

RADICAL PEDAGOGY

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Up from SCUM: Radical Feminist Pedagogies and Consciousness-Raising in the Classroom

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Abstract

Though radical feminist texts played a major role in shifting discourse within second wave feminism, women's studies classrooms have rarely incorporated them on a consistent basis into the women's studies curriculum. While critical thinking and questioning the underlying premises of institutions remain two central goals of women's studies as a discipline, radical feminist writings have been continually excluded from most women's studies courses since the inception of women's studies as an academic discipline in the early 1970s. Reading classic liberal, feminist, queer, and antiracist texts have served as tools for consciousness-raising during third wave feminism of the last two decades; thus, unorthodox texts—particularly texts with overt emotion, humor, or anger—offer their own pedagogical value when teaching students about oppression. Helping students connect to the *affect* in their texts should represent a central goal for women's studies instruction. As such, this study utilizes one such radical feminist text—Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto*—as a basis for examining student attitudes about gender, power, and pedagogy. In doing so, we outline some of the challenges and limitations of uniting radical texts and feminist pedagogy.

Keywords: *SCUM Manifesto*, Valerie Solanas, feminist pedagogy, radical feminism

Introduction

“Having an obsessive desire to be admired by women, but no intrinsic worth, the male constructs a highly artificial society enabling him to appropriate the appearance of worth through money, prestige,

‘high’ social class, degrees, professional position and knowledge and, by pushing as many other men as possible down professionally, socially, economically, and educationally.”

—Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* (1968)

“Feminism is shaped by what it is against, just as women’s bodies and lives may be shaped by histories of violence that bring them to a feminist consciousness. Being against something depends on how one reads what one is against. Anger is a form of ‘against-ness’...not only signifying protest, but also putting an end to the thing being protested against...It is the history of anger that gives feminist politics its edge.”

—Tiina Rosenberg, “Still Angry After All These Years, or Valerie Solanas under Your Skin” (2010)

First published in 1967 at the start of second wave feminism, Valerie Solanas’s *SCUM Manifesto* enacts a full-fledged revolt against commonly-held assumptions of the day. For example, by utilizing the same strategies employed by Freud in his work on penis envy, Solanas argues that men have “pussy envy” and that they admire women’s inherent emotional, physical, and intellectual superiority to men (Solanas, 1968). Solanas utilizes a combination of humor, satire, and anger to convey her primary message: we need to dismantle oppressive social institutions and rethink gendered assumptions. Her experience comes from “a puffing screaming black hole of misogyny and sticky bodily fluids...What is said about patriarchy out of that position is the only thing that is worth knowing about patriarchy” (Stridsberg, 2003, p.7).

This study examines student responses from four semesters of teaching *SCUM Manifesto* in order to raise questions about the value of utilizing radical feminist texts in upper-division women’s studies courses. We explore the various ways that Solanas provoked students to consider their own beliefs about gender, particularly as Solanas attacks the central tenets of liberalism—a philosophy most women’s studies classes endorse. For example, Solanas disagrees with the commonly held liberal idea that all parties involved in a conversation must welcome disagreement and remain civil; rather, she argues against the “civil disobedience lunch club” of feminism and instead, perhaps satirically, for total annihilation of men. In doing so, exposes the (faulty?) rhetoric of liberalism even while venturing into the seemingly absurd.

This paper specifically examines the way Solanas’s writing inspired students to locate themselves politically and personally in relation to her radical ideologies, thus playing with the boundaries of “good feminism” and “bad feminism.” Largely considered a work too controversial for the classroom—in part because it emphasizes stereotypes most women’s studies instructors work hard to battle against (i.e., feminist teachers as man-hating, discriminatory, and angrily queer)—Solanas has been thrown in the dustbin of history. We argue that, by resuscitating her provocative writings, students can grapple with their own discomfort about, or identification with, women’s rage. *SCUM Manifesto* might also work to expose the faulty underlying premises of women’s studies’ current “public relations” campaign. Commonly seen as vulgar and unacademic, Solanas’s brazen statements wrapped in subversive satire have provocative pedagogical utility in the women’s studies classroom.

Feminist Pedagogy

Many scholars that utilize critical and feminist pedagogies have critiqued the traditional model of education as one that creates a learning environment centered on a grading system, memorization, and an authoritarian teacher and submissive student relationship. Embedded within this model, power imbalances are perpetrated without much consideration for how such imbalanced power dynamics affect student learning. Critics of traditional pedagogy argue that it overrelies upon what Paulo Freire describes as “banking,” where students become passive receptacles that teachers supposedly “fill” with information (Beckman, 1990; Freire, 1970; hooks, 1994; Larson, 2006). Both critical and feminist theorists argue that knowledge is socially constructed and that schools perpetuate certain value systems via beliefs, attitudes, and priorities set forth in the classroom. Pedagogical practices are therefore not “neutral,” but rather, modes of communicating dominance, social norms, and ideologies about social identities like race, class, and gender (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1999; McLaren, 1998).

Though feminist pedagogy and critical theory share similar criteria and goals for educating students, feminist pedagogy focuses specifically on women’s lives and experiences as a starting point for creating and learning about epistemology in the women’s studies classroom (Beckman, 1990; Larson, 2006). Feminist pedagogies insist upon a continual examination of the way gender affects lived experience, policy, and cultural norms, particularly by exploring and unpacking the unexamined dynamics of gender and power (Crabtree & Sapp, 2003; Stake, 2006).

Crabtree and Sapp (2003) describe feminist pedagogy as “a set of classroom practices, teaching strategies, approaches to content, and relationships grounded in critical pedagogical and feminist theory” (p. 131). Feminist pedagogy challenges the teacher-student relationship and the student’s relationship to knowledge (Stake, 2001). Jayne Stake and Francis Hoffman (2000; 2006) qualitatively measured women’s studies professors’ pedagogical practices and found the following four categories most commonly used: 1) *participatory learning*: student participation by expressing their personal experiences in the classroom; 2) *development of critical thinking/ open-mindedness*: strengthening of critical thinking skills, where students engaged in critical thinking about the topics in lecture, rather than accepting information or “debanking”; 3) *validation of personal experience/ development of confidence*: encouraging students to see the connection between assigned readings and their own life experiences and 4) *development of political/social understanding*: helping students to conceptualize connections between readings, their societal context, and their role in engaging actively in social change. Therefore, feminist pedagogy enables students to critically examine the microcosmic implications of macrocosmic and hegemonic cultural policies and to decipher how those belief systems affect them on the personal level (Stake, 2006).

In addition to the aforementioned tenets of feminist pedagogy, women’s studies professors often strive to practice egalitarian power dynamics in the classroom, as well as to encourage egalitarian attitudes in general (Crabtree & Sapp, 2003; hooks, 1994; Stake, 2006). This creates a supportive atmosphere where students respect everyone’s right to comment and critically evaluate their world. Opinions inconsistent with feminism expressed in the classroom can serve as platform for critical analysis and debate, with students deconstructing comments construed as sexist, racist, heterosexist, etc. while maintaining the democratic structure of the classroom (Kimmel & Worrell, 1997). Women’s studies classes have demonstrated the capacity to heighten students’ awareness of gender inequality; increase confidence and sense of empowerment; develop less conventional beliefs about gender and create greater practices of egalitarianism. Enhanced confidence, empowerment, and critical thinking skills students developed in women’s studies classes predicted feminist and political activism later on (Stake & Hoffman, 2001; 2007).

No current studies have interrogated the intersections between radical politics and feminist pedagogy. The one text on radical feminism in academia notably features a “survival guide” for radical feminists in academia; Gearheart (1983) outlined tasks that enabled instructors to retain their radical politics within the authoritative, hostile environment of the academy (Gearheart, 1983). She explains how radical feminism inherently conflicts with the liberal structure of university education because the academy is “racist and class-biased as well as sexist and is an institution serving an exploitative economic system. U.S. colleges and universities function according to the stratification, values, methods, and goals of the larger society, those of white male capitalism” (p. 5). Radical feminists, on the other hand, advocate for complete demolition of those oppressive social institutions, which often comes across as more threatening and “dangerous” than the liberal premises of feminism (Gearheart, 1983). As the Gearheart text is the only text to address radical feminism in the academy, a study that examines the potentials and pitfalls of radical feminist pedagogy is needed.

Up from SCUM

Little academic work has paid attention to Valerie Solanas’s *SCUM Manifesto* and its impact on contemporary sexual politics, despite the fact that Solanas is relatively famous for shooting Andy Warhol (along with two of his associates) on June 3, 1968 (Fahs, 2008). As a result of the shootings, Solanas herself has been dismissed as mentally unstable and crazed; her writing has become obscured and labeled extreme, banished to the margins of the women’s studies curriculum. In her blunt, derogatory delivery, Solanas criticizes the patriarchal influence of social institutions and practices, taking aim at wide swath of targets: economics, government, religion, culture, prejudice, social class, and the family. Making concrete the stated goals of feminist pedagogy, Solanas addresses how personal experiences can act as a site for the creation of knowledge and how easily and willingly people remain complicit in their own oppression. For example, she explains how the patriarchal family composition (the father system) turns women into “daddy’s girls”—that is, insecure, timid, fearful, pandering, and always considering themselves inferior to men both personally and professionally (Solanas, 1968). Obviously, Solanas did not advocate for an egalitarian societal structure—a stance that notably conflicts with the agenda of most feminist educators. Rather, Solanas rejected the atmosphere of peaceful camaraderie among all women (the second wave credo of “sisterhood is powerful”) by instead anticipating all-out war complete with a male genocide and the triumph and rule of SCUM females.

Solanas’s message has not fallen on deaf ears. Rather, the manifesto has been translated into at least

twelve languages and has sold more copies than any other radical feminist text from the late 1960s and early 1970s (Fahs, 2008). Of all radical feminist texts from that era, it stands as one of the few still in print—in fact, Verso put out its seventh published U.S. edition in 2004, with an introduction by noted critical scholar, Avital Ronell. In 1996, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, a feature film directed by feminist filmmaker Mary Harron, documented Solanas's most active writing years, her failed assassination attempt, and the aftermath of the shooting. The film received many positive reviews and critics described it as witty, funny, and adventurous (Rea, 1996; Romney, 1996), with Lili Taylor's performance of Solanas being described as a "brilliant, absolutely riveting portrayal" (Salem, 1996, p.6).

Within the academy, a small handful of studies have examined Solanas from the perspective of feminist studies, performance studies, and related disciplines. Most have looked at Solanas's actions as contradictory and unsettling for contemporary gender politics—something quite relevant for students exposed to Solanas for the first time in a feminist classroom. Breanne Fahs (2008) argued that the interplay between Valerie Solanas's writings and actions imply that Solanas *lived through* her writings in order to resolve the contradictions of her existence. Speaking about the radical nature of her work and its usefulness to discourses of gender politics, Fahs wrote, "Although Solanas's contradictions alienate her from the feminist movement (and consequently elicit a dismissive or reductive reaction to her work and actions), they also exemplify the power and importance of radical thought, both on a textual level and through the interplay between radical work and gender politics" (p. 592).

Dana Heller's (2001) analysis of the real and fictionalized events in the film *I Shot Andy Warhol*, also speaks to the contradictions between Solanas's lived experiences and her written text. For example, inaccurately depicted in the film, Solanas received the gun used to shoot Warhol from "Mark" of the anarchist affinity group, Up Against the Wall Motherfuckers.

Harron readily acknowledges that several changes such as this were made in the interests of plot development; however, this particular fictionalization suggests that Solanas sleeps with Mark in order to steal his revolver. The film's relentless focus on her passionate hatred of the male sex overlooks the fact that Solanas forged emotional connections with a number of men, some of whom went to significant lengths to assist her. Mark Motherfucker actually did stage a street theater 'happening' in Solanas's defense (p. 178).

Solanas developed a close friendship with Ben Morea, based on the character "Mark," despite her animosity and anger towards men depicted in the manifesto (Fahs, 2012).

Taking up Solanas's actions and beliefs, Amanda Third (2006) described Solanas's shooting of Warhol as a "propaganda stunt" to draw attention to her feminist intentions outlined in the manifesto. Third framed the assassination attempt as a "terrorist tactic" or a kind of performance similar to the protest performance of radical feminist groups of the 60s: "Solanas attempted to redirect popular attention to her political cause by facilitating the linkage of her 'radical gesture' with the politics of feminist revolution outlined in her manifesto. That is, for Solanas, her attack on Warhol constituted a propaganda stunt that would operate in the violent, spectacular, and publicity-centered terms of terrorism to foreground a political agenda" (p. 108). In contrast, Jennifer Baumgardner argued in her review of *I Shot Andy Warhol* that Solanas's shooting of Warhol did not constitute a feminist act or a radical "terrorist tactic" to divert attention to her manifesto, explaining that "Valerie Solanas struck and became a confused symbol of fighting back, but she is more of a Lorena Bobbitt than an Andrea Dworkin" (p. 74). Baumgardner also argued that Mary Harron did not interpret the shooting as a feminist act, but rather, framed the shooting as Solanas's violent response to her perception that Warhol was withholding her play, *Up Your Ass*: "Harron says, 'the shooting was a personal act of revenge and paranoia, not a political assassination'" (p. 74).

Finally, Mavis Haut (2007) argues for recognition of Solanas as a woman comedian and the first feminist satirist, claiming, "When *SCUM* was written, Solanas stood alone – there was no tradition of ultra-aggressive, feminist satire for her to fall back on" (p. 30). Haut compares Solanas's style to that of 18th century Anglo-Irish satirist Jonathon Swift and Jewish-American comedian Lenny Bruce. While Swift joked about cannibalizing the poor and Bruce about racial stereotypes, Haut claims that aggressive satire directed towards men was not as welcomed: "SCUM's basic thesis was not, however, widely understood at first: when a woman writes such savage, unyielding satire, its humour seems to evade many readers and can provoke more disgust than enlightenment" (p. 29).

Perhaps most notably, Solanas invites readers to consider the meaning of *radical writings* as they relate to radical feminist pedagogies. As Fahs (2008) wrote, "We cannot define the center of the feminist

movement without that which signifies the fringe, without, in this case, ‘Andy Warhol’s feminist nightmare.’ It is the radical that shifts the center back and forth, redefines the ‘normal,’ and helps us to reimagine ourselves and our political worlds” (p. 613).

Certainly, the current climate around feminist classrooms—where women’s studies and ethnic studies programs face constant cuts and setbacks—requires women’s studies professors to carefully consider the kinds of material they will assign in their courses. While Solanas may not seem like an obvious choice for those concerned with the “image” of women’s studies, radical writings have a valuable place in the women’s studies curriculum and that they may indeed work to *create* social change rather than merely commenting on it.

Method

This study utilized 107 student response papers from four semesters of upper-division women and gender studies courses taught between 2008 and 2012 at a large southwestern university. These courses included: 400-level (advanced) Women and Health (Fall 2008), 300-level (introductory) Women in Contemporary Society (Spring 2009), and 400-level (advanced) Hate Speech, Manifestos, and Radical Writings (Spring 2011 and Spring 2012). Students in both Women and Health and Women in Contemporary Society had no required women’s studies pre-requisite courses prior to taking these courses, while students in Hate Speech, Manifestos, and Radical Writings had already taken at least one women’s studies course. Most of the Hate Speech students had taken several women’s studies courses prior to the course. Thus, the students who read *SCUM Manifesto* had different backgrounds prior to “digesting” this text, with some having little to no women’s studies experience and others having substantial experience with feminist theory and feminist principles. Still, like all women’s studies courses, issues of self-selection were present, as students who take women’s studies courses more often report openness toward feminist ideologies and arguments.

Notably, all students read the *SCUM Manifesto* no sooner than eight weeks into the course. For the introductory course (Women in Contemporary Society), students read this text during their final week of class, while the three other courses read this text in weeks 8 and 9 of the course. Prior to writing these response papers, students had not read anything about Valerie Solanas, though the Hate Speech classes had an article about Valerie Solanas assigned for the same day that they read the *Manifesto*. After turning in their response papers (analyzed for this study), students engaged in a 3-hour facilitated discussion about the text, processed their feelings and thoughts about the text, and then examined additional texts that helped to contextualize the manifesto in lieu of radical feminism as a whole. The Hate Speech students read Solanas along with six other radical feminist texts, while the other two classes read Solanas as the only text due that day. Students’ responses by the end of the class discussion differed from their more “raw” responses analyzed in this study. Students did not write additional response papers following the class discussion, though these class discussions were tape recorded and transcribed so that we could go back and analyze the threads of discussion that arose around the *SCUM Manifesto*. The class discussions are not included in this study.

A total of 107 students from diverse backgrounds, with 76% women (22% women of color, 78% white women), and 24% men (35% men of color, 65% white men) participated in an assignment that required them to write a one-page response paper to the *SCUM Manifesto* attending to their emotional reactions to the manifesto and to the aspects of the manifesto they found most and least useful. This response paper was turned in prior to the lecture and discussion about *SCUM Manifesto* meaning that these responses revealed students’ *initial impressions* of *SCUM Manifesto* rather than their impressions following class discussion. Only six students refused to participate, leaving the response rate at 94%.

Responses were qualitatively analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). This analysis style allowed for grouping of students’ responses to *SCUM Manifesto* into common themes and sub-themes. To conduct the analysis, we familiarized ourselves with the data by reading all of the response papers thoroughly and looking for patterns in students’ ways of interpreting the manifesto. We selected and generated themes through the process of identifying logical links and overlaps between participants. In the 107 response papers, we isolated four themes (Excess, Ideological Conflicts, Biographical Connections, and Intellectual Affinity) and a series of sub-themes within each primary theme during the examination process. Students’ responses often fell into multiple themes and were reasonably consistent across semesters. Percentage distributions were as follows: Women and Health (Fall 2008); excess: 37%; ideological conflict: 30%; biographical connections: 48%; intellectual affinity: 19%; Women in Contemporary Society (Spring 2009); excess: 56%; ideological conflict: 35%; biographical connections: 60%; intellectual affinity: 30%; Hate Speech, Manifestos, and Radical Writings (Spring 2011); excess: 65%;

ideological conflict: 1%; biographical connection: 50%; intellectual affinity: 65%; Hate Speech, Manifestos, and Radical Writings (Spring 2012); excess: 33%; ideological conflict: 11%; biographical connections: 33%; intellectual affinity: 78%. Categories tended to overlap in response papers with all students falling into at least one to all categories per paper in all courses. Some differences were noted between semesters, as the more advanced students in the Hate Speech, Manifestos, and Radical Writings courses found more intellectual affinity with the text than did the more introductory students from “Women in Contemporary Society” and the less explicitly political course, “Women and Health.” Between classes, however, groups were relatively similar with the distributions for excess and ideological conflict.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Excess

Students identified *SCUM Manifesto* according to its excessive or extreme qualities, often identifying it as aggressive, “too much,” or “going too far.” In line with much feminist theorizing about women themselves as “excessive” (Grosz, 1994; Hartley, 2001; Stinson, 2001), students responded to Solanas’s writing as a more intense version of this same process. Responses in this category tended to include negative appraisals of Solanas’s work and involved personal attacks of her as a man-hating angry lesbian, sometimes comparing her to Hitler (and *SCUM* to Nazi propaganda). Notably, Solanas was dubbed the model of the stereotypical radical feminist, responsible for giving feminism a “bad name.” Responses from this category appeared in between 30-65% of student responses, with more students reporting themes of excess in classes where they had little or no previous experiences taking other women’s studies courses. Responses about excess were divided into four common sub-themes: (1) *man-hating as excess*; (2) *excess as offensive*; (3) *gives feminism a “bad name” or not-consistent with liberal feminism*, and (4) *comparison of Solanas to Hitler as a model of extremism*. Some sub-themes overlapped.

Man-hating as excess. Building on theories of compulsory heterosexuality (Rich, 1980) and notions that women *cannot* express rage toward men, several students expressed alarm at Solanas’s outright anger and hatred toward men and patriarchy. Four students (Lyn, Lenore, Jean, and Clarissa) expressed outrage at Solanas’s proclaimed hatred and denigration of men. Lyn could not comprehend the reasons for Solanas’s open hostility toward men and expressed exasperation towards Solanas’s generalization of all men as “walking dildos.” Similar to many other students, she maintained that, while Solanas accurately described *some* men, certain men were exceptions to Solanas’s characterization of masculinity:

I cannot even find the words to explain how I feel about this article. It actually frustrated me to think that there are some people who think this strongly about men. Being a female, I have a very large amount of male friends and yes, some of them are the typical male described in this article, but not all men are the same, some men do care about the female and try to understand their emotions and feelings.

Lenore associated Solanas’s violent, antagonistic rhetoric with her lesbian identity (even though Solanas exalts asexuality as the idealized state). Constructing Solanas as bitter and jaded by her past experiences, Lenore pathologized Solanas for her rage: “I felt that she came across as a bitter, violent, angry lesbian *who chooses* to find nothing good in men.” Similarly, Jean reacted to Solanas as both man-hating and inconsistent with liberal feminism: “Male bashing at its finest and the reason feminists are not taken seriously.” Clarissa expressed *SCUM* as the most extreme document of male-bashing that she has observed: “She is an extremist. I have heard of male bashing, but she takes it to another level.”

Excess as offensive. Justin, Jenny, Julian, and Adriana were offended by the extreme content of the text in general, finding Solanas’s assertions outlandish and constructing the manifesto as propaganda used to persuade women into becoming “SCUM females.” Justin described the message of the manifesto as “Nazi-style propaganda” intended to sway women into hating and killing men: “The entire paper is filled with outlandish extreme (Nazi style) feminist propaganda. There is so much crap in it fabricated to brainwash women into believing that her ideas are correct. I have never been so offended in reading an article in my entire life.” Similarly, Jenny expressed complete shock at the manifesto and added that she believed the focus of the text became unhinged and obscured by its progression to anarchy and nihilism:

My gut reaction, however was still shock [...] I found the tone of the manifesto grew increasingly manic and irrational as the text progressed. But then Solanas began to talk about how reproduction would eventually be unnecessary, asking ‘why should there be future generations?’ For me, this question was the most extreme proposition in the entire manifesto. In truth, the whole thing made me a little nervous.

Julian rejected the satirical merit and felt that Solanas's call for genocide discredits her legitimate claims of inequality: "I find no satirical quality in *SCUM*. Whether or not she truly intended for her demands to be carried out is beside the point. The stink of genocide and blind hatred completely pervade her work." Adriana reacted with disbelief and confusion to the imagery from the text: "I found Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto* pretty repulsive. As I read the manifesto I kept thinking 'are you kidding me?' The things she had to say were unbelievable!"

Comparison to Hitler. Paul, Beatrice, Constance, and Lorenzo described Solanas's call for male genocide as resembling Hitler's final solution. Paul expressed particular dismay not only at Solanas's proclamation of male genocide, but also Solanas's insistence that men participate in their own eradication: "In her description of men being allowed to live only in the capacity of eliminating his brethren conjures up the same type of hysterical and vomit-inducing vitriol written against the Jews by Hitler and his friends. To not only imply genocide against men, but to also insist that men actively participate in their own demise is sickening, to say the least." Likewise, Beatrice likened Solanas to Hitler rallying the troops to destroy a common enemy: "Solanas is a modern day Hitler and *SCUM Manifesto* is another charismatic speech, convincing the German people (i.e. women) to join the Third Reich. As for men, they are comparable to Jews in the Holocaust." Constance similarly held an anti-essentialist, liberal feminist view that conflicted with Solanas's radical approach, contending that violence would too closely resemble a Nazi regime and that a world without men would not produce a peaceful utopian society: "Her solution to the problems of the world is to commit certain 'genocide' against the male species. Wouldn't that make the actions of women no better than the horrible acts committed by Nazi Germany against the Jews? However, would the elimination of males bring peace to the world? Surely, a woman-only world would have its problems for various reasons." Lorenzo found that Solanas's description of males as biologically and innately prone to fault and without recourse or hope of changing their position similar to anti-Semitic explanation for internal short-comings of Jews: "Solanas's rhetoric belittling 'the male' as a biological defect, a 'waking abortion,' is similar to the way that 'the Jew' is portrayed in anti-Semitic texts. Both are viewed as beings who cannot rise above their instinctual behaviors due to the circumstances of their birth."

Gives Feminism a Bad Name. Jean, Katherine, Stephanie, and Danny found that the extreme tone of the manifesto disagreed with their concept of the theory and praxis of feminism. Katherine particularly took issue with re-establishing female dominance, as that went against the foundational promise of equality between genders put forth by liberal feminism and most feminist pedagogies. Stephanie and Danny believed that Solanas cemented long embattled stereotypes of feminists who marginalized the movement. Jean expressed alarm at *SCUM Manifesto* and attached it to negative associations with feminism: "Valerie Solanas's *SCUM Manifesto* was terrible. Appalling, really. This is the epitome of why feminism has such a negative connotation attached to it." Katherine (notably using the language of men and women as separate "species") also pleaded a liberal feminist argument that equality should trump radical upheavals of gender, noting that Solanas does not present a democratic definition of feminism: "The whole idea that feminism is based off of is equality, that everyone should receive equal rights and that we all deserve a fair chance at life to pursue the goals we want. I think that feminism does not seek to eliminate the male species, but instead it seeks to gain rights for the female species." Stephanie found that Solanas hurt the reputation of the feminist movement and perpetuated stereotypes of feminists responsible for repelling people: "The reading builds stereotypes of feminism, for example: scary, man-hating, hairy, lesbians who know everything." Similarly, Danny thinks that Solanas's salacious speech fuels feminism's opponents: "It pissed me off; both as an attack on my person as a tool that will be used by the anti-feminists to marginalize our side."

Theme 2: Ideological Conflicts

Students noted the ideological conflicts they had with the various anti-male, anti-establishment messages of the manifesto. In particular, students identified conflicts between their own religious, nationalist, and scientific belief systems in comparison to the assertions made in *SCUM Manifesto*. Most of these responses expressed negativity and hostility toward Solanas, with some accusing her of being unpatriotic and disrespectful toward the presumed sacredness of heterosexual relations and the "divine merit" of both sexes. Taken as hyper-literal text (as many students are trained to do), several students also dismissed claims of the manifesto for lacking a scientific foundation and/or concrete evidence. The ideological category comprised of the smallest percentage of students with between 1 and 35% in all four courses reporting this theme. Three sub-themes were identified: (1) *religious disagreements*; (2) *lack of scientific foundation*; and (3) *nationalist views*. As with the previous theme, some sub-themes overlapped.

Religious Disagreements. Jean, Katie, and Kelsey proclaimed frustration, shock, or hostility at Solanas for describing men as biologically inferior and accidental, often taking the manifesto as a literal document intended to advocate for the elimination of men. Jean took particular issue with Solanas's remarks about religion: "If we did not need men to reproduce to live, God would not have created them. Oh, but then, according to Solanas, God and heaven are made up by men, because of their 'inability to relate to anybody or anything.'" Similarly, Katie argued that men and women exist because of God's will: "Her total disgust in men is surprising. I totally disagreed with her with men being flawed females dealing with the X and Y chromosomes. I think that God created both different on purpose, not some evolutionary flaw." Some students, like Kelsey, argued that women *need* men in a Biblical sense, again constructing women a naturally inferior counterpart to men: "I believe in the bible and I don't believe that women can exist without men, so the idea of killing them all off or converting them to male-female disgusts me."

Lack of Scientific Foundation. Several students, including Chase, Louisa, and Mary thought Solanas's claims about men's inferiority to women and subsequent behavioral patterns lacked credibility given that they were devoid of scientific process and proof. Completely missing the potential value in the satirical aspects of the manifesto, these students expressed irritation with Solanas for straying from "Science." In particular, some male students expressed outrage at Solanas for questioning their inherent value, as Chase said: "Her justifications are unbelievable and her outrageous claims with no supporting evidence, i.e., that males are responsible for all problems in the world and how if males were eliminated all disease would be cured and women would live forever. Bullshit!!!" Solanas's clear challenge to male privilege and their unlimited access to women provoked anger in some student responses. Also, Louisa disliked Solanas's generalization of all men: "I do not agree with the idea of someone generalizing men and putting men down continuously with no concrete evidence."

At times, the claims that Solanas did not have "evidence" for her work also coupled with the requirement that Solanas's biography *explain* her opinions and viewpoints. Mary constructed Solanas as purely the victim of trauma rather than as an intellectual (or a satirist): "I felt her manifesto was based on her opinions of men formed as a result of some tragedy inflicted on her in childhood. She offered no support for her statements; I felt her work was not researched."

Nationalist Views. Again situating Solanas as a threat not only to men but also to the patriarchal bases of society, Billy Ray described Solanas as unpatriotic and disrespectful of the founding fathers and servicemen. His claims about Solanas as anti-nationalistic reinforce the notion that anger at (and particularly violence toward) men are completely unacceptable, even while men kill other men in the name of "God" and "country":

All I have to say again was that Valerie Solanas's writing was offensive, discriminating, insulting, cruel, degrading, and very much revolting. I was very much upset and ticked off that someone could just sit at home with all the time on their hands to write such a hateful book just to show much hate and contempt you have for men built up inside. It's very sad that someone could write such crap that isn't scientifically proven. Our country was founded by brave men who defied an empire overseas and heroes especially men, fathers, sons, and brothers who have fought countless wars and have died to protect our freedom and country. Her writing is so disrespectful that it spits on everything that these men have done.

Clearly, Billy Ray reveals that, in addition to taking Solanas as literal, he refuses to acknowledge the ways that institutionalized sexism inform the basic institutions of our country. Like many students who read *SCUM Manifesto*, he does not understand Solanas as providing an inversion of gender, nor that women's anger against men is perpetually invalidated.

Theme 3: Biographical Connections

Revealing the importance of linking the personal and the political, students also found connections between some portion of Solanas's text and their own lives, linking her ideas and/or biography with their own autobiographical stories. Students observed parallels between Solanas's descriptions of expected gendered behavior and their own lives, at times linking their experiences of abuse, neglect, violence, coercion, and powerlessness to Solanas's text. Between 33 and 60% of responses in all four classes fell into this theme. Responses connecting the manifesto to personal experiences fell into three sub-themes: (1) *experiences and observations of gender socialization*; (2) *relationship experiences*; and (3) *witnessing paternal abuse*. Some themes again overlapped.

Gender Socialization. Several male students identified with Solanas's characterizations of men, particularly about their socialization with money and sexuality. Robert identified with Solanas's argument that men use money to manipulate relationships with women and children: "The author made some interesting points as to how men and money play a power/love role in society and in relationships. I can see how that can be held true from some men in society, i.e., husbands. I have a lot of friends that make most of the money in the home and use that as a controlling factor to keep "their women in line." Similarly, Jaime agreed that, because of men's insecurity and their desire for women's sexual acceptance, they use materialism to assert dominance over other men: "I think that most guys want to be desired by women and to help this desire, they use money, class, and position to push down other guys in the process. I also somewhat agree with Solanas's view on how some men are insecure and fear losing their women, so they seek to isolate her from other men and move her to the suburbs with other couples." Alejandra, too, constructed men's aggressive behavior as rooted in insecurity and thus driven by their desire to dominate other men and all women: "It makes a lot of sense that men are only concerned about themselves and they will overcome anything that comes in their way because they want to be better than the rest. Men cover that insecurity. They hide their emotions and in turn become assholes or dicks towards women and men for their satisfaction."

Jorge identified with Solanas's characterization of fatherhood as demanding passivity and obedience:

"Solanas says that 'the effect of fatherhood on females is to make them male-dependent, passive, domestic, animalistic, insecure, approval and security seekers, cowardly, humble, 'respectful' of authorities...' I see that many women exhibit these traits and sometimes I see my nieces being educated this way as well. It makes me think about the kind of parent or father that I want to be later in life. I would not want daughters to grow up like this—being domesticated and not able to fulfill their full potential."

Relationships. As the most common theme, many students identified Solanas's descriptions of men with their own partners, boyfriends, husbands, or friends. For example, Tina found Solanas's descriptions of men's psychologies to mirror her ex-boyfriend:

I found myself relating to the things she was saying about the characterization of men to my ex. For instance, she wrote, "Eaten up with guilt, shame, fears, and insecurities and obtaining, if he's lucky, a barely perceptible physical feeling, the male is nonetheless obsessed with screwing..." Solanas makes such a connection between these two that it's obvious that men battle internal frustrations, particularly sexual, that may be a result of feeling insufficient, thus leading them to exhibit repetitious signs of anger.

Bianca identified with men's concern about sexual performance trumping concerns for intimacy:

I decided she is correct to say that men always want to know how they did, or was it a "good plumbing job." Solanas is correct in saying that men do not emphasize with their partners because they just do not think that way, especially after sex. I once asked a guy when we just finished making love (or so I thought so) to cuddle with me for a while and he said, "guys want to make a sandwich or watch television after sex, not cuddle."

Similarly, Karolina identified her boyfriend as emotionally deficient and unable to address her emotional needs. He acknowledged an internal and involuntary character flaw similar to what Solanas describes: "I'm not a sure if this emotional disconnect is a product of society or if men are naturally incapable of emotion, but I know I don't like it. My boyfriend once freely admitted he often feels 'completely self-centered,' even though it makes him unhappy to feel that way."

Abuse. Clearly identifying with Solanas's notion of men as abusive, several women also resonated with Solanas's accusations that men use abusive means to ensure control and dominance over women, often to mask their deep neediness. Lindsey reflected on a public encounter she witnessed between a father and daughter while on public transportation:

"Men help mold their daughters into being completely dependent on them. I have a very disturbing memory of a father and a young toddler girl on the light-rail. The father kept saying, 'never say no to daddy,' and repeating it in her ear so many times as she cried and cried. It was almost eerie. I felt so bad for the poor girl. 'You never say no to daddy' resonates with me when I read this. Women

grow up with a fear of their fathers that gets passed on to how they act with their husbands.”

Identifying with Solanas’s portrayal of the father as unquestionably in authority with the family, Lindsey’s reaction speaks to the links between Solanas’s (satirical?) portrayal of Daddy’s Girls and students own recognition of enforced passivity and approval-seeking.

Theme 4: Intellectual Affinity

As a stark contradiction to the student responses in themes 1 and 2—where most students took the text as a hyper-literal account of men’s scientific and social merit—many other students resonated with the intellectual contributions of the text, often claiming that its satirical qualities had solid academic and scholarly merit. Most of these students recognized that Solanas’s extremism, wit, humor, and well-planned attacks of sexist and patriarchal institutions offered something new to the landscape of feminist writing. These students characterized the manifesto as enlightening, satirical, well-written, and noted that it encouraged critical thinking about the oppressive nature of major social institutions. Students also resonated with Solanas’s depiction of the cultural expectations placed on women and men, noting positive affinity toward Solanas’s brazen, bold text. Many students also identified her as a major figure within feminist theory and feminist thought. Over 70% of students in the Hate Speech, Manifestos, and Radical writings classes identified some kind of intellectual merit in *SCUM*. Responses that expressed intellectual affinity fell into three sub-themes: (1) *Satire as consciousness-raising*; (2) *Encouragement of critical thinking*; (3) *Solanas as unjustly dismissed*.

Satire as consciousness-raising. Many students did not see *SCUM Manifesto* as a literal text, instead constructing it as a satirical literary device that effectively exposed the absurdity of ideas like “penis envy” and “male superiority.” Ashley described Solanas’s use of inversion as intellectually effective when exposing the frivolity of biological sex differences: “I was repulsed by a lot of her definitions of men as a ‘lesser sex,’ but then realized that many of those same definitions have been applied to women by men and taken seriously by society as a whole. This realization made her seem a lot more reasonable and I came to value her text as effective satirically if nothing else. When the roles are reversed, it seems a lot more ridiculous to attribute one sex as ‘lesser’ and biologically, emotionally, or intellectually inferior.” Going beyond her initial reactions of anger and dismissal, Ashley recognized Solanas’s descriptions of “pussy envy” as a valuable contribution to expose faulty patriarchal logic.

Colin also initially expressed anger when reading the manifesto, but soon interpreted the text as both funny, enlightening, and containing kernels of truth: “Initially I was greatly angered while reading this paper but then my anger faded and I found the writing to be amusing and even hilarious at times. Male sexual relations being a redundancy and her reasons given provide a hilarious thought on some slight truths.” Amari had a similarly humorous response, identifying habits he saw in men: “I could not stop laughing and nodding in agreement. All the things she said were so true and I couldn’t agree with her more. I believe the author is a genius as far as men go, she is right on the money.” Perhaps these students’ reactions speak to the difficulty of *both* connecting to a text in an emotional way *and* recognizing its intellectual contributions in a more distanced or intellectual way.

Encouragement of critical thinking. Many students also recognized *SCUM Manifesto* as a text aimed at raising consciousness about gender socialization and systemic oppression enforced by patriarchy rather than a text that literally encouraged people to commit genocide against men. Mike argued that, rather than considering the manifesto as a “call to action,” we should examine Solanas’s general critique and strategies:

“I think that from a practical perspective, the only way to appreciate Solanas’s work is to disconnect its applicability as a call to action and instead attempt to understand its grander, over-arching intentions, including the re-evaluation of the money system, the function of government, censorship, the oppression of women within the family, religion as an instrument of control, critiques of militarization, racism, prejudice, and violence.”

Along these lines, Rachel adopted a liberal feminist argument that diversity matters and Solanas can serve as a provocative outlier: “I do not think it necessary to adopt the same attitudes as Ms. Solanas or agree with every point she puts forth. I think it is important, however, that we are aware of the arguments she makes because trying to understand a subject from all perspectives regardless of how extreme, offensive, or pedestrian, make us better critical thinkers.” Likewise, Victoria interpreted the manifesto as a discussion-provoking piece and that Solanas never intended her work as serious or literal: “In no way do I

find men as repulsive as the manifesto describes and yet I would not assume Solanas to either. It's a document expressing extreme hate for men, not a discussion provoking piece. Anyone not open to feminist ideas would most likely take offense from the piece and be further engulfed in their one-sided heteronormative viewpoint." Aware that many who read the manifesto may lack the cultural and historical awareness to understand Solanas's motive for critiquing patriarchy, Veronica mimics many students' arguments that *SCUM Manifesto* provoked and pushed their thinking about gender, power, and patriarchal logic. Amelia found that the assignment incited positive discussion in a casual, social context while spending time with friends: "I think this is an excellent text, I even shared it with my friends and we discussed with our husbands, who created a battle for a moment but it was a really good experience."

Solanas as unjustly dismissed. Because Solanas shot Andy Warhol, some students like Jackie and Patricia explored the shooting as "manifesto in practice." For example, Jackie felt disappointed that people seemed so willing to link Solanas to the shooting as the pinnacle of her career: "I do think her shooting of Andy Warhol sadly pushes her manifesto to the side as the work of a lunatic. However, while she was clearly crazy, she was brilliant and I think often the two go hand in hand."

Additionally, a few students who looked into Solanas's biography more closely felt moved by her reasons for shooting Warhol and ever-more convinced that the shooting did not represent the manifesto's ideologies. Keith expressed sympathy with Valerie for having her play, *Up Your Ass*, stolen by such a prominent figure of the day: "I forgot to look at her as a writer and that was my mistake. A work functions as the identity of the writer and as someone whose primary identity is a writer, I have to say I agree with that. In fact, I have to say I think she had every right to shoot Andy Warhol. If you create a physical representation of a person's soul, then my collective writings would be that. *No one* has a right to degrade or tamper with something like that." Keith raises a key question when considering the impact of *SCUM Manifesto*: If Valerie did truly construct herself through her writings—as many writers do—might that be why students have such a difficult time separating her biographical self from her scholarly contributions? Was that her intention, in fact?

Patricia takes an insightful turn by noting that others discredit Solanas because heinous language and violence against women by men are condoned and normalized within the culture (e.g., Norman Mailer and Louis Althusser); when women advocate violence against men, they are labeled as crazy and dangerous because they reveal the *normality* of men's violence:

The problem with the *SCUM Manifesto* isn't that Valerie Solanas is crazy; people call her crazy in an attempt to discredit her and the points she makes. People don't think men are crazy when they make porn that dehumanizes, humiliates, and degrades women. People don't think men are crazy when they're "dogs" or "sexist pigs." Those things are all OK. It's perfectly acceptable to treat women like beasts that exist to be made mother and whore, but critiquing men and masculinity means you should be locked up. And God forbid anyone actually use the same kind of hateful language that men use against women. I think one of the reasons people work so hard to discredit Valerie Solanas is that she is partially correct. More than that, the hateful language and essentialism work to highlight just how disgusting and hateful it is when it is done by men towards women.

Indeed, looking at statistics about the verbal and physical violence present in "mainstream" pornography (Bridges et al., 2010), the staggering sexual assault rates, (Basile et al., 2007; USDJ, 2011), and the frequent use of sexist language in nearly all types of media (film, music, print, stand-up comedy, blogs, etc.) (Caputi, 2002; Caputi, 2006) confirms Patricia's views that Solanas *exposes* something in her attack on patriarchy. Regardless of whether one finds Solanas unquestionably offensive—even four decades later—the questions she raises remain pertinent. As Cara commented, "I'm not sure if people will ever be ready for Solanas, but everyone should read her manifesto anyway."

Conclusion

As these narratives show, radical feminist pedagogies have the potential to generate vastly diverse responses from students, often with emotional, personally relevant, and politically significant impact. While *SCUM Manifesto* certainly does not represent all radical feminist texts, it does offer a window into the kinds of responses students might have to texts that directly target privilege and power to this extent. Most specifically, this study reveals that texts like *SCUM Manifesto* should have a place solidly within a feminist curriculum rather than merely on the margins, particularly given how "fresh" and relevant the text still feels today.

When considering the student responses as a whole, we were struck with the strong divide between those students trained to see texts as distant, evidence-based, fact-giving entities compared with those students who evaluated texts based on their *impact*, emotional provocations, and political savvy. As with all radical texts, it is much easier to dismiss them when we occupy the identities of the oppressors, the privileged, and the dominant; it is much harder to do so when we identify with the anger and rage we may share with the dispossessed. Like many postcolonial, black power, and indigenous rights scholars, Valerie Solanas uses language brimming with affect as she attacks the core of liberal and conservative “status quo” politics. Like others who have utilized the manifesto genre, she produces urgent, sweeping, radical claims that seek total upheavals of current institutions. As Mary Ann Caws wrote (2000), “At its most endearing, a manifesto has madness about it. It is peculiar and angry, quirky, or downright crazed. Always opposed to something, particular or general, it has not only to be striking but to stand up straight” (p. xix).

For this reason, gauging students’ responses prior to an organized class discussion on a text provides a window into the way students perceive, wrestle with, and integrate radical ideas. In the context of a class discussion—as we found with *SCUM Manifesto*—the intellectual strategies and ideas of the text take center stage (e.g., Solanas’s reversal of psychological theories of men’s natural superiority); this can sometimes sideline students’ more emotional, controversial, or narrative-based reactions to a text (e.g., seeing Solanas as *speaking to me and my life*). For feminist pedagogy, it is useful to assess both students’ intellectual relationship to radical writings and their emotional, affective, and autobiographical relationship to these texts. This study reveals the ways that radical texts may uniquely position students to unite their emotional and intellectual responses to a text, something we have found advances the goals of feminist pedagogy as a whole. Pedagogically, by focusing on asking students to consider their own emotional reactions to the text alongside the intellectual discussion to the text, they successfully integrated *SCUM Manifesto* into the classroom. By the time they turned in their final exams at the end of the semester, students on the whole could successfully navigate the intellectual contributions of *SCUM Manifesto* regardless of whether they had initially dismissed it or found it outrageous.

SCUM Manifesto has served as an enormously useful tool in the classroom, as it allows not only an examination of gender politics and sexism but also the intersections of gender and class (e.g., One class discussion focused on whether Solanas is speaking from a position of *class-based* rage, as she survived as a homeless prostitute during the time of writing the text), gender and sexual identity (e.g., A common thread when discussing *SCUM Manifesto* argues about whether her lesbian and/or asexual identity informs her gender politics, and if so, why this matters more for her than for Warhol), and gender and race (e.g., Solanas’s marked opposition to protesting and organized resistance undermines the highly celebrated civil rights movement tactics of the day). In class discussions, students confront the apparent differences of how their own social locations affect their interpretations of *SCUM*, as gender, sexual identity, race, and class appear in full force when discussing Solanas. The *SCUM Manifesto* also better contextualizes other feminist theory writings, as students grapple with the Solanas’s tactics compared with institutions like the National Organization for Women or the (more radical) Redstockings. Understanding Solanas as a radical outlier helps students to understand the *center* of feminism, primarily by contextualizing the extremist views and their impact on *moving* the center. Much of the work my students undertake has this exact purpose; Valerie Solanas pushes the limits for *any* feminist, radical or otherwise. Exploring student reactions at the edge of their politics has much potential (e.g., students sense the limits of their own politics and may work to expand their notion of the *possible*) and pitfalls (e.g., students can more easily dismiss or ignore extreme arguments as they often construct them as universally “irrational”).

Teaching texts like these has pedagogical utility in numerous ways: (1) It requires students to engage with texts directly, emotionally, and personally; (2) It introduces students to new genres, ways of writing/thinking, and styles of argumentation; (3) Students must evaluate the merit and worth of texts in different ways, looking directly at privilege and power; (4) Students must expand beyond the general liberal sentiments of their education and confront the edges of their own political beliefs (as we like to call it, “finding the edge of your own cliff”); (5) It encourages students to consider an author’s biography alongside their writing (something that seems increasingly urgent given that few students in a recent semester knew whether James Baldwin was black); and finally, (6) It allows students to access, engage with, challenge, and weave into their historical knowledge the voices, practices, and ideals of *radicals*. In an age when the radical Left remains so foreign to students (and the radical Right has such visibility and power), knowledge of radicalism on the Left gives students proximity to scholarly traditions they may otherwise have no access to. Radical feminist pedagogies, in particular, give students the tools to challenge sexism and patriarchy in ways that do not accept mere incremental, “let’s just give it time,” slow, careful change; instead, they learn to examine the *bases* of women’s oppression.

As radical scholars working within an institution like academia, we want the injection of these texts and discourses to fundamentally unsettle our students, even if it requires some pedagogical struggles to do so. The rewards for doing so are vast, while the costs of *not* doing so are too great. As Monique Wittig wrote, “Any work with a new form operates like a war machine, because its design and its goal is to pulverize the old forms and formal conventions. It is always produced in hostile territory. And the stranger it appears, nonconforming, unassimilable, the longer it will take for the Trojan Horse to be accepted. Eventually it is adopted, and, even if slowly, it will eventually work like a mine. It will sap and blast out the ground where it was planted” (Wittig, 1992, pp. 68-69).

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