Chapter 14

Collective emotional gatherings: their impact upon identity fusion, shared beliefs, and social integration

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In social life, collective gatherings constitute essential moments for generating or regenerating shared beliefs and emotions. Collective gatherings can take a variety of forms, including, among others, religious rituals, marriages, anniversaries, funerals, justice court sessions, festivals, concerts, sports events, or sociopolitical demonstrations. Collective gatherings generally involve emotionally salient vocal, visual, and kinesthetic manifestations taking formalized, stylized, and repetitive forms. Sosis (2003) suggested that participating with other people in such stylized and formalized behavior is proper to engender and maintain emotional affinity and cognitive consensus within a social group. Such a view of the emotional, social, and cognitive effects of collective gatherings is in full agreement with the classical model of social rituals proposed by Durkheim (1912).

Surprisingly, social psychologists have so far failed to develop empirical investigation of the impact that such mass events have upon socially shared beliefs and emotions as well as upon group behavior. Though scarce, exceptions to this exist. Some studies have focused on the relationship between demonstrations and social identity, but these studies were conducted primarily from a cognitive perspective, not examining emotional or behavioral processes (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 2001). Positive psychologists such as Nakamura and Csikszentmihalyi (2005) have stressed the potential offered by collective rituals and shared experiences for optimal learning, welfare, and the development of cultural beliefs. In sociology, Collins (2004) developed an approach to rituals directly inspired by Durkheim's model. Closer to our own discipline, Moscovici (1988) also proposed a broad analysis of collective behaviors partly relying upon Durkheim's views. Moscovici stressed that celebrations of cults, upon which Durkheim's work focused, are far from being the only events gathering masses of people. Every affect-loaded event brings people together and elicits a process of emotional communion or perceived emotional synchrony, composed by emotional contagion and synchrony with others, that supports fusion of identity analogous to what Durkheim described in view of religious ceremonies. In such circumstances, people are seen "flocking together, exalting each other, and communicating intensely," in such a way that "the group is recreated and reasserted

with exceptional strength" (Moscovici, 1988, p. 76). Symbols are reactivated and worked through in depth. Collective representations arise in such circumstances because people create them together in a strong state of fervor stemming from the excitement of a reunion enlivened by shared songs, dances, and stage performances. We will examine how these gatherings provoke shared flow experiences accompanied with enhanced emotional feelings, experience of collective emotions, and fusion of identity.

Shared flow, fusion of identity, and collective emotions

Csikszentmihalyi, who introduced the concept of "optimal experience," maintained that such experiences are closely comparable to the collective effervescence that occurs during ritualized social situations (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 21), and he explicitly referred to Durkheim in this respect (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, p. 41). According to Csikszentmihalyi, a state of optimal experience or "state of flow" develops when individuals act in a field they have mastered (e.g., work, sport, game, or artistic activities) and when three conditions are met in this activity: (1) clear goals, (2) immediate feedback, and (3) a challenge that the person's resources can face successfully. The experience of flow itself is characterized by: (1) a complete absorption in the experience, (2) by a feeling of having control in the activity, and (3) by the merger of awareness and action, the person acting in an automatic way, without thinking. Three major psychological consequences ensue from a state of flow: (1) an alteration of the temporal experience, (2) a highly intrinsically rewarding, autotelic, experience, and (3) a loss of self-awareness accompanied with a sense of merging with the environment. Empirical studies have largely confirmed the validity of these nine dimensions as well as their association with high-level performance and positive affect (Delle Fave, 2009; Jackson Kimiecik, Ford, & Marsh, 1998). Optimal experience occur when people reach a state of synchrony resulting from a temporary alignment of their cognitions (aim, purpose, or representation of what is to be achieved in the activity), their current action, and the external feedback they receive in the performance of this action. The accompanying subjective experience involves particularly powerful positive emotional states, a loss of consciousness of the self, a feeling that the self, the action, and the people around become fused, and an intense emotional experience of reward. An optimal experience thus builds up a state of self-transcendence, or of "transcendence" in the literal sense of this term. Indeed, psychological contours that usually separate the individual from the outside world tend to dissolve in such a way that the person is no longer separated from the world by the rigid boundaries of one's identity. According to Csikszentmihalyi, collective gatherings or rituals are affordances that a society offers to its members in order to allow them to meet optimal experiences under socially desirable forms (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 432). Flow and religious rituals are closely connected. Many optimal experiences occur in the context of rituals that seek to connect people with supernatural entities. Social rituals constitute a way to generate order in consciousness and to provide people with a source of enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, pp. 140–141; Nitz & Spickard, 1990). They are likely to cause flow because they involve clear goals and manageable rules, they allow adjusting the performance level to our capabilities, they

provide clear information on how we are doing, eliminate distraction, and make concentration possible (Csikszentmihalyi, 1993, pp. 13–14).

Despite these explicit references to collective gatherings, the state of flow has been investigated as an individual phenomenon. In several studies, however, respondents reported that their most powerful flow experience occurred in the context of a social situation and flow was more intense during shared activities than during individual ones (Walker, 2010). Walker's (2010) experiments show that flow experienced in a social situation elicited joyful experience at a higher level than solitary flow. In addition, this author argued that experiences of interactive and collective flow involve both a loss of consciousness of the "self" and an emotional communion with the group and the audience. As regards the loss of consciousness of the "self," it does not only imply a loss of one's own public image, but also the merge of the self or "I" with the "We." For instance, strong collective identity, and not only the loss of awareness of one's public personal image, characterizes sport team experiences (Jackson & Csikszentmihalyi, 2010). As regards emotional communion or perceived emotional synchrony, collective flow involves the transmission of non-verbal and verbal emotions and moods. This shared emotional arousal causes the creation of a common emotional climate.

In conclusion, we propose that, in collective emotional experiences, an attunement with the group develops from which shared emotions and identity fusion emerge. The remainder of this chapter is devoted to a review of empirical evidence that when collective behaviors are coordinated, participants manifest an increase of their sense of unity or fusion and a feeling of emotional communion or perceived emotional synchrony, based on synchronized behavior and sharing emotions by emotional contagion.

Coordinated collective behavior, fusion of identity, and emotional communion or perceived emotional synchrony

Humans are particularly well prepared to coordinate their movements with each other quickly and without much effort. Thus, individuals synchronize their movements when they walk side by side, or when they are immersed in a conversation (Konvalinka, Vuust, Roepstorff, & Frith, 2010). This capacity for mutual coordination allows humans to align their goals, intentions and actions with those of people around (Newman-Norlund, Noordzij, Meulenbroeck, & Bekkering, 2007; Sebanz, Bekkering, & Knoblich, 2006). Studies have found that the synchrony of movement has the effect of enhancing cooperation and prosocial orientation, and of favoring the emergence of a social unity between participants. In several studies (van Baaren, Holland, Kawakami, & van Knippenberg, 2004; van Baaren, Holland, Steenaert, & van Knippenberg, 2003), imitation was found to increase pro-social behavior. Participants who were imitated were more willing to provide help and more generous to others than participants who had not been imitated. Other studies have shown similar effects to result from behavioral synchronization. Wiltermuth and Heath (2009) found that compared with individuals placed in control conditions, those who acted in synchrony with others (while walking around campus in groups of three, listening to music in groups of three, or performing a task requiring some degree

of synchrony) showed more cooperation in economic exercises performed immediately afterwards. Similar effects were observed also from the simple synchronization resulting from singing together. These results suggest that actions that are synchronous with those of others, which are typical of collective gatherings, increase cooperation through strengthening the sense of unity and similarity with others. Social effects from synchrony of movement also occur in the eyes of spectators. Lakens and Stel (2011) found that when people move in synchrony, observers attribute them more feelings of mutual understanding and a higher level of entitativity (i.e., how far they constitute a single group, or "entity") than when they move in asynchrony.

Overall, these data provide considerable support to the idea that the synchrony of movement expands the self and opens it to experiences of self-transcendence with feelings of unity and social fusion. Despite the significance of this topic, neither studies of flow nor studies of synchrony addressed these collective emotional processes. The classic model originally proposed by Durkheim offers a number of precious guidelines for the development of empirical work in this regard.

In his book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim (1912; Collins, 2004; Páez, Rimé, & Basabe, 2005) analyzed situations in which people gather in the presence of symbols representing their membership group and evoking beliefs that members of their group share. Durkheim stressed that in such collective situations, participants focus their attention on common objects or common themes, in a "special" temporal and physical frame. They act in unison in a coordinated manner by synchronizing their movements, their actions, as well as their vocal and verbal expressions. They thus participate in coordinated collective behavior that is loaded with powerful symbolic meanings. During the collective situation, participants abundantly develop together expressive gestures, movements, dance, speech, shouting, and/or singing. These collective manifestations generate an atmosphere of emotion and fervor. The emotions of the participants then echo and reinforce each other so that a climate of collective emotional fusion follows in which individual emotional feelings give way to shared emotional feelings. In addition, their convergence of actions and emotions reinforces a sense of similarity among participants. Everyone thus feels a sense of shared characteristics with other group members and experiences being in community with them with respect to these features. The feeling of similarity and the shared emotional state then combine to bring participants to evolve to a sense of group membership, and to experience the "we" in place of the "I." For Durkheim, this state of self-transcendence and the generalized empathy it involves constitute the action levers of collective rituals. The feeling of group belonging is renewed and the social cohesion is strengthened. Shared beliefs, which usually vanish in the course of daily individual life, come back massively to the forefront of everyone's consciousness. Participants can then return to their individual occupations. They will for some time be satiated by the group's strength and the shared beliefs. A renewed confidence in the existence makes them able to face their daily life again with a sense of strength and meaning.

These propositions formulated by Durkheim (1912) in the context of his study of religious groups can be extended to many types of collective gatherings (Moscovici, 1988).

In the following, we will describe empirical studies that have focused on various types of community gatherings that support this model.

Collective emotional events and processes

In five studies, Páez, Rimé, Basabe, Wlodarczyk, and Zumeta (2013) tested the view that collective gatherings reinforce positive affects, social integration, and social beliefs. The first study relied upon an important folk tradition that has continued since the Middle Ages in some Belgian towns. In over 80 cities, an annual celebration consists of 3-day lasting religious processions accompanied by "walkers." Walkers are inhabitants of the town or village numbering several hundred and wearing historic military uniforms and armaments. They train all along the year, and at the time of an annual holiday, they escort the religious processions marching as military companies over long distances. For "walkers," these rituals represent symbolic moments of high emotional impact. In line with the model of Durkheim, it was expected that compared with non-participants, participants in the folk marches would after walking manifest an enhanced level of social integration, stronger positive affects, and strengthened social beliefs compared to control non-walker respondents (Páez et al., 2013). Dependent measures taken from walkers and non-walkers comprised: (1) self-esteem (Rosenberg scale), (2) state anxiety (STAI scale of Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970), (3) a measure of social integration (Richer and Vallerand, 1998), and finally, (4) core social beliefs (belief in a benevolent world and belief in a just world; Janoff-Bulman, 1989).

The authors also wanted to test specifically Durkheim's hypothesis that the feeling of emotional fusion experienced in the course of the collective event was crucial to the production of the various predicted effects. Therefore, the various studies summarized hereafter included a rating scale allowing the walkers to specifically report the intensity of their experience of fusion during the collective event (emotional communion based on emotional contagion, e.g., "I bathed in an emotion shared by the entire group," "I felt a kind of complicity between us"; and identity fusion, e.g., "I lost consciousness of myself," "I felt like I was transported out of myself and became a part of the group," "I had the feeling of being supported by other members of the group"). This "fusion" scale or perceived emotional synchrony had a one-dimensional structure and a high internal consistency. Ninety-three walkers completed the study forms within 48 hours that followed the 3 days of the annual festival. With the exception of the fusion scale, the same measures have been proposed to a large group of non-walkers respondents (N = 324) belonging to the same semi-rural and lower middle social class as the walkers. A total of 93 respondents paired for age and sex with respondent walkers were then randomly selected from this pool.

In line with our expectations, the comparison of non-walkers and walkers showed that the indicator of positive self-esteem was higher among the marchers than in the control group. For the state anxiety scale, the relaxation-confidence indicator also showed a significantly higher level among walkers. The comparison of walkers to control respondents for social integration revealed the average level of the former as significantly higher. Finally,

the group of marchers presented significantly higher average values for both the belief in the benevolence of the world and the belief in a just world. All the various hypotheses derived from Durkheim's model were thus supported by these data.

Walkers were then divided according to the median of the scores evaluating of the fusion scale. This allowed comparing 47 walkers for which the fusion experience was more intense with 46 walkers for whom this experience was less intense. In line with Durkheim's model, compared to the latter, walkers high in emotional communion or perceived emotional synchrony and identity fusion showed higher levels for self-esteem, relaxation and confidence, social integration, and core social beliefs.

A second study examined classical music concerts to which large numbers of musicians and singers took part (Páez et al., 2013). In the concert hall, immediately after a public concert, musicians and singers (N = 70) responded to the scale of emotional communion and identity fusion with regard to what they had experienced during the event. One week after the concert participants were contacted and responded to the questionnaires of anxiety, social integration, and beliefs. In this study, the results were somewhat weaker than those of the marchers' study where measures had been taken 48 hours after the marches. Effects for anxiety and social integration were not replicated in concert. But those for core social beliefs have emerged with the same force in both studies. The delay of 1 week might have played some role in this regard. Indeed, Durkheim specifically insisted that major religions had adopted a 1-week periodicity for their rituals because effects of the latter were likely to vanish within that delay. Thus, future studies should consider this question more closely.

A third study assessed similar variables in the context of sociopolitical demonstrations (Páez, Javaloy, Wlodarczyk, Espelt, & Rimé, 2012). In Spain, in the spring of 2011, a major protest movement called "movement of May 15" in opposition to the economic and social situation sprang spontaneously across the country. Subjects answered a short version of the "fusion" scale. They were instructed to refer to their participation either at mass events related to the movement of May 15, or at some unrelated mass meeting which they attended recently. The second type of instruction was adopted in order to constitute a comparison group composed of respondents who also participated in mass meeting, but devoid of the intensive character taken by the May 15 movement. All participants also responded to a short scale of perceived social support whose purpose was to assess their level of social integration and to a questionnaire assessing their perception of the emotional climate in their social group (De Rivera & Páez, 2007). Finally, participants in the May 15 study also rated the extent to which they endorsed different values promoted by the movement of May 15 (solidarity, freedom, dignity, participation, social justice, and equity).

Data confirmed that the investigated movement increased emotional communion and collective identification more than other common group activities. In addition, the higher the intensity of emotional communion and fusion identity, the higher was the perceived social support. These results confirm the critical role that Durkheim attributed to the emotional fusion in the social integration effects resulting from collective movements.

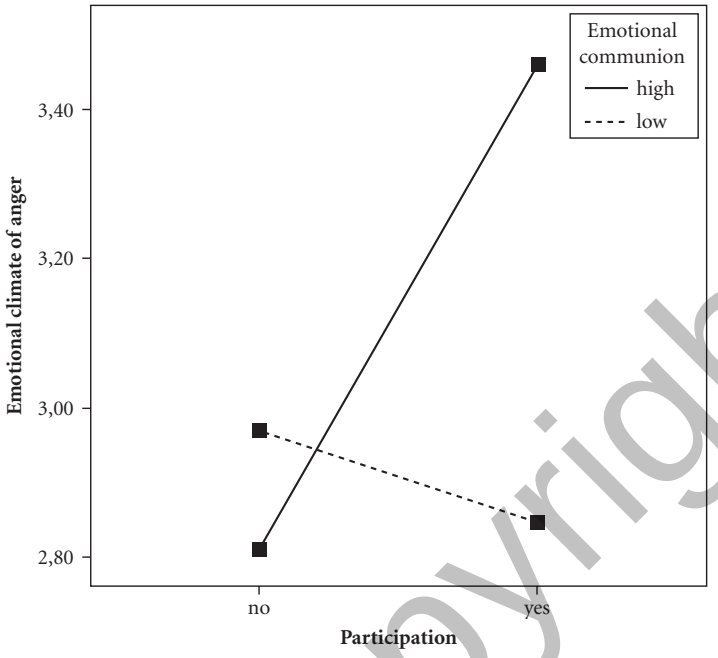

Fig. 14.1 Emotional climate of anger as a function of level of emotional communion and participation in collective mobilization or in another (control) activity.

These effects were manifested also in the perception emotional climate. Those who participated and experienced high level of emotional communion perceived more intense anger in the emotional climate compared with those who experienced a low level of communion, whereas no differences occurred between those who did not participate (see Fig. 14.1). This result is important. It reveals that participation in a protest social movement is associated not only with personal moral outrage, but also with the perception that others feel an emotion such as anger, which fuels mobilization. Moreover, in line with Durkheim's model, the experience of a high level of emotional communion and fusion of identity in demonstrations enhanced perceived collective emotions.

Finally, higher emotional communion or perceived emotional synchrony in the demonstrations correlates with higher agreement of values advocated by the movement of May 15, supporting the conclusion that social representations such as collective or cultural values are fed by the emotions produced in collective gatherings and are anchored in these emotions.

In the fourth study, Páez et al. (2013) addressed participation in religious rituals with the purpose to test whether such participation reinforced participants' feeling of self-transcendence and whether it was especially so in people who had experienced a high level of emotional communion and identity fusion. Spirituality involves a belief in a connection with others, humanity, and next generations (Emmons, 2006). The scale of self-transcendence proposed by Cloninger (1999) taps into the notion of spirituality as transcendence. Participants took part in a Catholic mass on a Sunday and responded to

this scale of self-transcendence on the preceding Thursday and again on the following Tuesday. Control participants also responded to the questionnaire at the same time but took part in a secular Sunday activity (e.g. family meals, playing cards with friends) and not in a religious event. Both groups also responded to the scale of emotional communion and identity fusion in the context of their respective social activity. Participants who attended the Catholic mass experienced an increase in their transcendence of the self whereas the participants of secular Sunday activity did not. In addition, a higher emotional experience of communion and identity fusion was associated with a more intense feeling of self-transcendence.

Due to limitations in their design, the findings of the studies described so far remain open to alternative explanations. Studies based on an experimental induction accompanied with appropriate controls would provide more convincing evidence. In a fifth study, Páez et al. (2013) randomly assigned social work students to participate in either what was presented as "an organized activity" or in a control condition. The organized activity involved writing slogans and drawing signs denouncing prejudice against immigrants, and thereafter going to the campus to demonstrate by exhibiting these slogans. One week before and after the event, participants from both conditions responded to questionnaires measuring: (1) public collective self-esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992), (2) identity fusion (Gomez et al., 2011), and (3) perceived similarity with the group. They also responded to questions assessing their emotional responses to immigration (mistrust, insecurity) and their prejudices toward immigrants.

Whereas the control group did not show change in collective self-esteem, identity fusion, or perceived similarity with the group, the experimental group showed a significant increase in each of these three variables "after" the participation in the demonstration. Furthermore, compared to the control group, the experimental group manifested a significant decrease in of the threat they perceived from immigration as well as in feelings of mistrust and insecurity with respect to migrants. This experimental study thus supported the major points of Durkheim's theory. Indeed, an experimentally induced collective gathering triggered a process of emotional fusion and of group integration, an increased sense of confidence and a consolidation of all the various social representations related to the theme of the induced demonstration.

Social representations and emotional climate in collective gatherings

Results along the same lines have been found in longitudinal studies with participants who had experienced high-intensity collective events and took part in relevant collective demonstrations. One such study was conducted in the post-genocide context in Rwanda. It is estimated that over 800,000 people were killed during the genocide that took place in Rwanda between April and July 1994 in the framework of the long-standing conflict between ethnic "Hutus" and "Tutsis." Approximately 130,000 people were detained on charges of involvement in the genocide. To manage this situation that the

ordinary courts could not cope with, a community system of conflict resolution called "Gacaca" was adapted as a Rwandan version of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. Rimé, Kanyangara, Páez, and Yzerbyt (2011) conducted a longitudinal investigation on participants of the Gacaca process and of control respondents in a study that included both victims and prisoners. Half of each group participated in Gacaca and the other half responded to the same questionnaires at exactly the same time when Gacaca tribunals had not yet taken place in their area. All participants answered first before and then after the Gacaca trials to which participants in the "experimental" condition took part. Both data sets were collected within a period of 10 weeks. In total, 755 people participated in the study.

The results clearly confirmed that participation in a collective emotional event involves the reactivation of emotions: victims who participated in the Gacaca showed an increase in almost all negative emotions assessed whereas no change in emotional activation was found in control group of victims. To evaluate the effects of Gacaca on social identity and intergroup beliefs we measured: (1) identification with the ingroup, (2) positive stereotypes about the outgroup, and (3) the perceived homogeneity of the outgroup. The results showed that identification with the ingroup decreased among victims and among prisoners after the trial whereas their respective control groups showed a trend in the opposite direction. This suggests that the collective procedure involving emotional expression and recognition of past faults contributed to some weakening of "ethnic" identification and enhanced, at least to some degree, social integration.

Both for victims and perpetrators in the experimental groups, the results for positive stereotypes were particularly remarkable. They were initially at a lower level than those of control groups, probably because of the participants' anticipation of confrontations in court. But they ended up being more positive than those of control respondents after participating in Gacaca. Finally, we found a significant decrease of perceived outgroup homogeneity in the experimental groups after participation in Gacaca, both among victims and prisoners. We observed no such change for victims and prisoners in the control groups. Viewing the outgroup as homogeneous is to deny their members any individual or personal characteristics and to reduce them to simple exemplars of their category, which leads to prejudice and perpetuates hostile social relationships. In short, participating in the Gacaca trial has elicited positive changes of social representations. In addition, these changes were associated with an increased emotional activation of participants. The mediation analyses and regressions conducted on these data showed a partial mediation effect in support of Durkheim's model. Such results are important because they suggest that the emotional arousal occurring in collective situations, even if negative, serves to support changes in social representations.

Participation in transitional justice procedures such as Gacaca in Rwanda also affected collective emotions. Before Gacaca, participating victims rated positive emotional climate as higher than their controls, probably because of the hopes and positive expectations in the period preceding the trial. Their positive perception of the climate decreased after the trial but remained higher than among victims in the control group, suggesting that

their hopes did not entirely vanish with the trial. Prisoners, for their part, perceived the emotional climate as less positive than their controls before Gacaca, probably because they expected to be punished. After Gacaca, the perception of positive emotions in the social climate was markedly increased among perpetrators who participated, confirming that the collective process increased social integration for this group. These asymmetrical effects for victims and perpetrators are consistent with those of other studies which found that active perpetrators showed a more positive attitude toward transitional rituals, especially when they did not receive hard punishment—as occurred in the Gacaca trials (Martin-Beristain, Páez, Rimé, & Kanyangara, 2010).

In the study just described, participation in the collective gathering caused an increase in positive collective emotions only in perpetrators' group. Yet, we conducted another longitudinal study that rather than a collective event involving two opposed groups, addressed a collective mobilization against an opposing group. This study confirmed that participation in collective gatherings increases positive collective emotions. In Spain, on March 11, 2004, several terrorist bombings simultaneously struck commuter trains in Madrid and killed 191 people. These events triggered scenes of protest and social and political agitation in cities all over the country. Data were collected from a sample of 661 adults (university students and their families) of five Spanish regions. Participants completed questionnaires 1, 3, and 8 weeks after the attacks. At the first measurement time, 1 week after the events, we assessed the level of respondents' participation in demonstrations over the previous days. Whereas 22% of the respondents reported not having participated in demonstrations, 11% reported having attended sometimes, 15% many times, and 52% reported taking part in every possible demonstration. In line with the model of Durkheim, the study examined the extent to which participation in collective mass movements had resulted in changes in social perceptions and emotional climate (Páez, Basabe, Gonzalez, & Ubillos, 2007; Rimé, Páez, Basabe, & Martinez, 2009). As an indicator of collective emotions, perceived emotional climate was measured during the first week and again at the eighth week following the events using the Emotional Climate scale (Páez, Ruiz, Gailly, Kornblit, & Wiesenfeld, 1997). Participants indicated the extent to which they endorsed statements regarding their perception of social climate in their country ("The social climate is marked by hope," "not at all"–"very much"). Social representations were assessed using a measure of post-traumatic growth addressing the intrapersonal benefits (perceived changes in the appreciation of life), interpersonal benefits (perceived increase in social cohesion), and collective benefits (augmentation of political participation and commitment; strengthening of awareness of human rights violations) that could have resulted from the confrontation to such a collective drama (Vazquez & Páez, 2011). Respondents completed this measure in the third week following the events. Finally, they also completed, 1 week and 3 weeks after the events, a scale assessing their emotional arousal in response to these events.

In accordance with Durkheim's model, the more people participated in the demonstrations, the higher was their level of emotional arousal. Furthermore, it was confirmed that both emotions felt at the personal level and perceived in the social environment during

the first week were associated with an enhancement of the participants' social integration and a strengthening of their social representations 3 weeks after the events. Level of post-traumatic growth assessed 3 weeks later was predicted by first week measures of: (1) negative emotions (Helgelson et al., 2006), (2) personal emotions of pride and joy which are generally related to altruistic behaviors and solidarity reactions, and (3) perception of a positive emotional climate in the. The latter finding suggests a collective resilience process in which positive collective emotions fuel positive changes in social representations about the national group (see Páez et al., 2007).

Participation in demonstrations was also associated with stronger beliefs in collective post-traumatic growth. This effect on post-traumatic growth was evidenced as the main mediator of the relationship between participation in demonstrations and the perception of a positive emotional climate. As for the emotional climate perceived in the society 8 weeks after the bombing, there was a significant increase for the protesters, whereas for non-demonstrators there was no difference. Participation in demonstrations was thus associated with a positive change in the perception of social climate. These results fit well with the Durkheimian functionalist vision of collective behavior: participation in mass demonstrations led to the development of a societal post-traumatic growth and these social representations fed a climate of hope and collective solidarity.

Conclusion

The various studies described in this chapter lead us to conclude that the model proposed by Durkheim is largely supported. Collective gatherings bring about an enhancement of emotions, of emotional communion and fusion of identity, of social integration and of positive affectivity, of social representations and of emotional climate or collective emotions. Specifically, studies on the state of flow showed that collective gatherings can provoke shared optimal experiences. The latter are characterized by a fusion of identity, by a transmutation of the "Self" into the "We," by more intense emotions and by the experience of collective emotions. Studies of imitation and coordinated activities typical of collective gatherings—gestures, songs, and music—confirmed that such behaviors reinforce the fusion of personal identity with the collective one. Studies on participation in marches, concerts, and demonstrations confirmed that such collective gatherings cause an enhancement in social integration and in positive affectivity as well as a positive reinforcement of social representations. The emotional experience of communion and identity fusion plays a central role in explaining such effects. The described studies also confirmed that collective gatherings increase emotional arousal. Even negative emotions experienced during group gatherings predicted the improvement of social representations. Collective positive emotions that support a process of societal resilience reinforced positive affectivity, altruistic behavior, and belief of collective post-traumatic growth (Bar-Tal, Halperin, & de Rivera, 2007). Finally, group gatherings, such as rituals of transitional justice or sociopolitical demonstrations, not only improve social integration and positive affectivity, but also strengthen the

emotional climate or dominant emotions perceived in the social environment. In turn, the strengthening of social representations plays a mediating role between the participation in collective gatherings and the improvement of the emotional climate. Globally, evidence supports Durkheim's ideas that emotional communion is at the heart of social rituals. Collective gatherings reinforce affects, social integration, and social beliefs, and these effects are stronger in participants experiencing higher emotional communion and fusion of identity with the group.

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