

# UC Santa Cruz

## Out in the Redwoods

### Title

Nancy Stoller, Out in the Redwoods, Documenting Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender History at the University of California, Santa Cruz, 1965-2003

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7d59d4f9>

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### Publication Date

2004-04-01

### Supplemental Material

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7d59d4f9#supplemental>

## NANCY STOLLER



Nancy Stoller, circa 1982 during tenure battle

**Interviewer, Jesse Silva:** *While researching colleges in the Orange County Public Library, I stumbled across an essay detailing Nancy Stoller's impact on UC Santa Cruz. I was awestruck by the institutional changes resulting from her tenure lawsuit. After reading the essay, I knew that if UCSC was the changed campus the essay said it was, then UCSC was the campus for me. As my adviser, Nancy assisted in my journey through the community studies major and the writing of my thesis on queer youth in Dallas, Texas. Because of scheduling conflicts, I interviewed Nancy first on January 24, 2002, and again on May 15, 2002. The long break allowed careful consideration on both what to add and what to clarify in the next interview. Both interviews took place in her office at College Eight. For me, the interview shed new light onto someone who is not*



*only a great professor, but also an amazing activist, and an innovator in the LGBTQ movement.—Jesse Silva*

**Silva:** Why don't you start by telling me a little bit about your early life? Where were you born and where did you grow up?

**Stoller:** I was born in Hampton, Virginia, and my birthday is July 16, 1942. Hampton at that time was a small town, about six- or seven-thousand people. It was incorporated as a city. It's at the tip of what's called the middle peninsula in Virginia, close to Norfolk, right on the coast, about sixty or seventy miles from the North Carolina border. The main industry in Hampton was crabbing. In fact, Hampton High School used to have the Hampton Crabbers as its sports slogan. However, in addition there were a couple of other institutions there that affected my life a lot. One was a black college called Hampton Institute, which is now called Hampton University. When I was a kid, my parents would sometimes bring me and my brothers to Hampton Institute to see the ballet and symphony. It was one of the few places in the town where some of these cultural events that my parents were familiar with—both of them were from New York City—could be seen and heard.

**Silva:** Did they want to expose you to different cultures, varieties of things?

**Stoller:** Yes, and also, my parents did not believe in segregation, although the town was totally segregated. Everything, the schools, the restaurants, every institution that would touch your life was segregated. It was really hard for black people to vote. Etcetera. So that was one institution that was there that was important in my life.

Then, out in the county, outside of Hampton itself, there was an air force base on which there was a research unit connected to the National Advisory Committee on Aeronautics, which was a precursor to the space agency. My father got a job when he got out of college working there. Both my parents grew up in New York City, and my father was trained as an engineer at City College. When he graduated in 1938, and was looking around for a job, after about a year he got this job working for the federal government



doing research on rockets. They had this research facility down in Hampton, so he took this job and he went to Hampton. After he had been there for a couple of months, he had a day off, and he went back to New York, where he and my mother got married. They came back and they lived there until, as it happened, the same year that I graduated from high school.

So I grew up in the South. And at the same time, I had parents who were from the North. In addition they were Jewish, although neither of them was religious. They were both either agnostics or atheists. Because there was a lot of anti-semitism in the town, they sent me and my brothers to Jewish Sunday school to learn a little bit about our history. So I grew up in an environment where my own family was critical of local laws and local norms. I was brought up in a family where people were not allowed to say explicitly prejudiced things about black people. If friends of ours came over and used the word *nigger* they were informed by whichever of my parents were there that that term couldn't be used. Then of course, my brothers and I took on that as well. So that's a little about the political and social environment that I grew up in.

Do you want to hear about my being a tomboy and things like that? Or do you want to hear more things about what it was like growing up then?

**Silva:** Were you a tomboy?

**Stoller:** I was a tomboy.

**Silva:** Were you aware of anything at that point in your life?

**Stoller:** Aware of *anything*?

**Silva:** Your sexual orientation or anything like that.

**Stoller:** No, I don't think I had... Well, I take that back. Maybe I gradually had some kind of sexual orientation when I was little. You have to understand a little bit about my sibling constellation. I have twin brothers who are a year-and-a-half older than me. We



were brought up almost like three children who were the same age. I always wanted to do things with my brothers. If they went somewhere, I always went with them. When somebody called to them, like, “Hey Twin,” I would answer. Not because I thought I was a twin, but because I thought the person was saying, “Hey you kids who are over here,” and I wanted to be included. I thought they meant, “Hey Stoller.” I thought I should come too. I always played with them. I was in some ways more butch than they were. We were brought up in a very non-sexist household. Each child took a turn doing the chores. They were rotated through the household. There was no boys’ versus girls’ chores. My parents were not very supportive of organized sports. In fact, at one point when my mother was the president of the local PTA in our elementary school, there was a proposal to introduce junior football in the school, and she opposed it. I remember going to school one day and having some kids go, “Oh it’s *your* mother. She’s so bad.” And I’m going, “My mother? What did she do?” [laughter] I had no idea. I had to go home and find out that there was a huge fight going on in the school between the adults about whether or not we would have these sports, which my mother was opposed to because she thought they were too violent and dangerous for kids.

My brothers and I did play football in the backyard and softball in the backyard, but not organized sports. We did lots of things outside. I was always involved in these kinds of things. I never, ever liked playing with dolls. They never appealed to me at all. I think I had a few stuffed animals somewhere. But I just couldn’t understand... I never wanted to baby-sit. I wasn’t interested in any of these traditional female roles.

**Silva:** How about dresses?

**Stoller:** I *hated* wearing dresses and skirts. I was forced to wear skirts to school because that was a school rule. I got my brothers’ hand-me-downs, so I often had blue jeans and T-shirts. My idea of what to wear growing up, my ideal outfit, was a pair of blue jeans, loose because you want to be comfortable, a T-shirt, and a flannel shirt. That was what my brothers wore. I had this funny thing happen to me when I was teaching while I was still in graduate school in Boston. I remember coming into work in a pair of pants (they weren’t blue jeans), and a student coming to my office and saying, “Gosh, I didn’t know



they'd abolished the dress code for teachers." And my responding saying, "We don't have a dress code for the teachers." This was at a Catholic school, but for the lay teachers there was no dress code. Then when I came to Santa Cruz as a teacher and I wore blue jeans, or attempted to, people would say, oh this is the new fashion. To me, it was what I had always worn all my life everywhere I possibly could.

From the time I was very little, I wanted to be able to do anything that a guy could do, a boy or an adult. I was brought up in a household where that was supported, in a lot of ways, and I remember other kids, or somebody asking me, do you want to be boy? I always said, "I don't want to be a boy, but I want to be able to do everything that a boy does." I wanted all the boy privileges and opportunities, and, from my point of view, fun. I didn't want to change my body. I had absolutely no desire to change my body. I did not want a penis. [laughter] I thought, oh that's so inconvenient. It's so much in the way if you fought. I wasn't encouraged to fight, but the worst thing I could do was to kick my brothers in the balls. I thought, this is a dangerous part of the body. You don't really want to have that. I much preferred my own body.

But I never wanted to do the things that girls did. I stayed outside the house all the time. There were no organized sports for girls. There were some by the time I got to junior high school, or high school maybe, but not very much, and they weren't very encouraged. So what I got involved in, starting when I was about seven or eight, was first the Brownie Scouts and then the Girl Scouts. And I always did everything that was outside. So in the Girl Scouts, I liked to camp. I went hiking. I was involved in all that stuff where you could...where you were like—like boys. The main thing is you didn't have to dress up in these girl clothes and do these girl things. I loved nature; I loved being outside; and I liked doing activities where I could push myself.

**Silva:** Where did you go to school for undergrad and grad school?

**Stoller:** Oh. Do you want to hear anymore about my child sex life? [laughter] Do you want to hear anything else about my high school?



**Silva:** Yes.

**Stoller:** When I was little, every once in a while the kids in my neighborhood would get together and play doctor. Typically, almost always I was the only girl there, because I hung out with my brothers and these guys, because the other girls were not interested in climbing trees and all that kind of stuff. So I was involved in these play doctor kinds of things. Then I had this friend, a girlfriend. Every so often we'd get together and try to figure out what sex was about, what people did. I was probably around nine or ten, and we'd do this little body-rubbing kind of stuff. We did that a couple of times. Then when I was in high school, I had this friend who is now married to a cop in Colorado, and sells Mary Kay cosmetics.

**Silva:** Are you still in touch with her?

**Stoller:** She's in touch with my brothers. She tried to get back to be friends with me, but I didn't really want to do it. It had a lot to do with my being a lesbian now. I didn't really want to discuss with her the fact that I was a lesbian, given certain things about who she was in the present (conservative and conventional). But anyway, we were very, very tight. We both, of course, thought of ourselves as straight, and we had boyfriends of some sort. But we used to spend the night together a lot. We used to do this thing, like a lot of teenage girls, practice kissing. We would do that occasionally. I remember even then thinking, what a shame that we have to go off and have these boyfriends. It's not like we had to have them, but in a certain way we were much closer to each other than we were to the people we were seeing. I don't think she got pregnant, but she was having an affair with one of her boyfriends and she got found out. She had terrible social and family consequences, and I was her first line of support.

Okay. Now I'm ready for college.

**Silva:** Where did you go to college?



**Stoller:** I went to Wellesley College, a women's college outside of Boston. When I went there, I remember thinking, I don't really want to go to a women's college, but it was the best of the colleges that I applied to that I got into. I thought, this will be a really good place. It will be very challenging for me.

**Silva:** And graduate school?

**Stoller:** For graduate school in sociology I went to Brandeis right outside of Boston.

**Silva:** What brought you to Santa Cruz?

**Stoller:** Starting in 1960, when I was a freshman in college, I got involved in direct action in the civil rights movement, the sit-in movement. I pretty quickly became part of this group called the D.C. Area Nonviolent Action Group. My family had moved to Washington, D.C. They were living in a suburb. I got involved with that group, but I won't go into the history of that. The group did direct action on civil rights issues. It was a mixed-race, black-and-white group. We had sit-ins and pickets. This group became one of the groups that joined together to form the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. So from the very beginning of SNCC, I was involved. And throughout the time I was in college I participated, either in the Boston area where I was going to school, or the D.C. area. During some of the summers, I participated in other projects, for example one in southwestern Virginia, kind of a freedom school project.

**Silva:** Was there any support from Wellesley for this action?

**Stoller:** Oh no, the college was not in favor of any of this! But I got very involved in civil rights organizing and my first research was for the Virginia group. I was working with the Prince Edward County Christian Association in Virginia, where they asked me, just after my junior year in college, if I would do a voter registration survey during the summer when I was there. I didn't think I had the skill, but I did it anyway. So as a consequence, my approach to research has always been community-based and politically engaged. When I was in graduate school, I took some time off to work full-





time for SNCC. But when I was “on campus” I was involved in “radical” research projects. We formed a group called the Brandeis Crisis Research Group, where we who were graduate students would go to a demonstration and we’d document the demonstration. It would give us the opportunity to go to a demonstration and use multiple perspectives for documenting it. One role was the full-scale participant. I always volunteered for that one. Another role was the participant-observer (somebody who is more observing than participating), and some people who are just observing.

When I got my doctorate, I was looking around for a good job. I had an okay job at this place called Emmanuel College in Boston. I applied to a bunch of places and got offers at all of them. The one at Santa Cruz appealed to me a lot, because in the community studies department there was explicit support for people who did research and were engaged in social action and community issues of social change. I think from the point of view of the department, I was a really good match. I came from a really good sociology department that had a focus on theorizing about social change, and that’s what they wanted. I liked the idea of coming to Santa Cruz because it looked a lot like the little town [where] I had been brought up in Virginia. But by the time I was ready to come here... Although I was divorced, I had been married to somebody black; I had an interracial daughter. I knew I was not going to go back to Virginia to live. [UC] Santa Cruz was a place where I could do politically engaged research and teaching, and train community organizers, which is a dream job. I could also be in a very beautiful place and connect with nature and be near the ocean. All of these things from my childhood were really important to me. So that’s how I came here. That was in 1973.

**Silva:** You mentioned that you were married before but had been divorced by that point. When did all that happen?

**Stoller:** I got married in 1966. His name was Donald Shaw at the time. Now his name is Kwame. We had met when we both participated in an economic boycott organization in Boston. Basically, he kind of pursued me. Once when I went to Arkansas to work (I was working for SNCC), he decided that he should come to Arkansas, too. [laughter] I was thinking, oh okay. I didn’t really care. But after a couple of years of pursuit, during the



middle of which my father died, at a really young age, at forty-six, from melanoma cancer, I really appreciated this attention. I don't think I was ever really in love in the way that you feel that you're going to be with this person for the rest of your life, that kind of thing. I succumbed to his attention. I wouldn't say it was totally that. There were many things about him that I really liked. Also, we both were interested in having a child, and we were living together and I thought he'd be a really good parent. I guess he thought I'd be a good parent.

So we decided to get married, because we believed that if we had an interracial child it would be much better for her if her parents were married. (Neither of us really believed in the institution of "marriage.") Actually in the year that we got married, 1966, it would have been illegal for us to get married in my home state. It was still illegal. We got married in Boston. Two years later, my daughter was born, in 1968. And in 1970 or 1971, basically because of disagreements that we had about how to share the work of bringing her up, and my frustration of not being able to make any progress in that area, I decided to get divorced. So we spent about a year separating and getting back together, and then we got a divorce. That was in probably 1972, that we actually got divorced, but we had already been separated for a year or two.

**Silva:** Did you have any attraction to women at this time?

**Stoller:** I'm going to say yes and no. I'll say the "no" part first, and then the "yes" part. I always thought of myself as straight. I never knew that I knew anybody who was a lesbian or a gay person. I had been brought up to believe that gay people were kind of normal in some sense. You felt sorry for them because they were unhappy. But not that there was anything inherent in them that made them unhappy. Their situation in the world was that they were deviant, not in a judgmental deviant way, but they were people who were a little strange, or couldn't help themselves in wanting something a little different, so as a result they were shunned. It wasn't that their behavior was criminal or sick... Or I don't know, maybe there was a little of that. I was unaware, like I say, of having known anyone who was lesbian or gay. It just really didn't figure in my consciousness, other than theoretically, that there were lesbians and gay men.



When I was teaching at Emmanuel College, it was the beginning of the development of the women's movement, which I was involved in from the beginning. For example, I was involved in the formation of the first chapter of NOW [National Organization for Women] in Boston, which was one of the very early NOW chapters that was established. I was also involved in developing the Boston Women's Health Collective and some of the first *Our Bodies, Ourselves* courses. I was assigned at Emmanuel to teach a course on the family in the sociology department. I had never even taken a course on the family, so I structured my course around the idea of the family as a social institution which regulates sexuality, reproduction, and socialization. I decided to have speakers come and talk about sexuality. I invited the people from the Daughters of Bilitis and from Gay Male Liberation, which were two groups that were active. This was in 1971 or 1972. When two women from the Daughters of Bilitis came [to speak], they spent a lot of their time talking about how they would love to get married and they were so unhappy that they couldn't get married. I was like, get married? Here you are, free from heterosexuality and all you want to do is get married!?! [laughter]

I didn't realize how much I was challenging what was going on in the college, because I didn't know anything about Catholicism. One student said to me, "I'd like to bring my girlfriend to come to hear these women when they come to talk." I thought: *friend, girl*. It didn't even occur to me that this woman in my own class was basically saying to me, "I am a lesbian, and I am so glad you're going to have these speakers come from this lesbian organization." It just went in one ear and out the other.

My view of lesbians and gay men and gay liberation at the time was that this is a great thing. It's complementary to feminism. But at that time, aside from these speakers who came to my class, I felt that I didn't know anybody. In 1971 or 1972, one African-American woman whom I knew was involved in a sit-in to try to create a woman's building on some property that was owned by Harvard. This woman, who spoke at one of the meetings where everybody was occupying this building, talked about being a lesbian. I remember thinking, gosh there is this real group of people who are gay. Before then, I used to think about lesbians: they lived in these dark apartments where you



walked inside and you could sort of look and see a bedroom, in shadow. And here's this woman who had stepped out of this shadowy bedroom and was one of the leaders of the occupation of this building. I remember feeling a little like, what would it be like to know this person? I didn't know her at all personally. I had heard a little bit about her involvement in this occupation. So that was my thinking about lesbians.

At the same time, I developed a really tight friendship with a woman who had been a senior at Emmanuel College when I went to work there. She was about four or five years younger than me. She and a friend of hers used to baby-sit for me, and as I got separated, and then divorced from my husband, I spent more and more time with them. We would go camping. We would take my daughter Gwendolyn camping. She was two or three. And we spent long periods of time together. By that time she was living in Providence, Rhode Island, and I was in Boston. We were really, really tight. I remember after I was divorced and we would be camping, that I had a really strong attraction to her. One time we were staying in somebody's house; we were sleeping in the same double bed—but that didn't have anything to do with romance or sex. I remember all I wanted to do was hug her. Finally, I said to her that I was attracted to her. I really didn't have the language to even talk about it. She, who was even more repressed than I was, just said, "Okay." There was no further discussion. I thought, what does that mean? She thinks I'm weird. We'll be friends. We won't be friends? So I did absolutely nothing. Another six months went by. And I thought, I still feel this way. What am I going to do about this? Finally, at that point in time, I think it was even a year, I remember saying to her, again when we were near each other, probably not in the same bed, but telling her again that I was really attracted to her. And her saying something like, "Oh well, that's okay." [laughter] I thought, forget it! Nothing's ever going to happen here.

The only other thing that happened to me in relation to lesbian stuff... Not my desire to be with somebody, but around this time, but before I had gotten divorced, a cousin of mine who was about twenty at the time, came to see me and introduced me to a woman who she said was her girlfriend, and told me that they were taking a trip. I had the feeling that she was trying to talk about something, but I couldn't figure out what it was.



Two years later, she committed suicide. It turned out that she was involved with this woman, and that letters that they had exchanged were found by her father, who was my uncle, my mother's brother. He was a total, horrible bully in his family in general. He humiliated her, and he and his wife, although I don't blame her as much, decided that my cousin, whose name was Susan, was mentally ill. She was sent to a psychiatrist and incarcerated in a mental hospital. She had shock treatment and psychotropic meds. No one outside of that nuclear family knew about this. In a way, I think she came to visit me because she was really trying to find support from us, because even though I was straight, my brothers and I kind of represented the liberal section in our extended family. About a year after the visit she made one attempt at killing herself and a later second one that was successful.

After she died, it came out in the family, and I felt terrible. It was horrible to hear what had happened to her and how she'd been treated, but also it reminded me how, especially after I myself got involved with women, just how invisible people were who could have been right in front of me all the time. So it showed me how, regardless of my feelings or my behavior, the way I had been socialized and what I "saw" growing up, meant that the clues I picked up or didn't pick up, were inaccurately interpreted. Of course, growing up as a tomboy and thinking of myself as straight, may have in a certain way contributed to it, because of my critique of: "Well, do you want to be a boy?" Well no, I just want to be able to do everything a boy can do. My own defense against that critique caused me to see women who were non-traditional in their behavior or their dress as just being "normal." And in my thinking, normal meant heterosexual, or basically heterosexual.

**Silva:** By the time you got to Santa Cruz were you aware of lesbians, gays, bisexuals?

**Stoller:** I knew they existed! [laughter] Of course, well, starting with the first people that I met, this woman at the feminist occupation of the building... I don't think I found out that my cousin was a lesbian until after I was actually out. I had that huge crush on my friend Nina. In the immediate six or eight months or year preceding my coming to Santa Cruz, when I was close to Nina, it was probably more and more in my consciousness.



That was in 1973. I came to Santa Cruz in July. By November, I was in a relationship with a woman. Actually I had a boyfriend, but I was also sexually involved with a woman here.

**Silva:** But you had never been in a relationship with a woman prior to coming to Santa Cruz?

**Stoller:** No. I got here and I moved into a household on Auburn Avenue near Natural Bridges [State Beach]. A friend of mine whom I knew from Boston had just taken a job here in the psychology department, and we had been involved in some feminist activity back in Boston.

**Silva:** What was your friend's name?

**Stoller:** Patricia Greenfield. Now she teaches at UCLA. She was not a lesbian, just a friend. She had some money and she wanted to buy a house and have it be a communal living situation. She bought this house. It was three bedrooms and a garage and a family room and we turned it into a five-bedroom house. We had four adults and a kid's room. Her husband, I don't know if they were divorced or not, had a job at UCLA. The kids were half the time with him. During the week they'd be with him, and on the weekends they would come up. So Gwendolyn, my daughter, and her kids shared this room. This was really good for me because I wanted to be in a house with other adults, rather than living as a single parent.

So I was living there. And at the same time, Mike Rotkin, who works here in community studies, and I became really good friends, very quickly, because we were working in an Extended University program where our job was to travel, and teach in San Jose and in Fresno. Mike was involved in a lot of radical activity that was happening at the time. There was a lot of overlap in Santa Cruz, starting [in about] 1970, 1971, where whatever the political activity was, whether it was anti-war stuff or this project I was involved with all during the 1970s, which was working with women who were at the prison outside of Los Angeles—all these projects tried to operate on a feminist basis, and people



were very experimental about lesbian/queer things, gay stuff. A lot of the people I knew were experimenting with bisexuality. When the [Santa Cruz] Women's Health Collective was developing, I remember in the early times going to some of the meetings that people had. There was this big house downtown at the corner of Chestnut and Locust, and a lot of women lived in that house. A big communal household of people who were developing the health collective in 1974 lived there. I remember we had these all-day, all-weekend meetings, but a big group of people would be having their retreat, and they'd sleep there. Two women might have sex this time, and another night or week they'd be involved with somebody else. It was a very open period.

Anyway, through Mike I met a lot of people who were involved in a lot of political activities, and a lot of feminists. A lot of women were leaders in this stuff. One of them actually happened to be his landlady, so to speak. Her name was Catherine Angel. She was also a graduate student here. I was kind of fascinated with her because she wore black leather, drove a motorcycle, was very smart, and was very, very political. We started going out sometime in the fall. She was my first woman lover. After about a year or so... She had been living in graduate student housing and she needed to move. So she moved in with me with her daughter. My daughter was six at the time and hers was ten. We lived down on Auburn Street. (There was a shift in who was living there.)

I had a really intense, quick coming out in Santa Cruz because Catherine was very, very active in a lot of lesbian politics, identity, issues, "We are here!" stuff. Even though in my mind I wasn't a lesbian, I was just myself doing what I was doing. I also had some relationships with men, although my relationship with Catherine became monogamous pretty quickly. Then I found out that everybody that met me thought I was *born* a lesbian, because they had never known me any other way. This place is really small. You can't, or you couldn't, have one life downtown and another life on the hill.

**Silva:** So were the students aware, when you were teaching?

**Stoller:** I had no idea what they thought when I first started teaching. But there were very few divisions between undergraduates, graduates, and faculty in terms of the





people who were involved in political activity. A major focus of my political activity was the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project. We had undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and community people involved in the project. The project was predominately run by women, and predominately by lesbians, or those who we now say are *queer*. Basically, women who either were, or might, or occasionally had, slept with other women.

**Silva:** Were there any GLBT organizations on campus when you arrived that you were aware of?

**Stoller:** I don't think so.

**Silva:** Was there any GLBT organizing or activity?

**Stoller:** Well, it seems to me there was a lot of activity. For example, there was the women's music scene. I remember in... It must have been in 1973 or 1974, going to a house concert for Cris Williamson while she was having her very first tour. She had just put out her first record, *The Changer and the Changed*. It was woman-focused, lesbian music. I'm not sure if she performed on campus but there was advertising for it.

**Silva:** Was she billed as a lesbian, or as woman folk?

**Stoller:** No, woman-identified. But that was a code word. Everyone I knew, knew that it meant lesbian.

There might have been some kind of an organization on campus, but if it existed it was both lesbian and gay. I don't know when those first lesbian, bi, LBQ things were started. But there was a lot of activism. People would speak in classes about being gay. Faculty and students, but especially students, brought speakers to campus who were identified as gay or lesbians. When there'd be some kind of feminist event, there would be some attention and support about lesbianism. There was a lot of community culture that was very much supported by people on campus. A lot of the community gay politics had





students involved, and a few faculty. But there were very few out faculty on campus at the time.

**Silva:** Were you aware of the gay faculty? Was there a gay faculty clique?

**Stoller:** People sort of knew who was there. As far as I knew, I was definitely the only out, lesbian, tenure-track faculty person at the time. Alan Sable was the only really out male gay person, and not enormously out, but out. I think people in his department knew. I had a colleague whom I knew was gay. I'm sure Carter [Wilson] knew he was gay. He was a junior faculty member. Carter didn't come out until after he had tenure. I can't remember exactly when he came out to himself, but he never came out publicly before then. I remember that very well because of my own experiences with tenure and being out.

**Silva:** When Alan Sable was denied tenure, were you scared that that might happen...

**Stoller:** I didn't really connect what happened to Alan at the time to what later happened to me. I think with Alan... The way the organizing was done around his case (at least as I remember it, I'm sure he has a different memory), but the organizing was all focused around the fact that he was a good teacher, but he didn't get good reviews of his research, or he didn't do enough research. So the whole fight was—here's somebody who is a fantastic teacher, who is not getting tenure because he hasn't published enough. It was never argued that it was anti-gay discrimination. I don't ever remember that argument being put out. I don't remember (as I think of it now) as, here's a gay person who's losing his job. That was kind of a minor part of the way it was presented.

I think I always thought of Alan more as somebody who was politically progressive. He was aligned with liberal, progressive, radical views. He was identified as a radical teacher who was student-identified, a cares-about-students person, which was a big part of the early educational philosophy that was promoted at UCSC. It was seen more as a kind of a tragedy of tenure, the research-emphasis in a research university. But looking back at it, and also talking about how I saw it when I was dealing with bias myself,



during my tenure fight, I would say probably there was a homophobic or discriminatory aspect to it, because I think that a lot of subtleties are involved in how a person is evaluated by his or her colleagues when a tenure decision comes up. There are a tremendous number of personal, non-objective factors that come into play: "I believe this person should be here, or this person shouldn't." "This person is my friend." "We know him or her." Or, "this person is a stranger, and what has this person really contributed?" "What would it be like to share a department with this person for the next forty years?" I think that the tenure decisions that are made involve a lot of these subtle judgments. In Alan's case, I believe that that subtle stuff was probably what tipped the decision away from him.

**Silva:** Did identifying as a lesbian affect your work, your research during the 1970s?

**Stoller:** I think being a lesbian made it much easier for me to do a lot of the work that I did. It connected me to a feminist radicalism which had at [its] core lesbians, and/or women who didn't pay too much attention to the men who were in their lives, and focused their attention on working with women. And all, not all, but almost all of the research that I've done in my career has been focused on women, and how women make their way through the world in the face of various obstacles. I think that expressing in my personal life my desire and affection and love for women opened up that feeling of an openness to women that I brought with me when I did my prison work or other kinds of activism. When I would be working on something, whether it would be organizing a weekend at the prison, or teaching at the prison, or writing something, I felt a continuity between my own feelings, my research, the social practices that made my research possible, and the enjoyment of being in an environment with predominately or all women, either organizers or people who were incarcerated, or dealing with some kinds of health problems. It might not explicitly have anything to do with being a lesbian. I might be advocating about breast cancer services, or something like that. You know there is an expression: "Feminism is the theory, lesbianism is the practice?" Well, that kind of worked out in some ways for me, not my lesbianism in the sense of my sexual practice, but my day-to-day life involvement with women.



The other thing is, by having my personal life be very much organized around women, and with not very many men in it, I didn't really have to waste time on dealing with the types of male socialization that I found extremely irritating. That certainly contributed to the productivity of the work that I did. It was a tremendous amount of energy that I didn't have to expend. I would say it was very positive. I never felt that I was losing something by being a lesbian. To me, in my work, it's always been a gain.

**Silva:** What was it like to be known as an out professor at UCSC in the 1970s?

**Stoller:** [laughter] Well, that was fun! (Although some of it wasn't so much fun.) But a lot of it was really fun because students in my class appreciated it. One of the classes I taught was, *The Role of Women in Revolutionary Struggle*; I also taught a course on ethnicity and family. We had a nascent women's studies program which was run by students, and I was part of the steering committee for quite a while. Women students would come to my class who would realize I was a lesbian. Some would develop some kind of a crush on me, and I would think, what? I didn't even realize it. People would say, "Look at her behavior." I once had this student who confronted me that she had been keeping a diary about me and she threatened to publish it. Supposedly it was about the fact that I was a lesbian. This was all pre-tenure stuff. I remember thinking, this woman is nuts [laughter] and saying to her, "Go ahead. Nobody is going to be interested. It would be a better use of your time if you'd be studying, reading books, instead of studying my life." Nothing ever came of it.

I had those kinds of unusual experiences. Then also because I was a lesbian faculty member, women who were lesbians, or who were engaged in lesbian practices at the time, felt comfortable being in the classes. Not just being in the classes, but also exhibiting gay behavior. I'd be teaching a class. I'll never forget this. I used to teach this course, I taught it for a while, called *Women and the Color Line*. It was all about the challenges of feminism and racism. I was teaching this class. It was the mid-1970s. I remember the classroom really well. Everyone was sitting in regular chairs. (I think it was at Kresge but I'm not sure why they were sitting in regular chairs and not on the



floor.) But there were two dogs in the room that were being calm, sitting down there. And there were two couples making out in the back of the room.

**Silva:** Lesbian couples?

**Stoller:** Two lesbian couples. So these two lesbian couples were in the back of the room. One of them was somebody who'd brought her partner, her girlfriend of the day, to the class. And they are making out, and I'm thinking, this isn't the way it's supposed to be. If they are in class, at least they could pay attention to what's going on! But in a certain way the class functioned as a safe space. Just like people going to the bar. It was a safe space. So I had those kinds of experiences, of people taking my classes strictly because they knew they'd be in a friendly environment. I had people come up and tell me that they took the class... They wouldn't say, "Because you are a lesbian," they'd say, "Because I heard about you and I thought I'd be happy in the class." They didn't mean my politics. They meant because I was a lesbian.

In some ways that was the fun part. But I also faced various kinds of homophobia from the faculty and staff. For example, when I first came to work here, I [wasn't affiliated with] a college, because I was working in the Extended University and that was enough of a double responsibility. In addition to teaching on campus for community studies, I was also teaching off campus. But when the Extended University program was ended, I had to pick a college. The college that I picked was Oakes. Oakes at the time was actively involved in dealing with issues of diversity and inequality within the United States. It was exactly the place for me in terms of my interests in racial equality. So I applied to be a faculty member at Oakes. I found out from faculty at the college later that some people had to defend me, partly because I was white, but also because I was a lesbian (that was an unexpressed but implied part of the debate), as being a person who actually did believe in the values of Oakes. The people who defended me were Diane Lewis, a now-retired anthropologist who is African American and had participated in the Prison Project, and knew me from there, and Roberto Crespi. They said that they knew me politically and they knew that I was anti-racist.



Then when I got to Oakes, the person who had the office across from me was Jan Willis. She is African American. When I met her everything was fine, but Jan told me later that Bob had said to her, “Oh, that’s Nancy Shaw (which was my name at the time); she’s a lesbian but she’s okay.” Meaning I had good politics. It wasn’t, “She’s white.” People could see that. But, “She’s a *lesbian*, but she’s okay.”

**Silva:** How did you feel about that?

**Stoller:** It was kind of painful to have people say, “She’s a lesbian but she’s okay.” Although I know he meant it in a positive way. During those early years, I never felt comfortable bringing a partner to parties or to campus events. There were some people who were ready and able to do that, and did do it. I’m not quite sure when it started. Was Michael Cowan the first? I’m not sure. But I think the invisibility that we had in the 1970s on campus was such that at that period of time it wasn’t a comfortable situation. In fact, I got in fights with my first lover because she felt that I should bring her to all those places as part of our visibility. And I didn’t really want to because I was having enough visibility issues. [laughter] But even if I had gone to these places, everything was relentlessly straight, and except for my close colleagues in community studies, and a few people scattered here and there, if I went to campus social events I knew that we would be the only same-sex couple there. I didn’t really want to subject myself to that. I was very out in my interactions with people, and going to the movies, and being downtown, and all that kind of stuff. But I didn’t see why at work I should have to deal with people staring at me.

**Silva:** What happened in your tenure case? You were denied tenure in 1982, 1981?

**Stoller:** My tenure review started in fall of 1980. If it had gone straight through, it would have ended in July of 1981. Instead, there were delays and it ended in July of 1982 with a negative decision.

**Silva:** What caused the delays?



**Stoller:** The delays were caused by the then chancellor, Robert Sinsheimer, ordering a re-review of my material through a second ad hoc committee, the committees that were appointed by CAP [the Committee on Academic Personnel] to do the individual focused review. That's technically what happened. At first, I had been recommended by all of the committees and my department for tenure, until it got up to the vice chancellor, whose name was John Marcum. He refused to make a recommendation either way, and either suggested to the chancellor or the chancellor got the idea himself, of going back and getting some more information.

**Silva:** Was that a common practice?

**Stoller:** I don't think so. So there was a second internal review, beginning with the chancellor's letter to CAP saying, "I have a lot of doubts about this case. Would you review it again." Even though the second ad hoc that they set up also recommended tenure, the second CAP also had changed from one year to the next, and become more conservative.

The Committee on Academic Personnel is the senior faculty Academic Senate committee that makes of the faculty a final recommendation to the administration. The second CAP recommended against my tenure, and so after the second recommendation the chancellor issued a notice, which they have to issue, of a "tentative denial." They have to issue this notice if there have been any recommendations that are positive. So there was the tentative denial. Then there was a huge flurry of activity, demonstrations, and benefits at the Santa Cruz Civic [Auditorium].

**Silva:** Benefits for you?

**Stoller:** Benefits for me, for my legal expenses. At that time people thought I needed a lawyer so I had to raise money.

At the point that Sinsheimer issued this tenure denial, a campus policeman came to meet me (not at my request) when I went to pick up my letter, based on their concern that



there might be a demonstration or something. It was kind of humiliating to have a cop there. Actually the policeman, I don't remember who it was, but the person apologized to me, said that the police supported me. In between this tentative denial and the actual denial, there was a sit-in in the chancellor's office that went on for twenty-four or forty-eight hours. There was a march to his house and a big bonfire. Holly Near was giving a concert on campus, and at the end of the concert she and some other people who were involved in the concert, including a woman I had taught while she was in prison (Lea Starlight) led this march.

**Silva:** Was the tentative denial made public?

**Stoller:** I was given a copy of the letter and a copy was sent to my department. People in my department and at Oakes were extremely angry. I actually knew a little earlier that something was going on because of the delays and a letter from the Committee on Privilege and Tenure. I complained to Privilege and Tenure and they did a little bit of an investigation. They said, "Well, it seems like something improper is going on, but if you get tenure despite this stuff then the whole thing is moot. You have to say, okay it was bad but I got my tenure. But if you don't, come back to us." So I knew something weird was going on. But they couldn't tell me what it was.

**Silva:** Did they know?

**Stoller:** Yes. After the tenure denial itself, I immediately initiated a formal complaint with Privilege and Tenure, because they had clued me into the fact that something weird was happening. So in the following year there was a hearing. It was the first hearing they'd had since 1967. My attorneys came to the hearing; the chancellor's attorneys were there. He was represented by the General Counsel's office at UC. He was forced to testify; so were other people in his administration. It was a campus hearing held in a conference room in the library.

**Silva:** Was it open to the public?



**Stoller:** No. It was private.

**Silva:** Were the students, the public aware that it was going on that day?

**Stoller:** Actually, it went on for a couple of days. I'm not quite sure how aware people were of the particular days that happened. I don't remember that part very well. I remember the hearing very well. I don't remember anybody being outside the door. So in the hearing it came out that he [the chancellor] had written a letter to a faculty member here in which he said that he thought there was a progressive social science network that was promoting my career. He wrote that to Wally Goldfrank, a faculty member who'd written him a letter that stimulated his own letter, [that] said, "Yes, it was unfortunate that he was being pressured by this group." The people who had written support letters for me, my formal external review letters, some of them certainly one might identify as progressive social scientists. But others did not have any left or other politics that were characteristic of their work. He basically tarred them with my reputation. "They support her; they must be progressive radicals." So that was one thing the chancellor did that was a violation of University rules—political bias in a personnel case.

Another was that he already had all of the information that he was supposed to use, but basically he was on a fishing expedition of trying to get more negative stuff in the file in order to justify a negative decision. The committee found that was inappropriate, and also that you have a right as a faculty member to know everything that's being considered. I had no way to defend against all this other stuff that was going on, because I wasn't informed of it. Also, Sinsheimer referred back to an earlier review, my mid-career review, and I didn't know that they had done that.

Then the other thing he did with the committee, is he lied. That part really infuriated them, because in terms of this letter where he had said there's this progressive network and stuff like that... We had been able to find this letter embedded in the file materials that they gave us. At that time, under the guise of something called confidentiality, or their notion of what confidentiality means in terms of faculty promotion, which is





basically protecting the people who write about you, they used to give out your file, (if you requested your personnel file, vis-à-vis a particular action) the file that you got had all the language in it chopped up. But we were able to piece together this letter. It was so different than anything else that you find in a personnel file. People helped me to try to sort out where it came from. We concluded that it probably came from him or someone in his office, some high-placed person.

So I made my lawyer ask him in the hearing, “What do you know about this letter? Or these chunks that we’re pretty sure came from it...” He said, “Gosh, you know I’ve never seen that before.” He had just testified that in the previous week he had looked at everything in the file that related to this office. So I said to her, “Ask him again.” Finally the third time, the guy who was chairing the hearing, Dick Wasserstrom, says, “He already answered the question. He doesn’t know anything about it.” The committee had the power to go and see the initial documents from which the segments came. Wasserstrom ordered that staff find out where these paragraphs came from. Five days later, my attorneys and I got a letter from the attorney for the chancellor, who says, “Well, Chancellor Sinsheimer made a mistake. He is familiar with that letter. He wrote it.” The committee was really pissed. So that was another thing that they ruled against him, that he lied to the committee. I don’t think that they put much stock in anything he said after. They ruled unanimously in my favor that my rights as a faculty member had been violated.

If he had been smart, I would say from his point of view, he should have just ordered a complete new tenure review. But instead, because he was a person who was being accused in this hearing, the ultimate administrative decision about what to do was bumped up to the UC President’s office. The president at that time was David Saxon. Saxon over-ruled the committee. Saxon had the same attorneys that the chancellor had. Neither Sinsheimer nor UCOP wanted to give in. So they over-ruled the committee and basically supported Sinsheimer’s decision.

My next option was to file an EEOC complaint, which I did. Meanwhile, the University gave me a terminal year of employment. I had started a terminal year. The EEOC officer



for some reason did a really quick, thorough investigation, and she ruled that the University was guilty of gender discrimination. I had told her that I was a lesbian and that it was known. EEOC doesn't protect you against sexual orientation discrimination; it certainly did not do so then. I tried to argue that it was a form of gender discrimination. Now people think of sexual orientation discrimination as a form of gender discrimination, but my attorneys thought we couldn't use that. Plus, they were straight and less-versed in gender theory, but more in political and employment rights. (My attorneys were Doris Brin Walker, recommended to me by Bettina Aptheker, and Ellen Lake, recruited by Doris.) Anyway, I got the ruling from the federal government. The University still refused to settle. I had two terminal years. One was 1982-83 and the other one was 1983-84.

**Silva:** So you were still working?

**Stoller:** I was still working. You have to understand this was covered very extensively in the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. There was a tremendous amount of organizing. I had a defense committee in Santa Cruz which was both on- and off-campus people. There was a defense committee in San Francisco, where I moved. People organized funds for the case at the American Sociological Association. So there was a lot of activity, and there was a lot of coverage in the lesbian/gay press. In any event, at the end... During 1983, I moved to San Francisco. It was the summer of 1983, even though I still had some more teaching time at UCSC. I moved, because everywhere I went in town in Santa Cruz, people would ask me what was happening with the case. People were, generally speaking, very, very supportive, both faculty and staff, even though some people didn't understand the situation the way I understood it. For example, I remember talking to a faculty member who was in economics, I think, who said to me, "Well, I've really learned a lot from your case." I said to him, "What did you learn?" He said, "I learned to do my writing in the professional journals and to save my radical activity until after I got tenure." And as it turned out, this guy did not get tenure. But that's what he learned. Basically he said, "The reason this happened to you is because you're too radical." Of course some of the criticisms that



were made of me by the chancellor when he turned me down for tenure were that I was, “more concerned with social amelioration [rather] than sociological theory.”

**Silva:** Didn't he criticize ethnographies?

**Stoller:** Yes, basically he didn't like my feminist research method.

**Silva:** And ethnography was a very respected method, wasn't it?

**Stoller:** Oh yes, ethnography is very respected, but he accused me of being a journalist. So one of the things we did in organizing our defense for court was to get some really well-known journalists to explain that I was not a journalist. Jessica Mitford wrote a letter for me saying, “I've read her books and her stuff might be good but it's not journalism. Journalism is *this*.” Lots of academics wrote letters supporting my work as ethnography. Many academics treated my tenure denial as an attack on feminist research. One aspect of my research was I gave weight to the voices of women in prison. I argued that they knew as much from their own point of view, their situation as prisoners seeking health care, as the doctors and nurses who served them. One of the things that Sinsheimer said was: “She asserts that male patients who go to clinics in prison are given more serious diagnoses and therefore more treatment for the same illnesses that women prisoner patients have.” In other words, that they get better treatment. He said, “I'm sure if she did further research she'd come up with a different answer.” Now this was not anything that any of the scholars who read my work asserted or anything like that. But he didn't like the results of my research, and he thought my work was an attack on the medical profession, so he just dissed my work, and asserted that that was another reason why I shouldn't become a permanent faculty member. And he said in his letter that I didn't have the proper quality of mind to be a faculty member at the University of California. This is all in the documents. All the supplementary documents, by the way, are at the Northern California GLBT History Archive in San Francisco.<sup>16</sup> The legal papers themselves, including the papers that were associated with

<sup>16</sup>The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society of Northern California.



the Privilege and Tenure hearing are all in the library here in Santa Cruz, but the defense committee things and all the organizing materials are up there at the archive.

Almost all the publicity about the case mentioned that I was a lesbian. As a result, I came out simultaneously around the country! Anything I hadn't done here, I did then. It was very liberating, because I never had to deal with it any further. [laughter] It just made it really easy for me.

**Silva:** Come out once, and come out with a bang.

**Stoller:** Yes, why not?

**Silva:** So the case went to court.

**Stoller:** Starting in 1984, since we didn't get any satisfaction with the EEOC ruling, we filed in state and federal court, but we decided to pursue the case in state court. (This was potentially better in terms of economic compensation for damages that we might get.) From 1984 to the summer of 1986, we were in court, partly on procedural issues. By 1986, we had had an exhausting two years of raising money to pay for hearing costs and copies of papers and briefs. My attorneys were basically working for nothing. Even though they officially charged me, they had no money left at the end, regardless of what we were able to raise. We did raise about sixty or seventy thousand dollars, which to us was an enormous amount of money, through very creative activities, like getting people to give us loans and stuff like that, and all kinds of benefits—everything from bake sales to book sales, to concerts, and direct mail. You name it, we did it. The two dollar benefit and the two thousand dollar benefit. We had a whole series of concerts with women musicians in Santa Cruz and the Bay Area. Everything we did was multicultural, lesbian, gay, straight. So the organizing basically reflected the values that were under attack.

In the summer of 1986, there was a court ruling that indicated that the University was going to lose on every procedural issue in the case. The General Counsel's office decided they would like to settle rather than go to court. In some ways that was really good for



us, because the fight was so exhausting and so expensive. The University was funded by the taxpayers of California. Their General Counsel's office receives all that money. Money didn't seem to be a problem for them, but it was really a lot of work for us.

We had settlement talks that went from approximately July until December, through which we finally agreed how the finances would work. That was the hardest, in some ways. Over the period of the lawsuit, the people in the UC President's office and the General Counsel's office had gotten to be very sympathetic to my side, so we were able to craft a very good tenure decision process. They were sympathetic, and in some ways it was as if they actually believed that I deserved tenure, and that I had been unjustly treated. So we were able to set up a new review process, where all the later material that Sinsheimer had managed to put into the file that was kind of negative, was taken out, and I was allowed to organize the file so it looked good. Initially, UC was just going to take things in my file, dump this big collection of papers and books in boxes, and give them to the people who were going to make the decision. Instead, I was allowed to arrange the file so it looked neat and was easily accessible to the new review committee. We got an agreement that there would be three people who were at other campuses than Santa Cruz, who were either chancellors or vice-chancellors, who would make the decision.

Anyway, [around] January, the materials were sent off to these three people, and in early February I got a phone call from my attorney saying that they'd made a decision, and I was now a professor again. I got some back pay. I got reinstated as an associate professor. I knew that that spring was the last period of time that Sinsheimer was going to be on campus. I knew he was retiring. So even though I had been given some sabbatical time that I had lost, I organized myself and came back and taught a class just so he'd be forced to see me on campus. That was my revenge. So I was here for a quarter while he was still here.

**Silva:** Did that feel good?



**Stoller:** Definitely. I went to an Academic Senate meeting, and when I came into the meeting all these people got up and welcomed me, and he was forced to acknowledge my presence. One of the things that had happened after Privilege and Tenure ruled against him, was that he, at the encouragement of some other faculty, I think, brought a complaint to the Academic Senate saying that the Privilege and Tenure ruling was destroying the personnel process, and he wanted the Academic Senate in a public meeting to vote to censor the Privilege and Tenure Committee for its decision. Instead, what happened is that the Academic Senate voted eighty-to-twenty to support the Privilege and Tenure committee. So it was a big loss for him, a loss on a vote of confidence. I was very strongly supported by the faculty from beginning to end, because they thought of my tenure case as a case of faculty rights.

When I came back, I was immediately appointed to be the chair of this new committee, the GLBCC, as it was called then. The first thing we did was a survey. That was that first survey of conditions, especially for GLB students, on campus.<sup>17</sup>

**Silva:** Was that committee in response to what had happened?

**Stoller:** Yes. In fact Beatriz Lopez-Flores, who was an early director of the Women's Center, always maintained that the fact they were able to get the Women's Center was directly related to the tenure fight. That happened a year or two before, during the time when I was not actually on campus. But one of the things that women argued then, in support of the Center, was that my tenure case showed the depth of discrimination against women on campus. During the period of my lawsuit, a number of faculty on campus came out, including some untenured faculty, who later got tenure, Bettina [Aptheker], for example. Prior to my case there had never been anybody who was out as an untenured faculty person, who made it through.

<sup>17</sup>Randy Nelson, "The Educational Climate for Gay and Lesbian Students," (Santa Cruz, Calif. : Office of Analysis and Planning, UC Santa Cruz, 1990). Available in the Out in the Redwoods archive.



I think that my case was a fight between two forces of that period. On one side were the forces that were opposed to feminism, the real meaning of feminism in research. They were aligned with those who thought that being a lesbian or a gay man was a personal sexual practice, and that it was perverted or inappropriate to make it public, and therefore the person was inappropriate as a teacher in the University. If that person could somehow keep it a secret, maybe it was okay for them to be there. But better yet, it should be so much of a secret that not even the faculty knew. If you felt you had to talk about it, it was like you were talking about your bathroom habits. You just weren't appropriate. I think [there was] a struggle between those people who thought that, and other people who thought there are new ways of doing research; there are new ways of thinking. They were aligned with those who believe that we are a world in which these strict views about sexuality and the right of people to have their personal lives and their affectional lives has changed. This is a different world, and we want it to be a different world, because if we constrain our faculty, we are really denying ourselves and the University the opportunity to have people who are operating at their fullest capacity. If it's the other way, people are not able to think, to act, to research, to teach, to be honest. If you create an environment where people have to lie about who they are, that's totally contrary to what a university is supposed to be like. As long as the people who we are talking about aren't harming other people, then they should be full participants in the community.

I think in my case that struggle was going on, between an older way of thinking and a newer way of thinking about who belongs in the University as a teacher, as a student. It raised the question: who really belongs in society? What kind of basic values do we have? This struggle came to a head in the 1970s, and this was one place where it came to a head, in my being tenured. But it was just one part of a change, where there is one force going in one direction and one in another, and there is conflict and struggle, that each time moves the University in a different direction. It can be progressive or regressive, depending on how those decisions are resolved. The fact is that my tenure fight brought it out into the open, regardless of how it would have been ultimately resolved. I think that, in and of itself, made it possible for people to talk about things that they never



really talked about before. It was possible for people to do hirings differently even while the case was still going on. They could say, “Oh, we want to hire this person. Hey, that’s great he’s gay. That will bring something into our department. He wants to do scholarship on gay topics.” Or, “She’s interested in feminism and sexuality.” Before people wouldn’t say that. It was taboo to talk about that aspect of people’s work. Or they’d say, “Well, he does work on sexuality about gay/queer stuff, but he also does all this other stuff, and we can sort of forget about the gay/queer interests, and if he has spare time he can do that.” As opposed to saying, as we often do now, “Hey these people are good to have because it’s the way the world is.” So [my case] had a really good effect in terms of opening things up on the campus.

Of course today people constantly say things that show their lack of knowledge about the history of the campus. When I say I was involved in this tenure fight and it was about this and that, and being a lesbian and so on, they say—“Santa Cruz? I can’t believe that happened in Santa Cruz!” And I say, “Well, if it hadn’t happened in Santa Cruz, probably Santa Cruz wouldn’t be quite like it is now.” But also it was *because* Santa Cruz was a progressive place that this could actually occur. If it had been less of a progressive place at the time, who knows? I might have been fired sooner. The openness probably would have happened eventually, but it might not have had as much of an impact, because the faculty might not have had the opportunity to be so openly supportive. We wouldn’t have been able to have those benefits where all kinds of people came. And the experience of students, faculty, staff, and community people attending those benefits, participating in those fundraisers, strengthened people in terms of their sense of what is possible, and how diversity is a source of strength. That had a really good effect on the campus.

**Silva:** Working on the GLB chancellor’s committee. Was that just a local thing or was there a bigger UCGLBT Association like there is now?

**Stoller:** That didn’t exist then.

**Silva:** Was that a direct result of that committee?





**Stoller:** Well, this was in the mid- to late-1980s, and several of the campuses had some kind of gay organizations. They tended to be more student-focused, initially. But over time, one of the desires of some of the various campus groups was to have Centers with staff. So gradually all the campuses got these Centers with staffing. That was one of the things we got really early, a little space and part-time staff. Staffing has meant that over time the systemwide organization has become much more staff-dominated. I think that is unfortunate in some ways, but good in others. Basically there was no systemwide group. One of the things that gradually happened was the beginning of meetings that brought people together from all over the campuses.

Also in the early-1990s was when we started really working hard on getting the faculty and staff access to benefits. I chose to work on that. I worked on that for about five years. Finally we were successful. It was like, bit by bit by bit. That contributed a lot to some of the systemwide organizing. People also used the internet for organizing around that in very effective ways. At that time there was the beginning of these yearly conferences that brought people together and combined to some extent, the academic side with the organizing side.

I have all my files from the organizing around the benefits struggle.<sup>18</sup> I don't really remember when the conferences started.

**Silva:** Going back a little bit to the UCSC Gay and Lesbian Campus Concerns Committee, what was that like to work on at the very beginning? You were on it when it first started?

**Stoller:** Yes, I was on the very first committee as the chair. I can't remember how the members on the first committee were picked. But I remember that there were two students, two staff people, two faculty. Something like that. We were given some money from Student Services. When we first got together our thinking was, "Well, what are the most important things that we want to address here?" Immediately we thought, "We

<sup>18</sup>Extensive material available in the Out in the Redwoods archive.



want to have some kind of a survey about homophobia on campus.” We had the sense that while there might be problems for faculty or staff, the people who really were suffering were students. Valerie Simmons, who at that time was in the Affirmative Action office (I don’t know if she was on the committee, but she was helpful.), and Randy Nelson, who worked in the Institutional Research office, helped us to design the questionnaire. We distributed the questionnaire, got the results back, and made a report. The report indicated that the longer a student was on campus, the more liberal he or she became about gay stuff, that the most homophobic people were white, male freshpersons, that getting to know people made a difference, etc. On the basis of what we found out from the survey, we made a series of requests and initiated some programmatic and curricular changes on the campus. And we were able to get the residential life staff to incorporate CLUH trainings. Initially, I don’t think it was CLUH, but it was a CLUH-type of training. Actually I think CLUH to some extent emerged from these trainings for freshpeople when they came to campus.

We had trainings for the residential staff instituted. We tried to do some work, I can’t remember how much we were able to do, in the direction of curricular reform, trying to develop awareness among the faculty to address the issue of diversity across the curriculum, in the sense of lesbian and gay diversity. We got funds for some of the early UC-wide conferences to take place on our campus. We made sure that there would be funds for the committee each year. We worked hard to have a meeting each year with whoever the chancellor was.

**Silva:** Have the chancellors been receptive?

**Stoller:** Yes. The committee was bureaucratically (although not geographically) located close to the chancellor’s office, as opposed to further down in the hierarchy, in order to confirm the idea that changing the atmosphere on a campus in regard to homophobia or discrimination or visibility has to start at the top. So as part of our visibility we tried to meet with as high up a person as we could. I remember twice meeting with M.R.C. [Greenwood] after she was here. I must have still been connected to the committee. I would go to some of the meetings even after I was not officially a part of the committee.



I had stepped back in order to do other things. Then over time I thought, I can't do this forever. I let go of that work.

Meanwhile, I started teaching courses on lesbian and gay themes. I started teaching the *Lesbian and Gay Social Worlds* class. I think that was the first explicitly lesbian and gay course that was taught on campus. I might be wrong there. We can go back and look at the catalogs. I started teaching that a year or two after I came back.

**Silva:** What was the response to that? Was it a small class or a large class?

**Stoller:** When I first started teaching it, I was afraid students wouldn't take it because of the title, that they'd be afraid to have it on their transcript. But there were always at least thirty or forty students in the class. Over time, the number of students when I've taught it has varied between forty to sixty students. Generally it's been taught every year, either by me or by others, [like] Susie Bright. In the last year or two it's been taught by Scott Morgensen. Since then, a lot of other faculty have come and taught on lesbian, gay, or queer themes, both graduate-level and undergraduate-level courses. My course is a lower-division course and I'm kind of glad it's a lower-division course. But I would also say, over the years, comparing when I first taught it, to four or five years ago, or three or four years ago, there has been a really big change in the students in the class. When I was first teaching, perhaps half to less than half the students were gay or lesbian. Many of them were coming out in college. Then I began to get more and more students who had already been out in high school. That was quite a revelation to me, to hear them talk about their activism in high school. I was really inspired, I have to say! I remember once, this was in the early-1990s, I had a student in the class who said, "Both of my parents are lesbians." I remember thinking, I can't believe this person, she's in the generation where not only did she grow up with "out" lesbian parents, but she just casually mentions this in the class! I remember thinking, well, this is a sign of how different things are from my experiences in the 1970s. This kind of casual disclosure of her family. Now it may be that she wouldn't have been so casual in another class, but she certainly was casual. Also, she was talking about a kind of "out" family form that would have been very difficult to have thirty years before that, in the 1950s. In the 1950s, in most communities, you could



have been raised by two women living together, but they wouldn't have talked about being lesbians unless it was with a small, supportive environment, if they were lucky.

**Silva:** Have you taught any other courses with queer themes besides *Lesbian and Gay Social Worlds*?

**Stoller:** Last fall I taught a graduate course in sociology called *Sexualities*, which focused on non-normative sexuality, particularly lesbian, gay, queer, transgender stuff.

**Silva:** What was the reception for that?

**Stoller:** It was a small number of students, but that's the way graduate courses often are. I had a great time. The people in the class liked it and gave it strong reviews. We looked at the history of sexuality theory throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I liked it. It wasn't at all the same as teaching undergraduates in a big class. A lot of students come to my undergraduate *Lesbian and Gay Social Worlds* class as a way of finding a place, an environment to come out, to learn about the gay, queer world. I just changed the title of the class. I am going to teach it again next year, and it's going to be called *Changing Sexualities and Genders*. I changed it because *Lesbian and Gay Social Worlds* is too narrow to cover what I am interested in, which is this whole range of new sexual communities and organizing and movements that address sexuality and gender in a kind of mish-mush, mixed-up...

**Silva:** Are you doing research in that area?

**Stoller:** Very little now. In the past I've done research on lesbian health, lesbian activism, and health movements, and in my current research on women in prison there is a little bit about gender and sexuality. There is a lot about gender in a general way, with some of the research being about gender identification, sexuality and sexual harassment. But right at the moment it's not a primary focus.

**Silva:** Are you still doing work on prisons?



**Stoller:** Yes. It's a return to what I was doing before my tenure fight. When I was off campus from 1984 to 1987, I did a lot of work on the AIDS epidemic, with lesbian health, lesbian risk for AIDS, lesbian sexuality, and a lot of other things as well, including developing educational materials for gay men about sexuality and HIV risk. However, I am trying to put aside as much time as I can to finish up my work on women's health in prison.

**Silva:** Please talk about your book *Lessons from the Damned*.

**Stoller:** It's a book about communities organizing in response to the AIDS epidemic, and looks at sexism and racism as challenges that different communities had to deal with. It's basically about how lesbians, prostitutes, gay men, Asian Americans and drug users have tried to respond organizationally and on a grassroots level to the problems that they've encountered in responding to the epidemic. It looks at certain kinds of community organizing challenges. I see it as something useful to people in the community, as well as to academics.

**Silva:** What are your thoughts about the viability of queer studies as a minor?

**Stoller:** Do you think it's going to be a minor here?

**Silva:** I don't know. It's a minor at UC Riverside.

**Stoller:** There was discussion about this at least ten years ago. I think it was the year after Vito Russo was teaching, probably 1990 or 1991. There was a lot of student activism on campus, both about LGBT issues and also about minority education, ethnic studies. The lesbian, gay, and bisexual students had been working with the ethnic studies students supporting more money for ethnic studies education, and also at the same time wanting funding or support for some kind of LGBT (although "T" was not in there) studies. As a consequence of all of this activity and activism on campus, a group of faculty got together with students to talk about having an undergraduate major. The meeting took place in Kresge. The essence of the conversation was that there were



faculty who were happy to teach courses in this subject, and students were interested in having the major be present. There were in the room about five or six or seven faculty, and maybe twenty students. And of the students who were there, only one student said that if there were such a major, he would want to major in that. The faculty concerns that were expressed were that setting up a new major on campus required approval through the Committee on Educational Policy and an Academic Senate process, and it would be necessary for faculty to create the major, even if there was student support for it.

I think most of the faculty who taught in this area felt that it would be really hard for them to take their time away from their departments and put it into this other new department, unless there was financial support for developing the proposal, and staffing a department office if there was going to be such a program. In order for the whole process to get initiated, it would have been necessary for a couple of faculty (as it was discussed in this meeting, and with faculty I talked to afterwards), to get together and make a proposal. Even before making the proposal, we would need to get some money from the campus curriculum development funds to prepare a more detailed proposal for a major. There was no group of three or four faculty who were willing to prepare the initial proposal and get the funds. It was partly about time and effort, but also it was about a pedagogical, or philosophical and educational question: should there be a separate department focused on queer studies? Or should queer studies be incorporated across the majors and throughout the curriculum? I think that everybody whom I talked to thought it was a good idea to have both, but they didn't feel they had enough resources immediately available to them to generate both. They didn't think there would be enough students at that time who would select this as a major. And they didn't know whether or not they'd be able to get the support funds for staffing and to pay for a faculty person to coordinate the program. There just really wasn't the energy to produce the program. I thought it was a little disappointing. That's basically what happened to it. It was really a lack of faculty support for an independent major.

**Silva:** Has there been any initiative to start something like that again?



**Stoller:** The only thing that I've seen since then has been the discussion in literature, I think, about having some kind of a queer-focused track. I don't know if that was ever done. It may have been or may not. I think if there was an attempt to develop an undergraduate major I would have heard about it. But I haven't. Right now, there is this graduate initiative in the area of sexualities, which is really most focused on non-normative sexualities, and critiques of heteronormativity. But that's a graduate-level initiative.

**Silva:** You've been a catalyst for change at this University, with your tenure case and some of the stuff that you've been involved with. Can you share some of your thoughts on LGBTQ life and work, as you've seen it change from the time that you got here until roughly today?

**Stoller:** Well, I got here in 1973. It was a really exciting time for everything queer in Santa Cruz, that period of the mid-1970s. One of the things that was really exciting about that time was that there was a mixture of young, and to some extent older people from the community, and campus queer youth. Politics in Santa Cruz was very much affected by feminism, as well as by all kinds of gay liberation. There was a radical atmosphere that had enveloped the campus from the late-1960s, and the educational atmosphere here right from the beginning—really young faculty, very progressive, supportive of engaged scholarship and teaching—was wonderful. The boundaries between the University and the community were very, very porous. For example, the Santa Cruz Women's Health Collective (which later became the Women's Health Center), had a lot of staff who were students and were working in the health collective. As a feminist organization, the collective was also a place where there was a lot of experimentation and openness about sexuality. We used to joke that everybody involved in the organization of the health collective had slept with each other: sometimes in groups, sometimes singly, in different combinations, and so on.

We had a group on campus called the Santa Cruz Women's Media Collective, and they made this hysterically funny video about sexuality and gender. It was almost all about either lesbian, gay, or bi vignettes. In one vignette, two women are studying together and



then they end up being sexual. In another vignette, these three guys dressed up in sleazy cross-dress and in the background somebody read from a book which was directed at young women who want to be models saying, “Do your knees this way, stand this way, do that,” and they acted out on camera these stylish things—like how women are supposed to move their bodies. Mike Rotkin was in this vignette. There was a third vignette which involved kissing. In this vignette you’d see a male and female kissing, and then there’d be kind of a fade, and it would turn out to be a male and a male. And then it would be male and female, female and female. It was almost like a little cycle. These were things that involved people who were graduate students, undergraduates, faculty, and community people. That was the atmosphere. In my mind, some of that atmosphere has been lost. There are connections between the community and the campus. But partly because on campus now we have a lot of space and places for queer stuff, I think the community-campus connections maybe aren’t quite as strong.

Things were very experimental. The graduate students were very active. Probably because I was closer in age to them, I could see more of what they were doing. They were active on campus and also in the community, in terms of queer stuff.

Some of the big changes I’ve seen... First of all, tremendous growth in student activity and student visibility on campus, everything from having the Center, to the CLUH workshops, to the institutionalization of training for the residential assistants, to having Queer Awareness weeks or months, to having something like the Queer Fashion Show and dances where lots and lots of students go, where straight students feel comfortable as well. That’s been an enormous change, in terms of visibility and activities and programming.

The second really big change is that over the years we’ve had an enormous number of courses taught by ladder faculty all over the campus, in the social sciences, the arts, and the humanities, some really fantastic courses, graduate level and undergraduate level. We have created an atmosphere on campus where people feel comfortable about proposing those courses, where academic committees approve that, and people get promoted on the basis of their teaching and research in these areas. That’s something we





didn't have at all then. It was just the opposite. We have a whole department that is almost entirely lesbian, the women's studies department. That's very unusual, compared to other campuses, and also historically it's a change.

The thing that I find a little bit frustrating and distressing is (In the same way, we can see this in ethnic studies, although not quite so much, and certainly in women's studies.) there is something happening in queer studies and teaching, and that's that there's a conservatizing trend that often takes place as things are institutionalized. The more recent hires on our campus (I'm speaking mostly about lesbians), don't seem to have a sense of the history of the relationship between their positions in academia and the community struggles that have made them possible, not just in the 1970s or 1980s, but in the 1990s as well. There is a benefit to institutionalization, which is that people get to study and develop and become scholars and expand their teaching and research range into these areas. The negative side is that the political edge can be lost, and the emphasis on theory loses what I'd call its critical edge, which has to do with addressing issues of social justice, of activism. That edge gets lost, and is replaced by academic elitism. I think it has been lost some on this campus.

In some ways it seems to me, and here I'm sure some students would disagree with me, that some of the emphasis in student culture on culture *per se*, and on individual choice about culture—am I queer; am I transgender; how do I dress, etc.—all this cultural emphasis sometimes distracts from thinking about serious issues of violence, for example, or equality in terms of racial equality within the gay community, or issues about men and women, gender issues, sexism, as well as the more general issues that affect queer people, like domestic partnership, or legal rights. I am a really strong believer that people should enjoy themselves, and people should be just as out in a literal sense [laughter] as they want, in terms of having fun and being outrageous and dressing however they want to. Those are key elements of a liberatory philosophy. But I also think that it would be good to have some kind of a thread in this cultural expression that keeps the political edge there. I just looked at the pictures from the Queer Fashion Show that were posted on the website. Not having been to the Queer Fashion Show, I can't



comment on what the models really meant by all their symbols. But I liked the fact that people had a critique of the U.S. flag, and had those signs about terrorism. I don't think dressing in an unusual way with the flag means people think of one as a terrorist. I just liked the fact that there was something political in there. That's just my bias.

I also find that when students critique my lectures, it's more about my language... Like one of my classes recently was concerned about my asking students to take on roles including other ethnic groups than they were. A student in the class said she thought that was kind of offensive because there was the likelihood that the student who took on this role would stereotype in some way the person in this other ethnic group than her own. And my defense was, well, you are supposed to be reading about different worlds; you should be able to present different perspectives, and know the difference between responding to a particular challenge from a point of view of one person within that group, as opposed to thinking that you're supposed to speak for a whole group. This was obvious to me, but not to her.

The reason I tell this story is because I find that students will critique the discourse, as opposed to raising questions about "real" politics or activism. I think that one of the benefits of our development of queer theory is it does help people think more about discourse. But it often does not help people think about their role in society, or our society's priorities for addressing the kind of issues that the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission addresses, or other kinds of organizations that are focused on transgender rights, etc. I'd like to see a little bit more of that political edge.

**Silva:** Can you share some thoughts on where your research focus is at the present time?

**Stoller:** Right now, I am most involved in advocacy and action research associated with health issues for prisoners and women in prison. And a little bit of that deals with sexuality. I've been in this American Public Health Association Task Force that focuses on jail and prison health issues. We wrote a new set of guidelines and standards. I wrote the section on transgender issues. I also wrote the section on sexuality, and issues of sexual health and rights, and transgender health and rights. So whatever area I work in,



I do try to keep a little bit of a queer focus there. This particular project has been going for a couple of years.

I still have a plan, which I got first interested in a couple of years ago, to do a lesbian grandmothers handbook. This was stimulated by my becoming a grandmother, and realizing that there is a lesbian grandparent point of view. Or there may be many points of view. And they are very interesting points of view. They have to do with feminism. They have to do with what the role of a grandparent can be, that's different from a parent. It's about the kinds of values that can be transmitted to the grandchild. Seeing one's parents' parent who is a lesbian or a gay man or queer, is a very thought-provoking message for a child because the elderly in society, and older people are to some extent seen as repositories of wisdom. I think that it gives a sense of acceptability to being queer if your mom's mom, or your dad's mom says it's okay by sharing her own life. Also in talking to others, particularly lesbian grandparents, but also to some gay male grandparents, I've seen a lot of different ways that families are formed. I know people who've volunteered themselves to be grandparents. There are a lot of other interesting stories that I've come across. My goal (when I have time) is to begin to put together some of these accounts, as well as some of my own thoughts on it. That's a project that I know I will get back to.

And then, on a very personal level, I am planning to write a memoir of my political experiences in the University and outside. That's also off in the future four or five years from now.

**Silva:** Do you have anything else you'd like to share with the oral history project?

**Stoller:** Well, I can't wait until you make the oral histories public. I'm eager to hear the stories, of faculty, students and staff. I'd like to hear lots of stories from people who have been on this campus and have been involved here.