Feminist Political Togetherness
Rethinking the Collective Dimension of Feminist Politics

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Abstract

The feminist “we,” which during the first and second waves of feminist political organizing had a natural basis in “women,” became a theoretical and political problem in the late 1970s. In this study, I examine efforts to replace the earlier idea of “women” as the collective subject of feminism with more nuanced visions of the feminist “we.” I refer to these efforts, which continue right down to the present, as the “discussion on feminist political togetherness.” Women of color in the United States initiated this discussion in the late 1970s, when they criticized feminist movements for suppressing differences between women and neglecting intersecting oppressions, and when they conceptualized feminism as a coalition among women from different backgrounds. In the 1990s, this criticism began to intermingle with the post-structuralist critique of stable and unitary identities.

The novel visions of feminist political commonality have received far less attention than the various criticisms of the category “women” as the basis of feminist politics. Through examining alternative conceptualizations of the feminist “we” proposed by, among others, Gloria Alzaldúa, Judith Butler, Adriana Cavarero, Jodi Dean, bell hooks, Maria Lugones, Chandra Mohanty, and Linda Zerilli, the present study provides a counterbalance to the representations of the recent history of feminism, which focus on theoretical work on differences, subjectivity, and agency.

“Political togetherness” is the key concept in my study. On the one hand, this concept is a heuristic tool that allows us to see similarities among the visions of the feminist “we” proposed in different decades and contexts and based on different vocabularies and theoretical resources. On the other hand, I use the term to illustrate the distinctiveness of the discussion on feminist political togetherness in comparison to other recent debates about political community in the field of political theorizing.

I examine the discussion of feminist political togetherness from three perspectives. First, I focus on the exact concepts used in the debate. Thus far, feminist theorists have not created new concepts for theorizing the feminist “we”; they have given new meanings to terms with an established position in the field of political theorizing. I identify the main vocabularies that feminist theorists have used for this purpose, namely, identity, coalition, and solidarity. Second, I
turn my attention from vocabularies to the theoretical resources used and analyze visions of collective feminist politics based on the concepts put forth by Hannah Arendt. Since the 1990s Arendt’s thought has been the main theoretical resource in the discussion of feminist political togetherness. Arendtian visions of the feminist “we” form a distinct strand in this debate, owing to their indebtedness to Arendt’s existential approach to politics. Arendtian feminists have broadened the scope of the discussion with new ideas. However, some of the traces of Arendt’s existential framework in their conceptualization are problematic. Finally, I discuss five themes that have persisted in the feminist political togetherness discussion for decades. The persistence of these themes reveals that, even though feminist theorists use different vocabularies and theoretical resources to address the problem of the feminist “we,” the solutions they provide are similar. Most draw attention to sustained, but open political bonds across difference and privilege, bonds that have to be actively created and maintained and that enable political action in the context of diversity and inequality.

My study suggests that the visions of the feminist “we” from the late 1970s down to the present offer an explicitly feminist understanding of political commonality, which takes into account the diversity of groups, intersecting oppressions, fragmentation of individual subjectivity, and differences in power and privilege. This understanding, which I call “feminist political togetherness,” differs from other recent debates about political community in the field of political theorizing, and I suggest it provides new opportunities for discussing the collective dimension of politics in diverse and unequal societies.
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Literature
Abbreviations

For Hannah Arendt’s books discussed in chapter 3, the following abbreviations are used:

- BPF: Between Past and Future
- HC: The Human Condition
- LLKP: Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy
- OR: On Revolution
1 Introduction

In this study, I examine a wide range of efforts to replace the much-criticized notion of feminist politics based on women’s identity with more nuanced visions of the feminist “we.” I suggest that, when feminists rethink the feminist “we,” they provide a specific understanding of collective politics in the context of diversity and inequality, an understanding that differs from other recent conceptualizations of political community in the field of political theorizing.

The feminist “we,” which during the first and second waves of feminist political organizing had a natural basis in “women,” became a theoretical and political challenge in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In these years, black feminists, women of color, lesbians, Third World women and women with multiple identities began pointing out that the dream of a global feminist sisterhood suppressed differences of race, class, culture, and sexuality. They argued that the simplistic categories provided by women’s movements were unable to account for their multiple allegiances and identifications or for the intersecting markers of oppression that structured their lives. “Women” as the collective political subject of feminism was deemed hierarchical, exclusionary, and complicit with the racial and colonial oppression of non-white and Third World women. (E.g., Anzaldúa and Moraga [1981] 1983; hooks [1984] 2000b; Mohanty 1984; Lorde 1984.) A few years later, Judith Butler’s (1990) powerful critique of “women” as the presupposed collective subject of feminist politics made use of deconstructionist views. These views, which were gaining ground among feminists in the academia, called into question the notion of a stable and unitary identity, a unified subjectivity, and the search for foundations.

It has been argued that, owing to the confluence of multiple-difference feminism and postmodern feminism, academic feminists have turned their attention either to differences and diversity or to the subject and possibility of individual agency, leaving aside the difficult questions of collective feminist politics (e.g., Zerilli 2005; Allen 2008; Weir 2008). My study challenges this claim and reveals that, since the late 1970s, feminist theorists have made considerable efforts to rethink the feminist “we.” However, while the criticism of feminist politics based on “women’s identity” and the subsequent emphasis on differences and agency have become a well-documented part of the recent history of feminist
thought, the alternative conceptualizations of the feminist “we” which I discuss in this study remain relatively unknown.

The challenge of the feminist “we” has both a theoretical and a practical dimension. On the one hand, feminist theorists are confronted with the theoretical challenge of conceptualizing political commonality in a non-foundational manner and reconciling commonality and difference. How to conceptualize political community and collective action in the context of difference and inequality is one of the most intriguing questions in the field of political theorizing as a whole that remains unsolved. On the other hand, in the day-to-day political experiences of political organizing, feminist activists are struggling with both the old and the new challenges that the various types of feminism face. It is necessary to build connections among women across interests, differences, and regions. In addition, individuals must be mobilized for feminist causes at time when public discourses about feminism are focusing on the empowerment of individual women while casting solidarity between women and as a holdover from the past and as something that restricts rather than empowers women.

The theoretical and practical aspects of the problem of the feminist “we” are intertwined. By theorizing about the collective dimension of feminist politics, scholars can provide activists with new ideas and concepts and engage in a form of feminist activism themselves. Concrete feminist practices can, in turn, inspire academics in their explorations and remind them of what makes individuals act together and commit to joint projects.

In this study, I refer to the efforts to solve the problem of the feminist “we” as the “discussion on feminist political togetherness.” This discussion emerged in the late 1970s from the critique of global sisterhood and in the 1990s became entwined with the post-structuralist critique of stable and unified identities. Theorists who have participated in this discussion reject the idea that feminist politics must be grounded in a shared women’s identity; however, they also believe that feminist politics must have a collective dimension in order to transform the society. The theorists assume that there is now – as there must also be in the future – a feminist movement or a feminist political community and that this community holds the keys to making our societies more equal, just, and democratic and to transforming the gendered norms that bring individual subjects to being. “Theorists of feminist political togetherness” react to the various criticisms of the category “women” and the challenges that feminist political movements face, and they rethink political relations among feminists in a way that does not assume sameness and that recognizes differences rather than excluding them.

My main argument in the present study is that the visions of the feminist “we” from the late 1970s down to the present offer an explicitly feminist understanding of political commonality, which takes into account the diversity of groups, intersecting oppressions, fragmentation of individual subjectivity, and
differences in power and privilege. I suggest that this understanding, which I call “feminist political togetherness,” provides new opportunities for discussing the collective dimension of politics in the context of difference and inequality, even beyond the context of feminism.

**The concept of political togetherness**

The key concept of my study, “political togetherness,” is not part of the everyday terminology of political theorizing, nor do the feminist theorists whose texts I study use it often.¹ To my knowledge, there have been no prior attempts to introduce the term into the conceptual arsenal of political and feminist theorists. I use it for two different purposes. On the one hand, it is a heuristic tool that allows me to discuss a wide range of efforts based on different vocabularies to rethink the feminist “we.” On the other hand, I use the term to come to terms with the specificity of the discussions that I analyze.

When I write about the “discussion on feminist political togetherness” and “theorists of feminist political togetherness,” I use the term “political togetherness” as an umbrella term that sets in dialogue theorists who discuss the feminist “we” using different concepts, including identity politics, identification, solidarity, coalition, and political community. The heuristic use of the term brings together different approaches to the collective political action: the emphasis is on collective entities, such as communities, coalitions, and movements, and the focus is on relationships between individuals through ideas such as solidarity. My approach enables seeing similarities in the various conceptualizations of the collective dimension of feminist politics. These similarities may escape those who look only at the concepts used by theorists themselves. Although there are separate studies of feminist theorizing about coalitions (e.g., Lloyd 2005), feminist theories of solidarity (e.g., Lyshaug 2006), and feminist approaches to community (e.g., Weiss & Friedman 1995), the present dissertation, which evaluates the differences and the points of connection in these different vocabularies, is the first comprehensive study of the discussions of the feminist “we” as a whole.

The disadvantage of using an abstract umbrella term such as “political togetherness” is that abstraction hides significant differences among theorists. In the first place, each of the vocabularies used has its own history, and each of

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¹ “Political togetherness” occurs in passing in Susan Bickford’s article “Anti-Anti-Identity Politics: Feminism, Democracy, and the Complexities of Citizenship.” She argues that recognition of multiplicity within groups and individuals requires developing “a second model of political togetherness” that goes beyond the sisterhood model of feminist solidarity. (Bickford 1997, 123.)
them draws attention to different aspects of the collective dimension of politics. Second, feminists write about the issues that I refer to as political togetherness at different levels of specificity. Some are interested in abstractions such as the ideal feminist community; others make reference to local feminist groups, to grassroots-level feminist activism in general, or to the global feminist movement. Some write about the political organizing of women; others are interested in coalitions between feminism and other social movements. The same vocabulary can be used to discuss political togetherness at different levels. For example, the term solidarity has been used to discuss the ideal feminist community, the sustained bonds within feminist conscious-raising groups, and alliances among different social movements. There is also a third variable involved. Theorists discuss feminist political togetherness for different reasons. Some want to gain a better understanding of the feminists’ collective political practices. Others criticize the forms that feminist movements take and suggest better ways to organize them. Some create abstract theoretical models of being together politically and set these models against other, similar theoretical constructs.

Although I had to create an abstraction in order to see the similarities between texts that were not based on the same vocabularies, my analysis traces every theorist back to the location from which she writes and the concepts she uses. My method of reading, therefore, involves a constant movement from abstraction to location of the works I discuss in their respective contexts and concepts.

The term political togetherness is more than a heuristic tool. I also use it to embody the particularity of the efforts to rethink the feminist “we.” I propose that feminist theorists solve the problem of the feminist “we” by putting forward a particular understanding of political commonality, which takes difference and privilege into account and focuses on sustained, open political bonds. It is this understanding that I refer to as “feminist political togetherness.” This means that the expressions “discussion on feminist political togetherness” and “theorists of feminist political togetherness” used here are not purely heuristic: they contain a reference to what, in my view, the texts that I study share.

I had already attached a certain meaning to the term prior to my analysis, in particular, to the attribute “political.” For me, not every form of human togetherness is political togetherness. By using this term, I imply that it is both possible and desirable to separate the political relations that have been created between individuals from the relations they maintain with each other in the rest of their daily lives and to distinguish between political community and other forms of community. I understand as “political” those entities or relationships that spark collective political action. In this sense, the notion of the political that guides my study is connected with the civic republican tradition of political theorizing, which emphasizes political participation. I also build on the postmodern or poststructuralist view that political relations and communities are
results of political action. There is an artificial element in the way political togetherness comes into being: there is a moment of constitution, an effort. Political togetherness does not happen by default, and it is contingent and fragile. It has to be actively created and maintained, and it can always be contested. This understanding of what is “political” in political togetherness has guided my analysis.

The discussion of feminist political togetherness

I suggest that the initiators of the discussion on feminist political togetherness were black feminists and other non-white feminist activists and academics in the United States, who were also the first to criticize the global sisterhood approach to feminism, which was popular in the 1970s. Since the late 1970s and early 1980s, black feminists and women of color have created new ways to conceptualize political alliances across difference, based on their own experiences of multiple identifications and oppressions and day-to-day activism in women’s movements and other political movements, and they remain important contributors to the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Collaboration with white women had a significant role in their early texts (Burack 1999, 133), and they have also discussed alliances between various groups of marginalized women and between women of color and other marginalized groups.

Indeed, the idea of “women of color” was itself a new feminist “we”; as a concept, it brought together Chicanas, African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latinas, and “Third World” feminists who wanted to challenge the racism of Anglo-American feminism and the sexism of ethnic nationalist movements. Texts by women of color, collected in such anthologies as This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color (Anzaldúa & Moraga [1981] 1983) and its successors, Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color (Anzaldúa 1990a) and This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation (Anzaldúa & Keating 2002), contributed to the construction, maintenance, and gradual transformation of this political identity.

Writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, María Lugones, Chandra Mohanty and bell hooks have been influential participants in the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Their long-standing and still ongoing work on non-appropriating political relationships among women across privilege as well as on the political alliances required to address intersecting oppressions has been highly relevant for later discussions on the collective dimension in feminist

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2 Moya defines “Chicana” as a woman of Mexican ancestry who was born and or raised in the United States and who possesses a radical political consciousness (Moya 2001, 447).
politics, and it is also relevant for broader debates on political commonality in the field of political theorizing.

However, many theorists, who have recently criticized contemporary feminist theorizing for paying more attention to difference and subjectivity than to the collective aspects of politics, rarely mention the texts of women of color. This is surprising, given their groundbreaking and still ongoing work on this issue. Sometimes women of color have been evoked not as feminist political theorists providing novel understandings of feminist political commonality, but as an exemplary non-foundational feminist “we” (e.g., Haraway 1991, 155-57). Indeed, women of color have criticized the way mainstream theorists treat their work, which they argue ranges from total neglect to appropriation without understanding its context (Alarcon 1990, 358-59; hooks 2000a, xiii; Moya 1997, 128-35). For example, bell hooks writes about the “ghettoization” of black feminist texts, which, in her view, arises from their being deemed too polemical and insufficiently scholarly (hooks 2000a, xiii).

In the early 1990s, under the increasing influence of poststructuralist theorizing in feminist thought, the discussion of feminist political togetherness gained an additional focus. The main goal was no longer to address differences and racism within the women’s movements or to find ways in which feminist practices could take multiple differences into account. The new, additional challenge was to theorize about political togetherness in a manner that could accommodate the insights of postmodern criticism of identity, unity, and foundations, or, alternatively, to find alternative theoretical frameworks that could be used to conceptualize political commonality better than these insights. To this end, feminist theorists such as Iris Marion Young, Jodi Dean, Shane Phelan, Diane Elam, and Amy Allen began to create novel explanations of solidarity, coalition politics, and political community in relation to political theorists and philosophers such as Derrida, Lyotard, Nancy, Habermas, and Arendt.

It is important to point out that this “theoretical turn” in the discussion on feminist political togetherness does not represent a complete break from the initial stages of this discussion, nor from the ongoing efforts by women of color theorists to discuss the collective dimension of feminist politics. Some feminist scholars who advanced theories about the feminist “we” in the 1990s and 2000s have built directly on insights of women of color (e.g., Adams 2002; Bickford 1997; Fowlkes 1997; Weir 2008);3 others have elaborated in a more implicit

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manner on the themes they raised. Recently, the discussion on feminist political togetherness has been connected with new issues such as the implications of globalization and neo-liberalism for transnational feminist politics. (See Bartky 2002; Mohanty 2003; Weir 2008.)

The theorists and texts that I discuss in detail as well as those I refer to in passing are representative of the discussion on feminist political togetherness as a whole. They indicate its different contexts and goals as well as its vocabularies and theoretical resources. The texts I study closely were chosen on the basis of their value in studying what I identify as the most relevant aspects of this discussion, based on my reading of a wider selection of materials. As for the vocabularies used, the efforts to rethink the feminist “we” are centered on the concepts of identity, coalition, and solidarity, and Hannah Arendt’s political thought is the main theoretical resource. Although the discussion on feminist political togetherness involves other vocabularies as well as other theoretical allegiances, I devote less space to theorists who use vocabularies other than those of identity, coalition, and solidarity or who build theoretical approaches to the collective dimension of feminist politics based on theorists other than Arendt.

There are many well-known feminist political theorists whose reflections on the non-essential feminist “we” I discuss only in passing, such as Nancy Fraser, Iris Marion Young, and Seyla Benhabib. The better part of their work is already well known, and feminist and political theory scholars continue to discuss their thoughts and the implications. In this study, my aim is to look at a certain discussion in the field of feminist theorizing from a broad perspective and not make the texts of a few well-known theorists the centrepiece of my study. However, Young in particular has made significant contributions to the discussion on feminist political togetherness, even though theorizing about the feminist “we” has never been her priority. Her conceptualization of “women,” not as a group, but rather as a seriality (Young 1997), her criticism of the concept of community (Young 1990), her proposal that “city” is a suitable metaphor for a diverse political collectivity (Young 1990; Young 2002), and her recent discussion on feminist solidarity (Young 2011) are just some examples of her contributions. However, Young’s texts on the topic are based on a wide range of theoretical resources and vocabularies, and do therefore not fall easily under the structure of the present study.

Although the theorists I discuss in detail are diverse in the sense that they are academics and activists, have different theoretical allegiances, and represent different races and sexualities, most of them are based in the United States. Anglo-American feminists, including U.S. women of color and U.S.-based Third World feminists, are of course not the only ones to have discussed the problem with the feminist “we”; European and non-Western feminist been debating the issue too. However, the dominance of the Anglo-American feminist literature makes this literature available and influential and, therefore,
relevant to analyze. In addition, there are specific reasons why U.S.-based feminists seem to have been more interested in theorizing about political togetherness than, for example, their counterparts in some European countries.

First, the discussion on feminist political togetherness was initiated in the late 1970s as a response to racism within the U.S. women’s movements by women who identified themselves as feminists and who suffered from racist oppression, which the mainstream feminist movement was complicit in sustaining. In Europe the different national feminist movements encountered less internal criticism than in the U.S., as European societies at the time were less racially and socially divided. Second, in the U.S., the tradition of collective political organizing around feminist goals has been stronger than in most European countries. In the Nordic countries, for example, such organizing has been weak because the state became involved early in promoting gender equality through legislation and public policies (e.g., Anttonen, Henriksson, & Nätkin 1994; Borchorst & Siim 2008; Hernes 1987). Still today, many of the well-known European feminist political theorists focus on gender mainstreaming, gender equality legislation, European Union gender equality policies, and various forms of gendered citizenship (e.g., Kantola 2006, 2010; Lister 2002; Lovenduski 2005; Outshoor & Kantola 2007; Siim 2000; Squires 2007; Walby 2011) or discuss diversity and intersectionality in connection with citizenship rather than women’s movements (Lombardo & Verloo 2009; Verloo 2006).

Of the European feminists who have discussed the problem of the feminist “we” in the last three decades, Italian feminists must be mentioned. In the 1980s the Italian feminist movement was dominated by women’s collectives, which sought to establish new, women-only political spaces to explore feminine subjectivity, relations between women not mediated by men, and the collective dimension of women’s experience; furthermore, they wished to institute more democratic and fully participatory approaches to political activism. These collectives, such as Diotima and the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, produced theoretical and political texts that were deeply influenced by Luce Irigaray’s philosophy of sexual difference. (Cavarero & Bertolino 2008, 128-29.) Most of these texts have not been translated to English, but they are part of my discussion through Adriana Cavarero’s work.

The texts I have studied were written over a time span of thirty-five years. They range from the Combahee River Collective’s “Black Feminist Statement” written in 1977 and Bernice Johnson Reagon’s speech about coalition politics in the West Coast Women’s Music Festival in 1981 to Iris Marion Young’s discussion of feminist solidarity in 2011. Over these years, the theoretical and political landscape that provides the backdrop for the ongoing debate on the feminist “we” has changed considerably. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, when this discussion was initiated, feminism was a movement rather than a strand of academic scholarship, and contributions to this debate were mainly attempts to
make the feminist movement more inclusive. The more recent efforts to rethink the feminist “we” are still reactions to particular feminist political practices, but they also are positions in feminist academic debates.

The challenges that feminist politics face and to which theorists of feminist political togetherness react have also obviously changed over the years covered by my study. In the late 1970s, women of color were asking how non-white and white women could work side-by-side to advance feminist goals. Since the dawn of the twenty-first century, theorists of feminist political togetherness have been asking how transnational feminisms could be created to counter the impact of global capitalism and the new forms of inequalities that have arisen between women of the First World and those of the Third.

Structure of the study and main arguments

In this study, I discuss a wide range of efforts to replace earlier essentialist notions of feminist politics based on women’s identity with more nuanced visions of the feminist “we”; these efforts began in the late 1970s and continue up to the present time. I suggest that these efforts, which emerged from the critique of global sisterhood and which incorporated later aspects of the post-modern critique of essentialist identities and foundations, constitute an ongoing debate about the collective dimension of feminist politics, which I call “the discussion on feminist political togetherness.” My main argument is that this discussion provides an explicitly feminist understanding of collective aspects of politics in which diversity of groups, non-unified subjectivity, intersecting oppressions, and differences in power and privilege are taken into account. I call this understanding “feminist political togetherness.”

In chapter 2 I provide an overview of the discussion on feminist political togetherness by analyzing the concepts or vocabularies that theorists have used to address the problem of the feminist “we.” I show that instead of inventing new terms to discuss the collective dimension of politics, feminist theorists have given new meanings to established terms. I identify the main vocabularies used in this discussion, namely, the terms identity, coalition, and solidarity and their word families. My analysis reveals that the vocabularies chosen lead theorists to ask somewhat different questions about the creation, form, and maintenance of the feminist political “we.” The vocabulary of coalition draws attention to the artificiality and contingency of feminist political communities, while the vocabulary of solidarity leads theorists to discuss ethical political bonds and ask how cross-difference political bonds can be maintained. However, in the face of the logical assumption that it is a different thing to write about identity or solidarity than about coalition politics and notwithstanding the tendency of the theorists I study to rigidly separate these vocabularies from one another, I show
that the understandings of the feminist “we” provided through all three vocabularies are strikingly similar. Whether they write about identity politics or identification, coalitions, or solidarity, feminist writers who address the problem return repeatedly to the same themes, whatever decade they write in, and whether their accounts are based on their own experiences or philosophical concepts.

In chapter 3, I complete my overview of the discussion on feminist political togetherness and provide further evidence for my argument that certain themes persist in this discussion by turning my attention from vocabularies to the theoretical resources used: I examine how Hannah Arendt’s concepts have been used to rethink the feminist “we.” Arendt is the main theoretical allegiance in this discussion, and the Arendtian views of the feminist “we” are the most theoretically elaborate. I show that feminist theorists find Arendt an appealing ally for theorizing about the feminist “we” because they believe that the tension between individual distinction and political togetherness in her thought provides a tool for combining political commonality and difference. I argue that the Arendtian descriptions of the feminist “we” stand apart from the theories of feminist identity politics, identification, coalition, and solidarity discussed in the second chapter, mainly owing to the traces of Arendt’s existential-phenomenological philosophical framework present in them. I identify three of these traces: the link drawn between the human and the political, a high level of abstraction, and a rejection of the affective dimension of politics. Sometimes the Arendtian traces lead to shortcomings in the theories of the feminist “we”; sometimes they enable the addition of valuable new ideas to the discussion of feminist political togetherness and extend its scope. Although the Arendtian accounts of the feminist “we” are distinctive, theorists influenced by Arendt discuss the same recurring themes of feminist political togetherness, approaching them in a different manner.

In chapter 4 I turn my attention away from the concepts and theoretical resources used in the texts that I study to focus on the particularity of feminist political togetherness. I discuss in detail five themes that have persisted in the efforts to rethink the feminist “we” across decades, vocabularies, and theoretical allegiances. The first of these is the founding role given to difference and conflict in constituting feminist political commonality and the view that difference and conflict transform feminist political communities from within. The second is the conviction that the feminist political “we” is constituted internally, not in opposition to a “them,” and the consequent focus on interactive relations within a political “we.” The third is the focus on the individual self in constituting and maintaining political bonds across difference and the necessity of self-transformation. The fourth is the emphasis on the affective dimension of political togetherness, particularly on the emotions evoked by encounters with others. The fifth is the contention that theorizing about the feminist “we” requires
engaging feminist scholarship and feminist movements in dialogue, with a resulting sensitivity to contexts and an interest in particular political communities rather than in abstract ideals.

Together these five recurring themes tell us what is specific about the way feminist writers have addressed the collective aspects of politics: Feminist theorists who rethink the feminist “we” replace the idea of “women” as the natural political subject of feminism with a focus on sustained, but open political bonds between embodied individuals across difference and privilege. These bonds have to be actively created and maintained. This idea is what I call “feminist political togetherness,” and I argue that it provides the basis for an inspiring and productive conceptualization of the collective dimension of politics, which can contribute to other discussions about political bonds in diverse and unequal societies.
2 Main vocabularies of feminist political togetherness

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the efforts made to rethink the feminist “we” from the late 1970s until the present day. I show that this discussion on feminist political togetherness revolves around certain concepts and that three main vocabularies, namely, identity, coalition, and solidarity, are used to discuss the collective dimension of feminist politics.

Before I move on to outline the main arguments, I must clarify what I mean by “vocabulary.” When used as a methodological tool in political analysis, this term often refers to a cluster of words that move in the same semantic field or have the same ideological roots. For example, Richard Rorty refers to vocabulary as a common sense mediated through language and crystallized in specific terms that involve strong value judgments. In this sense, Rorty writes about the Newtonian and the Aristotelian vocabularies of science, and about the Athenian and the Jeffersonian vocabularies of politics. For Rorty, vocabularies are contextual and contingent; new vocabularies will always emerge and replace existing ones. Furthermore, for Rorty new vocabularies are not tools to describe reality, but they make something that was previously impossible possible and thereby create new purposes. (Rorty 1989.)

When I write about vocabularies of political togetherness, I refer to something more specific than Rorty: I am referring to terms that are connected with the collective dimension of politics and belong to the same word family and to expressions built around these terms. For example, for me the vocabulary of identity includes expressions and concepts such as collective identity, self-identity, identification, disidentification, and political identity, while the vocabulary of coalition contains expressions such as coalition politics, coalitional spirit, and coalition work. In my analysis of the vocabularies of identity, coalition, and solidarity, I focus on the active conceptual work that feminist theorists do when they use these terms and the expressions around them to rethink the feminist “we.”

Of course, theorists also use other terms to conceptualize the collective dimension of feminist politics. For example, the words intersubjectivity and recognition are indispensable for many, and compelling work has been done with “relationality” (Cavarero 2000, 2005). However, these terms are not used as
often as identity, coalition, and solidarity and their word families, and for this reason I do not count them among the main vocabularies of feminist political togetherness. Identity, coalition, and solidarity also stand out from other terms in the discussion because feminist theorists do active conceptual politics with them. These three terms have a well-established position in political and feminist theorizing as well as in everyday discussions about collective political action. Theorists who rethink the feminist “we” use these familiar terms in creative ways and give them new meanings. Therefore, although “community” and the word family around it are frequently used in the discussion on feminist political togetherness, I do not count “community” among the key vocabularies. Feminist writers criticize the term community (e.g., Walby 2011, 139-40; Young 1990, 227-35) rather than use it to create new understandings of the feminist “we”.

Most theorists who rethink the feminist “we” use more than one of the three main vocabularies of political togetherness. In most cases it is possible to identify the dominant term for which new meanings are given and which is used to convey novel ideas about feminist political commonality. The fact that the vocabularies interfere with each other does not mean that conceptual choices do not matter. On the contrary, theorists of feminist political togetherness make conscious decisions about the vocabularies they use, and they present strong arguments for the potential of the concepts selected for the task at hand and against the concepts selected by others. Diana Elam (1994, 72), who uses the vocabularies of coalition and solidarity, argues that the vocabulary of identity is caught up in the exclusive logic of identity. Judith Butler (1990, 20-22) writes about identifications and coalitions, but rejects the vocabulary of solidarity as necessarily based on unity. Jodi Dean (1996, 73; 1997, 249), who uses the vocabulary of solidarity, argues that the vocabulary of identity cannot grasp the role that disagreement plays in the feminist “we” and that the vocabulary of coalition is too strategic and fails to provide tools with which to discuss durable relations between feminists.

The present chapter has three sections, each devoted to one of the main vocabularies of political togetherness that have been used to rethink the feminist “we”: identity, coalition, and solidarity. In order to provide a representative view of the discussion on feminist political togetherness and a profound analysis of the uses and genealogies of each vocabulary, each section is devoted to several texts written in different decades and contexts and based on various theoretical resources. I conclude my analysis in each section by outlining the main shifts

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4 Linda Zerilli’s (2005) account of political community based on Hannah Arendt’s theory of judgment is an exception. I will discuss Zerilli’s theory of political community in chapter 3. Linnell Secomb (2000) has discussed alterity within community using Deleuze’s concepts.
that have taken place in the use of the vocabulary discussed and the key themes that feminists address with it.

My analysis reveals that the vocabulary of identity is highly controversial. Some theorists reject it as oppressive and exclusionary; others claim that because identities factually exist, the vocabulary of identity is indispensable for theorizing about political togetherness. The vocabulary of coalition leads theorists to emphasize the creation of new political identities and shows how collective political action transforms existing identities and self-understandings. The vocabulary of solidarity allows theorists to think about durable and lasting relations within the feminist “we”; users of this vocabulary call on the notion of ethics. I draw the conclusion that, although the three vocabularies lead theorists to discuss different aspects of collective feminist politics and even though theorists make strong distinctions between the sets of concepts, the feminist accounts of identity politics, coalition politics, and solidarity ultimately address the same themes. This unanimity provides the basis for my main argument, namely, that when examined in retrospect, the numerous efforts to rethink the feminist “we” yield a specific understanding of the collective dimension of politics in the context of diversity and inequality.

2.1 Identity

Identity is a term rich with meanings. As Tuija Pulkkinen observes, as a philosophical concept referring to sameness (“there is a relation of identity between A and B”), identity has always been central. Since the 1940s, “identity” has been used in various ways in different academic disciplines and in everyday language, including the sphere of politics. Pulkkinen points out a psychological meaning of identity, which alludes to a person’s sense of being one and the same; a socio-psychological meaning, having to do with a person’s sense of belonging to a social group; and a meaning that refers to the quality or characteristic of a group independent of anyone’s personal identity, as in the expression “women’s identity.” Through these shifts, the concept of identity has become disconnected from its old meaning as stable sameness. Pulkkinen argues that the focus of the current usages of the concept is the content of identity, and contemporary theorists frequently characterize identity as changing, fragmented, and complex. (Pulkkinen 2004, 484.)

These overlapping meanings are visible in the multiple ways that theorists of feminist political togetherness use the vocabulary of identity. Theorists who take part in this discussion refer to “collective identity” and “group identity,” “self-identity” and “personal identity,” “political identity” and “identity politics,” and to “identification” and “disidentification.” Attempting to determine what identities are and why they matter in the creation and maintenance of the feminist
“we,” these theorists characterize identities as real, lived, experienced, complex, multiple, fragmented, and constructed, depending on which theoretical traditions they are attached to. “Women’s identity” and “feminist identity” are also often discussed. Although the link between the two has been questioned, many theorists still, at least unconsciously, consider the concepts equivalent.

The vocabulary of identity is the most controversial of the three main vocabularies of feminist political togetherness. The link between the vocabulary of identity and feminist politics was questioned by the criticism of “women” as the natural basis of feminist politics, the criticism that initiated the whole discussion on feminist political togetherness. In this process in particular the term “identity politics,” generally seen to imply that who we are should ground our political demands, has become a signifier for the weaknesses of the earlier phases of feminist politics, which contemporary theorists try to overcome.

Allison Weir has observed that the criticism of identity politics has led to a situation in which “many theorists have retreated altogether from thinking about collective identities to a focus on individual identities – as if it would be impossible to talk about a collective identity, ‘we’” (Weir 2008, 118). My analysis of the usages of the vocabulary of identity to theorize about collective aspects of feminist politics reveals that, although some theorists argue that this vocabulary does not provide a suitable basis for the task, most of them continue to see identity as a relevant concept, which helps to clarify what feminists do when they act together politically. The critique of identity politics may indeed have discouraged feminist writers from theorizing about collective identities, but the present study shows that focus on collective identity is not the only way, and not even the most productive way, to use this vocabulary to rethink the feminist “we.”

In the first section below I show how the critique of identity politics has influenced feminist theorists’ understandings of identity and their perceptions of the usefulness of the identity notion for theorizing about the feminist “we.” I maintain that, in the 1990s, many theorists saw identity as an excluding category and argued that the whole vocabulary of identity should be replaced with other vocabularies that would enable feminists to create “post-identity” or “non-identity” understandings of feminist politics. Since the late 1990s, however, a growing number of theorists has challenged this “post-identity approach” and

5 As Susan Bickford has pointed out, various versions of identity politics are circulating, and most critics leave the precise meaning implicit (Bickford 1997, 112). According to Moya Lloyd, in feminist debates “identity politics connotes a form of politics based upon certain characteristics of the individual shared with others. This might be an essential nature or a set of experiences which, regardless of the various differences between members, based on race, age, or sexual orientation, for instance, they all have in common.” (Lloyd 2005, 36).

6 This is the case in particular with women of color theorists. Because the main vocabulary they use is that of coalition, I discuss their texts in section 2.2.
contended that a notion of lived and experienced identity is analytically indispensible for theorizing about the collective dimension of feminist politics. In the second section I identify another way of using the vocabulary of identity for this purpose: to discuss the affective, often involuntary processes of identification and disidentification. Theorists who take this approach argue that there is nothing given about the feminist collective identity. It is constituted and maintained through identifications with concrete others, with collective identities, with values and principles, or with terms and signs.

**From critique of identity politics to affirmation of lived identities**

The criticism of feminist politics based on an essential women’s identity is the starting point for all theorists of feminist political togetherness. In this section I show that this criticism has led to different ways of understanding identity, as well as to conflicting assessments about the usefulness of the notion for novel understandings of the feminist “we.”

One of the most frequent arguments made against feminist identity politics is that it excludes or simply ignores all those who fail to conform to the correct model of womanhood and indeed, excludes difference in general (e.g., Dean 1996; Elam 1994; Hekman 2000). It has also been pointed out that identity politics creates an understanding of public identity comprised of a suffering self (e.g., Brown 1995) and that it prevents us from seeing that identity is a regulatory practice and one whose norms produce exclusions (e.g., Butler 1990). Inspired by these arguments, theorists such as Jodi Dean (1996), Amy Allen (1999), Diane Elam (1994), Susan Hekman (2000), and Shane Phelan (1994) have contended that feminists should turn to vocabularies of coalition and solidarity, which they believe are better suited to theorizing about a non-fixed feminist “we” that does not exclude difference. They describe their accounts of coalition politics and solidarity as visions of “post-identity” or “non-identity” feminist politics and claim that they “go beyond identity.”

Hekman, for example, argues that the best way to answer the criticism of identity politics is to “say ‘no’ to identity” and to “remove identity entirely from the political realm.” She recommends that feminists turn to “post-identity politics … that neither imposes a singular identity nor requires particular identities for political actors” and “focus on concrete political goals rather than the identity of political actors pursuing those goals.” (Hekman 2000, 304-5.) Elam implies that part of the problem of identity politics lies in the very use of the terms “identity” and “identification” as motivations for feminist politics. She argues that “in the name of ‘identity’ and ‘identification,’ [identity] politics demand of women that they all join together solely on the basis of what they have in common, so that difference among women is not just ignored but erased.” (Elam
For Elam, the feminist “we” must be based on “groundless solidarity,” a shared “suspicion of identity as an essential grounding for political action” (Elam 1994, 69). Dean suggests that feminists should move beyond identity politics because “when our politics is anchored in our identities, we can no longer argue; whatever is contentious is sequestered in the sacred realm of the self” (Dean 1996, 73). In her views, the vocabulary of solidarity is better suited for theorizing about a non-essential feminist “we.”

Most theorists who approach feminist politics from the post-identity perspective do not refer to the specific meanings that feminist scholars or activists have given the term “identity.” The quotations above reveal that lack of specificity leads to confusion between identity as a term, which can have various meanings, and the specific idea of identity as a unified, exclusive category that imposes sameness. In their extreme form the efforts to go beyond identity lead to framing the vocabulary of identity as a theoretical and political dead-end for feminism. It is as if the use of the vocabulary of identity always implied homogeneity, exclusion of difference, and assimilation, no matter how identity was understood.

However, a closer examination reveals that most theorists who use the “beyond identity rhetoric” continue to use the term identity. They give the idea of identity a role, albeit often a minor one, in their accounts of the feminist “we” based on the other principal vocabularies. For example, Shane Phelan, who describes her account of lesbian coalition politics as “non-identity politics,” also argues that “it is crucial that we examine the particular identities provided or imposed on us” (Phelan 1994, 90). She writes about the need for “better identity politics,” by which she means “continual shuffling between the need for categories and the recognition of their incompleteness” (Phelan 1994, 154).

The efforts to go beyond identity, which are mainly influenced by poststructuralism, are by no means representative of the discussion on feminist political togetherness as a whole. The notion of identity has remained central to women of color coalition theorists such as Gloria Anzaldúa, whose texts I will discuss in detail in chapter 2.2. In addition, the post-identity approach to collective feminist politics has recently been explicitly challenged by theorists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Susan Bickford, and Allison Weir, who claim that the vocabulary of identity is indispensable for theorizing about the feminist “we.” These theorists, whose views I see as part of a broader move within feminist and cultural theory to challenge the postmodern understandings of identity, argue that focusing on subjective and lived identities provides an understanding of the connections between women and feminists, and of their reasons to act together politically.
Mohanty (2003), Bickford (1996; 1997), and Weir (1996; 2008) argue that the postmodern critique of identity, unity, and foundations, which was useful in problematizing essentialist views of women’s identity, has gone too far and produced a narrow concept of identity that emphasizes exclusion, power, and coercion. They argue that the hegemony of this concept, which they label “postmodern” or “poststructuralist,” has made it difficult to discuss the positive role that identities play in feminist politics or to develop alternative concepts of identity. Mohanty provides an excellent example of this argument:

The critique of essentialist identity politics and the hegemony of postmodernist scepticism about identity has led to a narrowing of feminist politics whereby either exclusionary and self-serving understandings of identity rule the day or identity is seen as unstable and thus merely “strategic.” Thus, identity is seen as either naive or irrelevant, rather than as a source of knowledge and a basis for progressive mobilization.

(Mohanty 2003, 6.)

Of course, not all theorists who share the postmodern non-foundational view of identity see identities as restricting or as irrelevant to feminist politics. For example, Tuija Pulkkinen points out that consciousness of the constructed history of identity does not make it any less of an identity or any less relevant for politics. Although seen as contingent categories that are the result of action, identities are still meaningful for feminist politics. (Pulkkinen 2000, 127, 135-37.) However, in my view the main issue that Mohanty, Bickford, and Weir raise is not whether or not postmodern feminists see identity as a useful term for theorizing and practicing feminist politics, but rather how they understand identity. For example, Weir argues that one of the main weaknesses of the postmodern critique of identity lies exactly in seeing identity as a category (Weir 2008, 114).

In all, Weir and other writers, who reclaim the notion of identity for theorizing about feminist politics, are of the view that the postmodern understandings of identity are problematic because they do not resonate with what could be called the reality of identities. They argue that these understandings cannot give an account of how women experience their embodied identities, what these identities and experiences mean for them subjectively, and how these identities connect them with each other, contributing to the creation and maintenance of the feminist “we.” Weir and others suggest that feminists need new understand-

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7 The same argument has been made in a stronger manner by Linda Martin Alcoff (2000, 2006), Paula Moya (1997, 2000, 2002), and Lois McNay (2010) who contest the postmodern view of identity with realist notions, but who do not explicitly theorize about the feminist "we."
ings of identity that would be better placed, among other things, to understand and theorize about the collective dimension of feminist politics.

As I suggested above, the efforts to contest the post-identity approach to feminist politics are a reflection of a general aspiration to propose alternatives to postmodern accounts of identity as a constructed category. The most elaborate expression of this move is the “postpositivist realist theory of identity” developed in the 1990s by Satya Mohanty (1993, 1997) and by other scholars in cultural studies, literary criticism, and multiculturalism.

Paula Moya and Linda Alcoff are some of the most prominent advocates of this approach in the context of feminist theory, and they have modified the idea for feminist purposes (Alcoff 2000, 2006; Moya 1997, 2001, 2002). Moya argues that identities are “socially significant constructs that become intelligible from within specific historical and material contexts”; they are constructed because they are “based on interpreted experience and on theories that explain the social and the natural world,” and they are real “because they refer outward to causally significant features of the world.” (Moya 2001, 467-68.) Alcoff defines her realist approach to identity in the following manner:

A realist theory of identity, then, is one that recognizes the dynamic, variable, and negotiated character of identity. It is one that acknowledges the variability in an identity’s felt significance and cultural meaning. Yet it is also one that recognizes that social categories of identity often helpfully name specific social locations from which individuals engage in, among other things, political judgment.

(Alcoff 2000, 341.)

Moya and Alcoff contest the view that identities are imposed on us from the outside, and they stress the meaning and the embodied experience of identity. However, they focus on the epistemic rather than the political implications of the realist theory of identity.

Mohanty builds her efforts to rethink the role of identity in feminist politics on the realist theory of identity (Mohanty 2003, 244-45). She argues that, although political collectives are not products of essential connections, they are still related to the experiences, identities, and histories of individuals and involved local communities. Therefore, efforts to create feminist solidarity should, in practice, always start from historically and spatially located identities and experiences. (Mohanty 2003, 104.) Mohanty (2003, 6) also points out that the identities we live and experience motivate us politically.

8 Solidarity is Mohanty’s main vocabulary of political togetherness, and I discuss her views later in this chapter.
Theorists also have other views of how to understand identity and its role in promoting political bonds among feminists. Weir proposes a notion of identity which draws on Charles Taylor and the existential philosophical tradition.

This alternative understanding of identity is ethical-political: focused on meanings, values, and struggles for change. It is historical: focused on processes of creating meaning through practice and through narratives over time. And finally, this understanding of identity is relational: formed through relationships with, identifications with meanings, values, and other people.

(Weir 2008, 118.)

Weir points out that identities, as experiences of belonging and being held together by ideals, relationships, and commitments that matter, provide solidarity and a sense of meaning and therefore can help us hold together as feminists (Weir 1996, 114-16).

Lois McNay offers yet another understanding when she argues that the post-identity approach to feminist politics should be contested with “relational and materialist phenomenology.” She contends that this change in perspective would allow us to understand how lived and embodied identities generate political consciousness or disincline us to act politically. (McNay 2010, 512.)

Bickford argues that feminist theorists should look at the texts of women of color, who in her view have been successful in conceptualizing the connection between identity and politics in a politically and theoretically vital way. She argues that “far from being constituted solely by their oppression and exclusion, group identities may be cherished as a source of strength and purpose” (Bickford 1997, 119).

Theorists such as Mohanty, Weir, McNay, and Bickford, who contest the post-identity approach to feminist politics prominent in the 1990s, argue that identities are valid motivations for political action, that they sustain individuals in their political struggles and link them to each other. They agree with the postmodern criticism of identity politics, which maintains that feminists have to reject the idea that collective political action could be based on an essential, shared identity. However, they claim that the vocabulary of identity is necessary for theorizing about the collective dimension of feminist politics because it has analytical potential: exploring lived identities and experiences helps to explain

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9 McNay is more interested in theorizing about feminist politics through the concept of agency than through thinking about the feminist “we.” However, her idea of the mobilizing power of identities and experiences is relevant in the context of the discussion on feminist political togetherness.

10 For other positions, see, for example, the essays in the collection Feminist politics: identity, difference, agency edited by Deborah Orr, Dianna Taylor, Eileen Kahl, Kathleen Earle, Christa Rainwater, and Linda López McAlister (2007).
and interpret why individuals become attached to certain political groupings and why they commit to feminist projects. I suggest that the implication of this argument is the belief that identities factually exist, that they are ontologically real.

My overview of the uses of the notion of identity in the efforts to rethink the feminist “we” has revealed two contrasting views about its usefulness for theorizing about the collective dimension of politics. These views are linked to opposing understandings of identity. On the one hand, many theorists who have been writing since the 1990s have adopted a post-identity approach to the collective dimension of feminist politics, which is fueled by the postmodern criticism of full identity and unified subjectivity. This approach may lead to rejecting the usefulness of the concept of identity for theorizing about the feminist “we.” On the other hand, a growing number of feminist writers challenge the post-identity approach and the view of identity as a restricting category that informs it. They use the vocabulary of identity to speak about particular lived and embodied identities. In their view, the vocabulary of identity has explanatory power for theorizing about the collective aspects of transformative feminist politics: factually existing identities and experiences have an impact on the way individuals relate to each other and act or fail to act together politically. In other words, these writers argue that identities simply exist, and they use the vocabulary of identity to make an ontological argument.

**Identifications create and maintain the feminist “we”**

Writing about “identity” is not the only way to use the vocabulary of identity to rethink the feminist “we.” Another way, frequently used, is to examine the processes of identification and disidentification. In order to outline how identification is seen to constitute and maintain political bonds among feminists, I will look closely at Maria Lugones’ idea of loving identification (1987), Allison Weir’s notion of transformative identity politics (2008), Chantal Mouffe’s views on radical democratic politics (1993, 2000, 2005), and Judith Butler’s views of disidentificatory resistance (1993, 2000). These theorists discuss several objects of identification, which range from concrete others to values.

One of the earliest visions of a feminist “we” in which the term identification plays the key role is Maria Lugones’ article “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling, and Loving Perception” (1987). In this text, Lugones writes about the need for coalitions among different groups of women of color and between women of color and white women. Lugones argues that the controversies she observed between women of color and white women in the U.S. in the mid 1980s were related to “a failure of love,” which is linked to “the failure to identify with another woman, the failure to see oneself in other women who are quite different
from oneself” (Lugones 1987, 7). The idea of “loving identification,” which draws on her experience of coming into consciousness as a woman of color and her relationship with her mother, is Lugones’ solution to this problem.

Lugones’ identification is an affective process, and in her usage love and identification are almost identical terms. She argues that one has to love another person in order to identify with her, and one must identify with the other in order to love her. However, Lugones’ affective identification is not the intimate or romantic love we feel for lovers, families, and friends. For Lugones, a loving identification with the other is a mode of acknowledging the other and perceiving her attentively. Lugones argues that identifying with other people means that we learn to understand “what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes” and are “fully subjects to each other” (Lugones 1987, 17). She describes a loving identification with another person with the metaphor of “traveling into her world” (ibid., 9-11). By world, Lugones means the perspective from which a person understands herself and others, a perspective that is partly produced by relations of power, but that also gives a sense of agency vis-à-vis those relations of power.

Because our perception of the other is limited and based on the perspective we have as inhabitants of our own world(s), traveling to the world of the other and seeing her as she sees herself changes our perception. We learn to see her as an active, creative agent and not as a victim of oppression. (Lugones 1987, 8.)

Identification and traveling into each other’s worlds requires effort, commitment, and an attitude that Lugones describes as “playfulness.” Playfulness involves openness to surprise, and to be playful, one must understand the world as a contingent place where it is possible do things that cannot be explained by existing rules and norms. This attitude also entails openness to self-construction or reconstruction. When we travel into the worlds of others and let others enter into our world, we have to be open to the possibility that our self-perception changes as we struggle to see ourselves from others’ perspectives. (Lugones 1987, 16-17.)

Lugones’ early reflections on how women from different races and backgrounds can identify with the other and perceive her attentively have influenced more recent and theoretically ambitious accounts of identification, including Allison Weir’s (2008) notion of “transformative identity politics.” Weir’s goal in theorizing about the feminist “we” is to provide a vision of what holds feminist movements together and to develop a theoretical framework useful for the transnational feminist politics of the twenty-first century. Weir’s text is one of the rare descriptions of feminist political togetherness that I examine which embraces the term identity politics. She describes her own project as an attempt to “reconstruct identity politics for feminism” by reconceptualizing identity as “identification with” (Weir 2008, 113).
Weir’s view is more complex than Lugones’, because she differentiates among three identifications that are indispensable for constituting and holding together a feminist “we.” First is the identification with feminist values and ideals. Individuals have different ideas about what feminist values are, and these values change over time. What is important is that feminist values inform feminist practices, meaning that individuals are committed to these values. Second is “identification with ourselves – with women, and with feminists – as a ‘we,’” by which Weir refers to our willingness to see a number of individuals as a feminist “we.” The third form of identification she mentions is the one in which Lugones is interested, that is, identifications with particular others. Weir stresses that these identifications involve various kinds of relations such as erotic desire, love, empathy, and admiration and that they are often mediated. It is also necessary to identify with strangers and those who are very different and distant from us. (Weir 2008, 115-16.)

Weir argues that when individual women practice these three forms of identification, the result is a collective identity that could be called “women’s identity.” This identity is the basis of feminist solidarity, and it enables women to recognize common interests. (Weir 2008, 111.)

Although Weir writes about the feminist “we” in terms of bonds between women and refers to women’s identity, she distinguishes transformative identity politics strictly from conventional identity politics, which rely on the unity and stability of identity. She argues that, unlike the traditional form of identity politics, her version can take change into account. (Weir 2008, 111.) Weir argues that identifications with particular others keep collective and individual identities in constant motion. In her words, identifications with concrete others “mediate our feminist solidarity and our collective and individual identities” (ibid., 115).

In a manner similar to Lugones, Weir notes that when we identify with another person, we do not recognize a similarity in the other; rather we engage in an active process of traveling into her world and learning about her perspectives. Weir develops this idea further and stresses that learning about the other must include recognizing the relations of power between one and the other. Identifications with concrete others across privilege ideally lead one to “enlarge one’s horizons” and to “reconstitute oneself.” We construct anew our mutual relationship and the collective “we” of which we are a part through these transformations. (Weir 2008, 125-27.)

Weir also contends that in order to create a broader feminist solidarity, the identifications with concrete others that keep individual identities and the collective women’s identity open have to be supplemented with identifications with a “we.”
Transformative identity politics rests on the engagement and identification of each participant with the “we.” If I identify with this “we,” it matters to me to engage in questioning and critique, to continually rethink, and thereby affirm, the basis of our attachment.

(Weir 2008, 128.)

Commitment to the “we,” achieved through identifications, in turn makes it easier to confront different others and reconstruct oneself based on these encounters.

From the perspective of my aim in this section, that is, to understand the role that feminist theorists give to identification in constituting the feminist “we,” the most significant aspect of Weir’s views is the double role she gives to the processes of identification. On the one hand, identifications create collective identities and hold them together; on the other hand, they force these identities to change over time. Identifications with feminist values and the feminist “we” create and maintain the sense of solidarity required for collective feminist politics. By identifying with each other, we participate in the constant shaping and reconstituting of the feminist collective identity.

Chantal Mouffe, who provides my third example of how the term identification is used for theorizing about the collective dimension of politics, grounds her views on poststructuralist theory and psychoanalysis. Mouffe’s main interest is in how democratic collective identities are created and maintained. She envisions a new, progressive political front that stands against oppression, and she sees the feminist movement as part of this collective of “radical democratic citizens.” Mouffe has commented on feminist politics only in passing, but her fierce defence of the collective dimension of politics makes her contribution important in the context of the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Mouffe argues that we cannot talk about politics without discussing the constitution of political community (next to “identity,” “community” is her key vocabulary of political togetherness):

Politics concerns collective, public action, and deals with collective identities; it aims at a construction of a ‘we’ in a context of diversity and conflict. … Without any reference to the political community, democratic politics cannot exist.

(Mouffe 1996, 39, 44.)

Identification is one of Mouffe’s key concepts in theorizing about political community. Similar to Weir, who argues that collective identities provide meaning and significance to individuals, Mouffe argues that “in order to act

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11 In fact Mouffe has discussed feminist politics explicitly in only one text in which she argues that the most effective form of feminist politics is to be part of a wider front of groups and movements that fight against oppression (Mouffe 1993).
politically people need to be able to identify with a collective identity which provides an idea of themselves they can valorize” (Mouffe 2005, 25). However, whereas Weir, who focuses on identifications with concrete others, implies that we can choose the objects of identification, Mouffe maintains that we identify with positions that are constructed by the surrounding social and political discourses and institutions (Mouffe 2000, 95-96). Political identities such as “feminists” or “women” are, in her view, temporary fixations produced through identifications with what she calls “discursive surfaces” (Mouffe 1993, 71). Because the discursive structure is unsteady and bound to change in order to cover its gaps, the points of identification offered change over time. New political identities become meaningful through the emergence of new hegemonic discourses, which construct the social and political space in a different way.

Mouffe’s strong emphasis on antagonism distinguishes her account of political community from Lugones’ view of feminist coalition and Weir’s vision of feminist solidarity. Whereas Lugones and Weir write about relations within the political “we” that identifications create, Mouffe argues that political relations between groups are always relations between “us” and “them” and involve conflict (Mouffe 2008, 92). This view arises from Mouffe’s allegiance to Carl Schmitt and his view of politics as drawing lines between friends and enemies. Following Schmitt, Mouffe gives conflict a fundamental role in politics. Whereas Weir understands conflict as something that maintains political identities in the sense that conflict transforms identities from within, Mouffe sees human life as inherently conflictual and describes antagonism and conflict as part of the “human condition” (Mouffe 1993, 3; Mouffe 2000, 98).

Mouffe’s notion of agonism softens the antagonistic us/them relationship that has a pivotal role in her theory of political community.12 By agonism Mouffe refers to a relationship between “us” and “them” that does not regard the “they” as an enemy needing to be destroyed, but as an adversary who has different views and opinions, but who shares with us a “common symbolic space” (Mouffe 2005, 52). There are still conflicts between adversaries, but these conflicts are conducted according to democratic procedures, rules, and values accepted by the participants. Adversaries consider each other’s positions to be legitimate, although they do not necessarily agree with them. In some sense, adversaries belong to the same political community as we do. (Ibid., 21, 52.) In terms of identification this means that the members of the democratic community at large identify with a shared set of values, principles, and institutions and

12 Mouffe argues that the purpose of democratic politics is to turn antagonism into agonism, “to envisage how the antagonistic dimension can be given a form of expression that will not destroy the political association” (Mouffe 2005, 52).
commit to making these values the basis of their political action, although their interpretations of these values may differ.\textsuperscript{13}

Although Mouffe does not say much about feminist politics, her views of identification can be used to theorize about feminist political community. In Mouffe’s terms, to identify as a feminist means that one is attached to a few key values, such as equality between women and men and ending the historical oppression of women. Those who subscribe to these values form the broad feminist political community. However, not everyone within this broad community understands the idea of ending women’s oppression in the same way. Feminists may have different views of the causes of women’s oppression and what should be done to end it. Thus, conflicts arise. Feminist values function like empty signifiers: they collect various individuals and groups having different views, yet without fixing the agenda of feminism. New interpretations of the key values can emerge when a political situation changes, around which new specific political identities within the broad feminist political community can be created. Mouffe’s views on antagonism act as a reminder that political relations among those who identify with the same collective “we” are not necessarily harmonious.

My fourth and final example of identification as a term with which to discuss feminist collective politics is Judith Butler’s “disidentificatory resistance.” Butler’s account of the role of identification differs significantly from Lugones, Weir, and Mouffe’s. Butler is interested in the failure of identification, and she argues that it is the process of disidentification, not identification, that carries radical political potential.

What are the possibilities of politicizing disidentification, this experience of \textit{misrecognition}, this uneasy sense of standing under a sign to which one does and does not belong? ... [I]f the term cannot offer ultimate recognition ... it may be that the affirmation of that slippage, that failure of identification is itself the point of departure for a more democratizing affirmation of internal difference.

\textit{(Butler 1993, 219.)}

Butler contends that disidentification enables us to see that political communities, groups, and movements are divided internally. She argues that not everyone recognizes themselves in the terms that are supposed to motivate them politically and that promise solidarity and community, for example, the term “feminism.” Even those who affectively identify with feminism may feel disap-

\textsuperscript{13} Another of Mouffe’s concepts that is relevant for the efforts to rethink the feminist “we” is articulation. However, it is not linked to her account of identification, which is my focus here. Briefly put, Mouffe defines articulation as “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of articulatory practice” (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 105; see also Laclau 1997, 57).
pointed when they find themselves part of a factionalized constituency that produces exclusions instead of the inclusive political community they imagined. According to Butler, such disappointments, which can lead to disidentification with the mobilizing term, should be embraced rather than feared.

Butler does not write about identifications with concrete others as do Lugones and Weir, but rather argues that we identify with terms and signs. As does Mouffe, Butler contends that the discursive field provides the positions with which we identify. She is interested in how a particular political field, on a given moment, makes possible, encourages, and forecloses certain identifications. However, it is important to note that, for Butler, the reiterated identifications themselves create and maintain the normative power and hegemony of those positions.

Butler argues that the political task of “disidentificatory resistance” is to transform and widen the horizon of political identifications that are possible at a given moment. For Butler, the failures of the process of identification are the key to destabilizing the political field, and she suggests that disidentification with one political position can provide the necessary push for political mobilization toward new political collectives. (Butler 2000, 150-51.) Butler’s position echoes the views of some continental political theorists who see political potential in the failure of identification. For example, Jacques Rancière has connected identification with conservative institutionalization and the maintenance of the existing order of things and linked disidentification with the political disruption of this order, which provides the starting point for constituting new political subjects and subjectivities. (Rancière 1999.)

My discussion of Lugones, Weir, Mouffe and Butler’s descriptions of the role that identification plays in constituting, maintaining, and disrupting the feminist “we” reveals that these theorists refer to several processes of identification. Mouffe and Weir write about identifications with a collective identity and about identifications with values and ideals. They point out that, although individuals may view differently a certain “we” or a value, the shared identification connects them with each other, and they re-enact this connection whenever they debate their different views. Butler argues that we identify with terms and that it is the repeated identifications that give these terms their normative power. Lugones and Weir see identifications between concrete others as grounds for a broader feminist “we.” The idea that feminists should identify with various others in order to act politically with them has been criticized as transcending difference and appropriating the different other (Mohanty 2003, 115-16; Young 1990, 234-36; Young 1997, 68). However, Lugones and Weir stress that when I identify with the other, I should not see her as similar to myself, but perceive her in her difference, learn about her perspectives, and be prepared to change myself as the result of the identification.
Theorists who focus on identification with signs or subject position tend to argue that identifications are limited by discourses and are partly involuntary; theorists who focus on identifications with concrete others focus on the efforts needed to identify with the other in a respectful way.

My discussion also draws attention to a controversy between the maintaining and the contesting of collective political identities. Lugones, Weir, Mouffe, and Butler agree that there is nothing God-given about collective identities and political communities, because these entities are created and maintained through various forms of identification. The four theorists also agree that the power of identifications is limited; collective identities that have once been constituted will not remain infinitely unchanged. This is where the similarities end. Weir, Mouffe, and Lugones draw the conclusion that feminists interested in rethinking the collective dimension of feminist politics should theorize about identification because the affective power of identifications creates collective identities and maintains them over time. Butler’s position is almost the reverse. She draws attention to the norms that identities and positions impose on those who identify with them, and she understands identification as a conservative force that maintains these norms. In her view feminists should focus on the political potential of disidentification, which can destabilize those norms. For Butler, it is not relevant to maintain existing collective identities. Political formations are supposed to be temporary and shifting, and the political aim of feminists should be to extend the field of possible political formations instead of clinging to some of them. From Butler’s perspective, even the slow internal transformation of collective identities that Weir discusses is not enough. Existing patterns of identification should be disrupted in order to pave the way for new points of identification.

Features of the vocabulary of identity

The vocabulary of identity is the most controversial of the three main vocabularies, and its use – or the refusal to use it – to rethink the feminist “we” evokes strong passions. The entire discussion of alternative ways of understanding the collective dimension of feminist politics arose because of the critique of an essential women’s identity, and all theorists of feminist political togetherness have built on different forms of this critique. We have seen that, although the critique of identity politics has led some theorists to reject the whole vocabulary of identity, the notions of identity and identification have had – and still have – a central place in the efforts to solve the problem of the feminist “we.”

How identity is understood leads to diverging views about its relevance for theorizing about the collective dimension of feminist politics. Many theorists who in the 1990s used the vocabularies of coalition and solidarity to rethink the
feminist “we” adopted a “post-identity approach” to feminist politics. The most vocal advocates of this approach, which involves seeing identity as a restrictive category, rejected the whole vocabulary of identity as exclusionary and oppressive. Since the late 1990s, feminist writers have enlisted the vocabulary of identity to discuss lived and embodied particular identities and thereby to challenge the post-identity approach and the view of identity that informs it. They insist that the vocabulary of identity is necessary for giving an account of the feminist “we” because experienced identities have an impact on the ways we relate to each other and act together politically. In between these extremes, most theorists of feminist political togetherness see identity as a useful concept, but do not make it the centerpiece of their analysis, nor do they create novel notions of identity.

An alternative to using the notion of identity to rethink the feminist “we” is to theorize about identification. Theorists who take this approach argue that there is nothing fixed about the feminist collective identity. It is constituted and maintained through identifications with others, with collective identities, with values and principles, or with terms and signs. Theorists who focus on identification with others argue that we must choose to identify with the other and aspire to do this in a way that respects her difference. Theorists who focus on identification with signs and subject positions emphasize that the discourse produces and limits the potential points of identification available at a given moment. My analysis reveals a tension between maintaining and contesting the feminist “we.” Allison Weir, Chantal Mouffe, and Maria Lugones argue that theorizing about the process of identification helps to understand how the feminist collective identity can be maintained over time. Judith Butler sees identification as a conservative force that maintains existing norms; she argues that only disidentification carries real political potential for feminists. This tension is central to the whole discussion on feminist political togetherness.

Theorists who use the vocabulary of identity to discuss the feminist “we” return repeatedly to two ideas. They draw attention to individual selves, and they stress the affective dimension of political bonds between feminists. We will see below that these themes are not limited to the theorists who use the vocabulary of identity, but rather are characteristic of the discussion on feminist political togetherness as a whole.

Feminist theorists who use the vocabulary of identity shift the focus from collective identity, which is typical to traditional identity politics, and from the idea of identity as a category characteristic of the postmodern critique of identity politics, to self-identity. In particular the search for realist and materialist notions of identity draws attention to the lived and embodied experience of one’s specific identity. Another manifestation of the focus on the individual is Weir’s and Lugones’ interest in the efforts that individuals must make in order
to identify with concrete others in a non-appropriative manner. Creation of political commonality requires effort, certain attitudes, and certain dispositions.

The second theme in the representations of the feminist “we” based on the vocabulary of identity is the importance of the affective aspects of political relationships. Weir criticizes some views of feminist coalition politics from the “disparagement of affect” and argues that the vocabulary of identification makes it possible to think about political struggles through affective relations to other people and their problems (Weir 2008, 122). Mouffe argues that passions encourage identifications. Ever loyal to her antagonistic view of politics, she connects passions mainly with the potential for violence, hostility, and conflict inherent in social relations. (Mouffe 1993, 140; Mouffe 2005, 25.) Lugones (1987) links identification to love, which she conceives as the attentive perception of the other.

## 2.2 Coalition

The term coalition is conventionally used to mean separate and self-contained groups or individuals who have come together around a particular issue to achieve a particular goal (e.g., Albrecht & Brewer 1990, 3). The identities of the groups or individuals involved are regarded as already constructed and left unaffected by the self-interested and often temporary coalitional process. Within political theory, the interest-group model of politics together with game theory have been the most usual approaches to theorizing about coalitions (Lloyd 2005, 153). In everyday political discourses, “coalition” is used to refer to parliamentary politics and the formation of majority governments in multiparty systems and to broad assemblages of civil society organizations representing various identities and causes.

The recent history of feminism is often represented as shift from identity politics to coalition politics (e.g., Bickford 1997; Lloyd 2005; Lyshaug 2006). Indeed, my study reveals that “coalition” is one of the three main vocabularies that feminist theorists have used to rethink the feminist “we” since feminist politics based on a simple women’s identity was questioned. Although “coalition” is frequently used in feminist writing, a thorough analysis of how feminist representations of coalition politics differ from the conventional understandings of coalitions and how they have evolved over time is lacking. My detailed analysis of the way feminist theorists have used the term coalition when they propose alternative visions of feminist collective politics fills this lacuna.

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Theorists of feminist political togetherness are more often unanimous about the potential of the coalition vocabulary than about the potential of the identity vocabulary. Katherine Adams summarizes some of the positive expectations that feminists attach to the concept of coalition.

Coalition work brings us face to face with the absence of universal truths, the danger of safe assumptions, the falsity of common sense – or the lack of any supposed common basis in reason or rationality that promises to simultaneously transcend and unite difference. Rather today’s diverse political communities require approaches to discourse that will promote negotiation among divergent identities, voices, histories, and desires. … [Coalitions] reconcile attention to difference with the equally vital desire for – and urgent necessity of – connection and alliance.

(Adams 2002, 2.)

Susan Bickford reveals another set of these expectations when she argues that “coalitions are an example of a specifically democratic intersubjectivity; that is, of political relations between partially constituted and partially constituting subjects in a context of variegated power” (Bickford 1997, 123-24). My analysis of the feminist uses of the term coalition reveals that the conviction that the vocabulary of coalition can address differences and complex subjectivity is a long-standing one, even if the way feminist theorists use the term has changed since the late 1970s when it entered into the discussion on feminist political togetherness.

I discuss two instances of the feminist coalition discourse. The first is that of black feminists and other non-white U.S. feminists, which was developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s and is still popular. This discourse was initially based on their experiences in the women’s movement and their efforts to collaborate with white women and portrayed feminism as a coalition of different women across relations of power. It is characteristic of this discourse that the vocabulary of coalition intertwines with the vocabulary of identity: identity politics and coalition politics are seen as complementary political strategies and the articulation of specific individual identities and experiences is seen to play a role in coalition building. The second instance of feminist coalition theorizing involves views in the 1990s and 2000s by theorists whose interest in coalitions is theoretical rather than personal. Although some of the recent, theoretically elaborate uses of the term coalition are intended to provide a post-identity theory of feminist politics, I argue that the coalition discourse of women of color and its emphasis on specific identities have had a significant impact on the later feminist coalition theorizing.
Coalitions between women across difference and privilege

The first feminist writers to use the vocabulary of coalition for the explicit purpose of imagining novel forms of the feminist “we” were black feminists and non-white academics and activists in the United States in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It is no coincidence that these writers took up the term coalition. Black women, Latina women, women of Indian origin etc. were forced to develop political relationships across cultural lines. They were active in various political movements in which they did not feel at home, and they had to work with people with whom they did not identify (Burack 1999, 134). By analyzing the Combahee River Collective’s visions of coalition politics together with those of Bernice Johnson Reagon and Gloria Anzaldúa, I show that the first usages of the vocabulary of coalition to rethink feminist collective politics were connected with revealing the experiences of women of differing ethnicities, races, sexualities and social backgrounds in the mainstream women’s movement. In other words, the early feminist coalition discourse mobilized by black feminists and women of color was linked to the vocabulary of identity and to the politics of particular identities.

An early example of a feminist use of the term coalition is the “Black Feminist Statement” written in 1977 by the Combahee River Collective, a group of leftist black lesbians active in Boston from 1974 to 1980. The Statement is one of the key texts of black feminism, and it has subsequently been recognized as one of the first feminist texts to come up with the term “identity politics” (Alcoff 2000, 314; Fowlkes 1997, 105; Lloyd 2005, 153; Phelan 1994, 145). Yet far less attention has been paid to the other innovative aspect of this text: the idea that identity politics requires coalition work with other progressive organizations and groups in order to succeed.

The Statement emphasizes the particular experiences of black women and the importance of organizing around these experiences. The Combahee River Collective explicitly refers to its politics as “identity politics” and points out that “the most radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression” (Combahee River Collective ([1977] 2000, 267). However, as some commentators have observed, the Statement does not portray black feminist identity as a pre-ordained biological fact. Rather this identity arises in coming to terms with differences of sexual orientation and class within the emerging community (Norman 2007, 119).

The Collective emphasizes that organizing as black (lesbian) feminists must go hand in hand with doing political work in coalition with other groups. They reject separatism as a political strategy and emphasize their solidarity for progressive black men and all oppressed groups.
The inclusiveness of our politics makes us concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World, and working people. We are particularly committed to working on those struggles in which race, sex, and class are simultaneously factors of oppression.

(Combahee River Collective [1977] 2000, 272.)

It is the difficult, never-ending work to construct a specific, black feminist identity and accept internal differences sensitizes the members of the Collective to other struggles and enables them to build coalitions with other movements.

Bernice Johnson Reagon’s much quoted essay “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century” (Reagon 198115) provides a more substantive discussion of feminist coalition politics. The essay, which is based on a speech that Reagon, a singer in an African-American music group and a professor of history, delivered before a mostly white audience at the West Coast Women’s Music Festival in 1981, provides another way to use the term coalition. Whereas the Combahee River Collective wrote about coalitions between black feminists and other progressive groups, Reagon describes feminism itself as a coalition of women of different races and backgrounds, a view that was taken up by many women of color who adopted the vocabulary of coalition in the 1980s.

Based on her experiences in women’s movements, Reagon emphasizes the hardships involved in cross-difference politics among women. In general, she presents coalition politics as an agonistic affair, which is not about feeling good but necessary for survival.

Today, wherever women gather together it is not necessarily nurturing. It is coalition building. And if you feel the strain you may be doing some good work. [...] You don’t go into coalition because you like it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possibly kill you, is because that’s the only way you can figure to stay alive.

(Reagon 1981.)

Reagon’s description of the women’s movement as a coalition painful to its participants can be seen as a reaction to the idea that gatherings of women, such as the music festival whose audience she addresses, should be safe, women-only spaces devoid of conflict.

Reagon presents coalition as the opposite of identity-based community. Identity-based groups, which she refers to as “homes” and as “wombs,” are (or at least, mistakenly, consider themselves) places of comfort and nurturance, where “you check everybody at the door.” Coalitions put a strain on those involved and in a coalition “folks who are not like you” with different claims.

15 The version cited of Reagon’s speech, accessible online, is not paginated. The quotations from Reagon that follow here are taken from the online text.
Main vocabularies of feminist political togetherness

experiences, and bodies can enter and must be welcomed without the require-
ment of assimilation (“That’s called allowing people to name themselves”).
(Reagon 1981.)

Although Reagon makes a rigid distinction between identity-based groups
and coalitions, identities play a central role in her vision of coalition politics.
First, like the Combahee River Collective, Reagon understands coalition politics
and identity politics as parallel strategies that support each other. The practical
and ethical primacy of coalition politics over identity politics does not render
irrelevant identity groups and politics that promote their own interests. Because
it is impossible to be in a coalition all the time, we all need “homes” where we
take strength from people who are similar to us or who we have chosen. Reagon
also contends that sometimes it is useful to engage in political action with those
who inhabit the same “home”: “At a certain stage nationalism is crucial to a
people if you are going to ever impact as a group in your own interest.” (Reagon
1981.)

Second, although Reagon questions women’s identity as the basis for femi-
nist political mobilization, she nevertheless acknowledges that identities, in
particular racial identities, have an important role in coalition politics:

It does not matter at all that biologically we have being women in common. We
have been organized to have our primary cultural signals come from other fac-
tors than that we are women. We are not from our base acculturated to be
women people, capable of crossing our first people boundaries – Black, White,
Indian, etc.

(Reagon 1981.)

Reagon argues further that when she takes part in political groups and move-
ments, she always does so as a black woman. In general, black people are always
the starting point of her political action: “I do not start nothing except with
Black people.” (Reagon 1981.) In other words, she proposes that an individual
always enters a coalition from a certain position and as someone distinguished
by a specific identity. She is not supposed to leave this identity behind.

Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana feminist writer who played an active role in
constituting women of color as a new feminist political identity and edited
several anthologies of texts of women of color, has elaborated on many of the
themes present in Reagon’s account of coalition politics. She builds on Reagon’s
idea of the necessary coalition character of the women’s movement and the
political uselessness of separatism, extending Reagon’s focus on race to differ-
ences in sexual orientation and differences in power in general. Anzaldúa con-
tends that the vocabulary of coalition is well-suited to describe political relations
between women who are differently placed by relations of power:
Coalition work attempts to balance power relations and undermine and subvert the system of domination-subordination that affects even our most unconscious thoughts. A coalition cannot be based on an assumption of a common ground, there are no permanent solutions, resolutions, or agreements.

(*Anzaldúa 1990a, 225.*)

For Anzaldúa, coalitions between women of color and white women and between lesbian and heterosexual women should be based on strategic estimates on when and how to engage with others rather than on a real affinity. Like Reagon, she emphasizes that coalition building is hard work and that one cannot be in a coalition all the time, but she does not see total withdrawal from coalition work as a sustainable way of living and doing politics. (*Anzaldúa 2002, 3; Anzaldúa 1990a, 223-24.)*

Anzaldúa elaborates also on the argument implicitly made by Reagon: marginalized women must make their specific identities the basis of their coalition work with more privileged women. She reminds that feminist coalition politics should never “strip us of our individuality” (*Anzaldúa 1990a, 225*) and elaborates:

All parties involved in coalition need to recognize the necessity that women of color and lesbians articulate the terms of engagement: that we be listened to, that we articulate who we are, where we have come from (racial past), how we understand oppression to work, how we think we can get out from under, and what strategies we can use in accomplishing the particular tasks we have chosen to perform.

(*Anzaldúa 1990a, 225.*)

Anzaldúa is known for her metaphors of “bridging” and “bridge building” that she uses to describe coalition building across differences and relations of power throughout her work. She has defined bridging as a means to mediate between oneself and one’s community and other people (*Anzaldúa 1990a, 223*), and more recently she has described bridging in the following manner:

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16 Anzaldúa elaborates on four ways to think about coalition building between women of color and white women. The first is “to bridge,” which means being a “mediator between yourself and your community and white people.” The danger is that the one who bridges may be used by those she is trying to reach. The second is “to drawbridge,” to choose whether to become physically engaged with white people, or to withdraw, usually temporarily, in order to charge one’s energies before “going back to the frontline.” The third is “to island,” to withdraw totally. For Anzaldúa, this is not a sustainable way of life. The fourth option is “to sandbar.” Sandbars, which connect islands to the mainland, are sometimes under water, sometimes visible, depending on the tide. To sandbar “means getting a breather from being a perpetual bridge without having to withdraw completely.” (*Anzaldúa 1990a, 223-24.*)
To bridge means loosening our borders, not closing off to others. Bridging is the work of opening the gate to the stranger, within and without. To step across the threshold is to be stripped of the illusion of safety because it moves us into unfamiliar territory and does not grant safe passage. To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded.

(Anzaldúa 2002, 3.)

The expression “to bridge” draws attention to the efforts individuals must make to understand their own complexity and the strangeness of others in order to build coalitions.

Reagon’s and Anzaldúa’s visions of coalition politics are representative of the first instance of feminist coalition discourse, the way women of color used the vocabulary of coalition in the 1980s. Like Reagon and Anzaldúa, they described white women as their main coalition partners and portrayed feminism as a coalition of different women across privilege. In addition, they reminded that women of color in whose name many of them spoke were a coalition too: a constructed political identity that had to be actively maintained (e.g. Lugones 1987).

Furthermore, in line with Anzaldúa’s texts, the early feminist coalition discourse of women of color focused on the efforts that individuals must make when they build and maintain coalitions across difference and portrayed political togetherness as a result of will and creativity. Commentators of this literature have argued that women of color have developed skills involved in acknowledging and negotiating difference and have created knowledge out of their experiences of forming coalitions across difference (Moya 2001, 466-67; Sandoval 1991, 15).

Indeed, looking at the texts of the era, it is possible to come up with “guidelines” for building cross-difference coalitions and making them work. For example, one has to examine one’s self and come to terms with one’s own suffering in order to understand others (Moraga 1983, iii), one has to try to understand struggles not shaped by one’s personal priorities (Dill 1983, 148), and one has to be willing to transform one’s self, even one’s most valuable convictions (hooks 2000b; Lugones 1987; Moraga 1983, iii; Combahee River Collective [1977] 2000, 273). Coalition building is an “act of love” (Anzaldúa 1990a; Molina 1990), and it involves an attempt to love the other (hooks 2000b; Lugones 1987). Finally, one has to be playful and creative and not take things too seriously (Reagon 1981; Lugones 1987; Anzaldúa 1987).

Although the coalition discourse of women of color in the 1980s bears some affinities to the conventional understanding of coalitions as temporary, strategic
alliances related to specific issues or goals, I suggest that women of color have laid the groundwork for a distinctively feminist account of coalition politics. They have given the vocabulary of coalition an ethical and political purpose that makes it stand apart from the conventional understanding of coalitions. Going beyond the necessity that has driven them to build coalitions with other groups, women of color have framed coalition politics as an ethically desirable form of collective political action. Even Reagon, who cites survival as the main reason to engage in coalition work, contends that coalition politics can help everyone face the new century with their “principles intact.” She also points out that coalition work challenges you to “go beyond yourself” and allows you to “find yourself alive.” (Reagon 1981.) The ethical dimension of coalition politics, visible in the “guidelines” that I mentioned above, involves, among other things, ethical bonds between the self and different others and openness to self-transformation.

From the perspective of my goal in this chapter, which is to explicate the links and the differences between the vocabularies used to rethink the feminist “we,” the most interesting aspect of the coalition discourse of feminists of color is that it combines the vocabularies of identity and coalition. They have established four links among these vocabularies.

First, this discourse implies that every identity group, including women, black feminists, and women of color, is necessarily a coalition. As has been pointed out, when women of color drew attention to negotiating differences within groups, they contested the idea of identity-based political groups as self-contained and unified (Burack 1999, 131, 139). For example, the Combahee River Collective depicts the painful and never-ending negotiations involved in the construction of a black feminist “we” and points out that this “we” will change in the future owing to internal dissent and conscious efforts to broaden its scope (Combahee River Collective [1977] 2000, 272-73).

Second, women of color maintain that politics that promote the interests of a specific identity group – which in itself is already a coalition – must be supplemented with coalitions with other marginalized groups and progressive

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17 Although supportive of coalition politics with white women, feminists of color addressed coalitions with caution. Many argued that if women of color put too much effort in building coalitions with white women and educating them to become anti-racist, they may lose sight of their own oppression. For example, in the mid-1980s, Sheila Radford-Hill warned black women against “premature coalitions” with white women and argued that organizing around black women’s own interests and agendas will allow them to build even stronger coalitions with white women, but only “when issues cut across the interests of several groups.” (Radford-Hill 1986, 164-65.) However, this tactical and necessity-based approach is only a part of the coalition discourse of women of color.

18 Burack (1999, 139) argues that attentiveness to internal dissent has provided black feminists and women of color with the resources to build and to conceive of respectful coalitions with other groups.
 movements. Although they underline the necessity of advancing the interests of one’s specific groups and combating specific intersecting oppressions, they argue that separatist identity politics alone will not succeed. For example, Reagon contends that, although at a certain stage it is crucial to engage in political action with those who inhabit the same identity group, ultimately, everyone needs coalitions to survive (Reagon 1981).

The third connection between the vocabulary of coalition and the vocabulary of identity is the argument that coalition building requires knowledge of one’s specific identity and social location and the communication of this identity to others. Cherrie Moraga observes that it is only by going deeply into oneself, coming to terms with one’s own oppression and multiplicity, that it becomes possible to understand others and build coalitions with them (Moraga 1983, iii). Anzaldúa emphasizes self-narration in Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (1987), in which she describes the located, historically specific context in which she and other women of Indian/American/Hispanic descent navigate. It is the coming to terms with the complexity of one’s own identity and oppressions and encountering similar complexities in others that make the creation of political coalitions across difference possible. In other words, women of color coalition theorists imply that individual subjects who engage in coalition building are always historically specific; they have their specific social locations, experiences, and identities that partly coincide with those of others.

The fourth connection between the two vocabularies is more implicit than the other three. Although women of color understood “women” as a fabricated coalition rather than as a self-evidently shared identity grounding feminist politics, they still saw “women” as the collective subject of feminism, and the idea of “women’s identity,” although understood as non-uniform and complex, guided their early feminist coalition discourse.

My analysis of the women of color coalition theories from the late 1970s and 1980s reveals that the connectedness of the vocabularies of identity and coalition is part of the genealogy of the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Building on their experiences in various political movements, women of color have argued that identity politics requires coalition politics with other groups in order to succeed and that building coalitions is enabled by articulating one’s specific identity and location and analyzing the linkages and differences among those involved. I have argued that when feminists of color portrayed feminism as a coalition of women across differences and relations of power, they laid the groundwork for a specific feminist coalition discourse distinct from the conventional understanding of coalitions as temporary, tactical bonds. This discourse has ethical implications: among other things, it emphasizes openness to negotiating differences within emerging coalitions as well as within every identity group and requires openness to transformation.
Contingent coalitions between feminism and other movements

Feminists of color used the term coalition to improve the practical feminist politics in which they were engaged. Since the beginning of the 1990s, other theorists of feminist political togetherness have increasingly used the term in order to develop a theory of non-essential feminist political commonality (e.g., Adams 2002; Allen 1999; Bickford 1997; Butler 1990; Cole & Luna 2010; Fowlkes 1997; Haraway 1991; Lugones 2003, 2006; Lloyd 2005; Phelan 1994). In order to show how the coalition discourse of women of color has been carried over into recent discussions on the feminist “we,” which also build on the postmodern criticism of identity and foundations, I will discuss in detail the views of Judith Butler, Shane Phelan, and Diane L. Fowlkes on coalition politics.

Judith Butler has developed a distinctly anti-foundational understanding of a coalition as a contingent political identity, which dissolves as surprisingly as it is formed and is partly involuntary and accidental. Her use of the term contrasts with the coalition discourse of women of color.

In Gender Trouble (1990), Butler describes coalition as a suitable term for theorizing about feminist politics in a way that does not rely on a coherent and uniform category of “women.” She acknowledges that “coalition” is a popular term in the feminist discussions of the era – probably the reason she discusses coalitions in the first place – and has been used to describe feminist politics that “does not assume in advance what the content of ‘women’ will be.” However, Butler is not satisfied with the accounts of coalition politics as dialogic encounters between variously positioned women that I discussed above. She criticizes feminist coalition theorists for positing an ideal form of coalition beforehand and for trusting agreed-upon forms of dialogue through which the established identities of those who are building a coalition could be articulated. (Butler 1990, 20-21.)

Butler explicitly questions the links that women of color drew between identity and coalition building when she argues that “coalitional politics requires neither an expanded category of ‘women’ nor an internally multiplious self that offers its complexity at once” and that the political practices that constitute coalitions should always “have purposes other than the articulation of individuality” (Butler 1990, 21). In her view, anti-foundational coalition politics should endeavor to create new contingent identities and bend the boundaries of the existing ones:

An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure.

(Butler 1990, 22.)
A key feature of Butler’s account of coalition politics is that a coalition is a contingent and precarious form of political togetherness, which is not made to last. When she writes about the constitution of coalitions, she always mentions right off that coalitions are also relinquished or dissolved. Butler goes so far in embracing contingency that she argues that feminist coalition politics should have as its explicit aim the disruption of the boundaries of the emerging coalition (Butler 1990, 21). This emphasized temporality contrasts with the way many women of color focus on the efforts that individuals should make to keep coalitions alive.

The understanding of coalition as created by goals and practices, not by identities, and as inherently precarious also forms the baseline of Butler’s discussions of coalitions in her more recent work. Whereas in Gender Trouble Butler wrote about the feminist collective political subject as a non-foundational coalition – perhaps because she reacted to similar literature rather than maintained her own view of the best use of the coalition vocabulary – more recently she has turned to broader coalitions between progressive movements and marginalized communities. For example, Butler reflects on the possibility of a coalition among Leftist political movements and minority communities, which could include feminism, the struggle against racism, the struggle against homophobia, the struggle against the IMF, and counter-nationalist movements (Butler 2000, 166-67). This move from conceptualizing feminism as a coalition to emphasizing broader coalitions between feminism and other movements is also characteristic of other feminist coalition theories from the 1990s and 2000s.

When Butler argues that coalitions are brought together by goals and practices, not by identities, she draws attention to the involuntariness of our political alliances. She uses advocacy for same sex marriage to make her point. Butler suggests that when gay and lesbian rights activists make a bid for marriage, this bid is an identification with the institution of marriage itself and, by extension, with the state and the straight people who are already part of that institution. Through this political goal, they break the alliance with a variety of groups, straight and queer, whose lives are not determined by the institution of marriage. (Butler 2000, 176.) This means that, even though Butler thinks that certain political coalitions are desirable, she does not understand coalition politics as a conscious attempt to bring together individuals from different backgrounds or to build bridges between different minority movements and progressive groups. Coalitions are based on overlapping goals, and they work in unpredictable ways. They establish connections that are not sought and break others that might be actively pursued.

The insistence on the involuntariness and unpredictability is the most original aspect of Butler’s understanding of coalitions. It sets her apart from other feminist coalition theorists of the 1990s and 2000s, who in line with women of color coalition theorists are interested in the relations that those who build
coalitions have to each other and in how coalitions can be maintained over time. Shane Phelan (1994) and Diane Fowlkes (1997), whose theories of coalition politics elaborate on rather than contrast the coalition discourse of women of color, provide more insights into these issues.

Shane Phelan has written about coalitions in the context of lesbian politics. She sees coalition politics as a solution to the tendency of lesbian feminists to treat lesbian identity as homogenous and essentialist and to silence voices that do not fit the unitary idea of the lesbian (Phelan 1989, 166). In Getting Specific: Postmodern Lesbian Politics, Phelan argues that cross-identity coalitions between lesbians and non-lesbians are necessary for “any real transformation of the social and political landscape” (Phelan 1994, 139). I read Phelan’s approach to coalition politics as a combination of the postmodern suspicion of foundations with a focus on specific identities and locations, which is characteristic of the coalition theorizing of women of color. Phelan calls her approach “getting specific,” and contrasts this approach with contemporary political theory and deconstruction, which, in her view have failed to “speak to our lives.” (Phelan 1994, 92.)

Similar to Butler, Phelan describes coalitions as completely artificial entities that are not based on something that the groups and individuals engaged in them already share, but arise from specific practices initiated in specific contexts and are necessarily provisional. Yet, whereas Butler’s non-foundational coalitions emerge and dissolve in a contingent manner even without conscious effort, Phelan argues that, owing to the lack of a natural foundation, coalitions have to be actively created and sustained. In her view, feminist theorists should give more attention to this issue.

Moving still further away from Butler and approaching the coalition discourse of women of color, Phelan argues that one’s specific identity, location, and experience must be the starting point of theorizing about coalitions and building them in practice. She argues that theorizing coalitions requires turning attention to the “reality of provisionally fixed identities and locations” (Phelan 1994, 96) and “working out from the center of our lives to see the connections and the contradictions in them” (ibid., 32). She also advocates for “a return to the original formulation of identity politics” of the Combahee River Collective as a practice that “works for those issues that stem from our experiences and identities” (ibid., 145-46). In addition, she argues, similar to Anzaldúa, that particular life-narratives are the best resource for theorizing about the intersections of race, class, and the oppression of lesbians (ibid., 32).

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19 Although Phelan does not directly use the vocabulary of coalition to rethink the feminist “we,” her elaborate discussion of coalition politics is relevant in the context of feminist political togetherness.
Although Phelan explicitly builds on the coalition discourse of women of color, she also borrows some points from Butler’s criticism of this approach. Phelan stresses that the experiencing self of her theory of coalition politics is a “post-modern self,” which is conflictual, multiple, and under constant construction (Phelan 1994, 146). She argues that making our selves the starting point of coalition politics “does not mean simply drawing from our ‘experience’ in an unmediated way but means articulating our lives, interpreting and reinterpreting them in ways that link us to others” (ibid., 140). She also notes that identities, subject positions, and subjectivities are part of “a terrain of possible change” and that coalition politics means opening oneself to the provisionality of identities (ibid., 140).

For Phelan, “getting specific” about coalitions means taking into account the “messiness” and difficulties of coalition building. Similar to Bernice Johnson Reagon, Phelan describes the pain, uneasiness, fear, and hurt related to coalition politics. Creating coalitions among different groups and individuals involves power struggles, because not all individuals or groups are considered equal in the eyes of others. We may feel threatened, embarrassed, or disgusted by our allies and their opinions and prefer to give up rather than to keep working together. (Phelan 1994, 151.)

In order to shed light on how coalitions are created and maintained in the face of these difficulties, Phelan turns her attention to the role that individuals with their specific subjectivities and material social locations play in coalition politics, building again on the views of Anzaldúa and other women of color coalition theorists. She notes that “those looking for allies must begin by volunteering to become allies” (Phelan 1994, 175) and that coalitions require “self-extension of each person toward others” and “conscious commitment to the welfare of others, both in general and in each person we meet” (ibid., 158). For Phelan, successful coalition politics boils down to questions of commitment and character.

The questions to ask are not whether we share a given position but whether we share a commitment to improve it, and whether we can commit to the pain of embarrassment and confrontation as we disagree…. The question is whether we can decide to be allies, and whether we have the strength to follow through that decision.

(Phelan 1994, 156.)

Successful collective political action requires a certain aesthetic of self, a “conscious fashioning of character.” Laziness, arrogance, denial, and cowardice may disrupt entire organizations and struggles, but we can all develop our characters by engaging in coalition politics and slowly becoming better coalition partners. (Phelan 1994, 156-58.)
My discussion shows that, although Phelan calls her approach to coalition politics postmodern and describes it as “nonidentity politics”, it resonates more with the coalition discourse of women of color, which stresses individual efforts and specific identities and locations, than with Judith Butler’s anti-foundationalist understanding. Phelan’s vision of coalition politics could be seen as an effort to bridge the women of color coalition discourse and the postmodern criticism of identity and unified subjectivity.

The last of my three examples is Diane L. Fowlkes’s (1997) “feminist theory of coalition.” Fowlkes builds explicitly on texts by women of color and endeavors to grasp and illuminate their potential contribution to theories about the collective dimension of feminist politics. Fowlkes’ main argument is that building political coalitions around shared goals must start from constructing intersubjectivity, and she argues that this is one of the main theoretical insights of the coalition theorizing by women of color. In her interpretation, these women had moved from the traditional unified collective subject to a “standpoint of intersubjectivity”20 and made space for individual difference within collective action. (Fowlkes 1997, 106-8, 114-15.)

Fowlkes argues that the intersubjectivity required for collective political action is created by writing “complex identity narratives,” exploring the complexities of our identities and exposing these complexities to others. Fowlkes quotes Gloria Anzaldúa’s account of her culturally and historically located memories and self-transformation in Borderlands/La Frontera (Anzaldúa 1987) as an example of such an identity-narrative. When others read and respond to such narratives, an intersubjective space is created in which speaking to and with others is possible (Fowlkes 1997, 109, 121). This space, in itself political, is the precondition for building coalitions across difference around shared political goals (ibid., 114-15).

Fowlkes’s view that coalition politics requires self-narration is not unique among the second-generation feminist coalition theorists. We have already seen that Phelan (1994, 32) presents similar ideas, and the view is also shared by Maria Lugones (2006), who discusses coalition politics between marginalized women and other non-privileged groups. Referring to Anzaldúa, too, Lugones writes about the “coalitional communicative gesture” that enables coalition work across difference and about self-narration that interprets collective memo-

20 Fowlkes borrowed the term “standpoint of intersubjectivity” from Seyla Benhabib (1986). Fowlkes argues that this standpoint “requires that we claim the universal need for human dignity and, at the same time, let go of the illusion that universal knowledge, and subjectivity, and a unified plan of action are possible, or necessary” (Fowlkes 1997, 114.) She observes that this standpoint also requires acknowledging the partiality of other persons’ or groups’ perspectives and their complex identities.
The focus on self-narration reveals that individual selves are the starting point of Fowlkes’s feminist theory of coalition. Indeed, Fowlkes argues that, in a feminist theory of coalition, the term coalition should not refer to relations between groups, but to relations between individuals who have partial perspectives on the world and complex identities:

Such coalitions will no longer be understood as coordination among many collective singular groups, but coordination in a network of variously and complexly identified intersubjects who have persevered in the struggle to achieve a feminist materialist standpoint of intersubjectivity....

(Fowlkes 1997, 121.)

Fowlkes’s argument about the centrality of individual selves for building coalitions across difference makes explicit the emphasis on individuality that I have already identified in the coalition theorizing by women of color and in Phelan’s views. The idea that coalitions are created when internally fragmented selves express their difference from each other and find points of connection in these differences also grounds other theories of feminist coalition politics from the last two decades. For example, Katherine Adams, who develops a “self-interested coalition discourse” that combines Hannah Arendt’s thought with women of color theorizing, argues, describes the importance of the self in the following manner:

Coalition discourse calls for remaining completely self-interested, not only articulating self through interest, but also staying interested in self, curious, observant, open to the full play of motivation and desire, and willing to negotiate all aspects of this self across the coalition table.

(Adams 2002, 27-28.)

The discussion above reveals that feminist theorists who since the 1990s have created theories of feminist coalition politics can be roughly divided into two antagonistic groups, based on their approach to the women of color coalition discourse.

Like Butler, some build on the postmodern criticism of unified identity and foundations. They see the vocabulary of coalition as a way to theorize about the feminist “we” after identity politics, and some even maintain that they are creating non-identity visions of feminist politics (Butler 1990, Butler 2000; Lloyd 2005). Butler rejects outright the coalition discourse of women of color on the grounds that it relies on unity and articulation of pre-given identities. Others follow Fowlkes and build on the coalition discourse of women of color. They emphasize the need to reclaim certain group identities (Bickford 1997, 123) or
articulate specific identities and locations (LugoButlernes 2006; Fowlkes 1997; Adams 2002). Some of these theorists, like Adams and Bickford, turn to feminists of color with the explicit aim to find an alternative to postmodern feminist theorizing. In their view this theorizing, which they believe Butler represents, does not provide sufficient tools for discussing the feminist “we.” Phelan (1994) tries to combine these antagonistic approaches. She argues in line with women of color that specific experiences and locations provide the starting point of coalition building efforts, but she emphasizes that the experiencing self should be seen as a postmodern, fragmented self.

Although many second-phase feminist coalition theorists build on the discourse of women of color and retain the connection between coalition politics and the articulation of specific identities implied therein, they destabilize one of the connections drawn between the vocabularies of identity and coalition in the 1980s. When writers such as Reagon and Anzaldúa described feminism as a coalition of different women, they left the link between feminism and women’s identity unquestioned. No matter what their theoretical background, writers who, in the last twenty years, have used the vocabulary of coalition to discuss the collective dimension of feminism have extended the feminist political “we” beyond women. They argue that feminists should stop thinking only in terms of women’s concerns and begin creating coalitions with other movements and engaging in broader political struggles. For them, this is the only way to build a feminism that is truly inclusive of women of diverse racial, sexual, and class identities, address intersecting oppressions, and transform the social and political landscape. (Adams 2002, 2; Allen 1999, 115; Phelan 1994, 139; Butler 2000; Lugones 2006; Mouffe 1993.)

Moya Lloyd (2005, 151-67), who has examined feminist representations of coalition politics, has observed that feminist coalition theorists imply that coalition building is a process that creates new identities and new political forms. My analysis confirms this observation. The feminist coalition theorists of the 1990s and 2000s have elaborated on an idea implicit in the women of color coalition theories from the 1980s, namely, that coalition politics creates new individual and collective identities and destabilizes existing group identities and subjectivities. Butler (1990, 21) argues in a normative manner that coalition politics should “take the transformation or expansion of existing identity concepts as its normative goal.” Bickford (1997, 123) notes that coalition politics allows us to transform identities and “to challenge the terms on which identity is given by creating new political confederations.” Adams (2002, 28) points out that in her coalition discourse “identity remains always open to revision, never permitted to settle down into that home away from home in a priori unity.” Lugones (2006, 84) observes that “coalitional communication is enacted through a change in one’s own vocabulary, one’s sense of self, one’s way of living, in the extension of one’s collective memory.” I suggest that the identity-creating and
identity-transforming potential of coalition politics has been the main promise of the coalition vocabulary for the theorists who have used it to rethink the feminist “we” in the last two decades.

To summarize, the texts of feminists of color from the 1980s have been a valuable resource for the more recent, theoretically elaborate accounts of feminist coalition politics. In particular, the idea that specific identities and social locations must play a role both in theorizing about feminist coalitions and in building them in practice has been adopted. Theorists who discuss feminist coalition politics from an anti-essentialist and deconstructionist perspective argue that the vocabulary of coalition helps feminists to move “beyond identity.” I argue that the second-phase feminist coalition theorists do move beyond identity in the sense that, by theorizing about coalitions between feminists and other social movements, they destabilize the link between women’s identity and feminist politics. Nevertheless, the vocabularies of identity and coalition continue to be linked.

**Features of the vocabulary of coalition**

Women of color, who initiated the discussion on feminist political togetherness in the late 1970s, portrayed coalition work as the only possible form of feminist politics, given the differences between women and intersecting oppressions. Feminist writers have continued to use the vocabulary of coalition through the 1990s and down to the present to theorize about inessential feminist community and non-foundational feminist politics.

Feminist theorists who use the term coalition to rethink the feminist “we” provide a notion that is thicker than the everyday understanding of coalitions as temporary constellations around joint interests. Writing about “coalition work” and “coalition building,” they argue that coalitions have to be actively established and maintained by the individuals involved. Commitment to endure conflict and difficulties, engagement in dialogical processes, efforts to understand the other while respecting her difference, risking intimacy with the other, and openness to self-transformation are just some examples of the efforts and attitudes that are seen as being necessary for creating feminist coalitions. Although some theorists have seen coalition politics as a necessity, most frame it as a possibility that has ethical implications.

The meanings given to the term coalition have shifted since the word entered the discussion, coinciding partly with the two phases of the feminist coalition discourse that I have identified: the early feminist coalition discourse of U.S. women of color in the late 1970s and the 1980s and the more theoretically elaborate discussion about feminist coalition politics since the 1990s. The most obvious of these shifts concerns what I call the scope of coalition politics, that is,
who is in coalition with whom. In the 1980s, feminist theorists and activists conceptualized feminism itself as a coalition. They argued that women are marked by such differences that feminist politics should be seen as a form of coalition politics rather than as a naturalized sisterhood of all women. (Anzaldúa 1990a; Lugones 1987; Reagon 1981.) In the 1990s, the idea of feminism as a coalition was replaced by the idea that broader coalitions between feminists and other oppressed groups are necessary for transformative feminist politics (Adams 2002; Allen 1999; Butler 2000; Lugones 2006; Mouffe 1993; Phelan 1994).

I understand this shift as part of a complex set of turns and continuities in the relationship between the vocabularies of identity and coalition in the discussion of feminist political togetherness. I have argued that the specific feature of the feminist coalition discourse of women of color is the connection between coalition politics and various notions of identity. Women of color see coalition politics as parallel political strategy to struggling for the interests of one’s own specific identity group, that is, to identity politics, and they argue that one must make specific social locations, experiences, and self-identities the starting point of coalition work. The concept of identity also guided the early feminist coalition discourse in the sense that “women” was still seen as the collective subject of feminism and that the link between women’s identity and feminism was not questioned.

By contrast, feminist coalition theorists of the last two decades, who have built on the postmodern critique of unified identities, consider the vocabulary of coalition as an alternative to the vocabulary of identity. For example, Moya Lloyd and Shane Phelan describe coalition politics as “non-identity politics” (Lloyd 2005, 151, 153, 166; Phelan 1994, 139). Although the second-phase coalition theorists destabilize the link between women’s identity and feminist politics that was implied in the early descriptions of feminist politics and use explicit “beyond identity” rhetoric, they do not move beyond identity altogether. I have shown that most theorists who used the vocabulary of coalition in the last two decades to conceptualize the feminist “we” have adopted the focus on specific identities characteristic of the early coalition theories of women of color. They argue that conceptualizing broader coalitions of oppositional social movements and marginalized groups is not possible without taking into account the lived experiences of embodied individuals (Adams 2002; Fowlkes 1997; Lugones 2006; Phelan 1994).

My analysis suggests that the vocabulary of coalition leads theorists of feminist political togetherness to discuss the creation of new contingent identities and the transformation of existing identity concepts. Theorists using other vocabularies also refer to these issues, but those who use the vocabulary of coalition provide the most elaborate discussions.
Feminist coalitions are seen as contingent results of a coalition building process that has nothing given about them. Theorists of feminist political togetherness react to the contingent character of coalitions in different ways. Some writers emphasize that those who participate in coalition building should make efforts to maintain coalitions despite the difficulties faced (Reagon 1981; Phelan 1994). Others acknowledge that coalitions are necessarily precarious and will sooner or later disintegrate. Judith Butler goes furthest in this direction when she argues that those who are part of an emerging coalition should destabilize the new coalitional identity even before it is established in order to prevent it from becoming a reified norm (Butler 1990, 21).

Feminist theorists who use the vocabulary of coalition to rethink the feminist “we” emphasize that coalition work not only creates new provisional identities, but it also transforms existing collective identities and individuals’ sense of self. Judith Butler argues explicitly that transformation of existing and emerging identity concepts should be the normative goal of feminist coalitional politics (Butler 1990, 21). Women of color and the theorists who elaborate on their views point out that the linkages to others through coalition work initiate changes in ourselves and in our convictions, and they maintain that openness to self-transformation is a precondition for building sustained coalitions. (Adams 2002; Anzaldúa 2002; Lugones 2006; Phelan 1994.)

In the previous section, I identified two themes that emerge from the efforts to rethink the collective dimension of feminist politics using the vocabulary of identity: the focus on the individual and the focus on the affective aspects of collective political action. These themes are some of the persistent elements in the discussion of feminist political togetherness across all vocabularies, including, obviously, the vocabulary of coalition. Whether feminist coalition theorists write about coalitions between different groups of women or between feminism and other progressive movements, my analysis reveals that, for them, the agents of coalition politics are individuals, not coalitions. The focus on the individual is manifest in the pivotal role that women of color and the theorists influenced by them give to the articulation of specific identities. Also the argument that coalition building requires efforts and commitment from the individuals involved is a step in this direction. Theorists who rethink the feminist “we” using the vocabulary of coalition also draw attention to the affective dimension of collective political action. The term “love” is used frequently to describe the attitude required for coalition building (Lugones 2006; Anzaldúa 2002, 4; Phelan 1994, 158). Feminist coalition theorists explore still another aspect of the affective dimension of collective feminist politics: they point out that individuals engaged in building coalitions across differences will experience fear, feelings of powerlessness, and pain (Phelan 1994, 151; Reagon 1981).
2.3 Solidarity

When sociologists and political theorists discuss solidarity, they sometimes connect the concept with communitarian understandings of community, and sometimes with the more open inter-subjective bonds that hold individuals together while allowing for difference and fragmentation (Brunkhorst 2005; Pensky 2008). It is widely understood that solidarity involves feelings of belonging to or identifying with a group. For example, solidarity has been defined as “the ability of actors to recognize others, and be recognized, as belonging to the same social unit” (Hurt & Benford, 2004, 439). Solidarity is also seen to involve a concern for the well-being of the solidarity group or even a normative idea of mutual obligation to help its members. For example, Scholtz defines political solidarity as a unity of individuals held together by “complex moral relation” (Scholtz 2008, 51).

Solidarity was an important concept in the feminist political mobilization of the 1960s and the 1970s, as it was in the leftist movements of the time. When the idea of a uniform women’s identity implied in the vision of global sisterhood solidarity was challenged, the usefulness of the term solidarity was questioned as well. For example, in the early 1990s, Judith Butler portrayed solidarity as “an exclusionary norm at the level of identity that rules out the possibility of a set of actions which disrupt the very borders of identity concept, or which seek to accomplish precisely that disruption as an explicit political aim” (Butler 1990, 21).

Theorists who insist on the significance of the solidarity vocabulary for theorizing about the collective dimension of feminist politics have later questioned Butler’s critique. For example, Amy Allen argues that “if we reject solidarity altogether, as Butler does, it becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible, to understand how oppositional social movements can formulate common goals and strive to achieve them” (Allen 1999, 101). Allen is not alone in her view. Some theorists, such as bell hooks, have used the vocabulary of solidarity all along (hooks [1984] 2000b, 1989, 2000a). Since the mid-1990s, others have reclaimed this vocabulary as a valid way of speaking about political attachments that bind women or feminists together and in the process have provided complex descriptions and normative views of solidarity bonds. (Allen 1999; Bartky 2002; Cole & Luna 2010; Dean 1996; Elam 1994; Kruks 2002; Lyshaug 2006; Mohanty 2003; Steans 2007; Weir 1996, 2008; Young 2011.)

The increasing popularity of the vocabulary of solidarity in the discussion on feminist political togetherness can be seen as a reaction to the coalition vocabulary that dominated the debate in the 1980s and early 1990s. Some feminists who use the vocabulary of solidarity argue that feminist coalition theorizing is lacking ethical and affective substance and does not, therefore, provide a solution to the problem of the feminist “we” (Dean 1997, 249; Kruks
Main vocabularies of feminist political togetherness

2002, 154; Lyshaug 2006, 77-79). According to Brenda Lyshaug (2006, 78), “[coalition politics] 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.” In her view feminist theorists must “supplement their account of coalition politics with an account of the ethical and dispositional preconditions of forging inclusive political ties,” which theorizing about solidarity can provide. (Lyshaug 2006, 78.)

In this section, I discuss the descriptions of feminist solidarity proposed, among others, by bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Diane Elam, and Jodi Dean. I have chosen to focus on these writers because of the depth of their re-conceptualizations of solidarity, which are based in different theoretical backgrounds. I argue that the vocabulary of solidarity leads theorists to discuss the feminist “we” in terms of relations within the feminist political community rather than in terms of opposition and exclusion and to ask how these relations can be sustained. Whereas practice-oriented theorists such as hooks and Mohanty argue that theorizing about the feminist “we” requires learning from activists and taking account of specific locations, Elam and Dean, who have developed abstract theoretical notions of solidarity, draw attention to the notion of ethics.

Powerful feminist movements require solidarity

Chandra Talpade Mohanty and bell hooks were already emphasizing the importance of solidarity for collective feminist politics in the 1980s. hooks, a U.S. black feminist scholar, and Mohanty, a postcolonial and transnational feminist theorist of Indian origin, addressed the same questions as those U.S. women of color who embraced the vocabulary of coalition, namely, how could women of different races and ethnicities and women of the First and the Third Worlds work together as feminists. Instead of employing the vocabulary of coalition, hooks and Mohanty turned to the vocabulary of solidarity. They wrote – and are still writing – about solidarity in reference to the feminist movements they are

21 Other feminist conceptualizations of solidarity which I refer to in passing are Sandra Bartky’s (2002) vision of feminist solidarity as Mitgefühl, that is, as feeling-with, inspired by Max Scheler, Sonia Kruks (2002) and Brenda Lyshaug’s (2006) elaborations on Bartky’s views, Amy Allen’s (1999) Arendtian account of solidarity as a power that arises from action in concert, Iris Marion Young’s (2011) redefinition of solidarity on the basis of Derrida’s political friendship, and Elizabeth Cole and Zakya Luna’s (2010) view of feminist solidarity based on an analysis of the experiences of feminist activists in the U.S. who work at the intersections of gender with other axes of power.
engaged in and argue that powerful feminist movements cannot survive without solidarity.

Solidarity has been central to hooks’ work since the 1980s. She has been concerned in particular about the relationships between black and white women in the U.S. women’s movements. hooks argues that feminism must be a mass-based political movement if it is to have a transformative impact on society (hooks 2000b, xvii). In her view such a movement needs solidarity to inspire and motivate people to act. She refers to political solidarity between women as “the force putting in place positive change” (hooks 2000a, 17) and something that “strengthens resistance struggle” (hooks [1984] 2000b, xx). hooks argues that the feminist movement since the turn of the century has been weak and fragmented and that feminist solidarity is consistently undermined. Therefore, “we are as much in need of a renewed commitment to political solidarity between women as we were when contemporary feminist movement first began.” (hooks 2000a, 17.)

hooks’ reflections on solidarity are an excellent example of the attempts to consider the role of difference in constituting and maintaining a feminist “we” characteristic of the discussion on feminist political togetherness as a whole. For hooks, differences related to race, gender, sexuality, and class are the conditions for political solidarity. As she states, “beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world” (hooks 1995, 265). Political communities exist and are capable of political action because they are diverse, not in spite of being diverse.

For hooks, solidarity is not a feeling. It is a tiring process linked to concrete encounters between concrete persons. There is nothing automatic about solidarity; creating solidarity between women and bonding across races and differences is hard work, and it has to be continuously sustained through commitment. (hooks 2000a, 16-17; hooks [1984] 2000b, 59, 67.)

Working collectively to confront difference, to expand our awareness of sex, race, and class as interlocking systems of domination, of the ways we reinforce and perpetuate these structures, is the context in which we learn the true meaning of solidarity. It is this work that must be the foundation of feminist movement.

(hooks 1989, 25.)

In other words, to form a broad-based feminist movement, women should work together to identify and confront their differences, see how they dominate and are dominated in turn, and acknowledge their privilege.

For hooks, a solidarity based on difference cannot be created and fostered without conflicts, owing to differences in power and privilege. She describes
society–constituting confrontations as affective and points out that they force feminists to work through negative emotions such as hostility and anger. (hooks [1984] 2000b, 66–67.) Confrontations in which some women are hurt should not be avoided, because it is the process of confronting difference that creates a strong collective political subject held together by solidarity.

Furthermore, confrontations that are faced courageously create new kinds of individual feminist subjects. hooks notes that the collective confrontation of difference has an impact on the individuals involved:

True politization is a difficult, tiring process, one that demands that we give up set ways of thinking and being, that we shift our paradigms, that we open ourselves to the unknown and unfamiliar. Undergoing this process, we learn what it means to struggle and in this effort we experience the dignity and integrity of being that comes with revolutionary change. (hooks 1989, 25.)

When hooks argues that feminism as a collective movement cannot achieve social transformation without “education of critical self-consciousness,” she elaborates on the theme of self-transformation that is familiar from feminist coalition theorizing, and from Weir’s and Lugones’ accounts of identification.

Ewa Ziarek, who has elaborated on hooks’ ideas about solidarity, says that for hooks, solidarity is based on respect for the “irreducible difference of the abstract, capitalized Other.” Ziarek 2001, 211). However, in my view hooks is not evoking the abstract, capitalized Other. On the contrary, she emphasizes face-to-face encounters with concrete others and the solidarity relations between particular women that these encounters create. Although hooks writes about a mass-based feminist movement, she argues that the basis for this movement and the self-transformations crucial to it is laid in small groups where women from different backgrounds meet and discuss feminist issues, confront their differences, and form personal woman-to-woman relationships (hooks 1989, 24, 26). hooks even argues that feminism should be based on women-to-women relationships in which women affirm and strengthen one another (hooks [1984] 2000b, 46–48).

Chandra Talpade Mohanty develops her account of transnational “feminist politics of solidarity” in Feminism Without Borders: Decolonializing Theory, Practicing Solidarity (Mohanty 2003). Already in 1984, she had addressed related themes in her often-quoted essay “Under Western Eyes,” in which her criticism of the colonialist tendencies of Western feminism was based on the conviction that it is possible to forge coalitions between white Western feminists and working class women and feminists of color around the world (Mohanty 1984, 334).

Mohanty’s idea of “solidarity across borders” broadens the scope of the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Most accounts of identity, coalition,
and solidarity that I examine in this chapter, including hooks’, are reflections of the U.S. feminist movement. Mohanty provides a significant update to the debates about the feminist “we” when she draws attention to the new global realities faced by feminism. Mohanty’s theorizing about solidarity is closely linked to anti-capitalist critique and decolonialization.\footnote{By colonization, Mohanty is referring to activity at the level of nation-states, but she also speaks about the “discursive colonization” of the lives and struggles of marginalized women (Mohanty 2003, 230).} In her view what follows from this framework is that feminist politics must be cross-cultural and transnational. (Mohanty 2003, 83.) Evoking the necessity of coalition politics between feminism and other progressive movements, Mohanty argues that feminist scholars and activists should establish links with anti-capitalist struggles. Feminism, she says, cannot afford not to be anti-capitalist. (Mohanty 2003, 230.)

Although Mohanty understands the challenges to feminist politics differently than hooks, for whom the main issue is to tackle the racism inherent in feminist movements, the main elements of their visions of solidarity are similar: acknowledgment of difference and orientation to feminist practices that can guide feminist theorizing. Mohanty defines solidarity in terms of “mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interest as the basis for relationships among diverse communities.” She continues:

Rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together. Diversity and difference are central values here – to be acknowledged and respected, not erased in the building of alliances…. Solidarity is always an achievement, the result of active struggle to construct the universal on the basis of particulars/differences. It is the praxis-oriented, active political struggle that is important to my thinking … I believe that feminist solidarity as defined here constitutes the most principled way to cross borders – to decolonize knowledge and practice anticapitalist critique.

(Mohanty 2003, 7.)

In short, for Mohanty, as for hooks, solidarity is not given. It is the result of a struggle, and it originates from the effort to confront differences within political communities.

Mohanty’s approach to solidarity is reminiscent of the coalition discourse of radical women of color in that it aims to address the role of specific identities, experiences, and social locations in the constitution of a feminist “we.” For Mohanty, the identities that mobilize us politically are always spatially and historically located. This means that solidarity based on experiences and identities can never be separated from the contexts in which the individuals and groups involved are located and which shape their experiences and identities.
Building solidarity requires seeing the historical interconnections between particular identities and experiences, but also networking across local specificities and finding common ground across regions of the world. As Mohanty puts it:

In knowing differences and particularities, we can better see the connections and commonalities because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determining. The challenge is to see how differences allow us to explain the connections and border crossings better and more accurately, how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully. It is this intellectual move that allows for my concern for women of different communities and identities to build coalitions and solidarities across borders.

(Mohanty 2003, 226.)

The main idea that both Mohanty and hooks put forward is that differences among women do not hinder feminist solidarity, but rather enable its creation. However, Mohanty and hooks have different views of which differences create solidarity among feminists and the role of difference in this process. hooks writes mostly about race, but also about class and the links of race and class to hierarchies and inequalities of power. She is interested in the manifestations of these differences and the relations of power in encounters between women. The concrete, embodied other person with her particular skin color, social background, and gender becomes the marker and the location of the difference that matters when feminist solidarities are built.

Mohanty points rather to the importance of context-sensitivity in general and the importance of taking spatial locations and historical processes into account. Only when thus contextualized, can differences be seen as the “common differences” that contribute to solidarity. This historical-spatial contextualization provides an understanding of difference that is not oppositional, but that places experiences, identities, and practices on a map where they are connected with and separated from each other by borders. These borders shift and can be crossed, exactly like the geographical borders between countries and regions, which feminist solidarity must also be able to cross. In other words, Mohanty is interested in understanding how the particular and the local contribute to creating broad ideas and movements such as transnational feminism.

The second idea shared in the solidarity conceptualizations of hooks and Mohanty is that the collective dimension of feminist politics must be theorized in connection with concrete feminist political practices, in a manner that crosses the border between feminist academia and the feminist movements. Some recent accounts of feminist solidarity across difference also share this approach and are based on feminist practices rather than on philosophical concepts (Cole & Luna 2010; Steans 2007). The dialogue between feminist theory and practice that hooks and Mohanty defend is one of the persistent themes in the discussion.
on feminist togetherness as a whole. Like hooks and Mohanty, theorists of feminist political togetherness who call for taking feminist practices into account have different understandings of what the exemplary practices are. I will return to this theme in chapter 4.5.

Abstract feminist solidarity as ethical relationships within the “we”

Whereas hooks and Mohanty argue that theories about feminist solidarity should draw inspiration from feminist practice, Diana Elam (1994), Jodi Dean (1996, 1997), Sandra Bartky (2002), Sonia Kruks (2002), and Brenda Lyshaug (2006) have drawn on various traditions of philosophy and political theory. Elam’s notion of “groundless solidarity” is based on ideas of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Nancy. Dean’s notion of “reflective solidarity” has been influenced by Jürgen Habermas’s discursive universalism, while Bartky has turned to Max Scheler’s phenomenology. I show that all these theorists of abstract feminist solidarity share an interest in conceptualizing a political commonality among feminists in terms of ethics.

In Feminism and Deconstruction (1994) Elam argues that feminist politics should take the form of the “politics of the undecidable.” Using this Derridean phrase, she argues that feminist politics should be seen as continuous negotiation and contestation: there is no single form that feminist politics should take. Nor can feminist politics rely on a stable subject, and there are no universal moral laws to tell feminists how to make judgments. (Elam 1994, 69, 77, 81-82, 87, 106.)

Although Elam questions the idea of a stable feminist subject, she argues that feminist politics should involve some notion of political commonality. She presents “groundless solidarity” as a form of political or ethical community compatible with undecidable feminist politics. (Elam 1994, 106.) Elam defines groundless solidarity in an elusive manner, which emphasizes that solidarity does not in fact have a ground:

Solidarity forms that basis, although not the foundation for political action. That is to say, groundless solidarity is a stability, but not an absolute one; it can be object of conflict and not mean consensus…. There is a sense in which groundless solidarity could be said to constitute a moral community but only in a very limited and restricted sense…. What continually destabilizes this community of groundless solidarity is the difference contained both within and without it, a difference which works to destabilize any clear separation between individual and community, between self and the other.

(Elam 1994, 109.)
Elam sets groundless solidarity in contrast to identity politics and goal-based coalition politics. In Elam’s view, any feminism that strives to achieve well-defined goals and acts on predetermined principles or that defines “woman” in one way or another is lacking in solidarity (Elam 1994, 108). She argues that “the solidarity to which I am referring would, in fact, be a coalition built around a suspicion of identity as the essential grounding for meaningful political action” (Elam 1994, 69). She continues:

As feminists, we are all concerned for women, yet we do not know what they are. And what binds us together is the fact that we don't know. The specificity of feminism is thus its insistence that the politics of undecidability (among multiple determinations [of women]) must be understood from a standpoint of indeterminacy, of political possibilities.

(Elam 1994, 84.)

In other words, instead of goals or identity, what those involved in groundless solidarity share, in Elam’s view, is what she calls “freedom of collective uncertainty.” Feminists do not know what women are, who it is who belongs to the feminist “we,” what kind of political judgments can be made in the name of feminism at a given moment, or how such claims will look in the future. As a result, feminists must allow a new range of differences and opinions to appear within the solidary community. (Elam 1994, 68, 84.)

Elam makes use of the notion of ethics, a characteristic of the theoretical visions of the feminist “we” based on the vocabulary of solidarity since the 1990s, when she argues that deconstructive feminist politics must take the form of “ethical activism.” By this term she means the need to make political judgments and decisions, even when there are no universal laws or truths on which to ground them. Ethical obligations are also part of groundless solidarity. The solidary bond is not only based on the shared suspicion of identity, which would be a very thin bond indeed, but Elam also describes groundless solidarity as “a coalition brought together on the basis of shared ethical commitments” (Elam 1994, 109). These commitments enable feminists to face the “freedom of collective uncertainty” and make ethical judgments without imposing universal moral standards or ideas.

For Elam, the key ethical commitment that forms the basis for groundless solidarity is the obligation to recognize, respect, and handle otherness and difference (Elam 1994, 110-11, 114). It is obvious that, unlike hooks and Mohanty, Elam is not writing about respecting and recognizing the differences of concrete others with whom one has to bond in order to create solidarity. Nor is she writ-

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23 See chapter 3.3 where I examine Linda Zerilli’s Arendtian vision of political community for another vision of feminist political togetherness in the face of “abyss of freedom.”
ing about recognizing relations of power between oneself and others. In Derridean style, she writes about the obligation to the “unrepresentable, the incommensurable, the radically Other” (ibid., 114). Drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy, she argues that “the Other to whom there is an ethical responsibility, is neither a material particular, nor a universal abstraction” (ibid., 111). Elam insists that we cannot know in advance which differences will matter in the future or what difference they will make (ibid., 115).

Elam’s frequent capitalization of “the Other” and her use of an undefined notion of “difference” in the singular reveal that, even though she claims that her overall project is to contest abstract, universal moral theories, her idea of ethical responsibility to the different other and her notion of groundless solidarity are abstract. Unlike Mohanty’s and hooks’ views on solidarity, Elam’s “groundless solidarity” is not based on concrete feminist practices.

Ethics and recognition of difference are also central to Jodi Dean’s notion of “reflective solidarity,” which she develops in Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism after identity politics (Dean 1996). In contrast to Elam, who refuses to say anything substantial about which differences matter how they should be handled in order to build solidarity, Dean provides a detailed theory of communicative interaction, which can create solidarity out of differences and is built on Jürgen Habermas’s norms of communicative action.

Dean elaborates on the argument made by some feminist theorists who use the vocabulary of coalition: that the feminist “we” is created through interaction. I have shown that several feminist coalition theorists see narrating one’s specific identity and being attentive to the narratives of others as a means of creating coalitions across difference (Adams 2002; Anzaldúa 1987, 1990b; Fowlkes 1997; Lugones 2006; Phelan 1994). Dean is not interested in self-narration; she builds a normative view of dialogue that can create solidarity. She argues that such a dialogue is based on two attitudes or norms: mutual recognition of the other as part of “us” and taking a responsible orientation to relationship (Dean 1996, 1997).

Dean argues that the communicative “we” of reflective solidarity is based on mutual recognition of the other as part of the group, not on the exclusion of someone or on opposition to a “they”: The strength of the bond connecting us stems from our mutual recognition of each other instead of from our exclusion of someone else.” (Dean 1996, 31.) Dean stresses that the dialogue that recognizes different others and their viewpoints must leave room for criticism and disagreement. Drawing on Lynet Uttal’s (1990) experiences with groups of feminists of color, Dean argues that conflicts and disagreements can bring individuals together as a “we” more effectively than agreement. She states that “rather than viewing criticism as potentially disruptive, reflective solidarity sees it as furthering the inter-subjective recognition characteristic of solidarity.
bound members.” (Dean 1996, 32.) Criticism keeps the communicative feminist “we” open for constant renegotiation.

Although disagreement and questioning have fundamental roles in Dean’s notion of reflective solidarity, even more essential is the idea that individuals have responsibilities toward each other and toward the solidary group. In Dean’s words, they share “a responsible orientation to relationship” (Dean 1996, 35). This means that individuals recognize the other in her difference and accept that others may have different interpretations of the norms and goals of the group they constitute together and that discussion of these differences is allowed. The other may dispute my claims, but I can trust her to recognize that my different views are a contribution to the shape this “we” is going to take, not a hindrance to solidarity. (Dean 1996, 35-39.) It appears that when Dean writes about disagreement and conflict, she describes a situation in which individuals are already committed to the “we” in question.

Dean focuses on the rules of communication that guide the relationships between individuals within established communities, but she also insists that the ethical underpinnings of reflective solidarity extend beyond those with whom we are in communicative relationships; we are also accountable for the exclusions implied in the groups and relationships of which we are a part (Dean 1996, 34, 43, 150). She argues that in order to include the excluded and make their views heard, we must take a reflective attitude to the norms of our groups and be prepared to expand their membership. This self-reflection underlines the openness of every communicative “we.” (Dean 1996, 33; Dean 1997, 260.) Dean claims:

Achieving solidarity requires that we open up notions of membership to communicative reflection. Solidarity itself has to be understood as an accomplishment requiring self-reflective understanding of who “we” are on the part of those making up the “us.”

(Dean 1996, 33.)

Dean argues that, in order to become reflective of their communities, feminists must engage in the imaginary exercise of distancing themselves from the norms and practices of their groups and grasping the perspective of the excluded others. When feminists make this “perspective of the situated, hypothetical third” a part of all their interactions with each other, they open existing notions of membership and belonging for reflection. (Dean 1996, 33-34.)

24 Dean distinguishes the perspective of the hypothetical third from the Habermasian neutral onlooker able to move beyond a subjective view and a given communicative situation to assess a situated claim impartially. To this end Dean argues that when I assess the norms of my communities, I do so as a concrete and embodied person and that reflection never enables me to see
Interestingly, the reflective gaze gained through this exercise is not focused on oneself, and, unlike hooks, Dean is not interested in self-transformation. Seeing from the perspective of the excluded is a cognitive exercise whose aim is to question the prevailing norms of one’s communities and the exclusions implied in them, not to make one recognize how one is implicated in the relations of power that have created these exclusions and maintain them.

Feminist writers, who have discussed feminist solidarity later in the 1990s and 2000s, quote Dean often critically. For example, Sonia Kruks (2002) and Brenda Lyshaug (2006) see reflective solidarity as an insufficient description of feminist solidarity, because Dean focuses too much on communication and the cognitive aspects of cross-difference political relationships, and because she does not pay enough attention to the affective aspects of solidarity. Indeed, Dean contrasts “reflective solidarity” with “affectional solidarity,” that is, solidarity based on feelings (Dean 1996, 17-19).

Kruks discusses the affective dimension of feminist solidarity by focusing on the unconscious and embodied ability to feel-with another woman’s pain, an ability that, according to her, arises from the shared female embodiment (Kruks 2002, 163, 167). Lyshaug gives an account of the affective aspects of solidarity by developing the notion of “enlarged sympathy,” a disposition that individuals should actively cultivate by imaginatively identifying with different others. Lyshaug describes enlarged sympathy as an ethical self-transforming practice that is necessary to build cross-difference solidarity and to cherish attentiveness to the constantly changing different others that feminists encounter. (Lyshaug, 2006, 82, 86, 90-91.)

Both Kruks and Lyshaug build their views of feminist solidarity on Sandra Bartky’s (2002) reading and extension of Max Scheler’s phenomenological account of Mitgefühl, feeling-with. Bartky reads Mitgefühl as an affective experience that encourages attentiveness to difference while preserving the distance between the one sympathizing and the object of sympathy. Feeling-with is intentional: one has to use the faculty of imagination actively in order to make the other’s feelings and experiences present in one’s mind. Furthermore, feeling-with the other requires that one has a basic background knowledge of the other’s situation so that one can evaluate her feelings in light of the context that evokes them. (Bartky 2002, 73-87.)

The theoretical views of feminist solidarity discussed above seem contradictory, but I suggest that they could be seen as complementary. Dean offers a detailed understanding of communicative interaction that ensures that political actors have some basic knowledge about the situation of their potential allies, as
well as of political deliberation and negotiation across difference. Lyshaug’s notion of enlarged sympathy gives an account of the affective disposition to different others and the process of self-transformation that, she argues, are preconditions for political deliberation. Although Kruks’s account of feeling-with the pain of others as the “predisposing factor” in feminist solidarity is too connected with sexual difference to provide a plausible vision of the feminist “we,” it does explain some patterns of feminist political organizing. It has been easier to mobilize women around issues such as rape and domestic violence than around injurious working conditions in sectors of predominantly female employment. (Kruks 2002, 171.)

The abstract theoretical views of feminist solidarity that I have discussed in this section share a focus on ethics. Diverging theoretical allegiances lead Elam, Dean, Bartky, Kruks, and Lyshaug to propose different visions of the ethical dimension of feminist solidarity. The Habermasian Dean presents a normative view of reciprocal communicative interaction that builds an inclusive “we” out of differences. Elam’s ethics of solidarity is an abstract responsibility for the Other and a respect of difference within and without, which at any moment may destabilize any political community. Kruks (2002, 172) writes about “an ethic of simultaneous concern and respect for others” and about a moral choice to learn about the worlds of others. Lyshaug (2006, 86) focuses on the “ethics of self-transformations,” which enables individuals to sustain attentiveness and a sense of connection and accountability to diverse others.

**Features of the vocabulary of solidarity**

Solidarity is the third key term that I have identified in the discussion on feminist political togetherness. bell hooks, Chandra Mohanty, Diane Elam, and Jodi Dean, whose texts I have taken exemplary of feminist uses of the vocabulary of solidarity, frame solidarity as a sense of responsibility and respect for the different other that allows for a sustained political relationship between differently positioned women or feminists. These relationships enable and motivate them to act together for a feminist transformation of society.

Theorists who use the vocabulary of solidarity to rethink the collective dimension of feminist politics emphasize that solidarity has to be actively created and constantly maintained and recreated. For example, Iris Marion Young has recently argued that “solidarity must always be forged and reforged” (Young 2011, 120). These theorists do not search for the basis of feminist solidarity in a shared women’s identity, experience, or embodiment (Kruks’s link between feminist solidarity and a shared feminine embodiment is an exception). Neither do they make references to shared humanity as the basis of solidarity, as many philosophers do (Min 2005; Rorty 1989). If feminist solidarity can be said to
have a basis, then my analysis suggests it can be found in the shared commitment to respectful recognition of the different other, a readiness to face conflicts, and a preparedness to change one’s views and one’s self as a result of encounters with others.

I suggest that feminist writers who use the vocabulary of solidarity to discuss the feminist “we” pay particular attention to two themes that I believe are typical of the discussion of feminist political togetherness as a whole, namely, difference as that which creates solidarity, and relationships within the “we.” In addition, hooks and Mohanty evoke a third common theme when they argue that conceptualizing the feminist “we” requires attention to concrete feminist practices.

Theorists of feminist political togetherness challenge the conventional usages of the term solidarity that imply homogeneity and unity of the solidarity group; their explicit aim is to create an understanding of cross-difference solidarity bonds. However, they go even further and write, not only about creating solidarity across difference, but also about solidarity based on difference. For example, Dean argues that “the permanent risk of disagreement must itself provide the basis for solidarity” (Dean 1997, 251).

Making differences the basis of solidarity requires recognizing and confronting them in a specific way. Some theorists stress encounters with concrete others who are differently placed by relations of power and our ability to face the conflicts and disagreements that arise from these encounters (Cole & Luna 2010; Dean 1996; hooks [1984] 2000b; hooks 1989). Others emphasize the cognitive exercise of understanding the perspective and views of the other. In addition to listening skills, this requires the use of imagination. (Allen 1999; Dean 1996.) For some, it is crucial to feel the experience of the other in more affective and sympathetic ways (Bartky 2002; Kruks 2002; Lyshaug 2006). Finally, some writers stress that before a durable feminist solidarity can be created, the concrete and imaginary encounters with different others must lead to changes in one’s self (hooks 1989; Lyshaug 2006).

The second theme typical of the discussion on feminist political togetherness as a whole and one that those who use the vocabulary of solidarity often bring up is the idea that the feminist “we” is constituted internally, not through opposing “us” against a “them,” with a resulting focus on relations within the

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25 Theorists who argue that differences create solidarity have different understandings of which differences matter. For example, hooks writes about race and confronting racism, while Mohanty links difference to specific historical and spatial contexts. Elam writes about difference as the irreducible otherness that destabilizes every collective constellation, and for Dean, each self is a “concrete particularity,” individuated and different from others. I will discuss the various conceptualizations of difference in the discussion on feminist political togetherness in chapter 4.
“we.” Dean stresses that the inclusive we of reflective solidarity is not formed through opposition or in making a distinction between “us” and “them” (Dean 1996, 31), and hooks explicitly opposes a vision of feminist political community based on opposition between friends and enemies (hooks 1989, 25). The focus on the relations within the feminist “we” goes hand-in-hand with a focus on maintaining and cherishing these relations. For example, Kruks (2002, 155) writes about “sustaining … a long-term or broad feminist movement”; Dean (1997, 249) refers to the need for “achieving a more broad-based and lasting feminist solidarity”; Lyshaug (2006, 81) writes about the need to “sustain a durable sense of connection or mutual accountability” among allies.

In comparison to the vocabularies of identity and coalition, a salient feature of the vocabulary of solidarity is the key position given the notion of ethics. Writers who use other vocabularies of political togetherness rarely use this term. References to ethics are characteristic of thinkers who construct theoretical notions of solidarity (Bartky 2002; Dean 1996; Elam 1994; Kruks 2002; Lyshaug 2006). However, the commitment to recognize and respect differences to which the notion of ethics in these texts usually refers is also stressed by theorists of solidarity who do not use this term, as well as theorists who use other vocabularies of political togetherness.

I opened this section with the observation that theorists of feminist political togetherness who use the vocabulary of solidarity tend to see conceptualizing solidarity as a necessary supplement to the feminist coalition theories. The vocabulary of coalition is not seen to provide a sufficiently profound understanding of the ethical and affective aspects of political bonds among feminists and of what holds the feminist “we” together (Dean 1997, 249; Kruks 2002, 154; Lyshaug 2006, 78-79). My analysis confirms that there is indeed a slight difference between the two vocabularies. As we have seen, the vocabulary of coalition is used to emphasize the contingency of the feminist collective political subject. By contrast, the vocabulary of solidarity is used to draw attention to sustained political relationships within the feminist “we.” However, I also maintain that these two vocabularies are closer to each other than Dean, Kruks, and Lyshaug believe. Most feminist theorists who use the vocabulary of coalition add to the traditional thin notion of coalition as a strategic alignment of interests the same elements that are important for solidarity theorists: responsibility for the other, affect, the need to make political relations last, and self-transformation.

2.4 Conclusion: Different vocabularies, shared themes

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the discussion on feminist political togetherness by focusing on the specific concepts that theorists use when they try to replace essentialist notions of feminist politics based on women’s
identity with more nuanced visions of the feminist “we.” I have argued that this discussion revolves around three key terms: identity, coalition, and solidarity. Although new concepts such as intersubjectivity and relationality have emerged over the more than thirty-year period that my analysis covers, they have not destabilized the position of identity, coalition, and solidarity as the main vocabularies of political togetherness used to theorize about the feminist “we.” Feminist theorists do active conceptual politics with the vocabularies they use. In order to rethink the collective dimension of feminist politics, they employ terms that are familiar from everyday political discourses and political theorizing and give these terms new meanings.

My analysis brings to light the specific histories of each of the three main vocabularies of political togetherness. It also reveals that although these vocabularies are linked, they lead theorists to ask somewhat different questions about the basis, form, and maintenance of the feminist “we” and the political bonds between feminists.

The vocabulary of identity is the most controversial of the three. Although some writers have thought it bears too strong a link to politics based on pre-established unified identities, the notions of identity and identification have a prominent place in the efforts to address the problem of the feminist “we.” The initiators of the discussion on feminist political togetherness, namely, feminists of color in the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, represented politics that advances the interests of specific identity groups and coalitions between different groups of women as parallel feminist political strategies. They maintained that coalition building requires articulation of specific identities, experiences, and social locations, and they have continued to use the vocabulary of identity down to the present. In the early 1990s the proponents of what I have called the “post-identity approach” to feminist politics framed identity as a restrictive category, and some rejected the whole vocabulary of identity as exclusionary and oppressive. Since the late 1990s, however, a growing number of feminist theorists have explicitly challenged the post-identity approach to feminist politics. These theorists, who in a manner similar to women of color theorists draw attention to particular lived and embodied identities, make the ontological claim that identities simply exist and therefore have analytical potential for theorizing about the collective dimension of feminist politics. Finally, some theorists have turned away from the notion of identity to that of identification. They argue that the feminist collective political identity is constituted, maintained, and destabilized through processes of affective and often involuntary attachments to values and principles, concrete others, and the feminist “we.”

Feminist theorists who use the vocabulary of coalition to rethink collective feminist politics depart from the conventional understanding of coalitions as strategic alignments of the interests and goals of separate groups and instead accentuate the efforts, commitment, and affective investments required to build
and sustain coalitions across differences and privileges. The term “coalition” entered the discussion on feminist political togetherness in the late 1970s in texts of feminists of color. I argue that in discussing collaboration with white women, women of color laid the groundwork for a feminist coalition discourse that emphasizes openness to negotiating differences within and between groups, as well as openness to self-transformation. My analysis of the more theoretically elaborate accounts of feminist coalitions from the 1990s onward reveals a shift in how the vocabulary of coalition is used. Whereas in the early 1980s women of color conceptualized feminism as a coalition, since the 1990s most feminist theorists have discussed coalitions between feminists and those involved in other struggles for social justice. I argue that, although the recent feminist coalition theories destabilize the link between women’s identity and feminism implied in the early coalition discourse of women of color, most contemporary coalition theorists elaborate on their ideas, in particular on the idea that building feminist coalitions must start from the articulation of specific identities, experiences, and locations. My analysis reveals that the salient feature of the vocabulary of coalition is that it leads theorists of feminist political togetherness to discuss how collective political action creates new contingent identities and transforms existing identities and self-understandings.

Theorists of feminist political togetherness who use the vocabulary of solidarity describe solidarity as responsibility and respect for the different other, which makes possible a sustained political relationship between differently positioned women and feminists. These relationships enable and motivate individuals to act together for the feminist transformation of society. Against conventional notions of solidarity implying homogeneity, feminist writers argue that feminist solidarity must be based on recognizing difference and confronting the conflicts caused by these differences. My discussion reveals that the vocabulary of solidarity leads feminist theorists to ask questions about the relationships within the feminist “we” and to ask how these relationships could become more lasting and durable. In comparison to the vocabularies of identity and coalition, the specificity of the vocabulary of solidarity is the strong connection its users make to ethics, a term rarely brought up theorists of feminist political togetherness who employ the other vocabularies.

Feminist theorists build strong contrasts between the different vocabularies of political togetherness and have strong views about their suitability for conceptualizing the feminist “we.” Many theorists who use the vocabularies of coalition and solidarity declare that they go beyond the vocabulary of identity because it implies unity (Elam 1994; Hekman 2000), or does not provide space to discuss the role of disagreement and conflict in the constitution of feminist political community (Dean 1996). Some theorists who use the vocabulary of solidarity criticize those who use the vocabulary of coalition for giving an instrumental view of collective feminist politics and for failing to give an account
of the ethical and affective aspects of feminist politics (Dean 1997; Kruks 2002; Lyshaug 2006). The vocabulary of solidarity has been criticized for falling prey to identitarian logic and the requirement of unity (Butler 1990).

Although it is natural to assume that different vocabularies would lead to different understandings of the feminist “we,” my findings challenge this hypothesis. The conclusion I draw in this chapter is that, although the vocabularies used to rethink the collective dimension of feminist politics lead theorists to emphasize different aspects of political being together, there are significant similarities in their visions of the feminist “we.” Whether they write about identity politics or identification, about feminist coalitions or feminist solidarity, feminist writers who address the problem of the feminist “we” discuss similar themes.

I have identified five themes that occur frequently in all the main vocabularies. The first is the fundamental role given to difference and conflict in constituting political commonality and transforming it from within. The second is the focus on interactive relations within a political “we.” The third is the focus on the efforts, commitments, and responsibilities of the individual self. The fourth is the affective dimension of political action. The fifth is the argument that theorizing about the feminist “we” requires dialogue between feminist scholars and feminist movements. The persistence of these themes across the vocabularies used suggests that theorists who try to solve the problem of the feminist “we” are discussing the issue in similar ways. However, instead of creating new concepts to embody this understanding, they give new meanings to familiar terms such as coalition and solidarity, which have a strong standing in everyday political discourse.

I will discuss these five persistent themes in detail in chapter 4, where I develop the main argument of my study: that the efforts made since the late 1970s to find alternatives to feminist politics based on women’s identity provide an explicitly feminist understanding of the collective dimension of politics, which takes into account the diversity of groups, intersecting oppressions, and differences in power and privilege. I call this understanding “feminist political togetherness,” thereby making use of the term political togetherness, which I also use as a heuristic tool in my analysis. Before the fourth chapter, I will add another dimension to my exploration of efforts to rethink the feminist “we” in order to make this argument stronger and to deepen my description of “feminist political togetherness.” I will show that the five themes also persist in the most theoretically distinctive part of the discussion on feminist political togetherness, namely, in visions of the feminist “we” based on the ideas of Hannah Arendt.
3 Arendtian elaborations of feminist political togetherness

Hannah Arendt is the most prominent female political theorist of the twentieth century. Her reflections on political action, political judgment, freedom, evil, totalitarianism, and human rights have become increasingly popular in the field of political theorizing, including feminist political theorizing, since the discussion on feminist political togetherness began in the late 1970s. There has been a clear shift in the feminist perception of Arendt’s thought. Whereas feminist theorists in the late 1970s and early 1980s were critical of Arendt, owing to her rejection of embodiment and her strict division between the public and the private (Rich 1979; O’Brien 1981; Brown 1988), in the 1990s feminists began to explore the potential of her concepts for feminist theories.26 This shift coincides with the moment when the discussion of feminist political togetherness took a theoretical turn. Theorists in search of resources to provide visions of a non-identitarian feminist “we” are a significant group those feminists who have built on Arendt’s ideas.

Arendt’s political thought is the main theoretical resource on which theorists of feminist political togetherness have relied since the 1990s, and some of the most theoretically elaborate descriptions of the collective dimension of feminist politics are built on her concepts. Although feminists who conceptualize the feminist “we” by building on Arendt’s ideas use the main vocabularies of political togetherness outlined in chapter 227, they have a distinctive way of writing about political togetherness. This distinctiveness is visible at the textual level in the use expressions such as “individual uniqueness,” “plurality,” “world-building,” “who one is,” “what one is,” and “action in concert,” which are characteristic of Arendt’s political theorizing. Arendt’s influence is also visible in a more subtle manner, namely, in the traces of her existential-phenomenological philosophical framework. Although it would be an exaggeration to claim that

26 See Dietz (2002, 119-122) for an insightful discussion of the feminist reception of Arendt’s thought.

27 For example, Amy Allen (1999) develops and Arendtian notion of solidarity, and Katherine Adams (2002) uses Arendt’s concepts to develop a feminist theory of coalition. In addition, Arendtian feminists make use of other terms such as “political community” (Disch 1994, Zerilli 2005) and “relationality” (Cavarero 2005).
feminist theorists influenced by Arendt have a distinctive vocabulary of political togetherness, I nevertheless consider them a specific group apart from other writers who rethink the feminist “we.” Due to this distinctiveness as well as to the popularity of Arendt’s concepts in the debate, it is important to discuss Arendtian elaborations of feminist political togetherness in a separate chapter.

The specificity of Arendtian visions of the feminist “we” notwithstanding, my study reveals that also Arendtian theorists address the five themes that persist in the discussion on feminist political togetherness across the main vocabularies used. The detailed study of the efforts to solve the problem of the feminist “we” with Arendt’s concepts supports my argument that the solutions provided are similar to one another – not just across vocabularies, but also across the theoretical resources used. However, my analysis reveals that theorists relying on Arendt discuss the five themes in a distinctive way, thanks to her existential approach. Therefore, it provides more information about how theorists of feminist political togetherness have solved the problem of the feminist “we,” and about points of disagreement between them.

I have chosen to discuss in detail two Arendtian visions of the feminist “we”: Adriana Cavarero’s notion of relationality and Linda Zerilli’s theory of political community constructed in the practice of making judgments. I consider Zerilli’s and Cavarero’s views to be suitable representatives of Arendtian theorizing about feminist political togetherness because they use different parts of Arendt’s theory and because – their allegiance to Arendt notwithstanding – they have different theoretical backgrounds and motivations.

When Cavarero and Zerilli draw on Hannah Arendt, they do not blindly apply her concepts, although they include them in their vocabulary. They transform Arendt’s concepts in such a way as to make them compatible with contemporary feminism and their own theoretical starting points. The theoretical choices of Arendtian feminist theorists are political in another sense as well. Cavarero and Zerilli evoke Hannah Arendt in order to challenge and build opposition to postmodern feminism, which they see as the hegemonic paradigm of contemporary feminist theory. In their view, postmodern feminism is unable to provide an account of enabling political connections among feminists.

In the first part of this chapter, I outline what is at stake when feminist theorists use Arendt’s concepts to conceptualize the feminist “we,” and I explicate why Arendt appears to be a promising ally in this endeavor. I discuss Arendt’s key concepts from the perspective of her existential–phenomenological background and argue that an interest in the specificities of human existence frames

\[28\] Also Joanna Cutting-Gray (1994), Katherine Adams (2002), Amy Allen (1999), Susan Bickford (1996), and Lisa Disch (1994) have used Arendt’s concepts to discuss the collective dimension of (feminist) politics.
her political thought, including her reflections on political togetherness. I suggest that feminist theorists are interested in Arendt mainly because of the tension between individual distinction and political togetherness in her thought, which they see as an asset for theorizing about political bonds across difference. I argue that Arendt’s concern for individual uniqueness and the feminists’ concern for difference and the privileges implied make an uneasy alliance.

In the second part of the chapter, I discuss Adriana Cavarero’s notion of relationality as an example of an account of political togetherness that takes Arendt’s phenomenological background seriously. I argue that, although Cavarero significantly transforms Arendt’s concepts in order to make them compatible with contemporary feminism, she emphasizes the connection between “the human” and political togetherness that I consider to be implied in Arendt’s thought. Owing to this connection, relationality is established almost without effort, and it cannot therefore be considered a specifically political form of togetherness. In the third section I analyze Linda Zerilli’s notion of political community. I argue that drawing attention to Arendt’s theory of judging rather than Arendt’s theory of political action allows Zerilli to conceptualize the feminist political community as contingent and artificial. However, her notion of feminist political community carries other Arendtian traces, such as the rejection of the affective dimension of politics and the high level of abstraction.

In the fourth and final section, I discuss what I see as intentional or unintentional traces of Arendt’s existential framework in accounts of the feminist “we” based on her concepts. These are: 1) a link between “the human” and the political form of togetherness; 2) a high level of abstraction; and 3) a rejection of the affective dimension of politics and the focus on the world-in-between. I argue that because of these three traces, feminist theorists influenced by Arendt conceptualize political togetherness differently from most other feminist theorists. Sometimes these traces lead to shortcomings in the theories of the feminist “we” based on her thought; sometimes they enable Arendtian feminists to add valuable new ideas to the discussion of feminist political togetherness.

My analysis of the distinctiveness of the Arendtian approaches to political togetherness contributes to the main argument in this study: although feminist theorists use different vocabularies and different theoretical frameworks to solve the problem of the feminist “we,” there are significant similarities in their solutions. I will argue in chapter 4 that the five themes that persist in the efforts to provide non-identitary visions of the feminist “we” contribute to a distinctive, explicitly feminist understanding of political bonds across difference, which I call “feminist political togetherness.”
3.1 Individual uniqueness and the politics of difference: An uneasy alliance

In this part, I provide a general overview of what is at stake when feminist theorists appropriate parts of Hannah Arendt’s thought to solve the problem of the feminist “we,” how feminist theorists who participate in the discussion on feminist political togetherness read Arendt, and why they engage with her ideas in the first place.

In the first section, I discuss the key features of Arendt’s political thought in order to provide the background for my analysis. My reading of Arendt focuses on her existential-phenomenological background, which in my view frames her conceptualization of politics as individual distinction, on the one hand, and as collective action, on the other. In the second section, I study how theorists of feminist political togetherness read Arendt in order to identify what makes Arendt an attractive ally for rethinking the feminist “we.” I show that feminist theorists highlight the tension between individual distinction and political togetherness in her thought and see in this tension a means of theorizing about political collectivity in a way that does not require unity and that respects difference. I argue that the tendency to align Arendt’s idea of individual uniqueness with the feminist debate about the politics of difference is problematic because it does not take into account the existential-phenomenological framework for this idea. In the third and final section, I provide a short reading of Amy Allen’s vision of feminist solidarity and Lisa Disch’s description of democratic community. My aim is to show how feminist theorists make use of the tension they identify in Arendt’s thought. I also make preliminary remarks about the specificity of Arendtian accounts of the collective dimension of feminist politics.

Arendt as a theorist of individuality and political togetherness

Hannah Arendt is a major theoretical influence in the discussion on feminist political togetherness. However, in light of some of her ideas, this is a rather surprising state of affairs. Many commentators, feminist and otherwise, have pointed out that individual distinction and personal difference from others are extremely important for Arendt – so important, in fact, that her political project is centered on individuality more than around the idea of political community. For example, Mary Dietz has argued that “Arendt is overtly attuned to individuality at the cost of many other factors that are relevant in political action” (Dietz 2002, 198). In particular, early feminist commentators on Arendt criticized her emphasis on individual distinction, arguing that her vision of politics is masculinized, elitist, and competitive (Benhabib 1992, 93; O’Brien 1981; Pitkin 1981, 338; Rich 1979).
Arendt’s emphasis on individuality as the search for glory and immortal fame has been explained by her admiration for ancient Greek and Roman political life (Canovan 1974). However, what I think is more relevant is that her emphasis on individual distinction can be traced to her indebtedness to existential and phenomenological philosophy (Benhabib 1996, xxix, 50; Hinchman & Hinchman 1991, 435; Pulkkinen 2003, 216).

Arendt’s allegiance to this philosophical tradition also explains her interest in the general conditions of human life and her treatment of human beings as members of the same species that frame her political philosophy. Arendt’s interest in the specificities and conditions of human existence is prominent in The Human Condition, a work that is the main reference point for theorists who use her concepts to rethink the feminist “we.” As is well known, in this work she distinguishes among three fundamental human activities – labor, work, and action – that constitute what she calls vita activa, “human life in so far as it is actively engaged in doing something” (HC, 22). All of these activities have a corresponding human condition that makes them possible. According to Arendt, the condition of labor is life, the condition of work is worldliness, and the condition of action is plurality. Apart from the three conditions of vita activa, Arendt identifies what she calls “the most general conditions of human existence”: birth and death, natality, and mortality. (HC, 7-9.)

Although it has been pointed out that by the word “condition” Arendt does not refer to an essential component of human life and that she is suspicious of the notion of human nature or essence (Taminiaux 1997, 80; HC, 9-10), it has also been argued that an existential interest in the human species and in the conditions of human life frame her thinking (Pulkkinen 2003).

These two existential-phenomenological aspects of Arendt’s thought, her interest in theorizing about “the human,” and her emphasis on individual distinction are linked. In The Human Condition Arendt argues that one of the key features of the human species is that human beings are all “single individuals, unique, unexchangeable, and unrepeatable entities” (HC, 97). She points out that every human being is singular in the abstract sense that every object is distinct from every other object, even if these objects are exact copies of one another. In addition, human beings as well as other living beings are different from each other; hence the unexchangeability. But only humans are unique, because they are able to distinguish themselves actively and communicate their distinctiveness to others. (HC, 176.) Although disclosing one’s uniqueness to others requires some effort or initiative, it is not actually a choice, because this

29 In referring to Arendt’s books, I use the following abbreviations: The Human Condition (HC); Between Past and Future (BPF); On Revolution (OR); Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy (LKPP).
uniqueness is “implicit in everything somebody says or does” (HC, 179) and because “its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born” (HC, 176-77). Human beings are destined qua being human to exhibit this uniqueness by appearing before each other, and this disclosure is a measure of one’s humanity, “truly human life.”

Arendt argues that individuals disclose their uniqueness to others through action, the highest form of human activity around which political life is centered (Taminiaux 1997, 85). In Arendt’s terms, when individuals act politically, they disclose “who they are” as distinct from “what they are,” this “what” corresponding to talents, roles, relationships, statuses, and psychological tendencies that a person has (HC, 179). Unlike work, which fabricates things external to it, action lies outside of the means-to-an-end thinking, and it has intrinsic value and is performed for its own sake. Unlike labor, which is connected with necessity and repetition, action is the activity connected with freedom and beginning something new and unprecedented. Arendt scholars have pointed out that, for Arendt, action takes the form of speech with others in the public sphere and therefore has primarily a linguistic or discursive character (Passerin d’Entrèves 1994, 71; Taminiaux 1996, 28, 85; Villa 1997, 17-41).

Disclosure of the uniqueness of political agents through action and speech is such an indispensable part of Arendt’s understanding of politics that she claims there would be no politics without it (HC, 179-180, 192-3). The disclosure of uniqueness is valuable per se because it actualizes the specificity of human existence and the full human potential. However, Arendt also links the importance of uniqueness to a more practical and a more conventionally political matter. Because of their uniqueness, individuals have different perspectives on the affairs of the common world in which they live, and they form different opinions about this world (Villa 1999, 123). When individuals reveal their opinions and learn the opinions of others, they contribute to a more profound understanding of this world. In Arendt’s words, opinion formation and political debate confirm the “realness” of the world. (HC, 58.)

What exactly does Arendt’s emphasis on individual distinction mean for political action in general and for feminist politics in particular? As has been thoroughly pointed out, the value that Arendt puts on individuation translates into a strong devaluation of activities, spheres, and characteristics that are related to sameness and that render individuals similar to each other (Allen 1999, 107; Gottsegen 1994, 24). For Arendt, sameness equals conformity and loss of individuality and, consequently, the loss of politics (HC, 214-15). Therefore, Arendt is hostile to all models of civic engagement based on ideology or worldview, and she rejects the notion of political action based on a shared identity if that identity rests on some sort of sameness (Allen 1999, 107; Villa 1999, 123).

I suggest that Arendt’s view of each human being as unique and distinct from others and her repudiation of sameness from the sphere of politics are
behind many of the issues for which feminist theorists have criticized her. One of the frequent feminist criticisms of Arendt’s political thought is that she treats gender as an unpolitical issue. Her distinction between “what one is” and “who one is” is taken to mean that gender, as well as ethnicity, religion, and sexuality, does not belong to politics. Arendt’s sharp distinction between political and non-political domains and her banishment of embodiment from the public sphere are two further examples that have drawn feminist criticisms and that in my view follow directly from her appreciation of individuality and her repudiation of sameness.

Although Arendt’s emphasis on individual distinction would seem to make her an unlikely ally with those who want to rethink the feminist “we,” other aspects of her thought appear more useful for the purpose. Arendt is as explicit about politics requiring togetherness as she is about politics being about the disclosure of individual uniqueness. She argues that action, the political and the highest form of human activity that reveals this uniqueness, is not possible in isolation, without the presence of other people (HC, 22, 188). As Passerin d’Entrèves and Taminiaux have noted, action enables individuals to establish relationships with others and can be understood as a form of human togetherness in itself (Passerin d’Entrèves 1994, 64, 84; Taminiaux 1997, 28). According to Passerin d’Entrèves, one of the crucial tasks of political discourse for Arendt is the creation of a collective identity, a “we” to which we can appeal when faced with the problem of deciding between alternative courses of action: “By engaging in this or that course of action we are, in fact, entering a claim on behalf of ‘we’, that is, we are creating a specific form of collective identity.” (Passerin d’Entrèves 1994, 19.)

It has been pointed out that, by arguing that being in the world with others is political and enabling, Arendt makes a radical break with the existential-phenomenological tradition of Heidegger. Indeed, Arendt’s view of human plurality as the condition of politics differs significantly from Heidegger’s view of the fundamental being-with-others as an inauthentic way of being and his argument that only isolated reflection can reveal the meaning of a human being. (Benhabib 1996, 51-56; Taminiaux 1999.) However, the break from the existential-phenomenological tradition is not total. Arendt’s interest in “the human,” which follows from her attachment to this tradition and frames her view of politics as individual distinction, also frames the passages in which she discusses political togetherness. Arendt often writes about the presence of other people as an essential part of human life and characteristic of the human species. She repeatedly describes human togetherness as a fact (HC, 7, 22), as something that is indisputable and that cannot be neglected when we speak of human activities such as politics. She depicts this factual human togetherness as the condition of action and political life along with the idea of individual distinction. She also describes “sheer human togetherness,” being with each other and neither for or
against the other as the condition of individual distinction through action (HC, 180).

Arendt also writes about a specifically political form of being together. She makes a distinction between a political form of togetherness and collective political action based on sameness or unity, and she stresses that truly political commonality takes place between people who are different (HC, 214-15). Arendt describes the political form of togetherness through the well-known metaphor of individuals who sit together around a table. The table has a double function. It separates individuals from each other, preventing them from “falling over each other,” and it relates individuals to each other, being the tangible something they all share, although they look at the table from different perspectives. In this metaphor, the table symbolizes the common world of concrete, human-made artifacts, such as material infrastructure and political institutions, and the invisible network of past actions and speech. (HC, 52-53.) A further feature of Arendt’s view of political commonality is that it is fragile and only lasts as long as action takes place. There is always the danger of political commonality turning into sameness and uniformity. This happens when action ceases or when, for example, in totalitarian regimes and mass society nothing separates individuals from each other and allows them to disclose their uniqueness.

Arendt scholars have different views regarding how the specifically political form of togetherness is created. Some commentators emphasize that the Arendtian political commonality requires a common concern or common interest that people share, even though they may have different perspectives on the object or event in question (e.g., Disch 1994; Gottsegen 1994, 51-53). Others argue that what brings Arendtian political community into being is not the existence of common concerns, but the way in which we communicate our opinions to others, take their respective opinions into account, and let their ideas influence ours (Bickford 1996; Benhabib 1996). Some emphasize that attaining the Arendtian political commonality requires sharing a public space and participating in its activities (Passerin d’Entrèves 1994, 16).

Although political togetherness and collective political action have important roles in Arendt’s thought, based on the discussion above there are reasons to be critical of the potential of her ideas for solving the problem of the feminist “we.” As I have argued, this is not only a theoretical dilemma, but also one related to feminist practice: to political mobilization and movement building, and to answering the challenges that feminist movements currently face. Arendt discusses the broad conditions that enable and even force human beings to act together politically, and as Arendt scholars have pointed out, for her, human beings are by nature “political animals.” Arendt is interested neither in particular political communities organized around specific goals, identities, and values, nor in the efforts individuals must make to establish political bonds with others.
It is not easy to use Arendt’s approach to political togetherness, at least as it is outlined in *The Human Condition*, as a framework for theorizing about the creation and maintenance of particular political communities across differences and power relations.

**Feminist readings of Arendt: The tension of individuality and togetherness**

Feminist theorists who create theoretically elaborate models of the feminist “we” based on Hannah Arendt’s thought read Arendt in a similar manner. They draw attention to the co-presence of individual distinction and political togetherness that I have outlined above and argue that this tension makes Arendt an attractive model for rethinking the collective dimension of feminist politics.

Amy Allen, who has written about Arendt’s concept of solidarity as a power that binds oppositional social movements together, refers to “a dialectical tension between identity and non-identity, between sameness and difference” that is “at the heart of Arendt’s understanding of politics” (Allen 1999, 105-6). Katherine Adams, who has used Arendt’s notion of *inter-* to conceptualize coalitional politics between feminism and other social movements, understands Arendt’s theory of politics to “resist binary oppositions between sameness and difference” and to make it possible to “think in terms of copresent impulses (impulse to sameness, impulse to difference, impulse to contestation, impulse to agreement) that struggle with and build upon (rather than exclude) each other” (Adams 2002, 12). Lisa Disch, who has written about what she calls Arendt’s non-foundational vision of political community, argues that “the tension Arendt maintains between individuality and community is one of the distinctive aspects of her political theory” (Disch 1994, 45).

These theorists do not adopt a straightforward interpretation of Arendt as a theorist of collective political action and political community, although such an interpretation is possible. Instead, they acknowledge the presence of two conflicting aspects of her thought: individual distinction and political togetherness. The terms used by feminist theorists to describe this tension vary. Disch writes about a tension between individuality and community; Allen and Adams call one dimension of the tension “difference” and the other “sameness.”

Allen and Disch situate the origins of this tension in Arendt’s concept of “plurality,” the human condition that makes action possible and that is the condition of all political life (Allen 1999, 105; Disch 1994, 45). According to Disch, Arendt’s concept of plurality “affirms that the starting place of political theory is simultaneously the irreducible differentiation of human beings and their inextricable connectedness across those differences” (Disch 1994, 45). Indeed, for Arendt, the human condition of plurality means that the world is
always shared with others, who are the same in the sense that they are all, as humans, unique and distinct from anybody who has ever lived (HC, 7-8).

Theorists of feminist political togetherness also find this tension at the heart of other key concepts in Arendt’s thinking. Linda Zerilli argues that Arendtian political judgment is a vehicle both for individual distinction and for the constitution of political communities (Zerilli 2005, 159). Adams and Disch describe Arendt’s notion of inter-est as “a mechanism of simultaneous differentiation and relation” (Allen 2002, 16) and as “a commonality that does not mean concord” (Disch 1994, 36-37).

Disch, Adams, Bickford, and Zerilli point out that the tension between individual distinction and political togetherness cannot be effectively resolved because its terms are fundamentally dependent upon each other. According to Bickford (1996, 63), “the appearance of individuality in the world requires togetherness.” Disch (1994, 34) notes that, for Arendt, “individuality only manifests itself in acting in concert with others.” Zerilli (2005, 159) makes the same argument in inverse terms: “the articulation of individuality is the very condition of any idea of community that is political.” Adams (2002, 13) too argues that, for Arendt, “difference is exactly that which drives people to act together.” In other words, they point out that, for Arendt, individual distinction contributes to the construction of political togetherness and that before individuals can disclose their uniqueness, some form of togetherness must already be in place.

Feminist theorists who use Arendt’s thought to rethink the feminist “we” are not the only ones to read Arendt through tensions or contradictions, yet there is something original in their reading. The uniqueness of their reading in the context of the constantly growing Arendt literature, including feminist reinterpretations of her thought, becomes clear when compared with that of Seyla Benhabib (1992; 1996), feminist commentators on Arendt who engage with her for purposes other than theorizing about the collective dimension of feminist politics.

Benhabib writes about the contrast between agonal and associative views of public space in Arendt’s thought, and she understands these contradicting

30 In the early 1990s, identifying contradictions in Arendt’s thought was a popular approach to reading her texts. For example, Seyla Benhabib (1992, 93) distinguished between associational and agonal dimensions of Arendt’s notion of politics. Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves (1994, 10-11) discussed the expressive and the communicative tendencies inherent in Arendt’s concept of action. Bhikhu Parekh (1981) argued that, in The Human Condition, Arendt formulated a heroic view of politics, while in her later work she developed a participatory view. Margaret Canovan (1992) identified democratic and elitist attitudes in Arendt’s political thought.

31 An associational view is related to an understanding of the public space that can emerge whenever men act in concert. An agonal view of the public space refers to space in which moral and political greatness can be displayed. (Benhabib 1992, 90-95.) Some years later, Benhabib reviewed this argument and distinguished between agonal and narrative models of action in Arendt’s thought. The agonal model refers to expressing uniqueness and revealing “who one
tendencies as separate, mutually exclusive approaches. She argues that making Arendt useful for conceptualizing collective feminist politics requires excising the agonistic dimensions of her thought and embracing the associative features. (Benhabib 1992, 90-95.) Honig argues that what makes Arendt appealing for feminist theorizing is exactly the agonistic dimension of her thought rejected by Benhabib. Honig suggests that Arendt could show a way to “agonistic feminism” that emphasizes the development of individuality.32 (Honig 1995, 160.)

For theorists who seek to conceptualize the collective dimension of feminist politics, Arendt is a fascinating thinker exactly because her thinking has two dimensions that are in conflict with each other. They understand Arendt’s focus on political commonality and her simultaneous appreciation of individuality and rejection of sameness as the very strength of her thought for the task at hand: to build a theoretical framework that enables feminists to think about the feminist “we” without a pre-determined and exclusive collective identity and to conceptualize the role of difference in political togetherness.33 However, it is worth asking whether the tension between individual distinction and political togetherness in Arendt’s thought is compatible with questions about recognition and respect of differences and about dealing with relations of power that are a vital part of the discussion of feminist political togetherness. A short comparison of motivations and contexts shows that Arendt and the theorists who use her ideas to rethink the feminist “we” are indeed interested in different things.

Arendt’s text most often referred to by feminist theorists is The Human Condition, written in 1958. The immediate context of the book was post-World War II society when totalitarian regimes were still fresh in the memory and where new forms of mass culture were emerging. In Arendt’s view totalitarianism and mass societies of like-behaving, like-minded individuals who consume the same cultural products have a shared problem: they do not leave room for

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32 Although Honig embraces the agonist dimension of Arendt’s thought, she acknowledges (using Benhabib’s terms) that originally Arendt pairs agonism and associationism (Honig 1995, 160).

33 Bonnie Honig also acknowledges this idea, although she does not develop the theme to the same extent as Allen and Adams. Honig argues that “the restoration of [Arendt’s pairing of agonism and associationism] is important for contemporary feminisms at this time because our recent focus on difference and plurality in response to the deployment by some feminisms of the homogenizing and disciplinary category of ‘woman’ has led some to wonder how, in the absence of a unifying identity, case, or ground, any future feminism might motivate concerted action. Arendt helps us to answer the question (albeit not for feminism in particular) by theorizing an agonistic action in concert that postulated difference and plurality, not identity, at its base.” (Honig 1995, 160.)
the uniqueness of individuals. Consequently, they destroy political life and freedom.

Feminist theorists since the 1990s who have used Arendt’s concepts to re-think the feminist “we” are concerned about the state of feminist theory and politics. They face a situation in which feminism is criticized for imposing too much community and neglecting differences between and within individuals, as well as intersecting oppressions. Linda Zerilli (2005) has identified an opposite challenge. As a consequence of the critique of women as the political subject of feminism, feminist politics has become overtly centered on subjectivity and agency, and questions about political community and collective action have been sidetracked. Theorists of feminist political togetherness thus balance between two threatening visions: universalizing notions of “women” that exclude difference and a too subject-centered approach to feminist politics that refuses to posit any commonality for fear of being labeled essentialist.

Both Arendt and the theorists who draw on her ideas in the context of feminist political togetherness think that too much sameness is dangerous for political life, but that some form of togetherness is still required. However, the individual uniqueness that Arendt believed was destroyed by mass societies and totalitarianism and that she wanted to bring back to political life is not the same thing as the “difference” that feminist theorists argue should be recognized in order to build more democratic and inclusive feminist political communities.

Feminist theorists who use Arendt’s thought as an inspiration to theorize about a feminist “we” that “embraces rather than excludes difference” are interested in questions such as how women/feminists are differently positioned by power relations, what individuals should do to recognize these differences and deal with the privilege involved, and how multiple allegiances held by individual subjects affect their political affiliation as feminists. In contrast, the individual uniqueness that for Arendt was the condition and the marker of political action is detached from the social and material differences and the power relations embedded in them which most feminist theorists have in mind. As I have pointed out, in Arendt’s existential, abstract framework, every human being is unique and distinct from everyone else, and every human has the urge to reveal this uniqueness to others for the sake of being a human being and having been born. This abstract, general uniqueness does not involve any qualities or attributes; it is only revealed through public, political action.

Arendt’s individual uniqueness and the feminist discussions about differences and the inequalities and exclusions related to them make an uneasy alliance. Nevertheless, when some theorists who use Arendt’s concepts to provide new visions of the collective dimension of feminist politics write about the tension they identify in her thought, they use the terms of the feminist debate. For example, Adams and Allen use “difference” to describe the individualistic aspects of Arendt’s thought. This wording places Arendt in the specific context...
of the feminist debates about multiple differences and the politics of difference in a problematic way, and it fails to capture her existential-phenomenological view of politics as individual distinction. What follows in my view is that theorists who seek to rethink the feminist “we” with the help of Arendt’s concepts fail to consider the aspects of her existential framework that are problematic from the point of view of conceptualizing the collective dimension of feminist politics, such as her focus on “the human.” As a result, traces of this framework remain in the visions of the feminist “we” and the political bonds among feminists, which the Arendtian feminists propose.

**Reconciling difference and togetherness with Arendt’s concepts**

I will now turn to Amy Allen’s theory of solidarity and Lisa Disch’s remarks about Arendtian democratic community in order to show how feminist theorists use the tension between individual distinction and political togetherness implied in Arendt’s thought, and how Arendtian accounts of feminist political togetherness differ from those discussed in chapter 2.

Allen argues that, to be effective, feminist politics requires collective forms of action and resistance, and she writes about feminism as a political movement and about coalitions between feminism and other social struggles. Allen’s theoretical-political agenda is to oppose theorizing that rejects the political relevance of group identities and embraces non-identity, an approach she believes Judith Butler represents. What she calls Arendtian “commonality within difference” is for her a way to embrace the criticism of politics based on fixed and pre-determined identity categories put forward by thinkers like Butler, while continuing to understand collective political action in terms of group identities.

Allen’s aim is to develop a feminist notion of power as solidarity, and she summarizes Arendt’s usefulness for this project in the following way:

> Arendt’s dialectical account of equality and distinction, of commonality within difference, offers resources for a feminist critical theory of power that supersedes the opposition between exclusionary identity and fragmented non-identity and that reformulates solidarity as the result of concerted action, rather than as a pre-given, fixed and, hence, repressive identity. Thus, Arendt helps us to think how members of oppositional political social movements can be united in a way that, far from excluding and representing difference, embraces and protects it.

*(Allen 1999, 106.)*

In short, Allen argues that the tension of individual distinction and political togetherness in Arendt’s thought is a resource for theorizing about political
collectivities that make claims in terms of identities, but that are not based on exclusionary identity (Allen 1999, 112).

Allen is interested in what binds internally fragmented political movements such as feminism together and what enables building coalitions between oppositional movements organized around different identities and aims. She argues, as do many feminist theorists who I discussed in chapter 2, that the answer is solidarity. Allen suggests that Arendt’s account of solidarity is a suitable resource for conceptualizing feminist solidarity because it does not rely on essentialist and exclusionary notions of group identity, but is the result of collective action (Allen 1999, 98).

Allen’s allegiance to Arendt sets her apart from other feminist theorists who use the vocabulary of solidarity to rethink the feminist “we.” Allen does not describe solidarity as an affective bond between individuals. Neither does she evoke the notion of ethics as responsibility and accountability for the different other that has been characteristic of the theoretically elaborate visions of feminist solidarity since the 1990s. Instead, she describes solidarity in Arendtian terms as a “collective power that grows out of action in concert” (Allen 1999, 112). This solidarity is achieved through shared commitments or promises by distinct individuals to work together for a common goal, such as ending sexist oppression. When promises cease to bind, solidarity disappears. Allen underlines that promises and commitments are not fixed; they are open to contestation and reinterpretation, and it is exactly this openness that makes it possible to keep them. (Allen 1999, 113.)

Lisa Disch also locates Arendt’s contemporary usefulness in the tension between individual distinction and political commonality that she identifies in her thought.

[Arendt’s views] anticipate contemporary critical theorists’ attempts to provide a nonfoundational account of democratic community. That is, a community grounded neither in common identity, nor in universally valid moral principles. Arendt attempts to account for the possibility of solidarity and collective action without either invoking an underlying common identity or appealing to tran-

34 Arendt herself did not write much about solidarity. She has defined solidarity as a dispassionately founded community of interest that is based on commitment to ideas (OR 88-89, Reshaur 1992), but some commentators have even argued that Arendt was skeptical about political action based on solidarity (Villa 1999, 131). Indeed, Allen builds on various aspects of Arendt’s thought, such as her notion of power. For Arendt, power is separate from strength and violence, and it could best be understood as a positive force that is related to forming and maintaining political communities and public spaces. It is a collective achievement, arising from the concerted action of a plurality of agents. It cannot be stored; rather it exists as a potential that is actualized only when people become engaged in public deliberation. It is power that, in reference to the initial getting together, keeps public spaces of appearance in existence and that gives political institutions and forms of government their legitimacy. (Canovan 1992, 208-9; Passerin d’Entrèves 1994, 77-79.)
scendent reason…. Arendt argues for a democratic public space constituted by common interests, but at the same time she maintains that commonality is not the ground of politics but is revealed in public speeches and action.

(Disch 1994, 45.)

Disch does not use her reading of Arendtian political community to theorize about feminist political community, although she acknowledges that Arendt’s notion of plurality and the tension between individuality and political togetherness could be useful for the purpose (Disch 1994, 47). She is interested in the implications of Arendt’s tension for theorizing about the abstract “democratic community.” Disch argues that Arendt helps us to think about political community without universals and consensus, a community that does not have any ground or foundation. In describing how such a community is constituted, she builds on Arendt’s idea of inter-est, a common interest that constitutes an “in-between” that “lies between people and therefore can relate and bind them together” (HC, 182).

According to Disch, Arendtian political community exists whenever people meet in a common situation, exchange their perspectives and views, and articulate these as a common interest or problem that will constitute the “in-between” and link them together. This does not require a consensus on the exact definition of the problem or the best way to solve it; rather, disagreement and divergence of perspectives are needed in order for any situation to become a common interest. In Disch’s view, Arendt shifts the locus of “common” from inner selves to a linguistically mediated external interest that can be anything from a past event to a concrete artefact that is compelling enough to make people act together (Disch 1994, 36-45). As Disch puts it, “commonality is not discovered by recognizing how we are all alike; rather, it is constructed by learning how each of us sees differently” (ibid., 40).

Again, it is possible to observe a difference in comparison to the accounts of the feminist “we” I discuss in chapter 2. For Disch, the relationships among those who form a political community are always mediated through an event or issue that is outside the individuals concerned. These relationships do not require affective identification with others, an attempt to truly understand them, or ethical responsibility for them. Furthermore, Disch argues that the Arendtian political community should not be based on inner selves. By contrast, many theorists whose visions of identity politics, coalition politics, and solidarity were discussed in chapter 2 argue that building political bonds among feminists across differences and inequalities requires that we focus on our selves – not in

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35 Disch herself does not use any of the three main vocabularies that I identify and discuss in chapter 2, but makes use of the term “community.” However, the difference I wish to demonstrate here owes to Disch’s choice of theoretical framework, not her choice of vocabulary.
order to ground commonality on something that we essentially share, but in order to communicate our experiences to others and transform ourselves through our encounters with them and our efforts to understand their perspectives and experiences.36

This brief discussion of Disch and Allen indicates that the theorists influenced by Arendt stand apart from other theorists of feminist political togetherness. Allen’s theory of solidarity and Disch’s view of democratic community provide excellent examples of one of the features of Arendtian approaches to political togetherness: downplaying the affective elements of political bonds and arguing in one form or another that we relate politically to others through a third object, namely, a goal we try to attain or an issue we debate. In Arendtian terms, we are connected with each other through the common world. I will argue later in this chapter that the disparagement of affect and focus on the world-in-between is one of the traces of Arendt’s existential framework that can be found in the visions of the feminist “we” based on her concepts.

3.2 Adriana Cavarero: Relational bonds among unique women

Adriana Cavarero’s reflections on political togetherness combine Hannah Arendt’s concepts with Italian feminism of sexual difference. It is important to consider Cavarero’s work in detail because she takes Arendt’s phenomenological background seriously, including her understanding of individual uniqueness. Cavarero develops Arendt’s ideas into an “ontology of uniqueness,” and her vision of a political form of being together as “relationality” directly reflects this ontology. Analyzing Cavarero’s work enables me to explain what it means from the point of view of rethinking the feminist “we” to emphasize Arendt’s phenomenological-existential interests.

I will begin by examining the “ontology of uniqueness,” Cavarero’s rereading of Arendt’s notion of plurality as the unrepeatable uniqueness characteristic of every singular being, in order to show how Cavarero amends Arendt’s concepts in order to make them compatible with contemporary feminism and the philosophy of sexual difference. I suggest that Cavarero makes a valuable philosophical move when she incorporates the embodiment of “who one is” into Arendt’s notion. I will then turn to relationality, Cavarero’s main contribution

36It is also possible to read Arendt differently on this point, although it requires reinterpreting her concepts. Katherine Adams (2002), who bases her account of “self-interested feminist coalition discourse” on Arendt’s notion of inter-est and combines Arendt’s concepts with the views of U.S. feminists of color, argues in line with them that building coalitions requires an interest in the self.
to the discussion on feminist political togetherness. I argue that Cavarero’s notion of relatedness strengthens the connection between the human and political togetherness that I have identified in Arendt’s thought. I argue that due to this connection, which for Cavarero is not an unintended consequence of Arendtian background, but an intended theory-political choice, relatedness should not be seen as a model of a specifically political form of togetherness, but rather as a phenomenological re-description of political commonality.

**From Arendtian individual uniqueness to an “ontology of uniqueness”**

In the same way as most feminist theorists who use Arendt’s concepts to rethink the feminist “we,” Cavarero builds on the tension of individual distinction and political commonality in Arendt’s thought. Unlike most of these writers, however, Cavarero does not equate Arendt’s notion of individual uniqueness with the feminist debate about difference. On the contrary, one of her aims is to go beyond this debate, and to this end she takes seriously Arendt’s phenomenological-existential claim that every human being is unique and has an urge to disclose this uniqueness to others. Cavarero turns Arendt’s conception of individual uniqueness as part of the human condition of plurality into an “ontology of uniqueness.”

Cavarero operates continuously with Arendt’s distinction between “who a person is” and “what a person is,” where the “who” coincides with the unrepeatable uniqueness of the individual and the “what” corresponds to a person’s qualities. Cavarero makes this Arendtian manner of speaking an integral part of her own theoretical vocabulary. In her view, all theoretical frameworks or political practices that subsume the uniqueness of individuals under categories and generalizations emphasize “what-ness” and fail to take into account the uniqueness of human beings. This happens whenever philosophers and political theorists introduce generalized, abstract figures such as “individual,” “Man,” “citizen,” or “subject,” but also when individuals organize politically around cultural identities based on ethnicity, sexuality, or class. (Cavarero 2002, 520.) The unique “who” that, in Cavarero’s view, philosophers, political theorists, and feminists overlook is the starting point of her philosophy, her political theory, and her feminism.

Therefore, when Cavarero writes about political being together, she does not discuss individuals with multiple identities who seek coalitions with each other, or groups, communities, or movements. She conceptualizes the protagonists of politics in the following manner:

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Cavarero is not the only contemporary theorist who draws on Arendt’s idea of the uniqueness of individuals. Jean-Luc Nancy operates within a similar framework (Nancy 1991; 2000).
They are unique beings in flesh and bone who, unlike the abstract and universal “individual,” have a face, a name, and a life story. Unrepeatable and different from every other, they communicate the uniqueness of their own personal identity; they communicate reciprocally who they are.

(Cavarero 2005, 193.)

Cavarero argues that no collective identity could ever fully encompass this uniqueness and that “who one is” only becomes visible when all qualities, memberships, and cultural identities are bracketed out. According to Cavarero, grasping one’s “who-ness” “implies first of all the preliminary activity of stripping ourselves of our western, eastern, Christian, Muslim, Jew, gay, straight, poor, rich, ignorant, learned, cynical, sad, happy – or even guilty and innocent – being.” (Cavarero 2002, 526; Cavarero 2005, 205.)

Although Cavarero adopts Arendt’s distinction between “what one is” and “who one is” as the basis for her theorizing, she modifies Arendt’s view of what counts as uniqueness and how individuals disclose this uniqueness. For Arendt, individual uniqueness is implied in a person’s acts and words, and others can perceive this uniqueness in a public, political setting. The unique identity of a person retrospectively acquires tangible form as a life-story told by others. Cavarero makes two significant modifications to this scene.

In Relating Narratives (2000), Cavarero argues that the disclosure of individual uniqueness does not necessarily require public, political action and extraordinary acts, but is also communicated through the reciprocal act of telling life-stories (Cavarero 2000, 63). In Cavarero’s view, individual uniqueness manifests itself in what she calls the “narratability of the self.” This means that, because of their uniqueness, human beings have a desire to narrate and to have their lives narrated by others and thereby grasp their own unique identity. Everyone’s life is narratable, and everyone desires narration. This is the case with the politician who performs glorious deeds and speaks powerful words, as well as the poor Italian housewife who takes care of the home and the children and meets her female friends in the afternoons. Cavarero holds on to Arendt’s proposition that disclosure of this uniqueness requires a public interactive setting (Cavarero mentions a feminist consciousness group as an example of such a setting), but she implies that any reciprocal interaction between any “I” and “you” counts as a “plural space of interaction” and makes a situation political.

I see Cavarero’s focus on the narratability of self as a feminist correction to Arendt’s view of politics as the disclosure of individual uniqueness. Cavarero points out that women have been excluded from the public, political spaces where uniqueness in Arendt’s scheme is exhibited, and she extends the scope and space of political action to cover a broader range of activities and situations. (Cavarero 2000, 58-59.) Cavarero’s idea of self-disclosure through self-narration resonates with the views of the women of color coalition theorists, who argued
that the narration of one’s specific identity forms the basis of political relationships. The focus on self-narration also distinguishes Cavarero from other feminist interpreters of Arendt such as Disch (1994) who emphasize that political community is created through a shared discourse about a third object or a shared world rather than through reference to the self.

In For More Than One Voice (2005), Cavarero makes another significant modification to the Arendtian scenario of self-disclosure. She emphasizes the role of the voice as opposed to the content of speech.

As fact of everyday experience, the voice appears as the elementary principle of an ontology of uniqueness that radically contests the metaphysical tradition that silences the “I” in flesh and bone .... The voice belongs to the living; it communicates the presence of an existent in flesh and bone; it signals a throat, a particular body.

(Cavarero 2005, 176-77.)

By focusing on voice and its rhythms and sounds in disclosing the unique identity of a person, Cavarero emphasizes the role of corporeality in politics. She makes embodiment the core of her reinterpretation of Arendt’s view of individual uniqueness and the political identity of persons.

Arendt too understood individuals as always necessarily embodied, but as many feminist commentators have noted, the body for Arendt is a sign of sameness, not something that plays a role in disclosing one’s uniqueness (Honig 1995; Pitkin 1994; Zerilli 1994). Cavarero contests Arendt on this point, which has been one of the key reservations that feminist thinkers have had against using her thought for feminist purposes. Although Cavarero’s unique “who” is stripped of all qualities and belongings, she is a creature of flesh and bone. When the “who” appears to others in a public setting, she exposes herself first of all as a singular voice and a singular body.

Although incorporating embodiment in Arendt’s account of politics is an intriguing theoretical move, this is not Cavarero’s main point. She argues further that the unique “who” that reveals herself to others through her voice is always necessarily sexed. For Cavarero, conceptualizing uniqueness as embodied is a way to combine the Arendtian view of the uniqueness of individuals with the feminist philosophy of sexual difference.38

To conclude, although Cavarero is extremely loyal to Arendt’s existential-phenomenological framework and considers her idea of individual uniqueness

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38I am aware that Cavarero’s argument that individual uniqueness is sexed uniqueness can be questioned on the grounds that, if uniqueness is embodied, then any belongings based on a person’s bodily existence which are visible or audible to others should matter in political action and be part of one’s political identity, not just one’s sex. I will not explore this issue further here.
valuable, she transforms Arendt’s views of individual uniqueness and its disclosure in order to make them compatible with feminist concerns. She extends the scope of Arendtian self-disclosing political action to include self-narration so as to make it reflect the everyday experiences of ordinary women, and she re-conceptualizes the Arendtian political actor, the unique “who,” as embodied, arguing that corporeality is constitutive of political relations to other people. Although these transformations are theoretically ambitious, their usefulness from the perspective of the discussion on feminist political togetherness is limited. They highlight rather than question the central role that Arendt gives to individual uniqueness in politics.

**Relationality: A political or an ontological category?**

Cavarero’s main contribution to the discussion on feminist political togetherness is her notion of relationality. Cavarero introduces this new vocabulary of political togetherness in order to provide an alternative to models of politics based on the autonomous and self-sufficient individual and to visions of political community that suppress difference. Relationality is built directly on Cavarero’s ontological commitment to value individual uniqueness, and it translates the “ontology of uniqueness” into the language of politics. For Cavarero, relationality is a model of a specifically political form of togetherness, and she describes relationality as the “principal category of politics” (Cavarero 2002, 521). However, I will contest this claim on the basis of the difficulty of distinguishing relationality from the ontological togetherness of unique, singular beings, which the “ontology of uniqueness” implies.

Cavarero observes that most contemporary political theorists who focus on democratic deliberation understand the importance of relationality, but she argues that they all fail because they do not acknowledge what, for her, is the elementary criterion of politics, namely, valuing the embodied uniqueness of human beings. Furthermore, she criticizes these theories for focusing on the content of speech and on the procedures and norms of communication and for neglecting the role of the material voice. (Cavarero 2005, 188-90.)

As discussed above, Cavarero rethinks the link between speech and politics and corrects Arendt by arguing that it is the voice, not the content of speech, that reveals the uniqueness of the speaker. Consequently, for Cavarero, “what in speech convokes the relation among speakers is, first of all, the voice” (Cavarero 2005, 208). Political relations are evoked by the voice in its materiality: by the

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39 Cavarero refers to the primacy of the “who” over the “what” as the “regulative principle of politics” and describes the “ontology of plural uniqueness and relation” as the “generative and symbolic nucleus of politics” (Cavarero 2005, 205).
vibrations and sound waves formed by the throat of one person striking the ears of another. Cavarero characterizes the relation established in interaction as “vocalic relation that convokes mouth and ears” (Cavarero 2005, 182) and as “acoustic dialogue that takes its cadences from the very rhythm of breath” (Cavarero 2005, 201). What is it in the voice alone that, after all memberships and characteristics have been bracketed out, and even when nothing is said, forces us to answer and recognize the speaker? Cavarero argues that “what remains, because it has always been there, is ‘who are you?’ as a question directed toward ‘you who are here’.” (Cavarero 2005, 202.)

For Cavarero, the question “who are you?” that is implied in the voice and that does not have to be put into words recognizes the other and motivates her to reply.

Relationality is a very specific description of political togetherness. It stands apart, not only from the feminist theories of identity, coalition, and solidarity discussed in chapter 2, but also from other Arendtian visions of the feminist “we.” What makes togetherness political for Cavarero is the disclosure of one’s embodied uniqueness. Feminist political commonality is for her about the creation of a space in which “the sexed uniqueness of each speaker” can be revealed “in spite of patriarchal prohibitions” (Cavarero 2005, 206).

The first thing that follows from Cavarero’s focus on disclosure of one’s uniqueness is that, unlike most theorists of feminist political togetherness, Cavarero is manifestly uninterested in what is said in the interaction that creates political relationships between feminists:

The Said becomes secondary – whether as specific content (what gets said), or as a structure (the system of signification that regulates what gets said). And Saying becomes the privileged realm of a reciprocal self-communication, which simultaneously expresses uniqueness and relation.

(Cavarero 2005, 192-93.)

The focus on the Saying means that, for Cavarero, interaction does not need to have specific content or form in order to create political bonds; it only has to reveal the uniqueness of the speaker. Most theorists who I discuss in this study argue that in order to create political bonds with each other, feminists must negotiate differences in experiences, social positions, and power relations. In other words, they stress that the content of speech matters; feminists cannot

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40 Arendt also asks “who are you?” but she gives this question less weight than Cavarero. According to Arendt, “Who are you?” is “the question asked of every newcomer” (HC 178). By newcomer, she means that every human being is by virtue of being born a new beginning. Arendt does not imply that there is something reciprocal in this question, and she does not say anything about either the one asking the question or the one to whom the question is addressed. The question is left hanging, and the answer is implied in everything human beings say or do, or in Arendt’s words, in their words and deeds.
build durable political relations before they hear and understand – or make imaginary efforts to understand – what the different other is saying and before they are prepared to change their own positions accordingly. By contrast, Cavarero straightforwardly argues that the “pluralism of opinions,” the idea that people are situated differently in power relationships and that people with different backgrounds have different views, opinions, and interests, “functions as an indirect proof of a plurality of unique beings.” (Cavarero 2005, 191-92.)

The second consequence of Cavarero’s focus on individual uniqueness is that relationality is strikingly easy to establish. Relationality comes into being through the resonance of material voices that reveal the uniqueness of speakers. She argues repeatedly that one voice simply “convokes” or “invokes” another voice into a relation: “the always embodied singularity of an existent convokes the other with the rhythmic and sonorous breath of his or her mouth” (Cavarero 2005, 200). Nothing – apart from a pair of ears – is required from the listener either, because “the voice vibrates in the air, striking the ear of the other, even if it does not mean to do so” (Cavarero 2005, 178).

In contrast, as became evident in the previous chapter, feminists who re-think the feminist “we” tend to see any interaction across relations of power as a difficult task, which is one of the main challenges that the feminist movement faces. Susan Bickford’s argument that power relations and social and economic inequalities have an impact on how we hear others points out some shortcomings of Cavarero’s view. Bickford builds her view of political togetherness as attentive listening on Arendt’s thought and the theories of women of color. She points out that we are inclined to engage in interaction with those we see regularly and who are part of our daily frame of reference. Because of our personal experiences, some voices may seem to us like noise to be dismissed, rather than political speech. (Bickford 1996, 92, 95-97, 184.)

I suggest that the two particularities of Cavarero’s idea of relationality, namely, disinterest in the content of speech and the effortless way it comes to being, are the result of Cavarero’s reinterpretation of Arendt rather than of her allegiance to Arendt. Cavarero insists more than Arendt on the disclosure of individual uniqueness as the single most important criterion of political relationships, and it is her own addition that the voice, not speech, communicates this uniqueness. Other theorists who use Arendt’s thought as a resource to solve the problem of the feminist “we” put more emphasis on the content of speech, building on Arendt’s views about opinion formation and judgment (Bickford 1996; Disch 1994; Zerilli 2005).

I see the specific features of Cavarero’s notion of relationality as part of a broader issue, which makes me critical of this notion: the difficulty of distinguishing relationality as a specifically political form of togetherness from the way the ontology of uniqueness binds unique beings together in a fundamental way. This is because Cavarero embraces and elaborates on Arendt’s phenome-
nological-existential categories in which the connection between human togetherness and political commonality is already implied.

Cavarero herself would not agree with the claim that there is a link between political commonality and human togetherness in her thought – or in Arendt’s. She points out repeatedly that, for Arendt, the political sphere of action is distinct from the human condition of plurality, and she takes this to be the approach in her own work as well. 41 Cavarero argues that what turns the fundamental human togetherness implied in the ontology of uniqueness into relationality is the reciprocal self-communication of this uniqueness, which “actively” links unique beings to each other. (Cavarero 2005, 192, 193-97.)

However, my observation, that establishing relationality does not require effort, questions Cavarero’s definition of self-communication as an “active link.” Technically speaking, it is true that for Cavarero, establishing political relations requires interaction between specific individuals in a specific context; therefore, relationality can be distinguished from human togetherness, which is factually there even when individuals do not interact. However, we have seen that the active effort required to establish this interaction and turn the ontological human togetherness into political togetherness is minimal. Already Cavarero’s choice of words makes relationality appear as a natural and inevitable form of togetherness. She argues that unique voices have a “relational nature” (Cavarero 2005, 200), that unique speakers are “already tied by an acoustic dialogue” (Cavarero 2005, 200), that the voice “announces” the corporeal relation between unique beings (Cavarero 2005, 200), and that the “voice is always, irremediably relational” (Cavarero 2005, 177).

The immediacy of relationality is even more apparent in Cavarero’s reflections on “relational ethics.” For Cavarero, the ethics that grounds interactive communication between unique beings is based on the “fundamental principle” of recognition that all the people I encounter are unique and have unique life-stories. Cavarero argues that the recognition of the uniqueness of the other is “already at work in the exhibiting nature of the self” and that it is “rendered even more explicit” in the conscious act of storytelling. Stressing the naturalness and inevitability of relational ethics even further, she argues that this ethics is “not a fruit of choice,” but a “necessary aspect of an identity which, from beginning to end, is intertwined with other lives … and needs the other’s tale.” (Cavarero 2000, 87-88.) In other words, Cavarero is saying that we do not recognize the uniqueness of the other because we commit to take her into account,

41 To underline that relationality is a political, not an ontological, understanding of togetherness, Cavarero contrasts her own position (and Arendt’s) to Jean-Luc Nancy’s theory of community. She argues that Nancy’s political community does not have an active political moment because it coincides with the ontology of human plurality, extending everywhere, anytime (Cavarero 2005, 193-97).
but because as a unique “who” each of us is always relational and because the other is necessary for us.  

In spite of Cavarero’s own claim that ontology and politics should not be merged, I see her notion of relationality as an enactment of our ontological status as embodied unique beings who are already always relational. Relationality is an inevitable form of association between specific individuals who meet in specific contexts, and it stems from the fact that human beings have certain capacities (e.g., the physical capacity to form sounds and hear them) and needs (e.g., a desire for narration). Cavarero’s notion of relationality remains entangled in the Arendtian framework where, in my view, ontological human togetherness and political community are closely linked. In fact, Cavarero strengthens this link when she turns Arendtian plurality into ontology and makes the disclosure of uniqueness the sole purpose and criterion of politics.

I suggest that relationality is an inappropriate description of a specifically political form of feminist togetherness. As I have argued in the introduction, political togetherness must be more than a necessity that follows from shared humanity. It could be argued that her project is not a political project in the conventional sense, but rather an attempt to give a phenomenological description of the political form of being together based on the ontological uniqueness of every human being. Cavarero is engaged in the politics of philosophy, redescribing the key concepts of political theory with phenomenological and existential language.

My analysis of Cavarero’s notion of relationality contributes to the main argument in this chapter, namely, that the Arendtian visions of the feminist “we” form a specific strand in the discussion on feminist political togetherness, and that their distinctiveness is mainly due to subtle traces of Arendt’s existential-phenomenological background. Cavarero’s notion of relationality is a prime example of how the connection Arendt draws between political commonality and human togetherness and her existential interest in the “human” (Pulkkinen 2003) may become part of an account of the feminist political “we” built on her concepts. However, this is not an inevitable outcome. I will next discuss Linda Zerilli’s account of feminist political community, an account based on Arendt’s theory of judgment, which minimizes rather than maximizes the link between the human and the political implied in Arendt’s thought.

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42 Cavarero’s focus on ethics, a term absent from Arendt’s work and from most Arendtian accounts of the feminist “we,” connects the notion of relationality with the feminist theories of solidarity that I discuss in chapter 2. However, whereas feminist theorists of solidarity stress that the ethics that guides feminist political togetherness involves commitment, self-transformation, and conscious effort, Cavarero’s view of ethics is based on the ontological condition or shared humanity.
3.3 Linda Zerilli: Feminist community based on judgment

Linda Zerilli is concerned with the current state and the future of feminist theory and feminist politics, which she argues have become too subject-centered. In her *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* published in 2005, Zerilli presents an alternative idea of “freedom-centered feminism” based on various aspects of Hannah Arendt’s thought, which she reads through the lens of Wittgenstein’s philosophy of language and contemporary radical democratic theory. Freedom-centered feminism would, among other things, be more concerned with the common world than with the subject and pay more attention to the constitution of feminist political community than to the possibility of individual agency. As is the case with Adriana Cavarero, Zerilli’s reasons for turning to Arendt’s thought are related to the politics of theory. She wants to challenge the post-structuralist paradigm of contemporary feminist political thought with a new theoretical framework.

Zerilli’s reflections on political community, which are based on Hannah Arendt’s theory of judgment, are a significant part of her project of freedom-centered feminism. It is important to discuss Zerilli’s theory of political community in view of my aim in this chapter – to analyze the implications of using Hannah Arendt’s thought to theorize about the feminist “we” – because she builds on Arendt’s theory of political judgment, which I see as promising background for this purpose.

Although my goal here is not to reconstruct Arendt’s theory of judging, I will begin with a short overview of what Arendt wrote about judgment and how Arendt scholars have interpreted her reflections in order to understand the nuances of Zerilli’s theory of political community. I argue that Arendt’s theory of political judgment is a more promising resource for conceptualizing the feminist “we” than her theory of political action. I will then move on to discuss what it means when Zerilli argues that political communities are constituted through the practice of making political judgments. I argue that, although Zerilli avoids the conflation of human togetherness with political being together, which I observe in Cavarero’s notion of relationality, there are some very Arendtian elements to Zerilli’s theory. These include the neglect of the affective dimension of politics and conceptualizing political community in an abstract manner as a “shared sense of the common world.” I also argue that Zerilli’s account of political community is one of the most compelling attempts to use Arendtian vocabulary to conceptualize the collective dimension of feminist politics and that it provides ideas that extend the scope of the discussion on feminist political togetherness.
Kant, Arendt, and judgment

Arendt’s fragmented reflections on judgment43 draw on Kant’s distinction between determinate judgments, which presuppose a universal law and reflective judgments made without criteria. It is the reflective judgment that does not measure particulars against universal rules or laws that interests Arendt. Kant himself applied reflective judgment only to aesthetics (“this painting is beautiful”), but Arendt saw it as a model for political judgment (the “holocaust is wrong”). In Arendt’s view, telling right from wrong should not be grounded on pre-given universal criteria any more than on aesthetic judgments about the beautiful and the ugly. (Benhabib 1996, 188-89; Passerin d’Entrèves 1994.)

One of the key insights of Arendt’s involvement with Kant’s theory of aesthetic judgment is that the validity of political judgments – and indeed the whole process of forming them – requires togetherness with other people who have different perspectives on the same issues. When judging, I presuppose a “community sense” (sensus communis), a shared sense among the members of the community; this means that my personal judgment has to some extent to be affected by how I think others would judge. The idea of a community sense is behind one of the distinctive characteristics of Arendtian political judgment: when I make a judgment, I assume that others will agree with me, and the assumed agreement of others gives my judgment its validity.

In order to put my own judgment in the perspective of a community sense, I have to engage in a process that Arendt calls “representative thinking”: considering the issue from the perspectives of differently situated others with whom I need to come into agreement. Arendt is not saying that I should actually check with the persons with whom I act politically to determine what they have to say about a certain issue – representative thinking is primarily an imaginative exercise. It is the requirement of forming an opinion or judgment because it allows political actors to transcend the limitations of their specific location. (BPF, 220-21; Benhabib 1996, 185-92; Disch 1994, 152; Kateb 2001, 130-33; Pulkkinen 2000, 198-99; Zerilli 2005, 133-34.)

If the relationship between the person who judges and the others whose views she has to take into account is characterized by distance rather than by direct involvement, then the same is true for the relationship between the judg-

43Arendt never developed a complete theory of judgment. She discussed judgment in passing in essays from the 1960s, including “Truth and Politics,” “Freedom and Politics,” and “Crisis in Culture,” and in more detail in a series of lectures delivered in 1970 and published as Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy (1992) and in The Life of the Mind (1971, 1978). Judging was supposed to be the third and concluding volume of The Life of the Mind, Arendt’s final work. However, Arendt died shortly after finishing the second part, Willing. A few passages on judging in the first volume of Thinking and the outline of her theory of judging in the postscript of this volume give an idea of what Judging might have contained.
ing person and the event or object to be judged. In *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, Arendt introduces the figure of the “spectator” as the symbol of political judging. Arendt understands the disinterested or uninvolved spectator to be in a position that allows her to see the whole of a situation in a way that a political actor engaged in the events cannot (LKPP, 52-55). The spectator does not judge in order to determine how to act, but to retrieve meaning from the past and understand the exemplary value of past events (LKPP 56-58, 76-77).

Arendt scholars have interpreted her theory of judgment in contradictory ways. One frequent disagreement is whether Arendt’s political judgment requires the presence of concrete others or whether Arendt, like Kant, is only speaking about imaginary conversations with others.

Roland Beiner has suggested that Arendt’s work on judgment falls into two phases that are characterized by two different understandings of judgment. He argues that Arendt shifts from considering judgment as a feature of political life and focusing on the enlarged mentality of political agents to the retrospective judgment of historians and storytellers and to considering judgment as a mental faculty independent of political action. (Beiner 1992, 91-93.) It has been further pointed out that it is the judgment of the disinterested spectator that is more important for Arendt than the judgment of the one who acts politically (Villa 1999, 11-13). Many who follow Beiner’s interpretation argue that Arendt’s later emphasis on the impartial judgment of the spectator is problematic, and they criticize her for speaking about the possible judgments of imagined others rather than about the actual perspectives of real interlocutors (Allen 2008; Beiner 1992, 100; Benhabib 1996; Young 2001).

Other commentators have pointed out that, instead of separating judgment from the realm of politics, Arendt adds to the Kantian idea of enlarged mentality the encounter with other perspectives that are different from mine. It has been argued that, for Arendt, the actor and the spectator are not different persons, but that we humans constantly shift from one position to another (Bickford 1996, 89; Zerilli 2005, 160). Furthermore, although spectators may judge in solitude, merely anticipating the perspectives of other people, there are others who judge the same events, and the judging spectator cannot avoid confrontation with the differing views of others. Debate and persuasion are necessary to defend one’s judgment, and one has to be ready to change one’s own criteria for judging when exposed to the judgments of others. (LLKP, 42, 72; Disch 1994, 15; Nedelsky 2001a, 108-9; Passerin d’Entrèves 1994, 125; Zerilli 2005, 145-47.)

There are several aspects of Arendt’s theory of political judgment that appeal to feminist thinkers. Feminist theorists influenced by deliberative democracy have drawn attention to Arendtian political judgment as a process of reaching intersubjective validity, and they emphasize agreement and communication as the key elements of Arendt’s reflections (Allen 2008; Benhabib 1992,
Others read Arendt from a more agonistic perspective, embracing the absence of universal criteria against which political judgments could be measured and arguing that any political judgment is always subject to questioning. I assume the agreement of others when I make a political judgment, but those who do not agree with me may challenge my judgment. (Disch 1994, 15; Zerilli 2005, 140; Zerilli 2009, 309.)

I argue that Arendt’s theory of judgment, in particular when read from the agonistic perspective, has some elements that indeed provide a promising starting point for theorizing about the feminist “we.” First, Arendt’s theory does not evoke the idea of human community to the same degree as her theory of political action, which is the main reference point for most feminist theorists who use her concepts for this purpose. Arendt’s discussion of political judgment, which draws attention to how we make judgments about the common world and how we communicate these judgments to others as well as the content of these judgments, provides a multifaceted view of what constitutes a political community and one that goes beyond the disclosure of individual uniqueness. Second, Arendt’s theory of judgment incorporates two elements that are present in many non-Arendtian accounts of the feminist “we”: the need to see from the perspectives of other people and the often confrontational encounters between concrete others who have different views. Arendt’s work on political judgment may well be the most useful aspect of her thought for those who are interested in theorizing about the feminist political community in a non-foundational way.

To my knowledge, Zerilli is the only feminist theorist who has discussed Arendt’s theory of judgment in order to conceptualize a feminist political community. Many commentators have obviously noted that Arendt’s theory of judgment is community-based. For example, according to Nedelsky (2001a, 119; 2001b, 242), for Arendt it is always the community that judges, and Disch (1994, 152) argues that, for Arendt, “judging is only possible within the limits of some community, because it is only in community that communicability makes sense.” Zerilli’s view of the link between judgment and community differs from such interpretations. She argues that the practice of judging constitutes community, not that judgment requires a community that is already there.

**Two processes of judging: Two visions of a feminist political community**

Although the creation of a more democratic feminist “we” is a significant part of Zerilli’s vision of freedom-centered feminism, and although she constantly uses the term “political community,” it requires some interpretation to extract what Zerilli means when she argues that the practice of judgment constitutes a political community. Following Arendt’s complex and contradictory reflections
about judgment, Zerilli writes about two interlinked processes through which judging, in her view, builds and reworks political community. The first process is making judgments about the common world and debating them with concerned others. The second is the imaginative process through which individuals make sense of and extend the “common world” that shapes the actions they can take. I suggest that as a consequence, Zerilli puts forward two different understandings of feminist political community.

In the first instance, Zerilli describes feminist political community as “that what is once presupposed and created anew in the practice of judgment” (Zerilli 2005, 156). She asks:

What if we thought of “women” – that is, women as the collective political subject of feminism, rather than as a social or “natural” group – not as a category to be applied as a rule in a determinat judgment but as a claim to speak in someone’s name and to be spoken for? (Zerilli 2005, 173.)

For Zerilli, speaking in someone’s name means that, when I make a political judgment, I presuppose – as when making a Kantian aesthetic judgment – that others will agree with what I say about the object of judgment (Zerilli 2005, 173). For example, when I say that the gender pay gap is a problem which feminists should tackle as a matter of priority, I assume that women and feminists agree with me. In making this claim, I am also saying something about the group of “women” or “feminists” for whom I am speaking. For example, I assume that women should participate in gainful employment rather than stay at home to take care of children. According to Zerilli, claims like these call “women” as a political community into existence. The political community of women does not exist prior to the claims that bring it into being.

The speaking for others involved in political judgment and the building of political communities does not mean forcing one’s purely subjective views upon others. For Zerilli, a political form of judgment and a political form of community require that I take into account those in the name of whom I claim to speak. This means more than acknowledging the fact that differences between us lead us to see things from different perspectives and have different priorities. Drawing on Jacques Rancière, Zerilli argues that there is a political obligation to do something in relation to the differences between our perspectives, to acknowledge the person who makes an argument as someone who has the right to make an argument, and to count her speech as political. (Zerilli 2005, 146-47.)

Zerilli argues further that when I make public claims about women and their interests, the others in the name of whom I speak may respond. They can approve of my claim, but more often they reject it or point out its limitations and present their own opinions. I can give arguments to defend my judgments,
but these arguments are only a means of persuasion (Zerilli 2005, 171-73). To continue the previous example, someone might tell me that making equal wages the key goal of feminism takes for granted an economic system that is based on growth and that this goal is a typical concern of Western, middle-class women. Someone else might say that it would be more important for women to have a salary in the first place.

Speaking back constantly modifies the feminist “we.” The dimension of conflict and dispute and the risk of losing the community are always present, because the judgments of others are different from mine. The multitude of different opinions and perspectives make community building a risky and contingent activity.

These opening remarks about Zerilli’s theory of political community reveal that, although Zerilli builds on Arendt’s notion of plurality, she does not reiterate the connection between ontological human togetherness and political commonality that I identify in Arendt’s thought and that Cavarero emphasizes. Zerilli reinterprets Arendt’s concept of plurality as a political bond that must be established with effort, and she distinguishes plurality from the ontological condition of human difference and togetherness.

Although Arendt sometimes speaks of plurality as if it were exhausted by a state of being in which we find ourselves as human, plurality is much more than that. No mere existential concept – like most feminist accounts of differences between women ... – plurality is a political relation that is irreducible to empirical differences. ... Like all political relations ... plurality is a creation. ... Plurality requires that we do something in relation to whatever empirical differences may exist. Plurality names not a passive state of ontological difference, but an active and imaginative relation to others in a public space.

(Zerilli 2005, 145.)

In other words, in order to create a political community, I must actively take into account the differences that stem from plurality. It is not enough to recognize the other as an embodied unique being as Cavarero argues; I must take heed of what she is saying, and to allow this to have an impact on my criteria for judging. Although Zerilli argues in a manner familiar from Cavarero’s description of relationality that “the articulation of individuality is the very condition of any idea of community that is political,” she specifies that the articulation of individuality does not constitute political community for its own sake, but only because “it will always involve taking the perspectives of others into account” (Zerilli 2005, 159).

Zerilli’s description of this first function of making judgments in the constitution of feminist political communities – making claims in the name of others while acknowledging them as political speakers – refers to the concrete situations in which we make political judgments and different others contest our
judgments. It provides a normative vision of a feminist political community in which agonism and conflict play a role. This view of the feminist “we” is similar to some accounts of feminist coalition politics and feminist solidarity discussed in the first chapter of this study.

The second way Zerilli uses Arendt’s theory of judgment to conceptualize a feminist political community is to re-read Arendt’s notions of the judgment of the spectator and representative thinking and, through this reading, provide an abstract and distinctively Arendtian notion of feminist political community as “that what is communicable.”

In her reading of Arendt, Zerilli emphasizes that the judgment of the spectator constitutes the public realm. In her words, they “create the space in which the objects of political judgments, the actors and the actions themselves, can appear” (Zerilli 2005, 160). Indeed, Arendt can be understood to mean that spectators constitute the public realm in the sense that they set the limits for what counts as proper political action and proper political speech. To be understood by others, actors have to act within the framework created by the spectators. (LKPP 62-63; BPF 223.)

Zerilli goes further than Arendt and argues that judging spectators “alter our sense of the common world” (Zerilli 2005, 160). If we use our imagination while judging, we are able to expand our sense of the shared reality and make it include new kinds of actors and issues (ibid., 129-30, 160-63). This means that Zerilli transforms Arendt’s notion of the judgment of the spectator and the idea of representative thinking and makes them better serve her purposes. When Arendt writes about representative thinking, she refers to taking others’ perspectives into account in order to observe objects from various points of view and achieve a more objective understanding of the world. For Zerilli, the point of representative thinking is to produce new knowledge and new concepts and thereby expand our sense of the worldly reality and of action and speech possible within it. This expansion becomes possible, for example, when we use concepts in new ways, link concepts that have not been linked before, and bring new, de-familiarizing ideas into the existing conceptual framework. (ibid.,) Through her transformations of Arendt’s concepts, Zerilli adds to Arendt’s emphasis on the judgment of the spectator some of the political purpose it has been criticized for lacking (e.g., Beiner 1992; Kateb 2001).

Zerilli links the imaginative judging of the spectator to the constitution and expansion of political communities when she argues that “judgment of the spectator expands our sense of community, not because it tells us what is morally or politically justified and thus what we want to do, but because it expands our sense of what is real or communicable” (Zerilli 2005, 152). Here, we arrive at Zerilli’s second understanding of political community, which, in my view, is more distinctively Arendtian than the first. Zerilli implies that it is also possible to speak about political community in the abstract sense as the understanding of
the reality we share with others. Although our understandings of reality differ, there is a contingent part that is shared, and this part defines the range of issues that we understand as the legitimate objects of political debate at a given moment. Zerilli seems to imply that the abstract political community as a shared understanding of what is “real or communicable” is the precondition for any particular political claim about the goals or aims of feminism, as well as a precondition for an agreement on any particular political action to be taken to achieve these goals.

Judgments that create and expand the abstract political community as the shared worldly reality are not of the type illustrated by the example of gender pay gap. Instead, these judgments make us rethink the whole concept of “gender” and the ways we see our social arrangements. They make new political claims about women and feminism possible, after they have been debated and at least partly accepted by others. Zerilli herself cites the slogan “women’s rights are human rights,” which was incorporated into United Nations’ documents in 1993 as an example of such creative judgment. This statement makes common sense, as it simply asserts that women are human beings who have human rights. Yet by linking a number of questions such as domestic violence, sexual and reproductive rights, and sexual violence into the UN human rights framework, the statement enabled a shift in the strategies of feminist movements and forged new alliances. (Zerilli 2005, 173-74.)

Zerilli reminds that the two processes of political judging – speaking for others and being spoken for, and making creative judgments about the common world – are interlinked. When I make a judgment as a spectator, I may sit alone in my living room and imagine new links between concepts, but as Zerilli points out, afterwards I have to convince concrete others of my new way of seeing things. This requires debate and persuasion and a willingness to take into account what other people say and count them as political speakers. (Zerilli 2005, 146.)

Arguing that a feminist political community is constituted through accepted and refuted claims about what women are and what they should do, and conceptualizing political community as a shared sense of what belongs to the “common world,” are decidedly different solutions to the problem of the feminist “we.” In my view, the first understanding of a political community and its normative element related to counting others as political speakers can help feminists to construct theories about collective feminist practice and to understand particular feminist movements. The second is purely theoretical.

Amy Allen has argued that Zerilli’s conception of political community is problematic because it fails to consider that democratic politics might involve speaking to and with others rather than speaking for them. Allen writes that “one might say that it was precisely the eagerness of white, middle class hetero-
Arendtian elaborations of feminist political togetherness

sexual feminists to speak for others that generated the heated and fraught debates about identity politics in the first place” (Allen 2008, 17).

I do not agree with Allen. In fact, I think that the critique of feminism by women of color and Third World feminists in the late 1970s and 1980s is an excellent example of the speaking back that Zerilli sees as being necessary for the constitution of political communities. Women who were excluded by the definitions of “women” and “feminism” implied in the judgments of white women spoke back to express their disagreement, and this speaking back has extended our understanding of the objectives of feminist politics and feminist theory and of who “women” are. The impact is visible in the way that the ideas of feminists of color have been taken up by theorists of feminist political togetherness such as Susan Bickford (1996, 1997), Allison Weir (2008), Katherine Adams (2002), and Diane Fowlkes (1997).

Allen’s critique neglects what I regard as one of Zerilli’s main contributions: supplementing the commitment to the continuous reworking of the boundaries of political community with the necessity of positing community, even if this generates exclusions. Zerilli argues:

The condition of democratic politics is at once the positing of commonalities and the speaking back…. The idea that speaking for others necessarily generates exclusions and refusals and therefore should be avoided is to miss the whole point of democratic politics.

(Zerilli 2005, 172.)

For Zerilli, this tension between closure (speaking for others) and openness (speaking back) is the condition of feminist politics. Positing community among women can never be a fully inclusive act, but making claims about who women are and what they want is a risk feminists have to take in order for feminist politics to exist (Zerilli 2005, 168-71). I suggest that Zerilli’s argument about the necessity of closure is something that those interested in theorizing about the collective dimension of feminist politics should take into account.

From the perspective of my main argument in this chapter, it is necessary to ask how Zerilli’s allegiance to Arendt is visible in her account of feminist political community. Earlier, I argued that Arendt’s theory of judgment provides a more promising theoretical framework for new understandings of the feminist “we” than her theory of political action because it draws attention away from existential categories and “the human” and focuses on the content of political speech and debate. Indeed, my analysis of Zerilli’s vision(s) of a feminist political community confirms that Arendt’s reflections on judgment can be used to give an account of the contingent and constructed character of political being together. Zerilli’s feminist “we” does not exist outside the interactive and crea-
tive practice of judging. It is therefore contingent and artificial and has to be continuously reworked.

Zerilli avoids the humanity trap, which, in my view, haunts accounts of the feminist “we” based on Arendt’s thought. However, her theory of political community has two other Arendtian remnants. The first of these is the disparagement of affect. Zerilli specifically excludes empathy, identification, and recognition from political relations between individuals (Zerilli 2009, 313). Unlike most theorists of feminist political togetherness who, as discussed in chapter 2, describe political commonality as affective relationships between concrete individuals, Zerilli describes political relations as mediated by a third object, the world.

Second, there is a certain sense of abstraction in Zerilli’s second account of political community as the “shared sense of worldly reality” and our sense of “what is communicable,” which I believe is derived from her Arendtian background. She also describes the shared sense of real and communicable as the Arendtian space-in-between. Political community as the Arendtian space-in-between does not have goals, values, or principles; it is only the precondition for having them. This is exactly what feminist commentators have criticized Hannah Arendt for: banishing from the sphere of politics proper all of the issues that could actually matter to those engaged in political action (e.g., Pitkin 1981; Brown 1988).

To conclude, Zerilli proposes two different visions of feminist political community, owing to the complexity of Arendt’s reflections on judgment upon which she builds. The first vision is an understanding of a feminist political community as an artificial and constantly changing structure constituted through accepted and refuted claims. This understanding has a normative element: we must count others who have different views as political speakers and be prepared to transform our criteria of judging. The second vision is to understand political community in an abstract and distinctively Arendtian sense as that which is real or communicable. Again there is a normative element involved: Zerilli argues that this abstract sense of community can and should be expanded by making creative judgments. Zerilli’s theory of political community avoids the conflation of human togetherness and political togetherness, because Zerilli re-reads Arendt in a manner that emphasizes contingency and constructedness and adds normative elements. However, I argue that Zerilli’s views of the feminist “we” contain other traces of Arendt’s existential-phenomenological background: rejection of the affective dimension of politics and concern for the world-in-between together with a high level of abstraction.
3.4 Arendtian traces in visions of the feminist “we”

Even though the theorists of feminist political togetherness who base their arguments on Hannah Arendt use different parts of her conceptual arsenal and even though they set Arendt’s concepts in dialogue with different theoretical traditions, there is something strikingly similar in their visions of the feminist “we.” In this section, I elaborate on the main argument in this chapter, namely, that feminist theorists influenced by Arendt constitute a distinct group within the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Although feminists influenced by Arendt use all of the three main vocabularies of political togetherness – identity, coalition, and solidarity – and employ several other terms, such as “relationality” and “political community,” they discuss the feminist “we” in a distinctive manner. I suggest that part of this distinctiveness can be traced back to Arendt’s existential approach to politics and political togetherness. Fragments of Arendt’s existential and phenomenological insights are carried over into the accounts of the feminist “we” based on her thought, even when theorists who appropriate her concepts did not intend to do so.

I discuss three remnants of Arendt’s existential approach to political togetherness found in the visions of the feminist “we” based on her ideas that distinguish these visions from most other efforts to conceptualize non-identitarian feminist collective politics. These are 1) a coincidence of ontological human togetherness and political togetherness and an interest in “the human”; 2) a high level of abstraction as the aspiration to extract pure politics on the one hand and to cast political togetherness as an abstract background condition of particular political action on the other; and 3) the rejection of the affective dimension of political togetherness and a focus on the world-in-between that mediates political bonds. Some feminist theorists who use Arendt’s thought purposefully integrate one or several of these three aspects into their theories of the feminist “we.” On other occasions, these remnants can be seen as unintended consequences that have resulted from adopting an Arendtian framework for theorizing about political togetherness. It is also possible to appropriate Arendt’s concepts in a manner that does not reproduce any of these three elements. I argue that the persistence of these traces, whether intended or not, means that Arendt is a difficult ally for solving the problem of the feminist “we.”

44 For example, Zerilli discusses Arendt’s theory of political judgment; Cavarero is interested in individual uniqueness and storytelling; Allen writes about solidarity, and Adams and Disch build on Arendt’s notion of inter-est. Zerilli’s reading of Arendt is influenced by radical democratic theorizing and late Wittgenstein, Bickford reads Arendt in connection with U.S. feminists of color, and Cavarero’s reading is influenced by Luce Irigaray and Italian feminism of sexual difference.
“The human” as the basis of the feminist “we”

Some theorists who draw on Arendt make a link between ontological human togetherness and political form of being together and discuss feminist political togetherness from the perspective of the basics of human existence.

I have argued in the first part of this chapter that it is difficult to make a distinction in Arendt’s thought between general human togetherness and political togetherness in Arendt’s thought. I will return to this issue for a moment here in order to back up my argument. In my view, Arendt speaks about togetherness in at least three different contexts. The first is the factual being together in the world, “the sheer human togetherness” that is different from “being for or against someone,” and that derives directly from the conditions of human existence (HC, 180). The second context is the specifically political form of togetherness, which is characterized by space between individuals (the table metaphor) and the disclosure of individual uniqueness. The political form of togetherness entails that individuals who see and hear from different positions reveal and debate their perspectives on the common world and thereby constitute the realness of the public realm. (HC, 57, 214-15.) Finally, there is anti-political togetherness, the “unitedness of the many into one,” which likens individuals to each other, and which, in Arendt’s view, characterizes totalitarianism, mass society, and identity-based political movements such as feminism (HC, 214-15). Although Arendt distinguishes the different forms of togetherness from each other and although she is explicit in saying that human togetherness does not necessarily translate into political being together, human togetherness is, for her, the condition of political action.

The connection between the human and the political in Arendt’s thought extends beyond the link between human togetherness and political togetherness. Tuija Pulkkinen points out that Arendt has an existential interest in the basics of human existence and that she anchors issues such as gender and race in the nature of the human species and the human individual instead of seeing them as culturally constructed (Pulkkinen 2003, 229). I consider Pulkkinen’s insights into the existential human aspect in Arendt’s thought as an interesting opening that is relevant in assessing any feminist appropriation of her thought. Arendt’s existential interest in the human and its link to her reflections on political togetherness require further reflection that is beyond the scope of this study.

My analysis of Adriana Cavarero’s notion of relationality reveals how the connection between human togetherness and political togetherness and the general interest in the “human” implied in Arendt’s thought may become part of the theorizing about the feminist “we” that Arendt inspired. Cavarero consciously embraces Arendt’s existential-phenomenological notion of human plurality and the distinction between “what one is” and “who one is,” and she
makes these features the basis of her description of “relationality.” The present study shows that Cavarero strengthens the connection between the human and the political implied in Arendt’s thought when she focuses on the reciprocal self-disclosure of unique embodied individuals through voice as the defining moment that turns ontological human plurality into a political bond. As a result, relationality is created almost automatically whenever the sound of one unique individual’s voice strikes the ear of another. Furthermore, the desire to narrate one’s uniqueness and to have it recognized by others appears to be the main reason for creating political bonds in the first place. Cavarero does not take into account that, for Arendt, concern for the world, the content of speech, and the processes through which we form opinions and judgments also play roles in constituting political togetherness. My analysis of Cavarero’s notion of relationality reveals why this trace of Arendt’s existential framework is problematic for theorizing about the feminist “we”: the link between human togetherness and political togetherness undermines efforts to provide an account of the constructed and changing character of the feminist “we.”

By contrast, my analysis of Linda Zerilli’s account of political community shows that it is possible to use Arendt’s concepts in a way that does not carry over, even accidentally, the connection between the human and the political that is implied. Zerilli’s decision to draw on Arendt’s theory of judgment, which is less focused on the basics of human existence than her theory of action, is the first step in this direction. In addition, Zerilli acknowledges that there is a link between Arendt’s notion of plurality and the state in which we find ourselves as human beings. In order to avoid reproducing this connection when she uses the notion of plurality in her own theory of political community, Zerilli reinterprets plurality, with the help of Rancière and Lyotard, as an active political relation that requires counting others as political speakers. (Zerilli 2005, 145.)

Some theorists such as Amy Allen and Katherine Adams overlook the existential-phenomenological human aspect of Arendt’s thought when they appropriate her concepts and they interpret her interest in individual uniqueness simply as valorization of “difference.” This approach is in line with Mary Dietz’s observation that Arendt’s contemporary commentators tend to occlude phenomenological elements of her thought, such as the disclosure of individual uniqueness, and focus instead on the aspects they find more productive (Dietz 2002, 197-99). However, I suggest that it is necessary to acknowledge the existential-phenomenological framework of Arendt’s thinking and the focus on the human that follows from it, rather than to elaborate only on the more promising aspects of her thought. The failure first to identify problematic human aspects and then consciously to push them aside, as Zerilli successfully does, may mean that unintended traces of these aspects remain in feminist elaborations of Arendt’s thought.
A high level of abstraction

The second of the three traces that often follow from building a theory of political relations on Hannah Arendt’s concepts is a high level of abstraction. By abstraction, I mean two different things: on the one hand, extracting and cherishing pure politics, and, on the other hand, understanding political community as an abstract background condition for making particular political claims.

It is well known that Arendt has often been criticized for jealously patrolling the boundaries of the political sphere and making substantive limitations on the topics that can be discussed in public and on the types of actions and motivations to act that can be called political (Benhabib 1992, 100; Gottsegen 1994, 49-50). Feminist critics have added that Arendt banishes many issues from the sphere of politics that matter to feminists, such as gender, other constructed identities, and bodies (Pitkin 1981; Brown 1988). Several Arendt scholars have pointed out that this problematic border patrolling follows from Arendt’s theoretical framework. Seyla Benhabib criticizes Arendt for “phenomenological essentialism” – the ontological allocation of each issue and human activity to its proper place (Benhabib 1996, 123-24). Tuija Pulkkinen argues that Arendt’s “phenomenological foundational orientation” results in an aspiration to discover the pure core or essence of phenomena, including to extract pure politics (Pulkkinen 2003, 215, 229; Pulkkinen 2000, 190).

Arendt’s aspiration to discover pure politics and to guard the sphere of the political against contamination is particularly visible in Cavarero’s notion of relationality. For Cavarero, the political is a narrow ontological category, not something contingent to be questioned and expanded. She builds solidly on Arendt’s notion of “who one is,” and for her, the reciprocal disclosure of individual uniqueness determines whether a relationship or a situation is truly political. Cavarero argues that individuals who form political relations with others should be seen as “naked existents,” stripped of all attributes and memberships apart from sex, which she counts as part of our unique embodied being. Although Cavarero sets the limits of the political differently from Arendt when she includes corporeality and sex, she still does not count ethnicity, sexuality, and class as part of our political being. (Cavarero 2002, 526.) It has been argued that the narrow, Arendtian definition of politics is problematic, because, among other things, it does not allow for politicizing gender, race, and ethnicities as culturally constructed differences (Pulkkinen 2003, 229). This criticism also applies to Cavarero. Although she includes sexual difference in her definition of individual uniqueness, gender does not become something to be questioned through political action. For Cavarero, sexual difference and politics are ontological concepts, not something that should be challenged and transformed.

For Zerilli, politics is not an ontological category, but a constant process of politicizing, debating, and transforming the common world. She stresses that it
is necessary constantly to question the borders of the political community and the political space in order to extend them to new political subjects, new kinds of actions, and new topics. However, Zerilli sets limits on what counts as political when she argues that political judgments that are capable of creating and transforming the abstract political community as the shared worldly reality are not related to the goals of collective action or to the guidelines on how to act, but are creative observations of the common world (Zerilli 2005, 151). Zerilli’s view of judgments that have the radical political potential to extend what we share and what we can talk about is narrow, because it excludes things that matter to concrete feminist movements in concrete contexts.

The second form of Arendtian abstraction that I observe in Cavarero’s notion of relationality as well as in Zerilli’s theory of feminist political community is the tendency to conceptualize political togetherness as the general precondition for a particular political practice or as a space in which the debate about common goals and actions can take place. Arendt scholars have systematically pointed out this tendency in Arendt’s reflections on political commonality. For example, Dana Villa argues that Arendtian commonality is linked to “a minimum agreement in the background of judgments and practices” that serves as the “mediation necessary to the formation of opinions.” (Villa 1996, 34.) He adds that Arendtian commonality is also connected with the in-between world that makes politics possible.

Villa’s reading of Arendtian commonality is similar to my reading of Zerilli’s theory of political community. Zerilli argues that political community as the “in-between space of the common world” is the precondition for feminist politics, which seeks to transform normative conceptions of gender.

Any attempt to alter norms of gender or take non-normative account of sexual difference, then, cannot avoid the political as the practice of freedom and the constitution of the in-between space of the common world…. The kind of transformations envisioned by thinkers who focus on [subjectivity and identity] … requires the tangible and intangible political relations that Arendt calls a worldly in-between. It is in this space of the common world that differences become meaningful and the newly thinkable, other ways of constituting identities and configuring social arrangements such as gender, appears [sic].

(Zerilli 2005, 181.)

Zerilli also takes over Arendt’s idea of political commonality as a shared background agreement necessary for making judgments when she aligns her notion of political community with “what is communicable (what others can follow and assent to).” (Zerilli 2005, 161-62.) What is communicable determines the range of issues we can debate and the actions we can take, and creative, defamiliarizing judgments can expand our sense of what we can communicate. Cavarero also portrays relationality as the precondition of particular political
actions and particular political debates. Cavarero argues that the vocal reciprocity that discloses the uniqueness of the speakers and that actualizes relationality is more fundamental than any other kind of communication and always precedes the actual content of speech: “The relationality of saying, in the proximity of mouths and ears, is a necessary prerequisite for communication of the Said.” (Cavarero 2005, 181.) For there to be deliberation about a particular issue, the relational bond has to be already present.

There is a significant difference between Zerilli’s and Cavarero’s descriptions of political togetherness as the precondition for political action. Cavarero’s relational bond between the mouth and the ear is linked to human biology and to the specificity of human existence and is therefore invariable from one time and context to another. By contrast, Zerilli’s notion of political community as the shared sense of worldly reality and as what is communicable is contingent. There is no objective way to stipulate what we can talk about with others and what constitutes the shared world, and what is communicable differs from one moment and context to the next. (Zerilli 2005, 152, 161.) The second form of Arendtian abstraction, conceptualizing political togetherness as the general background condition for particular political action and debate, provides an attractive starting point for an abstract understanding of a feminist “we” that does not presume pre-given unity – at least as long as this abstract togetherness is seen as contingent and extendable.

A high level of abstraction as a remnant of Arendt’s existential approach to political togetherness is not necessarily a drawback for conceptualizing the feminist “we,” and Arendtian theorists have provided creative solutions to the theoretical challenge of combining political togetherness and difference. However, the two forms of Arendtian abstraction that persist in the accounts of feminist political commonality based on her concepts – extracting pure politics and conceptualizing political community as a general background agreement – may prevent feminist writers influenced by Arendt from addressing the practical aspects of the problem of the feminist “we,” including political mobilization, connections among women who differ in terms of privilege, as well as answering the challenges that feminist movements face.

**Limited space for affect: A focus on the world in-between**

Rejecting the affective dimension of politics and focusing instead on the world-in-between is the last of the three traces of Arendt’s existential approach to political togetherness visible in the Arendtian visions of the feminist “we.” Although Arendt’s exclusion of feelings and passions from the public sphere is one of the main feminist criticisms of her political thought, theorists who discuss the feminist “we” with her concepts do not question this exclusion, but reproduce it
in their texts. The refusal to see the political bonds between feminists as affective is an intentional choice, and it sets Arendtian feminists apart from other theorists who participate in the discussion on feminist political togetherness.

For Arendt, passion and intimacy do not belong to politics. She values warmth and intimacy in the private realm, but insists that the public realm has to be formal and artificial. (Canovan 1992, 248.) Arendt describes bonds based on love (HC, 51-52; HC, 242-43; OR, 86), charity (HC, 53), compassion, and pity (OR, 86-89) as non-political and at times even anti-political. She argues that such sentiments, being merely subjective, destroy the in-between that must exist in political relations between individuals and cannot respect the plurality of the public world. A further problem Arendt sees with sentiments is that they do not require speech in order to be expressed – at least not the kind of argumentative speech that Arendt regards as political. (OR, 86; HC, 242.) In her view, affect should only enter the political realm as the “love of the world,” the dispassionate but dedicated commitment of citizens to the welfare of the common world.

Feminist theorists who conceptualize collective feminist politics based on Arendt’s concepts adopt – surprisingly unanimously, in my view – Arendt’s exclusion of sentiments from politics. For example, Zerilli specifically excludes empathy, identification, and recognition from political relations between individuals (Zerilli 2009, 313). 45 Cavarero argues that political relationships should not be based on mutual identification, and she warns against building relationships between women based on empathy, the impulse to construct one’s sense of self in relation to others. Political relations between women should respect the distance and the difference between “the I” and “the you.” (Cavarero 2000, 90-92.) Susan Bickford argues that love for one another or even friendship should not be part of the mutual recognition and efforts to listen to the other that are required to build political relationships between women across differences. Only courage is needed. (Bickford 1996, 137-39.)

Arendtian feminists reiterate Arendt’s idea that a space between individuals is a fundamental aspect of political togetherness. They imply that feelings, affects, and identifications can destroy this crucial space wherein individuals disclose their uniqueness and discuss their different judgments about the common world. Arendtians are not the only feminist theorists who argue that a

45 Zerilli is not completely ignorant of the “affective dimension,” although her reflections on this issue are very brief. She argues that political judging is not about a cognitive commitment to a set of principles that tell us how to judge, but about a shared pleasure. Political judging makes us feel something, and this feeling drives us to make judgments. Zerilli argues, pace Arendt, that the pleasure in political judging is not related to the object we judge, but to the whole process of reflection. “What gives us pleasure is how we judge, that is to say, that we judge objects and events in their freedom” (Zerilli 2005, 163). Zerilli’s views on the pleasure involved in judging can be traced back to Kant’s idea of aesthetic judgment, which has its basis in feelings of the perceptual pleasure or displeasure.
certain distance between individuals is necessary for a political form of togetherness. It is an often-heard argument in the discussion on feminist political togetherness that a too-close identification with the different other appropriates her and neglects differences in power and privilege (Bartky 2003; Mohanty; Young 1990, 2002). However, only the Arendtians argue that distance between individuals should be preserved by banishing affective elements altogether from political relations between women and feminists. Furthermore, their reason to do so – to defend the “common world” – is unique.

My analysis reveals that Arendtian theorists replace the focus on the affective dimension of political relationships, which has a prominent place in the discussion on feminist political togetherness, with the argument that political bonds must be mediated by a third object external to the persons involved. For example, Disch (1994, 36-45) argues that the relationships between those who are part of a political community are always mediated through a common interest, which these individuals consider significant and worth debating. Bickford (1996, 138) claims that it is not caring for each other that enables political commonality, but caring for the world. Zerilli is more interested in individuals’ relationship to the common world than in direct relations between individuals, and she regularly argues that politics should be understood as a “world-question” or as “world-building activity” (Zerilli 2005, 22).

The significant role that Arendtian theorists of feminist political togetherness assign the common world is obviously a reflection of Arendt’s ideas. For Arendt, it is always “the intermediary of a common world of things” that relates individuals to each other even while separating them (HC, 58). Furthermore, Arendt specifically argues that her preferred model of political relationship, “friendship without intimacy and closeness” (HC, 243), is a shared relationship to the world, rather than a direct relationship between individuals. This political friendship is born of a constant exchange of talk about the common world. (Chiba 1995, 519-20; Villa 1999, 32, 132.) Arendtian political commonality and the relationships between individuals that are part of it have to be mediated, not only by the world as such, but also by continuous talk about it.

The idea that political community is created through a discourse about the problems, objects, and events of the common world rather than through affective relationships and mutual recognition stands in contrast to the tendency of most theorists of feminist political togetherness to focus on mutual recognition and efforts to listen to the other and understand her situation and perspective. When the theorists who I discuss in chapter 2 discuss communication, they stress the articulation of one’s personal experiences of racism, multiple oppression, and specific material social location, rather than judgments and opinions about the world. (e.g., Anzaldúa 1990a; Fowlkes 1997; hooks 1989; Lugones 2006).
I consider the focus on the world-in-between as a distinct, valuable idea that Arendtian feminists have added to the discussion on feminist political togetherness. However, I find it problematic that this idea goes hand-in-hand with rejection of the affective dimension of politics. I fully agree with those feminist theorists and the increasing number of other political theorists who argue that affects play a pivotal role in our attachments to those with whom we act politically and in the values to which we are committed (e.g., Hall 2002; Norval 2007; Waltzer 2002; Mouffe 2008). Theorizing about the affective elements of political bonds should be an important part of rethinking the feminist “we” and of theorizing about collective political action in general.

3.5 Conclusion: The potential of Arendt’s concepts for conceptualizing the feminist “we”

In this chapter, I have discussed efforts to rethink the feminist “we” with Hannah Arendt’s concepts. Arendt’s political thought is the theoretical framework used most frequently by feminist writers in the 1990s and 2000s to back up their reflections on the collective dimension of feminist politics. The Arendtian projects are the most theoretically elaborate ones in the discussion on feminist political togetherness. I have analyzed in detail Adriana Cavarero’s (2000; 2003; 2005) notion of relationality and Linda Zerilli’s (2005) theory of feminist political community, which I consider representative of the efforts to rethink the feminist “we” with Arendt. Where necessary, I have complemented my analysis with references to other such efforts (Adams 2002; Allen 1999; Bickford 1996, Disch 1994).

Feminists’ increasing interest in Arendt’s thought since the 1990s follows, I suggest, from the search for alternatives to postmodern feminist theorizing, which has been criticized for being too focused on the subject and its agency and for neglecting the collective dimension of politics (e.g., Allen 2008; Bickford 1996; Zerilli 2005). My analysis reveals that the main reason why these theorists turn to Arendt is the tension between individual distinction and political commonality that many scholars have identified in various aspects of Arendt’s thought. Whereas most commentators on her work see this tension as problematic, theorists of feminist political togetherness claim that it is useful. In their view, it helps to solve the problem of the feminist “we,” which has puzzled theorists since the late 1970s, because it provides a way to combine political togetherness with difference.

I have proposed that the Arendtian visions of the feminist “we” from the last two decades form a distinctive strand within the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Arendtians share with other participants in this discussion the goal of conceptualizing a feminist political “we” in a way that does not exclude
difference and does not require unity. They also use the vocabularies of identity, coalition, and solidarity identified here as the three main vocabularies of political togetherness used by feminist theorists, as well as other terms such as political community that often appear in the debate. In addition, they return to the same recurring themes than other theorists. However, owing to traces of Arendt’s existential-phenomenological framework, both intended and unintended, the Arendtian descriptions of the feminist “we” stand apart from accounts of feminist identity politics, identification, coalition politics, and solidarity discussed in chapter 2, and they discuss the themes of feminist political togetherness in a different manner.

In the first part of this chapter, I provided an overview of the key concepts of Arendt’s political thought and explained how writers who use them to re-think the collective dimension of feminist politics read her texts. I have pointed out that theorists of feminist political togetherness draw attention to the tension between individual distinction and political togetherness in Arendt’s thought and see this tension as a useful resource for conceptualizing a cross-difference feminist “we.” I argue that when feminist thinkers align Arendt’s existential idea of individual uniqueness with feminist discussions about politics of difference and intersecting differences, they fail to take into account the philosophical context of this idea and its problems. Arendtian concern for the disclosure of individual uniqueness as the activation of full human potential and the feminist concern for recognizing and respecting difference and destabilizing relations of power make an uneasy alliance.

In the second part of the chapter, I examined Adriana Cavarero’s notion of relationality, which emphasizes the existential-phenomenological aspects of Arendt’s political thought. Cavarero turns Arendt’s insights on plurality and individual uniqueness into an “ontology of uniqueness,” the idea of the fundamental relationality of singular and unique human beings. I show that Cavarero’s relationality reflects this ontology to the extent that it becomes difficult to separate relationality – for Cavarero a specifically political form of being together – from fundamental human togetherness. I argue that relationality, which is established almost without effort through the interaction of material voices that reveal the uniqueness of speakers, cannot be seen as a specifically political bond and that it is not a plausible solution to the theoretical and practical problem of the feminist “we.” I also point out that Cavarero actively reinterprets Arendt’s concepts in order to make them compatible with contemporary feminism and her own commitment to sexual difference. Contra Arendt, Cavarero claims that individual uniqueness is revealed through the voice and not speech and that this uniqueness is embodied and sexed. Although theoretically ambitious, these transformations underlining the self-disclosure of the unique “who” as the main aspect of politics fail to make Arendt more compatible with the discussion on feminist political togetherness.
In the third part of the chapter, I studied Linda Zerilli’s theory of political community based on Arendt’s reflections about political judgment. I show that it is possible to use Arendtian concepts without evoking the link between ontological human togetherness and political togetherness implied in her thought. I argue that Arendt’s work on judgment provides a more promising starting point for conceptualizing the feminist “we” than her theory of political action, because it goes beyond the disclosure of individual uniqueness and emphasizes how we make judgments about the common world and debate them with others. Indeed, I show that using Arendt’s reflections about judgment allows Zerilli to provide a compelling account of the contingency and artificiality of the feminist political community thus constituted. I suggest that a distinct, valuable idea in Zerilli’s account is the observation that feminist theorists should not be afraid to posit community, even if claims to community always entail exclusions. Politics is about making claims (closure) and contesting them (openness). However, Zerilli’s account of feminist political community contains some traces of Arendt’s existential-phenomenological framework: rejection of the affective dimension of politics and the concern for the world-in-between, and a high level of abstraction.

In the fourth and final part of this chapter, I discussed three remnants of Arendt’s phenomenological-existential philosophical framework that persist in Arendtian solutions to the problem of the feminist “we.” I suggest these remnants distinguish the Arendtians from other theorists of feminist political togetherness and that sometimes they lead to shortcomings in the visions of feminist political commonality that are based on Arendt’s concepts.

The first trace is the link between human togetherness and political commonality found in particular in Cavarero’s notion of relationality. This link is problematic for a vision of the feminist “we” because it undermines efforts to provide an account of the constructed and changing character of feminist political communities. The second of the three traces is a high level of abstraction, by which I mean the aspiration to discover pure politics, on the one hand, and to conceptualize political commonality as a background condition for particular political action, on the other. The first form of abstraction is problematic from the perspective of theorizing about the feminist “we,” because things that motivate concrete individuals to act are excluded from the definition of the political and because politics is seen as a fixed ontological category. Although abstraction in the sense of conceptualizing a political community as shared background agreements is a plausible starting point for an abstract theory of feminist political community that does not presume pre-given unity, it draws attention away from particular political communities and the practical aspects of the problem of the feminist “we.” The third trace is the reproduction of Arendt’s banishment of passions from politics and the idea that passions and sentiments destroy the distance that, in the Arendtian framework, is characteristic of political relations.
between individuals. Arendtian theorists focus instead on the shared discourse about the common world as that which constitutes and mediates these relations. I argue that the focus on the world adds new insight to the discussion on feminist political togetherness, a significant part of which centers on individual selves and recognition of different others. However, the rejection of affect is problematic and stands in stark contrast to most accounts of feminist political togetherness, which are based on the vocabularies of identity, coalition, and solidarity.

Overall, feminist theorists inspired by Arendt have argued decisively that it is crucial for feminists to theorize about political togetherness and to consider collective feminist practices. They have elaborated on many of the issues that the more practice-oriented feminists raised in the late 1970s and early 1980s when they questioned feminist politics based on women’s identity, and they have built creative, abstract theories of the feminist “we,” introducing new ideas into the discussion of feminist political togetherness. However, they have been less successful in discussing the practical questions that have motivated the search for new understandings. The shortcomings that I identify in some Arendtian visions of the feminist “we” that result from the remnants of her existential framework – the focus on the human, the difficulty of theorizing about particular political communities, and the rejection of passion – are not inevitable. My analysis reveals that it is possible to transform Arendt’s concepts and make them more compatible with feminist concerns, for example, to read Arendt in a manner that minimizes the existential human aspect of her thought (Zerilli) or that emphasizes embodiment (Cavarero).

In chapter 2, I concluded my analysis of the three main vocabularies used in the discussion of feminist political togetherness by arguing that five themes persist in it. My discussion in this chapter indicates that these themes persist as well in the Arendtian visions of the feminist “we,” apart from the emphasis on the affective dimension of politics. Also Arendtian feminists discuss the role of difference and conflict in constituting political commonality, draw attention to the internal constitution of political communities and on interactive relations within the “we,” focus on the efforts and attitudes of individuals, and are concerned with the relationship between feminist theory and feminist practice. However, as I will show in chapter 4, where I discuss these five themes in detail, Arendtian theorists approach these issues in a distinctive way. Through their differing views, they have expanded the scope of the discussion with new ideas.
4 Five themes of feminist political togetherness

In the present chapter, I take my analysis of the discussion of feminist political togetherness beyond the vocabularies and theoretical concepts used in specific texts. In order to grasp the particularities of this discussion in comparison with other debates about political community in the field of political theorizing, I focus on what the efforts to rethink the feminist “we” share.

Specifically, I will examine in detail five themes that persist in the discussion on feminist political togetherness across the decades and across the different vocabularies and theoretical resources used. These themes are issues or questions regarding the constitution and maintenance of feminist political togetherness that theorists who I study focus on and consider important.

The first of these five themes is to argue that differences and conflicts created by them constitute and maintain political togetherness. The second is to understand the feminist “we” as internally constituted and discuss it in terms of interactive relations within the “we,” rather than in terms of opposition or exclusion. The third theme is to focus on individual efforts and attitudes and frame political togetherness as a question of ethos. The fourth is the argument that political togetherness has an affective dimension: political relationships are not only about norms and responsibilities, but require emotional investment. The last of the five themes is the contention that theorizing the feminist “we” requires setting academic feminist scholarship and feminist movements in dialogue with each other. Although these five themes may not be discussed in all the texts that I analyze, they are present in most of them. These themes appeared already in texts written by women of color, in their initiation of the discussion on feminist political togetherness in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Later on, other theorists have elaborated on these themes in addressing the problem of the feminist “we.”

I argue that together the five recurring themes constitute the particularity of the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Their persistence indicates that, even though feminist writers rethink the feminist “we” using various vocabularies and theoretical resources, the ideas they put forward are similar. They draw attention to sustained political bonds across difference and privilege, which have to be actively created and maintained as the condition of transformative feminist politics. Feminist theorists who rethink the feminist “we” rarely
create new terms to convey the understanding of enabling the political bonds they put forward. In order to make the understanding tangible, I use the term political togetherness that I have also used as the heuristic tool of my analysis: I suggest that feminist theorists solve the problem of the feminist “we” by replacing feminist sisterhood with a specific “feminist political togetherness.”

Obviously, feminist theorists are not the only ones who theorize about the collective dimension of politics in the context of difference and inequality. Whereas feminist theorists ask questions about the creation and maintenance of feminist political community without reference to a unified category of “women” and propose ways to create political bonds between women and feminists across difference and privilege, democratic theorists discuss the inauguration and maintenance of democratic political communities without an underlying unity and envision democratic citizenship in diverse societies. In order to detect the distinctiveness of the discussion on feminist political community and the feminist approach to political community produced in it, I will discuss how the five themes in the discussion are linked to recent debates about the creation and maintenance of political communities in the field of political theorizing.

4.1 Difference and conflict create political togetherness

“Difference” is a term frequently used in feminist theorizing. No matter which vocabularies they use or what their theoretical allegiances are, theorists of feminist political togetherness discuss difference. The central role that concept of difference plays in the debate on the feminist “we” derives from the fact that most of the texts I have analyzed were written at a time when difference was established as one of the central issues and key concepts of feminist theorizing.

During the 1980s and 1990s, feminist theorists began criticizing theories and political practices that valued sameness and universality over difference and particularity and replaced calls for unity with calls for recognition of differences. Within feminist politics this approach has meant acknowledging that not all women are white, straight, and middle class, and it has meant taking into account the experiences of others. Within the field of political theorizing at large, feminist theorists have criticized homogenous notions such as the “common good,” “public,” and “citizenship” and argued for the need to acknowledge the diversity of democratic subjects and address the inequalities. In the course of this debate, the concepts of identity and unity have been sidelined, while difference is seen to hold theoretical and political potential.

As shown in chapter 2, a significant number of feminist theorists in the 1990s rejected the vocabulary of identity and argued for a post-identity approach to feminist politics. It is therefore hardly surprising that, in this period,
“difference” became one of the most frequently used terms in the discussions of feminist political togetherness. Theorists of feminist political togetherness rarely problematize the concept of difference or use the term in an analytical way. They frequently use “difference” as a non-specific singular noun, which they oppose to “sameness,” “identity,” or “unity,” presenting it as the favored term.

Indeed, studies of feminist uses of difference reveal that the term is vague and ambiguous (Anthias 2002; Felski 1997). Rita Felski, who has analyzed the appeals to difference in feminist discussions of the 1990s, has identified two usages that are relevant in the context of feminist political togetherness.46

The first is using the term “difference” to refer to cultural and material differences between women, with consequences for their lives as well as for the relations between them (Felski 1997, 3, 8-9). Theorists who rethink the feminist “we” use the term in the plural to refer to social and cultural differences between individual women (or groups of women) and feminists. They are also attentive to the relations of power linked to these differences.47 The second usage that Felski identifies, which is also present in the discussion on feminist political togetherness, is “difference” in its Derridean inflection as difféance. This so-called Derridean usage casts difference as an abstract concept in line with post-modern criticism of identity and universality, and Felski notes that feminist theorists have used the term in this sense to refer to the instability of linguistic meaning. (Felski 1997, 3.) Of the theorists I discuss, Diane Elam directly links her use to Derridean difféance. She uses the term in connection with something more fundamental than differences of race and sexuality between concrete women, and she writes about difference as the “unrepresentable, the incommensurable, the radically Other” that destabilizes every attempt at building community. (Elam 1994, 109, 114.)

The present study shows that, in the discussion on feminist political togetherness, the term difference also acquires meanings other than those mentioned by Felski. Theorists who use Hannah Arendt’s concepts provide one of these: the idea of individual uniqueness, which is characteristic of every human being. Although most Arendtian feminists are more interested in material differences between women (i.e., the first meaning of the term I identify above) than in the Arendtian individual uniqueness disclosed to others through political action and made tangible in life-stories, the idea of the fundamental difference of each

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46 The two other usages of the term difference that Felski identifies are linked to sexual difference: the idea of female difference or the difference between women and men, and the more recent interest in Lacanian notion of sexual difference. These meanings do not concern me here.

47 Gloria Anzaldúa has pointed out that white feminist and feminists of color define the term difference in separate ways. In her view, white feminists embrace the term difference, but are annoyed by the actuality of concrete differences, in particular, racial difference. (Anzaldúa 1990, xxi)
human being from every other appears in their accounts of the feminist “we.” (Allen 1999; Adams 2002.) I argued in chapter 3 that the Arendtian idea of individual uniqueness is inseparable from Arendt’s focus on the specificity of human life, and that therefore, this idea is ill-suited to theorizing about the role that social and cultural differences and unequal power relations play, particularly in political communities.

Whether theorists of feminist political togetherness understand “difference” as material differences between women, an abstract incommensurable Otherness, or the unrepeatable uniqueness of every human being, the main question that frames their views about the feminist political commonality is how to combine political togetherness with difference.

In particular, the theorists who use the vocabularies of coalition and solidarity to rethink the feminist “we” argue that combining difference and political commonality is the main goal of their projects. Theorists who give an account of feminist politics as coalitional politics understand coalition as a form of cross-difference politics or a mode of political connection that can embrace difference without the demands of sameness. For example, Katherine Adams argues that “coalitions reconcile attention to difference with the equally vital desire for – and urgent necessity of – connection and alliance” (Adams 2002, 2). Theorists who use the vocabulary of solidarity describe their projects in a similar manner. Amy Allen endeavors to develop an understanding of “how members of oppositional social movements can be united in a way that far from excluding or repressing difference, embraces and protects it” (Allen 1999, 107), and Diane Elam argues that her notion of “groundless solidarity” affirms political solidarity without “losing sight of difference within it” (Elam 1994, 69).

However, the rationale behind the efforts to reconcile political commonality and difference has changed slightly over the more than thirty-year period covered by the discussion of feminist political togetherness. Gloria Anzaldúa compares the way women of color discuss difference at the beginning of the twenty-first century to discussions in the early 1980s:

Twenty-one years ago we struggled with the recognition of difference within the context of commonality. Today we grapple with the recognition of commonality within the context of difference.

(Anzaldúa 2002, 2.)

Anzaldúa’s remark and my own analysis suggest that, in the 1980s, feminist theorists drew attention to differences within already established communities and movements, and they pointed out how some differences were excluded. In contrast, in the twenty-first century theorists interested in the feminist “we” have criticized feminists for focusing too much on differences. Their purpose is to defend the importance of commonality and imagine new visions of feminist
political community in a theoretical context that is shaped by the focus on difference and postmodern rejection of universality.

Some thinkers have greeted the feminist interest in theorizing about difference and the value given to the term with critical attention. Rita Felski writes about the “triumph of difference over identity” within feminist theory and claims that “difference has become doxa, a magic word of theory and politics radiant with redemptive meanings” (Felski 1997, 1). Ien Ang argues that “difference” has become an “obligatory tenet in feminist discourse” and says that feminists tend to frame the ability to “deal with difference” as a condition of the survival of feminism as a political movement (Ang 2001, 179).

I will linger for a moment over Ang’s criticism, as it provides a means to discuss how theorists of feminist political togetherness treat difference. Ang criticizes theorists who try to “deal with difference” within feminism for proposing solutions that are too easy. She argues that the use of terms such as “recognition,” “understanding,” and “dialogue” to describe relations between differently positioned women reveals that feminist theorists count too much on the possibility of open and power-free communication to overcome or settle differences. She argues that many feminist texts reveal “an almost blind faith in our capacity not only to speak, but also to listen and to hear.” (Ang 2001, 179-80.) In her view, despite efforts to deal with differences, feminism continues to represent itself as the natural political destination of all women, and feminist theorists are at best constructing a space for racial and other marginalized voices within an already established idea of feminist community. The status of the feminist community as a community, that is, the possibility of achieving such a community, is not challenged. And concludes:

By dealing with difference in this way, feminism resembles the multicultural nation – the nation that, faced with cultural differences within its borders, simultaneously recognizes and controls those differences within its borders, by containing them in a grid of pluralist diversity.

(Ang 2001, 180.)

I argue contra Ang that feminist theorists who have tried to reconcile feminist political commonality with difference have not fallen prey to replacing the global sisterhood they criticize with multicultural sisterhood. Certainly, theorists of feminist political togetherness do not question the possibility of a feminist community. They assume that feminism as a political community or as a movement exists and must continue to exist in the future. However, they do not understand the feminist “we” as a conventional political community; rather, they aim to conceptualize it as a more nuanced “feminist political togetherness.”

Furthermore, the terms “dialogue,” “recognition,” and “understanding,” which Ang criticizes for offering easy solutions to the challenge that differences
pose for collective feminist politics, are in frequent use in visions of the feminist “we.” However, when theorists of feminist political togetherness write about recognizing and understanding the different other, they are not saying that the other’s views can be learned if only we communicate well enough. On the contrary, Maria Lugones (2006, 84) points out that dialogue with different others can never be transparent, while Jodi Dean (1996, 43) and Iris Marion Young (1990, 234, 256) argue that the other will always remain “strange” in her difference. Although feminists who rethink the feminist “we” acknowledge that there is no such thing as open dialogue, they still consider dialogue worth theorizing about, because it is the practical means to establish political relationships between individuals.

The main difference between the understanding of political commonality put forward in the discussion on feminist political togetherness and the multicultural feminism that Ang criticizes is that the writers I study do not believe that differences should be overcome in order to build a feminist “we.” They point out that differences are always linked to relations of power and necessarily lead to conflicts. These conflicts, in turn, play a role in building sustained political relationships between women and feminists across difference. In other words, theorists of feminist political togetherness argue that political bonds between feminists get their fuel from differences, and even more importantly, from the conflicts that surface when these differences are openly faced and not just settled or overcome.

Jodi Dean, who maintains that the bonds between individuals that hold “reflective solidarity” together are based on dissent, questioning, and disagreement rather than on sameness and consensus, provides an apt illustration of this argument. Dean points out how conflicts and disagreements might bring individuals together as a “we,” and how solidarity can arise from disagreement and dispute. Therefore, “rather than viewing criticism as potentially disruptive, reflective solidarity sees it as furthering the inter-subjective recognition characteristic of solidary bound members” (Dean 1996, 32). For bell hooks, there is no political solidarity without the antagonisms that arise from acknowledging and confronting differences within the solidary community that is in the process of being formed. In her view, solidarity arises from “working together to confront difference” (hooks 1989, 25). Shane Phelan grounds her view of postmodern lesbian coalition politics on the view that conflicts and contradictions within various groups are inevitable; “they are not cause for despair but grounds for continued rearticulation, new narratives of political structures, and change” (Phelan 1994, 149).

48 These quotations reveal differences in how theorists of feminist political togetherness think conflicts should be confronted. Dean focuses on the cognitive efforts required: on listening to
These quotations reveal another aspect of the distinctive understanding of political commonality implied in the discussion on feminist political togetherness. The theorists who participate in this discussion argue that differences and conflicts internal to political communities transform these communities over time and rebuild their borders. As Gloria Anzaldúa writes:

Conflict, with its fiery nature, can trigger transformation depending on how we respond to it. Often, delving deeply into conflict instead of fleeing from it can bring an understanding (conocimiento) that will turn things around.

(Anzaldúa 2002, 4.)

Because of internal differences, any specific form that any feminist “we” takes is only a momentary fixation in a continuous struggle. Even more importantly, as Anzaldúa implies, the transformative power of conflict depends on how individuals respond to it. Allison Weir argues that, ideally, differences and conflicts within the feminist “we” should lead one to recognize one’s own complicity in relations of power and consequently to change one’s self. Only self-transformation guarantees that cross-difference political bonds will last. (Weir 2008, 123-27.) I will return to the role of self-transformation in the feminist discussion on political togetherness later in this chapter.

The crucial role that theorists of feminist political togetherness give to differences and conflicts as the forces that transform political communities from within reveals that they are not trying to accommodate difference with a pre-given understanding of feminist political community. Theorists who rethink the feminist “we” argue that feminist political communities are created and sustained, not through excluding or overcoming differences, but through allowing the conflicts that necessarily follow from internal differences transform these communities politically over time.

In short, based on my analysis, Ang’s criticism of the tendency of feminist theorists to deal with difference in too simplistic a way is inaccurate. I have shown that dealing with difference is extremely important for feminist theorists who, since the late 1970s, have tried to solve the problem of the feminist “we” with novel understandings of political togetherness. However, instead of stressing the importance of overcoming differences by communicating smoothly across them, theorists of feminist political togetherness emphasize the ineradicable conflicts that differences in power and privilege create. They do not question the possibility of a feminist political community, yet neither do they understand the feminist “we” as a conventional political community. Rather, they aim to conceptualize it as a more nuanced “feminist political togetherness”

the other and taking her view into account and on the norms that guide this process. hooks focuses on the emotional aspect of our encounters with different others.
that involves a constant process of transformation due precisely to internal differences and conflicts.

When compared to other approaches to political community in the field of political theorizing, the emphasis on conflicts and disagreements connects the discussion on feminist political togetherness with radical democratic theorizing, commonly associated with the work of Chantal Mouffe (1993; 2000; 2005), Ernesto Laclau (1996; 2005), William Connelly (2002), and Jacques Rancière (1999), among others. It has been pointed out that, unlike most contemporary political theorists who discuss political community (communitarians, third-way theorists), radical democratic theorists do not seek to manufacture a consensual moral voice out of differences. The purpose of radical democratic theorizing is to create political space for contestation as a means of dealing with multiple communities within societies and to encourage hitherto marginalized groups to voice their dissent. Even these small communities do not, of course, speak with a unified voice, but they have their own internal disagreements and inequalities of power. (Little 2002, 374-78.) However, whereas most radical democratic theorists discuss the role of disagreement and conflict on an abstract or ontological level and some portray conflict as something that marks the boundaries of political communities and brings them into being against that which is opposed or excluded, theorists of feminist political togetherness focus on ways of dealing with conflicts internal to particular political communities. This idea leads me to the second theme in the discussion on political togetherness – the focus on internal constitution of political communities.

4.2 The feminist “we” is constituted internally

The second of the five recurring themes being examined here is the argument that feminist political togetherness is constituted internally with the resulting focus on interactive relations within the “we.” This approach stands in direct contrast to Schmittian political theorizing, which stresses that every political “we” is constituted in opposition to a “them” and to poststructuralist views, which emphasize the idea that every political collective is based on exclusions and has a constitutive outside.

The idea that feminist political togetherness is constituted internally rather than through opposition may seem strange. After all, feminism has traditionally been understood as a series of oppositional relations: the juxtaposition of women and men, the juxtaposition of feminists who want to change the gender order vis-à-vis non-feminists who want to keep society the way it is, and the juxtaposition of feminism and the gender order itself. It is almost impossible to imagine feminism not based on at least some of these oppositions. However, the discussion I analyze is not about generating theories of the creation of feminism
and the conditions of its coming into being. Theorists of feminist political togetherness write in a context in which a feminist community or a movement already exists, and their texts are often direct reactions to this movement. The theorists may be critical of the specific manifestations that the movement takes, yet they nevertheless believe that the movement should continue to exist and that it should be strengthened in the face of its challenges. In other words, the discussion on feminist political togetherness rests on the presupposition that feminism as both a movement and an ideal exists.

Exclusions implied in political communities and opposition to “them” are ideas that are to some extent present in the discussion on feminist political togetherness. However, the general tendency is that feminist theorists emphasize the internal constitution of the feminist political “we.” Some of them even explicitly reject the us/them perspective on political community common in the field of political theorizing. I propose that one of the features of the feminist theorizing of political community is the theoretical discussion of the internal constitution and maintenance of political communities, something that, it has been argued, contemporary democratic theorizing has not sufficiently discussed (Norval 2007, 54-55, 144).

Radical women of color, Jodi Dean, and Linda Zerilli provide three examples of how theorists of feminist political togetherness at different levels of abstraction break away from approaches to political community based on opposition and exclusion and instead draw attention to the internal constitution of the “we.”

When in the 1970s American women of color drew attention to the exclusionary and racist practices within feminist movements, they proposed a shift in the way feminist politics is understood. Norma Alarcon points out that, whereas mainstream feminism of the time portrayed women and men as oppositional classes or categories, women of color turned their attention to relationships between women as the key aspect of feminist politics. She argues that the anthology This Bridge Called My Back: Writings of Radical Feminists of Color published in 1981 opened a discussion of conflicts and differences between women that expanded what “feminism” means. (Alarcon 1990, 358-59.) Indeed, Cherrie Moraga, one of the editors of This Bridge, acknowledges that the intention was to create a book that concentrated on relationships between women (Moraga 1983, iii).

The scope of the internally constituted feminist political community as discussed by women of color varies. On the one hand, they write about the need to

49 The Italian feminism of sexual difference that turns attention away from combating sexist institutions and focuses on relations between women could be mentioned as a further example of an approach to feminist political commonality that focuses on the internal constitution of the feminist “we.”
create bonds of political solidarity between different groups who are marginalized in the women's movement and in society as a whole. According to Moraga (1983, ii-iii), the motivation behind compiling This Bridge was to create a unified, broad-based Third World feminist movement in the United States, but also to forge links between women of color from every region of the world. On the other hand, writers such as Bernice Johnson Reagon (1981), Maria Lugones (1987), and Gloria Anzaldúa (1990) considered the possibility of coalitions between women of color and white women.

The idea that the feminist political “we” should be conceptualized as a set of internal relationships within the “we” rather than as opposition or exclusion also appears in the more abstract accounts of the collective dimension of feminist politics beginning in the 1990s. Whereas feminists of color discussed relationships between women in order to confront the earlier understandings of feminism as opposition to men, Dean and Zerilli draw attention to the internal constitution of political communities in order to contest conceptualizations of political community in the field of political theorizing, which emphasize opposition and exclusion.

Jodi Dean, who writes about “reflective solidarity,” has developed a pointedly anti-antagonistic understanding of political togetherness. She specifically argues that her notion of solidarity is not based on exclusion of the other or on opposition to the other. Those who are engaged in reflective solidarity should recognize each other as belonging to “us,” rather than constituting a sense of “we” by allying against someone else and creating a “them” to be excluded. (Dean 1996, 31-32.) Dean directly confronts Chantal Mouffe’s Schmittian claim that a political “we” has to be distinguished from a “they.” For Dean, the problem of an externally constituted conception of political community is that it reifies the outsiders as “them,” and she argues that this reification does not allow “them” to challenge our own understanding of a given community or collective identity. It does not require us to include the excluded or to show our responsibility for them. Dean argues that we should never conceive of anyone as an enemy, but always be obliged to hear the other, and “when necessary, to alter the discourse so as to allow her voice to emerge.” (Dean 1996, 43.) Dean acknowledges that a specific “we” always excludes some groups or individuals and that the term “we” often refers to a relationship among a limited number of individuals (Dean 1996, 43, 34). However, although Dean argues that exclusions

50 By calling Dean’s view of political community anti-antagonistic I do not mean that she does not give any role to conflict. As I argued in the previous section, Dean theorizes conflict as something internal to political communities.
Five themes of feminist political togetherness

are in practice characteristic of specific political communities, exclusion is not constitutive of her abstract model of solidarity.\(^5\)

Linda Zerilli, who builds her theory of feminist political community on Arendt’s notions of freedom and judgment, highlights the internal constitution of political communities, too.

Although it is clearly important to expose the exclusions that constitute community, the question remains as to how a more democratic feminist (or any other political) community based on practices of freedom might be formed.

(Zerilli 2005, 156.)

Zerilli opposes the view that political community is an unreachable horizon that always generates exclusion, which according to her has become common in feminist theories in the wake of the collapse of “women” as a unified category, and the idea that “women” should be nothing more than a site of permanent openness (Zerilli 2005, 156, 166). She argues that feminists and other political theorists need alternative conceptions of community to explain the basis on which we are in community with others, and to this end she proposes that feminists should focus on the practice of making claims in the name of a group and questioning the claims made by others.\(^5\) Positing community by speaking for others can never be a fully inclusive act; however, it is a risk that feminists have to take in order for feminism to exist. (Zerilli 2005, 172.)

For theorists of feminist political togetherness, the internal constitution of a political community happens through interaction: as we have already seen, terms such as dialogue and understanding appear often in the discussion. Dialogue and interaction are also familiar themes in other discussions about political community in the field of political theorizing, for example, in deliberative democratic theorizing (Gutmann & Thompson 2004; Habermas 1996; Bohman 1996). However, I argue that theorists of feminist political togetherness understand the interaction that constitutes the feminist “we” in a particular way, which differs from the consensus-oriented rational argument characteristic of deliberative democratic theorizing.

The first feature of community-building interaction described by theorists of feminist political togetherness in comparison to deliberative democratic

\(^5\) Because the existence of a “they” is not a condition without which a “we” could not exist, and because nothing therefore prevents a specific “we” from becoming more and more inclusive, Dean is able to write about a “community of all of us.” Dean’s universal aspirations are unique in the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Although most of its theorists share Dean’s interest in theorizing about relations within a given political “we” rather than the exclusions required to constitute this “we,” Dean is the only one who mentions the possibility of an all-inclusive community, even as just an ideal.

\(^5\) Zerilli also notes that the question of community cannot be settled by focusing on the communicative practice of political debate based on rational arguments.
 theorizing, is that this interaction does not have to result in an agreement. Theorists of feminist political togetherness imply that creation of political bonds requires that there is room to express disagreement and reject the claims made by others. (Dean 1996; Lugones 1987; Weir 2008; Zerilli 2005.) The emphasis on disagreement and conflict brings the discussion on feminist political togetherness closer to radical democratic theorizing than to deliberative democratic theorizing.

The second distinctive feature of the community-creating interaction discussed by feminist theorists is the focus on how we say things to others and how we respond. Theorists who rethink the feminist “we” write about interaction and dialogue in terms of recognition and acknowledgement of the other, rather than in terms of a debate about specific issues involving argument and persuasion. For example, referring to Emmanuel Levinas’ distinction between the Saying and the Said,53 Iris Marion Young argues that everyday communicative gestures such as public acknowledgement of one’s interlocutor should be understood as important parts of political communication. She sees greeting as the moment when the “speaker announces her presence as ready to listen and take responsibility for her relationship to her interlocutors.” (Young 2000, 58-63.)

Adriana Cavarero’s Arendtian account of relationality takes the primacy of the Saying over the Said even further. For Cavarero, what is said does not have a role in constituting political relations; it is more important that the material voices of the interlocutors reveal their uniqueness. Political bonds are constituted through mutual self-disclosure, not through an exchange of views or persuasion. (Cavarero 2005.)

For most theorists of feminist political togetherness, the content of communication – if mentioned at all – revolves around making visible differences in identity, experience, and social location among those who aspire to act together politically. For example, feminists of color and theorists who elaborate on their insights argue that togetherness-creating communication involves articulating one’s experiences to others, who must then recognize the stories told and respond to them. (Anzaldúa 1987; Fowlkes 1997; Lugones 2006.) Writers who build on Arendt’s view that political togetherness is constituted when individuals debate their judgments and opinions about the common world put more emphasis on the content of political speech than do other theorists of feminist political togetherness. (Bickford 1996; Disch 1994; Zerilli 2005.)

53 The name of Emmanuel Levinas is often mentioned in this context. Cavarero and Young directly refer to his distinction between the Saying and the Said, whereby “Saying” is a process of subject-to-subject recognition and “Said” is about expressing content (Cavarero 2005; Young 2000). Levinas argues that the condition of making assertions and giving reasons for them is the moment of opening to the other person and directly acknowledging her without the mediation of content that refers to world.
The significant role that the majority of these theorists give to mutual recognition and self-communication in establishing and maintaining political bonds leads many of them to add an element of intimacy to their accounts of the feminist “we.” Some describe political relations within the political “we” as relationships between an “I” and a “you,” as Allison Weir (2008) and Maria Lugones (1987) do when they write about identification with concrete others. For bell hooks and Adriana Cavarero, casting political bonds as relationships between “I” and “you” is an explicit theoretical and political choice. hooks argues that the feminist political community should be understood as woman-to-woman relationships through which women “strengthen and affirm one another and build a solid foundation for developing political solidarity” (hooks [1984] 2000b, 46-48). Whereas hooks’s vision is linked to the context of the American feminist movement in the 1980s, Cavarero’s claim about the primacy of the I/you relationship is an argument in a philosophical debate. Cavarero understands individuals as unique, singular beings, and in valuing and preserving this uniqueness, she goes as far to claim that “asking who ‘we’ are is simply an ontological error of the language” (Cavarero 2000, 92). She argues that instead of speaking about a “we,” feminist theorists should make the relation between “I” and “you,” which lets individual uniqueness be disclosed, be the model of political relations between women and feminists. (Cavarero 2000, 90-92.)

There are also opposing views regarding the intimacy and mutuality of political bonds between feminists. Jodi Dean argues that inclusive feminist solidarity cannot be based only on the relation between an “I” and a “you.” She writes that, when we interact with each other and constitute a political “we,” we should always bring in the perspective of a “hypothetical third” and supplement the “I” and the “you” with a “she/they.” According to Dean, taking the perspective of the imagined, excluded other makes it possible to question the boundaries of the community being constructed. (Dean 1996, 33-34.) Arendtian feminists, who use as their guideline Arendt’s description of political bonds as “friendship without intimacy,” stress that political relations between individuals should be characterized by a shared concern for the world rather than by concern for each other (Bickford 1996; Disch 1994; Zerilli 2005). Zerilli elaborates on the idea that it is important to focus on the shared world as “that which is communicable” rather than on interpersonal relationships based on mutual recognition, because the shared world places limits on the actions we can take and the issues we can debate. Transformation of a society requires creative judgments that imagine this world anew and that are debated between individuals. (Zerilli 2005.)

Zerilli’s and Dean’s reflections can be developed into a critique of feminist political “we” accounts that focus solely on the recognition of the other. Although in practice recognizing the other and responding to her is crucial for
constituting and maintaining political bonds, respect and recognition alone do not guarantee that the feminist political “we” remains contingent. Zerilli and Dean, who also explicitly argue for conceptualizing feminist political community as internally constituted, imply that focusing on interaction and relationships within the feminist “we” is not enough. In order to keep the boundaries of political communities extendable, feminists must reach beyond the given speech situations and the different others whom they face.

To conclude, theorists of feminist political togetherness argue that the feminist “we” is constituted internally through interactive relationships. In so doing, they depart not only from the earlier understandings of feminism in terms of opposition to men, but also from current discussions about political community in the field of political theorizing, which have tended to focus on opposition and exclusion. What constitutes the relations within the political “we” is interaction. I argue that, unlike many political theorists who stress interaction, particularly deliberative democratic theorists, theorists of feminist political togetherness write about interaction and dialogue in terms of recognition of and responsiveness to the other, rather than in terms of a debate about specific issues that involves argument and persuasion.

4.3 Individual attitude and character do matter

The third of the five persistent themes in the discussion on feminist political togetherness is the focus on the individual and the argument that the individual’s efforts and attitudes play a crucial role in creating and maintaining a feminist political “we.”

Some writers who in recent years have provided novel visions of the feminist “we” criticize contemporary feminist theorists for paying too much attention to individual agency and individual subjectivity and neglecting the collective dimension of politics (e.g., Zerilli 2005). However, looking at the discussion on feminist political togetherness as a whole, it becomes obvious that most writers who have theorized about the feminist “we” since the late 1970s are more interested in the individual self than in collective political subjects. As we saw, they discuss relations between individual subjects, intersubjectivity.

With a few exceptions, the term intersubjectivity is not frequently used in the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Amy Allen claims that feminist theorists should move beyond subject-centeredness and strive to develop an “intersubjective frame” for feminism (Allen 2008, 17). Diana Fowlkes, who constructs a feminist theory of coalition based on the writings of women of color, argues that interaction based on complex self-narratives creates an “intersubjective space” that is the precondition for building political coalitions (Fowlkes 1997, 114-15). Susan Bickford writes about the interaction of subjectivity and intersubjectivity, which, in her view, is at the heart of political togetherness (Bickford 1996, 139; 1997, 112).
thermore, they frame the creation of political bonds between feminists as a question of individual ethos.

In particular, feminists of color who use the vocabulary of coalition turn their attention to the individual subjects who act together politically. The emphasis on individual subjectivity in their texts is so evident that, in retrospect, some commentators have argued that their main contribution to feminist theory is a new way to talk about complex subjectivity (Alarcon 1990, 359, 366; de Lauretis 1987, 10). Women of color theorize about feminist coalitions by narrating their experiences as bearers of multiple identifications, their oppressions, and their strategies of survival, and they imply that the articulation of the complexities of the self provides the basis for political association across difference and privilege (e.g., Alzaldúa 1990a, 225; Lugones 2006, 81-84). Theorists of feminist political togetherness who elaborate on the coalition discourse of women of color argue that the focus on self-narration is the strength of their approach to coalition politics, and they make this insight the basis of their feminist theories of coalition (Adams 2002; Fowlkes 1997). Feminists of color also make another link between the self and political bonds: they describe the efforts that individual women must make in building coalitions across difference. For example, Anzaldúa’s (1990a, 224; 2004, 4) idea of coalition building as “building bridges” implies that, when women of color move between their different groups and communities, they personally are the bridge.

In the same vein, theorists who use Hannah Arendt’s concepts to rethink the feminist “we” argue that individuality plays a crucial role in political togetherness. Building on the tension between individual distinction and political togetherness in Arendt’s thought, they emphasize that political bonds only come into being through articulations of individuality and that individuality cannot be expressed without togetherness (Adams 2002; Allen 1999; Bickford 1996; Cavarero 2005; Zerilli 2005).

Most theorists of feminist political togetherness suggest – although in a less programmatic manner than women of color and the Arendtians – that theorizing about the feminist “we” is not possible without addressing individual subjectivity. Whatever their theoretical backgrounds, theorists of feminist political togetherness argue that the efforts and attitudes of individuals play a crucial role in building interactive relations across difference and privilege. They have several answers to the question of what individuals should do in order to create political bonds.

First, political togetherness requires individuals to be prepared for self-communication. Although women of color coalition theorists and Arendtian feminists have conflicting views on many issues, both groups argue that building political bonds across diverse identities and agendas requires the expression of individuality. Their views on exactly what should be expressed differ. Women of color write about their experience of multiple identifications and oppressions;
Arendtian feminists either write about individual uniqueness (Cavarero 2005) or about the unique individual’s different perspectives on and opinions of the world (Bickford 1996; Disch 1994; Zerilli 2005).55

Another point that theorists of feminist political togetherness emphasize is that individuals must desire to recognize the other person and make efforts to understand her perspective. Of those who use the vocabulary of identity, Weir (2008, 125) writes about an “imaginative and empathetic engagement” through which we learn about the world and perspectives of different others, and Lugones (1987, 9-12) writes about the “world-traveling” required to understand different others and their perspective on the world. Lyshaug, who uses the vocabulary of solidarity (2006), discusses the active efforts that individuals must make to cultivate an attitude called “enlarged sympathy,” which allows them to tend to different others. Bickford (1996, 148), who uses Hannah Arendt’s concepts, argues that political bonds are more about interaction of efforts to understand the other than about interaction as such. Weir, Lugones, Lyshaug, and Bickford all describe the process of learning to understand the other as a question of attitudes and dispositions and of emotional and intellectual skills.56

Although it is widely held that individuals should make efforts to understand different others if a political bond is to grow from their interactions, theorists of feminist political togetherness acknowledge that it is not possible to know the other fully. Individuals who engage in communication with different others should simultaneously make efforts to understand the other and acknowledge that they can never fully understand her perspective. They must recognize those with whom they act politically in their difference instead of trying to find commonalities in aims, backgrounds, and ways of acting. Dean (1996, 43) expresses this idea by suggesting that feminist solidarity must be the “solidarity of strangers.” In a similar vein, Young (1990, 234) argues that “politics must be conceived of as a relationship of strangers who do not understand

55 Bickford and Adams combine Arendt’s focus on individual distinction with the emphasis made by women of color theorists on self-narration. This is an interesting approach, because at first glance these approaches do not seem compatible.

56 Lugones argues that oppressed and marginalized individuals may possess certain skills that are useful for understanding others and creating coalitions across difference because of their experience of living at the edge of the mainstream. Most women of color theorists share this view. For example, Gloria Anzaldúa has written about la facultad, a survival tactic developed by marginalized people, which allows them to adjust quickly to changing circumstances (Anzaldúa 1987, 60-61). The question of whether the skills and knowledge of women of color, such as world traveling or la facultad, can be learned by anyone has been debated. Chela Sandoval argues, like Lugones, that such skills are not linked to gender and race, and she suggests that these skills would be useful for progressive politics at large (Sandoval 1991, 22-23n57, 23n58). Paula Moya takes the opposing view when she argues that experience of multiple oppressions is necessary for acquiring these skills (Moya 2001, 471).
each other in a subjective and immediate sense, relating across time and distance.”

The most crucial thing that creation and maintenance of political togetherness requires from individuals is preparedness for self-transformation. Moraga points out that when we work together with people different from us, many ideals, perspectives, and practices we take to be constitutive of our personality are challenged. In order to continue working together, we have to “change ourselves, even sometimes our most cherished rock-hard convictions” (Moraga 1983, iii). Anzaldúa, who uses the vocabulary of coalition, argues in a similar manner that “to bridge is about honoring people’s otherness in ways that allow us to be changed by embracing that otherness rather than punishing others for having a different view, belief system, skin color, or spiritual practice” (Anzaldúa 2004, 4). Lyshaug writes about the ethical self-transforming practices that enable individuals to be attentive to different others, which are required to build sustained feminist solidarity (Lyshaug 2006, 82, 86). Using the vocabulary of identity, Weir observes that learning about the perspectives of others, in particular those who are differently placed in relations of power, ideally leads one to “reconstitute oneself” and to an “enlargement of one’s horizons” (Weir 2008, 125-27). Arendtian feminists note that we must let other people’s judgments and opinions influence the criteria by which we make judgments about the world (Bickford 1996; Zerilli 2005).

Theorists of feminist political togetherness stress that self-transformation does not follow automatically from the encounter with different others. For example, Anzaldúa argues that one has to be open to whatever comes and be prepared for intimacy and personal relationships with those with whom one acts politically (Anzaldúa 2002, 4). Lyshaug argues that the “enlarged sympathy,” which enables self-transformation, must also be actively cultivated outside the interactions with different others (Lyshaug 2006, 82, 86).

To conclude, I argue that when theorists of feminist political togetherness claim that individual efforts and attitudes play an important role in the constitution and maintenance of political bonds between feminists, they frame feminist political togetherness as a question of ethos. Although these theorists do not create a normative theory in the Habermasian sense, the discussion on feminist political togetherness has a strong ethical element that is linked to how individuals should act toward each other. The three main ethical obligations or guidelines that come up in this discussion are readiness to expose one’s self to others, efforts to understand the other while acknowledging that she will remain strange, and openness to self-transformation. I suggest that when feminist theorists make individual attitudes and dispositions their starting point for rethinking the feminist “we,” the result is that their approaches have as much to do with the transformation of the self as with the feminist collective actions that transform social norms and political institutions.
4.4 Political bonds across difference have an affective dimension

The fourth theme that I identify in the discussion on feminist political togetherness is the focus on the affective dimension of collective political action. Theorists of feminist political togetherness ask what motivates us to act together, what attaches us to certain identities and groups, and how are we able to understand the different other? For most, the answer lies in passions, desire, emotions, attachments, and feelings. They argue that cognitive efforts to understand the other and her interests and goals are not enough to create political bonds across difference (Bartky 2002; Lyshaug 2006).

Judith Butler has discussed “passionate attachments” in an effort to understand the subject’s complex relation to subordination. In Psychic Life of Power Butler argues that subjects are formed through a passionate attachment to subjection, that is, to compelling norms, as well as to injurious names that we have been called. What drives this attachment is the desire to survive, which entails the idea that “I would rather exist in subordination than not exist.” In other words, we have a “narcissistic attachment” to the continuation of our existence and to anything that makes us social beings. This means that we cannot simply throw off limiting and subordinating identities. After all, being called by these names is what makes us social beings and subjects in the first place. (Butler 1997, 8, 113.) Amy Allen has pointed out that Butler’s idea of passionate attachments is important for those who theorize about feminist politics because it helps us understand the difficulty of changing gendered norms (Allen 2008, 73-74, 80-81).

Obviously, affective attachments are not necessarily an impediment to feminism. As Sara Ahmed and many others have pointed out, attachments may hinder transformative politics, but they also make transformative politics possible (Ahmed 2004, 171-72). Butler, of course, acknowledges the transformative potential of passionate attachments. She argues that attachments to certain terms and the injuries they produce are the conditions of any kind of resistance and re-signification of these terms. Only by being occupied by a term can I resist and oppose it. (Butler 1997, 104-5.) However, from Allen’s perspective this view of resistance is insufficient, and she encourages feminists to conceptualize non-subordinating attachments to others. Allen notes that individuals can also be passionately attached to feminism, to the values and principles that keep social movements going, or to other people who act in these movements. Such enabling attachments could, in her view, help feminists to understand how resistance to gendered norms works. (Allen 2008, 83-84.)

Since the late 1970s, theorists of feminist political togetherness have made considerable efforts to conceptualize attachments and affective investments that enable the constitution and maintenance of the feminist political “we.” I will
begin my exploration of these efforts with Chantal Mouffe. Her account of passions (Mouffe 2000; 2005; 2008) – like her accounts of political community and identification – is exceptional in the discussion on feminist political togetherness, yet it provides an example of how other discussions in the field of political theorizing treat passions and thus a useful point of comparison.

Mouffe has argued consistently that passions play a pivotal role in the formation of political communities (2000; 2005; 2008). She contends that theorizing about passions, which she describes as the “moving force in the field of politics,” is necessary in order to understand where political motivation and allegiances stem from and how political identities are constituted (Mouffe 2008, 93; 2005, 24). Political discourses have to mobilize people’s passions in order to succeed and to create a strong enough allegiance to make people act (Mouffe 1993, 140).

Mouffe does not offer much information on what she means by passions. She makes occasional references to psychoanalysis (Mouffe 2005, 25), but mostly she describes passions as unspecified pre-discursive forces that are “constitutive of the mode of existence of human beings” and the moving force of human conduct. Passions appear to be constantly looking for an “outlet” or a “channel through which to express themselves” (Mouffe 1993, 140). Mouffe argues that passions can attach to whatever collective identifications are available at a certain moment, as far as these identifications are meaningful to the individual (Mouffe 1993, 5; 2000, 104; 2005, 25). In her view, contemporary democratic politics should aim at mobilizing passions towards democratic designs in order to provide options for extreme right populist movements and religious fundamentalism (Mouffe 2008, 93, 97).

Mouffe discusses passions mainly in connection with antagonism. In her view what incites passions and makes people identify as a collective is the existence of a “they,” a common enemy or an adversary. Although Mouffe also mentions that people can identify affectionately with common values and principles, she does not elaborate on this line of thought. Mouffe stresses the centrality of antagonism, for example, when she writes that it is possible to encourage individuals to identify with democratic objectives by making conflicting positions within those objectives available. The strong link Mouffe makes between passions and antagonism means that she connects the force of passions mainly with the potential for violence, hostility, and conflict inherent in human social relations.

By contrast, most writers who theorize about the feminist “we” tend to focus on the emotions experienced by individuals and on the emotional investments they have to make when they act politically with different others. Using this focus, they take the discussion on the affective dimension of political bonds in a different direction from Mouffe, who writes about “collective passions.”
Love is the emotion that feminist theorists who use the vocabularies of identity, coalition, and solidarity most frequently link to the process of building the feminist “we.” Charlotte Bunch has described love as a possible motivation for a cross-cultural dialogue between feminists. She points out that it often happens that feminists come to understand difference through the love of a person from another culture. It takes persistence and motivation to learn about other perspectives, and love can engender such motivation (Bunch 1987). Most theorists of feminist political togetherness who evoke love make a point of not using the term in connection with the intimate emotions between two persons. Anzaldúa argues that “to bridge is an act of will, an act of love, an attempt toward compassion and reconciliation, and a promise to be present with the pain of others without losing themselves to it” (Anzaldúa 2002, 4). For her, to be loving is about compassion and about standing by the other, rather than the romantic love that Bunch writes about. For Lugones, to learn to love somebody is to “travel into her world” and to “understand what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes.” She connects love with the general attitude or the way of perceiving that is required of individuals when they interact with each other. It is about having an open attitude and being open to self-construction as well. (Lugones 2003, 78, 97.)

In a slightly more abstract vein, Phelan describes love as a “self-extension of each person towards others, conscious commitment to the welfare of others, both in general and in each person we meet” and as “a love for the world, a love for democracy, a love for others as inseparably part of the community within which we live.” (Phelan 1994, 158.) hooks describes love as a powerful force that challenges and resists domination and dehumanization, as a preserving attitude toward the whole world, and as a will to do justice for those living it. She argues that love can sustain us to continue to act together politically at moments when conflicts make it difficult and uncomfortable, and when we feel broken. (hooks 1989, 24-26.) Anzaldúa, Lugones, Phelan, and hooks cast love, on the one hand, as a force with the potential to transform the world, and, on the other hand, as the general attitude that individuals should have toward each other and toward the world they aim to transform.

Theorists of feminist political togetherness also discuss the potential of those emotions often considered negative, such as anger and rage, in creating and maintaining political relationships. Audre Lorde (1984) sees more potential in anger than in love, and she argues that love should not be a requirement for political cooperation, not even in the non-intimate sense in which hooks, Lugones, Anzaldúa, and Phelan use the term. Lorde understands anger as the “grief of distortions between peers” that has change as its objective (Lorde 1984, 129). She examines how expressing anger at each other could help women to face their differences and the distortions that separate them.
The angers between women will not kill us if we can articulate them with precision, if we listen to the content of what is said with at least as much intensity as we defend ourselves against the manner of saying…. The angers of women can transform difference through insight into power.

(Lorde 1984, 131.)

The key is to learn to read the anger expressed by the less privileged other and face it constructively. She argues that to some extent U.S. women of color have already gone through this process: they have learned to “orchestrate their furies” so that emotions do not tear them apart, but are used “for strength and force and insight.” (Lorde 1984, 129-33.)

Unlike Mouffe, for Lorde the political potential of anger does not lie in constructing a “we” that is sustained by a shared hostility directed at “them,” but in creating new kinds of open and creative relationships between individuals who work together politically and who are divided by relations of power. Other feminist theorists also point out that anger and rage should be seen as sources of energy and creativity that can contribute to political transformation and help constitute feminist political togetherness (hooks 1995; Lugones 2003).

Some theorists disagree with the tendency to conceptualize political relations between feminists as affective and emotional. The feminist writers who draw on Hannah Arendt argue that love or other sentiments should not have a role in the political bonds between feminists. For example, Susan Bickford, who challenges Arendt on many issues and follows the coalition discourse of women of color, argues with Arendt that love and friendship are not needed to create political relations between women. In her view, confrontations between different perspectives should not be addressed with love or any other emotion, but faced with courage. (Bickford 1996, 137.)

To summarize, although the affective dimension of political togetherness is a broad issue that can be discussed from various perspectives, theorists of feminist political togetherness who are convinced that political bonds have an affective dimension often focus narrowly on the emotions that individuals experience when they interact with different others. The focus on the affective dimension of politics sets the discussion on feminist political togetherness apart from interest-based approaches to political community and from deliberative democratic theorizing with its focus on rational argumentation and brings it closer to radical democratic theorizing, which also emphasizes passions. However, radical democratic theorists, including Mouffe, discuss affect in a more abstract manner (e.g., Laclau 2005; Norval 2007; Mouffe 2000; 2008; Zizek 1989) than the theorists of feminist political togetherness, who focus on emotions.
4.5 Theorizing the feminist “we” requires bridging theory and practice

The first four themes that persist in the discussion on feminist political togetherness tell us what is distinctive about the understanding of political commonality stemming from efforts to rethink the feminist “we” in the last thirty years. The fifth and final theme, namely, the contention that conceptualizing feminist political togetherness is not possible without acknowledging feminist practice, reveals how feminists have conceptualized political togetherness. The relation between feminist practice and feminist theory is a critical issue for writers who have been rethinking the collective dimension of feminist politics, particularly since the 1990s, after the institutionalization of feminism in the academy made it possible to speak about feminism as a “theory.”

It is an often-heard claim in recent feminist debates that there is a growing gap between feminist activism and feminist academic scholarship. Many theorists of feminist political togetherness express this concern, adding that the gap between feminist theory and practice is particularly apparent in matters concerning collective feminist politics (Allen 1999, 97, 99; Dean 1996, 67; Mohanty 2003, 6; Weir 2008, 113). For example, Jodi Dean argues that the “increased distance between debates in feminist theory and ‘real life’ is the widest in what comes to issues such as solidarity, responsibility and accountability” (Dean 1996, 66). She contends that, while feminist activism focuses on crafting solidarity or building connections across difference, it is difficult to find an emphasis on solidarity within what she calls “third phase feminist writing.” (Dean 1996, 66-67.) Susan Moller Okin has made a similar observation.

During the same decade-and-a-half in which feminists in academia who attempted to find, or claimed to have found, anything but differences between women were being taken to task for “essentialism,” Third World feminists and grassroots activists, as well as some Western feminists who were prepared to buck the tide, were working together to achieve the recognition by the international human rights community of women’s rights as human rights.

(Okin 2000, 38-39.)

Dean’s and Okin’s views reveal a belief, common in the discussion on feminist political togetherness in the 1990s and 2000s, that feminist activists know how to build coalitions and alliances across difference and privilege, whereas feminist scholars are lost in abstract debates about difference and subjectivity. In order to determine exactly what is at stake in this argument, it is useful to see what theorists who make it mean by theory, on the one hand, and activism, on the other.

Feminist scholars who criticize feminist theory either for disregarding the collective dimension of politics or for failing to provide the right tools for theo-
rizing about it may write about “theory” in general, but their texts reveal that the real target is postmodern feminist theorizing. This is the case when Okin argues that feminist theorizing is too occupied with anti-essentialism and differences between women (Okin 2000, 38), when Weir criticizes feminist theory for being too interested in deconstructing the category “women” (Weir 2008, 13), and when Dean writes about the “exclusionary and orthodox world of theory” (Dean 1996, 67). It appears that those who criticize feminist theory for not focusing enough on connection and commonality are more interested in building a simplistic opposition to postmodern or poststructuralist feminist theorizing than in elaborating on the broad range of existing efforts, some of them by theorists who start from postmodern premises, to rethink the feminist “we.”

Although theorists of feminist political togetherness who evoke the gap between theory and practice are unanimous in their belief that (postmodern) feminist theorizing neglects the collective dimension of feminist politics, each of them sees the feminist practice ahead of theory differently. For example, Okin sets what she calls the “anti-essentialist climate of feminist theory” against the United Nations World Conferences on Women organized in the 1980s and 1990s. She argues that women activists who participated in these conferences and their preparations made progress in identifying common concerns, engaging with other women, sharing experiences and views locally, regionally, and globally, and making previously silenced voices heard. (Okin 2000, 36-37.) Mohanty writes about the productive insights of transnational, often informal and local feminist coalitions informed by anti-capitalism and decolonialization. She understands promising feminist practices as being self-organized, and she argues that such practices should have the experiences of the least privileged women in the “Two-Thirds World” as their starting point (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, xxvii; Mohanty 2003, 231, 250.) One example that Mohanty mentions are women workers in free-trade zones and immigrant women workers in the U.S. who, owing to the sexism of trade unions, have formed more democratic women’s unions and created alliances with churches, feminist organizations, and community groups (Mohanty 2003, 163).

Driven by the idea that activists are ahead of theorists in matters of political togetherness, but also by other views about the relationship between feminist theory and practice, theorists of feminist political togetherness argue that dialogical encounters between theory and practice are necessary for conceptualizing the feminist “we.” They provide several views of the form that this dialogue should take.

57 Dean mentions the work done by Gloria Anzaldúa, Iris Marion Young, bell hooks, Chandra Mohanty, and Donna Haraway. However, she does not elaborate on their views. (Dean 1996, 67.)
Martha A. Ackelsberg and Chandra Talpade Mohanty argue that those who aspire to theorize about the collective dimension of feminist politics should draw inspiration from feminist activists rather than from political philosophers. Ackelsberg contends that “our theories and our models of politics are just beginning to catch up to the best of our practice,” and she suggests “we have not looked as carefully as we might at the places where people from a variety of identity categories have actually engaged in real-life political struggle and resistance” (Ackelsberg 1996, 97). Mohanty calls for scholarship and analysis “produced through active dialogic engagements with feminist collectives and movements,” and argues that “it is the practice within movements that anchors theory, the analysis is undertaken to improve the practice” (Alexander & Mohanty 1997, xxix). She adds that it is often in social movements that the new potentially transformative knowledge is created (Mohanty 2003, 248). As I noted above, feminist theorists disagree about which feminist practices are a suitable basis for theorizing about the collective dimension of feminist politics. The argument that theory should follow practice is therefore too vague to provide a general guideline for theorizing about the feminist – or any other political – “we.”

Linda Zerilli provides a more theory-centered view of the theory-practice dialogue needed to conceptualize the feminist “we.” Drawing on Arendt’s view that past events and practices should act as guideposts and references for the future, Zerilli argues that feminist theorists should turn to past events and fictional examples of feminist communities. Zerilli mentions the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective, an Italian women’s collective from the 1980s, and Monique Wittig’s fictional novel *Les Guérillères* as exemplary feminist community building practices that illuminate the feminist “we” in a new way. Zerilli uses practical examples as illustrations and inspiration for her theoretical work, and she does make a difference between real life and imagined examples of collective feminist action. (Zerilli 2005, 26, 93-94.)

Most theorists of feminist political togetherness propose subtler forms of dialogue between theory and practice. For them, the role of feminist scholars is neither to collect best practices nor to use specific practices as illustrations for abstract theories, but rather to provide new insights and concepts that can help feminists see what they are doing in new ways. Allison Weir suggests that feminist scholars could provide new understandings of the concepts that activists are

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58 Some theorists have taken the recommendation that theorizing about collective feminist politics should start from taking activists’ experiences seriously. For example, Elizabeth Cole and Zakiya Luna (2010) have developed an understanding of feminist coalitions and cross-difference solidarity by interviewing feminist activists. The same five themes that in my analysis persist in the discussion on feminist political togetherness also have a role in Cole and Luna’s understanding of coalitions and solidarity.
circulating. To this end, she develops a notion of “transformative identity politics” that differs from conventional understandings in that it can, according to her, take account of change. (Weir 2008.) Jodi Dean argues that it is essential to develop theoretical ideals that inspire feminist practice, but stresses that these ideals should always take the perspective of those who act politically, draw on difficulties they face in their struggles, and point at possible ways forward. She calls her notion of reflective solidarity an “activist ideal of post-identity politics” (Dean 1996, 49.) Weir and Dean point out that theoretical discussion of the collective dimension of feminist politics must be attentive to practice, but they add that theoretical or abstract discussion of political commonality has a role in producing new ideas and drawing connections that can inspire activists.

This last approach to theory-practice dialogue is close to my own perspective. I see a need for conceptualizing the collective dimension of feminist politics in a way that extends beyond an analysis of feminist movements, but is still attentive to and inspired by them and contributes to transformative feminist politics. I see the need to think about frequently used concepts anew, and in this study I have discussed how theorists of feminist political togetherness do just that, using the terms identity, coalition, and solidarity. It is also important to describe phenomena such as political relationships between feminists with new terms. This is exactly the point of my study: I introduce the term “political togetherness” and the phrase “feminist political togetherness” in order to describe and make visible the way feminist activists and theorists understand political bonds across difference. For me, this is a form of feminist activism in itself.

Although their views of the form and the aim of the dialogue between feminist scholars and feminist movements differ, theorists of feminist political togetherness argue decisively that such a dialogue is necessary if one is to address the problem of the feminist “we.” There is more to the importance given to these dialogical encounters than the general belief that activists are ahead of theorists in matters of political togetherness. This implies that rethinking the collective dimension of feminist politics is not merely a question of abstract thinking; it is only possible to imagine new visions of the feminist “we” by bringing theoretical concepts together with existing feminist practices. This brings me back to the argument I made in the introduction to this study: the feminist “we” is both a theoretical challenge and a practical problem. Most theorists of feminist political togetherness are able to discuss both the theoretical and the practical implications, thanks to their efforts to bridge the perceived gap between feminist scholars and feminist activists.

I consider the interest in dialogical encounters between political theorizing and particular political practices as one of the particular features of the discussion on feminist political togetherness by comparison with other discussions about the collective dimension of politics. This discussion is inseparable from the particular feminist communities, movements, and practices that are its
frame of reference. This means that theorists who rethink the feminist “we” are more interested in theorizing about particular political communities than in building abstract theories about the conditions of political commonality—an approach characteristic of post-structuralist radical democratic theory. Without any connection with contextual political practices, theorists—feminist and others—who develop understandings of the collective dimension of politics risk being left with an abstract notion of political commonality that is applicable in any context. However, owing to the way they tend to feminist practices, even those feminist theorists who create theoretically elaborate visions of the feminist “we” do not lose their sensitivity to contexts.

Theorists influenced by Hannah Arendt are, again, an exception. Like other theorists of feminist political togetherness, Arendtian theorists are concerned about the relationship between feminist theory and practice. However, Arendt’s approach to political togetherness, which is framed by her existential interest in the conditions and specificities of human life and the disclosure of individual uniqueness, does not easily translate into a framework for theorizing about the creation and maintenance of particular political communities across difference and privilege. Although feminist theorists influenced by Arendt have provided creative solutions to the theoretical challenge of combining political togetherness and difference, they have not been as successful in providing views of better feminist practice.

I have shown that debating the relationship between theory and practice is one of the particularities of the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Feminist writers argue that it is not possible to theorize about the feminist “we” without engaging scholars and feminist movements in dialogue. The proposed forms of engagement vary from making practice the main source of knowledge to providing theoretical solutions to the problems activists face. However, the interest in bridging the perceived gap between theory and practice means that most theorists of feminist political togetherness see the feminist “we” as a question with both theoretical and practical implications.

4.6 Conclusion: Specific “feminist political togetherness”

Feminist theorists, who have been developing alternative understandings of the feminist “we” since “women” was questioned as the collective subject of feminism, theorize about political togetherness in a particular manner. In this chapter, I have brought out what is distinctive in their approach and examined the specificity of the debates about the feminist “we” by comparison with other discussions about the collective dimension of politics in the field of political theorizing.
Five themes of feminist political togetherness

My analysis reveals that the accounts of identity politics, feminist coalition politics, feminist solidarity, feminist political community, and so forth, which I refer to as the discussion on feminist political togetherness, bear significant similarities to each other. These similarities outnumber the differences that result from the time and context of writing, the vocabularies chosen, and the theoretical resources used. I propose that when looked at in retrospect, the discussion on feminist political togetherness produces a specific understanding of sustained, but open political bonds across difference and privilege, which are the conditions of collective political action in diverse societies. In order to make tangible this understanding, which feminist theorists discuss by giving new meanings to established terms, such as identity politics, coalition, and solidarity, I use the same expression “political togetherness” that I have used as a heuristic tool to deal with the different vocabularies used. In other words, I suggest that feminist writers have replaced global feminist sisterhood as the guideline for feminist politics with a specific “feminist political togetherness,” an idea I see as a distinctive approach to political commonality, which departs from conventional notions of coalition politics, solidarity, identity politics, and political community.

I have addressed the distinctive approach to political commonality implied in the discussion on feminist political togetherness by identifying and examining five themes that persist in this discussion across decades, vocabularies, and theoretical backgrounds.

The first theme of feminist political togetherness is understanding differences and the conflicts that follow as that which constitutes political togetherness and keeps it alive. Difference is one of the most frequently used terms in the discussion on feminist political togetherness, and the main aim of the feminist theorists I have analyzed is to reconcile difference and political commonality. I argue that theorists of feminist political togetherness avoid the pitfalls for which the feminist debate about difference has been criticized. Instead of trying to overcome or settle differences, they emphasize the transformative power of difference and conflict. Theorists of feminist political togetherness argue that internal differences and conflicts, when faced, endured, and learned from, help to maintain political communities by subjecting them to a slow process of transformation.

The second recurring theme is the argument that the feminist “we” is constituted internally through interactive relations between individuals who are part of the emerging “we.” Many theorists of feminist political togetherness explicitly oppose views of political community based on opposition or exclusion, and they depart, not only from the earlier understandings of feminism in terms of opposition to men, but also from many current discussions about political community in the field of political theorizing. As regards to the interactive relations that constitute the “we,” these theorists are more interested in how
we say things and how we respond to others than in what we communicate when we interact with others. They write about interaction and dialogue in terms of recognition of the other rather than in terms of a debate that involving argument and persuasion.

The third theme is that individual efforts and attitudes play a pivotal role in the constitution and maintenance of political bonds between feminists. This means that feminist theorists frame political togetherness as a question of ethos. I suggest that, although theorists of feminist political togetherness do not build a normative theory in the Habermasian sense, nevertheless, the discussion on feminist political togetherness has an ethical element. The three main ethical obligations or guidelines that come up in this discussion are readiness to expose one’s self to others, efforts to understand the other while acknowledging that she will remain strange, and openness to self-transformation.

The fourth theme is the argument that political bonds are affective. I argue that theorists who rethink the feminist “we” are particularly interested in exploring the role of emotions such as love, hate, rage, and hurt in the process of building and maintaining political relationships across difference. Less attention has been paid to the role played by affective forces in general.

The fifth and final theme is the insistence that engaging feminist academic scholarship and feminist movements in dialogue is necessary for rethinking the feminist “we.” The proposed forms of encounter between theory and practice range from seeing activists the main source of theoretical knowledge or understanding theory as a way to serve activists to seeing practice as an inspiring illustration no different from fiction. I argue that the efforts to bridge feminist theory and practice cause most theorists of feminist political togetherness to conceptualize particular political communities, rather than to build abstract theoretical ideas about political community: This leads most of them to discuss the feminist “we” as a question with both theoretical and practical implications and makes them sensitive to contexts.

These five themes also persist in the Arendtian elaborations on the feminist “we,” which form a distinct, important strand within the discussion. Theorists influenced by Arendt discuss these themes in a slightly different manner, adding new ideas and expanding the scope of the discussion. When theorists who build on Arendt’s concepts argue that the feminist “we” is constituted internally through interaction, they do not focus on the recognition of the different other. Instead, they draw attention to the content of interaction and to argument and persuasion. Arendtian theorists discuss the affective dimension of politics, but only in order to argue explicitly that political bonds between feminists should not be based on emotions or passions. Although I am inclined to follow those theorists who argue that the affective dimension is an important part political togetherness, Arendtian theorists add an element to be considered: this togeth-
Five themes of feminist political togetherness

Feminist political togetherness should be mediated by a third object and based on a shared concern for the world.

The persistence of these five themes reveals that, despite the different vocabularies and theoretical frameworks used, theorists who rethink the feminist “we” draw attention to political bonds across differences between complex individuals. These bonds have to be actively created and maintained and they enable political action in the context of diversity and inequality. Conflicts and disagreement play an important role in constituting, shaping, and maintaining these relations, and they transform those involved. These relations require an ethical attitude toward others having different views, experiences, and social locations, and most theorists portray such relations as affective.

“Feminist political togetherness” is not an abstract theoretical ideal. It is an understanding of how particular political communities can be maintained, how the relationships between individuals that ground them can be sustained, and how the commitment and motivation of individuals can be strengthened and renewed, all the while acknowledging the contingency of every collective constellation and being committed to fighting the exclusions inherent in them. Indeed, this idea provides guidelines as regards how to act politically with different others.

It is important to bear in mind that “feminist political togetherness” is a retrospective construction. No single text that I have discussed here fully embodies all the elements that this idea entails. Some of the texts even stand in stark contrast to its elements. For example, unlike most theorists who discuss the collective dimension of feminist politics, Arendtian feminists argue that political bonds across difference should not be affective, and Judith Butler emphasizes the importance of disrupting every emerging political identity or coalition, rather than maintaining them (Butler 1990; 1993; 2004).

It is obvious that the five themes of feminist political togetherness are not unique to discussions of the collective dimension of feminist politics; political and democratic theorists who are interested in democratic community, political community, and civic identity address them too. Theorists of feminist political togetherness and radical democratic theorists share the emphasis on the affective dimension of politics and the focus on the role that differences and conflicts play in the constitution of political communities. The emphasis on interactive relations between individuals who constitute the political “we” and the interest in developing norms and guidelines by which individuals should act in order to create political bonds resonate with deliberative democratic theorizing.

59 Theorists of multicultural democracy, such as Will Kymlicka, have debated the role of differences within political communities in the context of citizenship and minority rights (Kymlicka 1995, 2001), but they put less emphasis on conflicts than do theorists of feminist political togetherness.
However, even if the discussion on feminist political togetherness shares elements with other strands of political theorizing, feminist writers provide different perspectives on the shared themes. For example, in terms of political interaction, deliberative democratic theorists emphasize rational argumentation and consensus in political deliberation; feminist theorists of political togetherness emphasize the role of self-exposure and argue that disagreement, not consensus, creates durable political bonds. Furthermore, the insistence on a dialogue between theory and practice and the resulting focus on particular political communities and sensitivity to contexts distinguish the approach to political community from the abstract notions of political community proposed by most poststructuralist political theorists. I also suggest that one of the specificities of the debate about the feminist “we” is that it provides a theoretical discussion about the internal constitution and maintenance of political communities.

An elaborate analysis of the specificity of the discussion of feminist political togetherness in comparison to various strands of contemporary political theorizing is beyond the scope of this study. An assessment of the potential contribution of “feminist political togetherness” for these debates calls for further research.
In this study, I suggest that feminist writers who have developed new understandings of the feminist “we” since “women” as the natural collective subject of feminism was questioned conceptualize political community in a distinctive way. They draw attention to sustained, yet open political bonds that enable collective political action in the context of diversity and inequality. I call this approach, which differs from other recent conceptualizations of political community in the field of political theorizing, “feminist political togetherness.”

My study provides a detailed analysis of an ongoing discussion in the field of feminist political theorizing about the collective dimension of feminist politics, which I refer to as the discussion on feminist political togetherness. This discussion was initiated by black feminists and radical women of color in the United States who, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, criticized the ideal of feminist sisterhood and postulated coalitions between white and non-white women and between various groups of marginalized women. Writers such as bell hooks, Maria Lugones, Gloria Anzaldúa and Chandra Mohanty have continued to discuss the collective dimension of feminist politics and remain influential participants in this discussion. In the 1990s, the discussion on feminist political togetherness intertwined with the postmodern criticism of essential identities and foundations. The new participants in this debate have created “anti-foundational,” “groundless,” and “non-identitarian” visions of the feminist “we” based on various theoretical resources. Since the dawn of the twenty-first century, this discussion has been connected with the emerging debate about transnational feminisms and the realities of feminist political practice in a globalized and increasingly unequal world.

The ideas presented in the framework of the discussion of feminist political togetherness are not as well known as they deserve to be, given their relevance, not only for contemporary feminist politics, but also for other discussions about political community. After all, questions regarding political community and collective political action in the context of diversity and inequality are among the most intriguing unsolved issues that all political and democratic theorists face. Prior to my study, the re-conceptualizations of the feminist “we” based on different vocabularies such as coalition and solidarity were not discussed together in a comprehensive manner. The occasional commentators on this litera-
ture, whose approach has been to discuss either feminist identity politics, feminist theories of coalition, or feminist theories of solidarity, have not recognized the remarkable similarities among the visions of the feminist “we” based on different vocabularies.

The problem that was posed when the multiple-difference and postmodern feminists questioned politics based on an essential women’s identity has both theoretical and practical implications. On the one hand, there is the unsolved theoretical challenge of reconciling difference and political togetherness. On the other hand, there are the concerns of feminist activists who must build alliances across difference and privilege and answer the old and new challenges that feminist movements face. Most of the writers who participate in the discussion on feminist political togetherness provide both new theoretical ideas about the collective dimension of feminist politics and views on a more fruitful feminist practice.

The writers who have tried to solve the problem of the feminist “we” have been balancing between positing too much community and too little. My study reveals that, as the result of this balancing act, they have turned their theoretical attention to active, relational processes between complex individuals who are divided by relations of power. In other words, I suggest that feminist theorists challenge conventional notions of political community, including the idea of global feminist sisterhood, with an understanding of “feminist political togetherness,” a more nuanced form of political being together.

We have seen in chapter 2 that feminist theorists rarely create new terms to discuss their novel ideas about enabling political bonds. Instead, they give new meanings to terms that have an already established position in the field of feminist and political theorizing. I identify the terms identity, coalition, and solidarity and the respective word families as the three main vocabularies of feminist political togetherness and show that these vocabularies lead theorists to ask somewhat different questions about the creation, form, and maintenance of political relations among feminists.

The vocabulary of identity played – and continues to play – a crucial role in the text of women of color who initiated the discussion. It has also created controversy. Some theorists writing since early 1990s have taken a post-identity approach to the feminist “we” and argue that the whole vocabulary of identity is useless for the task and should be rejected; more recently, others have argued from an ontological perspective that the vocabulary of identity is indispensable for explaining how we bond politically with others because identities factually exist. A productive way to use the vocabulary of identity has been to argue that collective identities such as “women” and “feminists” are constituted and maintained through affective and partly involuntary processes of identification with values and principles, with concrete others, and with the feminist “we.”
The vocabulary of coalition has lead feminist theorists to discuss the connections between feminism and other progressive political movements. It has also encouraged them to argue that collective political action creates new contingent identities and transforms existing identities and self-understandings. The vocabulary of solidarity has lead these theorists to ask how political bonds among feminists could be made more lasting and durable and to conceptualize ethical responsibility for the different other as the basis for lasting political relations.

Countering the natural expectation that it is a different thing to write about identity politics than about coalition politics and about coalitions than about solidarity and given the feminist theorists’ tendency to separate these vocabularies rigorously, I have shown that the understandings of the feminist “we” provided through the three vocabularies are strikingly similar. Whether they write about identity politics or identification, about feminist coalitions or about feminist solidarity, writers who in different decades address the problem of the feminist “we” return repeatedly to the same issues and questions that I have called “themes of feminist political togetherness.”

I have examined five themes that persist in the discussion about feminist political togetherness in chapter 4. The first of these themes is to argue that differences and conflicts constitute political togetherness. Feminist theorists who struggle to reconcile difference and political togetherness do not try to overcome differences. They stress that when conflicts due to differences are properly faced and endured, they will slowly transform political communities from within and make them more lasting and inclusive. The second theme is to argue that the feminist “we” is constituted internally through interactive relations between differently positioned individuals, rather than to conceive political commonality in terms of opposition or exclusion. When they write about interaction, feminist theorists focus on recognition of the other and responsiveness and pay less attention to persuasion and argumentation. The third theme is the focus on individual efforts and attitudes. Theorists who I study are particularly interested in the role played by self-transformation, and they frame feminist political being together as a question of ethos. The fourth theme is to argue that political bonds across difference have an affective dimension. Feminist theorists who rethink the feminist “we” are specifically interested in the emotions experienced and expressed by individuals when they engage with different others. The fifth theme is to insist that theorizing the feminist “we” requires setting up a dialogue between feminist theory and practice. Consequently, theorists of feminist political togetherness focus on particular feminist communities and are sensitive to contexts.

Together these five themes constitute the particular approach to political community implied in the efforts to rethink the feminist “we.” The first four themes tell as what is specific about “feminist political togetherness,” that is,
how the enabling political bonds across difference and privilege are constituted and maintained. The fifth theme reveals how feminists have theorized about the collective dimension of politics.

These themes also persist in the descriptions of the feminist “we” based on Hannah Arendt’s concepts, a significant and theoretically distinctive part of the discussion on feminist political togetherness. Arendt’s political thought is the most popular theoretical resource in the discussion, and the Arendtian projects are the most elaborate. We have seen in chapter 3 that, although many theorists influenced by Arendt use the three main vocabularies, the Arendtian elaborations on feminist political togetherness stand apart from other accounts of identity politics, coalition politics, and solidarity.

The popularity of Arendt’s thought within the discussion on feminist political togetherness in the 1990s and 2000s is surprising, given the extensive criticism of her thought, which among other things has pointed out her neglect of embodiment and her strict distinction between the public and the private. My analysis reveals that Arendt is an appealing ally for theorists of feminist political togetherness because of the tension between individual distinction and political commonality implied in her thought. Writers see this tension as a means to conceptualize feminist political commonality across difference. However, I show that Arendt’s abstract existential-phenomenological idea of individual uniqueness and the urge to reveal it to others through political action is not readily compatible with concern for recognition of difference and dealing with privilege that motivates the efforts to rethink the feminist “we.”

I argue that it is mainly due to intentional and unintentional traces of Arendt’s existential-phenomenological philosophical background that the Arendtian descriptions of the feminist “we” stand apart. I identify three such traces: a link between general human togetherness and political togetherness and interest in the “human”; a high level of abstraction by which I mean the aspiration to extract pure politics on the one hand, and to conceptualize political commonality as a background condition for specific political action on the other; and the rejection of the affective aspects of political relationships and focus on the mediating world-in-between. Sometimes these traces lead to shortcomings in the theories of the feminist “we” based on Arendt’s thought; sometimes they enable Arendtian feminists to add new, valuable ideas to the discussion of feminist political togetherness and extend its scope.

When Arendtian theorists provide their distinct perspectives on the five themes, they add their insights to the specific “feminist political togetherness” created in the discussion. Most significantly, whereas most of those who theorize about the feminist “we” by using the vocabularies of identity, coalition, and solidarity focus on individual selves and recognition of the different other, Arendtians emphasize the role of opinions and persuasion in interactions that create political bonds. Yet even though Arendt’s concepts have helped provide
elaborate theoretical discussions about combining commonality and difference, theorists influenced by her have been less successful in discussing the practical dimensions of the problem of the feminist “we.”

I suggested in chapter 4 that the persistence of certain themes in the efforts to theorize a non-identitarian feminist “we” across the vocabularies and theoretical resources used indicates that theorists have solved the problem of the feminist “we” in a similar manner. This understanding of “feminist political togetherness” concerns political bonds across difference and privilege, which have to be actively created and maintained and which enable political action in the context of diversity and inequality. Conflicts and disagreement play a pivotal role in constituting, shaping, and maintaining these relations, and they transform those involved. These relations require an ethical attitude toward those having different views, experiences, and social locations, and they have an affective element. In other words, independently of each other, theorists who rethink the feminist “we” approach the collective dimension of politics in a similar way.

“Feminist political togetherness” is my own retrospective construct that incorporates the main insights of writers who have theorized about the feminist “we” from the late 1970s until the present. No single text I analyze here fully embodies all the elements that the notion incorporates. “Feminist political togetherness” can be seen as the answer that theorists give to the theoretical challenges of theorizing about political communities in a non-foundational manner and combining political togetherness and difference. However, this is no abstract theoretical idea, but an understanding of how particular political communities can be maintained, how the relations between individuals that ground them can be sustained, and how the commitment and motivation of individuals can be strengthened and renewed. “Feminist political togetherness” also acknowledges the contingency of every collective constellation and encourages us to fight the exclusions inherent in them.

Feminist theorists are not the only ones concerned with political community and the collective dimension of politics; other political and democratic theorists are also struggling to come up with non-essential, yet enabling visions of political bonds. It has been argued that feminist theorists have been more successful in theorizing the collective subject of politics and that democratic theorists should learn from the way feminist theorists have discussed the collective subject of feminism (Ferguson 2007, 32). The results of my study provide evidence for this claim.

The specific “feminist political togetherness” shares its broad outlines – the five persistent themes – with other recent conceptualizations of political community. For example, radical democratic theorizing also emphasizes the affective dimension of politics and focuses on the role that differences and conflicts play in the constitution of political communities. The emphasis on interactive relations between individuals who constitute the political “we” and interest in
norms and guidelines by which individuals should act resonate with deliberative
democratic theorizing. However, theorists of feminist political togetherness
discuss these broad themes in a distinctive manner. Furthermore, the context of
sensitivity and the focus on particular political communities that follow from
the insistence on theory-practice dialogue and the focus on internal constitution
of political communities are specific to the debates about the feminist “we.”

The specificity of the discussion on feminist political togetherness in com-
parison to other debates about political community requires further research.
Also the potential contribution of “feminist political togetherness” for broader
debates about political community must be carefully assessed. My hypothesis
regarding this second point is that the strength of the discussion on feminist
political togetherness in comparison to other recent debates stems from the
practical and theoretical character of the problem of the feminist “we.”

The process that led feminists to rethink the feminist “we” in the late 1970s
and early 1980s was initiated by criticism arising from within feminist move-
mants and their margins. When it turned out that the ideal of global sisterhood
was not able to fulfill its promise of mobilizing all women and advance their
interests, those excluded spoke up. They pointed out that feminism had focused
on improving the lives of only a few privileged women and questioned its status
as an egalitarian and democratic political movement and its ability to transform
society. This internal criticism forced scholars and activists to find alternative
ways to act together politically and conceptualize the collective dimension of
feminist politics anew with various theoretical resources. The practical aspects
of the problem of the feminist “we” have led feminist writers to discuss earlier
than other political theorists what it means to construct and maintain non-
esential political communities. Because the efforts to theorize the feminist “we”
and practice more inclusive politics have been intertwined from the start, the
visions of the feminist “we” are more than abstract theoretical projects at the
level of political ontology; they have an ethical dimension related to concrete
political bonds across difference and privilege.

Although political and democratic theorists interested in political commu-
nity may indeed have something to learn from the discussion on feminist politi-
cal togetherness, they rarely use the views of feminist scholars and activists who
discuss the feminist “we” as a resource for their reflections. One reason for this
may be that rare of the feminists who discuss the feminist “we” attempt to make
a contribution to the debates about abstract political and democratic commu-
nity. Their aim is to rethink the collective dimension of feminist politics in
order to envision more effective feminist transformative politics and to solve the
theoretical challenge of the feminist “we,” and many of them discuss relations
between women and refer to particular feminist communities.

The explicit focus on relationships between women should not lead us to re-
ject the usefulness of visions of the feminist “we” for broader debates about
political community. Also those theorists who write about political relations between women counter the view of feminist politics based on an essential women’s identity. The political bonds they envision are not based on a shared identity, the history of oppression, or biological womanhood. Although writing about “women” when theorizing about the feminist “we” reproduces the idea that feminism is about and for women, the political bonds that feminist theorists of political togetherness describe are not related to womanhood. Their idea of sustained but open political bonds across difference and privilege is therefore extendable to other kinds of political communities.

The shift from global sisterhood based on a naturalized women’s identity to “feminist political togetherness,” which I have identified in the feminist discussions of the last three decades, provides a basis for an inspiring and productive conceptualization of the collective dimension of politics. Through its theoretical, practical, and ethical motivations, “feminist political togetherness” opens pathways for thinking and practicing transformative politics at a moment when public discourses about feminism focus on empowerment of individual women and cast collective and solidarity feminism as a remnant of the past. It also provides a starting point for further discussion on sustained political bonds in diverse and unequal societies.

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60 Jodi Dean, who explicitly theorizes about political relations between women, still argues that her notion of “reflective solidarity” as an alternative approach to political associating within complex and plural societies in general is an exception (Dean 1996, 103, 142).
Literature


Literature


Lyshaug, Brenda. 2006. “Solidarity without sisterhood? Feminism and the ethics of coalition building.” *Politics & Gender* 2, no. 1:77-100.


