

SPRING 2022

# INTERSECTIONS

Macalester Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department Newsletter

WGSS

## Our Interdisciplinary Matrix

By Josh Groven

It's "amazing and lovely" celebrates Sonita Sarker, describing Macalester's Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Department's most recent leap in size; "We're now seeing the highest numbers in 5 years with 25 plus majors and minors!". Despite "dips and peaks" in student interest, Sonita, department chair, knows the WGSS mission has always been a "relevant, critical, and topical" analysis of power and marginalized identities. A fundamentally intersectional approach centers discussions of and from BIPOC, trans, queer, feminist and people with dis/abilities' perspectives for "generations of students". This growth follows the latest bloom of students' curiosity into their own lives and their relation to inequities pervading the world around them.

Alongside intersectionality, a "natural and logical" extension of the department's mission is embracing what Sonita describes as an interdisciplinary matrix. In studying power and inequity, WGSS classes use a wide range of methods and perspectives from oral histories to visual mapping and archival research. Core department courses draw connections across these many fields. As a psych and linguistics double major with a WGSS minor explains: "WGSS 100...I connected to every other department because it's so interdisciplinary".

The department is also always "growing in ... interdisciplinary connections across departments", says Sonita. Naomi, a 2020 WGSS alum, echoes these efforts explaining that "most of the WGSS courses that I took were cross-listed with other departments like political science and American studies". From courses such as Narrating Black Women's Resistance to Race, Gender, and Pop Culture, they helped to "inform [my] politics, the way [I] organize folks [and] interpersonal interactions".

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INTERSECTIONS Student Staff:  
Zoe Kross  
Josh Groven  
Ruben Schneiderman

WGSS Department Coordinator:  
Jan Beebe

# Our Interdisciplinary Matrix cont.

## From the Classroom to a Career

Students and alumni see no contradiction between the learning they do at Macalester and their missions after college. Describing the department's diverse analysis Anna, a sophomore WGSS major, says it "helps me learn about how to interact with others, how to voice my opinions, and how to analyze inequitable situations. All of these things will be important in my future career". Caelin, a 2019 WGSS alum, speaks of the same range of skills and reflects on how "Sonita emphasiz[ed] how WGSS skills are transferable to every topic and career because our identities were crucial to how industries and fields operated". Ola, a WGSS graduate from 2001, has applied his "intersectional understanding of power" to sex education NGOs in Sweden while Naomi uses "concepts of bodily autonomy, intersectionality" in her organizing at Planned Parenthood.

## WGSS and You

The coexistence of intersectionality and interdisciplinary approaches blurs lines between academic content and the self asking "how does this apply to you?". The department emphasizes how 'intersections' of our identities are a mesh of co-constructed strands across lines of power and various lenses of understanding. WGSS and neuroscience major Zoe articulates that this synthesis helps "recognize my own privilege and apply that lens to think of solutions to problems in a more intersectional way". This "WGSS lens" speaks to social phenomena like "watching the news [and] navigating the pandemic" for Riley, a WGSS and psychology major and to being personally empowered to "reflect on my own gender" as Ruben, a WGSS major describes.

These "infinitely fruitful" linkages as Sonita calls them, become possible by recognizing boundaries that hold back learning and finding the best rewards in complexity and ambiguity. The confidence to make real world connections and claim space thrives among students in their personal WGSS missions. From classrooms to careers, the department's interdisciplinary dedication is fundamental, not simply functional, to the "deep and wide cultural matrix" of our lives. We look forward to expanding the WGSS community into all fields and identities as we further build and discover our intersections.

The WGSS Department would like to thank the WGSS majors and alumni for writing about their experiences in our fall survey and for allowing us to share this information here.

## WGSS Steering Committee

Current Members:

Sonita Sarker, WGSS Chair  
Myrl Beam, WGSS Faculty  
Satoko Suzuki, Asian Languages & Cultures  
Alicia Muñoz, Spanish & Portuguese  
Jaine Strauss, Psychology



Photo from the WGSS Steering Committee Fall 2021 Retreat.

Includes current members with former members and special guests:  
Adrienne Christensen, Political Science  
Devavani Chatterjea, Biology  
Lisa Anderson-Levy, Provost

"The WGSS Steering Committee is an interdisciplinary group of faculty deeply invested in the success of the department at every level. It provides advice and guidance on curriculum, department policies, student opportunities, and community-building events."

- Jaine Strauss

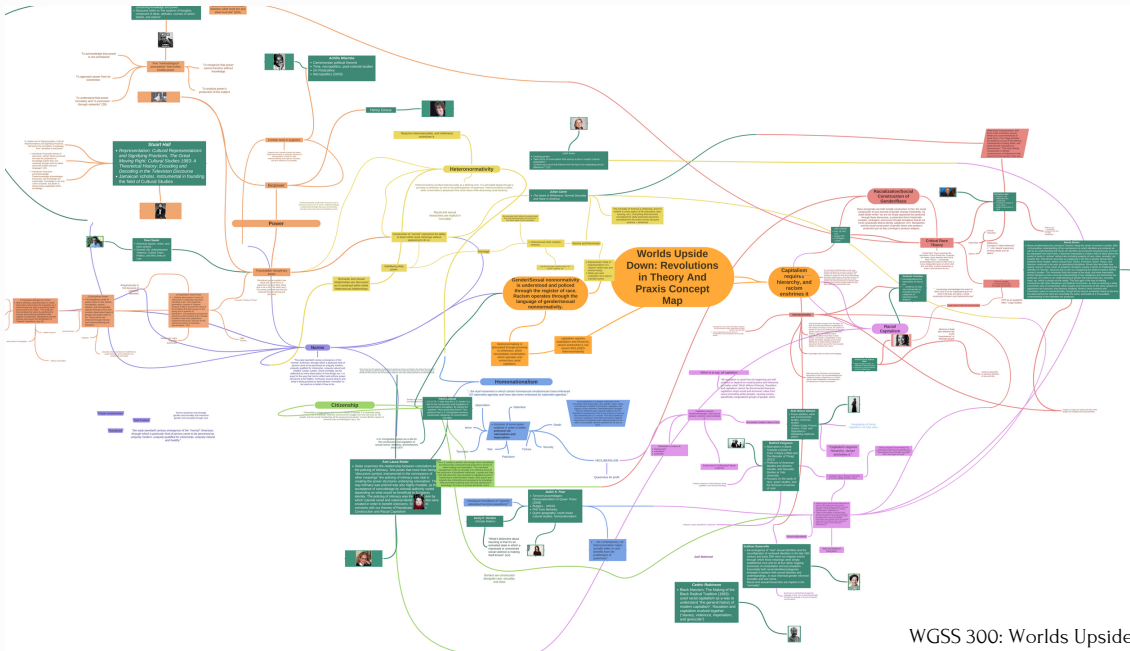
## Sonita Sarker's New Book

"Women Writing Race, Nation, and History: N/native"

Published by  
Oxford University Press

Release date May 5, 2022





WGSS 300: Worlds Upside Down Concept Map  
The link is [here](#) and on the WGSS webpage.



"I had initially imagined that each student would create their own concept map, but the students suggested working collectively on it, which I thought was a great idea - that meant that they had to create a system for decision making, for distributing the work, and for actually writing the content and organizing the visual representation of that material. No easy feat!"

- Myrl Beam

## Myrl Beam and The Concept Map

By Zoe Kross

Myrl Beam is a visiting assistant professor in the WGSS department at Macalester. He specializes in queer and trans social movements, critical race theory, oral history, affect, political economy, neoliberalism, capitalism, and queer and feminist theory. Professor Beam received his PhD in American Studies from the University of Minnesota in 2014. He has taught multiple theory classes in his field of interest at Macalester. He is also the author of "Gay, Inc.: The Nonprofitization of Queer Politics" (University of Minnesota Press, 2018). Most recently, his work has appeared in the edited volume "Queer Activism After Marriage Equality" (Routledge, 2019).

In the fall of 2021, Professor Beam taught WGSS 300: Worlds Upside Down, an advanced theory class. For the last two weeks of class, students collaborated to create a concept map (see the map at the top of the page) which covered the theory they read over the course of the semester. The concept map was split into overlapping themes such as homonationalism, intersectionality, citizenship, norms, racial capitalism, and more.

Author's note: I was honored to write about the concept map project. I was also lucky to be in Professor Beam's Worlds Upside Down course and learn about topics I didn't even know existed in the world of academia, such as homonationalism and its role in American politics. - Zoe Kross

# Myrl Beam and the Oral History Project

By Ruben Schneiderman & Fall 2021 WGSS 394

Professor Myrl Beam and Andrea Jenkins, the President of Minneapolis City Council, have worked to collect, preserve, and make “available oral histories of gender transgression.” (source?) Hundreds of interviews have been collected and made available through the University of Minnesota.



Students in Professor Beam's class WGSS 394: Telling Trans Stories: Queer and Trans Oral Histories worked all of the fall 2021 semester in partnership with the Tretter Collection's Transgender Oral History Project (TTOHP). The TTOHP is committed to collecting, preserving, and making available oral histories of gender-expansive people, broadly understood through a trans framework. According to TTOHP, the newest phase of the project specifically seeks to “document the transformative power of trans movements, and the stories of trans activists who are building them.”

The class has studied queer, trans, and feminist theory and explored oral history methodology. The class also watched many hours of oral history footage from the likes of Dean Spade, Sylvia Rivera Law Project founder; Dominique Morgan, Black and Pink Executive Director; Chase Strangio, ACLU attorney and Chelsea Manning's lawyer; Kris Hayashi, Transgender Law Center's Executive Director; Gabriel Foster, Founder of the Trans Justice Funding Project, and many others. Students then conducted their own interviews with trans athletes, artists, and activists, which will be added to the Tretter collection in the coming months.

Author's note: I am grateful to have been a part of this class, and to write about this wonderful experience! I highly recommend taking this class when it is offered again!

- Ruben Schneiderman



## Women's History Month Virtual Event with Mariame Kaba

### "Abolition Feminism is a Practice of Freedom"

Held on  
MARCH 24, 2022

Co-sponsored by:  
Dept. of Multicultural Life.  
WGSS Department  
American Studies Dept.  
Political Science Dept.  
Institute of Global Citizenship  
Program Board



# Honoring Our WGSS Senior Majors and Their Work - Congratulations!



**ZOE KROSS - MAY '22**

WGSS MAJOR  
NEUROSCIENCE MAJOR  
BIOLOGY MINOR

## **WGSS Honors Project Macalester's Role in Supporting Survivors of Sexual Assault**

My project is a multi-methods, intersectional psychology project that analyzes the idea of institutional betrayal at Macalester. I am interested in seeing what support students at Mac wish they would have gotten from the institution, and I am investigating the role of institutional betrayal, which evaluates the level of failure an institution provides to a survivor of on-campus sexual assault. I am also collaborating with the Macalester Title IX office and their 300k grant to generate new ideas about how to better support students who have experienced sexual misconduct. Additionally, I am creating a plan for cultural change around sexual misconduct at Macalester and ways Title IX can participate in harm reduction at Mac.



**SARAH GARRETT-ENGELE  
MAY '22**

WGSS MAJOR  
ENGLISH MINOR

## **WGSS Capstone The Hypersexualized Little Girl and Society's Endorsement of Predatory Behavior**

My project examines the sexualization of young girls in mainstream advertisements. I aim to explore this paradoxical phenomenon and determine whether or not the eroticization of young girls in mainstream ads influences adults' views of sexual interactions and relationships between underage girls and legal adults. I chose this project because every day, I notice at least one ad sexualizing and glorifying violence against women. What these ads don't explicitly say, though, is that these women don't just exist on the screen or in the social imagination. They exist in the many young girls who are sexually assaulted, raped, and molested every year. I hope this paper shows people the importance of dismantling these pedophilic messages endorsed by popular culture and that it compels people to reject the mistreatment of young girls.

## **WGSS Alumni Updates** Where are they now and what are they doing?

**Ariel Estrella '15** - PhD student at Cornell University  
Development Associate at National Domestic Workers Alliance

**Emma Cohen '12** - MEd from Harvard  
Health and Safety Professional

**Emily Lesnick '11** - MA from NYU  
Anti-Racist Education

**Melita Kyra Kou '01** - BA from Lenoir-Rhyne College  
Environmental Consulting/ Sustainability Expert

**Katie Barrett Wiik '00** - Doctor of Law from Harvard Law School  
Partner, Appellate and Litigation Attorney

**Holly Elwood '90** - MS from Johns Hopkins  
Senior Advisor, Environmentally Preferable Purchasing Program, US EPA



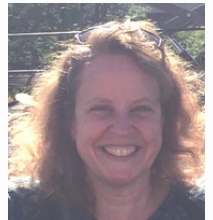
### ENGL/WGSS 308: Literature & Sexuality: Modernism & Queer Theory

I love this quote by Sara Ahmed: "I think of feminism as poetry; we hear histories in words; we reassemble histories by putting them into words." I enjoy cross-listing courses in English and WGSS because we get to listen to the poetry of feminist and queer history, putting our own words into conversation with the activists, thinkers, and makers from the past--all with the aim of contributing to a better, more radically compassionate present.

## Professor Amy Elkins - English Department

### PSCH/WGSS 264: Psychology of Gender

I am pleased to cross-list in WGSS because intersectionality, cultural humility, and social justice are key lenses through which students view material in this course. Understanding gender in context provides students with a way to connect learning to their own lives, to current events, and to the society in which we live. Students are invited to be co-creators of knowledge and encouraged to bring their knowledge and experiences to bear in the world by enacting real social change.



## Professor Theresa Glaser - Psychology Department



### BIOL/WGSS 117: Women, Health and Reproduction

It means a great deal to me that this course is cross-listed between Biology and WGSS. A liberal arts approach to social, legal and ethical dilemmas in gender, health and reproduction helps to unpack how and why we understand things. Historical events and biases continue to shape equity, access and health for people around the world, and this class looks at how our understanding of these intersections has evolved and continues to evolve. Physiology influences the social context and the social/historical context shapes the understanding and treatment of people and their physiology.

## Professor Elizabeth Jansen - Biology Department

### THAD 112/WGSS 194: Reading Plays: Queer Theater

Cross-listing a THDA course with WGSS allows me to teach performance, constructs, and signifiers of gender as key concepts in theater and broader media. Students are then able to deconstruct conflicts with current and former queer politics around the performance of gender, which in turn makes them more conscientious critics of any medium.



## Professor C. Meaker - Theater and Dance Department



### RELI/WGSS 294: Gender Relations in Islam

I feel like WGSS is my second home; therefore, cross-listing courses makes me feel more grounded in some sense. Teaching "Gender Relations in Islam" as both a "Religious Studies" and "Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies" helps me to think across disciplines with students.

## Professor Ahoo Najafian - Religious Studies Department



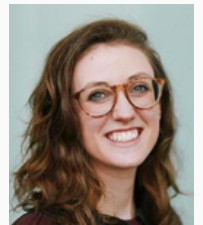
## PSCH 368/WGSS 394: Psychology of/and Disability

Cross-listing this course with WGSS helps ensure that course material will address how dynamics related to gender, sexuality, race, and other dimensions of social location/social identities shape the psychology of/and disability, and highlights the ways in which the field of disability studies is related to and can inform other critical identity studies fields.

## Professor Joan Ostrove - Psychology Department

POLI 305//WGSS 306: Women's Voices in Politics  
POLI 294//WGSS 294: LGBTQ Politics & Policy

Often the ideas we come up with have already been studied under a different name in another discipline. I thus see cross-listing a course in WGSS as an opportunity to work and engage in dialogue across disciplinary bounds.



## Professor Ashley Sorenson - Political Science Department



HIST/WGSS 194: History of Childhood  
HIST 350/WGSS 250: Race, Gender, and Medicine

Ten years before I came to Macalester, I had only ever taught WGSS courses! All of my mentors were WGSS-connected faculty, and I credit them for teaching me how to teach with a feminist, inclusive pedagogy, regardless of the course content. I crosslist most of my courses so I can continue to have WGSS-minded students in my classes--they bring depth, perspective, and fresh ideas to history classes.

## Professor Amy Sullivan - History Department

Professor [Susanna Drake](#) - Religious Studies Department  
RELI/WGSS 325: Conquering the Flesh: Renunciation of Food/Sex in the Christian Tradition

Professor [Paul Dosh](#) - Political Science Department  
POLI/LATI/WGSS 145: Latin America Through Women's Eyes

Professor [Morgan Jerald](#) - Psychology Department  
PSYC/WGSS 194: The Psychology of Gender & PSYC/WGSS 394 Psychology of Black Women

Professor [Christopher Lowy](#) - Asian Languages and Cultures Department  
ASIA/JAPA/WGSS 294: Queer Lit/Culture from Japan

Professor [Alicia Muñoz](#) - Spanish and Portuguese Department  
LATI/SPAN 386/WGSS 346: Constructions of a Female Killer

Professor [Juliette Rogers](#) - French and Francophone Studies Department  
FREN/WGSS 194: Persist, Resist, Rebel: Women in France and Canada

Professor [Ward Sayre](#) - Economics Department  
ECON/WGSS 294: Gender and Development

Professor [Della Zurick](#) - Political Science Department  
POLI/WGSS 294: Engendering Justice





**WGSS**  
Community Events

- Fall Open House
- WGSS Family Hour
- Halloween Coffee House
- Career Exploration Events
- Winter Celebration Dinner
- Convo(ersation) Pop-ups
- Women's History Month Event
- Honors/Capstone Presentations
- Spring Celebration Dinner
- Daily FIKA!

**WGSS**

New WGSS logo by  
Ruben Schneiderman

