

## Reflections on the Meaning and Structure of the Horizontal/Vertical Distinction

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The commentaries by Aaker (2006), Meyers-Levy (2006), and Oyserman (2006) extend the implications of the horizontal/vertical distinction described in our article (Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, & Torelli, 2006) in a number of interesting directions. We join these authors in calling for further research on horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism constructs. We also highlight conceptual and structural issues that remain to be resolved and evaluate priming and other operational approaches to the study of horizontal and vertical individualism and collectivism.

We have argued for the importance of distinguishing between horizontal and vertical cultural values in understanding the role of culture in consumer psychology (Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, & Torelli, 2006). Horizontal cultures or cultural orientations value equality whereas vertical cultures or cultural orientations emphasize hierarchy (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). In our article, we reviewed research on the utility of this distinction for predicting consumers' personal values, self-presentations, responses to persuasive communications, and other outcomes. The lucid commentaries by Aaker (2006), Meyers-Levy (2006), and Oyserman (2006) develop agendas for future research in a number of interesting new directions, and we agree with many of their points. Their suggestions underscore the broad range of implications of the horizontal/vertical distinction, and their commentaries offer much potential for stimulating future research on the topic. In our response, we discuss these new directions while highlighting some structural assumptions that are yet to be ad-

dressed about the relation between horizontal and vertical representations.

### The Horizontal/Vertical Distinction and Cultural Worldviews

Meyers-Levy (2006) relates the horizontal/vertical distinction to Terror Management Theory (TMT) and the impact of mortality salience (e.g., Arndt, Solomon, Kasser, & Sheldon, 2004). Numerous studies demonstrate that when mortality is salient, people adhere more closely to dominant cultural worldviews. Because those worldviews link to marketplace behaviors, this theory is rich with implications for consumer psychology (Maheswaran & Agrawal, 2004; Rindfleisch & Burroughs, 2004). Accordingly, research testing TMT predictions in North America indicates that mortality salience leads to an enhanced preference specifically for status-enhancing goods (e.g., a Lexus, a Rolex, suntanning services, and other luxury items; see Kasser & Sheldon, 2000; Mandel & Heine, 1999). One could speculate that this outcome of mortality salience would be limited to those with a vertical (especially vertical individualist, or VI) cultural orientation

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or background. For horizontal individualist (HI) cultural contexts, where cultural worldviews stress modesty and self-direction (Feather, 1994; Nelson & Shavitt, 2002), mortality salience should enhance preference for goods and services that convey self-reliance or uniqueness without being conspicuous. In horizontal collectivist (HC) cultural contexts, mortality salience may enhance the desirability of goods and services that foster peer bonding and sociability.

### Persuasive Styles

Aaker (2006) offers the interesting possibility that horizontal compared to vertical cultures may be more likely to favor modest and silent methods of endorsement. Some of our data bear on this possibility. A content analysis of 500 magazine ads in the United States and Denmark showed that models in Danish ads looked directly at the reader less often than did models in the U.S. ads (Figge, Shavitt, & Lowrey, 1998). American spokesmodels seemed to invite more direct interaction or admiration from the reader, whereas Danish models were more likely to direct their gaze elsewhere. Although indirect, these data are consistent with the notion that, in an HI compared to a VI society, endorsers play a more modest and less aggressive role. Future research could be directed at dimensionalizing the modest persuasive styles associated with horizontal versus vertical cultures and orientations.

### Attributions

When a top scientist in South Korea was recently fired from his university for reporting fraudulent stem-cell research data, the attributions made by investigators revealed a vertical collectivist (VC) approach. Citing his actions in damaging the school's honor and the country's international reputation, the university singled the scientist out for harsher punishment than the rest of the scientific team because he played the leading role in writing the papers that contained the faked data. This episode suggests implications of the horizontal/vertical distinction for the way attributions are made, and blame is assessed or credit is awarded, for product failures and successes, and Meyers-Levy (2006) alludes to such implications. For instance, in VC contexts, company leaders may be expected to shoulder more blame for product failures, whereas in HC contexts, blame would be shared among the team members responsible for product testing and marketing.

### Leisure Pursuits

Meyers-Levy's interesting speculations about consumers' preferences for physical activities can be further expanded by considering parallel research on the impact of social power on preferences for competitive sports (Winter, 1973). Winter emphasized that competitive sports can be seen as direct forms of power competition, and in certain societies (e.g., the United

States), success in sports can be the basis for achieving high status in the social hierarchy. Winter made a distinction between the directly competitive sports of person-against-person or team-against-team in a long chain of responses and counter-responses, and non-directly competitive sports of person-against-clock or person-against-self where sequences of actions are performed independently of others.

Building upon this distinction, one could argue that individuals with a VI orientation should be more likely than others to prefer directly competitive sports of person-against-person (e.g., golf, tennis), in which an individual can earn full credit for his/her own accomplishments. In contrast, individuals with a VC orientation should be more likely than others to prefer directly competitive sports of team-against-team (e.g., soccer, cricket), in which the status of one's group is raised above that of out-group teams. (As Meyers-Levy suggests, such persons may also prefer conformity-oriented physical training.) In contrast, individuals with an HI orientation should be especially likely to be attracted to non-directly competitive sporting events where the focus is on establishing one's own progress and "personal best" records. Finally, as suggested by Meyers-Levy, individuals with an HC orientation may be particularly likely to be drawn to noncompetitive leisure activities that allow them to socialize with others, such as camping.

More broadly, we agree with Meyers-Levy that one's cultural background or orientation may also shape one's preferences for a range of leisure consumption choices, including films and books. For instance, literature and popular culture in the United States promote the notion of movement up the ladder through the use of Horatio Alger rags-to-riches themes and depictions of the American Dream. In contrast, literature and popular culture in Scandinavia often address themes of alienation and existential inner struggles. One would thus expect that narratives in each culture would be appreciated to the extent that they match culturally dominant values and beliefs (e.g., *Rocky* for Americans or vertical individualists, Ingmar Bergman films for Swedes or horizontal individualists).

It may also be the case that exposure to culturally significant sporting events or films in turn activates VI, VC, HI, or HC cultural constructs. As an indirect example, Winter (1973) made participants' power motives salient by showing a clip of the 1961 inaugural address of President John F. Kennedy. This suggests that such exposures can be useful in priming culturally relevant constructs or motives related to hierarchy. We turn to this issue next.

## OPERATIONALIZING HORIZONTAL AND VERTICAL CONSTRUCTS

### Priming

Just as responses to narratives or activities may be determined by cultural values, exposure to particular narratives

may activate culturally relevant constructs. Indeed, Aaker and Lee (2001) used competitive sports scenarios successfully to activate independent versus interdependent self-construals. In their independent condition, participants imagined themselves competing in a tennis tournament. In their interdependent version, the same tennis scenario stressed that they were competing as part of a team. Although the studies were not designed to address the horizontal/vertical distinction, one might speculate that these experimental procedures also activated hierarchy motives, such that VI and VC constructs (rather than IND and COL, more broadly) were made salient. Similarly, Mandel (2003) primed independence and interdependence by showing participants selected film clips. In her independent condition, participants saw a self-help video on writing a resume that summarizes one's distinctive advantages over competitors. Again, one could infer that VI as opposed to broader IND constructs were primed by this film.

As noted in our article, much of the existing literature on individualism–collectivism contrasts only vertical cultural contexts. In her commentary, Oyserman (2006) raises the possibility that priming studies of independent and interdependent self-construal may suffer from the same limitations as other INDCOL studies if those primes invoke themes of hierarchy and competition. The consumer-research examples just reviewed suggest that hierarchy constructs may be activated by some existing primes of independent and interdependent self-construal, and we echo Oyserman's call for research on this possibility. The implication is that some findings involving primed self-construals may describe VC versus VI cultural contexts, not the broader IND and COL contexts, and thus their relevance to HI versus HC cultural contexts remains unclear.

In their commentaries, Oyserman and Meyers-Levy emphasized priming as a valuable approach for the further study of VI, HI, VC, and HC constructs. We agree that this is a worthwhile pursuit. However, successful priming of horizontal and vertical constructs will require a better understanding of the mental representations of these constructs (Shavitt et al., 2006). A number of structural issues remain to be resolved. For instance, are mental representations corresponding to horizontal and vertical constructs easily accessible and readily sampled in different situations? Oyserman argues that personal experiences with different types of relationships (hierarchical versus egalitarian) mean that such constructs are universal and, thus, capable of being primed. It is also possible that the nature of one's relationships is strongly influenced by one's cultural or chronic hierarchy motives. For instance, Winter (1973) found that males high in power motives preferred dependent wives. Bargh, Raymond, Pryor, and Strack (1995) found that some males have a strong mental association between power and sex that is readily activated. These studies suggest that for individuals with high chronic power motives, many kinds of relationships may be decidedly hierarchical. Indeed, Hofstede (2001) suggested

that social values rooted in family and school will have influences across a variety of relationship domains (work, political, etc.). Although this does not mean horizontal and vertical constructs cannot be primed, it poses challenges to the activation of such constructs. In vertical societies, vertical constructs may be much more readily activated than horizontal ones, and horizontal constructs may link to and evoke different mental associations across cultures. We return to this issue later.

Another key structural question, raised by both Aaker and Oyserman, is whether the horizontal/vertical distinction is more appropriately conceptualized as nested within individualism–collectivism or as a separate distinction. At the cultural level, the positive association between collectivism and verticality argues for developing methods to tease these dimensions apart. At the individual level, the relation between these distinctions is difficult to assess with available cultural orientation data because existing scales assume a nested structure and accordingly assess horizontal and vertical values within IND and COL categories (Triandis, Chen, & Chan, 1998; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). This means that interrelations between horizontal and vertical responses are conflated with those between IND and COL responses. As Oyserman and Aaker suggest, it would seem conceptually neater to assess horizontal and vertical constructs separately from INDCOL. They argue that treating power as a separate dimension would help to isolate the sociocognitive consequences of power motivation.

However, such a conceptualization would also blur key distinctions in the manifestation of such motives across cultures. Indeed, we suggest that the existing HI, VI, HC, VC distinction enables predictions not anticipated by either the power distance construct (Hofstede, 1980) or Oyserman's (2006) power-dependence dimension. It is helpful to revisit the original conceptualization that led to the horizontal/vertical distinction. The nested structure emerged not from Hofstede's power distance dimension but from Fiske's (1992) specification of four elementary types of sociality. This treats the horizontal/vertical distinction as reflecting different species of IND and COL, such that horizontal and vertical values take different forms and pull for different types of social relations in each type of society (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995; Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). Thus, for instance, there is an emphasis on competition and achievement in VI cultural contexts, presumably because these serve as mechanisms for attaining higher individual status. However, in VC cultural contexts, there is an emphasis on deference and sacrifice to meet obligations to the in-group. These different manifestations do not follow from a decontextualized conceptualization of a power-motivation dimension, either as a high-versus low-continuum as per Hofstede or as a have-versus-have-not dimension as per Oyserman. One might further argue that lower members of the power hierarchy in a VI context will be chronically motivated to improve their ranking, whereas low-power persons

in a VC context will be more likely to accept the authority of the higher order members, given that COL cultures stress acceptance of existing societal structures (Chiu, Dweck, Tong, & Fu, 1997). In short, power motives and power levels may have different consequences in IND versus COL societies or contexts. Hence, we suggest that richer insights can be gained by considering the horizontal/vertical distinction within INDCOL categories.

In this regard, the interplay between power-related mental representations and independent versus interdependent self-construals is worth examining. Aaker (2006) highlights the effect of power on self-views. We know that mental representations of power can be shaped by people's socialization patterns (see Winter, 1973), and that people with different cultural orientations can associate power with distinct goals (see S. Chen, Lee-Chai, & Bargh, 2001). Thus, individuals socialized to be independent are likely to associate power with self-centered goals of advancing one's status and impacting undifferentiated audiences, whereas people socialized to be interdependent are likely to associate power with goals of impacting and benefiting close others. In short, power-related goals would lead individuals with independent versus interdependent self-construals to pursue different strategies for exercising power. Furthermore, mental representations of power may be linked to specific self-concepts, depending on cultural background or orientation, such that priming power could lead to the activation of either independent or interdependent self-construals. Further research is needed on how mental representations of power link to the self in predictable ways in different cultural contexts.

### Construal Of Horizontal Versus Vertical Situations

The same situations may elicit distinct subjective interpretations across cultural contexts, such that their meanings will be assigned according to cultural priorities. For instance, an activity such as submitting an entry in an art exhibit may not be viewed as a competitive situation for someone with a horizontal cultural background or orientation, whereas someone with a vertical cultural background or orientation may perceive hierarchy implications (and the motive to win the "contest" may become activated). We have observed such tendencies among U.S. college students (Shavitt, Zhang, & Johnson, 2006). In a small-scale study, we instructed 30 students to read a scenario about submitting a picture for a photography exhibit, and then asked them to report an episode from their own life that elicited similar feelings as the scenario they read. Almost all participants who read a vertical scenario (which emphasized gaining status and impressing others through the exhibit) wrote about own-life episodes that were also vertically oriented, e.g., pitching for a championship game, or standing out at a science fair. However, more than half of the participants who read a horizontal scenario (which emphasized being unique, self-expressive, and having a good time) also wrote vertically oriented episodes.

Such tendencies in subjective construal speak to the question raised earlier regarding the relative accessibility of vertical and horizontal selves. If the vertical self is much more readily accessible, it will be more likely to influence interpretation of events, which in this case can complicate efforts to use scenarios to prime horizontal constructs.

### Frequency of Horizontal Versus Vertical Situations

In addition to differences in the way situations are interpreted across cultures, cultures differ in the degree to which one is likely to encounter situations with particular intrinsic features. Thus, Kitayama (2002) suggested that culture may best be understood via a *situation sampling* approach, which in the present context means looking for systematic differences in the degree to which everyday situations have either hierarchical or horizontal features. Indeed, in the United States, a relatively vertical society, everyday situations are often infused with competition and hierarchy features. For instance, although one would not normally consider movie viewing to have status implications, news organizations in the United States routinely rank the "Box Office Winners." Instead of their artistic merits, the focus is on which film beat the others in ticket sales, as if a competition between *King Kong* and *Capote* were somehow meaningful. In the domain of sports, even spectating has become increasingly competitive (consider the ubiquitous betting pools on the NCAA brackets). Indeed, our society's penchant for "top 10 lists" and "best of" ratings of every kind is a reflection of the strong hierarchical elements that characterize many situations. An examination of the degree to which social and consumption situations have such hierarchical features across cultures may yield new insights into the horizontal/vertical distinction.

### Is Horizontal the Absence of Vertical?

As Oyserman noted, a number of techniques have been used to heighten the salience of vertical or power constructs (e.g., Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Bargh et al., 1995; S. Chen et al., 2001). How should researchers operationalize or activate horizontality? The answer depends on assumptions about how it is represented mentally, and how it is structured with respect to verticality. Do the horizontal types of IND and COL represent simply the absence of vertical/hierarchy motives? If so, then HI and HC may be the "active ingredients" of IND and COL (Oyserman, Coon, & Kimmelmeier, 2002), and horizontality may be studied by examining persons whose vertical or power constructs are not salient.

Alternatively, horizontality may reflect cultural goals that are oppositional to vertical motives, representing a motivated rejection of hierarchy goals. If that is the case, then horizontal is more than the absence of vertical. In this case, priming verticality may also activate horizontal (oppositional) motives and constructs.



At the individual level, Schwartz's model of the structure of value systems, and extensive research supporting it, suggests that values that link to vertical and horizontal orientations are indeed oppositional (e.g., Schwartz, 1992). Data from two independent sets of 23 samples drawn from 27 countries ( $N = 10,857$ ) supported the assumption of contradiction between values such as power and achievement (corresponding to a vertical orientation) and benevolence and universalism (corresponding to a horizontal orientation), which were structurally hypothesized to be oppositional (Schwartz & Boehnke, 2004). An oppositional relation between values relevant to vertical and horizontal orientations has also been shown in other studies (e.g., Oishi, Diener, Suh, & Lucas, 1999; Singelis et al., 1995). For instance, Oishi et al. found that the more individuals value power, the less they enjoy universalism-related activities, such as "attending a rally to support conservation of nature" (p. 183). Likewise, the more individuals value universalism, the less they enjoy power-related activities, such as "buying expensive clothes or making a lot of money" (p. 183). Moreover, Oishi et al. found that the VI orientation is positively related to the value of power, whereas HI is negatively related to power, as measured by the Schwartz Value Survey (Schwartz, 1992). Chen, Meindl, and Hunt (1997) showed that in China, HC and VC orientations are differentially related to reward allocation preferences. Whereas VC was positively correlated with preferences for a differential reward system, which fosters hierarchy, HC was negatively correlated with such preferences.

Our consumer persuasion findings (see Shavitt et al., 2006; Table 4) suggested that the usage and persuasiveness of status appeals can be negatively associated with a horizontal orientation (especially HI), and positively associated with a vertical orientation. Finally, studies of horizontal individualist cultures (Feather, 1994, 1998, in Australia; Nelson & Shavitt, 2002, in Denmark) have suggested that horizontal motives involve "knocking down" or denigrating those who attempt to enhance their own status.

All of these studies are consistent with the notion that horizontal and vertical motives are arrayed in a pro-to-con bipolar space characterized by embracing versus rejecting of hierarchy. In other words, HI and HC orientations may represent more than the active ingredients of IND and COL (Oyserman et al., 2002), and activating vertical constructs may also activate oppositional goals in those with horizontal orientations or backgrounds.

A final structural possibility is that horizontal and vertical constructs are distinct rather than arrayed on a single continuum. This is in line with the original conceptualization of horizontal and vertical types nested within IND and COL categories, and factor analytic evidence supports distinct HI, VI, HC, and VC categories (Triandis & Gelfand, 1998). What factors may distinguish horizontal versus vertical cultural orientations? One possibility lies in the goal systems and belief structures underpinning them. For instance, those with a VI orientation are likely to have enduring hierarchy goals that are readily activated and that spontaneously influence

judgments and behavior. In contrast, it may be naïve to assume that people with an HI orientation are chronically *striving* for equality and against hierarchy, in the same way that people with a VI orientation are chronically striving to achieve, stand out, or outdo others. Horizontal cultural orientations may instead be more ideologically driven, reflecting political philosophies, standards, and beliefs, rather than self-serving and chronically salient personal goals. Examining these possibilities is an important priority for future research on horizontal and vertical cultural constructs.

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