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# More Than a Feeling: The Transmission of Affect and Group Identity

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MORE THAN A FEELING: THE TRANSMISSION OF AFFECT  
AND GROUP IDENTITY

by

Lauren Fine

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of graduation requirements for University Honors

English Department  
Brigham Young University

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## ABSTRACT

MORE THAN A FEELING: THE TRANSMISSION OF AFFECT  
AND GROUP IDENTITY

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Bachelor of Arts

This thesis explores the implications that the transmission of affect (when one person's emotions are transferred through pheromones and visual cues to trigger a similar affective response in someone else) could have on the study of rhetoric, specifically how we understand rhetorical situations involving large groups. According to Kenneth Burke, our identities are made up of the groups we identify ourselves with, which makes our identities largely based on emotionally connecting with other people. When groups are gathered together, particularly in emotionally charged situations, this emotional connection is often triggered by the subconscious transmission of affect. Transmission can lead a whole group to experience the same emotion, and if the members of the group also interpret the emotion in a similar way (either through situation or communication), the crowd will develop a sense of group identity—a feeling of togetherness and an impression that they are all part of the same group. This explains why large groups are able to begin thinking and acting in a unified manner so quickly. This type of non-verbal,

emotional communication has clearly had an effect on many crowds, including the protestors at Occupy Dayton, which I will use as my primary example.

I develop this idea in four segments: (1) a literature review, (2) an explanation of the social nature of emotion, including a description of affect transmission, (3) an analysis of how transmission applies to group identity, and (4) a case study of Occupy Dayton.

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## Introduction

“The space we had was so alive. It felt like something was really coming together” (Piper). This is how Jeff, a participant in Occupy Dayton, described the feeling of the Occupy group preparing for a protest (this was one of many protest groups that overtook public areas from September 2011 to February 2012 to protest corporate greed). Although Jeff, a middle-aged punk rocker with a family, first felt like he didn’t really fit in with the group at Occupy Dayton, he explains that once he had spent some time in close proximity with these people, especially during the emotionally charged times with “everybody chipping in,” he felt a sense of togetherness with his fellow Occupiers (Piper). And the space felt “alive,” like something in the air.

We’ve probably all experienced something similar—a clear, almost tangible emotion that we’re sure everyone in the area can feel. Phrases like “love is in the air,” or “the tension in the room was so thick you could cut it with a knife” illustrate that such experiences are certainly not uncommon, though few people probably understand (or even think about) what is happening in these situations. How is it possible for us to enter a room and start to feel the present affect before anyone says anything, before our brain even has the chance to consciously register what we’re seeing? This remarkable ability of our brains to subconsciously pick up on another’s affect through visual cues and pheromones and then trigger a similar neurological response in our own bodies is referred to by neuroscientists as embodied simulation of affect (Niedenthal et al.), emotional contagion (Prehn-Kristensen), or, as I will call it in this paper, affect transmission (Brennan).

These recent discoveries about how our emotional consciousness works have broad implications for understanding how we behave and interact with each other. Such discoveries have caused a resurgence of research about emotion in many fields, particularly the study of

rhetoric. While emotional appeals have been studied since Aristotle (so basically since rhetorical analysis has existed), for more than 200 years, the emphasis on reason that emerged during the Enlightenment made emotional appeals seem like a lower, less sophisticated form of rhetoric. However, modern brain science has again put emotion at the heart of persuasion as not just one factor but the factor that is perhaps most important in persuading an audience. As Brian Jackson explains, the research reveals that “only emotionally salient messages ‘get through to audiences’” (474) because emotion is required to incite action. According to neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, “feeling [is] an integral component of . . . reason,” and when brain trauma patients lose their ability to experience feelings, they also lose their ability to make decisions (xvi).

With this new knowledge about emotion’s central role in our thoughts and actions, there is a need for a new rhetorical theory of emotion. In the entry on *pathos* in the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, Lawrence Green spends seven pages on ancient Greece and Rome but just one page on the twentieth century, and that page mainly covers a few scholars, including I. A. Richards, Chaim Perelman, and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca, who emphasized the indispensability of emotional appeals in successful rhetoric (567). With detailed brain-scan technology, we have the opportunity to understand human emotion in an empirical way that Plato and Aristotle never could, and it follows that the discussion of pathos should be revolutionized by this knowledge. Several rhetoricians have begun to acknowledge the possible contributions of cognitive sciences to the study of rhetoric, as demonstrated by *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*’s special neuro-rhetorics edition in 2010, which emphasized the need to look at both the “neuroscience of rhetoric (the brain functions related to persuasion)” and the rhetoric of neuroscience (Jack and Appelbaum 411). Some, like Brian Jackson and Diane Davis, have even looked at how neuroscience affects

how we see emotion and identity, and my hope is to add my voice to theirs by considering what the cognitive sciences can tell us about how we develop emotions and how they affect our communication.

The existence of affect transmission, in particular, helps us to better understand what goes on when groups of people assemble together. As Thomas Rickert points out, the “material environment” should be considered in all rhetorical analyses (3), and that is particularly true when it comes to rhetorical situations involving crowds (this paper is, in a way, an answer to his call for a more ambient rhetoric). Many people who have participated in or witnessed a gathering such as a protest, a political rally, or even a rock concert have admitted to feeling a group energy that seems to be beyond their control. We haven’t always understood what causes this group dynamic, but recent studies in affective neuroscience seem to imply that affect transmission is part of it, leading people, in cases like Occupy Dayton, to feel they are unified and identify with the strangers around them, essentially forming a group identity.

This emotional component of identity has been studied by many rhetorical scholars, particularly since Kenneth Burke published his ideas about identification and identity in the 1940s and ’50s. While identity usually connotes an individual, personal sense of self, Kenneth Burke claims that even our personal identities are basically a series of group identities, or as he put it “the so called ‘I’ is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting ‘corporate we’s’” (*Attitudes* 264). Identification, Burke explains further, is what happens when one party comes to believe “their interests are joined” with the other party so that, at least in that matter, the two parties are part of the same group (*Rhetoric* 20). Many scholars have looked at Burke’s theory of identification, acknowledging the centrality of empathy in identity (Dennis Lynch), looking at where Burke falls short when it comes to large groups (Mark Wright), and acknowledging the

importance of action when forming identities (Eric Leake). However, since the transmission of affect is just beginning to emerge out of obscurity, rhetorical scholars haven't yet considered its implications for how we identify with each other, particularly how transmission influences the formation of the group identities that, according to Burke, make up who we are.

By taking this perspective and then looking at how it applies to the participants of the Occupy Movement, we learn that affect transmission can cause people in groups to experience the same emotions, which can lead to a sense of unity crucial to forming group identities. However, as we will see in the Occupy example, this emotional identification only creates an abstract group identity—a feeling of unity when, upon closer examination, there are few commonalities binding the group together. Thus, while transmission can create the affective undercurrent necessary to incite action, a more permanent, truly unified group often needs language to bring group members from feeling the same thing to interpreting their feelings the same way. Because affect transmission plays a part only in the initial emotional connection of the identification process, if we are to understand how groups come to think the same way, we must first understand how they come to feel the same way, which is where transmission comes in. In order to help us come to this understanding, I will (1) explain how the idea of transmission contributing to group identity fits in with recent rhetorical scholarship, (2) explain the social nature of emotion, both how it has been viewed historically and what recent neuroscience teaches us about affect transmission, (3) explain how this concept applies to the formation of group identity, and (4) illustrate these concepts through a case study of Occupy Dayton. I will conclude by briefly discussing this study's implications for future rhetorical scholarship, namely, its potential to help us better understand rhetorical situations involving groups, help us interpret

and regulate our own affect when we find ourselves in groups, and, most importantly, give us additional insight into how we can use rhetoric to harness and influence the emotions of a crowd.

## Literature Review

Although this is the first article (as far as I can discover) that discusses the role of affect transmission in forming group identity, several scholars have done substantial work covering the rhetoric of empathy, identification, and group psychology. As my work is indebted to their influence, I will begin by briefly explaining some of the most significant rhetorical and psychological research dealing with these subjects in order to illustrate how my own argument adds to and differs from theirs.

Affect transmission crosses several discussions going on in recent rhetorical scholarship, including the discussion of the rhetorical effect of empathy. Dennis Lynch notes that Burke anticipated the “turn toward empathy in the new rhetorics” with his emphasis on identification (an idea grounded in empathy) as the “aim of persuasion” (5). Eric Leake also discusses this empathy, wisely noting that this empathy is crucial for how “Americans identify with themselves as Americans” (82-83). However, when analyzing how people come to feel this empathy, he writes, “Empathy is based on imagined experiences” (75), excluding the possibility of a trigger from outside our own minds. Lynch likewise goes on to explain the problems with empathy we must consider, especially the idea that we can’t fully understand another person because of physical, bodily boundaries, which make some experiences and perspectives of others impossible to fathom. Peiling Zhao also notes this problem, but explains that this perspective of emotion is largely cultural. Many philosophers, Zhao notes, have challenged this idea of separateness, claiming, rather, that emotion is inherently social, bound up in our interactions with others (68). But because she was writing about a reader/writer relationship, Zhao still focused on a conscious

action to not see ourselves as separate. I plan to build on her ideas by showing that not only can the boundaries of separateness be dissolved through conscious action, but because of the neurological interaction between bodies, our emotions are actually not always entirely separate from others' emotions to begin with. Therefore, the initial emotional trigger that prompts us to imagine ourselves in another person's shoes (which is often crucial to persuasion) is often something outside of our own minds, namely the reception of affect from someone around us.

Although Burke clearly recognizes that empathy leads to identification with another person, he, like the scholars above, focuses on consciously identifying with others, failing to acknowledge the possibility of someone else's affect influencing us subconsciously. Diane Davis recognizes this problem, criticizing Burke's "almost absolute faith in the power of reason" which seems to contradict his empathetic idea of identity (since empathy is emotional, and emotion and reason occupy different neural pathways) (141). Davis finds a more plausible explanation in Freud's theory of hypnosis, which acknowledges that our identities are open to suggestion and alteration from other people (140). While this paper is indebted to Davis's understanding of Burke, my argument builds upon hers in two important ways: (1) affect theory offers a more modern and more scientifically based understanding of how our identities are altered, which allows us to see how we are affected by others' *emotions* (while Davis's article focuses on being suggestible to others' *ideas*), and (2) focusing on large groups allows us to better understand how we form the group identities that make up who we are according to Burke's theory of identity.

In addition to Davis's perspective on Burke, several other rhetorical scholars have published works on Burke that I intend to build on, particularly Mark Wright and Dana Anderson. Like Davis, Wright uses the work of Freud to fill in the gaps in Burke's theory of identification, but, unlike Davis, Wright looks at how Burke's theory applies to groups. He

argues that leaders are able to influence large crowds by encouraging them to essentially replace their superego with that of the leader, a move that allows identification to occur (308). I believe that the mechanisms of affect transmission clarify this abstract Freudian idea by giving a physiological explanation of how groups grow to feel a common emotion. Though the orator can help a crowd interpret the affective response, the emotion isn't coming solely from the orator. What is often coming from the orator is an expression of identity that helps the crowd explain their own feelings, and it is on this expression of identity that Anderson focuses her work. Anderson discusses how we can influence others "through the articulation of our sense of *who we are*" (4), further explaining that, for Burke, naming and changing identities constitutes symbolic "action upon the world" (21). Although I believe some amount of shared emotion (through affect transmission or otherwise) is necessary for this expression of identity to effectively influence people, Anderson's discussion of the strategy behind identification sheds light on how we can use transmission to our advantage (as I will discuss in the conclusion).

But, as psychologist Stephen Reicher points out, explaining how an orator influences crowds isn't easy because there are so many factors at play beyond the leader-audience relationship. Reicher explains three transformations that typify crowd psychology: first, a cognitive shift from focusing on personal identity to focusing on social identity; then, a relational shift toward intimacy; and finally, an affective transformation in which strong emotions arise (76-80). While Reicher does describe well what happens in a crowd (and his model would certainly work for some situations), the order of these transformations isn't always so clear-cut. Especially in situations where some people come to the crowd with intense emotions, the spread of affect can lead to the other phases, rather than the affective change coming last. Also, although Reicher offers important insights into crowd behavior and psychology, looking at



groups from the perspective of rhetorical identity helps us better understand how people persuade and are persuaded to think and act as a group.

Overall, these scholars have already set up a fascinating discussion space involving empathy, identity, and group psychology, but without the understanding of affect transmission, the discussion of how we relate to each other and define ourselves in groups is missing an enlightening element. I hope my research defines the crossroads of these three topics as I explore how the transmission of affect plays a role in the formation of group identities, which is a crucial element to any rhetorical situation involving groups.

## The Social Nature of Emotion

To begin to understand how emotion is social in nature, we must first define what emotion is. The Oxford English Dictionary defines emotion as “originally: an agitation of mind . . . subsequently: any strong mental or instinctive feeling” (“emotion”). This definition leaves the central debate about emotions open, vaguely stating that they might be either mental or instinctive. Recent scientific research favors the latter, at least for what we call *emotion*. It is obvious that when we describe how we’re feeling to someone, we are explaining something inside of us that isn’t presented to us in the form of language. Thus, the words we use to describe our emotions are inherently interpretations of a physiological experience, a sensation that has gone through the process of reflection and definition. In order to distinguish the physiological experience of emotion and the interpretation of emotion, some neuroscientists use *affect* and *emotion* interchangeably to mean “the physiological shift” accompanying the reception of stimuli, which stimuli can come from within (thought) or without (experience) (Brennan 5). A *feeling* involves “the process of continuous monitoring” of the bodily changes that take place (Damasio 145). Although Robert C. Solomon objects to a definition of emotion that is beyond

“voluntary control” (141), the truth is that there are two parts to feeling, and we need a way to distinguish them. So, for the sake of understanding, I will follow Damasio and Brennan’s distinction and use *emotion* and *affect* to mean the physiological experience of emotion and *feeling* to mean the interpretation of those physiological experiences.

### *Views of Emotional Isolation throughout History*

When psychologists divide feeling into experience and interpretation, it is easy to see that our emotions aren’t contained in our own isolated minds. The physiological response that constitutes an emotion must be triggered by something, and it makes sense that the trigger would often be something external, including our interactions with other people. However, throughout history, perspectives have occasionally changed regarding whether sociality simply awakens feelings (usually conscious) in self-contained individuals or whether it can lead to direct affect sharing (often subconscious) across bodily boundaries. In order to place our current understanding of transmission in context, I will spend the next few pages covering some of the major turning points in how people have viewed emotional isolation or connection.

As one of the first known writers in the western tradition, Aristotle seemed to favor the former perspective that sociality simply awakens feelings rather than emotions being directly transmitted or shared. In *On Rhetoric*, there is even a social element in the discussion of emotions that are less obviously social, like love or calmness. Daniel Gross points out that for Aristotle, anger is based on perceived injustices and therefore “presumes a *public stage* rather than private feelings” (2). Even reading through the headings in *On Rhetoric* makes it very clear that Aristotle sees emotion as something that is developed in relation to other people as each emotion he discusses has a section on “those toward whom people feel” calm or friendliness or

shame or pity (119-142). This illustrates Aristotle's belief that emotion, by nature, arises through our interactions with others.

However, although he sees the impact of other people on our emotions, Aristotle doesn't necessarily discuss the possibility of affect sharing. It almost appears, as W.W. Fortenbaugh claims, that Aristotle believes in "the essential involvement of cognition in emotional response" (12), though this seems contestable when we look at how Aristotle's view of emotion is dependent on social situations that aren't usually consciously recognized (see Gross 3).

However, if we move outside the western tradition, we see a clear belief in the interconnectedness of human life, suggesting that our bodies and our brains are not totally self-contained. For example, Buddhism believes in a Citta Niyama, an order of psychic law that accounts for thought-reading and other psychic phenomena where people cross the supposed boundaries between humans (Sayadaw). Many Native American cultures, likewise, have some version of the belief expressed in Disney's *Pocahontas* that "we are all connected to each other, in a circle of a hoop that never ends" (*Pocahontas*).<sup>1</sup> In fact, according to Brennan, the possibility of affect transmission "was once common knowledge" (2), even in the Western world, before the Enlightenment and industrialization. Evidence for this can be seen in the sixteenth-century writer Montaigne's observation that an old man would gain energy in the presence of a young man while the young man would lose energy (Brennan 16). Susan James also cites Malebranche's discussion of passions passing from one person to another as evidence that some seventeenth-century philosophers believed emotions could pass bodily boundaries (119).

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<sup>1</sup> Though *Pocahontas* isn't the most historically accurate movie, this line does express the belief of several Native American traditions, as current members of the tribes will tell you (see Mitakuye Oyasin – Lakota Prayer for an example ("Lakota Prayers")).

Despite Montaigne's, Malebranche's, and many cultures' belief in something akin to affect transmission, these beliefs fell out of favor in the western world during the 1600s. This change came, in part, with a belief in a clear separation between mind and body. Though modern neuroscience owes much to Descartes' exploration of how passions are felt in the body ("the passions of the soul are usually actions in the body" [1]), Damasio points out that one of Descartes' greatest errors was "the separation of the . . . mind from the . . . biological organism" (250). With this separation came the separation of reason and passion (passion from the body and reason from the mind), and the idea that, as humans, we can and must use reason to control passion. For example, Samuel von Pufendorf, a seventeenth century philosopher, writes that we ought to "use the authority of the mind, the servitude of the body," meaning that the mind should be in complete control of the body (chapter 5). In addition to not being entirely plausible (we know that reason and emotion are connected), this emphasis on controlling emotion contributed to the belief that we are "affectively contained" (Brennan 2) rather than influenced by the emotions of those around us. Since they believed passions came from within the body, and it is clear that our bodies are separate from the bodies around us, it seems only natural to believe that, like our bodies, our emotions are entirely our own. John Locke explains this in his *Essay on Human Understanding* by saying that because of the "nature of matter," the "same individual spirit may not be united to different bodies" which is why a person's nature and identity must be entirely the result of their own experience and choices (315). As Brennan points out, perhaps this is why many people accept that things of the mind (ideas, thoughts) are socially constructed (as Karl Marx and Michel Foucault argued), but it is difficult to believe the same thing about things of the body (2). Obviously this belief in self-contained bodies didn't mean these philosophers

believed sociality had no effect on our emotions; rather, they believed this sociality only affected emotion by contributing to circumstances that would make us consciously feel a certain way.

However, all along the way, there have been those that acknowledged affect as more susceptible to outside influences. Adam Smith, a philosopher and rhetorician around the same time as Pufendorf, seems to sense something like affect transmission when he says, “The passions sometimes seem to be passed from one man to another instantaneously, without the second man’s having any knowledge of what aroused them in the first man” (2). Although he focuses on the second man being conscious that the feeling comes from the first (which isn’t necessarily the case with affect transmission), Smith seems to recognize an automatic emotional connection between people.

The possibility of this connection began to gain greater traction around the turn of the twentieth century, as Gustave Le Bon, William McDougal, and Sigmund Freud began publishing books about group dynamics. In *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, Freud writes, “The perception of the signs of an emotional state is calculated automatically to arouse the same emotion in the person who receives them” (27). While this is certainly getting closer to our present understanding of transmission, there is still an emphasis on visual and sometimes auditory signs, which, as Brennan points out, implies communication taking place “between individuals whose affects are self contained” (57). Burke’s idea of consubstantiation illustrates a similar perspective to Freud’s, suggesting that through identification, we become consubstantial, or “substantially one” with another person, “both joined and separate” (*Rhetoric* 21). However, Burke’s claim that our bodies’ “pleasures and pains are exclusively [our] own” seems to illustrate an absolute separation between bodies and minds, with consubstantiation being a rational, cognitive unity (*Rhetoric* 130). It wasn’t until the last two decades, when technology

became advanced enough to study the brain in greater detail, that we began to see the full potential of affect transmission and how it works. Modern neuroscience has thus revealed not only how important emotion is to decision making, but also how much our own emotions can be affected by the emotions of the people around us.

### *The Transmission of Affect*

Although the understanding of how transmission works has only recently been uncovered, scientists' current interest in affect transmission actually began in the psychiatric clinic over a century ago, when the phenomenon was observed and noted if not entirely understood. Teresa Brennan, to whom I am indebted for first inspiring this project, has gathered records of many such instances in her book *The Transmission of Affect*. For example, sometime early in his career (probably in the 1870s or 1880s), Emil Kraeplin wrote that working in the psychiatric ward left him with "unusual, disturbing impressions" (7). At that time, when psychiatry was a fairly new field, being able to receive someone else's affect was considered a sign of mental illness, so Kraeplin likely didn't know how to handle or make sense of his feelings. But by the mid-twentieth century, many other apparently sane clinicians had documented similar experiences. One clinician left his job in a psychiatric clinic because "certain patients aroused extremely uncomfortable sensations within" him (Restak 68). Christopher Bollas went into greater detail in 1987 by explaining that different types of patients convey different affects, such as an obsessional patient transmitting a feeling of frustration or a "borderline" patient transmitting a "sense of confusion" (189). Although they did not have the means to run the kind of neurological tests we run today, some psychologists attempted to understand how these clinicians seemed to be able to directly receive patients' affects, usually attributing these subtle, subconscious emotional cues to "small shifts in muscular tension as well as changes in voice tone" (Cohen 77).

And they were right, of course, about subtle visual and auditory cues playing a part in affect transmission. Tone of voice plays a part in our perception of emotion; as Basso and Oullier point out, we can sense a “vocal smile” over the phone (435), but as vocal tone has been less of a focus in the study of affect transmission, we will move on to the visual aspect of transmission.

Visual cues have long been associated with communicating emotion, but we have only recently learned how visual details can directly trigger unconscious emotional responses in an individual. In the early 1990s, it was discovered that animals have something called mirror neurons that will fire the same whether the animal is doing an action, such as picking up a piece of food, or watching someone else do the action (Pellegrino et al. 176). This clearly blurs the distinct boundaries between self and other, since these neurons can’t seem to distinguish such differences. Although this first study focused on motor skills, this concept has since been extended to emotional imitation. The ability of humans to pick up on and emulate emotions from other humans is seen even in infants, who are able to discern and imitate emotions from facial expressions and seem to become distressed themselves when they hear or see signs of distress such as another infant crying (Decety 260). This involuntary affective response is based on the close link between “perception processing and emotion-related neural circuits,” which leads infants to experience emotions as “shared states” (Decety 261). The same neurological response is present in adults who have been shown to fire the same neurons that lead to smiling, unconsciously smiling mentally and sometimes physically, in response to seeing another person smile. This “smile simulation” involves “motor, somatosensory, affective, and reward systems” which means that smile simulation not only helps the subject correctly interpret the smile, but it triggers an actual affective response in the subject (Niedenthal et al. 418). Congruent with the theory that smiling makes people happier, subjects in Niedenthal’s study sometimes reported

feeling happier after they had seen and mimicked genuine smiles, though smile simulations also often had an “unconscious impact” on subjects’ emotional state as well (the tests showed signs of increased happiness, even if subjects didn’t report feeling happier) (423). Similar studies have been done regarding negative emotions, with similar results (425), illustrating that our visual perception of others’ emotions can automatically and unconsciously trigger similar emotions in us.

Until the last couple of decades, nearly all research on emotional contagion focused on sight, but this explanation seems insufficient when it comes to explaining how emotions can be transmitted across crowds of people. As Brennan points out, olfactory communication (chemical signals taken in through our sense of smell) offers a “more comprehensive” explanation of group transmission (68). In the last five years (after Brennan’s book was published), there have been several studies proving the role of olfaction in social communication. Several of these studies involved having subjects smell (breathe in) different sweat samples, some from donors in fearful situation and some from donors simply exercising. In research done by Mujica-Parodi et al., participants who smelled the stressed sweat samples showed “significant activation of the left amygdala,” an area of the brain responsible for both feeling fear and identifying it (2). Their data (as well as data from studies they referenced) also showed that exposure to stress-sweat led participants to be startled more easily and interpret ambiguous expressions as more threatening or fearful (1). This seems to indicate feelings of fear in the participants who smelled fear. Prehn-Kristensen et al., directly linked this occurrence to empathy by showing that several areas of the brain involved in empathy were activated for the participants exposed to the stressed sweat, thus creating an “automatic contagion of feeling” (8). Albrecht et al. also proved this by showing that after several minutes of exposure to stressed sweat samples, participants had noticeably higher



levels of anxiety, as demonstrated by both the participants' self-reporting on a STAI (state-trait anxiety inventory) test and the researchers' monitoring of other bodily signs (22). These levels of anxiety were significantly higher after 20 minutes of exposure (compared to 5 minutes) (24) indicating that the longer people are in the presence of someone with a certain affective state, the more they experience that affective state themselves. These studies clearly indicate that anxiety can be transmitted chemically through smell, triggering anxiety in the recipient.

While most studies of human olfaction focus on anxiety because it seems to be one of the most easily transmitted emotions, it is important to note that anxiety isn't the only affect that can be transmitted through smell. Smell clearly plays a role in sexual attraction (Stevenson 12), and smell also seems to be able to have a "stress-buffering effect" (Stevenson 13). Particularly as people become familiar with the smell of someone (close friends, family members, etc.), the smell of those people can have a comforting effect and help bond those people closer together (14). According to Stevenson, it is clear that olfaction has a role in creating social bonds and in evoking both positive and negative emotions (14). Overall, the studies in the last 5 years that reveal emotional transmission through olfaction clearly confirm that our emotions are not entirely our own but are, in fact, largely influenced by direct contact with the emotions of the people around us. Such direct interaction between people's emotions can impact how we feel about and identify with each other, as the next section will explain.

## **Transmission and Group Identity**

The possibility of affect transmission could have many implications for our social interactions, especially how we interact and communicate in groups.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to Reicher's statement that

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<sup>2</sup> I use *group* to mean a social system with boundaries, including at least one defining characteristic that differentiates group members from non-group members. This is a slightly looser definition than what

sometimes we define ourselves by personal identity and sometimes we define ourselves by social identity (77), Kenneth Burke conceived of identity as inherently social, based on “a series of ‘corporate we’s’” (*Attitudes* 264). Just think about how people usually introduce themselves: “I’m a lawyer,” “I’m from San Diego,” “I love *Star Wars*,” “I’m Catholic.” Although these statements are all about an individual person, they each make that individual part of a certain group, and the listeners form a picture of the individual based on what they know of those groups. Perhaps this is a rather superficial picture of a person, but it is nonetheless how we are inclined to think about our (and other people’s) identities. According to Burke, these group identities are formed through identification, meaning that a member of the group believes his “interests are joined” with other members of that group (*Rhetoric* 20). And it really only takes one shared interest to create a group<sup>3</sup>—even when the group or crowd is made up of people from a variety of backgrounds, it can still have a cohesive identity based on a shared truth (Redekop and Paré 33).

It has been shown that a person’s perception of their group can have a major impact on how they act as a part of that group. In a recent NPR story about primary elections for state senators, one voter explained that she voted for Adriano Espaillat because he is Dominican, like her, and she said it was time for “one of us to be representing us” (Elving). This illustrates Burke’s famous statement that “you persuade a man only insofar as you can... [identify] your way with his” (*Rhetoric* 55), that our perception of our group identities (who is “one of us” and who isn’t) influences the choices we make. With this in mind, understanding what brings us to

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some social scientists use, which also includes a shared purpose and differentiated roles (see Hackman and Katz 1210), a definition closer to *team* than *group* in my mind.

<sup>3</sup> In fact, when a group tries to define itself by too many identity markers, people will be less likely to understand and agree with what the group represents. This is why slogans are so useful—they explain what the group stands for (define the group’s identity) in a simple, memorable, relatable way.

settle on a shared truth and form a group identity around it is a crucial point for the study of rhetoric. In the next few pages, I will show how the transmission of affect contributes to our formation of group identities by (1) proving that identity is based on emotions, (2) showing how shared emotions (through affect transmission) can lead a group to a strong sense of unity and group identity, and (3) explaining some of the effects that this shared affect and shared identity have on how groups think and behave.

### *Identity is Emotional*

Although it may seem obvious that people who identify with each other do so on an emotional level, Burke didn't quite see it that way. When discussing how identification makes a person consubstantial (both joined and separate) with another, Burke said, "In acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them *consubstantial*" (*Rhetoric* 21). Despite the fact that the word "sensations" seems to be crossing over into the realm of emotion, Burke doesn't take this idea any further, focusing instead on persuasion, belief, ideas, and action, terms that imply cognition. Even when he mentions empathy, he explains that this "vicarious sharing" of emotion is an "'imaginative' identification with another's state of mind" (*Rhetoric* 130). He insists that "the body's pleasures and pains are exclusively its own pleasures and pains" and that any emotional resonance is a product of imagination, essentially a cognitive process. While Davis seems to claim too much in saying that Burke has "almost absolute faith in the power of reason" (141) because he acknowledged that identification can "operate without conscious direction" (*Rhetoric* 35), it is true that Burke's understanding of identification (and, by extension, how we form identities) doesn't leave room for "an immediate, affective identification with the other" (Davis 125). However, we know from experience (as well as from Damasio's studies linking reason and emotion), that feeling part of a group is, in fact a feeling, an emotional

response in which we come to believe that others feel as we do, making “I” and “they” part of the same entity. The group identities that make up our personal identities are created through empathy.

### *Transmission’s Role in a Unified Group Identity*

We’ve established that identity is inherently empathetic, but we must also understand how empathy works in order to see how affect transmission directly influences identity. Empathy, as defined by most developmental psychologists, is “an affective response... similar to what the other person is feeling” or stemming from understanding another’s feelings (Decety 258). Jean Decety explained the brain process leading to empathy in three stages: affective response, emotion understanding, and emotion regulation (260). Although the second and third stages require cognition to complete the conscious recognition of empathy (thus giving us the opportunity to use rhetoric, as I will discuss later), the first stage is an “automatic emotional response” (261) based on adopting the emotions of the person (or people) we are interacting with. The evaluation of our emotional state that happens afterward is, of course, “colored by the already activated affective dynamic” (Protevi 26).

In other words, the first stage of empathy includes affect transmission. Now, it’s certainly possible to have an “affective response” leading to empathy that doesn’t involve being in the presence of the other party (reading about a tragic event can make us feel empathy, even without olfaction or visual cues), but in any situation when people *are* in the presence of others and feeling strong emotions, transmission is almost certainly taking place. And although the visual

and auditory elements have historically been the focus of such discussions,<sup>4</sup> the visual elements are insufficient to understanding how emotion can be transmitted quickly in a large crowd. Thus, the recent research revealing how affect transmission occurs through olfaction gives us new insight into how an emotion is transmitted in groups, which is crucial to understanding how people in groups come to quickly empathize and identify with each other.

This potential for affect to spread quickly throughout a crowd leads a group to all feel a similar emotion at the same time, which, when the affect is interpreted the same way, can lead to a group identity. However, because affect transmission is only involved in the first step to empathy, it is important that we understand that transmission's effect on group identity can vary widely. As Brennan explains, affect doesn't exist in a vacuum (6), and other factors can influence how an emotion is interpreted or what action is taken in response. For example, if I pick up a feeling of anxiety as I walk through the testing center on my campus, I will probably attach that feeling to whatever I'm thinking about at the moment; it might be a test, which could lead to empathy for those in the testing center, or it might be an argument I recently had with my brother. Obviously, in an assembly that doesn't think of itself as a group (such as students in a testing center or crowds in a museum), transmission might result in this more sporadic interpretation of emotion rather than a sense of cohesion. However, the type of group we've been discussing ("an intact social system" with a shared characteristic [Barsade and Gibson 120]) generally forms with some shared experience already in place (cheering for a sports team, protesting, etc.), which, whether naturally or through communication, allows members of the group to interpret the emotions they receive and produce in a similar way.

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<sup>4</sup> Even Freud, who Davis and Wright praise for acknowledging an immediate, unconscious element to identification, focused on sight and sound, which is understandable since that is what he was able to observe. See Brennan, 56.

Since groups are often assembled with a purpose (something that helps individuals interpret a group affect in similar ways), transmission of affect frequently leads groups to identify with each other, creating a feeling of unity and some sense of group identity. Research has shown that affect transmission creates homogeneity in group moods, whether positive or negative (George 111), and when emotions are homogeneous in a group, the group is more likely to believe they share a common fate (Magee and Tiedens 1707). It seems that regardless of the nature of the emotion, when an emotion is transmitted and a group shares a common emotion, the people in the group tend to believe they have something in common (a shared fate, purpose, or characteristic), which will bring people together in an effort to encourage or avoid a certain outcome or goal. Whatever they believe that fate or purpose is becomes their group identity.

To illustrate how a shared emotion can lead a group to believe in a shared fate and shared identity, I will discuss the effect on a crowd of the most instinctive of emotions: anxiety or fear. Our bodies are programmed to respond quickly to signs of fear in other humans in order to protect us from danger. Daniel Shapiro explained that, due to this evolutionary response to anxiety, perception of a threat can “turn a tribe [a group] from a loose association to a tightly defined unit” willing to make personal sacrifices for the group (639). Since anxiety is an affect that implies danger, we naturally seek for something that will protect us from danger, and in many cases, that means joining forces with other humans. This explains why convincing people they have a common enemy can be such a powerful rhetorical strategy. Just think of the moments in the last century when Americans seemed the most united: World War II, the Nazis were the common enemy; the assassination of President Kennedy, Lee Harvey Oswald was the common enemy; September 11<sup>th</sup>, Osama Bin Laden was the common enemy. In these situations, the threat was obvious and might have created unity without strong leaders, but even in less

apparent situations, leaders who call attention to this threat help ensure unity by helping members of the group interpret their anxiety in the same way. By discussing a threat, a source of anxiety, group members or leaders touch on the issues that are often easiest to agree on. As Redekop and Paré explained, people can agree that there is a threat, even if they don't agree on how to deal with it (27), and the group identity in cases where there is an anxiety-inducing threat is often based on what the group is fighting *against*. Since anxiety is one of the most easily transmitted emotions and is often at play in group situations (especially protests), anxiety transmission can play a major role in helping groups form identities, leading the group to feel they are all on the same team, fighting for the same cause.

### *The Effects of Shared Identity and Affect*

Perhaps one of the most important effects of a shared identity created through a shared affect is that it can attract people to a group and then help them to stay there. Redekop and Paré suggest that “some people will be motivated to join a protest crowd out of a feeling of connectedness with other protestors” (50). As this feeling of connectedness (created through transmission) means they identify with crowd members, we can assume the transmission has an effect on groups forming in the first place, particularly when it leads to feelings of unity with the group. Youth seem to be particularly attracted to groups because of the sense of identity it gives them (a particularly strong need in the developmental teen years [Staub and Rosenthal 300]), a sense that comes from identification with the group's members and the group's shared identity. This is especially true for young people who don't have a strong identity from family or another group—when they start to feel a shared emotion with a group, they feel a sense of being part of something, which is attractive to people who don't feel that in other areas of their life.

And this attachment to the group seems to grow stronger the longer the group spends together as the group's identity becomes more and more solidified. Staub and Rosenthal explained that as shared identification deepens within a group, "deviation by individuals becomes less likely" (300). This, too, is consistent with what we know about affect transmission, for as Albrecht et al. proved, our own emotional response to someone else's affect increases the longer we are exposed to the pheromones of that person (24), and as Stevenson showed, we respond more to familiar smells we take in from people we know (14). Teresa Brennan also suggested that rhythms in sight, touch, and hearing can enhance common understanding in groups, and these rhythms become more concordant as people spend more time together (70). This inclination to stick with the group also comes from shared affective experiences. As groups build a narrative of shared victories and losses, their group identity and group loyalty becomes resistant to change (Shapiro 638), and when people receive a stimulus that resembles a previous affective experience, their bodies will automatically reactivate the physical effects associated with the original experience (Redekop and Paré 44). This means that as people experience a shared affect through transmission, that instance will be added to the group narrative, which strengthens their bond as a group and increases the likelihood of similar experiences in the future. We see this all the time in families, teams, and even church groups. An athletic team will often feel more unified after a particularly close game when the stakes were high (and emotions were, too) whether they won or lost, and that sense of unity will be re-awakened and even increased with each subsequent experience (just look at any team-sports movie ever made). These shared affective experiences clearly play a role in helping any long-term group stick together.



In addition to helping groups form and stick together, shared emotional experiences also amplify emotion and behavior, making the group identity and how they act according to this identity more extreme. Staub and Rosenthal's research has shown that in a group setting, people "arrive at positions that are more extreme than the average position of those who make up the group" (298), which can make the position by which they define their identity more extreme as well. Many movements use this to their advantage by developing a rhetoric of "you're either with us or against us," forcing polarization on the issue in order to gain more followers (see Bowers et al. 40-42). In American politics, for example, those with moderate views sometimes have a more difficult time being elected because both parties will see them as too close to the other party (they are often accused of not having the courage to take a strong position). When groups of people are assembled together (such as for a political rally), this polarizing language feeds off of the already intensified emotions (when a group receives affect from each other's emotions, the emotions are often more intense than a person by himself or herself) (Barsade and Gibson 119), so the effect of polarization is even greater when people experience a shared affect.

However, whether the affect is positive or negative can significantly alter how transmission impacts the behavior of the group. Transmission can "both intensify and regulate individual emotional responses," which means that, depending on the crowd, a shared emotion might lead to violence or it might lead to calmer consideration (Barsade and Gibson 119). To use the well-known literary example of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, After Caesar's death, Mark Antony turns an angry crowd into a murderous one through his speech (III.ii). True, his language is very persuasive, but had he been persuading one person that Caesar was good and his murderers were evil, that person's reaction would certainly not have been as intense as the anger being felt and spread among the whole crowd. On the other hand, if the emotion being felt is

positive (happiness) instead of negative (anger or fear), affect transmission can have a calming effect since “fear conveys danger” while “happiness conveys safety” (Parkinson et al. 186).

How the group behaves also depends somewhat on how they define themselves (are they a peaceful group looking for diplomatic solutions or are they an angry crowd looking for revenge), and how they define themselves is, of course, influenced by how they feel. Although we know that transmission can lead to homogeneous emotion, we also have to look at the nature of the emotion (positive or negative) to truly understand how the emotion is influencing identity and behavior.

Transmission also seems to play a role in how much people focus on the group by causing people to focus on the group identity and the shared moment, sometimes at the expense of forgetting all the other groups they represent as an individual. Daniel Shapiro has seen this dozens of times in an exercise he conducts requiring participants in six groups to decide what they believe in as a group (essentially, their group identity) and then asking those groups to choose one of the six groups that they will all be a part of in order to save the world from destruction. (The hypothetical situation is that an alien gives them an ultimatum—they must either decide on one group or the aliens will blow up the world; they can’t change what the groups stand for so they all must choose an existing group.) Nearly every time he has done this experiment, the world explodes because people quickly become loyal to their group and the amplified emotion makes the groups see themselves as more polarized than they really are (634-635). In this exercise, people appear to sacrifice their own sense of themselves for the sake of the group identity, as many participants later admit to not behaving how they expected themselves to behave. It appears that this is at least partially the result of amplified emotions due to affect transmission.

Another thing we learn from this example is that transmission can lead to division from some just as it can lead to unification with others. In fact, since identification with one group implies division from another (as Burke discussed), any time transmission leads some people to form a unified identity, it is also leading those people to see those outside of the group as separate. We see this, for example, if an anxious and angry affect is being transmitted through a crowd and people interpret that anger differently, causing them to turn on each other. Such a group often turns into several subgroups, and as Shapiro's study shows, the group affect then causes these subgroup's identities to "rigidify... rapidly," while, at the same time, people forget about the "subordinate goal" that brought the whole group together in the first place (635). Group affect (and, therefore, group identity) can change rapidly, and while affect transmission certainly helps us understand why and how these identities form (or don't form), we must recognize that a feeling of division from some and a feeling of unity with others go hand in hand when it comes to analyzing group identities.

Perhaps most importantly, this shared affect, and eventually shared identity, is what leads people to act in a unified manner when in groups. Even though Burke focused on individual action (he seemed to see "we" as "you and I" rather than "all of us," to answer Wright's notice of this ambiguity [307]), he clearly understood the active power (for good or evil) of a unified group acting together. In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke discusses how Hitler used this "sense of 'community'" (217) to rally support from the German people. However, as Wright points out, he doesn't discuss the importance of gatherings and rallies in creating this unity (308), which is a great oversight, as rallies were places where transmission could occur, allowing the people to experience the emotions that led them to identify with each other. Because of Hitler's strong leadership, they connected the feelings of awe and pride with the goals of the

Nazi party, which drove many people to believe and to act as they did (and remain loyal to the cause for a long time). As much as we claim to be rational beings, the truth is that we are motivated to act by emotion, not only reason (see Jackson 481 and Damasio xvii), so affect transmission is an important element to understanding why groups tend not only to think but also to act as one.

Overall, affect transmission is basically always at play when groups are assembled in emotionally charged situations. Because transmission is automatic and people are usually unaware of it, it can sometimes have unpredictable results for the group. However, when groups are assembled for a specific purpose or leaders help crowd members to interpret their emotions in similar ways, affect transmission has the potential to lead a group to form a unified identity, and that, in turn, can have multiple effects, including attracting people to a group, helping them stick together, amplifying emotion (in either a positive or negative way), polarizing group identities, and moving people to act. Although this knowledge of how emotions spreads in groups might be used in many ways to better understand situations involving crowds, I imagine most analyses would include a discussion of the language and behavior of the crowd or its leaders, discussing how the words and actions illustrate transmission or how words and rhetorical action influenced the crowd to interpret their emotions in a certain way. In the next section, I will take the former option, analyzing the language of five Occupiers to discuss how their words and actions might have been influenced by transmission. This approach will provide new insight as to why Occupy Dayton unfolded the way it did, allowing us to understand a new element of what drives a group to act in a certain way and potentially having a lasting impact on how we understand and persuade groups.

## The Occupy Movement

Now that I've set up the theoretical basis for looking at how affect transmission influences group identity, I will exemplify how this theory might be used in rhetorical analysis by looking closely at the Occupy Movement, specifically Occupy Dayton, Ohio. When 2000 protestors assembled and occupied a Manhattan park in mid-September 2011, it took less than a month for similar movements to crop up in 951 cities and 82 countries (Milkman et al. 1). Although the various locations and various groups had different goals, the movement was united by a common enemy: the extremely wealthy—bankers and CEOs who make millions a year while their lowest paid employees are beneath the poverty line. The Occupy Movement is particularly interesting for studying affect transmission because, first, the types of people who joined the protest were especially diverse, and second, the movement was frequently accused of having no particular purpose (because it had so many purposes), and therefore no clear-cut identity. These two factors mean a feeling of unity would have been more difficult to achieve; therefore, any evidence of group unity seems likely to have been influenced by affect transmission along with other factors.

I am focusing on Occupy Dayton largely because, thanks to Kyle Pitzer's *The Dayton Project*, I have access to lengthy interviews from five Occupy participants from Dayton. While I could have found shorter interviews for a variety of other movements, these one- to two-hour interviews gave me extensive insight into not just what people were trying to accomplish (which is what most interviews by news stations focus on), but also what kind of people participated in Occupy and what it was like to be there.<sup>5</sup> In these interviews, the Occupy participants describe some of their experiences in ways that seem to demonstrate affect transmission taking place in

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<sup>5</sup> One downside is that Occupy Dayton didn't have a very large camp, so the interviewees mostly discussed rallies and general assemblies (GAs) rather than interaction within the camp. As GAs and rallies were the most emotionally charged times, they work well for this project, but it would be interesting to do another analysis of how transmission played a role in the camps themselves.

rallies and general assemblies (GAs). Because these interviews were conducted two years after the event, what I am analyzing is the participants retrospective view of the protest, rather than a record of what was said or done in the moment; however, this makes my point all the more powerful, since the emotionally charged experiences seem to remain the most powerful memories for the five subjects. These emotions created a temporary feeling of unity and togetherness among Occupiers, but in the long term, the lack of clear leadership caused people's loyalties to wane, and, eventually, affect transmission seemed to also play a part in the group dividing and breaking up. But whether it was leading to unity or disunity, transmission occurred and affected how people identified with each other and the group as a whole. I will illustrate this using the same pattern as the previous section by first illustrating the role of transmission in the formation of Occupy Dayton's group identity and then discussing the effect that the transmission-based identity had on the group and their actions. I will conclude by discussing how strong leadership might have impacted the Occupy Movement in order to illustrate how rhetoric might offset some of the less controllable aspects of affect transmission.

### *Establishing a Unified Group Identity*

In order to understand how transmission led to a group identity, we must first get a sense of where the group started. It's hard to imagine a more diverse group than the one described by the interviewees. Among the five people Pitzer interviewed, Jeff is a punk rocker in his 40s with two children, Dana is an academically-minded grad student at Wright State with six children and a passion for roller derby, David is a veteran and a business owner who has been running for office in Dayton for twenty years, Emsenn is a basically homeless twenty-three-year-old street musician involved in free speech hacktivism (activism through computer hacking to help people get around government censorship), and Christina, one of the primary Occupy Dayton

organizers, is a single mom in her late twenties studying English at Wright State. Basically the only thing they all clearly had in common before Occupy was involvement in activism,<sup>6</sup> though even this common thread took these five in vastly different directions before and after Occupy. And this diversity did not go unnoticed among the Occupiers. Jeff describes it as “a grab bag of people,” saying that at first, he didn’t feel like he “fit in at all” (Piper). Christina likewise mentioned that she could stand next to bankers and “hippie mommies who feed their kids bean sprouts every night” at the same time (Hull). Dana and Emsenn both commented on the diversity of political affiliation within the group, saying “you could find someone who identifies as a libertarian,” someone who identifies with anarchists, and someone who identifies with socialists in the same group of people (Fleetham and Emsenn).

With such diversity in the group from the onset, it seems amazing that when reflecting on their experience, most of the subjects voluntarily commented on feeling connected with the other occupiers, especially when they had experienced a rally together. According to Burke’s idea that our identities are made up of the groups we belong to, these people came from a lot of clashing identity groups that would have been hard to connect, particularly because of the differing political ideologies. The only way such division could be overcome would be for another group identity to assert itself more powerfully than each individual’s established political identity. And though the different political perspectives (perhaps a more permanent group identity) did contribute to the group’s eventual splitting into factions, for a while, the vast diversity didn’t seem to matter much. Christina Hull said, “It didn’t matter at the end of the day. It didn’t matter what political affiliation anyone was from . . . what nationality, what religion, any of that. None of that mattered.” Jeff and Emsenn also expressed feeling separated from the rest of the group at

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<sup>6</sup> Since I only have access to audio files, I only know the demographic information they chose to give in the interview. Any other possible similarities such as race or income are unknown.

first, but as they started interacting with people, they felt a connection with the group that made them stick around and get involved (which, as discussed in the previous section, is a documented effect of affect transmission). And everyone expressed that the time the unity in the group was greatest was at the beginning, when emotions seemed to run the highest. It seems amazing that such a diverse group of people could not only come together for one protest, but they could feel a genuine connection with the group and continue working with them for at least a couple months. In other words, the group quickly formed a unified group identity, which seemed to be the result of experiencing emotion together.

Based on the language used by those Pitzer interviewed, I believe the transmission of affect is an important piece of the explanation of how this group was able to form and unite so quickly. All of the people interviewed explained that early in the movement, there was excitement and energy in the meetings and protests, a description that already implies a certain emotional atmosphere that seemed, to them, to be contagious. Jeff and Christina, in particular, explained specific moments when they felt this way. Jeff described the feeling of preparing for a protest in these words: “The space we had was so alive. It felt like something was really coming together. Making signs, making the train, everybody chipping in” (Piper). “Alive” implies a passionate feeling with its own life, outside of their control, and the fact that he points out their space shows that it had something to do with their physical place. This clearly points to a present emotion that Jeff seems to have picked up. And the fact that he links this emotional atmosphere to something “really coming together” shows that he, however consciously or unconsciously, links this emotional atmosphere with a feeling of togetherness in the group. At that moment, he felt like everyone in the group was on the same page, contributing to the same goal, and that identification is clearly linked to the affect that made the space feel alive.



Christina's story is perhaps even more exemplary of how affect transmission can lead to a unified group identity. At their second and largest rally (with about 250 people), she says she finally realized "what this was" (Hull). She describes the moment as a turning point, and her words clearly illustrate a feeling of something beyond herself. What really brought home the magnitude of what they were trying to do was her experience doing the "human mike," a protest technique in which the orator gives a speech by shouting each phrase and then giving the crowd a chance to repeat the phrase. This technique was originally used (at least by Occupy Wall Street) to help the speaker be heard because they didn't have the permit necessary to use megaphones. But this technique has another effect. "It was the most exhilarating moment of my life," Christina said. "It was as if the affirmation of every single person was validating everything I was saying" (Hull). She says they knew what she was saying was important and they helped her feel as if it were important. She talks of the "giving and receiving of energy." Even though she hadn't spoken to most of these people before, the fact that they were repeating what she was saying led her to conclude that they were all in agreement, that as a group, they were unified. And whether they were unified or not before the human mike, it's likely they all felt more unified afterward.

Nothing promotes a unified sense of group identity like unified action or speech, but it seems to be more than just cognitive—there is a definite emotional element to the human mike experience. Christina went on to say, "It was just that one moment when we all were just together and I could feel it, and there was this giving and receiving of energy and ideas, and it was one of the best days of my life" (Hull). Her own emotional connection to the moment is obvious, but her words "together," "feel," and "energy" seem to convey that the emotion was pervasive throughout the crowd. The human mike technique clearly does more than just amplify

sound; it helps the people speaking convey a message, which in turn helps those participating interpret the shared affect from the experience in a similar way. This created a strong bond, a feeling of togetherness that made the experience so memorable for Christina. As the people in the crowd repeated everything Christina said, they got a sense not only of what she was trying to say but also who they were as a group and what they stood for. For both Jeff and Christina, the most memorable experience of the protest was described as having both an affective response and a sense of togetherness, indicating that even if they didn't consciously recognize it, there was a connection between the shared affect and the unified identity of the crowd.

### *The Effects of Shared Affect and Identity in Occupy*

In the previous section (pp. 24–30), I discussed the possible effects a shared affect and identity can have on group behavior. Several of those effects were mentioned in the interviews, including the inclusive group identity and feeling of togetherness attracting people to the protest in the first place. All of the people interviewed had been involved in other protests and had seen many of them never really get off the ground. However, at Occupy Dayton, there was an excitement and passion in the group that many activists hadn't seen in a long time, and David mentions being drawn to the group by that. He was “just trying to be a part of it,” which supports the idea that some people are drawn to a crowd because of the shared affect and the feeling of community it brings (see Redekop and Pare 50). All of the interviewees specifically mentioned the words “community” and “being together” as elements that made the movement so attractive in the beginning. This illustrates that transmission may have played a role in bringing people to Occupy Dayton.

But the feeling of a shared identity didn't just bring people to the group; it also played a part in helping the group exist for as long as it did. The first major rally, including Christina's

human like experience, solidified their group identity (which mostly involved being against corporate greed) and gave the Occupiers a shared affective experience, which, as discussed above, builds a group narrative that increases loyalty to the group. Occupiers had many different reasons to come to Occupy (the emotional atmosphere, the excitement, was only one of them), but for a while it wasn't really about accomplishing their specific agendas; it was about the people they had met and the sense of community they had felt in the rallies and meetings. Jeff, Christina, Dana, and Emsenn all mentioned that bringing people together and making connections was the most important thing about Occupy, and Dana even mentioned that the "individuals who did get together" early on were the most effective and dedicated to the group (Fleetham). This supports the idea that identification between Occupiers fostered a stronger commitment to Occupy itself. The group identity may have been rather abstract (they believed they were all on the same page, even if they weren't), but thanks to shared affect through transmission, the group felt excited and connected during the first few weeks of Occupy Dayton, and that's what kept the movement going.

And for the movement to last several months is remarkable considering how diverse the participants were. This illustrates another effect of a shared identity created through shared affect: for a while, people put the group identity at Occupy ahead of the other groups they represented (just like the participants in Shapiro's experiment described above). Dana explained that because Occupy could be all things to all people, "it was sort of invigorating... that kept the movement very active early on because there were so many reasons to be involved" (Fleetham). At first, this variety of purpose seemed to help the group rather than hurt it because everyone has something to be frustrated about. As Christina mentioned, different political, religious, or national identities didn't matter at the time (Hull). People came together to express the raw

emotions of anger and frustration (frustration was mentioned by several interviewees as the main shared emotion) and then stayed together out of love for their fellow occupiers. They felt unified by their emotion, and while they were expressing their discontent, the less emotional issues that divided them (mainly what they should do to solve the problems that frustrated them) took a back seat to the emotional issue (the frustration with corporate America) that united them.

However, unity with some also leads to division with others (as discussed above), and after a few weeks at Occupy Dayton, people began to become more loyal to a certain group within Occupy than to the Occupy Movement itself. As the emotional fervor against outside groups died down a bit, the clashes in ideological groups began to emerge. People began to alter their identification from the Occupy group as a whole to the group they spent the most time with or identified with the most politically when they came to Occupy. One of the most distinct divisions that several of the interviewees mentioned was campers (those who were sleeping in the Occupy camp) and non-campers (those who came to, and often ran, the GAs and rallies). Each group felt the other group wasn't really working for the same goals, and at times they became rival subgroups. Problems began to arise, and the moment that several people mentioned as a turning point was a debate about whether the camp should move from the square to make way for the children's festival at Christmastime. Transmission seems to have played a part in this fracturing into subgroups as well. Jeff describes the meeting where arguments about this issue broke out saying, "I also remember the buzz—people breaking in and out of groups" (Piper). The debate apparently got pretty heated (or "tense," as Christina put it), despite the seeming insignificance of the issue, which fact, along with the "buzz" Jeff described, seems to indicate that people were feeding off of each other's emotions, causing them to get angrier than they might have otherwise (which amplified emotion is, of course, another effect of affect

transmission). Transmission seems to have been occurring in this situation just as in the rally that unified them, but this time, the protesters didn't interpret their anger the same way, so transmission led to division instead of unity.

### *The Impact of Leaders (or the Lack Thereof)*

The camp was gone a few months after it was set up, and Occupy Dayton basically stopped meeting by mid 2012 (though a few small factions continue to meet to talk about various issues, some still claiming affiliation with Occupy and some not). The interviewees seem to agree that dividing into subgroups is what ultimately ended up causing Occupy to lose its support, though other factors certainly contributed. This "lack of a cohesive vision," as Dana put it, meant that when the emotional fervor died down and people started trying to take action, there was a lot of disagreement about what Occupy Dayton really stood for. They had the abstract idea of a group identity, but without the shared emotion directed outward (as opposed to inward at members of the group), the group identity started to fall apart. When asked why it didn't last and what they could have done better, David and Dana both mentioned the importance of a community encouraged through leadership. Dana went on to say they should have focused on building community earlier on, that "building communities should be more important than building social action. . . . Trust has to be established, otherwise you don't have much of a movement" (Fleetham). David also remarked that since Occupy tried to practice consensus,<sup>7</sup> the lack of leaders made it difficult for Occupy to really accomplish anything. "I just don't think there was a

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<sup>7</sup> *Practicing consensus* means there is no clear leader, just officiators. At general meetings, anyone can propose an issue, and if there isn't at least 90% consensus, those who disagree get to explain their perspective in an effort to come to an agreement. Theoretically, everyone who wants to speak gets a chance.

plan to take it from thought to action,” he said (Esrafi). Both of these remarks illustrate the importance of leaders in helping maintain the unity in the group.

While leaders help unite people by helping direct and organize the actions of a group, I also think leaders are crucial in helping people attribute a shared affect to the same source. For example, when the group started breaking up over the matter of the children’s festival, an effective and emotionally aware leader might have realized that people were overreacting because they were feeding off of each other’s emotions, and they might have been able to cool the situation or even help direct their frustration to a common enemy. Obviously, people influenced by strong emotions can be unpredictable and uncontrollable, and leadership can’t always do something about that. But we know that giving people a common enemy or common purpose has united people throughout history, and if Occupy had been able to stay focused on that common purpose, who knows what would have happened. In Occupy, the idea of a group identity (including common enemy and purpose) united people at the beginning, and continued leadership might have sustained this united purpose and united identity longer.

In short, feeling a common emotion thanks to affect transmission can have the effect of unifying a group and giving them a common identity, as it seems was the case in Occupy Dayton. This sense of unity, however, is dependent on the crowd interpreting their emotions in a similar way, which could be the result of circumstances or the result of an influential leader. A leader with the ability to encourage the level of emotional fervor necessary for transmission to take place and then help the crowd to interpret their emotions in a similar way could potentially keep a group loyal to a cause for a long time, but in the case of Occupy, we see the lack of leadership eventually contributing to the group losing their shared identity and breaking up. Overall, this illustrates that transmission, though important, can have unpredictable results, so it

is important to understand it and try to channel it if we want a group to remain unified. Even though the group identity eventually dissolved to some degree, it is clear that affect transmission played a role in the feeling and behavior of the group, which makes the analysis of transmission a crucial part of understanding the full picture of how the group thought, communicated (verbally and nonverbally), and behaved.

## Conclusion

By now it's clear that affect transmission can have a significant impact on how we form group identities, but what does this mean for the study and practice of rhetoric? First of all, just acknowledging the role of transmission can help us understand rhetorical situations a lot better as a third party observer or analyst. Whereas before it was difficult to understand how large groups of people could come to identify with each other so rapidly and apparently without conscious decision, now we can see that transmission (through olfaction and other automatic processes) allows an emotion to spread rapidly, and, when accompanied by a shared interpretation, can lead the group to feel unified. Simply recognizing this occurrence can help us interpret what goes on in group settings.

In addition, this knowledge also has the potential to shape how we respond to affect transmission when we find ourselves in groups. We may not be able to stop our bodies from receiving someone else's affect, but we can regulate how we interpret and respond to affects. Davis points out that Burke's theory counts on "the human capacity to resist" identification when such identification could be dangerous (Davis 126). Although we might not be able to stop the emotional contagion, Burke was right that we can "reject and resist" certain identifications (*Rhetoric* 35). This is because, according to Daniel Kahneman's research, our mind works in two ways: System 1 that reacts automatically to a stimulus, and System 2 that "allocates attention" to

mental processes that require it (21-22). Affect transmission and reception is part of System 1, but creating an identity requires assigning a reason to how we feel, which is part of System 2. In other words, if we are conscious of transmission, we can be more thoughtful about whether transmission leads us to ally ourselves with a group.

The first step to resisting negative effects of transmission is, of course, to be aware of our emotional states and any unexpected changes in our emotional state. As Brennan notes, clinical psychologists and some cultures (Buddhism, for example) emphasize practicing affect regulation. However, in most of the western world, not understanding the impact of one's environment makes emotional intelligence (the ability to understand and influence both your own emotions and the emotions of others)<sup>8</sup> more difficult, leaving people with no means of discerning their emotions from received emotions (123). However, those who recognize how much others' presence can affect their emotions can "reflect on their experience" and "consciously make the connection between the stimulus and the emotional response" (Redekop and Paré 44). Even though the received emotion will still be affecting the reflection, a person can let go of the emotion "by examining its course or by allowing the course of other, calmer, feelings to assert itself" (Brennan 128). Those with a high level of emotional intelligence are capable of recognizing and resisting the effects of affect transmission, which allows them to be more conscious about how they identify with others;<sup>9</sup> although we might not be able to resist receiving an affect, when we are aware of its effects, we can recognize our emotions for what they are and not be as easily swayed by them.

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<sup>8</sup> In Howard Gardner's theory of intelligence, emotional intelligence includes both interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence (see Gardner 204).

<sup>9</sup> See Teresa Brennan's *The Transmission of Affect*, Chapter 6, for more information about how affect regulation works and how people can increase their emotional intelligence.



But perhaps most importantly, understanding how affect transmission shapes group identity actually allows us to better use rhetoric to influence groups. As Decety explained, empathy involves three processes in the brain, and while the first, affective response, deals with unconscious elements like affect transmission, the other two, emotion understanding and emotion regulation, can be influenced by language (260). Burke saw identification as central to persuasion, since a speaker persuades by “causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker’s interests” and using identification to “establish rapport” (*Rhetoric* 46). Obviously, our view of who we are impacts our beliefs and actions, so if a person can convince a listener that they are part of the same group, that their identities in some way overlap, the listener will be more likely to act in a way that accords with that group’s identity. As I’ve explained, in order for affect transmission to lead to a unified group identity, the members of the group have to interpret the emotion they are experiencing in the same way. Sometimes, the interpretation is provided by the context (at a rock concert, people will assume they feel connected with other members of the audience because they share an appreciation for the particular music being played), but sometimes a leader can help create a sense of unity by helping group members attribute their feelings to the same source. For example, Hitler wanted his audience to attribute feelings of awe and pride to him and his government; protestors in Occupy wanted people to attribute feelings of dissatisfaction to wealthy leaders and businessmen, i.e., the one percent. And just as clinicians use a received affect as “information about that patient’s state of mind” (Brennan 27), affect transmission can help leaders perceive how the audience is feeling in order to harness these emotions. One 2010 study revealed that groups with a negative affect performed better when their leader expressed anger, and groups with a more positive affect performed better when their leader expressed happiness (Barsade and Gibson 121). This shows that when a leader can

understand group affect and articulate the group's emotions in a way that illustrates identification (or a group identity), the group will be more loyal to the leader and more effective overall. Even though transmission itself might be out of our control, our discernment and interpretation of affect is not, and that means the formation of group identities can be consciously influenced by group members and leaders alike.

Overall, transmission is clearly a factor to consider when analyzing group dynamics. The effects of transmission can be unpredictable, but recognizing its presence helps us understand how large groups can assemble, unify, and begin behaving as one in very short periods of time. In the Occupy Dayton Movement, for example, transmission seems to have played a part in the feeling of togetherness participants expressed at some of the early rallies, despite the diversity of the group. Although experiencing a shared affect is only one step in forming a strong group identity (it must be supplemented by a shared interpretation if the group is to become truly unified, which is, eventually, where Occupy Dayton fell apart), it is an essential step since emotion is often what drives people to act. As the cognitive sciences discover more, I expect we will understand even better how transmission occurs and how it influences our daily lives. But one thing is certain: whether we're trying to persuade a group or simply understand it, we can no longer study group behavior or group identity without at least considering the role of affect transmission.

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