Dr. Frederika Schmitt

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This edition of Who Makes Millersville Special features Dr. Frederika Schmitt, associate professor of sociology/anthropology.

Q: How long have you been with Millersville University?
This is my 16th year.

Q: Where are you from?
I was born in Philadelphia and raised in Penn Valley/Narberth, a western suburb of Philadelphia.

Q: What college/university did you attend?
I attended Bucknell University for my bachelor’s degree in sociology and psychology with a minor in art history. I earned both my master’s degree and doctorate degree in sociology from the University of Delaware.
Q: What got you interested in sociology as a profession?
My mother was Swedish and my father was German, I was aware from a young age that different societies are structured in different ways. Trying to understand and create social change around inequality is what has drawn me to sociology.

Q: Why do you think sociology is an important topic to be discussed in higher education?
Most of us are not aware of the social forces that structure our lives and impact our daily experiences. We focus too much on the individual and sociology opens our eyes to the power of these larger social forces that impact us every day.

Q: What classes do you teach? What is your favorite class that you do teach?
I have taught 11 different courses, and I routinely teach Criminology, Gender and the Law, Sociology of Deviance and Feminist theory. I truly enjoy teaching all of my courses, each one is challenging and my students inspire me to do my best.

Q: One of your topics of expertise is sexual assault, what advice do you give students about preventing sexual assault on campus?
The vast majority of campus rapes involve the use of alcohol by the perpetrator, victim or both; I would encourage students not to drink at all, or drink very little. I strongly encourage bystander intervention. We have all seen behavior that we are uncomfortable with, students should not just observe but they should enlist a friend and intervene. It is not difficult, there is no need to make a big scene, and they can simply distract those involved in the troubling behavior, divert their attention and save them from making a huge mistake and possibly engaging in crime.

Q: One of your interests is also feminist theory, how would you personally define feminism?
I believe that our positions in society are based on social constructs (not biology) including power inequality. We are all privileged and targeted in some ways; based on our sex/gender, race, ethnicity, social class, religion, nationality . . . and this should bring about empathy and understanding, not divisions and hate. I also work to “practice what I preach” understanding that feminism is both a way of thinking AND acting.

Q: What is the most challenging part of being a professor?
Never having enough time to work with all of my wonderful MU students!

Q: What is the most rewarding part of being a professor?
Working with and getting to know our students, being a part of their learning and growing process, keeping in touch with them after they graduate and hearing of their accomplishments and how their Millersville education was integral to their success.

**Q: You adopted your two children from China, can you tell me a little about that process?**

We worked with an adoption agency that specializes in adoptions from China. They helped us with the mountains of paperwork that took six months to complete (criminal background check, employment verification, three letters of reference, financial statements, physical and mental evaluations . . .). Once the paperwork was submitted we waited to be matched to a child. This was the most difficult part. For Brielle we were told we would wait 12 months and we waited 13 months. For Serena we were told we would wait six months and we waited 22 months. Once we were matched to our daughters, we received photographs of them and we were able to travel to China six weeks later. We met Brielle on August 13, 2003 and Serena on July 23, 2007. We celebrate these dates each year, their adoption days, which are extraordinarily significant to us, as these represent the day(s) when we became a family.

**Q: How did you and your husband make the decision of adopting from China?**

I have wanted to adopt a baby girl from China since I was in high school, where I learned of the plight of so many young girls born into poverty and often abandoned. Fate created a situation whereby my husband was also eager to make this dream come true.

**Q: How was your time in China, have you traveled to any other countries?**

We traveled to and around China with other families who were also adopting children, known as our “travel group”, along with representatives from our adoption agency. We get together at least twice a year with each group. Our daughters refer to their friends from our travel group as their “China sisters.” These are significant relationships; our daughters share a special bond with their “China sisters”. We have a photograph of Brielle with her “China sister”, Kate, together in their crib in the orphanage in China, they were together before we met them! Our time in China was life changing, not only did we become parents and extend our family, we were able to experience parts of an extraordinary country, meet wonderful people and eat delicious food. We climbed the Great Wall, sailed down the Li River with its mystical mountains, and walked through Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City. Everywhere we went in China people would come up to us, touch our child and say in English, “lucky girl.” We were deeply touched by this show of support.
I have been fortunate to travel to the birth countries of each of my parents: Sweden and Germany. I have also visited and spent time in: Denmark, England, Scotland, Bermuda, Jamaica, the Bahamas, Mexico, and Canada.

**Q: What is your favorite book and why?**

Many books have been extraordinarily meaningful to me at different points in my life. I will mention two books that have touched me deeply in the last few years. First, “The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks”, by Rebecca Skloot, because this book tells the story of a poor African American woman whose cells were taken without her knowledge in 1951. Her cells became one of the most important tools in medicine – vital to developing the polio vaccine, cloning, gene mapping and more. Henrietta’s cells have been bought and sold by the billions, yet she remains virtually unknown and her family cannot afford health insurance. Her moving story is about the strength of the human spirit in the face of great adversity and the collision of ethics, race, medicine, scientific discovery and the quest for a daughter to learn about her mother.

The second book is “The Invention of Wings” by Sue Monk Kidd. This piece of historical fiction was inspired by the life of Sarah Grimke, a pioneer in the Abolitionist and Women’s Rights movement. The novel, set in early 19th century Charleston, S.C., tells the story of Sarah, daughter of a wealthy white landowning family and “Handful” the young slave who was given to Sarah on her 11th birthday as her handmaid. As we follow these characters over the next 35 years we are witness to their struggles for liberation, empowerment, and self expression.

I adore both of these books because they tell the stories of powerful women in American history, their struggles, their successes and their losses. These women and countless others have been overlooked for too long.

**Q: What do you typically do in your free time?**

To be honest it is difficult to carve out “free time” but I think it is essential! I try to spend as much time with my family and friends as possible. We play outside by skiing, ice skating, sledding/tubing, biking, hiking, canoeing, kayaking, and swimming. We adore spending time at the beach, in the ocean and playing with our dog. Friday night is family movie night and we also play “old school” board games. For “alone time” I run with our dog, practice Bikram yoga and read.

**Q: Please complete this sentence. People would be surprised to know that I**

practice yoga in 107 degree heat and can ski backwards.