

Studies of Gender in the Prehispanic Americas

Traci Ardren

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Abstract In the past ten years archaeologists have produced a vast literature on the study of gender in the prehispanic New World. This review defines key concepts, identifies three major themes within this tradition—gender in native cosmologies, intersections of gender and the body, and studies of work and specialization—and explores the significant contributions of engendered archaeology to the broader field. Final suggestions for linkages with queer studies and indigenous feminism point the way to where this field might develop productive new avenues of research.

Keywords Gender · Prehispanic · Americas · Identity

Introduction

Archaeological inquiry into gender within the ancient cultures of the New World has matured well beyond initial, but important, attempts to add women to existing androcentric reconstructions of the past. In concert with vibrant and active scholarship on ancient gender and identity worldwide, New World prehistorians have generated an immense and varied body of literature over the past decade that speaks to a rich and multivocal perspective on the past. Major contributions to many areas of New World archaeology can be found in this diverse literature, from methodological improvements to better guidelines for how to best “read” elusive concepts such as gender in the “text” of the archaeological record. With this diversity comes disagreement about such fundamental issues as the role of biology in gender, whether sex as a biological concept exists outside Western society, and

T. Ardren (✉)
Department of Anthropology, University of Miami, P.O. Box 248106, Coral Gables, FL 33124-
2005, USA
e-mail: tardren@miami.edu

how material evidence of gendered behavior can be read as both an indication of normative gender roles and the subversion of such norms.

Scholars working around the world have argued that careful study of gender as an organizing principle contributes to an improved scientific methodology, one less tied to Western assumptions and more sensitive to cultural variations or nuances. Engendered archaeology rejects unproven assumptions and is based on the extremely careful observation and reinterpretation of data (often overlooked or misinterpreted data). The scientific study of ancient New World cultures has been greatly strengthened by the frequent use of rich multiple lines of evidence available to address gender roles in the prehispanic New World, and by the wealth of new questions suggested by both data and comparative examples.

Many of the contributions of this body of literature are relevant to all archaeologists working today. The research trends of engendered archaeology parallel those of mainstream archaeological investigation—questions of ideology, subsistence, and culture change are central to scholars looking at gender. From specific contributions important to research in the New World, such as the solid evidence for multiple gender identities in the prehispanic world, to contributions applicable to a broader set of scholars, such as the way gender was manipulated by imperial forces to solidify craft production in service to the state, engendered archaeology has led to stronger and more robust archaeological models of the ancient world. Gender has been demonstrated to be a conceptual category used by the ancient people of the New World to structure relations, not only of individuals but of places, classes of artifacts, and events. Gendered principles were at work from cosmological to quotidian levels of experience throughout much of the ancient New World, and thus the study of gender can illuminate the complex intersections of ideology, politics, and economy that provided the machinery of complex societies. The recent literature reviewed below makes specific and lasting contributions in many important arenas, but scholars working on domestic production, cosmology and belief, and situations of culture contact will find especially important data of relevance to their models of ancient life. Often New World scholarship on gender is not read widely enough outside the core group of scholars working in this field—neither by other archaeologists working in the New World nor by scholars interested in gender worldwide. This is a challenge the field must face to make its significant accomplishments more visible.

Methodological improvements to the field as a whole also are visible in this body of literature. In areas as diverse as bioarchaeological identification of skeletal material and interpretation of ethnohistorical documents, refinements of archaeological research techniques have resulted from a greater awareness of native conceptualizations and gendered practices. Likewise, the frequent use of complementary (or conflicting) lines of evidence is common place in gender studies, as is the comparative approach. Scholars are currently debating the degree to which gendered patterns in the archaeological record reflect behavioral norms versus the subversion of such norms—a fruitful arena of analytical refinement that will be of interest to many archaeologists working on behavioral patterns. These contributions to archaeological methodology, as well as the wealth of new data on core areas of interest to all archaeologists such as subsistence patterns, the sexual division of

labor, burial treatments, and modes of production, have earned engendered studies widespread disciplinary recognition. One reflection of such acceptance is the highlighting of gendered analysis in Elizabeth Brumfiel's 2006 Presidential Address to the American Anthropological Association membership (Brumfiel 2006).

In this work I synthesize and comment on the explosion of literature broadly defined as “engendered studies” that emerged within prehispanic studies of the Americas in response to the mobilizing efforts of Margaret Conkey and Joan Gero's article in the *Annual Review of Anthropology* (1997). I identify three major research trends within the literature—gender in native cosmologies, intersections of gender and the body, and studies of work and specialization—and illustrate each trend with a selection of representative data-rich examples. Purely for reasons of length, I restrict myself to studies conducted by prehistorians and separate the literature on gender in the prehispanic Americas from closely related literature on prehistoric gender worldwide, the study of modern or ethnographically documented gender roles in the Americas, and gender studies by historical archaeologists. Summaries of this broader and deeply interconnected corpus can be found in Bacus (1993), Nelson (2004), Rautman and Talalay (2000), and Scott (1994). I also offer suggestions for three key works from the past five years that are important for all scholars of the ancient New World. These three monograph-length studies provide excellent examples of the theoretical and topical diversity that is the hallmark of the specialization. I mention some important methodological contributions to the field of archaeology as a whole in more depth and conclude with suggestions about the current challenges and future directions for an engendered archaeology of the ancient Americas.

Generally speaking, the diverse scholarship on gender studies of the prehispanic Americas is situated within the recent movement to examine evidence of identity in the archaeological record. This movement has focused on personal or individual identities related to gender, age, and status, or the closely related ethnic or class-based identities that are often studied in relation to population movements and political interactions (Cassella and Fowler 2005; Fisher and Loren 2003; Jones 1997; Meskell 2002; Orser 2001; Voss 2005). All identities share certain characteristics; they are culturally and historically specific and must be defined for each culture and moment in time rather than assumed to be “natural” or static. Identities are fluid and changing, and at both the individual and the societal level, identities can be deliberately changed, manipulated, or contested. Some identities are imposed, especially those of subordinated groups, and are thus difficult to change or escape. Finally, the archaeological study of identities shares certain methodological challenges, whether one looks for gender, ethnicity, or other indicators. Identity-based behaviors leave ambiguous material residue, precisely because identities are fluid and maneuverable. It is also notoriously difficult for archaeologists to step aside from their own deeply embedded identities in order to see accurately those of the culture under investigation. For example, recent research on ancient gender shows gender categories in the New World were often both more fluid and more diverse than normative Western gender categories of the modern era (Hollimon 1997; Klein 2001b;Looper 2002; Prine 2000). It is no longer possible to assume that the entire ancient New World population was gendered male or

female—multiple, third, or dual-gendered individuals have been identified throughout the New World, and these data have forced scholars to become even more careful and precise in their reconstructions of ancient life.

An examination of recent research on gender identities in the ancient New World reveals a highly diverse field of scholarship united only by its insistence that identity is a central organizing principle within anthropological archaeology, and by a more vaguely articulated agreement that multivocal or diverse reconstructions of the past are desirable over the laws of culture that characterized scholarship throughout most of the 20th century. There is no easy categorization of scholarship on ancient gender into either the processual or postprocessual schools of archaeological theory building. Much of the bioarchaeological study of sex and gender is more empirical and less given to conceptual discussion, but some osteologists are now deconstructing and debating the highly culturally constructed methods of sex determination used in modern scholarship in a way that highlights the political and social embeddedness of even the most “scientific” archaeology (Claassen 1992b, 2001; Geller 2004; Gilchrist 1997; Lucy 1997; Pyburn 2004b). Luckily, for the most part such diversity of perspective has not led to balkanized theoretical camps, but rather has inspired a very active and vibrant field of primary and secondary literature that few scholars have attempted to summarize. Within this eclectic landscape of theoretical perspectives, specific studies and topics of inquiry also vary tremendously. In some areas of the New World scholars are still attempting to find evidence of women and inject such data into models of ancient life (this work is especially important at the moment in the Andean area). In other areas such as the North American Southwest, scholars have moved into the study of the intersections of gender and other social identities such as age, as in the important mortuary analysis by Crown and Fish on postmenopausal women and their greater access to grave goods (Crown 2000a; Crown and Fish 1996). Masculinity studies of ancient New World cultures have just begun to appear (Ardren and Hixson 2006; Dean 2001), although there is a very rich ethnographic literature on this topic, especially from Latin America (Gutmann and Viveros V. 2005; Irwin 2003; Joyce 2000b, c). Bioarchaeological analyses of dietary differences based on gender and other identities are important throughout the region and coexist with embodiment studies, in which the social construction of the body in each culture is explored, a theme recently taken up by Mayanists.

Terminology and working concepts

Given the diversity of literature in the study of gender in the ancient Americas, it is prudent to define primary concepts within the field. Readers should realize such terms are defined variously in the literature under examination. Kelley Hays-Gilpin provides a lucid history of the use of the term “gender” in archaeological research in her volume, *Ambiguous Images* (2004), but currently the term is used by archaeologists to describe *the concepts and relationships that exist to organize sexual difference*, leaving open the number and nature of those concepts. Sex is often defined as *the biological differences in male and female bodies*. While

certainly tied to bodily functions, sex is no longer seen as a scientific imperative but rather a concept used to interpret and make sense of biological conditions. Scholarship in the 1980s, and in some cases today, polarized the concepts of gender and sex, assigning gender to the world of social behavior and sex to the world of biological reality. Paradoxically, recent engendered scholarship challenges the very notion of binary categories as inherent or natural, i.e., by demonstrating the Western intellectual desire to impose binary oppositions on sex (which is not inherently binary but clustered along a spectrum) as well as gender (clearly not binary in every culture given the existence of third or multiple genders).

Thus the opposition between gender and sex has been deconstructed by some scholars, and both are seen as cultural categories in need of careful exploration and definition. Gender is acknowledged as a universal element of human culture—there is no debate within the field about whether gender “exists,” although scholars agree it was not always the primary organizing principle it is today in the West. This observation is complicated by the nature of gender identities, which can be more or less apparent to the researcher given a host of other cultural features (and identities) that might obscure or accentuate the role of gender. People are not the only gendered subjects—in much of the New World it appears that landscapes and spaces were gendered; artifact classes or foods could be gendered as well (Costin 1998; Galloway 1997; Serra Puche 2001).

The field of engendered studies has a number of appellations, most of them used interchangeably with a few important exceptions. Within studies of the ancient New World, “gender studies” aligns one with social and cultural anthropologists also studying gender in all its aspects (masculinity, multiple genders, etc.), while the “archaeology of gender,” “engendered archaeology,” and “gender in archaeology” are all used interchangeably by archaeologists who specialize in the study of gender. Some scholars still shy away from using the term “feminist archaeology,” especially in the very conservative fields of Mesoamerican and Andean archaeology, for fear that misunderstandings about this term will marginalize their work. As articulated by a number of major theorists in the field of gender archaeology, some of whom work in the New World, this term also carries with it a more specific research agenda to question prior assumptions about the past and reconfigure the field along more equitable models (Brumfiel 1992; Conkey and Gero 1997; Conkey and Tringham 1995; Hays-Gilpin 2000d). Some see the term “feminist archaeology” as politically laden and thus subject to criticism for a lack of objectivity (see Klein 2001c). Other scholars argue all archaeology is political, and it is better to acknowledge one’s political interests, because careful acknowledgment and reflection lead to better science (Claassen 1992a; Nelson 2004; Pyburn 2004a). It is the opinion of this author (and others) that feminist archaeology is simply acknowledgment of the concept *that ancient women and men were equally innovative and intelligent, thus their contributions to our reconstructions of the ancient past are equally important*. Like the popular t-shirt says, “feminism is the radical notion that women are people.” Thus all good engendered archaeology should also be feminist archaeology, must by definition challenge dominant Western cultural assumptions about the capabilities of women and science, and must expose social inequalities. In this sense of challenging norms, “queer studies” as a field has

taken up much the same charge as feminism, as it is used as a new lens through which to question past interpretations and the intellectual “disappearances” of whole classes of people from our reconstructions of the past. As discussed below, queer studies is much more than looking for nonheterosexuality in the ancient world (although it is that also). As defined by Alison Wylie and others at a recent conference, queer studies in archaeology should be a “pervasive and persistent questioning of heteronormative assumptions about culture” (Wylie 2004).

Major research themes

Despite the vast diversity of approaches to the study of gender in the ancient New World, major themes in the recent literature do stand out. These themes seem to demonstrate only indirect connection to earlier suggestions for a desired “program” for feminist archaeology (Conkey and Gero 1997; Hays-Gilpin 2000d; Nelson 1997) and instead exhibit similarity to general research trends within the field of New World archaeology. One might argue that the lack of responsiveness to calls for certain research agendas reflects a healthy diversity within the field of engendered studies, one that results from the variety of means by which archaeologists find themselves confronting evidence for gender in the past. The nature of this subject matter attracts a uniquely diverse set of authors, a fact reflected in the literature. Scholars range from passionately committed to academic scholarship on feminist theory to those whose interest is based on little more than a perception that scholarship on gender-related topics is needed to correct earlier absences. There is also a view that women write about gender or women in the past because they have some innate connection to their ancient sisters. This of course is a gross misunderstanding of the role gender plays in modern scholarship, yet it also reflects a real degree of interest on the part of female scholars in a subject many of their male colleagues find peripheral. Some authors find this range of abilities and lack of shared theoretical frameworks troublesome and have issued repeated calls for greater theoretical diligence or rigor (Conkey 2001; Conkey and Gero 1997). The need to make a lasting theoretical contribution to feminist studies as a whole and to transform the discipline of anthropology along feminist lines motivates these scholars to call for archaeologists to engage more profoundly with mainstream feminist theory. Such cries are read carefully and digested by a very broad range of scholars, some of whom take such calls to arms very seriously, while others continue to produce works that draw on feminist literature only indirectly. Certainly, engagement with compelling theoretical movements is important and benefits the field. However, there are many avenues by which to transform the academy, and some scholars who claim to have something meaningful to say about ancient identities do not participate in any particular theoretical paradigm, yet see their work as contributing to the social transformations called for by feminists.

The fact that publications over the last ten years within the field of engendered research parallel closely the trends of New World prehispanic scholarship generally means that the gender literature is very accessible to the nonspecialist. Relatively free from insider jargon, the major research agendas of archaeologists interested in

gender are closely connected to the mainstream research agendas of the field: elucidation of belief systems and their affect upon social organization, recovery and analysis of human remains for purposes of understanding population dynamics as well as cultural beliefs, and models of economic production, including the nature of specialization. The literature on gender has made a significant contribution to our understanding of each of these major research areas.

Native cosmologies

One of the richest areas of research within engendered studies of ancient New World cultures is the examination of the role gender played in native cosmologies. This literature has real historical depth, as exploration and documentation of the rich native belief systems of the New World have long fascinated researchers (Ardren 2002a). Recent developments within anthropology in the way gender and power are conceptualized, especially the way gender can be used as a mechanism of control by the state or other dominant force, have reinvigorated studies of ancient cosmology and made a real contribution to our collective understanding of ancient worldview. Gender is now seen as a primary means by which power was shared (through studies of gender complementarity) as well as contested. The concept of “complementarity” is well documented in much of the scholarship on ancient cosmologies of the New World, from studies of dual-gender creator deities (Bassie-Sweet 2002; Gustafson 2002; Klein 2001b) to the way states influenced female and male gender roles to cement productivity and ideal values (Crown 2000b; Gose 2000; Joyce 1996, 2000a; Vogel 2003). Studies of female deities (McCafferty and McCafferty 1994, 1999; Milbrath 1995; Rodríguez 1996) and the ideological basis for female power (Ardren 2002b; Hamann 1997; Hays-Gilpin 2000a; Koelher 1997; Troccoli 1999) are also very common, although relatively few studies have examined the role of queens in the ancient states of the New World, despite the vast scholarship on divine kingship (see Bell 2003; Hewitt 1999; McCafferty and McCafferty 2003).

In a recent work that draws on mortuary data and historical records from the southern Appalachian area of the 14th to the 18th century, Sullivan and Rodning (2001) show that early contact period societies of the southeastern U.S. had gendered patterns of access to power and status. While different for men and women, these patterns were seen as “complementary pathways” (Sullivan and Rodning 2001, p. 119). A pattern of male burials in public architecture and female burials in residential architecture reflects gender distinctions in the lived landscape of Appalachian chiefdoms, where ethnohistoric documents show that power was vested in both male leadership of towns and female leadership of kin groups (Sullivan and Rodning 2001, pp. 114, 108). Complementarity also is a concept utilized by Ellen Bell when she addresses the complicated connections between ideology and power in her study of the royal queen found in the Margarita tomb at Copán (2002). Bell shows that the artifacts associated with the queen underscore Classic Maya ideals of female power and its connection to the productive power of the state. Hundreds of weaving needles, loom weights, and spindle whorls, some of them made of jade, accompanied this queen in her funerary ritual, conveying a

message of citational gender performance that solidified her status as an elite woman of central importance to the dynasty (Bell 2002, p. 97; cf. Joyce 2000a).

Evidence for the intersection of gender and power becomes more complex in situations of culture change or contact. Because identities are malleable, gender can be used as a lens through which to illuminate how cultural change occurred, and archaeology contributes a unique ability to explore the disjunctions evident in the period of first European contact. Spanish descriptions of the Mexica goddess Xochiquetzal drew on European notions of appropriate female behavior and male Aztec perceptions of Xochiquetzal's potentially dangerous power. Geoffrey and Sharisse McCafferty were able to find Postclassic material evidence that contradicted both Spanish and Aztec ethnohistoric accounts of the role of this marginalized yet important goddess. Women affiliated with the female deity Xochiquetzal and her priestesses "participated in an alternative discourse, not congruent with Aztec dominant culture," yet were accepted by Aztec society for the beneficial role they played in cloth production and ritual prostitution (McCafferty and McCafferty 1999, p. 121). Material evidence challenged the dual biases (Spanish and masculine) of early ethnohistoric accounts. McCafferty and McCafferty concluded the worship of Xochiquetzal was very important to the negotiation of female power in Postclassic Aztec culture as an embodiment of the Aztec notion that female power allowed the transformation of nature into art.

Ethnological studies of Native American societies in which multiple genders were expressed and accepted have encouraged archaeologists to look for comparable evidence of multiple or fluid gender statuses in prehistory. Sandra Hollimon has done extensive research on the role third-gender peoples played in native societies of California, utilizing historic descriptions paired with osteological analysis of occupational stress. Her studies have shown mortuary remains can be used to identify a group of third gender (or "two-spirit") individuals who specialized in mortuary services and treatment of the dead among the early historic Chumash (Hollimon 1992, 1997, 2000). There is ample documentation of two-spirit people or a third-gender status that carried with it unique ceremonial and occupational obligations throughout many native societies of historic North America (Callender and Kochems 1983; Jacobs and Thomas 1994; Roscoe 1987, 1991), but little research has documented these same people in the prehispanic record (see Looper 2002; Prine 2000). The widespread existence of multiple genders in native societies of the New World has obvious and important implications for archaeological models of production, socialization, ritual, etc., and future work on the archaeological identification of multiple or third-gender categories is an exciting avenue through which an engendered archaeology can make significant contributions to anthropological archaeology.

Studies of the body

Attention to the way the physical bodies of ancient people were affected by ideas related to gender remains a very important theme in the literature on ancient gender in the New World. This interest manifests in a long-standing interest in

bioarchaeological studies of dietary, nutritional, and disease differences expressed along gender lines (Ambrose et al. 2003; Danforth et al. 1997; Gerry and Chesson 2000; Haviland 1997; Lambert 2001; Martin 2000), which often illuminate patterns of inequality organized around an economic or other axis. In concert with recent research on the role of violence in the past, bioarchaeologists have noted abuse patterns that differentiate along gender lines (Martin 1997; Wilkinson 1997), a conclusion with important ramifications for understanding systemic or normalized violence. Commemoration and representation in death of culturally specific ideas about gender and bodies remains a central tool for discerning significant patterns in mortuary studies (González Cruz 2004; Hollimon 2001a; Neitzel 2000; Rodning 2001). The literature on mortuary ritual struggles with the question of whether poorly preserved human remains should be sexed using grave goods, a practice usually discouraged by feminist archaeologists anxious to avoid projecting modern assumptions about artifacts and behavior on the human remains of the past. Yet within the study of certain cultures, patterns have begun to emerge of a gendered burial complex (such as the association of weaving tools with high-status female burials in the Maya area) that suggests this practice may be appropriate in some cases.

Many studies of gatherer-hunter societies corroborate what Barbara Crass suggests about gendered work patterns and mortuary ritual in prehistoric Inuit society—man-the-hunter and woman-the-gatherer models do not reflect accurately the lived performance of economic activities, nor gender differentiation in other contexts (Crass 2000; McGuire and Hildebrandt 1994; Wadley 1997). Strong gender differentiation is not present in prehistoric Inuit burials, where profound belief in the activities of the soul after death took precedence over ideas about the gender identity of an individual. In her study of Inuit burials from the first through the 19th century A.D. throughout the Arctic, Crass found an equal number of each sex were buried with grave goods, and that there were few differences between the types of goods buried with a woman or a man (Crass 2000, p. 72). Women were slightly more likely to have been buried with sewing and skin-processing tools, but men were buried with these items frequently as well. The reverse held true of hunting items and dog tack. Inuit ideology strongly supported interdependency to survive the challenges of Arctic life, and Crass suggests that cooperation and task sharing between the genders resulted in a lack of distinctive mortuary assemblages for women and men.

Bioarchaeological studies and mortuary studies also have made a strong contribution to the emerging field of childhood studies, where there is broad interest in the emergence of gender roles and the indoctrination of young people into culturally specific gender roles and identities (Crown 2002; Sobolik 2002). Like many scholars now working on childhood or other social identities, Stephanie Whittlesey first wrote on gender in adult prehispanic populations and believes “real” or documental differences in gender or age can best be seen in bioarchaeological remains (Whittlesey 1996, 2002). Utilizing data from Grasshopper Pueblo and Pueblo Grande in Arizona, as well as Arroyo Hondo Pueblo in New Mexico, Whittlesey finds evidence for very poor maternal health in the high incidence of fetal and infant mortality, perhaps related to cultural differences in the

diets of women and men as demonstrated in bone chemistry studies (Ezzo 1993, p. 54; Whittlesey 2002, p. 160). Similarities in the mortuary rituals of women and children, evident in a lack of utilitarian and ceremonial grave goods common in adult male burials, suggests to her that ideas about status and health were both directly affected by gender values.

Although embodiment studies are still somewhat rare in New World archaeological studies of gender (see Hill 2000; Joyce 1998, 2003; Lesure 1997, 2002), this theoretical approach is quite significant in Europe and other regions where archaeology is less embedded in discourses of science. Like other embodiment scholars following in the anthropological tradition of Victor Turner (1984) and Mary Douglas (1966), who explore human bodies as liminal sites where the individual and the social intersect, Erica Hill argues the human body is a “historically contingent social phenomenon” (Hill 2000, p. 319). Hill uses Moche artistic depictions, especially scenes of sacrifice, to discover how the Moche used the human body as a medium for the transformation of the social body (see Gero 2004; Weismantel 2004; for other recent engendered studies of Moche pottery). Strongly influenced by Foucauldian ideas about how the body is disciplined by the state and thus represents a discursive field for state values, Hill shows that the recurrent theme of a sacrificed woman being devoured by birds depicts a violated liminal body in service to state-controlled sacrificial ritual (Hill 2000, p. 324). Because these women are depicted with specific features, and never as a group, Hill believes they are representations of individual women whose sacrifice fulfilled the requirements of a social body (Hill 2000, p. 324) in contrast to Moche depictions of sacrificed male prisoners whose individual identities were blurred or obscured in favor of an emphasis on group identity. In this way Hill examines the intersection of multiple identities and shows that what was important to the artist was not the sex of the individual portrayed but the intersection of a sexed body and the social roles associated with that body. Although not the case in Hill’s study, often gender is not the central focus of embodiment studies, which aim to expand our understanding of how ancient peoples understood or constituted the corporeal body.

Work and specialization

Giving voice to the many women who labored in the ancient world, especially examination of those forms of labor centered in the domestic sphere, has been and continues to be an important focus in engendered research in the ancient New World. The myriad levels of social organization in the region provide a rich resource for examination of how women’s roles changed over time, as well as the ways in which gender specialization for both women and men evolved or was deliberately constructed to serve the needs of emergent power groups. Early in the development of this specialization, scholars made very significant contributions to an engendered archaeology using data and societies of the ancient New World as their focus. The studies by Claassen on fishing and gathering activities of women in North America (Claassen 1991, 1992b, 1997) and the reformulation of the origins of horticulture by Watson and Kennedy (1991) permanently changed the way early settled villages are

conceptualized by North American archaeologists, especially in terms of the contributions of previously invisible populations like women and children.

Joan Gero's study of women's long-overlooked role in lithic production and Janet Spector's examination of women's tool kits in a native Dakota village both revolutionized the ways in which tools and associated activity areas could be used to conduct engendered archaeology (Gero 1991; Spector 1991). The work of these two scholars not only enriched our understanding of the role women played in ancient economies but also revealed a pervasive bias in earlier interpretive models that viewed tool-making as a male activity. Spector went on to write one of the first book-length monographs within feminist archaeology, in which she not only looked for women in the past but employed innovative new ways to ask questions about the past with an associated awareness of the interests of the investigator in archaeological interpretation (Spector 1993). Domestic work traditionally associated with women was explored in such early studies by Brumfiel (1991) and Hastorf (1991), both of whom explored the ways gender roles can be exploited by state-level power mechanisms.

Many of these themes continue to be actively pursued today, as engendered scholarship has shifted from looking for women to looking for gender constructs or questions of identity construction and manipulation. Food production and distribution remain a central topic of research (Bray 2003; Crown 2000c; Gose 2000; Habicht-Mauche 2000; VanderWalker 2002), as does cloth and textile production (Beaudry-Corbett and McCafferty 2002; Costin 1998; Hendon 1997; Kehoe 2000), since these are two crucial productive activities centered in the home that were often keyed directly to gender roles and expectations as well as the productive demands of society. Broader studies of the sexual division of labor and associated cultural expectations of each gender also are common and have greatly improved the ability of archaeologists to speak meaningfully about household economic production and the connections between work and status (Brumfiel 1998; Claassen 2002; Crown 2000b; Fish 2000; Fritz 1999; Gillespie and Joyce, 1997; Hegmon et al. 2000; Mills 2000; Shaffer et al. 2000; Thomas 2001; Williams and Bendremer 1997; Zeanah 2004). Within this tradition, prehispanic pottery production enlivened by analogies to ethnographically documented production of pottery by women also is an important theme (Crown and Wills 1995; Habicht-Mauche 2000; Sassaman 1992; Skibo and Schiffer 1995). Throughout this tradition of scholarship, gender has been seen as a means by which productive activities are organized and maintained; recently, the study of work and specialization has evolved to explore the ways in which specialization contributed to gender indoctrination and maintenance, whether through production and consumption of specialized products (like high-quality cloth and food) or gender-specific rituals associated with productive activities. In this way, engendered research contributes to archaeological models of production and economic organization by illuminating not only the means by which such processes were enacted but the crucial intersections between economics, politics, and ideology that underlie such processes.

A recent study by Cathy Costin builds on her earlier work on gender and cloth production in the Andes (Costin 1993, 1995, 1996). In a study of the intersections between cloth production and social identity in late prehispanic Inka culture, Costin

notes that while widely acknowledged as the most economically, politically, and ritually important item of local economies, there have been few studies of how cloth production was organized in the Andes (Costin 1998, p. 124). Using ethnohistoric documents on cloth producers, as well as archaeological data from cloth-producing warehouses, Costin shows how gender and status intersected in the maintenance of massive levels of cloth production. Common women wove rough cloth, and in many ways this work defined their identity as women. Elite women wove in service to their station, often using finer materials and intricate symbolic imagery, but were kept from specialization by other domestic burdens of state fealty. Two classes of full-time specialists wove professionally for the state; one was a lower class of adult married men who retained land ownership and wove using specific elements of ethnic identity. The other professional class was the highly ranked *aqllakuna* or “chosen women,” who were removed from their families at adolescence, trained in weaving and other courtly arts, and then given in marriage to newly conquered foreign elites. Costin argues for a correlation between the status of the weavers and the social value of the cloth they produced, although both cloth and weavers represent state-driven strategies of domination (Costin 1998, p. 137).

Recently Julia Hendon synthesized much of her significant corpus of research and writing on the household activities of Classic Maya women and men (Hendon 2002) in a concise summary of the intersection of household and state-based power systems. Hendon shows how practice theory illuminates the complex relationships between those who held formal authority and those who did not. When used by archaeologists investigating gender, practice theory helps illuminate symbolic concerns, since it views material culture as the result of actions infused with meaning and worth by the people who practice them (Bourdieu 1977; Hodder and Hutson 2003). Hendon uses this perspective to argue that common household rituals such as ancestral burial and figurine use are a primary means through which groups of interconnected people defined themselves as a household. She also sees evidence for household group identity at the elite level of Maya society, and her discussion of the role of gender in such identities demonstrates how in ancient Maya society the interdependent productive roles of both women and men were emphasized over their biological differences (Hendon 2002, p. 80). In a number of important works, Hendon has shown that the distinct craft activities that took place in Maya residential areas, such as weaving and pottery production, were key components of gender identities as well as household identities (Hendon 1991, 1996, 1997). Hendon concludes with an examination of how rank intersected with gender ideology to express hierarchy and shows there is ample evidence that while gender complementarity was well established in Maya society, rank and social stratification were equally important as a basis for identity and the expression of power.

In an exhaustive review of the role of women in the evolution of cuisine in the American Southwest, Patricia Crown uses cross-cultural and ethnographic data, as well as bioarchaeological, artifactual, and iconographic data, to demonstrate the link between women and food preparation. Differentiating between diet (actual foods consumed) and cuisine (cultural beliefs and practices concerning food), Crown argues that because women traditionally held knowledge of cuisine, changes in cultural values about food affect women much more than men, and women occupied

a critical node between production and consumption that was subject to dramatic change at numerous points in the prehistory and contact periods of the Southwest (Crown 2000c, p. 226). As diets changed and tools changed, women were at the nexus of these cultural adaptations. Specifically, Crown shows that time constraints and scheduling conflicts led to the development of tools for processing maize more efficiently, such as the two-handed metate around A.D. 400 (Crown 2000c, p. 245). Crown also reviews the data for changes in container technology and cooking facilities, other processes of technological innovation in which women were crucial. These data all show intensification of food-processing demands over time, and Crown suggests that changes in women's social status were tied to these increases in processing demands. Because some of this increased demand for food production stemmed from enhanced feasting and associated ritual use of food, women maintained a crucial position in the ability of social groups to conduct key ceremonial and status-related events. Throughout the New World such ritual foods were (and remain today) difficult to prepare, requiring specialized training or ingredients, and Crown suggests that women who possessed the knowledge of such aspects of cuisine were highly valued individuals (Crown 2000c, p. 266).

Methodological innovations

The literature on gender in prehispanic cultures of the New World is a rich source of methodological advancements made by scholars interested in recovering evidence of ancient gender in the archaeological record. The inherent tendency of engendered archaeology to innovate in methodological matters is due to the lack of precedents, the necessary rejection of androcentric assumptions, and the healthy use of the scientific process to investigate areas of ancient cultures previously largely ignored. Wylie has argued that feminist archaeology makes for better science as it adds new ideas to the field, rejects untested assumptions, and draws on multiple lines of evidence (Wylie 1992, 1996).

As a primary structuring principle of ancient life throughout the New World, conceptualizations about gender played a key role in the behaviors and beliefs of ancient people. In turn, gender played a key role in structuring the archaeological record. Activity areas, subsistence strategies, burials, etc.—every area of ancient life was touched in some way by gendered principles of behavior and belief. As students of ancient life, archaeologists working in the New World are now able to discern those segments of the archaeological record in a given ancient culture that were most sensitive to gendered patterns of deposition. Certainly mortuary treatments in the Maya area are well documented to have been structured along gender lines (as well as economic or status lines) (Ardren 2002b; Bell 2002; Danforth et al. 1997). However, food production in the prehispanic cultures of the American Southwest (Crown 2000c; Fish 2000) and central Mexico (Brumfiel 1991) or tool production in North America (Frink et al. 2002; Fritz 1999; Habicht-Mauche 2000) also are activities whose material remains entered the archaeological record in large part due to gendered principles of behavior. Acknowledgment of this taphonomic reality and careful attention to the interpretation of patterns of discard and use by scholars

interested in recovering gender is a lasting contribution to the interpretive models used by all archaeologists.

Perhaps more fundamentally, in many of the works already discussed, as well as others, scholars have reached well beyond the common use of ethnographic analogy to test or critique the projection of ethnographic models into the past. They have rarely settled for a simple use of ethnographic data, instead combining such information with additional lines of evidence such as bioarchaeology, oral history, and imagery. Good examples of this theme are plentiful in the literature under examination, but Crown's work on the evolution of Southwestern cuisine (Crown 2000c), Costin's work on cloth production (Costin 1998), and Hollimon's identification of third-gender individuals (Hollimon 1997), all discussed above, certainly exemplify this tradition of multiple avenues of argument. Ethnoarchaeological research by Hetty Jo Brumbach and Robert Jarvenpa (1998, 2006a, b) on the relationship of life-cycle dynamics to women's hunting and trapping experience in far northern North America has been a particularly influential and successful example of this trend. Brumbach and Jarvenpa use oral history, mapping, and excavation of early historic Chipewya and Cree settlements to document the role women played in providing small game. Interviews with Chipewyan women and men concerning the spatial, temporal, and material dimensions of food procurement and processing yielded valuable information for a catchment analysis of food resources in the region, with a suggested range of 3–5 km for land travel and a 5–10-km range for water travel (Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1997, p. 29). Furthermore, interviews coupled with spatial analysis of artifacts showed that women's participation in hunting was more easily identified in the archaeological record than that of men. Carcasses of small game usually hunted by women were regularly returned to the village site for processing, in contrast to the practices of large-game butchering at the kill site. Likewise, the distinct tool kits used by women would subsequently preserve at a higher incidence within site boundaries (Brumbach and Jarvenpa 1997, p. 30). This research shows that ethnoarchaeological studies of gender not only have important contributions to make in terms of the analysis of the sexual division of labor and native subsistence systems, but it illustrates the need to be attuned to gendered principles in artifact deposition and the value of native testimony for interpretation of even very ancient archaeological cultures. Because scholars working on ancient gender are often asking questions not previously explored, innovation, creativity, and experimentation often characterize the research methodologies in use. What is specifically distinctive about gender studies is the need for the researcher to set aside deeply ingrained Western patterns of gendered belief and behavior to see the unique patterns inherent in native cultures. This characteristic alone makes the archaeological study of gender methodologically significant to the entire field.

Key works on gender in the prehispanic Americas

Often it can be useful for scholars working outside a particular subject area to be made aware of key publications that summarize or represent well the current status

of a research specialization. At the risk of greatly oversimplifying the diversity of engendered archaeology in the Americas, I have chosen three monographs that I believe are relevant to all archaeologists working in New World studies. They might present an entry point for someone working in a parallel field, or a touchstone for gender studies of the ancient Americas at the turn of the millennium, but they certainly do not summarize or encompass the range of theoretical perspectives nor questions under investigation within the field today.

The first of these three books, *Gender in Pre-Hispanic America*, is an edited volume that resulted from a conference on “Pre-Columbian gender” held at Dumbarton Oaks in 1996 (Klein 2001a). The contributions in this volume ask questions of the New World data that were rarely asked prior to the conference. Most of the chapters explore the dynamics of gender relations as opposed to solely women’s roles; this represented a monumental progression in the theoretical development of the field at the time the conference occurred. In addition, the volume remains one of the few sources for studies of gender ambiguity and androgeny (Dean 2001; Klein 2001b). The fields of masculinity studies and embodiment studies remain in their infancy today in New World studies, but both of these avenues of inquiry are represented in this volume in chapters dedicated to the exploration of Andean processes of masculinity reinforcement (Dean 2001) and Mixtec conceptualizations of the body, sexuality, and gender (Monaghan 2001). Core concepts in New World gender studies also are apparent; there are rich and subtle discussions of gender complementarity, the iconography of sacred power within a gendered cosmos, and the gendered landscape. Many of the chapters utilize a wide range of data, including historical texts, bioarchaeological remains, figurines, and native books, and at least two of the contributors are ethnohistorians working primarily on contact period studies (Burkhart 2001; Dean 2001). Finally, the volume concludes with two very different chapters, one by Margaret Conkey and the other by editor Cecelia Klein, both of which have greatly influenced the subsequent development of gender studies through their suggestions for the future direction of the field (Conkey 2001; Klein 2001c).

The second key reference is a single-authored volume by Rosemary Joyce, a scholar whose prolific contributions to the field of engendered archaeology have profoundly shaped a whole generation of current scholars interested in the archaeology of social identities in Mesoamerica. Her work also has earned her a well-deserved reputation in the field of gender studies throughout the rest of the world. Joyce’s publication, *Gender and Power in Prehispanic Mesoamerica*, is a comprehensive analysis of the evidence for gender as a central component of identity throughout ancient Mesoamerica (Joyce 2000a). This study was one of the first to utilize the influential queer-theorist Judith Butler’s concept of the performative nature of gender—i.e., its need to be defined and performed rather than revealed as obvious and natural—which has since become a very influential model to help explain the strong emphasis on gender-specific costuming and artifacts in the prehispanic cultures of the Americas. When Joyce states, “archaeological materials and settings were the media and stages for gendered performances,” she makes an explicit link between Butler’s theory and the archeological or material record available to prehistorians (Joyce 2000a, p. 7). In

this study Joyce strongly rejects the inevitability of Western conceptualizations of two polarized genders and embraces the ambiguities that we know existed in early cultures of Mesoamerica and the rest of the New World. Her articulation of the importance of ambiguity to gender relations has become a touchstone for later scholars interested in the manipulation of identity and power. Throughout the book she shows that gender was seen as *potential* in ancient Mesoamerica, it was subject to change and manipulation, and in need of stabilization (Joyce 2000a, p. 177). Rituals, costuming, burials, and figurines are just some of the ways in which gender was fixed from its potential into reality. These events were both deeply personal as well as opportunities for the state or dominant social force to intercede and predetermine the outcome, thus allowing for state-controlled values. Joyce is at the forefront of scholars who reject unified interpretations of gender and embrace the multivocal representations of the past that engendered research provides us today. This monograph is a masterpiece of synthesis and theory and demonstrates both the richness of data available for this field and Joyce's own theoretical maturity and engagement with engendered literature outside archaeology and anthropology.

A major new volume by Kelley Hays-Gilpin, *Ambiguous Images: Gender and Rock Art*, synthesizes 12 years of research on the intersections of prehispanic southwestern iconography and conceptualizations of gender (Hays and Adams 1992, Hays-Gilpin 1996, 2000a, b, c, 2002, 2004). For Hays-Gilpin, rock art and gender are both marginalized subjects in archaeology, although she is proud to work at the margins “because the most exciting ideas often emerge at the fringes of accepted disciplinary practice” (Hays-Gilpin 2004, p. 1). For this author, feminist archaeology is also concerned with margins—either as a reflection of its own position in the discipline or a manifestation of its charge to elucidate marginalized populations. Thus Hays-Gilpin makes use of feminist and queer theory to situate rock art and gender as new ways in which to view the center (dominant culture) from the margin, or periphery. This is a relatively innovative way in which to frame the study of gender, one that acknowledges the influence of European and African rock art specialists who use queer theory, and one that promises to be an important addition to acknowledging both the politics of doing engendered archaeology and the significance of gender as a way to understand ancient cultures.

After a careful examination of the relationship of gender to rock art worldwide, as well as a refutation of the fertility/mother goddess theme in American southwestern rock art, Hays-Gilpin shows how rock art was used as an active component of rituals of age transformation and gender socialization. Speaking of the ubiquitous butterfly maiden images, Hays-Gilpin says, “They also remind the wearer and all viewers that here was an individual in the process of assuming her ritual and social responsibilities, most important in the large, aggregated, ritually complex communities of the 1300s and later,” (Hays-Gilpin 2004, pp. 145–146). For its theoretical innovation and methodological depth, this work will certainly become a model of the detailed regional study that we desperately need other authors to conduct throughout the New World.

Challenges and future directions

Many of the challenges faced by an engendered archaeology of the precontact New World are the same challenges faced by all archaeological research today—the variation in how concepts are defined, the wealth of data and literature available, the choices between specificity and generalization. Some of these challenges take on greater significance to an archaeologist attempting to recover evidence of ancient gender, as gender is not a tangible thing that one can easily find or rediscover. The work done in this field to date seems to lean toward a conceptualization of gender as a set of experiences, an inherently relational process or set of intersections to be problematized rather than assumed. Even the presence of gender as a significant category of identity cannot be presupposed, although the evidence weighs strongly in favor of its centrality to the cultures of the New World. Writing only a few years ago about this same challenge, Conkey noted, “scholars themselves are still negotiating, defining, reconceptualizing gender,” and thus must make every effort to achieve clarity about how they employ concepts like identity and gender (Conkey 2001, p. 344). As I hope I have made clear throughout this review, this lack of programmatic definition or fluidity of conceptualizations provides intellectual depth and diversity to engendered archaeology that is an inherent strength. It is an exciting time to be engaged with the definitional processes of this field, and contestation is not to be avoided as long as room is made for a diversity of voices. This deliberation will continue to manifest in debates over such specifics as the appropriate use of ethnographic analogy, the polarization of those who eschew theory in favor of “data-rich” descriptions, and the on-going discussions about whether engendered archaeology is inherently feminist.

A challenge that has yet to be debated sufficiently in the literature is the struggle over seeing our rich indigenous data as a reflection of cultural norms versus a subversion of such norms. Deeply embedded in the political development and modern realities of this field, research that recounts the laundry list of gender markers without taking a critical perspective on how those same artifacts, burial patterns, bioarchaeological markers, and so on, also could have been interpreted as evidence of resistance to dominant cultural norms, is no longer as interesting or compelling. Within recent history we needed scholars to find evidence of women, and in many areas and periods of New World prehistory we still desperately need primary data on the lives and experiences of women or other nondominant populations in the cultures we study. However, more and more, a very rich database of such diversity exists, and instead we must see the subtleties and contradictions in often overly essentialized patterns of what it means to be a woman or a man or other. This field will always struggle with persistently androcentric datasets, but I predict we will develop new and better ways to see the resistance and individual agency in otherwise monolithic or normative reconstructions.

New directions

It does not require a soothsayer to predict that engendered research in the New World will follow many of the trends taken up by our colleagues in Europe, who

have embraced the relevance of gender and other social identities wholeheartedly. Future research questions will need to take into account more fully the intersection of gender with other social identities such as age or class. Research on these questions is already taking place (Ardren and Hutson 2006; Crown and Fish 1996; Hays-Gilpin 2002), but much more of it is called for. It is remarkable how little is known about the conceptualization of childhood gender roles (to take only one example) throughout the ancient cultures of the New World, even though there is tantalizing evidence that childhood held tremendous potential for numinous power, as evidenced by the prevalence of sacrificial remains of children throughout the region (Kamp 2002).

Attention must also be focused by those with an interest in gender toward the very earliest periods of human occupation in the New World, where the evidence is obviously much more limited but just as compelling. The literature that addresses these periods is remarkably small (Gero 1995; Hollimon 2001b), although this period holds the promise of significant contributions to our understanding of the evolution of gender-specific roles and the intersection of subsistence changes with gendered tasks. New World archaeologists working on gender in early periods are in very good company as some of the most significant research on gender has taken place on materials recovered from Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic Europe and robust theoretical models for such remains exist (Bender 1987; Conkey and Tringham 1995).

Finally, further investigation of gendered landscapes promises new contributions to fields such as settlement pattern archaeology, long considered fundamental to the archaeological endeavor. Few cultures in the world are as rich with evidence of a gendered landscape, or the ways in which places and their associated activities were understood to be gendered, as those of the prehispanic New World. Sullivan and Rodning (2001) find evidence for the use of gender to structure spatial arrangements in the communities of 14th to 18th century Appalachian chiefdoms, and specific architectural forms for the *aqllakuna* of Inka culture have long been acknowledged. However, we have yet to ask if gender played a role in allowing or denying one access to certain spaces, or if important sacred centers were conceptualized as holding a gendered identity or alternating gender on a calendrical or seasonal basis. There is a rich universe of information to be gained on the articulation of gender to other forms of identity or social organization by shifting our attention away from the lives of human individuals and toward the rest of the lived environment.

The central theoretical challenge to an engendered archaeology of the ancient New World is to make our research more relevant to scholars and other interested parties outside our own geographical area or region of specialization. Our incredible depth of data is often used as an excuse to “talk amongst ourselves” to the exclusion of any serious engagement with the sizable world of scholarship on ancient gender and identity outside the Americas. Such engagement would benefit our own field as we could become more conversant in theoretical models that work and provide exciting comparative frameworks, and it would greatly benefit the rest of the scholarly community who are hungry for the kind of multicomponent arguments we take for granted given the wealth of artifactual, iconographic, and textual data available for New World cultures. Scholars working on prehispanic cultures of the

Americas are extremely conversant with the intricacies of social phenomena such as sacrifice, native literacy, urbanism, and propaganda, and we need to engage in conversations about these phenomena with our colleagues working on gender elsewhere in the world and share our analyses more often.

This engagement with a conversation going on in the rest of the world might be facilitated by looking at theoretical movements already important in the study of gender outside the ancient Americas that are rarely cited by New World archaeologists. There are many such literatures from which to choose, but to limit myself to highlighting only two of central importance, I mention briefly the value of queer theory and indigenous feminism.

Barbara Voss and Robert Schmidt have published extensively on the use of queer theory in archaeology (Schmidt 2002; Schmidt and Voss 2000; Voss 2000). Queer theory is well established in the humanistic and social scientific fields and is increasingly utilized by archaeologists in Europe who are interested in exploring difference. Perhaps the best known conference on gender and archaeology celebrated its 15th anniversary with the theme of “que(e)rying archaeology,” an acknowledgment of the powerful role of queer studies to cross-pollinate gender studies and reassert the shared intention of both fields to question how difference is a central component of social life.

Destabilizing notions of gender and sexuality are at the heart of queer theory, and this critical perspective is extremely important to a better understanding of the nuances of especially New World indigenous cultures, given what has already been documented about the variety of ways in which gender and sexuality were conceptualized (Callender and Kochems 1983; Jacobs and Thomas 1994; Roscoe 1987, 1991). Thus queer studies of the ancient New World would not be overly concerned with looking for evidence of nonheterosexuality but instead would be focused on ways in which the normative and deviant have been defined, not specifically in sexual behavior but in all social structures in which there is a center and a periphery (in other words, everywhere). Other social scientists have found queer theory useful in illuminating the challenge of bringing differences (such as gender, ethnicity, status, or sexual preference) into social analysis without defining them as inferior to the mainstream, thereby keeping them suppressed (Seidman 1997). Of course, not all differences can be acknowledged in archaeology, an inherently synthesizing discipline, but we must think hard about what differences are important to illuminate and why.

An additional body of theory that New World scholars have the obligation to explore is the growing literature published by indigenous feminists, especially scholars from indigenous New World cultures who have taken an interest in the way gender is utilized in the academy and in studies of indigenous cultures. Indigenous feminists and scholars of gender in prehistory share many goals—the need to redress historic stereotypes, the struggle for inclusion and a significant voice in the academy, and the importance of teaching indigenous history (Conkey 2005). Native American feminists like Devon Mihesuah write articulately about the need for a multivocal past, one in which the multiple stories and experiences of different tribes and different women (and men) are all told. Like other third-wave feminists, Mihesuah and her colleagues resist the label of Other and Native Woman and urge academics to see the

distinctions between the experiences of women of different classes, races, and ethnicities rather than their essential similarities (Hooks 1984; Hull et al. 1981; Mohanty et al. 1991). These are points not lost on anthropologists, and those of us working on the study of gender roles and expectations within native cultures must agree with the charge that there is a need “to recognize the heterogeneity among Native women through sensitive research methodologies” (Mihesuah 2003, p. xii).

Indigenous native feminists call for specific kinds of research and see tremendous benefit to the recovery of stories about women and other marginalized groups that have been left out of mainstream history for generations. Arguing for the inclusion of native perspectives is not limited to the intellectual need for a multivocal past—it is also the way to address pressing issues facing native cultures throughout the Americas today. Native scholars level the same critique of traditional academic scholarship made by many feminists working on gender studies—traditional histories and ethnographies have excluded or overlooked the role of women. The importance of gender, the details of childhood and aging, and other social identities are vital components in the complexities of native culture. When traditional histories are read by native students, they do not find themselves well represented, and even modern generations learn a distorted version of the history of the Americas (Champagne 1998; Fixico 1998). This process impacts native women and young people especially, many of whom are struggling to redefine themselves while living in a postcolonial world. As early feminists in the academy noted the need for studies of women, native feminists now call for careful and sensitive studies of native gender to help fill a gap in what has been explored. Mihesuah writes, “unless students are cognizant of the powerful roles women held in their tribal societies and their tribes’ cosmologies, and unless natives are taught of the important female tribal legacies, then women will continue to be abused as second class citizens, even among their own people” (Mihesuah 2004, p. 54).

Such a clear political rationale for academic study carries with it a call for specific research practices that might impact the field of engendered archaeological research as well as enrich our anthropological sensitivity as a result. “Contribution history,” as such studies are called, or research focused on an accurate portrayal of native people that helps counteract media and historical stereotypes, should not be repetitive or sensationalistic. Sacred or ceremonial information may not be appropriate to convey, without the express permission of tribal leaders, and collaboration with indigenous scholars is always encouraged. Many of these practices and principles are well accepted by archaeologists working on gender studies throughout the Americas, but the literature of indigenous feminists has yet to be cited regularly. There is nothing to fear from a deeper engagement with the literature and ideas of native scholars, and the study of gender in the past seems to provide a natural point of mutual interest within our respective communities.

Conclusion

The field of archaeological inquiry into gender relations and identities in the ancient New World has matured and diversified over the past ten years. A truly impressive

amount of data and theoretical reconstructions of past gender relations have been published, and certain regions, like the American Southwest, have seen multiple synthetic volumes that establish a solid foundation of information about the beliefs, practices, and contestations related to indigenous conceptualizations of gender. Situated within a broader field of the archaeology of social identities, engendered studies struggle to define and recover concepts and experiences that are often fleeting or changeable during any individual lifespan. Nonetheless, such concepts have proven to be central components of the cosmology, organization of labor, and life-cycle transitions in most cultures of the ancient New World. Gender beliefs and expectations can be seen in operation at every level of ancient society, from the structure of burial grounds to the daily processing of corn, from the design of temple architecture to temporary hunting camps. The very rich archaeological record of the New World provides enormous evidence for gendered behavior, and scholars today utilize every imaginable means by which to approach the recovery of this elusive but fundamental characteristic of ancient life.

With such diversity of data comes a wide variety of interests and theoretical perspectives, which has led to long-standing disagreements, or perhaps what are more correctly described as absences of agreement, over fundamental concepts. Within archaeology and the social sciences more generally, scholars of gender do not agree on the role biology played in determining gendered behaviors or beliefs, nor do they agree on whether sex (as the biological correlate of gender for many scholars) is conceptualized in the same fundamental way within non-Western cultures. Archaeologists face the additional challenges of deciphering how to “read” gendered behavior and beliefs from the imperfect “text” of the surviving material record, as well as disagreements over whether and when such remains reflect cultural norms or resistance to such norms. None of these absences of agreement threaten the integrity of this specialty—on the contrary, they provide a fertile arena of collegial debate and discussion that enriches our reconstructions of the past by providing many voices united in their attempt to remedy distorted versions of the history of the Americas.

The study of gender does not simply add new subject matter to archaeological investigations, but as many others have pointed out, it also involves a fundamental rethinking of traditional paradigms and reconstructions. Once one acknowledges that slightly more than half the ancient population has been left out of most reconstructions of ancient culture, it is a small step toward wondering what other fundamental components of ancient indigenous culture modern researchers have overlooked. This in turn leads to a reassessment of the underlying assumptions about both how we view the past (and its material residue) and how we practice the social science of archaeology. An engendered archaeology does not require rejection of all previous research by any means, but it does require a careful and critical eye toward the means by which we arrive at our reconstructions and the people we find there.

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