

## **Veteran Feminists of America—Pioneer Histories Project**

**Esther Rothblum**

### **Activism:**

#### **How did you first become involved in the women's movement?**

I became a feminist my first week at Smith College, when the president of my dorm told us that a man had been seen on the top floor and said "let's all tackle him!" I immediately realized the power of women (70 of us, one of him) and in a larger sense, the gender power imbalance in the world. Being at a college in which all the students and student leaders were women was a powerful introduction to the women's movement.

A well-meaning mentor once told me: "Don't study women, it's too narrow." I spent the rest of my life proving him wrong. My research and writing have focused on LGBT relationships and mental health as well as on the stigma of weight. I have edited 28 books, including *The Fat Studies Reader* and *Preventing Heterosexism and Homophobia*. I've has compared lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals to their heterosexual siblings, as well as transgender to cisgender siblings. There has been little research on sexual orientation and gender identity that uses appropriate comparison groups. A former longitudinal project compared same-sex couples who were united in a civil union during the first year this legislation was available in the U.S. (in the State of Vermont, July 2000 to July 2001) with their same-sex coupled friends who did not have civil unions, and with their married heterosexual siblings. My research team focused on demographic and relationship information, presence of children, social support from friends and family, conflict, and mental health. I am also interested in ways that women connect with each other in non-sexual ways. I have edited the books *Lesbians Ex-Lovers*, *Lesbian Friendships*, and *Lesbian Communities* and is currently studying asexuality.

#### **What were the earliest issues/actions/organizations you were involved with?**

My own activism as professor of women's studies at San Diego State University for 16 years and before that 23 years as professor of psychology at the University of Vermont focused on mentoring women and members of other underrepresented groups in academia to write and publish. I had two reasons for this activism: I wanted women and other minority groups to survive in academia, where publishing is vital, and I wanted to ensure that their radical and important ideas were not lost to history.

I began editing the academic journal *Women & Therapy* while still in my twenties and continued in that role for 12 years. I founded the *Journal of Lesbian Studies* that I edited for 26 years, and founded *Fat Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Body Weight and Society* that I edited for 12 years.

#### **What organizations/issues have you been active in (along with dates involved)?**

Along with five other feminist faculty members, I started the Women's Studies program at the University of Vermont in the 1980s and chaired the program in 1986-1988.

I started the LGBT Studies program at San Diego State University in 2009 (at the time, it was only the second at any U.S. college) and directed the program until I retired in 2021—it was first a minor, then a major, and then included a graduate certificate. I also started the annual Lavender Graduation that continues today.

I was president of the division of LGBT issues of the American Psychological Association from 1999-2000 and also chaired the APA Committee on Lesbian and Gay Concerns in 1991-1992.

I also started a Size Acceptance Caucus at the Association for Women in Psychology in 2008, and co-chaired that caucus for two years.

I was treasurer of the Burlington, Vermont Mayor's Council on Women in 1985. I was chair of the Committee on Women and Minorities of the Vermont Psychological Association from 1984-1986, and a member of the Speaker's Bureau of the National Women's Studies Association from 2010-2012.

### **What is the most important thing historians should know about you and your activism?**

My mantra has been that when something begins to look good on my c.v. (my academic resumé), it's time to move on to other more radical issues. I would like to be remembered for my activism and scholarship on behalf of women, LGBTQ+ individuals, and fat people.

### **Are you currently involved as an activist? If so, please describe.**

I have been a member of the Advisory Board of the National Association to Advance Fat Acceptance from 1996 to the present.

I continue to be a Visiting Distinguished Scholar at the Williams Institute, the LGBT School of Law at UCLA.

### **Other information (Other interviews you have done in the past, locations of your papers, other people who should be interviewed)**

Here is an interview that Dr. Nanette Gartrell did of me that is also stored in the Sophia Smith Collection of Women's History:

[https://SDSU.zoom.us/rec/share/p3DS9vo6TfizLcoqcfkVC7z57FtCnT\\_HyT8e4HFNTV5FJroZDMII7TmJqPi1iu6n.yLTc8ypkSmAyXfHD](https://SDSU.zoom.us/rec/share/p3DS9vo6TfizLcoqcfkVC7z57FtCnT_HyT8e4HFNTV5FJroZDMII7TmJqPi1iu6n.yLTc8ypkSmAyXfHD)

My papers are also stored at the Sophia Smith Collection—see

<https://libraries.smith.edu/search/libraries/cse?keys=esther+rothblum>

Here is my interview at The Outwords Archive: <https://theoutwordsarchive.org/interview/esther-rothblum/>

My San Diego State University website is: <https://womensstudies.sdsu.edu/people/rothblum> and includes a video about me when I received 2014 Monty Award

This is my bio on the website of the Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law, where I am currently Visiting Distinguished Scholar: <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/experts/esther-d-rothblum/>

### **Background information**

#### **Educational Background**

BA: Smith College, 1972-1976, major in psychology

MS: Rutgers University 1976-1979, clinical psychology

Ph.D.: Rutgers University, 1979-1980, clinical psychology

Pre-Doctoral Internship University of Mississippi Medical Center, Jackson, MS, 1979-1980

Post-Doctoral Fellowship Yale University, Depression Research Unit, Psycho-Social Epidemiology, 1980-1982

#### **Work Experiences**

<u>Women's Studies Department, San Diego State University</u>	2005-2021
Professor Emerita	2021-present
Interim Department Chair	Spring 2021
Professor	2005-2021
Program Director, LGBTQ+ Studies	2009-2021
Graduate Advisor, Women's Studies	2012-2017
Participating Scholar, Center for Research on Sexuality and	

Sexual Health, Graduate School of Public Health	2015-2021
<u>Department of Psychology, University of Vermont</u>	1982-2005
Director of Clinical Training	2001-2003, 2004-2005
Professor	1993-2005
Associate Professor	1988-1993
Assistant Professor	1982-1988
Chair, Women's Studies Committee	1986-1988
<u>University of California Los Angeles</u>	
<u>Williams Institute Visiting Distinguished Scholar</u>	2015-present
<u>Concordia University, Montreal:</u>	
Research Associate, Simone de Beauvoir Institute	2001-2002, 2004-2005
<u>Cambridge University, England:</u>	
Life Member, Clare Hall	1996-present