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Native American gender politics and material culture in seventeenth-century southeastern New England

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have long recognized that European contact had a profound impact on native peoples throughout the Americas. However, subaltern men and women are no longer seen as passive victims in their interactions with the dominant culture but rather as active agents who made their own histories, even as they confronted colonialism on a daily basis. In southeastern New England, population decline and increased commodity exchange created new social opportunities for native men and women by the mid-seventeenth century. These demographic, economic and social conditions contributed to ongoing transformations in gender roles and responsibilities, though they were not experienced uniformly throughout the region. Building on limited and ambiguous documentary and oral accounts, I use archaeological evidence of pipes, pestles, pots, and *peage* (wampum) to examine gender politics in native New England after European contact.

KEYWORDS

colonialism • cultural transformation • ethnohistory • gender politics • material analysis • native New England

■ INTRODUCTION

The impact of European colonialism on the history and culture of indigenous peoples continues to be an important research topic in the postcolonial world (Bragdon, 2001: 216; Ethridge and Hudson, 2002; Fitzhugh, 1985; McEwan, 2000; Nassaney and Johnson, 2000; Thomas, 1990; Wesson and Rees, 2002). Long-standing historical and anthropological concerns for understanding transformations in indigenous economic, social, and religious life persist even as anthropology has experienced a shift in its dominant narrative. Discussion has moved away from assessing the degree of acculturation to an examination of how local structures of power were experienced and contested by agents who played active roles in the creation of history and the reproduction of sociopolitical relations (Rowlands, 1998: 330).

This is the intellectual milieu that informs many social archaeologists' perceptions of native peoples as active agents who made their own histories, even as they confronted colonialism on a daily basis (Handsman and Richmond, 1995: 114–15; Nassaney, 1989; Robinson, 1990: 20–8; Scarry and Maxham, 2002; Thomas, 2001). This is not to say that the Americas before 1492 were occupied by cold societies who were given history by literate Europeans, nor to deny that European policies, practices and ideologies were powerful and transforming forces. And despite the rhetoric of the vanishing Indian and the political pressures placed on native peoples to assimilate and give up their former ways of life, native groups in southeastern New England persist as viable cultural and legal entities (Hauptman and Wherry, 1990; Herndon and Sekatau, 1997; Robinson, 1990).

In an age of globalization and cultural homogenization, there are lessons to be learned from the stories of Native American cultural survival and their struggle for political autonomy. Yet, understanding cultural persistence requires recognition of change, because native descendants are significantly different from their seventeenth-century forbears, in their material accoutrements at the very least. The purpose of this article is to explore how indigenous peoples actively responded to the forces of colonialism in seventeenth-century southeastern New England, by examining the material outcomes of their decisions in everyday life. The intent is not to enumerate the ways in which men and women sought to resist colonialism or how they struggled to preserve timeless traditions (as it has become fashionable to do). Rather, I examine the effects that colonialism had on native societies, with a particular focus on gender politics – the roles, responsibilities and power relationships between women and men. For social archaeologists, gender is an arena that can capture in microcosm some of the tensions and struggles individuals experience in social groups (Brumfiel, 1992; Nassaney, 2002). It is a relationship that harbors potential contradictions in all societies, native America notwithstanding.

Change and continuity in gender roles clearly have archaeological



implications for the objects that were made, used, and deposited by native men and women because material culture was used to create and reproduce social identities. I draw my archaeological examples from the modern state of Rhode Island and the areas of Connecticut and Massachusetts east of the Connecticut River. Major groups occupying the region at the time of contact include the Massachusetts, Mohegans, Narragansetts, Pequots and Wampanoags (Figure 1). I recognize that these groups (and others) may be the products of European contact (Fried, 1975; Goodby, 1998:

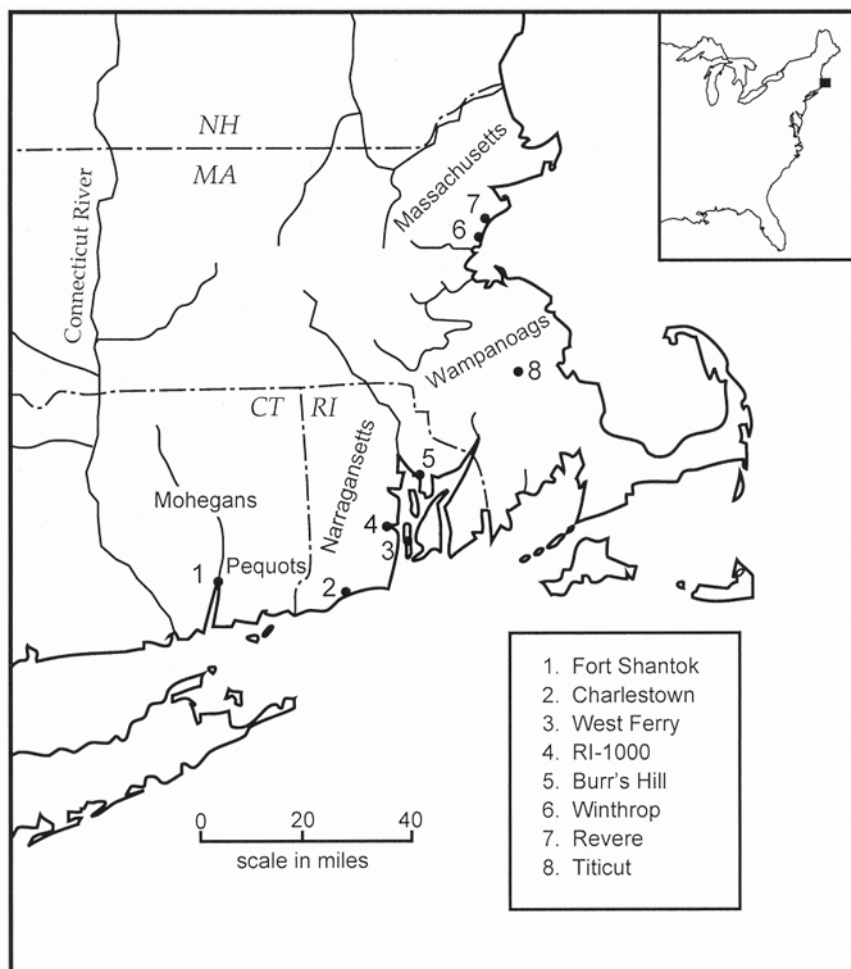


Figure 1 Map of southeastern New England showing the locations of major Native American groups at the time of contact and archaeological sites mentioned in the text

163–6) and that there were significant differences in social, political, and economic organization within the region (Bragdon, 1996). Although colonial policies and actions led to sharply contested social and political boundaries, the residents of southeastern New England still shared many cultural traits prior to contact as a result of frequent interaction and inter-marriage, patterns that continue to the present. I examine both the differences and similarities in their material lives, in order to draw some lessons from their collective and individual responses.

I begin by presenting some theoretical principles that inform my perspective on the dynamics of culture contact. I also discuss the data sources that I employ to construct a picture of a gendered native society in the seventeenth century. I then examine the new conditions and opportunities that men and women experienced as they became entangled in the colonial encounter. Finally, I focus my attention on a few specific classes of material culture – namely pots, *peage* (or wampum), pestles, and pipes – and suggest how their production, use, and deposition imply changes in the political relationships between native men and women.

■ THEORIZING CULTURE CHANGE AND THE DISCURSIVE ROLE OF MATERIAL CULTURE

Humans employ daily cultural practices (social action) in an attempt to recreate the social structures or rules of practice (Giddens, 1979). Because humans make active choices, the process of social reproduction (or structuration) does not replicate society exactly. The results are structures that resemble, but are not identical to, their precedents. Thus, cultures are in a constant state of flux and any appearance of stability is an illusion. Cultural traditions (or social structures) are continually being created and negotiated as part of the process of history making. The heterogeneous social identities of culture bearers who vary by age, status, gender and the ability to exercise power, also contribute to the dynamism and direction of structure.

This perspective on culture change problematizes the concept of so-called ‘traditional culture’, since traditions are by no means static but are continually being invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). Thus, gender roles immediately prior to contact were different than they were a century earlier. The so-called Late Woodland period (c. AD 1000–1600), in particular, was marked by social transformations associated with major subsistence and settlement changes that had significant implications for gender relations (Williams and Bendremer, 1997).

One way in which human agents create, express and transform social structure is through the use of material objects (Hodder, 1982; Loren, 2001;



Nassaney, 2002; Wobst, 1977). Material objects are durable media that can convey a broad range of social messages based on their form and contexts of use. In short, they are symbols. Even the most mundane objects in daily life encode information about their makers and users. Among many native groups, objects frequently include artistic or stylistic embellishments, which often have spiritual associations (Tanner, 1992: viii) and deep cultural meanings. Indeed, the social and spiritual realms of native societies are often closely interwoven. Furthermore, the meanings of material symbols are by definition arbitrary in the sense that they are historically constructed; thus, they are subject to reinterpretation and their meanings lie in the eye of the beholder. It follows that an observer's social identity influences what is seen and understood about a particular message (Garman, 1994).

To complicate the matter further, a social identity is a composite of various roles that an individual plays in society. We cannot speak of men or women without taking into account their status, age, and ethnicity or tribal grouping and the intersection of these roles. It follows that a Wampanoag squaw sachem ('sachem' is a position of hereditary leadership among New England Algonquians and women who held this position were sometimes referred to as 'squaw sachems') experienced and understood the material world differently than a Pequot refugee girl or an elder Narragansett woman. Important social and spiritual stages have been identified in the life cycle, as demonstrated by the various mortuary accompaniments found with female juveniles, adolescents, and older women in several cemeteries from the region (Rubertone, 2001; Zymroz, 1997). Likewise, political leaders and members of high status lineages were treated differently in life and in death (Johnson, 1999: 158–9).

Finally, researchers must also contend with the interpretive barriers that separate contemporary life from the seventeenth century. While a number of source materials are available to scholars to interrogate the seventeenth century, these must be critically scrutinized lest they merely serve as mirrors that reflect current social and political concerns onto the past.

■ SOURCE MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY GENDER POLITICS

Beginning in the 1980s, researchers noted that the roles of women and any meaningful analysis of gender were underrepresented in the ethnohistoric and anthropological literature (Conkey and Spector, 1984; Forward, 1991; Gero and Conkey, 1991; Richmond, 1988: 7). This neglect was partly due to early European observers' failures to record the voices of native women who were effectively silenced, whereas later ethnographic practices also contributed to these biases. In most instances, European men had limited contact with native women. For example, Narragansett men forbade their

women from boarding Verrazzano's ship when they first encountered each other in 1524, in order to protect them against the foreigners' enticements (Wroth, 1970).

Despite the paucity of documentary evidence regarding women's lives, there has been increasing historical and anthropological attention paid to women and gender politics over the past two decades (Anderson, 1990; Claassen and Joyce, 1997; Demos, 1995; Ezzo, 1988, 1991; Klein and Ackerman, 1995; Shoemaker, 1995b; Sleeper-Smith, 2001; Van Kirk, 1980; White, 1999; Wishart, 1995). Moreover, researchers have cogently argued that gender (along with class, race and ethnicity) structures the archaeological record and is an important analytical lens that can assist in understanding human social dynamics (Albers, 1989; Albers and Medicine, 1983; Caffrey, 2000; Claassen and Joyce, 1997; Hudecek-Cuffe, 1998; Nelson, 1997; Wright, 1996). Current debates over native gender roles center on the permeability of the boundaries between women's and men's work and the implications of the meaning of a gendered division of labor for the relative power and status of women and men in these societies (Klein and Ackerman, 1995; O'Brien, 1997: 159). This study contributes to these debates by employing multiple lines of evidence to examine native gender politics in the seventeenth century. While historical documents and oral accounts inform my research, the focus of this analysis is on the archaeological evidence. Each of these data sources has their limitations as I discuss below.

Despite claims to the contrary, early European observers did not completely neglect native women in their accounts. Even though they were not written as ethnographies, seventeenth-century records can inform about various aspects of native life ways. As with any source materials, documents must be subjected to rigorous critical analysis and they can seldom be taken at face value. As Rubertone (2001: 97) noted, 'one can hear the voices of the Narragansett people' through a close reading of Roger Williams' highly fragmentary work, *A Key into the Language of America* (1643). She argued how *A Key* can be used to unlock information about Narragansett identity, origins, settlement and mobility, social organization, ceremonies and rituals. Even though Rubertone (2001: 107) claimed that Williams conveyed the idea of male dominance and patrilineality (which is still being debated), muted the voices of women and belittled their actions, she is still able to use the text to suggest alternative readings of female roles and their importance in reckoning descent. Thus, even the most biased texts have some merit. In some instances, the historical silences of these accounts are as telling as their printed words. Although no other seventeenth-century writings achieved the canonical status of Roger Williams' work, a number of authors such as Edward Winslow (1624[1910]) and William Wood (1634[1973]) explicitly commented on the gendered division of labor. Their statements appear to be reliable when corroborated by other written sources, oral accounts and



archaeological evidence. Given the voluminous documentary record for seventeenth-century southeastern New England, I do not claim to have exhausted its research potential for understanding gender. Yet the sources I consulted contained little information about native gender roles because the documents were created as an outcome of the colonization process. Thus, daily, mundane activities (both of the colonized and the colonizers) are seldom mentioned unless they had a direct bearing on the economic and political success of the European enterprise.

Accounts of native voices written in their own hand are woefully under-represented. In place of written documents, many non-literate societies have developed rich oral traditions to pass down important information from one generation to the next. There is considerable debate surrounding the veracity of oral history and oral tradition (Echo-Hawk, 2000; Mason, 2000; Vansina, 1985). Nevertheless, the oral accounts collected and recorded by Speck (1903), Simmons (1986) and others have been used profitably for cultural and historical reconstruction and to develop hypotheses that can be tested against other lines of evidence (Staeck, 2000). Elsewhere I have shown how archaeology and oral tradition in native New England can be used in tandem to illuminate each other (Nassaney, 2000).

Contemporary native voices remain underutilized in historical studies in southeastern New England. One must demonstrate (and not merely assert) that there is an 'unbroken chain linking' the memories of descendant communities with their seventeenth-century ancestors (Handsman, 1988: 29). For example, McMullen (1996) has argued that native reclamation of their pasts in the twentieth century depended ironically on the documentary materials that Europeans created in the seventeenth century. Rubertone (2001: 61) also noted that Williams' *A Key* served as an important tool in preserving Narragansett culture for the Indian Council of New England in the 1930s. The opportunities to explore the contributions of contemporary world views for understanding seventeenth-century life will likely increase as anthropologists and contemporary natives establish closer relations of trust and work to bridge the gap between native and non-native ways of knowing and interpreting the past (Fixico, 1997; Watkins, 2000). Collaboration under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) could pose just such an opportunity.

NAGPRA involves the repatriation of sacred objects to descendant Indian communities (Bragdon, 2001: 253). Some level of study is required in the process of determining the cultural affiliation of these artifacts. In many cases, affiliated objects such as ceramic vessels and smoking pipes are the direct products of native hands and originate within a native worldview providing a cultural context that documents often lack (Nassaney and Johnson, 2000: 3). Even European objects that were adopted by native peoples were often imprinted with new meanings that can be interpreted from their archaeological contexts of recovery (Hamell, 1983; Turnbaugh, 1992).

Most of the archaeological materials on which this study is based derive from a number of mortuary sites that have been excavated since the late nineteenth century (Brenner, 1988; Gibson, 1980; Robinson et al., 1985; Tuma, 1985), whereas others are museum specimens that lack provenience. Mortuary contexts are important sites in which native peoples marked, masked, and/or transformed identities; therefore, they provide an important entry point into past social and ideological lives. With the passing of NAGPRA, many culturally affiliated objects from mortuary contexts have been inventoried and brought to the attention of the archaeological community. Despite the potential of these materials to inform about the past, many have been returned to native groups before adequate study could be conducted. In other cases, materials may no longer be available for study once it is determined that they are affiliated with a recognized group. I encountered this situation in 1999 when I attempted to examine a collection from Charlestown (Chapin, 1927) held by the Rhode Island Historical Society but claimed by the Narragansetts. Even permission to reproduce images of grave goods that have previously been published may be difficult to acquire, as in the case of the Burr's Hill materials (Gibson, 1980) that were being contested by the Narragansetts and Wampanoags when I first began this study. NAGPRA has truly been a mixed blessing that has both helped and hindered the interpretation of native history and culture.

Other archaeological materials that may be available for study often lack adequate provenience information, which greatly diminishes their research potential. In addition, the archaeological record is fragmentary and subject to the vagaries of preservation such that only a small sample of seventeenth-century material culture still exists today. Finally, few seventeenth-century native domestic sites have been systematically investigated in New England (Thorbahn, 1988). Since houses and villages are the places in which people experienced everyday life, the material culture at these sites is likely to be significantly different from that found in mortuary contexts for various reasons (Conkey, 1991; Zagarell, 2002).

Readings and interpretations of documents, oral accounts, and material objects may complement or contradict each other because different individuals created them in different contexts (Leone and Crosby, 1987). None of these sources are *a priori* more dependable but all must be critically evaluated on a case by case basis. In regards to written records, we should take into account the fact that different authors observed different groups at different times. It follows that there will be variation in what was recorded about native lives. Lastly, scholars are likely to disagree over the interpretation of material objects. As symbols, they can embody multiple meanings simultaneously that may be interpreted differently depending on the social context of the observer in the past and in the present.



■ NATIVE CULTURAL PRACTICES, GENDER ROLES AND IDEOLOGIES AT CONTACT

A number of scholars have commented on the difficulty of using European documents to reconstruct pre-contact life ways because native societies were often significantly transformed by the time Europeans began to keep records (Nassaney and Johnson, 2000: 7). The following reconstruction of the lives of native men and women on the eve of contact is based on a careful reading of multiple lines of evidence. This description risks portraying native life in static terms, which it was not even in ancient times. My analyses suggest, however, that changes seem to have accelerated in the mid-seventeenth century. Documentary, archaeological, and oral source materials indicate that groups in the region at contact practiced a mixed hunting, gathering, and horticultural subsistence strategy that involved seasonal movement, with some variation between coastal and interior upland areas (Bragdon, 1996: 77–9). Age and gender formed the basis for a division of labor and other important social distinctions were based on personal ability, status, and wealth (Bragdon, 1996: 169–83; O'Brien, 1997: 146–7).

Native women in southeastern New England planted, cultivated, and harvested the crops and gathered wild plant foods and shellfish. They also produced a variety of domestic objects including pottery, baskets, clothing, and textiles, and were responsible for cooking, serving meals, and child-care. Women literally made and kept house, though men often assisted by cutting the poles that framed these dwellings.

Men, on the other hand, were charged with hunting and fishing, though the latter was sometimes a communal activity. Male contributions to agriculture were confined to clearing the fields and cultivating tobacco. Men were responsible for producing wooden implements such as bowls, bows, and handles for various objects, as well as canoes (O'Brien, 1997: 147). They also employed a lapidary industry that involved the production of smoking pipes (Turnbaugh, 1976) and other stone tools. Stone pestles, however, were certainly used and probably made by women (Nassaney and Volmar, 2003). There is some evidence that men were the principal minters of wampum, whereas women collected the shellfish and strung the beads together (Price, 1996). According to Bradford (1974: 235), only sachems and other important people possessed wampum among the Wampanoag, and wampum production may have been generally confined to higher status households and lineages (Lincoln, 1913). Contrary to popular belief, wampum was not a form of 'Indian money' prior to contact. Rather, it served as personal adornment, a form of tribute, and a means to secure a ransom. Only later did it serve as an exchange medium.

Within a hereditary lineage-based kinship system, men and women identified themselves as members of a local community that was occasionally

integrated into larger confederacies that formed for purposes of alliance (Johnson, 1999). There remains some debate as to whether descent was matrilineal, patrilineal, or bilateral (O'Brien, 1997: 158, n. 8). The uncertainty may result from: (1) variation in the region; (2) flexibility within groups; (3) confusion between the rules of descent and rules of succession; and/or (4) a shift that was taking place in response to contact (Bragdon, 1996; Burton and Lowenthal, 1974; McMullen, 1986; O'Brien, 1997; Starna, 1990). Men and women freely married at the onset of adulthood; a woman could initiate a divorce by placing her husband's belongings outside of her house, implying that women had a choice in their mates. Marriage often took place between men and women of similar status. Lineages were ranked and members of high-ranking lineages within the region frequently wed to establish political alliances. Leaders were also chosen or inherited their positions by virtue of their lineage. While both men and women are known to have held positions of leadership in the seventeenth century, most leaders at contact were men, based on the preponderance of male sachems in the region.

Mortuary practices immediately before and after contact provide further insights into native sociopolitical organization (Nassaney, 2000: 414–18). Most burials prior to contact were isolated features with few associated grave goods. The goods that do occur seem to mark achieved status consistent with egalitarian social relations. Grave goods increased in frequency and diversity in the early seventeenth century, perhaps as ranking emerged. Burials often occurred in formal cemeteries that were regularly organized in rows with interments oriented toward the southwest, testifying to the importance of a ritual specialist who prepared individual corpses for their postmortem journey (Tuma, 1985; Williams, 1973). The process included the placement of artifacts appropriate to one's role and status and these were differentially distributed among burials in number and kind. For example, hoes, pestles, and brass kettles have often been found with women, whereas knives, clay pipes, unfinished wampum, whetstones, and gun parts were buried with men. Female adolescents who had died before giving birth were associated with particularly rich offerings commemorating their loss to society (Rubertone, 2001).

There were a number of ritual specialists in native societies who could seek spiritual power through visions and encounters with otherworldly beings (Simmons, 1986: 41–64). These included powwows that exhibited many shamanic traits, as well as herbalists and various other religious practitioners who were generally responsible for ensuring the physical, social, and spiritual well being of the community. They often employed offerings, potions, visions, and curing rituals to effect their ends (Simmons, 1986). According to the Mohegan anthropologist, Gladys Tantaquidgeon (1930: 16), the Aquinnuh of Martha's Vineyard were knowledgeable of a native pharmacopoeia used for herbal remedies and several female herb-doctors



were adept at preparing and administering these medicines. Although women were generally well acquainted with plant habitats and herbal curative properties, men alone cultivated tobacco, which was widely used for ritual purposes throughout North America in the seventeenth century (Nassaney, 2000, 2005; Von Gernet, 2000; Williams, 1973). Roger Williams (1973: 126–7) claimed that pipe smoking was prevalent among Narragansett men; however, only some males smoked. Thus, the practice was not universal. While its frequency of occurrence and context of use is difficult to assess prior to contact, there appears to have been a long-standing connection between men, ritual and tobacco (Nassaney, 2005).

Various authors have commented on the notion of whether the activities of men and women constituted separate spheres (Shoemaker, 1995a: 3–5). Male and female roles were interdependent and generally more flexible than their European counterparts (but cf. R. Shoemaker, 1998). The English invariably characterized women as having had lower status than men had. Both Edward Winslow and William Wood, for example, remarked on the ‘slavish’ lives of women and how more industrious and laborious they were in comparison to their lazy husbands. Such negative reports have generally been dismissed as due to a lack of understanding, though they may point to inequities that were developing, if not already in place, after contact. While I am inclined to see men and women’s roles as complementary, there is also evidence for social asymmetry along gender lines (Bragdon, 1996: 181).

Gender inequalities may have resulted from new social conditions brought about by contact. However, there is ample evidence to suggest that gender roles were not static throughout the Late Woodland period. For example, the introduction of maize horticulture relatively late in the pre-contact era would have had significant implications for the allocation of female labor (Little, 2002, on the timing of the introduction of maize; Williams and Bendremer, 1997). **Nevertheless, changes in gender roles seem to have accelerated after contact. These changes, I argue, are expressed in new forms of material culture that served to rationalize and challenge colonial conditions.**

■ NATIVE RESPONSES TO COLONIALISM: GENDER POLITICS AND THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD

Colonialism had far-reaching consequences for both colonizers and colonized due to the clash of different political-economic structures and unequal relations of power. The English, as with most colonial powers in North America, were motivated by mercantilism to acquire land and extract the surplus of its bounty in order to create and accumulate wealth (Wolf, 1982).

Ideally, this required permanent settlement and it led to regular interactions between natives and newcomers. One of the major outcomes of this sustained contact in the early seventeenth century was the epidemic diseases to which natives had no defense (Cronon, 1983). Major epidemics in 1616–1619 and 1633 led to significant population decline, especially among groups east of Narragansett Bay (Carlson et al., 1992; Cook, 1973, 1976). Yet, for much of the seventeenth century, interactions took place on relatively equal footing, with neither group able to dominate the other. Disease, coupled with foreign military tactics (Hauptman, 1990), had severe demographic consequences that ultimately tipped the balance of power in favor of the English.

Population decline had a profound impact on native societies. For example, it upset the rules of political succession and led to struggles for positions of leadership (Johnson, 1993). This may explain the increased presence of female sachems after the mid-seventeenth century, as widows often filled the roles once held by their deceased husbands. Diminished group size brought about by disease and warfare was interpreted as an imbalance in the cosmic order (Zymroz, 1997). In some instances, the mere presence of Europeans seemed to threaten Indian belief in how the world worked and how to influence its workings (Simmons, 1986: 62–3). The world was no longer a predictable place in which to live. The defeats of the Pequot War (1636–1637) and King Philip's War (1675–1676) further assaulted the natives' confidence in their worldview. Native Americans were awestruck by English technologies and ravaging diseases and began to question ancestral certainties (Simmons, 1986: 262; Volmar, 1992: 35). One effect of colonization, epidemics, and warfare on native America was the spiritual deprivation experienced by the survivors (Salisbury, 1982: 106). In response, the Narragansett challenged the material symbols of social inequality and rapid change by employing ceremonies to destroy large amounts of material goods, perhaps in an effort to restore good health and fortune (Simmons, 1986: 58).

The biological and spiritual assault that natives experienced was coupled with economic transformations. In the process of seeking to acquire wealth, the English drew native peoples into exchange relationships that led to an influx of European goods into native material repertoires, as the documentary and archaeological records demonstrate. These goods were often substitutes for native counterparts (Nassaney and Volmar, 2003), but many were used in distinctively native ways. Some objects served as markers of newly emergent political statuses, which increased social inequalities (Brenner, 1988; Nassaney, 2000; Robinson, 1990; Simmons, 1986: 58). Other commodities (e.g. iron drills, files) facilitated the intensified production of some objects (e.g. wampum) and more elaborate forms of others (e.g. smoking pipes). Commodity exchange affected native groups in two other related ways. First, imported goods often replaced native goods, freeing up



time for native producers to reallocate their labor. For example, the influx of European cloth would have placed fewer demands on women to produce fur clothing (Anderson, 1994). Second, native peoples channeled their labor to produce goods that Europeans wanted to acquire. For instance, initially the English eagerly sought to obtain maize from native trading partners, followed by increasing quantities of wampum to secure economic stability and increase political influence in the region (Ceci, 1990; Robinson, 1990). Thus, native participation in the fur trade had a significant influence on the ways in which labor was allocated that, in turn, potentially restructured the division of labor along gender lines. By the end of the seventeenth century, the events of the colonial encounter had left many people landless and made it impossible for them to maintain an economy that reflected earlier (i.e. pre-contact) gender roles (Johannsen, 1980: 32; O'Brien, 1997: 156). But native peoples were responding to these new conditions even before they became dispossessed.

Several European imports effectively replaced their native counterparts soon after contact. For instance, metal knives, axes, and drills quickly replaced many types of stone tools (Nassaney and Volmar, 2003). Metal hoes also became common, even though some elderly women resisted their adoption and sought to retain their shell equivalents (Williams, 1973: 171, 213). The broad range of European cloth types at the RI-1000 cemetery (Welters, 1985) may be taken to indicate that cloth became widely available after 1650. Brass kettles and imported ceramic containers made native ceramic technology nearly obsolete by the end of the seventeenth century (Goodby, 1994). And white ball clay pipes were common artifacts in seventeenth century mortuary contexts, suggesting their ready availability and frequent use among the living including men, women and children (Brenner, 1988; Nassaney, 2000, 2005; Tuma, 1985: 124–48). In short, **as native men and women adopted imported materials and took advantage of the opportunities that these imports afforded, they began to redefine their gender roles and identities.** In the remainder of this article, I discuss how these roles were expressed in new material forms.

■ CHANGES IN THE MATERIAL LIVES OF NATIVE NEW ENGLAND MEN AND WOMEN

Native responses to population decline, commodity production, and social disruption are clearly implicated in the material record. Material changes in the archaeological record are expressions of new gender roles and relations in the context of changing economic and political conditions. As mentioned previously, the English system of market exchange placed new labor demands on native men and women and work was reorganized to

accommodate this shift. In the Mohegan homeland, women intensified their agricultural pursuits, made corn their exclusive domain, and appropriated surpluses that were stored in specially constructed granary pits (Handsman, 1990). Given the importance of maize in native society, both before and after contact, control over this critical resource would have increased the status of women and underscored their role in the economy.

One way in which women were expressing their association with maize, fertility, and biological reproduction were the new motifs that appeared on the castellations of their ceramic vessels (Goodby, 1994; Handsman, 1990; McMullen, 1986; Rouse, 1947) (Figure 2). While these styles were first defined at Fort Shantok in the Mohegan homeland, they also appear at

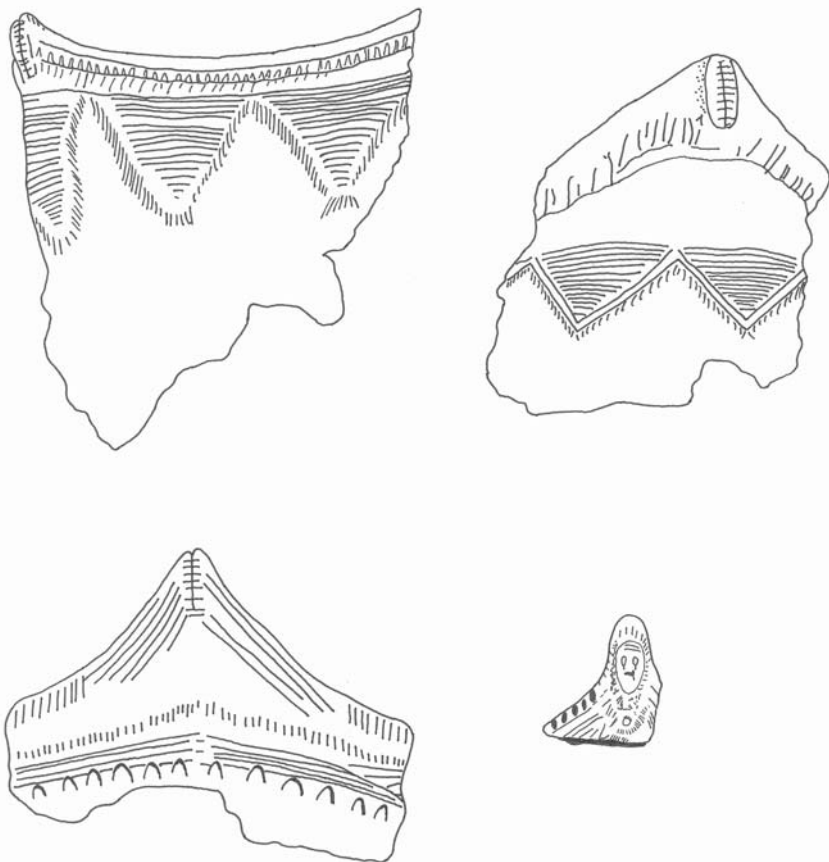


Figure 2 Motifs that evoke women are shown here on the castellations of Shantok ceramic vessels (adapted from Handsman, 1988; Johnson, 2000; Rouse, 1947)



other seventeenth-century sites throughout the region (Goodby, 2002; Johnson, 2000; Williams, 1972). Prominently displayed on these castellations are stylized references to women and their bodies including symbols of female genitalia (Handsman, 1988; McMullen, 1986; Rouse, 1947). McMullen (1986: 5) has suggested that 'some castellations are actually (depictions of) women's heads with the head of a baby on the inside of the pot, as if the baby were on a cradleboard'. Some of these images have also been interpreted as representations of maize or the Corn Mother and have been documented in other areas of the Northeast (Rouse, 1947; Wonderley, 2002). These symbols reminded viewers of the importance of women to genetic continuity and their role in preserving native traditions and culture (Handsman, 1988: 31; McMullen, 1986: 7) at a time when disease, warfare, and foreign ideas were threatening cultural integrity. An anonymous reviewer suggested that women might have used this imagery to protest changes in their increasingly subordinated status.

Some native women in southeastern New England did not subscribe to this imagery and its associated practices, nor did they necessarily experience diminished status. Some were making different pots and pursuing different strategies by producing other commodities. For example, the presence of agricultural implements with predominantly older women at RI-1000 (Turnbaugh, 1984) suggests that younger women were spending less time cultivating maize and more efforts in producing other commodities for exchange such as wampum. Peage, or true wampum, is the name given to the cylindrical white and purple shell beads that were made of marine whelk and clam (quahog) shells (*Mercenaria mercenaria*) from Narragansett Bay and Long Island Sound after contact (Figure 3). It was an extremely important resource in southeastern New England, such that competition over wampum arguably led to the Pequot War in the 1630s (Ceci, 1990). Iron awls, metal dills, and nails were used to drill shell beads at a rate that far exceeded earlier techniques. This technological innovation, along with a growing demand for wampum particularly among inland groups, led to standardized forms and provided an economic incentive to substantially increase wampum production in coastal areas by the mid-seventeenth century. I contend that these technological changes had important ramifications for the organization of labor as women were drawn into a new form of commodity production.

The Dutch recognized wampum's role in a triangular trade system early in the seventeenth century. First, European commodities were brought to the region and exchanged for wampum. Second, wampum was transported inland and traded for furs. Third, the furs were sent back to Europe and sold at a profit (Ceci, 1990: 58). While both women and older men collected the raw material for its production, it is not entirely clear who was responsible for producing the finished beads (Price, 1996: 18; Williams, 1973 cited in Williams and Bendremer, 1997: 144). However, mortuary data from

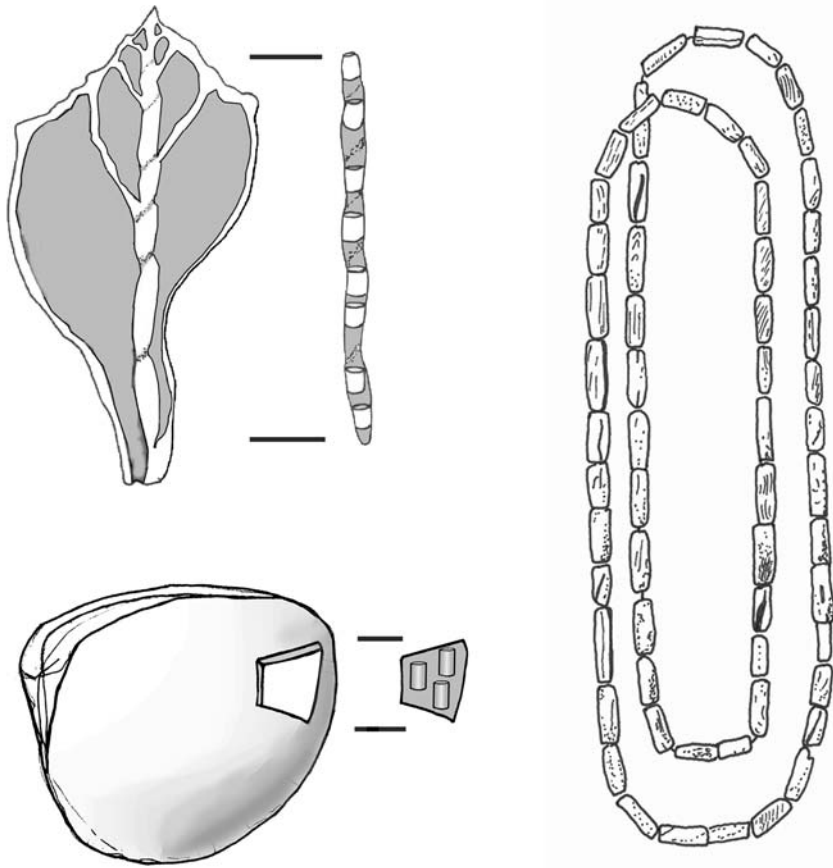


Figure 3 Left: white, cylindrical shell beads (wampum) were made from the center column of the whelk, and purple beads from the edges of the hard shell clam or quahog. Right: a string of wampum from the Winthrop site (adapted from Willoughby, 1924)

Narragansett Bay are suggestive. The tools involved in wampum production and raw material scraps have been recovered from burial contexts at two sequentially used cemeteries – West Ferry on Conanicut Island and RI-1000 in Wickford. At West Ferry, which dates to the first half of the seventeenth century, all of the wampum blanks, drills, and whetstones used to grind the shells into beads were found associated with three adult males, two of whom are older than 50 years of age (Simmons, 1970). In contrast, the later RI-1000 (*ca.* 1650–1670s) cemetery also yielded wampum blanks and drills, but these were found with *both* adult men and women (Turnbaugh, 1984).



The captive Mary Rowlandson observed that Weetamo, a female Wampanoag sachem, made 'girdles of wampum and beads' (Lincoln, 1913: 150). Unfortunately, it is not clear from her account whether Wampanoag women made beads or merely wove them into belts, nor whether such activities were confined to women of high status. The mortuary record from Narragansett Bay suggests the expansion of wampum making by involving female labor to underwrite the fur trade. It is interesting to note that the Narragansetts were forced to use wampum to purchase corn from the English in 1648, whereas they were producing a maize surplus for exchange two decades earlier (Robinson, 1990: 167–8). While the 1648 maize shortage may have been due to environmental factors, it may also suggest that women's labor had been diverted away from maize agriculture and towards the production of wampum, coincident with increased European demand for this commodity. Ceci (1990: 61–2) conservatively estimated that southern New England and eastern Long Island Indians paid nearly 7 million beads to the English colonists from 1634–1664. Thus, by the mid-seventeenth century, wampum was arguably a more profitable, flexible, and portable exchange currency than labor-intensive maize (Ceci, 1990: 59; Nassaney, 1999). Wampum production also had a potential for expansion that was not shared by maize agriculture; it was not constrained by seasonality and it could be organized as a cottage industry with labor drawn from a broad segment of society.

staple
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If women made wampum as I suspect they did, it still remains unknown whether they retained control over the fruits of their labor be they the beads or the finished belts (Williams and Bendremer, 1997: 149). In systems of commodity exchange, men often appropriate the surplus labor of their female kin as they expand their involvement in exchange transactions (Leacock, 1978; cf. Grumet, 1980). Male appropriation of either the beads or the finished belts would, in turn, have diminished female status thereby creating or exacerbating tensions between men and women.

Even as women became wampum producers, they remained associated with pestles, which, despite their phallic appearance, have been linked with females archaeologically and in oral accounts (Handsman, 1988; Simmons, 1986: 273–6). Pestles have a long history of use in New England, having been found in Late Archaic (*ca.* 4000 BP) cremation cemeteries in eastern Massachusetts (Dincauze, 1968). Usually associated with wooden mortars ethnographically, pestles are cylindrical-shaped stones that were used by women to pound corn and other grains into meal prior to cooking (Tantaquidgeon, 1930; Volmar, 1992). Many pestles were laboriously pecked and ground into a near perfect roller shape. Both ends are generally rounded; one end has characteristic concentric striations from use in pounding and grinding. Pestles were clearly implicated in both biological and social reproduction, particularly of gender roles.

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Archaeologists have distinguished pestles that exhibit sculpted

representations on one end. The sculpted ends of these so-called 'effigy pestles' can assume a variety of different shapes or representations including zoomorphic, anthropomorphic and ambiguous forms (Figures 4 and 5; Willoughby, 1973: Figs 81–83). Based on a study of over 60 effigy pestles from the region, Volmar (1992; Nassaney and Volmar, 2003) argued that effigy pestles date to the Contact period and suggested that they are not merely fancy utilitarian pestles. Whereas 80 percent of the non-effigy pestles exhibit use wear, only 17 percent of the effigy pestles have such wear. Their contexts of discovery indicate that effigy pestles are usually found associated with the burials of women or (presumably female) children; they almost never occur with men.

The effigy depictions evoke mythological symbols of supernatural beings in Algonquian society (Volmar, 1992: 22). The principle deity who appeared to humans in visions and dreams was Hobbamock, whose name is related to the color black, the words for death, the deceased, dead man, and the cold northeast (Simmons, 1986: 39; Volmar, 1992: 25). Spiritual power was conferred upon those who dreamt of Hobbamock. Inanimate objects, particularly snake-shaped objects with representations of human and animal forms like effigy pestles, could be charged with spiritual power derived from Hobbamock through a dream or vision. While depictions of snake or bear effigies are common (Figures 4 and 5), human-faced effigy pestles also occur (Nassaney and Volmar, 2003: Fig. 6.3; Willoughby, 1973: Fig. 81). Animal effigies may represent an animal's spirit, whereas human effigies may be images of Hobbamock, perhaps making the human effigy a more potent spiritual form. Elsewhere Nassaney and Volmar (2003: 92; Volmar, 1992) have argued that effigy pestles would have been important symbols in communicating with the spiritual world. Women could have used

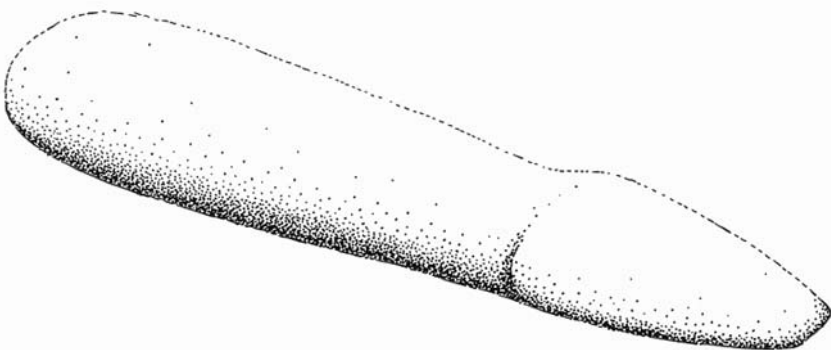


Figure 4 Snake-shaped effigy pestle in the Charles Gorton Collection, Museum of Natural History, Roger Williams Park, Providence, RI. Length: approximately 25 cm

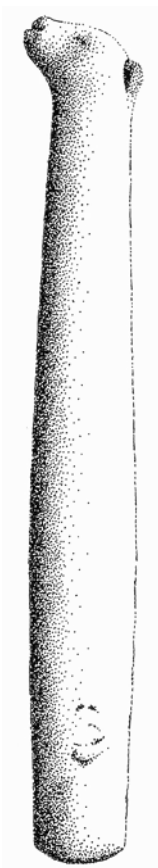


Figure 5 Bear effigy pestle of gray slate from Burr's Hill, Warren, RI. Length: unspecified (adapted from Gibson, 1980)

these objects to heal the sick, divine the future, or threaten (and possibly attack) those whom they perceived as dangerous. In *The Tale of Chah-nameed*, a beautiful young girl protects herself and perhaps metaphorically preserves her way of life by using her mortar and pestle to impede the efforts of her pursuing husband whom she reluctantly married (Simmons, 1986: 274–6). Finally, effigy pestles were interred with women as their personal possessions for use in the afterworld.

In the onslaught of a crumbling social order that challenged the predictability of roles and relations, women transformed the meanings of pestles and used them to make contact with otherworldly forces and beings. Pestles were not only meant to intercede with the supernatural, but also symbolized women and reproduction in much the same way as did pots.

Wooden mortars may have served a similar role, thus implicating pestles as female tools that helped to assure sustenance for the physical and spiritual well-being of the group. One reviewer opined that pots, mortars and pestles had a close symbolic association with maize, which was emblematic of tradition, nurturance, and biological continuity. Also, since mortars received the repeated ‘thrusts’ of the pestles, mortars are female and pestles are actually male (and not quintessential) female artifacts. Even if this was the case, the fact that women wielded such powerful male symbols suggests the importance of women in social and biological survival.

In their struggle to confront colonialism and to seek a balance between the old social order and the new, women also took up a new practice that had been confined to men – tobacco smoking. The archaeological evidence suggests considerable antiquity for pipe smoking in New England. Both steatite (soapstone) and clay pipes were used (Figures 6 and 7); the ceramic elbow form became more common later and was observed in use at contact throughout the region (Hoffman, 1991: 95–7; Willoughby, 1973). Ethnohistoric evidence suggests that tobacco, often mixed with other substances, was smoked in native New England (Turnbaugh, 1975).

As mentioned previously, men cultivated tobacco for ritual use in southern New England (Turnbaugh, 1975: 63; Von Gernet, 2000: 70), and it was common throughout the Americas for tobacco to be confined to men or women who had shamanic power (Spinden, 1950: 66). Tobacco was seldom smoked for pleasure until after contact. Edward Winslow (cited in Simmons, 1986: 47) commented ‘that the men smoked much tobacco, but it was inappropriate for younger boys to do so’ in southeastern New England, implying the restricted use of the substance.

Turnbaugh (1975, 1980, 1992) has argued that smoking became more

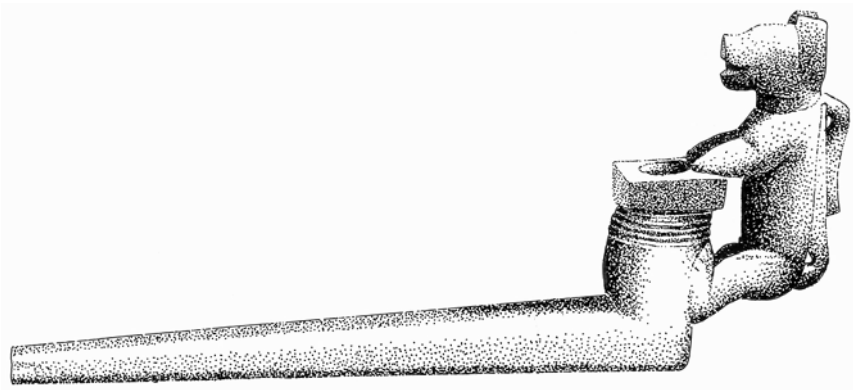


Figure 6 Wolf or mountain lion steatite effigy pipe from Burr's Hill, Warren, RI. Length: 23.9 cm (adapted from Gibson, 1980)

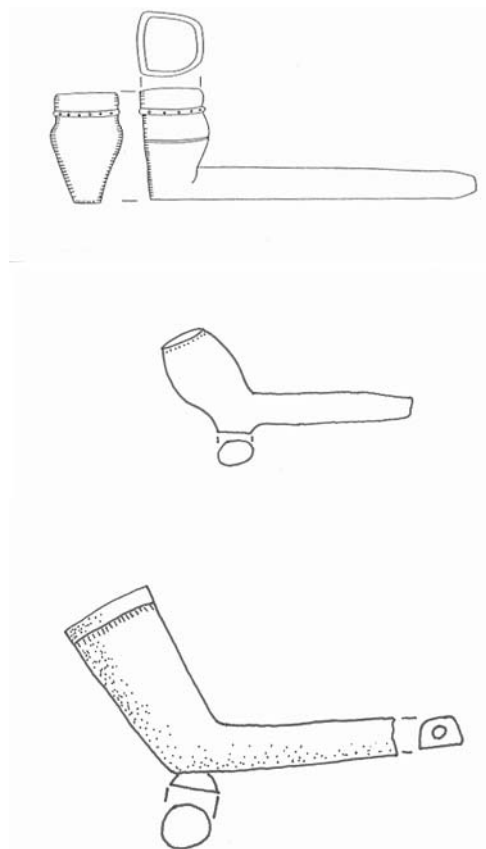


Figure 7 Three smoking pipes from RI-1000. Top: Narragansett soapstone pipe, length: 12 cm; middle: European white clay trade pipe, length: 9.8 cm; bottom: Native clay copy of a European-style pipe, length: 7.0 cm (adapted from Turnbaugh, 1992)

widespread in native society by the mid-seventeenth century. The practice was facilitated by the introduction of widely available European-manufactured white clay pipes (Bradley, 2000), which quickly became disseminated to all segments of society including women and children. This shift also accompanied the introduction of a new species of tobacco from the Caribbean (*Nicotiana tabacum*) that substituted for *Nicotiana rustica* (Turnbaugh, 1975: 66). According to several sources, *N. rustica* has a higher nicotine content than *N. tabacum* (Winter, 2000: 99). Men continued to cultivate *N. rustica* and smoke it in ritual contexts using stone pipes long after women and children began consuming imported *N. tabacum* in white

clay pipes (Nassaney, 2005; Nassaney and Volmar, 2003). Its wide distribution has gone unrecognized, however, because domestic contexts remain under-explored and pipes seldom accompanied women and children in death.

I have examined the distribution of clay and stone smoking pipes by age and sex from a number of seventeenth-century Native American cemeteries in southeastern New England (Brenner, 1988; Chapin, 1927; Hadlock, 1949; Nassaney, 2000: 424; Simmons, 1970; Tuma, 1985; Turnbaugh, 1984; Willoughby, 1924) to discern patterns of association. All of the pipes from RI-1000 ($n = 11$) were found in male graves (Nassaney, 2000: 425). Likewise, the two white ball clay pipes from the West Ferry site were associated with male burials and have been interpreted to indicate that pipe smoking was 'solely a male pleasure' (Simmons, 1970: 44). Unfortunately, age and sex is seldom available for the human remains from the majority of sites that have yielded pipes. For example, Brenner (1988: 162–8) invariably linked clay and stone pipes with males at Burr's Hill. However, Gibson (1980: 14) claimed that the excavator 'made little attempt to identify the age and sex of the individuals he unearthed, nor did he preserve the remains for future study', thereby calling into question any gender attributions. Smoking pipes can only rarely be linked definitively with women or children in the archaeological record. The late sixteenth/early seventeenth century Winthrop site in eastern Massachusetts yielded a terracotta pipe in association with a two-year-old child (Willoughby, 1924: 16–19). Chapin (1927: 19) noted that 'some metallic Dutch pipes' were found in the grave of a late seventeenth-century female sachem in Charlestown, Rhode Island. Finally, a grave excavated in Revere, Massachusetts in 1874 yielded a soap-stone pipe. According to Hadlock (1949: 67), this pipe and several other contact period artifacts were found with two middle-aged female skeletons 'in the same or adjacent graves'. Willoughby (1924: 19) suggested that the occasional presence of tobacco pipes in graves of young children is an 'indication of the affectionate forethought of the parents for the future comfort and welfare of the departed boy'. He thought it improbable that these children were users of tobacco at the time of their death, even though English schoolboys of the 1670s frequently indulged in the practice (Nassaney, 2005).

It would be tempting to conclude from the archaeological evidence that smoking remained an adult male practice well into the seventeenth century. However, I would suggest that the patterns observed in mortuary settings *after* contact represent ideal (vs. actual) behaviors that generally precluded the placement of pipes with women and children, though exceptions were made. Pipes continued to be prescribed for male use in the afterlife because gender expectations influenced how actual behaviors were materially encoded. Thus, by cross-checking the material record with other sources of information, archaeology can be used to deduce past activities that were



seldom represented due to ideological factors (Zagarell, 2002: 102). Although gender roles may be blurred in everyday life, they are most likely to be thrown into stark relief and portrayed stereotypically in highly ritualized settings, such as in mortuary contexts (Conkey, 1991; Nassaney, 2000: 425).

Evidence that native women *were* smokers who sought to employ special, powerful pipes, can be gleaned from the oral account of 'The Silver Pipe' (Nassaney, 2000: 422; Simmons, 1986: 124). In this oral tradition passed down from the seventeenth century, a woman desires to smoke from her husband's silver pipe after his death. Despite repeated attempts, she is unable to grasp the pipe as it moves away from her reach. Eventually, she is able to hold the pipe once she promises to return it to her husband's grave. After she fulfilled her husband's command, she 'was enabled to smoke in peace of mind and conscience (for) the rest of her days' (Butterworth et al., 1893, cited in Simmons, 1986: 124). This story clearly indicates that smoking was not restricted to men in the seventeenth century and it points to the struggles that ensued when tobacco diffused to new segments of native society.

I contend that the widespread use of tobacco during the contact period was not an imitation of profane, European practice but a means of seeking and expanding access to spiritual power. Among the Huron, and probably other groups in the Northeast, smoking was believed to bring people into contact with the spiritual realm. The use of tobacco among women and children was an attempt by increasing numbers of people to seek a way to adjust to the alterations brought about by Europeans (Nassaney, 2005) and perhaps challenge conditions of subordination. The wider dissemination of tobacco use had profound social consequences. I argue that it led to social tensions between men and women by undermining an activity that had once served to reproduce gender relations and ideologies. As Turnbaugh (1980: 21) stated, 'the traditional employment of the tobacco pipe as a socially significant male-only activity was losing ground'. While the use of tobacco, as inferred from pipe availability and oral accounts, was becoming increasingly common in native society by the mid-seventeenth century, the reasons for the expansion of the practice were more complex than mere emulation of European usage or addiction.

When women (and children) began to employ European clay pipes, they challenged male authority in dealings with the supernatural. The use of tobacco and potential access to its experientially derived spiritual power was no longer confined to men. One possible response to the wider dissemination of the practice was to idealize native pipes and re-emphasize smoking as a ritual activity (Turnbaugh, 1975: 67). Two unfinished stone pipes, one an elaborate human effigy, were recovered from a seventeenth-century native grave in southern Rhode Island (Turnbaugh, 1977: Figs 1 and 2). An iron file was found in association with the latter pipe and both

pipes show clear signs of having been manufactured with metal tools. In 1634, William Wood (1977: 80) reported that the Narragansetts used European metal tools to manufacture 'their great stone pipes, which will hold a quarter of an ounce of tobacco'. While these pipes may have been produced prior to sustained European contact, they seem to have experienced a renaissance or revitalization in the seventeenth century partly as a result of the availability of metal tools that facilitated stone carving (Turnbaugh, 1976, 1977, 1992). A number of stone pipes have been recovered from contact-period cemeteries in southern New England (Figures 6 and 7; Gibson, 1980; Hadlock, 1949; Turnbaugh, 1984; Willoughby, 1973). One might expect that the vast majority were curated as heirlooms or purposefully hidden to assure that no one other than their male makers or owners would use them (Nassaney, 2000: 422–7). With rare exceptions, stone pipes are invariably found in male graves when sex has been determined. If the pipe from Revere was indeed associated with a woman, there is no doubt that she was a spiritually powerful religious specialist with the rights and responsibilities normally reserved for male ritual practitioners.

The preference for pipes of native manufacture for ritual purposes among natives has been documented elsewhere on the frontier of eastern North America in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries; this pattern was not unique to southeastern New England (Trubowitz, 1992; Wagner, 2003). By maintaining a decided preference for using their own pipes as opposed to those introduced by trade, some men may have sought to limit tobacco use for themselves. This may support the idea that 'native pipes filled with *native* tobacco' (*Nicotiana rustica*) were seen as necessary to effect the appropriate ritual outcome in communicating with the supernatural (Turnbaugh, 1980: 21). Nevertheless, this did not inhibit native women from adopting the practice. In the maelstrom of change, ritual was becoming less institutional and more personal leading to a more 'democratized shamanism', in which all members had the potential to acquire spiritual power for themselves and their community (Nassaney, 2005; Von Gernet, 2000: 78, 80). After contact, more men and women sought direct communication with spirit beings in an attempt to regain control over their destinies and restore gender politics to an earlier state.

■ SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In seventeenth-century southeastern New England, native men and women confronted colonialism by making active choices in response to new economic, social and political conditions. Not surprisingly, their efforts had profound consequences for their material world. As women and men struggled, resisted, and adjusted to the new circumstances that were thrust upon



them, 'they created a rich, varied, and complex material record to represent the plurality of their lives and voices' (Handsman, 1990: 8). By examining this material record, we can better understand their heterogeneous survival strategies that were not always simply aimed at 'preserving traditions' (cf. Handsman, 1990: 8). They were, in fact, inventing new ones as they created culture and made history.

Human choices have unintended consequences; the activities of native New Englanders were no exception. I have tried to show how changing demographic, economic, social and political circumstances led to new decisions surrounding the production, distribution, and use of pots, *peage*, pestles and pipes. These choices, in turn, created new roles and responsibilities for women and men and, in some instances, heightened tensions along gender lines. Colonial life was wrought with contradictions for both the colonizers and the colonized. The adjustments and accommodations that native peoples made in the seventeenth century underscore their cultural resilience. These changes, which prepared Indian peoples for the continuing challenges that they would face throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, also enabled them to reclaim and revitalize their traditions in the twentieth century (Hauptman and Wherry, 1990; McMullen, 1996; O'Brien, 1997).

To understand the dynamism of native societies in the contact period requires us to consider not only their political struggles with Europeans but also their internal tensions and contradictions (Robinson, 1990), including gender politics. As infant mortality and juvenile death rates increased (Robinson et al., 1985) and social solidarity was threatened due to war, loss of land, and economic erosion, both men and women responded in various ways. Women sought to re-establish the predictability of an earlier social and political order and regain control over their lives and their communities by resisting subordination and connecting to known supernatural life forces in new ways. They also adjusted their economic roles to produce the surpluses that were necessary to assure individual and group survival in unprecedented circumstances. Taking up the pipe (albeit European ones), employing new ceramic iconography, and reinventing utilitarian pestles formally and symbolically, native women countered colonialism.

Given the complex meanings and symbolic associations of the forms of material culture examined in this article, it should be clear that there is no single interpretation of the meanings that pots, pestles, *peage* and pipes held for their makers and users. It should also be apparent that by employing multiple lines of evidence and juxtaposing different data classes, contemporary researchers can begin to shatter the silence of native women's lives in the seventeenth century and gain an understanding of how people used the material world to signify their identities.

Pots, pipes, pestles and the intensified production of *peage* point to the heterogeneous strategies employed by native women and men to survive

in the seventeenth century. Native men and women took an active role in transforming their lives and, in doing so, created a new material world that served to rationalize the demographic, social and political upheavals that their communities were experiencing. The choices that they made often varied according to their age, status and other historical circumstances that remain to be fully understood. What is clear is that the material outcomes are physical embodiments of efforts to ameliorate the imbalances that Europeans created in native society. They point to successful strategies of accommodation in a frequently hostile political environment that involved not merely the persistence of ancient practices and beliefs but active and creative responses that promoted social, biological, and cultural viability.

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