



Review article

Attending to emotions is sharing of emotions – A multidisciplinary perspective to social attention and emotional sharing. Comment on Zahavi and RoCHAT (2015)



Oren Bader

The Cohn Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Ideas, School of Philosophy, The Lester and Sally Entin Faculty of Humanities, Tel Aviv University, Tel-Aviv 69978, Israel

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 22 November 2015
 Revised 30 March 2016
 Accepted 25 April 2016

Keywords:

Dan Zahavi
 Caregiving
 Emotional sharing
 Expression of emotions
 Social attention
 Social cognition

ABSTRACT

Attending to bodily expression of emotions plays an important role in the human social world. It provides subjects with valuable information, constructs opportunities to act, and importantly, as Daniel Stern pointed out, it is involved in the constitution of the direct experience of others. Whether mutual or one-sided, these direct experiences, in which the subject can share the perspectives and attitudes of other subjects, always comprise one person's bodily expression of emotions that is available to another person. In this article I suggest that attending to other subjects' expressed emotions involves a special (social) mode of attention and emotional sharing. This suggestion challenges Dan Zahavi's view that confines the sharing of emotions solely to reciprocal experiences.

© 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Contents

1. Introduction	382
2. The evolution of expressing and attending to emotions in humans	384
3. The role of attention to emotions in the development of human infants	386
4. The cognitive basis of social attention and emotional sharing	387
5. Phenomenological perspective on the coupling of social attention and the sharing of emotions	388
5.1. The constitution of the subject-other bodily relation	388
5.2. Attending and sharing	388
5.3. The extent of attentional sharing	389
6. Comment on Zahavi (2015) and Zahavi and RoCHAT (2015): sharing of emotions is not (solely) reciprocal	390
7. Typology and degrees of emotional sharing	391
8. Conclusions	392
Acknowledgments	393
References	393

E-mail address: oren.bader@gmail.com

1. Introduction

This paper has two objectives. One is to point to the crucial role of primary sharing of emotions in constructing human social attention. The other is to suggest that sharing of emotions in direct encounters does not necessarily involve reciprocity. I argue that by attending to other subjects' expression of emotions I already share their emotions. Using data and insights from several disciplines, including evolutionary biology, developmental psychology, cognitive science and phenomenology I show that the construction of experiences that involve attending to and with other human subjects is profoundly influenced by the evolution and by the ontogenesis of emotional sharing. This perspective helps in clarifying what motivates humans to favor attending to one another over other forms of attention, and in explaining what encourages the development of neural mechanisms thought to be involved in social attention.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the philosophical literature and in empirical research in the phenomena of social attention and the sharing of emotions. Abundant research shows that human subjects prioritize attending to other human subjects, and points to the crucial role of social attention in the development of human social cognition (e.g. Birmingham & Kingstone, 2009; Sinigaglia & Rizzolatti, 2011). In addition, wide-ranging investigations present compelling evidence pointing to the significance of emotional sharing in facilitating sociality and in amplifying the subject's own emotions (e.g. Boothby, Clark, & Bargh, 2014; Reddy, 2012, 2015; Stern, 1985, 1999). This suggests that both social attention and the sharing of emotions greatly influence the subject's direct experience of other subjects. However, the relation between these experiences, which seem to be intimately related, has not, as yet, been sufficiently analyzed. In the absence of an integrative account, different investigations from different research fields are prone to error in identifying the basic structure of subjects' direct encounters, and in particular, in understanding how the sharing of emotions affects human attention (one recent example on which I dwell in this paper is Zahavi, 2015, and Zahavi & RoCHAT, 2015; see also Schmid, 2009, 2014).

In this paper I address these issues by adopting a wide interdisciplinary perspective that underscores the profound influence of emotional sharing on the construction of human attention. More specifically, I show that emotional sharing, which has an innate basis and springs (ontogenetically) from the subject's first direct encounters, broadens the subject's primary bias to attend to other subjects. This encourages the construction of social attention as a distinct attentional state and extends the scope of sharing of emotions to non-reciprocal experiences that involve one-sided attention.

I develop these arguments by employing insights from different research fields, mainly evolutionary biology, developmental psychology, cognitive neuroscience and classical phenomenology. Before I start, a few words regarding this framework are in order. Whereas contemporary philosophical discussions of social cognition draw evermore on cognitive science and on developmental psychology research (RoCHAT & Zahavi, 2011; Krueger, 2013), evolutionary biology considerations are often neglected. This deficit strikes me as odd, since many of the subject's capacities have their origins in human evolution, and thus, incorporating evolutionary considerations might help elucidate the development and the structure of human social cognition. For example, using evolutionary analyses can help in clarifying the relationship between seemingly different social capacities. This can be done by identifying co-evolutionary processes that foster distinct, yet interconnected, traits, and by pointing to the advantage that these social co-evolved traits gave to pre-sapiens hominines.

As I argue for the case of social attention and emotional sharing, highlighting what drove their construction in phylogeny can help in understanding the phenomenal scaffolding that allows their ontogenetic co-development. This, alongside phenomenological, developmental and cognitive considerations, contributes to the elucidation of the unique structure of social attention and captures the wide scope of the sharing of emotions in humans.

I will present my argument in the following manner. First I argue, based on evolutionary biology insights that humans had evolved to bodily express and attend to emotions, especially toward, and of, their group members. Then, using developmental psychology resources, I show that infants' first direct attentional encounters already involve and rely on the sharing of emotions through their special attention to the expressive behavior of their carers. I thereafter review cognitive research that points to the distinctiveness of social attention and show that this special mode of attention is tied up with the sharing of emotions. I proceed by suggesting that this data is consistent with phenomenological investigations of the structure of subjects' direct experiences of others, particularly with analyses drawn from classical phenomenology. This phenomenologically-informed perspective suggests that by directly attending to other subjects' bodily gestures and facial expressions I already share their world. I show that this understanding undermines Zahavi's view (Zahavi, 2015; Zahavi & RoCHAT, 2015), which restricts the sharing of emotions exclusively to reciprocal experiences. I conclude by presenting my alternative account of emotional sharing.

A quick note to clarify the meaning of the key terms that I use in this paper, namely social attention and the sharing of emotions. I use the term 'social attention' to define the special state of attention, in which subjects attend to and with other fellow humans. I suggest that social attention is involved in all types of attentional states where humans attend to one another in direct encounters¹ such as, one-sided attention, joint attention, and mutual ('we') attention. I argue that this special attentional state, is always already different in what motivates it, in what it enables us to do, and in its feel from other forms of attention, such as attending to natural objects or to non-human organisms. For example, attending to other human subjects enables subjects to coordinate movements and to construct joint experiences with one another; it allows them to rapidly

¹ The term 'direct encounters' refers in this paper to situations in which both subjects are present in the same environment at the same time, and therefore the other subject's movements, gestures, and actions are directly available to them, whether or not the attention is mutual (that is, whether or not the other is aware of my attention).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7288613>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7288613>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)