

The Honorable Claudine Schneider
U.S. Representative of Rhode Island (1981–1991)

Special Exhibit: A Century of Women in Congress

Early Expectations

Representative Schneider remembers her parents pushing her to pursue gendered career options.
Interview recorded January 20, 2015

Well, the sad thing was, was that when I was a little girl I thought, first I wanted to be a nun, then I wanted to be a professional dancer, and then an artist. And my parents said, "No, no, no, no." And, ultimately, I said, "Okay, I'd like to be a doctor." And then my mother said, "No, no, no. You know, you let your brother be a doctor. You can marry one." So, that was, needless to say, disconcerting. And then, when I was studying chemistry and other challenging aspects in college of being pre-med, it was just really tough for me, and my mother said, "Well, why don't you do what you're really good at doing, and that is languages. Because, if you studied French"—and my mother spoke French at home—"or Spanish, or whatever," she said, "you can always be a teacher." And I thought to myself, "Teacher? I want to be an ambassador." So, I think the expectations were, to some degree, gender-specific, and relatively low.