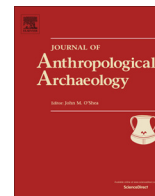




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From great kivas to great houses: Community formation and social dynamics in the southern Chuska Valley, New Mexico



Monica L. Murrell*, David T. Unruh

Statistical Research, Inc., 4425 Juan Tabo Blvd. NE, Suite 112, Albuquerque, NM 87111, United States

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ABSTRACT

Understanding the sociopolitical contexts behind the construction of outlying Chacoan great houses requires a close examination of the relationships between great houses and their neighboring communities. Changes in household-ritual organization and socioeconomic interactions within the Figueredo great house community are used to examine the emergence of social complexity in the southern Chuska Valley. Long-term trends observed in settlement and economic organization are evaluated using a competition model to understand the social dynamics of local community development. Various lines of evidence suggest the residents of the Figueredo community comprised a multiethnic population that maintained a series of diverse socioeconomic interactions across the Four Corners region.

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1. Introduction

The sociopolitical contexts that influenced the construction of Chacoan great houses across a great expanse of the Four Corners region remains much of an enigma to researchers working in the northern Southwest. Outlying great houses are defined on the basis of architectural references to the monumental constructions in Chaco Canyon, such as core-and-veneer masonry, great kivas, enclosed kivas, plazas, road segments, earthworks, and are often situated within proximity of small sites or residential communities (Kintigh, 2003; Van Dyke, 2003). While many studies have centered on the geographic extent and sociopolitical organization of outlying great houses, much less attention has been focused on understanding the relationships between great houses and their neighboring communities (cf. Gilpin, 2003; Windes et al., 2000). Distinguishing changes in the organizational structure of associated residential communities is necessary to reveal the behavioral contexts behind the construction of outlying great houses.

A large-scale data recovery project recently carried out along a 30 mile stretch of the US 491 highway corridor in the southern Chuska Valley investigated two such small residential sites or villages near the Figueredo great house (Fig. 1). The diversity of residential settlements investigated during this project provide important insights into the sociopolitical contexts of local community development extending from the earliest evidence of community formation to a later period of village florescence and great

house construction (Murrell and Vierra, 2014). Multiple lines of evidence point toward deep-rooted relationships between populations in the Chuska Valley and Chaco Canyon, stretching as far back as the early A.D. 800s. It is during the late A.D. 700s that we see the first indications of an emerging social complexity in the southern Chuska Valley, signaled by definitive evidence of social differentiation and the formalization of a shared ideology among local populations.

We examine the social history of the residential community surrounding Figueredo great house through changes in household-ritual organization, autonomy, as well as the distribution of exotic and ritual items. Socioeconomic relationships among residents of the Figueredo great house community and Chaco Canyon are further explored through patterns of pottery exchange. These data are applied to a social comparison model of competition to argue for behavioral motivations behind local great house construction. Predictive circumstances inherent in the model can be used to reconstruct social dimensions behind the establishment of great houses across the Four Corners region. We evaluate the working hypothesis that competition over the legitimacy of social status served as the primary motivation behind local great house construction (Durand, 2003: 160–161; Roler, 1999: 211–214; Van Dyke, 1999: 471, 2000: 91–100, 2003: 120).

2. Social comparison theory and competition

Various correlates of social comparison theory have been used by researchers to explain prehistoric social dynamics (e.g., Jones, 1997), and it is the main body of theory from which the concept

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: mmurrell@srcirm.com (M.L. Murrell).

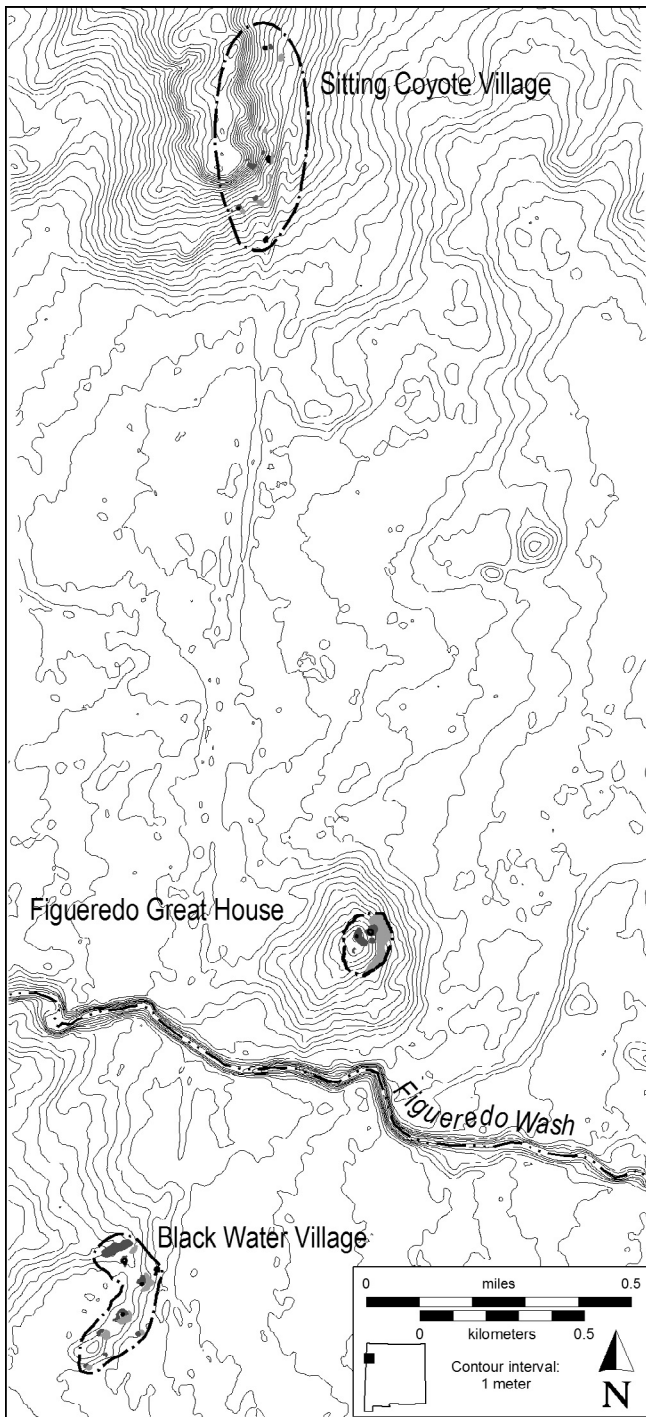


Fig. 1. Location of the villages and great house discussed in this study.

of competitive emulation is derived. Social comparison theory has been successfully applied toward identifying the behavioral basis for formal variation in material culture or stylistic attributes (Wiessner, 1984). Recently, Van Dyke (2003) and Durand (2003) applied the concepts of competitive emulation and symbolic entrainment within the peer polity interaction model (Renfrew, 1986: 8; Renfrew and Cherry, 1986) to explain regional patterning in the great house architectural tradition. We further explore evidence for competitive emulation as the motivation for local great house construction in the southern Chuska Valley within the larger theoretical underpinning of social comparison (Festinger, 1954).

Social comparison theory revolves around the idea of forming self-concepts by a comparison of one's own values and abilities to that of others, and is identified as the principal agent in the process of identity formation and the source of competitive behavior (Garcia et al., 2013: 634). According to social comparison theory, individuals are motivated by a basic drive—the unidirectional drive upward—to improve their performance and simultaneously lessen or preempt discrepancies between their and other persons' level of performance (Garcia et al., 2013: 635). This theoretical model posits that an individual of lower status will emulate or imitate those that are of higher status within an established social hierarchy.

Social emulation represents one major behavioral manifestation of social comparison, while another is social competition (Hedstrom and Swedberg, 1998). Whereas the effects of social emulation are represented by equivalence or similarity, modeling the effects of social competition are based on a different specification that considers the degree of dissimilarity between the individual and their peers. It has been demonstrated that a small number of situational factors structure the behavior of social comparison (Garcia et al., 2006, 2013). These circumstances are directly relevant to specific behavioral motivations that drive competitiveness among individuals.

Competition derives from social comparison on a mutually relevant dimension (e.g., social ranking within a hierarchy) with a commensurate counterpart (e.g., rival). People compete along a dimension that is relevant or important to the individual, and identity-based motivations increase competition along the dimensions that are relevant to that specific identity. While the individual factors that influence social comparison can vary greatly from person to person, background situational factors concern an individual's perception of the surrounding social environment, and therefore, can exert a more universal effect on comparably situated individuals (Garcia et al., 2013: 636). Situational factors contained in this model include incentive structures, proximity to a standard, number of competitors, and social category fault lines (Garcia et al., 2006, 2013).

Various factors associated with the structure of a specific competition, such as the direct incentives it offers individuals to engage in comparison, can increase the level of comparison concerns, and thus, competitiveness. At one end of the scale would be a zero-sum situation, in which one individual's gain is another's loss resulting in the highest degree of competitiveness. At the opposite end of the scale would be a situation in which all individuals are equal, resulting in the lack of an incentive to engage in comparison and competition. Social ranking or stratification also differentially increases competition, in that, comparison concerns and competitiveness intensify in the proximity to a standard. A standard is defined herein as an acknowledged measure of comparison, which in this case would be signified as a recognized social status or ranking within an established hierarchical organization. In this model, competitiveness between highly ranked individuals is stronger than between intermediately ranked ones. Comparison concerns also tend to increase as the number of competitors decrease, in which the limited number of individuals that have achieved the highest-order ranking will exhibit the highest degree of competitiveness.

Lastly, comparisons across social category fault lines (such as cultural identity or ethnicity) increase comparison concerns and competitiveness relative to comparisons made within similar social categories. This is an important component of the model since the degree of local competition reflected by great house emulation within a shared system of beliefs, or society, provides direct implications for the ethnic composition of a given area. Thus, a significant concentration of monumental constructions (i.e., great houses) built within a limited geographic area could signal competition among ethnically diverse populations.

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