Can Emotions be Shared?

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Emotions: Rationality, Morality, and Social Understanding

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The Problem

• Sharing attitudes in theories of collective intentionality (e.g. Schweikard & Schmid, 2013)
  – Ontologically individual attitudes from group’s intentional perspective
• Schmid (2009, 108): “In the straightforward sense, sharing is not a matter of type, or of qualitative identity (i.e. of having different things that are somehow similar), but a matter of token, or numerical identity”.
  ➢ Is it possible to share emotions in token-identity sense, or only in type-identity sense?
    – Three individualistic theses about emotions: ontological, epistemological, and physical
• What is shared when an emotion is shared?
  – Componential views (e.g. Scherer 2009): appraisals, ANS changes, motor activation, and subjective feelings
  – Phenomenological views: emotional experience
Proposed classification

• Type-identity theories
  A. Aggregative theories
     – Organizational psychological theories
     – Ritualistic theories
  B. Group-based theories
     – Intergroup emotion theory
     – Analytic theories
     – Phenomenological theories

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A. Aggregative theories
Organizational psychological theories

• Group emotion as a sum of individual group members’ emotional experiences and disposition.
  – George (1996): *group affective tone*
  – Barsade & Gibson (1998*); Kelly & Barsade (2001): affective team/group composition: “examines how the emotions of individual group members combine to create a group-level emotion, and how group emotion may be seen as the sum of its parts” (Barsade & Gibson 1998, 88)

• Affective homogeneity is not necessary for a shared emotion in an aggregative sense.

• Basic problem: do not distinguish between very dissimilar shared emotions, some of which do not qualify as such in the first place because the individuals do not have the same type of emotion.

Ritualistic theories

• Durkheim (1912), Collins (2004)*
• Ritual ingredients: group assembly with boundary to others; mutual focus of attention; shared affect
  – Feedback intensification through rhythmic entrainment
• Collective effervescence, “a high degree of absorption in emotional entrainment, whatever the emotion may be” (Collins 2004, p. 108)
• Ritual outcomes: group solidarity; emotional energy; group symbols (infused with EE); standards of morality
• Shared affect and mutual focus of attention *accompany* and *causally reinforce* each other, without being constituents of collective effervescence.

B. Group-based theories
Intergroup Emotion Theory

• “When an individual identifies with a group, that ingroup becomes part of the self, thus acquiring social and emotional significance” (Smith, Seger, and Mackie 2007*, 431).

1. Group-level emotions are distinct from the same person’s individual-level emotions.

2. Group-level emotions depend on the person’s group identification.

3. Group-level emotions converge towards a prototypical profile in the group.

4. Group-level emotions motivate and regulate intragroup and intergroup attitudes and behavior.

• Since togetherness with others is not necessary for group-based emotion, the theory only predicts shared emotions proper.

➤ Menges & Kilduff (2015): *group-shared vs. group-based* emotions

Analytic theories


• X and Y share an emotion, or have a collective emotion if,
  (a) X and Y experience an emotion of the same type with similar:
    (i) evaluative content and
    (ii) affective experience; and
  (b) X and Y are mutually aware that (a)
• Sharing the evaluative content is a matter of appraising the object of emotion similarly with others on the basis of shared concerns.
  – Private vs. collective commitment to shared concerns
• Experienced both functionally and phenomenally in the role of a group member, e.g. as “our joy about our winning the prize”
• Affective experience may take many forms (e.g. “oneness”, togetherness); synchronization of emotional responses as causal substrate.

2. Helm (2014)*

- An interpersonal pattern of reactive emotions (resentment, gratitude, indignation, approbation, guilt) both constitutes and manifests a community of respect.
- Sharing manifests as appropriate emotions in relevant role positions.
  - A pattern of rationality extends across multiple persons “so that what reactive emotions it is rational for me to feel is tied to those it is rational for others to feel and second that the evaluative attitudes these patterns constitute —the respect and reverence themselves—are ours jointly” (Helm 2014, 48).
- Treats divergences as either occasional, individual failures in an interpersonal pattern, or — if they are deep and persistent enough— as anomalies that annihilate the existence of the pattern.
  - How to distinguish improvement in reactive emotions before they have become widely shared?

Genuinely vs. distributively collective emotions: *feeling-together with others* vs. *feeling alongside others*

- Felt in the mode of a group member together with other group members on the basis of shared concerns.
- *Caring-with* manifests as an interpersonal pattern of emotions in activities whose participants take themselves to constitute a group.
- Complementary emotions are collectively intentional insofar as the participants care about the object as a group.

Existential background structures of collective affective intentionality

- *Felt preparedness* to have certain kind of experiences, such as *feelings of being-together* that “prepare us to immediately understand certain circumstances as situations in which what goes on has import to us (the participants) as a group” (2016, p. 192).
- Also non-affective forms of collective intentionality, e.g. institutions

2. León, Szanto & Zahavi (2017)*

- "Shared emotions are socially extended emotions that involve a specific type of constitutive integration between the participating individuals’ emotional experiences." (p. 1)
  
  (i) Reciprocal other-awareness; allows individuals to experience the emotion as ours rather than merely mine or yours
  
  (ii) Synchronic and diachronic integration; “identification with other subjects’ emotional perspectives and appraisals” (p. 12)

- Distinguish emotional sharing from instances that fall short of it, such as emotional contagion and affective mimicry, arguing that these are not necessary let alone sufficient for emotional sharing.
  - MS: These processes may still contribute to the phenomenology of emotional sharing, especially feelings of togetherness.

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Analytic theories

• Plural subject account (Gilbert 2014, 23): “Persons X, Y, and so on (or members of a population) are collectively E if and only if they are jointly committed to be E as a body.”
  – A properly installed authority can commit an entire group to a certain emotion
  – A joint commitment to an emotion can be expressed by acting and talking in ways that are consistent with the emotion
  – Feelings of collective emotion exist in and through the individual group members’ feelings

• MS: Impossible to give rise to a collective or shared emotion by a joint commitment to it.
  – A joint commitment to an emotion amounts to the creation of a group-social feeling rule (Hochschild 1983).

2. Huebner (2011)*

- Collective emotions are coordinated and integrated states of complex computational systems whose subsystems realize distinct components of emotion.
- Functionalism: any system with sufficient computational sophistication, whether biological organisms, silicon-based life-forms, or social groups, can have emotions.
- The case of USS Palau has distributed computational architecture but lacks “the sort of agitation that we find in the case of a fear representation” (p. 114).

➔ Collective fear in McCain-Palin presidential campaign 2008
  - MS: collective fear can be explained equally well or even better with group-based accounts that highlight shared concerns of the group members and their complementary emotions.

Phenomenological theories
1. Krueger (2014)*

- Joint ownership of emotion is founded on mutual affect regulation
  - Prime example: early infant-caregiver relationship: the caregiver’s and the infant’s emotions are token-identically shared because they form a coupled social system in which the caregiver’s emotion is a constituent part of the infant’s emotional experience.
  - After infancy, joint attention with mutual awareness together with emotional convergence alters the quality of emotional experience, compared to a similar solitary experience. Yet the change in phenomenal experience does not warrant the ascription of a numerically identical emotion to all members of the group.

- MS: The joint ownership thesis is plausible in infancy, but it is another thing whether it amounts of sharing of emotions (rather than affects with similar valence)

2. Schmid (2009)*

- When individuals share concerns, they are capable of experiencing a phenomenal fusion of their feelings into “our” feeling
  - E.g. shared grief of mourning parents (Scheler, 2008)
  - Differences in the intensity and quality of feeling do not threaten the emergence of a phenomenological “we” if the participants’ feelings match those of the others “according to the different roles the participants play in the joint activity” (p. 79) as these are differences between aspects of one and the same feeling.

- León et al. (2017): it is questionable to distinguish between an experience (the emotion) and the experiences of that experience.
  - We are not pre-reflectively aware of our experiences as objects on which we can adopt different perspectives.

- Salmela & Nagatsu (2016) a phenomenal fusion may not indicate strong sharing if it may associate with dissimilar shared emotions.

Final remarks

• An optimal theory of collective emotions would be a synthesis of ritualistic theories and philosophical group-based theories, both analytic and phenomenological.
  – Analytic theories highlight normative underpinnings of collective emotions in the group members’ shared concerns as well as rational interconnections between their emotions,
  – Ritualistic theories emphasize the synchronization of emotional responses in the emergence of collective emotional experiences.
  – Phenomenological theories could benefit from incorporating the latter into their analyses of emotional integration, feelings of togetherness, and felt our-ness of shared emotions.

• Together, these approaches are complementary rather than competitive as they study the same phenomena from different perspectives.

Thank you for your attention!