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Queer Archaeology, Mathematical Modeling, and the Peopling of the Americas

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Abstract

Issues of chronology, technology, and subsistence have long dominated discussions of the peopling of the Americas, to the near exclusion of more anthropological topics. For example, little attention has been given to the social implications of an unpeopled landscape for understanding and indigenous sex roles and gendered relationships of the first Native Americans. There has been some recent discussion of the sexual division of labor among Paleo-Indians—and even women's fertility (MacDonald 1998; Surovell 2000; Waguespack 2005). However, many of these approaches are fraught with biological and environmental determinism as well as gender stereotypes. Taking a page from queer theory, in this paper I seek to (1) explore that which does not "make sense" from my 21st Century, feminist perspective, in terms of modeling Paleo-Indian colonization, and (2) move away from heteronormative and sociobiological assumptions in considering paleodemography—e.g., the assumption that the only unit of analysis that matters for modeling demography is the heterosexual, monogamous couple. Instead, I seek alternative, less "comfortable" and less "logical" behavioral and biological parameters from which to build more complex and less ethnocentric mathematical models, which can then be tested against the archaeological record. What I outline here is a research prospectus—a plan for a plan of action, rather than new data or a corrective interpretation. I begin with a retrospective.

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