CHAPTER THREE
IN-BETWEEN HOME AND COALITION:
FEMINIST DEMOCRACY AND ALLIANCES THAT WORK

In chapter two, I argue that feminist trickster figures in the form of troublemakers, outlaws and storytellers serve as important role models for feminists who are attempting to develop and practice a democratic ethos. These figures provide feminists with the guidance and inspiration that they need in order to continue engaging in the difficult, uncertain and dangerous process of feminist democracy. But while these three trickster figures are helpful role models, on their own they do not provide us with enough reassurance that democratic feminism is possible or even desirable. In addition to these individual figures, we need to think about the types of connections and communities that feminists must draw upon if they are to develop more democratic futures for feminism. For it is not the case that feminists act alone. They act on behalf of, with the help of and in concert with others. And they function from within a wide network of communities, communities that support, encourage, inspire and train them as they push for more radical forms of democracy.

Feminists need others if they are to be successful in their development of a democratic ethos. Even feminist role models like the troublemaker, outlaw and storyteller rely on others in their practices of resistance and transformation. For example, troublemakers’ actions are meaningless unless they have a network of communities to authorize and back those actions up with a collective force greater than their own. They need the help of others to convert their subversive acts into sustained and transformative
resistance. And outlaws need others to help them survive the dangerous and demanding
work of living and fighting on the edge. Their network of communities supports,
encourages and equips them with the skills that they need in order to keep on resisting
and rebelling. Finally, storytellers need others to listen to, participate in and pass on the
stories that they tell.

But, what do these communities look like and how do they function? How are
they developed and sustained as oppression becomes increasingly complex and more
widespread? And how do feminists work together and draw upon each other to keep
democracy alive in face of its uncertainty and precariousness? In this chapter, I explore
the possibilities for community within a democratic feminism that encourages difference
and conflict and that emphasizes questioning and critical debate.

Starting with Bernice Johnson Reagon and her discussion of home versus
coalition communities in “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,” I argue that neither
community as home or community as coalition are sufficiently effective models for
feminists as they attempt to develop and sustain a radically democratic ethos. While
community as home can provide feminists with nurturing support, it does so by ignoring
the many differences that exist within the feminist movement. And, while community as
coalition can provide feminists with the coping skills that they need in order to survive a
feminism based on difference and conflict, it does so by denying the possibility for any
sort of deeper connection between those different feminists. In contrast to both of these
models, I claim that the type of community that works best for feminism is alliance.
Existing somewhere in-between homes and coalitions, alliances emphasize meaningful
and supportive relationships between individual feminists that are created by and supported through a continued engagement with difference.

**FEMINIST COMMUNITY: HOME VERSUS COALITION**

In a coalition you have to give, and it is different from your home. You can’t stay there all the time. You go to the coalition for a few hours and then you go back and take your bottle wherever it is, and then you go back and coalesce some more. It is very important not to confuse them—home and coalition.

—Bernice Johnson Reagon

I begin this chapter on community with a reading of Bernice Johnson Reagon’s oft-cited essay, “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century.” In this essay, which was originally a speech given at the West Coast Women’s Music Festival in 1981, Reagon distinguishes between two different types of community, home and coalition, and then argues that if feminists are to “have something to do with what makes it into the next century,” they must participate in coalition building (Reagon 1984, 356). According to her, while home communities can serve as valuable nurturing spaces, they cannot provide us with the skills that we will need to in order to contribute to the project of democracy in the twenty-first century.

In the opening pages of her essay, Reagon describes home as a “nurturing space where you sift out what people are saying about you and decide who you really are” (358). This nurturing space is like a womb; it feeds and sustains you, giving you a place where “you act out community” (358) with people just like you. It is a place of comfort, safety and sameness where you go to withdraw and recover from a society that punishes those who are different and who do not (or refuse to) fit in. What home is not,
however, is a place of political transformation because the nurturing space of home is also a barred room, a room where only “X’s or Y’s or Z’s get to come in” (357). Such a barred room—a yours only space—cannot prepare feminists for coping with the real world, with people who are different from them and who have different ideas about how to act out community or run society.

In addition to failing to provide feminists with the survival skills that they need to work with people who are not like them, this barred room is also an impossible space to maintain, one that inevitably leads to the exclusion of those who want to be included in the group but are not considered members. Reagon addresses this problem through a discussion of the women’s movement and its failed attempts to create “women’s only spaces”—spaces where individuals, by virtue of being women, can come together. She writes:

If you’re the same kind of women like the folk in that little barred room, it works. But as soon as some other folk check the definition of “women” that’s in the dictionary (which you didn’t write, right?) they decide that they can come because they are women, but when they do, they don’t see or hear nothing that is like them. Then they charge, “this ain’t no women’s thing” (360)!

Once this barred room becomes inhabited by all different kinds of women, it is not a safe, comfortable space, but a dangerous and hostile one where survival skills are needed in order to negotiate the differences that exist between women.

Reagon refers to this type of dangerous space as a coalition, arguing that it is where the real work of feminist politics gets accomplished. In contrast to the nurturing space of home where you feel protected and supported by others like you, a coalition
exists as a difficult and dangerous place where you “feel as if [you’re] gonna keel over any minute and die” (356). Far from home, coalitions take place in the streets, where feminists join up with others who may be enemies instead of allies and work for survival instead of nurturing or comfort.

Reagon offers this distinction between home and coalition as a way of challenging the romanticized belief that feminism and feminist communities are or should be safe homespaces where all women can come together as fundamentally the same—sharing the common bond of oppression, some essential identity or a deep loving connection—and work for social transformation.¹ She believes that the model of community as home is too difficult for feminists to maintain and that it severely weakens feminists’ ability to respond to the ever-changing and expanding ways in which oppression operates. Moreover, community as home threatens the possibility for global democracy within feminism because it produces mono-issue individuals who focus much of their attention on only one type of issue (women’s) and one subject (woman). For Reagon, movements such as feminism cannot be effective if they focus exclusively on one issue or on one path for transformation. They must expand the scope of their agenda to address an ever-

¹ In particular, Reagon is challenging the idea that women-only festivals like the one she is speaking at are locations where women can come together to retreat from oppression. She writes, “The women’s movement has perpetuated a myth that there is some common experience that comes just cause you’re women. And they’re throwing all these festivals and this music and these concerts happen” (Reagon 1983, 360). She argues that these festivals are not safe refuges where women all get along and comfort/nurture each other; they are exhausting spaces—where you don’t have enough food and water, where your tent is too small for all the people who want to get in and where your understanding of “woman” isn’t the same as many of the women who are there.
increasing number of sites of oppression. And, they must expand their understanding of community to include a wider number of individuals and groups.²

In contrast to home, Reagon argues that the more effective model for understanding how feminists should forge political connections and engage in democratic practices is through coalition. In coalitions, women work together, regardless of their differences and in spite of the discomfort and uncertainty that this difference can produce. While coalitions do not feed and nourish feminists, they help them to develop coping strategies that could allow them not only to survive, but “to have something to do with what makes it into the next century” (Reagon 1983, 356). And, they help them to stretch their politics to include a diverse and more democratic range of voices and concerns.

But, Reagon does not reject home altogether. She believes that coalition work is too exhausting to do continuously. “You can’t stay there all the time,” she writes about coalition. “You go to the coalition for a few hours and then you go back and take your bottle wherever it is, and then you go back and coalesce some more” (Reagon 1983, 359). Instead, she claims that home and coalition are two separate spaces that make two important yet distinctive contributions to feminism and the survival of the movement and its participants. While coalitions are essential for the survival of feminist political movements, enabling feminists to hone their political skills and to further the movements’ goals, home is essential for the physical, emotional and moral/spiritual survival of the feminist self, enabling feminists to temporarily distance themselves from

² Reagon writes: “It must become necessary for all of us to feel that this is our world. And that we are here to stay and that anything that is here is ours to take and to use in our image. And watch that ‘our’—make it as big as you can—it ain’t got nothing to do with that barred room” (Reagon 1983, 365).
the exhausting work of feminist politics and to get some rest and nourishment so that they
do not become overwhelmed or overworked within the coalition (Reagon 1983, 361).

Reagon’s description of the functions home and coalition each fulfill within feminism highlights the importance of theorizing about how feminist communities can and should serve the political and physical, emotional and spiritual needs of individual feminists. As Reagon argues, it is not enough to think about how feminists as political subjects can collectively transform society or survive in a hostile and dangerous environment. We must also think about how feminists as individual selves, can live to see another day, that is, how they can be sustained politically, physically and spiritually through the exhausting and risky process of involvement in feminist democracy. Reagon wants feminists to ask themselves, “What would you be like if you had white hair and had not given up on your principles” (361)? She believes that this ability to survive with one’s principles intact is only possible when feminists have both a home community to retreat to and a coalition to fight in.

Reagon’s promotion of discomfort as necessary (in the form of coalition work) for effective political action and her recognition of the physical and mental toll that this discomfort can take on individual feminists is very important for any discussion of creating and sustaining connections within a democratic movement such as feminism which prizes the pushing of one’s limits and working with and through discomfort. It is easy enough for theorists to suggest that feminists need to be uncomfortable, that they need to push themselves and their ideas in order to be vital or that they need to engage perpetually and persistently in public conversations and democratic arguments about
what is best for feminism. However, if these suggestions do not address the physical, emotional and moral/spiritual effects of pushing one’s limits or how to continue pushing those limits without burning out, shutting down or selling out, then feminism is a movement that ultimately cannot be effective or sustainable. Any discussion of feminist democratic community must address the important question: How can feminists survive politics without becoming “a martyr to the coalition” (Reagon 1983, 361)?

This issue of survival and the value of not becoming a martyr to feminist politics is a central theme for Reagon and an important part of my own understanding of how to develop and maintain democracy within twenty-first century feminism. Practicing and promoting a democratic ethos is painful and filled with uncertainty, ambiguity and risk. Feminist must work vigilantly to ensure the survival and sustainability of themselves and the feminist movement. The need for survival/sustainability is more than physical, although, as Reagon describes in “Coalition Politics,” the practice of democratic politics is physically demanding and dangerous. Survival/sustainability is also about maintaining our motivation for engaging in the difficult practices of feminism alive. It is about sustaining hope in the face of an uncomfortable present and uncertain future. And, as Reagon indicates, it is about keeping our ethical and political principles intact as we work

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3 At the beginning of her essay, Reagon describes the difficulty/dangers of coalition work in physical terms, linking it to her physically demanding experience of dealing with the high altitude at the music festival in Yosemite National Forest, California. She writes: “I’ve never been this high before. I’m talking about the altitude. There is a lesson in bringing people together where they can’t get enough oxygen, then having them try to figure out what they’re going to do when they can’t think properly…I feel as if I’m gonna keel over any minute and die. That is often what it feels like if you’re really doing coalition work. Most of the time you feel threatened to the core and if you don’t, you’re not really doing no coalescing” (356).

4 Sharon Welch discusses the need for hope and the consequences that occur when it no longer exists in A Feminist Ethics of Risk. “[T]o stop resisting,” she writes, “is to die. The death that accompanies acquiescence to overwhelming problems is multidimensional: the threat of physical death, the death of the imagination, the death of the ability to care” (Welch 1990, 20).
with a wide range of feminists, all of whom have different perspectives and maintain a number of different allegiances outside of feminism. Finally, survival/sustainability is about keeping the story of feminism (in its multiple forms) alive and being able to pass that story on to future generations.⁵

In continuing to value home as a type of connection that can restore and sustain feminists, Reagon acknowledges that rest and healing are essential to feminism. And, she emphasizes that feminist democracy is not merely about transforming society but about living to see what that transformation looks like. “None of this matters at all very much,” she admonishes her audience, “if you die tomorrow…It might be wise as you deal with coalition efforts to think about the possibilities of going for fifty years” (361). But, while Reagon encourages feminists to think about the necessity of being both uncomfortable and restored within feminism and about engaging in difficult coalition work and retreating to nurturing homespaces, her essay raises several issues about how and where these needs for discomfort and restoration can be met within feminist communities and what these feminists communities as home and coalition should look like.

First, Reagon does not adequately theorize her notions of home or coalition. In terms of home, she argues that, as a “yours only” autonomous and separatist space where everyone is the same, it is not possible and claims, “there is nowhere you can go and only be with people like you. It’s over. Give it up” (Reagon 1983, 357). Then she suggests that

⁵ In *Sweet Dreams in America*, Sharon Welch, drawing upon the poetry of Carol Lee Sanchez, argues for the importance of passing on the story of democracy to future generations (88-90). And in “Coalition Politics,” Reagon argues that passing on our stories/theories/analyses of oppression to future generations is essential. “Most of the things that you do, if you do them right,” she argues, “are for people who live long after you are long forgotten…Whatever it is that you know, give it way, and don’t give it away only on the horizontal. Don’t give it away like that, because they’re gonna die when you die, give or take a few days. Give it away *that* way (up and down)” (Welch 1999, 365).
home is still necessary without providing us with any other way in which to envision it.\textsuperscript{6}

If home is a type of community where we find comfort and healing because everyone is like us but spaces where everyone is like us no longer exist, how and where can we be restored? And, what would this restoration look like?

In terms of coalitions, Reagon argues that they are essential for the survival of political movements like feminism and that feminists must embrace them as the primary way in which to work with and through difference and to connect with others if society is to be transformed. But, Reagon fails to adequately describe what \textit{kinds} of connections these coalitions produce. At its least, it would seem that the connection that participants within a coalition share is that of the need and desire for survival. At its most, this shared connection is one between individuals who simply “share a commitment to living together in the world” (Bickford 1996, 138) and who “continuously argue and interrupt each other yet find enough worth listening to so that they may continue to talk” (Ferguson 1993, 157).

But, if coalitions are our only alternative to unrealistic and exclusive communities of the same and our only option of practicing politics within a feminist movement based on difference, are they or should they be enough? What does a feminist movement that promotes this type of connection look like? What does it lack? While I agree with Reagon in her promotion of the value and necessity of coalitions, I wonder about what gets lost within our assessment of the types of connections that are possible within feminist

\textsuperscript{6} In her essay, “Difference, Dilemmas and the Politics of Home,” Bonnie Honig argues that Reagon attempts to contextualize home, but falls short of reconfiguring it. For Honig, “if home is to be a positive force in politics, it must itself be recast in coalitional terms as the site of necessary, nurturing, but also strategic, conflicted, and temporary alliances” (269).
democracy when we think about feminists connecting through difference only in terms of coalition.

Second, Reagon offers too sharp of a distinction between home and coalition and their functions and locations. According to her, home is a private space of withdrawal and nurturing that exists outside of the realm of politics and political transformation and coalition is a public space of fighting for survival and working through the difficulties of difference that exists outside of the realm of home and nurturing support. But, are these spaces and the functions that they produce so distinct? Are homespaces purely private enclaves where we go to withdraw and recuperate and coalitions purely public spaces where we engage in battle?

Third, in her distinction between coalition and home, Reagon reinforces some troubling assumptions about the role of sameness and difference within feminism. Even though she is critical of home and its potential for being maintained, she still envisions it as a valuable type of connection in which people who are the same come together to nurture and give each other strength. In contrast, she envisions coalition as a necessary type of connection in which people who are all different are forced to come together and work with each other, whether they like it or not. Reflecting on the necessity of coalition work, Reagon writes: “You don’t go into coalition because you just like it. The only reason you would consider trying to team up with somebody who could possible kill you is because that’s the only way you can figure to stay alive” (356-357). In describing home and coalition in this way, she perpetuates a logic which dominates much of feminist thought on sameness and difference, a logic which suggests that sameness is safe and
happy and is therefore something we should embrace and that difference is dangerous and threatening and is therefore something we should fear.

The depiction of sameness as good and difference as bad is not limited to Reagon’s articulation of it. Among feminists, difference is frequently construed as a threat to the unity of feminism as a movement and an obstacle to developing deeper connections among sisters. Difference is seen as “cause for separation and suspicion…” (Lorde 1984, 112) and is connected to “liability, disorder [and] fear” (Ziarek 2001, 206). It is seen as weakening the effectiveness of feminism and its political projects. In contrast, sameness is understood to be the foundation for a deep and loving community and is promoted as a goal to be achieved or a lost state of innocence to be mourned. Some feminist narratives suggest that sameness is the objective of any feminist engagement with difference while others suggest that feminism was once a unified—innocent, loving and supportive—movement that has been splintered by the forced recognition of differences among women. Must sameness and difference always be construed in such ways? Should sameness always be our goal? And, what are the dangers of promoting sameness over difference?

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7 This latter narrative, that is, of lamenting the loss of community, is implicitly present within Reagon’s essay. She writes, “We’ve pretty much come to the end of a time when you can have a space that is ‘yours only’—just for the people you want to be there. Even when we have our ‘women-only’ festivals, there is no such thing. The fault is not necessarily with the organizers of the gathering. To a large extend it’s because we have just finished with that kind of isolating. There is no hiding place. There is nowhere you can go and only be with people who are like you. It’s over. Give it up” (357).

8 Janet Jakobsen (1998) discusses how sameness within feminism, operating through anthologies such as Robin Morgan’s Sisterhood is Powerful, has erased the difference among women that have always already existed. She argues that this sameness is at play in the feminist narrative(s) that describe the feminist movement of the 1970s as purely white, middle-class, heterosexual feminism (61). One key problem with this narrative is that it fails to take into account the significant and thought-provoking work of a wide range of women of color, working class women and lesbians who were doing (and writing about) theory in the 1970s. In the retelling of this sameness narrative, feminists repeatedly ignore and deny the important work of non-white, non-middle class and non-heterosexual feminist theorists who wrote in the 1970s and, as a result, contribute to the reinscription of sameness as the dominant narrative of feminism.
In recognizing the dangers of promoting sameness at the expense of difference, it is important to rethink feminism’s (and Reagon’s) explicit linking of sameness with safety, nurturing support and difference with danger, hostile challenging and mere survival. Can we develop notions of difference that are not threatening but nurturing? Can we promote difference as a goal? And, can we develop an alternative type of feminist connection that is not so concerned with pure expressions of sameness (community) or difference (coalition)?

All three sets of these critiques—(1) Reagon’s inadequate theorizing of home and coalition, (2) her strict division between their functions and (3) her perpetuation of the troubling logic of sameness versus difference—suggest the need for a third type of community, one that is neither a home space of pure nurturing, safety, and comforting sameness nor a coalitional space of pure hostility, survival, and threatening difference. But, what would this community look like and how and where does it function? To answer these questions, I turn to a discussion of community as alliance.

**ALLIANCES: IN-BETWEEN HOME AND COALITION**

I have learned that coalitions and alliances are different. Coalitions are intellectual and political exercises where individual needs are sacrificed for the cause…. When we build coalitions we forget to take care of ourselves. We dismiss our own importance because winning the battle is the goal…. Alliances, on the other hand, are about individuals, they are about love, they are about commitment and they are about responsibility.

—Papusa Molina
Alliances represent a third type of community, one that exists somewhere between the enforced sameness of community as home and the dangerous and divisive difference of community as coalition. While alliances can begin as coalitions, the two types of communities are different. As Molina suggests in the above quotation, alliances can offer a deeper sort of connection than coalition; they are not based on individuals coming together temporarily to battle a crisis and then necessarily disbanding when that crisis is addressed or overcome. Nor are alliances just about fighting with those we do not care for or who do not care for us in order to work for social transformation.

Instead, alliances are about actively developing and sustaining relationships with others who are different from us and about bringing our own voices, experiences and ideas as unique and valuable individuals into conversation with those others. The goal of an alliance is not to win the immediate battle at any cost but to create and maintain a system of allies that will serve and strengthen us (as feminists and democratic citizens in the world) in future battles. This system of allies enables us to take care of ourselves and others so that we are not physically, emotionally or politically depleted by the exhausting process of struggling against oppression.

We develop these allies by expressing love and responsibility for those others with whom we are working and by maintaining a strong commitment to sustaining our alliances. The love and responsibility we express for others with whom we are allied is

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9 While many feminist theorists use the terms coalition and alliance interchangeably, some others, such as Papusa Molina and Lisa Albrecht/Rose Brewer (1990), wish to distinguish between them. Agreeing with Molina and Albrecht/Brewer, I argue that alliances are a deeper form of coalition, a form that is created when individuals in coalition, after working side by side with each other, are able to find some common ground and forge deeper connections. Alliances are not guaranteed when coalition members work together—coalitions do not necessarily lead to alliances—but they are possible.
not exclusively or necessarily based on consensus, commonality, shared understanding or identity. Nor is it free of anger, rage, hostility, conflict or politics. Instead, expressions of love and responsibility within alliances are based on the choices that we make to support others and what actions we take to demonstrate that support. Love and responsibility are about casting our lot with others (Rich) and having each other’s back (Isasi-Diaz).10 And, love and responsibility are about our willingness and commitment to engage in the difficult and uncertain process of forging alliances with others even when we disagree with those others or cannot completely understand them or their experiences. These alliances are not created by erasing those differences or disagreements but by harnessing their creative potential.11 In this way, alliances differ from home communities because they offer long-lasting and supportive connections created through difference instead of sameness.

As a type of feminist community, alliances exist somewhere in-between home and coalition. Like community as home, they emphasize meaningful and supportive relationships between individuals. But, unlike home, they do not rely on sameness as the foundation or goal of those relationships. And like community as coalition, alliances

10 The idea of casting one’s lot with others is taken from Adrienne Rich’s poem, “Natural Resources,” as discussed by Susan Bickford in The Dissonance of Democracy: “I have to cast my lot with those/who age after age, perversely,/ with no extraordinary power,/ reconstitute the world” (Bickford 141). The idea of having one’s back is taken from Susan Thistlethwaite’s recounting of Maria Isasi-Diaz’s comments at a conference in Chicago as discussed by Janet Jakobsen in Working Alliances and the Politics of Difference. “In a lecture at Chicago Theological Seminary, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz was asked by a black woman in the audience, ‘How can women of color trust white women?’” She replied that she had learned to trust white women who would ‘cover your back’”(163).

11 In Sister Outsider, Audre Lorde writes, “difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic” (111).
emphasize engagement with difference. But, unlike coalition, they do not reduce that difference to pure hostility or danger.

To further highlight the differences between communities of alliance and communities of home and coalition and to demonstrate the suitability of alliances for the feminist project of democracy, I want to focus some attention on four distinctive features of alliances: (1) Alliances provide a complex and multi-faceted treatment of difference; (2) they are based on the hard and difficult labor of working through differences to forge connections instead of on an assumed and pre-existing ‘we’; (3) they fulfill the functions of both home (restoration) and coalition (engagement) and (4) they reside in messy, in-between spaces.

First, alliances provide a more complex and multi-faceted treatment of difference than either home or coalition communities do. While members of home communities often ignore or actively attempt to exclude those who are different, members of coalition communities often treat difference as hostile, threatening or divisive and they envision it in simplistic and reductive ways.

Individuals working in coalitions frequently think about difference in one of two ways. Either they think about it in terms of the differences among the various groups in a coalition, such as the differences among the feminist group versus the gay and lesbian group or the black civil rights group, or they think about it in terms of the differences within any particular group in that coalition, such as the differences within the feminist
group between white, black, lesbian and/or heterosexual members. Both of these ways suggest that differences exist between coherent, autonomous and fixed units.12

For example, in terms of differences among groups, each of the groups in a coalition—the feminist group or the gay/lesbian group—are understood to be autonomous and unified.13 Likewise, in terms of differences within groups in a coalition, each of the markers of difference, such as “race” or “sexuality,” are understood to be discrete, stable and unchanging categories. While differences among and within are important for coalitions because they enable groups both to establish unique and distinctive identities and to talk concretely about specific experiences based on gender or race for example, when we limit our treatment of difference to these two, we fail to explore other ways that difference could exist in coalitions.14

The understanding of difference as differences among groups or differences within a group, does not fully address the multiplicity of ways in which different individuals within a group or different groups within a coalition interact with and

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12 This treatment of difference is also connected to the treatment of difference within “liberal-pluralist multiculturalism” that I mention in chapter one. Within “liberal-plural multiculturalism,” difference is treated as a discrete unit to be added to an ever-expanding definition of feminist.

13 Internal conflicts and differences within the group are not considered. Instead, they are subsumed under the larger (coherent and singular) group identity. For more on autonomy and the internal problems it causes for groups, see Jakobsen (1998).

14 As many feminists have suggested, identity is still important. We need to be able to talk about our specific (and unique) experiences and we need to be able to distinguish those experiences from others. Moreover, oftentimes we need to present ourselves as an autonomous movement, one that is clearly distinguishable from other movements. For example, in Fighting Words, Patricia Hill Collins discusses the importance of autonomy and “coming to voice” for Black women as a distinctive and unified movement. For more on her argument, see chapter two, “Coming to Voice, Coming to Power: Black Feminist Thought as Critical Social Theory,” in Fighting Words (44-76).
influence each other.\textsuperscript{15} Nor does it account for the messy ways in which particular differences bleed over into each other or the multiple ways in which discrete and fixed units of difference (whether as groups or as social markers such as “race” or “class”) invariably fail to fully contain particular experiences of that difference.\textsuperscript{16} And, it does not address the “relations of production which create” and give meaning to these differences (Jakobsen 1998, 5).\textsuperscript{17}

Finally, this understanding of difference as differences among or differences within does not allow for any discussion of the connections in-between differences in which various individuals in a group or various groups within a coalition intersect, interact and potentially connect with each other in unexpected ways. This lack of discussion about the in-between connections, which Gloria Anzaldúa identifies as taking place at the borders or crossroads, also erases the possibility of developing deeper connections between these intersections.

By refusing to explore the intersections, feminists are failing to ask important questions about how different categories within a group or different groups within a coalition are implicated within one another and where they might converge and

\textsuperscript{15} For example, how does this scenario enable us to think about the interactions between an individual from one group and an individual from another group when each of those individuals engage with each other in ways not connected to their group affiliations?

\textsuperscript{16} For example, while an individual may identify with a particular group, such as a feminist group, she may have other competing allegiances—to groups organized around her race, class, sexual preference—which complicate her position within that group. Moreover, her identification with the different markers that constitute her own identity (again, race, class, gender, sexual preference) are difficult to distinguish, that is, how can she determine which parts of her are connected specifically to her experience as a “woman” or as “white” or as “heterosexual.”

\textsuperscript{17} When we think of differences as fixed and discrete, we fail to see the culturally and historically specific ways in which those differences come to matter. Additionally, we fail to see the unequal relationships that exist between these differences.
potentially produce meaningful connections. The failure to ask these questions forecloses the possibility of addressing the complicated and multiple ways in which differences not only among and within but in-between feminists could work with and against each other in feminist coalitions. And through this foreclosure, it leaves us with a notion of difference that divides instead of empowers.

In contrast to communities of home and coalition, alliance members take the critiques and constructions of difference very seriously, arguing that difference, particularly a complex notion of it, is essential for any effective community. Placing such an emphasis on difference and its complexity, alliance members acknowledge that difference comes in many forms and are committed to working at a variety of sites of difference, including differences among groups, within groups or in-between individuals or groups.

Alliance members also recognize the positive value of difference. Throughout her collection of essays in *Sister Outsider*, Audre Lorde contends that difference is not something to be merely tolerated or to accept as inevitable, but something to be embraced. Difference needs to be “seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our [women’s] creativity can spark like a dialectic” (111). This dialectic is not one in which differences as fixed and discrete units are put into conflict with each other in order to create a happy synthesis of those differences or to progress to a higher form of feminism. Instead, it is one in which confrontations between differences in its many

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18 Thinking of difference beyond the ways it divides or threatens us is not meant to deny how different perspectives or experiences of power can generate hostility and do pose a real threat of danger to women, particularly women whose differences place them outside of the mythical norm. But, if we only always think of difference in hostile and divisive terms, we fail to see its creative and transformative potential.
forms produce brief moments or sparks of insight, generating creative energy that has the potential, but is not guaranteed, to produce deeper, loving connections that could sustain and energize us in our difficult practices of democratic feminism.

What is central to the more complicated understanding of difference necessary for communities as alliance is the idea that connections between individuals in a community are possible only through the dedicated labor of addressing and working through and with a wide range of types of differences within the community. This idea is directly connected to the second distinguishing feature of an alliance: Alliances are based on the hard and difficult process of working through differences to forge connections instead of on an assumed and pre-existing “we” which unites a community. In other words, alliances are formed through interactions and relationships not a shared identity.19

Unlike understandings of community as home where commonality among women or a shared experience of oppression is assumed and required, understandings of community as alliance do not involve the assumption that meaningful connections between women must exist before those women come together. In an alliance there is no assumed “we” of community existing prior to the development of that community; individuals working together are not assumed to begin as allies who necessarily like or even care for each other. The initial basis for community can be a common cause, a shared desire for a better world, a basic need for survival or even a shared experience or

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19 Joseph Maxwell distinguishes between relationships based on identity which produce similarity-based solidarity and those based on action which produce contiguity-based solidarity. He writes, “in all human societies, there are two fundamentally different dimensions of relationships that are involved in the creation and maintenance of solidarity: similarity and contiguity. Similarity-based solidarity derives from the ways in which people recognize or construct resemblances between one another, ways that they are alike. Contiguity-based solidarity, on the other hand, derives from the ways in which people interact, meet one another’s needs, and thereby come to know and care about one another” (as cited in Welch 1999, 69).
However, this temporary or superficial connection can only become a deeper, more meaningful one when members of the community actively decide to engage in the difficult job of making themselves and others into allies.

But, what does this labor look like? How do we convert a common cause or a shared passion for justice into the basis for a meaningful and sustainable community? How do we make ourselves into allies? Because these questions will serve as the basis for chapter four, I will not spend much time reflecting on them here. However, I do want to add that the labor of becoming allies comes in many forms.

Audre Lorde suggests that we can become allies with each other when we listen and take seriously, through respectful engagement, each other’s differences and the anger and pain that those differences can cause, particularly when some of those differences are privileged over others or when only certain differences are recognized as important. In “Uses of Anger,” she writes, “anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies” (Lorde 1984, 127).

Sharon Welch and Bernice Johnson Reagon argue that we can become allies for others when we participate in the physical and material struggles of those others. This physical and material engagement requires that we do more than pay lip service to the oppression against others that we wish to denounce; it requires that we challenge that

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20 Alliances most certainly can have members with similar identities and shared backgrounds. However, a similar identity or shared background does not guarantee that individuals care about or even like each other. Not all white women are friends, for example and not all families look out or nurture and support each other. In both of these cases, individuals become allies with others through their caring and loving actions toward those others.
oppression “directly in our workplaces, in our families, and in our own lives…” (Welch 136). By engaging in the struggles of someone else directly, we can prove to them that we are trustworthy and that we genuinely care about them.

Additionally, the process of engaging in these material and physical struggles with a wide range of others has the potential to transform our understanding of ourselves and our relationship to oppression. In “Coalition Politics,” Reagon writes about whites from the North who came down South in the 1960s to fight for civil rights for blacks:

There were people who came South to work in the movement who were not Black. Most of them were white when they came. Before it was over, that category broke up—you know, some of them were Jewish, not simply white, and some others even changed their names…At some point, you cannot be fighting oppression and be oppressed yourself and not feel it (363).

Through their direct participation with others in the struggle to end oppression, these (predominantly) white Northerners were able to transform how they understood themselves. They came to see how oppression directly affected their own lives and, in so doing, became stronger and more committed allies to others who were also fighting against oppression.

Finally, Judith Butler claims we can become allies when we engage in a collective examination of some difficult questions about how we are dependent upon each other and how we share some responsibility for each other’s pain and exclusion. For Butler, these questions are concerned with exploring the ways in which we (and our various identities) come into being because of or at the expense of others. In *Bodies that Matter*, she implores feminists to ask themselves and each other questions like: “How has the
‘Orient’ been figured as the veiled feminine (Lowe, Chow); and to what extent has feminism pillaged the “Third World” in search of examples of female victimization that would support the thesis of a universal patriarchal subordination of women (Mohanty)” (Butler 1997, 117)?

Fundamental to these different discussions of the labor needed for becoming allies is the idea that this labor is democratic in nature. It is democratic because regardless of their methods, all of these feminists argue that we become allies when we work for the redistribution of power within ourselves and within our relationships, that is, when we shift the emphasis away from our own perspective and towards the perspective of others, when we value the voices (their expressions of pain, anger) and subjectivity of those others as much as our own, when we actively (as in physically and materially) engage with others in struggles against oppression or when we learn to acknowledge and rectify how our own privileged positions have contributed to the silencing and oppression of those with whom we wish to forge alliances.

Regardless of how we understand it, the alliances that we create through those labors are fragile, dynamic and constantly shifting in nature and form. And the community that is created from those alliances—the “we”— is always contingent, part of an ongoing project in which members of the community work to “constitute the term ‘we,’ while simultaneously questioning it and pushing its limits” (Jakobsen 1999, 2).

A third distinctive feature of the alliance involves the functions that it fulfills. In contrast to communities that serve only as nurturing, resting places (homespaces) or only as sites of struggle and battle (coalitions), alliances serve as both sources of support/
restoration and locations of active political engagement. Much like Reagon, I recognize the necessity and value of both restoration and engagement, but unlike Reagon who creates a strict division between these functions and their locations, I do not believe that these functions must exist in fundamentally separate spaces. Alliances are a type of community that can “provide home and critique, comfort and challenge” (Welch 1999, 67).

But while alliances are able to function as locations for support/restoration and political engagement, the support and restoration that they give and the political engagement that they encourage are often very different from what is found in either home or coalition communities. Take, for example how alliances provide support and restoration as compared to homespaces. Within homespaces, support and restoration are usually linked with safety, unquestioned acceptance, love and, above all, sameness. Individuals retreat to private spaces where they are supported and restored by others like them who unconditionally love and care for them.

This understanding of support and restoration helps to perpetuate a romanticized notion of sisterhood in which all women, because of their shared experience of oppression or their innate capacity for compassion and caring for other women, express unconditional loyalty and allegiance to each other and work together as friends who genuinely like each other. In this understanding, homespaces are believed to be free of power and critique and therefore capable of generating and sustaining a safe haven outside of politics.
The linking of support with love and sameness where all women get along and agree as loyal sisters is dangerous for feminism and helps to perpetuate the idea that difference is a problem instead of a possibility. It also relies on a notion of sisterhood that rejects internal critique and any expressions of anger and rage by feminists toward other feminists.

In her essay, “Sisterhood: Political Solidarity between Women,” bell hooks claims that this version of Sisterhood “dictate[s] that sisters [are] to ‘unconditionally’ love one another; that they [are] to avoid conflict and minimize disagreement; that they [are] not to criticize one another, especially in public” (1984, 46). She challenges this prevailing definition of sisterhood and the idea that feminist love requires uncritical, unconditional and anger-free support, arguing that it only allows for a shallow, superficial form of sisterhood. For hooks, any notion of sisterhood that is created through the suppression of angry dissent produces a false type of solidarity.

Instead of a superficial sisterhood, hooks believes that strong, effective, loving and supportive connections between feminists are only created through engaged critical exploration and (sometimes) painful confrontation between feminists with different perspectives and viewpoints. In this way, rage, anger and critique are not always counter to solidarity but can be an important part of its creation, serving as the “catalyst pushing us on to greater clarity and understanding” (hooks 1997, 63). In arguing for this deeper sense of (hard won) solidarity, hooks is not rejecting sisterhood or support altogether, but suggesting that it must be earned and that it must be worked for.
Audre Lorde echoes this suggestion in her discussion of anger in *Sister Outsider*, arguing that the difficult and painful process of working through our anger (anger towards racism, classism, heterosexism within feminism, for example) produces stronger and more effective connections between feminists that could not only enable us to distinguish between our allies and our enemies, but allow us to find sources of support that strengthen and restore our ability to fight.

A community of alliance is much like the communities that both hooks and Lorde describe; the support that it provides for members of that alliance cannot be assumed, but must be earned through the difficult labor of making oneself into an ally. And the support that it provides is not displayed through unconditional and uncritical love but through an enduring respect and appreciation for the unique voices and experiences of all of the members within the alliance.

While the support of our allies can enable us to retreat from the difficulties of politics (albeit momentarily), the restoration of our minds and bodies that that support allows for is not primarily the result of rest but of reinvigoration and engagement. As hooks suggests above, when we engage instead of retreating with others who are different from us in the process of alliance formation, the critique and challenge that this requires can strengthen us and our commitment to our communities. Working with each other and
our many differences does not have to drain us physically, emotionally and spiritually. Instead it can energize us and renew our commitment to the struggle against oppression.21

The fourth and final distinctive feature of the alliance that I wish to discuss in this chapter concerns what types of spaces these alliances are created and sustained in. In contrast to communities of home that are understood to exist in spaces where everyone is the same and that are fully outside of the public sphere and communities of coalition that are understood to be developed in spaces where everyone is different and that are fully inside of the public sphere, communities of alliances are created in messy, in-between spaces. These spaces are neither fully inside nor outside the system and are not as exclusive or escapist as homespaces or as dangerous or exhausting as coalition spaces.

Much like trickster spaces, the spaces in which alliances are created and sustained exist on the outside and are inhabited by outsiders.22 In Yearning, bell hooks argues that this outside space, which she describes as the margin, is one where outsider individuals can be supported and encouraged by others. It is “a site of resistance and liberation struggle” (43) that “affirms and sustains our subjectivity” (153). And, it is a space of

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21 This process can also enable us to see our differences differently, beyond the ways that they divide us. We may be able to understand other ways in which we are connected. This process of understanding could help restore our hope or commitment to the fight as we see our stakes in that fight differently. We are not just fighting for others, but for parts of ourselves. Audre Lorde writes, “I am a lesbian woman of Color whose children eat regularly because I work in a university…if I fail to recognize the lesbian who chooses not to have children, the woman who remains closeted because her homophobic community is her only life support, the woman who chooses silence instead of another death, the woman who is terrified lest my anger trigger the explosion of hers; if I fail to recognize them as other faces of myself, then I am contributing not only to each of their oppressions, but also to my own” (Lorde 1984, 132-133).

22 In using the term outsiders, I am referring to a wide range of individuals who inhabit the outside to varying degrees. This can include those individuals who have virtually no power, who are ostracized by the system for multiple reasons. And, it can include individuals who maintain some power, either who can “pass” as normal or have gained some amount of token acceptance within the inside. Outsiders are not simply those who, by virtue of their experiences as members of undesirable groups (non-white, lower-class, homosexual, disabled), are cast aside. Outsiders can also be those who choose to express solidarity with others who do not fit, who choose to renounce their privilege and who are traitors to those privileged identities.
radical openness and refusal—a space “where one can say no to the colonizer, no to the
downpressor” (150).

According to hooks, the margin is absolutely essential for the spiritual, emotional
and physical nourishment of those who are forced to live and work within a system that
repeatedly denies and suppresses their humanity and subjectivity (hooks 1990, 150).
Without access to this outsider space, hooks argues, “a deep nihilism penetrates in a
destructive way the very ground to our being. It is there in that space of collective despair
that one’s creativity, one’s imagination is at risk, there that one’s mind is fully colonized,
there that the freedom one longs for is lost” (hooks 1990, 150-151). In other words, we
need spaces where we can exist outside of the system, spaces where we imagine
ourselves differently and spaces where we develop our own opinions independently of a
system that attempts to dictate how we think, act and treat others.23

Deep nihilism and the threat it offers to creativity, imagination and freedom is
very damaging to the development of alliances among different individuals. In order to
create and sustain alliances, individuals need to approach each other subject to subject,
envisioning themselves as valuable and worthy subjects who are engaging and
connecting with other such subjects. They must be willing to respect the differences (the
conflicts, varied experiences and definitions of oppression) that exist between them. And

23 In “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” Nancy Fraser describes how subordinated groups (groups in the
minority who do not share the ideas/experiences of the dominant group) must have their own counterpublic
spaces where they can “deliberate among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies.” Without
these spaces, these groups are “less likely than otherwise to find the right voice or words to express their
thoughts and more likely than otherwise to keep their wants and needs inchoate.” According to Fraser,
“this would render them less able than otherwise to articulate and defend their interests in the
comprehensive public sphere” (81).
they must understand difference in terms other than those dictated by the system, that is, they must see differences as sources of empowerment not just division.

To approach each other in this way, individuals must have access to an outside space where they are not fully consumed by the oppressive and colonizing gestures of the dominant system. Only from within this outside space can they imagine themselves and others as subjects who are valuable and worthy of dignity and respect. Because alliances as outside/outsider spaces can be sources of encouragement and support for individuals, they differ from coalition spaces. Unlike coalition spaces, which are understood by Reagon to be purely dangerous spaces that sap our energy and motivation without giving anything back to us, alliances spaces are potential locations for restoration and reinvigoration.

These outside spaces can be understood in a number of different ways. They can be understood literally as existing in specific locations, such as bell hooks’ description of the margins at the edge of town where she lived as a young girl24 or Gloria Anzaldúa’s description of the U.S. Mexican border.25 They can be understood figuratively as existing in the psychic “as if” spaces where individuals imagine new possibilities, such as Drucilla

24 In “Choosing the Margin as a Site of Radial Openness,” hooks describes her own experience of the outside, marginal space: “As black Americans living in a small Kentucky town, the railroad tracks were a daily reminder of the marginality. Across those tracks, we could not enter, restaurants, but we could not live there…” (149).

25 Anzaldúa describes the outside space as existing in the borderlands between the United States and Mexico “where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of the two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture…” (3).
Cornell’s description of the imaginary domain or Dorothy Allison’s description of her creative re-imaginings of her childhood through fiction. And they can also be understood as fluid and flexible spaces which exist in between fixed differences, fixed locations or fixed identities, such as Chela Sandoval’s description of the mobile space of the differential consciousness or Maria Lugones’ description of the street as a fluid location where outside subjects interact and develop tactical-strategic theories for resistance.

Regardless of how the outside space is understood, its primary function in terms of alliances is the same: to provide outsider individuals with the critical distance from the dominant system that they need in order to develop a network of allies who can support them and back them up with a collective strength greater than their own individual actions could provide. Having a critical distance from the system is crucial for outsider individuals because this distance allows them to connect with others in ways that potentially do not reinforce the dominant system (or its unequal power structures). It enables them to step outside of a system that dictates how they should behave and that either works to demean and dehumanize them because they do not fit or that threatens

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26 In *At the Heart of Freedom*, Cornell describes the imaginary domain as “the psychic and moral space for the exploration of new possibilities and for the chance to rework the fabric of meanings out which the self is spun” (183). Cornell links this imaginary domain with women’s need for sexual freedom—the need to create oneself as a sexuate being and the need to find a space from which to express that sexuality, arguing that the imaginary domain exists prior to any and all definitions of what woman or women’s sexuality is and serves as an “as if” space, one in which women can imagine themselves and their sexuality differently.

27 See Allison (1994) and (1995)

28 In her discussion of differential consciousness and tactical subjectivity in *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Chela Sandoval understands the outside to be a fully fluid and mobile space that exists in between different modes of (and methods for) consciousness.

29 In “Tactical Strategies of the Streetwalker/Estrategias Tácticas de la Callejera,” Maria Lugones describes the outside space as being located in the street.
them with a loss of power and privilege if they do fit and wish to express solidarity with others who do not.

While the purpose of the outside alliance space is to provide individuals with some much needed critical distance from the system, the goal of individuals in alliance should not be to permanently escape from the system but to use their network of allies to dismantle and rebuild that system in ways that are more democratic.\textsuperscript{30} Alliances help to empower individuals to not only resist (that is, stand apart from) the system, but to transform it. In alliances, allies develop tools and skills for understanding the world in new ways that are markedly different from those dictated by the system. For example, in her essay, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” Nancy Fraser argues that feminist alliances create counterdiscourses in which they “formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (Fraser 1997, 81). Within these counterdiscourses, they develop “new terms for describing social reality” that challenge the very nature of distinctive insider and outsider spaces and help to expand our understanding of reality beyond who fits in and who does not (Fraser 1997, 81).\textsuperscript{31}

This idea that outside alliance spaces are not intended to be separatist spaces in which individuals escape to a private retreat but counterpublic spaces in which those individuals contribute to the shaping of a wider, more inclusive and more democratic “public-at-large,” is important for helping us to distinguish alliance spaces from home

\textsuperscript{30} In fact, as many theorists argue, individuals cannot fully escape the inside. Bell hooks (1990) argues that we cannot live and work on the outside all of the time; we must function on the inside. And, Bernice Johnson Reagon claims that we cannot possibly sustain these outside spaces; we cannot keep the inside out (1983).

\textsuperscript{31} These counter-public discourses are much like the oppositional forms of knowledge that the outlaw promotes in chapter two of this dissertation.
spaces. Homespaces are barred rooms where you try to keep everyone out who is not like you or who threatens you and work on issues that are only important to those of you who are in the room. In contrast, alliance spaces are open and fluid places where you work with a wide range of individuals on a wide range of issues in order to expand the scope of what should be considered matters of public concern. The goal of an alliance space is not to retreat from the system but to engage with it democratically, to transform the system so that it addresses the needs and interests of more people.

So far in my description of the fourth distinctive feature of the alliance, I have indicated that alliance spaces exist somewhere in-between the inside and the outside. While they function primarily on the outside, alliance spaces are not completely disconnected from the inside. Alliance members cannot exist on the outside, they must take what resources they have developed from being on the outside and use those resources (network of allies, skills, counterpublic discourses) to resist and/or rebuild the inside in more democratic ways. But, the in-between nature of alliance spaces is not limited to the inside and outside. In addition to being located in-between the inside and outside, alliances spaces also exist in-between fixed identities, fixed groups and fixed differences.

In this way, alliances are located in messy spaces where identities are fluid and complex and where individuals have competing loyalties, such as Anzaldúa who is torn between three cultures (Mexican, Indian, White), hooks who struggles as a upper middle-class academic feminist to remain connected to her heritage as black and poor or Lorde

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32 For more on the term “public-at-large” see Fraser (1997).
who works to negotiate the tensions between her identities as a black woman and a lesbian. As Anzaldúa describes in *Borderlands/La Frontera*, these messy spaces are uncomfortable and unpredictable. They produce a psychic unrest within us, one in which we are in perpetual transition between conflicting identities or groups and where we experience constant confusion over our ambivalent situation.33

But, while these messy spaces are difficult and destabilizing, if we are willing to inhabit them, we could develop the skills that we need in order to become allies to others. For, in order to survive in these messy spaces, we develop “a tolerance for ambiguity” and learn how to remain flexible and open to competing and conflicting ways of being (Anzaldúa 1987, 79). And we begin to recognize that the differences within us (competing loyalties) or between us (clashing cultures/beliefs) are not intractable or even necessarily divisive; they can be creative, transforming the “way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave…” (Anzaldúa 1987, 80). Working within these spaces, we can uncover hidden connections and forge new relationships between ourselves and others and we can find common ground without grounding our connections in commonality.

**WHY ALLIANCES WORK**

33 Describing her experience as a mestiza living between Mexican, Indian and White cultures Anzaldúa writes, “Cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value system, la mestiza undergoes a struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war. Like all people, we perceive the version of reality that our culture communicates. Like others having or living in more than one culture, we get multiple, often opposing messages…Within us and within *la cultura chicana*, commonly held beliefs of the white culture attack commonly held beliefs of the Mexican culture, and both attack commonly held beliefs of the indigenous culture” (78).
As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, feminists need others if they are to be successful in their development of a democratic ethos. In addition to individual role models, like the trickster figures, they need communities that can support, encourage, inspire and train them as they push for more radical forms of democracy. As a type of community, alliances work for feminists in a number of different ways.

First, by participating in alliance communities as opposed to home or coalition communities, feminists are encouraged to take difference and the conflicts, debates and tensions that it creates, seriously. They learn to appreciate the value of differences between feminists—over what feminism is or should be—as having creative and transformative potential. They also learn how to identify and deal with difference beyond the limited (and simplistic) ways in which it is often treated within feminism.

Second, in becoming involved in alliance communities, feminists learn the importance of engaging in hard and democratic labor in order to forge connections between feminists with different experiences, perspectives and agendas. Within alliances, it is not assumed that feminists, by virtue of the fact that they are feminists, will automatically form supportive and loving connections. When feminists participate in alliances, they are forced to develop skills and strategies for negotiating among the many conflicts that potentially exist between them. Through their participation in the hard work of forging alliances, feminists could develop deeper and more meaningful connections that are based on working through difference instead of (oftentimes falsely) assuming unity and similarity.
Third, alliance communities provide feminists with both the nurturing that they need to cope with the dangers and difficulties of feminist democracy and the skills that they need to continue effectively engaging in practices of resistance and social transformation. But, in contrast to either home or coalition communities, the nurturing within alliances is not based on comfort, sameness or retreat (home) and the skills/strategies for survival are not created through pure risk or fatal exhaustion (coalition).

Finally, alliance communities emphasize the value of in-between, messy spaces as powerful sources of resistance, connection and democratic politics. These spaces, which are neither fully inside nor outside of the system, are where individuals are encouraged to engage with the system without being completely subsumed by it. The cultivation and continued theorization of these spaces, which are very rarely mentioned within discussions of home or coalition communities, is essential for the development of meaningful and radically democratic connections between feminists.

But, while alliances work for feminists in many ways, they are not guaranteed to be successful. In fact, as Janet Jakobsen indicates in *Working Alliances*, alliances within feminism have frequently failed to work. “Despite the current emphasis on alliances in feminist theories and practices,” Jakobsen laments, “the production of alliances has proven difficult, often with significant consequences” (2). According to Jakobsen, the reason that alliances frequently fail is because not enough attention is given by feminists to understanding how to engage in the hard and democratic labor of working through our differences. We may be committed to diversity and difference, but if we do not know how to demonstrate that commitment beyond simply stating it to others, we cannot develop
deep and lasting alliances. In order to forge alliances that are effective and can be sustained in the future, we need to examine this democratic labor. In chapter four, I will undertake such an examination.