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C H A P T E R S E V E N

THE MARKING OF AGE IN ANCIENT COASTAL OAXACA

Stacie M. King

INTRODUCTION

Research on gender by feminist anthropologists during the last two decades has inspired recent theoretical and methodological work on the subject of crosscutting social identities and “intersectionality” (Moore 1993; Collins 1999; Meskell 2001). Of particular interest is how social identities differentiate individuals and groups of people, as well as how varied identities can overlap and intersect based on age, sex/gender, class, ethnic affiliation, and sexuality (Meskell 1998). As a result, archaeologists have begun to consider age-based identities in addition to social identities based on gender or status alone (see also Sofaer Derevenski 1994a, 2000; Lillehammer 1989; Moore and Scott 1997; Scott 1999; Kamp 2001). To do so, it is necessary to recognize the disjuncture between skeletal age (infants, juveniles, sub-adults, and adults) and cultural categories (children, adults), much in the same way sex and gender are separate (Sofaer Derevenski 1994b:8–10). In many circumstances, gender itself is an age-dependent category (Gilchrist 1997;

Lesick 1997:35; Lucy 1997:154; R. Joyce 2000a). Thus, recent work has sought to define childhood and adulthood (and all age-based social differences) based on emic categories using archaeological evidence specific to the culture being studied so as to develop local "cultural theories on ageing" (Lillehammer 2000:24).

Archaeological studies of childhood have focused on three primary sources of information: mortuary practices and the skeletal remains of infants and juveniles (e.g., Meskell 1994; Lucy 1997; Rega 1997; Crawford 2000; Houby-Nielsen 2000; Nagar and Eshed 2001), toys and learning (e.g., Sillar 1994; Wilkie 2000), and apprenticeship in tasks such as lithic manufacture and ceramic production (e.g., Finlay 1997; Crown 1999; Kamp et al. 1999; Grimm 2000). Historical documents and iconography that depict children are an additional line of evidence about childhood in Mesoamerica. Until now, Oaxacan archaeologists have not specifically attempted to understand childhood and age-dependent status differences (other than noting circumstances of "ascribed status" in child burials and rituals of child sacrifice), but work on figurines (e.g., Martínez López and Winter 1994; Marcus 1998, 1999) and on costuming and status symbolism in Mixtec codices (e.g., Pohl 1994; Hamann 1997) may help us to locate some of the basic markers of age difference and symbols of childhood.

In this chapter, I use two lines of evidence to consider the meaning of childhood and markers of age in ancient coastal Oaxaca. First, I discuss the figurine assemblage found in household excavations at Early Postclassic Río Viejo (Figure 1.1) and examine the connection between children and figurine use, as well as the representation of children and adults in figurines. Second, I highlight mortuary ritual in the lower Río Verde valley of coastal Oaxaca and examine the material marking gender and age in burial contexts. Mortuary practices are a promising avenue for investigating childhood in ancient coastal Oaxaca, since burial data are widely available. I examine childhood at Río Viejo by considering the *absence* of child burials and presumed spatial separation of child burials from the interior of houses where adults were buried. I draw on data from recent excavations at the site of Río Viejo, which unearthed remains of two residential neighborhoods likely pertaining to ancestors of Chatino peoples. This coastal community was connected to Highland Mixtec and Central Mexican communities of Tula, Hidalgo, and Cholula, Puebla, through long-distance networks of communication and trade in cotton and obsidian during the Early Postclassic (King 2003, n.d.).

FIGURINES FROM EARLY POSTCLASSIC RÍO VIEJO

The Operation B figurine collection includes 545 hand-modeled and mold-made fragments of figurines and whistles found in structure fill and midden contexts along with all other kinds of domestic refuse. Hand-modeled figurines were most often fashioned into small human and zomorphic forms and were pierced for hanging as pendants. The most frequently occurring type of mold-made figurine is the combination figurine/whistle depicting a woman wearing a skirt, jewelry, and a headdress. The headdresses of these figurines were highly elaborated, with beads, feathers, intricate hair designs, and representations of birds such as turkeys and eagles. These figurines/whistles have mouthpieces on the reverse side that function both as whistles and supports for standing the figurines upright.

The Río Viejo figurine assemblage could be useful for an archaeology of childhood, especially one that considers play, learning, economic participation, apprenticeship, and the transmission of cultural knowledge from one generation to the next as part of the childhood experience and the foundation for children's social action. Elsewhere, researchers have suggested that figurines were used and perhaps made by children as toys for play (e.g., Spence 2002; Winter 2002). Based on spatial distribution, depositional context, and representational content, however, the Río Viejo assemblage can in no obvious way be linked in whole or in part to children. In the absence of clear means to connect children and figurines, I cannot interpret Río Viejo figurines as items produced by or used only by children as toys for play.

Although children might have interacted with figurines as toys, I can build strong arguments using Oaxacan ethnohistoric documents and Mexican ethnographic accounts that link figurines and figurine use to ritual action involving people of *all* ages (see also Smith 2002:105–108 for a discussion of Aztec sources). Ethnographic studies show that pre-Hispanic ceramic and stone figurines are often described by indigenous peoples to be imbued with a life-force that is symbolically linked to the earth, which was considered volatile and potentially dangerous (Parsons 1936; Sandstrom 1981; Dow 1986; Sandstrom and Sandstrom 1986; Lipp 1991; Bellas 1995; Monaghan 1995). In these accounts, figurines and *ídolos* (larger stone figures) were commonly placed on altars and offered sacrifices (Gonzalez Obregon 1912:74; Dávila Padilla 1955; Greenberg 1981; Lipp 1991; Bellas 1995), placed on the sides of paths to mark boundaries between communities (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934; Parsons 1936; Crumrine 1964; Vogt 1969; Greenberg 1981; Lipp 1991), placed at stops in ritual processions (Greenberg 1981), set on thresholds

of houses (Parsons 1936; Crumrine 1964), or placed in front of caves (Parsons 1936; Lipp 1991) to mark points of exit and entrance. They sometimes served as stand-ins for living participants in life-cycle ceremonies (Greenberg 1981). In other cases, figurines were molded into miniature versions of items being petitioned and placed as offerings (Parsons 1936). The ritual use of figurines in the Mesoamerican past has been suggested by many archaeologists in recent studies and especially linked to women, life-cycle rituals, and ancestors (e.g., Cyphers Guillén 1993; Scott 1993; Brumfiel 1996; Lesure 1997; Marcus 1998; Smith 2002). These and other examples show that figurines likely communicated powerful, yet sometimes subtle ritual messages within multiple contexts of use.

I am encouraged by the contributions of Geoffrey McCafferty and Sharisse McCafferty and also Jeanne Lopiparo (Chapters 2 and 6, respectively), in which they suggest that whistles, flutes, and sound-making objects might have been material objects used primarily by children. If we link children, play, and the ritual use of figurines, the interaction between children and figurines takes on more symbolic potency. Figurines, therefore, would provide evidence of children's social and ritual action (see Hamann, Chapter 8; Román Berrelleza and Chávez Balderas, Chapter 9). The social and ritual importance of sound and sound-making in ancient Mesoamerica is provocatively discussed by Dorothy Hosler with reference to metal bells (1994:233–248), and this discussion could appropriately be extended to clay whistles, flutes, and rattles. If children were the primary users of sound-making objects, then nearly all of the Río Viejo figurine assemblage could be connected to children. Whistles, flutes, clay bells, and clay balls used as rattles in ceramic vessel supports were all common artifacts at Río Viejo and were deposited in a variety of contexts, including those associated with adult action. These objects show a community-wide interest in sound-making associated with people of all ages.

The *use* of figurines does not provide us with the only information about the social experience of childhood. The imagery and symbolism of bodily adornment in human figurines is also a way to consider the marking of age and childhood (see Follensbee, Chapter 10). Ceramic buttons, pendants, bells, and miniature vessels found in Operation B might have served as costume ornaments that could possibly be linked to representations on figurines. These details might help us to better understand what it took to transform children's bodies into those of adults (R. Joyce 2000a; Boyd 2002:142; Fowler 2002:63–64; Robb 2002). Although the age of the individuals depicted in all of the Río Viejo figurines is rarely clear, two examples of the figurines/whistles de-



7.1: Figurine of adult and child, Operation B, Río Viejo.

pic infants. The children do not wear any clothing and are held in the arms of an adult or sub-adult (Figure 7.1). In one of these, both the child and the adult have jewelry, including ear ornaments, a necklace, and bracelets. The symbolism of these figures connects children and adults to one another in a way that is not evidenced by burial treatment at Early Postclassic Río Viejo, both in terms of burial location and bodily adornment of adult individuals. The figurines depict adults as protectors and caregivers of children with a certain amount of physical intimacy. In terms of clothing and body ornamentation, both children and adults are similarly adorned with jewelry, demonstrating that jewelry alone is not an insignia of an age-based social status. Therefore, archaeological data from figurines provide limited, yet provocative information about the role of children in ancient Oaxaca.

EARLY POSTCLASSIC MORTUARY PRACTICES AT RÍO VIEJO

Thus far, I have considered the possibility of linking the social and ritual use of figurines and the representation of children in ceramic figurines

with children. Although we might speculate about the ways that children interacted with figurines, we must look elsewhere to examine the *meaning* of age differences and childhood specifically. For this reason, I focus the rest of the chapter on mortuary practices. Taken together, the combination of the figurine data and the mortuary evidence from Early Postclassic burials at Río Viejo provides a more robust evidentiary framework for considering childhood.

In 2000, portions of eleven residential structures dating to the Early Postclassic (800 to 1200 CE) were unearthed, along with a full suite of domestic artifacts and the mortuary remains of twenty-one individuals in two different residential neighborhoods (A. Joyce and King 2001). I will discuss Early Postclassic mortuary practices, drawing comparisons between the Operation B neighborhood burials and the Operation A neighborhood burials. I will also consider the entire register of lower Río Verde valley burials excavated from other sites and contexts. Roughly 175 burials spanning the Middle Formative to the Early Postclassic (400 BCE to 1200 CE) have been located and studied in the lower Río Verde region.

The lower Río Verde valley sample includes 102 burials from Late and Terminal Formative residential zones at the site of Cerro de la Cruz, reported by Arthur Joyce (1991b, 1994). In these residential zones, sub-floor and sub-patio burial was common and included primary and secondary and also single and multiple individual burials of people of all ages and sexes. Burial positions were flexed or extended, and burial orientations varied but most often paralleled structure walls. The Classic-period sample includes thirty individuals recovered from test pits at the site of Río Viejo or intrusive deposits at Cerro de la Cruz (A. Joyce 1991a, 1994; Christensen 1999). In 2000 twenty-one individuals were recovered in Early Postclassic residential zones at Río Viejo. The remainder of the burial sample was recovered from contexts that have not been securely dated or the remains were highly fragmentary and therefore have not been included in this discussion.

Four Early Postclassic burials were recovered from the Operation A residential neighborhood excavated by Arthur Joyce, Laura Arnaud Bustamante, and Marc Levine (2001). These included two children buried in flexed positions outside of buildings, one adult male buried outside of a residential structure with no offerings, and two adults interred together underneath a patio.

Of the sixteen Early Postclassic burials found in the Operation B neighborhood, all were the result of primary, single individual burial events (Table 7.1). Each person was positioned similarly, in an extended

Table 7.1 Early Postclassic burials, Operation B

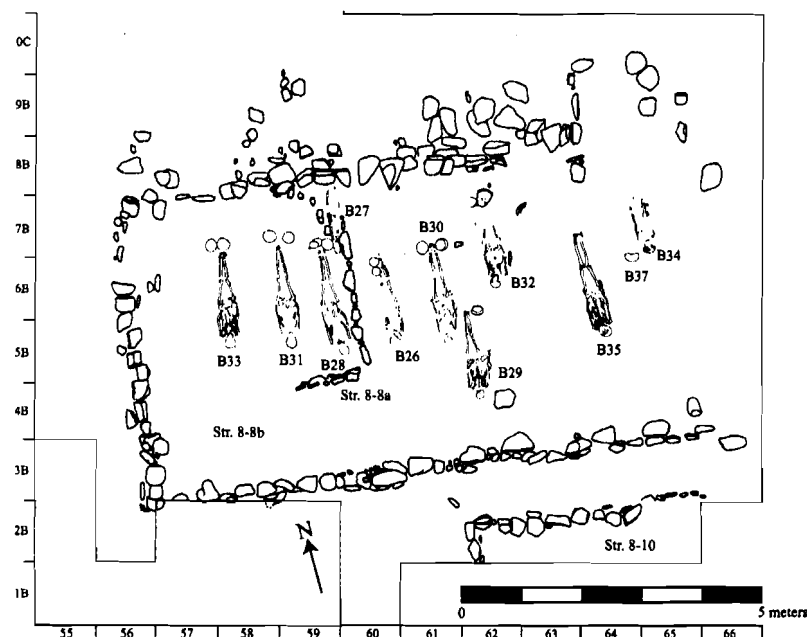
| Burial | Indv | Location | Sex* | Age† | Orientation | Vessels | Other Offerings |
|--------|------|----------|--------|------|-------------|---------|---|
| 26 | 34 | Str. 8-8 | x | a | 8° W of N | 2 | |
| 27 | 35 | Str. 8-8 | x | a | 4° E of N | 0 | 3 obsidian blades and 1 quartz burnisher |
| 28 | 36 | Str. 8-8 | m | a | 4° W of N | 3 | |
| 29 | 37 | Str. 8-8 | x | sa | 7° E of N | 2 | |
| 30 | 38 | Str. 8-8 | x | a | 4° E of N | 2 | 1 quartz burnisher |
| 31 | 39 | Str. 8-8 | f? | a | 4° E of N | 2 | |
| 32 | 40 | Str. 8-8 | m | a | 6° E of N | 2 | |
| 33 | 41 | Str. 8-8 | x | a | 7° E of N | 2 | |
| 34 | 42 | Str. 8-8 | x | a | 6° E of N | 1? | |
| 35 | 43 | Str. 8-8 | m | a | 2° E of N | 0 | |
| 37 | 45 | Str. 8-8 | unexc. | | | 1 | |
| 43 | 52 | Str. 8-7 | f | a | 17° E of N | 3 | |
| 45 | 54 | Str. 8-7 | x | a | 22° E of N | 0 | |
| 46 | 55 | Str. 8-7 | m | a | 9° E of N | 1 | 5 shell pendants |
| 50 | 59 | Str. 8-7 | x | a | 12° E of N | 1 | |
| 53 | 62 | Str. 8-7 | unexc. | a | | 2 | |

* x = indeterminate, m = male, f = female, unexc. = unexcavated

† a = adult, sa = sub-adult

position lying on his or her back, with arms either resting alongside the torso or with hands crossed and resting on the abdomen (Figure 7.2). Association with the Early Postclassic is based on the presence of distinctive ceramic vessels interred with most of the deceased. Ceramic debris of vessels similar to those placed in the burials was found in a midden in Operation B with a calibrated AMS radiocarbon date between 1035 and 1187 CE (2S variation, AA40040). The stratigraphic sequence of burial events, however, is difficult to discern. Earthen burial chambers or plastered floor surfaces were not present to help distinguish one burial event from another and, without any superimposition of the actual bodies, further assessment of the sequence of interment is difficult. Pathological indicators and the age-at-death profile of the individuals buried beneath the floor surfaces give no indication that the burials were the result of a single traumatic event, such as a violent massacre or an epidemic. Rather, the skeletons exhibit normal signs of aging and degenerative bony afflictions such as osteoarthritis (in the back and, in one case, the hand), osteoporosis, wear on the teeth, and antemortem tooth loss.

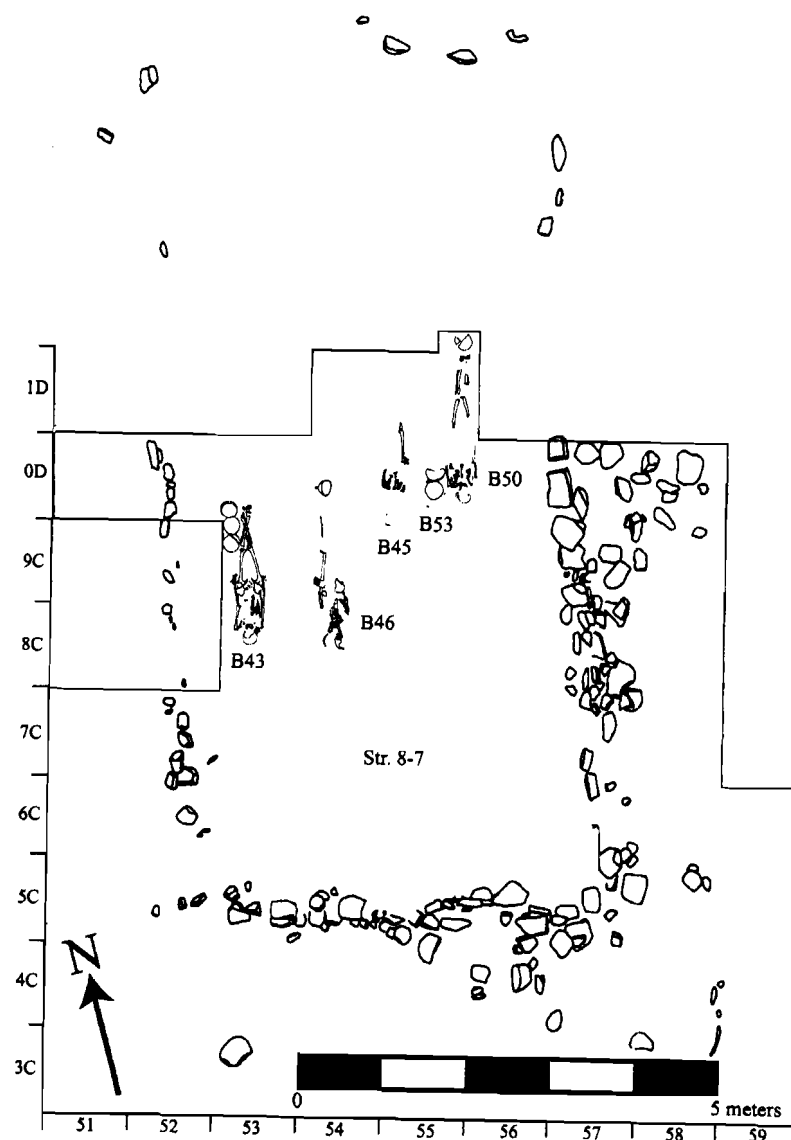
Eleven of the Early Postclassic burials were interred beneath the floor of Structure 8-8b. The structure is an 11 x 5 meter rectangular building in which the long axis runs east to west. The remarkable precision with which the remains were placed underneath the floor resulted in side-by-



7.2: Plan of Structure 8-8b, Operation B, showing locations of Early Postclassic burials.

side interments extending nearly the entire length of the structure. The orientations of the burials paralleled the short axis of the structure walls, and all individuals were oriented north to south, with their heads to the south. Thus, the resulting distribution of burials forms a rough row of bodies across the length of the structure, as shown in Figure 7.2.

The remaining five burials were found beneath the floor of Structure 8-7. Since the structure was only partially excavated below the occupation surface, the total number of individuals buried beneath the structure may have been higher. Like Structure 8-8b, Structure 8-7 is also a rectangular building roughly 11 x 5 meters, but the long axis of this structure runs north to south. Placement of the deceased in Structure 8-7 paralleled the long axis of the building, with bodies oriented north to south and heads positioned to the south as in Structure 8-8b (Figure 7.3). If excavations had continued beneath the interior floor surface in the northernmost and southernmost sections of this structure, it is possible that auxiliary rows of burials may have been recovered.



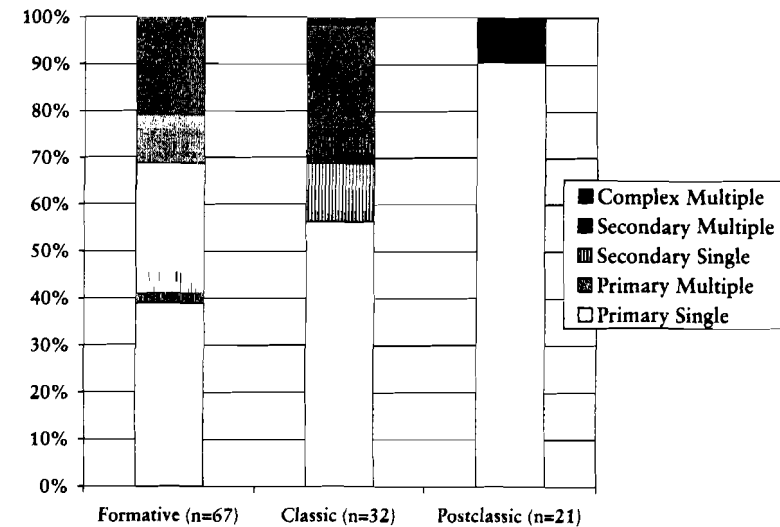
7.3: Plan of Structure 8-7, Operation B, showing locations of Early Postclassic burials.

None of the burial events disturbed the skeletal remains of individuals previously laid to rest. This shows that those still living had knowledge of the location of past burials beneath the structure floors, either by remembering where the dead had been buried or by prospecting for a location that was not already occupied. In either case, superimposition of Early Postclassic burials was purposely and carefully avoided. This practice contrasts with the evidence from earlier time periods in the lower Río Verde valley, when individuals were more often placed atop and alongside one another in complex multiple burials or in sequential and intrusive burial events (A. Joyce 1991a). In the Valley of Oaxaca, tombs were frequently reused for the burial of multiple individuals, whereas non-tomb burials typically included only one or two individuals (Whalen 1981, 1988; Martínez López, Winter, and Antonio Juárez 1995:236; Miller 1995; Middleton, Feinman, and Molina Villegas 1998). Arthur Miller (1995) argues that the addition of newly deceased individuals and "heads of household" in Valley of Oaxaca tombs involved a purposeful spatial reconfiguration of the human skeletal elements and offerings already present to emphasize connections between the newly deceased ancestor and those still living. The less formal, earthen pit burials at Río Viejo required no restructuring of burial space to accommodate the newly deceased and demonstrate a stronger preference for avoiding already occupied space rather than reconfiguring it.

CHANGE THROUGH TIME IN LOWER RÍO VERDE VALLEY MORTUARY PRACTICES

In comparison with earlier time periods in the lower Río Verde valley, the Early Postclassic mortuary practices show some significant changes. By the Early Postclassic, the residents exhibit a preference for primary single burial (19 of 21 individuals, or 90 percent) ($\chi^2 = 42.492$, $p < 0.001$) (Figure 7.4). The only burial that is not a primary single burial is the complex multiple burial located in the Operation A neighborhood. A. Joyce, Arnaud Bustamante, and Levine (2001) suggest that this complex burial might have been the result of a sacrificial ritual involving the primary burial of a tightly flexed, perhaps bundled female and secondary burial of another individual, both of which showed signs of burning. Ritual treatment might in part explain its variation from the rest of Río Viejo's Early Postclassic burials.

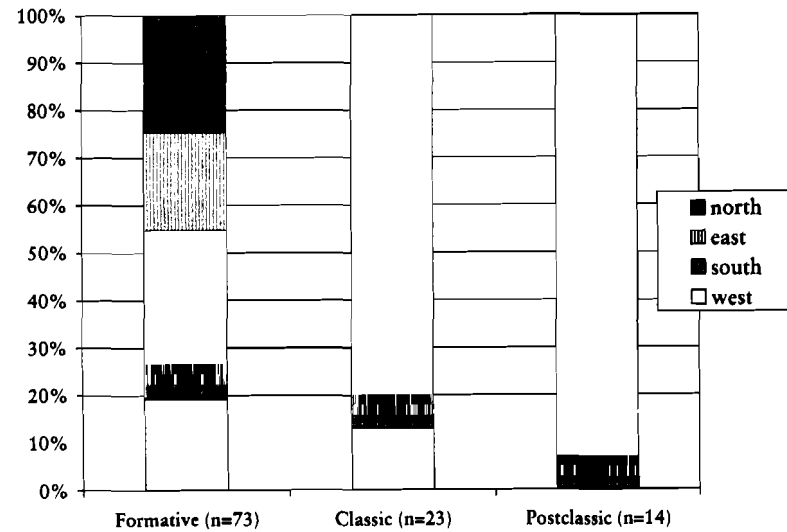
In addition, the Early Postclassic is the first time period in which all burials for which data are available (100 percent of 14 individuals) were positioned with their heads to the south ($\chi^2 = 34.159$, $p < 0.001$)



7.4: Types of burials in the lower Río Verde valley burial sample, by individual.

(Figure 7.5). In the Late and Terminal Formative, it was presumably acceptable to bury the deceased oriented in any of the four cardinal directions, preferably parallel with structure walls. By the Early Classic and Late Classic, the south and west predominated. Because the Early Classic and Late Classic have not been the focus of extensive study in the lower Verde, however, the sample sizes are quite small and have little reliable context information. For all time periods, south-facing burials were more likely to occur when individuals were placed below house floor surfaces in structure interiors (28 of 40 south-facing burials, or 70 percent) ($\chi^2 = 22.704$, $p = 0.03$), so the preference for south-facing burials during the Early Postclassic may also be related to the context preference for sub-floor burial.

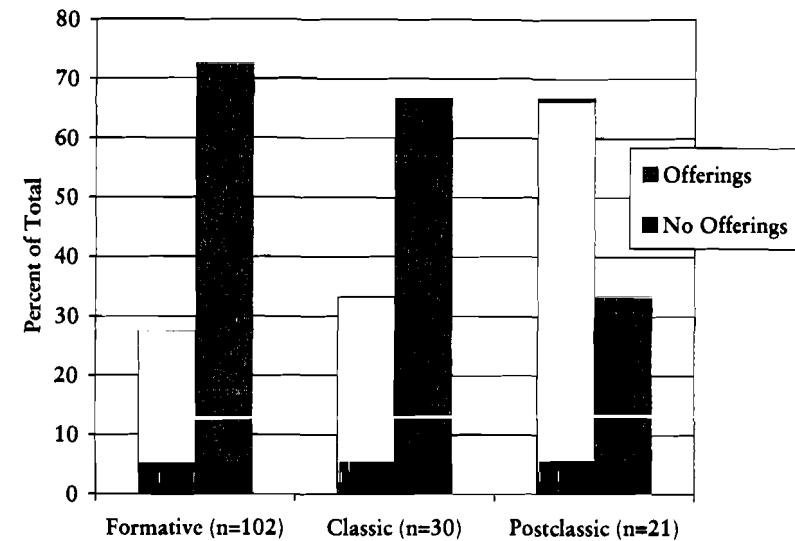
Nearly all of the Operation B neighborhood Early Postclassic burials include offerings ($n = 13$ or 81.3 percent). In these cases, one to three ceramic vessels were placed around the feet of the deceased. The vessels are painted, differentially fired, and highly uniform with two predominant forms: high-walled and low-walled semispherical bowls. These forms in no way represent the complete range of ceramic vessel forms of the Early Postclassic, but they are also not restricted to burial contexts, since fragments of similar vessels are found throughout Early Postclassic



7.5: Orientation of burials in the lower Río Verde valley burial sample.

fill layers and midden deposits. Maize phytoliths were present in at least one of these vessels, demonstrating that a maize-based food was either presented to the dead or shared among participants in funerary rites, or that well-used and unwashed vessels were selected as offerings (see also R. Joyce 1999:20). Two Early Postclassic burials (Burial 27 and Burial 29) included beautifully polished quartz burnishers placed beneath the head of each person. These burnishers show evidence of extensive polishing and use wear, and were likely heavily used in pottery manufacture prior to interment with the deceased. Burial 27 additionally contained three obsidian blades, which were probably placed within the deceased individual's mouth, and yet another (Burial 46) wore a necklace of shell pendants (see Table 7.1).

The presence of offerings in the majority of Early Postclassic burials contrasts sharply with the lack of burial offerings in all earlier time periods and the Late Formative in particular, when 75 percent (70 of 93 individuals) of the deceased were buried without offerings ($\chi^2 = 16.038$, $p < 0.001$) (Figure 7.6). Burial location is also connected to the presence of offerings, such that individuals buried outside of structures were more likely to be buried without any offerings as compared to individuals interred beneath house floors. (This difference, however, is not statisti-



7.6: Presence of burial offerings in lower Río Verde valley burials.

cally significant.) This relationship is perhaps most clear for the Early Postclassic, where burials found underneath structure floors in Operation B almost always include offerings (14 of 16, or 81.3 percent), and the five Early Postclassic burials found outside structures in Operation A (the only Early Postclassic burials located in Operation A excavations) were buried with none. Because the two neighborhoods differed in the treatment of the dead, however, mortuary rites may not be directly comparable. Variability in mortuary practices between the neighborhoods may suggest a qualitative difference between the residents of each neighborhood, in spite of similarities in architectural design and spatial configuration, economic practices, and material culture (A. Joyce and King 2001; King 2003).

The evidence from Operation B excavations suggests that during the Early Postclassic, people customarily buried the dead below the floors of their houses. Houses were not constructed solely for the purpose of "housing" the dead but were occupied and used prior to and probably after interments. In this neighborhood, only two of the excavated structures contained burials (Structures 8-8b and 8-7), which likely marks a separation between at least two household groups. Overall similarity in the burial patterns suggests that strong community standards and traditions

were in place. Because the bodies of the deceased were not elaborately decorated with costume ornaments, jewelry, or luxury items marking social differentiation, it seems that the similarity between people was emphasized more than social distinctions based on wealth, status, economic practices, or gender. On the other hand, a spatial separation exists between the locations of adult and child burials during the Early Postclassic. Only adults, including both women and men, were buried within houses, suggesting that some fundamental conceptual and social distinction separated children and adults. Perhaps only adults were considered true members of a given household or, alternatively, something special or powerful pervaded adult bodies, ancestors, or souls that required burial within the confines of architectural space.

GENDER-BASED DIFFERENCES

The mortuary data from Río Viejo give us a unique opportunity to examine the intersection between economic activities, social categories, and ritual practice as they relate to gender. Part of my interest in studying the relationships in the burial data is to connect mortuary practices to lives of the people who lived in Río Viejo and, thereby, better understand how people defined themselves vis-à-vis other communities nearby and far, other neighborhoods at the same site, and among themselves.

Traditionally, researchers have analyzed sexed individuals and their associated burial offerings to try to understand gender-based divisions of labor, status, and power, as well as gender- (and sex-) specific economic practices and social categories (e.g., Rathje 1970; Saxe 1970; Binford 1972). The faulty assumptions, however, that were often made in these studies, such as assuming the sex of an individual based on associated grave goods or interpreting grave goods as directly reflecting the wealth of those buried, have been largely exposed (Hodder 1982, 1987; McCafferty and McCafferty 1994; Arnold and Wicker 2001). In studying mortuary practices, we must be careful not to assume a direct mapping between biological sex and the cultural experience of gender and recognize that even the physiological interpretation of sex itself is culturally constructed, such that "sexed" bodies are themselves not always a stable basis on which to discuss gendered identities (Gilchrist 1999:76; Moore 1999; Sørensen 2000).

For Postclassic Mexico and the Aztec in particular, the abundant iconographic imagery and written codices support the general interpretation that an identity-related distinction was made between adult males and adult females, with males associated with images and material cul-

ture of warfare, and females associated with spinning, weaving, cooking, and child-rearing (Brumfiel 1991; McCafferty and McCafferty 1991; R. Joyce 1993, 2000b:477). Whether people of Postclassic Mexico in general actually experienced a distinction between male and female gender identities and gender roles on a daily basis or whether it was a dichotomy being represented and promoted by the producers of public media is another issue with which to contend (Hamann 1997:172; R. Joyce 2000a:184–187).

If the associations do imply a gendered division of labor, we must also recognize that divisions of labor change through time, from context to context, and throughout the lives of specific individuals (Mills 2000). In spite of the separation of male and female, the gender differences and associated roles of Postclassic Mexico seem to have been promoted as complementary and necessary rather than hierarchical and differentially valued (McCafferty and McCafferty 1988; Kellogg 1995; 1997:127; Burkhardt 1997), such that women who died in childbirth, for example, were likened to male warriors who died on the battlefield (Klein 1994:141).

We must also examine the situations in Postclassic Mexico in which women's and men's roles are *not* differentiated. For example, the introduction of the carved stone "genealogical register" as a form of smaller-scale monumental art during the Oaxacan Postclassic shows the importance of marriage alliances for claiming rights and privileges (Marcus 1983; 1989:205–206). The iconography of these registers traces genealogical connections through both male and female lines. Mixtec codices and Aztec documents record numerous marital alliances in Postclassic Mexico that opportunistically emphasize maternal and paternal genealogical connections to establish or reinforce elite heritage (Spores 1974; McCafferty and McCafferty 1988; Gillespie 1989; Terraciano 2001). Although necessarily based on a distinction between maleness and femaleness, genealogies that utilize equally maternal and paternal ancestors effectively create a structural similarity between male and female, much like the parallelism in male and female images in the codices (Hamann 1997:171; Terraciano 2001).

The similarity between male and female is also represented in other situations in Oaxaca. For example, the faces of a male and female are carefully carved above the entrance to Tomb 2 at Lambityeco, presumably representing the main occupants of the tomb who Paddock, Mogor, and Lind (1968) have interpreted as a possible marriage pair. Regardless of the nature of the relationship between the two individuals, it is important to recognize that they were both presented in the same role adorning the tomb façade, and the gender reference made by the carvings was one

of similarity (the same) rather than one of complementarity (separate but equal). In the Oaxaca barrio at Teotihuacan, both women and men garnered independent and equally rich burial offerings, suggesting that men and women might have enjoyed a similar status (Spence 2002).

On the coast of Oaxaca, monumental art may have changed from the Late Classic to the Early Postclassic. The Late Classic pattern of (presumably?) male persons depicted on carved stone stelae changed to include standing sculptures of females (identified on the basis of clothing and exposed breasts) during the Early Postclassic (Urcid and Joyce 1999; A. Joyce, Arnaud Bustamante, and Levine 2001). A. Joyce, Arnaud Bustamante, and Levine (2001:373) suggest that the inclusion and predominance of female figures in coastal Early Postclassic monumental art may reflect a gender ideology that allowed women greater social power. The public versions of sculptural iconography may or may not correspond to the social experience of gender and gender difference in the lives of Río Viejo residents. If it was the case that women had access to greater social power, then what were the arenas of social power for women prior to the Early Postclassic and how have they changed? How did gender difference correlate or correspond to a difference in power (James 1997:218–219; Gilchrist 1999:52)? Was women's social power unique from the social power of men, or could it be that social power in this context had no reference to gender?

The burials of Río Viejo show us that the line between male and female gender was perhaps not as sharply drawn during the coastal Early Postclassic as Postclassic Mexican iconography might suggest. At Río Viejo, all individuals were buried in nearly identical positions, in similar contexts, with similar offerings. In spite of the high number of spindle whorls and bone needle fragments found in the Río Viejo excavations, which in the iconography of Postclassic Mexico are almost exclusively associated with adult female gender identity, none were placed in burial contexts as offerings. At Early Postclassic Cholula, both men and women received spinning and weaving items as burial offerings (McCafferty and McCafferty 2000). The lack of spinning and weaving implements with *all* deceased individuals at Río Viejo may perhaps show that adult gender identities were not partitioned or that gender identities were not linked to spinning and weaving.

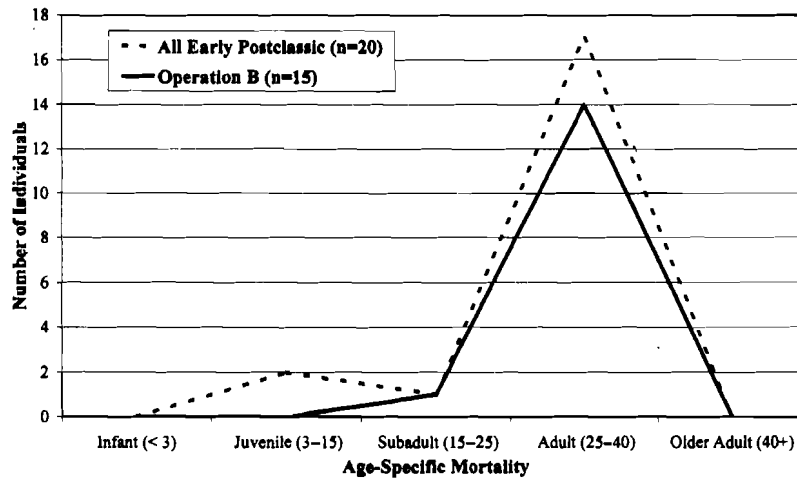
For all time periods on the coast of Oaxaca, variation based on sex produces no statistically significant results in the analysis of the mortuary data set. By the Early Postclassic, the people of Río Viejo chose to demonstrate the *similarity* between males and females rather than emphasize *difference* or *complementarity* between genders in mortuary prac-

tices. The burial data, rather, suggest that the gender ideology as expressed materially at Río Viejo is one in which sameness is emphasized and gender makes little difference. Perhaps in the case of Río Viejo, social roles of males and females were more non-gendered and more fluid than what is evidenced in the monumental art of Postclassic Oaxaca. Alternatively, burial contexts may not have been appropriate places to mark the distinction between male and female gender roles and the similarity in burial may simply belie marked differences between gendered adults (Kamp 2001:7; cf. Parker Pearson 1982). In either case, we must look elsewhere for supplementary positive or negative evidence for how coastal Oaxacans experienced gender.

AGE-BASED DIFFERENCES

Rather than gender, I argue that *age*-related identity was the primary identity distinction communicated through mortuary practices at Early Postclassic Río Viejo. All individuals buried inside buildings and directly below Early Postclassic house floors were above the age of seventeen ($n = 20$), including both males and females (Figure 7.7), and most ($n = 19$) are biologically mature based on skeletal markers (approximately 20–25 years of age). A normal age-at-death profile would have included nearly as many infants and juveniles as adults and certainly more than zero. Therefore, the lack of any biologically immature individuals beneath Early Postclassic house floors or in most areas outside structures suggests that cultural practices influenced the choice of burial location. If we can define a separation between adulthood and childhood on the basis of burial location and skeletal age, then the lack of individuals less than seventeen years of age buried beneath house floors may mean that these children were not yet considered full members of particular families, houses, or perhaps even the community.

The burial of children outside houses could also reflect a child's connection to multiple houses. As new members of society with parents who presumably came from different houses of origin (if Río Viejo residents practiced the kind of bilateralism widely suggested for Oaxaca), a young child's adult identification with the house of one of its parents was not already determined. The death of children before they established their house connection in practice could have foreclosed any opportunity of being part of one specific house. Children, in this case, would presumably have had the same (or greater) opportunity to be buried in open non-house spaces (as happened in the Operation A neighborhood), and the death of a child could have provided the opportunity



7.7: Mortality curve of Early Postclassic burials.

for larger and more diverse groups of people to celebrate, mourn, or otherwise mark a child's death.

A particular age or a social status that was connected to age was a prerequisite for burial within Early Postclassic buildings at Río Viejo. This location preference contrasts with evidence from earlier time periods in the lower Río Verde valley, with children found in the same contexts as adults, such as burials at Cerro de la Cruz and Río Viejo (A. Joyce 1991a, 1994). In Highland Oaxaca, few examples suggest that a similar age (or age-based status) was a requirement for primary burial in particular locations. The one obvious exception is the Early Formative cemetery at Santo Domingo Tomaltepec in the Valley of Oaxaca. This cemetery was located away from the residential zone and contained nearly eighty individuals, all over the age of thirteen, while infants were buried instead in residential-zone middens and near structures (Whalen 1981:table 3).

Burial practices in Highland Oaxaca tended to vary through time and from site to site, as well as within sites. Children, however, were often buried similarly to adults in locations such as tombs, patios, and underneath floor surfaces, albeit underrepresented in number and with fewer offerings (but with exceptions) (Urcid 1983; Whalen 1988; Martínez López, Winter, and Antonio Juárez 1995:234–236; Christensen 1998; Feinman, Nicholas, and Haines 2002). Marcus Winter (2002:77–78) interprets unique mortuary practices at Classic-period Monte Albán that

involve infants and children buried beneath communal patio floors and in special deposits as being connected to Teotihuacan. At Río Viejo, among the burials that occurred outside of structures in the Early Postclassic Operation A neighborhood, two were children. Why did Río Viejo residents of both neighborhoods choose to exclude children from burial beneath house floors? What might this tell us about the neighborhoods, the houses, and the lives of the people who lived in and around them?

Mortuary rites create and modify ties between the deceased, the ancestors, and the living. In the case of Early Postclassic Río Viejo, burial rites were undertaken in closed spaces within the confines of a residence, suggesting that the burial was not an event of large-scale, public commemoration, but rather a smaller-scale ceremony involving household members or a ceremony defined in part by house space (R. Joyce 1999:18; A. Joyce, Arnaud Bustamante, and Levine 2001:359; Cannon 2002:192). The burial event served to create a social memory of the deceased within the home (Chesson 2001), linking the deceased by space and place to those still living (Kuijt 2001; Gillespie 2002). We have no evidence to suggest that the buildings where the dead were buried were thereafter abandoned, nor do we have evidence that residents erected altars or otherwise renovated the architectural space following the interment of a departed family member, as is evidenced at some Maya sites (Gillespie 2002:70). Although not all of the buildings crowded on this wide platform were constructed at the same time and not all buildings contained burials, residents seem to have preferred to construct new buildings, rather than renovate or architecturally modify existing structures. If residents moved following the burial of (at least) the first deceased family member, they likely did not move far. Newer buildings were added to the neighborhood in between and only a few meters away from the earlier structures. Both neighborhoods were continuously occupied for several generations, with residences clustered so tightly that architectural space was likely pre-planned and bounded.

Burial beneath house floors and within residential zones is a common practice across Mesoamerica, and most scholars have linked this sub-floor burial to ancestor worship or ancestor veneration (McAnany 1995; Gillespie 2002; Manzanilla 2002; see also Smith 2002:112 in which the lack of burials beneath house floors at Aztec sites is used to argue that Aztecs did not practice ancestor veneration). More than just providing daily access to the ancestors, however, the physical and spiritual proximity of deceased ancestors reinforced ideals about proper behavior and gave those still living access and rights to the material (and nonmaterial) property of their ancestors (Gillespie 2001, 2002). Keeping

bodies in the house kept close the intangibles of status, wealth, and privilege that form individual and group identity, tying the social landscape to specific architectural spaces (Kuijt 2001:89). Standardization in mortuary ritual helps to reinforce, or is reflective of, a sense of community and generational continuity (McAnany 1995; Kuijt 2001), while at the same time the spatial location of these rites within *particular* houses differentiates one house from another and one neighborhood from another, fostering both “affinity and estrangement” at the same time (Schiller 2001:78).

It seems that by burying only those who had reached adult status underneath house floors, the residents were making a statement about what kinds of people could appropriately provide certain kinds of services to the group or deserved this kind of commemoration. Similar findings of a distinction between adult and child burial locations at Formative-period Tetimpa, Puebla, have led Gabriela Uruñuela and Patricia Plunket to a similar conclusion (2002:29). The exclusion of children from burial in houses during the Early Postclassic may suggest that children were considered “outside” of the house until a certain age-status was reached, and that their realm of physical and spiritual power was in a different, as yet undiscovered, arena. The “child’s world” (Lillehammer 1989:89), at least in this one respect, was partitioned from both the world of adults and the world of adult ancestors, and children’s connections to the house were most likely mediated through their associations with living and deceased adult members.

CONCLUSION

The coastal Oaxacan Early Postclassic saw a change in mortuary practices that linked only adults with houses. This evidence of social differentiation based on age is unique from Classic- and Postclassic-period sites in Oaxaca, and helps us to better understand how residents of Early Postclassic Río Viejo organized their community and experienced life and death. The mortuary evidence from coastal Oaxaca shows that the division between adult and child burial represents new ideas about belonging and house membership, and distinguishes the Early Postclassic community of Río Viejo from earlier time periods. Childhood was a stage of life during which house connections had not yet been established, and the premature death of a child required a different kind of burial treatment or ceremony.

The depiction of children in figurines reminds us, however, that we should not think of Río Viejo children as non-members of houses and

therefore as separate. Children were intimately connected to adults in ways that the mortuary data do not show. Children were obviously integral parts of daily life and would have been present and active in residential social settings. What is striking is the juxtaposition between the representation of children in figurines and the separation of child burials from those of adults. Children had close connections to adults in daily patterns of interaction, but the burial patterns show that the definition of the category *child* may have had multiple meanings. Children in Early Postclassic Oaxaca might not have belonged to only one social group and may have had more fluid social positions with respect to membership in houses. The mortuary evidence from Cholula (McCafferty and McCafferty, Chapter 2) may perhaps show a similar fluidity of social position for children in that the burial patterns for children are generally more variable than those of adults.

The conclusion that Geoffrey and Sharisse McCafferty draw from the mortuary patterns at Cholula is different from (but not necessarily incompatible with) the Río Viejo evidence. They argue that children at Cholula were gradually inculcated into adult practices, given that child burial patterns increasingly conform to adult patterns with age at death. This may have also been true for Río Viejo children but, without the evidence of child burials at Río Viejo, this cannot be confirmed. The burial evidence from Río Viejo might instead show that the death of children and adults required different sets of practices and spatial standards. Rather than gradual indoctrination to norms of adult age and gender, childhood might have had its own unique social meanings, operating apart from the standardized, restricted world of adults. Children were connected and integrated into the lives of adults whose house membership was more spatially and socially segregated. The burial and figurine evidence together suggest that children were both independent and dependent in their social position, entailing multiple relations with older individuals, who themselves were parts of separate, intersecting social groups connected to particular houses.

Mortuary practices and iconography in ceramic figurines are two ways to examine childhood in ancient coastal Oaxaca. The figurine assemblage provides evidence of daily patterns of interaction between adults and children, both in terms of figurine use and representation. Although gender-based distinctions in social identity were not marked in mortuary practices at Early Postclassic Río Viejo, social distinctions based on age were expressed and created through burial location. Adults were interred beneath the floors of houses, whereas children were buried outside houses in patio space—as in the Operation A neighborhood—

or outside of residential areas in as yet undiscovered locations. These differences in burial location signal a conception of adulthood and childhood that was connected materially and socially to house membership and houses, wherein adults had connections to particular houses and children's social positions were defined without reference to a single house. Through mortuary ritual within the home, children were shown to be distinct and separate, yet intimately connected to adults, giving them multiple points of reference against which their own unique identities were formed and experienced.

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