Empathy ≠ sharing: Perspectives from phenomenology and developmental psychology

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A B S T R A C T

We argue that important insights regarding the topic of sharing can be gathered from phenomenology and developmental psychology; insights that in part challenge widespread ideas about what sharing is and where it can be found. To be more specific, we first exemplify how the notion of sharing is being employed in recent discussions of empathy, and then argue that this use of the notion tends to be seriously confused. It typically conflates similarity and sharing and, more generally speaking, fails to recognize that sharing proper involves reciprocity. As part of this critical analysis, we draw on sophisticated analyses of the distinction between empathy and emotional sharing that can be found in early phenomenology. Next, we turn to developmental psychology. Sharing is not simply one thing, but a complex and many-layered phenomenon. By tracing its early developmental trajectory from infancy and beyond, we show how careful psychological observations can help us develop a more sophisticated understanding of sharing than the one currently employed in many discussions in the realm of neuroscience. In our conclusion, we return to the issue of empathy and argue that although empathy does not involve or entail sharing, empathy understood as a basic sensitivity to and understanding of others (rather than as a special prosocial concern for others) might be a precondition for sharing.

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1. Empathy and affective sharing

Recent years have witnessed an upsurge of interest in and work on empathy in many different disciplines, including philosophy, cognitive science, developmental psychology, social neuroscience, anthropology, nursing, and primatology. Despite all the work being done, there is, however, still no firm agreement about what precisely empathy is or how it might relate to and differ from motor mimicry, emotional contagion, imaginative projection, perspective taking, and sympathy. However, one of the very few ideas that have been able to gather widespread agreement is the idea that empathy is a process whereby one individual comes to share another individual's affective experience. Even people who otherwise strongly disagree endorse such a view. Here are a few examples:

In a 2009 paper, Pfeifer and Dapretto write that "shared affect between self and other" constitutes the experiential core of empathy (Pfeifer and Dapretto, 2009, 184). In an article from the same year, Nickerson, Butler and Carlin note that the word empathy conveys the notion of "shared or vicarious feeling" (Nickerson et al., 2009, 43). In various articles, Decety et al. have argued that one of the crucial components of empathy is affective sharing between self and other (Decety & Lamm, 2006,

1146, Decety & Jackson, 2004). And whereas Darwall defines empathy as involving something like a sharing of the other's mental states (1998, 263), in her defense of the perception–action model of empathy, Preston refers to empathy as "a *shared emotional experience* occurring when one person (the subject) comes to feel a *similar emotion* to another (the object) as a result of *perceiving* the other's state" (Preston, 2007, 428).

Whereas the majority of contemporary empathy theorists endorse the claim that empathy involves a sharing of affect across individuals, the main point of controversy concerns the question of whether or not such sharing is sufficient for empathy. Some have claimed that it is and have consequently argued that various forms of contagion and mimicry count as prime (or at least primitive) examples of empathy (cf. Darwall, 1998, 264–266, Hatfield, Rapson, & Le, 2009). Others, by contrast, have insisted on the need for a distinction between empathy and emotional contagion and have argued that sharing, while necessary, is insufficient, and that it must be accompanied by some self-other differentiation, and by some cognitive ascription of the affective state to the other (Jacob, 2011). The problem that both sides have in common, however, is nicely highlighted in the quote by Preston. On a currently quite popular simulationist approach to empathy, empathy requires isomorphic emotional or sensory states in empathizer and target and involves some kind of inner imitation. But does similarity amount to sharing? Is it really the same to share an emotion with someone and to come to have a similar emotion as someone else as a result of perceiving (and imitating) the other's mental state? We will in Section 4 argue that the answer to these questions must be negative. But to motivate this argument, let us first quickly consider some of the early and very different analyses of empathy and affective sharing that can be found in phenomenology (for further details, see Zahavi, 2008; 2011, 2012, 2014b, 2015).

2. Empathy

The German term "Einfühlung" was coined in 1873 and used in the domain of aesthetics by the philosopher Robert Vischer. It was subsequently taken over by Theodor Lipps, who introduced it into the field of social cognition and used it to designate our basic capacity for understanding others. It was Lipps' notion that Edward Titchener, the American psychologist, had in mind when he in 1909 translated "Einfühlung" as "empathy". According to Lipps' original proposal, we have to distinguish three domains of knowledge: (1) knowledge of external objects, (2) self-knowledge, and (3) knowledge of others, and Lipps took these domains to have three distinct cognitive sources, namely perception, introspection, and empathy (Lipps, 1909, 222). In the wake of Lipps' investigation, a number of phenomenologists engaged in intensive discussions regarding the nature and structure of empathy. Whereas they accepted the idea that empathy must be equated with (a basic form of) other-understanding, they were more critical of Lipps' suggestion that empathy involves a form of inner imitation, and rejected various attempts to explain empathy in terms of mirroring, mimicry, or imitation. As they pointed out, whereas the latter processes might explain how and why I come to have a certain experience myself, they do not explain how I come to understand the other. For someone to have a feeling herself and for someone to empathically understand that another has a feeling are two quite different things (Gurwitsch, 1979, 24–25). Ultimately, the phenomenologists did not merely dismiss the proposal that imitation is sufficient for empathic understanding. They also questioned whether it is necessary. Cannot I empathically grasp that my child is afraid of the dark, without myself being afraid of the dark?

On a more positive note, the phenomenologists took empathy as the term of choice for our perceptually based experience of foreign consciousness, arguing that more complex and indirect forms of social cognition presuppose as well as rely upon it (Zahavi, 2011, 2014a). Empathy is the experience of the embodied mind of the other, an experience which rather than eliminating the difference between self-experience and other-experience takes the asymmetry to be a necessary and persisting existential fact. Thus, the phenomenologists would strongly have opposed recent claims to the effect that empathic arousal blurs the distinction between self and other, that the other comes to feel like a part of our self, and that it leads to a sense of merged personal identities (Cialdini, Brown, Lewis, Luce, & Neuberg, 1997). Whereas the experience of empathizing is first-personally given, the empathized experience is not given first-personally to the empathizer. To insist that the empathizer must have the same (kind of) state as the target, is to miss what is distinctive about empathy, namely the fact that it is a special form of other-directed intentionality, one that allows the other's experiences to disclose themselves as other rather than as own (Husserl, 1959: 176). In short, empathy is what allows me to experience other experiencing subjects. It entails neither that the other's experience is literally transmitted to me, nor does it entail that I undergo the experience I observe in the other. Rather, to empathically experience, say, the emotion of another necessarily differs from the way you would experience the emotion if it were your own. In empathy, you are confronted with the presence of an experience that you are not living through yourself. One might say that empathy provides a special kind of knowledge by *acquaintance*. It is not first-person acquaintance, but rather a distinct other-acquaintance. Empathy denotes a special kind of epistemic access and should not be confounded with sympathy or compassion. It does not have to be prosocial. As Scheler pointed out, empathic sensitivity is a precondition for cruelty, since cruelty requires an awareness of the pain and suffering of the other, and must be sharply distinguished from a pathological insensitivity to the pain of others (Scheler, 1954: 14).

None of the phenomenologists would accept the claim that one can only empathize with affective states. Rather, they would take empathy to refer to our general ability to access the life of the mind of others in their expressions, expressive behavior and meaningful actions. We can see the other's elation or doubt, surprise or attentiveness in his or her face, we can hear the other's trepidation, impatience or bewilderment in her voice, feel the other's enthusiasm in his handshake, grasp his mood in his posture, and see her determination and persistence in her actions. Thus, we certainly also express

or manifest our mental states by acting on them. My fear or concern is not merely revealed to others in my facial expressions, but also in my running away from what terrifies me or in my attempts to console somebody who is grieving. Importantly, however, when saying that empathy can provide a special kind of understanding, this is not meant to suggest that empathy provides an especially profound or deep kind of understanding. In order to obtain that, theoretical inferences and imaginative simulations might very well be needed. No, the specificity of the access is due to the fact that it is basic and intuitive, i.e., the empathized experience is given directly as existing here and now. Just as we ought to consider the difference between thinking about a lion, imagining a lion, and seeing a lion, we also ought to acknowledge the difference between referring to Anton's compassion or sadness, imagining in detail what it must be like for him to be compassionate or sad, and being empathically acquainted with his compassion or sadness in the direct face-to-face encounter. In the latter case, our acquaintance with Anton's experiential life has a directness and immediacy to it that is not possessed by whatever beliefs I might have about him in his absence.

3. We-experience

Early phenomenologists did not simply target empathy in their analyses, however. In her doctoral dissertation *On the Problem of Empathy*, for instance, Stein also considers the following case of shared joy (her dissertation was written during World War I): A special edition of the newspaper reports that a fortress has fallen. When learning of this, we are all seized by 'the same' excitement and joy. Does this entail that the borders between the participating individuals have broken down? Stein denies this. On her account, I feel my joy and I empathically comprehend the others' joy and see it as the same. As a result, our respective joys overlap and coincide. I come to feel their joy as mine and vice versa. The *we* consequently arises from the 'I' and the 'you'. What we feel, when we share a joy is different from what I feel and what you feel in isolation. But the 'I' and the 'you' is retained in the we (Stein, 1989, 17–18).

A number of interesting ideas are introduced here. Most relevant for our present purposes, however, is the idea that shared emotions rather than simply being a question of having the same kind of emotion as another, involve a reference to the first-person plural. They amount to a dynamically emergent and negotiated we-experience. There is an interplay of both identification and differentiation.

Stein's brief description is amplified and further developed a few years later in Gerda Walther's 1919 dissertation *Zur Ontologie der sozialen Gemeinschaften*. In her analysis, Walther carefully distinguishes experiential sharing from empathy, sympathy and imitation (and emotional contagion). On her account, to grasp the experiences of the other empathically is quite different from sharing his experiences. In empathy, I grasp the other's experiences insofar as they are expressed in words, gestures, body posture, facial expressions, etc. Throughout I am aware that it is not me who is living through these experiences, but that they belong to the other, that they are the other's experiences, and that they are only given to me qua expressive phenomena (Walther, 1923, 73). Even if we by coincidence had had the same kind of experiences, this would not amount to a shared experience, to an experience *we* were undergoing together. Despite the similarity of the two experiences, they would not be unified in the requisite manner, but would simply stand side by side as belonging to distinct individuals (Walther, 1923, 74). To feel sympathy for somebody, to be happy because he is happy or sad because he is sad also differs from being happy or sad *together* with the other (Walther, 1923, 76–77). Finally, we also need to distinguish experiential and emotional sharing from imitation or contagion. In the latter case, I might take over the experience of somebody else and come to experience it as my own. But insofar as that happens, and insofar as I then no longer have any awareness of the other's involvement, it has nothing to do with shared experiences. The latter requires a preservation of plurality. In the case of, say, shared joy, the joy is precisely no longer simply experienced by me as *yours* and/or *mine*, but as *ours*. Walther consequently claims that we-experiences involve a peculiar belonging-to-me of the other's experience (1923, 75). Or as Jessica and Peter Hobson would put it almost hundred years later, emotional sharing must encompass "the other as participating, with me, in that experience" (Hobson & Hobson, 2014, 188). This is why it makes perfect sense to articulate the experience in question with the use of the first-person plural: 'We enjoyed the movie', or 'We saw the traffic accident'.

4. Sharing revisited

We are still quite far from being in a position to offer a positive account of what sharing amounts to. But enough has been said to reach various negative conclusions. If one accepts the phenomenological account of empathy, empathy does not involve similar states in empathizer and target. You might empathically grasp your colleague's distress when he receives notice of his demotion even though you are personally delighted by this piece of news. The fact that you do not feel the same kind of distress, the fact that you are feeling a very different emotion (e.g., *Schadenfreude*), does not make it any less a case of empathy, nor does it make your awareness of his distress merely inferential or imaginative in character. But even if one is unwilling to endorse this classical analysis of empathy, reasons have been given to resist Preston's claim that similarity amounts to sharing. Likewise, it is not plausible to claim, as Michael has done in a recent article, that emotion detection amounts to a minimal form of sharing and that a paradigmatic way of sharing an emotion is for X to express an affective state, and for Y to perceive that expression (Michael, 2011, 361–363). Just as Y through her observation of X can come to be in the same kind of state as X without sharing that state with X, Y can empathize with X without X being in any way aware of it. Empathy can, in short, be one-sided, it does not have to be reciprocal. That is, however, arguably a clear requirement for

emotional sharing. To claim that I am (aware of) sharing one of your emotions, while denying that you are (aware of) sharing one of mine, does not seem to make that much sense. Consider, by comparison, recent work on joint attention. There is widespread consensus that joint attention is not simply a question of two unrelated people simultaneously looking at the same thing, nor is it sufficient that the attention of one of them is causally influenced by the eye direction of the other. For joint attention to occur, the attentional focus of two persons (or more) should not merely run in parallel, it must be joint in the sense that it is shared, i.e., it must involve an awareness of attending together. The fact that both persons are attending to the same object must, to use Sperber and Wilson's (1986) phrase, be 'mutually manifest'. This is precisely what makes joint attention quite unlike any kind of experience one might have on one's own. The emphasis here is clearly on the importance of bi-directionality and reciprocity.

Given these considerations, one ought to reject the widespread idea that empathy involves a sharing of affects. The very idea is premised on a misunderstanding of what both empathy and sharing amount to. But how should we then approach sharing? What does it involve? Given what has been said so far, it appears as if the answer requires a closer explorations of we-intentions. Let us briefly consider two proposals found in recent discussions of social ontology.

In his book, *The Philosophy of Sociality: The Shared Point of View*, Tuomela discusses what a shared we-attitude amounts to and offers the following summary of his analysis:

(*WI*) *A* member A_i of a collective g *we-intends* to do X if and only if

(i) A_i intends to do his part of X (as his part of X);

(ii) A_i has a belief to the effect that the joint action opportunities for an intentional performance of X will obtain (or at least probably will obtain), especially that a right number of the full-fledged and adequately informed members of g, as required for the performance of X, will (or at least probably will) perform their parts of X, which under normal conditions will result in an intentional joint performance of X by the participants;

(iii) A_i believes that there is (or will be) a mutual belief among the participating members of g (or at least among those participants who perform their parts of X intentionally as their parts of X there is or will be a mutual belief) to the effect that the joint action opportunities for an intentional performance of X will obtain (or at least probably will obtain);

(iv) (i) in part because of (ii) and (iii) (Tuomela 2007, 93–94).

On this construal, sharing must be seen as a fairly demanding cognitive accomplishment. Consider next a proposal by Hans Bernhard Schmid. He argues that what is shared, i.e. that which belongs to *us*, precedes the distinction between yours and mine, and is prior to any form of intersubjectivity or mutual recognition (Schmid, 2005, 145, 149, 296). On his account, emotional sharing does not presuppose the givenness of the other experiencer, but rather precedes any such givenness (2005, 138). More generally speaking, Schmid denies that the *we* is founded upon an other-experience or in any other way involves or presupposes some kind of reciprocal relation between I and you, self and other. Likewise, he also questions whether plural self-awareness (and having a sense of *us*) really presupposes singular self-awareness, and instead suggests that one in ontogeny first becomes aware of oneself qua member of a group, and that plural self-awareness and group-membership to that extent precedes and grounds singular self-awareness (Schmid, 2014, 23).

Both of these proposals can be subjected to philosophical scrutiny (cf. Salmela, 2012; Zahavi, 2014b). At a more empirical level, we can also evaluate the assumptions driving such theories in light of developmental psychology. What kind of developmental support is there for either of the proposals? Does it support the view that sharing can only occur after the child has acquired the ability to engage in sophisticated action planning and metacognition, or will it rather point to the emotional and embodied roots of sharing? Will it support a claim concerning the basic and primordial character of the *we*, or rather demonstrate that the *we* is a developmental achievement? As we shall see, neither of these philosophical proposals seem to resonate well with what developmental psychology can teach us. Beside serving a critical function, looking at developmental psychology provides some empirical ground for a more careful and nuanced understanding of what sharing might stand for, including a distinction between different forms of sharing and how reciprocal exchanges develop early in life, from infancy and beyond (for further details, see Rochat, 2014). One important outcome of our analysis is also that empathy although clearly insufficient for sharing, might nevertheless play a crucial enabling role.

5. Sharing in development

Progress in infancy research during the past 40 years has debunked many classical theoretical assumptions; assumptions revolving around the ill-informed intuition of a starting state characterized by un-differentiation and an initial state of emotional, social, perceptual and cognitive incompetence in newborns.

It is now well established that we are not born in a blooming, buzzing, confusion, in some state of undifferentiated fusion with the environment, as proposed by William James over a century ago, assumed also by many pioneer child psychologists such as Piaget, Wallon, Baldwin, or Freud and many of his followers like Mahler or Klein (Rochat, 2011). We now know that newborns perceive their own body as a differentiated entity among other entities. For example, they root significantly more toward the finger of someone touching their cheek (single touch), than toward their own fingers touching their cheek (double touch, Rochat & Hespos, 1997). Furthermore, research show that hour-old infants are already sensitive to distal

objects and not just proximal stimulations hitting the senses (Kellman & Arterberry, 2006; Slater, Mattock, & Brown, 1990). Infants from birth show remarkable attunement to particular features in the environment. They prefer and discriminate among animate as opposed to inanimate things; face vs. non-face entities (see Rochat, 2001 for a review); familiar as opposed to unfamiliar people based on even pre-natal experience of maternal voice and the taste of maternal amniotic fluid (Marlier, Schaal, & Soussignan, 1998).

In relation to the issue introduced above and motivating this article, we have to note that the concept of empathy has also been used ambiguously in the developmental literature, often with strong pro-social connotations. Although we cannot expand on the issue, we do not agree with the definition and developmental threshold postulated by, for instance, Doris Bischof-Köhler (1991) and Michael Lewis (2001). On our more minimal definition of empathy as a basic sensitivity to the mindedness of others, such sensitivity is manifest from the outset. What changes in development is its form and content. By 6 weeks, if not earlier, infants are already sensitive to (1) eye gaze, (2) 'motherese', and (3) turn-taking contingency. As Csibra has argued, this shows that they are able to recognize that they are being addressed by someone else's communicative intentions long before they are able to specify what those intentions are (Csibra, 2010, 143). The basic empathic ability by which the child clearly distinguishes between persons and inanimate things allows them to develop various levels of experiential sharing. This development follows the marked and rapid expansion of children's awareness of being with others in the world. In what follows, we describe 3 major levels unfolding in development between birth and 5 years. These levels are in turn primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Each of these levels emerging in development determine ways and forms of sharing that are fundamentally different in both content and function. However, as we will also see, although each determines primary bounding and some sort of social togetherness or experience of 'we-ness', as discussed above, none of them presuppose either absolute fusion or strict sameness of experience. Rather, we will show that at each level, and from the earliest age, children engage in dynamic co-regulation with others that amounts to an open-ended system of negotiation, where this includes the dynamic process of constant affect monitoring and emotional alignment with others, i.e., a mutual adjustment between self and others' experience. Even sharing a good laugh entails timing and monitoring of other's responses to one's laugh. Such process is a central feature of experiential sharing and is expressed from the outset. At each level, the child comes to experience a different kind of co-engagement with others, from individual persons at primary and secondary levels of intersubjectivity, eventually expanded to the larger group at the tertiary level of intersubjectivity. However, throughout this process and at each level, none of the protagonists abandon their own perspective or subjectivity. For each level there is a different kind of co-engagement entailing some degree of identification. But the perspectives never fuse with one another; they always remain differentiated in order to allow for coordination. Inversely, such coordination does not appear to emerge from an original state of fusion or symbiosis with the other, as psychoanalysts tend to suggest, but rather from an original self-world differentiation combined with the innate ability to discriminate and empathize with people as distinct sentient and animated entities in the world. Although it has sometimes been claimed that young children fail to appreciate the separateness of subjects of experience, and that their awareness of mental states involves an undifferentiated *we*, not decomposable into *I* and *you*, early joint attention interactions provide, as Roessler has pointed out, straightforward counter-evidence, since the whole point of proto-declaratives is to bring someone else's focus of attention in line with one's own (Roessler, 2005, 247).

As we will see next, each of these 3 basic levels adds a new layer of meaning to sharing, progressively expanding from the individual to the group. This enlargement follows a path that parallels and echoes the development of self-consciousness (cf. Rochat, 2009), leading children, from the exchange of gazes and smiles (primary intersubjectivity), to the sharing of attention toward objects, including the actual offering and request for physical things (secondary intersubjectivity), and ultimately to the negotiation of material and immaterial values in reciprocal interpersonal exchanges (tertiary intersubjectivity, see Rochat & Passos-Ferreira, 2008 for further discussion), but also, and more importantly in relation to the present topic, the novel expression of group affiliation and group conformity that brings the experience of being part of a we to a new, much larger level.

5.1. Primary intersubjectivity: Affective sharing (2-months and up)

By approximately 6 weeks post partum, a new kind of mutuality emerges that is distinct from the primeval biological and instinctive co-regulation we find already at birth. It is from this time onwards that infants engage in face-to-face interaction, and display the first socially elicited smiling. It is this first active sharing of affects in proto-conversation with others that amounts to the so-called *primary* intersubjectivity (Trevarthen, 1980). It is the original ground for sharing in the literal sense of reciprocal exchanges. Infancy researchers have documented and characterized this sharing in terms of rhythmical *turn taking* (Gergely & Watson, 1999), and *two way shared mutual gaze* (Stern, 1985; Stern, Hofer, Haft, & Dore, 1985). It goes beyond mere affective mirroring or emotional contagion as such exchanges take place for the first time within open-ended, *co-created* transactions made of successive emotional bids. To share an experience with someone else is not to have an experience of one's own and then simply to add knowledge about the other's perspective on top; rather a shared experience is a qualitatively new kind of experience, one that is quite unlike any experience one could have on one's own. The other's presence and reciprocation makes all the difference.

Infants at birth open their eyes and orient their gazes toward faces, preferring face to non face objects. Even though they are documented to imitate facial gestures and emotional expression (like tongue protrusion or sad faces) (Field, 1982; Meltzoff & Moore, 1977), the gaze of newborns remains often sluggish and hard to capture, as if it is passing through

you. Starring straight at a newborn with open eyes often gives the impression that the child is looking through you rather than at you. By 6–8 weeks, however, the gaze becomes unmistakably *shared and mutual*, inaugurating a proto-conversational space of social exchanges made of turn taking and a novel sensitivity. Mothers commonly report that they now discover a person in their baby. Whereas eye-to-eye contacts are often threatening signs and tend to be avoided in other primate species, it is a major attractor in humans and becomes a critical index of engagement in proto-conversational and early inter-subjective exchanges. It is a variable picked up by the child as a measure of the relative degree to which others are socially engaged and attentive, affectively attuned and effectively 'with' them. It gives rise to prototypical narrative envelops co-constructed in interaction with others, made for example of tension build-ups and sudden releases of tension, like in peek-a-boo games that are universally compelling to infants starting the second month (Rochat, 2001; Stern, 1985). Such exchanges are primarily scaffold by strong affective marking and compulsive affective amplification on the part of the caretaker producing high pitch inflections of voice and exaggerated facial expressions ('motherese'), tapping into the child's attentional capacities and perceptual preferences (Gergely & Watson, 1999; Rochat, 1999, 2001; Stern et al., 1985). The adult's systematic tendency toward affective scaffolding and amplification, a running emotional commentary that is attuned to the child's expressed emotions, combined with the novel attentional capacities of the child by the second month (Wolff, 1987) makes such proto-conversation more than mere complementary actions between adult and child. Play and sharing games give children privileged access to their own limits and possibilities as agents in their environment. It is in such affective, face-to-face playful exchanges of gazes and smiles that infants first gauge their social situation: the impact they have on others, the quality of social attention they are able to generate and receive from others. It is from this point on that we can talk of sharing as a process that rests on reciprocation and putative co-creation of affects in interactions with others. Importantly, in relation to our topic, this is a process in which for the first time self and other are engaged *together* in an open-ended, emotional bid building process. This emergence defines a novel horizon for development that leads the child toward symbolic functioning, explicit self-consciousness as opposed to implicit self-awareness, linguistic competence, and ultimately the development of an ethical stance toward others (i.e., strong reciprocity in sharing, see Robbins & Rochat, 2011). It also provides a basis for infants to become socially selective and sensitive to social identity markers like language, manifesting already from approximately 3 months relative preference and affiliation with particular others that are more familiar. For example, recent research show that by 6 months, infants prefer strangers who speak with no foreign accent (Kinzler, Dupoux, & Spelke, 2007); respond to them in a familiar temporal manner (Bigelow & Rochat, 2006); or act in pro-social as opposed to anti-social ways (Hamlin, Wynn, & Bloom, 2007).

5.2. Secondary intersubjectivity: Referential sharing (7–9 months and up)

If by 2 months infants begin to share experience in face-to-face proto-conversation with others, things change again by 7–9 months when infants break away from mere face-to-face reciprocal exchanges to engage in referential sharing with others *about* things in the world outside of the dyadic exchange. This transition is behaviorally indexed with the emergence of social referencing and triadic joint attention whereby a triangular reciprocal exchange emerge between child and others in reference to objects or events in the environment (Striano & Rochat, 2000; Tomasello, 1995). By triangulation of attention, objects become jointly captured and shared. Objects start feeding into the exchange. This is the sign of a 'secondary' inter-subjectivity (Trevarthen, 1980) adding to the first exchanges of 2–6 month-olds.

Prototypical instances of triadic joint attention include not only cases where the child is passively attending to the other, but also cases where the infant, through acts of protodeclarative pointing, actively invites another to share its focus of attention. In either case, the infant will often look back and forth between adult and object and use the feedback from his or her face to check whether joint attention has been realized. Importantly, the jointness of the attention is not primarily manifest in the mere gaze alternation, but in the shared affect that, for instance, is expressed in knowing smiles. One proposal has been that interpersonally coordinated affective states may play a pivotal developmental role in establishing jointness (Hobson & Hobson, 2011, 116). Another suggestion has been to see joint attention as a form of communicative interaction. On this proposal, it is communication, which for instance can take the form of a meaningful look (i.e., it does not have to be verbal), that turns mutually experienced events into something truly joint (Carpenter & Liebal, 2011, 168).

This new triangulation emerging by 7–9 months is also, and maybe more importantly, about social affiliation and togetherness. Like the optical parallax that gives depth cues to viewers, first signs of joint attention gives children a new measure of their social affiliation, a novel social depth. By starting to point to objects in the presence of others, by presenting or offering grasped objects to social partners, infants prey for others' mental focus by creating and advertising for a shared attention. Psychologically, it also corresponds to the first *appropriation* of an object as topic of social exchange, in the same way that in the course of a conversation someone might spontaneously appropriate an object (pen, stick of wood, any small object) to help in the telling of a story. The object, used as a conversational prop in early bouts of joint attention, becomes the infants' new 'fishing hook' to capture, gauge and eventually possess others' attention against which they can gauge further their relative agentive role, control, and impact in relation to others: their situation and place in the social environment.

It is reasonable to state that in joint attention we find the roots of the child's first socially shared mental projection of control over an object (i.e., possession in the literal sense). In starting to bring other people's attention onto things in the environment, the infant opens up the possibility of claiming ownership of both the initiation of a conversation about something and the thing itself. Pointing, offering, or presenting objects to others, are all new social gestures becoming prominent in the healthy child from 7 to 9 months.

An object that is presented or offered can now be retrieved or taken away by others, given back or ignored by them. It gives rise to all sorts of new, complex and objectified social transactions. It is in these new objectified social transactions that the child consolidates the concept and idea of what eventually will become in a few months developmental time and with the emergence of language the explicit claim of ownership: the assertion of "that's mine!" and "not yours!"; an explicit assertion of ownership that on its part allows for new forms of sharing.

From this point on, and at this pre-linguistic stage of development, objectified and socially shared centrifugal and centripetal forces are the new playing field created by children (Rochat & Striano, 1999a, 1999b; Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne, & Moll, 2005). It is a crucial step in the development of sharing. Feeding their basic affiliation need, children learn from then on that with objects, others' attention and recognition can be earned and shared. Note that what develops are new forms and objects of reciprocation all presupposing the same basic self-other differentiation and empathic stance that appear to be expressed and maintained from the outset.

By 11–12 months, the child adds a novel layer of meaning to referential sharing. This layer corresponds to a novel understanding of the *manners* in which sharing and exchange games are played. They begin to modulate their ways of sharing and reciprocating, becoming more selective of the person they share with, trying to imitate or to coordinate actions in attempts of co-operation.

From 12 months of age, infants also begin to show significantly greater modulation and flexibility by engaging spontaneously in role reversal imitation (Ratner & Bruner, 1978). For example, imagine a situation where an adult engages the infant to play a collaborative game where the adult holds a basket and the infant throws toys into it. If the adult suddenly stops holding the basket and now wants to throw, 12 month-olds seeing this are able to switch roles to continue the joint game: the infant will spontaneously stop throwing, grab and hold the basket to let the adult throw the toys (Carpenter, Tomasello, & Striano, 2005).

Typical development of social experience leads children toward an inclination to identify with others. Indeed, Hobson argues that in affective sharing the process of 'identifying-with' plays a very early and pivotal role in typical social development by structuring "social experience with polarities of self-other differentiation as well as connectedness" (Hobson, 2008, 386). From 12 months, infants can follow through and maintain the sharing, collaborative game by taking the role of the other, that is, the child begins to show some rudiments of perspective taking and the budding ability to get into the shoes of others.

The investigation of joint attention suggests that we to a large extent come to understand others by sharing objects and events with them. Moll and Tomasello have argued that by the second year infants in situations of joint engagements where they are directly being addressed by the adult and involved in her actions are able to learn things and display skills they otherwise could not (Moll et al., 2007). Indeed, it has been suggested that infants come to learn about the social world, not "from 'he's' or 'she's' whom they observe dispassionately from the outside" but "from 'you's' with whom they interact and engage in collaborative activities with joint goals and shared attention" (Moll & Meltzoff, 2011, 398). By 14 months, the infant becomes explicit in discriminating the shared experience of an object as special. They are able to discriminate objects experienced by 'we' as opposed to 'I' alone (Moll, Richter, Carpenter, & Tomasello, 2008; Tomasello et al., 2005).

5.3. Tertiary intersubjectivity: co-consciousness and group identification (21 months and up)

The expletive "Mine!" that children utter from around the same age (approximately 21 months, Bates, 1990; Tomasello, 1998) is symptomatic of a major transition happening at this stage. The explicit assertion of ownership parallels the emergence of explicit self-recognition and self-objectification in the mirror (Rochat & Zahavi, 2011); but also novel expressions of self-conscious emotions like blushing, shame, envy, or pride. The awareness of being evaluated by others starts to shape toddlers' social and affective lives. It is from this point on that children show first signs of systematic self-management, starting to care about their own reputation in relation to others as both individuals and groups of individuals (Rochat, 2013). Related to self-management and audience awareness, it is also from then on that children develop a renewed ability to conceal their mental states, manipulating what they expose of themselves to others. As part of this major developmental step, children become particularly sensitive to approbations or dis-approbations from others, constantly gauging and promoting their own social affiliation. They probe and see what works and what does not in sharing with others, starting a new era of bartering and endless negotiation of permissions that parents of 2 and 3 year-olds know too well. They properly start to have others in mind in the sharing process, while never confounding their own perspective with that of others. This transition toward tertiary inter-subjectivity is briefly illustrated below with empirical findings on (a) the development of an ethical stance taken by children toward others between 3 and 5 years, and (b) the parallel emergence of a sensitivity to group norms and affiliation, including explicit ostracism from 6 to 7 years and beyond.

(a) When asked to split a small collection of valuable tokens with another, 3 year-olds tend to self-maximize in their distribution, becoming significantly more equitable by 5 years of age. This developmental phenomenon is robust and has been documented across at least 7 highly contrasted cultures (Rochat et al., 2009). Between 3 and 5 years, children start to act 'principally' toward others, according to some ethical principles of *fairness* they internalize and seemingly hold for themselves. They become sensitive to the moral and ethical dimension of sharing possession with others and try to reach 'just' decisions. More generally speaking, children typically develop as autonomous moral agents as opposed to strict conformists who simply obey and abide the greatest, more powerful majority in order to feed a basic

social affiliation need. From this point on, they start to show signs that they care about their moral identity. They begin to show clear signs that they try to maintain self-unity and coherence, avoiding moral self-dissonance in relation to others, including groups.

(b) Parallel to the development of principled sharing, children also become progressively more sensitive to what people think of them. Sharing is the primary context in which children establish their own moral perspective and moral identity in the evaluative eyes of others. Beyond 6 years of age, further layers are added, where children increasingly refer and abide to trade rules and the pragmatics of what become ritualized exchanges sanctioned by *institutions* (group norms, collective ways of being, school or playground culture). They become progressively more sensitive and aware of the cultural context: the institutional or consensual collective order that transcends and ultimately governs personal wants and inclinations (Rochat, 2014). If the referential sharing occurring at the preceding level (secondary inter-subjectivity, see above) would correspond to a *we*-experience with a particular individual in the context of here and now small-scale collaboration expressed in either social referencing or joint attention, the co-conscious sharing occurring at the tertiary level of intersubjectivity is qualitatively and structurally different. It amounts to a group-based we-experience in the context of larger scale collaboration. This would correspond to the predictable developmental transition between two forms of shared intentionality, what Tomasello has recently called *joint intentionality* and *collective intentionality* respectively (Tomasello, 2014).

As children start manifesting an ethical stance between the age of 3 and 5, they also start to expand their experience of being part of a larger *we* by becoming sensitive to group affiliation and its necessary counterpart: the potential of being socially excluded. Entering institutions that extend the family environment to peers (i.e., pre-schools and other kindergarten), children develop a new sense of group belongingness. They start to identify with the group, they show in-group biases and start to endorse group attitudes. They come to share the view and preferences of the group. Classic instances of strong group conformity (Asch, 1956) are replicated in 3–4 year-old children who tend to reverse their own objective perceptual judgments to fit a peer group majority opinion (Corriveau & Harris, 2010; Corriveau, Kim, Song, & Harris, 2013; Haun & Tomasello, 2011; Haun et al., 2013). From 5 years and beyond, sharing drastically expand and begin to map the social psychology of individuals in their relation to the group, in particular the in-group/out-group dynamic described in adult social psychology experiments. Multiple experiments show that children are quick to affiliate with particular groups based on minimal criteria (blue team vs. red team). By 4 years, they are prompt to manifest out-group gender or racial stereotypes and other implicit group attitude biases toward others (Cvencek, Greenwald, & Meltzoff, 2011). From approximately 7 years, children also begin to manifest active ostracism and social rejection in order to affirm one's own group affiliation and identity (Aboud, 1988; Nesdale, 2008).

From the time children become aware of and start to internalize the other's evaluative attitude toward themselves, the content of what they identify as their own characteristics (who they are as persons in the larger social context) become increasingly determined by how they compare to the perceived and represented (belief) characteristics of others as individuals but also as particular group of individuals (e.g., siblings vs. peers, parents vs. strangers). This is evidenced by the inseparable development of self-conceptualizing and the early formation of gender identity and social prejudice, the way children construe their relative *affiliation* and manifest affinities to particular groups by ways of self-inclusion and identification, as well as by social *exclusion*: the counterpart of any social identification, affiliation, or group alliance (Dunn, 1988; Nesdale, Maass, Durkin, & Griffiths, 2005).

Extending the original cognitive-developmental work of Kohlberg (1966) on sex-role concepts and attitudes, research shows that by the middle of the third year (i.e., 31 months), children correctly identify their own gender (Weintraub et al., 1984). Interestingly, the degree of gender identity expressed by 3-year-olds depends on parental characteristics. Weintraub and colleagues found that, compared to other parents, fathers who have more conservative attitudes toward women, who tend to engage less in activities that are stereotyped as feminine, and who score low on various femininity scores have children scoring higher on the gender identity task. These findings demonstrate the early onset of group identity (i.e., gender) and the role of social influences in the determination of early group categorization and identification. In relation to social prejudice, research investigating children's social identity development suggests that, contrary to gender, it is only by age 4–5 years that children are aware of their own ethnic and racial identity. Only then do they begin to show identification with and preference for their own ethnic group (see Gibson-Wallace, Robbins, Rochat; 2015).

Early on, children derive self-esteem, and hence a conception of self-worth, from group membership and group status. According to Nesdale (2004), for example, ethnic and racial preference manifested by 5-year-olds is based on a drive to assert their own in-group affiliation, and not yet focusing on the characteristics of out-group members that they would eventually discriminate or exclude. Social prejudices, whereby some children might find self-assertiveness in focusing on negative aspects of out-group members, are manifested in development no earlier than 7–8 years of age based on Nesdale's research and interpretation.

From 7 years on, the self and social identity begin to be conceptualized on the basis of combined social affiliation and exclusion processes. These combined processes are contrasting or 'bringing out' the self *positively* by association with some persons and *negatively* by dissociation with other. From then on, children are subject to group norm influences. They begin to construe their social identity through the looking glass of the group they affiliate with, as well as the members of other groups they exclude. In this dual complementary process, combining affiliation and contrast or opposition to selected others,

children manifest new ways of asserting and specifying who they are as persons, for themselves as well as for others as individuals and groups of individuals.

In summary, developmental observations force us to recognize complex varieties of sharing that can be organized in relation to 3 major categories following the necessary chronology of their emergence in ontogeny. All of these varieties require from the outset self-other(s) differentiation rather than some kind of fusion. Indeed, developmental research suggests that it is primarily through the dynamic process of value negotiation between differentiated self and other(s) that something like we-ness or we-experience may arise.

6. Conclusion

Let us, in closing, briefly return to the issue of empathy. Our initial target of criticism was the widespread view that empathy is a process whereby one individual comes to share another individual's affective experience. We argued that sharing cannot simply be equated with similarity and that, while empathy can be one-sided, affective sharing is necessarily reciprocal. After having highlighted some findings from the early phenomenological exploration of empathy that supported this analysis, we then moved into the domain of psychology and carefully delineated three main developmental levels of sharing, leading from the exchange of gazes and smiles, through the sharing of attention toward objects and the offer and request for physical things, to what might be called group-based sharing.

Although our negative conclusion is that empathy does not involve or amount to affective sharing, this does not imply that the former is irrelevant for the latter. In fact, given the minimalist definition of empathy provided by the phenomenologists, where empathy rather than being identified with, say, prosocial behavior or a very special kind of imaginative perspective taking, is simply used as a label for our most basic other-acquaintance, i.e., our sensitivity to and direct experience of other minded creatures, it should be fairly obvious that empathy is presupposed by all the early dyadic and triadic types of sharing that we have discussed in the previous section. On our account, informed by insights found in phenomenology and developmental psychology, empathy with its entailed preservation of the self-other differentiation must precisely be considered a central precondition for experiential sharing and emergence of a we (cf. León & Zahavi in press; Zahavi 2014b, 2015).

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