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Women's Voices

Follow-up Study on the Second Generation of Women in OD

By Kathryn Kaplan

Over twenty years ago I was searching for some way to know what to expect as a woman entering a new field. I was transitioning at midcareer from occupational therapy (a healthcare field of mostly women) to organization development. At the time women accounted for about half of the field of OD, but they were not reflected equally in publications, faculty appointments, or awards. I wondered if I could find a way to learn how other women experienced OD. I particularly wanted to know what successful, experienced women consultants would say about working in the male-dominated world of consulting to organizations. I ended up interviewing 32 women who were referred by their peers for their professional reputation and respected for having successful ongoing consulting practices for 15–20 years (Kaplan, 1994).

Two decades later, my motivation for doing a follow-up study is somewhat different. Now, having worked as an internal consultant myself (and VP of OD with some external consulting and faculty work), I wanted to explore their experience of aging, what had changed and what remained relatively stable in their lives and work. My intention was to compare key themes from the first and second study. Conducting the research would serve my goals to honor these women as they age,

crystalize their legacy, and capture the collective story of these successful women in OD. This article will begin with the methodology, follow with the research findings, identify the impact for myself and younger women, and end with a conclusion. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate to OD practitioners of any age, gender, and background the value of sharing generational experience and wisdom.

Methodology

How Women in OD Were Identified

I asked Sharon Thorne, who was the director of the OD Network, if there might be women who would be interested in speaking with me about being a woman in OD. Her enthusiasm, generosity, and guidance led to the first 15 women I contacted. They then identified the remainder of the women, with the notion that it takes one to know one (“chain referral snowball sampling”).

In the process of getting to know the 32 women, I discovered the term “second generation” of women in OD. They distinguished themselves from the “first generation” who were the first women to join and help shape the field: Edie Seashore, Barbara Bunker, Billie Alban, Elsie Y Cross, Kathleen Dannemiller, Kaleel Jamison, Mikki Ritvo, and Alice Sargent. The second

generation perceived them as very wise yet over-extended with requests to present and take leadership positions. Many of the second generation were mentored by them, as well as by men in the field.¹ All of them found the first generation of women inspiring beyond measure and extraordinary role models. I believe the story of the second generation of women will also add a perspective to the field's history that has been largely invisible, and if not told, will be forgotten.

As representatives of the second generation, the women researched were ready to add their energy to the field, being responsible for starting and participating in the Women in OD pre-conference sessions. They were members of ODN and/or NTL. These were the women who came of age during the late 1960s and early 1970s and were true to their roots in the civil rights and women's liberation movements, bringing their social consciousness to their consulting practices. They did not plan their careers. As they said: "one thing led to another," "the right place at the right time," "tripped backwards into the field," "ran right into it," "by default," "serendipity," and "happenstance." There are differences with when and how they entered the field, and also how much they saw themselves as OD consultants. However, almost all of them spoke of their entry to the field as a major turning point and their commitment to OD and its values as a calling.

Demographics

When I first interviewed the women, they ranged in age from 42–60+ years old, average 51. Now 12 are 60–69, 13 are 70–79, and 2 are 80+. (Of the original 32 women, 2 are deceased, 2 have serious health problems, and 1 could not be located.) They have been in the field from 20–50 years, with most practicing for 40 years. I sought diversity, especially with the urging of one of the White women committed

1. Robert Golembiewski is the only author I found who has written about the first four generations of OD consultants—all men with the exception of Edie Seashore. She was mentioned with her husband Charlie Seashore for their "third generation" contribution to the NTL internship program. Golembiewski wrote of the "Founding Fathers."

Table 1. *Participants' Demographic Information*

ORIGINAL STUDY 1994	CURRENT STUDY 2015
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 26 Caucasian » 4 African American » 2 Hispanic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 21 Caucasian » 3 African American » 1 identifies as Mixed » 2 Hispanic
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Various religious and spiritual traditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Various religious and spiritual traditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 12 West Coast » 16 East Coast » 3 Midwest » 1 Trinidad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 10 West Coast » 14 East Coast » 2 Midwest » 1 Australia » (8 of them moved)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 11 Doctorates with two in progress » 12 Masters » All participate in ongoing education through professional development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 13 Doctorates with 1 in progress » 12 Masters » Most involved in ongoing professional development.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Less than half were married or remarried, 18 had children at the time, and although busy, most engaged with family and friends and non-work activities, such as: politics, exercise, reading, cooking, arts and crafts, theatre, music, gardening, collecting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 16 are married and 11 single and half of each group have children and grandchildren. » Continued, or even greater, involvement in a variety of non-work activities and relationships.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » About 70% had solo practices, with the rest (30%) in partnerships or larger firms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » 67% are still in practice and four have firms. One third are retired or doing volunteer work and writing. Six of those in practice have left the field to do individual coaching, clinical practice, or other work.

to eradicating and learning from racism. See *Table 1* for further demographic information.

The majority focus on both diversity work and large system change. Almost half do executive coaching and some training. They develop teams, leaders (focus on women but also work with men), and Boards. Some work with HR and others strongly oppose doing so. They also work with clients on organization design, "future," strategic planning, conflict management, transitions, mergers, intergroup integration, resistance, and cultural assessment. They work with small to very large organizations representing most industries—international and domestic, for-profit and nonprofit, and sectors that span healthcare, education, government, manufacturing, technology, and finance.

They usually work at the top level of the organization, although some work with middle and senior levels or all levels. Overall, they work to integrate organizational strategy with system and global values, creating truly inclusive cultures.

Research Design

After virtually no contact for twenty years, I invited the same women to participate in my follow-up study. Their commitment to the field and our connection forged in the first research project yielded enthusiastic participation in the follow-up study. In the first study women from across the country were interviewed over two–three hours mostly in person or when not feasible, over the phone. After collecting demographic information, four main qualitative research questions were explored in-depth

to facilitate the women telling their stories about their experiences and perceptions as women OD consultants. They were asked to describe:

- » The Changes they experienced over the course of their careers.
- » The Challenges they encountered doing the work of OD.
- » The Contributions they made to the field.
- » The Lessons they learned that they wanted to pass on to younger women in the field.

For the follow-up study, they completed an online written survey I designed on Survey Monkey, answering both demographic and exploratory open-ended questions organized by the same four original research questions.

Both studies entailed categorization of key themes, while being careful to understand each woman from her own perspective in the data analysis. The heuristic research approach (Moustakas, 1990) provided the framework for my dissertation and I believe accounted for the retained connection of the women for the follow-up study. When I found that the detached, methodical categorization of themes during the dissertation did not match the spirit and relationship of the actual interviews, I searched for a way to be true to my passionate commitment to the research process and to capture the essence of each woman. I discovered a creative depiction of the experience by writing what I call “poem portraits” based on the individual narratives. Examples of titles include “The Woman Who Swims with the Sharks” and “Seeing Life in the Rearview Mirror.” I also created collage images of each woman as a symbolic form of data reduction. Once the women validated the truth of their poem portraits, I was able to link the previous analysis with the themes, images, and stories to synthesize the findings and complete the study. For the follow-up research I sought to learn if their poem portraits still rang true and had meaning today. In addition, I asked about the top issues facing women OD consultants as they do their work to change organizations and if there

has been progress over the twenty years from when I first asked them to identify key issues. To set the context for the initial study I did an analysis of publications and OD membership. In the follow-up study I did a comparison of similar data. These will be discussed next in the section on research findings after first presenting a final aspect of the methodology.

Younger Women

An additional feature of this follow-up study was to interview nine younger women in OD and related fields. The women were identified by two of the senior women in the study and my male business partner, who each thought understanding the concerns and interests of diverse younger professional women would ground the analysis of the results. In particular the question on lessons for younger woman would be enhanced by clarifying what the senior women offer with what the younger women seek. The four OD consultants interviewed are currently internal to organizations. The other five younger women represent the co-workers and clients with whom the OD practitioners often work. The choice to interview one-third of the number of women in the follow-up study was determined to be sufficient for the purposes of the research. The younger women were interviewed by phone and asked questions similar to the online survey, yet adapted to be engaging and relevant to them. The intention was not to replicate the depth and richness of the research with the senior women; merely to add to the understanding of the audience for whom this work is directed.

The younger women in my study range in age from 26 through 44. They reflect both the Millennials and Generation X, although interestingly their identification with a generation is not what defines them. What is more significant to them is their heritage, career focus, and personal/social life. Some of the women were born in other countries—India, Poland, and Russia—and have indigenous, African, Irish, and Italian ancestry. Several are bi-lingual (English and Italian, Polish, or Russian), and retain an interest in the global economy. Four out of the nine are single, five

are married, and four have children. There are lesbians and heterosexuals, with some of the single women wanting marriage and family and others more connected to extended family members. Four are from New York (3 in NYC and 1 upstate), four are from the Midwest, and 1 from California. Location turned out to be a significant factor for two in the Midwest who grew up in the East and miss the opportunities and sophistication they are used to.

In terms of education, four have PhDs and one is in a PhD program. Three have Masters Degrees, and two have Bachelor’s with additional certificates. This bias in being highly educated reflects the educational levels of the senior women in the study as well as the tendency for younger people to get higher degrees before they get work experience. The younger women interviewed represent broad industry experience, from academia, finance, and healthcare to manufacturing and technology. They work in private and nonprofit organizations as scientists, professors, Human Resource professionals, consultants, and trainers. Although all are working inside organizations, previously one was an external OD consultant doing diversity work, and one is eager to be an external consultant and adjunct professor after she completes her OD doctoral program.

Research Findings

The current membership of the OD Network includes 15% more women than men in the field than 20 years ago. ODN did not provide data on race, age, or other aspects of identity.

The publication landscape has also shifted. In a pilot study I did prior to my initial research, for instance, most of the publications I reviewed from 1985-1991 were written by men. Of the total of 1,400 articles, only 29 (2%) were written by women, and almost all focused on women in the workplace and other gender-related issues. Less than 6% were on topics of general interest to the field such as corporate culture and strategic management (Kaplan, 1995). By rough comparison (of only one journal vs. six reviewed previously), over the past six years 43% of the articles in the *OD Practitioner* were written by women

and 57% were written by men. Only 19 articles were written about diversity and inclusion (with some including gender). Of those articles nine were written by women, five by men, and five co-authored by a woman and a man.

These markers indicate that while there are more women in OD and more women publishing articles, the focus is now on diversity/inclusion and topics of general interest rather than on women and gender-related issues as before. Twenty years ago the women in the study were already looking beyond gender and working to integrate diversity and strategy. That is why their responses to the qualitative research questions then and now provide a window on OD practice that is different and additive to the literature in the field. What is expressed here in their own words and through their collective voices is far more accessible than most reports of research findings.

Issues in OD

When I conducted the original research, it was a year or so after “The Year of the Woman” and Ruth Bader Ginsberg became the second woman judge to be nominated to the US Supreme Court. I was focused on the intersection of being a woman in general—sexism, gender roles, and feminine values—and being a woman consultant in OD—working in male-dominated corporate cultures, in a field based on humanistic values, and needing to understand business and a wide range of industries as well as change processes. The issues the women identified included:

- » Concern for women surviving in the competitive market
- » Sexual bias and harassment of female external consultants
- » Communication differences between men and women
- » The question of what differences or “value-added” women actually bring to the field
- » Income disparities
- » Ageism
- » Lack of leadership by women in research and publication
- » Ways to demonstrate women’s strengths.

Obviously, there have been many positive changes since then, yet many of the issues persist. On the positive side the women in the follow-up study observed that more women have access to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) careers; diversity and inclusion do not need a business case anymore; emotional intelligence and people management are more mainstream in MBA programs and corporations; and women (at least White US-born) are seen in high-level roles.

On the sobering side they note there has been no progress on sexual violence. Reading the newspaper any day reveals the economic inequities locally and globally contributing to the widening wage gap between the haves and have-nots, barriers to minorities in leadership positions, and rampant injustices. As one of them said, “There has been a change in the rhetoric, but little progress in the reality of organizations as more inclusive, diverse, just, and equitable.” An overarching concern is how to engage younger women in the issues of feminism and social justice, to both appreciate their advantages and still realize how much more needs to be done. So many of them, they told me, act as if sexism is a thing of the past. “Both women and men need to understand the ways that systems set women up to be confused and disappointed about what to expect from each other. Women and men need to also understand the ways that women’s contributions are undervalued in most organizational cultures.”

Twenty years ago in OD there was concern about what would happen as more women entered the field. Other groups—from teachers, to secretaries, to Jewish Cantors—had experienced a loss of professional status (and an exodus of men) after women joined their ranks. As one woman said, “Women have always followed the men in this field, from personnel to human resource development, and to consulting in organizations. Now men are focused on strategic interventions in the corporate world. Will women follow?”

The follow-up study occurs at a time when there are significantly more women in OD than men, and yet concern about the field losing status as a result was not

mentioned by any of them. Instead, they focused on issues ranging from social and global perspective, unconscious bias, corporate greed, and difficulty in getting organizations to get to the root cause of problems. They offered a wide variety of remedies to help leaders think systemically about complex issues in an environment of uncertainty, politics, and patriarchy. They caution organizations to use modern technology without being consumed by it. They bemoan the lack of time given to develop people in organizations. While some progress is noted in tackling sexism and racism, it is imperative that what is unacceptable be exposed. Still remaining are pay inequality and issues of child care and work-life balance. Some of the women think progress has been made over twenty years, some of them do not or do not know, and a third of them are mixed. What they agree on is the extent and urgency of involvement by younger women to get the field and society to the next level.

The women in the study implore consultants to demonstrate empowering behavior in organizations that are regularly disempowering. They stress that it is vital for women consultants not to collude with executives when OD values, fairness, and “isms” are at stake. They see the necessity of speaking truth to power, naming White privilege, and paying attention to internalized misogyny and covert bullying. They encourage consultants to support marginal women in organizations and address economic disparity in communities. Just having more women at work and in leadership positions does not guarantee equity and social justice. Their vision of cultural sensitivity and global inclusion is not just women’s work; and in fact, as is strongly advocated by one of the women, until men do their diversity work with men, then patriarchy, sexism, male, and White privilege have no chance of being eradicated. Women need to speak out when they see other women sabotage each other. These are all reasons why they say it is vital that young women learn more about the theory and application of feminist methodologies whether or not they consider themselves feminists. The next level of change for true transformation requires women to access

their deep feminine power and inner wisdom, participate fully in organizations, and express their voices in OD and beyond.

Changes and Challenges: They are Remarkable, Resilient, and Relevant

When I had the pleasure of first interviewing these women, what was remarkable to me was how open they were about their struggles, modest about their achievements, and generous about their lessons learned. I did not expect the degree to which they would interweave their personal journeys with their experience as OD con-

What woke me up was their clarity about the necessity to face oppression in organizations and society and the impact of patriarchy on women and minorities. Also impressive was their conviction on the centrality of relationships in getting and doing the work of OD. They had vivid stories of getting undermined and betrayed by both men and women. Yet, they also celebrated enduring relationships with partners, mentors, and colleagues.

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As I have returned to their experiences and perceptions, I believe the same overarching themes remain. They are still women doing the work of OD as part of their life's journey, in the context of oppression, helped and hindered by their relationships with both men and women (Kaplan, 2010). Now, however, what stands out is their resilience in overcoming some of the changes and challenges that have occurred over the ensuing two decades. There are ways in which they have stretched themselves, become more attuned to who they are, and made choices to reflect changing circumstances and inner truths. Some of them have distinguished themselves and been recognized in ways not previously

evident. All have become role models as senior women aging in positive and healthy ways that they did not expect twenty years ago. Back then they worried that aging and ageism would affect their credibility, but now it seems that the intervening years have become another credential. As one of them playfully said, twenty years ago she was a "Cronette," now at 70 she's a real "Elderella." At the same time, contemplation of and preparation for death and the fourth phase of life is a deep spiritual practice that some of them, working in hospice or taking care of ill spouses and family

members, are aware is on the horizon.

What is more present, as a couple of them put it, is reinventing themselves for their "third act." For some that means a change in how they define themselves and their practice. They represent diverse interests focused on making a difference: in effective governance and American democracy; as a scholar in organizational studies on the simultaneity of race, gender, and class; as a leader in creating the capacity to design and host "conversations that matter" around critical strategic questions in organizations around the globe; as a researcher doing foundational work on women's relationships to women; as an advocate for a global perspective focused on the triple bottom line (people, profit, planet) and leading from ancient traditions and Earth wisdom. One woman sold to her partners her share of a profitable business she built. Facing grief and loss, it allowed her to embark on leadership coaching and begin a PhD program in her 70's. For others the third act looks like a joyful retirement, moving across the country or globe, taking on running a family business, or spending more time volunteering and writing.

As a group they do not complain about having survived cancer, financial stresses, death of parents, and seeming bad luck that does not end. Instead, they trust the universe, reach out to longstanding women support groups, engage in therapy and spiritual practices, and always find a way to continue to give while deepening their personal development. They are becoming comfortable being viewed as wise elders and they are resilient in how they harden their resolve to keep going until a new normal surfaces. They are grateful to life and their place in it, sharing how they discover great compassion for everyone's life story.

In response to the question about whether their individual poem portraits still have meaning today, their replies validate that while their essence does not change, circumstances do. Examples of positive comments include, "I was amazed at how much it still does have meaning for me... the themes that were important to me then, still remain important in my life today." "The essence of the poem I find even more deeply true: we know more about the women in the world and know even more about their plight." "First I want to say that I love the poem and it is powerful to reread it now 20 years later."

Only three women did not identify with the poems now even though affirming they were true at the time. The vastly different structure and content of their lives made one woman comment, "Rereading my poem portrait is like looking at an album of pictures from the past. I don't look like that anymore." The majority gave nuanced glimpses into how their journey has progressed and they have been transformed. Still committed to social justice and their values, they speak of changes they notice in themselves, such as: more anger and cynicism, more confidence, more balance, more focus on personal life, more internal and artistic orientation, and the use of different tactics in their work.

In terms of external forces the economic downturn impacted many of them in solo practice. They had to market differently, go into debt, make sacrifices, and reach out for help and support. Realizing they had to deal with factors outside of their control, some coped by getting out.

Others were still able to accept paid work based on values rather than basic survival, and another was able to continue running a business that met her standards for excellence and still be viable financially. One woman who was leading a nonprofit organization for 20 years was able to attract funding due to her persistence and willingness to develop new business models. Yet several women commented on how a change in leadership wiped out years of work and discontinued long-term contracts. One woman said, "The biggest frustration was that no matter how many times we demonstrated the value of the work, only on rare occasions did it lead to the creation of ongoing structures to carry out the work."

The overwhelming sentiment from them as a group is their ongoing commitment to OD principles, if not the field, and fond memories of those not still practicing. However, a subgroup of them have been disillusioned and disappointed that OD did not live up to its potential for fulfillment, whether it was people in the field who want to maintain the status quo or those in a professional association who advocated inclusion but were perceived as excluding and demonizing colleagues who had a point of view different from their own.

Early on, many of the second generation of women had the chance to "grow up" as OD also grew. When much of the opportunity for creativity and innovation became seen as cookie cutter, it lost its appeal. International travel has broadened many of their perspectives, and as one woman put it, "the internet and social media have made my early work look quaint!" One woman was wistful about not changing the world, "I wish I could feel more positive about my career, as I certainly put a lot of energy into it." Another lamented, "The many things that I was involved in that were very exciting breakthroughs at the time, and created bonds that felt lifelong and self-defining, in retrospect were blips on the timeline of history." Another woman said, "In my experience OD has become irrelevant to justice and equality in organizations and has lost its cutting-edge possibilities with its turn to individual-based interventions like coaching, and

metaphors borrowed from the physical (not social) world like self-organizing systems."

I raise these voices because the purpose of studying women as a group is to allow the diversity among them to be a source of strength and an opportunity for dialogue. It is as important to express a view of the irrelevance of OD in a changing world as it is to sing its praises and potential. Critique from passionate consultants who have been involved in the field for so many years is another facet of their important legacy.

Contributions: Legacy of the Second Generation of Women Consultants

I am aware that these women are not done yet. This review of their contributions is just the beginning of attempting to crystalize what they have collectively given to the field. Many of them had difficulty with the question about their contributions during the first research project, including explorations of recognition and success discussed below. They said things like the following: they were taught to be humble, they take what they do for granted because they just do it, and they did not recognize their work with politics, communities, and associations as a contribution to the field. As one of them said, "My assumption is that everybody does what I do, everybody knows what I know, everybody sees what I see... I have not espoused a new theory or done a piece of research or written books." However, now with more maturity and experience, they are not shy about articulating their contributions.

When asked what they are most proud of first, they emphasized their publications. The woman who twenty years ago was "too much the practical theorist to write," today has written a landmark book on citizen engagement in governance. Some of them were publishing books when I first met them. Others have books in progress and others are getting ready to write one.

A second category of contribution was having influence and impact. Their leadership and consultation has changed education, large and small organizations, and opportunities for women's leadership nationally and internationally. They have created programs that lasted after they

moved on, including job sharing, training in healthcare, compensation for staff and faculty, and leadership development for the next generation of government leaders. They have tackled racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination that cause harm. Through the United Nations, they have supported peace through science. They can claim to have influenced a more socially responsible tobacco industry that is now under government regulation.

The third category involves relationships. Through mentoring, serving as board members, and being mothers, they have perpetuated the values that were already strong in their contributions 20 years ago. While it was troubling to them back then to be undervalued professionally and not receive public recognition, now their own self-assessment and self-regard have taught them how much it means to raise families, strengthen businesses, and encourage careers of younger professionals who expand consciousness. They are proud of their daughters and sons who join them in this work. Sometimes with a global reach behind the scenes, they help others open the space for important conversations and making a difference. How they remember themselves is still more crucial to them than receiving public acclaim.

The final category of contribution is about qualities they value and how they would like to be remembered. "As an honest, authentic, funny person focused on building the talent and potential of systems." "The calm in the eye of the storm" able to help clients focus their energy and rationality to deal with the chaos and create a renewed vision for the future. "Using my voice, speaking my truth, not afraid to raise issues." "As a kind, gentle, intelligent, risk-taking person." "As a catalyst and learner/teacher and a connector and lover." "Being competent, authentically caring, for being serious about the work, for exhibiting high integrity, and being truly helpful."

Recognition

The second generation of women in OD certainly have a lot to be proud of and deserve professional recognition in addition to the appreciation from clients,

friends, and family they say they value. It is not surprising to me that their need for recognition from external sources is not pronounced at this stage in their lives. Satisfaction in doing good work is cited repeatedly as more important to them than public recognition. Some forms of recognition are inherent in being asked to speak at conferences and being selected for participation in programs. Others have noted

Award, and the 2014 Common Ground Award. No longer would “The Top 10 OD Consultants” be only men, as they were in 1983 to their dismay. The issue of invisibility is not as pronounced as it was in the first study because so many of them have taken up the mantle of writing, publishing, and reaching an extensive and even worldwide audience. In addition, the more mainstream acceptance of diversity and

more comfort with most of them with giving and receiving credit. If it is not forthcoming because of the nature of being a consultant, I still wonder if there is sufficient recognition for solid work involving relationships by the field that values relationships along with system change. I did not see any evidence in their responses that those who have retired or left the field made that decision based on lack of recognition. I think that may be because of how they defined success for themselves.

One of the definitions I was most inspired by in the original study, I am glad to know is still true for this woman: “Success is experiencing the thing, whatever it is, and living with it until you know it is right for you.” She explains, “Whenever I have felt exhausted or crazy, I have stepped back and looked at what was causing that, then made a decision to deal with it. My definition of success back then did not explicitly include my family, but it does now.... [It] feels like the best thing I ever did.”

recognition by invitations to publish and receiving media attention. For those with solo practices, being able to be in business a long time—practically without having to market their services, and having clients express their appreciation for meaningful work is recognition enough. Seeing others they have mentored discovering themselves and achieving their own meaningful goals is profoundly satisfying.

Yet, also evident in some of their responses is regret at not getting more recognition from professional associations. Whether the breach is from being a woman, Woman of Color, or the type of work not being recognized, it has caused some of the women pain and frustration. The conclusion may be to acknowledge, “The time is past to get recognition from others; it must now come from myself.” Nevertheless, there are times when public recognition they have clearly deserved has been claimed by others, sometimes men and sometimes women, who are credited for their original innovations.

Fortunately, about a quarter of these women have received numerous prestigious awards for their work. Just a sample include: The ODN Larry Porter Award, Global Work and Lifetime Achievement

inclusion means that differences are more often valued and sought. Of course (alas) that does not mean sexism, racism, and ageism are a thing of the past.

In relation to recognition, the main way they collectively saw their contributions to OD in the past was through relationships. They gave support to colleagues and provided service to their communities and professional associations. They noted taking partnerships and mentoring seriously. Just the fact of being perceived as doing the work of OD as a competent woman (White or of Color) made them a role model to men and younger women. While they valued their strengths of caring and connection, the prevailing culture did not. It is here that the resentment for invisibility was most palpable. If the nature of the work of OD is to empower clients and then leave, then neither men nor women consultants should be seen by clients as expert gurus. Yet, at the time, men were more often perceived by them as actively seeking that role. The women more comfortable behind the scenes and not expecting accolades somehow did not get the validation and respect from the field they were committed to and loved.

Fast forward 20 years and I sense

Success

I asked them about their definitions of success in the original interviews and returned to it in the follow-up study. The definitions are multifaceted and have little to do with financial gain and the pursuit of power. The most common definitions have to do with setting their own goals and meeting them. Every one of them felt successful as defined on her own terms: a catalyst and connected to spirit, doing whatever it is they want to do with positive feelings of happiness and gratitude, making a contribution to humanity, helping others realize their potential, and making the world a better place. For them it is about living with authenticity, learning from work and life, and having no regrets. Coming to a place of peace inside has not always been easy, as they told me. However, looking back there is the feeling “I am living the work I came here to do and am responding to the changes in energy as a result of aging.”

I admire this woman who said, “For me, the definition of success is to realize that if I died tomorrow, I would feel more than satisfied with what I have contributed to making this world a better place. And that I have done enough, made enough, created enough, contributed enough, made enough friends, and had and given enough love—to make me now wake up each day smiling. Thank goodness I am in good health and able to enjoy most everything I want to do.”

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have felt exhausted or crazy, I have stepped back and looked at what was causing that, then made a decision to deal with it. My definition of success back then did not explicitly include my family, but it does now.... [It] feels like the best thing I ever did.”

I believe their internal focus for guiding their personal and professional lives through their own definition of success has provided a sense of satisfaction regardless of external recognition. While their publications, examples of influence and impact, relationships, and personal qualities certainly describe their legacy, they will not stop there. Also handed down is the wisdom they share as lessons for younger women in the field.

Lessons: Passing on Wisdom

I asked the women to share the lessons they learned that they would like to pass on to the younger women, as well as to their younger selves, if they could. I did this because I wanted to discover if the advice they had for their younger selves would be different from what they would advise younger women today. Their own advice had the compassion and humor of someone who has learned along the way. They were reassuring to their younger selves, cautioning of what they would encounter out in the world of politics and gender bias, and realistic about what is needed to really make a difference at the system and organization level. Sometimes they were practical, offering guidance, and giving themselves permission to be more of who they really are. At the same time, they did not know if they would follow their own advice if they had received it years ago, for they recognized that everyone has to live and learn on their own terms.

From the nine interviews with younger women I realized that the wisdom the senior women had to share would be important and relevant to the younger women’s concerns. They voiced respect for older women in their lives and were eager to learn from women who have experience overcoming challenges that they are now facing at work. As the senior women expressed, most of the younger women did not identify with feminism and especially

not calling themselves feminists. They had a more humanistic orientation, wanting equality for all. In fact a Woman of Color who had been devalued because of stereotypes, expressed the common belief that age, in terms of gaining credibility, matters more than gender or race. However, two women in OD and two in academia are sensitive to not using “binary codes” for gender and they read about topics such as intersectionality for social equality. They are well versed in foundational feminist authors and activists as well as more recent voices from the transgender experience. They seek gender-neutral parenting and leadership practices.

All the younger women interviewed had keen observations about workplace dynamics and negotiations that disadvantage women. They share stories of frustration when male bosses dominate, female bosses are not supportive of women, and co-workers engage in power plays, undermining teamwork. When they experience gender bias, the topic seems taboo, leaving the women often feeling isolated, vulnerable, and in no-win situations.

The difference between the four younger women in OD and those five in other fields is that the latter seem to want coaching about career choice points and what to do about specific conflicts and workplace scenarios that create anxiety. They are more oriented toward getting promoted and tenure. Those in OD are eager to get mentored, learn more about contracting and use of self, and to know the resources that have most influenced the success of the senior women. All were interested in regrets the women might have and how to avoid them. Balancing work and life figured prominently as a concern whether caring for children or their grandparents. They struggle with their definitions of success, wanting external rewards and also personal satisfaction. However, for some their chosen careers do not support both desires.

Recognizing the particular and varied questions posed by the younger women, this study seeks to address those most common to their concerns as a group. In fact when I conducted the first study, after hearing their lessons learned I then

perceived the second generation women as a collective, not as a collection of individual women. Because of their strengths in mentoring and building relationships, they offer these lessons in general, not with the fine tuning of speaking with a specific younger woman. Included below are lessons that link what the younger women sought with what the senior women have found most valuable: doing the work of OD, gaining expertise, writing and publishing, maintaining strong relationships, developing yourself, and dealing with oppression.

Doing the Work of OD

As experts in OD, the senior women emphasized how important it is for younger women to always think systemically and strategically. Whether focused on creating inclusive cultures or developing skills like negotiation and influence, they found it crucial to focus on the client’s needs yet also trust their own assessments:

- » “Learn to think in multiple levels of systems. Always select an intervention that can impact individual behavior and system change.”
- » “Encourage younger women OD consultants to NOT think of themselves as OD consultants, but rather as strategic thinking partners and organizational strategists (or learning architects) with their clients. Also, to try to get a place in the line organization rather than an HR department!”
- » “Trust the process and don’t allow the method to dictate the message. Trust yourself and allow yourself to go to the edge sometimes. If the men attempt to marginalize you, it is important to know who you are, what you bring, and continue to pay attention to the system as opposed to getting caught up in someone else’s ego to derail you. It is all about the client.”
- » “Credibility and impact improve with experience. So get involved, learn what you can from the successes and the failures and try to be honest about assessing your role in both. And do your due diligence! Regardless of where he/she sits in the hierarchy, never trust a

client's assessment of the issue. Go out, gather data, and build your own view. Get out in the trenches—where the air isn't too filtered and the reality quotient is higher.”

Gaining Expertise

Younger women are concerned about how to get taken seriously; the senior women speak to how to gain expertise and respect by staying focused yet humble:

- » “Read some of those books about how to get ahead, but don't take it all too seriously. Develop a special area of skill that you are naturally good at, work incredibly hard at it, and find a job that showcases that. Do your best and look your best.”
- » “Once you become ‘the expert’ you will have status in a male-dominated environment, and credibility with varied populations. However, you must never flaunt your expertise and must always meet those other groups where they are and be the one who encourages them to look at the world from another perspective.”
- » “Your best shot at being respected is to do your work with great skill and to make sure the right people know about it. Take on the difficult and challenging tasks with courage and determination. If you fail, learn from it and communicate what you've learned.”

Writing and Publishing

The senior women find great value in writing and sharing their experiences and have published extensively. Here they advise younger women on ways to get started:

- » “Write. First write for yourself. Write about your experiences, every day. If some day you chose to write a book, that is a different and perhaps important project, but first you must write for yourself. Ideas will come on the paper or screen that you did not know were available to you.”
- » “Publish. Take the time to describe methods, techniques, and what you feel is work that is contributing to the field of OD. Make writing about your work a norm.”

Maintaining Strong Relationships

Their advice on how to maintain strong relationships is based on learning by doing. These nuances are easier said than done, which is why experiential learning is highly recommended. With practice and mentoring, younger women can improve their relationships with clients and colleagues by developing effective ways to deal with conflicts, politics, differences, and partnerships:

- » “Never whine, never blame. Challenge assumptions and groupthink, but do so with a light touch and never make anyone look bad, wrong, or stupid if you hope to influence him or her. Call people privately on their missteps. Don't take male dominance seriously—respect accomplishments and senior levels appropriately, but don't be afraid to ‘speak truth to power.’ Support and mentor other women and men, especially those who might find it difficult to find a mentor.”
- » “Don't shy away from politics; meet them on your terms.”
- » “Do not compete with anyone. Make him or her your colleague. Get acquainted with other consultants, for example, at professional meetings that facilitate some relationships.”
- » “Build strong work and personal communities of support and challenge. Together you keep your finger on the pulse of what needs to be done and you help each other through a strong, intentional network. Women still do not understand that the dominant group has that network without working on it, and women often think that their success has to be accomplished through their own individual stamina. Actively seek role models at every stage of life—personally and through biographical reading. Notice how they see the work, make choices.”
- » “Spend learning time in experiential work with those who are different from you. Listen carefully to what others have and are experiencing.”
- » “Invest in creating good working partnerships with internal and external people, so that you get honest feedback,

support, and the information you need to do good work.”

Developing Your Self

No matter how well a younger woman is trained in OD, her instrument is her use of self. These senior women know what it takes to show up fully—by taking the journey to know who you are, attend to your own needs, and express your voice for the good of all concerned:

- » “It is wonderfully laudable to care about and act for the good of the whole, but you must also have a strategy about what is good for you....What matters is to stay in tune with one's deepest yearning and spend time doing what you love.”
- » “You are an extraordinary instrument. Learn that every breath, every movement, every expression of energy has an impact on you and others. Be all that you can be. Spend as little time in negative spaces as you can authentically manage.”
- » “Relax. Pay attention.” “Be more assertive and trust your intuition.” “Be more honest about what you are experiencing.”
- » “Search your hearts and minds for what you really love to do with people and organizations, and build that into your daily work.”
- » “Know yourself in all its dimensions so that you have maximum flexibility in the places you use your talents. The greater your acceptance of self, the less you can be manipulated, especially with strong networks of women and men as allies who reflect reality for you and help find ways through.”
- » “Learn from nature, from rhythms and cycles of the universe. Work with heart as well as head. Co-create collaborative relationships. Draw on the inner power of your soul. Approach problems of the world in a way that is not fearful; walk toward whatever it is that frightens you. Start with gratitude; acknowledging your own deep gifts. Make a shift of consciousness that will make the world possible. Tap collective intelligence and consciousness (listen and hear). Be at

peace with yourself and the world will follow. Know that we choose how we react; we are responsible for the self and our decisions and actions.”

Dealing with Oppression

One of the key findings in the first research study was the awareness and knowledge the senior women had of the impact of patriarchy in organizations and society. While these messages about oppression may seem too strong to younger women who do not identify with feminism, nevertheless they offer guidance that is well-taken when navigating the unexpected challenges of organizational dynamics:

- » “Recognize that you are only oppressed to the degree you allow yourself to be oppressed in your own heart.”
- » “Embrace your particular female power. Do not allow yourself to be intimidated. Stand tall and grounded. Learn from the successful women executives—they’re the ones that are really in the line of fire and you must try to identify with that position and barrage of missiles they are subjected to from others—both men and women. You can be a model for them of retaining your ‘female’ qualities effectively. Be well educated and well-aware of diversity issues and address them head on, but effectively.”
- » “Do your work on loosening the grip of the binary codes of sex and gender. Figure out your politics on democracy and empire. Sort out your position of what you mean by being an ally. Have strong spiritual practices. Deconstruct your own internalized misogyny and get to the place of power equity/harmony between the male and female parts of your own psyche so you can be strong enough to not join the problem.”
- » “Dismiss the belief that patriarchy, sexism, male and White privilege are going to be eradicated by you and your womyn colleagues [quote intentionally spelled that way as a political statement]. That is work for men to do with men. Cultivate your personal power and your relationship with courage. Think of courage (and its forms) as applied skills. Apply it to your OD work! Call

out dismissive, discounting, and sabotage of womyn by womyn. Consider how you may be distancing yourself from feminism and learn more about feminist methodologies and how they can benefit you and your OD work.”

Impact

After conducting the initial research I then embarked on my own journey of being an OD consultant absolutely influenced and empowered by what I learned from these women. They were my virtual learning

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laboratory and helped me in a way that no book, class, or workshop had. With my eye on the hidden aspects of organizational dynamics, I could see forces at work when power was used to dominate those who were seen as different. Especially in healthcare, where hierarchy and patriarchy have a long tradition, I could help people in the organization appreciate why teamwork was failing and help them succeed. Eager to follow their advice about relationships, I took care to build partnerships, to get and give mentoring, and to be alert to toxic interactions. I was less naïve than prior to learning from them and more confident in pulling from a wide range of resources to be an effective catalyst for leadership coaching, program development, navigating organizational dynamics, and culture change.

What I discovered through doing the first study was a capacity I did not know I had—to be a passionate researcher and trust my inner knowing to express what Thomas Merton refers to as the “value, rightness, and truth of the work itself.” I then applied those capacities to my work in organizations. As I progressed in my leadership roles in OD, I regularly published and presented, receiving recognition

on my impact on culture change as a Chief Learning Officer (Whitney, 2007). However, eventually I experienced what the women in the follow-up study point to when changes in organizational leadership and priorities can wipe out years of work. Returning to the research has rekindled my aliveness and inspired me to create my own third act. Further, through their resilience during challenging times, the study participants have offered me a window on how to move through aging with more grace and perspective.

What I learned from these women in the follow-up study is key: that younger women do not have to be demoralized when considering their own futures, as the senior women feared twenty years ago. What the second generation has contributed is a treasure trove of expert and diverse solutions for bringing about systemic change to address important problems in organizations, communities, and the world. By taking their personal and professional growth seriously, they have become more than they might have without such expert support and guidance. Now they set an example for other women to give themselves permission to invest in themselves, their careers, and whatever it takes to make a difference. I know they have affected me in the same way. And they told me that I have affected them by being a catalyst for their reconnecting as a community.

What we learn from the women’s reflections on their poem portraits is there is an essence in each of us that transcends the details of our changing situations. Sharing of our stories provides the opportunity to reveal our true selves and experience deeper connections so critical to diversity, inclusiveness, and the promise of

OD. Sharing our stories helps us see that everyone struggles. Knowing this reminds us to shift from a focus on struggles to cultivating what is remarkable, resilient, and relevant in our lives. The hope, then, is that younger women are inspired to become the next generation of leaders in the workplace, field, and beyond.

Conclusion

This article provides a summary of the experiences and perceptions of successful women in OD with over 40 years in their own consulting practices. From the original 32 and the current 27 women from the second generation, we learn how they came into the field, the personal and professional changes that ensued over that time, the challenges they struggled with in doing OD, the contributions they made to the field, and the lessons they pass on to younger women. Two decades later they paint a vivid portrait of the issues still facing OD and the organizations in which they work.

While much has changed in society, the need for younger women of all colors and all sexual orientations to take up the banner of anti-racism, feminism, and social justice is imperative. No matter what label they apply to themselves, the work of true inclusion based on ever-growing diversity cannot be accomplished without the commitment of men and women, separately and together, challenging the status quo and holding a vision of equality for all. The women in the research are advocates for linking organizational strategy with cultural sensitivity and a global perspective.

Each of the women in this study is a role model for aging with examples of how they stay vital, are reinventing themselves, and still giving to others. Although a concern for ageism was evident in the original study, it has not been a theme in the follow-up. As senior women with expertise and the autonomy of business owners, they have not experienced the ageism common to those employed in organizations. Whether retired, doing different work, or continuing their OD practices, these

women know what brings them satisfaction. At the same time, they are articulate about what has not been fulfilling about the work and the field, and some have moved on. Some are writing fiction and personal memoirs and also making sure what is important to them professionally is added to the library of scholar-practitioner contributions. Their legacy so far already includes substantial publications, a history of influence and impact, sophistication about relationships, and stellar reputations.

Deserving of public recognition, which many of them have received, they stay internally focused on their own definitions of success. They continue to be the same generous, honest, and accomplished business women and leaders I first had the honor to meet. An outcome of this research is validation of the continuity of who they are at the core throughout the trajectory of their careers. By focusing on the collective story of the second generation of women in OD, younger women and the field can appreciate this significant missing piece of its history.

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