

# A demand for encompassment: A Hayekian experimental parable about political psychology

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## Abstract

Emile Durkheim said that when all of the members of a tribe or clan come together, they can sanctify the sacred and experience a spiritual “effervescence.” Friedrich Hayek suggested that certain genes and instincts still dispose us toward the ethos and mentality of the hunter-gatherer band and that modern forms of political collectivism have, in part, been atavistic reassertions of such tendencies. Picking up on Hayek, Daniel Klein has suggested a combination of yearnings: (1) a yearning for coordinated sentiment (like Smithian sympathy) and (2) a yearning that the sentiment encompasses “*the people*,” that is, some focal and seemingly

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definitive set of “we.” This article reports on an experiment designed to explore the demand for encompassment by having subjects sing together. In each trial, one person in the room was designated not to sing *unless every one of the others in the room had made a payment sufficient so as to have that person sing*. Our evidence of a demand for encompassment is threefold: Subjects chose to sacrifice money to achieve encompassment 47.4% of the time, with 59.6% of the subjects doing so in at least one trial. An exit questionnaire showed that subjects’ chief reason for making such a sacrifice was a belief that the singing would be more enjoyable if it encompassed the whole group. Furthermore, the subjects reported significantly higher enjoyment when they had experienced encompassment. We are well aware of the significant differences between the situation of the experiment and the situation of actual political life. We nonetheless discuss the experiment as a *parable* for a penchant toward political collectivism, a parable that helps to clarify the role of encompassment in the sentimental facets of Hayek’s ideas about the psychology of political collectivism.

JEL Codes: **A13, H89, Z1**

### Keywords

Durkheim, effervescence, encompassment, Friedrich Hayek, political psychology, the people’s romance

A man who enters the theatre, is immediately struck with the view of so great a multitude, participating of one common amusement; and experiences, from their very aspect, a superior sensibility or disposition of being affected with every sentiment, which he shares with his fellow-creatures.

David Hume (1902 [1751]: 222).

In the midst of an assembly animated by a common passion, we become susceptible of acts and sentiments of which we are incapable when reduced to our own forces ...

Emile Durkheim (1915: 209–210)

### en·com·pass

*verb (used with object)*

1. to form a circle about; encircle; surround.
2. to enclose; envelop.
3. to include comprehensively.

(definition at Dictionary.com, accessed 26 December 2011)

Why have we been so unsuccessful in persuading intellectuals everywhere of our views? Our opponents would give the obvious answer: because we are wrong and they are right. Until we can answer them and ourselves in some other way, we cannot reject their answer, we cannot be sure that we are right. And until we find a satisfactory answer, we are not likely to succeed in changing the climate of opinion.

Milton Friedman (1988 [1972], qtd in Friedman and Friedman, 2011: 191)

## Introduction

Experiments have explored the demand for coffee mugs, the demand for insurance, and the demand for saving a mouse. We conducted an experiment to explore the demand for encompassment.

We tested whether people are willing to sacrifice money to make an experience *encompass* the whole group. The experience was singing a Christmas carol together. In each trial, one person in the room was designated *not* to sing *unless every one of the others in the room had made a payment sufficient so as to have that person sing*. Whether the possible-non-singer (PNS) sang depended on the sacrifices that others made to see to it that he or she sang as well, that is, their willingness to pay (WTP) to make the experience encompassing.

The experiment involved no strategic element whatsoever. The best thing for the subject to do—“best” in terms of his or her own overall well-being, not narrowly in terms of money payment maximization—was simply to write down the maximum amount of money he or she would be willing to pay to ensure that the PNS, too, got to sing. That’s it, aside from singing and then filling out an exit questionnaire.

How often did subjects choose to sacrifice money to help ensure that everyone in the group, including the PNS, would sing? The answer is 47.4% of the time. Furthermore, 59.6% of subjects did so in at least one trial. So, a majority of subjects, in at least one trial, sacrificed money to help ensure that everyone would sing. The subjects’ responses on the exit questionnaire showed that their chief reason for making such a sacrifice was that “it would be more fun if everyone sang.” Furthermore, the subjects reported significantly higher enjoyment when they had experienced encompassment.

The experiment was not undertaken with an intention to show something surprising. The point of the experiment is to operationalize the idea of encompassment, to advance interest in the idea, and to provide evidence that there is often a demand for encompassment, even in trifling manifestations like that in our experiment. We believe that the idea of encompassing

experience/sentiment deserves greater study, for the part it can play in explaining important things.

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim (1915), using terms such as “tribe” and “clan,” wrote of the ways of life of “primitive” societies to represent the “elementary forms” of religious life. He argues that “religious force is nothing other than the collective anonymous force of the clan” [which] “can be represented in the mind only in the form of the totem,” and thus, “the totemic emblem is like the visible body of god” (p. 221). Again, he says, “the god is only the figurative expression of the society” (p. 226). That is, the superior being, represented in totems and other collective representations, is actually a representation of society. It makes sense that, if society is a being, it is indeed a being superior to any individual person. But how does the society come to find figurative existence as a being? It is in the ritualized gatherings of the whole tribe or clan that society is translated to an emblematic, totemic being. In such universal gatherings, Durkheim says, people experience “effervescence.” “When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by the collecting which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation” (p. 215). Effervescence is a heightened sense of sacred being, which expresses itself in “co-operation and movements in unison,” notably chants, songs, and dance. “[I]t is in the midst of these effervescent social environments and out of this effervescence itself that the religious idea seems to be born” (pp. 218–219).

Durkheim does not use the term *encompass*, but it is implied in his description of the elementary forms of religious life. Consider the following passages, in which we have italicized words that imply encompassment:

Every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in *all the minds* ...; each re-echos the others, and is re-echoed by the others. (pp. 215–216)

[T]he totem is the flag of the clan ... Placed thus *in the centre* of the scene, it becomes representative. ... By definition, *it is common to all*. During the ceremony, it is the centre of *all* regards. (pp. 220–221)

[Concepts are collective representations as] they belong to the *whole* social group... (p. 235)

[W]henver the drought is very great, the great council assembles and summons the *whole* tribe. It is really a tribal event. (p. 404)

If a belief is *unanimously* shared by the people, then ... it is forbidden to touch it, that is to say, to deny it or to contest it. (p. 213)

[T]he ways of action to which society is strongly enough attached to impose them upon its members, are, by that very fact, marked with a distinctive sign provocative of respect. ... [I]t is society whom we hear in hearing them; and the *voice of all* has an accent which that of one alone could never have. (pp. 209–208)

Since they are elaborated *in common*, the vigour with which they have been thought of by each particular mind is retained *in all* the other minds, and reciprocally. (p. 207)

It is by uttering the same cry, pronouncing the same word, or performing the same gesture in regard to some object that they become and feel themselves to be *in unison*. (p. 230)

To bring the economic trope of “demand” to the matter, we may break things down as follows: Durkheim says that people have a demand for sacredness, for larger meaning. To serve that demand, they have a demand to commune with a sacred superior being, which, Durkheim says, “raises them to a superior life” (p. 221). To serve the demand for a totemic being with which to commune, they produce effervescence. One requisite to serve the demand for effervescence is to achieve encompassment. Thus, there is a demand for encompassment.

The idea of encompassment, then, might help to elaborate, or explain, what Durkheim called the elementary forms of religious life. What else might encompassment help to explain? By moving backward from Durkheim’s tribes and clans, back to the primeval Paleolithic band, the cradle of human genes, and, simultaneously, moving forward to modern political society, we come to what chiefly motivates our interest in encompassment.

The motivation for our study springs from speculations about political psychology based on Friedrich Hayek’s emphasis on the fact that human instincts evolved in the simple setting of the small band. In the small Paleolithic band, membership delimited a definitive set of people. The individual was enveloped in encompassment; he knew encompassment in the experiences, practices, and sentiments of the definitive “we.” Meanwhile, in modern society, political parties, the political culture, and the government itself promulgate the idea that membership in the polity, particularly the nation, functions to delimit “*the people*”—the definitive group to which encompassment pertains. Modern statism, Hayek suggested, is an atavistic reassertion of the sentiments and mentality of the small Paleolithic band. In the political rhetoric of today, we often find themes of encompassment—in talk of “everyone,” “all,” “the whole country,” “no child left behind,” “together we can,” “united we stand,” “our country,” “our troops,” “a common project,” “a common vision,” “a common experience,” and so on. Talk

of “the United States” or “we” doing something suggests an encompassing cooperative undertaking; talk of “the United States” experiencing something suggests an encompassing experience. Themes of encompassment are central in political theories, for example, in talk of “the general will”/“will of the people,” “popular sovereignty,” and “the social contract.”

In what follows, we start with a review of Hayek to develop his atavism thesis in a way that accentuates the role of encompassment. Only then do we set out the experiment and the results. The group created by the experiment is of course a far cry from “the people”—the experimental group was only fleeting and was entirely voluntary, whereas “the American people” is enduring and institutionalized by government force. Still, by operationalizing a demand for encompassment, the experiment might advance our thinking about Hayek’s provocative interpretation of modern political collectivism. If we find a demand for encompassment within a fleeting group, it is natural, we suggest, to suspect that such demand would also play a role in the political body or “the people.” We explore the demand for encompassment as a parable of Hayek’s ideas about political psychology.

Before proceeding to Hayek, we note some connections to the related literature. By searching at Web of Knowledge and Google Scholar on “encompass” and so on in title words, we find no literature that treats explicitly of encompassment. But encompassment is implied in sociological work on common knowledge, such as Michael Chwe’s (2003) discussion of the role of focal points in creating common knowledge, as in an inward-looking circle; Chwe applies the insights to phenomena such as political authority, social events, and advertising. Another related area of research is recent experimental studies involving singing and other synchronous behavior. A study by Scott Wiltermuth and Chip Heath (2009) is already proving seminal; they found that players in public goods games cooperate more when put to singing, marching, or coordinated movement. Other studies have reinforced the finding that priming individuals with synchronous activities enhance subsequent co-operation, sensitivity among individuals, elevated endorphins, and related outcomes (Cohen et al., 2010; Kirschner and Michael, 2010; Valdesolo and DeSteno, 2011; Valdesolo et al., 2010; Wiltermuth, 2012). While such findings relate to ours, in that they show a connection between shared experience and sympathy (as well as Durkheim’s effervescence), they do not investigate encompassment directly. Yet, another line of research shows that when people sing together, their breathing and heart rate variability also tend to come into sync (Vickhoff et al., 2013). Again, these studies do not treat encompassment, but it is not hard to speculate on how a *lack* of encompassment—awareness of some who are *not* included in the synchronous or shared experience—would reduce the effervescence and social harmony. All of these experimental studies support

Adam Smith's postulate, in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, that sympathy is pleasing and soothing; in fact, Smith very often used musical and synchronous metaphors to express sympathy or coordinated sentiment (Klein and Clark, 2011).

## Hayek's atavism theory of collectivist political psychology

In a famous essay entitled "The Atavism of Social Justice," Hayek (1978) starts with the hunter-gatherer band:

[B]efore the last 10,000 years, ... man ... existed for at least a hundred times as long in small food-sharing hunting bands of 50 or so, with a strict order of dominance within the defended common territory of the band. ... It was a grouping in which, at least for all males, the common pursuit of a perceived physical common object under the direction of the alpha male was as much a condition of its continued existence as the assignment of different shares in the prey to the different members according to their importance for the survival of the band. (p. 59)

The small band was characterized by universal face-to-face familiarity, little privacy, and a definite sense of *the* group. It was much like a team or organization, in that most of the major actions were collective. Likewise, sentiments and major experiences were shared—"we" are always together (or continually coming together).

Paul Rubin (2002, 2003) emphasizes the zero-sum mentality arising from a situation of very little trade, innovation, or economic growth. Other literature deals more with sentiments, norms, and epistemics. Our reading of the science and our interpretation of Hayek are generally along the multilevel selection lines of works such as Hodgson (1991), De Waal (1997), Sober and Wilson (1998), Boehm (1999, 2012), Zywicki (2000), Tullberg (2003), Field (2004), Whitman (2005), Rubin and Gick (2005), Wilson (2013), and Bowles and Gintis (2013).

In the Paleolithic band, the coordination of sentiment would have encompassed all of those of any moral standing. Evolution may have selected not only for the yearning for sympathy and coordinated sentiment but also for the yearning for the sentiment to encompass all of "the people." Mathematically, a set of 50 people contains an extraordinarily large number of possible partitions. But there is one partition that is exceptionally focal: the universal set of 50 people. In the band, the universal set was far more focal and decisive than anything we know today. Thus, the sense of "we" was simple and unambiguous.

People still carry a vestigial penchant for encompassment. It is pervasive in the narrative arts, where encompassment may be read into a story's resolution (e.g. when people live happily ever after). We suggest that encompassment also plays an important role in political psychology. For example, consider the following expressions from the history of American political culture: *united, unity, for all, we the people, universal suffrage, common schools, e pluribus unum, and one nation*.

Hayek (1978) touches on the epistemic and sentimental aspects of the primeval band:

The events to which the group could adapt itself, and the opportunities it could take advantage of, were only those of which its members were directly aware. Even worse the individual could do little of which others did not approve. (p. 59)

Hayek (1988) adds in *The Fatal Conceit*:

[M]an's instincts ... were adapted to life in the small roving bands or troops in which the human race and its immediate ancestors evolved during the few million years while the biological constitution of *homo sapiens* was being formed. These genetically inherited instincts served to steer the cooperation of the members of the troop, a cooperation that was, necessarily, a narrowly circumscribed interaction of fellows known to and trusted by one another. ... These modes of coordination depended decisively on instincts of solidarity and altruism—instincts applying to members of one's own group but not to others. (pp. 11–12)

Just as Adam Smith treated sympathy as instinctual and fundamental, Hayek saw evolution as selecting for instincts of cooperation and solidarity. When free riders and cheaters gain at the expense of fellow band members, the band suffers from their actions. The band's "culture," if it can be called that, plays a crucial role. Hayek (1988) says that "cultural evolution operates largely through group selection" (p. 25). Evolution selects not only for inclinations to cooperate but also for inclinations to punish, kill, and expel non-cooperators. Those wanting sympathy and solidarity were probably last to eat, last to multiply, and first to die. "The members of these small groups could thus exist only as such: an isolated man would soon have been a dead man" (Hayek, 1988: 11–12).

Smith (1790) wrote that "nothing pleases us more than to observe in other men a fellow-feeling with all the emotions of our own breast; nor are we ever so much shocked as by the appearance of the contrary" (p. 13). Hayek (1979) highlights as innate "the fear of the frown and other signs of disapproval of our fellows" (p. 167). Likewise, he writes: "Cooperation, like solidarity, presupposes a large measure of agreement on ends as well as on methods employed in their pursuit" (Hayek, 1988: 19). While Hayek

never zeroes in on the notion of encompassment, the notion fits his thinking about the environment of evolution adaptation.

Hayek (1979) writes of man's "little changing foundation of genetically inherited, 'instinctive' drives which are determined by his physiological structure" (p. 159). "The needs of this ancient primitive kind of society determined much of the moral feelings which still govern us, and which we approve in others" (Hayek, 1978: 59). A growing body of research indicates that there has been much more genetic development in the past 10,000 years than previously thought (for an overview, see Cochran and Harpending, 2009). Still, it seems safe to presume that today the genetic make-up of the entire family of humankind remains basically like that of humans in the Upper Paleolithic ending about 10,000 years ago.

Hayek diagnosed the modern ethos and mentality of state collectivism, particularly in the ideologies of fascism, communism, socialism, and social democracy. While he pointed other barbs at conservatism (see the epilogue of Hayek, 1960), the atavism theory was pointed primarily at the political left, whose collectivism he saw as a reassertion of the primordial instincts:

What in fact leads to the condemnation as anti-social of that pursuit of individual interests which contributes to the general interest, and to the commendation as "social" of the subservience to those sectional interests which destroy the overall order, are sentiments which we have inherited from earlier forms of society. (Hayek, 1976: 138–139)

[T]he whole of socialism is a result of that revival of primordial instincts. (Hayek, 1979: 169)

Their demand for a just distribution in which organized power is to be used to allocate to each what he deserves, is thus strictly an *atavism*, based on primordial emotions. (Hayek, 1979: 165)

*[T]he demand to restrict one's action to the deliberate pursuit of known and observable beneficial ends ... is in part a remnant of the instinctual, and cautious, micro-ethic of the small band, wherein jointly perceived purposes were directed to the visible needs of personally known comrades (i.e., solidarity and altruism).* (Hayek, 1988: 80)

Tocqueville (1969) described how the civic religion of democracy invites citizens to think of themselves as a part of government, and even above, rather than subordinate to, the rulers (pp. 690–695). The historical developments that engendered the political assertion of the band instincts were the crystallization of the nation and the spread of democracy. Universal

suffrage involved a mythos of encompassing political participation and political equality. “It was the Rousseauesque idea of democracy,” writes Hayek (1967 [1963]),

his still thoroughly rationalist conceptions of the social contract and of popular sovereignty, which were to submerge the ideals of liberty under the law and government limited by law. It was Rousseau and not Hume who fired the enthusiasm of the successive revolutions which created modern government on the Continent and guided the decline of the ideals of the older liberalism and the approach to totalitarian democracy in the whole world. (p. 120)

By 1900, collectivist ideologies were rampant among the younger generations of intellectuals, and by 1940, they had greatly subverted the semantics and wisdom of liberal culture (Klein, 2014).

Recent words from President Barack Obama (2010) nicely illustrate the modern mythos:

When our government is spoken of as some menacing, threatening foreign entity, it ignores the fact that in our democracy, government is us. We, the people— (applause.) We, the people, hold in our hands the power to choose our leaders and change our laws, and shape our own destiny.

Consider what Durkheim (1915) said about the elementary forms of religious life:

[P]rimitive societies are not those huge Leviathans which overwhelm a man by the enormity of their power and place him under a severe discipline; he gives himself up to them spontaneously and without resistance. ... The individual carries it all inside of him; it is a part of him and consequently, when he gives himself up to the impulses inspired by it, he does not feel that he is giving way before compulsion, but that he is going where his nature calls him. (p. 224)

Daniel Klein (2005) has offered the term “the people’s romance” for the idea of a focal and official set of individuals as “the people.” The idea is defined by the polity, particularly the nation, and by the yearning for *encompassing* sentiment, such as when we take pride in our “power to choose our leaders and change our laws, and shape our own destiny.” Our experiment, which we report below, illustrates the demand for encompassment.

## The experiment

The experiment explored whether people were willing to pay to help ensure that *everyone* would join together in singing. When we recruited subjects to

**Table 1.** Details of experiments.

	Three-member groupings	Four-member groupings
Sessions	Six (one session has six subjects, others all have nine subjects)	Three sessions (each session has 16 subjects)
Number of unique groups	49	36

our experiment, we stated that the experiment would involve singing. To minimize confusion, we communicated this purpose to the subjects in very plain terms. We detected little confusion or uncertainty among subjects during the experiment.

We wrote instructions and examples on the whiteboard in the laboratory's reception room. When the subjects arrived, one person explained the experiment. Here, we explain the experiment in the context of nine subjects broken out into subgroups of three; however, we also conducted sessions with 16 subjects forming subgroups of four.<sup>1</sup>

Overall, 99 subjects participated in our experiments—51 in three-member groupings and 48 in four-member groupings. Except one session when only six subjects showed up to the laboratory, each subject experienced three separate rounds (see Table 1). Each subject was randomly assigned an ID number that he or she kept for the entire experiment; the IDs ranged from 1 through 9 for the three-member groupings, and 1 through 16 for the four-member groupings. In each round, subjects were rematched and randomly assigned into one of three (or four) groups. No one was grouped with the same subject twice. Subjects knew this when they made their decisions.

To explain the procedure, we will assume a session of three-member groupings. At the beginning of each round, each of the nine subjects is given an endowment of US\$6. He (or she) is asked to indicate his (or her) WTP to include one of their potential group members to sing together with them. One of them will be randomly assigned the role as the PNS, while the other two in the group will have the role of definite-singers (DSs). The two DSs will definitely sing the Christmas carol together. Will the third person sing along with them, or sit silently in their close company? The potential-non-singers join in the singing only if each of the two DSs in the group marks a WTP (to have the PNS sing too) that was sufficiently high (the sufficient amount was, in fact, always 20 cents, but the subjects did not know that when they marked their WTP).

The WTP decisions of the DSs determine whether potential-non-singer sings too. Before the subject knows his role, he is asked to indicate his WTP,

on the assumption that he will be a DS (this we did to generate more data, that is, WTP decisions even from those who would turn out to be a PNS that round). The WTP options range between 0 and 100 cents, stepping up by 20 cents. The subjects are told that experimenter has a pre-determined non-zero threshold amount  $X$ , from 20 to 100 cents. Only when *both* DSs have decided to pay an amount that is not less than the threshold amount  $X$  (which, unbeknown to the participants, was always 20 cents) will the PNS be able to join the DSs in singing. Otherwise, the PNS attends close to the other two, forming a small circle, but does not participate in the singing.

In any group, if a PNS is able to sing, it is because both the DS members decided to pay an amount not less than the threshold  $X$ . In that case, every DS will be charged by only  $X$  cents, so each earns (US\$6.00— $X$  cents) in that period. The payment, then, did not depend on *by how much* the subject's WTP exceeded  $X$ , and for that reason, the subject's best option (in terms of well-being, that is, not narrowly in terms of money payment) is simply to mark down his or her maximum WTP. We structured the procedure so as to elicit the subject's maximal WTP.

If the PNS was not able to join, then it indicates that at least one of the DSs marked an amount less than  $X$  cents. In this case, nothing will be charged; everyone earns US\$6 in the round.

The preceding paragraphs spoke of three-person grouping experiments. For the four-person grouping experiments, the design is the same, except that the number of DSs in each group is now three instead of two; there is still just one PNS.

In explaining how the experiment worked, we were careful not to lead the subjects (e.g. we did nothing to suggest they *should* sacrifice cash to help achieve encompassment). Likewise, we made it quite clear that there was no strategic aspect and that there was nothing to “figure out.” We explained the situation very bluntly: *Mark zero if all you care about is maximizing your cash payoff. Mark something other than zero if you are willing to pay to make it that everyone in the room will join together in the singing. It's your choice.*

From the beginning, almost all subjects seemed to understand that they would be sacrificing some undisclosed amount  $X$  if the operative WTP amounts exceeded  $X$ , and that the way to maximize cash payoff was to mark zero. In the unlikely event that any subjects had residual doubts as to how the experiment worked, these were resolved by the end of the first round.

Each sub-group of subjects was given the lyrics and sang along to a recording of a familiar Christmas carol (“Jingle Bells,” “Let It Snow,” or “Deck the Halls”—one song per round). The PNS could sing only if the two DSs marked willingnesses above or equal to  $X$  (which, again, unbeknown

to them, was always 20 cents). If this did not occur, only the two DSs sang. While the PNS remained seated with the others in the small circle of the subjects, he/she did not get to share in the singing experience. Thus, the experience did not encompass the whole group.

After each round, each subject filled out a questionnaire. There were four versions of the questionnaire, tailored to whether the subject had been a DS or a PNS and whether encompassment had been achieved.

### *Demand for encompassment or “The More the Merrier”?*

Given that there was only one PNS, the experiment did not operationally disentangle the demand for encompassment from the demand for simply “more,” that is, “the more the merrier.” One way to accomplish this would be to have two PNSs. In one variant of the experiment, subjects would pay for one of the non-singers to be able to sing (gratifying “more the merrier,” but *not* encompassment), while in another variant they would pay for both the non-singers to sing (gratifying both factors). Here, however, we proceed with a focus on encompassment. The reason is that we believe that “the more the merrier,” as distinct from encompassment, was likely not a large factor in the experience. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to pursue future experiments to disentangle the two.

## **Results**

### *Demonstrated WTP for encompassment*

When we asked the subject to mark her WTP, she was to suppose that she would be a DS; otherwise, her mark would have no bearing on the outcome. By eliciting the WTP prior to disclosing the subject’s role for that round, we collected WTP data from all subjects in every round, even those to be assigned the role of PNS.

The number of sessions, trials, and WTP elicitations consisted of the following:

- Five 9-subject sessions each consisting of three rounds of three 3-person trials, yielding a total of 135 WTPs.
- One 6-subject session consisting of two rounds of two 3-person trials, yielding a total of 12 WTPs. (This session was intended to have 9 subjects, but the turnout was not sufficient.)
- Three 16-subject sessions consisting of three rounds of four 4-person trials, yielding a total of 144 WTPs.

**Table 2.** Cash sacrifices made in the 291 decisions.

WTP	0	20 ¢	40 ¢	60 ¢	80 ¢	US\$1.00	Total	
Frequency	153	70	32	16	9	11	291	
		138 instances of WTP > 0						
		Or 47.4 % of the time						
		Mean of these = 39.6 ¢						
		Mean of all 291 WTPs = 18.8 ¢						

WTP: willingness to pay.

**Table 3.** Reasons given for sacrificing cash.

Why did you decide to offer something to include the other person in singing?	Weight received	Percentage of total weight
(a) Because I thought it would be more fun if everyone sang	86.0	71.9
(b) Because I would be less self-conscious if everyone sang	9.7	8.1
(c) Because I'd feel bad for the person left out	18.0	15.0
(d) Other (please specify)	6.0	5.0
Total	119.7	100

Thus, we collected 291 WTPs. The results are shown in Table 2.

In 47.4% of the decisions, the individual sacrificed to achieve encompassment. Of those sacrifices, the mean sacrifice was 39.6 cents, and there were even quite a few sacrifices in the upper ranges of viable sacrifice, up to US\$1.00. Even including the 52.6% of WTPs = zero, the mean sacrifice still equals 18.8 cents per decision.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, of the 99 subjects who participated in the experiment, 59 of them (or 59.6%) sacrificed cash at least once to achieve encompassment. Thus, a majority of subjects evinced some demand for encompassment.

### *“More fun if everyone sang”*

The decision to sacrifice cash might be interpreted in a number of ways. After each round, we administered a questionnaire that asked the subject whether she had marked a WTP > 0, and if so, why? The results are shown in Table 3.

We summed up the responses of those who had sacrificed cash as follows: Response (a) received a weight of 1 when it was the only one checked,

**Table 4.** Higher enjoyment in encompassment: all definite-singer experiences.

Definite-singers	Scored as:	How did you enjoy the experience?					Total
		Not at all (-2)	Not enjoyed (-1)	Neutral (0)	Enjoyed (1)	Very much (2)	
The whole was not encompassed	N	5	5	48	97	20	175
	%	2.9	2.9	27.4	55.4	11.4	100
	Points	-10	-5	0	+97	+40	Mean score = 0.70
The whole was encompassed	N	0	1	6	14	9	30
	%	0.0	3.3	20.0	46.7	30.0	100
	Points	0	-1	0	+14	+18	Mean score = 1.03
Total		5	6	54	111	29	205

responses (a) and (b) each received a weight of 0.5 when a subject checked only those two responses, and so on.

The questionnaire strongly supports interpreting the cash sacrifices as a demand for encompassment. The response “it would be more fun if everyone sang” received 71.9% of the weight. The response “I’d feel bad for the person left out” may have also had an element of encompassment motivation. After all, the non-singer had no choice in whether he or she would sing, and it is plausible that others would sympathize with the non-singer’s inability to participate in the shared experience. Thus, the demand for encompassment of experience/sentiment is especially captured by response (a), but also to some extent by (c), and arguably even (b) (“I would be less self-conscious if everyone sang”).

There were 85 trial groups (49 with three people, 36 with four people). For the group to achieve encompassment, every DS had to have marked at least 20 cents. This happened in 12 of the 85 trials. In the other 73 trials, encompassment was not achieved, that is, the PNS did not sing.

### *Subjects report higher enjoyment with encompassment*

Other information also supports the hypothesis that people value encompassment. In the experiment, it is the singers whose experience and sentiment are a matter of encompassment or not. That is, we are not concerned here with the enjoyment of the person left out of the experience but with those who have the experience.

After each round, we asked subjects “How did you enjoy the experience?” In Table 4, we report the response of DSs.<sup>3</sup> We see that the encompassment experiences were more often rated as “Very much enjoyed” than

**Table 5.** Higher enjoyment in encompassment: all experiences of the 15 individuals who, as a definite-singer, experienced both encompassment and non-encompassment.

Definite-singers	Scored as:	How did you enjoy the experience?							
		Not at all (-2)	Not enjoyed (-1)	Neutral (0)	(0.5)	Enjoyed (1)	(1.5)	Very much (2)	Total
The whole was not encompassed	N	2	0	3	0	8	1	1	15
	%	13.3	0.00	20.0	0.0	53.3	6.7	6.7	100
	Points	-4	0	0	0	+8	+1.5	+2	Mean score = 0.5
The whole was encompassed	N	0	0	2	1	8	0	4	15
	%	0.0	0.0	13.3	6.7	53.3	0.0	26.7	100
	Points	0	0	0	+0.5	+8	0	+8	Mean score = 1.1
Total		2	0	5	1	16	1	5	30

the non-encompassment experiences. Using a zero-centered scale for the five possible responses (Not at all enjoyed, Not enjoyed, Neutral, Enjoyed, Very much enjoyed), we see that the encompassment experiences had a mean enjoyment score of 1.03, whereas the non-encompassment experiences had a mean score of 0.70.

Next, in Table 5, we consider the 30 experiences of only those 15 subjects who, as a DS, *had both encompassment experiences and non-encompassment experiences*. Although enjoyment can take only integer values, some subjects experienced encompassment or non-encompassment twice (out of three total experiences). For such subjects, we recorded their enjoyment as the average of the enjoyment they reported during those two experiences. Thus, Table 5 contains a column for an enjoyment value of 0.5 and 1.5.

For the 15 subjects in Table 5, the difference between mean scores is stark, with a mean enjoyment score of 1.10 for encompassment and 0.50 for non-encompassment, a difference that, despite the small number of observations, is not far from being statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 level ( $n = 15$ ,  $p = 0.09$ , two-sided t-test). It is perhaps not surprising that this group would report more enjoyment with encompassment since all of them were willing to pay a positive amount in at least one round to obtain encompassment, but this comparison nevertheless at least shows that a difference in enjoyment shows up clearly across the two sets of experiences *for the same set of people*. This result militates against the idea that the results from Table 4 arise because zero-WTP subjects simply tend to rate experiences, regardless of the encompassment, lower than do positive-WTP subjects.

Note that subjects who achieved encompassment had cash deducted from their earnings, while other subjects did not. The fact that they rated the experience more highly despite having money deducted only bolsters the idea that people value encompassment.

We also asked DSs who had achieved encompassment: *Do you think the experience would have been less enjoyable if the PNS had not been able to join in the singing?* There were 26 such decisions from subjects, and 20 of them selected “Yes, I am glad that everyone joined in the singing,” 5 selected “neutral,” and, oddly, 1 selected “No, I would have enjoyed it better if PNS had not gotten to sing.” We also asked DSs who had not achieved encompassment: *Do you think the experience would have been more enjoyable if the PNS had been able to join in the singing?* Only 6.9% responded “no,” while 48.3% revealed a clear preference for encompassment.

Thus, we have three kinds of evidence for a demand for encompassment: (1) actual WTP, (2) explanation of that WTP, and (3) responses from two separate enjoyment questions in the post-round questionnaire. All the data support the conclusion that encompassment is enjoyed and demanded, a demand that is quite widespread, if not preponderant.

In considering the evidence for a demand for encompassment, it is pertinent, we feel, to share our impression that many subjects are “professional subjects” who regularly sign up to participate in experiments as a way of obtaining some extra cash. Such students are delighted to figure out how to walk away with maximal money payment. We believe that once it was made perfectly clear that the way to do so was to mark a zero WTP, many students simply decided at that moment to mark zero without giving much thought to the rest of our prattle about how the experiment worked. Our evidence of a demand for encompassment should be considered in light of the perfect ease of seeing that the way to maximize money payment was to mark zero.

### *Gender and group-size effects*

Figure 1 presents subjects’ average WTP for encompassment, by gender (male or female) and by group size (three people or four people). The figure helps one see each effect in isolation. The number of observations per category is indicated in parentheses (e.g. 28 men participated in three-person groups).

*Gender by group size.* We believe that the demand for encompassment provides a basis for the political penchant toward collectivism. It is well established that women, relative to men, are more supportive of the “left” within their political context. For example, women in the United States are more



**Figure 1.** Willingness to pay for encompassment by gender and group size. WTP: willingness to pay.

supportive of the Democrat Party and collectivistic policies than men (see, for example, Pew Research Center, 2009; Pratto et al., 1997). Therefore, it is interesting that women display a higher average WTP (mean=22.6,  $n=43$ ) for encompassment than men (mean=16.13,  $n=56$ ,  $p=0.090$ , one-tailed  $t$ -test). In three-person groups, the WTP is much higher among women ( $n=23$ ) than among men ( $n=28$ ,  $p=0.070$ ,  $Z=1.815$ , two-tailed Mann–Whitney  $U$ -test). In four-person groups, the WTP for women ( $n=20$ ) is not different from that of men ( $n=28$ ,  $p=0.749$ ,  $Z=-0.320$ ). Also, women more often sacrificed cash for encompassment.<sup>4</sup>

*Group size by gender.* For men, their WTPs are statistically significantly higher in four-person groups ( $n=28$ ) than three-person groups ( $n=28$ ,  $p=0.037$ ,  $Z=-1.881$ , two-tailed Mann–Whitney  $U$ -test). For women, the WTP increases from the three-person groupings ( $n=23$ ) to the four-person groupings ( $n=20$ ), but the increase is not statistically significant. It seems men are more sensitive to the change in group size.

While the sizes of the sub-samples do not deliver statistical significance for all of the preceding relationships, the results suggest that women’s demand for encompassment is stronger than men’s and that men’s demand is much higher in four-person groups.

Why is WTP higher in the four-person groups? One possible explanation is that a group of just three individuals (two DSs and one PNS) is still quite simple, that is, “I sang, Sue sang, and Bill did not sing.” Perhaps, the experiences are still few enough to remain individual and disaggregated. As a result, the instinct of “the group” and the impulse for encompassment may not kick in as much. A group of three people has five possible partitions: {ABC, A-BC, AB-C, AC-B, and A-B-C}. A group of four, however, has 15 partitions. In the four-person setting, three subjects definitely sing, and the fourth subject possibly sings as well. The addition of another person may

make the group seem more like a single aggregated entity, a band, or a troop, and this setting might lend itself more naturally to aggregation, with focus on the undivided partition ABCD or simply “everyone.” Did the whole group share the experience and sentiment or not? Such management becomes more focal because it would be significantly more difficult to treat the activity in an individuated way. Whereas a set of three people remains three people, four people make a gang. The impulse for encompassing sentiment among the group is stronger. It is also possible that group instincts are more important in larger groups to prevent group dissension and disintegration, for example, the possibility that a group of four would subdivide into two factional couplings.

### Support for “The People’s Romance” thesis?

The results of the experiment suggest that many people have an interest in a sense of encompassment—they are even ready to forgo cash for it. That interest will affect their choices in life and quite plausibly their choices in what to believe. Belief systems that better accommodate an aesthetic of encompassment—even an encompassment only notional or imaginary—will hold some attraction on that account.

In politics, group boundaries are drawn by the polity, particularly by citizenship in the nation. In discourse about national issues, it is the nation that defines the group. In modern societies, citizens are invited, even compelled, to identify with the nation and to partake of “national experiences.” Particularly relevant are experiences initiated and managed by government. Public policy is often represented as a collective effort (sometimes even as a “war”) to fight drug use, crime, illiteracy, or poverty; to advance health care; to protect the environment; and so on. The welfare state is *us taking care of us*—just as in the Paleolithic band.

In the experiment, 59.6% of the subjects sacrificed cash for encompassment at least once, and cash was sacrificed in 47.4% of all the decisions. The experiment was just one setting. Many of the subjects were, no doubt, “professional subjects,” who came to the experiment with a mindset of individual cash maximization, the means of which was trivial to discern. But, when it comes to citizenship, no culture has ever morally authorized individual cash maximization. We suggest that in the moral and aesthetic dimensions of life, the instinct for encompassment of group experience and sentiment is quite universal.

In actual politics, the mythology of national experience does not depend exclusively on voluntary sacrifice—far from it. Government forces “participation.” Aside from exiting the polity, we cannot help but “help” take care of “us” since taxation is not voluntary. Likewise, obedience to the commands of

“the people’s endeavors,” from recycling to “consumer protection” to “the war on drugs,” is not voluntary. And the government uses the power of coercion and the power that comes from its being an incomparably big player to indoctrinate and propagandize for support of such mythologies. The warm fuzzy feeling, or effervescence, of encompassing experience and sentiment might be crucial to induce public acquiescence to such activities. Opaque governmental proposals have consequences that are complex, abstract, and unknowable. They are packaged with a feel-good, effervescent gloss of collective action, good intentions, and encompassing effects, led by officers of the people’s collective choosing. Duly created government policies are “the will of the people.”

The experiment provides evidence of one possible factor in the bent toward political collectivism: demand for encompassment. Such a demand fits Hayek’s atavism theory and speaks to questions about why the governmentalization of society vastly exceeds the bounds counseled by the Scottish enlightenment, classical liberalism, and the American Founding.

On a presupposition of an undue appeal for political collectivism, we do not mean to suggest that “the people’s romance” is a definitive explanation for such undue appeal. Indeed, we see many interrelated forces in play. James Buchanan (2005) highlights “the attitudes of persons who seek *to have values imposed upon them* by other persons, by the state or by transcendental forces” (p. 23). Bryan Caplan (2007) formulates “antimarket bias,” “antiforeign bias,” “make-work bias,” and “pessimistic bias.” Jeffrey Friedman (2007) offers the “intentions heuristic” (pp. 213–233). Our emphasis on encompassment and “the people’s romance” may be placed alongside all such speculations. We would suggest, however, that there is potential to weave many such speculations into a more integrated interpretation, an interpretation with strong moorings to Hayek’s idea that our make-up is principally still Upper Paleolithic and that the ethos and mentality of modern statism are in a significant way the atavistic reassertion of those of the small band.

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## Notes

1. In one case intended for nine subjects, only six turned up, so we ran that session with just two subgroups of three.
2. The mean willingness to pay (WTP) by round was fairly stable: 16.2 cents in the first round, 21.2 cents in the second round, and 18.9 cents in the third round. A breakdown by gender is provided on one of the worksheets of the Excel file available at [http://econfaculty.gmu.edu/klein/Assets/Encompassment\\_Exp\\_Data.xlsx](http://econfaculty.gmu.edu/klein/Assets/Encompassment_Exp_Data.xlsx).
3. As noted, it would be inappropriate to include in the analysis possible-non-singer (PNSs) who were in fact not included in the singing since they did not have the singing experience at all. We pondered whether to include in the present analysis PNSs who *were* included in the singing, but opted not to, first, just to keep things simpler, but also, second, because their experience was a bit different in that when the subgroups (of either three or four) met to sing, the PNS was told that she was the PNS, and that might psychologically alter the experience (i.e. she might think of herself as one who got included, rather than one who experienced encompassment).
4. Simple gender comparisons not controlling for group size are shown in the following table:

Gender	WTP (N)	Percentage of WTP > 0	Mean WTP
Male	164	41.5	16.0¢
Female	127	55.1	22.4¢
All	291	47.42	18.8¢

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## Appendix

Experimenter's Script (The instruction), which was only loosely followed. (The words in "" are spoken out aloud to subjects, other words aim to further clarify.)

You have earned a \$5 show-up bonus for participating. Now we give you \$6 for this round of activity. Then there will be another \$6 for another round, and then another \$6 for the third and final round. If you do not spend any money during the experiment you will leave with \$23.

In a moment you and two other subjects will be relocated to another room, forming a group of three.

After speaking these words, the speaker pointed to a blackboard diagram showing that the nine subjects would be segmented into three groups, and in each group there would be two DSs and one PNS:

The three of you will sit down together, and in the room will be a computer/CD player that will play a simple and familiar tune. The words to the song will be printed out on a piece of paper, with enough copies for everyone.

There are two types of roles for the participants. When you get to the room, your attendant will let you know which role you have. One role is called *definite-singer*. The other role is *possible-non-singer*.

The speaker pointed to the cell with two DSs and one PNS.

Two will be definite-singers, who definitely sing along when the tune is played. The third person will be the possible-non-singer. That person will sing along too *only if* the other two have offered to pay enough money to have that person included in the singing.

You won't know which role you have until you get to the room.

Now we want to ask you a question that assumes that you will be one of the definite-singers. The question is: *How much you are willing to pay to have the possible-non-singer join in the singing?*

So imagine that you will be one of the definite-singers. After we have finished the instructions you will check off an amount of money on the Willingness to Pay slip before you. It could be zero, 20 cents, 40 cents, 60 cents, 80 cents or one dollar. This number is called your *willingness-to-pay*.

The way it works is that at the room the attendant, first, will tell you who the definite-singers are and who the possible-non-singer is. Then he/she will see

whether the willingness-to-pay written down by each definite-singer is equal or greater than the price of including the other person. Let's call the price  $X$ . We don't tell you how much  $X$  is, except that it is greater than zero. If both willingnesses-to-pay are greater than  $X$ , then everyone sings.

The speaker pointed to a whiteboard illustration with a vertical axis marked with zero and  $X$ . He indicated with his hand that if both willingnesses were above or equal to  $X$ , then everyone would sing, but if one or both were below  $X$ , then only two people sing.

Unbeknown to the subjects,  $X$  was set at 20 cents in every trial. We chose not to disclose the value of  $X$  in order to elicit subjects' maximal WTP.

If you are a definite-singer and both willingnesses are greater than  $X$ , so everyone sings, you will be charged  $X$ . Again, the amount you will be charged is not the amount you write down now but rather the amount  $X$ , which, in that case must be less than what you wrote down.

The price  $X$  is a payment to get everyone to sing; it will be deducted from the \$6 you otherwise would get for this round. It does not go to the possible-non-singer.

If it turns out that you are the possible-non-singer, what you write now will not affect your earnings. You will earn the same amount this round as the other two people in your group.

Here are two examples:

- Jim checks 20 cents, Sam checks 80 cents, Phil checks zero.
- $X$  is 20 cents.
  - Example 1:
    - Jim and Sam are the definite-singers.
    - Phil is the possible-non-singer:
    - Then:
    - All three guys sing together.
    - Each comes away with US\$5.80 in this round.
  - Example 2:
    - Jim and Phil are the definite-singers.
    - Sam is the possible-non-singer:
    - Then:
    - Jim and Phil sing together, *but not Sam*.
    - Each comes away with US\$6.00 in this round.

Now let's do a quiz together with the following examples:

- Jim checks 20 cents, Sam checks 40 cents, Phil checks 60 cents.
- $X$  is 40 cents.

- Example 1:  
Jim and Sam are the definite-singers.  
Phil is the possible-non-singer:  
Then:  
*Does Phil get to sing?* [Answer: no]  
*How much does each get for this round?* [Answer: US\$6.00]
  
- Example 2:  
Sam and Phil are the definite-singers.  
Jim is the possible-non-singer:  
Then:  
*Does Jim get to sing?* [Answer: yes]  
*How much does each get for this round?* [Answer: US\$5.60]”

Does everyone get it?

After the singing you will be asked to fill out a brief questionnaire. Then all nine of you will come back here and we will do another round, and after that we will do a third and final round. You will be grouped with two other *different* participants in each round.

Any questions?

Now please check off the amount of money you are willing to pay to ensure that everyone sings.