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León, Felipe; Zahavi, Dan

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# HOW WE FEEL: COLLECTIVE EMOTIONS WITHOUT JOINT COMMITMENTS

*Felipe León and Dan Zahavi*

## *Abstract*

*This article engages critically with Margaret Gilbert's proposal that joint commitments are necessary for collective emotions. After introducing Gilbert's concept of joint commitment (Section 2), and the joint commitment account of collective emotions (Section 3), we argue in Section 4 that research from developmental psychology challenges the necessity of joint commitments for collective emotions. In that section, we also raise a more principled objection to Gilbert's account, independently of developmental considerations. Section 5 develops a complementary line of argument, focused on the notion of mutual recognition. While we agree with Gilbert that mutual recognition has an important role to play in an account of collective emotions, we take issue with her attempt to analyse face-to-face based mutual recognition in terms of the concept of joint commitment. We conclude by sketching an alternative analysis of collective emotions that highlights the role of interpersonal identification and socially mediated self-consciousness.*

## I. Introduction

In the past decades, Margaret Gilbert has developed a distinctive philosophical approach to the analysis of a wide range of social phenomena, taking as the cornerstone of her analysis the concept of *joint commitment* (Gilbert, 1989, 2013, 2018). The range of phenomena analysed by Gilbert is impressive. It includes not only collective belief and collective action, but also collective emotions, mutual recognition, joint attention, promises, social conventions, and agreements (Gilbert, 2013). If, as argued by Gilbert, joint commitment is the “structure of the social atom” and the “foundation of human social behaviour” (Gilbert, 2003, p. 39), the concept of joint commitment would have a pervasive explanatory power, and be of obvious significance for understanding the structure of sociality. Without aiming at a comprehensive assessment of Gilbert's rich and wide-ranging approach, in the following we will mainly focus on the case of *collective emotion*, a topic that Gilbert has engaged with over the years. There is a remarkable continuity in Gilbert's treatment of collective emotions, in that she has throughout sought to account for them by means of her concept of joint commitment (Gilbert, 2000a, 2000b, 2002, 2014). Our main aim will

precisely be to test and assess the applicability of a joint commitment account when it comes to collective emotions. Are joint commitments really necessary for collective emotions, as Gilbert contends?

The paper is structured as follows. After introducing Gilbert's concept of joint commitment (Section 2), and the joint commitment account of collective emotions (Section 3), we will argue in Section 4 that research from developmental psychology challenges the necessity of joint commitments for collective emotions. In that section, we will also raise a more principled objection to Gilbert's account, independently of developmental considerations. Section 5 develops a complementary line of argument, focused on the notion of mutual recognition. While we agree with Gilbert that mutual recognition has an important role to play in an account of collective emotions, we will take issue with her attempt to analyse face-to-face based mutual recognition in terms of the concept of joint commitment. In the last section of the paper, we will sketch an alternative analysis of collective emotions that highlights the role of interpersonal identification and socially mediated self-consciousness.

## 2. Gilbert's Concept of Joint Commitment

A central claim of Gilbert's is that we cannot account for the social world in singularist terms. What we need if we are to do justice to, for instance, group formations such as families, sports teams and terrorist cells is an account that addresses head-on the nature of the collective 'we' (Gilbert, 2013, p. 5). For Gilbert, the latter cannot be understood as a mere stand-in for 'we all' or 'we both' (Gilbert, 2013, p. 65). A collective we is more than a mere aggregate of persons, just as a joint action is more than two people doing concurrent actions. It involves a sense of unity, it links the involved persons together in a way where they jointly constitute what Gilbert calls a 'plural subject'. As she makes clear, the technical notion of plural subject should be understood in terms of the concept of joint commitment (Gilbert, 2013, p. 63). But how should we understand the concept of joint commitment?

One of Gilbert's recurrent examples is taken from the domain of joint action, and involves two people going for a walk together (Gilbert, 1990, 2013, pp. 24–25). According to Gilbert, for two or more persons jointly to commit themselves to go for a walk together is for them to be normatively constrained in a specific way. The constraint in question is specific both in terms of its formation and its outcome (Gilbert, 2018). In the first place, it arises from the

persons' recognized expression of readiness to jointly commit everyone in the group to a certain course of action (under conditions of common knowledge, i.e., assuming that such readiness is 'out in the open' for everyone in the group). Although a joint commitment might arise as a result of a prior explicit agreement, the latter is not a necessary requirement (Gilbert, 2013, pp. 26, 33). The participating individuals must know what a joint commitment is in order to enter it, they must in fact possess the concept of joint commitment, but a joint commitment might nevertheless be established simply as a result of the individuals' expression of readiness to participate in the joint action. This doesn't have to involve verbal communication but might, for instance, come about as a result of mutual eye gaze. Secondly, the outcome of that process is distinctive in that it imposes normative pressure on all the committed persons to act as a body, i.e., to act as a unit or as one. In this sense (and only in this sense) the subject of a joint commitment is not singular, but plural (Gilbert, 2018, p. 137). For Gilbert, the notion of a plural subject consequently does not denote any kind of supra-individual group mind (Gilbert, 2013, pp. 9, 119), but is simply the name for any number of persons who because of a joint commitment are unified in a certain way (Gilbert, 2013, p. 63).

Gilbert's concept of joint commitment can be further explicated by considering how it differs from the concept of personal commitment. One central difference between the two types of commitment is that a personal commitment, but not a joint one, can be unilaterally made or rescinded (Gilbert, 2018, p. 133). A joint commitment is thus not "a personal concatenation of personal commitments of the parties" (Gilbert, 2013, p. 7)—however one understands these personal commitments to be interrelated —, although this is not to deny that each party to a joint commitment has derivative "individual commitments". However, differently from personal commitments, such individual commitments depend upon a joint commitment, and are therefore not unilaterally establishable or rescindable (Gilbert, 2018, p. 134). Moreover, one important consequence of the irreducibility of joint commitments to personal commitments is that participants in a joint commitment have the right to issue demands and rebukes to other participants, in given situations. That is to say, participants have specific obligations to one another to conform to the joint commitment. The obligations engendered by joint commitments are neither legal nor moral, but nonetheless normative (Gilbert, 2013, pp. 5–6). For example, if while taking a walk together with you, I suddenly turn around and go my own way, you are entitled to rebuke me. Indeed, one central line of support for the appeal to joint commitment is precisely that it can explain

the appropriateness of the participant's potential demands and rebukes to one another in such and similar situations (Gilbert, 2013, p. 88).

### 3. Gilbert's Joint Commitment Account of Collective Emotions

Many of Gilbert's examples are taking from the domain of joint action: they are examples involving people doing something together. As Gilbert repeatedly insists, her aim is to construe "an adequate account of shared intention as one that provides individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions" (Gilbert, 2013, p. 105). But what is primarily revealed in her analyses of joint action, namely the role played by joint commitments, is taken to hold true of other cases of shared intentionality as well. Just as people might be jointly committed to go for a walk together, they might be jointly committed to intend, believe, accept, value, or hate something together (Gilbert, 2013, p. 64). The notion of 'doing something together' must consequently be construed broadly enough so as to include different types of psychological states, including believing, intending, and feeling something together (Gilbert, 2013, pp. 2, 33).

In a number of publications, Gilbert has more specifically applied the joint commitment approach to the field of collective emotions, and has analysed in some detail collective remorse (Gilbert, 2000a) and collective guilt (Gilbert, 2000b, 2002). Other types of shared emotions that she occasionally mentions and discusses are collective excitement, collective fear, and collective anger (Gilbert, 2014). Consider the case of collective excitement. In a nutshell, Gilbert's account is the following: "Persons X, Y, and so on, are collectively excited if and only if they are jointly committed to be excited as a body" (Gilbert, 2014, p. 23). As we have already seen, the expression "as a body" references the kind of unity that is taken to hold by taking part in a joint commitment. On Gilbert's proposal, the analysis of joint action in terms of joint commitment can be extended to the case of collective emotions. Consequently, on the joint commitment account of collective emotions, normativity and normative pressure play as significant a role as they do in the case of joint action. In particular, persons taking part in a collective emotion are entitled "to rebuke one another for behaviour that is not in the spirit of the collective emotion" (Gilbert, 2014, p. 23). Here is one illustrative example offered by Gilbert: "if, say, Alice, Ben, and Chris are jointly committed to be excited, as a body, over Stella's win, then by virtue of that fact Ben and Chris have the standing to rebuke Alice for angrily bursting out "Why did Stella have to win *another* prize?," given that her

outburst does not conform to the pertinent joint commitment” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 25). Having a collective emotion is, according to Gilbert, a matter of the participant’s “public performance”, rather than of what they might individually experience. Indeed, according to Gilbert, having a collective emotion does not require that the participants have corresponding personal emotions. In a collective emotion, “*what goes on in each mind and heart* is not at issue with respect to what the parties are committed to” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 25).

Like other cognitivist accounts of emotions, Gilbert’s account very much highlights the evaluative aspect of the emotions, and has less to say about their phenomenal character. Gilbert offers two types of justification for this strategy. First of all, she remains sceptical about the role of phenomenality (or as she phrases it, phenomenology) in emotions, regardless of whether we are dealing with individual or collective emotions.<sup>1</sup> She notes that, even in the individual case, the role of conscious states in the constitution of emotions is open to debate (Gilbert, 2014, p. 20). And if phenomenal character might not be essential for individuals’ emotions, why should it be essential for collective emotions? Moreover, even in those cases where Gilbert concedes that collective emotions might involve concomitant feeling-sensations, she contends that their phenomenality doesn’t differ from the phenomenality of individual emotions. Whatever the difference between individual emotions and collective emotions might amount to, it is not a phenomenal difference. As Gilbert writes, “a pang is a pang is a pang” (Gilbert, 2013, p. 254). Rather, individual and collective emotions of the same emotion type differ in terms of the involved judgments or thoughts.

Our main purpose in what follows is not to take issue with Gilbert’s general understanding of emotions and phenomenality, but to scrutinize the cogency of the joint commitment account of collective emotions. Are joint commitments as central to collective emotions as Gilbert has argued? In particular, are joint commitments necessary for collective emotions?

1 Let us here simply state that we find Gilbert’s use of the terms ‘phenomenology’ and ‘phenomenological’ problematic. As many other analytic philosophers, Gilbert is using these terms as synonyms for phenomenality, i.e., as labels for the qualitative character of experience. To discuss the role of phenomenology in emotions is consequently to discuss a certain dimension of experience. This obviously contrasts with those who—in our view, far more appropriately—use the terms to designate a specific method or tradition in philosophy. When thinkers like Scheler, Sartre or Heidegger offered phenomenological analyses of different emotions they most definitely did not simply seek to disclose or describe the qualitative character of specific feeling-sensations. In recent years, a number of approaches to collective emotions have been developed that give phenomenology a far more central role than Gilbert does (Schmid, 2009; Krueger, 2013; León, Szanto, & Zahavi, 2017).

#### 4. Are Joint Commitments Necessary for Collective Emotions?

Recall that on Gilbert's account a joint commitment is a commitment of two or more people, where each party is answerable to all parties for any violation of the joint commitment, and where none is in a position to unilaterally rescind this commitment. An account like this seems tailor-made to deal with some cases of joint action, but is it also applicable to cases of shared affectivity? In some cases, probably yes. Consider, for instance, a situation where a group after some discussion reaches the following agreement: Any group member who reveals the secrets of the group to an outsider will be met with contempt and anger from the other group members. If the group members commit themselves to upholding this principle, and if on the occasion of a later transgression, one of the group members fails to comply by showing mercy towards the transgressor, the other group members might indeed rebuke the member in question. A case like this, it seems, can be straightforwardly analysed in terms of the joint commitment account of collective emotions. Members of the group in question will be subject to the normative pressure that arises from their commitment to the mentioned principle. But this example is surely not a paradigmatic case of shared affects.

The problem is not merely that garden-variety cases of collective emotions don't usually presuppose deliberation or explicit (verbal) agreements between the individuals taking part in them. In fact, such an objection would have little bite against the joint commitment account of collective emotions, since Gilbert holds, correctly in our view, that there can be non-verbal ascriptions of collective emotions. Although verbal ascriptions of collective emotion are the starting point of Gilbert's most recent and general treatment of collective emotions, "How we feel: understanding everyday collective emotion ascription" (Gilbert, 2014),<sup>2</sup> she also concedes that there can be cases of collective emotions that don't involve verbal exchanges. Recall the example, referenced in the previous section, of collective excitement about some piece of news. About this case, Gilbert writes: "No one need actually say "We are excited," for it to be true. Nor would the involvement of words be necessary to justify the collective emotion ascription, given the initial announcement or some other happening that serves the same purpose. For instance, Stella comes into the room carrying the prize. The occurrence of appropriate non-verbal behavior would be enough" (Gilbert, 2014, p. 22).

While the admission that there can be non-verbal collective emotions gives

2 The title of the present paper is obviously indebted to the title of Gilbert's chapter.

more plausibility to the joint commitment account of collective emotions, Gilbert's account presupposes that individuals taking part in a collective emotion have a sufficiently robust conception of the kind of normativity involved in joint commitments. If collective emotions require joint commitment, and if the latter requires an expressed readiness to commit (under conditions of common knowledge), what should we say about cases featuring individuals who seem to lack the prerequisite cognitive capacities, but who nevertheless seem to have collective emotions? It is important to be clear about why this would be a challenge for the joint commitment account of collective emotions. The point is not that individuals who possess the concept of joint commitment should be able to articulate that concept in detail, and that individuals who are less cognitively sophisticated than human adults would not be in a position to do so.<sup>3</sup> The point is rather that Gilbert's notion of joint commitment references "the commitment *of* two or more wills *by* two or more wills" (Gilbert, 2018, p. 131), and that joint commitments are taken to have a binding force between the wills of individual parties, in the sense that "[e]ach has sufficient reason to act in accordance with the commitment." (2013, p. 87). Applying this analysis to collective emotions of cognitively unsophisticated individuals seems implausible and misguided.

In the last decades, research in developmental psychology has debunked the view that neonates and young infants lack social competences for entering into intersubjective interactions. Quite to the contrary, it has been documented that from birth onwards, infants are sensitive to other people in ways in which they are not to inanimate objects (Trevarthen, 1979; Trevarthen & Hubley, 1978; Zahavi & Rochat, 2015). Infants show from birth a distinctive sensitivity to the mindedness of others, a natural responsiveness to others that signals not only an awareness of the differentiation between self and other, but also of patterns of connectedness between the two (Trevarthen & Aitken, 2001, p. 6). From around 2–3 months of age, infants engage in mutual exchanges of gazes and smiles with caregivers. It has been shown that such exchanges or "proto-conversations" (Bateson, 1979) are cross-cultural, and have a structured character, involving turn-taking and specific timing (Trevarthen, 1998, p. 23). The social interactions that infants enter into at this stage of life are mutually coordinated between infant and caregiver, and they are also affectively loaded. They involve "the infant's recognition of emotions and the capacity to react emotionally in differentiated ways" (Draghi-Lorenz, Reddy, & Costall, 2001, p. 274). Such

3 As Gilbert writes, "I take it that one can possess a concept without having the ability explicitly to give an account of it—just as one can know how to move one's body in riding a bicycle without having the ability to describe precisely what is going on." (2013, p. 9)



early interactions include not only “feelings of liking, dislike, shyness, sadness or annoyance, as well as inattention and sleepiness” (Trevarthen, 1984, p. 140), but also positive interest, affectionate pleasure, joy, sadness, anger, and humour. Proto-conversations provide for the context in which “for the first time self and other are engaged *together* in an open-ended, emotional bid building process” (Zahavi & Rochat, 2015, p. 548).

These early affective exchanges do not seem to be automatic or reflex behaviours, insofar as their reciprocal character is fundamental for sustaining them. A dramatic illustration of this is the still-face experiment (Tronick, Als, Adamson, Wise, & Brazelton, 1978; Mesman, van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2009). In that experiment, an adult initially engages with the infant in a normal face-to-face interaction. This is followed by a period where the adult becomes unresponsive and poses a stationary expression (still-face). Infants as young as two months of age manifest a robust still-face response: they are sensitive to such interruptions of social interactions and not only do they attempt to reengage their social partner, by smiling, vocalizing and gesturing, but when this fails they display eye contact avoidance and distress. The general interpretation of such findings is not only that something in the gaze of the other is perceived by the infant as significant enough to arouse strong emotional reactions, but also that they have expectations about the way the face-to-face interactions should proceed, and about the nature of appropriate interactive responses from social partners (Rochat & Striano, 1999). The character of the mutual regulation and synchronicity of dyadic affective interactions in the first year of life has motivated researchers to talk about shared emotions at this stage of development (Krueger, 2014; Varga, 2016)

At around one year of age, early affective interactions become with the onset of triadic joint attention, and with it, of “secondary intersubjectivity” ((Trevarthen, 1998, p. 31). Triadic joint attention is the infant’s capacity to perceptually attend to objects and events together with another subject, typically a caregiver (Carpenter, Nagell, Tomasello, Butterworth, & Moore, 1998; Carpenter & Liebal, 2011; Tomasello, 1995). This capacity, which usually appears between 9–12 months of age, is typically exercised because either the infant or the caregiver direct the other’s attention to an object by means of an ostensive gesture, or because a salient external event attracts the attention of the infant and the caregiver. There is widespread agreement that triadic joint attention is different from parallel attention and mere gaze following (Rakoczy, 2018, p. 409). What is relevant for our purposes is that triadic joint attention provides a developmental ground for sharing emotional responses to an object of interest, where

it is manifest to both co-attenders that they are focusing on the same object (Moll & Meltzoff, 2011b, 2011a).<sup>4</sup>

One line of support for the claim that joint attention scaffolds shared emotional responses to an object of interest in early childhood, slightly later than the age at which triadic joint attention usually emerges, comes from research by Moll and colleagues. They have presented evidence that infants as young as 14 months are sensitive to, and able to track the affective significance that an object has had for ‘us’ (the infant and an adult), based on previous joint attentional engagements with the object (Moll, Richter, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2008). In the experimental condition (Share Condition), an infant and an adult shared an object (or target) excitedly because it reappeared unexpectedly in several predefined places: on the floor of the hallway, under a piece of cloth in another location of the hallway, and inside a box. Afterwards, infant and adult shared two other objects in a more neutral way for the same length of time as they had shared excitement over the first object. In the subsequent test phase, infant and adult were presented with a tray containing all three objects. The adult then reacted excitedly to the three objects, making an ambiguous request to the infant of handing “it” to her. Most children chose the target object. There were two control conditions. In the first control condition (Adult Change Condition), a different adult, who hadn’t had contact with the objects, made the same ambiguous request to the infant. In the second control condition (Individual Condition), the infant only witnessed the adult experiencing the target object with excitement, without interacting with the adult. The results of the experiment indicate that, upon the ambiguous request from the adult, 14-month olds tend to hand over the object that they had shared excitedly with her. The control conditions suggest that infants don’t do this because of their individual excitement about the object (independently of the person they had shared the experience with), or because of the adult’s own excited reaction to the target object, but rather because they (infant and adult) had shared a special experience about the object in the past.

The fact that in the experiment by Moll and colleagues the significant or special way of interacting with the target object involved sharing excitement about it invites a comparison with Gilbert’s (admittedly brief) treatment of collective excitement. In the first place, the experimental results could hardly be explained by appeal to the infant’s or the adult’s individual excitement about the target. So far, there is convergence with Gilbert’s insistence not to take for granted the validity of “summative accounts” of collective emotions (Gilbert,

4 For an account of shared emotions that highlights the role of joint attention in enabling shared emotional responses, see (León et al., 2017).

2014, p. 21). However, infants in the experiment appear to be relying on a specific interpersonal and affective transaction with the adult, a transaction that justifies Moll and colleagues' phrasing of "what 'we' have shared in a special way", as distinguished from "just I or you alone" (Moll et al., 2008, p. 90).

Let us now go back to Gilbert's joint commitment account of collective emotions. How plausible is it to suppose that 14-month olds have the requisite capacities for having joint commitments, as understood by Gilbert, and that their shared experience of excitement with the adult about the target object would involve a joint commitment to be excited 'as a body'? In our view, that proposal lacks plausibility. Note that possession of the concept of joint commitment is not sufficient to get the collective emotion going. The parties to a joint commitment also have to understand that the expressed readiness to jointly commit happens under conditions of *common knowledge* (Gilbert, 2014, p. 24). As Gilbert explains elsewhere: "Common knowledge in general may be understood roughly as follows: there is *common knowledge that p* among certain parties if and only if the parties *notice* that the fact that *p* is *open\** with respect to all of themselves. As I define it, *openness\** involves, roughly, many levels of potential knowledge of one another's knowledge" (Gilbert, 2013, p. 43). Now, if possession of the concept of *openness\** involves the possibility of exercising recursive mindreading, as suggested in this passage, it is implausible to attribute it to 14-month olds (Miller, 2009). If it doesn't, how precisely should *openness\** be understood in the case of young infants?<sup>5</sup> At any rate, on Gilbert's account, entering into joint commitments appears to require not only the possession of the concept of joint commitment, but also of the concept of *openness\**, and this introduces a further challenge of the joint commitment account of collective emotions in further childhood.

Let us now consider the two following rejoinders. In the first place, one might say that early forms of affective sharing over an object of attention, as illustrated by the experiment by Moll and colleagues, do not qualify as collective emotions as analysed by Gilbert. Even if such early forms of shared affectivity are non-verbal phenomena, they would be, at best, precursors to collective emotions proper, as found in adults. One challenge for this reply, however, is to specify when in development we would then be warranted in talking of

5 Gilbert's full definition of *openness\** involves reference to her concept of a "smooth reasoner counterpart of a person X", which is "roughly, a being otherwise like X, but whose reasoning is untrammelled by limits of time, memory capacity, and perseverance" (Gilbert, 1989, p. 191). Moreover, she supposes that "human beings generally possess the concept of *openness\**, and that this is effectively known by all adult humans" (Gilbert, 1989, p. 191). Whether, and if so, how Gilbert's understanding of *openness\** would apply to cognitively unsophisticated individuals is not something that she discusses, as far as we know.

collective emotions proper, and not merely of precursors to them. Recall that, on Gilbert's account, joint commitments need not be verbally expressed. The issue is, at best, open: when in development would collective emotions proper appear, and what would warrant the postulation of a difference between precursors to collective emotions, and collective emotions proper?

A second way of responding to the criticism would be to argue that joint commitment comes in different forms, and that it might be appropriate to introduce a rather minimal form of it, one that could be attributed to young children, even though they lack a sophisticated understanding of common knowledge and the normative elements that are part of Gilbert's approach (Michael, Sebanz, & Knoblich, 2016, p. 4). One of the core suggestions behind this proposal has been the idea that mere repetition can give rise to an implicit sense of commitment (Michael et al., 2016, p. 3). We consider this an interesting proposal, but in our view, it cannot save Gilbert's account. Consider that developmental studies suggest that only from around 3 years of age children begin to understand the kind of commitment involved in cooperative activities, such as playing games together (Gräfenhain, Behne, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2009; Hamann, Warneken, & Tomasello, 2012). The experiment by Moll and colleagues involved 14-month olds, and the shared excitement over the reappearing object did not happen in the context of a cooperative activity structured by a joint goal, but rather happened unexpectedly, due to the reappearance of the target object in different places. Secondly, and more importantly, the minimal approach to the sense of commitment should be seen not so much as a leaner version of Gilbert's approach to joint commitment, but rather as departing from it in important respects (Michael et al., 2016, p. 2).<sup>6</sup> So even if the minimal approach to the sense of commitment could be applied to illuminate some aspects of phenomena of shared affectivity in early life, it wouldn't automatically speak in favour of Gilbert's joint commitment approach to collective emotions.

The case of shared affective responses in early infancy, even in situations where such responses are not structured by a joint goal, points to a more principled objection to Gilbert's joint commitment account of collective emotions. This objection is ultimately independent of developmental considerations, and it targets the very idea that Gilbert's analysis of shared action can without further ado be transferred to cases of shared affects. Here is arguably a far more prototypical case of collective emotion than the one we started with at the beginning of this section. I watch a movie together with a friend. We both enjoy

6 One important difference between the two approaches is that the minimal approach to the sense of commitment focuses on psychological, rather than normative factors.

the movie, or more accurately we enjoy the movie together. The enjoyment I feel as a result of seeing the movie together with my friend differs from the enjoyment I would have had, had I seen the movie on my own, and the same holds true for my friend. What we are dealing with here is not simply a case of emotional contagion. It is not simply a question of my enjoyment being intensified as a result of me being causally affected by my friend's emotional state. It is not simply a question of a certain modulation of *my* experience of joy, but rather of an experience that is felt as *ours*, i.e., as co-owned, as one that we are feeling and experiencing together. A case of two people feeling joy together seems a prime candidate for a shared emotion. But how reasonable is it to claim that the emotion they have is a collective emotion precisely because of the involvement of a joint commitment? How plausible is it to insist that I would be entitled to rebuke the friend with whom I share the joy of watching the movie, if after some time he doesn't find the movie enjoyable anymore?

In many cases of collective emotions, we are bound together by affects that overwhelm us. We are *affected* by them. This aspect of affective life is referenced in the conceptualization of (some) emotions as *passions*, and in locutions such as being 'overcome with joy' and 'overwhelmed by sorrow' (Deonna & Teroni, 2012, p. 1). But in these cases, where emotions are not directly influenced by the will, the notion of joint commitment seems to be of little relevance. This doesn't mean that emotions, individual or collective, don't have associated action tendencies. The point is rather that there are relevant differences between shared action and shared affects that should prevent us from analysing all cases of the latter with the same tools that we use to analyse the former.

Consider, further, what means would be available for testing the presence of a joint commitment in a collective emotion. At least in many cases, the appropriateness of an apology when breaking the joint commitment would testify for the presence of the latter. If so, however, there are many cases of collective emotions where such an apology makes little sense, such as in the example of collective joy when watching a movie together with someone. In the developmental literature, evidence suggesting that children only start from around 3 years of age to offer an apology or an excuse when they unilaterally break off from a joint activity has precisely been interpreted as indicating that they only then would have an understanding of joint commitments (Gräfenhain et al., 2009).

## 5. Mutual Recognition and Joint Commitment

We have so far argued against the necessity of joint commitment for collective emotions, by drawing on research in developmental psychology, and by pointing to significant differences between actions and affects. We have also considered possible strategies Gilbert might take to respond to the challenge, but have suggested that they are unconvincing. In this section, we will supplement the preceding discussion with another line of argument, which focuses on the notion of mutual recognition. The argument builds on Gilbert's assumption that mutual recognition is foundational in the sense that mutually recognized subjects "constitute a fundamental kind of social group" (Gilbert, 2013, p. 332). Although we share this assumption, we will argue that Gilbert's account of mutual recognition fails for reasons related to the ones we have discussed in preceding sections. In particular, we find problematic Gilbert's claim that mutual recognizing "presupposes, for one, that the parties have the concept of joint commitment" (Gilbert, 2013, p. 333).

As we have repeatedly seen, for Gilbert it is joint commitments that unifies us and makes us us (Gilbert, 2013, p. 331). A collective we can, however, vary in both complexity and duration. For Gilbert, the most basic form is the one established through mutual recognition. Those who mutually recognize each other constitute the simplest and most fundamental form of a social group (Gilbert, 2013, pp. 324, 332).<sup>7</sup> Such a group will not yet have shared aims and values, but by recognizing one another, the members of the group have already started the process of forming a group with "character". Social conventions, for instance, are in most cases established on a basis that involves mutual recognition (Gilbert, 2013, p. 333). Just like Gilbert, we readily concede that there are forms of collective intentionality that go beyond cases of face-to-face based mutual recognition, and that connect individuals who are not known to (and perhaps will never know) each other (Gilbert, 2013, p. 51). It is consequently important to be clear about the relationship between the unification obtaining between particular individuals who know each other, and more anonymous and institutionalized forms of such unification. While we agree with Gilbert on the primacy of the former, we have issues with the particular analysis that she offers.

Gilbert considers mutual recognition to involve common knowledge of copresence (Gilbert, 2013, p. 324). When two people, A and B, engage in dyadic joint attention, i.e., when they are looking in each other's eyes, it is common

7 Recognition is understood by Gilbert as "a more or less enduring state, like believing, as opposed to an event like noticing" (Gilbert, 2013, p. 332).

knowledge between A and B that A and B are co-present (Gilbert, 2013, pp. 325–326). Gilbert also argues, however, that A and B are thereby jointly committed to recognize as one that they are both co-present (Gilbert, 2013, p. 329). Or as she also puts it, they are committed to act in relation to one another as if they are ‘of one mind’ with respect to the fact that they are co-present (Gilbert, 2013, p. 330). It is not hard to see, why Gilbert has to argue like this. Had she allowed for mutual recognition to obtain without joint commitment, and had mutual recognition been both necessary and sufficient for the formation of a basic type of social group, Gilbert’s own claim concerning the centrality of joint commitment would have been undermined. According to Gilbert, mutual recognition—as exemplified by a case of being aware of someone’s co-presence, and by engaging in a minimal form of communication, such as nodding and smiling to each other—presupposes “that the parties have the concept of joint commitment” (Gilbert, 2013, p. 333).

One challenge to Gilbert’s account of mutual recognition can again be found in the developmental literature. 2–3 months olds infants can engage in dyadic joint attention and participate in simple forms of proto-conversations. According to Gilbert however, mutual recognition requires a possession of the concept of joint commitment (Gilbert, 2013, p. 333). It is not obvious that this claim accords with the developmental findings. Perhaps one could circumvent that challenge by opting for a much thinner notion of commitment. But we would then be confronted with the problem that by accepting a more deflationary notion one also dilutes the notion, and risks ending up with a fairly vacuous account, where the notion of joint commitment has little content.

Let us conclude, however, by briefly mentioning a different concern. As already mentioned, we agree with the idea that mutual recognition is important, but in our view, the main reason for this has to do with reasons Gilbert doesn’t address in her own account. It is not entirely clear to us whether Gilbert would actually oppose the following analysis, but it is in any case not one that to our knowledge has been spelled out in her own writings.

When one is feeling something with another, say feeling joy and pride together with the another, one is not simply feeling the joy and pride as mine, but as ours. How can this happen? How can one come to feel and experience oneself as one of us? In its most basic form, a shared emotion involves emotional interpersonal interaction, where both participating individuals are reciprocally affecting and experiencing each other. We consequently hold that it is counterintuitive to call a felt emotion ‘shared’ unless the subject of the experience is also aware of the presence and participation of the other(s), and vice-versa. One implication of this is that a shared emotion necessarily involves a preservation

of the difference between the participating individuals. Mere reciprocity is, however, not sufficient for shared emotions. After all, the former condition is also met by various kinds of antagonistic relationships. What more is needed?

Not surprisingly, it seems urgent to get a better grip on the nature of the togetherness, i.e., the kind of integration that is required by shared emotions. The integration required goes beyond not only summation or aggregation but also beyond cases of mere coupling or co-regulation. One of the difficulties in fleshing out the required integration is that the depth or tightness of integration may well differ from case to case. One might witness a flutist playing on the street, and a sharing look and a smile might make it transparent that the delight is shared with another passer-by. Although such a case would not simply be a case of emotional contagion, such a form of sharing delivers only a quite ephemeral form of integration. Contrast this example with the kind of integration that can be found in the case of a romantic couple in which the partners' tight integration and fully unified appraisal of, say, a happiness-inducing situation would make it possible and appropriate for them to articulate the experience in 'we' terms. What marks the difference between these two ranges of cases?

Our proposal is that *identification* makes the difference. To feel an emotion not simply as one's own but as *ours*, requires that one identifies with the other(s) in order to experience oneself as *one of us*, where the latter expression is understood in non-distributive terms. What is of primary importance here, however, is that this identification goes hand in hand with a certain transformation or modulation of the participating individual's respective self-experience. There are different accounts available of how this might happen (see for instance Zahavi, 2015, 2019; León, Szanto, & Zahavi, 2017; León, 2018), but here we simply want to insist that an adequate account of collective emotions must factor in and account for this change, and in our view, Gilbert's reference to joint commitments leaves this problem unaddressed.

## 6. Conclusion

We in no way want to dispute that joint commitments can enhance, consolidate and add stability to many social phenomena, including some types of collective emotions. However, we are sceptical about the proposal that joint commitments are necessary for collective emotions, as Gilbert contends. We have argued that research in developmental psychology puts considerable pressure



on such a proposal, and that consideration of everyday adult cases of collective emotions, such as enjoying a movie together with a friend, are not convincingly amenable to an analysis in terms of joint commitments. The phenomena of shared affectivity discussed by the developmental psychologists as well as the just mentioned example are counterexamples to Gilbert's claim concerning the necessity of joint commitments for collective emotions. Moreover, while we concur with Gilbert's proposal that face-to-face mutual recognition is foundational for other types of social engagements, analysing mutual recognition in terms of joint commitments is equally implausible. Research on collective emotions is an ongoing endeavour, and much more could be said about the topic. We contend that, like other collective social phenomena, collective emotions involve a sense of we-ness, or us-ness, that makes them different from solitary emotions. A plausible *desideratum* for an account of collective emotions is that it illuminates the nature of the shift that makes it possible for me to experience an emotion as 'ours'.<sup>8</sup>

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