„... and harming your enemies":
Is there a need for a psychology of emnity?

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Introduction

Screening the literature on emnity, it appears almost compulsory to remark that this topic has hitherto not been addressed in great detail (e.g. Holt, 1989; Wiseman & Duck, 1995). This is particularly surprising given that the majority of publications on the topic also highlight ist importance. Enemies, according to these papers, are strong – even evil – adversaries meaing us harm. As such, they are more than a mere, potentially moraly neutral, opponent.

Generally, the last more detailed engagement with emnity in social psychology **dates back to the end of the Cold War** (see Issue 45(2) of the „Journal of Social Issues", Holst & Silversteib, 1989), dealing with the importance of „enemy images" in a post-Soviet time. Apart from this, there exists a handful of psychodynamic contributions (e.g. Volkan, 1985; Zur, 1991). Apart from this, there is a small selection of papers on interpersonal emnity, particular as part of childhood development (see Oppenheimer, 2010).

This begs the question, whether psychology has merely overlooked the topic, while focussing on friendship on one hand and intergroup conflict on the other. Arguably, it is also possible that there is no research into emnity, because the concept lacks practical relevance. The aim of this poster is to shed some light on this question.

Enmity an irrelevant concept?

Prevalence of 'enemy'/'enemies'
One way to determine, whether emnity (or in this case 'enemies' and 'enemy'I is a phenomenon worth investigating further, is to test if and how prevalent it is within contemporary debates or media. Obviously, a fully-fledged investigation would justify a poster in ist own right, but some basic date provides a good primer.

First of all, there is 'ngram' a service provided by Google allowing to plot the frequency of words across a large (6000 books/year) sample of digitalised books. Here, entering 'enemy' or 'enemies' respectively, indicates a decline in frequency, following a brief spike in the middle of the 18th century. The only exceptions – unsurprisingly being the periods surrounding the First and Second World War (See Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Google nGram for enemy and enemies.

Empirical Primer

Sample and method.
To get a first impression, whether emnity is a psychologically relevant phenomenon, I asked a small sample of German **psychology students** (*n* = 33, ♀ = 31) to complete a brief questionnaire.

It consisted of a) **word association tasks** (*What comes to your midn thinking about the term 'enemy'/'enemy image'/'political enemy'?*), b) a **sentence completion task** (*„Enemies are common in the context of...", „Enemies have to be...", „Someone with enemies..."* and *„Enemies aim to.."*) and c) How much they agreed with statemets justifying **harming enemies** (e.g. *„When dealing with enemies, it is justified to use violence."*), the **importance of emnity today** (e.g. *„The age of enemyship is over."*), their **usefulness as a political term** (e.g. *„Enmies are a relevant concept in political debates."* and how much they **determine politics** (e.g. *„Within IR there will always be enemies."*) (two items each, rated on a seven-point likert scale from 'totally agree' to 'totally disagree'. I also asked, whether there are currently any specific 'enemy images' or 'enemies' within/towards Germany.

Results

What constitutes an enemy and their goals?
The most frequent associations for enemy, enemy image and political enemy are listed in table 1 below. Interestingly, 'enemy' is largely described as aggressive and negative, while enemy images are predominantly understood as prejudiced stereotypes. When it comes to political enemies, either military conflict or political disagreements came to mind as well as actual and quite contemporary world powers. The goal of enemies was, without exception understood to be harming –if not destroying- others.

Table 1
Most frequent word associations for different enmity related words

Enemy (n, %)		enemy image (n, %)		political enemy (n, %)	
1) war	16 (48%)	1) prejudice	12 (36%)	1) war	13 (39%)
2) violence/aggression	16 (48%)	2) stereotype	5 (15%)	2) Russia	7 (21%)
3) Anger	12 (36%)	3) aggression	4 (12%)	3) Ukraine	6 (18%)
4) fear/hatred	11 (33%)	4) nation	4 (12%)	4) Cold War / USA	5 (15%)
5) evil/negative	7 (21%)	5) negative	4 (12%)	5) Quarrel/Debate	5 (15%)

The existence and relevance of enemies and enemy images
The results with regards to the relevance of enemies/enemy images are somewhat mixed see fig. 2 to 4 below. On one hand the majority of participants indicate that there are particular enemy images in the German Context (mostly Islam/Terrorists, but also foreigners, unemployed people and the USA). In fact a third of the participants states that Germany currently has actual enemies (terrorists, Russia, the USA, nations facing bankrupcy) and that emnity as a concept to some extent determines international politics. On the other hand, almost half of the sample, does not see Germany as currently having specific enemies and on average participants saw emnity as neither particularly important or useful in terms of world politics and understanding them.
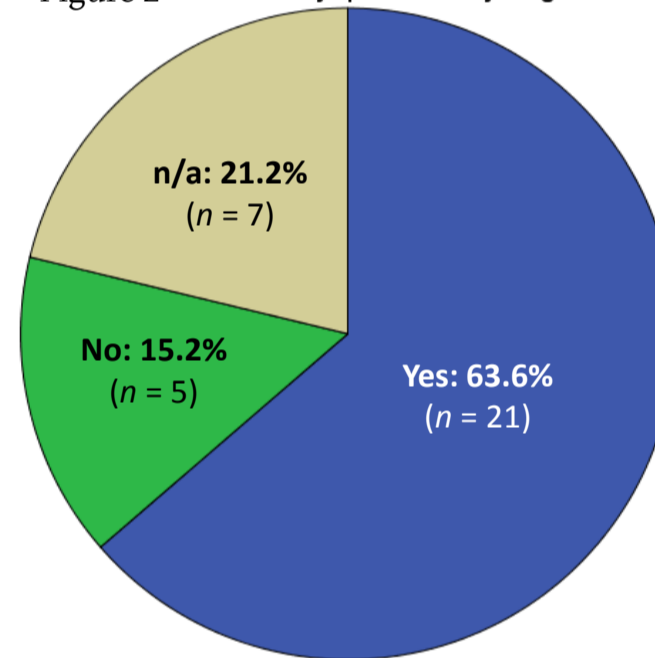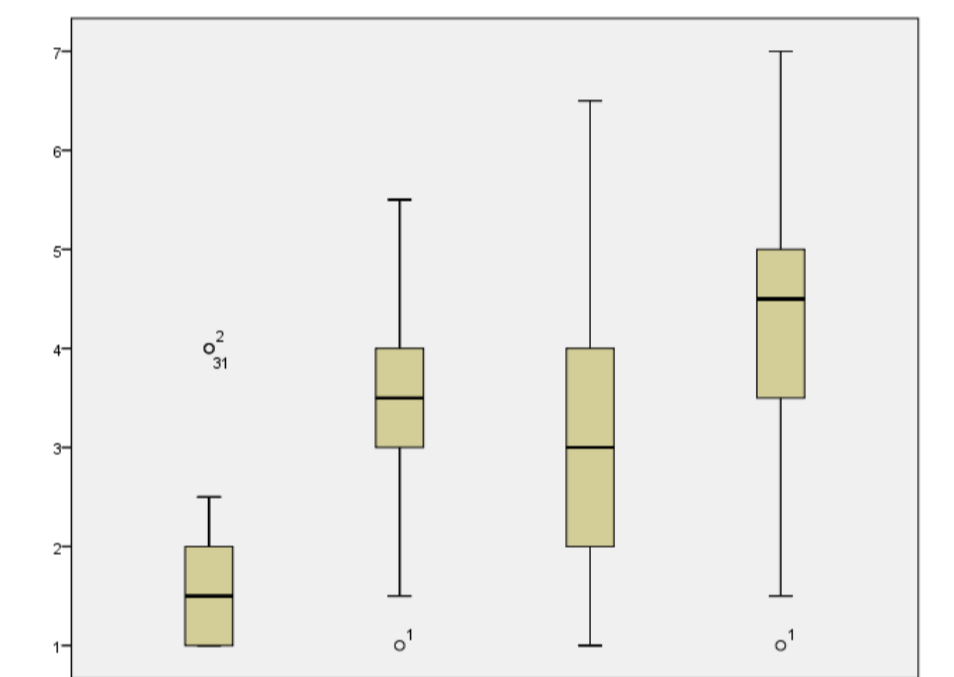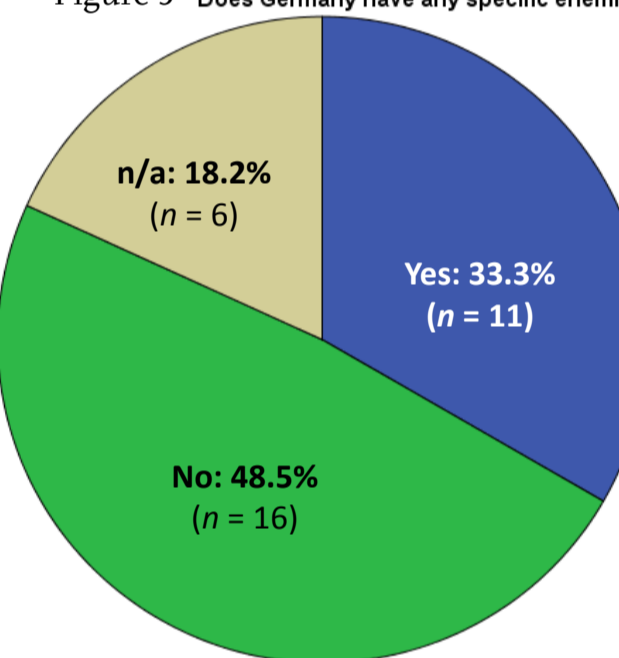

Figure 4: Boxplots for the likert-scaled items.

What to do about enemies?
Regardless of whether or not there currently are specific enemies, harming enemies or using violence against them was (almost) univocally refused. The majority of the sample indicated that „Enemies have to be..." accepted, ignored or avoided. Only four participants said enemies should be fought, which contrasts to five participants stating enemies should be loved, respected and treated fairly.

Discussion

Where do these findings leave us with regards to the question, whether or not there is a need for emnity as a concept within psychology?

Given the relative decline of emnity related words over the last decades and the subjective unimportance of the concept in my sample, one could conclude that emnity is too irrelevant to be investigated more thoroughly.

However, this would miss two important points. Firstly, emnity – unlike other concepts – rolls a variety of meanings into one. An enemy is more than an opponent. The term comes with strong connotations of conflict, negativity, even morality („Enemies are 'evil'.") and these connotations are reported by the students in my study. Secondly, despite the reported lack of importance or presence of political enemies, a noticable share of the sample could easily name some very contemporary 'enemies', say Russia or the USA. What is more, they saw emnity as a key factor within international politics.

If the participants themselves are not particularly positive in terms of harming enemies or using them as a personal way of understanding politics, it is worth highlighting that we are talking about a sample of well educated, possibly left of center student. In a more representative sample, the intentions towards 'terrorists' or 'Americans' might not be quite as passive or tolerant.

In conclusion, political emnity should be studied in more detail, if we want to avoid preemptive generalisations from a brief questionnaire.

References

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