

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Group evidence

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

To date, most work in group epistemology has focused on group doxastic states such as belief, justified belief and knowledge. But an important question for group epistemology is the nature of group evidence. For, a subject's evidence affects whether her beliefs and actions are justified. For instance, if a subject receives evidence that these are poisonous mushrooms, then that affects whether she is justified in continuing to believe that they are not poisonous and justified in feeding them to her children. Similar points apply at the group level. If the government's evidence supports that its new policy is harming the environment, then that affects whether the government is justified in believing that its policy is not harming the environment and whether it is justified in continuing with the policy. Fortunately, the question of group evidence is beginning to receive attention (e.g. Buchak & Pettit, 2015; Hedden, 2019<sup>2</sup>). Here, I argue against a summative account of group evidence and in favour of a non-summative account.

I start in the next section by sketching the assumptions about evidence that underpin the argument. In section 3, I distinguish summative and non-summative approaches to group evidence. In section 4, I argue against summative accounts of group evidence before defending a non-summative approach in sections 5–6.

## 2 | EVIDENCE

Before examining the nature of group evidence in more detail, it's important to set out the assumptions about evidence which I will be making. The notion of evidence is philosophically controversial, but I hope to remain neutral on many of the key issues here. In this paper, I will assume that all evidence is propositional.<sup>3</sup> Further, I accept the common assumption that a proposition is part of a subject's evidence only if it is part of her epistemic perspective ("perspectivalism about evidence").<sup>4</sup> For instance, some hold that a proposition is part of a subject's evidence if and only if it is known (e.g. Bird, 2007; Hyman, 2006; and Williamson, 2000). Others argue that it

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is necessary and sufficient for a proposition to be part of a subject's evidence that she justifiably believes it, or perhaps has a particular kind of justified belief toward the proposition such as non-inferentially justified belief (e.g. Goldman, 2009; Littlejohn, 2013).<sup>5</sup> The perspectival constraint on evidence is motivated by the thought that facts outside an agent's epistemic ken are not part of her evidence. For instance, suppose that a son has totalled the family car but so far their mother has no idea about this. In the circumstances, that the son has totalled the family car is not plausibly part of the mother's evidence. We can support that by noting that it wouldn't justify any further belief or action on the part of the mother, say the belief that she will need to find an alternative way to pick up their younger child from football practice, or further actions such as grounding the son. By contrast, if the mother does know that the son has totalled the family car, that fact is plausibly part of the mother's evidence and it would justify further beliefs and actions.

Thus, I will endorse the following constraint on evidence:

Doxastic Constraint: *p* is part of *S*'s evidence if and only if *S* bears doxastic relation, *D*, to *p*.

Here, different philosophers will interpret the relevant doxastic relation in different ways, whether as knowledge, justified belief, or so on. However, it's worth noting that mere belief is not sufficient to make a proposition part of one's evidence. For, one might believe that *p* for all sorts of bad reasons, whether wishful thinking, dogmatism, or through a fallacious inference. For instance, the fact that a parent believes through wishful thinking that their child is especially musically gifted does not make it part of their evidence that their child is especially musically gifted. At a minimum, the belief that *p* needs to have positive epistemic standing for *p* to be part of one's evidence, whether being justified or perhaps constituting knowledge. Without such positive epistemic standing, evidence cannot play one of its central roles, namely that of justifying beliefs and actions.

A last issue concerning evidence is whether it is factive: *p* is evidence only if true. Although factivity is increasingly popular, it remains controversial and I remain neutral on factivity here.<sup>6</sup> However, we will see that whether or not one endorses factivity makes a large difference to the plausibility of certain approaches to group evidence. In particular, I will argue that endorsing factivity makes summative approaches less problematic.

Having set out the assumptions I am making about the nature of evidence, I turn next to consider the main two approaches to group evidence: summative and non-summative approaches.

### 3 | TWO APPROACHES TO GROUP EVIDENCE

The distinction between summative and non-summative approaches to group epistemic phenomena is familiar from existing discussions of group belief. According to a summative approach, to ascribe the belief that *p* to a group is simply an indirect way of ascribing the belief that *p* to members of the group. Summativists hold that a group believes that *p* if and only if most or all of its members believe that *p*.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, non-summativists argue that ascribing the belief that *p* to a group is not simply an indirect way of ascribing the belief that *p* to its members. Non-summativists have denied that it is necessary for a group to believe that *p* that some of its members believe that *p*; further, they have denied that it is sufficient for a group to believe that *p* that most or all of its members believe that *p* (e.g. Gilbert, 1989; List & Pettit, 2011; Tollefsen, 2015).

An analogous distinction can be made between different approaches to group evidence. On a summative approach, to say that a group has proposition  $p$  as part of its evidence is an indirect way of saying that some of its members do. For instance, a summativist might suggest that  $p$  is part of the evidence of a group if and only if it is part of the evidence of some or most members of the group (e.g. Buchak & Pettit, 2015<sup>8</sup>). Thus, a summative approach to group evidence might take either the form of a pooled, or shared approach:

Pooled evidence:  $p$  is part of the evidence of a group if and only if it is part of the evidence of some member of the group.

Shared evidence:  $p$  is part of the evidence of a group if and only if it is part of the evidence of most members of the group.<sup>9</sup>

By contrast, a non-summative approach denies that it is necessary and sufficient for a proposition,  $p$ , to be part of a group's evidence that it is part of the evidence of some/most members of the group. For instance, Hedden (2019) defends a non-summative approach to group evidence by combining a non-summative approach to group knowledge with the idea that a group's evidence is its knowledge. More broadly, Hedden's account suggests a general recipe for defending a non-summative account of group evidence: combine a non-summative approach to some group doxastic state,  $D$ , with the view that  $p$  is part of a group's evidence if and only if the group bears  $D$  to  $p$ . Suppose that a proposition  $p$  is part of a subject's evidence if and only if the subject bears doxastic relation  $D$  to  $p$ , where the subject could be a group or an individual. On a non-summative account of the relevant doxastic attitude, a group could bear  $D$  to  $p$  so that  $p$  is part of its evidence, even if none of its members bear  $D$  to  $p$  and so none of its members have  $p$  as part of their evidence. Furthermore, even if every member of the group bears  $D$  to  $p$  so that  $p$  is part of the evidence of every member of the group, it doesn't follow that the group bears  $D$  to  $p$ , or that  $p$  is part of its evidence.

Hedden shows how someone already committed to a non-summative account of group doxastic states could argue for a non-summative account of group evidence by appealing to a doxastic account of group evidence on which  $p$  is part of a group's evidence if and only if the group bears doxastic relation  $D$  to  $p$ . Of course, it's controversial whether to endorse a non-summative account of group doxastic states. So here I offer an alternative defence of a non-summative account of group evidence that doesn't presuppose a non-summative account of group doxastic states. In particular, I argue that summative accounts of group evidence face a range of independent problems: 1) to the extent that one endorses a non-factive approach to evidence, they are likely to have the result that a group's evidence set is wildly inconsistent; 2) they yield counterintuitive results about group evidence and 3) they are in tension with the doxastic constraint. I will deal with these points in order.

## 4 | AGAINST SUMMATIVE APPROACHES

### 4.1 | Inconsistent evidence

A first worry about summative approaches is that they may lead to a group having an inconsistent set of propositions as its evidence. To see how a pooled approach may have this result, assume a non-factive approach to evidence on which it is sufficient for a proposition to be part of a subject's evidence that she justifiably believes it, or perhaps has a certain kind of justified belief in it.

On such a non-factive approach to evidence, it's possible that a proposition which is justifiably believed by, and so part of the evidence of, one group member is inconsistent with a distinct proposition justifiably believed by, and so part of the evidence of, a different group member. To illustrate, one member of a detective team, M1, might justifiably believe that Mr Big was responsible for the jewel heist (or *j*), whereas another member of the group, M2, justifiably believes that Mr Big was not responsible for the jewel heist. Thus, *j* is part of the evidence of M1, but not-*j* is part of the evidence of M2. As a result, on the pooled conception, the group would have a set of evidence including both *j* and its negation. But if the group's evidence includes such straightforward inconsistencies, it's far from clear what further beliefs or actions it supports (for instance about whether to believe Mr Big is now rich from the proceeds of the crime, or whether to arrest him).<sup>10</sup> Of course, on a non-factive account of evidence, there may be some inconsistencies in an individual subject's evidence.<sup>11</sup> For instance, a subject might not have noticed that her beliefs regarding one topic are inconsistent with her beliefs regarding another. But, the problem is hugely magnified on the pooled conception of evidence given that different members of the group may justifiably believe very different things. While an individual subject is unlikely to believe obvious inconsistencies such as both *p* and not-*p*, on the pooled conception of evidence, group evidence will routinely contain such straightforward inconsistencies simply because it's routine for members of groups to disagree.

It is useful to note that that the concern with inconsistent evidence sets also affects the shared conception of group evidence. It's true that the shared conception of group evidence is likely to reduce the number of inconsistencies in the group's evidence. For, on the shared conception, it doesn't follow from the fact that, say, M1 has *p* as part of her evidence and M2 has not-*p*, that the group's evidence includes *p* and not-*p*. For a proposition is part of the group's evidence only if most of the members have *p* as part of their evidence. Even despite this, the shared conception when combined with a non-factive account of evidence may have the result that the evidence of the group contains simple inconsistencies. For instance, consider a group of 10 members with the following distribution of justified beliefs concerning the propositions *p*, *q*, and (if *p* then not-*q*):

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10
<i>p</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
<i>q</i>	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
If <i>p</i> then not- <i>q</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

Here, each member of the group considered individually has consistent beliefs. However, for each of the propositions, *p*, *q*, and (if *p* then not-*q*), there is a majority of members who justifiably believe it. Assuming a justified belief view of evidence, for each of the propositions, *p*, *q*, and (if *p* then not-*q*), there is a majority of members of the group who have it as part of their evidence. Thus, the shared evidence view has the result that the group's evidence includes each of the propositions *p*, *q* and (if *p* then not-*q*). Thus, the group's evidence contains a simple inconsistency.

## 4.2 | An overly generous conception of group evidence

A second problem facing summative approaches to group evidence is that they yield counterintuitive results about group evidence. In particular, they count too much as part of a group's evidence. To see that, consider the following example, Sexual Harassment. Suppose that a male member of

a department, X, has been sexually harassing a female colleague, Y. However, X has done this in such a way that no other member of the department has any evidence that it's taking place. We may suppose that X has been especially careful to take these precautions since the department is committed to gender equality and eliminating sexual harassment. Given their involvement, both X and Y have evidence that such sexual harassment has taken place (indeed, they both know it has!). On the pooled conception of evidence, if a member of a group has some proposition as part of its evidence, then so does the group. Thus, on the pooled conception, it's part of the department's evidence that X has sexually harassed Y. But this may be counterintuitive depending on how we fill out the details of the case. Suppose, for example, that both X and Y keep quiet about the sexual harassment for different reasons (X doesn't want to be sanctioned and Y has decided to deal with the incident in her own way). This is despite the fact that the department has excellent systems for dealing with allegations of sexual harassment; indeed, we may imagine the department systems are just as we would want them to be. In such circumstances, it seems intuitive that the group has no evidence that X has sexually harassed Y. This is backed up when we consider the department's actions. Given that the department is committed to gender equality and eliminating sexual harassment, it would be puzzling if the department had evidence of harassment yet did nothing. Indeed, the department might well be morally blameworthy for failing to act despite having such evidence. Thus, the pooled conception of evidence seems to be overly generous when it ascribes the evidence of every member of a group to the group itself.

An analogous problem faces the shared conception of evidence. To see this, we can consider a variant of our sexual harassment case in which most of the members of a department know that sexual harassment is taking place within it as a result of the fact that a single perpetrator, X, has sexually harassed most of the women in the department. Let's suppose that, despite the fact that the department has all the right procedures for dealing with allegations of sexual harassment, all of its members who know about the sexual harassment decide for different reasons to keep quiet about it. The perpetrator doesn't want to face sanction, and the victims decide not to raise the matter for a variety of different reasons (some are under stress at the moment; some have dealt with it in their own way and so on). It's a consequence of the shared conception of evidence that, in this example, the department's evidence includes that sexual harassment is going on. However, that seems counterintuitive given that the perpetrator and the victims all keep quiet about the harassment and don't report it. Further, if the department did have such evidence, we would rightly ask why it hasn't done anything about it, and it would be blameworthy for failing to act. But, it doesn't seem blameworthy for failing to act, and it seems intuitive that it could rightly claim to be ignorant of the harassment.<sup>1213</sup>

Notice that it doesn't help to add a common knowledge condition, e.g. suggesting that p is part of a group's evidence if and only if 1) p is part of the evidence of most members of the group; and 2) 1) is common knowledge. For even if we suppose that the common knowledge condition is met, that is compatible with no one reporting the harassment to the group's processes. But, if none of the victims come forward to report the harassment to the group's processes, it seems plausible that the group's evidence does not include the fact that sexual harassment is going on. Of course, even if the group's evidence does not include that sexual harassment is going on and the group itself is morally blameless for failing to act against the perpetrator, it doesn't follow that individual members are morally blameless for their actions. The perpetrator is clearly morally blameworthy for harassing the victims; and some victims may be morally blameworthy for not reporting the harassment to the group (e.g. perhaps one of the victims used her power in the organisation to deal with the perpetrator but owes it to less powerful victims to report the sexual harassment to the group's processes). Furthermore, even if the group is morally blameless for failing to act it

may be legally liable since legal and moral standards may differ. To take a trivial example, a good samaritan may be legally liable for a parking fine even if she is morally blameless for illegally parking to help a sick passerby. Likewise, a legal jurisdiction could hold that it is sufficient for an organisation to be legally liable for sexual harassment that one member knows about it.

In conclusion, both the pooled and shared approaches yield intuitively the wrong results about what's part of a group's evidence.

### 4.3 | Tension with the doxastic constraint

Even setting aside the first two concerns, summative accounts of group evidence face the further objection that they are in tension with the doxastic constraint on evidence. To illustrate the problem for the pooled conception, assume for the sake of argument that one's evidence is one's knowledge. Further, assume that just one member, M1, of a group knows that *p*, where M1 is one of the 20 operative members of the group. By the identification of evidence and knowledge, M1's evidence includes that *p*. According to the pooled conception, a proposition *p* is part of a group's evidence if and only if it is part of the evidence of some member of the group. As a result, the group's evidence includes *p*. However, on neither a summative nor a non-summative account of group knowledge, does it follow that the group knows that *p*. A summative account of group knowledge would hold that a group knows that *p* only if most of the members of the group know that *p*, or perhaps most of the operative members do. But, this condition is not met in our example. Non-summative accounts of group knowledge hold that it's not sufficient for a group to know that *p* that all or most members know that *p*; and it is not necessary for a group to know that *p* that some member of the group knows that *p*. Thus, from the fact that one member of the group knows that *p* nothing follows about whether or not the group knows that *p*. So it's consistent with the description of the case to suppose that the group does not know that *p*. Thus, the pooled conception of group evidence is in tension with the doxastic constraint on evidence: it allows that a proposition *p* may be part of a group's evidence even though the group doesn't hold the relevant doxastic relationship to *p*.

It might be tempting to think that the pooled conception of group evidence would look less problematic if we were to understand the doxastic constraint not as involving the subject actually having a doxastic relation to the propositions which are her evidence, but merely potentially doing so (let's call that "accessibilism"). For instance, some suggest that if a subject is in a position to know that *p*, then *p* is part of her evidence (e.g. Gibbons, 2013; Lord, 2018). And it might be suggested that a group is in a position to know what its members know by asking them for the relevant information. But, it's not clear that accessibilism helps overcome the problem. For, accessibilism is controversial and, more importantly, not all versions of accessibilism would allow that a group is in a position to know what its members know. To see this, it's important to note that accessibilists need to be careful not to allow a too generous understanding of potential doxastic relationships. To illustrate, return to the example of the parent whose son has totalled the family car although so far the parent has no idea of this. Compatibly with this, we may suppose that there are a variety of things which the parent could do which would result in them knowing that the son has totalled the family car. E.g., if they asked the son, he would confess; or if the parent walked down by the river they would see the car wrapped around a lamppost. But, before the parent does any of these things, it seems that the fact that the son has totalled the car is not part of the parent's evidence. For instance, it wouldn't justify further beliefs and actions, such as the belief that they need to find an alternative way to collect the younger child from football practice or the action of

grounding the son. Thus, it's no surprise that many of those who identify a person's evidence with what she is in a position to know usually understand it in a less generous way so that it excludes the idea that one could come to know that  $p$  by further investigation. Rather, they suggest that a subject is in a position to know that  $p$  if she can learn that  $p$  on the basis of her existing evidence and without a significant change in her epistemic position. She is in a position to know that  $p$  in this way if, say, she has beliefs/experiences with contents such that if she attended to them and inferred that  $p$  in the right way it would constitute knowledge (e.g. Lord, 2018, pp. 91–3). So understood, a group is not in a position to know everything which its members know. Thus, It's far from clear that even an accessibilist approach to evidence can reconcile the pooled approach with the doxastic constraint.

Now consider the shared approach to group evidence on which  $p$  is part of a group's evidence if and only if  $p$  is part of the evidence of most of the members of the group. The shared approach might not seem to be in tension with the doxastic constraint if it's combined with a simple summative account of group doxastic states on which a group holds a doxastic relation,  $D$ , to  $p$  if and only if most of its members hold  $D$  to  $p$ . For instance, consider combining the idea that one's evidence is one's knowledge with a simple summative account of group knowledge on which a group knows that  $p$  if and only if most of its members know that  $p$ . By the shared approach to group evidence, if most members of the group have  $p$  as part of their evidence, then so does the group. Furthermore, if most members of the group have  $p$  as part of their evidence, then by the equation of evidence and knowledge, most members of the group know that  $p$ . By the simple summative account of group knowledge, it follows that the group knows that  $p$ .

It might seem, then, that unlike the pooled account of group evidence, the shared account of group evidence is not in tension with the doxastic constraint. However, it is a problem for this line of thought that those most attracted to broadly summative accounts of group doxastic states have recently rejected simple summative accounts according to which a group holds a doxastic relation,  $D$ , to  $p$  if and only if most of its (operative) members hold  $D$  to  $p$ . For instance, Lackey (2021) objects to simple summative accounts of group belief, justified belief and knowledge even though she endorses a broadly summative account. She rejects simple summative accounts because they ignore the relationships between the doxastic states of the members of the group which, in her view, are relevant to whether the group has the doxastic state in question. We can illustrate her concern by looking at her Conflicting Bases Case (p. 77). In the case, all of the members of a group of 100 museum guards justifiably believes that an inside theft of a famous painting is being planned by a guard, or  $g$ . Each of the first 20 guards,  $M1$ – $M20$ , justifiably believes that only guard Albert is planning an inside theft and so deduces  $g$ . The remaining guards do not believe and are not justified in believing that Albert is planning a theft. Each of  $M21$ – $M40$  justifiably believes that only guard Bernard is planning an inside theft and deduces  $g$ . The remaining guards do not believe and are not justified in believing that Bernard is planning an inside theft. Each of  $M41$ – $M60$  justifiably believes that only guard Cecil is planning an inside theft and deduces  $g$ . The remaining guards do not believe and are not justified in believing that Cecil is planning an inside theft. Each of  $M61$ – $M80$  justifiably believes that only guard David is planning an inside theft and infers  $g$ . The remaining guards do not believe and are not justified in believing that David is planning an inside theft. Each of  $M81$ – $M100$  justifiably believes that only guard Edmund is planning an inside theft and so infers  $g$ . The remaining guards do not believe and are not justified in believing that Edmund is planning an inside theft. Lackey argues that since the bases of the guard's beliefs that someone is planning an inside theft are incoherent, the group as a whole does not justifiably believe that someone is planning an inside theft, even though each guard individually considered does justifiably believe that. This problem for the simple summative account of group justified

belief leads Lackey to her own view of group justified belief. This is a broadly summative account since it requires that most operative members of the group justifiably believe that *p*. However, unlike the simple summative account, it is not sufficient for a group to justifiably believe that *p* that most of the operative members justifiably believe that *p*. In addition, the bases of the member's justified beliefs that *p* must cohere and the total evidence which members of the group have and should have had must sufficiently support that *p* (p. 97).

Regardless of whether one endorses Lackey's positive account of group justified belief, if one agrees with her verdict on the Conflicting Bases Case, then the shared account of group evidence is in tension with the doxastic constraint. According to her verdict, each guard justifiably believes that *g*, yet the group does not justifiably believe that *g*. Suppose that *p* is part of one's evidence if and only if one justifiably believes it. It follows that *g* is part of the evidence of each museum guard. By the shared conception of evidence, it follows that *g* is part of the evidence of the group. But since the group does not justifiably believe that *p*, there is a violation of the doxastic constraint on evidence.

A defender of the shared account of group evidence might wonder if it's legitimate to appeal to Lackey-style examples to show that the shared conception of group evidence is in tension with the doxastic constraint. For, it might be suggested that Lackey's examples implicitly assume a pooled conception of group evidence. For instance, perhaps Lackey's Conflicting Bases Case example implicitly takes it that the evidence of the group of museum guards is the conjunction of the evidence of each of the museum guards. If so, it would hardly be surprising if Lackey's examples make trouble for the rival shared conception of group evidence on which *p* is part of a group's evidence if and only if it is part of the evidence of most of the members of the group.

In reply, Lackey's examples are not committed to a pooled conception of group evidence but only to the claim that the epistemic standing of a group's belief is affected by the evidence of members of the group. In particular, she argues that a group's belief that *p* is justified only if it is supported by the set consisting of the actual evidence of members of the group together with the evidence they should have had as individuals and as members of the group. But this condition on a group's belief being justified doesn't entail the pooled conception of evidence on which all of the evidence of members of the group is part of the group's evidence. For, it is plausible—and indeed Lackey holds—that the epistemic standing of an agent's belief is determined not only by the evidence she has but also by evidence she doesn't in fact have but should have had. Thus, the epistemic standing of a group's belief that *p* can be affected not only by evidence the group has but also by evidence the group should have had. As a result, one can employ the Conflicting Bases Case to show that the shared conception of evidence is in tension with the doxastic constraint without illegitimately assuming a pooled conception of evidence.

To illustrate how evidence one should have had can affect the epistemic standing of one's beliefs, consider Kornblith's (1983) example of a pig-headed physicist who is so in love with his favourite theory that he ignores evidence, *p*, provided by a more junior colleague against that theory. Suppose that his dogmatism leads him to refuse to even believe the evidence, *p*, his more junior colleague provides. If one identifies a subject's evidence with what they know or justifiably believe, then the pig-headed physicist does not have *p* as part of his evidence. But, surely, his dogmatic refusal to believe that *p* should not make it easier for his belief in his favourite theory to be justified? As a result, many suggest that whether a subject's belief is justified depends not only on the evidence she does in fact have, but also the evidence she should have had.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it seems that one could use Lackey-style examples to cause trouble for the shared account of group evidence even without endorsing a pooled account of group evidence. For instance, one might argue that in Lackey's original museum guard example, the group of museum guards should have had some

process for bringing all the relevant evidence together in a discussion about whether there is an imminent threat of a museum heist. To the extent that the group should have had such a process, then the evidence of the individual museum guards is arguably evidence that the group should have had. Thus, this evidence can be used to show that the group doesn't justifiably believe that some guard is planning an inside theft even though most of the members of the group do justifiably believe that.

I've now argued that problems face summative accounts of group evidence according to which  $p$  is part of a group's evidence if and only if some or most members of the group have  $p$  as part of their evidence. When combined with a non-factive account of evidence, summative accounts are very likely to have the result that groups have inconsistent evidence sets. Further, they yield counterintuitive results about group evidence, counting too much as part of a group's evidence in the sexual harassment examples. Last, we've seen that these accounts are in conflict with the doxastic constraint on evidence. Given the problems facing summative accounts of group evidence, I explore a non-summative account in the next section.

## 5 | A NON-SUMMATIVE ACCOUNT OF GROUP EVIDENCE

Non-summativists deny that it's necessary and sufficient for  $p$  to be part of a group's evidence that it is part of the evidence of some/most members of the group. One way to develop a non-summative account would be to suggest that  $p$  is part of a group's evidence if and only if the group bears an appropriate doxastic attitude toward  $p$ , where one endorses a non-summative account of that doxastic attitude. Such a "doxastic attitude account" of group evidence could be developed using a range of different doxastic attitudes. For instance, Hedden (2019) endorses a non-summative account of group knowledge and identifies a group's evidence with its knowledge. Alternatively, one might provide a non-factive account of group evidence by, say, combining a non-summative account of group justified belief with the claim that  $p$  is part of a group's evidence if and only if the group justifiably believes that  $p$ .

Let's now consider how the doxastic attitude account compares with the summative accounts of group evidence discussed earlier. Unlike the pooled and shared evidence accounts considered above, the doxastic attitude account obviously meets the doxastic constraint. To the extent that the doxastic attitude account employs a factive doxastic attitude, it also avoids the problem of attributing an inconsistent set of propositions as the group's evidence. In addition, a doxastic attitude account would mitigate the inconsistency problem even if it employed a non-factive doxastic attitude such as justified belief. For non-summativists about group doxastic attitudes typically place rationality constraints on group belief. For instance, List and Pettit (2011) explicitly argue that a group can have beliefs only if it meets certain rationality constraints and this is at the heart of their argument for non-summativism about group beliefs. More generally, the kind of interpretationist and functionalist approaches often used to motivate non-summative approaches mitigate the inconsistency problem.<sup>15</sup> On an interpretationist approach, a group has beliefs and desires only if its behaviour can be explained and predicted on the assumption that it has beliefs and desires. Such an approach builds a rationality constraint into a group having beliefs and desires. A looser rationality constraint is implicit in a functionalist approach to group mental states according to which groups have mental states if and only if they have functional states which play the relevant role. Part of the relevant functional role for states such as belief is that they are disposed to interact in rational ways. Of course, both interpretationist and functionalist approaches allow that groups, like ordinary human subjects, can have some inconsistencies in their beliefs. But, there are limits

to the extent of these inconsistencies. At a certain point, too much inconsistency is incompatible with having beliefs.

A doxastic attitude account not only fares better with both the doxastic constraint and worries about inconsistency, but would also avoid attributing too much evidence to the group in our sexual harassment examples. In the first variant, two members of a larger group, the perpetrator X and the victim Y have as part of their evidence that sexual harassment is going on but keep this to themselves for different reasons. In the second variant, most of the members of the group have as part of their evidence that sexual harassment is going on since one perpetrator, X, has harassed very many female members of the group. However, both X and his victims keep this information to themselves for different reasons. Intuitively, in both variants, it's not part of the evidence of the group that sexual harassment is going on. A doxastic attitude account of group evidence can accommodate that intuition. To illustrate, suppose that an agent's evidence is her knowledge. On a non-summative approach to group doxastic states, the fact that one member of a group knows that *p*, or even that all members know that *p*, does not entail that the group knows that *p*. Thus, from the fact that it's part of the evidence of some or even all of the members of the group that sexual harassment is taking place, it doesn't follow that it's part of the group's evidence that sexual harassment is taking place.

It seems, then, that the proposed non-summative account avoids the key problems faced by summative accounts discussed earlier. However, it may be suggested that it faces other objections. In particular it may be thought that it faces problems raised by Lackey to one brand of non-summativism about group evidence, a joint acceptance account of group evidence. I discuss Lackey's objections in the next section.

## 6 | LACKEY'S OBJECTIONS TO JOINT ACCEPTANCE ACCOUNTS OF GROUP EVIDENCE

Lackey (2021) criticises joint acceptance accounts of group reasons for allowing a group's reasons to be affected by financial and pragmatic factors in problematic ways. On a joint acceptance account, a group has a reason *r* to believe that *p* if and only if all members of the group would properly express openly a willingness to accept *r* jointly as the group's reason to believe that *p* (e.g. Hakli, 2011; Schmitt, 1994). In one of her examples, *Ignoring Evidence*, most of the operative members of a large tobacco company are individually aware of the massive amounts of scientific evidence revealing the links between smoking and lung cancer and heart disease, and individually believe that these dangers give the company a reason to believe that warning labels should be placed on cigarette boxes. However, because of what is at stake financially and legally, the members refuse to jointly accept that the evidence reveals links between smoking and lung and heart problems. As a result, on the joint acceptance account of group reasons, that smoking increases the risk of lung cancer and heart disease is not one of the company's reasons (p. 64). In a second example, *Fabricating Evidence*, most of the operative members are again individually aware of the massive amounts of scientific evidence revealing the health dangers of smoking. But because of what is at stake financially and legally, they decide to jointly accept that the scientists working on the relationship between smoking and health problems are liars. As a result, they jointly accept that the duplicity of the scientists gives the company a reason to believe that the results of the studies alleging a connection between smoking and health problems are unreliable (p. 65).

Lackey worries that these examples show that a joint acceptance account of reasons or evidence is problematic. In particular, she argues that in *Ignoring Evidence*, it counts too little as part of

the group's evidence (excluding the scientific evidence revealing the health risks of smoking); and that, in *Fabricating Evidence*, it counts too much as part of the group's evidence (including that the scientists working on the relationship between smoking and health problems are liars). As a result, she argues that the joint acceptance account yields the wrong results about the epistemic standing of the tobacco company's beliefs, and the ethical standing of its actions. In particular, she suggests that the joint acceptance account would have the result that in *Ignoring Evidence*, the company has no reason to put warning labels on its packets of cigarettes; and that in *Fabricating Evidence*, the company has an excuse for failing to put warning labels on cigarettes (pp. 64–65).

However, in reply, a doxastic attitude account of group evidence needn't be committed to these problematic conclusions. While it does hold that  $p$  is part of a group's evidence if and only if the group bears doxastic relation  $D$  to  $p$ , it needn't hold a joint acceptance account of the relevant attitude. For joint acceptance approaches are only one of a range of non-summative approaches to group doxastic states which also include functionalism, interpretationism and judgement aggregation approaches. Further, even if a non-summativist did embrace a joint acceptance account of group belief, it wouldn't be committed to the problematic conclusions. As we saw earlier, it's implausible to suggest that if a subject believes that  $p$  then  $p$  is part of her evidence. For she might believe that  $p$  for all sorts of bad reasons. Thus, even if one adopts a view of group belief on which, in *Fabricating Evidence*, the group believes that the scientists are liars that is not sufficient for the company to have that claim as part of its evidence. For instance, consider a doxastic attitude account which takes a factive doxastic attitude to  $p$  to be necessary for having  $p$  as evidence. On this view, since it's false that the scientists are liars, the company does not have the proposition that the scientists are liars as part of its evidence. Even on a non-factive variant of the doxastic attitude approach, a belief plausibly needs positive epistemic standing before its content is evidence. For instance, it might be suggested that it is sufficient for  $p$  to be part of one's evidence that one justifiably believe that  $p$ , or perhaps has a certain kind of justified belief with respect to  $p$ . But, a non-summativist need not accept that the company's belief that the scientists are liars is justified. For instance, she may point out that forming beliefs on the basis of financial interest is not a reliable way to form beliefs. Thus, a defender of a doxastic attitude account need not accept that in Lackey's *Fabricating Evidence* example, the company has as part of its evidence the proposition that the relevant scientists lied.

Now consider her *Ignoring Evidence* example. On a non-summative account of group evidence, that some or all of the members of the group have  $p$  as part of their evidence doesn't entail that the group has. Thus, a non-summativist would allow that in *Ignoring Evidence*, even though it's part of the evidence of all of the operative members that smoking damages health, it doesn't follow that that's part of the group's evidence. However, it doesn't follow that the non-summativist is committed to supposing that the group's belief that smoking doesn't have serious health risks is justified, or that the group has an excuse for failing to place warning messages on cigarettes. As argued earlier, and as Lackey agrees, it's plausible that the epistemic standing of a subject's belief depends not only on the evidence the subject does in fact have, but also on the evidence she should have had. Thus, it's open to a non-summativist to argue that in *Ignoring Evidence*, the tobacco company's belief that smoking is not a health risk is unjustified in the light of the evidence the company should have had but didn't.

In developing the suggestion, a non-summativist may point out that groups may have a duty to take advantage of relevant evidence held by their members. In our example, the tobacco company ought to take advantage of the evidence held by its members that smoking is damaging to health. That's not to say that the evidence held by the members of a group exhausts the evidence the group should have had. In some cases, a group should have had better detection systems than

it actually had (say to detect whether it's operations are producing environment pollution), or it should have investigated more into the consequences of its processes for the local community. Nonetheless, the evidence held by members of a group is an important source of evidence for the group. Thus, a group may have a duty to implement appropriate systems for allowing it to learn of the evidence held by members and to ensure that members are properly incentivised to provide relevant information (by ensuring that members aren't punished for revealing inconvenient information and perhaps sanctioning members if they knowingly refuse to reveal information). Of course, it may be costly to retrieve evidence from members, so the extent of the group's duty to obtain such evidence depends on contextual factors such as the stakes.

Of course, even if a group has done all that it should have done in terms of having appropriate systems for allowing it to obtain the evidence held by members, it may nonetheless not have all the evidence its members have. In some cases, that's because the information is irrelevant to its operation. For instance, my employing university doesn't have some of my evidence which is irrelevant to its operation (e.g. what I had for breakfast this morning, or my preference for raspberry over strawberry jam). In some other cases, members may have relevant evidence but choose not to disclose it even though the group has done all it should have done to allow it to obtain relevant evidence held by members. Members may choose for their own reasons not to share evidence: perhaps it's embarrassing, they fear (rationally or irrationally) for the consequences for them or their colleagues, or are attempting to undermine the company. In some other cases, members of the group may have information relevant to the group's aims but it's not obvious to those members that the information is relevant, and the group couldn't have been expected to realise that the member held the relevant information. For instance, it may so happen that the accountant in a university has information relevant to a disciplinary enquiry into student behaviour. As a member of the local bowling club, the accountant may just so happen to have seen the accused student at the time the offence was being committed across the other side of town. Thus, the accountant can provide an alibi for the student. But, there may be no reason for the university to suppose that the accountant can provide such an alibi, and the accountant may have no idea that the relevant student is being investigated for a disciplinary offence. Thus, for a variety of reasons, even if a group has done everything it ought to have done to facilitate the flow of evidence from members to the group, the group may be blameless for the fact that it doesn't have all the relevant evidence of members. In such a case, even though it would have been useful for the group to have that evidence, the evidence of the members doesn't count as evidence the group should have had. And the group's belief may be justified in the light of the evidence it actually has and should have had even if it wouldn't be justified on the wider set of evidence which also includes the evidence of its members.

I've now argued that a non-summative account of group evidence can respond to Lackey's tobacco company examples. In particular, in *Fabricating Evidence*, the non-summative need not agree that it's part of the group's evidence that the scientists lie. Furthermore, in *Ignoring Evidence*, even if it's not part of the group's evidence that smoking is linked to heart and lung problems, the non-summative need not accept that this has the result that the group is epistemically justified in believing that smoking doesn't carry health risks, or is justified in failing to place warning labels on cigarette packets. For the justification of belief depends not only on the evidence one has but the evidence one should have had.

Even while accepting this, Lackey may suggest that the proposed non-summative account is still problematic because it has counterintuitive consequences concerning the group's evidence. For she suggests that, in *Ignoring Evidence*, it's intuitive that it's part of the group's evidence that

smoking is linked to heart and lung disease in virtue of the fact that operative members have this evidence:

Every member of this group is aware of the scientific evidence showing the dangers of smoking and, accordingly, believes that warning labels should be put on cigarette boxes. The mere fact that the company is illegitimately ignoring relevant evidence through dogmatically and steadfastly refusing to jointly accept facts that are not to its liking should not result in its not having this reason too. This conclusion is supported by the fact that we would surely hold Philip Morris responsible for the ill effects caused by smoking precisely because we take it to have a good reason to warn people about the dangers of cigarettes. (p. 64)

As we've already seen, we can accept that the company is blameworthy for failing to warn people of the dangers of smoking without holding that it's part of the evidence of the company that tobacco is linked to heart and lung disease. For, the normative evaluation of a group's beliefs and actions depends not only on the evidence it actually has but also on the evidence it should have had. Furthermore, the defender of the doxastic attitude account of group evidence may point out that Lackey's suggestion that the group's evidence includes the health risks of smoking resembles a familiar concern for doxastic accounts of evidence on which  $p$  is part of an agent's evidence if and only if the agent bears a suitable doxastic relation,  $D$ , to  $p$ . On a doxastic account, there will be cases in which a subject, whether an individual or a group, is provided with information but may not believe that information for a number of reasons. For instance, on being provided with information by the police that their child has committed an offence, parents may refuse to believe what the police say (say because they would find it psychologically too difficult to believe). On the doxastic attitude account, it's not part of the parent's evidence that the child has committed an offence (although related propositions might be part of their evidence, such as that the police said that that is the case). Nonetheless, a third-party might find it intuitive to say that it was part of the parent's evidence that their child had committed the offence. For instance, a relative might say of the parents, "They have evidence that Tommy committed the crime, but they just can't believe it".

There are two potential replies to this concern. First, a defender of the doxastic attitude account might insist that a proposition,  $p$ , is part of the group's evidence if and only if the group in fact bears an appropriate doxastic relation  $D$  to  $p$ . It follows that since the group doesn't believe that smoking is connected to lung and heart problems, then this isn't part of its evidence. The defender of the doxastic attitude account might then attempt to explain away the contrary intuition by appeal to the suggestion that we sometimes confuse the evidence the subject actually has and the evidence the subject should have had<sup>16</sup>, a confusion encouraged by the fact that both kinds of evidence affect the epistemic standing of the subject's beliefs.

Second, and alternatively, a defender of a doxastic account of evidence might suggest that a proposition can be part of a group's evidence even if it's not actually part of its epistemic perspective but is accessible from that perspective in some sense. For instance, it might be suggested that one's evidence is not only what one actually knows but what one is in a position to know (e.g. Gibbons, 2013; Lord, 2018). Depending on the precise details of the case, this might allow that it is part of the evidence of the tobacco company that smoking is a serious health risk. For instance, the group may have beliefs from which they could infer that smoking is a serious health risk and, if they did, those beliefs would constitute knowledge, e.g. the beliefs that reputable scientific journals have published articles linking smoking to health risks and the belief that those journals are reliable). (As already noted, expanding what counts as evidence in this way would not change

the overall dialectic of the paper in favour of the kind of summative account of group evidence rejected earlier in the paper. See note 4.)

## 7 | CONCLUSION

We've been discussing whether we should adopt a summative or a non-summative account of group evidence. According to the summative view, to say that a group has *p* as part of its evidence is shorthand for saying that some of its members have *p* as part of their evidence. By contrast, the non-summative view denies that. I argued that summative accounts face a range of problems. If they embrace a non-factive account of evidence, then they will often have the result that group evidence is inconsistent. They yield counterintuitive results about group evidence in certain cases, such as our sexual harassment cases. Furthermore, we saw that they are in tension with the doxastic constraint on evidence. In the light of that, I developed a non-summative account of group evidence appealing to the idea that a proposition is part of a group's evidence if and only if the group holds the relevant doxastic relation to that proposition. Such a view is straightforwardly consistent with the doxastic constraint on evidence. It avoids the counterintuitive results about group evidence in the sexual harassment cases. Furthermore, it ameliorates worries about a group's having inconsistent evidence even on a non-factive approach to evidence. Further, we saw that this approach can deal with concerns which Lackey raised for certain non-summative accounts of group evidence such as joint acceptance approaches. Overall, then, we should accept a non-summative view of group evidence.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup>Thanks to the Leverhulme Trust for a Major Research Fellowship which enabled me to complete this research. Thanks also for helpful comments on earlier versions of the paper from Sanford Goldberg, John Greco, Brian Hedden, Justin Snedegar, Deborah Tollefsen and from audiences at Glasgow, St Andrews, and the SWIP-NYC.
- <sup>2</sup>Buchak and Pettit and Hedden consider different accounts of group evidence in considering whether there are rational requirements on group belief in addition to the requirement to conform one's beliefs to the evidence.
- <sup>3</sup>Williamson (2000) argues that only propositions are part of one's evidence because only propositions can play some of the central functions of evidence, such as supporting hypotheses by inference to the best explanation. Although we also cite physical objects and experiences as evidence, Williamson argues that it is propositions about objects/experiences which are one's evidence.
- <sup>4</sup>An alternative suggestion is that a proposition can be part of one's evidence even if it's not actually part of one's epistemic perspective but is accessible from that perspective in some sense. Expanding what counts as evidence in this way would not undermine the argument of the paper against summativism about evidence. Its effect would be to add propositions to the evidence of members of the group and so, on a summative approach, add propositions to the group's evidence. But, adding propositions to the group's evidence wouldn't help overcome the problems of inconsistent group evidence, or including too much as part of the group's evidence.
- <sup>5</sup>By contrast, some suggest that having an experience as of *p* is sufficient for *p* to be part of one's evidence (e.g. Schroeder, 2008). Independently of any other objections to the view, it seems implausible that groups have sensory experiences. Thus a group's having a doxastic relation to a proposition is necessary for that proposition to be part of the group's evidence.
- <sup>6</sup>For arguments in favour of factivity, see Williamson (2000) and Littlejohn (2013) *inter alia*; for objections to factivity, see Comesana and Kantin (2010); Comesana and McGrath (2014); and Schroeder (2008).
- <sup>7</sup>Or, on some versions, if and only if most or all of its key, or "operative", members believe that *p*.
- <sup>8</sup>Buchak and Pettit variously suggest that a group's evidence is a function of the evidence of its members, the judgements of its members, or the votes of its members. Of these, the first is the most promising. It is not sufficient for a proposition to be part of one's evidence that one believes it, since one might believe it for all sorts of bad

reasons (e.g. wishful thinking or fallacious inference). Furthermore, since subjects can vote dishonestly, that a subject votes for *p* doesn't even show that she believes that *p*. So it's implausible to suggest that if most of the members of a group believe that *p* or vote for *p*, then *p* is part of the group's evidence.

<sup>9</sup>These options are distinguished in Hedden (2019).

<sup>10</sup>If an evidence set is inconsistent, then it entails any proposition whatsoever. So, if the group's evidence includes an inconsistency, then it might entail both that Mr Big is now rich from the proceeds of the crime and that he isn't. Furthermore, Bayesian approaches to evidential support will be in trouble for conditional probabilities are undefined when the conditioned proposition is necessarily false.

<sup>11</sup>Although this could be avoided if there is a coherence constraint on justified beliefs according to which one cannot have justified beliefs in inconsistent propositions.

<sup>12</sup>Notice that it's unpromising to attempt to deal with these problems for the summative account by suggesting that it is only a certain subset of the department's members whose evidence determines the group's evidence, say the operative members. For, the intuitive verdicts about the examples don't change even if we assume that the relevant parties are operative members. Nor does it help to suggest that it is only the evidence of "non-rogue" members which determines the group's evidence, where a rogue member is a member who doesn't share the group's aims and perhaps acts to undermine them. Though the behaviour of *X*, the perpetrator, conflicts with the department's aims, and so *X* might be judged to be a rogue member, that's not so for his victims.

<sup>13</sup>The problem might even extend to a version of the shared evidence view on which a proposition is part of the group's evidence if and only if it's part of the evidence of every member of the group. For we can imagine that everyone in the group is either a harasser or a victim, but everyone keeps quiet about it.

<sup>14</sup>E.g. DeRose (2000); Gibbons (2006); Goldberg (2017, 2018); and Lackey (1999, 2021).

<sup>15</sup>Functionalist approaches are defended by Bird (2010), List and Pettit (2011) and Strohmaier (2020); interpretationism is defended by List and Pettit (2011) and Tollefsen (2015).

<sup>16</sup>A further source of confusion in the case of attributions to groups may arise from a failure to cleanly distinguish between the epistemic position of the group itself and its members. In Lackey's examples, all of the operative members have as part of their evidence the scientific studies linking tobacco to heart and lung disease. If we don't clearly distinguish between the operative members of the company and the company itself, we may confusedly take the fact that that operative members have this evidence to show that the company itself does.

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