

Abstract of thesis entitled:

Relationship Differences in Anger Responses: The Roles of Approach and Avoidance

Motives

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

Emotion theories from social and functionalist perspectives have greatly emphasized the importance of relationship contexts for emotions (Carolyn, 2004; Lazarus, 1991), yet relatively few empirical efforts have been spent on exploring whether and how individuals differentially deal with anger under different relationship contexts. Study 1 investigated how individuals' anger responses might vary with relationship contexts across cultural contexts. Two hundred and sixty-six participants from America, Hong Kong and Mainland China reported their responses toward anger-eliciting scenarios that were elicited by a kin, a close or a casual friend. Results indicated that, after controlling for demographic variables, personality, and relationship qualities, individuals displayed a higher level of direct and replaced aggression but a lower level of cognitive reappraisal and indirect aggression in kinship than in the two types of friendships across the three samples. While Hong Kong Chinese displayed a higher level of fractious motives in kinship than in two types of friendships, Mainland Chinese displayed a lower level of malevolent motives in kinship than in two types of friendships.

To resolve the controversy between two interpretations for the above relationship effect on anger response, we conducted an experiment to examine the roles of

approach and avoidance motives in determining relationship effects on anger responses in Study 2. One hundred and fifty two Hong Kong Chinese female participants' anger responses during emotion recalling tasks were assessed in terms of subjective feeling, physiological arousal and facial expression, after approach and avoidance motives were manipulated. Results revealed that, even after controlling for relevant personality traits, demographic variables, and relationship qualities, individuals displayed a higher level of anger-related subjective feeling and facial expression in kinship than in friendship. Such relationship effects were reversed and disappeared when approach and avoidance motives. In addition, we found that approach motives reduced individuals' sympathetic activation to anger-eliciting events in kinship, and avoidance motives lowered individuals' parasympathetic activation to happy events in friendship. The above findings have great implications for anger regulation and health promotion under relationship contexts.