

# The social value of emotions

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## Facial expression display social power

Certain emotions relate to or constitute different social statuses. Empirical studies have shown how displays of embarrassment mark lower status (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). They also show how low-power people report more pressure to smile and expect that the other's impression of them will diminish if they fail to smile (LaFrance and Hecht, 1999). Thus, facial expressions of emotions (EFE) communicate both emotions and social power.

## Evaluative knowledge

The Dual-Knowledge Theory (Beauvois & Dubois, 2000; 2009) may be a useful framework to understand why EFE display social power. EFE are displayed in social interactional contexts. Interaction (dyadic or group) is always a specific kind of social relation (a friendship / professional / seduction / teaching / parental, etc. relation) implying an evaluative knowledge. This knowledge refers to the social value of the person, *i.e.* it tells what "one can do" with the other person(s) in the context of the social relationship that brings them together. In this perspective, emotion transmitted by the face carries social value.

H<sup>0</sup>= EFE exhibit social value (social desirability value and social utility value)

We assume that the description of others' EFE is an evaluative activity.

In other words, a social value judgment process parallels the emotional descriptive activity.

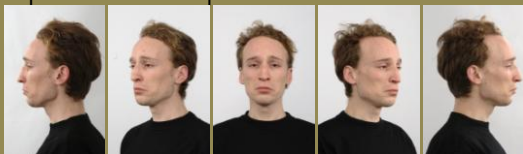
Beauvois (1995) distinguishes two types of evaluative activity: *social desirability* judgments and *social utility* judgments:

*Social desirability* is rooted in the interpersonal domain. It implies the adoption of strategies which are likely to cause a person to be liked or disliked by other people.

*Social utility* is rooted in social functioning. It indicates the benefit that a social organization can obtain from a given object or person.

### Procedure

31 lay persons (15 women and 16 men; mean age: 40,68) were shown pictures of young males displaying EFE and were asked to answer questions describing them. They were told they were participating in a study on first impressions about persons.



### QUESTIONNAIRE

- *social desirability* item

Would you say that this person has everything to be liked by other students and by his relatives?

- *social utility* item

Would you say that this person has everything to succeed in his education and to practice a lucrative job?

### Material

The material consisted of a PowerPoint file that included a presentation of **10 pictures** each followed by **12 items**.

The pictures were taken from the Radboud Faces Database (RaFD).

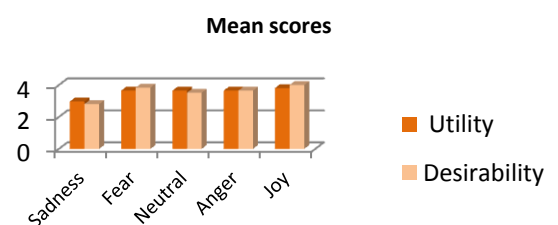
The pictures displayed EFE of **5 emotions** (Anger, Fear, Joy, Neutral and Sadness), displayed by 10 different males (two males for each emotion) seen from five different viewpoints (from left to right in steps of 45°).

The first 4 questions were diversion items. The **8** following questions were alternatively *social desirability* items and *social utility* items.

Participants answered each item on a **7-points scale** (from 0 = *Totally disagree* to 6 = *Totally agree*).

### Results

Two ANOVAs with the number of emotions (5) as repeated measures were performed, the first on Utility judgments, the second on Desirability judgments. Significant effect of the emotion was observed for Utility judgments  $F(4,27) = 2,70$ ,  $p = .05$ . Significant effect of the emotion was also observed for Desirability judgments,  $F(4,27) = 6,61$ ,  $p < .001$ .



Results show that displaying **sadness** is appraised as not much desirable nor utile whereas expressing **joy** is the opposite. Therefore, other's facial behavior does not solely express emotional information (descriptive knowledge); it also conveys social value (evaluative knowledge). More specifically, **emotions are carriers of desirability and utility values**. Such results support the literature on implicit personality research according to which the psychological description of others is mainly a process of internalization/naturalization of social values. In this perspective, EFE can be considered as social acts with consequences (LaFrance, 2011). The display of emotions may help individuals negotiate roles and statuses via social value.

**Conclusion** – Social value is the ubiquitous context for emotional expression.