

IN MEMORIAM  
Rhoda K. Unger (1939-2019)

By Rose Capdevila, The Open University, UK

Rhoda Kesler Unger was a feminist empiricist psychologist who advocated for the importance of asking the right questions. Her academic work, her activism and her engagement with psychology as a discipline were all informed by a heartfelt and enduring commitment to social justice. Laudably, she mentored, encouraged and supported countless early career feminist scholars as they found their way in the discipline.

Born in Brooklyn, New York on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of February 1939 to Gustav and Ellen (Samuels) Kesler, Rhoda obtained a BS in Psychology from Brooklyn College in 1960. She went on to attend Radcliffe where she received an MA in Experimental Psychology, and then continued to Harvard University where, in 1966, she completed her PhD – also in Experimental Psychology – under the supervision of Charles G. Gross. Gross, considered by many to be one of the founders of cognitive neuroscience, who died only a few days before Rhoda, spoke later in his life of the gender oppression she was subjected to during that period and encouraged others to read her account of that time.

Rhoda often spoke of the impact of notable feminist scholars such as Naomi Weisstein, Florence Denmark, and also Marie Jahoda on her work. Although, while at Harvard, she coincided with Naomi Weisstein and Carol Gilligan, she did not at that point consider herself a feminist. It was later, after teaching the psychology of women at Hofstra University and Montclair State University in the early 1970s and while writing the classic textbook *Woman: Dependent or Independent Variable?* (1975) with Florence Denmark, that she began to identify with feminist politics. From that point forward she became an indomitable force within the discipline. Her pioneering journal articles were critical in advancing thinking about gender, about otherness, and about the politics of methodology.

In 1998, Rhoda became Professor emerita after almost 30 years at Montclair State University and joined Brandeis University as Resident Scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center. Across her career, she maintained a commitment to activism within psychology. She served as president of the APA divisions the Society for the Psychology of Women (1980-1981) and the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPPSI) (1998-1999), and was the inaugural editor of the SPPSI journal *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy*. Recognised well beyond the borders of the United States, she was a member of the *Feminism & Psychology* editorial group as well as a visiting professor at both the University of Haifa in Israel and Ochanemizu University in Tokyo, Japan. She received numerous accolades and honors including the Association for Women in Psychology's (AWP) Distinguished Career Award in 1994 and the Gold Medal for Lifetime Achievement in Psychology in the Public Interest from the APA in 2007. In 2009 the AWP established the Unger-Frieze Prize for students.

A prolific and collaborative writer, Rhoda Unger's work, including nine books on the psychology of women, was integral to a literature that changed the way the discipline conceives of gender and the production of knowledge. Rhoda Unger passed away on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2019 in Concord, Massachusetts. She was joined, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2019, by her partner and spouse of 53 years, Burt Unger. Together they shared a rich life. She is survived by their two daughters, and a granddaughter and grandson whom she adored.