The Routledge Handbook of Anthropology and Reproduction is a comprehensive overview of the topics, approaches, and trajectories in the anthropological study of human reproduction.

The book brings together work from across the discipline of anthropology, with contributions by scholars in archaeological, biological, linguistic, and sociocultural anthropology.
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REPRODUCTION IN THE PAST

A bioarchaeological exploration of the fetus and its significance

Amy B. Scott and Tracy K. Betsinger

Introduction

Bioarchaeology is a discipline focused on the lived experience drawn primarily from skeletal evidence yet couched in social, cultural, and historical understandings of geographically and temporally bound human populations (Martin et al., 2014; Larsen, 2015). While the biological remains of an individual form the foundation of bioarchaeological inquiry, considering the social and cultural elements of the lived experience are just as significant, albeit more difficult:

complex biological, social, and cultural

contemporary notions of the fetus

al-specific data in the archaeological

alized today was historically non-

the fetus’s social and cultural evolu-

tional perspective, discussing how
discipline, and how fetal mortuary
identity in the archaeological past.

the fetus and reproduction. As the
fetus represents a tangible output
physical fetus, bioarchaeologists are
that might otherwise be invisible,
(e.g., Perry, 2014; Gowland, 2015;
formal health (e.g., Gowland, 2015;
practices (e.g., Justice and Temple
Ellis, 2020); breastfeeding and wean-
and Prowse, 2018; Pearson, 2018;
Barber, 1992, 1995; Gowland, 2015;

A bioarchaeological examination of the fetus and its complex cultural and social definitions provides an opportunity to highlight the lived experience of those who came before (mother) and those who come after (fetus). Additionally, modern reproductive studies benefit from these types of bioarchaeological analyses as they provide material evidence of how the reproductive process has continued to be redefined over time based on temporal, geographic, cultural, and social components of past populations. While the biological processes related to reproduction have arguably remained the same throughout the evolution of our species, it is the cultural and social evolution of this process, evidenced through bioarchaeological inquiry, that helps to form the foundation for the anthropology of reproduction and the acknowledgment of the complex history of the womb and the contents within.
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BRINGING LANGUAGE INTO THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF REPRODUCTION

The text and talk of pregnancy

Sallie Han

Childbirth is an intimate and complex transaction whose topic is physiological and whose language is cultural. Topic and language or, to put it another way, content and organization are never available one without the other. They must be considered together for a holistic view.

(Jordan 1992 [1978]: 1)

In Birth in Four Cultures, a founding work in the anthropology of reproduction, Brigitte Jordan (1992 [1978]) employed “language” as a metaphor for the cultural variations of practice that surround and support the physiology of childbirth. Yet, her statement went not far enough. Childbirth and reproduction more generally are not only “like” language, but also constructed and constituted by through, and of language. Human reproduction is a linguistic as well as a biological, social, and cultural experience.

If the aims of the anthropology of reproduction are to explore and examine the human experience of reproduction, then the approaches and perspectives must be drawn from the four fields of the study of humanity. Through this holistic understanding, which anthropology is singularly situated to provide, reproduction can come to be known as a biological, social and cultural, material, and linguistic experience of the present and the past.

and the contributions of bioarchaeology as relevant to our understanding in the present (see Scott and Betsinger, and Halcrow et al. in this volume). Language and linguistic anthropology,

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BIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON INFANT SLEEP

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Introduction

Within sociocultural anthropology, the anthropology of reproduction has focused on experiences of pregnancy, infertility, and the development and application of new reproductive technologies. The period of postpartum caregiving has largely been overlooked, with infant care and infant sleep in particular receiving little attention.

This is a direct result of the historical fragmentation of birth and infant care in the US and other Western settings (Tomori similarly treated separately, further processes, with more attention to Polanski in this volume). Biological to reproduction, rooted in an evolving overview, see Kramer, Veile, and a notable niche component of the separations. Infant sleep, the child of approach that crosses the traditional fields.

Infant sleep research in anthropology has influenced how we think about infants within infant care as a whole. Work in the approach to childbirth, infant feeding, cultural ideologies of infant care that has changed cultural assumptions about norm for infants (Rudzik and Balfour) for sleep safety. Biological anthropologists the evolutionary relationships of mother-infant relationships have used ethnographic data on “training” their infants to achieve sleep. This work provides key insights into the biological and sociocultural perspectives we produce better research, which may in turn lead to more accurate, equitable, and stigma-free public health guidance in support of all families.

Anthropological research on infancy offers a broader interpretation of reproductive work to include postpartum care for the sleep and feeding of infants, and attention to the ways in which parent-infant physiology and behavior are intertwined in early life. The complexity of infant sleep has demanded an integrative approach and has to date been productive in bringing together the biological and sociocultural subfields of anthropology. Such integrative approaches will continue in future to address the power relations and inequities that are inherent in the medicalization of infant sleep. Addressing infant sleep in a holistic manner in the anthropology of reproduction can transform how we think about it. By uniting biocultural and sociocultural perspectives we produce better research, which may in turn lead to more accurate, equitable, and stigma-free public health guidance in support of all families.