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The Deviant Geographer

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“Jan Monk is probably THE most important mentor to so many women in the field” – J.P. Jones, III

“Jan’s degree of dedication goes well beyond just amazing career achievements. In her 84+ years on Earth she has changed countless lives for the better and, through her estate, will continue to do so in perpetuity” – Chris Lukinbeal

I’ve spent my life being a deviant. When I say that, I don’t necessarily mean in a delinquent sense (though that has been necessary at times). Rather, I mean I’ve always had to approach things *differently*. Things about your own life and background can help to shape and widen the ways in which we study, and how we see the world – even if you don’t realize it. For me, it was a combination of breaking my work-a-day upbringing cycle (I came from a working-class family and lived/grew-up in the Petersham suburb, west of downtown Sydney, Australia) and being the only female graduate student in the Department of Geography at the University of Illinois where I pursued qualitative research during geography’s quantitative revolution. My life has been about that age-old geographical concept: find your own way.

I went to an all-girls high school in Sydney, Australia – the original Fort Street Public School. It was the oldest public occupied building in Sydney at the time and was there before the harbor bridge was built (<https://www.fortstreet.nsw.edu.au/about/school-history/>). I was there from 1949-1954, though the school would later move to the suburbs (<https://goo.gl/maps/ozLERChBXsJKtkX2A>). To go to that high school, I had to be qualified by going for “opportunity classes”, which selectively enrolled students in 5-6 grade. At the end of grade 6, you went to high school. It took 30-40 minutes of walking *each way*, as well as riding the electric train for a spell, then up an escalator past Saint Phillips Church – the oldest in the city – and then along Bradfield Highway.

Once I completed high school, I got accepted to the University of Illinois (at Urbana-Champaign), and once I completed my PhD there, I was hired on as a full-time, tenure-track assistant professor – and the first female faculty member. The

thought that continually fueled me was, “Who’s *not* being studied, as well as who *is*”. Both great questions for a geographer. That’s where my idea of feminist geography began to blossom. Working with Susan Hanson, we wrote the now-seminal article *On not Excluding Half of the Human in Human Geography* (Monk and Hanson 1982). That concept – the working woman – has been a driving force in my life and career. People just weren’t researching women at the time, even though women made up a high percentage of the population at the time. I found the discrepancy interesting!

Now, being deviant has come with some rather incredulous moments as well. For example, when I was President of the AAG, I had to give an award to the man who denied me tenure at the University of Illinois. When he accepted his award in front of those thousands of geographers, he said to me, “You’ve done nicely in your career. I hope we can be good colleagues”. *Nicely*. Never mind my (lengthy) contributions to the discipline, my numerous awards, my high funding record, my international collaborations, or that I was **President** of the AAG (something he never achieved). My career was just “nice” to him. Remember, I was doing qualitative research during the quantitative revolution and even though it was ground-breaking research, I still got denied tenure. I would like to say that those kinds of incidents have been one-offs, but throughout my career and in my experience, unfortunately they haven’t. But that’s part of being a deviant – overcoming challenges in novel ways.

You know, believe it or not, I’ve never held a tenured post. In fact, I have never truly been in a geography department full-time! After Illinois, I was hired at the University of Arizona in Women’s Studies and was Director of the Southwest Insti-

Janice Monk

tute for Research on Women (SIROW) for a couple decades. And that's pretty much where I stayed for a lot of my career, even though I did teach occasional classes for the Geography Department as an adjunct for years. When I think about it, in a lot of ways, being at SIROW turned out to be a good thing. I never felt tied down to the "publish or perish" paradigm so often found in universities. I could still collaborate with other geographers, but I got to do a lot of other things in my life I might not have had the opportunity to do if I had gotten tenure at Illinois – or even had a tenure-track post. I have a difficult time imagining what my life would be like if I hadn't been deviant all those decades ago.

Still, whatever I was doing, I always worked hard to be inclusive, and that goes a long way to helping build better communities. We need more awareness, more understanding, more compassion in what we do. I didn't do a lot of mentoring. Not formally at least. I just pursued research I thought was interesting, like women and gender and health along the US-Mexican border, as well as the importance of place among those entities. And if people wanted to join in, that was great. I was fortunate to find funding from the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations and the like, and I could go into the places and sell "women's studies", but as a geographer – especially because there weren't really geographers doing research on women at the time. Eventually, I was offered a post as Research Professor in the School of Geography at University of Arizona alongside my post at SIROW. I guess someone appreciated my deviant nature.

I'm so glad that I chose geography as a career, and that I deviated and did things I thought were important, like women's studies, international studies, studying people that were outside the mainstream and not just all the "heroes" of the discipline. It's important to know about the "big name" people of course, but I always wanted to know about the larger world as well – and the interplay between the local and global – and then particularly about people whose lives were usually overlooked by most traditional geographers: indigenous people, indigenous women, working class women, and sometimes men in certain situations.

Given everything, I still strongly feel that as people, humans, and geographers, we need to create new opportunities for women and underprivileged groups in geography and beyond. Sometimes (maybe much of the time?) we need to be deviant if we want to accomplish that – go against the current mode of thought and study things we believe in, regardless of what the mainstream might want. For example, gathering and assessing qualitative data. Qualitative data can, indeed, lead to rich understandings and insights. It helps you learn how people think, and what really "counts" for them in life. The memories you make by getting to know people – the *connections* with people outside your bubble, in other parts of the world (near and far), maybe even life-long friendships – that is what's important. I'll take quality over quantity any day.

As you make your way in life, and in your career, don't let people get you down. Build relationships with people who have a wider vision than you might have gotten otherwise. Believe in what you do and continue to do it. That way, you'll

contribute something, but you'll also get satisfaction and make good friends. Find something that is interesting and that you think is important. Enjoy doing it. Stick to it. Don't be afraid to take some risks. And you'll survive. Remember: It's okay to be deviant.

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REFERENCE

Monk, J. and Hanson, S., 1982. On not excluding half of the human in human geography. *The Professional Geographer*, 34(1): 11-23.

An Australian-American, **Janice Jones Monk (Jan)** has been a geographer all her life. One of the pioneers/founders of feminist geography, she has written over 100 journal articles and served as President of the American Association of geographer from 2001-2002. A numerous award winner, Jan also holds an honorary doctorate from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (Spain) and awarded the prestigious *Lauréat d'Honneur* by the International Geographical Union (2012). Currently she holds the posts of Research Professor in the School of Geography and Development Research Social Scientist Emerita with the Southwest Institute for Research on Women. Dr. Monk has a public Facebook Page, available here: <https://www.facebook.com/JanMonkGeographer>.

