Social identity refers to the various ways people identify themselves in relation to their membership in diverse social groups. The use of the term “social identity,” as opposed to gender, clan, ethnicity, class, nationality, or religion, recognizes the nested and mutable identities individuals espouse as well as individual choice in affiliation. A single individual in any society will have several social identities, such as household member, kin relation, participant in a religious group, hunter, and speaker of a particular language. The social identities of individuals change throughout their lives, as they assume, often by choice, roles in diverse groups. Making inferences about the social identities of people in the past is critical to contemporary archaeology in the United States, for both academic and legal reasons (Ferguson 2004). Discussions relating to social identity are at the core of questions about ancient migrations, the formation of alliances, and maintenance of social boundaries of inclusion and exclusion that have been central to southwestern archaeology since its inception. Today, in order to implement the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, archaeologists are also required to make determinations of cultural affiliation, which is construed to include social identity.
Examining past social identities was one of three key topics included in the Eighth Southwest Symposium held in Tucson, Arizona, in 2002 (Mills 2004). At that symposium, social identity was explored primarily through ethnographic (Fowler 2004; Webster and Loma’omvaya 2004), historic (Levine 2004), and linguistic (Hill 2004) data. For the Ninth Southwest Symposium, convened in Chihuahua City in January 2004, Laurie Webster and Maxine McBrinn assembled a session that built upon its predecessor yet differed from the previous symposium session in two important ways. First, contributors were asked to examine social identity with purely archaeological data. Second, participants were asked to explore social identity in more than one class of archaeological data, such as ceramics and architecture. Revised papers from that session are included here.

The chapters that follow explore various theoretical perspectives and invoke historic or ethnographic examples, yet the focus in each is explicitly on issues in southwestern archaeology and archaeological data. The classes of data examined are those that are accessible to archaeologists, including ceramics, lithics, wall paintings, pictographs and petroglyphs, architecture, and fiber artifacts. The time period of interest in these chapters extends from about 3,500 years ago to about 500 years ago. Even in chapters where the sources of inference are ethnographic, for example, Hays-Gilpin’s (Chapter 13) work on visual metaphors in Hopi material culture, the interpretations are applied to data available for archaeological scrutiny (ceramics, basketry, petroglyphs). In addition to addressing their inquiries to archaeological data, presenters were asked to examine evidence for social identity in more than one class of data. Therefore, Mabry, Carpenter, and Sanchez (Chapter 9) looked at projectile points, fiber artifacts, water control technologies, and cultigens; McBrinn (Chapter 11) at projectile points and fiber artifacts; Ortman (Chapter 12) at kiva architecture and wall paintings; Hays-Gilpin (Chapter 13) at pottery, basketry, and rock art; and Eckert (Chapter 14) at architecture, ceramics, kiva murals, and fauna.

The order of the chapters here differs from the chronological order of their subject matter, which was the way they were presented in Chihuahua City. This section begins with a chapter by Mabry, Carpenter, and Sanchez (Chapter 9), which evaluates Jane Hill’s (2001) model of migration of Uto-Aztecan–speaking farmers into the Southwest. Although Mabry, Carpenter, and Sanchez focus on discerning the social identity of these early farming peoples, their chapter is also relevant to the discussions in Part 1 of this book concerning the initial spread of agriculture into the Southwest. By placing their chapter at the beginning of the contributed chapters in Part 2, we hope to facilitate comparison with those in Part 1, particularly Steven LeBlanc’s discussion in Chapter 7 that reviews the same linguistic model from a different perspective.

Lyons and Clark (Chapter 10) provide an introduction to some of the more general intellectual positions that underlie archaeological discussions of social identity and how these, in turn, influence directions of inquiry and interpretations in southwestern archaeology. They explore a number of conceptual dichotomies use-
ful in untangling the literature relating to social identity. The most basic contrast they describe is between interactionist approaches to identity and enculturationist perspectives. Interactionists view style, including technological style, or the choices made during the course of material culture production (Lechtman 1977; Lemonnier 1986), as primarily active, largely intentional signaling. For example, from this perspective a potter would consciously decide to use a particular color scheme to signal identity with others producing pottery decorated with the same colors. In this interactionist context, style has function, and that function is to signal affiliation. In the literature of southwestern archaeology, interactionist interpretations of stylistic similarity have been used to suggest the existence of alliances that may also be marked by the frequent exchange of goods within the alliance structure (Plog 1983, 1984; Upham 1982). These alliances and exchanges may, in turn, serve to buffer shortfalls in subsistence production, which would make them particularly useful in the relatively unpredictable environments of the Southwest (Braun and Plog 1982).

According to Lyons and Clark, an enculturationist view, by contrast, emphasizes the “unconscious or passive stylistic variation” often reflected in objects of low physical and contextual visibility. These similarities in unconsciously selected attributes of low visibility are interpreted as reflecting a common enculturative background (Clark 2001; Lyons and Clark, Chapter 10). These attributes are often used to infer ethnicity or culture of origin and are therefore helpful in recognizing ethnically heterogeneous settlements and, within regions, the presence of intrusive migrant groups. Lyons and Clark list a series of dichotomous concepts that more or less follow from the differences between interactionist and enculturationist perspectives, including instrumentalism versus essentialism, instrumentalist versus primordialist, ethnic identity versus cultural identity, and agency versus structure. Recognition of these distinctions is helpful for understanding current literature in southwestern archaeology, including much of the literature on alliances, exchange, and migration.

Lyons and Clark also discuss approaches drawn from a variety of sources that may bridge the structure (culture) and agency dichotomy. They pay particular attention to Richard Jenkins’s (1997) social constructionist model of ethnic identity, which focuses attention on the contexts within which different kinds of markers of social identity are employed. Examples of the kinds of contexts Jenkins describes are instances of demographic stability or instability, interacting populations of like or unlike size, interacting populations with more or less equal or unequal access to power, and so forth. Lyons and Clark propose that these contextual parameters suggest different strategies that would be employed to signal social identity. For example, under conditions of more or less equal access to power among groups, individuals might use markers of social identity that are both flexible and easily emphasized or deemphasized. Understanding the demographic and political contexts of identity formation and marking would be especially useful to archaeologists in differentiating processes such as migration from emulation or exchange.
As Barbara Mills (2004:4) points out, however, social theorists from Anthony Giddens (1979, 1984) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990) to Frederick Barth (1969) and others have recognized that identity is multifaceted, situational, negotiated, and expressed at various scales (i.e., age, gender, residence, ethnicity). Further, each of these ways of expressing identity is variously constructed in each society. For these reasons alone, inferring identity from archaeological data poses a number of challenges. Other challenges arise as well because virtually all of these theorists accept Barth’s (1969) model of ethnic identity as the social organization of cultural difference.

Barth’s (1969) classic statement about ethnic groups continues to be a touchstone for subsequent theorists, including Lyons and Clark. Barth defined an ethnic group as a population (1) that is largely biologically self-perpetuating, (2) that shares fundamental cultural values realized in overt cultural forms, (3) that makes up a field of communication and interaction, and (4) whose membership identifies itself and is identified by others as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order (Barth 1969:10–11). The necessary component of the definition is the last, which entails self-ascription. Barth concluded that the sum of objectively different features is not necessarily important. Rather, for Barth, identification of an ethnic group is limited to those features seen by the actors themselves as significant. It is this most crucial part of the definition with which archaeologists have the most difficulty. Barth’s approach is ethnographic, entailing access to individuals who can express their identities and affiliations. Archaeologists generally do not have access to people who can tell them whether an object, or an attribute of an object, is significant and carries meaning.

Lyons and Clark note that interactionists follow agency theory, which views people as mindful participants. Thus interactionists conceive of style as primarily intentional signaling, whereas enculturationists view style as unconscious or passive variation. Interactionist perspectives require that the intentions of the individual be known. Adopting this perspective does not seem useful for archaeology. Rather, it would be helpful for archaeologists to use some of the implications of practice theory (Bourdieu 1977), which is less concerned with knowing individuals’ intentions. Whereas practice theory acknowledges the active choices of participants in any society, practice theory does not focus as closely on individual intent as it does on outcomes (Dobres and Robb 2000). Individual choice matters in both agency and practice frameworks. Practice consists of a series of choices; however, these choices may be conscious, subconscious, or unconscious. Nevertheless, their implementation leaves material manifestations that reflect multiple levels of group identity (Stark 2006).

Without living people to tell us that they identify themselves as a group in contrast to other groups, we as archaeologists cannot pursue a purely Barthian approach to identity. If we try, we run the risk of extending our data too far. Diacritica of social identity not only change over time but may move from markers that are material, hence potentially available to archaeologists, to markers that leave no trace.
in the archaeological record. For example, as Lyons and Clark note, markers that once took material forms that are potentially visible archaeologically, such as dress or pottery forms, may be replaced by the archaeologically invisible, such as spoken or unwritten language. How are these and other markers of social identity recognized? Living people use them and notice them and tell others, including ethnologists, that they mark group identity and sometimes what they symbolize. Those of us who work in the Southwest are privileged to work among the indigenous descendant peoples (Pueblos, Seri, O’Odham, Yaqui, and others) of those whose material remains we study and who can tell us who they are in relation to others. Yet what of markers that changed over time, and what of the millennia of pre-agricultural southwestern hunter-and-gatherer occupations? What also of the social markers that existed, for example, in Chacoan and other times when the social landscapes of the Southwest did not mirror those known in modern times?

The distinction between passive style and active style is not particularly useful for archaeology because generally archaeologists cannot detect the intentions of past actors from the material record available for study. We will probably never know whether the end products of the choices we see reflected in artifacts were conscious or not. Practice theory, which does not entail knowing the intention of social agents, seems to offer a more productive approach to this particular aspect of inferring social identity. Among the chapters in this section, two that provide especially useful insights into the dilemma of reading identities from artifacts are those of McBrinn (Chapter 11) and Mabry, Carpenter, and Sanchez (Chapter 9). They do so because they focus on practice theory and on technological style (Lechtman 1977; Lemonnier 1986) and because they examine hunter-gatherer populations in time periods remote from our own, when social maps of the Southwest were unlike those with which we are familiar.

McBrinn’s (Chapter 11, 2005) study of Archaic hunters and gatherers in southern New Mexico admits the difficulty of seeing diacritics of ethnicity in remnant “stones and bones.” Rather, she uses existing models of hunter-gatherer behavior and ethnographic research to suggest that Archaic hunters and gatherers participated in at least two different kinds of networks of interaction. One of these is networks of learning and enculturation. Learning and enculturation networks are developed through face-to-face interactions, hence they may be fairly spatially localized. The other kind of network McBrinn distinguishes is an economic network of risk sharing that will include people who interact infrequently and potentially over considerable distances. Each of these kinds of networks, McBrinn notes, should be reflected in different kinds of attributes of artifacts.

McBrinn links the two types of networks to two different kinds of stylistic variation James Sackett (1986, 1990) refers to as isochrestic and iconological. McBrinn suggests that attributes reflecting isochrestic style are learned through kinship networks or networks of enculturation and are generally not visible in the finished product. It does not matter if isochrestic style is conscious or not. Those attributes that are not visible in finished objects cannot function as signals—of affiliation or
anything else. Iconological style, on the other hand, can signal affiliation by being visible to others within networks whose members may or may not be in day-to-day interaction. In her example, the same class of artifacts—sandals or projectile points—will be composed of attributes reflecting both kinds of style and both kinds of networks. McBrinn’s work shifts the focus of analysis from the type to the attribute. Attributes are expected to reflect participation, learning, and choice in different kinds of social networks. The distributions of these different kinds of attributes should form different spatial patterns reflecting the size and shape of the social groups within which they operate. McBrinn’s approach has two very important consequences. It frees archaeologists from having to know what was in the minds of individuals in the past, and it focuses on networks of social interaction rather than on bounded groups. Being able to define bounded groups would require analysis at a different (larger) scale.

Mabry, Carpenter, and Sanchez (Chapter 9) bring together archaeological data on lithics, fiber artifacts, radiocarbon dates on cultigens, and aspects of agricultural technology to evaluate a model of migration based on linguistic reconstruction. Jane Hill (2001) proposed that speakers of Proto-Uto-Aztecan, originating in the central Mexican highlands, introduced maize agriculture into the Southwest. Hill’s model provided a catalyst for studies that examine how we might think about migration for time periods lacking ceramics and settlement layout, our usual archaeological markers. Mabry, Carpenter, and Sanchez eschew the “points equal people” approach. Like McBrinn, they focus on attributes of projectile points, elements of hafting design not visible when the point is in use, to reflect choices learned during enculturation. Mabry, Carpenter, and Sanchez give us a great deal to think about, and their conclusions do not fully support Hill’s model. Again, I find two lessons from this chapter particularly important for archaeologists. First, the authors encourage us not to privilege language but to see language as one of many potential social markers that may or may not be activated in particular circumstances. Second, I believe we need to stop thinking like Americans. Many people in the world are bilingual or multilingual; they use language situationally. There is no reason to dismiss this possibility for temporally remote hunter-gatherers.

Although addressing a time period—the fifteenth century—that is very distant from the Archaic hunter-gatherers and early agriculturalists of McBrinn’s and Mabry, Carpenter, and Sanchez’s chapters, Eckert (Chapter 14) also examines attributes that reflect different kinds of social interaction. In the Pueblo Southwest, the fifteenth century was a time of migration and population aggregation. Among other locations, very large settlements were founded at the sites of Hummingbird and Pottery Mound in central New Mexico. Eckert uses different data classes and specific ceramic attributes to argue that those who founded these two communities participated in a regional, integrating ritual system and also maintained identities reflecting their different origins and migration histories. Of particular importance here is the notion of nested social identities. Individuals participate in more than one social network and have more than one social identity. Eckert uses theoretical
insight provided by Patricia Crown’s (1994) study of ritual integration reflected in thirteenth-century Salado polychrome pottery and Miriam Stark’s (2006) presentation of communities of practice to discern different social networks reflected in technological style. The notion that technological style relates to networks of learning and enculturation is similar to the discussions of isochreestic style in the chapters concerning hunters and gatherers. Here, however, these attributes are visible and are thought to signal social boundaries within each of the aggregated villages. Eckert’s data are rich, and I find her argument compelling. At the same time, I hope her ideas stimulate further development of theory that will assist us in understanding the contexts within which social boundaries are maintained and signaled. These could well follow the bridging arguments discussed by Lyons and Clark.

The remaining chapters explore identity in terms of the structure of attributes seen in more than one class of archaeological data. For Ortman (Chapter 12) and Hays-Gilpin (Chapter 13), it is visual metaphor. These authors use metaphor theory to address social interaction reflected in symbols. As I understand it, metaphor theory, like analysis of symmetry classes, brings a perspective from cognitive psychology. As Hays-Gilpin points out, some symbols are human universals. Although these are interesting to note, if we are interested in social identity we should focus on variations within these universals, the presence or absence of visual metaphors in specific archaeological contexts, or both. Both Hays-Gilpin and Ortman indicate that the meanings of these metaphors—visual, architectural, or both—can be deciphered through language, and such metaphors can be used as social markers. Hays-Gilpin’s look at “LIFE IS A PATHWAY” depends upon ethnographic and ethnohistoric data as well as discussions with Native Hopi speakers. Ortman’s observations about architectural metaphors in Chacoan and Northern San Juan Ancestral Pueblo worlds employ a code-breaking procedure that does not depend upon access to Native speakers. Both chapters strike me as exciting and productive, in part because they focus on some of the most attractive (pottery, architecture, wall paintings) and intractable (symbols) of the archaeological remains.

Metaphor theory examines the same visual metaphors in different classes of material culture, such as a specific line break woven into basketry or painted on a bowl. If we, as archaeologists, must actually know the meaning of the symbol to the Native speaker, I suspect this will be an impossible task. The meanings attached to symbols change over time within single linguistic or cultural traditions and, of course, vary among cultural traditions, regardless of whether the traditions are historically related. That is the nature of symbols. We need theory and, I suspect, a great deal of controlled cross-cultural analysis to help us sort out what might be a period of changing metaphor rather than cultural interaction or a period of changes in affiliation. Ortman begins to develop necessary middle-range theory in proposing very specific procedures to decipher metaphorical meanings of architectural features among Ancestral Pueblos. I find his approach intriguing and his use of it masterful.
The topic of “identity” continues to be tremendously important in anthropology, sociology, political science, philosophy, and, increasingly, archaeology (Mills 2004). The chapters in this section provide stimulating and innovative approaches to this important and complicated issue. As a group, the chapters provide new directions for research and new insights into variation in archaeological data. They point to the need to continue to develop theory—at different levels—that will be useful in linking attributes of artifacts to networks of social interaction and in understanding the general conditions under which networks change. The laboratory afforded by the archaeology of the Southwest and the history of its vibrant Native peoples should continue to be sources of ideas about the dynamics of social identity that are useful to diverse academic disciplines and to all who wish to better understand the world in which we live.

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