

VETERAN FEMINISTS OF AMERICA—PIONEER HISTORIES PROJECT

Nanette K. Gartrell, M.D.

I came out as lesbian in my first year at Stanford in 1967. I became a feminist shortly thereafter, because of the sexism in the anti-Vietnam War movement and the climate of sexual predation toward women on campus. As an undergraduate, one of my most empowering experiences was to take a women's self-defense course that taught me how to protect myself and say "no" effectively.

I set my sights on becoming a feminist psychiatrist at a time when it was a predominantly male field and homosexuality was considered a mental illness. To address the latter misperception, I launched the first of my many studies on LGBTQ+ people, paving the way to an academic and clinical career focused on social justice through research and education.

I have always been known for refusing to bow to sexist and homophobic stereotypes, even at a young age. In 1974, when applying for psychiatric residency at Columbia, I was interviewed by Dr. Robert Spitzer, an advocate of reparative therapy to "cure" homosexuality (until 2012) (<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/19/health/dr-robert-l-spitzer-noted-psychiatrist-apologizes-for-study-on-gay-cure.html>). He peppered me with questions about my sexuality, which I refused to answer. I told him that his questions were irrelevant to my application for the program. (https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J236v07n04_04?journalCode=wzgp20) He blocked my admission into the program on the basis of my comfort with my identity (as I later learned from my mentor). Consequently, I ended up at Harvard! (<https://exhibits.stanford.edu/oral-history/catalog/dg115gj4342>)

Between 1982 and 1984, as national Chair of the American Psychiatric Association's Committee on Women, I led a series of groundbreaking investigations into sexual misconduct by physicians. <https://www.newsweek.com/sex-and-psychotherapy-197196> In over a dozen scientific publications, my collaborators and I documented sexual abuse of (mostly female) patients by (mostly male) psychiatrists, psychiatric residents, and physicians in other specialties. Based in part on this research, the American Psychiatric Association and American Medical Association amended their ethics codes to rule sexual conduct with current or former patients unacceptable.

Meanwhile, lesbian mothers were losing custody of their children because judges believed that growing up with sexual minority parents would be harmful. In response, I launched the ongoing U.S. National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study (NLLFS). It is the longest-running and largest investigation of sexual minority parent families in the world, with 90% still participating after 38 years. The findings have been a resource for specialists in healthcare and family services, and were instrumental in the American Academy of Pediatrics' support of same-gender marriage. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/21/health/american-academy-of-pediatrics-backs-gay-marriage.html?hp&r=1&>) The results have been cited in international efforts to

achieve equality in marriage, adoption, and foster care—including briefs filed with the U.S. Supreme Court. The NLLFS report on the psychological adjustment of the 17-year-old offspring was heralded as one of the “Top 100 Science Stories” by *Discover Magazine* in 2010 (<https://www.discovermagazine.com/health/88-same-sex-parents-do-no-harm>), and a similar highly cited study on their mental health at age 25 was published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* (2018). (<https://www.nejm.org/doi/10.1056/NEJMc1804810>)

Along with my psychiatrist spouse Dee Mosbacher, M.D., Ph.D., I spent 13 years volunteering my psychiatric services to chronically mentally ill unhoused people in San Francisco’s Tenderloin District. An experience in a shelter became the basis for my piece in the San Francisco Chronicle Magazine, “A Tenderloin Tail.” <https://www.sfgate.com/magazine/article/A-Tenderloin-Tail-2519570.php>

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

Yes! Always!

After the election of 2016, my spouse Dee Mosbacher, Judith Herman, and I wrote a letter to President Obama calling for an immediate neuropsychiatric evaluation of the incoming president. Our letter went viral, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/is-donald-trump-mentally_b_13693174 spawning a movement of mental health professionals warning about Donald Trump. **Robin Morgan** interviewed us on Women’s Media Center Live (#228) <https://womensmediacenter.com/wmclive/wmc-live-228-judith-herman-dee-mosbacher-nanette-gartrell-original-airdate-11-12-2017> **Gloria Steinem** read an excerpt from our letter during her speech at the 2017 Women’s March in Washington, D.C. Dee and I were contributors to the best-selling book, *The Dangerous Case of Donald Trump*. <https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2017/10/22/combined-print-and-e-book-nonfiction/> I’m currently 75 years old, and still speaking out about his dangerousness as he mounts another run for the presidency.

The U.S. National Longitudinal Lesbian Family study is ongoing, with four recent publications by our research team: “Donor Sibling Relations Among Adult Offspring Conceived via Insemination by Lesbian Parents,” “Adults Conceived via Donor Insemination by Lesbian Parents Reflect on Their Own Future Parenting Plans (and Their Own Parents Reflect on Being Grandparents),” “Sperm Donor Relations Among Adult Offspring Conceived via Insemination by Lesbian Parents,” and “Long-term Effects of Family Resilience on the Subjective Well-being of Offspring in the National Longitudinal Lesbian Family Study.” <https://www.nllfs.org/publications/>

Educational Background:**Work Experience:**

I attended Stanford University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in Human Biology in 1972. I earned a medical degree from the University of California, Davis, and completed my residency training at Harvard Medical School's Massachusetts Mental Health Center. I was an Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at Harvard until 1987, and then an Associate Clinical Professor at U.C.S.F. until 2011. From 2009 to the present, I have been a Visiting Distinguished Scholar at the Williams Institute, a think tank at U.C.L.A. that conducts rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy, and I hold a Guest Appointment at the University of Amsterdam. I have been a researcher for 55 years. My research has focused on women's mental health and LGBTQ+ families.

Selected Awards:

- 1999 LAVA Award, Lesbians of Action, Vision, and Achievement
- 1999 Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition "in recognition of outstanding and invaluable service to the community."
- 1999 Certificate of Honor, Board of Supervisors City and County of San Francisco, for outstanding service to a significant portion of the people of the City and County
- 2001 Roy Scrivner Research Grant, American Psychological Association
- 2002 Lyon-Martin Women's Health Services Warriors Dee Mosbacher & Nanette Gartrell
- 2002 California State Assembly Certificate of Recognition for contributions to women's health
- 2005 Roy Scrivner Research Grant, American Psychological Association
- 2005 Researcher of the Year, UCSF Lesbian Health Research Center
- 2008 "Ten Powerful Lesbian Doctors," Curve Magazine, Vol. 18, #1, page 67.
- 2008 American Psychological Assn. (Div. 44) Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award
- 2011 *Discover Magazine*: 100 Top Stories of 2010. #88 "Same-Sex Parents Do No Harm"
- 2013 American Psychiatric Association, AWP Presidential Commendation Award
- 2014 Gay Lesbian Medical Association Achievement Award
- 2014 Mathew O. Tobriner Public Service Award, Legal Aid Society-Employment Law Center
- 2014 Mayor Edwin M. Lee and the City & County of San Francisco: Certificate of Honor "for commitment to social justice and dedication on behalf of LGBT people."
- 2014 Senator Dianne Feinstein, U.S. Senate Certificate of Commendation: "for outstanding leadership and longstanding commitment to social justice and service in the GBT community."
- 2014 Leader Nancy Pelosi, Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition "in recognition of outstanding and invaluable service to the community."
- 2018 Stanford Pioneering Women Oral History

- 2020 Stanford Pride Award of Merit
- 2020 Dr. Alexandra Symonds Award, American Psychiatric Association, for contributions to women's health and the advancement of women
- 2023 John Fryer Award, American Psychiatric Association, for contributing to the mental health of sexual minorities.