

## Review 5

**Title:** Mothers, Daughters and Political Socialization – Two Generations at an American Women’s College. By Krista Jenkins (2013). 178 p. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press. ISBN-10: 143990927X

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For whom might expect a dry description of longitudinal scientific research when reading “Mothers, daughters and political socialisation. Two Generations at an American Women’s College”: you might be slightly disappointed. This book by scholar Krista Jenkins is so much more. Not only is it a true time document, it is also a relatable representation of the inner struggle every woman fighting for gender equality experiences, in the seventies and today still.

Initially, the starting point was situated in the mid-seventies by researcher Roberta Sigel, who took a series of interviews with mothers and daughters to map out women’s attitudes towards the women’s movement. At that time, women’s liberation was in its heyday and the women’s movement denounced, among other things, the under-representation of women in hierarchical structures such as business and politics.

Sigel wanted to gain an insight into how different generations of women were facing a then revolutionary transition in terms of gender emancipation. She asked two questions: during this important period of emancipation, is there a noticeable difference between the two generations? Specifically, are daughters more tolerant of the women’s movement than their mothers? And secondly: to what extent have the views of mothers changed over the years and what is the reason for this?

Krista Jenkins, the author of this book, was Sigel’s assistant at the time of the first study. Years later they both decided to replicate the research with the next generation, which formed the basis for this book. From the first book she distilled two additional variables that form the thread running through the research. They offer a strong deepening in understanding how women deal with gender roles and what their attitudes and behaviors are towards women’s emancipation. First, she examines the role of inter-generational transmission. In other words, how much influence do mothers have on their daughters’ views? Secondly, she looks at the importance of generational effects: to what extent is the ruling *Zeitgeist* during the identity building of girls determining?

Unfortunately, Roberta Sigel died before the book was written, but she helped shape the underlying question after researching numerous focus groups and surveys. This showed that although there is broad acceptance of the fact that men and women are essentially equal and should therefore be treated as such, the reality is different.

Remarkable – or not – is the fact that this dichotomy weighs heavily on women, much less on men. When women are confronted with unequal treatment, they fall back on various coping strategies: they try to surpass the instigator by working harder, by exceeding his capacities and by becoming more competent in order to prove the invalidity of that unequal status. In fact, this means that a woman has to make much more effort than a man to get the same recognition. This is a sound thesis, but it will be scientifically substantiated in the remainder of this book.

The main purpose of Jenkins' research and accompanying book is therefore to examine the patterns of socialization for women today, in order to be able to conclude if they are being socialised in order to accept or reject traditional role patterns that undermine their equality. In doing so, she builds on Sigel's research and comes to some confronting but even so not always surprising conclusions.

"Mothers, daughters and political socialization" starts with a focus on gender roles in relation to political socialisation. In doing so, the author departs from the premise that political socialisation by definition starts from a patriarchal system and thus perpetuates sex discrimination. According to this hypothesis, any previous research on this theme can therefore be assumed as biased. She bases her thesis on the observation that in today's society, the political socialisation of women is still more focused on the experience of political engagement in the private sphere. This automatically creates a hierarchy in the public sphere in which men are and remain much more strongly represented. As a result of this imbalance, this vicious circle of biased socialisation is largely maintained. The rise of the women's movement has temporarily shaken this up. This emerged strongly in the initial study by Sigel and Jenkins. But in the second series of interviews in 2000, the innovative effect of this largely disappeared. As a result, it is acceptable to assume that both of the variables used by the author – the influence of mothers and the generational effects – have a greater impact than in the first study. The first chapter goes on to define the framework for this qualitative research: the target group is defined, the methodology, but also a number of conceptual definitions are presented. What is important in this research is that a choice was made to interview mothers and daughters who attended the same college. That way, the effect of the variable 'education' in this research is largely overturned.

In the second chapter, the author digs a little deeper into the women's movement and respondents' attitudes to its strategy and goals. A very interesting exercise that was made here is to compare the views of both interviews of the mothers on the women's movement. Do they still look at it in the same way, and if not, what are the factors that contributed to a change in attitudes? To this end, the author compares data from today with interviews conducted in 1975.

The daughters are also questioned. To what extent is their attitude towards traditional role patterns influenced by their mothers, by generational factors or by both? The author concludes at this stage that there are many similarities between mothers and daughters, but that as a generational group they differ in certain important aspects. For example, we see that a positive attitude towards the women's movement is shared, but much stronger among daughters than among mothers, who are more divided. In both groups it also appears that their will to challenge traditional gender roles is not always as strong as their support for the women's movement seems to show.

The next chapter focuses on the impact of gender roles in the private sphere. Jenkins interviewed the mothers about how they have dealt with the challenges of gender expectations in their personal lives and how they reflect on this. Did their lives become what they expected or did events occur that changed their future? In a next phase, she compared this experience of mothers with the future plans of daughters, both between mothers and daughters and between generations. This established a coherence in the dominant role that caring tasks play or are likely to play in the lives of both groups. Although women are increasingly participating in the labor market, the division of homebound tasks appears to have changed little or not at all. Women continue to be much more responsible for child care, household tasks and practical tasks such as driving children to school. It also appears that in families where both partners work full-time, women spend significantly less time at work than men, but self-report studies also indicate they have less time to themselves. Interviews show that both mothers and daughters see their lives or future expectations impacted by the continued pressure of traditional role patterns. On the other hand, the importance that daughters attach to domestic responsibilities differed from that of their mothers. Whereas the younger generation sees the maintenance of traditional roles as an individual choice, the mothers see this rather as a concession necessary to maintain peace in the family. The author places this partly in the youthful individualism of the daughters, and in the fact that they have fewer references than their mothers who think much more of themselves as members of a group.

Traditional gender roles are also ubiquitous in public life. Chapter four therefore focuses on the conclusions concerning gender expectations at work and beyond. It is striking here that daughters were clearly more optimistic than their mothers about reducing patterns of discrimination in the workplace. However, both groups of women developed the same coping strategies when it comes to responding to such sexism: they see a way out by rising above the discrimination on the one hand or by strengthening their competence on the other. With the latter, they are trying to prove that the unequal treatment is unjustified and thus enforce a better approach. However, both also seem to some extent resigned to the existence of a degree of unequal treatment in the workplace, they accept it as part of the fight against gender discrimination in the public forum which paradoxically, leads to some level of resignation

In the penultimate chapter, the author goes a step further and makes the link with political engagement, the behavior and attitudes that correlates with it. Because the emergence of feminism and the women's movement are also strongly politically linked, the author examines whether the respondents make that link as well. Do they consider it important for women to engage politically in order to achieve gender equality? The author mainly sees a detached attitude here, but in a different way for mothers and daughters. What is interesting in this section is that although there is consensus between the generations, at a micro level – between mother and daughter – this is not the case. The majority of pairs differed significantly in their political commitment. However, it is not the case that one generation was more or less committed as a whole. So it seems that mothers with a strong commitment can deter daughters from engaging as well, whereas mothers with a low political commitment can have daughters with a high level of ambition. Both those groups hold each other in balance.

However, both generations are aware of the importance of diversity in politics, and both show signs of a nascent feminist identity. Although they are not sufficiently convinced that their voices can have sufficient weight in the pursuit of political goals in their own interests, they do not make politics their weapon of choice when it comes to fighting for women's rights.