

## The Response Evaluation and Emotional Experiences of Indirect Aggression: Findings from Children during Early Adolescence in a Culturally Chinese Context

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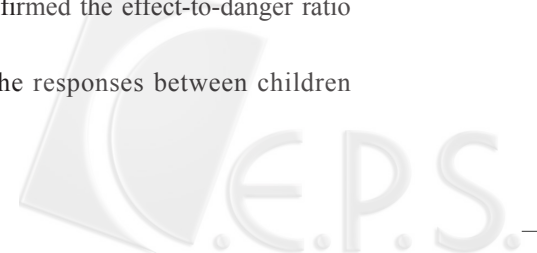
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Although the understanding of indirect aggression has been significantly advanced in recent years, past research still suffers from a few limitations. Firstly, data should be collected through methods other than questionnaires that dominate the recent findings. Secondly, research has yet to further clarify the processes that lead to the emotions and the response evaluation while being victimized by indirect aggression in peer context. Thirdly, most prior studies focused on children in middle childhood, leaving the effect of indirect aggression on children during early adolescence less explored. Finally, the vast majority of research has been conducted in Western cultural contexts, which may conceive the meaning of indirect aggression differently from culturally Chinese societies. Therefore, the specific goal of this research was to examine the response evaluation and the emotional reactions to victimization of indirect aggression among culturally Chinese children at the stage of early adolescence by means of a newly developed structured interview with card-sorting procedures. The interaction effect between gender and peer status on the response evaluation was also of interest according to the effect-to-danger ratio hypothesis.

Fifty-six children nominated by their head teachers as popular or rejected (mean age = 11.60 years) participated in Study 1. During the interview, a vignette depicting indirect aggression was visually and auditorily presented, and then a series of questions concerning personal experiences, including emotional reactions, were presented. Subjects' evaluation on the effectiveness of various kinds of indirect aggression strategies was then probed through a deck of 15 cards each stating a strategy of indirect aggression. Results showed that the gender by peer status interaction on response evaluation was not significant. However, rejected children enumerated marginally more indirect aggression strategies as effective than their popular counterparts. Study 1 also confirmed the effect-to-danger ratio hypothesis and showed that girls felt more troubled and sad than did boys in response to indirect aggression, while degree of anger revealed no gender differences.

Sixty children nominated by same-gender same-class peers as popular or rejected (mean age = 13.98 years) participated in Study 2, where the interview procedure was similar to Study 1 except for minor modifications. The number of indirect aggression strategies that popular and rejected subjects enumerated as effective was not different. Next, to take the statistical power issue into account, data from Study 1 and Study 2 were pooled. Results indicated that rejected subjects enumerated more indirect aggression strategies as effectively than their popular counterparts. Further, Study 2 found a significant interaction effect of peer status and gender on response evaluation. Compared with popular boys, rejected boys were more likely to adopt indirect aggression strategies to cope with indirect aggression. By contrast, rejected girls did not favor indirect aggression strategies more than popular girls. As for emotional reactions to victimization by indirect aggression, Study 2 replicated the findings in Study 1 that confirmed the effect-to-danger ratio hypothesis.

Study 3 attempted to further validate the structured interview by comparing the responses between children



designated through peer estimation technique as either highly or less indirect-aggressive and 72 children (mean age = 12.08 years) were recruited. Results indicated those who were highly indirect-aggressive did not enumerate more indirect aggression strategies as effectively than did the less aggressive counterparts. Further, the interaction effect of peer-estimated indirect aggression tendency and gender was not significant. It is suspected that the highly indirect-aggressive children might be better or at least not worse at social intelligence, which had buffered them from displaying biases or deficiencies in social information processing. Study 3, again, replicated the findings in Study 1 and Study 2 that girls were more troubled and sad than boys but felt similar degree of anger compared to boys while being victimized by indirect aggression. Findings from the above studies were discussed based on both the social information-processing model and the effect-to-danger ratio hypothesis. The incompatible results among the three studies were discussed according to a developmental perspective.

**Keywords:** *indirect aggression, relational aggression, peer status, peer relationship, social information-processing*

