How Social Acceptance Moderates the Impact of Mutual Antipathies


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

Previous Research:

- Defining "enemies"
  - A mutual antipathy is defined as a relationship characterized by reciprocal dislike between two people (Abecassis, 2003; Harpur, 2003; Withkow, 2005).
  - An enemy relationship (enemies) can best be described as the most extreme form of mutual antipathy because it is characterized by hatred instead of mere dislike (Abecassis, 2003).

How common are enemieships?

- 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., 2003), and up to 76% of adults (Abecassis, 2003).

How do enemieships affect people?

- Most research suggests that enemieships have a negative affect on one’s life, such that enemieships have been linked to increases in depressive symptoms, social anxiety, loneliness, and decreases in self-worth (Papas, 2003; Withkow, 2003; Nishina et al., 2003).
- However, Sinclair (2004; Coller, 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 and negatively impact people.
- Need for Belonging: Enemies can cause friction in current relationships such by attempting to reveal 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 pursuits, such as completing homework. However, they can also make one strive to work harder to outperform an enemy.
- Need for Positive Identity: Enemies can have a negative effect on one’s self-esteem by spreading rumors and gossiping about him/her. They may also positively affect identity by teaching them to accept themselves.
- Need for Trust: Enemies have the ability to affect one’s ability to believe 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 enemieship. 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. Participants were recruited through the Psychology Research Lab and completed the following scales:

- Predictive Variable: Peer Social Exclusion (Sinclair, 2004, b = 94). This scale was used to assess history of social inclusion.
- Outcome Variable: Enemy Impact Inventory-Revised, the quality of mutual antipathies (Sinclair, 2004, b = 94). This scale was used to assess the impact of enemies on one’s life, as measured by reciprocal dislike between two people (Abecassis, 2003).
- The scale includes 91 items (to assess both positive and negative antipathies) and indicates actual hatred of an enemy, only some degree of dislike.
- 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.
- 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/identification. Mean Social Exclusion scores in High School were 5.43 with a standard deviation of 1.16. In college, scores for Social Exclusion were 5.43 with a standard deviation of 1.16. Overall scale reliability was .92.
- The EII-R showed how antipathies can impact all five of one’s 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.
- 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.
- Correlations between Enemy Impact and Social Exclusion: Sacs for occasional non-significant correlations, Positive Enemy Impact were negatively correlated with Social Exclusion and Negative Enemy Impact subscales were positively correlated with Social Exclusion.
- Summary of Findings: Consistent with our hypothesis, we found that persons reporting higher levels of social exclusion reported more NEGATIVE enemy impact. In contrast, socially accepted people reported glooming more POSITIVE outcomes from enemieships.

Participants were recruited to complete a survey titled “Keep Your Friends Close and Your Enemies Closer” online via the Survey System seating assignment program. Participants completed the following scales:

- Need for Belonging: Enemies can cause friction in current relationships such by attempting to reveal 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 pursuits, such as completing homework. However, they can also make one strive to work harder to outperform an enemy.
- Need for Positive Identity: Enemies can have a negative effect on one’s self-esteem by spreading rumors and gossiping about him/her. They may also positively affect identity by teaching them to accept themselves.
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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 benefit 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 Points:

- 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.