

WGSS Alumni Updates: 2009

This September, nine years after I graduated from Macalester, I'll be back on the campus of a small liberal arts college, this time as an Assistant Professor of Sociology. I've spent the past several years working on my PhD at the University of California at Santa Barbara and teaching part time at Sonoma State University. Now, with the dissertation done and the PhD in hand, I'm moving on to a new position at Davidson College, outside Charlotte, North Carolina. After my time at Macalester, I knew that I wanted to eventually teach in this kind of school, so I'm incredibly excited to start this new job.

As a feminist academic, very few days go by when I don't draw on something that I learned in the WGSS program at Macalester. I use teaching strategies that I first saw in my classes at Mac, return to important texts that I read during that period when I'm writing and revising, and continue to think about scholarship and knowledge production in ways that are certainly guided by the theoretical perspectives that I first encountered as an undergraduate. My academic career has absolutely been shaped and influenced by my time as a WGSS Major at Macalester. My honor's thesis, "Girl Power Politics: The Relationship of Girlhood and Feminism," became the basis for my first scholarly publication, and I continue to do research on girls and politics. Most recently, I conducted a multi-site transnational ethnography of girls' activism. Based on in-depth interviews and participant observation with 75 high-school-aged girl activists in Mexico City, Buenos Aires, Caracas, Vancouver and the San Francisco Bay Area, the project explores the relationship between girls' identity narratives and their social movement strategies. A book derived from this research, currently titled *Rebel Girls: Teenage Activists and Social Movements in the Americas*, is under contract with an academic press and will likely be published sometime next year or two.

I've been so grateful for the intellectual training that I received at Macalester and continue to appreciate everything I learned there. If any current (or former) WGSS students want to contact me with questions about grad school, sociology, international youth activism, girlhood, or anything else that I'm working on, I'd be glad to hear from you. For now, you can reach me at jtaft@umail.ucsb.edu. In the fall, look for me at Davidson.

-Jessica Taft '00

After graduation I stayed in MN for a few years, and eventually found my way back home to MA and pursued a teaching career. I now teach for the Boston Public Schools as a Special Education Inclusion Teacher for seventh grade math and science. I work with one hundred students every day who are in fully inclusive classes of mixed physical, emotional and cognitive abilities. Given the "joys" of seventh grade...every day is both a blessing and an exercise in patience! I just bought a house three blocks from my school, so I guess that means I like it enough to stay put for a while...and I do. I'm committed to working in the community where I live and helping create a safe and positive environment for the kids with whom I work who are not always going home to a feeling of physical or emotional security. Only 3 years in urban education, I have learned an amazing amount, and continue to every day. Kids are generous like that always giving you something to think about.

On a personal note, I recently got married to my wife Anna: Thank you Massachusetts! She is a Swarthmore grad and a teacher in Adult Basic Education. We are both looking forward to our trip in June for reunion.

-Mary Fernandez-Buehrens '99

I graduated from Macalester in 2001, (double major in Psychology & WGS) and began a doctoral program in Community and Prevention Research Psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago 2003. I'm currently finishing up my dissertation and in the fall I will begin a new chapter in my life as an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Lake Forest College in Lake Forest, IL.

It's hard for me to pinpoint exact memories of WGS because it so *brightly colored* all of my time at Macalester. I will never forget my Advanced Feminist Theory class with Professor Sarker, where we sat in a tiny room in Old Main that was much too small to hold the big ideas of the five women there. I also know that my scholarship today began in WGS classes, especially Psychology of Gender (taught by Professor Gudeman), where I realized that research can be used for social change (and perhaps optimistically) the "enlightenment" of others. I find that educating people about the *facts* of different women's lives is the best way to open their minds to understanding different lived experiences, appreciating the strengths of others, and working towards justice for all groups. I know that my own view of the world was remarkably shaped by WGS classes, and hope that students today gain the same passion for learning and applying knowledge.

-Susan Long

My greatest memory of WGSS was the thoroughly nurturing atmosphere, where my peers also became my friends, supporting each other both academically and emotionally. This setting truly inspired a drive for passionate scholarship. I remember and cherish the intellectual stimulation to question all expressions of authority, to theorize from actual experience, and to marry our studies with our desires to enact positive change in the world. Since graduating from Macalester, I have worked at the fledging Museum of Sex in New York, assisting both the curator and collections manager in developing and producing exhibits and events with the aim of presenting to the public the diverse histories and cultural significances of sexuality. After a few years in New York, I have now relocated to San Francisco where I volunteer with the GLBT Historical Society as a docent and archivist and will be attending a Master's program in Human Sexuality Studies in the fall with the intention of working with a public health field with a focus in sexual health.

I hope that works out for you! Thanks for thinking about me for this update. I feel truly honored to be represented as a role-model for a new generation of passionate students in WGSS.

-Michael McNamara

As a graduate student in a Women's Studies Department, I find that the intellectual rigor and level of social and political engagement of the WGSS Department at Macalester set the stage for how I am engaging with feminist, race, and queer studies as subjugated knowledges linked by shared histories and transformative social and political projects. I draw on so much of what I learned in Scott and Sonita's classes to frame how I approach debates, contradictions, and complexities in the fields that my work contributes to and critiques. WGSS was a big part of my development as an intersectional critical thinker. I recall having my mind lovingly and compellingly blown in WGSS class (sometimes on a class by class basis)- forcing me to pay attention to issues of citizenship, race, sexuality, culture, and gender all together and at times in the same moment. There were many aha and wrinkled forehead moments to say the least.

-Freda Fair, PhD Student

Department of Women's Studies | UCLA

Research Interests: working class queer of color community activism, artistic production and contemporary manifestations of eugenics in public assistance programs

My experience as a WGSS major at Macalester has had an enormous impact on the direction my academic/activist life has taken. The internship/volunteering opportunities available through WGSS led me to become engaged in work against gender-based violence in immigrant communities (at Casa de Esperanza, for example). After graduation, I moved back to NYC, and worked, for many years, at a community-based organization that works to end violence against South Asian women. I also became involved in different community organizing projects that focus on queer and transgender justice, immigrant rights, and/or racial justice. The relationships between these intersecting issues inspired many difficult questions-- particularly around different perspectives about the role of the state and state violence/policing in immigrant communities of color and especially in NYC in the post-9/11 period-- and I eventually decided to return to school with the hope of further exploring these dynamics. I am currently working towards a Ph. D. in Sociology, with a Women's Studies certificate, at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. The WGSS courses/academic opportunities and the mentorship that Professors Sonita Sarker and Jaine Strauss provided directly helped to situate me on this scholar-activist path-- and I am really grateful to WGSS for this.

-Soniya Munshi

Though neither a major nor minor in WGSS, I was closely connected to the department through my thesis work with Professor Sarker and through some close friends who studied under Professors Sarker, Morgensen and others. I was always inspired by the department's true commitment to community engagement as a form of practice. Currently, I am doing such work as a city coordinator for Greenpeace in Boston, engaging with the public on environmental issues and moving the public to become part of our campaign strength. The principles of the WGSS department guide me in my work on many levels, as ultimately community organizing is the work of restructuring power from the ground up. I send my love, thanks and best wishes to everyone back at the department!

-Adi Heller

After graduating as a Macalester WGS major in 1999 I stumbled into a job working for a non-profit organization in St. Paul, Lifetrack Resources. I ended up working in the Ramsey County Human Services building explaining the rules of the new welfare program to new applicants and assisting them in finding jobs as part of the fulfillment of their work requirements under welfare. In this position I witnessed first hand the intersection of gender, race, and class in the lived reality of welfare recipients. I also became convinced of the need to translate feminist theory into feminist public policy.

In 2001 I entered a PhD program in gender and social policy at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. As I was completing my coursework I interned for a year with NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, lobbying Congress for progressive welfare reform. I also worked for a year at the Urban Institute helping with policy research, but ultimately I decided that teaching was my passion.

Even as I was exploring new opportunities in Washington, DC the ideas I grappled with at Mac continued to hold my attention. While in graduate school I wrote a chapter on third wave feminists working at national women's organizations, which is published in *Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement*. This project was an out-growth from my Mac honors thesis on third wave feminism. My research these days focuses on the ways in which gender, race, class, age, and sexuality function in and around U.S. social policy. In particular I am exploring the ways gender, race, class and age construct and maintain a politics of deservingness in contemporary Social Security policy.

After graduating last spring, I began a tenure track position as an assistant professor of politics at Whitman College in Walla Walla, WA. Many of the courses I teach are cross-listed with our gender studies program, including: Queer Politics and Policy, Deservingness in US Social Policy and the Political Economy of Care/Work. Many of the books from my Mac WGS courses are still on the shelves in my office, and I continue to look to Mac professors as examples of the teaching excellence to which I aspire.

-Susanne Beechey
Assistant Professor of Politics | Whitman College