face. Actually, sometimes the effects of this reflected glory are more intensive than one's own achievements when the face is earned from one's offspring. The results of Su and Hwang's study (2003) did find that retired people reported experiencing more intensive feelings of having face when their children had achieved accomplishments than they themselves did.

However, since the Eastern cultures value Vertical Distinctiveness (VD) more than Horizontal Distinctiveness (HD), it is very possible that parents would adjust their expectation to their children from appreciate their good performance in both the field of HD and VD goals to lay stress only on VD goals following their children's growing up and facing more stress of academic demands. As a result, especially when children are in high school, a period of very highly stressful for academic performance, parents might feel more proud (having more face) of their children's performance in the field of VD than HD and might have very different reactions when their children achieve VD goals rather than HD. The purpose of Study 2 would like to examine parents' feelings of having face and other related reactions when their high school children were successful in VD versus HD goals and the hypotheses generated were as followings:

Hypothesis 1: Parents will feel having more face when their child achieves in VD goals rather than HD goals.

Hypothesis 2: It is more likely that parents will encourage their child to pursue his/her future career in VD goals rather than HD goals.

Hypothesis 3: Parents will feel more matching their expectation to their child if s/he pursues his/her future career in VD goals rather than HD goals.

Hypothesis 4: Parents will feel more regretful if their child pursues his/her future career in HD goals rather than VD goals.

Method

Participants

286 parents of high school students from 5 schools in Taiwan (Taipei) participated in this study; except one who did not identify his/her gender, 72 of them were male (25.2%), and 213 were female (74.5%). Their ages were from 37 to 84 ($M = 48.16$, $SD = 4.37$). Among them, 136 (47.6%) of their child were male and 150 (52.4%) were female.

Research design

In order to compare the differences in parents' possible reactions to their children's achievement in a VD versus HD goal, we adopted and slightly modified two scenarios (one for VD, and the other for HD) which have been used in other studies. The scenario for VD described a high school student who won the silver prize in a nationwide science contest (Han, 2011) while the one for HD described a high school student won the silver prize in a nationwide singing contest (Han, 2012). Participants were randomly assigned to one of the two versions and were instructed to imagine that the student who won the silver prize in the contest was their child.

Instruments

Measures of having face: Participants were instructed to rate for "If the student who won the prize in the contest was your child, how intensive feelings of having face will you have?" on a 9-point scale (1 = do not have this feeling at all, 9 = feel having face very much) after reading the scenario.

Measures of other related reactions: Participants were also instructed to rate for 1. "If the student who won the prize in the contest was your child, will you encourage him/her to pursue his/her future career in this field?" on a 9-point scale (1 = will not encourage, 9 = will definitely encourage); 2. "If the student who won the prize in the contest was your child, does it match your expectation to your child if s/he pursues his/her future career in this field?" on a 9-point scale (1 = not match at all, 9 = match very much); and, 3. "If the student who won the prize in the contest was your child, will you feel regretful if s/he pursues his/her future career in this field?" also on a 9-point scale (1 = will not feel regretful, 9 = will feel very regretful).

When answering the scenario questionnaire, participants were also instructed to indicate their gender, age, and the gender of their child as well.

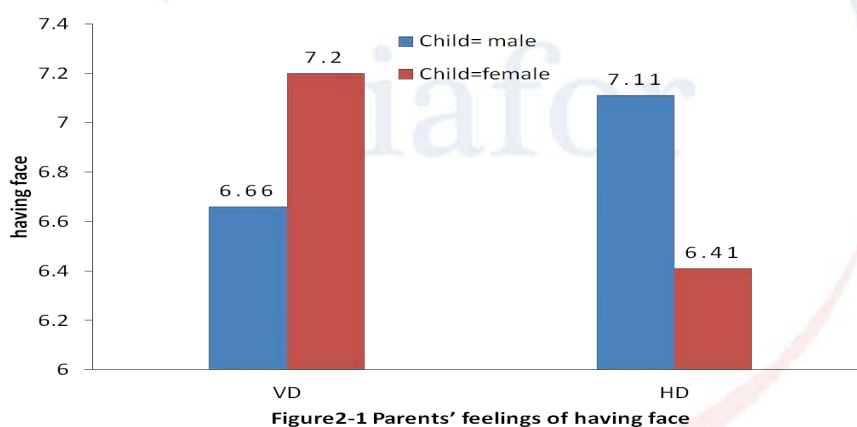
Procedures

The two scenario versions of the questionnaire were randomly mixed before they were assigned to participants. Each participant answered one version of the questionnaire only before the PTA meeting held on School Day at high schools.

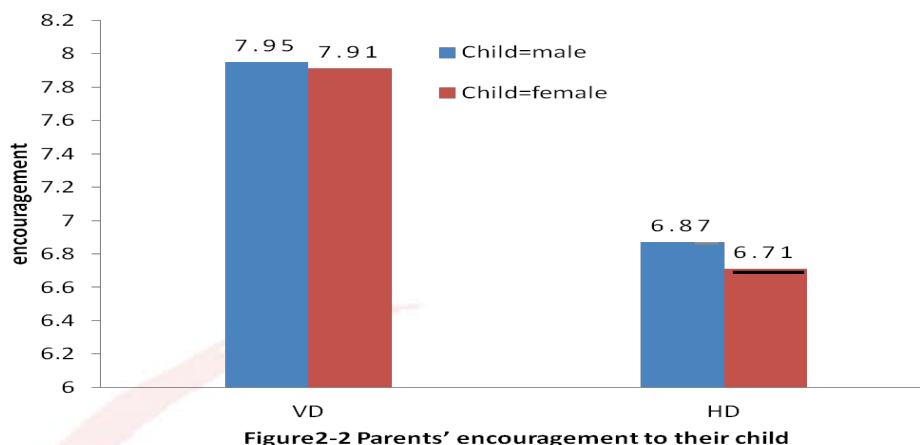
Results

Total 302 questionnaires were collected from 5 high schools in Taipei, among these questionnaires, 8 did not answer the checking questions correctly and the other 8 did not complete the questions properly, excluded these questionnaires, only 286 questionnaires were analyzed.

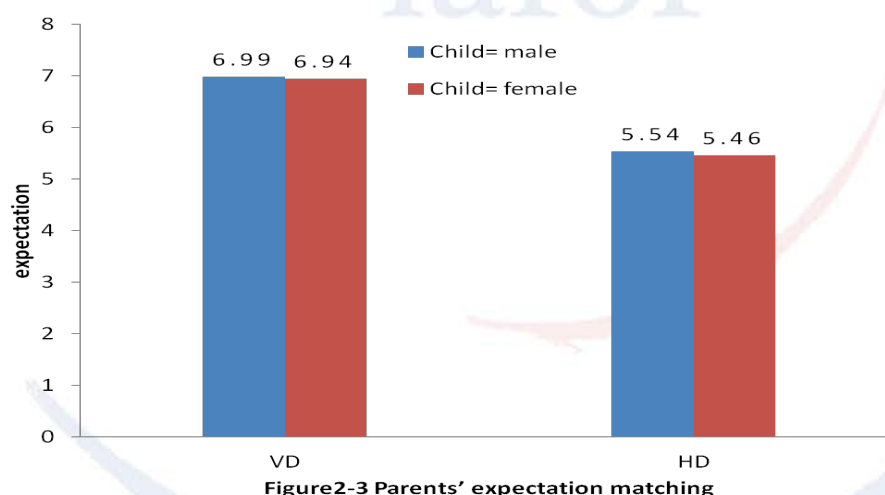
To examine whether parents would have different face feeling when their child achieved in VD versus HD goal, A 2 (achievement Type: VD vs. HD) X 2 (Child's Gender: male vs. female) ANOVA with parents' feeling of having face as dependent variable was conducted. Parents' ratings of having face were presented in Figure 2-1.



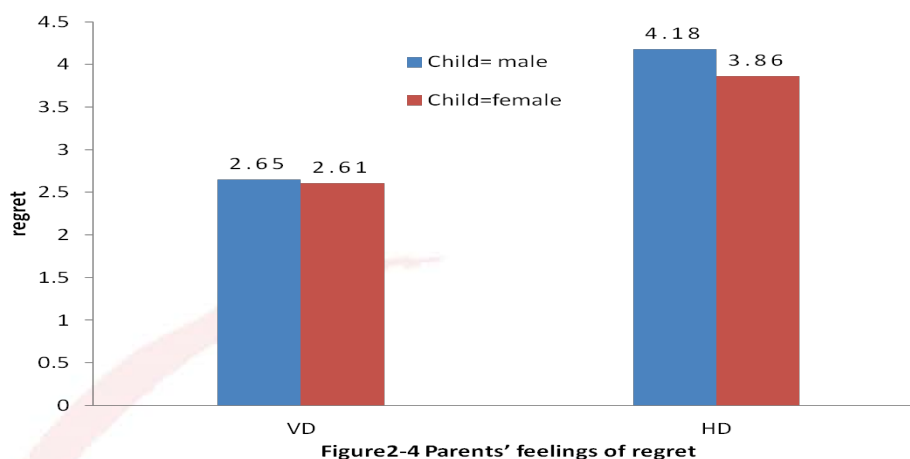
The main effects of Achievement Type and Child's Gender were not significant (Achievement Type: $F_{(1, 282)} = .58, p > .05, \eta^2 = .002$; Child's Gender: $F_{(1, 282)} = .14, p > .05, \eta^2 = .001$); therefore, hypothesis 1 was not supported. However, the interaction effect of Achievement Type and Child's Gender was significant ($F_{(1, 282)} = 8.25, p < .01, \eta^2 = .029$), parents experienced more intensive feeling of having face on their daughter's success in VD and less having face in HD comparing to the same success of their son. This interaction effect would be discussed in General Discussion.



Regarding to whether parents would encourage their child to pursue his/her career in the field s/he won the prize (parents' ratings were presented in Figure 2-2), the results of ANOVA (with Encouragement as dependent variable) showed that only the effect of Achievement Type was significant ($F_{(1, 282)} = 38.3, p < .001, \eta^2 = .12$). It was more possible that parents would encourage their child to pursue his/her future in the field of VD goals than HD. According to this, hypothesis 2 was supported.



As for whether or not children pursues their future career in the field of their winning prize meet their parents' expectation, participants' responses were presented in Figure 2-3. With Expectation Matching as dependent variable, the results of ANOVA also revealed that only Achievement Type had a significant effect ($F_{(1, 282)} = 40.19, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$). Comparing to HD, children pursued their future career in the field of VD goals was more matched their parent's expectation. Thus, hypothesis 3 was supported.



The results of whether participants would feel regretful if their child pursues his/her future in the field s/he won the prize were presented in Figure 2-4. Using the same ANOVA analyzing method with Regret Feeling as dependent variable; again, the results showed that only Achievement Type had a significant effect ($F_{(1, 282)} = 34.81, p < .001, \eta^2 = .11$). Therefore, hypothesis 4 was supported that parents would feel more regretful if their child pursued his/her future career in the field of HD goals instead of VD.

Discussion

The results of study 2 indicated that comparing to HD goals, when the achievement of participants' child was a VD goal, it would be more likely for them to encourage their child to pursue his/her career in this field. In addition, participants also felt that it would match their expectation if their child decided to pursue his/her future career in this field. On the contrary, participants would feel more regretful if their child devotes his/her future in the field of HD goals instead of VD. Although participants' feeling of having face did not differ when their child had a success in the field of VD versus HD, parents did experience of having more face on their daughter's success in VD goal and less having face in HD goal comparing to the same success of their son.

General discussion

Study 1 tried to examine that whether children would perform well in the field of VD and HD differently when they were in different developing stages. The results of study 1, from the perspective of parents, did find that 8th and 9th graders performed higher ratio of vertical distinctiveness than any other type of achievement while 1st and 2nd graders had more good performance in the field of horizontal distinctiveness (and good behaviors). The results of study 2 found that it would be more likely for

parents of high school students to encourage their children to pursue their career in VD field. In addition, if their children pursue their future career in this field they would feel that it matched their expectation. On the contrary, parents would feel more regretful if their children pursue their future career in HD goals instead of VD. However, parents did experience the same intensive feelings of having face when their children had a success in the field of VD versus HD which did not support our hypothesis.

The insignificance effect of parents not experiencing having more face when their children had a success in the field of VD than HD might be caused by the scenarios. The scenarios designed in this study were describing a high school student who won a silver prize in a nationwide contest. It was reasonable that parents would all feel extremely excited and happy for their children to win such a nationwide contest and rated highly intensive feelings of having face. Future studies can try to adopt more sophisticated methods or design more suitable scenarios to test this effect.

However, there was an interaction effect for achievement type and gender of children, parents felt having more face for daughter's VD success and having less face for her HD success comparing to the same success of their son. It was very possible that this effect was caused by the expectation of suitable social role for different gender (Harrison & Lynch, 2005; Venkatesh & Morris, 2000). Although Confucian societies value VD goals more than HD, VD goals are still more for men to pursue. Comparing to daughters, parents used to expect their son to perform well in the field of VD. If a girl who achieve a VD goal, it implies that she is more excellent than the male; therefore, makes her parents feel having more face.

The results of this study were compatible with the perspective of Hwang et al., (in press) that people in Confucian societies value VD goals more than HD. In addition, because of the social orientation (Yang, 1992) and the concept of big self (Hwang & Han, 2011; Li, 1993) in Eastern culture, parents are more possible to encourage their children to pursue their future career in the field of VD goals rather than HD, this could account for why academic elitism is so prevalent in Taiwan. Children have learned from the process of socialization that they have to endeavor to get into a "good" high school and/or university in order to get into top ranked.

One may argue that the different frequency recalled in VD versus HD goals between 8th and 9th graders and 1st and 2nd graders was because that the contents of their daily life were different. For young children, one of the central parts of their everyday life

is to have fun; on the contrary, for elder children who have faced the stress of Entrance Exam of High School, the contents of their everyday life become competing academic performance with others. The purpose of this study was not to deny this phenomenon. Instead, this study viewed this phenomenon as a reflection of social demands on VD and HD. Because Confucian societies value VD goals over HD, children are forced to face competition in the field of VD, and thus, learn to value it.

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