

# TWO DECADES OF WOMEN LATIN AMERICANIST GEOGRAPHERS

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## ABSTRACT

The past two decades has witnessed the growth in membership and stature of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers since its official organization in May, 1970, at Ball State University. In our paper we examine the contributions of women Latin Americanist geographers over the same time period. First we evaluate numerically the papers presented by women at CLAG meetings. Then we discuss the proportion of females who have published in the *CLAG Proceedings* in a general relationship to those who have published in *Annals* of the Association of American Geographers. Finally, we consider their overall service and participation in CLAG governance. Results suggest that after an uneven start, the pattern of contributions of women Latin Americanist geographers in all three categories has been both commensurate with or in greater proportion to the overall contributions made by women geographers in the discipline. It also appears that several geographers have acted as catalysts, promoting increased participation by women geographers over time.

The issue of the invisibility of women geographers as practitioners of the discipline was raised nearly two decades ago.<sup>(1)</sup> Since then, there has been considerable documentation of women's underrepresentation and the operation of gender bias at both micro and macro spatial scales.<sup>(2)</sup> The historical roots of contemporary gender biases have been identified and the social and economic basis of gender discrimination have been examined by other researchers.<sup>(2)</sup>

Notwithstanding this documentation, two decades of professional activity by women Latin Americanist geographers, active within every subdiscipline of geography, provides a unique temporal perspective and prospective for the discipline. We think geographers have a professional and moral obligation to consider the diversity of human behavior and perspectives. This ethical model applies to relations within our own academic peer group as well. Our essay offers qualitative perspectives and quantitative observations about the professional activities of women in the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers (CLAG). We celebrate the positive accomplishments of a heretofore minority voice.

First we outline the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers meetings in which women geographers have participated by presenting papers over the past two decades. A discussion of women geographers' publication[**end p. 359**] record in *CLAG Proceedings* follows. The number of articles and page length of articles are compared with the publication record of women geographers in the *Annals* of the Association of American Geographers, a highly ranked scholarly journal. Finally, we consider the overall leadership contribution of women geographers through service and participation in CLAG governance as well as related changes

in United States society during the same time periods.

**Table 1: Women Geographers: Presentations at CLAG Meetings**

Year	Place	Presentations by Women	Total
1970	Muncie	0	56
1971	Syracuse	1	18
1972	-no meeting-		
1973	Calgary	7	63
1974	Boca Raton	7	53
1975	Chapel Hill	1	17
1976	El Paso	5	33
1977	Paipa	7	90
1978	Rohnert Park	2	43*
1979	-no meeting-		
1980	Muncie	1	44
1981	Buffalo	0	13**
1982	Santo Domingo	7	44
1983	-no meeting-		
1984	Ottawa	5	43
1985	Washington, DC	5	35
1986	-no meeting-		
1987	Merida	14***	57
1988	San Jose	7	35
1989	Queretaro	21	90

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\* Seven read by title only.

\*\* Panel session chairs only.

\*\*\* Not including Presidential Addresses.

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These past two decades (1970 to 1990) have witnessed a significant growth in membership and stature of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers since its official organization in May, 1970, at Ball State University. There was a concomitant growth in participation in the organization by women geographers. **[end p. 360]**

## **PARTICIPATION AND PUBLICATION RECORD**

Scholarly growth is the *sine qua non* in the sustenance of an academic community. Dissemination of research results and ultimately their formal publication remains the cornerstone of professional advancement.

The small number of women participants at CLAG meetings is striking (Table 1). During the first decade (1970 to 1980), participation increased from zero to 13 percent of the CLAG programs.<sup>(3)</sup>

From 1982 onward the participation averaged 18 percent, with considerable variation year to year. Over the two-decade period, slightly over 12 percent of all paper presentations were contributed by women geographers. While the absolute numbers are small, they are proportional to the number of women geographers who were members of CLAG during those time periods.

Interestingly, it appears that the CLAG meetings outside the United States (Calgary, Paipa, Santo Domingo, Merida, San Jose and Queretaro) attract proportionally more women participants than those within United States borders. Many of those participants were Latin American women geographers from Latin American universities.

The publication record in CLAG proceedings, although sporadic, is slightly more robust (Figure 1).

Following a slow start in the early 1970s, the percentage of articles contributed by women geographers increased from zero to 27 percent in Volume 6 with a maximum of 29 percent in Volume 14 in 1988. From 1981 to the present, women geographers have contributed an average of 13 percent of the articles in the Proceedings. However, the average for their contribution of articles for the two decades combined is about 10 percent. Curiously, the number of pages per article differs by gender. More often than not, the article length is a page or two less for women contributors. The average percentage of total volume pages contributed by women was slightly under 10 percent (9.6 percent) for the entire period; however, considering pages from 1983 to the present, the average is nearly 17 percent (16.8 percent).

A comparison of CLAG *Proceedings* publications with those contributions by women geographers to the *Annals* of the Association of American Geographers follows. Janice Monk demonstrated that an average of 2.9 percent of the *Annals* articles were contributed by women for the period 1911-1971.<sup>(5)</sup>

The period of 1970 to 1980 shows an average of 8 percent of articles by women geographers whereas from 1980 to 1989 the average increased to an average of 15 percent. The percentage of articles by women geographers for the two decades combined averaged over 11 percent, one percentage point above the CLAG *Proceedings*. With the exception of 1970, the extreme fluctuations in number of articles are not as evident as they were for the CLAG *Proceedings*.

The average number of pages in *Annals* articles compared by gender indicates that women have contributed slightly longer articles than men, 15 pages versus 14 pages, respectively. The percent of pages contributed by women geographers for the two decades, 11.67 percent, is just slightly more than that indicated for the CLAG proceedings.

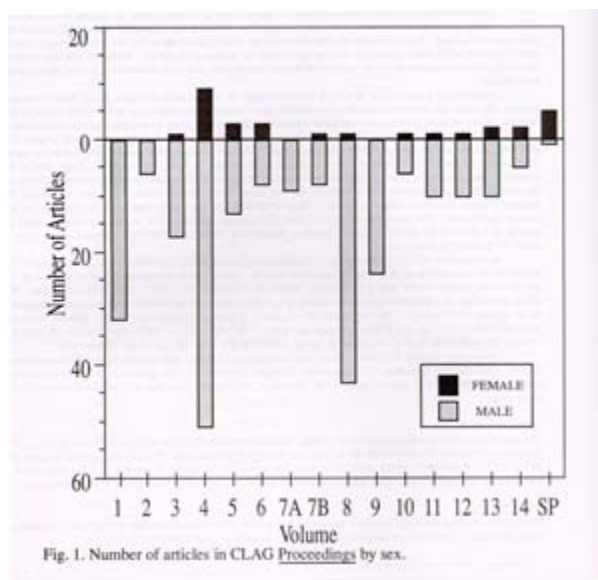
## GOVERNANCE

The past decade has witnessed considerable change, indeed. For example, three women, Katherine Kvale, Lydia Pulsipher and Martha Works have served as editors of the *CLAG Proceedings*. Furthermore, women membership on the CLAG Board of Directors totals 19 to date, for an average of nearly 20 percent, and has been actively supported by the organization. One woman, Barbara Fredrich, has served as Chair of the Board of Directors.

## DISCUSSION

The patterns depicted merit interpretation in an historical context. Here we present some thoughts and observations about the nature of women's participation in geographic research in Latin America.

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Indeed, interest in Latin America has not been constrained by time or gender. As has been aptly demonstrated by Janice Monk, demonstrated about Lucia Harrison by Oscar Horst, and briefly noted by Bud Minkel, among others, most women geographers traditionally taught school in grades K-12, so there was by definition a limited participation of women in university research where higher credentials were increasingly necessary.<sup>(6)</sup>

Monk notes, in fact, that between 1900 to 1970, women contributed an average of 20 percent of the articles in the *Journal of Geography*, which is devoted to geographic education. This proportion continues to date.

What are the underlying reasons for this pattern? During this period, there could be few

contributors from the middle or lower classes where the social structure did not permit women equal access to the educational resources provided by society. Perhaps some of the early twentieth century women geographers came from upper class echelons and were not economically, socially or personally constrained so that they were in a position to participate actively in geographic research as independent thinkers and explorers and they may have had access to independent outlets for their research. Moreover, their livelihood or economic existence may not have depended upon direct competition with men in the academy. Nevertheless, the fervent desire to explore and discover the world in order to understand spatial processes and pursue eclectic themes was present then as it is today.

We suspect that this upper echelon scenario describes the situation for some of the early affluent Latin Americanist women geographers who contributed actively to Latin American geography apart from pedagogy. This pattern probably persisted until the 1970s in the United States and possibly elsewhere. Concomitant and proportional to the increased enrollments in colleges and universities by middle-class persons, women expressed their interest in geography. Nevertheless, field training necessary for research was not equally accessible at all universities. Sources of financial support from male-dominated institutions were limited. Probably a great deal of field work was conducted with meager funding.

The past two decades have witnessed legislation providing for equal hiring practices (1971), passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (1972), the Supreme Court verdict on *Roe vs. Wade* (1973), equal access to credit (1975), equal consideration for a Rhodes scholarship (1976), absence of gender bias in naming hurricanes (1979) and the naming of a woman as an Associate Justice of the Supreme Court (1981). However, as of spring, 1991, women were still earning 70 cents to the male dollar.<sup>(7)</sup>

Some demographers have suggested that there can be little equality until 2025.

Women do not fit the academic "success" model. The myth of a career path, started early and scrupulously adhered to, is false. Each succeeding step, otherwise known as promotion, in the appropriate time frame is defined as "success." Falling behind connotes "failure." Women attempt to adjust to that environment where research is typically more valued than teaching; where the emphasis is *mastery*, the objective, *dispassionate mastery* of the subject; where sabbatical means "work;" and where hierarchical peer relationships prevail. Moreover, there exists a particular type of camaraderie around shared work and successful experiences in "playing the system," which are sometimes described as the exhilaration of "doing it" in the "hero model" of the patriarchal academic domain.

The adjustment is not without inherent difficulty. Basically, women start later and the cost of starting later in career context is high. Women's career paths are interrupted for personal, often familial reasons. Progression or pace in the career context is best described as erratic. While networking among women geographers has increased, Latin Americanists included, the absolute number of women faculty in geography departments hinders the evolution of an *esprit de corps femmes*. [end p. 363]

Several feminist geographers have acted and continue to act as catalysts promoting the increasing participation by women geographers over the past two decades.<sup>(8)</sup> To these people, listed in random order, Tom Martinson, Oscar Horst, Gary Elbow, Dick Longwell, Clarissa Kimber, Carl Johannessen and Ernst Griffin, we express our sincere gratitude. These geographers, among others, recognized that analyses of social, cultural and physical processes in the landscape must take into consideration the imprints of the other 50 percent of the population in order to interpret change and spatial transformation. In the final analysis we see *gender bias*, not *gender*, as the problem.

As we as social scientists begin to identify the socio-historical and economic bases of gender prejudices, we will come to an understanding of how institutionalized gender bias, reflected in patriarchy, restricts women's access to quality positions in academia. Ultimately, this process of self appraisal will enhance participation and the quality (read *reality*) of scholarly academic research, unbiased in its world view.

## CONCLUSION

The numerical comparisons appear rudimentary or simplistic because they indicate only a partial record of the participation and accomplishments of women geographers. However, these comparisons represent a relatively objective accounting of progress that may be compared with future conditions. Furthermore, they suggest more questions than provide answers. We conclude in that very spirit.

Social scientists have often reflected the gender prejudices of the group in which their work is embedded. Are CLAG research paradigms are different than those of other scholarly journals? What is the influence of specific training in geographic research? Does funding influence the role of geographic research and determine whether or not gender issues are involved?

More importantly, during this period of civil unrest in Latin America, does the new generation of Latin Americanist women geographers (*Latinas* and others) have sufficient women mentors to be successful in the academy of geographers? Are they increasingly financially burdened so as to preclude their participation in the academy?

We have reason to be most optimistic. In the presence of each new generation of geographers is the possibility of transformation of the environment of academia. We find these circumstances constitute perhaps not a renaissance but considerable cause for optimism indeed.

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## Notes

1. See Wilbur Zelinsky's report in *The Professional Geographer* 25(2):101-112 and 151-165. Janice Monk analyzed the activities of women geographers in her paper entitled "Women Geographers and Geographic Institutions, 1900-1950." For a current appraisal of women in geography, see David R. Lee's article entitled "The Status of Women in Geography: Things Change, Things

Remain the Same," in *The Professional Geographer* 42(2):202-211. Also, profiles of Association of American Geographers membership appear in the AAG Newsletter. See Volume 26 Number 4 for 1988-1990 data.

2. See, for example, the chapter entitled "The Geography of Gender" by Sophie Bowlby et al. in Richard Peet and Nigel Thrift, eds. *New Models in Geography*. London: Unwin Hyman, 1989. For a recent listing of references, see *Women in Geography, 1990: A Bibliography*, by David R. Lee, available on request.

3. A complete listing of all CLAG presentations by women and year is available from the authors on request. Participation can be based on other criteria, such as attendance, pedagogical excellence, mentoring, or administrative service.

4. A complete listing of CLAG publications by women and volume is available from the authors upon request.

5. See Janice Monk, "Women Geographers and Geographic Institutions, 1900-1950."

6. See *Papers in Latin American Geography in Honor of Lucia C. Harrison*, Special Publication of the Conference of Latin Americanist Geographers, Volume 1. Ed. by Oscar H. Horst (1981).

7. See Rebecca Blank, "Women's Paid Work, Household Income, and Household Well-Being" in *The American Woman, 1988-1989: A Status Report*. Ed. by Sara Rix. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1988. For general overviews, see Sey Chassler, "How Working Women Have Changed America," *Working Woman* 1986:129-175 and Catherine Romano and Alexandra Siegel, "Who Makes What" in *Working Woman* 1991:68-70.

8. A feminist geographer, herein defined from the Women and Geography Study Group of the IBG, is that person who explicitly takes into account the socially created gender structure of society and who expresses a commitment both towards the alleviation of gender inequality in the short term and towards its removal through change towards real equality in the long term.

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