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Introduction: Relational Activism in and through Pragmatist Feminism

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This *Hypatia* cluster aims to create space for sharing stories and tools designed to support situated, embodied, and dialogical philosophical activism. It emerges from a new generation of pragmatist feminists, illustrating how the field has evolved. These pieces locate pragmatist feminism in place- and issue-based philosophical activism. As an activist and pragmatically grounded philosophy, this approach values the embodied and relational nature of social change as well as the need to create multiple pathways of engagement situated in and across communities.

The inspiration for this cluster emerged from the 2019 Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy conference. We noticed a prominent, emerging theme amid conference sessions not only to recover and reexamine historically underrepresented voices, but also to integrate philosophical insights into presenters' lives more directly and explicitly and explore the possibilities of pragmatist feminism as a resource for approaching practical problems in our communities. We also noticed overlapping tensions around the practical, epistemological, and ethical challenges of living out philosophical activism across diverse communities. These themes stood out precisely because, as pragmatist feminists ourselves, we are seeking to live out this approach while negotiating these challenges. We have found that the efforts of earlier pragmatist feminists have shifted the "structural and symbolic boundaries" of philosophy (Collins 2011), literally creating new social and theoretical places to be. We hope the dialogical exchange among these essays will offer additional insights and strategies for negotiating the challenges of living out a pragmatist-feminist approach to embodied, relational, and situated social-justice and social-change work. Alongside other fields, pragmatist feminism has been further integrating these ideas into contemporary activism. We also hope that these essays present a challenge to philosophy more generally to actively situate itself within the complexities of time and place, engage across disciplinary divisions, and span institutional boundaries.

Pragmatist feminism has evolved over the last thirty years. In 1993, *Hypatia* published a special issue on pragmatist feminist philosophy, edited by Charlene Haddock Seigfried (Seigfried 1993). That issue became a significant resource for those working in this emerging field. Seigfried's groundbreaking book *Pragmatism and Feminism: Reweaving the Social Fabric* further opened this field to a wide range of scholars (Seigfried 1996). Defined as a form of philosophy that emphasizes pluralism, experience, and public engagement, pragmatist feminism integrates pragmatist theories and

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processes with feminist theories in order to address the complexities of lived experience across diverse spaces. The weaving together of feminist and pragmatist practices situates social and political issues within historical, relational, geographical, embodied, and experiential terms and privileges the need for collaborative action and practical interventions across differences (Whipps and Lake 2020). Like feminism, pragmatism historically has deep roots in public philosophical engagement. As Elizabeth Anderson says, pragmatism starts "by exploring the [philosophical] problem as it emerges in practice, in the experiences of the people who confront it" (Anderson 2014, 83). Pragmatist-feminist philosophy has expanded the pragmatist "canon" by searching for and recovering women's voices from the early pragmatist era (1880–1920), exposing the impact of gender discrimination in philosophy.[1] Pragmatist feminists have brought back the voices of women such as Jane Addams, Emily Greene Balch, Mary Parker Follett, Anna Julia Cooper, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Ida B. Wells. As Patricia Hill Collins has noted, "much of this work on individual women philosophers aims to revise the narrative to correct for existing bias," and thus yield "new insights about the substance of pragmatism itself" (Collins 2019, 177).

As the *Stanford Encyclopedia* entry on pragmatist feminism highlights, dozens of pragmatist feminist publications emerged in the 1990s and 2000s focused on recovery of women in early pragmatism, examining how the inclusion of these early activist-philosophers shifted our understanding of the history of pragmatism (Whipps and Lake 2020). These earlier publications included three Penn State University *Feminist Interpretation* volumes: on Dewey (Seigfried 2001), James (Tarver and Sullivan 2015), and Addams (Hamington 2010). Communities of pragmatist-feminist scholars also formed, demonstrated by five conferences focused specifically on pragmatist feminism. A sixth one is scheduled for 2022.

Given that the foundational figures of American Pragmatism—historically seen as William James, Charles Sanders Pierce, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead—brought white, privileged, male, cisgender, straight experiences to their philosophy, this initial expansion outward has been critical, but limited. The inclusion of these women philosophers within the field has partially addressed problems of exclusion, "a promising first step that opens the door to asking how gendered analyses . . . might provide new insights about the substance of pragmatism itself" (Collins 2019, 177). The intersecting nature of their privileged and oppressed social identities provides a different perspective from that of the philosophers noted above. Although many of these women were white and a number came from connected and wealthy families, half of the women listed above never married (Addams and Follett had lifelong female partners), and two of the women were African American. Some brought extensive connections through wealth and education, but others did not. The wider range of experiences and identities presented divergent frameworks that cracked open long-standing assumptions about the foundational ideas of pragmatism and revealed new practices for philosophical engagement, which shifted the field. It also opened different kinds of spaces and opportunities within philosophical activist work. As boundary-spanners, these women were far more connected to diverse communities than were their male colleagues; they built relationships with and worked alongside a plurality of community members, often leveraging power to advocate for change across social and political divides. For instance, as a community organizer in Chicago in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Addams engaged with neighborhood residents across immigrant communities, labor-rights activists, business owners, city officials, government officials, and intellectuals.

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As demonstrated by the essays in this cluster, recent work is expanding the scope of pragmatism globally, situating intersectional identities and exploring the role of power and place. This work is part of a larger feminist movement to reexamine the fields of philosophy and feminism.

For example, in 2020 *Hypatia* released two special issues explicating some of the work unfolding in decolonial and indigenizing philosophy (in particular, see Bardwell-Jones and McLaren 2020; Velez and Tuana 2020). These special issues continue some of the early work of decolonizing theory done by scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, María Lugones, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, and the volume edited by Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding (Narayan and Harding 2000; Mohanty 2004; Lugones 2010; Tuck and Yang 2012). Reforming a field requires boundary-spanning advocacy, working across disciplines on joint projects, and bringing into view both the connections to and departures from traditional fields. Transforming a field "takes time," and, according to Collins, "is best carried out by disciplinary insiders" (Collins 2019, 176). Feminist philosophers are taking up this work. Critical to current efforts within feminist pragmatism specifically is their engagement across epistemological, ethical, and structural divides. Recent pragmatist work draws explicitly on a broader array of both feminist and pragmatist traditions. Scott Pratt's work, for instance, explores indigenous influences across pragmatism (Pratt 2011). Collins and V. Denise James explore the synergies between the intellectual activism of African American feminists and the pragmatist method (James 2009; 2013; Collins 2019). *American Philosophy: From Wounded Knee to the Present* (McKenna and Pratt 2015), provides a broad and inclusive overview of the thinkers and activists in the American tradition, many of whom would not have been considered "philosophers" in the traditional twentieth-century canon. This expansion is not only shifting the narrative and locus of the field, but also sparking greater self-reflexivity about the role of privilege and oppression. The essays in this cluster continue those efforts to rethink and resituate the pragmatist tradition.

Along with this necessary, inclusive reinterpretation of the canon, the focus of pragmatist feminism is shifting to methods of engaging practical problems and social issues. This mirrors the broader push for changes in the culture of philosophy, such as that urged by Kristie Dotson when she asked "whether the field of philosophy has the capacity to sustain the work of diverse peoples?" (Dotson 2012, 3). In order to find a way forward for philosophy as a space for women of color and the global South, she urged that philosophy move from the twentieth-century "culture of justification" that requires legitimation via a predetermined canon of thinkers, to a "culture of praxis." According to Dotson, a radically inclusive culture of praxis focuses on "issues and circumstances pertinent to our living" as they "emerge as pertinent among different populations." This cluster attempts to do just this by focusing on contemporary issues that are grounded in specific communities. It seeks to encourage "multiple ways of understanding disciplinary validation" (17) and thereby further cultivate a critical, reflexive, internal gaze alongside a willingness to collaborate.

Growing from an activist and pragmatically grounded philosophy, pragmatist-feminist approaches value the embodied and relational nature of change as well as the need to create multiple pathways of doing philosophy, recognizing that "unjust social relations, such as those that constitute institutionalized race and gender inequality, distort inquiry by suppressing insights from the less advantaged" (Anderson 2014, 84). As demonstrated in this cluster, this newer iteration of pragmatist feminism has turned specifically toward public philosophy, defined as "philosophy that engages issues

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of public concern and works collaboratively with civic and professional communities" (PPN 2020). Current pragmatist feminists are, for instance, engaging issues of epistemic justice, food justice, critical and engaged pedagogy, border-crossing, and political activism. To do that work, a number of current scholars are exploring the work of civil-rights activist Grace Lee Boggs (Lake 2020; Pappas 2021; Varner 2021), Latin American philosophers (Pappas 2017), and Chicanx philosophers such as Gloria Anzaldúa (Newton 2017; Alessandri 2019; Tirres 2019; Alessandri 2020; Stehn 2020).

In addition, more and more scholars from across fields have been enacting what we call pragmatist-feminist strategies in order to explicitly weave their academic and activist work together (Yun Lee 2011; Boggs and Kurashige 2012; Lake 2014; McHugh 2015; Saltmarsh and Hartley 2016; Cann and DeMeulenaere 2020; Hernandez 2021). In *The Activist Academic: Engaged Scholarship for Resistance, Hope, and Social Change* for instance, Colette Cann and Eric DeMeulenaere coauthor an "autoethnographic counterstory" designed to shift hegemonic academic practices to hold space for situated academic activism (Cann and DeMeulenaere 2020). Similarly, the 2020 issue of *The Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education* was devoted to supporting critical service-learning efforts that shift dominant practices of service so they are more focused on understanding histories of oppression, social change, "authentic relationships," and "the redistribution of power" (Mitchell and Latta 2020, 4). Nancy McHugh advocates for "a transactionally situated approach," weaving together archival and case study research with her feminist-philosophy scholarship, teaching, and service obligations, in order to intervene in cycles of epistemic oppression (McHugh 2015, 7). In her case, this has led to her teaching in the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program, her service work as the 2020 Public Philosophy Network President, and the Institute for the Public Humanities and Sciences.

This cluster of articles shares stories and tools designed to support these endeavors. These essays highlight exemplars of historical and contemporary philosophically engaged feminists and explore how the insights gleaned from these exemplars inform these six authors' current work. Some of the theorists and activists they rely on may be relatively unknown to pragmatists, such as the late twentieth-century civil-rights activist Grace Lee Boggs and the current immigrant relief work being done by Sister Norma Pimentel at the Mexican/American border. These essays also explore what can be learned by rereading and reconsidering the work of activist-philosophers such as Jane Addams and Mary Parker Follett as forms of extremely sophisticated *public philosophical activism*. Several of these essays intentionally integrate research practices with pedagogy and the norms of academic service. Others explore the way pragmatist-feminist practices filter into our personal as well as professional lives. Most important, all of these essays demonstrate how readers might live as feminist philosophical activists.

In "Feminist-Pragmatist Reflections on the Filial Obligations of a Filipina American Daughter," Celia Bardwell-Jones explores the role of filial conflict and tension across gender and cultural norms. By explicating how our lived experiences and relationships shape our selves over time, this Musing showcases the need for self-reflexivity within philosophy. The Filipino concept of respect and authority, *amor propio*, encourages practices of respect toward the father as head of the household, but clashes with the author's personal and public commitment to gender equality. The essay draws on Anzaldúa's reconstruction of the concept of "home" and Jane Addams's writing on filial relationships to contextualize this struggle. It also highlights the potential value in relational activism within complex and intimate relationships.

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Mariana Alessandri's "Place-Based Philosophical Activism on the US–Mexico Border" builds on Anzaldúa's tradition of "spiritual activism" to define the work of Sister Norma Pimentel, who in 2014 started the Humanitarian Respite Center (HRC), which provides relief and support to Central American refugees passing through federal immigration centers at the Mexico–Texas border. Alessandri recounts the HRC's efforts to provide food, clothing, and temporary shelter to countless people from 2014–2019 and places these efforts within a pragmatist-feminist context, highlighting it as a critical space for relational philosophical activism. The essay connects Sister Norma's activism to Jane Addams's work in the immigrant neighborhoods surrounding Hull House and reframes the role of direct service as a critical space for being-with others across differences, generating sympathetic understanding and taking action to restore human dignity. Alessandri recounts her own work to align her teaching, service, and research with Sister Norma's efforts. The public philosophical and activist nature of her partnership with the HRC challenges more simplistic notions of sympathetic understanding and helps reframe the role of direct service and engaged teaching so they both become a critical space for being-with others across differences.

In "Grace Lee Boggs's Person-Centered Education for Community-Based Change," Tess Varner explores how two narrative models can shift classroom practices: Boggs's visionary, relational, and place-based educational model, and that of the international "Narrative 4" organization. Both offer storytelling tools that support creative co-transformation across disparate communities. Varner first examines the work of activist philosopher Grace Lee Boggs, highlighting how Boggs's "humanity-stretching" activist pedagogy aligns with pragmatist feminist philosophies and fosters democratic habits for resilient changemaking. She then connects Boggs's educational model to the Narrative 4 program. As a global, educational story-sharing initiative, Narrative 4 facilitates space for community story-sharing. Facilitators provide time for community and students to connect through sharing stories. Participants connect with a partner, listen to that person's story, then retell their partner's story from the first-person perspective (as if it were their own). This approach shifts emphasis toward seeing one another across our differences; it emphasizes experience, relationality, and plurality in order to visualize unconscious biases, build relationships, and provide skills for future philosophical activist work. Combined with Boggs's emphasis on philosophical activism, this pedagogy opens space for individual and collective transformation and healing across communities.

Jennifer Fenton further explores the value and challenges of telling others' stories as a form of activism in "Storied Social Change: Recovering Jane Addams's Early Model of Constituent Storytelling to Navigate the Practical Challenges of Speaking for Others." She examines how Jane Addams and contemporary social-justice-nonprofit leaders use storytelling about their constituents to speak to wider publics about social problems. She asks what people today might learn about the practical and ethical challenges and possibilities of constituent storytelling from Addams's boundary-spanning work as a "hybrid activist-scholar situated across diverse spaces". Much has been written on this issue by feminist theorists, but Addams highlights practical possibilities and challenges for practitioners navigating structural conditions of oppression and exclusion. Drawing on Addams, Fenton suggests that "activist storytelling can open spaces for inviting privileged publics into wider understanding of their social world, and into acknowledgment of marginalized stakeholders." She considers how human-services professionals might ethically share the stories of others in order to spark opportunities for social change. Drawing from Addams's own practice, Fenton concludes that

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responsible storytelling practices must name and situate the storyteller within the story, acknowledge the story's partiality and limitations, seek out implicit biases, and open opportunities for "democratic *neighborship* with the Other across difference."

Danielle Lake returns to Jane Addams's work in "Emergent, Relational Revolution: What *More* Do We Have to Learn from Jane Addams?" She demonstrates that Addams's model can be a resource for social innovation, looking to spark radical but incremental change. Understanding and utilizing Addams's strategies requires, as she says, situating Addams's work in time and place. It also requires contemporary activists acknowledge their own cultural and temporal situatedness. Both are needed to avoid a cursory reading of Addams and problematic misappropriations of her work (Fischer 2019).[2]

Rereading Addams's work in its context offers three specific strategies for the publicly engaged philosopher. Like Fenton, Lake first reads Addams as illustrating the need to bring a strong dose of humility to situations of unequal power and privilege. Humility is the foundation for a commitment to be in long-term, reflective, participatory relationships with community members. Second, following Addams's model, Lake recommends bringing a systems-change perspective to activism, pointing to the collaborative geographical and historical community-mapping that Hull-House undertook in its early years. Last, she illustrates how Addams often used narratives to shift readers' moral perspectives, an approach that enabled Addams to reframe social problems. Contemporary activists working within communities could use similar collaborative approaches to "uncover and co-create evocative narratives" to inform the general public and as pedagogical practices. These three strategies can lead to what Lake calls a "relational revolution," that is, a transformation that is "drastic, pervasive, and sustained" but not sudden or violent. Instead, it can open toward what Grace Lee Boggs called "radical imaginaries" (Boggs and Kurashige 2012), real change that is grounded in diverse communities.

In "Mary Parker Follett as Integrative Public Philosopher," Matthew Brown explicates how rereading Follett as a feminist-pragmatist public philosopher better visualizes her unique approach. As he says, Follett was a "socially engaged philosopher of democracy, of community life, and of social organization." Because of her wide-ranging interdisciplinary work, and her focus on labor issues and management practices, Follett has not previously fit neatly into pragmatist or feminist philosophy, but Brown situates her work as a model of public philosophy. Follett's philosophy grew out of her personal relational experiences, including her early work with a social settlement that, like Hull House, served largely immigrant communities, many of whom were poor or working-class.

This deep engagement led to her groundbreaking analysis of how power works in community life and in organizations. She rejected what she called "coercive power," the domination of those in privileged positions, and promoted "coactive power" or "power-with" (Pratt 2011; Whipps 2014). A power-with approach requires careful listening to others' perspectives with the intent to preserve those multiple voices, similar to the approaches advocated in the Varner, Fenton, and Lake essays. This power-with approach, in community problem-solving and in organizations, leads to creative solutions that wouldn't be visible from a power-over perspective. Utilizing a power-with approach is more likely to result in sustainable solutions that work for a broad constituency.

Follett's model can be used to extend community efforts such as those outlined in Varner's "person-centered education." Follett proposes a complex democratic process

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that integrates multiple grassroots voices toward group decision-making "in which individuals with differing experiences, aims, and values come together to make a decision." Because of this approach, she didn't support single-minded affinity groups, like the women's-suffrage movement, which she said didn't adequately reflect an individual's diverse perspectives. Instead, Follett put an innovative approach into practice, taking an experiential and experimental democratic approach in community meetings. Follett says that at community decision-making meetings, "we should begin to observe and analyze our experience much more carefully than we do at present" (Follett 1924/1951, 212). The process includes being present to carefully listen to others' experiences, followed by research to further investigate and situate the issue. Brown's essay concludes by highlighting the need for a form of philosophical activism that is more aware of and responsive to social realities and thus nimbler in the face of those shifting complexities.

Multiple themes connect these essays, beginning with relational, situated activism that grows from knowing and sharing experiences across diverse communities. From personal to professional to social spaces, the contributors focus on the practices of situated, iterative reflective action. Sustained philosophical activism requires a willingness to be with others in space and time, which highlights the need for humility and self-reflexivity about the intersecting nature of privilege, power, and oppression.

The essays also highlight how current efforts toward relational activism are stymied by siloes and suggest that this work requires not only a willingness to value the experiential stories of others, but also a willingness to explore how we move from those stories toward collaborative action. Contributors explore the possibilities and limitations of an array of strategies and methods, from self-reflexivity, to constituent storytelling, collaborative community-mapping, and transdisciplinary boundary-spanning. Varner's and Alessandri's work focuses on bringing disparate voices and perspectives together in the same space, whereas Bardwell-Jones highlights the need for self-reflexivity within relationships that cross social differences. Fenton explores the role of personal stories in bridging spatial divisions and opening opportunities for transformational engagement across differences. As Fenton explains, telling others' stories ethically is challenging and requires one to be reflective about one's own social standpoint. Lake and Brown move beyond storytelling toward explicating processes for collaborative co-creation across power differentials. They suggest that public philosophers pursue a situated approach to social justice that prioritizes the need for humility, adaptability, and relationality.

By putting these strategies into practice within their own lives, these contributors highlight the potential and the challenge for generating social change. Collectively, their essays open up multiple pathways for engaging in relational and situated philosophical activism across personal, professional, and social spheres. They demonstrate the embodied and connected ways in which many pragmatist feminists are living out these practices across their lives and working toward change in their communities. Contemporary pragmatist feminists return to the possibilities and the challenge, the opportunities and the risks, of meliorism that is embedded in the pragmatist tradition and that offers both pragmatists and feminists models of publicly engaged philosophy.

Notes

1 For early work in this field prior to 1993, see Boydston 1975; Laird 1988; Lagemann 1985; Mahowald 1986–87, Heldke 1987; Gatens-Robinson 1991; Miller 1992; and Seigfried 1992.

2 Marilyn Fischer's book *Jane Addams' Evolutionary Theorizing* gives multiple examples of how scholars have misread Addams because they either do not understand the early twentieth-century vocabulary that

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she used or have missed her historical patterns of reasoning. For example, Fischer disagrees with critics such as Cartelli (Fischer 2019, 80), Westbrook, and Menand (88–90), who accuse Addams of not vigorously critiquing capitalism. Fischer demonstrates that Addams, like most other intellectuals of her day, thought in terms of historical processes rather than abstract categories. Like the Fabian socialists, Addams saw "capitalism" as a temporary and anarchic phase that was essentially a holdover of feudalism, with the capitalist as feudal lord. Hence, in "A Modern Lear," she criticized Pullman for holding to a feudal ethics. She thought of capitalism as merely a label for a passing phase on the way toward economic and social democracy. Likewise, some scholars have interpreted the Labor Museum as a "sign of Addams's alliance with capitalist employers," whereas Fischer's contextual reading demonstrates that it was created as an educational step toward removing the predatory "incubus" of industrialized labor (145–46).

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