

The emotional side of paternalism: do people share what they feel?

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Introduction

•Paternalism (when A acts towards B with a fatherlike attitude) has been extensively studied when targeted at women as a category. However, paternalism is a widespread phenomenon and can be targeted at other categories as well, such as the young, the elderly or the handicapped person. Paternalism has been shown detrimental on the cognitive performance of its target (e.g., Dardenne, Dumont, & Bollier, 2007). Far less well known is the emotional reaction of the target. In the present study, we investigated the emotional reactions of people being the target of paternalism because of their young age.

•Because paternalism is generally positively perceived and not identified explicitly as prejudice (Fehr & Sassenberg, 2009), we predicted that targets confronted with paternalism will self-report explicit positive feelings (and little negatives ones). However, and because paternalism has deleterious consequences on target's cognitive functions, we predicted that they will socially share a different pattern of emotions. When it comes to share their emotions with a close friend (Social Sharing of Emotions, Rimé, 2009), paternalism might lead to sharing less positive and more negative emotions than in the self-reports.

Methods

• 132 undergraduates (mean age = 21.53; $SD = 2.06$), native French speaker participants were randomly assigned to a paternalist, hostile or factual context ($N = 45$, $N = 43$, $N = 44$, respectively). We activated paternalism and hostility via a description of the welcome speech of the participants' alleged new boss. In the paternalistic version, the boss was protective, benevolent, helpful, and somehow intrusive (in his employee's professional as well as personal lives). In the hostile version, the boss clearly expressed all his negative stereotypes about young in the workplace (inexperienced, reckless, lazy, greedy, etc., Chasteen, Schwarz, & Park, 2003).

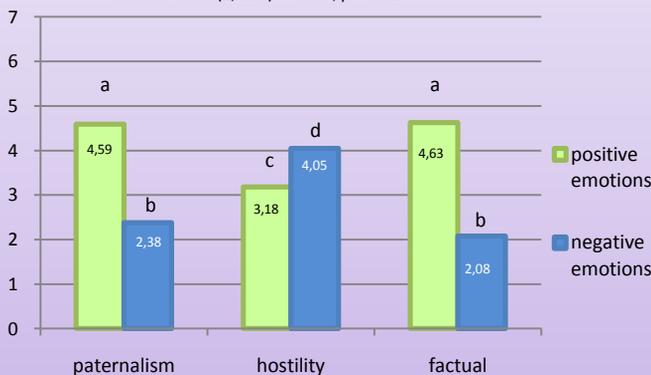
• After reading one of the three texts, participants had to report how they felt, on a list of 68 positive (e.g., enthusiastic, happy) and negative (e.g., angry, sceptical) emotions and feelings, using a 7-points Likert scale.

• For the social sharing of emotions measure, participants were asked to imagine that their best friend had sent them an email asking how their first day was going. They had 5 minutes to write their answer on a word processing document. Using EMOTAIX (Piolat & Bannour, 2009) as a support, we identified the emotional words used by the participants. We created two complementary variables, a positive social sharing (percentage of socially shared positive emotions) and a negative social sharing (percentage of socially shared negative emotions)

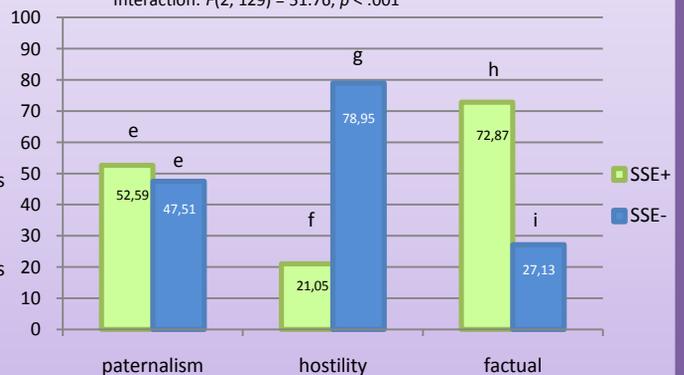
Results

We used a 3 (condition: Paternalist vs. Hostile vs. Factual) X 2 (valence: Positive vs. Negative) X 2 (emotion measure: Self-reported vs. Socially shared) ANOVA, with valence and emotion as within subject variables, to test our hypotheses. The DV were standardized but are displayed below with the original metrics. The Condition X Valence X Emotion measure interaction was significant, $F(2, 129) = 6.55$, $p = .002$

Self reported emotions (7-point Likert scale)
Interaction: $F(2, 129) = 47.48$, $p < .001$



Socially shared emotions (percentage of positive and negative shared emotions, summing at 100%)
Interaction: $F(2, 129) = 51.76$, $p < .001$



Note. Means with different subscripts differ significantly at $p < .001$ (except between c and d, which differ significantly at $p < .05$)

References

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Conclusion

Even though participants in the paternalist condition reported more positive than negative emotions, when it comes to share them, similar amounts of negative and positive emotions appeared. Participants reported experiencing paternalism as positively as in the factual condition. However, when given the opportunity to share this experience of paternalism, it is not as positively experienced as a factual event anymore. Paternalism is less positively and more negatively experienced than a factual event.

We can conclude that paternalism is positively perceived at first glance, as we can see in the self-reported emotions, but when we use a more subtle measure of emotions (Social Sharing of Emotions), a negative component appears, making paternalism an ambivalent episode.