6-24-2011

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Katherine McMillian

The University of Western Ontario

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McMillian, Katherine (2001) "A Study of Class and Gender in the Great Lakes Early PalaeoIndian Period," Totem: The University of Western Ontario Journal of Anthropology: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 3.

Available at: http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/totem/vol9/iss1/3

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A Study of Class and Gender in the Great Lakes Early PalaeoIndian Period

Keywords
great lakes, palaeo indians, gender, class, inequality

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INTRODUCTION

At the broadest level, this paper examines the study of class and gender in archaeological investigations. As it stands, this topic is enormously broad in scope, and so I will narrow my focus to the evaluation of the applicability of class and gender studies to the case of "simple" societies in the deep past. For the purposes of this paper, these simple societies are ones which exhibit little internal social differentiation and which leave minimal traces in the archaeological record. In contrast, more complex societies exhibit great social and political differentiation, and tend to be much more visible archaeologically. Class and gender have been studied with fair success in archaeology (for example McGuire and Paynter 1991; McCafferty and McCafferty 1994). However, many of these studies have focused on archaeological cases for which the historical and social contexts are well known. The study of class and gender in simpler prehistoric societies is more problematic, presenting researchers with two major obstacles. First, taphonomic processes, including physical and chemical alterations, operate through time to transform or destroy detail in the archaeological record. Second, because class and gender are socially constructed concepts and are dependent upon perceived social positions, we are faced with the difficulty of understanding the perceptions of individuals and groups long since vanished.

These hurdles are encountered at three levels within the analysis. First, challenges arise when attempting to comprehend the experiences and understandings of individuals. Without skeletal evidence or artifacts that exhibit signatures of individual handiwork, it is difficult, if not impossible, to recognize the individual in the archaeological record. Such markers are especially elusive among "simple" societies. Second, we confront challenges at the level of collective understandings of social positions. However, detailed studies of settlement structure and intra-site assemblage variability, indicative of the division and use of space and other resources, may provide insight into this level of understanding. Third, because class and gender are relational concepts (i.e. the identity is constructed in opposition to another perceived identity), it is necessary to come to an understanding of the perceptions surrounding relationships between the individual and the larger social unit. A lack of evidence for the individual, in combination with sparse data for the historical or social climate, renders untenable most attempts to enter the minds of these prehistoric individuals.

The question then arises of whether it is indeed feasible to study class and gender in prehistory. I will approach this question through the application of theory derived from class and gender studies to the case of the Palaeoindian habitation around the Great Lakes. The Palaeoindian period represents the initial hunter-gatherer occupation in the region and therefore provides a suitable case
against which to test the applicability of the theory to deep prehistory and simple societies.

OVERVIEW OF THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The concepts of gender and class are closely linked. Both may be regarded as forms of socially-constructed identity which indicate a person’s position in society, and both are constructed around relations of power. Preucel and Hodder (1996) explain that gender is “a constitutive element of human social relations based on culturally ascribed similarities and differences between and among males and females” (p. 418) and that it represents only one of the ways individuals self-identify. Smith (1991) echoes this sentiment, suggesting that gender represents the most fundamental construction of “selfhood”. This identity is presented to the world, and the meaning assigned to it in a larger social context is subsequently internalized. Class may be viewed similarly, encompassing self-constructed and imposed identities. The assignment of class is “based on economic access and economic relationships...shared in degree and in kind by those within a stratum” (Berreman 1981: 13). Class is a socially constructed identity based on economic position, and it arises through differences in the relations of production, relations between those who control the means of production, and the labourers who are controlled. Class is reproduced from within a stratum as members construct and present an identity, but it is also reproduced externally as the “other” creates and imposes an identity.

Interpretations of class and gender as seen in the archaeological record have been influenced by our perceptions of these constructions in our own societies. Archaeology, as a scientific discipline, emerged in the context of capitalist societies. These societies embraced specific roles for each of two genders. Men were viewed as breadwinners and women as key figures in the domestic sphere. All other societies, contemporary and archaeological, were seen as occupying positions in the progression toward capitalism, and as possessing the same “natural” gender division. More recent research into class and gender have shattered these myths.

Archaeological class and gender studies have followed different trajectories, with the notion of class receiving more attention for a longer period of time than gender. Gender has only recently been brought to the forefront of archaeological research. The delay in its acceptance as a valid subject of study may be explained as a result of the perceived naturalization of gender through its equation to biological sex. As Wylie (1991) explains,

if biological males and females can be assumed always to have occupied the range of sharply differentiated and hierarchical roles that are represented as ‘naturally’ their’s in societies, then gender can be dismissed as unproblematic and uninteresting for archaeological purposes (p. 19).

It is only recently that gender has become viewed as a fluid social construction and therefore worthy of study in a discipline interested in cultural change. By contrast, early European exploration and contact with ethnographically-recorded populations, in combination with the discovery of ancient remains from apparently simple societies, revealed that class, unlike gender, had not always existed as a ‘natural’ set of divisions.

Class has been studied differently in archaeology than in socio-cultural
anthropology, probably as a result of the particular materials archaeologists have available for study. However, our sociocultural counterparts provide a convenient entrance into the study of class in prehistory. The notion of class has grown from Marxist theory surrounding ideas of the modes and relations of production. Eric Wolf (1982) provides a clear discussion of the relation of Marxist thought to the study of culture. Humans exist as both a part of nature, and as social creatures. We enter into confrontations with nature, but these confrontations are mediated by social processes. The relationship between nature and human social organization is referred to as labour. The labourer, as the direct producer, exists in relation to others, specifically those individuals who organize and mobilize labour. The relationship between the labourer and the organizer is known as the relation of production.

There are both physical and cognitive aspects to the labour process: labour is intentional and incorporates meaning. I would argue, then, that because the process of production is meaning-laden the products may also be imbued with meaning. This provides an avenue to archaeologists for understanding the social processes at work in past societies. From an understanding of the physical and cognitive elements of the labour process, we can begin to understand the organization or modes of production, the "specific, historically occurring set of social relations through which labour is deployed to wrest energy from nature by means of tools, skills, organization, knowledge" (Wolf 1982: 75).

However, it is difficult to uncover evidence for these modes of production and hence for class in studies of simple prehistoric societies. Class is less frequently mentioned in prehistoric archaeological studies, especially as a result of its connection to social complexity. There are references made to class in studies of highly stratified state-level societies, but understanding the relations of production in simpler prehistoric societies has been largely ignored. However, a simple internal organizational structure does not imply that individuals occupied precisely the same roles, nor does it mean that there were no relations evident between individuals and groups. Eric Wolf provides a way of approaching the study of prehistoric social organization. Although these societies did not exist at a level that incorporated traditional class strata, social labour nonetheless was organized and mobilized through what he calls the kin ordered mode of production. Kinship can be viewed as the tracing of pedigrees or as a social construct comprising symbolic knowledge of descent and affinity (Wolf 1982: 90). It operates by ensuring that anyone within a kin group may obtain resources, by restricting access only to those who can claim kinship. Within this mode of production in simple societies, there is no differential access to the means of production. However, within this egalitarian system, we still must consider both the economic and political dimensions of the organization of social labour:

The kin-ordered mode inhibits the institutionalization of political power, resting essentially upon the management of consensus among clusters of participants. Moreover, the ties of kinship set limits to the amount of social labor that can be mobilized for collective purposes. Social labor can be aggregated through the temporary convergence of many separate ties, but is dispersed again when changing conditions require a rearrangement of commitments. At the same
time, the extension and retraction of kin ties create open and shifting boundaries of such societies (Wolf 1982: 99).

Application of this theoretical framework to archaeology has been limited though, and a concrete methodology for its execution in the field has not yet been developed. Colin Renfrew (1982), in his study of ranked societies, suggests that we can access the individual through skeletal remains and handiwork, and yet he believes that even with evidence for the individual, we cannot see kinship archaeologically. Miller and Tilley (1989) suggest that the issue of complexity has been at the forefront of archaeology since the inception of the discipline. The degree of complexity in societies has been modelled mathematically through the analysis of managers, hierarchies, and peer polity interaction. However, human behaviour does not submit to the predictability of mathematical models. Therefore, Miller and Tilley propose studying inequalities through the examination of relations of dominance and resistance, power, and ideological legitimation. The authors provide no methodological approach to complement their theoretical propositions. McGuire and Paynter (1991) provide a more accessible methodology in their study of the relations of dominance and resistance in cases of historic archaeology. They suggest that power can be seen through architectural and material remains that incorporate the notions of dominance into everyday life until the inequalities become viewed as common sense. Resistance arises when non-elites refuse to share the elite ideology, and the authors suggest that correlates of this resistance are visible in historical and archaeological records. For example, the destruction of monumental architecture may signal an internal uprising, or there may be evidence (written or artifactual) for sabotage or strikes.

How do we proceed, though, in societies where there is no monumental architecture or known historical context? In search of an answer to this question, I turned to Bender’s (1989) article “The Roots of Inequality”, believing that it might provide some insight into an approach toward understanding the organization of social labour in prehistory. However, her article examines the origins of complexity, and provides little discussion of the organization of simple societies. Ian Hodder (e.g. 1990; 1996) has studied organization of prehistoric societies, but ones that are architecturally, artifactualy, and artistically rich, such as the impressive Neolithic settlement of Çatalhöyük in modern Turkey. As a result, his methods lack applicability to much simpler societies. I propose, therefore, that in order to understand the organization of social labour in the deep past, we must first abandon the notion of accessing the mode of production directly. Instead, we should seek to understand that most fundamental division in the conceptualization of selfhood: gender. By examining the economic organization of many prehistoric societies, we see that their primary economic pursuits are subsistence-oriented. Within this form of economy, gender represents the primary social division and may therefore provide insight into the ways in which labour was organized, and the relative values assigned to each productive activity along that gender division.

Although class, social organization, and division of labour have been subjects of study for a longer period of time in archaeology, gender studies have become prolific recently. Gender archaeology has grown out of the feminist movement which, as Preucel and Hodder (1996) explain, is more than just an advocation of women’s rights. It is a movement which has engaged in diverse discourses and has contributed to theory in
philosophy and the social sciences. Drawing issues of gender into studies of the past is not simply a matter of searching for evidence of men and women, but also seeks to understand how gender works as a structuring principle, and as a source of cultural meanings (Gero and Conkey 1991: 14). Wylie (1991) adds that a gendered archaeology seeks not to produce an archaeology only of women, but an “archaeology of humans” (p. 22), encompassing the range of individuals and groups in the human past.

Why has a study which seeks to explore the great variation in prehistory taken so long to become accepted? Wylie (1991) proposes that the answer may lie partly in tradition of male dominance over archaeological research, and partly in the long-term hold that the empirically-based Processual approach had on practitioners of archaeology. Under this positivist paradigm, ‘ethnographic’ variables such as gender were seen as inaccessible archaeologically (p. 416). In regions where Processual archaeology has not been so influential, the delay in accepting gender as a valid subject may be based more in the tradition of male dominance in the discipline.

Feminist archaeology has been linked strongly to the development of the Post-processual critique to the New Archaeology. The Post-processual approach has itself generated many critiques focused on its apparent lack of methodology, and this critique might easily be extended to gender archaeology. However, Alison Wylie (1996) does provide us with a way of thinking through a gendered approach. She writes that:

While we cannot treat archaeological data as a given – a stable foundation – it is by no means infinitely plastic. It does, or can, function as a highly recalcitrant, closely constraining, “network of resistances,” to use the terms of Shanks and Tilley’s. . .discussion. What we need is a nuanced account of how data are interpretively laden such that, to varying degrees, they can stand as evidence for or against a given knowledge claim (Wylie 1996: 447; original emphasis).

Here we can see Wylie’s tie to a Post-processual approach. Her statements are reminiscent of much of Ian Hodder’s writing. Hodder believes that although interpretations of archaeological data cannot be viewed as “real”, the data exist in the physical world and therefore constrain the sorts of interpretations that may be drawn from them (e.g. Shanks and Hodder 1998). The more data that can be collected, the more resistant they become to invalid interpretations. Hodder suggests that as researchers move back and forth between theory and data, they will reach a point at which too much “special pleading” is required to allow the fit between theory and data, and the interpretation is rendered inadequate (1986). Therefore, to avoid false interpretations, researchers must bring together as many lines of evidence as possible.

In archaeological investigations of many prehistoric societies the lines of evidence are restricted. Often, populations were not large enough to leave substantial traces, and taphonomic processes may have destroyed certain classes of evidence. Therefore, in order to strengthen our interpretations of prehistoric societies, it sometimes becomes necessary to seek evidence outside the realm of archaeology. Janet Spector (in Ehrenberg 1989) has suggested that in order to understand gender in archaeology, it becomes necessary to arm ourselves with a basis of ethnographic knowledge which yields insight into gender-
divisions in tasks, space, and value assigned to activities (p. 19). Spector advocates caution in the use of this approach, emphasizing the need to ensure that the ethnographic analog is a suitable one to use. This method may be extended to provide clues about social differentiation and inequalities based on gender divisions. There are, of course, dangers inherent in using ethnographic analogy in archaeology, but in cases for which there is little evidence, it may provide the most successful means of approaching understandings beyond those of technology, subsistence, and general settlement patterns. Therefore the approach may prove useful in my study of “class” and gender in the Great Lakes Palaeoindian Period.

CASE STUDY: “CLASS” AND GENDER IN THE GREAT LAKES EARLY PALAEOINDIAN PERIOD (ca. 11,000-10,400 B.P.)

A Crash Course in Early Palaeoindian Archaeology

When the first people entered the Great Lakes region, approximately 11,000 B.P. (before present) (Ellis and Deller 1990:39), the Wisconsin glaciation (25,000-10,000 B.P.) had not released its grip on the northern portion of North America (Karrow and Warner 1990). Over the course of 15,000 years, the Laurentian ice sheet retreated and exposed new tracts of land into which human populations were able to migrate. As the ice moved from the Great Lakes region, the human populations were faced with an unpredictable and harsh near-tundra environment (Meltzer and Smith 1986). In this highly variable environment, the one predictable resource was caribou, although Palaeoindian hunters may have supplemented the diet with rabbit, muskox, deer, moose, ground squirrel, and mastodons (Ellis and Deller 1990). Caribou are migratory animals, yet they appear to have been available during most of the year (Jackson 1997), and skilled hunters could procure them easily by ambushing the herds (Speiss 1979). Processing caribou carcasses would have required the investment of some time and energy, but the effort would not have been in vain. Caribou provide meat, fat necessary for preventing protein poisoning in the absence of carbohydrates (Speth and Spielmann 1983), skin for clothing and shelter, and bone and antler for making tools. The species is valuable, rich, and highly versatile. In short, caribou are economically and physically low risk prey, representing a sound investment of the labour required to procure and process them.

The archaeological record reveals that caribou hunting had a profound impact on shaping the rest of the Early Palaeoindian culture. Plaeoindian hunters did not rely exclusively on caribou, but the species was important enough that its migration patterns influenced Early Palaeoindian settlement patterns. Archaeological investigations have revealed many Early Palaeoindian sites located on loamy soils in well-drained, elevated locations such as ancient strandlines, or along lake shores or rivers. Each of these environments would have been attractive to migrating caribou herds. During the summer, a period of peak caribou population, the animals would have congregated at lakeside or riverside locations where they could eat and drink, and where breezes from the lakes would deter insect pests (Ellis and Deller 1990; Kuehn 1998). These waterside sites tend to be relatively large, and are interpreted as areas of population aggregation facilitated by the concentration of prey species. The large sites that represent single occupations reveal assemblages indicative of a general cross-section of society performing a wide variety of activities (Ellis and Deller 1997). The more frequent small Early Palaeoindian
sites, located away from waterways, likely represent the camps of small bands of hunters and their families who had dispersed to follow the scattering caribou herds. Therefore, it appears as though Early Palaeoindian populations may have exploited large territories, following predictable resources for hundreds of kilometers, and congregating only when resources were abundant enough.

Within the annual subsistence round, the migratory Palaeoindian bands would also have exploited preferred lithic sources. The lithic materials found on large aggregation sites are almost exclusively non-local and were obtained from quarries several hundred kilometers away. Preservation biases through time have resulted in lithic materials being highly visible on Early Palaeoindian sites. Researchers suggest that technology also was affected by settlement patterns which were in turn affected by subsistence pursuits. Following the highly mobile caribou herds throughout the year required Early Palaeoindians to fashion a highly portable technology. Considering that the populations exploited such distant lithic sources, the need for portability (both of tools and of raw materials) was doubly important. As Goodyear states, “[s]uffice it to say that a reliance on geographically uncommon raw material sources by a regionally mobile group will rapidly place them in a raw material and tool replacement bind” (1993: 12). To ensure that the population had a constant supply of raw materials and tools, the Early Palaeoindian populations responded in two ways. First, they increased the transportability of raw materials by reducing the materials, at the quarry sites, to cores and preforms which then could be cached at sites to which the Palaeoindian groups returned frequently. The second way in which the Early Palaeoindian tool kit was designed to ensure a constant supply of portable tools may provide insight into the reasons for employing such distant raw material sources. Unlike many of the later tool kits, the Early Palaeoindian technology exhibits signs of reworking and recycling. In order to rework chert in an intensive manner, the raw material must be of high quality. Goodyear suggests that the reliance by these highly mobile populations on distant, high-quality lithic raw material sources had an adaptive significance which allowed the retention of a constant supply of easily reworkable material throughout the annual cycle (Storck 1998).

In summary, the retreat of the ice sheets allowed caribou, followed by their human predators, to inhabit the Great Lakes region for the first time. The Early Palaeoindian populations relied heavily on caribou, pursuing them through vast territorial ranges on an annual cycle, and procuring lithic raw materials simultaneously. The tool kit, shaped by subsistence needs, also reflected disparities between lithic raw material source location and tool use locations, and the need for maintainability, versatility, flexibility and portability.

**Theoretical Framework for the Study of Early Palaeoindian “Class” and Gender**

The archaeological record for the Early Palaeoindian provides a fairly comprehensive picture of subsistence, settlement and technology, but there is still little evidence upon which to base interpretations of social positions and relations. In addition, the nature of the artifactual assemblage itself has biased the interpretations of the social structure, effectively masking women. The Palaeoindian flintknappers produced a distinctive form of projectile point: the fluted point. The high degree of skill required to produce these tools, combined with their general aesthetic appeal and resistance to taphonomically-induced destruction, has made the hunting-related portion of the artifactual assemblage a popular area of study.
The focus on these fluted points has created a male-centred interpretation of the period and has resulted in the almost virtual absence of an understanding of either women or children of the Palaeoindian.

This androcentric interpretive approach is not limited to the study of the Great Lakes Palaeoindian period, but extends to lithic studies in general. Joan Gero (1991) has noted that lithic analysis has been primarily a male pursuit. It is the men who produce and utilize experimental reproductions of lithic technology. Women have participated in lithic studies, but in a much different manner:

in contrast to the male-dominated areas of lithic studies, a very different line of investigation asks how tasks were carried out with stone tools. And it is female investigators who, in disproportionate numbers, have worked from a functional perspective to study expedient, non-standardized tools, at the level of micro-wear analysis, macro-wear analysis, or by means of studying the composition of lithic assemblages (Gero 1991: 98).

Male and female researchers have thus interacted differently with lithic assemblages, and are differentially represented in the lithic studies literature.

Considering the virtual exclusion of women from the Palaeoindian archaeological record, for the reasons noted above, how can we combat this underrepresentation and produce a more comprehensive picture of Early Palaeoindian society? There are two complementary approaches we can follow: the analysis of spatial distributions of artifact types on sites, in combination with the application of a suitable ethnographic analogy.

Joan Gero’s article, “Genderlithics: Women’s Roles in Stone Tool Production” (1991), provides an appropriate methodology to follow. She demonstrates quite successfully that women would have participated in stone tool production, and provides an interpretive framework for understanding material culturally-indicated gender relations. Gero’s approach is incorporated easily into Wolf’s understanding of organization in preclass societies, as she “recognizes gender as a dynamic and critical construct in social life and one that provides entry into studying the organization of prehistoric social labour” (1991: 164, emphasis added). She focusses on attempting to understand use applications, and broadens the definition of “tools” to include expedient tools. This definition challenges a basic tenet of archaeology, that being the distinction between formal tools and expediently-used “flakes”, a term which implies their existence outside the true realm of formal technology. In previous studies, men were viewed as the tool producers, and formalized tools as the only form of technology.

Rather than focusing on the production of tools, Gero investigates the manner in which tools were used. She outlines several assumptions central to her analysis. First, the population was approximately 50% female. Second, women carried out productive activities at sites. Third, women would be most active in household contexts, and thus should be most visible in house floors, base camps, aggregation sites, and village sites. And finally, women probably would be overrepresented in household refuse. Based on these assumptions, Gero states that women would not have sat waiting patiently for the men to return in order to produce tools for the women to use in their activities. Women could easily have produced and used expedient or non-formalized tools, a fact
supported by many ethnographic accounts. Gero addresses the possibility that women and men may have had differential access to lithic resources. She states that many lithic procurement camps were long-term occupation sites and therefore would have housed an entire population, including men and women. Women therefore would have been able to gain access to lithic resources. Another critique that has arisen surrounds issues of strength. From personal experience, I can attest to the fact that flintknapping does require strength, but the production of flakes can be relatively effortless with an understanding of the proper technique.

From this gendered division of stone tool production, can we draw an understanding of the value of socially divided labour? Some researchers have suggested that stone tool production requiring low energy expenditures, such as the creation of expedient flakes, would have been assigned a much lower value. However, as Gero writes,

In societies where female-male relationships are characterized by reciprocity and complementarity rather than by hierarchy and dominance, and where women are known to have held positions of power and respect, there is no reason to believe that women did not produce elaborate stone tools (1991: 175).

I would suggest that even in the case of a population in which it is more likely that women were producing simple tools, this activity would have been equally valued. For example, in a climate in which the production of clothing would have been necessary to survival, the creation and use of expedient tools by women in the activities of hide processing and clothing production would have been necessary and highly valued. Men and women may have been filling complementary and highly necessary roles imbued with equal esteem.

In addition to this approach, we can consider an appropriate ethnographic analogy. For this case, I have elected to examine information from the northern Cree of the James Bay region. There is evidence to suggest that the Cree are descended from the Palaeoindian populations who entered the region in the Late Palaeoindian period, after retreat of the ice sheets from the north (Richardson 1976). The ethnography I chose was compiled with the specific purpose of providing information that might be useful to archaeological interpretations (Rogers 1973). The Cree live in a Boreal forest environment, similar to the surroundings of the Early Palaeoindians. The Boreal forest zone is an area divided by streams, rivers and muskeg. The Cree survive by hunting a similar range of animals as those exploited by the Early Palaeoindians, and just as in the case of the Palaeoindian period, migratory birds were captured only rarely, and fish represent a very minor portion of the diet. The Mistassini Cree are migratory hunters, following a similar settlement pattern to the Palaeoindians. In the spring/early summer, they aggregated at trading posts, dispersing again during the fall/winter into individual hunting groups (Rogers 1973). While the Palaeoindians were not aggregating at trading posts, the pattern of summer aggregation and winter dispersion in response to resource availability is similar in the two cases.

Rogers describes the activities that occurred at the Mistassini residential sites. Generally the men would leave camp to hunt, sometimes for days at a time, while the women stayed behind and engaged in vital domestic tasks. Their role was to perform the general upkeep of the camp, to cook, process hides, hunt and trap small game, and gather...
plant foods. The camp consisted of individual family residences and communal work/specialized task areas. Although each hunter provided for his own family and regularly distributed food to family and friends, resources were considered communal; hunters and their families would provide assistance to any other family that needed resources. While labour appears to have been divided along the lines of gender and age, no differential value appears to have been attached to these activities. There is some evidence for the existence of what could be termed a “hunting fraternity”: the men engaged in cooperative hunting, and often shared meat at the kill site.

Based on this ethnographic information, what can we see archaeologically? I will present an overview of the information from Thedford II and Parkhill, two Early Palaeoindian aggregation sites in Southwestern Ontario, in order to assess whether it is possible to determine social divisions in the deep past.

**Thedford II and Parkhill**

Both Thedford II and Parkhill are Early Palaeoindian fluted point sites located in southwestern Ontario. The large areal extent of the sites, in combination with the diversity of their respective lithic assemblages suggests that these were aggregation sites likely occupied during times of rich resource availability (Deller and Ellis 1992; Ellis and Deller 2000). Following Gero’s framework, there are three areas of the archaeological record that should reveal information about divisions along the lines of gender: tool types, raw materials, and spatial distributions of artifacts.

The artifactual records from both sites demonstrate a highly variable assemblage comprising fluted points, fluted and unfluted preforms, several types of bifaces, a profusion of scrapers, and a series of informal unifacial and flake tools including piercers, denticulates, and retouched flakes (for detailed descriptions see Deller and Ellis 1992; Ellis and Deller 2000). The variety of tools present on these sites are indicative of the wide range of activities carried out at these locales, and suggests that the sites were occupied by general cross-sections of society.

As is typical of Palaeoindian sites in southwestern Ontario, nearly all tools were fashioned on Collingwood chert procured from the Fossil Hill formation near Collingwood, Ontario. This material, obtained at a distance of approximately 175-180 km northeast of the sites, was so highly preferred that it has become diagnostic of Palaeoindian assemblages (Deller and Ellis 1992: 11). There is no apparent disparity in the materials used for the production of formalized versus non-formalized tools. Based on the fact that this highly prized material, obtained during long journeys throughout the year, was not reserved solely for the creation of fluted points or other formal tools, we may conclude that the activities performed with the wide range of non-formal and expedient tools were not devalued. An anonymous reviewer suggested an intriguing alternative possibility. If expedient flake tools were made on waste flakes derived during the production of formal “male” tools, then perhaps expedient “female” tools could have been devalued as a result of being made on waste rather than on truly valued material. However, testing this order of consumption archaeologically could be problematic. It would require distinguishing flakes recovered from detritus piles, from those derived from prepared cores but used only expediently.

Analysis of the spatial distributions of artifacts at both sites reveals a settlement pattern similar to that described ethnographically for the northern Cree. At Thedford II, six distinct artifact clusters are evident. Five of these exist around the

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periphery of one larger concentration. The five smaller areas exhibit similar artifact assemblages and suspected features. Each of the five concentrations includes points, some scrapers, and even channel flake points which have been interpreted as children’s toys. In addition, Deller and Ellis (1992) write

Based on variability in raw materials and in fluted point production and morphology, this suggests that different individuals were present at these loci and that each represents the location of a small social unit such as a family group. There are suggestions of activity differences between these clusters and we argue that these are a product of the skill of the point-makers at each locus and a short duration of occupation or a limited time or use for lithic-related activities (121).

Parkhill exhibits similar, although not identical trends. Excavations revealed nine discrete artifact clusters, with variation in the frequency of points across those clusters. A few areas of the site appear to have been highly specialized, areas “devoted largely, almost exclusively in some cases, to the discard, rehafting and manufacture of fluted bifaces” (Ellis and Deller 2000: 254). Each of these specialized areas is located on the western margin of the site, close to the ancient Lake Ardtrea strandline. The authors suggest that this location may have been occupied by males so that the “movements of caribou in the vicinity of the shore could be monitored while preparing or refurbishing tool kits” (Ellis and Deller 2000: 254). The remaining artifact clusters exhibit the variety of tools seen at Thedford II, suggesting a general occupation where everyday activities were performed.

**Interpretations**

This information is limited, and interpretations of gender roles and the organization of social labour may very well be highly speculative, but the application of Gero’s framework and the inclusion of ethnographic information may allow some inferences to be made. If we accept that women were the primary producers and users of informal and expedient tools, then we may conclude that there is no evidence to suggest differential value assigned either to the production or the use of the technology. Even expedient tools were fashioned on the same highly prized material as the fluted points. Based on ethnographic analogy, there is little reason to conclude that women’s work was in any way devalued. It is evident that they occupied different social roles than did the men, but the division does not appear to have been structured hierarchically. At the specialized fluted point manufacturing loci, there is perhaps a slight hint at Parkhill of a hunting fraternity similar to that noted ethnographically. However, the spatial division may represent nothing more than a kill site removed from the actual campsite.

In general, the Early Palaeoindian inhabitants of the Great Lakes region appear to have been an egalitarian culture, as evidenced by the layout of the settlements. The Palaeoindian settlement structure parallels that of the ethnographic case, with individual family areas surrounding a communal work area. The individual family clusters reveal similar artifact distributions, indicating that everyone participated in essentially the same set of activities, just as we see among the Cree. Based on the many similarities to the ethnographic case, it may be possible to suggest a similar form for the organization of social labour among the
Palaeoindians, an organizational structure based around gender divisions. Women in the prehistoric case likely were not housebound, just as the Cree women are not. Among the Cree, if a woman must leave camp to check her snares, for example, other women will watch her children (Rogers 1973). To suggest a similar system in operation in the Palaeoindian period probably is not unreasonable.

If we accept Gero’s assumptions as correct and the northern Cree as an appropriate analogue, then we gain a picture of the Palaeoindian period as one in which social labour was organized around the primary division of gender within a broader kinship system. Men and women occupied separate but complementary and equally important roles. I would suggest, though, that in a highly unpredictable environment, these roles would not have remained fixed, but rather would have allowed fluidity, with individuals stepping in to fill gaps as needs arose.

CONCLUSION

Many details Great Lakes Early Palaeoindian life remain unclear in the archaeological record. However, if we employ a particular framework which allows the incorporation of women into archaeological interpretations and which focuses on the activities performed with certain tools, we can gain insight into the structure of gender roles and the organization of social labour in prehistory. The inclusion of ethnographic information helps to strengthen these interpretations if used judiciously. This form of study is still in the preliminary stages, and we must remember to keep testing our theories against data in order to achieve the best possible fit between the two. This is the goal that Shanks and Hodder (1995) term “heterogeneous networking”: the incorporation of as many lines of evidence as possible into an interpretation. Despite the paucity of information which might point more directly to understandings of social roles and relations, the approach demonstrated in this paper provides a promising avenue through which we may begin to build understandings of the operation of prehistoric societies, beyond the description of technological, subsistence, and settlement systems.

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