

Blema Steinberg  
1934–2017

Blema Steinberg passed away at the age of eighty-two on 29 January 2017 following a brief illness. Blema was an academic leader and woman ahead of her time. Impressively, she was the first Canadian woman to receive a PhD in political sciences and the first woman in the Political Sciences Department at McGill to become a full professor. Her academic interests were international relations and U.S. foreign policy. She was admired for her academic rigour and adored as a teacher, in addition to her devotion to her students. When walking down the street with Blema, it was not unusual for her former students, even those she had taught many years before, to tell her how much they had enjoyed her classes.

During her midlife, Blema became interested in psychoanalysis and pursued analytic training while continuing to teach political science full-time. This was particularly impressive since she had no prior clinical experience or background in psychodynamics, but with her keen mind and voracious appetite for learning, she relished the training and graduated in 1988.

After becoming a psychoanalyst Blema developed a course at McGill that combined her interests in psychoanalytic theory and political science. Psychology and Politics became her signature class that she taught until retiring as professor emerita in 2001. Her fascination with personality and politics led her to study and write about the unconscious dynamics, needs, fears, and drives that shape personality and have an impact on politics. A particular area of study was the influence of personality styles, gender, and sibling relationships on the policy decisions of world leaders.

Her first book, *Shame and Humiliation*, published in 1996, examined the impact of personality, and especially narcissism on the policy decisions of world leaders. Using the era of the Vietnam War, she analyzed personality differences of Eisenhower, Johnson, and Nixon, and using Kohut's theory

of narcissism she teased out the role of narcissism on decisionmaking. She demonstrated that each leader's internal and external worlds were intertwined, and their major decisions were often the result of vulnerabilities and unconscious motivations rather than facts. Considering her own history, it was not surprising that Blema went on to explore women, ambition, and power. She became interested in the reason that some women become leaders while others with equal potential do not. Her investigation of this topic led to the publication of her second book in 2008, *Women in Power*, which explores how the early development of three female prime ministers, Indira Ghandi, Golda Meir, and Margaret Thatcher influenced their respective leadership styles. Blema demonstrated that each woman had unique status in her family and especially with her father because none of them had a brother to carry the family mantle.

Blema remained passionate about psychoanalysis and was a leader in the field. She became chair of the Professional Standards Committee for the Quebec English Branch and was a member of the Executive Council from 1999 to 2001.

She was known and admired for her inquisitiveness and intelligence and was never afraid to share her thoughts. There was rarely a meeting or conference where she did not make an academically informed comment or ask a pertinent question. In addition to her teaching, Blema had a private psychoanalytic practice, and after retiring from McGill joined the Hope and Cope program, in which she saw cancer patients for a low fee.

At its inception, Blema joined the Kravitz Clinic at the Jewish General Hospital where she treated patients in psychoanalytic psychotherapy for a low fee as well.

Blema was a loving wife, devoted mother, and grandmother. She was a cherished friend, leader, and gracious role model. She enthusiastically embraced psychoanalysis and was a highly valued and extremely productive member of our community. She is lovingly missed by all who knew her.

Rita Schulman