Chapter 3

Challenges to Solidarity

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Whatever else it is, solidarity is an ideal. It describes something that has value, something toward which we should aspire. Understood provisionally as a form of standing together against adversity, it embodies an ideal of *unity* and *integrity*. It is opposed to division, rancor, strife, and discord. Those who exhibit solidarity with others exhibit a virtue of character and conduct. To act solidaristically is to act well. Flourishing lives that are lived in solidarity with others are all the more flourishing for it.

We will need to say more about what solidarity is and why it is supposed to have value and function as an ideal. We will come to that. But first we need to state a series of challenges, because not everyone agrees that solidarity is a good, or a virtue, or an ideal. Many believe that solidarity is not an appropriate aspiration for a modern, diverse, and individualistic people; its demands for unity stifle liberty and encourage exclusion. Others believe that it is a wishy-washy, vague term whose meaninglessness is a honey trap for demagogues and bad politics. Others still worry that, when given a more precise character, it becomes redundant, no different from similar ideas, such as altruism, empathy, identification, fellow-feeling, or justice. In this chapter,

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I will address these challenges; I will address, that is, the challenge that solidarity is (i) *illiberal*, (ii) *exclusionary*, (iii) *empty*, or (iv) *redundant*.

WHAT IS SOLIDARITY, AND WHY IS IT VALUABLE?

To address these challenges, we first need to specify an account of solidarity that can serve as a counterpoint. In other work, I have defended an account of solidarity that has the following form.[1] I argue that solidarity is a form of acting together to overcome significant adversity grounded in identification. We act solidaristically when, that is, (a) we identify with one another on the basis of a shared way of life, cause, set of experiences, condition, or role; (b) we are, as a result, committed to doing our part in overcoming significant adversity and to setting aside, in a range of cases, narrow self-interest in its pursuit; (c) we have a settled, reliable disposition to come to others' aid in support of our goal, and are disposed not to bypass one another's wills in that pursuit; and (d) we trust one another with respect to (b) and (c) (where trust is reliance plus a normative expectation that others will indeed be committed and come to our aid when necessary). On this reading, solidarity does not name an emotion, such as fellow-feeling, and it cannot be reduced to mere support for a noble cause (e.g., donating money to Oxfam). It is also omni- rather unilateral: acts of charity, altruism, or humanitarian aid do not, as such, count as instances of solidarity. Solidarity, furthermore, cannot be merely passive: the dispositions and commitments mentioned above must be dispositions and commitments displayed

1. Sangiovanni 2023.

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in a form of irreducibly joint action. We cannot *be* in solidarity unless we *act* in solidarity.

In defense of this view, I argue that this account can provide an explanatory and normative structure to the five main traditions of thought that have shaped solidarity (as a practice), namely socialism, solidarism, nationalism, Christianity (especially Catholicism), and contemporary social movements.[2] Each one grounds solidarity among workers, citizens, nationals, human beings, and disadvantaged groups (women, African-Americans, disabled, and so on), in a distinctive notion of identification, and advocates a distinctive kind of collective action designed to overcome significant adversity. Within socialism, solidarity among workers, for example, is grounded in identification based on a shared condition as exploited, and is realized through collective action designed to overthrow capitalism. Within Christianity, solidarity among human beings is grounded in identification with one another on the basis of a recognition of our interdependent vulnerability, and is realized through forms of organization and cooperative action (e.g., family, community, country, church) designed to alleviate the suffering that interdependence brings in its train. A similar pattern unites all the other cases.

As I have already mentioned, solidarity is a *value-laden* practice. While it is possible to speak of solidarity among, say, right-wing nationalists (when employing the concept for descriptive purposes), solidarity is usually seen to be both instrumentally and non-instrumentally valuable. In the mouths of advocates, it is a rallying cry describing an ideal of human cooperation. This value-laden background provides another important perspective for evaluating different accounts of solidarity. For a particular account of solidarity to be successful, it must, that is, be able to capture the distinctive values associated with it. Any successful theory of solidarity must then

2. Sangiovanni 2023, Section 2.

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characterize those values, and explain how the account of the concept proposed captures those values.

It is evident that solidarity, where it exists, can have *instrumental* value. When solidarity is present, we are able to achieve things together that we wouldn't have otherwise been able to achieve. But what non-instrumental values, if any, does solidarity realize? I argue that this value has three components, each of which captures the sense in which solidarity realizes a kind of *social unity* among actors.[3] (i) Solidarity instantiates the non-instrumental value of, inter alia, *mutual commitment*, where what is valued is not just my standing by you, or your standing by me, but the conjunction of the two. The value of this kind of mutual commitment is evident in thinking through cases in which we prefer struggling together against adversity than surrendering, even if we know we will be overwhelmed. (ii) Solidarity instantiates a form of non-instrumentally valuable cooperation in which we each participate in the complementary excellences of all, and take pleasure in the collective realization of ends that none of us could achieve alone. (iii) When we act in solidarity, we also rightly take pleasure in the fact that we can see our collective agency reflected in our joint, coordinated, and beneficial activity; we can say, for example, not only that justice was done, but that *we* did it. Each of these forms of non-instrumental value are reflected in the five main traditions I mentioned above. These values are, however, *conditional* on the goodness of the ends promoted by solidaristic action: while right-wing nationalists might exhibit solidarity, because the ends promoted through their solidarity are wicked, the solidarity ceases to have value.

3. Sangiovanni 2023, Section 4. For a different account of solidarity as non-instrumentally valuable, see Kolers 2016, ch. 6.

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With this brief summary, we are in a better position to assess our main question: Can an account of solidarity that has the form outlined in this section answer all four challenges?

DOES SOLIDARITY UNDERMINE LIBERTY?

Does solidarity muffle liberty? In her celebrated essay, the "Liberalism of Fear," Judith Shklar claims it does. Echoing Isaiah Berlin, she writes:

> We must therefore be suspicious of ideologies of solidarity, precisely because they are so attractive to those who find liberalism emotionally unsatisfying, and who have gone on in our century to create oppressive and cruel regimes of unparalleled horror. The assumption that these offer something wholesome to the atomized citizen may or may not be true, but the political consequences are not, on the historical record, open to much doubt. To seek emotional and personal development in the bosom of a community or in romantic self-expression is a choice open to citizens in liberal societies. Both, however, are apolitical impulses and wholly self-oriented, which at best distract us from the main task of politics when they are presented as political doctrines, and at worst can, under unfortunate circumstances, seriously damage liberal practices. For although both appear only to be redrawing the boundaries between the personal and the public, which is a perfectly normal political practice, it cannot be said that either one has a serious sense of the implications of the proposed shifts in either direction.[4]

4. Shklar 1989, p. 36.

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There is, one might think, an element of truth in what Shklar says here. I, too, have emphasized that an ethic of solidarity becomes important for us now and around here when and because we sense the need for collective resistance and unity of purpose in the face of adversity. I have also emphasized the non-instrumental (albeit conditional) value in setting aside self-interest in a horizontal identification with others ('community') on behalf of a shared goal, where part of what is valued is our seeing, together, our collective agency reflected in the ends we pursue ('self-expression').

The element of identification may seem particularly problematic. Identification requires, among other things, coming to see others as 'like oneself,' and taking that similarity as a basis for joint concern, empathy, and normative orientation. So, for example, when I identify with you *as a worker*, I see our common role as providing an important orientation in my life. It matters to me what 'being a worker' means, what struggles we face, what happens to us as workers. My well-being is tied up with you as a worker: when we, as workers, do well, I do well. I also feel concern for you as a worker, and am moved to come to your aid when you are under attack. But identification of this kind, especially when it underpins solidarity, and hence joint action, also brings with it a demand for *loyalty*—for setting aside self-interest when this is required by the group, setting aside smaller differences for the success of our plans, setting aside individual concerns for the well-being of all. In this sense, an ethic of solidarity demands that one set aside the personal for the political (thus 'redrawing the boundaries' between them).

The worry is that, in politics, this demand for similarity, commitment, and loyalty leads to tyranny. Liberals like Shklar prize the freedom that comes from a vigilant distrust of politics. Politics should aim to provide good fences, to secure personal rights and personal space against incursion. It should not aim to forge a common purpose or identity, or a devotion to a whole in which each can feel themselves

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realized. Hannah Arendt famously captures this diagnosis. Total terror, she writes in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*,

> substitutes for the boundaries and channels of communication between individual men a band of iron that holds them so tightly together that it is as though their plurality had disappeared into *One Man* of gigantic dimensions. To abolish the fences of laws between men—as tyranny does—means to take away man's liberties and destroy freedom as a living political reality; for the space between men as it is hedged in by laws, is the living space of freedom.[5]

Solidarity, Shklar fears, is like the 'band of iron,' dissolving plurality and hence stifling individual liberty.

George Kateb finds solidarity troubling for similar reasons. He warns us against it, and celebrates the democratic individuality championed by Thoreau, Whitman, and Emerson in its stead. In the same volume that contains Shklar's essay, Kateb writes:

> The weakening of traditional enclosure in status, group, class, locality, ethnicity, race—the whole suffocating network of ascribed artificial, or biological but culturally exaggerated, identity opens life up, at least a bit. The culture of individual rights has lightness of being; free being is light. . . . Nothing is worse than the horrors that do or would come from the unqualified prestige of participation in sovereign politics, the society-wide bond of community, the

5. Arendt 1973, 465–466. Arendt herself, it should be noted, was not a critic of solidarity, and not a liberal either. She is better classified as a republican, and views the communicative power generated by collective action as necessary for freedom. See Arendt 1990 [1963], 84. I mention her in connection with Shklar because Shklar believes that the same impulse underlies both the yearning for solidarity and the yearning for individual transcendence that totalitarianism seeks to satisfy.

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> solidarity of the armed group, and the project of socialized self-realization. They are horrors in themselves and are auxiliaries to the further horrors of statism. The remedies for the troubles must be found, at least in any democratic setting, within rights-based individualism and the aspiration to democratic individuality.[6]

'Enclosures' of status, group, class, locality, ethnicity, and race are, Kateb claims, suffocating. And so solidarities based on them, by extension, must also be suffocating: they rest and rely on seeing one another—for the sake of our common action—as bound together not primarily as individuals but as members of a group, whether of, say, workers, women, citizens, immigrants, or African-Americans. The democratic individualist can allow for coordinated action and resistance (here Kateb cites Thoreau on civil disobedience), but it should be temporary, shifting, improvised, and based on independent affirmation rather than identification.

As criticisms of solidarity, I find these challenges unconvincing for two reasons. First, they treat a commitment to solidarity as incompatible with a commitment to liberalism. To be sure, solidarities organized to promote illiberal ends by illiberal means (one might think here of xenophobic nationalisms or alt-right racists) are, well, illiberal by definition. But their disregard for individual rights or freedom or equality is not entailed or required (although it may be facilitated) by their solidarity. Solidarity makes, we might say, their common actions all the worse, but this is compatible with all that I have said so far: recall that the non-instrumental value of solidarity is only realized when the ends in view and the means taken to those ends are not wicked. The presence of solidarity amplifies the goodness of the ends and means when they are good, but, at the same time, amplifies the badness of the ends and means whey they are bad.

6. Kateb 1989, 188, 204.

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Indeed, liberalism, I want to argue, *requires* solidarity rather than being at odds with it. If, as Shklar and Kateb repeatedly emphasize, liberalism demands vigilance, hatred of injustice, and a readiness to resist power when necessary, then liberalism requires solidarity. What Shklar and Kateb overlook is that resistance is most effective when it is conducted by *groups* whose grievances are shared, and known to be shared. The grievances—when they are shared and known to be shared—provide a spring for joint action, and a powerful source of identification. Such identification is necessary to overcome fear, and to lead people to look beyond their immediate self-interest to the larger task at hand. Identification also promotes pro-social and altruistic behavior among those engaged in the joint task: when you identify with others in the cause, you are more likely to come to their aid when necessary.[7] Furthermore, individual resistance is rarely, if ever, successful. Isolated acts of resistance aren't either. From this point of view, it is no surprise that Kateb cites Thoreau on civil disobedience. Thoreau's speech is a paean to the individual standing alone, fortified by his conscience, against an unjust state. The speech, although it invites its listeners to act as he did (i.e., to cease paying general taxes), is not a call to rise up *together* against the state. It is not a call to organized rebellion, coordinated resistance, or collective protest.[8] Its central moral message is: do not make yourself a tool of injustice by blindly supporting an unjust state.

This brings me to the second reason why these challenges strike me as unconvincing. In both Shklar and Kateb, the target is what we

7. See Bowles and Gintis 2011, 35–38 and ch. 8. See also Tajfel et al. 1971. Yamagishi et al. 1999 argues that ingroup favoritism is explained by expectations of generalized reciprocity within groups derived from shared norms. See also note 7, and accompanying text, below.

8. It is important to note that Thoreau did not deny that collective resistance was often necessary. Indeed, in his defense of John Brown, he lauded the raid at Harpers Ferry. But in such cases, he did so at a distance—as someone whose conscience had been moved by the actions of others.

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might call *state-level* solidarity. Though they do not name it, their target is nationalism or patriotism—solidarity as invoked by those who have political power and who aim to rally the people against an enemy (whether internal or external), or solidarity as it is invoked by those who believe that active, partisan political participation is essential for a flourishing life. The first response is simply to point to the fact, as I have above, that solidarity can be at the heart of social movements and bottom-up political action. It need not be solely focused on or through the state. The second response is that even state-level solidarity need not be so pernicious. In particular, state-level solidarity, or civic solidarity as I will call it, need not enforce blind conformity, disrespect difference or disagreement, or raze plurality.

The key is in identifying a form of solidarity among a people that is neither a form of nationalism nor constitutional patriotism. Using the account of solidarity I reviewed in the first section of this chapter, I will give a sketch of such an account here. It is often said that welfare state institutions, for example, are products of solidarity, or are governed by a principle of solidarity, but it is just as often unclear what is meant.[9] If solidarity is understood as simply a willingness to share resources, or a commitment to social justice, then it is too unspecific. There are many instances of sharing resources that do not count as instances of solidarity, and identifying solidarity with social justice dissipates the theoretical and practical interest of solidarity as a value *distinct from* social justice. The distinctive nature of civic solidarity, however, can be preserved if we understand it as grounded in the identification of citizens with one another. But on what basis? The nationalist will say that the identification that binds citizens together is an identification based on a shared way of life. But there is another way

9. I draw here on Sangiovanni 2023, Section 3. On welfare state solidarity and its relation to justice, see also Bayertz 1999, 21–26.

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that I want to defend here, that does not ground civic solidarity in identification rooted in *sharing a culture* but in *sharing authorship of a set of institutions*. The moral pressure to act in solidarity will depend on the presence of identification, but will be ultimately derived from demands of fairness.[10] On this view, solidarity *supports* demands of justice by grounding such demands in the nature of civic identification, rather than in general, natural duties to support just institutions. (I return to the relationship between justice and solidarity below.)

Citizens who identify with their role as citizens conceive of their joint participation in reproducing, reforming, and authoring common institutions as providing normative orientation. The argument is an analogue of Léon Bourgeois's case for solidarity as interdependence.[11] Where Bourgeois emphasizes our myriad contributions, through work, to the joint social product, this account emphasizes a more fundamental contribution to the basic structure that makes our contribution through work to the joint social product possible in the first place. We recognize, as citizens, that it is not only through our state's official political acts—its legislative, executive, and adjudicative output—but also through our support of informal conventions and norms that we collectively author the basic institutions that both constrain and enable individuals' pursuit of the good life. When citizens identify with one another *as citizens* in this sense, they recognize that their ability to generate a marginal product of labor, or to invest in productive resources, and thereby to gain, depends on the contributions of millions of others in a complex division of labor

10. See also Yamagishi et al. 1999, who argue that ingroup favoritism is explained by expectations of generalized reciprocity within groups derived from shared norms. If no generalized reciprocity is expected within the group, ingroup favoritism, Yamagishi shows, disappears.
11. Bourgeois 1902 [1896]. I discuss Bourgeois at greater length in Sangiovanni 2023, Section 2.

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that is backed by a set of basic social and political institutions.[12] They therefore recognize that their public, civic, economic, cultural, and political activity has a cumulative effect on the prosperity of the state as a whole, and are disposed to seek an understanding of how their coordinated actions impact on the prospects of other citizens. When things go well, their collective achievements as authors contribute to their own sense of well-being; when things go poorly, they perceive their own lives as less flourishing as a result.

While there is, of course, profound disagreement about the character and requirements of the values and ideals that underlie common institutions, citizens who identify share a readiness to define them through deliberation (and sometimes more open conflict); this process of reflection, deliberation, and conflict reflects a disposition to see common institutions as their own, as reflecting their collective deliberation and disagreement. Indeed, it is more often than not the characteristic lines and modes of *dis*agreement—rather than areas of consensus—that form the focus of identification among citizens. This is a direct result of the fact that identification is not, on this understanding, grounded in a shared culture or in a shared set of values, but in the exercise of shared agency as a people.[13] Citizens recognize that their peers come from multiple, sometimes only thinly overlapping cultural backgrounds.[14] Their attachment to common institutions is founded on what they *do* together, which defines, in part, who they *are*. (Note that nationalists have it the other way around: who we *are* should define what we *do* together.)

Solidarity becomes a demand of citizenship, then, when citizens recognize that sustaining and reproducing common social and

12. I make this argument in the context of the global justice debates at greater length in Sangiovanni 2007.
13. Cf. Jodi Dean's conception of reflective solidarity Dean 1995, 123.
14. See also Miller 2017, 68.

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political institutions require commitment to overcoming, together, the adversity created by imperfect markets; legacies of racism, sexism, colonialism, and other forms of arbitrary exclusion and oppression; poverty and (especially work-related) illness; vulnerability to foreign interference, disruption, and economic dependence; pandemics; and so on. Solidarity also requires mutual trust, which, in this context, implies a tolerance for difference and a recognition that sustaining a common life requires respect for (sometimes foundational) disagreement, and a willingness to meet others halfway.[15] Solidarity, finally, demands a disposition to come to each other's aid in overcoming adversity, which, in this case, can be interpreted as a willingness to divide the joint social product fairly and in a way that recognizes the contributions of each to the functioning of the whole.[16] There are two sources of rational pressure at work here. First, there is prudential pressure from our identification with the project; to fail to act in solidarity with others with whom we identify is then a failure of integrity. But there is also moral pressure from a sense of fairness: should citizens who identify fail to act in solidarity with others—by failing, say, to support policies that divide the social product fairly, or not be disposed to engage others with tolerance and respect, or not to do their part in maintaining, reproducing, and reforming common institutions that are just or nearly just—they would not only be contributing to injustice but also free-riding on the efforts of others to maintain the public good.

One might think my rendering of civic solidarity bears some similarity to constitutional patriotism.[17] There is a crucial difference. According to the constitutional patriot, what binds individual citizens into a people is a shared commitment to constitutional

15. On meeting others halfway, see the Introduction to Banting and Kymlicka 2017.
16. Bourgeois 1902. For more discussion, see Kohn 2018.
17. See, e.g., Habermas 2001; Ingram 1996; Müller 2007.

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principles and values, such as justice and liberty—where, importantly, this commitment takes particular historical forms in different polities according to their specific histories and political cultures. By contrast, on my account, civic solidarity is based *not* on a shared affirmation of principles and values, but on the basis of a horizontal identification with other citizens (and, indeed, residents) for the role they play in authoring and reproducing common institutions. Often such shared authorship will involve a shared commitment to values and principles but it need not. As I mentioned previously, it is possible for there to be deep disagreement about which such principles and values ought to govern our cooperation; as long as there is a shared intention to continue political and social life together, and there continues to be horizontal role-based identification, commitment to overcoming significant adversity, dispositions to share one another's fate, and trust, then there is enough for civic solidarity.[18] There is, therefore, no reason to believe that solidarity, even state-level solidarity, and liberalism need to be at cross-purposes.

IS SOLIDARITY EXCLUSIONARY?

Solidarity is grounded in identification, where identification, in turn, can be grounded in a shared cause, role, condition, set of experiences, or way of life. And so solidarity, it seems, must be exclusionary: those

18. Cf. Levy 2005, 107: "[The inhabitants of a political community] are not what nationalists falsely claim co-nationals to be: members of some pre- or extra-political social whole that can make its will felt through politics. . . . They are not the particular subset of humanity united by allegiance to some particular political ideal, at any level of abstraction; even if most people had sufficient political knowledge and sufficiently coherent views to qualify as holding an ideal, politics contain a perennial diversity of such ideals. . . . There is no polity made up entirely of liberals or social democrats or civic republicans, and each of those is found in more than one polity." The account of civic identification I defend in the text, which relies only on our role as collective authors, does not fall prey to this criticism.

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who do not share the grounds of identification with us cannot be in solidarity with us. Solidarity is, furthermore, often (though not necessarily) oppositional:[19] when we seek to overcome together some significant adversity, that adversity—more often than not—will be created and maintained by other individuals acting against us. When we struggle in solidarity, we struggle, therefore, against *them*. We might struggle, for example, against slave-owners, members of a government, racists, or the occupiers. What we want to explore here is whether and when solidarity is *objectionably* exclusionary (from here on I will drop 'objectionably').[20] It seems self-evident that solidarity need not *always* and *necessarily* be exclusionary (we could, after all, stand in solidarity together as the human race battling climate change). But it also seems evident that it can often be exclusionary precisely in virtue of its demand for trust, mutual commitment, and unity of purpose. The best way to proceed is not by trying to enumerate all the particular instances when and where solidarity is exclusionary. Rather, I will use an example to work through how the problem of exclusion emerges, and how it can be addressed, within particular solidaristic groups.[21] My example will be the idea of *sisterhood*. Although I do not do so here, it should be clear by the end of the discussion how the argument can be extended to other contexts, too.

It seems uncontroversial today to assert that, given diversity among women, the basis for sisterhood should *not* be shared experiences of womanhood. This has, by now, become a staple of the feminist literature: the experiences of African-Americans, working-class, Egyptian, Irish, lesbian, trans-women (including the intersections among any of these categories) will be vastly different—so different

19. On the oppositional character of solidarity, see Sally Scholz 2010.

20. On problems of exclusion and inclusion within solidarity movements, see also Sally Scholz, Chapter 7 in this volume; Shelby forthcoming.

21. I draw here on Sangiovanni 2023, Section 1.

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that it would be exclusionary and divisive to base identification and, in turn, a politics of solidarity on a canonical list of such experiences. Trying to come up with such a list will, more often than not, turn out not to represent something universal about women but something altogether more partial, namely the perspective of those privileged few who have the power and access to forge and disseminate the list as 'canonical' in the first place.[22] In *Ain't I a Woman?*, bell hooks calls out Adrienne Rich, who writes:

> An analysis that places the guilt for active domination, physical and institutional violence, and the justifications embedded in myth and language, on white women not only compounds false consciousness; it allows us all to deny or neglect the charged connection among black and white women from the historical conditions of slavery on, and it impedes any real discussion of women's instrumentality in a system which oppresses all women and in which hatred of women is also embedded in myth, folklore, and language.[23]

The problem is that, in attempting to create and invite solidarity among women *as such*, white feminists like Rich either didn't realize, or self-consciously ignored, how they themselves participated in the system of oppression they were criticizing. hooks mentions, for example, Betty Friedan's seminal *The Feminine Mystique*, which identified the central problem for feminists as the exclusion of women from the world of (male) work. hooks and other black feminists were quick to point out that black women were always expected to work, and work, often, for white women. hooks also shows how,

22. For seminal contributions on this point, see, among others, Lorde 2009, 219–220; King 1995; Collins 2002 [1990]; Spelman 1988; Crenshaw 1990.
23. Adrienne Rich cited in hooks 2015 [1981], 168.

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throughout the history of the women's movement, black women's particular concerns were marginalized and silenced; they were welcomed only insofar as they were willing to fight for, what were, in the end, white women's concerns.

For hooks (as for many other feminists), the response is to acknowledge (rather than repress) the radical diversity among women (including the ways in which race, class, sexuality, nationality, and gender intersect[24]), to confront racism and other exclusions within the women's movement head-on, and to build solidarity on commitment to a *cause* rather than on a *shared set of experiences*.[25] She writes:

> We understood that political solidarity between females expressed in sisterhood goes beyond positive recognition of the experiences of women and even shared sympathy for common suffering. Feminist sisterhood is rooted in shared commitment to struggle against patriarchal injustice, no matter the form that injustice takes.[26]

24. For a useful overview of recent debates on intersectionality, see Carastathis 2014.

25. See, e.g., "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" in Lorde 1984, 111–112 and "Difference and Survival" in Lorde 2009, 201.

26. hooks 2015, 15. Cf. de Beauvoir 2012, 18, who writes, "The proletarians have accomplished the revolution in Russia, the Negroes in Haiti, the Indo-Chinese are battling for it in Indo-China; but the women's effort has never been anything more than a symbolic agitation. They have gained only what men have been willing to grant; they have taken nothing, they have only received. The reason for this is that women lack concrete means for organizing themselves into a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and they have no such solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat. They are not even promiscuously herded together in the way that creates community feeling among the American Negroes, the ghetto Jews, the workers of Saint-Denis, or the factory hands of Renault. They live dispersed among the males, attached through residence, housework, economic condition, and social standing to certain men—fathers or husbands—more firmly than they are to other women."

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Ending patriarchal injustice, on this picture, requires an acknowledgment that such injustice will take different forms in different circumstances, and that sisterhood requires coming to terms with the way that race, class, nationality, and so on, can divide and exclude women among themselves.

This way of framing the question raises a puzzle. If the best way to understand sisterhood is to see it grounded in commitment to a *cause* or *coalition* against injustice, then what distinguishes, if anything, solidarity among *feminists* and solidarity among *women*? After all, men can (and should be) feminists. Men can (and should) recognize the marks of patriarchal injustice and fight against it. Emphasizing a common commitment to fighting patriarchal injustice gives rise to a solidarity grounded in identification based on a *cause*. But, once any kind of common experience (or common essence) is rejected as uniting women, what role is there for a politics of solidarity grounded in identification among *women*? What kind of identification, if any, ought to ground *sisterhood* among women *as* women?

Referring to critiques of the category *woman* as united by a set of shared experiences (of the same kind I mentioned above), Iris Marion Young writes:

> I find the exclusively critical orientation of such arguments rather paralyzing. Do these arguments imply that it makes no sense and is morally wrong to talk about women as a group or, in fact, to talk about social groups at all? It is not clear that these writers claim this. If not, then what does it mean to use the term *woman*? More importantly, in the light of these critiques, what sort of positive claims can feminists make about the way social life is and ought to be? I find questions like these unaddressed by these critiques of feminist essentialism.[27]

27. Young 1994, 717. See also Zack 2005, 7, and Alcoff 2005, 143: "What can we demand in the name of women if 'women' do not exist and demands in their name simply reinforce the

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I mention Young at this point because I find her discussion of what might unite the type *woman* illuminating as a possible basis for identification and solidarity among women as women—a basis that, in turn, promises to be less vulnerable to the diversity and exclusion critiques briefly alluded to before.

According to Young, women as a group form what she calls a *series*. A series is united neither by a set of intrinsic properties possessed by all members of a group, nor by a shared recognition of constituting a group, nor by a shared set of goals or experiences; it is united, rather, by a relation between persons and a set of socially conditioned material objects around which they orient their activity. The group of bus riders—who orient their activity around objects like bus stops, buses, and so on, and the norms, expectations, and patterns of behavior surrounding them—constitute a series. Similarly, radio listeners—who orient their activity around the radio and the norms, expectations, and patterns of behavior enabling and conditioning radio listening—are a series. And so are women. The primary material object around which women are expected to orient their activity is the sexed body. This is not the body understood as possessing a vagina, clitoris, breasts, and so on. Rather, it is the body as conditioned by social rules and expectations.[28] Young mentions menstruation, lactation, pregnancy, and childbirth as examples. Each of these activities is not just a brute biological fact but is shaped by social practices that condition possible meanings and opportunities. The norms, expectations, and patterns of behavior surrounding

myth that they do? How can we speak out against sexism as detrimental to the interests of women if the category is a fiction? How can we demand legal abortions, adequate child care, or wages based on comparable worth without invoking the concept of 'women'?"

28. One might wonder here whether another exclusion is in the wings: what about trans-women? But even in this case, one might argue, in defense of Young, that trans-women as women are also expected to comply with the social rules and expectations that have built up around the sexed female body. This threatens further forms of exclusion and subordination if they cannot meet those expectations.

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the body, in turn, give rise to a range of further socially conditioned physical objects (such as clothes, cosmetics, tools, spaces, and so on), and hence further social practices. Together these reinforce two overarching social structures that position women as subordinate to men: heterosexuality (who desires and who is desired, who possesses and is possessed) and the sexual division of labor (who does what, where, and how).

On this picture, women are those individuals marked out by the system of objects and social practices as occupying a particular position vis-à-vis men. The category *woman* is defined, that is, by the relation of individuals to gendered social structures rather than by any intrinsic properties they share. Young is keen to emphasize that a particular individual's *response* to how the structure positions her/him will be as variable as you like. Some will resist and challenge the positioning and expectations, others may internalize them, others still will waver and become alienated. And, even more importantly for our purposes, some individuals' response to the structure will be further conditioned by other aspects of their circumstances, including race, class, nationality, sexuality, and so on. There is no expectation, then, that women's (or men's) particular experience of the structure will be the same. What *is* the same is *subjection* to the structure, which is reproduced through myriad daily interactions, characteristic scenarios, institutionalized forms of behavior, expectation, and habit, and so on.[29]

The analysis of women as a series also provides a possible basis for identification among women grounded in a *condition* shared by women: subjection to a subordinating gendered social structure. This does not imply, as we have seen, that women who identify in this way with one another have had the same *experience* of such subjection. Here we can draw contrast to identification among cancer survivors,

29. Cf. Haslanger 2012, 239.

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which *is* based (we are imagining) on sharing a set of experiences. Identifying with others as a cancer survivor is identification that presupposes that others with whom one identifies have had cancer. The common experience is what motivates mutual sympathy, understanding, and an attempt to make sense together of that experience. But, as we have seen, making particular experiences the basis of identification among women is unnecessarily exclusionary given the wide diversity of ways in which women experience their subjection to a gendered social structure. Identification based on *condition* promises to avoid these problems. Subjection to an oppressive social structure is like subjection to a system of law: two different individuals can be subject to the law—can be addressed by the system—without experiencing the weight of the law in the same way.[30]

Notice that I shifted above from speaking of the concept *woman* (in my elaboration of Young's account) to the possibility of identification among women as women. The two ideas can come apart. One may, indeed, come to believe—as many feminists do—that there is *no* unified concept *woman*, or that the concept is unified, but not by the idea of oppressive subjection to a gendered structure. It would still be possible, on the picture I have drawn, to identify with other women who *are* oppressed by the gendered system on the basis of their shared condition.[31] There is, that is, no necessary congruence between the concept *woman* and the basis for identification among women. To illustrate: suppose you believe it is *possible* for there to be *non-oppressed* women—women who are not subordinated vis-à-vis

30. Cf. Haslanger 2012, 239: "So women have in common that their (assumed) sex has socially disadvantaged them; but this is compatible with the kinds of cultural variation that feminist inquiry has revealed, for the substantive content of women's position and the ways of justifying it can vary enormously. Admittedly, the account accommodates such variation by being very abstract; nonetheless, it provides a schematic account that highlights the interdependence between the material forces that subordinate women, *and* the ideological frameworks that sustain them." See also Alcoff 2005, 148.

31. On this point, see Mikkola 2007, 375–380.

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men.[32] It is, on this view, not a necessary part of being a woman that one is oppressed. It might nonetheless be true that, in *our* world, all women are (contingently) oppressed, and come to identify with each other on that basis.[33]

An intersectionality theorist may object that it is a mistake to say that there is a *single* gendered social structure. Each person, depending on their circumstances, is addressed by the gendered social structure in a fundamentally different way—so different that there is no sense in speaking of it as a single system. A black woman's body, for example, will be gendered and positioned vis-à-vis men in different ways than a white woman's body, the body of a working-class woman in a different way than an upper-class woman, and so on. The objector concludes that it would be just as arbitrary and inevitably exclusionary to identify with other women, who are positioned so differently, on the basis of a common *condition* as it would be to identify on the basis of a common *set of experiences*.[34]

This is, I believe, a difficult objection to meet successfully. In a Youngian spirit, one might respond to the objection in the following way: Just as it would be mistaken to say that an *employed* and an *unemployed* immigrant within a single society are subject to entirely different systems of law, it is a mistake to say that *white* and *black* women are subject to entirely different gendered structures. Within a single society and system of law, employment law and immigration law are *interlocking* and *overlapping*.[35] To be sure, there is no way to understand how unemployment affects immigrant rights without understanding how immigration and welfare law *interact*. However, although the employed and the unemployed immigrants' legal rights will differ in

32. Cf. Stone 2007, 160–163, on Haslanger. And see also Stoljar 1995, 281.
33. I thank Jude Browne for helpful discussion.
34. Crenshaw 1990, 1299; Spelman 1988, 167. See also Stone 2004.
35. Cf. the Combahee River Collective on the interlocking character of oppression (Collective 1983).

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basic ways (including their rights to stay, their right, in some cases, to access welfare, and so on), there are other ways in which they are addressed in the *same* way by immigration law (including their rights to access emergency care, their rights to appeal immigration decisions, and so on). Drawing the analogy, we can say that the same is true of black and white women in, say, the United States. While it is certainly true that black women's bodies are positioned by the gendered social structure in different ways than white women's bodies, there are many dimensions of the gendered social structure that address black and white women in the same way. The objects, norms, expectations, and practices of the gendered social structure address black and white women, across many dimensions, *in common* (which is not to say that their *experience* of that subjection will be the same). That common subjection, the response concludes, can be a basis of identification among women *as* women, just as the common subjection to immigration law of an employed and unemployed immigrant can be the basis of their resistance to that law *as* immigrants.

I am not sure what to make of this kind of response, since it will certainly meet with the following counter: the response begs the question about whether there really is only *one* gendered system of subjection with different manifestations (analogous to a complex system of law with different parts), or rather many more such systems (analogous to different systems of law each with its own internally complex structure). Indeed, it is difficult to come up with examples that survive the objection: norms and practices regarding beauty, the sexual division of labor, the way heterosexuality is enforced, and so on, all *do* seem to address black and white women differently (and upper- and lower-class women, and women of different religious backgrounds). One cannot, I believe, adjudicate between the two views by employing solely empirical criteria. Adjudicating requires asking: What is the *point*—politically, socially, and ethically—of insisting on one or the other reading? If one believes that the struggle for woman's

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liberation needs more solidarity among women *as* women, then one might be attracted to the Youngian view.[36] On this view, solidarity among women is based on identification grounded in a *condition*. If, on the other hand, one believes that, historically, the call for sisterhood has been exclusionary, partial, blinkered, and divisive, and that it is more important to focus on fighting injustice than to seek an elusive common ground, then one will more likely opt for the intersectional-coalitional view. On this view, there is also possibility for solidarity, but it must be solidarity grounded in a *cause* rather than in a condition or set of experiences. For our purposes, we need not come to a conclusive judgment; it is enough if we see how a politics of solidarity founded on identification, but that is alive to the problem of exclusion, can proceed without abandoning solidarity as an ideal worth fighting for.

IS SOLIDARITY EMPTY OR REDUNDANT?

I will address the challenges from *emptiness* and *redundancy* together. With respect to the former, the best defense is offense: solidarity is not an empty concept if we can show both that it plays an important role in real-world politics across time, and that it is determinate enough to give shape and structure to debate today. The best response, that is, is simply to defend an account of solidarity (as I have outlined above), and see if it can do some work in important political and social disputes in which the term figures.[37]

And, once we have a determinate account in hand, we can then address the redundancy critique. I will give a quick summary, via

36. Cf. Schor 1994; Riley 1988.

37. For more on the history of solidarity (and its significance), see Blais 2007 and ch. 2 in Sangiovanni 2023.

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a series of contrasts, of the ways in which the account of solidarity I have singled out is not redundant. First, we can draw up a list of the most relevant, adjacent concepts: fellow-feeling, altruism, empathy, community, and justice.

Solidarity is not merely fellow-feeling (and not, by extension, merely an emotion). While it is no doubt true that fellow-feeling or camaraderie will often accompany solidarity, solidarity is not reducible to it. It is possible for actors to be in solidarity—to meet all of the conditions I have outlined in the first section of the chapter—while not feeling any camaraderie at all. As long as they identify with one another, act to overcome significant adversity, are willing to set aside narrow self-interest, do not bypass each other's wills, are disposed to share one another's fate, and trust one another, they are in solidarity. Their feelings or emotions about their solidarity can come and go without their solidarity coming and going along with those emotions.

Solidarity is not merely altruism. While one must be disposed to share another's fate (and so behave altruistically) to be in solidarity with them, altruism is not sufficient for solidarity. Unilateral acts of humanitarianism—such as aiding someone injured by the side of the road—are not, on the account I have defended, acts of solidarity.

Solidarity is not merely empathy. While one of the key features of *identification* is a disposition to feel heightened empathy toward those whom one identifies with, identification is not sufficient for solidarity, and empathy is not sufficient for identification. I might empathize with someone, yet not act in solidarity with them; I may simply be overcome with the emotion they are feeling, or project myself in their situation. I also may identify with someone without ever acting together with them to overcome some significant adversity. In that case, my identification is not sufficient to make it the case that we are in solidarity.

Solidarity is not merely community. Whatever it is that 'community' is, I may relish my neighborhood and its lively sense of

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community, but this is not sufficient to say that I stand in solidarity with them. Until we work together to overcome some significant adversity that threatens us *as* neighbors, we do not count as being in solidarity as a community.

And solidarity is not merely justice. Unjust groups can act in solidarity. Justice also usually refers to a set of principles; solidarity to a way of acting together. Justice also comprehends a range of negative duties that we would not normally speak of as duties of solidarity (such as a duty to refrain from violating others' rights).

Indeed, the fact that the account outlined in the first section does not collapse into any one of these notions should strengthen our confidence in the overall account as an accurate picture of a distinctive practice.

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