

Towards a Taxonomy of Collective Emotions

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Abstract

This paper distinguishes collective emotions from other phenomena pertaining to the social and interactive nature of emotion and proposes a taxonomy of different types of collective emotion. First, it emphasizes the distinction between collective emotions as affective experiences and underpinning mechanisms. Second, it elaborates on other types of affective experience, namely the social sharing of emotion, group-based emotions, and joint emotions. Then, it proposes a working definition of collective emotion via a minimal threshold and four structural features. Finally, it develops a taxonomy of five types of collective emotion: emotional sharing, emotional contagion, emotional matching, emotional segregation, and emotional fusion.

Keywords

collective affective experience, collective emotion, group-based emotion, joint emotion

Introduction

The collectivity of emotions is a thriving area of emotion research. The term “collective emotion”, however, is notoriously vague and ambiguous. This paper proposes several conceptual distinctions that serve the purpose of providing more conceptual clarity in the complex field of socially extended and collective emotions. The paper focusses on the ways in which emotions might be socially embedded, facilitated, and indeed, extended or collectively enacted (for an overview of how these terms are used see Stephan et al., 2014). Before I begin, let me briefly indicate where this paper is heading.

Most importantly, I will suggest a rather narrow and demanding definition of collective emotion. The definition is meant to make sense of the intuition that a *collective emotion* is (phenomenologically and functionally) *the emotion of a collective*. I understand *collectives* as self-organizing systems that emerge when individuals with suitable habitualized interaction patterns are sufficiently coupled in ongoing social interaction (Thonhauser & Weichold, 2021; Weichold & Thonhauser, 2020). This definition combines the idea of dynamical self-organization, which is a familiar notion in social psychology (Dale et al., 2014; De Jaeger & Di Paolo, 2007; Vallacher et al., 2002), with a

diachronic perspective on habitualization, which is well-established in sociology (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).¹ Following this definition, I suggest speaking of a *collective emotion* when an affective experience is enacted by a collective. Usually, the emerging collective affective experience involves four structural features: (1) a collective evaluative perspective which leads to a shared focus of the emotion; (2) a collective appraisal of the eliciting object or event leading to the same (or sufficiently similar) emotional responses among participants; (3) a sense of togetherness, meaning that collective emotions come with first-person plural awareness of the emotion being *our* emotion; (4) self and other awareness, meaning that the involved individuals are related to each other as co-subjects of the collective experience. However, not all structural features are equally present in all enactments of collective emotion. To account for those differences, we can distinguish between five ideal types of collective emotion based on the (relative) absence of one of the structural features.

Before this novel approach to collective emotions is presented in more detail, it is useful to distinguish collective emotions from other forms of socially embedded, facilitated, or extended affective experience. What I suggest calling *joint emotion* has most similarities with collective emotion. Like a

collective emotion, a joint emotion is functionally dependent upon a collective evaluative perspective, leading to individuals sharing (to various degrees) the emotion's focus (Sánchez Guerrero, 2016). However, although a joint emotion depends on a socially distributed basis, the emotion itself is that of an individual, and not of a collective. Whereas a collective emotion requires the coupling of individuals in ongoing social interaction, a joint emotion might also be experienced by an individual that is currently not in any social interaction. In short, when enacting a joint emotion, an individual appraises a situation from the perspective of a collective, but it does so individually. Consequently, the structural features (3) and (4) are absent from joint emotion and (2) is only enacted by one individual. *Group-based emotion*, as it is used in social psychology, has many similarities with joint emotion. The difference is that it is based on a lower degree of diachronic integration, as it does not involve a collective evaluative perspective, but merely the identification with a social category. Otherwise, group-based emotion and joint emotion have the same experiential structure.

Collective emotions, joint emotions and group-based emotions are different forms of (to various degrees) *socially extended* affective experience. They can be distinguished from *other-directed* affective experiences like empathy and sympathy as well as from the communicative function of emotions (Wilutzky, 2015) and the general tendency to communicate our emotions (Rimé et al., 1991). All of this is part of the social nature of human emotional life, and might be considered socially embedded or facilitated, but does not amount to social extension or distribution (Krueger & Szanto, 2016).

All distinctions discussed so far pertain to a taxonomy of different forms of affective experience. *Affective experiences* need to be distinguished from *underlying mechanisms*. This is important because, especially in the case of socially distributed emotions, several (psychological, neurological, social, etc.) mechanisms are involved in the facilitation of an affective experience. A clear distinction between mechanisms and experiences is the precondition for investigating the interplay between the two.

The paper proceeds in the following steps. Section 2 discusses some background assumptions on which this paper is built, but which cannot be defended within its scope. Section 3 elaborates on the distinction between affective experiences and underlying mechanisms. Section 4 offers a taxonomy of other forms of affective experience apart from collective emotion. Section 5 develops the working definition of collective emotion in more detail and proposes a taxonomy of different types of collective emotion. Section 6 provides one example how this narrower definition of collective emotion might help improving research designs. The paper ends with a brief conclusion.

Background Assumptions

In this section, I discuss a few background assumptions on which this paper is built and which provide the methodological framework for how I proceed. To begin with, the paper builds on the growing body of evidence suggesting that emotions can be *socially extended* (Carter et al., 2016; Krueger & Szanto, 2016; León et al., 2019; Slaby, 2014). In contrast to the classic extended mind thesis which is based on the so-called “parity principle” (Clark & Chalmers, 1998), I follow Krueger and Szanto (2016) in suggesting that it is more promising to approach the issue of the extended mind by emphasizing dynamical self-organization. The core idea is this: If individuals are integrated (“coupled”) in a proper way, processes which are distributed among several individuals can form extended systems with emergent properties. I suggest calling these systems *collectives* (Thonhauser & Weichold, 2021; Weichold & Thonhauser, 2020). Now, the main premise of this paper is that dynamical self-organization enables a collective, among many other things, to enact emotions. To be sure, there remain many open questions and explanatory challenges for such an approach to socially extended or distributed emotions. Most importantly, emotions are structurally complex and more research is required to explore how different components of an emotion might be socially distributed (Krueger, 2012).

The specific contribution of this paper is to chart the territory of the socially extended affective mind from the perspective of affective experience. This builds on a systematic connection between dynamical system theory and phenomenology. As Rowlands (2010) has argued, the new way of approaching the issue of the extended mind via dynamical self-organization is actually the old way in which the phenomenological tradition has thought of embodiment. Hence, what is described as dynamical self-organization from the perspective of dynamical system theory can be described as inter-bodily resonance from the perspective of phenomenology (Fuchs & De Jaeger, 2009).

Building on this connection, I make use of another key premise of the phenomenological tradition: It is wrong to assume that affective experience only shows us how an emotion appears to us distinct from what it really is. Rather, the key premise of phenomenology is that an analysis of the structure of affective experiences makes manifest crucial aspects of the reality of emotions (Zahavi, 2021). To be sure, this does not imply that experience is infallible. Perception, for instance, is fallible. Something appears like a house, but upon closer inspection, it becomes manifest that it is only a facade as part of a film set. In the same way, an affective experience can appear like a collective emotion to an individual, but upon closer inspection, it turns out that nobody else participated in the experience, and thus, that it was not a collective experience in the first place. It is unwarranted, however, to draw sceptic

conclusions from the fallibility of experience. Rather, we should expect that, at least in the felicitous cases, the structure of the experience makes manifest the reality of the emotion. A reality that can also be identified by empirical studies. In short, phenomenological reflection (which is different from introspection) can validate the structural features of the different types of socially extended emotions distinguished in this paper.

Let me end this section with a final methodological remark: I consider conceptual distinctions to be heuristic tools. The overall aim of this paper is to improve the understanding of the relevant *phenomena* in the field of socially extended emotion, with the purpose of facilitating empirical research in that field. I am not interested in a conceptual analysis of how we use terms like “joint”, “shared”, or “collective” emotion (for the distinction between phenomena and concepts see Weichold & Rucińska, 2021). This builds on an understanding of *concepts as formal indications* of the relevant phenomena (Heidegger, 2010). Thus, it is only for the purpose of emphasizing so far overlooked distinctions between phenomena that I will use some concepts differently than in most of the literature. If someone prefers other terms to signify those phenomena, I am fine with it. The phenomenal distinctions are important, not the words used.

Types of Experience versus Underlying Mechanisms

Most research on collective emotion in psychology and the cognitive sciences studies the psychological mechanisms underlying collective emotion. For instance, in an overview article von Scheve and Ismer (2013) focus on the mechanisms leading to “synchronous convergence in affective responding”. This is their working definition of collective emotion, which is much broader than my use of the term and involves all forms of socially extended emotion in my taxonomy. von Scheve and Ismer (2013) discuss “face-to-face encounters”, “culture and shared knowledge”, and “identification with a social group”, before suggesting regrouping those mechanisms in terms of “social cognition”, “expressive behavior”, and “social practices”. What I take von Scheve and Ismer to provide is a taxonomy of the psychological and sociological mechanisms underpinning socially extended emotions.

Within the framework of this paper, it is not possible to delve into the issue of underlying mechanisms. For one, it is too complex to be accounted for in one paper anyway. Moreover, as a philosopher I am not the most qualified to attend to that issue. Rather, this paper addresses the phenomenological task of mapping the field of affective experience. I take it that a taxonomy of socially extended affective experience is of value in itself. But more importantly, it lays important groundwork for the question of how different underlying mechanisms relate to different affective experiences. Studying the relation between mechanisms and experiences is a difficult task, as multiple mechanisms might

underlie the same experience, and conversely, different experiences might arise from the same combination of mechanisms.² It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this issue further. Rather, the focus will be on developing a taxonomy of affective experience, which is already an enormous task.

But before moving to the first distinction in the proposed taxonomy, let me briefly cast a few selected spotlights on ongoing work on mechanisms which I consider particularly important in connection with the core claim that emotions can be socially extended. One important area of research concerns the social distribution of emotion regulation. Newer research suggests that the distribution of emotion regulation across various individuals is the norm rather than the exception (Varga & Krueger, 2013; von Scheve, 2012). Similarly, emotions are always enacted within a specific repertoire of emotion (Poser et al., 2019), which suggest that expressive behavior is usually also part of socially distributed regulatory processes. In addition, I want to point to studies of how emotional entrainment affects the intra-personal, intra-group, inter-group, social, and symbolic level (Páez et al., 2015; Rimé, 2009; Zumeta et al., 2016). These areas of research explore how different components of an emotion can be socially extended beyond individual bodies by being enacted via mechanisms that are distributed across several individuals.

Finally, let me briefly elaborate on the psychological mechanism which is called “emotional contagion” here, because I will later (section 5.3) use the term – obviously in a different sense – to signify a type of collective emotion. Emotional contagion might be defined as the “process by which a person or group influences the emotions or behavior of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioral attitudes” (Schoenewolf, 1990, p. 50). Currently, there is an ongoing debate between the mimicry-based model which considers emotional contagion to be “relatively automatic, unintentional, uncontrollable, and largely unconscious” (Hatfield et al., 1992, p. 153), and an appraisal-based model which suggests that emotional contagion should be understood as based on a receiver’s appraisal of a sender’s emotional expression (Dezecache et al., 2016; Isern-Mas & Gomila, 2019; see also Parkinson, 2020). In relation to this debate, a clear distinction between affective experience and underlying mechanisms shows its value. On the one hand, there is ample evidence that there are mechanisms through which we “catch” others’ emotions without our awareness (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999; Lakin et al., 2003). In terms of affective experience, however, it is rather implausible that someone can be involved in a dynamical process of socially distributed emotion enactment without any awareness. It is much more likely that individuals actively seek mechanisms like emotional contagion to regulate and facilitate their affective experiences with the help of external resources.

Other Types of Affective Experience

This section sketches a map of the broader field of affective experience in the social domain before the subsequent section zooms into what I call collective emotion. I begin with the social sharing of emotions as a form of social embeddedness that does not amount to social extension. Then, I move to two forms of socially extended emotions besides collective emotions: group-based emotions, and joint emotions.

Social Sharing of Emotion

Let me begin by discussing a phenomenon which pertains to the social nature of emotions but does not belong to the domain of socially extended emotions. There is a growing body of research on the *social sharing of emotions* (Rimé, 2009; Rimé et al., 1991, 2020). The main idea is that “after an emotional event, individuals will initiate interpersonal behaviors in which discussing this event and their reactions to it is central.” (Rimé et al., 1991, p. 436) According to its basic definition, “social sharing involves: (1) the re-evocation of the emotion in a socially shared language; and (2) at least at the symbolic level, some addressee.” (Rimé et al., 1991, p. 438) The social sharing of an emotion might take the form of a direct communication in which an individual openly speaks about an emotional episode to others, or more subtle forms in which the addressee might only be present in a symbolic form, e.g., when writing a letter or in one’s diary. Newer findings suggest that the social sharing of emotion has a number of important social effects and is so common and vital to the emotion process that it should be considered a basic component of an emotion (Rimé, 2009). In the context of this paper, however, it is important to note that this line of research investigates how individual emotions are embedded in social dynamics. But this embeddedness of individual emotions into communicative processes needs to be distinguished from socially extended emotions which are based on socially distributed processes with emergent characteristics. In section 5.2, I will use “emotional sharing” to signify a type of collective emotion. Obviously, my use of “emotional sharing” needs to be distinguished from “the social sharing of emotion.”

Group-Based Emotion

Let us now move to the first form of affective experience which is socially extended. However, the social extension here is rather weak and only involves the basis of an emotion and not the emotion process itself. I am referring here to the impressive body of research on group-based social appraisals and how emotions are elicited by such appraisals (for an overview see Smith & Mackie, 2015). The theory of *group-based emotion* applies the self-categorization theory of social identity to the domain of

emotion research by combining it with the appraisal theory of emotion (Smith, 1993). The core idea is this: If a social identity (based on, e.g., gender, occupation, or area of residency) becomes salient, individuals tend to evaluate a situation not from their personal perspective, but from the perspective of the relevant social group. In other words, they appraise a situation from the perspective of what they perceive to be the relevant social group and experience an emotion based on that appraisal. In such cases, we might say that they experience an emotion *on behalf of* a group (e.g., women, teachers, or residents of Norway). This simply means that the emotion is not based on their individual perspective, but on what they perceive to be the perspective of the relevant social group.

It is important to note that a group-based emotion does not require social interaction. It is possible to experience a group-based emotion when being alone. For a group-based emotion, it is sufficient that an individual self-identifies with a social category, appraises a situation based on the social identity that this self-categorization evokes, and experiences an emotion based on that appraisal. This is in line with Turner’s reasons for introducing the self-categorization theory of social group in the first place: “This definition stresses that members of a social group seem often to share no more than a collective perception of their own social unity and yet this seems to be sufficient for them to act as a group.” (Turner, 1982, p. 15) Thus, group-based emotions are based on a socially extended basis, the evaluative perspective of a social group. But the emotion itself is entirely individual.

There is research on how group-based emotions relate to collective emotions (Goldenberg et al., 2014). However, as I will discuss in section 6, these studies suffer from a vague and disadvantageous definition of collective emotion, and thus, can profit greatly from the taxonomy of collective emotion proposed in this paper.

Joint Emotion

Appraisal-based accounts of group-based emotions are most prominent in social psychology. In philosophy of emotion, a similar approach is developed in terms of cares and concerns (Helm, 2001; Roberts, 2003; Salmela, 2012). Here, concerns are taken to “psychologically underlie emotions as perceived changes in their status evoke emotions about the perceived cause of those changes in the agent whose concern is affected favorably or adversely.” (Salmela, 2012, p. 39) Helm (2002) explains the connection between concerns and emotions using the following example: When you throw a ball in my living room, I might fear that the ball will damage a vase. As Helm elaborates, whether my fear is warranted depends on, firstly, whether the ball is, in fact, a danger to my vase. Secondly, my fear being warranted also depends on the vase mattering to me. If I were indifferent about the vase being damaged, my fear would seem unwarranted. More

generally, Helm underscores that my emotional outlook depends on my evaluative perspective, that is, the pattern of concerns which constitute what I care about and what thus matters to me.

Later, Helm (2008, 2014) applies this concern-based account to the case of plural agents. The gist of his proposal is this: Like individual agents, plural agents also care about things and based on those cares, engage in certain activities, and display certain patterns of emotions. The core claim relevant for our context is that a plural robust agent is constituted by a unified evaluative perspective that is shared among its members. Based on sharing the group's perspective, the members of a plural robust agent are responsive to what matters for that agent. Thus, they evaluate situations based on the relevant concerns of the plural agent (rather than their personal concerns) and experience emotions based on those concerns.

The similarities between social psychological accounts of group-based social appraisals and philosophical accounts of group-based concerns are obvious. Both claim that emotions can be based on the evaluative perspective of a group. However, there is a relevant difference between the theory of group-based emotions based on social identity and Helm's plural agent account: the latter requires a much stronger form of diachronic social integration. An individual might experience a group-based emotion on behalf of a social group, even if nobody else recognizes her as belonging to that group. This is the case because the ability to experience a group-based emotion solely depends on an individual's self-identification, and someone can have such an identification in the absence of corresponding social recognition. By contrast, Helm emphasizes the importance of individuals being integrated into groups of mutual recognition, which he calls communities of respect (Helm, 2017). Thus, the emotions Helm conceptualizes depend on a history of social interaction in which individuals are integrated into a group with a sufficient degree of self-organization, so that the group can count as a plural agent. To make the distinction from group-based emotions explicit, I suggest calling this more demanding form *joint emotions* (Sánchez Guerrero, 2016). To further mark the difference, we might want to say that joint emotions are not only experienced *on behalf of* a group, but also *as members of* a group. In other words, when experiencing a joint emotion, an individual is aware of herself as member of the relevant group. This does not need to be the case for a group-based emotion. In fact, typical experiments studying group-based emotions proceed by tricking participants into perceiving a specific social identity as salient, usually without the participants being aware of this (see, e.g., Kuppens et al., 2013). To end this section, it is important to note that joint emotions and group-based emotions are socially extended only in terms of the underlying evaluative perspective, while the emotion itself is not socially extended, but fully individual.

Collective Emotion

Some defend the view that joint emotion is the strongest possible form of social integration in affective experience; they claim that there is no such thing as a genuinely collective experience, but only diachronic integration into collective evaluative perspectives (Sánchez Guerrero, 2016). Similarly, some scholars define collective emotions simply as group-based emotions being spread among several individuals, i.e., several individuals simultaneously experiencing a group-based emotion (Goldenberg et al., 2014; von Scheve & Ismer, 2013). By contrast, my core claim is that there are emotions that are not only socially extended in terms of the underlying evaluative perspective, but also in terms of dynamical self-organization in ongoing interactions (Krueger, 2013, 2016; León et al., 2019; Salmela, 2012; Szanto, 2015; Thonhauser, 2020a, 2021). In other words, it is important to distinguish between a *distributive sense of collective emotion* (meaning that several individuals have similar individual emotions at the same time) and a *participatory sense of collective emotion* (meaning that several individuals experience an emotion together). At least for the purpose of this paper, I suggest restricting the use of the term collective emotion to the latter and explore the field of collective affective experience in more detail. A *collective emotion*, as I understand it, is a mereologically complex affective response whose components are distributed among several individuals. There is nothing mysterious or super-natural about this: A collective emotion is simply a complex system of socially distributed components based on dynamical self-organization through social interaction.

In contrast to group-based and joint emotions, which can be experienced by isolated individuals, a collective emotion requires at least two individuals who are integrated ("coupled") through ongoing interaction. It is an empirical question what forms of social interaction might lead to the emergence of collective emotions. As was discussed in section 2, multiple mechanisms might underpin a collective emotion. Whatever the concrete mechanisms might be, the threshold for a collective emotion to be possible is that the underlying mechanisms provide enough synchronous integration for a collective to emerge. As a reminder, I understand a *collective* as a self-organizing system which emerges when individuals with suitable habitualized interaction patterns are sufficiently coupled in ongoing social interaction.

We can further characterize collective emotions via four structural features. However, let me note that I do not take these features to be necessary and sufficient conditions for the concept of collective emotion. Rather, those features are present to greater or lesser degree in various phenomena within the field of collective emotion. The varying degrees in which the features are actualized allow to further differentiate between subtypes of collective emotion. Moreover, the four features are interconnected. As I will explore in more

detail, one feature sometimes becomes so prominent that it forces another feature into the background.

Explicating the Four Structural Features

The following discussion of the four features also provides a first explication of the subsequent taxonomy of different types of collective emotion.

1. *Collective evaluative perspective and shared focus* of the emotion: Collective emotions are based on individuals (with habitualized interaction patterns based on a history of social interactions) who evaluate a situation from a collective perspective. This leads them to share the same (or sufficiently similar) cares and concerns (the background focus of an emotion) based on which they appraise an eliciting object or event. However, there might be cases in which individuals participate in a collective emotion despite not sharing the respective evaluative perspective and the cares and concerns underlying the emotion. In such case, I suggest speaking of *emotional contagion*.
2. *Collective appraisal*: Based on the first feature, individuals come to appraise the eliciting object or event in the same (or a sufficiently similar) way. In the most robust cases, individuals share both the formal object and the target of an emotion (for the distinction of formal object and target see Helm, 2002). However, there are also cases in which individuals only share the formal object, thus experiencing the same type of emotion (e.g., fear or anger), although this is elicited by different targets (i.e., different concrete objects or events). Following Goldie (2002), I count these cases as a subtype of *emotional sharing* and will not discuss them further. Conversely, there are cases in which the eliciting target is the same, but the individual appraisals are different and lead to different types of emotions (e.g., some individuals experiencing grief and others' anger). Given several other circumstances, those cases might amount to *emotional matching*.
3. *Sense of togetherness*: Collective emotions are experienced with first-person plural awareness; they are experienced as "our" emotion (Schmid, 2008, 2014). Some prefer to explain this in terms of double intentionality, claiming that collective emotions are not only directed towards an object, but also towards the experiencing collective itself (Stein, 2000; cf. Szanto, 2015). However, I consider it misleading to think of the sense of togetherness as a part of the intentional directedness. It rather takes the form of pre-reflective, not-thematic self-awareness (Sartre, 1991). Many seem to reject this idea based on the intuition that first-person plural awareness will disappear with reflection (Salmela,

2012). However, I do not see a *prima facie* reason why reflection should not be able to validate the collective nature of the experience (Thonhauser, 2018). In ontological terms, a collective emotion is the emotion of a collective, i.e., an emotion whose components are socially distributed within a group of sufficiently coupled individuals. In terms of collective affective experience, it depends on how exactly an individual goes about the reflection. Consider a couple collectively enacting joy. If the reflection focuses on the individual contributions, then it will count two distinguishable but connected emotions. However, if the reflection focuses on the collective as a self-organizing system, then it will count one collective emotion that integrates the individual contributions. Both ways of counting are justified. But as Schmid (2008) has argued, counting three emotions (two individual plus one collective) would be a category mistake. The collective emotion is nothing above and beyond the dynamical integration of individual contributions, but those contributions would not be possible without the dynamical self-organization on the collective level.

4. *Self and other awareness*: A collective emotion is the emotion of a collective. A collective, however, is a self-organizing system consisting of sufficiently integrated individuals, not a super-individual. This means that collective emotions involve an awareness of oneself and of others as co-subjects of the collective experience. Compare this with the fictive species of the Borg from the Star Trek universe. The Borg are portrayed as a super-individual which assimilates new members in such a way that the self-other distinction disappears and is replaced by group consciousness. If the Borg were to exist and experience emotions, they (or rather, it?) would experience emotions like an individual, not like a collective. In a collective emotion, by contrast, the involved individuals experience themselves as co-subjects of the experience, which involves both first-person plural awareness *and* self and other awareness. It is *our* emotion, meaning that we are aware of *us* (a plurality of individuals) experiencing the emotion *together* (as one collective). In some enactments of collective emotion, the self-other distinction can become so strong that it overrides the sense of togetherness and compartmentalizes the individuals from each other. In such cases, I speak of *emotional segregation*.³ In other instances, the sense of togetherness can become so strong that the self-other distinction disappears from awareness. I suggest calling these cases *emotional fusion*.

The four characteristic features leave us with five types of collective emotion. I suggest speaking of *emotional*

sharing when all four features are present in a robust sense. Emotional contagion, emotional matching, emotional segregation, and emotional fusion occur when one of the four features is (relatively) absent. The resulting taxonomy of types of collective emotion is summarized in Table 1.

Of course, we could hypothesize additional types by considering scenarios in which two or more features are affected in more complicated ways. Given the complex nature of affective experience, one could likely complicate matters quasi-endlessly with ever sharper distinctions based on ever more complex scenarios. Hence, I do not claim that this taxonomy exhausts the field of collective emotion. However, I submit that the delineated types of collective emotion correspond to actual phenomena that can be studied in real-life settings via empirical methods. In other words, I take the taxonomy to be a viable heuristic tool for classifying the most common types of collective emotion.

Emotional Sharing

I begin with *emotional sharing*, as this is the most robust type of collective emotion. This also means that in a sense, all other types are related to emotional sharing and might be considered cases of emotional sharing in which one structural feature is actualized to a lesser degree. However, it is important to develop nuanced descriptions of the other types, because it allows for more fine-grained distinctions within the domain of collective affective experience.

As an example of emotional sharing, consider a group of friends going together to a concert of their favorite band. Through a series of past interactions, they have established a collective evaluative perspective, meaning that they jointly care for the band, share a pattern of corresponding concerns, and are aware of the collective nature of their cares and concerns. They go through their usual pre-concert routine: They meet at a bar, have a few drinks, and walk to the concert arena. These collective actions are based on and activate well-practiced interaction patterns. Moreover, they enable dynamical self-organization through which the friends enact themselves as a collective. In turn, the dynamical self-organization consolidates their status as a collective and strengthens the unified evaluative perspective. It also makes each of them more receptive to future interactions in

an ongoing situation of mutual affecting and being affected (Froese & Fuchs, 2012; Fuchs & Koch, 2014). At the concert, their unified evaluative perspective together with the ongoing dynamical self-organization leads them to collectively appraise the situation, experiencing the same (or sufficiently similar) types of emotion (e.g., joy, excitement, etc.) towards the same targets (the brilliant performance of the band, the wonderful atmosphere at the concert, etc.). They experience the joy as *their* joy, as something they, as a collective, experience together. However, this sense of togetherness does not lead them to lose track of each other. They do not somehow merge into a collective mind (as, e.g., crowd psychology would have it (Le Bon, 1896)). Rather, they are aware of each other as distinct participants of the collective experience. This does not mean that they are directed towards each other. Rather, they are in a situation of joint attention, experiencing each other as co-subject of the collective experience. As co-subjects, they are not only directed at the common object of their experience, but also monitor what is going on within the collective (even if often without conscious awareness), constantly realigning their collective outlook.

The example, as I have described it, is a phenomenological description of what I suggest calling dynamical self-organization. In a felicitous case, in which actual self-organization takes place and an actual collective emotion emerges, the collective nature of the experience will hold up under the scrutiny of reflection. If one of the friends reflects on the concert visit, her reflection will confirm the collective nature of the experience. What she experienced were *their* emotions, the emotions she enacted together with her friends.

Emotional Contagion

Let me proceed with the next type of collective emotion, *emotional contagion*. Here, two preliminary remarks are required: As I discussed in section 3, empirical emotion research uses the term “emotional contagion” to signify a psychological mechanism. By contrast, I use the term to denote a kind of collective affective experience. Such a use of the term has predecessors within the phenomenological tradition (Hanich, 2019; Zahavi, 2015). This leads to a second remark. In classic phenomenology, the distinction between emotional sharing and emotional contagion served as a crucial building block (e.g., in the works of Max Scheler (1954) and Edith Stein (2000)). Scheler and Stein invoke the following criteria for that distinction: First, whereas individuals have a justified reason that warrants their sharing of an emotion, this is not the case when an individual is emotionally contagioned. Second, when sharing an emotion, individuals are aware of the collectivity of the experience. By contrast, when someone is contagioned, she does not notice the external source of her emotion, and thus, mistakes it for her individual emotion. Based on the

Table 1. Types of collective emotion.

Features Types	Collective evaluative perspective	Collective appraisal	Sense of togetherness	Self and other awareness
sharing	+	+	+	+
contagion	–	+	+	+
matching	+	–	+	+
segregation	+	+	–	+
fusion	+	+	+	–

second point, Scheler and Stein maintain that there is neither a sense of togetherness nor an awareness of others in emotional contagion, and thus, emotional contagion does not amount to a type of collective emotion. In contrast to this traditional conceptualization, I suggest revising our understanding of emotional contagion as a collective affective experience. The reason for my revisionary use of the term is that my new definition can point to a relevant type of collective affective experience that the traditional conceptualization ignores or misconceives.

Let me explain my use of emotional contagion via another phenomenological description. Consider Johnny, who does not care about the band, but nevertheless decides to join the group of friends from the previous example. Johnny fully participates in the preparation for the concert. At the concert, he has a great time, dancing and singing along with his friends. He is clearly part of the dynamical self-organization of the collective. Johnny participates in the collective experience, experiencing the same types of emotion as his friends in a situation of ongoing self-organization and with an awareness of him and his friends making the experience together. But if we asked Johnny, he would still tell us that he does not care about the band. This marks a crucial difference between Johnny's experience and that of his friends: Johnny does not share the collective evaluative perspective. I suggest using *emotional contagion* to refer to cases in which an individual joins a collective emotion without being integrated into the underlying evaluative perspective.

If we compare my use of the term to the conceptualization of Scheler and Stein, we can see that I agree with their first criterion. In emotional contagion, an individual does not share the cares and concerns that are the basis of the collective emotion. Consequently, we might say that his emotion is somewhat void or hollow, and indeed, unjustified or unwarranted. But I disagree with the second criterion. It is not necessarily the case that an individual is unaware of being contagioned. In the example, Johnny has not only allowed himself to be contagioned, but he also actively sought to be part of the collective affective experience. Why else would he join his friends to the concert? Moreover, he participated in the collective emotion with full awareness. Of course, there might also be cases in which someone is drawn into a collective emotion against his will. But even in those cases, I consider it implausible that this is entirely out of an individual's control. Emotions do not spread like diseases, but rather, they allow for (at least a minimum degree of) psychological control (Isern-Mas & Gomila, 2019; Parkinson, 2020; Thonhauser, 2020b). And the more relevant scenarios appear to be those in which emotional contagion is voluntarily allowed or even actively pursued. But this still makes emotional contagion a borderline case of collective emotion because the possibility of emotional contagion, in my definition, depends on the existence of a collective which enacts a collective emotion in the mode of emotional sharing (or

maybe emotion fusion or matching). In other words, emotional contagion is the collective affective experience of free-loaders, who batten on the collective emotions of others.

Emotional Matching

There might be cases of collective emotion in which individuals do not experience the same type of emotion. The likely reason for this being that the specific context makes it inappropriate for them to express the same type of emotion. Instead, the situation requires them to express different but interlocking emotions about the same object or event, and only these intermeshing emotions allow them to experience the emotional episode together. I suggest calling this type of collective emotion *emotional matching*.

Consider the following example by Hanich (2019, p. 179):

Assume [...] you watch a film like *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013) with your African American friend. You respond with various mini-expressions of moral outrage; you shake your head, sigh angrily, or even mumble 'Damn racists!' These expressions show your friend that you are affected and that you value what is shown as something to be concerned about. Simultaneously your friend expresses the same care to you through his dead silence and by wiping away a tear."

The example suggests that emotional matching is particularly likely in morally charged situations involving individuals from different social groups. Emotional matching enables a collective affective experience in scenarios in which emotional sharing feels morally inappropriate. I call it emotional matching, because it requires the involved individuals to express emotions that are suitable for being interlocked into one collective affective experience. It is rather obvious that not all combinations of emotions enable emotional matching. Imagine the white person in the scenario reacting to the movie with joy and laughter. This would likely end any possibility of a collective emotion emerging and transform the social interaction into a distanced or maybe even hostile one.

It is an empirical question which pairs of emotions are suitable for emotional matching. The influence of moral factors prompts the hypothesis that the cultural background and the concrete social context have a strong influence on that matter. But this is something that needs to be empirically explored. Coming back to the experiential structure of emotional matching, each of the matching emotions might be experienced by only one individual, or it might be shared by a group. Hence, matching is an independent form of collective emotion insofar as it can occur without emotional sharing. But emotional matching can also involve emotional sharing as part of it. In more theoretical terms, this corresponds to the idea that a collective can include smaller collectives as its part. Emotional matching might also occur in antagonistic settings. For instance, different fan groups in a sports stadium might have matching emotions that enable them to

collectively enjoy the game while having a back and forth of competing chants (Thonhauser & Wetzels, 2019).

Emotional Segregation

The type which I suggest calling *emotional segregation* is similar to emotional matching in that it occurs in scenarios in which the specific context makes emotional sharing seem inappropriate. For instance, it might be too emotionally straining to acknowledge that one is sharing an emotion with others.

Let us consider another scenario at the concert hall. Gary, Howard, and Mark are at the concert, but they do not enjoy the performance. Rather, they are sad because they had to drop their own band project for lack of success. Our three protagonists share the same collective evaluative perspective and appraise the same event based on shared cares and concerns, leading them to experience the same type of emotion in a situation of mutual awareness of each other. However, it is too painful for them to admit that they are experiencing the emotion together. In other words, they experience a collective emotion, but without acknowledging the collective nature of the experience, without an affirmative sense of making the experience together. Instead, the distinction of self and other becomes so salient that the sense of togetherness vanishes into the background. Hence, emotional segregation occurs in scenarios in which a collective emotion has an individuating rather than a connecting effect. Hanich (2019, p. 174) suggests that some types of emotion or more likely to have this individuating effect, hypothesizing that negative emotions like sadness, embarrassment, shame or guilt are particularly likely to induce a felt individuation which distances individuals from each other, leading them to insulate themselves from the collective experience. On the other hand, some scholars suggested that negative emotions are especially powerful forces in establishing group coherence (Butler, 2004; Szanto, 2020). To my knowledge, there has not been explicit research on emotional segregation so far, because this phenomenon has so far lacked a clear definition as a specific type of collective emotion.

Emotional segregation might occur in combination with emotional sharing (or fusion), for instance when a bunch of individuals engage in emotional sharing, but one or several individuals feel isolated from the collective emotion. But it might also occur without other types of collective emotion. To reformulate a famous example of Max Scheler (1954): Imagine two parents grieving over the death of their child, but it is too painful for them to experience their grief together, so they compartmentalize their own experience from the collective dynamic. I take this to suggest that segregation and the following category of fusion are different from contagion and matching in that a thorough reflection on segregation and fusion would reveal that the collective emotion has been shared all along. In more abstract terms, this suggests that the sense of togetherness and the self and other awareness are a matter of degree, not an on/off question.

Emotional Fusion

Emotional fusion is the opposite scenario of emotional segregation. I use this term to refer to cases of collective emotion in which the sense of togetherness becomes so strong that it overrides the participants' awareness of each other as distinct individuals. In other words, emotional fusion refers to cases in which the dynamical self-organization of the collective becomes so strong that the participants feel themselves as part of a bigger unity that overrides their individuality. Like in the case of emotional segregation, in which reflection would lead to the revelatory finding that it has been *our* emotion, the emotion of us as a collective, reflecting on a case of emotional fusion would retrieve the self-other distinction, revealing that the collective is nothing above and beyond the dynamical self-organization of its participants; the collective is simply us, the sufficiently integrated co-subjects of the experience. For in the end, we are not Borg, but humans with the ability for advanced forms of social interactions.

This makes itself manifest in the differences between first-person singular and first-person plural awareness. Whereas first-person singular awareness is unshareable and undividable, first-person plural awareness is a mereologically complex phenomenon that involves self and other awareness.⁴ If first-person plural awareness did not involve self and other awareness, it would collapse into first-person singular awareness, and we would be Borg after all. Moreover, reflection is only possible in the first-person singular. Collectives cannot reflect on their experiences, only individual members can. But to repeat a core premise of this paper: Individual reflection can confirm the collective nature of the experience. Reflecting on the structure of a collective emotion confirms that a collective emotion is functionally and phenomenologically the emotion of a collective, i.e., a mereologically complex whole with components that are distributed among several individuals.

We should not dismiss the possibility of emotional fusion, if only because it is an experience that is actively sought. Many people visit music festivals or dance clubs,⁵ or use drugs with the main purpose of reaching a state of emotional fusion. Pacherie (2011) suggested that there are different degrees of involvement in collective action. There are very robust cases in which participants lose their sense of individual agency and fully immerse in the collective agency. But there might also be cases in which one participates in a collective action by doing one's part with a high sense of individual agency and very low sense of collective agency. This can be applied to collective affective experience. Some collective emotions come with a very high degree of self and other awareness, in which case I suggest speaking of emotional segregation, while others come with a very strong sense of togetherness, and such cases might be called emotional fusion.

Putting the Taxonomy in use

In this section, I discuss one research paper from the field of intergroup emotion theory to provide an example of how future research can profit from the taxonomy introduced in this paper. In a paper from 2014, Goldenberg, Saguy and Halperin study the influence of “collective emotions” on “group-based emotions”. They define group-based emotions fully in line with my presentation in section 4.2, namely as “emotions that are dependent on an individual’s membership in a particular social group and occur in response to events that have perceived relevance for the group as a whole.” (Goldenberg et al., 2014, p. 581) Where things get interesting is when it comes to their definition of collective emotion. They define collective emotion as “group-based emotions shared and felt simultaneously by a large number of individuals in a certain society.” (Goldenberg et al., 2014, p. 582) This suggests that collective emotions, in their understanding, are simply group-based emotions that are spread among a cluster of individuals. Two sentences later they state that “collective emotions differ from group-based emotions, because group-based emotions consider an individual’s emotional experience in response to group-related events, whereas collective emotions refer to the collective as the entity that experiences the emotion.” (Goldenberg et al., 2014, p. 582) At first glance, this statement appears to be in line with the working definition used in this paper: A collective emotion is the emotion of a collective. It is remarkable, however, that Goldenberg et al., do not offer any elaboration on what a collective is. They do not seem to see any need to define or operationalize the term “collective”. The sentence directly preceding their definition of collective emotion suggests that they tacitly assume that a collective is nothing else than a summation of group members’ attitudes. They define a “collective’s emotional experience” as “the perception of what the majority of group members feel.” (Goldenberg et al., 2014, p. 582) A few sentences later, they reiterate that a “collective emotion” is understood as “what most of the people in a certain society feel” or as “what most people feel.” (Goldenberg et al., 2014, p. 582) In short, the paper builds on an understanding of collective emotion as someone’s vague perception or assumption of what most people in a vaguely defined group feel. According to the taxonomy suggested in this paper, this is clearly not a collective emotion. I would suggest that it is more appropriate to speak of an emotional climate or atmosphere to describe the intended phenomenon.

The authors defend an interesting claim. In contrast to previous research which suggested a tendency towards conformity between group-based emotions and collective emotions, they claim that matters are more complicated. Specifically, they aim to show that group members tend to deviate from what the majority feels when they perceive the group as failing to experience what they consider the appropriate emotion. What I want to highlight is how collective emotions

are operationalized. In four of the five studies, participants were presented with a (fictive) survey measuring the percentage of the population reporting to have a certain attitude. In one study, participants were asked about their perception of what the society feels. This shows that “perception of collective emotion” refers to a vague estimation of what one takes most people in a group to feel, either conveyed via a (alleged) survey or by stipulating an estimation by the participants. The authors list as one of the limitations of their studies that participants “did not experience the collective emotional response firsthand” (Goldenberg et al., 2014, p. 594) and suggest that follow-up studies should explore the relation between group-based emotions and collective emotions under conditions of co-presence. However, such studies require an adequate understanding of what a collective emotion is under such conditions. This is exactly what I have provided in this paper. And even the original studies could profit from more conceptual clarity regarding the use of the terms “collective” and “collective emotion.”

Conclusion

Research into the social dynamics of intergroup and intragroup emotion is often conducted with the tacit assumption of a vague and wide definition of collective emotion. By contrast, this paper proposed a narrow working definition of collective emotion. The proposed understanding of collective emotion is rather demanding, as it requires a high degree of interpersonal coordination and integration. But this is what we find in many domains of social life like sports, artist performances, political parties, family life, or the workplace. Moreover, the paper suggests that collective emotions be clearly distinguished from group-based emotions and joint emotions. In sum, this article aims to provide a set of conceptual distinctions that can guide future research on the complex mechanisms underlying different forms of socially extended emotions.

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Notes

1. Berger and Luckmann (1991, pp. 70–71) write that, “All human activity is subject to habituation. Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be reproduced with an

economy of effort [...]. Habitualization further implies that the action in question may be performed again in the future in the same manner and with the same economical effort.”

2. I owe that formulation to an anonymous reviewer.
3. This name was suggested by an anonymous reviewer.
4. Many scholars doubt the possibility of first-person plural awareness because they consider it incompatible with the self-other distinction (León et al., 2019; Martens & Schlicht, 2018; Salmela, 2012; Sánchez Guerrero, 2016). I think that this mistakenly confuses the plural and the singular, ignoring the mereological structure of first-person plural awareness.
5. I thank an anonymous reviewer for those examples.

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