

PEOPLE, POTS, AND PROSPERITY: THE CERAMIC VALUE INDEX AND AN ASSUMPTION OF ECONOMIC CLASS

James M. VanderVeen: Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Indiana University South Bend, 1700 Mishawaka Avenue, South Bend, Indiana 46634-7111 USA

ABSTRACT. The ceramic value index is a powerful empirical tool used in historical archaeology to assess the required economic access necessary for a family or individual to accumulate specific household goods. The focus of this method is primarily on the status of the artifact assemblage itself, however, and not the people who acquired the objects. Since this measure of socioeconomic status is quantified only through the pottery used by the site occupants, it may not take into account the various perspectives of the occupants have towards their domestic vessels, nor does it consider the wider social context of the study area. Although the formula has been used extensively in historic archaeology, this has been done without significant critique. Sites from 19th-century Indiana are used here as examples of the potential successes and failures of a formula built on the assumption that consumers utilize archaeological objects for all the same reasons.

Key words. Socioeconomic status, historic ceramic vessels

AN EXPLANATION OF “CERAMIC VALUE”

Many archaeologists have a special interest in ceramic objects, due in part to the durability and prevalence of the material in a historic site. Further, the form, function, and design of a ceramic vessel typically allow for interpretations of the passage of time, cultural affiliation, and categorically distinct activities. Like an archaeological version of the silicon chip, a ceramic sherd, only a small piece of fired clay and temper, can hold a tremendous amount of data.

There may be a great deal of additional information, however, that can be “read” from that sherd, with the proper tools. More than 20 years ago, George Miller (1980, 1991a, b) created a method of classification and interpretation of ceramics that continues to be employed by archaeologists. Working with documentary records such as bills of lading, price lists of manufacturers and retailers, and ship manifests, Miller argued that the remains of the domestic ceramic vessels reflect the socioeconomic status of households from which they were found. For example, he used Staffordshire price-fixing agreements to suggest that vessel decoration related directly to its cost to the consumer (Miller 1980). Moreover, the cost of the simplest undecorated ware,

called cream color or CC, remained relatively stable throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Miller 1980, 1991a).

Using the undecorated ware as a baseline, Miller calculated the ratio of the price of three other categories of decoration to this baseline. He determined that the comparison of the number and value of each type of decoration category could be used to construct a proportion of expensive to less expensive wares, called a ceramic value index. In its most simple operation, the ceramic value index works like a weighted mean. The prices for each type are analyzed and scaled in reference to the undecorated ware. An archaeologist need only count the number of vessels in each level, multiply this count by the index value assigned to that level, sum the products and divide by the total number of vessels recovered (see Miller 1991a for a full description of the formula).

Ceramic vessels take many forms. Some are basic utilitarian dishes needed by all, while others may be high status luxury goods. The four decorative classes created by Miller (1980) cover the majority of table, kitchen, and toilet wares recovered from across North America during the late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries. Since the pieces are ubiquitous and reflective of price, it was thought

that "having internal value scale for ceramics [was] going to increase our ability to perform socioeconomic analysis on archaeological collections" (Miller 1980). Indeed, the analyses occurred as predicted, as evidenced by the number of studies in the past three decades that dealt with the different economic classes suggested by recovered ceramic artifacts (e.g., Adams & Boling 1989; Andrews & Fenton 2001; Stine 1990). The method was seen as an objective measure of the socioeconomic status of a historical site, and was quickly adopted by researchers looking for a more systematic, empirical procedure on which to base their claims. Yet it seems as if the focus of these studies was more on the status of the artifact assemblage than on the people to whom it belonged, as if the pottery had an agency of its own. The analysis was then extended to the occupants and not the other way around. The formula has been used extensively in this way without much published criticism (see Majewski & O'Brien 1987 for an exception).

This paper examines a few of the assumptions underlying the application of the index to all sites indiscriminately. It is not meant to refute the value of the method, nor is the intent to discredit Miller. In fact, Miller himself warns of relying on historic archaeological data without reference to documentary sources (1980, 1991a); and he has placed other caveats on his technique (Miller & Hurry 1983). Instead, the objective is only to raise the yellow flag of caution in order to slow the speeding analyses of socioeconomic status through ceramics and warn the researchers of dangers in the road.

AN APPLICATION OF THE INDEX TO A PREVIOUSLY UNSTUDIED SITE

Aside from the date of occupation, very little is usually known about a small historic period archaeological site. It could be argued that the ceramic value index is just the tool needed to reach conclusions about the people who lived there. After all, it has an ease of application and a precedent for interpretation. If it were true that the style and number of food serving and production dishes were an accurate measure of economic wealth, then calculating the index would allow a researcher to ascertain the probable socioeconomic status of the occupants of the site. This information,

by extension, may assist in determining a potential occupation of the settlers, the size of the household structures, or even the number of people in the family living there. Each of the above is a factor that contributes to socioeconomic status, in much the same way as the dollar value of the associated ceramic assemblage.

In the case of the Reddick site in Marion County, Indiana, however, little information about house or family size is known. The systematic recovery of ceramics, and a smaller number of architectural and domestic materials, has allowed a date of approximately 1845 to be assigned to the site (VanderVeen 2001). Aside from some later county atlases documenting land ownership, and thus the name, to the first recorded European-American settlers in that area of the county, little else is known about the site or its occupants. Census data exist but cannot be reliably applied, for at the time it was a typical practice for an individual or family to squat on land owned by others. Further, it was not uncommon for an individual to purchase land speculatively and not establish residence for some time, if at all. Thus the actual identities and number of occupants of the site are unknown.

What is known, however, is the history of the land itself. With the "New Purchase" treaty, signed in 1818, Native Americans surrendered their land in the central region of the new state of Indiana to European-American settlement. The area was formally opened for legal purchase in 1820, and prior to then it may have been occupied by members of the Delaware, Miami, and Potawatomi nations, or by illegal European-American settlers. Because the site is located within the swampy eastern portion of Marion County, it was settled more slowly than the rest of the county. According to an early history of the area, many of the settlers were of Scottish, Irish, English, and German descent; and they primarily traveled west via the Ohio River from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and the North Carolina Piedmont (Sulgrove 1884).

The first documented European-American settlers in the township were Elisha Reddick, his wife Elizabeth, and their infant son. In 1832, Reddick purchased property from John Johnson in the southwest quarter of Section 36 (Sulgrove 1884). Reddick and his brother Joshua held the property until 1848, after

Table 1.—Index Values for Recovered White Earthenware Sherds at the Reddick Site.

Ceramic type	Sherds	Index value	Total value
Undecorated wares	511	1.00	511.00
Minimally decorated (total)	255	1.16	295.80
Annular/banded	78		
Edge-decorated	69		
Mocha ware	14		
Monochrome glaze	26		
Spattered/sponged	68		
Painted	74	1.30	96.20
Transfer-printed	80	2.50	200.00
Total	920		1095.68

which time it passed through a number of owners until it was purchased in 1903 by the United States government for use as Fort Benjamin Harrison. Land surrounding the property then became a state park in 1995.

The site is situated on top of a ridge overlooking Fall Creek and its flood plain, within the present boundaries of the state park. No evidence of structural footings have been found, but the type and distribution of the artifacts suggest a small, possibly temporary residence. Enough brick has been recovered to indicate the likely presence of a hearth or even a small chimney. Metal hardware and window glass also have been collected. Combined with the amount of household ceramics, the archaeology attests to a modest domestic structure.

This is an ideal situation for the employment of ceramics, by far the most common artifact, towards developing a picture of the people who lived on the site. The ceramic material collected from three archaeological field seasons were analyzed using a version of Miller's formula revised by McBride & McBride (1987) to better account for broken artifacts. The results of the formula as applied to sherd counts rather than whole vessel forms should be viewed cautiously, but previous research using this method found the results to correspond with occupational levels at a degree similar to that of Miller's formula (McBride & McBride 1987; Huser 1993). As seen in Table 1, the sherds were typed according to level of decoration style and the number within each level was multiplied by

the scale provided by Miller (1991a). Only refined ware, typically tableware, was analyzed this way, keeping with the procedure. The resulting ceramic value index for the Reddick site was 1.20.

IMPLICATIONS OF INDEXING

Naturally, there are some practical limitations to the methodology behind creating a ceramic value index, as there are with many other quantitative measures of social phenomena. The mean ceramic value is based on the price of the vessel at the time of the initial acquisition. Yet heirloom pieces and gifts would be examples of traditionally more expensive dishes given at no cost to an individual or family. More formal and more expensive ceramics are also used less often and are more carefully curated by their owners, so they tend not to break as frequently as those used in everyday circumstances and therefore are less well-represented in the archaeological record. Of course, archaeological data are always incomplete and may be biased due to site formation processes such as selective discard and scavenging (Schiffer 1972).

Another caveat is that some sherds may have been misclassified as undecorated when, in fact, they included a pattern that was not exhibited in the particular portion of the vessel that was recovered. Most vessels of the type studied either show decoration over the whole of the body, in which case the decoration would not be missed, or on the rim only. With regards to the latter, a body sherd from a rim-decorated piece may be incorrectly typed, but even so, the value differences between undecorated and minimally decorated vessels are relatively small.

Miller himself cautions about shortcomings of his method with regards to infrastructure, market access, and economic isolation (Miller & Hurry 1983). Nevertheless, adequate transportation systems were in place in the Midwestern United States by the early to middle nineteenth century, and new types of ceramics would appear even in the most remote areas within a few years of introduction in England (Lofstrum et al. 1976). Thus, the market access likely had little or no effect on the ceramic value index. A review of the *Indiana Gazetteer*, a directory of merchants and service providers, suggests the issue of distant markets was not problematic for the Reddick

site. At least four different retailers of ceramic vessels, and “queensware” in particular, are known to have establishments in the Indianapolis area by 1866 (Cowen 1866). Additionally, many of the new residents of the area had established connections with some of the other vendors operating west of the Appalachian Mountains.

The economic center of a region is usually wealthier and more developed than those areas at the edges, and access to economic goods is typically more restricted in the periphery (Cressey et al. 1982). If a commodity is not as readily available once people begin moving to less accessible areas, then value is added during the transportation of the item. Consequently, the price of a piece of pottery may increase in proportion to the distance of the supplier from the final point of purchase. Some scholars, on the other hand, suggest that there is no “tyranny of distance” *per se* (e.g., Baugher & Venables 1987). Rather, the access to a market has more to do with economic and political considerations than does physical proximity. If someone can afford to purchase an item, then “someone was ready, willing and able to ship it” (Baugher & Venables 1987).

COMPARATIVE SITES AND RESEARCH DEVELOPMENTS

To control for the various issues, including the economic access present in this “borderland” of the period, the Reddick site is compared here with other frontier sites in Indiana. Unfortunately, a very small number of historic sites within the state have properly documented archaeological investigations, and fewer still date as far back as the middle 19th century. Three such sites do exist that share with the Reddick site a similarity of house locations, contemporaneous time period of occupation, and number of recovered and analyzed ceramic sherds (see Table 2). When possible, only information determined to be solely from the occupation context dating to the appropriate time period was used. The descriptions below and data included in Table 2 are revised from the work of Huser (1993) and Stillwell (1990).

William Conner house: Believed to be one of the first brick buildings in Central Indiana, the Conner house was constructed in 1823. Originally a rural family residence, it is lo-

Table 2.—Listing of compared sites.

Site name	County	Mean ceramic date	Sherds
Conner	Hamilton	1851.1	1281
Godeke	Warrick	1845.3	1286
Reddick	Marion	1845.4	1536
Richardville/ LaFontaine	Huntington	1830–1870	2051

cated on a ridge spur above the White River valley in Hamilton County, immediately north of Marion County. The house is presently part of the grounds of the Conner Prairie Pioneer Settlement, a living history museum.

William Conner was born in Ohio and around 1800 traveled to Indiana as a fur trader. Conner married a Native American woman from the Delaware tribe with which he did business. His role in the government’s relations with the Native American people remains subject to some debate. After his wife’s departure from Indiana with the rest of her tribe, Conner married a European-American woman recently arrived from New York, and eventually established a distillery and several mills. Finally, he served as a state representative for several terms.

Conner’s many descendants who occupied the house made their fortunes in medicine, politics, business, and the military. Consequently, the Conner family, at least during the period examined here, were of high economic wealth and social status (Stine 1990).

Godeke site: There was no standing structure present at the Godeke site at the time of investigation, but several subsurface cultural features were found during excavation. The area sits on a low hill about a kilometer east of Bluegrass Creek in Warrick County. Although little is known about the history of the site, it is estimated to have been occupied between about 1830 and 1860. Census records list the various owners of the property as farmers and as a store clerk, but the property owners might have leased the land to others. Because of a number of assessments, including the lack of permanent structural remains and occupational activities, the socioeconomic status of the inhabitants of the Godeke site is evaluated as rather low (Stine 1990).

Richardville/LaFontaine site: Currently, the house at the Richardville/LaFontaine site

Table 3.—Comparison of Ceramic Value Indices.

Site name	CVI	Documented occupation
Conner	1.41	Physician; politician
Godeke	1.15	Farmer; clerk
Reddick	1.20	Unknown
Richardville/ LaFontaine	1.39	Politician; merchant

is a large, two-story wood-frame residence. The site is located at the confluence of the Wabash River and the Little River, on a flat plain in Huntington County. Some documentary evidence suggests that the house was built just after the Miami Chief John Richardville moved his tribal council to the Forks of the Wabash in 1831. Chief Richardville died in 1841 and, while he possessed political power in his position with the Miami, his trade business had been greatly depressed by the time of his death. Francis LaFontaine, Richardville's son-in-law, assumed the duties of tribal chief and inherited the section of land on which the house stood. LaFontaine's own descendants continuously occupied the site until the property passed out of tribal ownership early in the 20th century.

The inclusion of the Richardville/LaFontaine site may be in some ways problematic. In strictly economic terms, chiefs Richardville and LaFontaine should certainly be seen as part of the upper middle class (Stine 1990). The ceramic value index of the site is not significantly different than that of the Conner site, and both houses were at one time owned by politicians. Given their membership in an ethnic group different than that of the dominant society, however, the social status of the Richardville/LaFontaine families is uncertain. Because of their positions of power and respect within that minority, and the access and means to acquire expensive material goods, some may treat them as individuals of high status. Still, the prestige given to them from members of the majority may be reduced due to their ethnicity, thus also reducing that high status.

As seen in Table 3, the ceramic value index of the sites appears to correlate with other models of determining household wealth, such as occupation and house size (Powers 1982). Previous research using the Miller analysis on

sherd counts indicates that ceramic values of 1.20 to 1.30 can be interpreted as "middle income level," while values above or below may be seen as "upper" and "lower class," respectively (McBride & McBride 1987).

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ASSUMPTIONS WITHIN "VALUE"

But what of the people who lived at the sites? The process of assigning a ceramic value seems to be rather deterministic in that a collection of dishes defines the household. Through Miller's formula, the application of an easy and effective quantitative measure removes the power of consumer choice and diminishes the effect of other, more intangible, variables. For example, it could be argued that there is a "saturation point" of some sort with regards to the presence of ceramic vessels, as richer families will not continue to buy a new suite of place settings each year. After all, there is certainly a decreasing marginal utility for each additional ceramic dish purchased within a single household. Artifacts do not simply consume themselves (Cook et al. 1996). There are consumers apart from the commodities that must be given agency. People make choices, and are motivated to make those decisions for several reasons, determined by issues other than that of available economic wealth, or even class ideals. Furthermore, although some tasks, demographics, and behaviors may be assigned to all of the members of a household, every individual in that group does not necessarily share the same status (Wall 1999). The assignment of one level of "class" to the household is in many ways a simplification on the order of that made by the once-a-decade census, and equally as given to errors.

The role of class is given considerable power by researchers. Many proponents of objective measures of class report a strong relationship exists between economic roles (occupation), social stratigraphy, and the material culture recovered from a site (e.g., Nickolai 2003; Spencer-Wood & Heberling 1987), but they refrain from discussing what constitutes these various elements. Since this paper is meant to critique the assumptions of the ceramic value index and its accepted relationship with class, socioeconomic status, and household wealth, the concepts of those terms must be defined, at least generally.

Human beings appear to crave categories, and they create classifications whenever possible to better understand the world. While these categories are not natural, they are often rationalized as such in order to justify the restricted access to resources afforded to some groups of people (Beteille 1981). As for class, it is used to reflect a ranked social position, usually determined by wealth and occupation, but also based on prestige and family or social ties (Wurst & Fitts 1999). Class distinctions are relative and may be linked further with gender, race, and ethnicity. Regardless, when a group shares a similar lifestyle based on their economic position, they likely see themselves as members of the same class (Powers 1982).

It is not necessary for income to dictate class. Families with the same levels of wealth may choose to spend money in different ways, for money alone does not equate with comparable tastes. Some people are simply not interested in the approval of their peers and will behave in a manner entirely to their own liking. What scholars typically put forth as “class” seems to be a manifestation of a Bourdieu-like process of socialization, in which class members “learn” what possessions are held to be desirable or improper. A class, in this case, is defined “as much by its being *perceived* as by its *being*, as by its consumption—which need not be conspicuous in order to be symbolic—as much by its position in the relations of production (even if it is true that the latter governs the former)” [emphasis in original] (Bourdieu 1984). In sum, a class is what a person makes of it; and, as such, an empirical measure meant to calculate class across individual actors is bound to be misleading. The important issues of perception, agency, and the complex symbolic nature of ceramics are concepts unfortunately not attended to by Miller’s index; the commodities present in an assemblage cannot objectively predict something as amorphous as socioeconomic status. Historical interpretations are never completely neutral (Nickolai 2003).

The ceramic value index, with all its merits, is constructed on a number of assumptions that reduce its usefulness and should temper its results. For example, it is supposed that economic wealth (or, even more accurately, economic access) equates directly with the perceived social class (Wurst & Fitts 1999).

Yet research has shown that, in some instances, slaves had more expensive vessels than their masters or many northern European-American farmers and business owners (e.g., Adams & Boling 1989). Whether the ceramics were given to the slaves or bought on their own through money earned by extra work, the end result is that high ceramic value index scores were calculated for individuals with known low levels of social status, at least with reference to the dominant society. If the slaves indeed purchased the ceramics, one could assume that the motivation was to convey a particular message, and not necessarily one of adoption or imitation of the particular standards of the slave owners. This symbolic meaning may not have been related to the monetary value of the ceramics at all. Ceramics may be emblems as much as everyday utensils; they may possess symbolic value beyond that of a simple indicator of economic wealth (Beaudry et al. 1991; Wall 1999).

Further, it is not always true that the ceramics assembled by a household will accurately reflect the socioeconomic status of each of the members (Garrow 1987), since males and females within the household may be seen as possessing different levels of “status.” Although the researcher assigns class, those being researched may not have necessarily believed in the same definitions, or even felt any pressure to behave as others did. Miller (Miller & Hurry 1983) referred to this problem, although not exactly in the same context as he intended. He used a documentary record that showed that a particular settler became a wealthy landowner in an isolated area. This man probably purchased the ceramics in his house piecemeal and not in sets, owing to the shortage of available commodities. Without knowing the circumstances, the ceramic value index calculated for the assemblage recovered at this site could lead one to believe that the owner was from the lower class.

Finally, although wealth may allow one to purchase the “correct” symbols (a set of particular dishes for instance), it is the manifestation of the symbolic behavior (such as table manners and etiquette) that more clearly denotes membership in particular classes to others (Wurst & Fitts 1999). Status is defined by more than money; it is also a social construct.

People are not the passive products of economic models; rather, they often tend to make

unpredictable choices concerning the reallocation of resources or the reinterpretation of the values of a particular class. In these instances, as well as many others, a household may be in possession of considerable wealth, and even earn the respect or adoration of their neighbors, yet the resulting collection of ceramics could very well be below any arbitrary level demarcating their appropriate class. The right set of dishes simply may not be a priority, and assets are instead allocated elsewhere.

Based on its ceramics, the Reddick site was assigned to the level of lower middle socioeconomic status. Without many other documentary sources on which to base an evaluation, this site could be categorized as a simple farmstead with little access to wealthy goods and lacking in prestige, at least as viewed by others in the area. Yet in actuality, the scale of socioeconomic status on which the index categorizes people is quite relative and predicated on the acceptance of people whom it describes. Either of at least two opposing situations may be within the realm of possibilities: the settlers of the site may have possessed little money but were seen as wealthy by other, poorer, inhabitants of the area, or the same individuals may have had quite a sum of money but no contact with others and thus no need to present their wealth through ceramics. If it is true that the "social interaction that marked class affiliation called for prescribed behaviors, including participation in complex dining rituals that required expensive items of material culture" (Andrews & Fenton 2001), without the interaction there would be no need for the dishes. Conversely, if the dishes did not exist, a "dining ritual" could still occur, only shifted in its emphasis or alternatives for the dishes used. In each of the instances, the ceramic value index would not accurately represent the truth of the situation.

RECOGNIZING SELF-DEFINED "CLASS" THROUGH WARE RATIOS

It appears that the employment and interpretation of the index relies heavily on the central tenet of all archaeology—context. Class values can be reflected in the choice of particular ceramics, just as income levels can also be represented in the total assemblage. Because it cannot understand the motivation behind that choice, or the circumstances sur-

rounding that income, the index has little or no overall value, particularly in isolation. Individuals may choose not to participate in the same discourse as the larger part of society, or they may select instead to challenge the status quo. At the scale of a single person or household, decisions could be made to translate the accepted norms in a way that better reflects the needs and desires present at the time (Stine 1992). Both class and material culture can be social constructions.

Material culture may have different meanings or functions depending on its users. Producers may set the price of an object, but they cannot control how the consumer ultimately perceives and employs that item (Beaudry et al. 1991). Archaeological and documentary research can assist in providing context, but only if the interpretations are made with regards to the intrinsic distinctions meaningful to the consumer. Aesthetic appeal or other considerations are bundled with any object, and the choice of assigning importance to the different elements of a commodity resides with both the consumer and the surrounding culture; it is not fundamentally tied to the object's function (Marshall & Maas 1997).

Accordingly, a modest alteration to the problem of reading the ceramic value index calculated from the Reddick site is proposed: an investigation into the life cycle of the house, the occupants, and the artifacts themselves would provide the necessary context into which to place the index. For example, an investigative technique that compares ceramic utility wares to table wares could aid in interpretation. In the case of the Reddick site, the ratio of unrefined ware to the total collection (34.8%) is much higher than that found in the comparison sites (ranging from approximately 9–22%) (Huser 1993; Stillwell 1990). While unrefined ceramics, like undecorated stoneware or redware, are needed to cook and store food, and are thus typically present at certain levels in all households, refined ware is different. It includes types of ceramic vessels that would likely be used to serve food, especially the types known as whiteware, pearlware, and yellowware. The clay body in these wares is thinner, with fewer large inclusions, and the vessels tend to be much more highly decorated than unrefined ware. The more fragile and decorative serving dishes are then used for less practical purposes and may

be employed to show status or reflect other values important to the owners. A high ratio of production to serving vessels could mean that the inhabitants of the site had few opportunities to host their neighbors, or little inclination.

Further research concerning the frequency of unrefined ware corroborates the belief that the site may have been relatively isolated at the time of occupation. Typically, there is more evidence of home-canned goods at residences during this period than appears in the archaeological record of the Reddick site (William Wepler pers. commun.). The abundance of redware could lead one to think that those within the household did much of the food production at the site or nearby. Either way, this would suggest at least one behavior in which there was a lack of interaction with others in the area.

As for the domestic economy, it is interesting that economic status is usually inferred from the occupation of the male of the household, while the ceramic tableware, at the time more of a woman's domain, is the feature analyzed to support the class membership (Cook et al. 1996; Wall 1994). Ceramics are then "translated" into monetary value and "thus converted back into a measure of the status of the breadwinner" (Cook et al. 1996). Moreover, women are said to have orchestrated meals as rituals during this period in history (Klein 1991). Particular forms of behavior are used to create or affirm the values of the family (Wall 1999), as those outside the family often view indicators like the lack of table manners as an indication of poor upbringing. The role of women is unknown at the Reddick site; the rare census records show no wife for Elisha Reddick's brother, if that is who lived at the site.

Finally, the artifactual remains at the site imply that the dwelling might have been meant only for temporary or short-term use. There is a diversity of domestic refuse, but a low number of architectural elements, and, as of yet, no privy or outbuildings have been confidently located. So, if the structure was used for only a short while, by individuals new to the area, and without the "refining" influence of female companionship (Worthy 1982), the ceramic value index for the site may not accurately reflect the wealth or status of the occupants. The low proportion of dec-

orated vessels could be from isolation, frugality, preference, or simply convenience. Selection of commercial goods may be based on more than levels of wealth.

In conclusion, historical archaeologists must link consumer choices of ceramics, or any commodity, to individual acts as well as to the function of that particular good. Consumption of goods extends beyond the economic realm and is found within the social domain as well (Cook et al. 1996). The categories of material culture constructed by individuals constantly shifts over time and across space, and people often manipulate the meanings of artifacts while negotiating the concepts of class and status (Wurst & Fitts 1999). Relying on one "objective" method, then, is inadequate to measure this variation, especially if it decontextualizes that which is supposed to be studied. The goal of the research instead should be to look at the provenience of any suspected prosperity, to see the person, as well as the pot.

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