

# GENDERING CLASS IN LATIN AMERICA: How Women Effect and Experience Change in the Class Structure<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract: Female participation in the Latin American paid labor force is increasing dramatically. Building upon Portes and Hoffman's (2003) model, we use occupational data to measure gendered changes in Latin America's class structure over the last two decades of economic restructuring and adjustment and to investigate the causes and consequences of these regional patterns. Our results suggest two important conclusions. First, economic adjustment and restructuring is increasing women's parity with men in terms of class position largely as a consequence of the deterioration of men's once-privileged location in the class structure. Second, recent economic adjustment and restructuring has altered power relations between social classes in Latin America in part because it has inspired both qualitative and quantitative changes in the gendered composition of Latin American labor. The number of women entering the work force, and the labor conditions suffered particularly by women workers, has resulted in both the literal and figurative "emasculatation" of the Formal Proletariat. These preliminary findings make clear the explanatory benefits of including gender in analyses of changes in the Latin American class structure.*

## INTRODUCTION

Female participation in the Latin American paid labor force is increasing dramatically. Between 1980 and 2000, the male economically active population (EAP) grew by just 0.84 percent to a rate of 72 percent,<sup>2</sup> while the region's female EAP grew by 32.5 percent, reaching 37.2 percent in

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2. EAP refers to employed and unemployed individuals over the age of ten who are active in the labor force. The urban data we employ throughout this study refer to individuals ages 15 and older who are members of the labor force.

2000 (ECLAC 2003, 20). Latin America's female EAP is projected to continue increasing to 41.6 percent by 2010, while the male EAP is expected to remain steady at 72 percent (ECLAC 2003, 20). These changes in the gendered composition of the labor force suggest that women's class position, when operationalized as an individual's relationship to the means of production, is undergoing a profound transformation relative to men's class position in Latin America.

Building upon Portes and Hoffman's model of Latin American class structure (2003, 41–82), we measure and investigate the causes and consequences of these changes in the gendered components of class. Our results highlight two important trends. First, even as their overall quality of life may be in decline, the economic adjustment and restructuring of recent decades has increased women's parity with men in terms of class position. Second, and perhaps most provocatively, recent economic adjustment and restructuring has altered power relations between social classes in Latin America in part *because* it has inspired both qualitative and quantitative changes in the gendered composition of Latin American labor. The number of women entering the work force, and the labor conditions suffered, particularly by women workers, weaken the overall power of the working class in relation to the dominant classes. Thus, gender discrimination in the Latin American occupational structure is not only an important outcome of global economic adjustment and restructuring, it may also be a vehicle by which global capitalism is becoming increasingly efficient in disempowering all of Latin America's workers.

In what follows, we first review the literature on changes in women's labor force participation in Latin America during the past two decades of economic crisis, adjustment, and restructuring. Next, we present Portes and Hoffman's framework for analyzing Latin American class structures and suggest how incorporating gender into their model can advance our understanding of both gender inequality and recent changes in the Latin American class system. We utilize these literatures to present five broad hypotheses about how women effect and experience change in Latin American class structures. We then examine these hypotheses by creating and analyzing a gendered model of class structures based upon regional occupational data. Finally, we discuss how our gendered portrait of Latin America's class structure helps explain the effects of economic crisis and restructuring on women, as well as the effects of women's changing labor force participation on class structures and interclass relations.

#### WOMEN WORKERS AND ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING IN LATIN AMERICA

Before 1980, most Latin American nations pursued a neo-Keynesian development path commonly referred to as Import Substituting Industrialization (ISI). ISI fueled rapid growth in both industrial and public sector

employment as well as a corresponding improvement in living standards and the strengthening of labor movements (Infante and Klein 1991; Oliveira and Roberts 1994; Roberts 2002; Tardanico 1997). In the 1980s, under the weight of debt and inefficiencies, the ISI model gave way to a series of market reforms to accommodate the ongoing process of global economic restructuring. "Economic restructuring" refers to qualitative changes in the global integration and transnationalization of production, trade, and investment over the last two decades. This increasing integration is promoted by international financial institutions, which encourage nations to pursue structural adjustment and liberal market reforms such as privatizing national industries, decentralizing production, and promoting market competition through foreign investment and liberalized trade. This transition reversed wage and job security gains made by many Latin American workers under ISI: industrial and public sector jobs were lost, unemployment rose, labor conditions declined, unionization was curtailed, economic inequality increased, and minimum wages dropped (Infante and Klein 1991; Oliveira and Roberts 1994; Roberts 2002).

During this period of rising unemployment and worsening labor conditions, wage labor became an increasingly important component of women's lives, regardless of whether or not they lived with a male partner (Roberts 1995).<sup>3</sup> Depending on the country, between 1.6 and 2.0 household members are now economically active (World Bank 2004, table 4.3). Although between 61 and 94 percent of female heads of household with children (depending on the country) engage in paid work, between 38 and 59 percent of women in male-headed households with children are also employed (World Bank 2004, table 1.3). Despite women's intensive unpaid reproductive labor, the average weekly number of hours they spend on paid labor is only slightly less than that of men (ECLAC 2004, table IV, 15). Moreover, women's urban labor-force participation rates are highest between the ages of 25 and 44, precisely the ages at which females' reproductive labor peaks (ECLAC 2004).

Yet, women's quantitative gains in the labor force do not appear to bring commensurate qualitative gains. Recent empirical studies (Chant with Craske 2000; Roberts 1995; Thorin 2001; Ward and Pyle 1995) stress that the female labor force is experiencing a "disproportionate expansion of low-skilled, low-paid, unstable, and legally unregulated jobs" (Tardanico 1997, 12), suggesting a "ghettoization" of women's labor in the lowest strata of the occupational structure (Charles and Grusky 2004). Moreover, despite females' increasing educational attainment and school enrollment rates that equal or exceed those of men (ECLAC 2002, 253–254), a fierce wage gap persists between men and women in similar

3. Rates of female-headed households in Latin American nations range from 20 percent (Mexico) to 35 percent (Nicaragua) (ECLAC 2002, 223–24).

occupations. This gap only increases with higher levels of education (ECLAC 2002, 193–94). Indeed, 60 percent of the male-female wage gap cannot be explained by age, education, or human capital, but results from gender biases (Psacharopoulos and Tzannatos 1992).

Demand-side explanations of women's increasing-yet-consistently-subordinate role in the workforce focus on the effects of economic restructuring. Specifically, the tertiarization of labor markets, the removal of policies protecting Latin American industries and their workers, and the increasing ease with which companies can move their production from country to country, have reduced employment opportunities and wages in domestic production, particularly in male-dominated sectors (e.g., traditional manufacturing) (Roberts 1995). Conversely, employers in the rapidly expanding, low-wage, low-skill, export-oriented manufacturing sector have purposefully pursued women workers because they are considered a more flexible, cheaper, and docile labor force. Although women are not inherently "weak" workers as such stereotypes suggest (Salzinger 2003), it is true that unions and political parties have long ignored the concerns of women workers (Craske 1999, 88–111), while various forms of gender inequality in the larger social system (discrimination in the household, in education, in resource distribution, etc.) have made it more difficult for women than men to improve their occupational status (Wright 2001). Furthermore, these newly emerging export sectors have proven particularly efficient at disempowering workers, regardless of gender, by eschewing unionization, reducing wage and non-wage benefits, employing flexible hiring and firing systems, and adopting short-term contracts (Gwynne and Kay 1999). In short, studies of economic restructuring hypothesize that "countries experiencing major expansion of export-assembly production will see the fastest overall job growth for women in downgraded manufacturing sectors, and within those sectors growth in jobs for women will outpace that for men" (Tardanico 1997, 12). Thus, growing demand for workers in low-skilled, unstable, and legally unregulated export-assembly manufacturing has resulted in more than two decades of "female-led" industrialization (Chant with Craske 2000; Elson and Pearson 1981; Tiano 1994; Ward and Pyle 1995), and has also concentrated women precisely in the sectors where workers' rights are increasingly constrained.

Supply-side explanations of the increasing-yet-consistently-subordinate role of women's labor highlight how the economic crises coinciding with economic restructuring drove women to work (Roberts 1995, 129).<sup>4</sup> The stabilization and structural adjustment policies used by

4. Tardanico and Menjivar Larín (1997, 252–61) found that in most countries in Latin America, the "push" of poverty was a greater factor in women's increased economic activity than the "pull" of opportunities in job markets.

governments to combat economic crises caused rapid, region-wide impoverishment.<sup>5</sup> Contracting production provoked skyrocketing unemployment, inflation left workers' real incomes worth fractions of what they had been, prices of basic goods increased exorbitantly, and the heavy burdens of national debts led to severely curtailed social services throughout the region. Very rapidly, what was once conceptualized as female's "surplus" wages transformed into a dramatically higher portion of household economic resources and a necessity for household survival (Roberts 1995; González de la Rocha, et al. 2004).<sup>6</sup>

The severe budget cuts accompanying structural adjustment programs also contracted the public sector throughout Latin America, a sector representing one of the few formal occupational categories where women were well represented before 1980 (Infante and Klein 1991, 133; Roberts 1995, 142). Thus, not only did parallel processes of restructuring and adjustment push non-working women into the labor force, they also decreased job opportunities in the one sector of employment that historically held a relatively privileged position in terms of wages and benefits for women employees (ECLAC 2000, 244–47; ECLAC 2002, 186–89).<sup>7</sup>

A rich body of case studies documents how women have become the "shock absorbers" for these economic crises (Benería 1992; Elson 1992; González de la Rocha 1994; Moser 1992). In households facing enormous financial pressures, women responded by employing a series of strategies within the household, by organizing their communities to demand government assistance (Corcoran-Nantes 1993; Molyneaux 1985; Safa 1990), and by going to work or increasing the amount of time that they spent on paid labor (Benería 1992; González de la Rocha 2001; Oliveira and Roberts 1994; Roberts 1991). While household and community organizing strategies may have empowered women politically, women's roles as "shock absorbers" only increased their vulnerability in the work place, as vanishing household resources necessitated their increased acquiescence to poor working conditions (Chant 1999; Fernandez-Kelly 1994; Moghadam 1999; Thorin 2001). Thus, the term "global feminization of labor" has come to mean not only a proportionate rise of women in the workforce, but also a conversion of "all industrial employment to

5. By 1996, the average real industrial wage in Latin America was 5 percent less than that of 1980; between 1980 and 1997, the average real minimum wage fell by 30 percent (Roberts 2002, 6–7). Historically the region with the world's largest income inequality, Latin America's region-wide Gini coefficient grew from less than 0.50 to 0.56 between 1980 and 1995 (Roberts 2002, 7).

6. By *surplus* we mean not the main component of households' income, but casual or "secondary" wages earned in informal labor markets (see Chant with Craske 2000).

7. Tardanico and Menjivar Larín (1997, 252–61) found that females employed in the public sector in the 1990s generally filled low-skill, low-paying posts compared to their male counterparts, suggesting that the importance of these jobs for women may be overstated.

the (inferior) conditions endured by female labor" (Pearson 1998, 176; see also Standing 1999). Many localized case studies seem to suggest that women's increasing employment could be an important vehicle by which economic restructuring disempowers Latin American workers. However, the generalizability of the link between increasing numbers of women in the labor market and the overall deterioration of the power of the working class remains mostly speculative.

In sum, national-level studies of women's labor force participation in Latin America have highlighted the correlations between economic restructuring, women's work, and poverty, while micro-level, qualitative analyses have illustrated how women use both their paid and unpaid labor to survive increasing levels of poverty. Yet these analyses cannot explicitly address how economic restructuring affects both men's and women's positions within the regional class structure. As women take on more traditionally powerful roles such as "proletarian" and "head of household," do they also increase their privilege within the existing social order? How might changes in the use of female labor power affect the overarching class structure and relationships between classes? Are women truly leading the "race to the bottom," or are men simply joining the race by increasingly reflecting women's traditionally subordinate positions in the occupational class structure?

#### WHY MERGE CLASS AND GENDER?

Naturally, we are not the first to suggest marrying class analysis with research on gender inequality. Social scientists have long shown that class position shapes individuals' life chances, political behavior, and identity, while a society's class structure affects conflict among and between social groups. As a tool, class can reveal the causes of inequality and poverty and not just their surface manifestations (Portes and Hoffman 2003). Understanding the power relationships underlying class structures, therefore, can also illuminate the power relationships underlying gender structures. Just as each woman's class situation determines in part her life chances, analyzing women's distribution across a society's class structure can improve our understanding of the nature of women's inequality. Likewise, gender relations also have a causal impact on class relations. For example, certain class positions (domestic service is commonly cited) only exist when specific forms of gender relations are present in society (Wright 2001, 30). Thus, it seems logical for those interested in women's changing political and economic power to use class as an analytical tool, just as those interested in changing class structures must take into account the dynamic effects of gender relations.

In the 1970s, feminist theorists contested the male bias inherent in traditional models of class structure and mobilization, which were based

solely on men and men's occupations. Women and women's work, in the household and in the labor market, were conceptualized as being subsumed by male or household class positions (see for example, Blau and Duncan 1967; Goldthorpe 1980; Wright 1979). Feminist theorists developed extensive theoretical works addressing the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy as dual systems of exploitation (Acker 1980; Benería and Roldán 1987; Hartmann 1981) but struggled to theoretically integrate class and gender hierarchies as part of one dynamic process. Others devised empirical methods for studying class structures so that women were included (Britten and Heath 1983; Crompton and Mann 1986; Davis and Robinson 1988), but they were critiqued for reproducing male biases in the conceptualization of class (Acker 2000).

The challenges of merging large-scale systems of production and reproduction, of capitalism and patriarchy, created much fruitful discussion but no "new grand theory in which women and their work were as central as men and their work" (Acker 1989, 48). By the 1980s, feminist scholars interested in parallel hierarchies of class and gender moved away from attempts to measure their concomitant and interactive effects (what Wright called a "clender" category in 1993 [40]), toward understanding how these hierarchies are produced and maintained in particular moments and local places. While recognizing the value of such local-level studies, we regret the declining interest in generalizable trends at national or regional levels. Our conceptualization of class and gender admittedly does little to resolve the central questions of the 1970s, but we hope that, by demonstrating the great utility of even this most basic merger, we will at minimum revive the debate.

Akin to the unanswered theoretical questions about gender and class is a lacuna of regional-level class analyses on Latin America (Roberts 1995, 135).<sup>8</sup> In 1985, Portes was the first to systematically model and measure Latin American class structures. While acknowledging the tremendous variation across Latin American nations in terms of the size and strength of the different classes, Portes (1985) argued that generalizations can (and should) be made about the highly similar configuration of class structures across the region, given Latin American nations' (with the exception of Cuba) shared status as dependent economies in a global capitalist system. Portes operationalized classes in Latin America using the same Marxist criteria as many studies of advanced capitalist societies, by categorizing individuals according to their relationship to

8. Class issues are of course prevalent in research on Latin America, but most studies focus on the historical, structural, and transformative potential of classes at the national level, while world systems analyses use national-level measures to gauge inequality between nations.

the means of production. In doing so, he demonstrated clearly that because a large proportion of their populations exist outside of formal capitalist relations, Latin American nations do not fit neatly into the theoretical categories of class developed for advanced nations. Peripheral nations' massive Informal Proletariat plays a central role in supporting the global capitalist system and is critical for understanding class relations (and their corresponding political and economic significance) within Latin America.

Recently, Portes and Hoffman (2003) reanalyzed Latin American class structures in order to determine whether and how two decades of economic restructuring and adjustment have transformed them. Their new analysis suggests that the introduction of neoliberal politics in the 1980s and 1990s caused a decline in the size of the Formal Proletariat, increased the size of the Petty Bourgeoisie, and drove hoards of unemployed or underemployed into the informal labor market (Portes and Hoffman 2003, 55). They (like others such as Oliveira and Roberts 1994; Tardanico 1997; and Roberts 2002) argued that "plant closures, the precarization of employment, subcontracting, and the creation of special export zones—all part of this new model—have severely weakened the formal proletariat and, in turn, its capacity to support class parties" (Portes and Hoffman 2003, 76). Neoliberalism thus "weakened the basis for organized class struggle and the channels for the effective mobilization of popular discontent" (Portes and Hoffman 2003, 77). Moreover, they argued that the Formal Proletariat's political disempowerment, and a "common fate of poverty and deprivation" for both formal and informal workers, inspired new forms of political mobilization in an area previously dominated by the growing Informal Proletariat: communities (Portes and Hoffman 2003, 76). Despite the fact that women were often the first to utilize community politics throughout Latin America, and despite the enormous growth in the female workforce that has accompanied the transformations inspired by neoliberalism, this analysis, like the earlier study, was silent on issues of gender.

The absence of gender in Portes and Hoffman's model leads us to a number of questions about women's labor power. Does growing class inequality affect all workers, male and female, the same? If not, can the class hierarchy measured by Portes and Hoffman, and the inequalities that it documents, help explain the gendered distribution of economic power? Alternatively, do the strongly gendered differences in labor force participation, experiences, and rewards outlined in the existing literature also foment distinctly gendered class distributions? Finally, if class categories do vary over time according to gender, what are the implications of these variations for understanding the dynamics of class structure and struggle in the global capitalist system?



## PORTES AND HOFFMAN'S MODEL OF LATIN AMERICAN CLASS STRUCTURES

Portes and Hoffman (2003) classify individual workers based on the form of their remuneration and their possession of five assets, including (1) control over capital and the means of production, (2) control over a labor force, (3) possession of scarce or valued skills, (4) possession of other skills, and (5) legal protections and regulation. The resulting typology consists of four major classes, where the highest strata possess all five assets and the lowest lack all five assets: the Dominant Class, the Petty Bourgeoisie, the Formal Proletariat, and the Informal Proletariat.

The Dominant Class comprises two subclasses: Capitalists, and Professionals and Executives. The highest stratum, the Capitalists, is operationalized as large and medium-sized employers in private firms, managers of multinational subsidiaries, and top administrators of public and private enterprises. These latter groups are included with Capitalists because they control large-scale production; they control large labor forces; and, most importantly, they receive remuneration through profits or through high salaries tied to profits with bonuses (Portes 1985, 11; Portes and Hoffman 2003, 44).

The second subclass, Professionals and Executives, includes salaried managers and administrators of private firms and public institutions, university professionals, and other salaried professionals/technicians employed by large private and public institutions. These individuals possess scarce, highly valued skills, and they control the labor of others. Unlike the Capitalist subclass, however, they lack direct control over capital and the means of production, and they are not compensated on the basis of profits or bonuses tied to profits (Portes 1985, 11; Portes and Hoffman 2003, 45–47). According to Portes (1985, 11), this subclass plays a key role in producing and maintaining the social and economic infrastructure to legitimize the status quo.

The second class in Portes and Hoffman's hierarchy, the Petty Bourgeoisie, possesses some monetary resources or advanced skills and employs small numbers of workers. These individuals control limited means of production and labor and are remunerated through small, irregular profits. Portes, and Portes and Hoffman see the Petty Bourgeoisie as a key interstice of Latin America's class structure and a key location for social mobility. They link the interests of the Dominant Class to the functions of the remaining subordinate classes by organizing large segments of casual, informal labor. Through small, low-capital, flexible operations, as well as through complex and myriad subcontracting arrangements, this class directly supports global capitalist production; reduces consumption costs for wageworkers (and thus labor costs for employers); and reduces both direct and indirect production costs for formal firms, thereby enhancing their flexibility.

The third major class, the Formal Proletariat, comprises formal workers in either public or private institutions. These workers have steady, contractual work that is at least nominally safeguarded from abuse by wage regulation and social security coverage but do not control any means of production or labor. The Formal Proletariat includes everyone from lower-level civil servants and skilled industrial workers in heavy industries to maintenance personnel and sales clerks and thus is enormously heterogeneous in level of skill, unionization, wages, and working conditions. Portes (1985, 12) justified this broad categorization because of their relatively homogenous and privileged position in the class structure, owing to their generally contractual and protected wages, as well as their "indirect" wages in the form of benefits, union protection, and state regulation.

Following this large Formal Proletariat is a vast Informal Proletariat (Portes and Hoffman 2003, 44–50). Portes and Hoffman divide this expansive and diverse class into three subclasses: employees in informal microenterprises; self-employed, non-professional, non-technical workers; and domestic workers. Two shared characteristics set all informal proletarians apart as a mass of subordinate labor. First, their non-contractual remuneration is based on irregular earnings, piecework, verbal agreements, or even non-monetary compensations. Second, these workers lack the rights, protection, and the "indirect" wages and benefits that formal proletarians often enjoy. The precarious employment of informal proletarians lowers overall production costs through subcontracting, reduces consumption costs of the entire population (as well as for the foreign consumers of Latin American goods and services), and thus increases the amount of surplus wealth that the Dominant Class may extract, while limiting informal proletarians' power to generate wealth for themselves.

#### OUR HYPOTHESES

Portes and Hoffman used their model of Latin American class structures to measure how global economic restructuring contracted the size and political power of the Formal Proletariat and increasingly drove formal workers into the Petty Bourgeoisie and the Informal Proletariat. At the same time, contracting real wages and incomes for all but the Dominant Class increased income inequality between the highest stratum and the rest of Latin American workers, so that the majority of the non-dominant classes now receive wages that are below national poverty levels.

Given that a key feature of the recent economic crisis and restructuring is the growing number of women in Latin America's labor force, we argue that the trends Portes and Hoffman have identified likely differ by gender. We present five hypotheses about the direction and significance

of these gendered distinctions over the last two decades. Our null hypothesis is, of course, that changes in women's distribution across the class structure mirror those changes experienced by men.

Hypothesis 1: We hypothesize that recent improvements in women's educational attainment and recent increases in the size of the Dominant Class are working to increase the presence of women in this class.

Hypothesis 2: The Petty Bourgeoisie also increased in size during economic restructuring, but entering this class often requires capital, which women historically lack. Thus, we expect that women's representation in the Petty Bourgeoisie has stayed relatively the same or has perhaps even declined because of competition from male petty entrepreneurs.

Hypothesis 3: Existing research shows that women's employment has become increasingly central to private sector strategies of economic restructuring and has always been a large component of public sector employment. Meanwhile, Portes and Hoffman document an overall contraction of the Formal Proletariat, especially in the public sector. Should we expect that female patterns of employment in the Formal Proletariat have followed the overall pattern of contraction, or, given the new supply of and changing demand for women workers, might we expect that women's representation within this class has increased? We hypothesize that the overall number of female formal proletarians has declined, but that the relative number of women has increased in comparison to men. Moreover, given the poor labor conditions endured specifically by women, we expect that women's increasing presence in the Formal Proletariat may help explain Portes and Hoffman's observation of the declining power of this traditionally influential class. Given the emphasis in the economic restructuring literature on the shift to low-wage, low-skilled, unregulated employment in export-assembly operations, we also expect that rates of female proletarianization will be highest in nations aggressively pursuing comparative advantages in low-wage labor.

Hypothesis 4: Given the extensive literature about the "ghettoization" and increasing vulnerability of female labor, we expect that the acute, ongoing economic crisis and its accompanying impoverishment of households has driven an increase in the number and proportion of women who compose the Informal Proletariat.

Hypothesis 5: Finally, increases in women's educational attainment and the increased participation of women in the paid labor force should contribute to an overall improvement in gender-wage equality.

Whether and how women's changing labor force participation affects the overarching structures of class and gender inequality is the major theoretical focus of this paper. Collectively, these hypotheses posit that women's paid labor could be a key explanatory variable in exacerbating

income and power inequalities between the Dominant Class and the rest of Latin America's workers.

#### DATA AND METHODS

Like Portes and Hoffman (2003, see also Portes 1985), we use statistical series on occupations and incomes for economically active, employed populations furnished by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).<sup>9</sup> These data are compilations of periodic national censuses and household surveys from 1980–2000 for eighteen Latin American and Caribbean countries. Although these series are the best available, there are significant differences in these data over time and between nations, as well as differences in their reliability and variability. Yet, since we are measuring large and consistent regional trends over time, we consider these limitations acceptable.

Our analysis focuses on a weighted, regionally aggregated sub-sample of eight nations with complete and matching data from 1980: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, Uruguay, and Venezuela. We further narrowed our study of the employed, economically active population to urban populations for several reasons. First, nearly three-fourths of Latin America's population is urban. Second, space constraints do not allow us to compare both gender differences and urban and rural differences in class structure. Third, we feel that paid employment (our measurement of class) is a better measurement of urban than rural class structures.

Several classes in our typology correspond directly to ECLAC's occupational categories. These transferable categories include the Professional and Executive subclass, the Formal Proletariat, and two substrata of the Informal Proletariat (domestic servants and workers in microenterprises). Formal private sector and public sector workers together compose the Formal Proletariat but were not separated in most countries' series, forcing us to combine them in our aggregate measurements prior to 2000.<sup>10</sup> We operationalize the remaining classes using

9. Statistical appendices for ECLAC's *Panorama Social* (series 4,6,8,10, and 11). For 1980 data we used the 2000 edition and for all other data we used the 2002 edition. To calculate the size of the employed urban EAP by sex we used *Anuario Estadística*, 2003 edition. All of our data are accessible at: <http://www.eclac.org/estadisticas>.

10. With several exceptions in which national data combine workers in large and small enterprises, the formal private sector includes all wage earners in firms with five or more employees. Workers in microenterprises are employed (usually not contractually) in firms with fewer than five workers. Portes and Hoffman (2003) note that employment in firms with more than five workers does not automatically confer the protection and benefits traditionally associated with the Formal Proletariat. They estimate, therefore, that roughly 20 percent of those categorized as formal private sector workers have economic and class relationships that more closely resemble the Informal Proletariat.

matching series on low productivity sectors. Capitalists are those business owners in the total employed urban EAP, less the proportion of the EAP identified as business owners in low productivity sectors. These owners of low productivity businesses are included in the Petty Bourgeoisie, along with self-employed (own account) technicians and professionals. We estimate the self-employed Informal Proletariat sub-class as self-employed workers, less the self-employed technicians and professionals who we assign to the Petty Bourgeoisie.

Given this operationalization of class, we use weighted aggregate data from eight nations to estimate the separate class distributions of female and male workers for 1980, 1990, and 2000.<sup>11</sup> We aggregate the data from these eight nations by:

1. determining the urban, economically active male and female population (over age fifteen) of each nation for 1980, 1990, and 2000 (ECLAC 2003, tables 13 and 16);
2. reducing each figure according to the percentage of urban unemployed male and female workers in each country and each year (ILO 2004, table 3A; ECLAC 2003, table 32);
3. determining the numeric size of each occupational category in each nation and each year based on each nation's percentage distributions (ECLAC 2000, 237-40, 255-58; ECLAC 2002, 179-82, 197-200) and then;
4. summing the individual countries' urban employed male and female populations (we do this for each occupational category for each of the three years).

This aggregated sub-sample of eight countries (weighted by population) represents approximately 75 percent of Latin America's total urban, economically active, and employed population. We use these data to measure regional rates of female participation within each class (table 1), the proportion of females to males within each class (table 2), and how these rates vary over time. Based on these data, we also calculate several indices of dissimilarity to assess the overall differences in men and women's percentage distributions within the class structure and over time (table 1). To analyze gender income inequality, we use national-level data on the ratio of average female to average male incomes in each class (measured in multiples of each nation's poverty level). Finally, we also use data on average incomes within each class to approximate national male and female working populations earning wages less than the poverty level.

11. Most changes during this period were monotonic and we therefore focus in this initial study on changes between 1980 versus 2000.

We recognize several limitations of this most basic merger of class and gender. First, our data constrain us to model class structure using individual-level data for employed participants in the urban work force.<sup>12</sup> This precludes us from taking into account unemployed workers, the variety of employment statuses among workers in a household, or unpaid household labor,<sup>13</sup> even though we know that such labor plays a pivotal role in social welfare and the compositional and relational aspects of capitalist class structures (Chant 1999; Glucksmann 1990; Roberts 1995, 132–33, 145). Second, in light of our space constraints, we provide only a broad, regional overview that will hopefully serve as a template for more detailed analyses. Third, our use of aggregated urban areas within the region as a unit of analysis inevitably obscures what many note are increasing cross-national, intranational, and intraregional differences in labor markets and class structure (Oliveira and Roberts 1994; Tardanico and Menjivar Larín 1997, 13). Finally, we do not attempt to theorize how capitalism and patriarchy may interact. Our intention is therefore not to resolve the debate over the relationship between class and gender, but to revitalize it with comparative data on populations not incorporated in earlier studies and by showing how global economic change affects gendered relations of economic power.

#### GENDERING LATIN AMERICAN CLASS STRUCTURES

We present below our examination of each hypothesis, followed by an overall analysis of what global economic restructuring implies for both male and female workers in Latin America.

##### *Feminization of the Dominant Class?*

Our first hypothesis is that women's presence in the Dominant Class has increased. In Latin America, the Capitalist sub-class included only about 1 to 2 percent of the total employed urban EAP in 2000.<sup>14</sup> Broken down by gender, this subclass accounted for 1.9 percent of male

12. Although many class analyses use the household as the unit of analysis, compelling arguments have also been made for studying class at the individual level (Abbott and Payne 1990, 4).

13. For both non-employed and employed women, their household labor inhibits their opportunities to gain power within the labor market, within the household, and within broader society (Hartmann 1981).

14. Portes and Hoffman (2003) and Portes (1985) argue that because this classification includes owners of businesses with as few as five employees, these are inflated estimates of the true size the class of capitalists. Given that women tend to fill the lowest positions within class strata (Abbott and Payne 1990), we might further suspect that women classified as capitalists here are likely to be owners of the smallest businesses.

Table 1 *Urban Class Structures by Sex and Indices of Dissimilarity in Eight Latin American Nations, 1980 and 2000*

Class	Percentage of Employed Urban EAP					
	Total	1980		Total	2000	
		Males	Females		Males	Females
Dominant	<b>8.1</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>10.7</b>	<b>11.4</b>
Capitalist <sup>1</sup>	(1.3)	(1.9)	(0.4)	(1.9)	(2.5)	(1.0)
Professionals and Executives <sup>2</sup>	(6.8)	(4.9)	(9.5)	(9.1)	(8.2)	(10.4)
Petty Bourgeoisie <sup>3</sup>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>4.9</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>3.8</b>
Formal Proletariat <sup>4</sup>	<b>51.1</b>	<b>56.4</b>	<b>43.7</b>	<b>42.3</b>	<b>44.8</b>	<b>38.8</b>
Informal Proletariat	<b>37.3</b>	<b>32.1</b>	<b>44.4</b>	<b>41.9</b>	<b>38.8</b>	<b>46.1</b>
Informal Workers <sup>5</sup>	(7.5)	(8.8)	(5.6)	(10.1)	(12.6)	(6.6)
Self-Employed Workers <sup>6</sup>	(22.5)	(22.7)	(22.1)	(25.4)	(25.5)	(25.2)
Domestic Workers	(7.3)	(0.6)	(16.7)	(6.4)	(0.7)	(14.3)
Total	<b>100.0</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>99.9</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.1</b>	<b>100.1</b>

*Indices of Dissimilarity*

<i>Index comparing men and women</i>		<i>Index comparing 1980 and 2000</i>		
1980	2000	Total	Men	Women
20.7	10.4	9.6	11.7	7.4

Sources: ECLAC 2003: tables 13 and 16; ILO 2004: table 3A; ECLAC 2003: table 32; Portes and Hoffman 2003.

NOTE: Data used for weighted aggregate measures of the urban employed population include: Argentina (B.A. metro area), Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico (1984 data), Panama, Uruguay, and Venezuela (2000 data are national rather than just urban). Colombian data for 1980 and 2000 and Panamanian data for 1980 do not distinguish informal workers in microenterprises from formal workers, nor do they distinguish owners of large firms (Capitalists) from owners of microenterprises (part of the Petty Bourgeoisie). Mexican data for 1980 (which is from 1984), does not distinguish Formal Proletariat from informal microenterprise workers.

<sup>1</sup>Owners of firms employing five or more workers.

<sup>2</sup>Salariated administrators, university professionals, and technicians employed in firms with five or more workers.

<sup>3</sup>Owners of firms employing less than five workers, plus self-employed professionals and technicians.

<sup>4</sup>Wage workers in firms (public and private) employing five or more workers.

<sup>5</sup>Wage workers in firms (private) employing fewer than five workers.

<sup>6</sup>Self-employed non-professional, non-technical workers.

workers in 1980 and 2.5 percent of male workers in 2000 (table 1). In contrast, in both 1980 and 2000, no more than 1 percent of females participated in this highest stratum.

Professionals and Executives increased from 6.8 percent of the total urban EAP in 1980 to 9.1 percent in 2000. During this time, the proportion of the male EAP in this subclass increased from 4.9 percent in

Table 2 *Females' Share of Employment by Occupational Category in Eight Countries, 1980–2000 (percentages)*

<i>Class/Sub-Class</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>1980–2000</i>
<b>Female workers</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>42.2</b>	<b>42.2</b>	<b>+0.8</b>
Capitalists	12.8	21.0	23.2	+10.4
Professionals and Executives	57.6	55.1	49.8	-7.8
Petty Bourgeoisie	22.5	29.7	32.2	+9.7
Formal Proletariat	35.3	36.5	38.7	+3.4
Informal workers	31.1	30.5	27.8	-3.3
Self-employed workers	40.7	43.7	41.9	+1.2
Domestic workers	95.1	93.3	93.8	-1.3

Source: ECLAC 2003 table 13; 2000, 237–240 and 255–258; 2002, 179–82 and 197–200.

1980 to 8.2 percent in 2000. In contrast, women's already strong participation (relative to males) increased only slightly from 9.5 percent in 1980 to 10.4 percent in 2000. Although women started out as 57.6 percent of this subclass in 1980 (table 2), this rate dropped to 49.8 percent by 2000. These data likely reflect the inclusion of teachers and nurses in this class, professions traditionally dominated by women but subjected to stagnant job growth in recent decades because of ongoing economic crises.

Between 1980 and 2000, males increased their overall membership in the Dominant Class at higher rates than did females. Our hypothesis about females' experience and education driving increases in their participation in the highest class is therefore only supported in a very limited way. Although more women are employed in this class than before, women's proportional share of the Dominant Class in relation to men's is actually shrinking.

#### *A Male-Dominated Petty Bourgeoisie?*

Our second hypothesis is that women's limited access to capital would prevent their rise in the Petty Bourgeoisie. We found, however, that the number of petty entrepreneurs is increasing among both men and women workers. The female Petty Bourgeoisie doubled between 1980 and 2000 (table 1), such that the proportion of women in this class increased in relation to men by almost 10 percent (table 2). Therefore, the growth that Portes and Hoffman observed in the Petty Bourgeoisie is more pronounced for women than for men. Given that this class is considered an important location for social mobility, the growing representation of women could indicate that women are moving out of the informal sector and starting small businesses, albeit on a very small scale (less than 4 percent of women work as entrepreneurs).



*A Contracting Female Formal Proletariat?*

Outside the Dominant Class, the Formal Proletariat has historically enjoyed the greatest degree of economic protection and political power. Nevertheless, Portes and Hoffman (among others) argue that the potency of the Formal Proletariat has diminished both numerically and qualitatively under economic restructuring. Table 1 shows that, in 1980, 51.1 percent of all urban workers were in the Formal Proletariat, compared to only 42.3 percent in 2000.

Disaggregating the data by sex complicates this portrait. The Formal Proletariat has been, and continues to be, male dominated, but the numerical gap between men and women is shrinking (table 2). Male rates of participation in the Formal Proletariat shrank by 20.6 percent between 1980 and 2000, from 56.4 percent of all employed males to 44.8 percent (table 1). The female Formal Proletariat contracted by just 11.2 percent, from 43.7 percent of all employed females in 1980, to 38.8 percent in 2000.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the number of formal proletarians is decreasing for women as well as for men, but even amidst the stringent labor market conditions of the 1980s and 1990s, female representation within this sector increased relative to male representation. This gender convergence in the Formal Proletariat suggests that women's increasing economic activity is part of the transformations inspired by the neoliberal model that are cited as fragmenting and weakening the Formal Proletariat (Portes and Hoffman 2003, 76; Roberts 2002, 22).

In table 3, we examine variations among sixteen countries over the 1980 to 2000 period, thereby including several nations omitted from our aggregated subsample and improving our ability to hypothesize cross-nationally. Chile, El Salvador, Honduras, Bolivia, and the Dominican Republic all experienced varying degrees of feminization of the Formal Proletariat. Yet is there, as we hypothesized, a strong correlation between nations that seek comparative advantages in low-wage labor and nations where women's proportion of the Formal Proletariat is increasing? This question cannot be answered definitively with the data at hand. Among the nations in which women increased their membership in the Formal Proletariat, El Salvador, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic did employ strategies to exploit comparative advantages in low-wage manufacturing for export. In several other nations that employed similar strategies, however, there is no clear pattern of increasing female membership in the Formal Proletariat (Panama, Guatemala, Colombia,

15. Unfortunately, because most national data do not universally distinguish public from private sector employment before 2000, we were unable to measure meaningfully its changes over time.

Costa Rica, and Mexico).<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay experienced moderate to strong feminization of the Formal Proletariat, yet these nations' exports are not based on low-wage manufacturing, but rather ISI-era heavy industries that remain male dominated in their employment (see case studies in Tardanico and Menjívar Larín 1997). We suggest that feminization of the Formal Proletariat resulting from economic restructuring in these nations is probably better explained by labor market tertiarization than by low-wage export manufacturing (Tardanico and Menjívar Larín 1997).<sup>17</sup>

Thus, parallel processes of market liberalization, labor market tertiarization, and public sector downsizing cannot uniformly explain gendered changes in the Formal Proletariat across Latin American nations.<sup>18</sup> Many strategies exploiting comparative advantages in low-wage, low-skill sectors are concentrated in economic and geographical niches such as export processing zones, tourist industries, and information processing poles (Tardanico and Menjívar Larín 1997, 13). Thus, when measured in terms of national, urban, formal employment, their overall impact is obscured by shifts in formal employment in the public sector, other types of manufacturing, and commerce. Furthermore, while import-substituting industrialization fomented "occupational uniformity across Latin America" (Tardanico 1997, 13), there have been marked

16. Notwithstanding high levels of female employment in Guatemalan export-oriented industries, in the late 1980s this type of employment increased for males as well (as did males' overall rates of formal employment) (Tardanico and Menjívar Larín 1997). Despite Mexico's large export manufacturing sector, there was a net loss of manufacturing and public sector jobs in the 1990s, accompanied by growing employment of males in export manufacturing industries, and a shift to low-wage employment in the tertiary sector and to services in the formal "modern" service sector (Tardanico and Menjívar Larín 1997). Although table 3 shows decreasing female membership in Costa Rica's Formal Proletariat, Tardanico and Lungo found that employment in manufacturing industries was a source of job growth for both men and women but, among sources of women's employment, manufacturing jobs were the largest source of growth, especially "at the low end of production for the export and domestic markets alike" (1997, 127).

17. In Chile, the expansion of the female Formal Proletariat shown in table 3 can be explained by rapid growth in the number of females employed in commerce and services (especially modern services), attributable to tertiarization caused by Chile's recent history of economic growth (Tardanico and Menjívar Larín 1997). Cortés' study of the impact of economic restructuring on Argentina's urban labor markets (Tardanico and Menjívar Larín 1997) found a distinct trend towards the feminization of formal employment and the masculinization of informal employment, as men increased their employment in commerce and women increased employment in the public sector and modern services.

18. Gender-based shifts in several nations that seriously pursued comparative advantages in low-wage, low-skill manufacturing are further obscured because data from Mexico, Colombia, Panama, and the Dominican Republic include workers in informal microenterprises in all or some of their measurements of the Formal Proletariat.

Table 3 *Urban Workers Employed in the Formal Proletariat, 16 Nations, 1980–2000*

Country	Percent of Urban EAP in Formal Proletariat					
	Females			Males		
	1980	1990	2000	1980	1990	2000
<i>Cases where females had gains relative to males</i>						
Chile	—	32.6	43.5	—	52.9	55.1
El Salvador	—	29.7	32.0	—	48.6	41.2
Honduras	—	32.0	33.0	—	46.6	39.9
Brazil <sup>b</sup>	36.5	26.1	32.4	56.4	39.1	43.0
Bolivia	—	23.6	21.5	—	42.1	33.0
Dominican Republic	—	—	46.1	—	—	44.0
	—	50.1 <sup>b</sup>	54.2 <sup>b</sup>	—	50.0 <sup>b</sup>	51.7 <sup>b</sup>
Uruguay	45.4	44.6	40.0	61.9	56.7	51.7
Ecuador	—	32.6	30.6	—	41.9	37.6
<i>Cases where females and males had equal or near equal changes</i>						
Argentina <sup>a</sup>	41.8	39.6	41.2	45.3	47.8	44.2
Mexico <sup>c</sup>	—	—	47.5	—	—	48.7
	57.0 <sup>b</sup>	60.8 <sup>b</sup>	57.1 <sup>b</sup>	65.7 <sup>b</sup>	66.5 <sup>b</sup>	67.1 <sup>b</sup>
Colombia	53.4 <sup>b</sup>	51.6 <sup>b</sup>	43.6 <sup>b</sup>	59.9 <sup>b</sup>	58.4 <sup>b</sup>	48.8 <sup>b</sup>
Guatemala	—	29.1	21.9	—	42.3	32.2
<i>Cases where males gained relative to females</i>						
Costa Rica	61.1	54.5	49.0	59.7	54.6	50.4
Venezuela <sup>d</sup>	46.9	52.7	38.8	41.9	50.7	38.1
Paraguay <sup>a</sup>	—	26.8	26.6	—	43.7	46.7
Panama	—	57.4	51.2	—	51.3	50.6
	71.0 <sup>b</sup>	61.4 <sup>b</sup>	56.4 <sup>b</sup>	69.2 <sup>b</sup>	57.2 <sup>b</sup>	58.0 <sup>b</sup>

Source: ECLAC 2000, 237–40; 2002, 179–82; 2003, 249–52.

<sup>a</sup>Data are for capital city metropolitan areas only.

<sup>b</sup>Data do not distinguish Formal Proletariat from workers employed in private microenterprises. Brazil distinguishes formal private sector workers from employees in microenterprises on the basis of their possession of a *carteira* (work card).

<sup>c</sup>1984

<sup>d</sup>2000 data are for all workers and not just urban workers.

national variations in national economic crises and recoveries, market liberalization programs, the size of nations' public sectors, and in the political strength of nations' workers. Such complexity and increasing heterogeneity of formal labor markets points to the need for future research on the gender dimensions of sectoral transformations in each nation's Formal Proletariat.

What table 3 does suggest, however, is that the historical size of a nation's Formal Proletariat, and the historical gender distribution within each nation's Formal Proletariat, may influence how the gender proportions of the Formal Proletariat change under economic restructuring and adjustment. In Costa Rica, Venezuela, and Panama (nations in which men's gains in the Formal Proletariat outpaced women's), women's

1980-1990		Percent Change 1990-2000		1980-2000	
Females	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males
—	—	+33.4	+4.2	—	—
—	—	+7.7	-15.2	—	—
—	—	+3.1	-14.4	—	—
-28.5	-30.7	+24.1	+10.0	-11.2	-23.8
—	—	-8.9	-21.6	—	—
—	—	—	—	—	—
—	—	+8.2 <sup>b</sup>	+3.4 <sup>b</sup>	—	—
-1.8	-8.4	-10.3	-8.8	-11.9	-16.5
—	—	-6.1	-10.3	—	—
-5.2	+5.5	+4.0	-7.5	-1.4	-2.4
—	—	—	—	—	—
+6.7 <sup>b</sup>	+1.2 <sup>b</sup>	-6.1 <sup>b</sup>	+0.9 <sup>b</sup>	+0.2 <sup>b</sup>	+2.1 <sup>b</sup>
-3.4	-2.5	-15.5	-16.4	-18.4	-18.5
—	—	-24.7	-23.9	—	—
-10.8	-8.5	-10.1	-7.7	-19.8	-15.6
+12.4	+21.0	-26.4	-24.9	-17.3	-9.1
—	—	-0.8	+6.9	—	—
—	—	-10.8	-1.4	—	—
-13.5 <sup>b</sup>	-17.3 <sup>b</sup>	-8.1 <sup>b</sup>	+1.4 <sup>b</sup>	-20.6 <sup>b</sup>	-16.2 <sup>b</sup>

percent of the EAP in the Formal Proletariat in 1980 was higher than men's rates of formal proletarianization. In these cases, it appears that a strong history of proletarianization worked against women during restructuring, just as it did against males in nations where females had weak histories of employment as formal proletarians.

In sum, the Formal Proletariat is decreasing in size for both men and women across Latin America, but the female proportion of the Formal Proletariat is generally increasing throughout the region regardless of the size of a nation's economy or workforce. Men are only gaining relative to women in nations with initial high rates of female proletarianization; conversely, several countries with export-oriented policies that pursue comparative advantages in low-wage labor exhibit the highest relative increases in women's proletarianization. We add new dimensions to Portes and Hoffman's (2003) and Roberts' (2002) argument that economic restructuring disempowers the Formal Proletariat by showing gendered variations in how this weakening occurs. Women are

increasing their membership in the Formal Proletariat mainly in nations where they are not likely to enjoy the power and privilege historically associated with ISI era proletarianization in Latin America. Combining this tentative evidence with the literature on women's particular susceptibility to poor labor conditions, we offer generalizable support for previous, case-study-based speculation that women's labor is one key mechanism by which economic restructuring disempowers the Formal Proletariat.

#### *A "Ghettoization" of Female Labor as Informal Proletarians?*

Over the last two decades, the Informal Proletariat has expanded from 37.3 to 41.9 percent of the employed urban EAP, so that it now rivals the Formal Proletariat as Latin America's largest class. In 1980, 44.4 percent of female workers and 32.1 percent of male workers were classified as informal proletarians, revealing a clear concentration of women as non-protected, disempowered workers. Between 1980 and 2000, the male Informal Proletariat expanded 20.9 percent, to 38.8 percent of the urban male workers. During that same period, however, the female Informal Proletariat grew by just 3.8 percent, to 46.1 percent of all female urban workers. Therefore, although both men and women are joining the Informal Proletariat in higher numbers than other sectors, men are joining at higher rates than are women, negating our hypothesis that women are experiencing an intensification or "ghettoization" in traditionally female occupations.<sup>19</sup>

#### *A Shrinking Gender Income Gap?*

How do women fare when compared to men in the same class category? Women have long been remunerated at a fraction of their male counterpart's incomes and, as shown in table 4, intraclass income inequality continues to be high. The highest national rate of female average incomes to male average incomes is only 83 percent (Panama) and the inequality is as acute as only 58 and 55 percent of male earnings for Mexican and Guatemalan women respectively.

19. Tables 1 and 2 reveal a clear gender division of labor within the Informal Proletariat. Employment as a microenterprise worker is a more prevalent and growing source of informal employment for men than for women. Male participation in this subclass grew 43 percent between 1980 and 2000 (to 12.6 percent of the male EAP), while the percentage of women working in this subclass grew by only 18 percent (to 6.6 percent of the female EAP). Conversely, in both periods, less than 1.0 percent of males were domestic servants. Self-employed non-professional, non-technical workers (e.g., vendors, trades people), the remaining informal subclass, had very similar participation rates for men and women in both periods.

We hypothesized that women's increasing education and employment would reduce historical gender income inequality. As shown in table 4, wage inequality *is* decreasing in Latin America, in some cases very rapidly. Only Costa Rica exhibited increased inequality between men and women's average incomes in 1980 and 2000.

Table 4 displays females' percent of males' average income for various occupational groups, arranged to correspond with our class hierarchy. The category of employer in table 4 includes both large and small business owners. The other segment of the Petty Bourgeoisie, self-employed professionals and technicians, are shown separately.

In addition to illustrating a decreasing gender gap in average incomes, table 4 shows that income parity in every nation's formal private and public sectors is above national averages. While these data often indicate severe inequalities, the fact that women are doing better relative to national averages in this important Formal Proletariat class at least suggests that incomes for classes in which gender biases are likely to be institutionalized are no less equal than those classified as informal, where theoretically at least, the market determines wages.

Data on the gap between male and female average income measure relative gender differences in earnings within each class, but do not reveal how income wealth is distributed across classes. To conservatively estimate a hypothetical household poverty line, we assume that a male must earn an average income of four multiples of a national poverty line to support himself and three dependents (see Portes and Hoffman 2003, 59–60) and that a woman earning less than three multiples is considered part of this "working poor." Using ECLAC data on individual workers' average incomes (measured by multiples of each nation's poverty line) for each occupational class, we estimate which occupational classes are likely to be working poor in each country. These estimations for ten nations with available data, as well as the average annual rates of change, are displayed in table 5. By identifying the portion of the male and female EAP classified as working poor, we can account for gender differences in poverty, the changing composition of class structure, and changes in workers' incomes.

For example, in Venezuela in 1980, males in each class had average incomes greater than four multiples of Venezuela's poverty line, and therefore no male workers fell within our hypothetical definition of the working poor. By contrast, in 1980 Venezuela's female Informal Proletarians (domestic workers and *cuenta propia* workers) had average incomes less than three times Venezuela's national poverty line, suggesting that women's employment in the Informal Proletariat was not enough to pull women out of poverty, whereas men's employment in the Informal Proletariat was. By 2000, the gendered situation had converged. All Venezuelan informal proletarians, *and* all private formal sector workers,

Table 4 *Average Female Income as Percentage of Average Male Income by Occupational Groups, c.2000*

Country	Natl. Avg.	% Change		Self-
		1980	Employer	Employed Professional/ Technician
Panama	83	14.5	73	87
El Salvador	75	—	85	93
Dominican Republic	75	—	53	117
Colombia	75	24.0	76	—
Venezuela	74	4.0	84	86
Costa Rica	70	-4.3	71	70
Uruguay	67	23.9	77	58
Ecuador	67	1.5	65	76
Nicaragua	65	—	50	106
Honduras	65	9.2	57	136
Argentina	65	3.1	63	58
Brazil	64	31.3	80	58
Peru	63	—	43	81
Bolivia	63	6.3	114	102
Chile	61	0.0	49	70
Mexico	58	5.2	78	69
Guatemala	55	—	65	70

Sources: ECLAC 2000, 244-47, 261-64; 2002, 186-89, 203-206.

regardless of gender, had average incomes below our hypothetical household poverty line. Summing the percentages of the male and female EAP in each of these occupational strata (ECLAC 2000, 237-40, 255-58; 2002, 179-82, 197-200), status as working poor consumed the bottom four strata of Venezuela's male occupational hierarchy by 2000, or 77.8 percent of the male employed EAP. In contrast, in 1980 all female informal proletarians were poor (30.1 percent of the female EAP); by 2000, this impoverished segment of the class structure expanded to include formal private sector workers, or 67.6 percent of Venezuela's female workers. Overall, the non-poor class segments bridging the Dominant Class and the working poor classes in Venezuela (the latter of which are identified in table 5) are disappearing and/or shrinking, and thus so is the proportion of formal and informal proletarians whose labor lifts them out of poverty.

As shown in table 5, these same trends occurred in most Latin American nations. In 1980, there was a very small portion of male workers whose incomes could not support a household of four above the national poverty line. In Brazil, Uruguay, and Venezuela, however, employment assured no such status for women. By 1990, the proportion of

<i>Professional/ Executive</i>	<i>Formal Public Sector</i>	<i>Formal Private Sector</i>	<i>Informal Micro- Enterprise Worker</i>	<i>Self- Employed Worker</i>	<i>Domestic Worker</i>
85	78	100	107	54	96
75	100	90	84	69	69
86	102	97	77	64	64
72	78	93	—	57	78
73	81	87	95	66	65
72	84	80	87	42	74
55	75	76	83	57	78
84	76	100	82	52	64
60	74	86	62	67	46
63	87	78	83	50	63
69	78	84	79	61	81
56	68	71	82	44	67
96	65	73	81	57	161
73	79	71	69	61	95
60	76	84	111	67	80
43	86	73	70	32	52
55	79	73	75	50	60

male workers earning average incomes below four multiples of the national poverty line grew in each nation. Yet, in Argentina, Costa Rica, and Uruguay, there remained a huge gender gap in the proportion of the working poor. In Bolivia, Ecuador, Honduras, and Panama, the working poor in both 1990 and 2000 subsumed over one-third of both the male and female class structure, suggesting that the gap between this working poor and the Dominant Class represents somewhat of a "phantom" non-poor working class. In Brazil, poverty rapidly engulfed working women while it also increased dramatically for men. In Venezuela, nearly 45 percent of male workers earned less than four multiples of the poverty line, while the large segment of women earning less than three multiples rose more modestly.

In sum, table 5 illustrates that what was once a clear feminization of the working poor has now become a steady or increasing level of females working at poverty levels, alongside a dramatic expansion of Latin America's male working poor (Chile is the only exception). Thus, the closing gender income gap displayed in table 4 is due in large part to males' income contraction rather than growing economic power for women.



Table 5 Male and Female Working Poor, 10 Latin American Nations, 1980–2000

Workers earning average incomes insufficient to support a household  
(total percent and class components of total)

Country	c.1980		c.1990	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Argentina (Buenos Aires)	1.0 D 1.0	10.1 D 10.1	14.2 D 1.8 M 12.4	22.7 D 12.5 M 10.2
Bolivia	—	—	35.0 M 12.9 FP 22.1	33.1 D 12.9 M 5.2 P 15.0
Brazil	13.0 D 0.4 M 12.6	48.3 D 21.6 M 7.0 CP 19.7	21.9 D 0.4 M 21.5	75.3 D 15.6 M 11.2 CP 22.4 FP 26.1
Chile	—	—	63.1 D 0.2 M 10.0 FP 52.9	27.6 D 19.4 M 8.2
Costa Rica	12.6 D 1.6 M 11.0	14.6 D 13.9 SE 0.7	10.5 D 0.2 M 10.3	37.2 D 12.0 M 8.6 CP 16.6
Ecuador	—	—	74.9 D 0.6 M 13.8 CP 31.7 FP 24.5 MO 4.3	74.0 D 11.6 M 6.7 CP+SE 40.8 FP 14.9
Honduras	—	—	77.6 D 0.4 M 17.4 CP 26.8 FP 33.0	78.4 D 16.0 M 6.9 CP 39.0 FP 16.5
Panama	—	—	35.3 D 0.6 M 5.9 CP 28.8	33.3 D 17.8 M 4.0 CP 11.5
Uruguay	10.4 D 0.4 M 10.0	50.3 D 19.5 M 6.7 FP 24.1	11.9 D 0.1 M 11.8	68.7 D 17.1 M 8.1 CP 19.1 FP 24.4
Venezuela	0.0	30.1 D 15.4 CP 14.7	44.9 D 1.9 M 8.0 FP 33.9 E 1.1	37.5 D 15.0 M 3.4 CP 19.1

D: Domestic workers

FP: Formal private sector workers

M: Microenterprise workers

P: Public sector workers

*Average Annual Growth Rates*

c.2000		1980-90		1990-2000		1980-2000	
<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	M	F	M	F	M	F
16.5 D 0.1 M 16.4	24.9 D 12.9 M 12.0	1.3	1.3	0.3	0.2	0.8	0.8
53.2 D 0.2 M 14.3 CP 38.7	82.1 D 9.4 M 4.9 CP 56.3 FP 11.5	—	—	1.8	4.9	—	—
72.6 D 0.8 M 10.5 CP 28.5 FP 32.8	66.6 D 19.7 M 5.3 CP+SE 26.1 FP 15.5	0.8	2.5	5.6	-1.0	3.0	0.9
8.0 D 0.1 M 7.9	23.4 D 16.0 M 7.4	—	—	-5.5	-0.4	—	—
12.7 D 0.3 M 12.4	27.1 D 11.4 CP 15.7	-0.2	2.5	0.2	-1.1	0.0	0.7
79.8 D 0.7 M 16.8 CP+SE 34.5 FP 27.8	77.7 D 11.1 M 9.0 CP+SE 39.8 FP 17.8	—	—	0.5	0.4	—	—
91.7 D 0.6 M 16.2 CP+SE 28.4 FP 31.9 P 8.0 E 6.6	96.4 D 9.9 M 5.1 CP+SE 39.8 FP 21.2 P 11.8 E 8.6	—	—	1.6	2.0	—	—
33.5 D 1.0 M 7.4 CP 25.1	36.3 D 14.4 M 5.2 CP 16.7	—	—	-0.2	0.3	—	—
12.7 D 1.3 M 11.4	46.0 D 19.5 M 10.6 CP 15.9	0.2	2.0	0.1	-2.5	0.1	-0.2
77.8 D 0.1 M 13.7 CP 36.3 FP 27.7	67.6 D 5.6 M 6.9 CP 38.4 FP 16.7	5.0	0.8	3.7	3.3	4.3	2.1

MO: Microenterprise owners  
SE: Self-employed professionals  
and technicians

CP: Own account (*cuenta propia*) workers  
E: Professionals and executives

*Summarizing the Results: Gender and Change in Latin American Class Structures*

Over the last two decades, women in Latin America have increased their labor force participation, improved their educational attainment, and witnessed a reduction in the gendered wage gap. Women have also become more equally represented in the Petty Bourgeoisie, the Formal Proletariat, and the Informal Proletariat (women's proportions are increasing in the Formal Proletariat and the Petty Bourgeoisie, and decreasing in the Informal Proletariat). These trends suggest that women's positions in Latin America's class structures are improving. Moreover, as women take on traditionally powerful roles such as petty entrepreneur and formal worker, at rates increasingly similar to men's, then it is logical to expect that women's overall power in society should increase relative to men's.

Yet looking at gendered changes in the overall class distribution over time, we find that increasing parity in the Formal Proletariat does *not* seem to result from women's improving positions in the class structure, but rather because men are falling from higher to lower strata. Indices of dissimilarity (reported in table 1) make clear this phenomenon.<sup>20</sup> Between 1980 and 2000, the index of dissimilarity for the class structure of the total urban work force was 9.6. Breaking down the same period by gender, the index for men was 11.7 while the index for women was only 7.4. Therefore, the male class structure changed much more drastically than did the female class structure. Furthermore, comparing the class structure of males in 1980 to that of females in 1980 yields an index of 20.7. In 2000, the index declined to 10.4. Again, this evidences an overall change in class structure in recent decades in which male and female class structures (measured by occupation) are becoming increasingly similar. Women's increasing labor force participation is placing new women workers into the class structure in more or less the same proportion since the 1980s. Meanwhile, over the past two decades, men's proportional distribution across the class structure, and their corresponding incomes, are undergoing a dramatic—and negative—transformation.

**CONCLUSIONS: HOW WOMEN — AND MEN — EFFECT AND EXPERIENCE CHANGE IN LATIN AMERICAN CLASS STRUCTURES**

We have suggested that a gendered analysis of the Latin American class structure addresses two important questions: how have parallel

20. These indices measure relative differences between men and women's class position and how these differences change between 1980 and 2000. We compute them by summing the absolute values of the differences in each category in the distributions in table 1 and dividing by two. The higher the value of the index, the greater the difference in the distribution among classes (i.e., if there were no difference over time or between men and women, the value of those indices would be zero) (Marshall, Swift, and Roberts 1997).

processes of economic restructuring and adjustment affected gender inequality, and how have the gendered changes associated with these processes affected the overarching class structure in the region? We discuss the answer to these questions in light of our above findings, and suggest the implications of these preliminary findings for future research on the intersection of class and gender in Latin America.

Previous research shows that Latin American women are increasing their presence in the work force. However, both supply-side and demand-side explanations suggest that this increase is not a result of increasing gender equality, but rather is fueled by the poor living and working conditions endured specifically by women. Based on this research, we expected to find that neoliberalism exacerbated inequalities between men and women by further concentrating women in the lowest strata of the Latin American class structure.

Contrary to this expectation, our findings show that women's parity with men in terms of class position has increased during the past two decades of economic restructuring and adjustment (table 2). Only in the tiny Dominant Class did the gap widen between the proportion of male and female workers. In the remainder of the class structure, the proportion of male and female workers within each occupational category became increasingly similar. Specifically, women's proportions increased in the historically male-dominated Formal Proletariat and Petty Bourgeoisie, while men's proportions increased in the historically female-dominated Informal Proletariat.

Theoretically, women's increasing parity with men in terms of income and occupation should increase women's economic security and proximity to political action, especially given their greater representation within the historically powerful Formal Proletariat. Yet, the extant literature clearly documents that women workers in Latin America have actually experienced further exploitation, increasing impoverishment, and a general reduction in legal and economic rights throughout these past two decades of restructuring and adjustment.

Merging class and gender gives us a template for theorizing this paradox. Our indices of dissimilarity show that women's increasing parity with men in terms of class position did not come from women's improving conditions as we hypothesized, but rather from men "falling down" the class ladder. Similarly, increasing income parity did not come from women's gains as much as it did from male workers' more rapid, intense impoverishment. Therefore, although our analysis indicates that women's equality with men in the Latin American class structure is indeed improving, declines in men's status is not a very effective vehicle for women's broader social, economic and political empowerment.

Our findings further suggest that the correlation between economic restructuring and the declining power of the worker, as documented by

Portes and Hoffman (2003), has an important gendered component. Many localized case studies have speculated that women's increasing employment could be an important vehicle by which economic restructuring disempowers Latin American workers. We anticipated documenting this link by finding that an increasing number of women workers, accompanied by an increasing ghettoization of women in the workforce, would "weaken" Latin American labor simply by increasing the proportion of workers who are hindered by unequal gender relations and unprotected by formal wage labor. What we found, however, suggests a much more complex process.

The most important changes in the Latin American class structure in the last two decades appear to have been in the situation of male, and not female, workers. The rapid decrease in Formal Proletariat jobs and the expansion of the Informal Proletariat under neoliberalism highlight an occupational downgrading for *men* much more so than for women (table 1). Clearly, the gendered convergence we find is occurring not because women are becoming more like male workers, but rather because *men's working conditions are becoming increasingly similar to women's*. By extension, we suggest that the loss of political party and union power documented by Portes and Hoffman (2003, 77) indicates a loss for *men*, not women, who have long been excluded from such formal representation of their concerns as workers. Similarly, we suggest that the "move to community politics" (Portes and Hoffman 2003, 76) is also likely primarily a move for *men*; Latin American women have long used the community as their primary forum for placing demands on the government.

By documenting the gendered convergence in the Latin American class structure, our analysis suggests that global systems of capitalism and *patriarchy* that have long disempowered women workers are now also in part responsible for disempowering *men*. The increasing supply of women workers—whose position in a patriarchal society has made them particularly vulnerable to poor working conditions and economic crises—may be one mechanism "lowering the bar" for all workers, and perhaps "emasculating" the Latin American work force, both literally and figuratively.

While our study clearly demonstrates that the gender division of labor is a key variable changing Latin American class structure, we have perhaps raised more questions than we have answered about how these gendered differences matter. We conclude by suggesting three directions for future research. First, Portes and Hoffman have stated that the weakening political power of the Formal Proletariat is evidenced in part by its move toward "community based" and away from "party based" or "union based" politics. Given that women were largely responsible for popularizing community-based politics under past economic crises, and given that women are increasingly occupying a greater share of the Formal

Proletariat, could the increasing presence of women be a key factor directing the change in the loci of the Formal Proletariat's political organizing? Comparative case studies could shed light on this important question.

Second, how complete are studies of gendered relations of power in the household, the workplace, and the community, if men's changing economic and political power is ignored? Current case studies of gender and work in Latin America focus almost exclusively on women's changing labor force participation. Given the evidence that men's occupational downgrading is more pronounced than women's in recent decades, we call for more research on the social processes, specifically behind men's declining economic and political power in the workplace.

Finally, we hypothesized that rates of female proletarianization would be highest in nations aggressively pursuing comparative advantages in low-wage labor, but national variations in female proletarianization appear much more complex. Future comparative case studies that explore whether and how certain national-level strategies may encourage or discourage the feminization of the proletariat, and how this feminization might, under certain circumstances, bring about concomitant increases in women's political and economic power, are needed.

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