

GRADUATE COLLOQUIUM

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

Monday, January 11th, 2016

11:30-12:50

Cornett A125

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Adventures with the Obstetric Dilemma

Since the mid-20th Century, evolutionary models of human childbirth and pelvic morphology have been dominated by one central hypothesis – known as the Obstetric Dilemma. Under this hypothesis, the difficulty and risk associated with human childbirth is viewed as a “scar” of our evolutionary history, a compromise for human females between a narrow pelvis for bipedal locomotion and a roomier pelvis for birthing large-brained babies. In addition, the immaturity of the human newborn is viewed as a means of limiting fetal size to fit through the restricted pelvic canal of the mother. Human females therefore are inefficient bipeds relative to males, and childbirth in humans is a uniquely perilous event in terms of mortality and morbidity risk relative to other mammals. In recent years, researchers have begun to challenge the basic tenets of this prevailing hypothesis, and in the process are revising our views of the evolution and adaptability of hominins. This talk examines the research that is undermining the Obstetric Dilemma Hypothesis and the new models that are being formulated in its place. Since the Obstetric Dilemma has been the central theme underlying my own research since the early days of my PhD, this is also a story of the evolution of my own research program over the past 15 years.



EVERYONE WELCOME.