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Citation:

Barvosa-Carter, E. (2001). Multiple identity and coalition building: How identity differences within us enable radical alliances among us. In J. Bysteydzienski and S. Schacht, (Eds.). Forging Radical Alliances Across Difference: Coalition Politics for the New Millennium (pp.21-34). New York: Rowman & Littlefield.

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Multiple Identity and Coalition Building: How Identity Differences within Us Enable Radical Alliances among Us

Edwina Barvosa-Carter

We typically think of identity as singular, stable, and definitive. But in Chicago in the 1970s, members of two different and divided ethnic groups created and adopted a new identity. With this new identity they understood themselves collectively as members of a single, larger, internally diverse, and *politicized* ethnic group. Together these two ethnic groups used this new ethnic *Latino/a* identity to unify themselves and to mobilize together to combat discrimination and to seek social justice. In the process, Latino/a identified peoples both engaged a new identity and retained the identities they already had—including national, sexual, gender, age, ideological, class, professional, and other identities.

What these historical events suggest is that we should emphasize identity as a *set of qualities* that defines a person as a specific being. This *set* of qualities is large, diverse, and contains subsets of qualities that form different identities—*multiple identities*—that stand within an overarching identity. The idea of multiple identity has been gaining wider acceptance in a variety of academic fields. Yet, we know little about its political implications. I address this issue here by analyzing the politically strategic formation of Latino/a identity in 1970s Chicago using the concept of multiple identity. Bringing case and concept together, I describe three implications that multiple identity has for the creation and mobilization of diverse political coalitions—especially radical alliances that seek social justice.

Multiple Identity

The idea of multiple identity has a variety of sources both ancient and modern. Versions of the concept can be found from Plato's (1945) *Republic* to psychoana-

lytic theory, from postmodernist thought, post-colonial theory, and various feminisms (de Lauretis, 1990; Anzaldúa, 1987; Lugones, 1994) to sociology (Giddens, 1991) to empirical psychology (Ryan, 1995; Singer, 1995; Gregg, 1995).[1] Yet, while conceptions of multiple identity date to antiquity, it is modernity that has made multiple identity widespread. Modern conditions have made multiple identity prevalent by segmenting everyday life into a variety of different social milieus—each with its own social identity (Giddens, 1991). To function well in these many settings all modern peoples have had to acquire different social identities and have had to learn to practice them when appropriate. In this way, multiple identity has become a real and necessary aspect of life for everyone living in modern conditions.

The identity effects of social segmentation have also been compounded by the unprecedented interpenetration of cultures in modern history. Wars, colonization, decolonization, natural disasters, economic transformations, and other events have displaced millions of people around the globe (Bammer, 1994). Cultural intermixture generates multiple identity when displaced peoples (and their new neighbors) respond to changing life conditions by learning new identities (e.g., gender, ethnic, national, and subcultural) while maintaining their preexisting identities. Owing to cultural interpenetration, millions of people today are born of mixed heritage and are socialized to two or more religious, subcultural, ethnic, and/or conflicting gender identities (Spickard, 1989). Not only households but also entire regions have become areas where contradictory social milieus are co-present. Inhabitants of these "borderlands" often learn and retain several identities in order to thrive in the diverse social contexts that comprise the places where they reside (Anzaldúa, 1987).

While the conditions creating multiple identity have received increasing attention there is, however, no single model of multiple identity that all theorists of multiplicity follow (Lugones, 1994; de Lauretis, 1990; Basch, Schiller, and Blanc, 1994; Braidotti, 1994; P. Smith, 1988; A. M. Smith, 1994). I define multiple identity as a concept in which the self is made up of a number of different but integrated identities. Each identity is a *frame of reference* that includes a scheme of values and a set of meanings and practices. These identity frames of reference (or *identity frames*) are related to a nearly endless array of possible social identities, including: gendered and sexual identities, cultural, ethnic and racial, ideological and subcultural identities, identities based in nationality, physical ability, specific lifestyle, socioeconomic status, language group, subnational region, generation, and so on. The identity frames of any individual are potentially many, diverse, and possibly contradictory. Although distinct, these different identities are not entirely separate from one another, but are instead loosely *integrated* and *mutually conditioning*. As people move from one social context to the next, they foreground and inhabit (or perform) the identity that they consider (consciously or unconsciously) to best fit their immediate situation. People, therefore, inhabit their identity frames (1) *situationally*—in response to the contours of their immediate context and (2) *relationally*—in social relation to those with whom they share that context. Based on my definition, therefore, multiple identity has five characteristics: *multiplicity, contradiction, mutual conditioning, situationality,* and *relationality.*

Multiple Identity and Coalitions in 1970s Chicago

Multiple identity played a significant role in the political activities of Spanish-speaking and -surnamed people in 1970s Chicago. This population contained two disadvantaged groups: Mexicans (Mexican immigrants and native-born Mexican Americans) and Puerto Ricans.[2] The former group—Mexicans and Mexican Americans—arrived in Chicago in several waves throughout the twentieth century. The earliest Mexican arrivals were lured to Chicago with the promise of permanent employment. Once they had arrived, they were exploited as strikebreakers and paid the lowest wages of all unskilled laborers. Mexican-origin residents settled in four neighborhoods. Steel workers settled in South Chicago, meat packers in Back of the Yards, rail workers in Near West Side, and later arrivals inhabited Pilsen (Acuna, 1988). Residents of these barrios felt little self-awareness as members of a Mexican-origin community before the 1940s. But between the 1940s and 1960s, ethnic community consciousness and social and political organizing increased. Yet this organization was often centered in each of the barrios (Gomez-Quinones, 1989), and it was not until the mid-1960s that more citywide organizations sought to bring together Mexican Americans into a community of interest (Padilla, 1985).

Puerto Rican immigration to Chicago, in contrast, began in the 1940s and peaked during the 1960s. Economic transformations in the United States reduced jobs on the island and drove many Puerto Ricans to seek work in the United States. By the 1960s, Puerto Ricans in Chicago were primarily living in Westtown. Yet, unlike the circumstances faced by Mexican immigrants to Chicago (the economy had by 1960 begun to transform by reducing the number of unskilled industrial jobs), Puerto Ricans often could only find low-paid, nonindustrial, dead-end work.

The different histories of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans in Chicago are a clue to the distinctions between the two ethnic groups. For most of this century neither ethnic group identified with the other, but rather identified by national origin—as Mexican or Puerto Rican. Mexican Americans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans were (and still remain) divided—both among and within each group—by their histories, cultural practices, Spanish dialects, regional origin, employment patterns, class, ideology, citizenship, and legal status in the United States. These groups had little social or economic contact and no substantial political alliances in Chicago prior to the 1970s.

The deep differences between the three groups were not well acknowledged in

the broader social and political dynamics of post-war Chicago. Long-standing Euro-American stereotypes typically failed to distinguish the two ethnic groups, instead projecting onto them a single racialized, language-based identity that became part and parcel of the systems of ethnic subordination played out in twentieth-century Chicago (Padilla, 1985; Acuna, 1988). Perceived as a single Spanish-speaking mass, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans were subject to the same discrimination in employment practices, housing, education, and city resource allocation. Police brutality, judicial system injustices, employment discrimination, and workplace harassment prevented Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans alike from achieving equitable wages, decent housing, adequate health care, and basic legal protections.

Mexican American and Puerto Rican groups had tried but largely failed to make gains in these areas using traditional electoral means (Gomez-Quinones, 1989). But in the 1970s, as Felix Padilla's sociological study of events shows, the political tactics of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans began to include a new strategy; it involved the creation of a third ethnic identity—a Latino/a identity around which they mobilized for social justice. In Padilla's words Latino/a ethnic identity was an innovation conceived and adopted as "another form of group consciousness among the Spanish-speaking populations" (Padilla, 1985: 61). The innovation of Latino/a identity was intended to bring cohesion to disparate Puerto Rican and Mexican American groups. Those who advocated Latino/a identity held the conviction that Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans could make more political gains as a *Latino/a collectivity* than as separate ethnic groups.[3]

The founding aspect of this new ethnic identity was the shared social justice values and goals that derived from common experiences of ethnic/racial discrimination, economic marginalization, and persistent social barriers to upward mobility (Padilla, 1985: 64–83, 138–146). Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans drew clarity and conviction for these social justice values from the discriminatory treatment and impoverished living conditions inflicted on them by the privileged white majority. These values translated into a shared interest agenda that included the achievement of decent employment, housing, and health care. With these founding values, Latino/a identity was from its very conception a politicized identity.

Shared linguistic heritage was also used to signify and demarcate Latino/a identity. Spanish language was central to the "approximating myth" or "narrative of common origin" that served to describe the diverse Spanish-surnamed group as a single collectivity.[4] But, as Padilla made clear, language alone has long failed to unite these diverse groups. Where common Spanish language had failed, the integration of a social justice agenda into a new ethnic identification dramatically increased the possibility of mutual support, solidarity, and coordinated action toward shared goals within the multiethnic coalitions that subsequently formed.

Many activists worked to persuade Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans to view themselves *also* as Latinos/as. Hector Franco in particular played an important role in advocating Latino/a identity and in the multiethnic organizing that brought together Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans as Latinos/as. Franco, a Puerto Rican activist, was influenced by his own participation in multiethnic coalitions, such as the Allies for a Better Community, to which he was introduced by his friend and colleague Sally Johnson, an activist who worked to mobilize poor blacks and Puerto Ricans in Westtown (Padilla, 1985: 108–117).

Although Latino/a identity originated with organizers like Hector Franco, it became widely accepted in the course of community organizing through new interactions between members of the Mexican and Puerto Rican communities (Padilla, 1985: 155). Increased contact between Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans generated personal ties and shared practices among members of both groups. Puerto Ricans and Mexican Americans both created (i.e., performed) and internalized Latino/a identity through their ongoing social interactions.

Because the aim of Latino/a identity was to unify and mobilize two separate ethnic groups, coalition activity became the preferred mode of political action for the Latinos/as in Padilla's study. As he shows, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans who also identified as Latino/a began to work collectively to resist discrimination, particularly in employment. The primary vehicle for this struggle was the Spanish Coalition for Jobs.[5] This coalition was a collective of twenty-three Mexican American and Puerto Rican community organizations that originated from all of the principal Puerto Rican and Mexican American neighborhoods across the city: Pilsen, Westtown, South Chicago, and Lakeview. Nine of these organizations were job referral agencies frustrated by the refusal of major employers in Chicago to hire virtually any of the Latinos/as they regularly referred to them. The pattern of discrimination was clear, and new federal legislation on affirmative action convinced the coalition members they were right to attempt to reverse the patterns of economic marginalization from which they had long suffered.

The Spanish Coalition for Jobs used a combination of formal negotiation, consumer power, and protest tactics to fight discriminatory hiring practices. The coalition's first target was Illinois Bell, which with nearly 44,000 employees had only 300 Latinos/as on its payroll. At a public meeting in August 1971 coalition spokespeople asked Illinois Bell to alter its current hiring policies to increase significantly the number of Latinos/as they employed. When Illinois Bell offered to hire only 115 additional Latinos/as, the coalition began a year-long protest campaign against the company. Several subsequent negotiations also failed to bring results and were followed by additional protests. Ultimately, through continued

pressure, the coalition succeeded in its primary objective when Illinois Bell agreed to hire over 1,300 Latinos/as over a four-year period.

Implications for Coalition Building

By analyzing the development of Latino/a identity and politics in Chicago we can better understand the implications that multiple identity has for building coalitions with social justice goals. The first is that people can and do identify with more than one community. Since people with multiple identity alternate among different identities in everyday contexts, they can also relate to and participate in the politics of more than one group. Padilla described this multiplicity of identifications as it took place in Chicago. There "the Latino-conscious person sees himself as a Latino sometimes and as Puerto Rican, Mexican American, Cuban and the like at other times" (Padilla, 1985: 61–62). In political contexts, multiple identity allowed people to foreground Latino/a identity in situations of general concern and national ethnic identity when the political issues were narrower. A number of Padilla's respondents described how this dynamic worked in everyday political settings. One commented that in his own practices, "I try to use [Latino] as much as I can. When I talk to people in my community, I use Mexican, but I use Latino when the situation calls for issues that have city-wide implications" (Padilla, 1985: 62). Another comment shows how Latino/a and other ethnic identification varied in terms of the political issues at stake and the expected intra-coalition dynamics.

> When we move out of South Chicago and South Chicago is to have a relationship with the Westtown Concerned Citizens Coalition, it will have to be around issues that affect them equally. We cannot get South Chicago to get mad at Westtown if Westtown doesn't support their immigration situation. That is a Mexican problem that cannot be resolved through a Latino effort. But we can get them to come and talk to Westtown about jobs, about things that are hitting everybody. (Padilla, 1985: 62–63)

Latino/a ethnic identity was salient in those instances when the political context involved the Spanish-speaking and -surnamed community as a whole. When the context involved either the Mexican American or Puerto Rican community specifically, these national identifiers were foregrounded and different mobilization tactics were adopted.

In general, then, one contribution that multiple identity makes to coalition building is that people with multiple identities can internalize and retain a number of different identities and through these different identities they have potential connections to a wide range of social groups and communities. In the case of Latino/a political mobilization, for example, the internalization of Latino/a identity among residents showed that they could acquire a new Latino/a identity

and also retain their existing identities as Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Catholics, and so on. Consequently, these people could be simultaneously linked to a Latino/a community as well as a range of other more specific groups.

Where multiple identity increases the number of links between individual citizens and social groups, multiple identity also increases the opportunities for coalition building. Each link represents the possibility for recruiting an individual to a given social or political movement. It also represents the presence of a social link and an identity frame of reference that can be appealed to for judgment and action through public discourse. In this way multiple identity increases the avenues for political participation.

A second implication of multiple identity for forging coalitions is how it contributes to a synergistic development between identity formation and community building in which the development of one feeds the growth of the other. The open, fluid, yet durable characteristic of multiple identity enables residents to acquire new identifications throughout their lifetimes. This capacity, in turn, enables community building and transformation where the internalization of a new identity frame feeds the organization of a new community. In Chicago, for example, a few community organizers initiated Latino/a identity as part of a particular political strategy. Their articulation of Latino/a identity spread to others. This new identification led to an increase in existing social networks through the formation of new Latino/a community organizations. Identification and engagement with these organizations led more Puerto Rican and Mexican American residents to internalize the practices, meanings, and values ascribed to Latino/a identity. Widening Latino/a identification fostered still more Latino/a community organization. More Latino/a community organization led to yet wider Latino/a identification, and so on. This process proceeded synergistically, that is, once initiated the dual processes of identity and community formation fueled each other.

For individuals, therefore, the internalization of an additional identity into their existing identity scheme opened them to a process of community building. Latino/a identity enabled residents, including community organizers, to draw upon Latino/a individual and group identification to build a Latino/a community. As a multiethnic collectivity, the Latino/a community in Chicago relied on newly established interethnic social connections. The making and accepting of these connections by Mexican American and Puerto Rican residents depended on multiple identity as a structure open and fluid enough to take on new identities and durable enough to retain existing identity frames in spite of change.

The synergistic development between identity formation and community building can forward efforts to achieve social justice. In Chicago this synergistic process led to the formation of a set of uniquely Latino/a community organizations and networks and a Latino/a-specific social, economic, and political agenda. It also enabled the production of a set of symbols around which otherwise separated groups of Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans could come to-

gether to mobilize politically despite their cultural, historical, and other differences. Because multiple identity underpins this synergistic process of identity and community (trans)formation, multiple identity played a key role in political mobilization aimed at changing sociopolitical conditions and securing rights and opportunities that had been unjustly denied. In this way, multiple identity was a necessary but not sufficient condition of the identity and community innovations central to the coalition-building strategy adopted by Puerto Rican and Mexican American activists in 1970s Chicago.

Third, multiple identity can play a role not only in the formation of diverse coalitions, but also in the relations *within* those coalitions once they are formed. A well-functioning coalition requires organizers and members to find (or create) shared issues that will form the common ground for intra-group communication, decision making, and action. The large number of frames of reference that members will bring to a diverse coalition makes this task more difficult. Many of these perspectives will be at odds with one another or possibly at odds with the concerns that organizers and members have used to galvanize the coalition. The result can be intra-group contestation that can paralyze or destroy an alliance. Multiple identity can influence intra-coalition interactions by providing people with the capacity to foreground some identity frames of reference while deemphasizing others by shifting among their various identity frames as different settings demand or allow. Consequently, multiple identity provides a flexibility of social positioning that can smooth intra-coalition interactions.

In 1970s Chicago, Mexican American and Puerto Rican coalition members would, in particular political contexts, foreground their shared identification as Latinos/as and in the process deemphasize their differences as separate ethnic groups. The multiplicity of identifications held by these coalition members meant that they could emphasize their Latino/a identity for political action when necessary, and in the process temporarily deemphasize the differences among them in terms of their other identity axes of class, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and age. By foregrounding one axis of their identities for the purposes of political mobilization, they did not, however, eliminate other identities or the differences they represented.

Within the coalition process, therefore, multiple identity enables coalition members to temporarily deemphasize task-irrelevant differences in a way that does not ultimately deny those differences or banish them completely from the person or the organizational matrix of the coalition. By enabling coalition members to bracket (i.e., set aside but not relinquish) their identity differences until they are relevant for coalition goals, multiple identity can help the internal functioning of coalitions where the members are diverse both within and among themselves. This is not to say that coalition building will no longer involve the difficult work of forging commitment to common concerns and goals among those who have many differences. Nor is this to say that the work of coalition building will not at times fail. Rather, multiple identity is a flexible and open identity structure that makes it possible for people to foreground those identity frames of reference that they share with others in the context of specific political projects. Foregrounding shared perspectives in this way enables (though does not guarantee) cooperation on specific political goals despite the continued presence of deep difference and diversity.

Multiple identity also provides people with a (relatively greater or lesser) number of identity frames of reference. The greater the number of frames of reference, the greater the likelihood that a person's repertoire of identities will contain some frame of reference that will allow them to identify similarly to other members of a coalition. Imagine, for example, Puerto Rican activist Hector Franco and his coalition involvement with Sally Johnson. Because Franco is not African American, he likely did not know—as Johnson likely did—exactly what contemporary discrimination against blacks feels like. He did, however, certainly know the general history of African American experience since colonial enslavement brought Africans to the Americas. His unique personal history gave him a first-hand understanding of poverty. And although he may not have experienced segregation laws directly, he most likely knew that Jim Crow laws were applied to Mexican Americans as well as blacks in Texas and other areas of the United States (Montejano, 1987). Franco had also experienced de facto discrimination against Spanish-speaking and -surnamed peoples in Chicago.

Together, his knowledge and biographical experiences would have provided Hector Franco with two (overlapping) identity frames of reference (a class and ethnic identity) that included a detailed grasp of both poverty and ethnic and racial discrimination. African Americans such as Sally Johnson in coalition with Hector Franco would have also had identity frames that included understandings of both *poverty* and *racial discrimination*. As members of different marginalized groups in the United States, their understandings would have been somewhat different, though also broadly similar. As coalition partners, then, Franco and Johnson and other participants in their coalition would have shared (albeit imperfectly) at least two identity frames of reference—working class/poor and disadvantaged ethnic minority. As coalition members they may not have known *exactly* what other participants' experiences had been. Yet, through their multiple identity frames they had some intersection of frames of reference. These frames, in turn, equipped them to understand *approximately* the experiences and concerns of others in the coalition who were different from themselves. In other words, the *partial intersection of identity frames of reference* can make it possible for coalition members to partly understand and identify with very different people with whom they are working. This partial intersection of identity frames of reference can be a sufficient common perspective from which coalition members can negotiate agreement on shared problems and goals and plan for common action to pursue those goals.

Critics of this contention will no doubt respond that the *partial* overlap of identity frames and perspectives within a coalition still leaves a wide field of dif-

ferences and contradicting perspectives open. These differences, they will claim, will foment contestation within a diverse group and ultimately render it paralyzed by perpetual internal confrontation and irreconcilable differences. To this I have two replies. First, it is impossible to exile differences or contestation from political coalitions (or any diverse social organization). The presence of diversity can always contribute to disagreement and contestation that can become divisive and polarizing. But the disagreement and contestation that springs from difference can also be the source of political critique and the creative energy behind new political insights and solutions. Since intra-coalition contestation has both advantages and disadvantages, the problem that faces us is not how to eliminate contestation and disagreement from diverse coalitions. It is, instead, to understand how they can be harnessed and directed away from an unrelenting emphasis on division and separation and steered toward the establishment and pursuit of shared political, social, and economic objectives. Both possibilities are always open within the coalition process. Only the latter, however, stands a good chance of helping people achieve the social and political changes they envision.

Various organizational possibilities can help harness difference and contestation in a productive manner. Among Latinos/as in Chicago, for example, disagreement existed about the political means that should be used to achieve shared goals. Some established community groups favored grassroots mobilization and protest politics (e.g., Centro Latino, Pilsen Neighbors, Westtown Concerned Citizens Coalition). Others favored electoral politics and lobbying to achieve and/or influence traditional political powers (e.g., Mexican Civic Committee, League of United Latin American Citizens, Puerto Rican Congress) (Padilla, 1985: 71). Within the Spanish Coalition for Jobs these differences were reflected not only in the subgroups of the coalition, but also in the coalition's political tactics. Rather than allow dissension to dissolve the coalition, differences were channeled productively by combining protest tactics with sophisticated, formal negotiations with Illinois Bell. Both tactics were directed at the same social justice goals. Here disagreeing members could negotiate their different perspectives based on a common commitment to shared goals grounded in their shared Latino/a identification.

Those who suggest that groups must fully resolve all differences within their communities *before* they engage in multiethnic or other diverse coalitions must reconsider their claims against examples such as this and organizational possibilities such as broad coalitions and fluid political positionings. In any case, multiple identity gives people the capacity to emphasize the frames of reference that are appropriate in specific acts of coalition building, maintenance, and mobilization. In addition, multiple identity provides flexibility that is a necessary (though not sufficient) component of successful cooperation in the coalition process. The flexibility of multiple identity also enables people to enact subtle shifts in position in political contexts. These shifts in identity-position can be used to leverage the internal diversity of a community in order to achieve political ends. In this way, the flexibility inherent in multiple identity enables people to work together productively as members of a diverse political coalition.

Conclusion

Multiple identity has several implications for coalition building and the mobilization of radical alliances. First, multiple identity provides people with a range of actual or potential affiliations to social groups based on age, gender, class, race, ethnicity, ideology, physical ability, and so on.[6] The potential for politicization and mobilization of these groups for social justice goals is always present. People are therefore linked to not one, but a number of potentially politicized groups. Second, the openness and durability of multiple identity allows people to create, internalize, and inhabit new and/or transformed identifications while maintaining their existing identities. This, in turn, enables a synergistic process of identity (trans)formation and community building. In this process, new or transformed identifications and communities can become the basis for political coalitions aimed at social change. Third, multiple identity furnishes people with intellectual flexibility that can defuse and/or draw advantage from intra-coalition contestation. This flexibility increases the likelihood that coalition members will be able to locate and work from shared perspective(s) within diverse coalitions and to make strategic repositionings during political action, which can help them achieve their political goals.

My main point is that multiple identities can connect people to a number of social groups and communities that can, in turn, potentially become politicized and mobilized in order to achieve particular social justice goals. Identity-community formations, though durable, are open to constant revision and amendment. The fluidity and change that accompany the durability of multiple identity mean that the relationship between multiple identity and politics transcends "identity politics" by denying that specific identity frames are an essential aspect of the self (i.e., unchanging touchstones already there for political mobilization). Rather, as witnessed in the Chicago case, multiple identity means that new identifications can be strategically generated to unify previously unconnected groups of people. Theoretically and empirically, it is possible for multiple identity to help us forge new identifications *specific* to particular social or political crises that can be used to bring cohesion, political direction, and motivation to disparate groups of people who share common concerns but also deep differences.

While multiple identity can make key contributions to the formation and mobilization of diverse coalitions, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of these contributions. Multiple identity's contributions to coalition building largely involve the creation of possibilities. That is, multiple identity enables certain types of events but cannot guarantee that those events will occur. For example, multiple identity gives coalition members the capacity to shift among frames

of reference and to temporarily bracket and set aside perspectives they do not share with other coalition members. Likewise, multiple identity provides individuals with an open, fluid, yet durable identity structure that opens the way for adopting new or transformed identity (and community) formations and to using these politically to achieve social justice goals. Yet, multiple identity does not guarantee that coalition members will actually exercise this capacity in order to increase the cohesion of the coalition. Nor does it guarantee that the political mobilization arising from these identity-community formations will be able to achieve its intended results.

Many factors determine whether diverse coalitions will be formed and how successful they will be in their pursuit of social justice. Institutional, material, and historical factors all have a significant effect on coalition building. Multiple identity is one psycho-social factor that can aid the formation of diverse coalitions. Realization of the possibilities that multiple identity introduces will depend on the combined influence of other contributing factors. Regardless, multiple identity has important implications for coalition building and radical politics. Contrary to the conventional wisdom that difference is inherently divisive, the events analyzed here show that multiple identity—as difference within us—can play an integral role in coalition building, which brings together different people to work toward social justice. By focusing on multiple identity we can better see how differences within us can help us work together despite the differences among us.

Notes

1. A few thinkers have begun to explore the implications multiple identity has for democratic politics. Among these are Laclau and Mouffe (1985), Basch, Schiller, and Blanc (1994), A. M. Smith (1994), Espiritu (1994), and Lowe (1991). Lowe and Espiritu, in particular, have suggested that multiple identity might play an important role in the formation of multiethnic coalitions.

2. A Cuban population also resided in Chicago at this time; however, since they did not constitute a disadvantaged group, they are not a focus of Felix Padilla's (1985) study from which the case study central to this chapter is drawn.

3. A similar discussion continues today. Some Mexican Americans, for example, feel that as roughly 80 percent of the Latino/a population in the United States, it dilutes their influence to identify with other Latinos/as. Other activists insist that a coalition among Spanish-speaking and -surnamed groups (along with other minority groups) is the best path for political and economic reform. For a discussion of contemporary Latino/a identity, see DeSipio (1996).

4. The formation of a "community" is always an approximation that cloaks internal diversity. For thorough accounts of the role of approximation in community formation, see Cohen (1985) and Anderson (1991).

5. Some readers may question the "Latino" character of an organization named the

"Spanish" Coalition for Jobs. The naming of this coalition is interesting against the backdrop of widespread "Latino/a" self-reference—less because it erased or undermined Latino/a self-identification and more because it performed a strategic repositioning that sought to turn the misconceived Euro-American stereotype of the "Spanish masses" to good political effect. The sociohistorical conditions of the 1970s differ from current times, in which the term "Latino/a" has much wider acceptance, but still competes with terms imposed by the dominant culture such as "Hispanic."

6. There is a sense in which some identities within a multiple identity can become more or less significant over time. This dimension of multiple identity is more complex than I have had space to describe here. For additional details, see Barvosa-Carter (1998).

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3

The Dream of Common Differences: Coalitions, Progressive Politics, and Black Feminist Thought

Cynthia Burack

THE FANTASY OF HARMONY among women was a persistent theme in white feminist literature of the 1970s and early 1980s. It was expressed for many white women particularly by Adrienne Rich's (1977) evocative phrase "the dream of a common language." What shattered the dream of solidarity for white feminists was the insistence by women of color that differences of history, culture, experiences of oppression, and political agenda be acknowledged and that the work of women of color be accorded scholarly attention and respect. Principally as a result of critiques by black feminists, many white feminists have become more thoughtful and circumspect about the immanent harmony that white women have too often sought from feminist politics. Nevertheless, the internecine battles and challenges of feminist thought and politics have not turned feminists away from a hopefulness about groups and the forms of solidarity that make progressive political victories possible.

Political psychologists who study social and political groups are not similarly hopeful about the consequences of group solidarity. However, an examination of black feminist thought challenges the bleak conclusions about groups and group discourses to be drawn from an influential body of literature within political psychology. Analysis of black feminist thought demonstrates that issues involving inter- and intra-group conflict and power can be discursively negotiated in ways that facilitate progressive and productive politics, within the group and between groups. Further, black feminist engagement with coalitions—both within and between groups—is central to the progressive negotiation of identity and conflict. I use the concepts of "mature interdependence" and "work group" functioning, found in psychoanalytic political theory, to elucidate the discursive accounts of coalition processes that are common in black feminist thought.