Harper, Valerie (1940-) Encyclopedia Article

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Valerie Harper was a little-known actress-dancer when she was cast as Rhoda Morgenstern, neighbor and best buddy of Mary Richards, on CBS's landmark 1970s TV sitcom *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Harper emerged as one of television history's most beloved second bananas. The Jewish, Bronx-accented Rhoda was a true New York neurotic: obsessed by her weight and her looks; uncomfortably single and ever-anxious in her relationships with men; and a perfect wisecracking comic contrast to Mary, the more subdued, always perfectly-coifed Midwesterner.

Harper won three Comic Supporting Actress Emmy Awards for playing Rhoda. In 1974, she left the series to star in *Rhoda*, a *Mary Tyler Moore Show* spin-off. Here, Rhoda Morgenstern was relocated to New York, and her character was far more attractive and assertive. Early in the show's first season—in one of the all-time top-rated TV sitcom episodes—Rhoda married Joe Gerard (David Groh). Meanwhile, Rhoda's sister and neighbor Brenda (Julie Kavner) became the homelier, insecure second banana. *Rhoda* lasted four seasons, during which she and Joe separated—and Harper added another Emmy to her mantle, this one as Outstanding Series Comic Actress.

Further Reading:

Alley, Robert S., and Irby Brown. *Love Is All Around: The Making of The Mary Tyler Moore Show.* New York, Delta, 1989.