

# The Sowder Mathematics and Science Education Research Seminar Series 2015-2016

## Anthropological approaches to studying youths' identity work in science



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Monday, October 12, 2015

Seminar: 9:00-10:00 am

Q&A: 10:00-10:30 am

Natural Science Building  
Auditorium (Room 1205)  
UC San Diego

In this presentation, I provide an overview for studies of identity in science education that bring equity front and center. I introduce my theoretical and practical methodological approaches to and reasons for studying youths' identity work in science from a cultural perspective. A primary assumption of my work is that culture is produced in everyday practice, within and against larger social structures. So, when I examine a science learning setting, I ask questions about the local setting's culture, such as, "Who gets counted as a 'smart' ? What are the processes by which 'smart' and 'struggling' students get defined? How achievable, believable, and accessible are the desired subject positions for a broad range of students?" I also position these questions about the local setting within a broader historical, cultural, economic, and political context. So, for example, I might also ask, "In what ways do these local cultural meanings of 'smart scientist' broaden and/or constrain diverse youths' science-related trajectories? Broaden historically enduring meanings of schooling and smartness?" I incorporate concepts such as identity work, normative practices, agency, and power to raise questions about taken-for-granted meanings of schooling, to explain mechanisms by which even well-intentioned individuals reproduce the status quo, and why youth from under-represented backgrounds experience such tumultuous paths in science-related fields.

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