Forthcoming in *The Sailing Mind*, Roberto Casati (ed.), Springer.

The *We-Perspective* on the Racing Sailboat

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Racing in sailboats is for the most part a team sport, sailed in everything from two-person dinghies to super-maxi boats that require well over a dozen crew. Sailing is challenging enough but crewed racing boats present special challenges. Successful sports teams are able to adopt what is known as the *we-perspective*, forming intentions and making decisions, somewhat as a unified mind does, to achieve their goals. In this paper I consider what is involved in establishing and maintaining the we-perspective on a racing sailboat.[1]

1. Gilbert's account of *plural subjects*

There has been a lot of work in the last 30 years on *collective intentionality*, the phenomenon of treating complex systems, themselves composed of intentional agents, as subjects of propositional attitudes such as beliefs, desires, and intentions. Such *group minds,* as they are sometimes thought of, include corporations, clubs, religious organizations, military units, and more transient associations assembled for some immediate goal or purpose. Following standard usage in this literature I will call propositional attitudes ascribed to such collectives *we-attitudes* and the goals and intentions ascribed to them *we-intentions*. I will make use of Margaret Gilbert's well-known *plural subjects theory* (Gilbert 2006, 2009*)* in spelling out these notions. Her account provides a useful framework for introducing the notion of a plural subject, and the related notion of the we-perspective, though in the next section I will argue that it is inadequate to characterize the plural subject that is the racing sailboat.

[1] Much of what I say will apply to crewed cruising sailing, but my interest in this paper is in sailing in the context of competition.

Central to Gilbert's account of plural subjects is the notion of a *joint commitment*. She asks us to consider two individuals deciding to take a walk together. In doing so each takes on a commitment to act in a certain way. More precisely, here is how the joint commitment is created:

> In the basic case… each of two or more people must openly express his personal readiness jointly with the others to commit them all in a certain way. Once the concordant expressions of all have occurred and are common knowledge between the parties, the joint commitment is in place. (2009, 180)

Non-basic cases "involve authorities whose status derives from a basic joint commitment." (180) Joint commitments, Gilbert says, give rise to a normative structure of *obligations* and *entitlements*. If A and B are jointly committed to take a walk, then each is thereby obligated to act in an appropriate way and each is entitled to expect and demand of the other that they also act accordingly. Each owes the other the appropriate action. As Gilbert puts it, the joint commitment establishes the following conditions:

> … one's being owed that action by [the other] prior to his performing it, one's being in a position to demand it of him prior to its performance, and one's being in a position to rebuke him if he has failed to perform it at the appropriate time. (2009, 176)

The joint commitment grounds the notion of a *plural subject*:

> A and B… constitute a plural subject (by definition) if and only if they are jointly committed to doing something as a body—in a broad sense of 'do'. (Gilbert 2006: 145)

By undertaking the joint commitment the individuals involved create a collective entity – the plural subject – to which the attribution of propositional attitudes is appropriate. Together they accept and are committed to act on these *we-attitudes* and *we-intentions*, and each feels entitled to demand of the others that they also act accordingly. They have adopted what is called the *we-*

perspective (hereafter WP).[2]

Adopting the WP has an obvious pay-off: by taking themselves to be so bound a group is more likely to achieve goals that individual members of the group take to be worthwhile. They can more efficiently make decisions that require integrating diverse sources of information in a timely fashion and co-ordinate their behaviors to produce more complex actions. As long as the individuals in the collective continue to endorse the shared goals that define the group each has a strong motivation to abide by the normative commitment that binds them together and to recognize the obligations and entitlements that the commitment entails.

Some clarifications are in order before I turn to the application to sailboat racing. Adopting the WP does not require anything like a single locus of consciousness or a "distinctive form of 'subjectivity'" (Gilbert 2006, 134), nor does it entail that the individuals in the group share many other attitudes. As Gallotti and Huebner (2017, 257) put it:

> … you will still have your own perspective on things, which may be similar to mine, yet will not be an exact replica. After all, it would be unrealistic to assume that two people have to think the same thoughts as they perform a task jointly, if their minds are to count as shared in joint action. (257)

And while views about the metaphysical status of *group minds* and *extended minds* vary, Gilbert herself holds a deflationary view of the notion of a plural subject:

> This label ["plural subject"] should not be thought to have any ontological implications beyond those involved in the claim that certain persons are jointly committed in some

[2] For general discussion of the we-perspective see Petersson 2017 and Crone 2020. My use of the notion is independent of their analyses. The we-perspective is closely related to what Raimo Tuomela in a series of works (see e.g. 2003, 2005) and Gallotti and Firth (2013) call 'cognizing in the *we-mode*.'

way. (2009, 182)

In making use of Gilbert's plural subjects theory and the related notion of the WP I take no stand on whether attributions of propositional attitudes to groups should be construed literally, with the implication that individuals and groups are minded in something like the same sense, or whether they are merely a useful fiction. What is required to be a proper subject of intentional attribution is a vexed question that I will also take no stand on here, and nothing that I say about plural subjects or we-attitudes is intended to have any implications for intentional attributions to individuals.

2. The *we-perspective* on the racing sailboat

My central claim is that success in sailboat racing depends on the team adopting and sustaining the WP, as I will further characterize it in this section. The joint commitment that underpins the normative structure of obligations and entitlements is typically *implicit,* undertaken by individual sailors agreeing to be a member of a racing team. I will hereafter call the plural subject that is created by the joint commitment *the boat,* in order to underscore the analogy with an embodied thinking subject.[3] So the boat will be the subject of we-attitudes. The sailors, as well as the physical platform on which they sail, are all constituents of the boat. It will be clear from context where I am referring to the physical platform, the crew, or both. And by *crew* I include the skipper, the person ultimately (and indeed, legally) responsible for decisions made by the boat. So the skipper is a constituent of the crew, though one who has a special status.[4]

When the WP is in place it is appropriate to ascribe we-attitudes to the boat – goals,

[3] This is in fact how a team of racing sailors describes themselves, as 'the boat'.

[4] The plural subject framework can be applied at a higher level of aggregation to *team racing,* which typically involves two competing teams of three boats each working in tandem.

beliefs, desires, intentions, and so on. The ambition of every boat is to win, but for many boats winning is unattainable. In a large fleet that may include professional crews, Olympic medalists, Rolex 'sailors of the year', and college All-Americans, only a small number of boats have a realistic chance of winning the race (or the regatta or the series). But every boat has the goal of *finishing well*, where, depending on the experience and abilities of the crew, and whether the vessel itself has been optimized for speed,[5] finishing well might mean placing in the middle of the fleet or avoiding the dreaded DFL ('dead f…ing last').

Joint commitment to the collective goals of the boat – and the obligations and entitlements that the joint commitment underpins – contributes to the success of the boat in at least two distinct ways: (1) it facilitates the smooth execution of joint action; and (2) it increases the chance that individual crew members will exert their best effort in fulfilling their particular roles. I will discuss each of these in turn.

(1) *Joint action*

Many of the actions required of the crew are joint not merely in the sense that they are done by multiple agents acting together, but in the stronger sense that they are constituents of a more complex action involving the coordination of individual actions. A joint walk requires little more coordination than that the individuals involved meet at a certain place and walk at roughly the same pace. Two people dancing a tango is a better example to serve as a model for the sorts of joint actions required of a racing crew. The actions of the dancers are tightly coordinated. Successful execution of the dance requires the smooth and seamless co-ordination of

[5] Factors contributing to the sometimes elusive property of 'boatspeed' include how the standing rigging is tuned, the condition of the sails, the state of hull, keel, and rudder (i.e. whether properly faired), whether the hardware is 'state of the art' as allowed by class rules, whether all unnecessary weight has been removed, and so on. As every racing sailor knows, the list is endless.

synchronized individual actions. Developing this skill requires practice, and with practice the maneuver becomes 'second nature.' Many of the joint actions required of racing crew are similar in this respect. In dinghies and small keelboats the crew will typically facilitate tacking or gybing the boat by shifting their weight from one side to the other, i.e. by *roll-tacking* or *roll-gybing*. This maneuver enables the boat to maintain speed through the tack. A perfectly executed roll-tack or gybe can actually accelerate the boat, which is against the racing rules of sailing. Race referees are constantly on the lookout for excessive use of the maneuver, especially in light air where a series of quick tacks or gybes can give a boat an unfair advantage. Just as in dancing, timing and coordinated footwork are crucial: a roll-tack requires helmsperson and crew to simultaneously lean back to windward bringing the boom across the boat, duck under it, step up and across the boat while they tack the main and jib respectively, spin around, throw their weight back on the rail, and trim the sails for the new wind. A poorly executed tack or gybe risks dumping the air from the sails and stalling the boat, which in close proximity to other boats can mean disaster.

Perhaps a more central example of joint action required to sail effectively is the close coordination between helmsperson and sail trimmer necessary to achieve maximum VMG (velocity made good).[6] Very much like in ballroom dancing one takes the lead and the other responds appropriately. Sometimes the coordination will involve the helmsperson setting an optimal course for the conditions and the trimmer responding by easing out or trimming in to

[6] VMG (velocity made good) is the actual speed towards some intended destination, for example, the next mark of the course. Because sailboats are rarely able to sail directly towards their intended destination, a boat's VMG is only rarely identical to its speed along its current heading.

maintain optimal sail shape for the apparent wind. But the prevailing conditions always determine the most effective means of coordination. In heavy air and high seas it can be difficult for the spinnaker trimmer to make quick changes to sail shape, and so it is often preferable for the trimmer to take the lead, trimming the sails to what is optimal for the apparent wind, with the helmsperson responding by steering the boat up or down to maintain optimal sail shape, all in the context of maintaining the desired course. Often close coordination requires constant communication between the two, especially in very light air where the trimmer may be fighting to maintain sail shape. (Helmsperson: "I'm heading up to avoid a starboard tacker"; spinnaker trimmer: "I've got good pressure, you can come down" or "I'm losing it, steer up.") Sometimes special features of the venue will favor a unique solution to the coordination problem. I vividly recall racing in a JY15[7] North American Championship in the shallow water of Great South Bay off Long Island, NY and seeing former Sunfish world champion Paul-Jon Patin punch very effectively through the short, steep chop with a series of sudden extreme tiller movements. The trimmer made no effort to adjust sail trim to each jerk of the tiller, instead pre-setting the jib sheet for a sail shape that was going to be satisfactory most of the time. In any other condition this method would not be effective.

(2) *Encouraging best effort*

Some years ago we were competing in the Around Long Island Race in our 10 meter racer/cruiser, surfing along under spinnaker at night in a building 25 knot breeze. The predicted squall was approaching fast and we were thinking about taking down the kite, but for the moment we were enjoying the ride, flying by the boats that had opted to sail close to the beach off Fire Island. Suddenly the squall was upon us. Just as a flash of lightning illuminated the

[7] A JY15 is a two-person dinghy popular in North America.

scene, the boat off our starboard quarter was hit by a huge puff, shattering its spinnaker into hundreds of shimmering pieces. We were next; the puff slammed us hard to windward, causing us to broach. Everyone was clipped in, and we immediately scrambled to the high side. Our spinnaker trimmer, Mike Shannon, had been fully underwater for what seemed like minutes, but when the boat righted he was still standing, still holding the spin sheet, still focused on the task at hand. The squall was over as suddenly as it hit and after a quick clean-up we were back in racing mode. All of us were wet but Mike was thoroughly drenched in cold, salt water; however, he didn't miss a beat. His gear soaked and useless, he sailed the remaining 150 miles of the race in a T-shirt and nylon shorts, wrapping himself in sail bags to keep warm when he was down below off-watch.

Whatever else was going through Mike's head during the broach and its immediate aftermath, and the remaining 24+ hours of racing, he was laser-focused on the joint task at hand: getting maximum speed out of the boat, maintaining our position against the competition, and knocking off the odd boat here and there where close boat-on-boat tactics allowed. Throughout the race he remained fully committed to the shared goals of the boat, exerting optimal physical and mental effort despite considerable discomfort, and inspiring others to raise their level of performance as well.

It might be objected that people are capable of extraordinary effort when they are engaged in solitary activity, so it is not obvious that we must invoke the WP to explain such feats when they are engaged in joint activity. It is certainly likely that Mike would have exerted a similar degree of effort had he been solo racing; he is the relatively rare individual who is capable of performing consistently at the peak of his abilities whatever the context. The very top crews are constituted entirely by such people. My point is rather that having an exceptional team

member will raise everyone's performance. As long as they want the boat to succeed and feel themselves to be part of the boat – that is, as long as they maintain the WP – then even relatively weak members of the crew can perform at the peak of their abilities. Moreover, everyone on the boat can take pleasure in the fact that the exceptional individual is on the team and can legitimately feel pride in his (or her) performance. These emotions – *we-emotions* attributable to the boat – strengthen the joint commitment and make the team better.

Often, though, there won't be an exceptional individual to lift everyone's game. In that case, commitment to the joint goals of the boat – and a desire to perform well as a group – is perhaps even more crucial to success. In the final section I will discuss how to achieve and maintain the WP on the boat. First I will return to Gilbert's plural subject theory and consider how well it characterizes the WP on a racing sailboat.

According to Gilbert the joint commitment that brings the plural subject into existence underwrites a normative structure of obligations and entitlements. Recall how Gilbert characterizes this structure:

> … one's being owed that action by [the other] prior to his performing it, one's being in a position to demand it of him prior to its performance, and one's being in a position to rebuke him if he has failed to perform it at the appropriate time. (2009, 176)

Applying this characterization to the racing sailboat: each crew member, in undertaking the joint commitment to the boat, owes to the others the actions required by his/her particular role on the boat, and each in turn is entitled to demand these actions of the others, and to rebuke them if they fail to perform these actions.

While Gilbert's account of plural subjects captures some aspects of the joint commitment that binds racing sailors together, some features of her account would misrepresent that

commitment. Most importantly, it cannot explain the fact that adopting and maintaining the WP is crucial for the boat's success, and for success in team sports more generally.[8]

It is true that when racing sailors undertake the joint commitment that establishes the WP a normative structure of obligations and entitlements is put in place. But Gilbert's account leaves out something that is essential to team sports – each team member is not merely obligated to fulfill their designated role and entitled to expect and demand that others do so too. Each is further obligated to put forward their *best effort* in pursuit of the shared goal and entitled to expect and demand of others that they do so. So the account fails to characterize the particular obligations and entitlements characteristic of sailboat racing, indeed of all team sports.

Gilbert's account of plural subjects doesn't adequately describe the joint commitment undertaken by racing sailors because it has the following three shortcomings:

(1) The account is *too legalistic*. The commitment undertaken by racing sailors when they agree to race is more amorphous; it is not like a contract or a promise, committing the parties to some specified course of action. They do not typically think of themselves as engaged in anything quite so formal. That said, though, sailors do feel entitled to rebuke other crew members when their performance is sub-par, even if, in the interests of crew harmony, they may refrain from doing so. The notion of entitlement relevant here is intermediate between a kind of informal agreement and a fully legalistic contractual entitlement.[9]

(2) The account is *too individualistic*, requiring that each party "openly express his personal readiness jointly with the others to commit them all in a certain way." (2009, 180) Racing sailors

[8] Gilbert's account, of course, wasn't expressly intended to apply to sailboat racing. But the fact that it fails to adequately characterize the joint commitment involved in team sports indicates a limitation of her plural subjects theory.

[9] Thanks to Roberto Casati for pushing me on this point.

know what they are committing to when they agree to join a racing crew – they are committing to *race* – but Gilbert's account mischaracterizes both the nature of the commitment and how the commitment is undertaken. As I noted above, committing to race is committing to *do one's best* – to put in optimal effort – in the pursuit of the boat's shared goals. This can only be fully understood against the background of *team competition*. Thus the joint commitment undertaken by racing sailors presupposes a well-established social practice of *racing*, which involves precise *rules* governing the behavior of the boats on the course, one boat being designated the *winner*, and so on. But once the role of the social practice in structuring the joint activity is appreciated, then what is required of the individual sailor in undertaking the joint commitment is much more minimal, something that falls short of an open expression of readiness undertaken with other sailors. In presuming that the joint commitment that underlies the normative structure of obligations and entitlements that gives rise to plural subjects can be fully understood without reference to the social practices that make the joint commitment possible, Gilbert's account doesn't adequately characterize the plural subject that is the racing sailboat.

(3) The account is *too intellectualist* or *too cognitive*, leaving out the affective aspects of sailboat racing, indeed, of team sports more generally. This is another respect in which Gilbert's account of plural subjects is too individualistic. We are essentially social creatures. Most people derive pleasure from being part of a team, or more generally being part of a group devoted to achieving a shared goal. Being part of such a group is often valuable in itself. Sailors agree to join a racing crew not primarily to achieve the goal of racing successfully on that boat, but rather because they want to race as part of a team. Competing as part of a team is not simply (or not primarily) a means to an end, it is an end in itself. The special feeling of *belonging* to a team explains why people can take pleasure in having an exceptional individual on the team, as I described above.

When the boat does well every crew member feels it is their success, taking pride in the outcome; when the boat does poorly it is everyone's failure. All are emotionally invested in the performance of the boat.

The general point that her account of plural subjects is too cognitive (or intellectualist) applies to Gilbert's own parade example. Two people agree to take a walk together not simply to satisfy the goal of getting some exercise. They do so in part because taking walks with others is enjoyable in itself. In missing the essentially social aspect not only of team sports, but also of many other joint pursuits, Gilbert's account leaves out the affective aspects of group activity.

Much more can be said about the social aspect of sailboat racing, but I will only make a brief remark here. The shared interest in and commitment to racing is itself a kind of glue. Off the water there is a good deal of camaraderie among sailors on different boats, sharing information after racing about what worked and what didn't, both formally in post-race debriefing sessions, and informally at the bar. Though it is not the main point, much of this activity helps newcomers to the sport develop their racing skills. It also has the effect of promoting a kind of WP at higher levels of aggregation than single boats, binding individual sailors and boats together in local fleets, and in regional and national class associations, creating plural subjects connected by the shared goals of developing and promoting the sport.

3. Building and maintaining the WP

In this final section I will discuss how to build and maintain the WP on the boat and consider some characteristic situations that can pose a threat to the WP.

Most critical for maximizing a boat's chance of success is having the right mix of individuals making up the plural subject. There is an important asymmetry among the crew. A

boat is not a democracy; even if all crew members have input into the boat's decisions, the skipper – the person who bears moral and legal responsibility for the vessel and its crew – is ultimately in charge. Crew members occupy various roles – tactician, jib trimmer, bowperson, etc. – but the roles need not be as well-defined as they are for other plural subjects such as corporations or clubs.

Putting together a crew requires integrating individuals with different physical and cognitive abilities, different emotional profiles, and different strengths and weaknesses into a well-functioning whole. Good racing sailors know how to constitute themselves as a team. Any plural subject is more than simply the sum of its parts; its existence depends on the joint commitment that underpins the normative structure of obligations and entitlements described above, a commitment that, for teams engaged in competitive sports, involves an emotional component as well. Even if each individual is an experienced sailor, the team itself will often be a work in progress. The individuals must gel as a team. A good skipper can spot potential strengths and weaknesses, developing the former and being prepared to compensate for the latter.[10] Ultimately, the goal is to build a crew that functions something like a unified organism, though with this difference: in an organism, if the heart isn't working, the liver isn't going to take over; if a crew member fails to do their designated job or gets into trouble, everyone is expected to step up and fill the gap. Being prepared to do so when necessary requires everyone maintaining the WP.

Ultimately a skipper must recognize when a crew member simply can't do (or isn't

[10] For convenience I speak of the skipper as the person responsible for putting together the crew, but on many boats this job will be done jointly by the most experienced and long-standing members of the crew. Larger racing boats will often have a crew boss to handle crew issues, or in the case of offshore racing boats, watch captains who are responsible for the management of the crew on their watch.

doing) the job and replace them. There are other ways an individual may be a ‘bad crew’ besides being unable physically or mentally to do the job. Bad crew tend to come in characteristic types. There are sailors who think they are much better than they are, who overestimate their sailing knowledge or their ability to ‘read’ a situation, say on a crowded starting line or at a mark rounding, and can get the boat in trouble. There are ‘takeover types’ (typically, men) who move in to ‘help’ a crewmate (often a woman) who is doing perfectly fine. A woman sailing on a mixed gender boat is unlikely to be the strongest person on the boat, but strength is only one factor in allocating crew positions; good technique can make up for less brute strength. Timing is essential in tacking a jib, gybing a spinnaker pole, or raising a halyard; an experienced crew will execute the maneuver before the sail has a chance to load up. This is not to say that a good crew member doesn’t look around to make sure that no one needs an extra ‘pull’, but consistently stepping on a teammate’s toes can undermine the team spirit on the boat and threaten the WP. Another potential sign of trouble is the sailor who is always talking about themselves (or simply talking too much), bragging about their impressive feats in other situations and on other boats and generally attempting to focus the spotlight on themselves. A skipper interested in building a strong crew must be attuned to behavior that corrodes the WP on the boat and prepared to eliminate the threat. In summary, crew members can pose a threat to the WP either because they can’t pull their weight on the boat or because they have character traits or ingrained habits that corrode team spirit. That said, though, there may be someone on the boat who is so good – so physically gifted, so tactically brilliant – that the team is willing to put up with their flaws, but then it takes special vigilance to make sure that the problems do not ultimately outweigh the benefits.

Performance under stress plays an important role in building a strong team. Many boats

function well in ideal conditions. Everyone is at their best on a warm sunny day in 15 knots of breeze and flat water. But extreme conditions will test the boat and reveal the caliber of the crew; that's when you find out whether you have someone who freezes in a tough situation, possibly jeopardizing the safety of the boat, or someone who balks at carrying out a directive, such as raising the spinnaker on a windy run. A crew breakdown has immediate consequences: others have to step up and take on extra responsibilities in the moment, sometimes putting themselves at risk. When the WP frays in this way it is generally impossible to repair it without replacing the errant crew, who has shown the team that they can't be counted on. Often these individuals will decide to leave the boat of their own accord. On the other hand, having successfully managed stressful situations tends to strengthen the WP, provided that the success cannot be attributed simply to good luck.

On most boats there will be times when not all of the crew are in "racing mode", that is, when some sailors are not focused on the team's goals. Sometimes this is appropriate: off-watch on a distance race is the time to relax and recharge one's batteries, though one is still committed to jumping up on deck to help if called. But when crew members explicitly disengage from the WP – when they are no longer fully committed to the team's goals – the performance of the boat will suffer. Emotional challenges such as fear, boredom, and anger or frustration can cause crew to disengage from the WP, as can fatigue, seasickness and other forms of physical discomfort. I will conclude by discussing some of these factors.

Even when fully engaged in racing, the sailors constituting the plural subject ('the boat') are still individual subjects, agents in their own right, with their own particular experiences, beliefs, desires, intentions, and emotional profiles. These don't go away when sailors adopt the WP, and they can undermine the WP on a boat. Suppose we attribute to a boat the *we-belief* that

the left side of the course will be favored on the next leg, and the *we-intention* to tack immediately after rounding the leeward mark and get to the left. We can further suppose that the crew discussed the various options on the previous leg and the skipper or tactician announced the decision to tack after the mark. That said, an individual sailor can have a contrary belief – can even *know* – that the boat will be heading to the wrong side of the course, perhaps having noticed and reported that boats ahead on the right side are sailing in a freshening breeze and pointing higher before the *we-decision* to head to the left was made. Attitudes attributable to the plural subject do not require that every constituent individual subject have the corresponding individual attitudes, and it is quite common that crew members may have opposing opinions or no attitude at all toward the matter at hand. It isn't just physical labor that is distributed over the various crew members; efficiency typically requires that mental labor is too. If one's input to a joint decision is overridden, one doesn't just 'check out'; a good crew member will still be fully engaged in getting the best out of the boat. But sometimes the dissonance between we-attitudes attributable to the boat and attitudes had by individual sailors will be too much. The belief or feeling that bad decisions are consistently being made can threaten the WP and undermine the joint commitment to the boat. The more crew members who feel this way the greater the threat. The problem is exacerbated if the boat is ahead in the race and a series of bad decisions threatens to squander a hard-fought-for lead. And it can be excruciating in light air where there may be limited opportunities to recover from mistakes. In general if the skipper (or the tactician, if the skipper has yielded authority) is too autocratic, consistently making bad decisions and ignoring input from the crew, so that it is obvious that their opinions are not respected, the WP may be threatened and the boat's performance can suffer further.

As I discussed above, heavy air creates stresses that can either threaten the WP or, if

everyone rises to the occasion, strengthen it. But no condition is as challenging and as potentially corrosive of the WP on a sailboat as lack of wind. While the very top crews usually do well in light air (roughly, less than 3-4 knots) very few sailors know how to sail in it. Light air magnifies differences in sailing ability. The number of jobs on the boat effectively shrinks down to two – steering and sail trim. Everyone else is engaged in positioning their weight for optimal heel to take advantage of whatever wind there may be, subtly adjusting position as the wind fluctuates but most of the time trying to stay perfectly still so as not to disturb the sails or halt the boat's forward progress through the water. While steering and trimming in light air require a soft touch and a great deal of skill, the other crew members are unable to use their sailing skills. And the field of view shrinks down to what is happening right here. It doesn't matter that the boat that rounded the last mark behind you has a private puff and is now 100 meters ahead (grrr!); boat-on-boat tactics are irrelevant now, you have to figure out how to get every bit of speed out of the air you have right here, right now. In very light air crewmembers may be sent below to sit on the cabin sole to lower the center of gravity in the attempt to make the boat a more stable platform for sail trim.[11] Maintaining the WP in these conditions is perhaps most challenging of all. It is hard to keep your head in the race when you are down below and can't see what is happening, when for long stretches *nothing* is happening, or, worst of all, when the boat next to you has a private puff while you have been parked for twenty minutes. Yet, as I have said, the very top boats consistently do well in light air. The key is *patience*. Above all, the boat has to resist doing some maneuver – usually tacking or gybing – motivated simply by boredom or wishful thinking. Often the best strategy is to do nothing, trim to whatever scintilla of wind one has, optimize weight placement, and wait it out. There may be calls from impatient, antsy crew members to

[11] On the J/24 I sailed on for many years we called being sent below "getting sent to Elba."

tack or gybe, but nothing should be done without a clear rationale.

Finally, another source of frustration, and a potential threat to the WP if it persists undiagnosed over the course of a race (or longer), are boatspeed problems. The boat simply isn't moving as it should be – boats on both sides of the course are consistently moving faster or pointing higher – and no one can figure out why. Is the rig tuned too tight, is the jib halyard too tight, or too loose, is the helmsman pinching, is crew weight not properly distributed, is the boat overpowered for the conditions, could there be weeds on the keel (someone has already gone back to check the rudder)? Everyone's head is exploding. The crew may be at the point of trying anything and everything – without the patience to apply Mill's method of difference – to coax more speed out of the boat. If it gets to the point where the boat's performance no longer depends on tactics and boat-handling, that is, on factors within the crew's control, but rather on some mysterious lack of boatspeed, then morale on the boat will suffer.

The upshot of this discussion is that many factors go into building and maintaining the WP, most obviously, balancing strengths and weaknesses of the crew, but there are also intangibles. The WP can be a fragile thing, but the best boats are composed of individuals who have what it takes to sustain it.

5. **Concluding remark**

In this paper I have made use of the notion of the *we-perspective* as a way of considering what it is to be a racing team. The notion allows us to characterize a crucial component of success in sailboat racing and to diagnose distinctive ways that racing teams can fail to sail to their full

potential.[12]

Roll-gybe at the 2012 North American Viper 640 Championship in Marblehead, Mass.

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[12] Thanks to Roberto Casati and to my spouse and longtime sailing partner, Bob Matthews, for valuable comments on earlier versions of this paper.

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