
Remembering Ginnie Olesen



ABOUT DR. VIRGINIA OLESEN

Dr. Virginia Olesen, Ginnie to those who knew her, was Professor Emerita of Sociology in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences of the UCSF School of Nursing having joined the faculty in 1960. She was born in Lovelock, Nevada, did her BA at the University of Nevada, an MA in communication at Chicago, and completed her Ph.D. in 1961 at Stanford. Virginia Olesen then moved into a major leadership role in the then emergent area of women's health, including such courses at UCSF beginning in 1973, and organizing in 1975 the first US conference focused on social science contributions on Women and Their Health: Research Implications for a New Era. (DHEW 1977-3138). Her research continued to focus on nurses and other women workers, including clerical workers and issues in occupational health, and she began also to write about as well as teach qualitative research methodology.

In the early 1980s, Dr. Olesen began working with colleagues towards national and international curriculum development in women's health, not only in nursing but also in the social sciences. As a strong theoretical resource, Ellen Lewin and Virginia Olesen edited *Women, Health, and Healing: Toward a New Perspective* (Tavistock/Methuen, 1985). Virginia Olesen then spearheaded a successful grant to the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education and developed a team that then organized three Women, Health and Healing Summer Institutes held in 1984-1986. These 2 weeks long institutes were attended mostly by nurses and social scientists from the US, but Botswana, Australia, and other far away places were also represented.

From these conferences came the ideas and impetus for two major edited volumes in women's health, some years in the making. In 1997, Sheryl Ruzek, Virginia Olesen and Adele Clarke's edited *Women's Health: Dynamics of Diversity* (Ohio State University Press) won the Choice Top Three Outstanding Academic Book of the Year Award. The book elaborates in a widely accessible format the health-related needs and goals of differently situated women, centering especially on differences of race and class, mostly in the US.

Having taught feminist theory for many years as well as women's health, Professor Olesen felt the need to begin integrating the increasingly formidable conceptual armamentarium from that area with women's health concerns that were often undertheorized.

Based on a superb conference held in 1995 at UCSF, Adele E. Clarke and Virginia L. Olesen's edited *Revisioning Women, Health and Healing: Feminist, Cultural and Technoscience Perspectives* (Routledge) appeared in 1999. In the meantime, Virginia Olesen continued to do research and publish in the areas of women's health (toxic shock, ERT), mundane ailments, team-based qualitative research, and feminist qualitative research.


Virginia Olesen won the following major professional awards:

- Leo G. Reader Career Award of the Medical Sociology Section, American Sociological Association, 1988
- Helen Nahm Award for Distinguished Research of the School of Nursing, UC, San Francisco, 1992
- Mentor of the Year Award, School of Nursing, UC, San Francisco, 1993
- Chancellor's First Faculty Award for the Advancement of Women, UC, San Francisco, 1994
- George Herbert Mead Career Award of the Society for the Study of Symbolic Interaction, 1996
- Honorary Member, Theta Sigma Tau, 1997
- Society for Applied Anthropology: Celebration of the Work and Career of Virginia Olesen, 2000 Session

In addition, Professor Olesen was visiting faculty at the American University in Cairo, the University of Warwick, chaired the Medical Sociology Section of the ASA and twice was invited to deliver the plenary address to the British Sociological Association's Medical Section. She became Professor Emerita at UCSF in 1993 and continued to publish, supervise doctoral students, offer courses, attend and present at conferences for years after her retirement.

In 2022, Ginnie established the Virginia Olesen Endowed Scholarship for Sociology. This meaningful scholarship provides critical financial support to students pursuing a PhD in Sociology in the SON's Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences. The scholarship is awarded to students whose scholarly interests are inspired by Ginnie's tremendous contributions to sociology, particularly in women's health, qualitative research, sociology of emotions and interactionism.

She was a truly exceptional citizen of academia.



If you wish to honor and celebrate Ginnie's legacy, please consider joining her in supporting the Virginia Olesen Endowed Scholarship for Sociology. Established by Ginnie in 2022, this meaningful scholarship provides critical financial support to students pursuing a PhD in Sociology in the SON's Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences. It is awarded to students whose scholarly interests are inspired by Ginnie's tremendous contributions to sociology, particularly in women's health, qualitative research, sociology of emotions and interactionism.

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 - To make a gift by check, please make your check payable to the UCSF Foundation with a note to direct it to "The Virginia Olesen Endowed Scholarship for Sociology, Project ID 7902636." Please mail your check via the USPS to: UCSF Foundation, PO Box 45339, San Francisco, CA 94145-0339
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