

Archaeology 603.77: Social Identity Winter 2010

Instructor: Dr. Diane Lyons
Semester: Winter 2010 **Seminar:** Thurs 2:00-5:00 ES 822
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Course Description:

Social identity is a fundamental theoretical and practical concern for archaeologists, physical anthropologists, and paleoanthropologists. Humans use material culture and material practices not only to interact and to adapt to their physical environment, but to interact in a social world that is ordered by social identities. Social identity determines who has access to a group's material and social resources which in turn affects how groups interact and adapt to their physical environment. Archaeologists have assumed that material culture and practice play a fundamental role in expressing or constituting social identities. Indeed a uniquely human characteristic is our elaborate use of material objects to consciously create social differences and identities: e.g. status, social group membership, gender, religious identity. Unfortunately, the problem of identifying identity in the archaeological record is not an easy task because humans assume many types of social identities simultaneously and people acquire and shed identities during their lifetime. Furthermore, categories of social identities are also subject to change over time. Nevertheless, we cannot interpret the human past without addressing theoretical and methodological problems in determining social identity.

This course is intended to integrate the 2009/2010 cohort of graduate students (and anyone else who wishes to join us). The purpose of this course is for students to explore how their research, or research in their areas of interest, address social identity. In addition, by addressing a common topic, students will learn how other students' areas of interest, methods and theories can contribute to the same research problem. Weekly seminar topics and readings will be determined by the research interests of the students in the seminar. A list of topics is provided below for students to ponder. Seminar topics for this course will be generated in the first seminar. Come prepared with your ideas.

Course Evaluation:

Seminar participation: 50%

Each student will select a paper or papers for each seminar topic. These papers need to be identified for seminar participants at least one week in advance of the relevant seminar. Students will provide a discussion of the paper that they select and a one-page synopsis of their paper for distribution to other seminar participants (electronic copy to instructor for posting on blackboard). All seminar participants are responsible for reading the papers selected and generating lively discussion in the seminar.

Written Seminar Evaluations: 50%

Each student must critically evaluate the readings and discussions of five seminars of their choice. The evaluation should focus on the methods and theories used to determine social identity for the topic from different research perspectives and data sets. Students should use additional sources for their evaluation. Each evaluation should be 4 pages in length, double-spaced, 12 pt font. These are due one week following the selected seminars. (10 % each)

Suggested topics:

- Chaîne Opératoire
- Diet and Cuisine
- Gender/Sexuality
- Social Status
- Landscape and identity
- Occupation (craft workers)
- Individual identities and social group identities
- Religious identity
- Dynamic identities: colonial and other encounters
- Being human: what material evidence constitutes social identity and when did this begin
- Mortuary practices and identity
- Material style and identity
- Physical identities: genes, haplogroups, migration and interaction
- Race
- Iconography
- Households and Identity
- Ritual and identity
- stigma and marginalization
- Political identity
- Ethnographic analogy

Other topics are welcome. It is essential that the topics be addressed from a critical perspective. How is social identity determined from the material evidence you investigate in your area of research and what are the short-comings of theories/methods/data in interpreting identity? What can your area of research offer other researchers in evaluating identity?