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### Constructing the life ways of prehistoric women at Yellowstone National Park through the archaeological record

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## **Constructing the life ways of prehistoric women at Yellowstone National Park through the archaeological record.**

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### ***2015 UM Graduate Student Research Conference***

Archaeological data recovered from Yellowstone National Park offers potential for elucidating women's activities, activity areas, and particular sexual divisions of labor and economic systems. These life ways are an important piece to understanding the culture of past peoples. The Montana-Yellowstone Archaeological Project (MYAP), led by Dr. Douglas MacDonald of the University of Montana, has catalogued thousands of lithic artifacts and a few dozen features around the area encompassing Yellowstone Lake over the course of four field seasons. Evidence of occupation around the lake spans the Clovis period (11,500-11,000 BP) to the Late Prehistoric period (800-150 BP). Based on archaeological research done thus far indicates this may have been part of a seasonal hunting and gathering round that Native Americans took during the spring, summer and early fall months to procure resources before making a more permanent encampment for the winter at their final destination in Idaho, Montana or Wyoming.

In order to take a more fine-grained approach to the data recovered by the MAYP project, this thesis project focuses on evaluating the lithics (stone) artifacts and features (boiling pits, fire features and cooking areas) of the archaeological record from the Yellowstone Lake region specifically. Presently, the data recovered consists of about 90% lithic flaking debris from stone tool manufacture and a few dozen features that provide evidence of occupation. The homogeneity of the data recovered can be problematic when attempting to discern something as intangible as prehistoric gender relations. However, this homogeneity also offers a unique opportunity to looking at minutiae within the archaeological record that may be indicative of gender relations. The analysis done thus far focuses on calculating the ratio of biface (human modifications to both sides) to uniface (human modification to

one side) lithic artifact disposal in relation to features. In order to conduct this analysis I use a practical approach to evaluating the data through hand-counts and statistical analysis. Using this method allows me to evaluate any nuances in the data that the initial research may not have teased out. These nuances, I argue, are where we will begin to see how gender relations played out among prehistoric peoples utilizing the park's resources. There are indications that initial processing of wild game may have taken place at the kill site, and the meat was then transported to a cooking site, which may or may not have been a larger group encampment. Women would have been an active part of this economic system, through their contributions to the processing, assisting in the hunt, or possibly dictating the group's needs and movements.

Continued research will focus on more refined statistical analysis (chi square tests of significance) of lithic artifacts in relation to features, and building a frame of reference using ethnographic evidence to determine potential female specific activity areas and tools. Ultimately, this research will shed light on prehistoric life ways of women, an area that is often overlooked or inaccessible in prehistoric plains archaeological research. By focusing our attention on women in prehistory we elucidate not only their roles but also their importance, which can impact contemporary gender relations.