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Andrew D. Miller

Introduction

Estimations of body mass computed by physical anthropologists for Holocene populations of Homo sapiens have been based on both morphometric and mechanical methods (Ruff 2002). The former refers to the direct assessment of body size and shape through examination of skeletal elements, while the latter produce body mass estimates (BME) from only skeletal elements that are weight-bearing. Particular mechanical methods include those that examine articular surface dimensions and those that utilize diaphyseal breadth and cross-sectional analysis. Articular surfaces are preferable as they are largely independent of muscular loading and activity levels during the individual specimen’s life that lead to remodeling of the element due to bone strain (Lieberman et al. 2001). The goal of the present paper is to utilize two methods of estimating body mass, one morphometric, the other mechanical, to assess their applicability to a mid-latitudinal prehistoric Native North American population.

Two mechanical body-mass estimations using femoral head breadth, one with separated equations for sex (Ruff, et al. 1991) and one combined sex equation (McHenry 1992), will be evaluated for correspondence with the morphometric stature/bi-illiac breadth technique developed by Christopher Ruff (1997). As the femoral head estimations and bi-illiac breadth methods have been compared thoroughly to a world-wide sample of over 1,000 Holocene individuals I predict high correspondence between the femoral head technique and bi-illiac/stature method (Ruff 1991; Auerback and Ruff 1997). Based on the above prediction, the results of this comparison will correspond to comparative values attained in previous studies regarding latitudinal relationship with stature and bi-illiac breadth (Ruff 1994). Specifically, BME of the Native American sample population should most closely match the BME’s of other North Asian derived populations.

The logic behind assuming that the sample population should match most closely the physical dimensions of North Asian derived populations lays in theories of thermoregulation and climatic adaptation. Essentially, populations experiencing similar climatic pressures will have similar body breadths, while populations that live under different climatic conditions will have dissimilar body breadths (Ruff 1994). Moreover, due to the selection for cold-adapted morphology or “cold filtering” in North East Asian populations some physical anthropologists suggest that evidence of a wide body breadth should be present in New World human populations (Newman 1960). According to Allen and Bergman’s Rules, shorter limb lengths and a larger body will result in greater conservation of heat at high-latitudes through the reduction of body surface area and mass (Schrieder 1964). The 14 individuals excavated from Turpin Mound in Southwest Ohio and examined in this study should therefore exhibit wider body breadths in the form of bi-illiac breadth as evidence of cold filtering and should also exhibit general physiological dimensions most similar to other North Asian derived populations.

Bivariate analysis is used to find the best fit line through the sample population and the comparative populations. When set against latitude the mean bi-illiac breadth of the sample population fits practically equidistant between the bi-illiac breadths of the upper-latitudinal and the equatorial members of the comparative population. This finding suggests that latitude in and of itself may be a good predictor of bi-illiac breadth, and thereby body mass. However, when bi-illiac breadth and stature values are indexed and then compared against stature I find that as stature increases the sample population corresponds more with the South-East Asian linear fit region than that of other North Asian derived populations.

Assessing and comparing body mass in modern humans is significant to both scholarly and applied anthropology. Changes in encephalization, megadontia, and robusticity in hominin lineages are frequently pinpointed using body size (Pilbeam and Gould 1974). Migration, interbreeding, and subsistence changes can be documented using BME as a baseline (Ruff et al. 1997). The World Health Organization frequently uses body size measurements such height and weight when deciding on the health and nutrition of living individuals (WHO 1995). Accurate global trends in body mass are necessary for setting appropriate nutritional standards.
Methods

Sample

The 14 selected individuals examined in this study were part of a larger excavation of 259 skeletons in various degree of completeness from Turpin Mound in southwest Ohio. The sample population belonged to the Fort Ancient culture which inhabited tracts of Ohio, Indiana, and West Virginia between 1000 and 1650 C.E. Currently the Fort Ancient peoples are thought to have descended from the Hopewell Culture and may have built Serpent Mound, the largest effigy mound within in the United States (Tatarek and Sciulli 2000).

14 of the 259 individuals belonging to the Turpin excavation were selected for this study (see Table 1). Individuals were chosen based on established adulthood through examination of the symphyseal face of the pubis, and completeness of the ox coxae and sacrum, as well as femoral head and shaft. When both femurs were available their measures were meaned. Age estimates using the symphyseal face are based on the work of Suchey and Brooks (1990). Sex was established through gross inspection of the greater sciatic notch using the rating system presented by Walker in Buikstra and Ubelaker (1994). Of the 14 individuals selected all but one exhibit predominantly male characteristics. The pelvis is the most sexually dimorphic set of human skeletal elements; therefore the “maleness” of the sample population is well established. With this in mind one should be suspicious of a high degree of sampling error due to the almost utter lack of female specimens within this sample.

Table 1. Femoral length, Femoral head breadth, and bi-illiac breadth for 14 Fort Ancient males.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>max FL cm</th>
<th>FH brd mm</th>
<th>BI brd cm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turpin 33 HA 19-94</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>42.16</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>49.35</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>42.37</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>41.1</td>
<td>36.44</td>
<td>24.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>56.58</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>48.7</td>
<td>29.2</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>42.45</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>38.08</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>169</td>
<td>46.5</td>
<td>44.71</td>
<td>27.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Measures

Originally two different mechanical equations for estimating body mass were to be used in the study to see if a high correspondence existed between them. The equation used by McHenry (1992) is combined sex, whereas Ruff et al. (1991) provides equations for both males and females. Due to the overabundance of males in the sample only the equation used for estimating male body mass by Ruff et al. (1991) was utilized. Using digital calipers the anterior-posterior length of the femoral head was taken, and when both femoral heads were available the two measures were meaned. The lower limbs of hominins are especially useful in estimating body mass as they bear the mechanical loading of bipedality without confounding estimates due to individual differences in activity level (Trinkaus et al. 1994).

Stature was estimated by measuring maximum femoral length using an osteometric board. The length of the femur (or mean femur length when both were available) was then converted into a stature estimate using the equation provided in Ruff et al. (1997). Once stature was established bi-illiac breadth was obtained by rearticulating the innominate bones in a sand-filled receptacle to minimize destruction to the remains. The breadth between iliac crests was measured with spreading calipers. Bi-illiac breadth provides a useful estimate of body mass when combined with stature because body mass is distributed clinally such that body mass increases with latitude (Katsmarzyk and Leonard 1998). For body mass estimates see Table 2.

Table 2. Body mass estimations using antero-posterior femoral head length and bi-illiac breadth/stature

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample</th>
<th>***Stature cm</th>
<th>*fh kg</th>
<th>**fh kg</th>
<th>*** bi/s kg</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Turpin 33 HA 19-94</td>
<td>161.29</td>
<td>54.59</td>
<td>54.46</td>
<td>69.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
<td>160.06</td>
<td>72.33</td>
<td>70.59</td>
<td>67.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>126</td>
<td>157.62</td>
<td>55.11</td>
<td>54.96</td>
<td>62.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>143.21</td>
<td>40.48</td>
<td>41.68</td>
<td>46.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis

Using a worldwide population of 56 individuals compiled in Ruff (1994), the mean bi-illiac breadth for the sample population as well as a mean index score of bi-illiac breadth/stature, I was able to compare the individuals from Turpin to geographically dispersed data set. A wide geographic sample is critical in making assessments of body mass based on geocological principles. Variability should exist between populations that inhabit different climatic zones. In particular, humans in colder climatic zones should exhibit wider bodies over all. Previous research has demonstrated that wider bodies persist in colder climates while on average narrower bodies are found in warmer climates (Ruff 1994). The 56 individuals were sorted into four broad geographic groups, African, South-East Asian, North Asian, and European. Based on arguments regarding the Apache as a North Asian derived population (Ruff 1991) the sample population from Turpin should be most similar North Asian populations when compared to latitude. Bivariate analysis and best fit lines were used to find the area in which the sample population fell amongst the four geographic groups.

Results

The best fit lines through bi-illiac breadth and latitude (Figure 1) and bi-illiac breadth/stature over stature (Figure 2) reveal that the Turpin BME does not fall clearly within range of other North Asian derived populations. Regarding latitude, the data point representing the mean b-illiac breadth for the sample falls equidistant between the northern latitude groups (mostly Europeans and North Asians) and the those closer to the equator (Africans and SE Asians). As latitude increases so too does body dimension (bi-illiac breadth). The trend observed in Figure 1 fits the ecogeographic observation that cooler climate populations have wider bodies than those from warmer climes, which is consistent with the principle of heat conservation. Populations from latitudes that approximate the study group (30-50° North) mostly fall on or just above the regression line. The sample population from Turpin, along with several European samples, falls below the regression line. Such a result is unexpected given the hypothesis that the sample Native American population from Turpin would be most similar to North Asian derived samples.

Figure 1. Bivariate Fit of Bi-illiac breadth (cm) by Latitude

Key: Figures 1 & 2
■ African (Ruff 1994)
× South East Asian (Ruff 1994)
▲ North Asian (Ruff 1994)
● European (Ruff 1994)
* Native American (Sample Population)
population. On the other hand on Figure 1 the bi-illiac breadth of the sample population does reveal a latitudinal distribution. African and SE Asian groups are clustered around data points 23-27 cm and North Asian and European groups have a limited spread from 25 to 30 cm. The Turpin sample falls neatly between these two groups suggesting a medium body breadth at a mid-level latitude where ambient temperature is not as salient a selective pressure for body mass.

Figure 2. Bivariate Fit of Bi-illiac Breadth/Stature by Stature (cm)

Discussion

At the offset of this experiment femoral head measurements and the bi-illiac breadth measurement were expected to yield similar results. According to Table 1 both mechanical and morphometric methods produced comparable scores pertaining to BME. However, when plotted with a sizable comparative population the original hypothesis that the Turpin population would most closely match the North Asian derived groups is not clearly supported. Should such a refutation be considered evidence against thermoregulation as a selective pressure on Homo body size? To the contrary, while the average body width of the sample does not conform to the cold-filtered theory, which suggests that New World populations will retain cold-adapted body types, anthropologists should not be so quick to dismiss climatic adaptation (Newman,1960). The narrower body width observed in the sample population may have been retained through technology such as warm clothes to protect from cold temperatures.

Other studies on thermoregulation and body mass have included the Apache within the North Asian derived population (Ruff 1994). The Apache inclusion is based on evidence that they are recent migrants from the extreme northern latitudes and retain an overall body width that is most similar to Eskimos and Aleuts (Ruff 1991). Due to the recent migration of the Apache perhaps the Turpin sample is indicative of an older population that has had extreme climatic selective pressure removed, allowing for greater variation in body size.

Variation in body size due to microclimatic adaptation has been suggested as a compliment to strict latitudinal distribution (Katsmarzyk and Leonard 1998). Microclimatic adaptation here refers to the inclusion of dietary and nutritional factors which mediate BME. BME’s of 15,000 European Males within the United States have shown that when genetics are controlled variation in body mass can be attributed to nutrition and activity levels (Newman and Munro 1955). Among tropical and equatorial populations variation is also attributed to westernization of dietary patterns (Baker et al. 1986).

Genetic contributions have also been suggested as mediators of strict latitudinal BME’s. Eskimos and Inupiat populations in the past have had disproportionate bone-loss relative to Caucasians attributed to a high protein-calcium diet. New research on arctic populations’ over production of thyroid hormones, T3 and T4, has shown that the hormones reduce shivering while enhancing thermogenesis. Enhanced thermogenesis results in accelerated bone loss skewing BME (Lazenby 1997).

Previous stature estimates of prehistoric Ohio Native Americans have produced mean statures of 164 cm (Sciulli et al.1990). The mean stature for males in the current sample comes out to 154.8 cm. This number is more in line with above authors’ estimates of female prehistoric Ohio Native Americans. As stated in the Methods section the maleness of the sample population is well established based on an assessment of the sciatic notch. Therefore a degree of sampling error might be responsible for the low-balled estimates of the sample statures as only 14 males out of a total 259 individuals met the inclusion criteria.

Ultimately the thermoregulatory concept that populations inhabiting different climatic zones should express different BME’s while geographically concurrent populations should be similar is supported by this study. Using a sizable comparative population the Turpin sample distinguishes itself from both upper and lower latitude-dwelling populations. Those same
comparative samples are more closely grouped amongst themselves than with the Turpin sample (Figures 1 and 2).

Conclusion

This study examined 14 out of 259 individuals belonging to the Fort Ancient culture of prehistoric Ohio. The final sample contained almost entirely male specimens which were then assessed for body mass estimates based on morphometric and mechanical methods. Femoral head antero-posterior length, maximum femoral length, and bi-iliac breadth were measured to deduce estimated body mass and stature, using three different equations. All three equations for BME resulted in comparable estimates (Table 2). Because femoral head techniques rely on the assessment of articular surfaces and bi-iliac breadth is based on gross measurement of skeletal features the two methods provide a good check against each other.

The Turpin sample was analyzed along with a world-wide sample using bivariate regression to find the best fit line through four geographic groups. Based on the output of these analyses I find support for the general thermoregulatory principle that populations inhabiting different climatic zones will express differences in BME while those populations that are geographically contiguous will be more similar. However, due to the sample population being dissimilar to the North Asian derived populations (Eskimo, Inupiat, and Apache) I cannot conclude that the Turpin sample retains a cold-filtered body breadth.

Further sampling of prehistoric Native American tribes must be undertaken to assess the degree of sampling error in this study. Previous studies have estimated prehistoric Native Americans from this region as being practically 10 cm taller than the Turpin sample (Sciulli et al.1990). Moreover the exclusion criteria used in this study left the sample bereft of female specimens. With sex uncontrolled and unrepresented I leave out an integral aspect of estimating body mass for this population. Body mass studies in general are absent from the literature regarding prehistoric Midwestern Native American populations. Continued study will be necessary to produce samples with which anthropologists can compare within group differences in body mass. Establishing local trends in body mass will result in better world-wide comparative populations.

Acknowledgements

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World Health Organization  
Market economies have invaded nearly all aspects of our lives, and reproduction is no exception. Through the goods women provide for their children, they construct personhood. Women, even those of lower socio-economic means, go to great lengths to purchase the right types of status goods for their children. Mothers become acceptable through the material process of outfitting themselves and their living space for the new arrival (Clarke 2004: 65). The focus on goods, and specifically higher class goods associated with reproduction is evident in the case of a Colombian immigrant in London. In her third pregnancy, she purchases fabric for curtains at an upper-middle class store, while making a maternity dress from bargain fabric. The significance of the curtains is that they were purchased in a new environment. The from which they were purchased sold higher class items and while shopping the mother experienced higher class associations (Clarke 2004: 68). I use the example of the mother determining her and the baby's role through material goods as a reference point for my discussion of miscarriages in a culture of motherhood focused on consumerism.

Production is a correlate of consumption. In this paper I will show that as producers and consumers, women who miscarry or have other “reproductive mishaps” fail to sustain the capitalist ideology of motherhood. Initially silence surrounding the topic of miscarriage has been reinforced by an irrefutable scientific community whose technologies control the female body. From here, I move into a discussion of the consumer issues concerning reproductive mishaps. Finally, I consider how personhood is conferred on the unborn child. Personhood is not only constructed through parents imagining the lives their children will lead, but also through consumerism. Thus, when a pregnancy loss occurs, there is no longer a person to visualize.

As with many taboos in our society, the best way to deal with miscarriage is to ignore it. Miscarriage and other negative reproductive outcomes, being the final taboos regarding reproduction, are hardly discussed. Reproductive mishaps are not abnormal, but they are encased in silence within public discourse, which makes them appear to be. Fifteen to twenty percent of pregnancies end in loss, yet this is not the outcome most women imagined. Miscarriages are not mentioned or are given very little attention in mainstream pregnancy culture. Most popular pregnancy guides follow the model of obstetrical textbooks such as William Obstetrics and discuss miscarriage at the end of the book along with other ‘complications of pregnancy’ like still birth, after having first presented 'normal' pregnancy and birth (Layne 1997: 3).

Even though in the vast majority of cases, miscarriages take place early in a pregnancy, most popular pregnancy guides follow the model of obstetrical textbooks such as William Obstetrics and discuss miscarriage at the end of the book along with other ‘complications of pregnancy’ like still birth, after having first presented 'normal' pregnancy and birth (Layne 1997: 3).

Separating miscarriage from other topics, and placing it along with other post-delivery complications such as stillbirth, negates the normality of miscarriage. Both hegemonic culture and the alternative medical community gloss over the possibility of miscarriage and participate in sustaining silence surrounding the subject. Dominant culture as experienced in doctors' offices, lamaze classes, magazines, and stores that sell baby items participate in othering miscarrying women by excluding pregnancy loss as a possible outcome. When Layne (1997) had her first miscarriage, she attended a birthing center for her prenatal care. The birth center assured her that if something went wrong during her delivery, someone from the center would accompany her to the hospital. She had not considered the possibility of complications before delivery, but assumed that staff from the birthing center would assist her with pre-delivery complications as well. She was distressed when she discovered this was not the case (Layne 1997:1). The alternative medical system, promising to be more holistic in their care, only applied these standards to positive medical outcomes. When Layne's situation became an emergency which threatened the ideal of “natural birth,” the birthing center abandoned her. Women's health centers have constructed over medicalized birth as the problem in successful pregnancies and ignored negative outcomes of the birthing process.
In their effort to demedicalize pregnancy, women's health centers have overemphasized happy outcomes. By defining the problem in childbirth as medical intervention into what should be a joyful, natural process, nonmedically caused problems become invisible (Layne 1997: 3).

Since pregnancy loss is also a natural process, by eliminating the unhappy outcomes and magnifying the joyful ones, traditional and alternative medical systems perpetuate the culture of silence surrounding miscarriage.

The perpetuation of silence surrounding miscarriage is produced by the increased reliance on technology involving reproduction. A plethora of diagnostic tests are performed on pregnant women including amniocentesis, a variety of disability and genetic screenings, and repeated sonograms. Tests and other modern birth practices give women a false sense of knowledge and control regarding the reproductive outcomes. The ubiquity of prenatal tests also leads to doctors being held responsible for any outcome that is not perfect. Through testing, it is expected that the medical community will be able to control the natural world and a perfect baby will be born. Though not all doctors are men, the traditional medical community reinforces the stereotype of women as natural subjects subservient to masculine control the natural world and a perfect baby will be expected that the medical community will be able to control the natural world and a perfect baby will be born. Though not all doctors are men, the traditional medical community reinforces the stereotype of women as natural subjects subservient to masculine.

One of the main feelings experienced by men and women after a miscarriage is the thought of failure as it relates to production or reproduction. Producers are expected to provide an outcome, a tangible product. In the case of miscarriage, stillbirth, or death shortly after birth, there is no longer a child to present to the world. Writing about the stillbirth of her son, Sherokee Ilse (1989) recounts how the lamaze instructor glossed over the pain of childbirth by reminding women that after it was over, they would have a prize: a baby. As the child becomes a commodity, its producer becomes responsible for its well-being and when complications emerge it is the producer who is to blame. The fetus is fetishes by disconnecting it from its means of production; the woman who is carrying it. Attributes of life are ascribed to the fetus even though its survival depends totally on the mother (Taylor 2004: 189).

Recent reproductive technologies allow for the continuation of an economy surrounding reproduction and miscarriage. Being able to pick and choose traits of embryos and future children enhances the idea of the child as a commodity; a child can be accepted or rejected as if it were produce in the grocery store. Miscarriage, by cheating women of a visible product to display and an unstable.
parental status. O'Neill (1998) noted that although he is a parent in the biological sense, he felt he could not be considered one, since he did not have a living child to show for it. In cases of reproductive mishaps, there is nothing to show for one's reproductive labor, and therefore couples experiencing these mishaps, are denied parenthood. Individuals do not deny their own parenthood; rather, they feel that their parental status is denied by society. This denial of parenthood can be seen in the inadequacy of language to describe these parents' reproductive situations. We as a society have no way of defining people as parents who have conceived and then lost children. Our consumer obsessed culture excludes outcomes of reproduction which are outside the norm, lacking a final product.

Wise shopping is conforming to standard restrictions during pregnancy, though this practice does not always provide the desired outcome. Parents of children with disabilities struggle to reconcile the wise shopping they attempted with the outcome as do parents who experience miscarriage. Upon becoming pregnant, only a certain class of women can afford to radically change their eating habits, and those who cannot afford to do so are judged. Many women while pregnant abstain from the consumption of certain substances e.g. alcohol, cigarettes, caffeine, and even over the counter drugs. This reflects “wise-shopping” on the part of the mother. Wise-shoppers invest time and energy prior to shopping, thereby making the experience as painless as possible. The investment of effort allows them to impose their personalities on their goods. “But neither 'wise-shopping', nor the practice of what Miller calls 'devotional duty' could in this case bring the desired or expected result” (quoted in Landsman 2004: 107).

Landsman (2004) applies the analogy of the wise shopper to mothers whose children end up with disabilities. It is also applicable to women who miscarry. Even shopping wisely by denying themselves pleasurable substances out of “devotional duty” cannot guarantee a full term pregnancy. The wise-shopping that women are expected to engage in has dire consequence when such prescriptions are not followed. Mothers who do not radically alter their lives during pregnancy become “monsters” in the public eye and are sometimes even punished by law. Mothers who watched interactions between other mothers and babies, noted what the moms ate and drank, whether they smoked, and how they talked to their children (Bergum 1989: 62). Accusations of child abuse are brought against women who take non-prescription drugs or otherwise disregard doctors' orders (Tsing 1991: 285). Women are responsible for producing the perfect baby and they carry the entire burden of ensuring the baby's welfare. Responsibility does not empower the woman. Rather it creates a dependency on society's stipulations for proper motherhood (Tsing 1991: 296). Since the legislative system holds women accountable for the health of their fetus, it is no wonder that women are blamed in the event of a miscarriage.

Miscarrying couples find themselves outside of the expected pregnancy experience. Though miscarriage is not an abnormal outcome of pregnancy it is constructed as such by omitting its mention in pregnancy preparation forums. Women who miscarry are isolated in popular culture through images of women in a room with an empty crib. This symbol of loss is even reproduced in anthropological studies. An anthropology volume about pregnancy loss shows a picture of an empty stroller on the cover (Cecil 1996). Reading the subtext of these images, we can see that the empty crib and stroller reflect the empty nest, the lack of a product. By portraying emptiness it implies lack, which in turn corroborates the presence of consumerism (Reagan 2003: 365). Images of these reproductive outcomes are positive in that they break the silence which used to surround miscarriage. However, these images conceptualize a tragedy faced by women: they exclude variations in intensity of grief, or grief as it is experienced by anyone other than the mother. Stereotypes portray miscarriage as devastating and inherently feminine. “Discourses of grief are predominantly gendered through a customary and habitual focus on the grief of the woman” (McCreight 2004: 344). Men also endure a miscarriage with many similar feelings to women. Often there is the added burden for men to appear strong and hide sadness from their partners.

Both men and women participate in constructing the personhood of their fetus. Consumerism plays a large role in the development of personhood. Layne says “that it is through the accumulation of goods and gifts pertaining to a new child, most often initiated prior to birth , that a baby and mother are socially constructed” (Layne quoted in Clarke 2004: 56). The process of buying clothes for the expected baby, getting its room ready, and picking out names, are aspects of conferring personhood on the child.

Constructing personhood takes place throughout pregnancy and is made tangible by pictures from ultrasounds. Ultrasound provide a window into the woman's body, thereby enabling parents to see and begin bonding visually with the child (McCreight 2004: 335). Parents sometimes name their baby after an ultrasound has been done, which makes the child even more real in the parents' minds (Klaus et al. 1995: 15). The new reproductive technologies such as ultrasounds also make the fetus real far earlier in pregnancy than in previous times (Taylor 2004: 188). Rather than personhood being
built after birth, the material purchases parents make aid in the ideological construction of the child prior to birth. Choosing names, deciding on colors for the baby's room, and purchasing toys are all involved in the development in the parents' mind of a specific person rather than an abstract idea of a baby. In an Australian study thirty-percent of women who were 8-12 weeks pregnant with their first child believed the fetus was a real person and spontaneously imagined its appearance (Klaus et al. 1995: 7). The ultrasound was a transformative bonding episode for the mother (Taylor 2004: 203). The ultrasound was a tipping point for others involved in conferring personhood to the child.

When a miscarriage occurs, the being which the parents imagined is denied a chance to actually fulfill the role that was created for it. During the pregnancy, both parents participate in the ruminations on the person the child will be. “Fathers generated visions of parenthood through their imagining of the future baby, these imaginings amounted to the personal and social constructions of a lived being” (McCreight 2004: 336). After a pregnancy loss, both parties experience the loss of hopes and dreams regarding the new person who grew into their lives.

As members of a consumer driven society, women who miscarry fail to produce and therefore their status as mothers is called into question. When a reproductive mishap occurs, they lose the opportunity to continue constructing their child's personhood through material goods. Though miscarriage is traditionally seen as affecting women, it touches all parties involved in the project of delegating personhood to the fetus. Women are expected to trust that science and technology can control for all variables and when this is not the case, they have not been “wise-shoppers,” and therefore have no one to blame but themselves.

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2003 From Hazard to Blessing to Tragedy: Representations of Miscarriage in Twentieth

Taylor, Janelle S.

Tsing, Anna Lowenhaupt
The Unheard Voice: Analysis of a Feministic Ethnography

Key Beck

Feminism has often been portrayed as the study of women by women, but is this representation accurate in its view of methodology and results? This type of view limits the extent of feminist ethnography and its use in the field. Judith Stacey (1988) addressed issues of representation within the realm of feminism and ethnography in order to create a richer ethnographic experience. According to Gordon (1993), “Judith Stacey's 1988 essay, ‘Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?’ offered the first critical reflection on women's supposed potential for more ethical fieldwork practice based on their shared oppression as women” (100). This paper will explore the concepts of a feminist ethnology, the function and purposes of feminist ethnology, and investigate the possible potential for males, to create feminist ethnology. Two major works for my analysis of feminist ethnography will be examined, the first being Judith Stacey's (1988) “Can There Be A Feminist Ethnography?”, and the second, Elizabeth Wheatley’s (1994) “How Can We Engender Ethnography With Feminist Imagination?”. These two articles were chosen not only because of their influential nature in the feminist anthropology movement, but it is also due to the lack of scholarly work on feminist anthropology as a subject.

The description of a feminist ethnography has been interpreted in diverse ways (Gordon, 1993; Mack-Canty, 2004, Spacey, 1988; Wheatley, 1994). Each perspective may differ in their interpretation of a “true” feminist perspective in regards to the methodological work of ethnography. Feminist ethnology has ties with postmodernism in the respect that they both focus on a more in-depth interpretation of ethnographic work. “Critical or ‘postmodern’ ethnographers incorporate feminist insights into their reflexive critiques” (Stacey, 24). Ethnographers of these two perspectives focus on making ethnographic work an experiential and mutual beneficial relationship. There is a need for mutual benefit for both ethnographer and subject in feminist methodology.

Critical and feminist ethnography both highlight the need for a mutual understanding of the research and its implications between the subject and ethnographer. The feminist critique of anthropology reveals the need to focus attention on the political and social imbalances between the sexes. Stacey (1988) states, “Most feminist researchers committed, at a minimum, to redressing the sexist imbalances of masculinist scholarship, appear to select their research projects on substantive grounds” (21). These sexual imbalances have been observed and studied by many feminist scholars (Benedict, 1930; Mead, 1935; Slocum, 1939; Ortner, 1941; Gottlieb, 2002). The observations of imbalance between the sexes were the impetus for many women anthropologists to research issues of the women who remained constrained in a patriarchal world.

Stacey (1988) explores the need for an ethnographic approach that was inclusive of the concerns of women, while allowing both the subject and ethnography to collaborate in the research process. The feminist methodology would allow both researcher and participant to receive understanding and enrichment through mutual partnership in the research study. The overwhelming theme portrays a need for an approach that is transdisciplinary and inclusive, using integrative methodology that “grounds theory contextually in the concrete realm of women’s everyday lives” (21). This integrative approach may allow for a mutual understanding of the research, thus facilitating a rich emic viewpoint. The emic perspective will add candor to the ethnographic experience and description. Also, when the ethnographer employs a trans-disciplinary approach, there is a contribution to a more complete understanding of the feminist perspective. Anthropology and feminist studies are two approaches to the study of the human experience. By combining the critical lenses of both disciplines, the ethnographer will understand how to use tools of cultural relativism to further add to their thick, emic description.

Wheatley (1994) adds to this discussion of feminist perspective by explaining necessary attributes that could further expand the foci of feminist studies:

As the primary "medium" of research, the ethnographer must empathize with and connect to others in the study. Ethnographic research, like feminist research, requires respect between researchers and subjects if informants are to be treated as collaborators in the research process (404).
Stacey (1988) and Wheatley (1994) portray feminist ethnography as a mutual relationship that exists to further add texture and meaning to the research of feminist ethnographers. Supposing one examines the situation between women, this bond could allow an opportunity to explore intimate issues that may have otherwise been impeded by an ethnographer of a different sex. One can also see the possibilities from the perspective of a feminist scholar transcending the boundaries previously held because of gender, due to a partnership, or “friendship,” evolving rather than a strict researcher/subject dichotomy. Working as collaborators with informants will ensure the emic and etic perspectives are met, thus facilitating informational syncretism. This new product will hopefully inspire future study and exploration of the ethnographic experience.

Feminist scholars are encouraged to critically explore feminist perspectives while examining the methodological tools and steps used in traditional ethnography. The feminist methodology is concerned with dispelling the hierarchy of research; making it more grounded and available to a wider audience than its classic/traditional counterpart. This perspective of mutual understanding between subject and ethnographer is essential for the feminist perspective. One issue that Stacey (1988) confronts is the ways in which feminist methodology recognizes the hierarchical and exploitative nature of classic/traditional research. She infers the solution lies in employing “an egalitarian research process characterized by authenticity, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity between the researcher and her ‘subjects’” (22). As Stacey (1988) explains that authenticity, reciprocity, and intersubjectivity are needed to help support the mutual relationship that exists between researcher and subject. Reciprocity is essential in feminist ethnographic work. This concept must not only be spoken of in theoretical terms, but employed in every step of the research process. A key objective is to create trust between the researcher and collaborator to ensure validity is present. Valid data is often a concern for both quantitative and qualitative data, thus care should be taken to ensure accuracy is a key objective. The utility of finding commonalities and developing a relationship will influence a more immersive worldview of the collaborator or culture being studied. It is the “medium” that makes the ethnographic work truly feminist. The ethnographer will try and establish a relationship with informants so that the understanding of the culture is reflective in the research.

The feminist perspective is what led anthropologists like Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict to study women and their role in anthropology. It was observable that a schism remained between the “subject” and ethnographer leading to a thin description of the culture. The lack of feminist perspective was ubiquitous in anthropology due to limited amounts of research on women and their contributions to human societies. The lack of women’s perspectives and the traditional method of observation, only allows for the ethnographer to employ an etic view of the culture, especially in the underrepresented female population. Before the feminist view was used, it was advised that anthropologists remain neutral and somewhat distant from their subject. It was the search for the “fully objective” that led to the belief that distance and neutrality was preferred. The opinion that populations studied were “savage” may have led to this belief of keeping distance between the ethnographer and subject. As noted above, this is the opposite of what feminist ethnographers see as a necessity to ethnography.

Ethnography had already employed some of the viewpoints of feminist studies, like relying on the ethnographer to gather data by immersing oneself in the culture. Stacey (1988) believed that women were innately more emotional, and able to connect with their informants due to compassion and empathy. She found it only natural that feminist approaches would be employed with ethnographic methods:

Like a good deal of feminism, ethnography emphasizes the experiential. Its approach to knowledge is contextual and interpersonal, attentive like most women, therefore, to the concrete realm of everyday reality and human agency (Stacey, 22).

Stacey (1988) alludes to the fact that women are natural ethnographers because of this innate characteristic of empathy. Is this statement inclusive of anyone with the innate characteristic of empathy, or is this a characterization based on sex? The use of interpersonal methods to collect ethnographic data seems to be the most efficient way to ensure an emic viewpoint is explored. Men not having the potential to apply empathy to their work are as an assumption. To exemplify the inclusive nature of feminist ethnography, all ethnographers should employ the same methodological steps as feminist scholars. Stacey (1988) states that women are natural to feminist methods, but this view is not inclusive and ascribes to gender role stereotypes. Feminist methods should not be exclusive of all men. It is important to have an inclusive view of methodology, and ethnographers should use appropriate methods to ensure valid information is portrayed in ethnographies.
The feminist method still maintains a level of neutrality in the study of ethnography. A cost-benefit exchange exists between the ethnographer’s involvement in the study, and the allowance of subject involvement within the study. Neutrality is embodied in different levels of empathy and mutuality that the ethnographer and informant experience. A worthy endeavor may be to explore if there is a difference in reciprocal altruism at play in this exchange. At some point, the two perspectives intersect at a point where an understanding is met. Feminist methodology allows both actors in the ethnographic method to have mutual contributions. This defines where the ethnographers work ends and the respondent’s ethnography begins. The ethnography should transcend beyond a mere translation or interpretation. The ethnography itself should represent the respondent and serve as a representation of self. As long as a trusting relationship is present during the process, the results will be a rich, thick description surmounting from the collaborative work of ethnographer and respondent.

Stacey (1988) explores the limits and possibilities of feminist ethnography. She states that feminist dilemmas exist that do not fully allow the feminist viewpoint to be the useful. Part of the feminist view employs empathy and concern for the subject during the research process. Stacey (1988) cautions ethnographers about the manipulation of the informant, which is bound to happen in ethnography. Maintaining a relationship of reciprocity and collaboration, rather than pure consumption of information is important. In Stacy’s (1988) example, she was put in the uncomfortable situation of keeping the secret of her participant or presenting an unbiased ethnography. She perceived this situation not to be difficult for the traditional ethnographer, due to distancing and neutrality of the ethnographic method. Stacey (1988) discusses how feminist ethnography “places research subjects at grave risk of manipulation and betrayal by the ethnographer” (23). It is not to say that other ethnographies do not put their subjects at risk or betrayal and manipulation, but the feminist perspective insists that the researcher beware of such pitfalls. The victim to the process, due to the close nature of the relationship between ethnographer and informant, is usually the participant being studied. This issue is not viewed as an ethical issue, but a direct representation of the ethnographer’s will and manipulation. An ethnographer, who uses manipulation during the research process, does not fully understand concepts of reciprocity or the nature of feminist methods. Feminist scholars are trained to be aware of such incidents and avoid them, if at all possible. If these situations are unavoidable, then it is the responsibility of the feminist scholar to explore these ideas and find a solution that would be most appropriate and conducive to maintaining the positive relationship between the ethnographer and object of study.

Stacey (1988) further explores “situations of inauthenticity, dissimilitude, and potential, perhaps inevitable betrayal, situations that I now believe are inherent in fieldwork method” (23). The “betrayal” and “inauthenticity”, that may develop, are not something that should be feared by ethnographers. The establishment of a trusting and collaborative relationship will ensure that both ethnographer and respondent practice reciprocity. The avoidance of agencies that could rupture the ethnographer/informant relationship is further evidence of a feminist approach to ethnography. The concern for the informant shows that there is a mutual understanding and a level of compassion shown by the ethnographer. This level of concern for the informant can be costly to the ethnographer. The ethnographer may be forced to choose between maintaining authenticity of the research or authenticity with the informant. This is one of the many dilemmas that are presented by Stacey (1988) between feminism and ethnography.

Wheatley (1994) picks up on these concerns of compassion and authenticity, not interpreting them as problems, but instead seeing them as opportunities:

The dilemmas of fieldwork that Stacey identifies, and the tension she finds between ethnography and feminism, can be seen in a more positive light—as opportunities to make certain kinds of feminist political and intellectual interventions (406).

Wheatley’s (1994) perspective on the dilemmas with feminist ethnography further emphasizes the possibilities that exist when using the feminist approach to ethnography. The feminist approach to ethnography creates the opportunity to further explore and critique the imbalances that exist in society, while using ethnographic methods of mutual understanding of a problem between the ethnographer and the culture of study.

These dilemmas are revisited because Wheatley (1994) downplayed them as strictly feminist dilemmas, and focused on them as epistemological and ethical issues rather than feminist.” As Wheatley (1994; 406) argues, these interpersonal and representational dilemmas, and the consequences of choices made in response to them, exemplify ethical issues faced by all researchers who enter the field regardless of whether they pursue feminist aims or not. It is the way these dilemmas are
addressed that helps highlight the functionality of feminist ethnography. The ethnographer is a participant in ethnographic work, thus privy to reflection. An ethnographer has the potential to examine the influence that they may have on the ethnographic research process. This leads to an experiential approach involving both the informant and ethnographer. The dilemma of ethical decisions is common in ethnographic work due to many factors, such as syncretism of information and social cohesion. The ethnographer will translate information that is received, and it is expected that some authenticity will be lost with every translation that is made. The process of translation is bound to authenticity will be lost with every translation that is made. The process of translation is bound to ethnography, and its presence facilitates ethical decisions appearing during the research process.

Stacey (1988) maintains the viewpoint that feminist ethnography had the innate danger of exploiting and exposing the subjects to danger, more so than the “masculinist,” positivist research methods. She discusses how the greater the intimacy, represented by the mutuality of the researcher/researched relationship, the greater the danger. One gets a sense that Stacey (1988) is implying that feminist scholars should avoid ethnographic methods based on the assumption of losing authenticity. Contrary to Stacey’s (1988) viewpoint on the dilemmas of feminist ethnography, Wheatley (1994) feels this opportunity will allow for the implementation of feminist methodology to find adequate ways of dealing with these dilemmas. She advises feminist ethnographers to not make explicit efforts to avoid risk during the ethnographic process by abstention of collaborative methods, but instead “draw on diverse feminist insights in a sensitive manner when facing the dilemmas that are bound to emerge through the ethnographic process and product” (407).

The commonalities that exist between feminist and post-modern studies allow for an implementation of both methods. “Postmodern ethnography is critical and self-reflexive ethnography and a literature of meditation on the inherent, but often unacknowledged hierarchical and power-laden relations of ethnographic writing” (Stacey, 1988; 24). In theory, postmodern ethnography has a shared focus with feminist ethnography in that they examine similar aspects of culture. Both focus on breaking away from neutrality of description and methods. Also, both focus on a construction of self and others. The social schema of women in contemporary society matches with this view that the dominant society employs hierarchical and power laden relationships between the sexes. Coercion must be avoided at all cost, and a concerted effort to diminish the imbalance between researcher and respondent should be employed during the research process. Reciprocity should remain a constant goal for ethnographers employing feminist methodology.

Like feminist ethnography, the postmodernists’ perspectives are concerned with the political barriers and social struggles of women in society. Partiality and introspective analysis are part of postmodern ethnographies because the ethnographer is “…more concerned with the representation and interpretation of cultural meaning than with describing and explaining human behavior so as to capture or convey truths about the human condition or social reality” (Wheatley, 1994; 408). This partial understanding is why there needs to be feminist methods employed in the ethnographic work. The mutual contributive nature of postmodern or “critical” ethnography leads to the ethnographer employing feminist insight into the work. Stacey (1988) addressed this issue earlier, stating “reflexivity and self-critique of ‘postmodern’ ethnographic literature parallels and has much to contribute to feminist methodological reflections” (25).

The trans-disciplinary nature of ethnographic methods could be the ideal methodology for attaining a rich, textured description of culture. “Knowledge, in the postmodernist perspective, is always situated, partial, contingent, and interpretive” (Wheatley, 408). The postmodernist and feminist interpretations of culture are based on “…social relationships that they cultivate, and that they learn through and from in the field” (Wheatley, 407- 408). Critical ethnographers use these interpretations to construct “truth”, but realize that a partiality exists so it is never a certainty, but a situational construct.

Feminist ethnography can be a useful tool when used in conjunction with other methodological practices. Feminist ethnography can also be constrained when ethnologies for women by women are the only source of feminist perspectives. Feminist ethnography should be about establishing mutual understanding between the researcher and informant:

Feminist scholars in and out of anthropology have been generally more receptive to male scholars’ work with men, especially on the construction of masculinities. Men working with women, on the other hand, are sometimes seen to reproduce in their research the same sexist conditions women encounter elsewhere (Levinson, 1998).

A feminist perspective will be met when a mutual cooperation and benefit are gained from the experience between the researcher and the
researched. Men have the potential to provide deep, compassionate relationships while valuing the women’s unique perspectives.

Levinson (1998) addresses the constraints on men to effectively study the relations of power. He states that “there is a possibility for a commitment to reflexivity and women’s empowerment that might mitigate or even transform these relations [of power imbalance]” (16). The exploration of reflexivity will allow for the imbalance of power to be examined, while empowering women to overcome submission to male dominating factors. Empowerment can be used as a technique to counteract the power imbalance, but the imbalance remains in play outside the boundaries of the research study.

The interpretation of the women’s voice can be translated by the male ethnographer. It is part of the mutual cooperation between the researcher and the researched. Levinson (1998) explores the idea of interpretation of the women issues through semantic recontextualization:

As I recontextualize the women's gestures and statements through interpretation, I am, to be sure, doing them a kind of symbolic violence. But their voices are no less "authentic" for this mediation. After all, I am also inserting these voices into a larger sense-making scheme, a parallel narrative of feminist concern (Levinson, 19).

The addition of the women’s perspective to the greater feminist scholarship allows the male ethnographers to capture the essence of feminist ethnography. My hope is that more male ethnographers use feminist insight in their ethnographic work.

Feminist ethnography and its functions were explored in this paper. Feminist ethnography delves into intimate issues that require the ethnographer to approach with compassion and mutual understanding. Feminist methodology dispels the hierarchy of research allowing for it to be shared with a wider audience. The act of gaining ethnographic data requires the feminist ethnographer to immerse themselves in the culture to attain a rich, thick description. The researcher should try to involve empathy when dealing with the researcher/researched relationship. Mutual understanding and shared compassion allows for etic and emic perspective to be part of the research. The feminist ethnographer must approach dilemmas directly using feminist insight to solve the ethical issue that appear throughout the study.

Lastly, this paper investigated whether male ethnographers are capable of conducting feminist ethnographies. The male ethnographer has many of the same opportunities to employ compassionate and mutually beneficial relationships with the informant. The male ethnographer must be conscious of the power imbalances that are present and use feminist insight to address them. The use of reflexivity can allow for male ethnographers to mitigate issues of power imbalance. Also, Levinson (1998) points out that the translation of the feminist voice makes it no less “authentic” as it still contributes to the feminist narrative. Ethnographers would be best suited to use a trans-disciplinary approach to ethnography. The feminist perspective would enable the unique women’s perspective to be shared with anthropology and the world.

References


