

# Feminist archaeology



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The purpose of the article is to review the current place of feminism in archaeology and anthropology. More importantly it seeks to make “ an explicitly feminist inquiry in archaeology” with the intent of changing the practice, presentation, and interpretation of archaeology (Conkey 412). The authors wish to show the areas where feminism could make a contribution to the greater discipline of archaeology both presently and in the future. The subject of gender, which according to the authors is one which has of late received increased attention, is analyzed as to the reasons for this increased interest and its implications for the wider field of archaeology.

The general field, methodology, and teaching of archaeology are scrutinized from the perspective of feminism and its long-standing critique of the natural sciences. Ultimately the authors wish to see the development of a “ gendered archaeology” which gives to women the role in human history which they have truly had.

One example that the authors use to demonstrate that the field of archaeology has begun to change is the increasing studies which have “[recognized] female labor in a broad range of activities” in what “ were once considered exclusively male domains” (Conkey 415). They stress the importance of “ looking for women” projects which specifically seek to identify the tasks done by women in ancient societies which have erroneously been attributed to men.

The specific issue of gender, according to the authors, has begun to give new and added focus on the role of women. Archaeological research into gender varies from an emphasis on class and occupation to an interest into the ways in which the meaning of gender has evolved over time. As well, the authors point to rise in biographies being written about female archaeologists as

evidence that the field has begun to change. Interestingly the authors of the article claim that there is a correlation between research into gender inequities and work-place inequities within the field of archaeology itself. The idea that the field is sexist has, in their opinion, given rise to the increased interest and study into questions of gender.

Concerning methodology, and its relation to an “engendered archaeology,” the issue of gender as a social construct is put into perspective. According to the authors, gender has always been viewed as a social construct, though in varying degrees and depending on the given scholar. In their view, a gender-based archaeology would first and foremost seek to challenge any and all “starting assumptions” relating to the issue of gender in human history. The issue of gender would be interpreted as it relates to human-constructed reality and the material foundations of that same reality.

The article clearly tries to demonstrate that the question of gender as being central to archaeology has been long in the running. By collating the sum of archaeological research into gender, the authors want to show that the area must now carve out its own specific place. By relating it to feminist thought, the authors are able to show the areas where gender studies shed light: methodology, research, and intra-professional issues (hiring of archaeologists, male-female relations within departments, etc.). Most of all, they wish to show how a feminist archaeology might better approach “gender” than traditional archaeology.

I found the article to be interesting overall. Feminist thought surely does have much to offer mainstream archaeology, given that, as the authors have shown, the latter has historically misinterpreted or misrepresented the role and place of women in human history. Though, I must say that creating a “

gendered” archaeology which draws on feminist theory for its inspiration is in danger of over-applying its ideas and methodologies. By that I mean to say that a feminist archaeology might only interpret things from a female perspective to the detriment of others.

#### Works Cited

Conkey, Margaret W. and Joan M Gero. “ Programme to Practice: Gender and Feminism in Archaeology.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26 (1997): 411-437.