UNCOVERING THE SOCIAL CHILD IN MORTUARY CONTEXTS
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ABSTRACT
This paper aims to expand understandings of the multifarious social roles of children in past populations. A review of literature from archaeological, bioarchaeological, ethnohistorical, and human biology sources will be used. The literature will be discussed in relation to current understandings of childhood mortuary archaeology. It will critically assess the various social roles children played in the past, and how these may manifest in different ways than contemporary childhood distinctions. It will take an ethnoarchaeological approach, drawing on case studies and ethnographic studies that could serve as useful analogies for past understandings of childhood. In the review of childhood mortuary archaeology, I contend that there is a clear division between mortuary archaeology and bioarchaeology approaches to interpreting the social phenomenon of childhood, which reduces the potential for discussion and interpretation.

Introduction
Within mortuary archaeology, sub-adult burials are relatively underexplored, with little understanding about how to categorize particular burials within their unique cultural context. We often see generalized classifications of age identities, with a focus on the individual’s ascribed status, as regulated by the economic influences of their older kin groups and families (Baxter 2005). There is an important distinction between varying social age limits to childhood and the biologically determined categories of sub-adults. Here, chronological age is used: the term child is used to refer to individuals under the age of 12, youth reflects a broader range that captures contemporary adolescent ranges (12-17), and sub-adult (or juvenile) refers to the age category between 0 and 15 (Byers, 2010). This distinction is necessary, as an individual can become a social phenomenon that explores the treatment of the physical body within youth contexts, or can be limited to a biological profile constructed around typical skeletal developments at certain ages. The experience of childhood is a distinctly social phenomenon that can vary between cultures and through time, but often goes
unmentioned within mortuary literature (Baxter, 2005). This becomes problematic, as Western archaeologists risk ascribing our contemporary understandings of childhood onto past populations (Tuck, 2005). Our understandings can be altered by culture-bound factors, such as the acceptable age for a child to begin walking, or impact more critical understandings of when a child is expected to economically contribute to society. While biological methods of age estimations are able to estimate an age range based on particular skeletal developments, biological age is not always correlated with social age (Scott, 1997). Identifying age-related social identities becomes quiet challenging because of this, and studies become limited when they do not seek to delineate socially appropriate age-grades. A re-evaluation of mortuary contexts, especially those within cemetery demographics, will allow for a more thorough understanding of the social and economic powers of children in life and in death.

This paper aims to expand our understandings of varying social roles of children in past populations beyond the contemporary distinctions of childhood in Western contexts. A review of literature from archaeological, bioarchaeological, ethnohistorical, and human biology sources will be used and discussed in relation to the current understandings of childhood mortuary archaeology to more broadly understand theoretical approaches to uncovering the social child. It will draw on case studies and ethnographic studies that could serve as useful analogies for past understandings of childhood.

Theoretical Approaches to the Social Child

Archaeological narratives of mortuary behaviour are often incomplete, as they are framed within the particular perceptions of history of the researcher. In order to address the deterministic and reductionist narratives of past people, as per processualist approaches, post-processualists increasingly combined symbolic concerns and individual action as motivators for sociocultural patterns, which allowed for an altered reading of the past (Scott, 1997). One of the most powerful tools for post-processualist discussions has been contemporary feminist approaches, often in the form of critique, remedial revisiting of past histories, or theory building of alternative perspectives (Scott, 1997). As post-processualists continue to expand their voice within archaeological literature, spaces for gender-based archaeology have increased in the past two decades. These gender narratives within archaeology allowed for more investment into the so-called “invisible people,” such as children (Rega, 1997). Many archaeologists that were inspired by gender theories proposed that the realms of children and youth cultures, long absent from anthropological discussion, have been defined as feminine, in that they are subjected to very similar dichotomies as faced by
women throughout history (Baker, 1997). It has alternatively been suggested by sociocultural anthropologists that youth cultures are not frequently mentioned possibly because “like many other adults, anthropologists view youth as not to be taken very seriously: occasionally amusing, yet potentially dangerous and disturbing, in a liminal phase” (Wulff, 1995: 2).

At times, these depictions of children take the form of deviant burials or resistance to social norms. Deviant burials have been studied in-depth at medieval sites across Poland, with some research exploring atypical patterns of juvenile burials during the early and late medieval periods (Gardela and Duma, 2013; Gardela and Kajkowski, 2012). Gardela and Duma (2013) intended to contribute to debates surrounding the non-normative burials of medieval infants and children in the hopes of removing default arguments of deviance interpreted as vampires and exploring the cultural context a little deeper (Gardela and Duma, 2013). The paper looks at case studies from the 10th to 16th centuries, re-interpreting data from older excavations at sites across Poland (Gardela and Duma, 2013). Due to ambiguous and missing data, as well as rare and unique burials (such as a dismembered adult male buried with two children), it was difficult to provide comparative analysis (Gardela and Duma, 2013). Grave goods are placed within their emerging Christian context by the authors, loosely examining how items such as ceramic eggs or charcoal stones are placed in ways that represent a new religious identity, though Gardela and Duma (2013) are not successful in reconstructing the complicated pagan-Christian dynamics that would have impacted these deviant burials. This is primarily due to the physical and ideological separation of grave data and cultural data within their paper, which makes it hard for their arguments to cohesively develop. While Gardela and Duma (2013) ground the romanticized notions of deviance within Polish folklore, they fail to compare these deviant burials with typical child or adult burials, which only acts as another buffer on the route to a more unified methodological system in mortuary literature. Sub-adult burials at a range of medieval sites across Poland have found apotropaic objects on the deceased, or unusual burials of infants in ceramic vessels; both situations are significantly different from the typical mortuary practices and behaviours for these regions (Gardela and Duma, 2013). Such understandings of childhood as atypical or deviant are limiting, particularly because they emphasize the constant and liminal rebellion of children and youth to their superiors.

Notions of deviance and rebellion can be rooted in the post-World War II discovery of ‘teenagers’ as a distinct demographic category in America. The introduction of a teenage period not only changed the culture of consumption, but also fuelled extant perceptions of adolescence as a period “to be feared and loathed” (Jamieson and Romer, 2008; Irwin et al., 2002: 91). However, to remain within this framework is to ignore the dynamic and nuanced characteristics of
childhood from various cultures. To continue in such a bias restricts our understandings of socialization processes, and also significantly reduces what we can infer from growth and development statistics, or mortality rates from paleodemography. It seems that North American expectations and standards for child-rearing have often seeped into the assumed roles and developmental pathways that historic and prehistoric children may have faced.

In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of the process of socialization and its impact on childhood burial customs in the past, spaces of childhood are useful to explore and re-examine. In this way, excavations receive new life, and utilization of space becomes a question related to gender and age-based identity. As this subfield within mortuary archaeology has only begun to flourish in the past two decades, there are many barriers and inconsistencies, especially with standard terminology. Mortuary archaeology plays a critical role in outlining potentially challenging areas within narratives of childhood burials, and common misconceptions, such as creating universal definitions of “child” or “age,” which are impossible to generalize when faced with ever-changing notions in varying cultural and ethnic roles (Baxter, 2005).

The literature on childhood mortuary archaeology, while brief, has been strongly divided for the past ten years. The divide is most evident between mortuary archaeologists and bioarchaeologists. Those within the mortuary archaeological discipline tend to lean towards social interpretations of mortuary data, which can be exemplified in early work by Rega (1997), Joyce (2000), and Kamp (2001). As bioarchaeological technology increases in quality, biological evidence from individuals in mortuary contexts has been increasingly used to construct biological profiles, and assess pathologies and muscular enthesopathies (i.e. bony processes at ligament attachments) (Perry, 2006; Wilson et al., 2013). The contention between the two approaches will be further explored later, examining the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, as well as finding some common ground to work with for future studies.

Mortuary Archaeology Approaches to Social Age and Childhood

One of the few books dedicated solely to the topic of childhood archaeology is Jane Eva Baxter’s (2005) *The Archaeology of Childhood*, which embodies many of the tensions emerging in earlier discussions of childhood archaeology. Baxter provides a simple overview of a decade of new research on the mortuary archaeology of past children, outlining several of the challenges and misconceptions occurring within this field. Of utmost stress within this chapter is that of defining universal terms for age-based identities, that would be applied based on general patterning of cemetery demographics (Baxter, 2005). Baxter
(2005) questions the need for point-estimates of age, calling for more broad-based estimations that would be more strongly representative of culturally constructed age categories and how they intersect with gender. The work demonstrates a strong preference to alternative sex estimation methods, such as the location of burial, position of the individual, and grave goods as indicators of age-based identities and their relation to gender. As such, Baxter (2005) argues that bioarchaeological skeletal ages should be eliminated from the reconstruction process, as “they assume the cultural category of child on the basis of skeletal age.” While differential treatment of children and adults is a cross-cultural theme, social and philosophical-religious beliefs carry tremendous weight in mortuary space patterns, determining performances and collective social memories of varying individuals. As such, she urges mortuary archaeologists to explore subadults as having power in their own right, in contexts where they are not merely ‘children’ but instead represent active contributors to an economy, or to a society (Baxter, 2005).

Rega’s (1997) case study was one of the earliest to document childhood mortuary patterns. The paper interprets the social distinctions of age and gender through material mortuary remains at an Early Bronze Age cemetery of Mokrin, in former Yugoslavia. Rega (1997) examines archaeological materials and isotopic data (of demography and diet), but views biological data (such as isotopic, genetic, or physical) as part of the problem in understanding the social phenomenon of children. Biological data and the potential of human remains have increasingly been extolled in the Global North more than the actual results, at times speaking about quantitative results in broader and more assumptive way than could be safely proven (Rega, 1997). These assertions, while striking, are often rendered invalid, as they do not acknowledge the finely layered assumptions that biological data make when reaching a conclusion. Many mortuary archaeologists rely more on theoretical and sociological approaches to interpreting human remains, and are more open about the almost ladder-like system of theoretical underpinnings that provide a foundation for newer theories (Rega, 1997).

Another early comprehensive analysis of childhood archaeology is found within Kamp’s (2001) article on the state of the literature at the time of publication. Kamp (2001: 240) takes an almost militant tone against mortuary archaeology, for relegating the children of the past to the homestead, as “passive, and lacking in agency.” The lack of movement within childhood archaeological interpretations is detailed, and beyond the scope of this paper, but Kamp insists that the topic itself is not addressed, as it is not avant garde and does not solicit contemporary political movements that would “spur scholarship” (Kamp, 2001: 25). Kamp (2001: 26) calls upon theories from gender studies to develop culturally-specific ideas of childhood, with “critical consideration of the life
circumstances of past children.” Her strongest contribution from this paper lies in her call to reflect upon material culture as a form of childhood experiences, such as the implications to childhood mobility when their living community is heavily fortified (Kamp, 2001). Traditional data sources, such as burial contexts, architecture, and other artifacts, must be re-evaluated for new insights on the status and social roles of past children; it is suggested that a significant amount of creativity would be needed for such endeavors, and analyses must run through both physical and social settings, careful not to remove artifacts from these more politically charged landscapes (Kamp, 2001). Dilemmas often arise in analytical frameworks when archaeologists attempt to make sense of the degree to which both vertical and horizontal social statuses interplay, as child and adult artifact categories often overlap (Baxter, 2005). In a study of child burials at an Anglo-Saxon site, Crawford (2000) found that children were given a social status that was at least equal to being a ‘poor’ adult, or a liminal status of not necessarily child or adult. While age and gender are seen through social theory as merely distortions of vertical social positioning, instances such as these Anglo-Saxon burials challenge conventional perceptions of rigid vertical stratification, lending room for more economic and social power to be given to some children. This could also be recognized as potential for exercising power, as yet unrealized, moving from distortions of position to re-imagined understandings of the transience of position and control.

Immature skeletal remains can be difficult to physically examine, due to poor preservation (as subadult bone is less dense and contains less mineral content than adult bone), and sex estimation proves challenging, as sexually dimorphic traits do not typically appear until puberty. Additionally, gender roles during childhood can intersect with age categories and social status, further complicating interpretations. Rare examples of deliberate body orientation at Mokrin underline a deliberate and significant positioning of the body when compared to the more typical burials of adults in the cemetery (Rega, 1997). Rega (1997) found that this deliberate orientation was restricted to prepubescent children between 6 and 13 years of age. A more stimulating revelation was that while copper knives were most prominently associated with adult males, there was a significant absence of knives in the graves of male children under the estimated age of 18, though one sub-adult female was found to be associated with a bracelet made of a knife blade, and one old woman was found with “an impressive” copper axe in her burial assemblage (Rega, 1997: 235). Seniority dominates age-associated statuses and roles in such an instance, with gender equity having a stronger presence in Mokrin society as men and women age. These again may be subject to sex-estimation errors, but the significantly gendered patterns at Mokrin suggest much broader understandings of the roles of children, adults, and infants that break down our
conventional notions of aging, which eliminate the period of adolescence from the cemetery and create a liminal period between the ages of 17-19.

Sex, Gender, and Childhood

The dichotomy of biological sex and the more fluid sexuality of gender depictions remains contentious, especially when these theories are assigned to individual remains. While biological sex is generally determined on a scale through qualitative assessments of morphological variability in osteology (male, probable male, uncertain, probable female, and female), gender is more complicated and usually determined through engendered artifacts associated with a particular grave context (Byers, 2010). At Mokrin, the samples conveyed a highly gendered structural divide, with sexed male specimens corresponding to gendered male objects, and the opposite occurring for females (Rega, 1997). What remained difficult were the perceived discrepancies of this sex/gender structure, with some possible females being assigned male objects; this was assumed to most likely be due to a ‘miss-assignment’ during the preliminary sexing estimations, and the inherent range of error in this osteological method (Rega, 1997: 232). Rega (1997) used broad-based age estimates to create more suitable demographic profiles, finding that infants under the age of one were not included in the cemetery, and females were more represented between the ages of one to six. These significant trends in sex-specific mortality were argued to possibly indicate infanticide, though preservation bias or differential burial practice may also account for this observation. While contemporary gender roles and favoritism may not provide explicit comparisons or insights into past gender roles at Mokrin, a more comprehensive ethnoarchaeological exploration of contemporary gender roles in former Yugoslavia could provide useful analogies of longstanding and traditional gender roles throughout history. Rega (1997: 240) argues that these patterns are “consistent with ethnographic practices in societies where the material and/or social contribution of females is accorded vital importance.”

Ethnohistoric Constructions of Children and Ethnographic Analogies

The concept of sex-specific infanticide has been challenged most notably in sociocultural discourses. Lee Cronk (1993) investigated the frequency of parental favoritism among the Mukogodo people of Kenya, and the potential causes for this sex bias. Favoritism is viewed here in terms of reproductive success, with discussions of infanticide as only one manifestation of a strong bias towards children of one sex. In the Mukgodo context, it was suggested that parents were
more likely to favor their daughters due to a complicated synthesis of the little relative wealth of most Mukogodo men, the ability to afford bride wealth to neighboring groups, and the trend of investing more in daughters’ health and contentment (Cronk, 1993). Consequences of relatively little wealth for Mukogodo men were simple: “it is harder for them to find wives than it is for other men [from other communities] in this area … Their lack of livestock means they do not have the bride wealth needed” and stigma attached to their status make them very undesirable to women of other ethnic groups (Cronk, 1993: 276). As this bias can be seen in many mortuary contexts, Cronk’s (1993) ethnographic account serves as a useful analogy of why these mortuary biases might be in place, seeking answers beyond the traditionally expected notions of infanticide.

Broader evolutionary explanations of infanticide can critically inform and expand our understandings of infanticide from social perspectives. Evolutionary perspectives attempt to reconcile the proximate social factors underlying parental investment (such as socioeconomic status, ethnic backgrounds, and so forth) with ultimate causes, such as evolutionary pressures (Freese and Powell, 1999). Trivers and Willard (1973) argue that the investment parents make towards their children (sons versus daughters) is sensitive to their place in social hierarchies. This would mean that parents of lower status, with reduced access to resources, would yield more grandchildren and great-grandchildren if they invested more into their daughters, whose reproductive success is less risky or susceptible to variation. Alternatively, parents of higher status, with greater access to resources, could afford to invest more in their sons, as male reproductive success could be more variable, which creates a greater risk (Trivers and Willard, 1973). Kinship structure also plays an important role in the success of various adaptive strategies. For a patrilineal society, it may be more advantageous for parents to invest in sons, as daughters would have to leave, and sons would stay within their community. This was explored by Cronk (2007) in the low-status Romani group of Hungary, who were found to have a female biased sex ratio at birth, were more likely to nurse their daughters for longer periods of time, and sent their daughters to school for longer than male counterparts. These evolutionary perspectives are useful to explore, but should be considered within their unique sociocultural contexts and kinship patterns, as an adaptive strategy’s success is strongly influenced by and intertwined within these structures.

The positioning of graves at the site of Mokrin provides useful evidence for alternative methods of age-based categories. At Mokrin, infants under the age of one were not found in the cemetery — these sorts of exclusions are thought to be very deliberate and culturally significant. Differences in orientation and the absence of particular groups in a population’s demography enable archaeologists to make very broad suggestions about social meaning, but seem to be limited in reflecting the ideals and conceptions of childhood, as they are often the result of
adult decisions. This is prominently seen in the construction of childhood monu-
ments in Victorian-era graveyards. During this period, social order was
assigned due to certain biological assumptions that were within the framework of
evolutionary thinking at the time: men and women were separated within the
realms of the workplace and the homestead, though increasing material
consumption that came with this separation was found to be against Christian
ideals (Snyder, 1992). Children came to symbolize the innocence and
omniscience that ran counter to adult guile, branded as “uncorrupt, pure, artless,
and close to nature from birth” (Snyder, 1992: 13). Symbolism found on mortuary
monuments was in a way, a translation of these adult perceptions of children, as
they “depicted androgynous children without clothing in states of repose and
slumber” (Baxter, 2005: 105). The resting, peaceful, de-gendered children and
cherubs portrayed on monuments and grave stones reflected the sentiments of
how adults wished for their children to be, as a way of morally apologizing for
their own artifices. To a certain extent, the notion of young children being
innocent and unblemished still resonates within contemporary North American
society, which again is quite influential in how we, as archaeologists, think about
the dead, and their relation to the mourners (Baxter, 2005). These monumental
bereavements were certainly a performance for the living, as a way of
transitioning an individual from their living, liminal identity, to that of eternal
slumber, or purity. The relation of child to nature in Victorian beliefs is curious in
itself, especially as children were thought of as uncompromising, despite distinct
inclinations for adults to move away from nature and rural settings into the
modern, civilized urban spheres.

An interesting counter-narrative to this peaceful and polished child-entity
in transitioning industrialized nations can be found within the ethnographic
literature. In the Victorian era, these ideals were built up by adults in congruence
with a newly evolving romanticism of rural, agrarian pasts. Many scholars have
explored the development of these romantic narratives that centre on rural havens
as they embody ideals of family and spirituality (Matthews et al., 2000; Phillips,
1998; Yarwood, 2005). Challenging this nostalgic understanding of transitioning
youth are accounts of social disruption patterns and turmoil in urban migrations.
This is exemplified in Blum’s (2007) work on youth patterns in sub-Saharan
Africa. Here, youth exposure to social disruptions and the challenges towards
their known customs and values are explored, which can be used as an analog in
how children perceive themselves amidst tremendous changes to their
socialization processes. While cultural contexts are very distinctly different
between these two groups, the migration from rural to urban centres, no matter
what the geographic region, undoubtedly provoke resistance and adaptive
strategies for youth cultures.
During the early period of childhood archaeology, Joyce (2000) successfully challenged androcentric archaeological narratives while exploring ethnohistoric documentation of Aztec childhood, as well as the Aztec adult concerns with control of their children. Joyce (2000) uses ethnohistorical data from codices to infuse Aztec artifacts and sites with an informed and meaningful narrative about the landscape of age transformations. Children were examined through their status, which was expressed through physical representations of age categories, such as body modifications, dress, and hair (Joyce, 2000). While Joyce (2000: 474) does not discuss burial contexts often, her work contributes to a more fulfilling understanding of the material culture within mortuary contexts: the “conservative and repetitive nature of Mesoamerican lifecycle rituals results in their archaeological visibility as ordered material remains.” Joyce (2000) is able to provide insights into the world of Aztec social childhood and suggests comparing ethnohistorical data with material culture to gain valuable insights on the representation of childhood transitions through mortuary customs.

A comprehensive examination of childhood burial customs is found in De Lucia’s (2010) study on the social roles of children and the meaning of childhood through youth burials and their associated figurines at Xaltocan, Mexico in the pre-Aztec, Early Post-Classic Period. The article uses mortuary archaeology methods, ethnographic literature, and bioarchaeology to reconstruct age-related identities and social roles. De Lucia (2010) analyses interments from within domestic structures of commoners, which were always children under four years of age, buried either under the floor or within the walls of these structures. Children ages five or older were found within burial spaces of adults, making the deaths of infants and toddlers seem culturally distinguished for this community (De Lucia, 2010). This speaks to redistributions of age-related categories on the basis of body orientation and location of burials, as perceptions of infant deaths were grouped, and thought of, in a very different fashion than those of adults and older children.

Ethnohistorical data provide no distinctions for Xaltocan children during their lived experiences, though excavations of domestic structures and formal cemeteries provided data to identify three distinct phases of childhood, recognized in death, with separate spaces for infants (in the walls) and children under four (within a corner of the house) (De Lucia, 2010). De Lucia concluded that these burials were a means of keeping social memory, and would allow for continual relationships with the dead, curating the soul, and preparing the family for new infants. These physical structures did play an important role in constructing ethnohistorical social identities of Mesoamericans, which are reflected in beliefs about the dead and mortuary customs (De Lucia, 2010). Grave goods associated with children under four were also quite unique, typically miniature versions of figurines and vessels, which again created distinct social identities for young
children. In contemporary ethnographic studies of Latino families and parental perceptions of children, Durand (2011) is able to identify perceptual duties of mothers and fathers around raising and educating their children properly. Notions of familismo and educacion are examined within their social constructs, and Durand (2011) finds these terms take on much deeper meaning and value to Latina mothers, as they manifest in how they socialize their young children.

Alternatively, in cemeteries with high infant mortality, notions of love and mourning must be taken into consideration. Coping strategies are explored in the critical ethnographic account of mother love and violence in the Brazilian shantytown of Alto by Nancy Schep...
significant and meaningful member of society. In such instances, the separation and poor treatment of the dead come to suggest the need within a particular society for a desensitized and informal coping strategy.

Bioarchaeological Contributions to Social-Age Theory

Despite not always being recognized by mortuary archaeologists grounded in social theory, there have been several efforts on the part of bioarchaeologists to determine more quantifiable social ages. The contention between these two approaches has been argued to stem from the early years of bioarchaeology and its focus on cranial measurements, as well as the inability for biological data to provide meaningful information about broader societal and cultural values (Halcrow and Tayles, 2008).

Aging estimations rely heavily on the assumption of biological uniformitarianism. While uniformitarianism is a concept normally used in geology, it can be represented within biological research. Biological views posit that the human body’s responses to the environment has not significantly changed through time, such that the skeletal formation and aging process is identical today as it was to our early Homo sapiens ancestors (Howell, 1976). Biological uniformitarianism also states that while rates of performance in human responses to the environment may or may not have changed, it is the reaction itself that will “still respond in the same way to variations in the environment, including the cultural and technological aspects of human society” (Howell, 1976:26). This assumption has proven to be fundamental in reconstructing demographics and biological profiles, a way of understanding and relating our biological past, and as a way of demonstrating overarching mortality patterns in humans (Howell, 1976). Such assumptions can prove to be tremendously problematic when paired with external environmental influences on growth and development, such as resource availability, socioeconomic positions, and even growth limitations or adaptations within specific regional geographies. Other concerns with age estimation methods stem from issues with sample skeletal collections used to develop standards, most notably the Euro-centrism that subtly influences how bones are aged globally (Bocquet-Appel and Masset, 1982). These concerns have been taken into consideration with new biological technologies, and bioarchaeologists have worked hard to assess data in new and more symbolically-charged ways.

Perry (2006) evaluates the diverse techniques used to illuminate relationships between biological evidence and social interpretations. This marks a shift from the tension within earlier literature, as Perry (2006) tries to establish some common ground, such as the need to delineate culturally appropriate age grades. The biological markers of weaning and puberty, found through biochemical analyses and examination of body modifications, are used to supplement
ethnohistorical and material cultures. The physical manifestations of the body are a link in understanding life transitions and their associated rituals. Perry’s work is a quiet, yet strong reflection on the importance of utilizing methods that allow for understanding transitional phases in a way that is culturally reflective. It also is helpful in exploring how mortuary treatments of children may differ from their lived experiences.

The Role of Hybridity

Recent efforts have been made, with relative success, to bridge this divide through the use of hybrids, or the idea of the body being both socially and biologically unfinished (Halcrow and Tayles 2008). Many of these recent efforts have been made by bioarchaeologists, who, while presenting valuable biochemical and physical data within cultural contexts, tend to ignore the potential value of grave good analysis, or ethnoarchaeological analogs that would make for a more complete understanding of particular cultural mortuary customs.

Halcrow and Tayles (2008) examine the bioarchaeological contributions to understanding the social age of past populations, with particular interest in the ongoing tension between social theorists and bioarchaeology. Earlier arguments of the skeleton being unable to offer valuable information about societies and cultures are dismissed here, as Halcrow and Tayles (2008) commendably address historical issues within physical anthropology, such as biological uniformitarianism and the antiquated emphasis on cranial metrics. General themes of social theory research are implicitly explored, with a particular interest in approaching high infant and childhood mortalities (Halcrow and Tayles, 2008). Halcrow and Tayles (2008: 205) argue for the notion of hybridity, which creates an understanding of the body as both a material and cultural object, moving past “osseous changes to the environment,” simple inferences “between people and objects in mortuary contexts,” and towards “an analysis of the total milieu in which people are situated.” While creating these dynamic narratives of the past is certainly ambitious, the simple perception of the unfinished cultural and physical body is a promising alternative that could be structured within long-term mortuary research contexts.

A dynamic paper by Wilson et al (2013) combines many of the existing technologies and social theories to create a substantial analysis of three Incan child burials near Volva Llullaillaco, Argentina: a thirteen year old girl, and a boy and a girl aged between four and five. The paper discusses the capacocha ritual of child sacrifice in the Incan empire, detailing the treatment of children’s bodies during this period (Wilson et al., 2013). The paper sources information from colonial documents, CT scans of the skeletal remains (and tissue), grave context
and artifact analysis, as well as biochemical analysis of preserved hair follicles (Wilson et al., 2013). Biochemical analysis found the children to be heavily sedated with coca and chicha (alcohol), from which they outlined a series of ritual phases on the body prior to sacrifice, with ingestions of coca increasing incrementally over a one year period prior to death (Wilson et al., 2013). Here, we see the hybridity model in action: the material remains detail the developmental changes and processes to the materially unfinished body, while ritually engaging theories are intertwined to create a process of culturally significant remains. Grave goods were elaborate offerings of food and adornments, and the children were deliberately placed in an upright, seated position with elaborate feather headdresses, with plates and ceramics laid around them (Wilson et al., 2013). The children were treated as physical bodies, sacrificed for kin-related social memory and bestowed tremendous respect from their communities (Wilson et al., 2013). Wilson et al. (2013) also discuss the economics and spiritual beliefs held by the community as represented by the burial contexts of these children: the placement of the victims on high peaks was an extension of social control of the Incan empire on newly amalgamated territories.

Conclusions

As childhood archaeology is in its early days, it is understandable for such an open divide to have been challenged in the age of post-processualism. Efforts to use multiple sources of mortuary data, as well as reassessing old and potentially androcentric narratives of archaeological sites, have allowed for more engendered spaces to develop, in turn recovering the stories of past children and how they experienced previously static arenas. Children have a uniquely lasting legacy in cultural landscapes and material remains, and for that reason it is essential that each of these places be approached according to its individual spirit.

Mortuary archaeology’s role in disseminating childhood archaeology lies primarily in creating meaningful age-related social identities, beyond the scope of Western perceptions of innocent, economically powerless children. Earnest admissions of the assumptions used to create biologically relevant information is just as crucial in dispelling age estimation issues as understanding the notion of ‘child’ as ever-evolving, as individuals who participate in economic and political matters, as innocent, unblemished babes who leave too soon, and even as phenomenal entities born already wanting to die in regions with severe child mortality rates. By setting aside two decades of tension between disciplines, we are able to construct strong narratives of ritual practices and funerary beliefs, as well as construct meaningful social identities that intertwine notions of vertical and horizontal status. We can thus begin to make youth cultures of the past visible.
once again (through interpretation) within our present. We can seek to create analogies from contemporary social phenomena in how we understand the term ‘child,’ and spur the scholarship of archaeologists, physical anthropologists, and sociocultural anthropologists to create dynamic, politically charged understandings of childhood.

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