

Feminist Oral Histories of the University of Washington

Department of Gender, Women and Sexuality Studies, University of Washington
Seattle, WA

Sam Hatzenbeler

Interviewed by
Cristina Sofia Barriot

April 29th, 2024
Record online over Zoom

Narrator

Sam Hatzenbeler, born in Spokane, Washington is a feminist activist. She is an alumna of the Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies (GWSS) department at the University of Washington. She received the GWSS Alumni Award October 4, 2023. Sam currently works in an economic and racial justice nonprofit focused on making statewide policy changes to improve conditions for working families. She leads the health care affordability policy work. In the past, Sam has worked in a domestic violence shelter as a women and children's advocate, in a nonprofit supporting houseless people, and managed an abortion clinic. Though Sam did not originally set out to major in Women Studies, she found a home in the GWSS department. She loved the courses and decided to pursue a Women Studies major. Sam shares that the various leadership roles and her work in health care equity were launched at the age of 18 largely due to her experiences in the GWSS department.

Interviewer

Cristina Sofia Barriot is a doctorate student in the College of Education at the University of Washington. She completed this oral history in the Spring of 2024, as part of the 'GWSS 460: Feminist Oral History Research Methodology' course taught by Professor Priti Ramamurthy.

Abstract

Throughout this oral history, Sam Hatzenbeler shares her personal experiences growing up as a feminist. She shares family history and how women carried the labor in her community. Sam names her mother as the first feminist she encountered in her life and draws from her upbringing and her mothers' commitments to her family as the inspiration that set her in her path as a feminist and activist for working families. Sam discusses social issues in her teenage years from dress codes to teen pregnancy to women's advocacy. Sam also cites the importance of her undergraduate studies in Women's Studies in the GWSS department highlighting the importance of the department in shaping her perspectives on social justice and equity. Sam also discussed her experiences in feminist leadership and advocacy emphasizing how the GWSS department inculcated critical thinking skills and ability to center a global perspective and holistic view on how oppression manifests. When referencing her education and time at the University of Washington Sam names professors and classes that shaped her learning. She fondly remembers studying in the Czech Republic, studying Central European History with a feminist lens, and returning to the University of Washington to present her research from her time in Prague. Sam states that returning to the GWSS department to pursue a doctorate degree would feel like coming home.

Interview recorded by Cristina Sofia Barriot using Zoom Cloud Recording.

Files

Audio: 44_Hatzenbeler_Sam.mp4

Video: 44_Hatzenbeler_Sam.mp4

Transcript – 11 pages

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Sam Hatzenbeler Interview

[0:03]

INT: All right. So, I'm going to start by prefacing the interview and then we'll start with our first set of questions. So, this is an interview with Sam Hatzenbeler, I am the interviewer, Cristina Barriot. And today is April 29, 2024, on a Monday and we are joining through zoom. Okay, so let's get started. Um, could you share with us the name you go by and any pronouns you go by?

Narrator: Yes, my name is Sam Hatzenbeler and I use she, her pronouns.

[0:32]

INT: Thank you for sharing that.

INT: Okay. So, the first question that I have is just to know a little bit more about your early life and personal history that led you up to your college experience.

INT: So, this can include anything from like where you were born, your family, parents, work that they did, who was in your household when you were growing up, and the area you grew up in?

[0:55]

Narrator: Well, I was born in Spokane, Washington, in eastern Washington, and to my mom and my dad.

Narrator: And on my mom's side, I was the third generation to be from Spokane, and then maybe like three or four generations on my dad's side.

Narrator: Yeah. And they were married for a couple of years, and then got divorced.

Narrator: So, I was mostly raised by my mom. And yeah, that was difficult financially. We were poor at certain times, kind of were a working-class family.

Narrator: And yeah, I had a lot of extended family like grandparents and cousins, and yeah, close network of family around the state when I was growing up.

Narrator: Can you say the question again? Maybe I can answer more.

[2:10]

INT: Yeah, so it's just, um, just what was your household like when you were growing up and the area grew up if you wanted to share a little bit more about that?

Narrator: Yeah. I mostly lived with my mom in the suburbs of Spokane. And then my dad was homeless for some time. Then he lived with my grandparents. And eventually he bought a horse ranch out in a rural area outside of Spokane, called Medical Lake. And so, I did grow up around horses after like middle school.

Narrator: My dad worked in construction. And did a lot of like manual type labor. And then my mom mostly worked in sort of pink collar jobs, as they say, like, a woman worked as a secretary for several companies, and she I remember, she worked a lot of jobs, trying to, you know, provide for me and my dad wasn't, didn't contribute to child support. So it was mostly my mom supporting the two of us. And I was an only child. Yeah.

INT: She sounds amazing.

Narrator: Yeah, she was. She was a big -- she was I always say -- she was the first feminist that I that I met.

INT: I love that.

Narrator: Yeah.

[3:30]

INT: Okay, so the next question is, what were some social issues you encountered as you grew up that whether that is in like in the community in schooling like, what were some social issues, you started to see?

Narrator: Social issues? I mean -- I think the one that I was most acutely aware of just as a kid, because that was my personal experience was being a latchkey kid, you know, being home alone, after school from a really young age, maybe around seven, because we just didn't have the resource to you know, have more childcare, and a lot of the families around in our neighborhood, we're dealing with that.

Narrator: And I think maybe that was just maybe more common in the 80s. I don't know. But it was, you know, a lot of not a lot of resource for families and not a lot of flexibility with my mom's jobs. So yeah, it was kind of like a you're on your own don't burn down the house kind of thing.

[4:15]

Narrator: So I was definitely very aware of that. And I think that yeah, my awareness about sort of women carrying a lot of the labor to raise families and work and provide and I was very aware of like this sort of -- yeah, just women being in my community, at least it was the women who were kind of carrying a heavy load to take care for our family and community.

Narrator: And so, I was aware of, of economics. And I just always say I was a feminist since coming out of the womb, I was always very finely attuned to mistreatment of, of girls. And I remember that was a big feature growing up. Yeah.

[05:38]

INT: I love that -- A feminist, like straight out of the womb. That falls into the next question, which was, when did you first call yourself or define yourself as a feminist?

Narrator: Probably when I was a teenager in high school.

Narrator: I remember there were just lots of weird comments made. About girls, and you know, like sexual harassment. And when we graduated high school, girls were not allowed to participate in the graduation ceremony if we didn't wear a dress.

[6:14]

Narrator: And so I organized a bunch of my friends to go down and talk to the principal about it. And we didn't win. Like they said, well, you can't -- you can't participate if you don't wear a dress. I remember that.

[06:29]

Narrator: I remember... my high school at the time had the highest pregnancy rate in the state. So girls, when they got pregnant, they just sort of disappeared, never saw them again. You know, that we heard rumors, like maybe they were in the alternative high school. But they -- we just -- they just kind of kind of disappeared. So it was it was a really big thing.

[06:59]

Narrator: Like everybody was really aware of it and scared of getting pregnant. And it just looked really bad for you know, the guys who got these girls pregnant, continued in school, and we've never really knew what happened to the girls after that. And it just sort of, obviously seemed to derail their whole education and, and their lives. So, I remember being very aware of that, in my teenage years.

[07:35]

INT: Yeah, so would you say like, all these experiences led you up to your studies at the University of Washington?

Narrator: Yeah, absolutely.

Narrator: I didn't set out to declare women's studies as a major. But when I looked at the course catalog, I was just naturally drawn to all these amazing classes that I feel like I had been waiting for.

[8:01]

Narrator: And I always say, I feel like my life started when I moved to Seattle, and got to take all these amazing Women's Studies classes, because I felt such a strong personal connection, it just seemed to everything fit into place and kind of made sense.

Narrator: Made my life makes sense in a way and then I got to develop a racial consciousness as well. And being from a pretty homogenous white community I wasn't aware of, I mean, I was aware of racism but not in a way that not in a way that it's a systemic oppression.

Narrator: And so for my own gender and class awareness, it was easy then to just see how all of these systems of oppression connect and and interlock and and how that was informed by our economic system and history of our country.

[9:00]

Narrator: And then of course with Professor Ramamurthy, these classes, you know, putting it in a global context. So, I just loved all my classes and I just kept taking Women's Studies classes over the quarters.

Narrator: And then eventually I was like, oh, well I have enough to be you know, declared as a major so I might as well but there were so many great classes.

Narrator: I remember the Psychobiology of Women with Nancy Kenny; Antiracism: Race and Feminism with Rebecca Aanerud. What else? Women in Law the intro with Jeanette Bushnell.

Narrator: I mean, it's like I just like remember all these classes because they were also phenomenal and they just really challenged us to think really critically and add not just a gender lens, but you know, multiple lenses in terms of class and race and you know, on national identity, and it was just a very welcoming, but like nourishing and challenging -- intellectually challenging environment that I really thrived on.

[10:10]

INT: Yeah, it sounds like a very human approach to life.

Narrator: Right?

INT: And how we take the whole big picture. Well, thank you for sharing that those um, I was going to go into my next question, which was, how did you decide to study Women's Studies: Law, Society and Justice?

Narrator: Yeah, I didn't-- Well I'll see, I guess I did do a Law, Societies and Justice minor.

Narrator: I forgot about that.

Narrator: But Women's Studies, I remember that people would say, well, especially my family "a women's studies, what, what are you going to do with that?" And our answer was always "changed the world."

Narrator: Because I just felt like, everything I was learning. It had everything to do with my future goals and the kind of work that I wanted to do.

[11:03]

Narrator: And it was, it just felt like my, my home. So it was an easy choice. And yeah, I think one instructor sort of stands out, Doctor Anu Taranath. She was, I think, in the English department and Comparative History of Ideas, but also crosslisted with Women's Studies, and I got to take multiple classes with her including Nigerian Women's Feminism's.

Narrator: And I yeah, I just, I just felt like the Women's Studies Department was offering classes that were so intersectional that nowhere else on campus was really tackling these issues.

Narrator: So I, I mean, a lot of great programs, obviously, American Ethnic Studies was a great and sort of still building program, but, but I just loved the Women's Studies program and how it tried to look at just all different issues in an intersectional way.

[12:06]

INT: Is there one specific moment that you recall -- do you remember, remember, that felt particularly joyful, or that you felt particularly proud of in the department?

Narrator: Oh, um, let's see. Yeah, I haven't thought about this in a while. But I guess I did get the chance to study in the Czech Republic. And it was also through the Comparative History of Ideas Program, but it was Dr. Sokolova, was a women's studies PhD. Was she a student, or already, she may have already graduated in the Czech Republic, and she was connected to the UW Women's Studies Department. And so, we got to study Central European history with a feminist lens.

Narrator: And I just think, where else could we do that? Like, I loved it, I got to volunteer at a women's history library in Prague. And then I came back and the Women's Studies department was so welcoming. And I think I might have met with the department head.

Narrator: Yeah, who was it at the time? Maybe, Judy, I'm blanking on her last name right now it was 20 years ago. But she was very supportive. And I got to present my research that I had done while I was in Prague. And people came, and everybody was interested to hear my perspective.

Narrator: So, I just very much felt like I was valued as a student and as a person. So, this is one example.

[13:56]

INT: It's so amazing that you got to do that.

INT: Alright, so the next set of questions that I have is just after the Women's Studies, Graduate degree and beyond. So, what led you to pursue a graduate degree in public health?

Narrator: Yeah, well, um, so I had, let's see how many years between? Well, I graduated in 2006. So, I had a number of jobs where I was working at a domestic violence shelter for four years, as a woman and children's advocate. I worked at Real Change News, supporting houseless people. In the vendor program, I managed an abortion clinic. So, all of these things, a lot of its direct service, which was exhausting for me.

[14:43]

Narrator: It's -- a lot of people get really burned out doing that direct service work. It's so important and it saves lives. And I really wanted to work upstream and kind of change things from a on a broader level, so that we wouldn't have to keep kind of putting a bandaid on social problems -- like poverty and violence, for example, so, and lack of control over women's bodies for ourselves.

Narrator: So, yeah, so I started thinking about going back to school. And the School of Public Health had this amazing graduate program called the community oriented Public Health Practice Program. And it just felt like a natural fit.

Narrator: Public Health and Women's Studies are, are very closely linked. And it just felt like a good place for me with my feminist values and my interest in doing statewide policy work, which is what I do now.

Narrator: And, yeah, it was a great experience. And there were a number of Women's Studies majors in the program.

INT: That's so nice that there's still Women's Studies, majors in the program, and you get to do that connection, and also the community oriented aspects of it. That sounds so amazing.

[16:08]

Narrator: Yeah, it was a great program.

Narrator: And you know, I -- so when I was, I didn't mention this, but my -- I did my my thesis and undergrad on, let's see if I can remember the title.

Narrator: Radical Education, Social Change Feminist -- it has something to do with feminist democratic education methods.

Narrator: I think it's probably still in the UW library system if you want some light bedtime reading, but I did this massive year long research project around like feminist

education methods, and so that very much felt connected to my grad programs, methodology and how they taught.

Narrator: And it's all about hands on experiential learning and student driven learning, which was what my thesis was about. So it -- it just felt like a natural fit. Because, yeah, at that time, I had, you know, a number of years of professional experience, and didn't just want to go sit in a classroom and be lectured at.

Narrator: I wanted to kind of be able to get out into the community and get more more experiential learning opportunities. So yeah, they they're very much what went well together.

[17:31]

INT: Yeah, so it sounds like all the experiences you had in the department -- you were drawing on a lot of them during your master's program.

Narrator: Absolutely. Yeah.

Narrator: I feel like my, my Women's Studies degree, prepared me very well for well -- continues to prepare me well, for all the jobs I've had and including pursuing my, my graduate level degree.

[17:55]

INT: So specifically, since you left the university, um now in in this moment, what aspects of the education in the Women's Studies department do you see yourself drawing most on?

Narrator: Um, my critical thinking skills for sure. I definitely honed those when I was an undergrad. And let's see, I guess ability to think beyond the individual. But think - - think about individuals, but also see how our personal experiences relate to broader history and systems of oppression.

[18:36]

Narrator: Personal as political, as they say.

Narrator: And I'm able to carry that forward into my current work, always asking the question of how -- what's missing? Are women's stories and experiences being considered and? And yeah, I tried to bring that every day.

[18:59]

INT: Can you tell us a little bit more about the work you're doing today?

Narrator: Yeah. I work at an economic and racial justice, nonprofit. It's focused on making statewide policy changes to improve conditions for working families. And so I lead our health care affordability policy work. I work with legislators and advocates and agency leaders around improving access to affordable, equitable health care. And it's, I've gotten to have a lot of I think, leadership opportunities, partly because of my, you know, long career working on different health related and equity related issues that the Women's Studies Department kind of launched for me back when I was 18. So yeah.

INT: Thank you for sharing that.

INT: And I love how you brought it back to like asking the question of like, what's missing? And the women's stories, too, that you mentioned before.

Narrator: Yeah.

INT: That's really important.

Narrator: I agree.

INT: I remember I was reading a news article that said, like the studies on hours of sleep were conducted on men. And then they had just realized that like, oh, they hadn't done this on women and women need more hours of sleep than men. So yeah, it's like, we're constantly being left out.

Narrator: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, I had the opportunity in grad school to take some classes about maternal and child health. You know, so it's kind of thinking about women and women's experiences has been a thread throughout, you know, all of my career and, and graduate work as well.

[20:51]

Narrator: Yeah, it's encouraging that a lot of people are thinking about this more and more, especially in my line of work.

INT: Yeah, that's how we get change done.

Narrator: Yeah.

INT: All right. So, the next set of questions are on the Alumni Award. So, what does being recognized by the GWSS Department for the alumni award mean to you?

Narrator: Oh, well, it was such an honor. It was completely unexpected. And it feels funny, I'm 40 years old. So it feels funny to be recognized as a distinguished anything, because I feel like that award is usually given to someone who's, you know, worked more, more years than I have.

Narrator: But it felt very much like it was nice to reconnect with the program, and to reflect back and see that so many of my jobs, and the work that I've done, has continued to, I hope, benefit the community. And, and it's, it's all very related, you know, I think I, it's easy to at the time, you don't necessarily see how everything is connected, but looking back, you know, working for the abortion clinic, and the women's shelter, and it's all rooted in, in my feminist values and the work that I think is important.

Narrator: So it was very nice to see people -- and I got to see Dr. Kenny, and, you know, other professors that had been teaching when I was in school 20 years ago.

Narrator: So that was a really, really special treat, and to be nominated by Dr. Ginorio, who was one of my favorite professors. She taught Women and Violence. And she was my graduate or my undergrad thesis advisor as well. So, she wasn't able to make it because of some family issues. But it was really a wonderful, I am honored that she nominated me.

[22:44]

INT: Well, you are amazing. And all the experiences that you shared with me, and the work that you're doing is so inspiring. So, it's so well deserved. I just want to say that.

Narrator: Thank you so much.

INT: All right. So, my last question is, what does the GWSS department mean to you now?

Narrator: Oh, gosh, well, I mean, I'm just so proud that it's continued to grow and develop. And there you know; I remember there were very few graduate level students when I was there. And it seems like the department has really continued to flourish and build. So that just warms my heart and I am clinical faculty in the School of Public Health through my graduate degree, but sometimes I think maybe I, in my spare time, I could, you know, maybe come back and be more

involved in some way with the department and it's just so inspiring getting to hear especially at the awards ceremony, getting to hear about the research and work of the current graduate students.

[24:18]

Narrator: It's very exciting to me, it makes me want to go back to school, maybe get my -- I'm like, is it too late to get my doctorate, you know, in the program.

INT: That would be amazing.

Narrator: That will be like coming home. Yeah.

INT: Well, thank you so much, Sam, for sharing your time with us. Your experiences I've enjoyed so much learning from you. Just thank you.

Narrator: Thank you. Thank you for doing this.