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Solidarity without "Sisterhood"? Feminism and the Ethics of Coalition Building

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Many feminist theorists have embraced coalition building as the central model for feminist political mobilization. They have done so because they believe that coalitional solidarity resolves a long-standing impasse within feminism between the political claims of diversity among women and the political need for unity. In this essay, I argue that the turn to coalition politics within feminist theory is problematic: While coalitional solidarity honors the claims of diversity among women, it ignores the importance of acknowledging commonality. The tactical ties that it encompasses fail to enact the kind of mutual recognition on which feminism, as a movement for social justice, depends. I show that in order to address both the concern with diversity and the need for unity in a satisfying way, theorists of solidarity must supplement their appeal to coalition building with an account of the ethical and affective preconditions of inclusive political ties. Specifically, I argue that the cultivation of "enlarged sympathy" among feminist political actors is crucial to the establishment of political bonds that accommodate and affirm important differences among women.

The topic of coalition politics has received a great deal of positive attention from feminist theorists in recent years.[1] As fluid alliances between diverse subjects, coalitions seem better suited to combating the complex, intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality than do second-wave strategies of mobilization, which tend to focus on

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1. See Butler (1990), Haraway (1985), Mouffe (1992), and, Reagon (2000 [1983]).

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uprooting patriarchy. Indeed, the form of solidarity that coalitions establish between political actors seems to resolve a problem that has long beleaguered second-wave feminism: How can feminists acknowledge and accommodate important differences among women without giving up the unity on which feminism's viability as a political movement depends? While the second-wave appeal to "sisterhood" forged widespread unity, it did so by attributing a set of common interests to women—interests shaped by an allegedly shared experience of oppression—and it thereby suppressed, as is now widely acknowledged, the distinctive experiences and perspectives of working-class women, lesbians, and women of color. It also enabled white middle-class women to ignore their own complicity in race- and class-based oppression.[2] Yet the subsequent emphasis within feminism on women's diverse racial, cultural, and sexual identities has not only made it difficult to account for the possibility of broad-based feminist activism; it has also helped to suppress difference by entrenching existing identities at the expense of nascent and hybrid identities.[3] In light of these failures, it is not surprising that coalition politics has inspired excitement among so many feminist theorists. After all, coalitional solidarity seems to resolve the political impasse between the claims of unity, or "identity," and the claims of "difference." By bringing diverse constituencies together in the temporary pursuit of specific shared goals, coalition building enables subjects to act in concert without ignoring or suppressing the politically significant differences that divide them.

Despite the apparent advantages of coalition building as a form of mobilization, the move to embrace it as the central mode for forging feminist alliances is problematic. Coalition politics, as it is typically portrayed by its proponents, does not reconcile the claims of diversity and the need for unity in a satisfying way. Indeed, it simply inverts the central failing of second-wave sisterhood: It honors the claims of diversity among women while ignoring the importance of commonality. The tactical ties that it creates fail to enact the kind of mutual recognition on which feminism, as a movement for social justice, depends. I argue that in order to address both concerns in a satisfying way, feminist theorists of solidarity must supplement their account of coalition politics with an account of the ethical and dispositional preconditions of forging inclu-

2. Many theorists have developed these criticisms of sisterhood. See, especially, hooks (1984).

3. Critiques of identity politics abound in feminist theory. See especially Brown (1995). Also see Susan Bickford's thoughtful discussion of such criticisms (1997).

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sive political ties. They must account for the personal transformations that enable mutually affirming connections among diverse coalition partners. More specifically, I argue that the cultivation of "enlarged sympathy," in which individuals claim a kind of kinship across differences, can facilitate the establishment of political ties that honor both the differences that separate women and the shared humanity that unites them.

In the first part of this essay, I argue that theories of feminist solidarity remain incomplete unless they incorporate an account of the self-transformations that enable nonrepressive connections across difference. In the second section, I develop an account of enlarged sympathy that draws on Sandra Bartky's nuanced appropriation of Max Scheler's theory of sympathy and George Kateb's theory of "mobile identity." I outline how enlarged sympathy enables the creation of political bonds that accommodate and affirm difference and, thus, enhances coalition building.

FEMINIST SOLIDARITY AND THE ETHICS OF SELF-TRANSFORMATION

Enthusiasm for coalition politics is especially strong among theorists who emphasize the relational and hierarchical nature of identities: One group's enactment of an identity often limits the possibilities for self-realization of other groups' members. Self-identification is typically achieved through the constitution of "others" onto whom one projects the qualities with which one *dis*-identifies and which one denigrates.[4] Its proponents believe that by bringing subjects together across established boundaries of "difference," coalition politics not only avoids entrenching prevalent identity groups but also unsettles and reconfigures the lines that constitute these groups, creating space for the consolidation and affirmation of previously suppressed or stigmatized identities. After all, coalitions are formed when diverse groups unite to pursue specific shared goals and, therefore, they shift and change "according to the purposes at hand" (Butler 1990, 16.) To the extent that practitioners and theorists avoid specifying criteria of membership in advance of the formation of such alliances, coalition building forestalls "definitional closure" and thus avoids the widely noted exclusionary pitfalls of sisterhood and identity politics (Butler 1990, 16; also see Haraway 1985; Mouffe 1992).

In her widely influential account of coalition work, Bernice Reagon emphasizes both the painful and the necessary character of this form of

4. For a concise theoretical statement of this view of identities, see Iris Young (1995).

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mobilization (Reagon 2000 [1983]). Joining a coalition requires one to give up the comfort and safety of the "home" space of one's identity group, which shelters members from conflicts and antagonism in the world outside. By contrast, coalitions are dangerous and threatening places in which one must function without the protection or nourishment one receives in one's home space (ibid., 345–48). The inclusive character of coalitions is precisely what makes coalition work so taxing, since it involves reaching out to those with whom one disagrees about potentially significant issues and whom one might, in certain cases at least, dislike, or even fear.[5] Reagon's astute description of coalition work underscores that feminists do not simply choose to engage in such costly work out of a desire to honor difference. What impels them is a desire to survive; as she notes, the protective "barred rooms will not be allowed to exist. They will all be wiped out" (ibid., 349). The "women only" space is vulnerable precisely because it is exclusionary. Self-interest, then, *requires* members of identity groups to reach out to those who are different and to become inclusive; and brute necessity guarantees the place of coalition building among feminist strategies of mobilization. While coalition building is a necessary component of feminist politics, coalitional solidarity remains, in two important ways, an inadequate model on which to base feminist connections across difference.

First, the purely tactical temporary bond that coalitional solidarity establishes fails to satisfy one of the key demands of the feminists of color who first exposed "sisterhood" as an exclusionary ideal: the demand for reciprocal recognition and affirmation.[6] These early critics of sisterhood understood that self-interest alone was not a sufficient basis on which to build alliances across difference. Indeed, in a widely cited article, María Lugones and Elizabeth Spelman argue that self-interest is a wholly inappropriate motive for white Anglo women to act on in forging connections with women of color. Self-interested overtures toward solidarity on the part of privileged women can incur significant costs for women of color. Only active friendship provides a fitting basis for such alliances (Lugones and Spelman 1990, 31–32). This prohibition on self-interest is problematic because it reinforces traditional expectations for women to

5. Reagon alludes to tensions created within the "women only" space by the admission of some black women who are homophobic, whom lesbians then need to challenge (2000 [1983], 354).

6. See hooks (1984); Molina (1990). Also, compare my critique of coalition politics with Sonia Kruks's critique (2001, 153ff). Iris Young's description of a "Rainbow Coalition" acknowledges a need for mutual affirmation but does not address how affirming yet nonrepressive bonds might be achieved (Young 1990, 188–87).

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be selfless and wholly other-centered, and it also implies that we should extend political solidarity only to those whom we know personally. Any resulting circle of solidarity would be extremely narrow. If Lugones and Spelman go too far, however, in banishing self-interest from feminist coalition building, their distrust of such motives is instructive. It is difficult to see how a bond based *solely* on self-interest could sustain a durable sense of connection or a sense of mutual accountability among those whom it unites, especially if some parties to the alliance harbor ambivalent sentiments toward others. In such a union, one coalition partner can be expected to abandon another as soon as she is no longer useful. This form of bond puts the less privileged in an especially vulnerable position, since the logic of coalition building asks them to assist more powerful groups that are often implicated in the forms of oppression that the less privileged seek to eliminate.[7] Feminist connections across difference must be built on a more durable and generous form of reciprocal recognition than that of mutual instrumentality if a sense of mutual accountability is to be maintained between allies.

Jodi Dean develops an alternative model of solidarity that acknowledges the importance of incorporating a deeper form of reciprocity into relations of solidarity.[8] Building on a Habermasian account of the norms implicit in communicative action, she argues that the very differences that divide us are what make this alternative "reflective solidarity" possible, since differences present themselves only in a context of "communicative engagement"—a context of conversation, interrogation, and interaction. She sets out to reconstruct these "communicative underpinnings of feminist coalitional practices" with a view to "theorizing the perspectives and orientations we need to adopt if we are to work together" (1997, 4). Dean describes the communication that leads to "reflective solidarity" as a form of dialogue "in which participants share a sense of mutual respect" and "take a responsible orientation to [their] relationship" (1997, 8). Exercising "responsibility" here involves reflectively taking up the perspective of what she calls situated "hypothetical thirds"—those particular others who stand outside the relationship of solidarity. In this way, the realization of reflective solidarity avoids constructing a "we" through the creation of an excluded "them," or an

7. If Reagon is correct, necessity will drive disprivileged groups into coalitional alliances nonetheless, but feminism should surely aim for a more mutually satisfying and personally transformative form of politics. As Sonia Kruks argues, feminist alliances must establish an ethical bond between self and other (2001, 153–56).

8. See Dean's critique of coalitional solidarity (1996, 26–28).

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"other." Moreover, because reflective solidarity is dialogically constructed through a process of negotiating and attending to difference, it avoids effacing difference. Dean's emphasis on the necessarily communicative nature of the politics of "difference" is astute, and she is right to insist that the process of forging solidarity across difference should be governed by norms of mutual respect and reciprocal accountability. While her account of solidarity outlines a more ethically rich form of mutual recognition than theories of coalition politics do, and while it guards against excluding or suppressing difference as effectively as coalition building does, it nonetheless falls prey to a second problem that besets coalitional solidarity.

Not only do tactical bonds fail to enact a satisfying form of mutual recognition across difference, they also do not necessarily break down existing barriers that impede such recognition. As Sandra Bartky observes, feminist theorists who have sought to redress the failures of second-wave "sisterhood" have focused almost exclusively on the cognitive sources of these failures.[9] They have focused, in other words, on finding ways to ensure that privileged women achieve an improved knowledge or understanding of the "other." Seyla Benhabib's work offers a striking illustration of this exclusive emphasis. Focusing on mainstream political and moral theory rather than second-wave sisterhood, she nevertheless addresses the problem of false universalism. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's conception of "enlarged mentality," she argues that exercising moral judgment involves imaginatively reversing perspectives with the concrete others who will be affected by a particular decision. By doing so, Benhabib makes space within universalist moral theory for the consideration of others in their concrete difference or particularity. She insists, however, that the cultivation of enlarged mentality is not meant to establish ties of sympathy between diverse selves.[10] It is strictly a cognitive or "information-gathering" exercise aimed at enhancing judgment.[11]

Cognitive failures, however, were not the sole cause of the problems of second-wave sisterhood. These problems were linked as well to a range of troubling attitudes, sentiments, and dispositions among the white middle-class women who shaped the movement. Their appeal to sisterhood expressed presumptuousness and arrogance insofar as it assumed

9. Bartky (1997, 177–81).

10. Benhabib (1992, 137).

11. Other feminists also embrace Arendt's emphasis on the imaginative "reversal" of perspectives, or imaginative "travel," but they typically endorse this exercise as part of the process of political *judgment*, rather than as an effort to build affective bonds between political actors. See, e.g., Disch (1997).

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that all women experienced and gave equal priority to the same forms of suffering that they did. Such appeals also expressed their obliviousness and complacency regarding the ways in which they benefited from—and often helped to perpetuate—race- and class-based forms of oppression. Some feminists of color have also confronted subtle attitudes of superiority in white allies, which stem from their unscrutinized experience of racial privilege.

Because identities are relationally defined, conferring recognition on the marginalized involves changing the devalued status of their identities relative to those of the privileged. It requires (in part) what Nancy Fraser calls a "transformative" cultural politics aimed at shaking up the established regime of identities. As Fraser notes, however, individuals are psychologically invested in their existing identities, which works against such a politics.[12] Conferring recognition on stigmatized groups thus involves transforming the tendency of individuals to cling to established identities.[13]

The entrenched and hierarchically relational character of identities underscores the fact that feminist theorists must approach the problem of difference as more than a cognitive problem. Mutual recognition requires more than ensuring that privileged women are fully informed, through properly structured communicative action, about the experiences of less privileged groups. As the feminists of color who first criticized sisterhood have long insisted, a kind of "personal work" is also crucial.[14] Would-be feminist allies must transform the attitudes and dispositions in themselves that often accompany privilege and that block genuine mutual recognition and understanding. Yet theories of coalition politics do not offer an account of the kind of ethical self-practices that—as supplements to communicative action and coalition building—could effect such transformation.

Coalition politics requires one to engage in shifting and ever more inclusive cooperative interactions with those who are "different" and with whom one often *dis*-identifies. Thus, it requires continuous adjustments in one's self-conceptions. The capacity to engage in coalition work therefore depends on the widespread presence among political actors of a range

12. Fraser (1997, 24–31).

13. Wendy Brown emphasizes that this tendency is shared by the disprivileged, who become invested in their "wounded attachments." Driven by *ressentiment* to seek the status that the privileged enjoy, they demand political acknowledgement of their devalued identities by the state, and thereby work to retrench their "wounded attachments" (1995, 52–76).

14. Molina (1990, 328).

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of dispositions. At a minimum, it requires that one cultivate flexibility with respect to one's own self-understanding and receptivity or openness to that which may seem alien, unappealing, and even threatening in others. It also requires a tolerance for ambiguity and change. As the history of feminism suggests, the widespread existence of these dispositions cannot be taken for granted, even among the well intentioned. Yet proponents of coalition politics give little or no attention to describing these dispositions or to accounting for their presence among coalition builders.[15]

Some proponents seem to assume that engaging in coalition work will automatically produce such transformative effects in selves, reducing the complacency and arrogance that often accompany a strong investment in one's identity. Reagon might have such transformations in mind, for example, when she writes that coalition work can "stretch" the self's "perimeter" (Reagon 2000 [1983], 354). While this assumption expresses an attractive hope, proponents of coalition politics fail to explain why a form of solidarity that habituates individuals to interacting with "others" in primarily tactical and instrumental ways is more likely to eliminate their subtle complacencies and troubling forms of indifference, arrogance, or hostility than to leave such attitudes intact. Indeed, there is as much reason to think that the difficult and threatening form of engagement that Reagon describes will spark a reactive or self-protective retrenchment of existing self-understandings and attitudes among those forced, by necessity, to embrace such engagement.[16] Incorporating a feminist ethic of self-cultivation into our account of solidarity can help us to explain how individuals can transform their attitudes and self-understandings in ways that enable recognition and affirmation of others. By failing to outline the content of such an ethic, proponents of coalition politics fail to pursue the full implications of their own insight into the deeply relational character of identity.

Dean, too, fails to acknowledge the need to incorporate an ethic of self-transformation into efforts to establish a more inclusive solidarity. Her theory of reflective solidarity does not address the question of what enables us to adopt the sort of respectful and responsible stance required by communicative engagement when we dis-identify with our interlocutors in significant ways. Her account of reflective solidarity remains too formal.

15. One exception is Lugones. The dispositions I have listed coincide to some extent with her portrait of the playful world-traveler (1990, 390–402).

16. Monique Deveaux makes a somewhat similar point in a discussion of William Connolly's claim that agonistic, conflictual political engagement will reduce attachments to existing identities (1999, 15).

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Iris Marion Young, who, like Dean, embraces a communicative model of democracy, does acknowledge the importance of dispositions in enabling communication across difference. She argues that in order to reach understanding with others without effacing differences, the democratic citizen must adopt a stance of "wonder." Wonder comprises a stance of total openness to the other in which one "suspends" all of one's assumptions about the other and simply listens to her account of her experiences and perspectives. In doing so, one focuses on the other's endless ability to exceed any "understanding" of her that one might form. One avoids identifying with the other because it will likely involve a usurpation of her experience and perspective (Young 1997, 38–59). While Young is right to worry that identifying with others carries risks, a stance of wonder raises equally troubling dangers. When we refrain from claiming any kinship with others, we risk falsely projecting absolute difference onto them, or approaching them as objects of condescension, amusement, or fear.[17] Moreover, because it exclusively emphasizes the other's strangeness to us, wonder cannot easily sustain our recognition of the other's status as our moral equal. In a diverse political movement where the bonds that bridge difference must be secure enough to motivate some sacrifice of self-interest, a capacity to identify with one's allies as moral equals is crucial.

Dean's framework does incorporate this insight, even if it neglects the role of dispositions and affects in establishing solidarity. It is interesting, moreover, that Dean herself seems to concede that the formal reciprocity of communicative engagement is an insufficient basis for feminist solidarity when, citing Julia Kristeva, she endorses the view that "instead of seeing the stranger as the other of the citizen, citizens must recognize themselves as 'strange'" (Dean 1996, 42). In calling for a universal sense of "strangerhood" among citizens, Kristeva urges citizens to cultivate an awareness of the "otherness" that they each contain; and this cultivated awareness of one's own otherness is what becomes the basis of connection with actual others (Kristeva 1991, 1993). Dean's brief appeal to Kristeva actually points, then, to the importance of outlining an ethic of self-transformation because it implies that we must actively cultivate an awareness of and tolerance for the strangeness within ourselves before reflective solidarity with "others" can take hold. In short, if the cultivation of solidarity is to avoid suppressing difference, the formal reciprocity that Dean and Benhabib both emphasize must be supplemented by the

17. Cf. Spelman (1997, 117ff), Kateb (1992, 264–65), and, my comments in note 31.

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kind of ethical self-transformation that enables individuals to sustain attentiveness—as well as a sense of connection and accountability—to diverse others. A politics of "enlarged mentality" and of "reflective solidarity" needs to be *supplemented* by an ethics of enlarged sympathy.

THE POLITICAL VALUE OF ENLARGED SYMPATHY

What kind of connections across difference can sustain a sense of mutual accountability among allies that prompts each to be attentive to the differences that set them apart? In this section, I argue that the cultivation of "enlarged sympathy" can play an important role in feminist efforts to forge such alliances and that feminist theorists should therefore incorporate an account of enlarged sympathy into their theories of solidarity.

The experience of sympathy involves drawing the other near to oneself emotionally and, in at least a minimal way, identifying with her. In the wake of sisterhood, however, feminist theorists are wary about encouraging women to identify with each other, and they avoid encouraging the cultivation of sympathetic ties among diverse subjects. To many feminist theorists, it seems especially misguided for privileged women to try to identify with others, and they have outlined a range of ethical problems to which such identification is prone. To show that enlarged sympathy avoids such problems, it will be helpful to begin by outlining the most troubling of them.

The first case of problematic identification occurs when the one who identifies with another actually appropriates the other's experiences, claiming them as her own. "Identification," here, takes an egoistic form in which one loses a proper sense of the distance that separates oneself from the other. Elizabeth Spelman discusses a striking instance of such appropriation that illustrates its ethically troubling character. In the nineteenth century, white women suffragists frequently compared their situation to the plight of slaves. Drawing on research by Jean Fagan Yellin, Spelman discusses how white women used vivid images of slavery to describe their own suffering, while allowing the suffering of actual slaves to recede from their view. They appropriated the "experiential territory" of black women and men, but in ways that erased slaves themselves from that territory (Spelman 1997, 116). This appropriation of the language of slavery promoted the suffragist cause precisely by denying differences between the suffering of white women and that of slaves and, ultimately,

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by drawing attention away from the distinctive circumstances in which slaves suffered. In this instance of identification, the other is erased; the individual who appropriates the other's experience uses this claimed commonality for her own purposes and does so in a way that threatens her apprehension of the other's *difference* (ibid., 113–17).

In the second problematic case of identification, the one who identifies with another actually projects her own needs and fantasies onto the other in a way that distorts the other's identity and experiences. Jean Wyatt argues, for example, that when white women idealize black women's strength, and their moral and political focus, white women are unconsciously engaging in a form of "identification" that involves such projection. Using Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, she suggests that white women project onto black women an image of what they lack in themselves but strongly desire: unity, or wholeness. What they wishfully project onto black women is a false unity and sense of agency that obscures the "historical context and material conditions in which African-Americans became women" (Wyatt 2004, 881). Wyatt argues that white women's "[i]dealizing identifications tend to obstruct a perception of the other as the center of her own complex reality—as, in a word, a subject" (ibid., 882). These first two forms of identification involve a kind of "colonization" of the other's subject position, which effaces her difference and prevents one from gaining greater knowledge of her specific material and social circumstances.[18] In contexts of political decision making, the costs of such an effacement of difference for the disadvantaged can be high.

The third problem with identification occurs when one's sense of closeness to the other—or of sharing an identity with her—obscures one's awareness of one's own implication in her suffering. Second-wave appeals to sisterhood dramatically exemplify this problem. Identifying with another, especially in an affirming or loving way, makes it harder for us to see that we might be simultaneously, if indirectly, participating in the system of social relations that oppresses him or her (Spelman 1997, 127). Feelings of closeness or affirmation not only inhibit one's own realization of guilt; they also make it more difficult for the object of loving identification to confront or accuse the one who extends such affirmation.[19]

18. Cf. Iris Young's (1997) critique of imaginatively "reversing perspectives" with others.

19. See bell hooks on how appeals to "sisterhood" silenced black women's righteous anger, deterring them from confronting white women about racism (1984, 43–65).

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If sympathy engenders a sense of closeness to or identification with the other, and such a sense of identification can generate these problems, how can sympathy be a positive "ingredient" or aspect of feminist solidarity? Bartky goes some distance to answering this question. She draws on Scheler's phenomenological account of *Mitgefühl*—which she translates as "feeling-with," rather than as "sympathy"[20]—to show that this affective experience can promote the kind of solidarity that encourages attentiveness to difference. Bartky fully acknowledges the costly effects that "sisterhood" has had on women of color and other dis-privileged groups. Like the critics I have cited, she worries about the dangers of encouraging privileged women to identify with others. One of the central reasons she embraces Scheler, however, is that his account of what he calls genuine fellow-feeling demonstrates that this affective experience does not involve a problematic form of identification. Indeed, his most important contribution to feminist theory is to show that "genuine fellow-feeling" is compatible with—indeed, it presupposes—the preservation of emotional distance between the one sympathizing and the object of her sympathy.

Scheler writes that the experience of genuine fellow-feeling "presupposes just that awareness of distance between selves which is eliminated . . . by . . . identification" (Scheler 1954, 23). He describes genuine fellow-feeling in the following way: It is experienced as "a *re-action* to the state and value of the other's feelings—as these [feelings] are 'visualized' in vicarious feelings. . . . [T]he two functions of *vicariously visualized* feeling and *participation* in feeling are separately given and must be sharply distinguished" within the experience of fellow-feeling (ibid., 14; original emphases). The one who sympathizes, here, is aware that the feelings experienced by the object of her sympathy are distinct from what she herself experiences in her "vicarious visualization" of those feelings. Clearly, "feeling-with" others does not erase the boundaries between self and other.

To be sure, fellow-feeling constitutes an affective connection in which one identifies with another in the minimal sense that one shares the other's feelings by "visualizing" them in one's own mind. However, Scheler is emphatic that genuine fellow-feeling does not involve identifying with others in either of two ethically problematic ways. It does not

20. She prefers this term because she hears "echoes of condescension in the English term," sympathy. I hear such condescension in "pity" and "compassion," but not in "sympathy" (see Bartky, 1997, 181).

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involve the merely egoistic experience that he calls "projective empathy," in which one selects, from the repertoire of feelings one has had in the past, those that seem to suit the situation of the other and then simply projects these remembered feelings onto the other. Here, the self does not get outside itself or achieve a genuine link to the other. Nor does genuine fellow-feeling involve the kind of merger of self and other that characterizes what Scheler calls "emotional infection," which occurs when one unself-consciously picks up the mood of the people who happen to be around one (becoming happy, for example, on entering a room in which others are laughing and celebrating). Here, the self's feeling-state becomes unself-consciously merged with that of the crowd. According to Scheler, both forms of sympathy are inferior to genuine fellow-feeling because neither honors the distinctive subjectivities or the separate realities of self and other.

In addition to distinguishing fellow-feeling from these forms of sympathy that efface the distinction between self and other, Scheler's account of sympathy yields two other valuable insights for feminism. First, Bartky points to Scheler's insistence that what motivates sympathy is love—in the broadest sense of this term. As she explains, "love" refers here to a disposition to seek "higher values" in experience (Bartky 1997, 186). Sympathizing with others, then, expresses affirmation for and appreciation of them. Moreover, to the extent that fellow-feeling is animated by a desire to seek value in others, it enriches the self's experience of others and also "provide[s] an occasion for moral . . . development" (ibid., 187).

Second, Bartky highlights the fact that, on Scheler's account, genuine sympathy presupposes that the self has knowledge of the other's circumstances. Only in its debased forms does sympathizing with others blind one to the particularity of their circumstances. Scheler rejects "emotional infection," for example, because it is a form of sympathy in which the self picks up the other's joy or suffering without consciously observing or understanding anything about the circumstances that give rise to the other's feelings. Genuine fellow-feeling, by contrast, presupposes that one has a basic grasp of the other's situation so that one is in a position to understand and evaluate the nature of that person's feelings in light of the circumstances that give rise to them.

While she astutely highlights important insights in Scheler's theory, Bartky detects a gap in his account of sympathy. His notion of "vicarious visualization" remains "impressionistic" and radically underdeveloped (1997, 189–90). She convincingly argues that a fuller account would ac-

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knowledge the central role that imagination plays in the experience of "feeling-with" and she sets out to give an account of this role. In genuine fellow-feeling, one strives imaginatively to reproduce the other's experience as fully as possible in one's own mind. One uses the faculty of imagination to make the other's experience vivid to oneself. This imagining involves more than recreating the factual details of the other's experience in "the theater of [one's] mind" (ibid., 192). In other words, it involves more than the kind of emotionally detached, imaginative reversal of perspectives that characterizes Benhabib's account of "enlarged mentality." Genuine fellow-feeling involves imagining how the sufferer *feels*.

In the examples that she uses to illustrate how imagination bridges the distance between sympathizer and sufferer, Bartky is concerned to efface egoism and to play down any "awareness-of-self" within the experience of sympathy. For example, in a discussion of Nawal El Sadaawi's account of having been forced to undergo a clitoridectomy as a child, Bartky describes how she herself can reproduce, in her own mind, the circumstances and feelings about which El Sadaawi writes. Bartky is at pains to note that she "can imagine this scene without in any way substituting [her]self . . . for the small child" who endured the scene. In imagining her way into El Sadaawi's experience, she writes: "I do not think of myself at all" (Bartky 1997, 191–92). It is through this effort to efface the self from the experience of imagining others that Bartky seeks to safeguard her account of imagination's role in sympathy against the problems I outlined earlier. However, it is also one of the ways in which her account of sympathy falls short of explaining the full value of this sentiment for feminism. Bartky here, like other critics of identification, overreacts to the dangers that are undeniably associated with problematic forms of identification. The critics whom she seems to heed do not allow for the possibility that certain forms of identification—less ambitious than the ones they focus on—might be less prone to such problems and might even make a crucial contribution to establishing nonrepressive relations between self and other.

To gain a fuller understanding of how the cultivation of sympathy can enhance efforts to build solidarity across difference, it is necessary to go beyond Bartky's insightful extension of Scheler's theory. What distinguishes enlarged sympathy from Bartky's account of feeling-with is that it involves a certain kind of "egoism" or self-referencing. More specifically, it involves cultivating a sense of what George Kateb calls "mobile identity." Cultivating enlarged sympathy involves *imaginatively introjecting* others' differences into oneself in order to claim a kind of kinship

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with them, a practice that can thereby alter one's own self-understanding to some extent.

In appealing to Kateb's work, I do not mean to suggest that it can be appropriated wholesale by feminists. There is much in his theory that would resist such an appropriation. For example, Kateb is wary of the disposition to favor political engagement, since he thinks that it poses a temptation for one to relinquish one's individuality by immersing oneself in the group or the cause. His democratic individual inclines too much toward solitude to serve as the model for a feminist ideal of citizenship. Despite this tendency, feminist theory has much to gain from his work and, specifically, from his theory of mobile identity. Kateb offers a rich and detailed account of multiplicity within the self and of its relation to the self's inescapable need for identity. Often, postmodern and feminist theories of the multiple self refrain from specifying the conditions of a minimally unified agency within the self, making it difficult to account for the possibility of coherent (and progressive) individual or political action.[21] By contrast, his analysis of the self of mobile identity acknowledges the importance of both multiplicity and unified agency. He offers rich resources for delineating the sort of ethic of self-transformation that can promote a more fluid attachment to identity—that can help loosen the hold on individuals of the rigid binaries that constitute hierarchical differences of gender, sex, and race. Such an ethic of self-transformation can, in turn, facilitate the establishment of political bonds that avoid suppressing or excluding difference among political allies. I now focus on this specific aspect of Kateb's theory.

It will be useful to begin with a brief account of his theory of multiplicity in the self. Drawing on Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau, Kateb emphasizes the self's composite and irreducibly plural character.[22] The individual, on this view, contains *many* selves—and can therefore be caught off guard by what it is. The individual is composite in two ways. First, it is made up of several distinct parts, which include the soul, body, self, and personality. Second, one of these parts—the soul—contains "indefinite multiplicity" (*IO*, 246). The term "soul" is used by Kateb in a secular sense to refer to everything that is "given" in the individual. It is comprised of "desires, inclinations, and passions as well as aptitudes and incipient talents. . . . [It] is made up of the unwilled, the unbidden, the

21. E.g., Butler (1990); Haraway (1985.)

22. Whitman's "Song of Myself" is an especially important source for Kateb. See *The Inner Ocean* (1992, 240–66), hereafter abbreviated as *IO*.

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dreamt, the inchoate and unshaped" (ibid., 245). It is a vast "reservoir of potentialities" and of "unused powers" (ibid., 245, 34). It is this oceanic inner reservoir that contains a multitude of other selves.

The term "self," here, does not refer to the overall individual. It is the specific part of the individual that consists in "active self-consciousness and disciplined creative energy" (*IO*, 246). It performs two important roles. First, it shapes a "social persona" or "personality" from the infinite and indefinite materials of the soul. By drawing on certain inclinations and talents, the self actualizes an identity by which others can recognize the individual, and which thus enables one "to lead a life" (ibid., 246). Only a small number of the soul's vast potentialities are ever realized in the fashioning of a personality. The self's second role, then, is to try to capture poetically, in speech or expression, the greater "reservoir of potentialities" in the soul from which the narrower personality springs, which involves cultivating attentiveness to one's internal "otherness." (By its nature, though, the soul can never be fully known or expressed.) Through episodically expressing "as much of the truth as possible" (ibid., 246) about the soul, the self realizes the "impersonal" level or dimension of democratic individuality. It realizes what Kateb calls "mobile identity": It gets beyond, without renouncing, its actual, limited identity to acknowledge the potentialities in itself that the realization of an identity might otherwise block off or repress.

Kateb writes that the soul contains all of the potentialities that are actualized by others. Thus, "[w]e are impersonal . . . when we have sufficient self-acquaintance to know that all that has happened in the world has a source or echo in ourselves. . . . Impersonality registers an individual's universality or infinitude" (Kateb 1995, 31). According to Kateb, moreover, the soul is identical in all selves. Interpreting Whitman, he writes: "All the personalities that I encounter, I already am: that is to say, I could become or could have become something like what others are. This thought necessarily means . . . that all of us are always indefinitely more than we actually are . . . and we equally are infinite potentialities" (*IO*, 247). To anyone who has grappled with the problem of difference in feminism, these claims may seem startling. Do they attribute to individuals a universally shared set of purely abstract qualities (as do some liberal views of the self)? Or does the multiplicity they attribute to the self inhere in all selves as a kind of self-contained or fixed essence?

On the contrary, Kateb makes it clear that before the self finds an "echo" of others within, it must work to "absorb" the actual others that it

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encounters and observes. In other words, individuals use observational and imaginative powers to introject into themselves the identities that they see actualized in the world, and only by doing that do they come to realize or recognize their own internal multiplicity. This claimed commonality, then, does not rest on an inherent and fixed essence attributed to selves. Although differences initially exist in the self only in an abstract form (i.e., as potentiality), the self becomes fully acquainted with its inner multiplicity only through imaginative acts in which it gives particular form or shape to this potentiality. Thus, its inward multiplicity is in large part the creation of a "micropractice" of self-cultivation.[23] It is not a purely abstract or formless "infinity," nor does it exist in the self as a discrete and static set of ready-made internal others. It is the mind's capacity to absorb and imaginatively impersonate difference in others that puts one in touch with what Kateb deems the "highest truth" (*IO*, 247) about the self—the fact that it contains others.

How does Kateb's account of mobile identity contribute to feminist attempts to envision a form of solidarity that is inclusive and affirming of differences? By cultivating enlarged sympathy through imaginative identification, the self of mobile identity acquires a heightened sense of the contingency of its identity. It learns to recognize that under other circumstances, it "could become or could have become something like what others are" (*IO*, 247). This heightened sense of the contingency of identity helps loosen the hold on individuals of established, rigidly defined categories of identity and, in doing so, it can enhance feminist solidarity in four ways.

First, by enabling the self to identify with diverse others, imaginative impersonation opens possibilities for extending ties of solidarity across the boundaries of established identities[24] and shared forms of embodiment.[25] Thus, it helps expand the size and political strength of feminist coalitions. Secondly, Kateb maintains that imaginative impersonation

23. Stephen White uses this apt term to describe the practice about which Kateb writes (2000, 32).

24. Imaginative impersonation elicits qualities similar to those of Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness"; but where Anzaldúa focuses mainly on crossing the boundaries between one's actualized (multiple) identities, Kateb looks for a wider-ranging mobility (Anzaldúa [1987] 1999).

25. Cf. Kruks's claim that shared forms of embodiment provide a basis for feminist connections (2001). Kruks underestimates how differences among bodies, which all lay claim to being female, can subvert a sense of connection. (See Cressida Heyes's [2003] discussion of the challenges of extending feminist solidarity to include transgendered individuals.) Moreover, sharing a form of embodiment with another does not always enable one to understand her bodily suffering. For example, some women suffer little from menstrual cramps while others are temporarily debilitated. To understand the latter's pain, women in the former group may need to make as significant an imaginative effort as a man.

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enacts a form of recognition. Discovering that one contains an echo of every trait, aspiration, and talent that is actualized in the world elicits a sense of kinship with that which is different, strange, or other; and, in claiming kinship with others, the self confers on them recognition of their shared humanity. As I argued earlier, such recognition is an essential ingredient of feminist solidarity, which must be built on a more ethically rich form of reciprocity than that of mutual convenience if it is to serve the interests of less privileged groups. Again, what is achieved here is not the recognition of an abstract humanity that brackets out difference, but a sense of commonality built on an imaginative embrace of the concrete particularity of others. In eliciting a sense of kinship with diverse others, enlarged sympathy can help sustain a sense of mutual accountability between diverse coalition partners even when it is not in one's immediate interest to hold oneself accountable to particular others.

Imaginative identification with others enhances feminist coalition politics in a third way as well. Kateb writes that imaginative impersonation "impart[s] the sense that no actualization is definitive of anyone" (*IO*, 249). In other words, this practice ideally heightens one's sense that other individuals contain indefinite potentialities that far exceed their actual identities: No person is reducible to the sum of her actions or expressions. Thus, imaginative impersonation combats a temptation to see others in oversimplified, stereotypical terms. This capacity to recognize the complexity of others is especially valuable to feminist coalition building because a tendency to see others in reductive, essentializing terms contributes to the impulse to exclude them too hastily from alliances aimed at overcoming identity-based injustice. It also fuels the impulse to silence or discipline members of identity groups with a view to maintaining the group's homogeneity.

The fourth way in which cultivating enlarged sympathy enhances feminist coalition politics is in eliciting dispositions that heighten the self's attentiveness to others' differences. Imaginative impersonation encourages one to experience otherness not as a wholly alien external threat but as a potentially enriching aspect of oneself. In doing so, it ideally encourages the development of three important dispositions. First, it elicits a greater willingness to be flexible and "playful" about one's own *actual* identities; it reduces the impulse to cling fearfully or rigidly to an established persona. Such flexibility is important to coalition politics because admitting "others" into the circle of feminist solidarity often requires established identity groups to accept changes in their own self-conceptions. For example, if feminist coalitions are to serve the needs of transgen-

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dered individuals, then nontransgendered feminists must learn to recognize and relinquish the privilege that accrues to those whose gender steadily "matches" the sexed body they inhabit.[26] Because otherness, here, is not perceived as wholly alien or threatening, imaginative impersonation also elicits a disposition of tolerance and forbearance toward external others, even when their differences initially strike one as disagreeable and one's inclination is to push them away. After all, under other circumstances, "one could become or could have become something like what [they] are" (*IO*, 264–65). Such forbearance facilitates alliances not only with those unlike us but also with those whom we may not immediately like.[27] A third disposition that is ideally elicited through the micropractice of imaginative impersonation is generosity. The self's generous stance toward others stems from its heightened awareness that its inner multiplicity—which enriches its experience—depends in part on its exposure to the differences that others concretely enact. The cultivation of generosity can enable the extension of recognition and of solidarity to include others whose political interests do not extensively overlap with those of one's own more narrowly defined group.

What forms of action or practice enable the cultivation of enlarged sympathy? Though it is ultimately an introspective achievement, the development of enlarged sympathy is facilitated by certain forms of indirect and direct engagement with others and with their experiences. For example, reading literature that explores the experiences of oppressed groups can be a powerful vehicle for the cultivation of enlarged sympathy. Literature seeks neither to "inform" readers by presenting accurate data nor to "convince" them through rational argumentation. Instead, it invites readers to identify imaginatively (and temporarily) with complexly rendered, fictionalized "others." Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970), for example, powerfully evokes how the everyday transactions of racial oppression produce a devastating self-hatred in the main character, a black girl who yearns for blue eyes. To be sure, Morrison's work does not enable white readers to *experience* internalized racism and its damaging effects, or to understand these experiences in a comprehensive way, but her work does yield a degree of insight into these experiences. By enabling a form of imaginative identification with her characters and their experiences, by imaginatively transporting readers into unfamiliar and sometimes disorienting realms of experience, Mor-

26. See Cressida Heyes's (2003) discussion of this issue.
27. Cf. bell hooks's (1984) suggestion that solidarity should not presume friendship.

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rison's novels can have an affective impact that enables the cultivation of more expansive sympathies and that can perhaps spark, in receptive white readers, greater critical awareness of the ways in which their own racial privilege structures their relationships with racialized others. Reading literature may strike some as an "apolitical" activity, but if feminists are serious about bridging difference, they must eschew a narrow conception of the activities that are relevant and valuable to politics.

Direct dialogical interaction with others can also facilitate the development of enlarged sympathy. Indeed, Kateb acknowledges that sustained interaction with others is necessary to the development of "impersonal individuality," but he focuses on the role that friendship plays in this regard and does not fully address the role that broader, more "public" forms of interaction might play (1995, 96–133). We need not assume from his silence that broader forms of interaction are not valuable.[28] In fact, some forms of such interaction can clearly spur the kind of introspection through which enlarged sympathy is cultivated. *The Laramie Project* contains an example (Kaufman et al. 2001). The play was created by a group of New York actors who, in the wake of Matthew Shepard's brutal murder, interviewed residents of Laramie over a year and a half. Their interviews became part of a broader process of reflection and dialogue among Laramie residents about how the crime reflected on their community. Culled directly from these interviews, the play's script shows that many townspeople expressed denial in the wake of the murder, and some experienced retrenched homophobia. It also shows, however, that some townspeople engaged in a process of introspection through which they began to identify and sympathize with Shepard and with his parents, and through which they came to realize that for Laramie to become the kind of place where gay and lesbian residents could live freely, their own attitudes and beliefs would need to change. Jedadiah Schultz's transformation is especially striking. A University of Wyoming theater student who was raised to believe that homosexuality is immoral, he speaks to the New York actors in a final interview after having played the role of Prior in *Angels in America*. He says:

> I didn't for the longest time let myself become personally involved in the Matthew Shepard thing. . . . Matthew Shepard was just a name instead of an individual. . . . I just feel bad. Just for all that stuff I told you, for the person I used to be. . . . I just can't believe I ever said that stuff about

28. If this is his intended implication, there is good reason to reject it, as I argue elsewhere (Lyshaug, *Authenticity and Identity Politics*, unpublished book manuscript).

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> homosexuals, you know. How did I ever let that stuff make me think that you were different from me? (Kaufman et al., 98.)

Through introspection and imaginative identification, several townspeople in the play develop more accepting attitudes and more expansive self-understandings.[29] In each case, the process of introspection is facilitated by interaction either with the Shepards or the New York actors, or else by the broader public discussions among residents of Laramie.

How does enlarged sympathy avoid the dangers of identifying with others—most importantly, the danger of effacing their differences? As Kateb describes it, cultivating a sense of mobile identity has built-in safeguards against these dangers. Because enlarged sympathy involves a self-consciously *imagined* identification with the other, rather than a claim of sameness, it preserves a strong sense of the actual distance between self and other (as does Bartky's variant of feeling-with).[30] It does not encourage one to assume that one is actually similar to the other in any extensive or enduring way. Moreover, because imaginative identification heightens one's awareness of the contingency of identity, helping one to see others as complex and fluid selves, it counters any temptation to assume that one can identify with them in a complete or final way.

Moreover, enlarged sympathy does not mask the intersecting character of different forms of oppression. Because it is established at a certain distance from the other, the individual's imagined bond does not pressure the other to avoid confronting her about her guilt; it avoids the gentle coercion of loving affirmation that characterized "sisterhood." Since imaginative identification does not, in itself, create the sense that one is *actually* bonded with another, or that one shares the other's actual interests, it does not provide encouragement to the self to deny the ways in which one might be implicated in another's suffering.

Finally, because the practice of imaginative impersonation occurs through the introjection of difference into the self, it requires some knowledge of others and their circumstances and, hence, some engagement with others about their experiences. This requirement protects imaginative identification from lapsing into fanciful or unbridled self-projection. Nevertheless, enlarged sympathy does not necessarily require an accu-

29. The role of sympathetic identification in spurring Robert DeBree and Rulon Stacey's change of attitude toward gays is especially clear (Kaufman et al., 86, 71).

30. In contrast to Lugones's "world-traveling," mobile identity does not involve actual immersion in another's lived experience (1990). It also differs in this way from an ethics of care approach, since the latter emphasizes actual care-giving relationships and practices. See Joan Tronto's essential book (1994).

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rate or detailed knowledge of the other's situation or political perspective. As a result, it is possible that imaginative impersonation can lead one to identify internally with others while remaining ignorant to some significant extent about their actual experiences. Self-deception—a kind of "false consciousness" under which one feels connected to others without having adequately comprehended their concrete circumstances—remains a potential danger; and such false consciousness can lead a political actor to support goals that harm the distinctive interests of those to whom she feels imaginatively connected. How can the self of mobile identity be held accountable for its (mis)understandings of those others with whom it identifies?

Because communicative interaction is an essential feature of coalition politics—it is what enables the coordination of diverse interests—the norms of reciprocity that are presupposed by cooperative, communicative action can properly be expected to govern feminist mobilization (as Dean and Benhabib rightly suggest). It is the job of communicative interaction to ensure that political actors avoid presumptuous misconceptions about their allies. After all, communicative reciprocity requires that each member of an alliance be given the opportunity freely to describe her own interests and to advance claims, and it requires each participant to listen carefully to the views expressed by other participants. Moreover, communicative reciprocity ensures that each ally has an opportunity to reject or "nay-say" any mistaken understandings of her experiences and interests that are advanced by others in the course of articulating their shared goals. The norms and procedures of communication thus stave off the dangers of distortion and misunderstanding to which the cultivation of enlarged sympathy, on its own, might otherwise fall prey. The practice of imaginative identification, then, need not bear the burden of generating sufficient knowledge of one's political allies. Imaginative impersonation is not a cognitive exercise—one that, by securing an accurate understanding of the interests of dis-privileged groups, *authorizes* political action in the name of those interests. Communicative interaction is what fulfills this function. Enlarged sympathy fulfills the *ethical*, not the epistemic or cognitive, preconditions of solidarity. In short, the cultivation of enlarged sympathy is meant to supplement and enable—not to replace—the practices of political deliberation and negotiation that comprise coalition building.[31]

31. Some critics might claim that my account of enlarged sympathy exaggerates the self's imaginative capacity to get beyond the bounds of its subject position and to make contact with the expe-

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CONCLUSION

Drawing on Bartky, Scheler, and Kateb, I have developed an account of "enlarged sympathy" that fills an important gap in feminist theories of solidarity. It outlines the attitudes and dispositions that would-be allies must cultivate if they are to establish nonrepressive and mutually affirming political connections across difference. Enlarged sympathy facilitates such bonds because it encourages a sense of kinship with others—a sense of kinship that is forged not through bracketing out others' differences but through absorbing and locating an "echo" of those differences within oneself. In doing so, enlarged sympathy helps diverse subjects to sustain a sense of connection and accountability to each other. The cultivation of enlarged sympathy also prepares would-be allies for the taxing aspects of coalition work, better enabling them to confer recognition on continually shifting and expanding sets of "others" without being deeply threatened by the unsettling effect that such recognition can have on their own sense of identity.

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rience of others; they might argue that it thereby encourages the effacement of differences. It is worth stressing, however, that there are also ethical dangers in *under*estimating this capacity and discouraging attempts to develop it. Doing so can encourage the perception that racial, sexual, and gender differences are fundamental and unbridgeable. Such a perception of unbridgeable difference can encourage the relatively privileged to perceive others in exoticized, patronizing, or even dehumanized ways—as truly, absolutely "other." We do well to remember that, historically, the projection of false *difference* onto others has legitimated oppression and abetted evil action at least as often as has the projection of sameness. In recognition of these various dangers, I have argued that the effort to expand our sympathies through imaginative identification with others can enhance feminist solidarity so long as this effort aims for a self-consciously *incomplete* form of identification (like the one Kateb outlines), and so long as the collective actions that follow this effort are constrained by dialogue with (and, hence, by careful listening to) the others with whom we sympathize.

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