How Social Acceptance Moderates the Impact of Mutual Antipathies

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Introduction

Overview: The present study integrated Basic Needs Theory with the original version of the Enemy Impact Inventory to provide a framework for a better understanding of the effects of enemyships on the socially accepted and excluded.

Previous Research:

Defining "enemyships"

➤A mutual antipathy is defined as a relationship characterized by reciprocal dislike between two people (Abecassis, 2003; Hartup, 2003; Witkow et al., 2005).

➤An enemy relationship (enemyship) can be best described as the most extreme form of mutual antipathy because it is characterized by hatred instead of mere dislike (Abecassis, 2003).

How common are enemyships?

➤Enemy relationships have been found prevalent across all ages. Up to 65% of elementary children are involved in an enemy relationship (see Hodges & Card, 2003 special issue), up to 75% of secondary students (Nishina et al., 2005), and up to 70% of adults (Abecassis, 2003).

How do enemyships affect people?

➤ Most research suggests that enemyships have a negative affect on one's life; such that enemyships have been linked to increases in depressive symptoms, social anxiety, loneliness, and decreases in self-worth (Pope, 2003; Witkow et al., 2005; Nishina et al., 2005).

➤ However, Sinclair (2004; Collier, Sinclair, & Smith, 2008) found that enemies can also motivate individuals to work harder, can facilitate friendship formation, and can have a positive impact on one's self concept. Specifically, research by Sinclair (2004; 2008) in her construction of the Enemy Impact Inventory, reveals that enemies both positively & negatively influence:

➤**Need for Belonging:** Enemies can cause friction in current relationships such by attempting to steal a romantic partner. They may also help one find allies as "the enemy of my enemy is my friend."

➤**Need for Control:** Enemies can threaten need for control by teasing someone about things that they cannot change such as his/her race. Alternatively, they can bolster one's sense of being in control if one learns to take control of an adversarial relationship.

➤**Need for Purpose and Goals:** Enemies have the ability to affect one's purpose by interfering with goal-oriented tasks, such as completing homework. However, they can also make one strive to work harder to spite an enemy.

➤**Need for Positive Identity:** Enemies can have a negative affect on one's self esteem by spreading rumors and gossiping about him/her. They may also positively affect individuals by teaching them to accept themselves.

➤**Need for Trust:** Enemies have the ability to affect one's ability to belief that others can be trusted and make them question that the world is a safe place. However, they can also help one learn who to trust.

Hypothesis: The purpose of the present study was to examine whether certain factors can determine who is positively impacted by adversaries and who is negatively affected.

➤ We believe the impact of an enemy varies depending on the level of social exclusion; those who are more socially accepted will have a more positive impact while those who are more socially rejected will experience more negative effects.

Socially accepted individuals have a better social support network that might help them withstand an enemyship. Whereas for the socially excluded, an enemy would represent yet another threat to belongingness.

Method

Participants:

Undergraduate students at Mississippi State University (n=296). The sample was 61.8% female, 72.6% Caucasian, 24.3% African-American, and 3.1% Other with an average age of 19.76 (SD=2.40)

Materials & Procedure: *Participants were recruited to complete a survey titled "Keep Your Friends Close and Your Enemies Closer" online via the Sona-Systems experimental administration program. Participants completed the following scales:*

Predictor Variable: Peer Social Exclusion (Sinclair, 2004, α = .94)

➤ This scale was used to assess history of social inclusion

➤It is comprised of 40 statements (including 10 "reversed" items indicating acceptance) like "There are/were a lot of people I didn't get along with" and "I feel socially accepted" which participants are asked to rate their level of agreement on a 8-point Likert scale (*1=strongly disagree, 8=strongly agree*).

➤A high score indicates social exclusion vs. a low score indicating social acceptance

➤The participants were asked to complete the survey twice; once for high school (PSE-H) and once for college (PSE-C) in order to get a sufficient idea of their social history.

Outcome Variable: Enemy Impact Inventory-Revised (EII-R) (Collier et al., 2008; Sinclair, 2004; Smith, 2007)

➤ The scale includes 91 items (to assess both positive α= .95 and negative impact α = .92 across the five types of basic needs, so 10 sub-scales in total. The range of reliabilities for each sub-scale varied between .82 and .90. Overall scale reliability was .87.

➤The EII used a 8-point Likert scale, with *1=Strongly Agree* and *8=Strongly Disagree*. Participants agreeing with statements such as "My foes were people who tried to make other people dislike me," and "My foes were people who made me worry about what they'd do next" scored high on the EII-R, indicating that enemies had a strong impact.

Results

Means and Standard Deviations: Once the scales were established, we could run descriptive statistics. As can be seen, enemies largely impacted one's need for trust and belonging/connection. Mean Social Exclusion scores in High School were 3.43 with a standard deviation of 1.16. In college, scores for Social Exclusion were 3.45 with a standard deviation of 1.11. Peer Social Exclusion in High School (PSEH) was correlated with experiencing Peer Social Exclusion in college (PSEC), *r* = .68.

Negative	Mean	Standard Deviation	Positive	Mean	Standard Deviation
Impact on Belonging (NEIIB)	5.04	1.61	Impact on Belonging (PEIIB)	4.13	1.51
Impact on Control (NEIIC)	4.02	1.63	Impact on Control (PEIIC)	4.81	1.59
Impact on Purpose/Goals (NEIIPG)	3.96	1.55	Impact on Purpose/Goals (PEIIPG)	4.74	1.66
Impact on Self-Regard (NEIISR)	4.27	1.96	Impact on Self-Regard (PEIISR)	4.90	1.80
Impact on Trust (NEIIT)	5.41	1.53	Impact on Trust (PEIIT)	5.01	1.60

Correlations of Subscales: Positive and negative subscales positively correlated with one another, creating evidence that enemies can either have a lot of impact – in both positive and negative ways – or little impact.

EII-R Subscale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. NEIIB	---	.34**	.33**	.30**	.50**	.19**	.28**	.34**	.29**	.33**
2. NEIIC		---	.65**	.61**	.25**	.18**	NS	.16**	NS	.15*
3. NEIIPG			---	.58**	.17**	.18**	NS	.12*	NS	.12*
4. NEIISR				---	.16**	.14*	NS	NS	NS	NS
5. NEIIT					---	.18**	.37**	.42**	.38**	.56**
6. PEIIB						---	.55**	.53**	.59**	.42**
7. PEIIC							---	.68**	.66**	.57**
8. PEIIPG								---	.66**	.57**
9. PEIISR									---	.53**
10. PEIIT										---

Correlations between Enemy Impact and Social Exclusion: Save for occasional non-significant correlations, Positive Enemy Impacts were negatively correlated with Social Exclusion and Negative Enemy Impact scores were positively correlated with Social Exclusion.

EII-R Subscale	PSER-H	PSER-C
NEIIB	NS	NS
NEIIC	.32**	.26**
NEIIPG	.37**	.34**
NEIISR	.33**	.23**
NEIIT	NS	NS
PEIIB	NS	NS
PEIIC	-.19**	NS
PEIIPG	-.17**	NS
PEIISR	-.18**	-.13**
PEIIT	-.14**	NS

** = indicates significance at the p< .01 level.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings
Consistent with our hypothesis, we found that persons reporting higher levels of social exclusion reported more NEGATIVE enemy impact. In contrast, social accepted people reported gleaning more POSITIVE outcomes from enemyships.

Additional Findings:
➤ The results of the EII-R showed how antipathies can impact all five of one's basic needs in both negative *and* positive ways, thus supporting the idea that interpersonal rejection does impact basic needs (Williams, 2007).

➤ Sometimes positive impact even outweighed negative impact. It has been suggested that enemies have a positive effect on pushing individual's to attain their purpose/goals, especially when attempting to prove an enemy wrong (Abecassis, 2003). As can be seen in our results, the positive impact on one's ability to achieve goals outweighed the negative impact, so this may be one of the main differences between "good" enemies and "bad" enemies.

➤ The relationship between social exclusion and enemy impact was stronger and more prevalent in High School than in College, which may point to either developmental differences in responses to enemies or potential differences in retrospective versus current accounts.

➤ In particular, there was really only evidence for a link between positive enemy impact and social acceptance in High School. Correlations between negative impact and social exclusion remain fairly consistent.

➤ Also worth noting, a number of researchers (see Hodges & Card, 2003 special issue on Enemies) have argued that having an enemy is not all that distinct from being socially excluded. Yet, our results clearly show that EII is distinct from peer social exclusion; meaning just because you have enemies does not mean you are socially excluded.

➤In fact, the present research makes additional important contributions to further research endeavors by creating measures that will allow both level of social exclusion and presence/influence of a mutual antipathy through means other than the peer nomination method. Peer nomination has been used to measure both constructs in the past which may explain why there was difficulty discerning a difference between the two.

Caveats

➤ An important thing to note about this study is that although the title of the measure is the *Enemy* Impact Inventory-Revised, the quality of mutual antipathies is what is assessed with this scale. A mutual antipathy has been defined as a relationship characterized by reciprocal dislike between two people (Abecassis, 2003; Hartup, 2003; Witkow et al., 2005). A majority of participants did not indicate actual hatred of an enemy, only some degree of dislike.

➤ Also important is that the study asked participants to think about their social exclusion in high school. That retrospective bias may be what enabled participants to see the positive impact of their enemies.

➤ Further, as the data is correlational it is possible that it is not only the case that socially accepted people garner more positive enemy outcomes and socially excluded more negative, BUT it may be that having a negative enemy leads to more social exclusion and having a more positive enemy relationship leads to more social acceptance.

Future Directions

Research on enemy relationships is very limited, therefore many directions may be taken.

➤ One future direction is looking at how past mutual antipathies effects compare to present mutual antipathies effects in individuals.

➤ In addition, future research could continue to parse out when individuals may get benefits from an enemy relationship.

➤ Additional research may also want to pursue the directionality of the relationship between social exclusion and enemy impact, and thus determine why there are different impacts associated with social exclusion and social acceptance.

Take Home Point : *Although many people believe that enemies have only a negative impact on our lives, it is becoming more and more evident that enemies can also have positive effects on people, especially for certain types of people.*