

62 Questions for 1962 in 2017

We asked you to respond to 62 questions about where we are in 2017, plus three questions for Mount Holyoke. Here is our summary, with some questions to reflect on as you read this now, or at reunion. We are cautious about what we found. There were only 71 responses before the survey closed on January 25, and some of those did not answer all questions. Communications and access to the online survey did not effectively reach all of you. And it is possible that someone responded twice. Still, we think your responses, if not truly representative, do suggest something about where we are and what further questions our responses raise. We live in a time of division in the U.S. and uncertainty in many parts of the world. To the extent that we are daughters of Mary Lyon, we can reflect on our legacies, and on the contributions we can make in the years to come.

If you would like a PDF of the full survey responses, please email Susan Holcombe at shholcombe@gmail.com or Connie Dilley at constance.dilley@esuite.ca. It is an 87-page file that includes anonymous comments made on questions.

Growing Up

When we emerged from our Mount Holyoke cocoon in June of 1962, we entered a world of change. Change for women, growing protests against war, and mounting pressures for racial and social justice. As Betsy Hawes Weinstock put it in our magnificent 50th reunion book, "As we began to question rules, decided to go to law school, dared to wear mini-skirts and bikinis, had children but continued to work, we were voicing the hidden selves Woolf had ascribed to women, defying the anonymity, complicit in nudging a revolution forward."

So where has our nudging taken us? We did work. Most of us married. We had children. Some of us left the workforce, but then returned. We changed careers, and we volunteered. More than half of us reporting said they faced discrimination in the workplace. Ten of 66 responding are still working for pay, going to an office and putting in an average of 19 hours a week—to a maximum of 60 hours! Forty of 63 responding left the workforce to care for children or for other family reasons, and 92% of those said that they returned to the workforce after family responsibilities ended---though two of us wryly noted that family responsibilities "never really end". We have been flexible and adaptable. Some of us noted that re-entering the work force was not always easy and required a change of profession or another degree. But even a degree was not always enough for easy re-entry. Were

some of us denigrated for taking the mommy track? Do we not recognize that managing several individual children, a household, and community engagement may be the most practical preparation for managing people and strategies in organizations?

But we did adapt and grow. One of us said "my resume looks like I can't decide what I want to be when I grow up!" Many of us started in teaching or social work. Some of us went on to leadership roles in non-profits; others followed their fancies as a travel agent or an artist. Almost 30% of us responding have worked for government at the local, national, and international levels. Out of 55 responding, most of us have served on non-profit boards, civic boards, church and school boards: plus a few on corporate boards. And all the while we volunteered. Of 55 responding to a question about how many hours a week we volunteer, the average was 7 hours a week, with several volunteering for up to 20 hours per week—providing professional services or direct services to children, international visitors, schools, or local theaters. (The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2015 26.8% of women and 21.8% of men did volunteer work!).

Collectively we have at least 238 grandchildren and 64 step-grandchildren—but we are missing responses from many of you. Only 3 of us report being openly lesbian or bisexual, but many more of our children, stepchildren, grandchildren, step-grandchildren, and close relatives are LGBT. Only a few of us are now caring for other family members, in most cases our husbands.

This may not constitute a revolution; sometimes it seems, at best, two steps forward and one step back. Our voices are not hidden, and we defy anonymity, but are we still just nudging? Back when Mary Lyon was raising money for a sustainable Mount Holyoke, she wrote, "It is desirable that the plans ...(for higher learning for women at MHC)... should not seem to originate with us [women], but with benevolent gentlemen. If the object should excite attention, there is danger that many good men will fear the effect on society of so much female influence, and what they will call female greatness."

Engaging

Acting President Sonya Stephens recently noted Mount Holyoke's "mission to educate for purposeful engagement in the world". This carries on the original purpose of the College of which it was said, "(Mary) Lyon firmly believed that women must be well educated to contribute significantly to society's greater good" (<https://www.mtholyoke.edu/about/history/detailed>). How is the Class of 1962 engaging with the world and contributing? In addition to substantial volunteering, the Class of 1962, judging from our small sample, stays informed, is involved politically and is engaged globally.

Only one of 64 responding said she did not read a daily newspaper. The 63 others generally consulted a variety of sources, including *The New York Times* (32), *The Washington Post*, and other newspapers; television, especially but not limited to PBS; public radio; magazines and university lectures. More than 70% (47 of 67) termed themselves "liberal"; we have 17 moderates, 2 conservatives and 1 radical left/socialist. (This survey was developed well before the November elections and deliberately stayed away from specific candidates.) A large number of us consider ourselves politically active, first of all by contributing, then by volunteering or by participating in political events. Some have been active members of the League of Women Voters. At least one of us was elected to a state legislature; others have worked for local, state and federal officials, and served on elected or appointed commissions. Of 37 responding, 22 have participated in civil rights marches, 21 in anti war protests, 17 in marches for the ERA, 15 in pro-abortion and one in anti-abortion marches, 9 in pro- and 1 in anti-gun regulation marches, and 7 have marched for gay rights. We know from other communications that there was 1962 participation in the January 21, 2017 Women's March. We have fulfilled civic responsibilities with 75% of us responding serving on a jury.

The survey did ask about two hot button issues: abortion and guns. Out of 67 responding, 62 favored a woman's right to choose; 4 favored some government mandated restrictions on abortion, and 1 favored government prohibition of abortion. Again, of 67 responding, 7 said they owned or had owned a gun and 60 said they had not.

1962 gives. It was hard to disentangle the 56 responses to the question on our "number one charity"—1962 doesn't follow the rules. We mentioned many charities or causes in no particular order. Of

groups mentioned, a small plurality are domestic social service organizations, followed by churches, educational institutions, women's organizations (including Planned Parenthood), international service agencies, cultural, environmental and against gun violence. One respondent noted that her chief charitable objective was to contribute to grandchildren's education.

We write books, poems, newspaper and scholarly articles, and Huffington posts. We make and exhibit watercolors, photographs, quilts, jewelry; 24 of 65 responding perform with a singing or instrumental group; and some of us have been involved with making films or theater performances. We survey beavers know there is much more creativity out there, but our survey doesn't capture it.

We read. We read individually and in book clubs preferably in print (58 out of 65), but we also use our Kindles, iPads, and audio versions. We probably fit the stereotype (and National Education Association [NEA] estimates) that women read more fiction than men but we also read non-fiction. Out of 46 responses, two fictions (Elena Ferrante's 4-volume *Naples Quartet* and *All the Light We Cannot See*) and one non-fiction (Chernow's *Alexander Hamilton*) each got 4 mentions. Our reading lists are wide ranging. Of the 65 responding only 20 of us had read the Mount Holyoke common read, Ta-Nehisi Coates' *The World and Me*, but many of our recommended reads explore the unresolved issues of slavery and race in our society.

We are connected. Out of 61 responding, only one of us does not have a valid passport. Some of us speak French (15), Spanish, Italian, German, Russian, Farsi, and Bahasa Indonesia comfortably enough for social communication. But many of us lament the loss of a one-time fluency or bemoan that we never achieved it. We do travel, having visited more than 105 countries, including

Europe: Albania, Austria, Italy, Croatia, Greece, Russia, Czech Republic, Germany, Switzerland, France, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium, Liechtenstein, Denmark, United Kingdom (including Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland), Republic of Ireland, Iceland, Slovakia, Norway, Malta, Hungary, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Vatican, Monaco, Portugal, Cyprus.

Asia and the Pacific: Mongolia, North Korea, China (including Hong Kong), Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar (Burma), Indonesia, Fiji, Tonga, Cook Islands, Tahiti, Western Samoa, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, New Zealand, Australia, India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Tajikistan.

Middle East and North Africa: Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, Yemen, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco.

Africa: Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Ghana, Senegal.

South America and Caribbean: Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Venezuela, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, Cuba, Jamaica, British Virgin Islands, Bermuda, Panama, Barbados, St. Lucia, St. Kitts, Antigua, Aruba, Turks and Caicos, St. Martins.

North America. Mexico, Canada.

Many of us born in the United States have lived outside for 6 months or more. Most stays were for about a year, but two are stays of 50 years.

Europe: France (3), Switzerland (1), Austria (1), Germany (2), U.K. (8), Italy (1),

Asia and the Pacific. Pakistan (2), Japan (1), India (1), Afghanistan (1), China (1), Fiji (1), Indonesia (1), Australia (1),

Middle East and North Africa. Lebanon (1).

Africa: Tanzania (1), Kenya (1), Sudan (1), Nigeria (2).

Latin America and the Caribbean. Colombia (1), Honduras (1), British Virgin Islands (1), Peru (1), Grand Caymans (1), Bolivia (1), Brazil (1), Argentina (1).

North America. Canada (1)

Five of us (out of 61) currently live outside the U.S.

Trying to understand whether travel and life abroad were spent in luxurious bubbles or in circumstances where we would confront the local reality, the survey asked some odd questions. Out of 60 responding, 47 of us have used squat toilets and 21 out of 59 responding have used a tuk-tuk, matatu, or similar 'peoples' vehicle. Mostly we travel economy, not first class. And a few of us have had immersion experiences, as part of the Peace Corps or similar 12 month+ service overseas.

A subset of questions we asked tried—not always successfully—to get at some of the core and persisting issues of inequality and bias in U.S. society. As females, 28 out of 49 responded that they had faced discrimination in the workplace; smaller numbers reported discrimination in educational institutions (not Mount Holyoke), in financial transactions, or in health services. Twenty-seven of us felt we had benefitted from white privilege in social or other situations, and smaller numbers indicated they had benefitted from white privilege in the workplace or educational situations. Only one of us indicated she

had been sexually harassed. Others thought they had been accepted for their abilities, or “probably have benefitted from white privilege without being aware of it”. For one of us, being white did not privilege, but it did mean that a grandchild was excluded from a STEM program restricted to minorities. Your survey writers think that the question of white privilege will remain salient. A February 2017 article in the New York Times talked about the unease created (among adults) in Westport CT when students were given the opportunity to submit essays for prizes on what ‘white privilege’ means and whether it exists.

We also asked whether you socialized on a regular basis with people who are “other” than you. Seven out of 11 comments asked “what is meant by ‘other’?” We survey writers apologize; we left this deliberately vague. “Other” could mean anything from socializing with younger people, LGBT friends, to regular get-togethers with people of a different color, of conflicting political views, or from different religious, social, or economic backgrounds. Though we travel, read and engage, do we live in economic, residential and social bubbles? And what does that mean?

Growing Old

We’ve often read that a sound education contributes to good health and a longer life. Those who responded to our survey seem to confirm that, although perhaps only the hale and hardy took time to respond. When asked to evaluate physical health, our 63 respondents logged in at between 7 and 8 on a scale where 10 is excellent. All 86% of us keep in shape by exercising regularly. Walking is the preferred exercise and 91% walk regularly, followed at 49% who work out in the gym. Half as many again swim or hike, and 17% get on their bikes. No one works out at the barre, runs, goes mountaineering, or horse-back riding, although the latter is now an option at MHC. Tennis, golf, water aerobics, kayaking, and Zumba all had their adherents, and individuals added Pilates, cross-country skiing, tai chi, Qi gong, and canoeing to the list. Getting your hands dirty also contributes to good health and 80% of us garden. Most do it directly in the ground at home (66%) while others use containers (39%), perhaps reflecting our move to condominiums and other residences. One works in a community garden. Would this be different today, in our speeded up world?

Most of us still live in a single family home: 60%. Condominiums are the choice of 23% and if we add apartments and cooperatives, then 31% are housed with neighbours close at hand in the same building.

No one reports being in assisted living, though five have moved to a retirement community or a Continuing Care Retirement Community. In winter, only 5 of 60 get away to a place other than their principal home. We get around by car: only one respondent didn't own one. Forty percent have bicycles, and it would be interesting to know for how many this is principal mode of transportation. Nine respondents out of 65 own a boat.

In line with the evaluation about health, 46 of the 63 respondents report no trouble with walking (73%) and another 6 (13%) use a cane. Curiously, 13 or 20% report using a hiking stick, though one comments "only when hiking." Is this an aversion to the connotation of using a cane—that one is truly old? No one reports using a scooter or a wheelchair (yet). Nevertheless, we look ahead and plan for the day we can no longer care for ourselves independently. Putting ideas to paper, 85% have written a health care direction and a Living Will. Mostly, we mean to stay at home as old age takes its toll. With outside help, 74% plan to remain in their house while 3, or 5% will move in with children or other family. A small 18% are considering residential care with assisted living. The overwhelming majority—56 out of 60— support legislation enabling assisted dying.

Playing with our given names was interesting, and perhaps reflected the times we live in and the effect of feminism. We've grown up, and 8% of 64 respondents reported using a more formal first name now than their nickname in college, to Sue becomes Susan, Connie becomes Constance, Gingee is Virginia, while Betsy is now Elizabeth. It would be fascinating to know at what moment these transitions took place. Does this reflect a more powerful self-image, a rejection of the little girl we once were? Married, 78% of respondents adopted their husband's last name. We don't know if the remaining 22% were married or single. What we do know is that 14% of "adoptees" reverted to their birth name eventually. Three clever ones used a hyphenated name to incorporate both names, and 9% have always kept their birth name.

One random question was about tattoos, and 2 classmates of 65 have put themselves under the needle to get one.

Staying in touch

We stay in touch with friends and family as many do today, using a multiplicity of means. All those who answered (65) use the telephone and email, while 55% are on Facebook. Snail mail still serves 66%, but whether this is to pay bills, send cards, or actually keep up an old-

fashioned correspondence we don't know. Texts are sent by 52% and 9% are listed on LinkedIn. How many, we wonder, never leave home without their cell phone? Three use WhatsApp, 1 uses Instagram, but no one (yet) uses Tumblr. As for face-to-face communication, 35% rely on Skype, Face Time, and similar apps to stay in touch. Six of us mentioned that they still meet personally to spend time together.

Considering time spent on all social media, the 58 respondents averaged out to 9 hours per week, from a low of 2 to a high of 30. Eleven of us spend 21 hours or more per week. As for communicating with MHC classmates, it varies a lot, but 88% of us establish contact at least one a year. Weekly or monthly contact is made by 47% of those who responded: a healthy number after all these years. Only 3% use reunions as the only time they talk to classmates. And speaking of reunions, 65% of respondents expect to come to South Hadley in May for our 55th. Those who are not coming cite cost, and conflicts over Memorial Day weekend. Two more said they were just not interested.

Conclusions?

Given the slim number of respondents (71 out of a much larger class), no typical, representative woman emerges. We are all uncommon in our own ways. We read, we exercise, we use computers to stay abreast of the news, both within our families and in the greater world. We rely on our good health and good fortune to allow us to travel.

The questions asked prompted other questions, which go unanswered. How do we *really* handle retirement? Do we continue working because other interests don't present themselves? Do we delve into subjects and practices that are brand new to us, or do we dig down in subjects that have long tempted us? Do we volunteer for needy causes, like Syrian refugees, or help comfortably with our local library? Do we travel to understand other peoples in foreign circumstances or just for the thrill of the exotic? Do we actively think about how we can insert ourselves into matters that lay outside of our comfort zones? Is this even important? Can we still harness our education and resources to make our marks on the world around us and further afield? Perhaps we can use our reunion to talk about these issues.